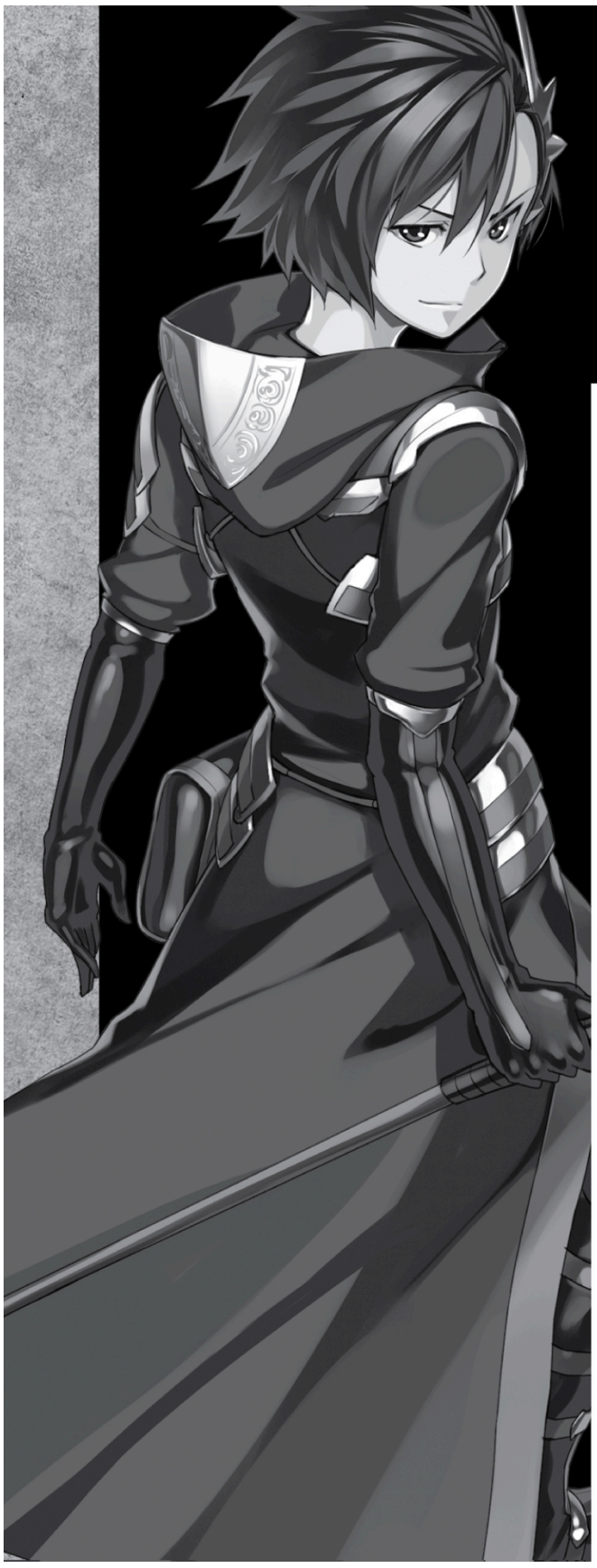

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BLACK SUMMONER 21
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MOTHER OF THREE
KATSURAGI KUON
WICKED GOD
ADDAMS
VAMPIRE
MARIA


"WAS I... A FOOL?"
CHERUVIM
GLORIA AMBUSHED CHERUVIM WITH A BINDING SPELL, ALLOWING ISABEL TO ATTEMPT TO UNCURSE HIM IN THE SPAN OF A SINGLE BREATH. AS ONE MIGHT EXPECT OF A PAIR OF SISTERS, THEIR TEAMWORK WAS PERFECT. FINALLY, THE CURSE WAS LIFTED.
GLORIA
"GOOD FOR YOU; YOU FINALLY REALIZED THE TRUTH."
ISABEL
REM



Black Summoner

Kelvin Celsius
Summoner who gained powerful skills in exchange for memories of his past life while transmigrating from Japan. Constantly seeking battles with powerful foes. Alias: Grim Reaper

The story so far:

The fallen angel Luquille wishes to reinstate Melfina to her former post. Meanwhile, Cheruvim, the god of death, has allied with Kelvin to finally assault Isla Heaven, the stronghold of the Ten Authorities.

Sera and Gerard created and activated a new move—Blood Dress—and successfully defeated Isabel, one of the Three Great Authorities. Meanwhile, Shutola, Melfina, and Serge managed to defeat Rem, the Goddess of Control. However, just when the prospects of defeating the Ten Authorities and ending their ambitions of reviving the wicked god with no casualties seemed real, one man appeared—Hao, the martial god.

Hao had defeated Goldiana, a Rank S adventurer and the current Goddess of Reincarnation. In the subsequent fight, Grostina sacrificed herself, but while Dahak and the other Dragonz were fueling their rage with the feeling of loss, a divine pink light suddenly descended onto the battlefield—Goldiana in the flesh.

She had appeared not for a grudge match or to avenge her fallen comrade. As is common for all who are enamored with martial arts, she sought a strong rival to drive her closer to the path of perfecting her skills. The pair of martial artists once again face off, ready to clash...

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ILLUSTRATIONS: DAIXT, KUROGIN (DIGS)

Chapter 1: Fusion

A little while before Goldiana and Hao were taken by surprise, the perpetrator behind the surprise attack—Hazama Shemhazar, known as the Foreign God and one of the Three Great Authorities—had encountered Dorothy first, so he was the first to start fighting.

"Khah hah hah hah! What an amusing girlie you are! I never would have thought you'd follow me this far into the ground!" he exclaimed.

"You're one to talk. I'm amazed you can keep burrowing while laughing like that. I would never imitate it, but I am impressed," Dorothy admitted.

Actually, it would be a little misleading to say that combat had started. Looking at the current situation, it was hard to say that they were actually in a ferocious fight.

To make the order of events clear:

As soon as Dorothy encountered Hazama, she shot at him with Maul, opening a large hole in his chest. However, he simply regenerated the rotten meat like nothing had happened before launching into a taunting dialogue with her. Furthermore, eerie tentacles emerged from under his robe, creating a tense atmosphere like the battle could kick off at any moment.

But there was no telling what went through Hazama's mind as he turned his back to Dorothy and burrowed into the ground. At first, Dorothy thought he was planning to ambush her from below. But Hazama didn't show himself no matter how long she waited, and there was no sign that he was mounting an attack.

Dorothy scrunched her brows together and thought, *Did he run away?*

One of the Ten Authorities—what was more, a member of the elite Three Great Authorities—had fled? Dorothy couldn't believe that was true. But in the end, Hazama had disappeared. Worse, his

presence was getting farther and farther away. And thus, Dorothy's doubts became certainty. Of all things, Hazama had turned tail and run from a fight with her. In fact, he'd done so boldly and without hesitation.

"Are you trying to lead me into a trap? Or are you just a coward?" Dorothy asked.

She was as expressionless as usual, but it seemed she was a little ticked off. Her choice of words exuded a bit of pressure.

"Khah hah! I just felt it would be too much trouble to fight you. I was going to let you fight Eld while I went to defeat someone who seemed a little weaker!" said Hazama.

"Well, either way, I wasn't going to let you go. Prepare yourself," said Dorothy.

Invisible bows instantly manifested around her, arrows nocked. Each was pointed at Hazama despite him being underground.

"Multiple Maul," said Dorothy.

Many arrows of decay were unleashed at that signal. The swarm burrowed into Isla Heaven, losing none of its deadliness as it traveled through the ground, chasing after Hazama. The arrows rapidly closed the distance. This time, they wouldn't take just a part of his body; there were enough of them to erase everything. However...

"His presence...split?" Dorothy wondered aloud.

Just as the arrows were about to hit, Hazama's presence seemed to split. And not only into two. Dorothy now felt over a hundred of him, and the number was still increasing. Every new presence felt like Hazama himself; there was no difference. She couldn't tell which one was real.

This was Dorothy's first time meeting Hazama face-to-face—not that she'd ever seen his face—but for some reason, she could imagine him laughing at her as she stood there in silence. That was just how twisted the god named Hazama was. Dorothy had realized as much. Though it might have seemed that she was quick to jump to conclusions, she was actually right on the mark.

"Reacquiring target at greatest efficiency. Reloading the next volley as they give chase," Dorothy said dispassionately. Since the

ritual, her ability to manipulate magic had become incomparable to when she'd fought Kelvin in the exhibition match. The arrows that had been chasing only one target suddenly split up to target different presences at her command.

They wouldn't be able to erase all the Hazamas that were continuing to split off, but they'd be able to stymie the inflation of his numbers for a time. Actually, since she was continuing to fire more arrows, as time went on, the number of extra Hazamas was steadily diminishing.

"Oho! So you're brute-forcing your way through my decoys," Hazama remarked. "But your ability to use such powerful magic at such a large scale surprises me. How strange... Wasn't Grim Reaper supposed to be the one with bottomless MP? My word, I shouldn't have relied on the reports from those fallen angels. Khah hah hah hah!"

"Really? Then how about you experience it for yourself?" Dorothy proposed.

"Hmm?"

Hazama could hear the lovely voice of a girl who shouldn't be under the ground, which was still being pierced by arrows of decay. Naturally, the owner of that voice was Dorothy, who should have still been attacking from aboveground. There was no way he should have been able to hear her down there. Still, whether it was a dream or an illusion, Hazama turned around and saw her. She looked like a mermaid, with her bottom half shaped like a fish, and was swimming through the ground, but it was definitely Dorothy.

"Hey now, what's the meaning of this?!" Hazama shouted. "You're looking quite a bit different from before! Khah hah hah hah! And you're so fast!"

This form was something Dorothy had gained from the ritual—from Zeval, specifically—which had given her the Unique Skill Worldswim. It allowed her to swim literally anywhere, meaning she could traverse any environment like she was moving through water. Of course, breathing was not a problem either.

In some ways, the skill resembled Burrowing, which allowed its user to burrow into the ground, but since swimming offered much

greater speed, it could be considered an upgrade. Hazama traveled through the ground freakishly fast by using disgusting-colored tentacles to dexterously part the earth, but Dorothy in mermaid form was even faster.

"Actually, how did you know where the real me was? The seeds I scattered as decoys should give off the exact same presence," Hazama said.

"I don't have the time to tell you every little trick of mine," Dorothy replied. "Stop using those gross tentacles already and let me kill you."

She would never reveal her tricks. There was no merit in explaining everything, from her invisible arrows to how she took in the situation underground. From confirming that the enemies she hit disappeared to checking to see if any of the presences she felt were moving strangely to detecting everything else through her arrows—a lot had gone into how she had found him.

Dorothy had gone through the steps methodically to destroy Hazama with certainty, but things would only get more difficult from here. No matter how much she shaved away at his flesh, Hazama would quickly regenerate. She needed to completely eradicate all of him, or at least find some sort of weak point like a human's head or heart, though it was still a mystery as to whether or not such a thing was a viable option.

"Multiple Maul," Dorothy ordered.

The invisible arrows she had deployed, which could travel through the ground just like her, were numerous. They accurately hit the areas on Hazama where his head and heart seemed like they would be, with several more piercing him all over to erase the rest of his body as well.

"Khah hah! You're really a merciless little girlie, aren't you! It stings, and you move amazingly well! If I were anyone else, I would have been dead! Hmmm?" Unfortunately, Hazama was able to quickly regenerate even the areas that seemed critical, his body swelling with new meat. The robe he was wearing was now a shadow of its former self, but he himself was able to regenerate if even a speck of him was left.

“It seems you’ve got a much more...interesting...body than I expected,” Dorothy observed.

“Khah hah! You’re one to talk!”

And that was how their chase had reached its current state.

There was no sign of Dorothy running out of magic, and neither did Hazama seem to be running out of stamina. Neither side was about to give up. If things continued like this, they would chase each other forever.

Dorothy did have the option of using the Rank S Time Magic spell Eternal to stop time and finish him without any chance of resistance, but that would be difficult for her since they were currently underground. That is to say, since the spell stopped the entire world, Worldswim would no longer work either. In short, Dorothy would find herself buried alive. Neither Time Magic nor Worldswim were all-powerful abilities; there were situations where they wouldn’t mesh well, like right now.

“Now then, I can see that it will be very difficult to run away. So I suppose it’s about time I turned around to fight,” said Hazama.

Though he had been hit by many arrows, each of which had rotted his body away, he didn’t seem bothered as he accelerated his burrowing speed. Finally, he burst out of the ground into a large underground space.

“Khah hah! Finally here, huh? Now then, girlie, show yourself already. This place will be your grave—” Hazama started.

“Eternal,” Dorothy interjected. The instant she descended into the underground space, she had cast the spell. Now, not only Hazama but everyone else on the continent, friends and enemies alike, were frozen in time.

Since Dorothy had only been shooting her arrows of decay until then, Hazama had probably thought of her as a rather annoying Black Mage and not a user of the rare Time Magic. It was only coincidence that he had escaped into one of the only environments that could counter her time-stopping abilities. Though Time Magic hadn’t had the opportunity to show its strength up until now, that was no longer the case.

“You have the devil’s luck, I suppose you’d say,” muttered

Dorothy. “I never would have dreamed you would so blatantly run away. Thank you for the rare experience.”

The chase scene was over, and in this frozen world, they finally came face-to-face. Of course, everything other than Dorothy was frozen, so her opponent wasn’t actually aware of that.

“I know I said this already, but...you really have the strangest body. What kind of god are you?” Dorothy asked.

She was looking at the mysterious and complicated form of her enemy, frozen before her. His bizarre head had a very large, pronounced mouth, and it was hard to think of him as a real, living thing. He didn’t seem to have any eyes to speak of until Dorothy noticed a single one within his large mouth. It looked like it was staring into her, even though time was frozen.

I really hate the feeling his gaze gives. It’s just nasty.

So Dorothy decided to start by destroying that eye. But even leaving aside his nasty gaze, it wasn’t just Hazama’s head that was strange. Everything below it was equally bizarre. It seemed the shapeless mass of meat that served as his foundation could form itself into anything, as growing out of it was everything from centipede sections to meat tentacles to limbs that looked like human arms. He was a hideous mass of defilement of all living things all mixed together. Any normal person would have gone insane just from laying eyes on him.

“I get why he covers himself with this robe now,” said Dorothy.

Luckily, she seemed to have some sort of resistance to grotesque sights, as even after seeing Hazama’s terrible form, she remained calm. In fact, the feelings she had experienced when they’d met eyes while he was trying to escape had been more intense.

“Still, this place is pretty strange too,” said Dorothy. “Why does a facility like this exist in a holy land where angels live?”

She was looking at her surroundings with interest. The large underground space they had ended up in seemed incongruent with the world it was in, like a modern research laboratory. What really drew her eye was a large glass tube filled with mysterious clear orange liquid. Quite a lot of those tubes were arranged in a line here, and each one contained what looked like an angel. Were they

being grown inside them? Some looked fully developed, while others looked like children, and some had yet to even take human shape. It was like a model of the growth phases of an angel.

This looks like something from a civilization more advanced than anything I can imagine, Dorothy thought. *I imagine this looks like Jildora's lab, though I've only heard stories about it. If I remember right, he shouldn't have been able to reach this continent. So was this the work of one of the Ten Authorities? No, that's not it. Judging from the state this facility's in, it's not new. At the very least, a fair number of years have passed since it was built. Which means someone built this and has been maintaining it for a while...right? Hmm, unfortunately, there is one extremely suspicious fallen angel who seems like she might be involved.*

Dorothy was thinking of the culprit behind the Ten Authorities' revival: Luquille. She was one of the few angels allowed to move freely within Isla Heaven, and the intense feelings she'd built up for Mel had turned her into a fanatic, resulting in her wanting to reinstate Mel as the Goddess of Reincarnation. Dorothy had never considered her an ally. In fact, she viewed the fallen angel as a treacherous snake in their midst.

The angels here seem to have been artificially made as puppets. If she's been using this facility over the years to experiment with creating artificial bodies, I can understand how this all came to be. The problem is whether or not the fanatic could truly make such an advanced facility by herself, but...I bet Jildora is involved somehow. I don't know exactly how, but I can't think of any other way this could have happened.

Luquille could have acted in secret to have the fallen angels do research for her, feeding her information up in Isla Heaven. Or she could have had a direct connection with Jildora. It was even possible that DarkMel, back when she was the Black Goddess, had handed over the technology as an investment for Kelvin's future enjoyment. Now that Jildora and that version of DarkMel were no longer in this world, there was no way to confirm any of these theories other than asking Luquille directly. But Dorothy couldn't imagine Luquille answering truthfully. So, basically, there was nothing she could do on

that front.

Dorothy sighed. “This is way too much trouble. Oh, whoops. I should finish you off first. But don’t worry, I’m ready.”

She had reverted back to her human form and now pointed her large staff at Hazama. She’d been continuing to cast her magic around Hazama even as she’d been pondering.

“Mass Contagion,” Dorothy stated.

Eight spells manifested around Hazama, perfectly surrounding him. These were castings of Contagion, which would decay everything within their area of effect. Compared to spells like Maul, shaped like an arrow, and Decadence, which concentrated the effect on the area around the soles of her feet, Contagion traded the power to age its targets by decades for a wider range. The magic spread out from its origin in a wave of decay. It would be incredibly difficult to dodge these brutal spells—in fact, it was nearly impossible. Even more so for Hazama, who was both unable to move and completely surrounded by them. Dorothy planned to erase his repulsive existence without a trace.

Thanks to Eternal’s properties, the waves of decay stopped mere millimeters from Hazama. But that would leave him a minuscule amount of time. No one else could stop the passage of time, and everything within this facility had already been affected by the spells.

“This is the end,” said Dorothy. “So I defeated one of the Three Great Authorities *and* destroyed this suspicious research lab. Looks like I got two birds with one stone. I’m sure Rion-san will be happy. Hee hee! Well then... Time: Resume.”

The moment time started again, Hazama’s body collapsed, and all the machines around them rapidly deteriorated before ceasing to function.

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The world started to move, and destruction came. Hazama didn’t even have time to finish his sentence, which had been interrupted when time had stopped. His corrupted body rotted instantly,

decaying to exposed bone from the inside out. The research facility around him experienced the same effect.

Dorothy sighed. "Your tenacity is unbelievable..."

But it was too soon to assume the battle was over. Hazama's body, which should have been annihilated by decay, suddenly expanded and returned to its original state. The event looked strange, like something coming from nothing.

"Khah...Khah hah! Khah hah hah hah hah hah! You're no regular Black Mage, are you, girlie?" Hazama asked. "My stock just plummeted by more than a hundred in an instant."

"Good for you," Dorothy replied. "So, when did I say I was a Black Mage? It seems you reached that misunderstanding all on your own."

At this point, Hazama's body had recovered enough that he could talk.

"Damn that smart little mouth of yours... And you destroyed my feeding ground too," he said. "Do you even understand how precious this place was?"

"Feeding ground?" Dorothy repeated after a moment's hesitation.

"Yes, indeed. Though they're cultured, this facility is capable of generating angel meat. I love that meat, you see, so I come here quite regularly. Well, whatever...it's not like this is the only one available," he replied.

Dorothy was silent, allowing him to continue.

"Oh, are you interested in angel meat too? Khah hah! If you are, then I don't mind letting you try some," he offered.

"No, I'm fine, thanks," Dorothy replied flatly. She instantly fired off a casting of Maul. The attack struck Hazama's eye, blasting it out the back of his throat before making it rot. Of course, as expected, the eye quickly regenerated.

After that exchange, Hazama finally replied, "I see. That's too bad. It's not good to dislike something without ever having tried it. You're missing out on about eighty percent of life. So...how about it? Would you let me try mermaid meat? It's a precious item said to grant eternal life, isn't it? Khah hah!"

"Your persistence, ugliness, and rotten nature aside, I hold no

interest at all in the nature of that flesh of yours. How many times can you die before your stock or whatever is gone? How about I test that? Well, I'll do it regardless of your answer," said Dorothy.

"Khah hah hah hah hah hah hah hah hah hah hah! Try it if you can! I hereby manifest my Authority!" Hazama declared.

With that, his body swelled past the state it had recovered to. As if rejecting conventions of all life, meat and bone were connected as his body bulged, expanded, and enlarged. In the end, he grew large enough to fill most of the underground space—though in truth, he was still growing. He'd turned into a huge mass of...something, complete with heads of beasts and dragons, parts of angels and demons, random chunks of flesh, arthropod shells, giant limbs, and even octopus tentacles and chunks of something gelatinous.

But there was still a fallen angel's pitch-black halo above whatever passed for his head, as well as a pair of ostentatious black wings coming out of what was apparently his back. Though he was a chaotic mix of a bunch of different parts, he seemed to be tacitly insisting that he was still a fallen angel.

"Well...my target's gotten a lot bigger," Dorothy commented. "Now it looks like I can shoot without really aiming and still hit."

"Khah hah! Your expression didn't change at all even after seeing my new form!" exclaimed Hazama. "You might only be the creation of a false goddess, but it seems you have the stuff to be a god of sorts. However..."

Whoosh!

Multiple limbs—octopus legs, centipede sections, and tentacles of some other persuasion—made an eerie attack on Dorothy, complete with the sound of the limbs slicing through the air. There were so many attacks it was impossible to count them all, making for an overwhelming mass that tried to crush her.

"But what?" Dorothy asked.

She deployed a wall of decay around her, destroying the incoming attacks head-on. She seemed perfectly calm, maintaining her icy attitude. Still, Hazama did not stop. More attacks launched from the wall of flesh that he had become, trying to brute force its way through the wall of time.

“Khah hah hah hah hah! Allow me to show you despair, girlie! My Authority is Fusion! I absorb the flesh of whatever I eat within me, turning it into materials and adding it to my power! Now that I’ve manifested my Authority, the limit on my material stock is gone! Furthermore, I can add the lives I eat with this Authority directly to my stock! In other words, no matter how hard you try, I can instantly revive! Do you understand? You are trying to fight a fusion of everything and everyone I’ve consumed! Khah hah! The number is countless! Infinite! How could you win against my infinite being?!”

Dorothy let silence reign for a moment before letting out a chuckle.

“Huh? What? What’s so funny? Did I strike a nerve or something?” Hazama asked.

“Oh no, my apologies. I need to thank you for going out of your way to explain your abilities to me. I just thought you were exaggerating a bit too much,” she replied.

Hazama gave that a moment’s thought before asking, “What?”

“I mean, it’s true, isn’t it? If what you eat is added directly to your Authority’s power, then it’s clearly not infinite. How would that lead to being countless or infinite? Do you know exactly how much you’ve eaten? Your wording is going to cause misunderstandings.”

Hazama didn’t respond immediately. He was lost for words by the timing and fierceness of her argument. He’d lived a long life as a god, and never had he been dealt such a shock. Was there anyone else able to attack him with scathing verbal blows even after seeing his huge and unseemly form? No, none existed in his memory, even back in the age of the great war.

It took a moment for him to recover, then he said, “Khah hah! You fool. The amount of meat I’ve eaten up until now easily surpasses the hundreds of millions. Meaning my stock of lives is over nine digits! Even you, with your strange techniques and magic, can’t hope to win against my fused body and sheer number of lives!”

Hazama increased the amount of attacks he was throwing out, and he now started emitting some sort of gas from the gaps of his flesh. The gas was gaudily colored, most likely poison.

Dorothy sighed. “Easily over? Such a sloppy estimate. So, you

really don’t have an actual number in mind. Also, you’re counting nine measly digits as an unbeatable number? There should be a limit to how ridiculous jokes can be. That’s not nearly enough to be considered infinite.”

“Keep talking, you little braaat!” Hazama shouted.

His rage increased the ferocity of his attacks, but he was still failing to move both the wall of time and Dorothy’s expression.

“A brute-force strategy in a closed space, supplemented by poisonous gas. If you were facing anyone other than me, it wouldn’t have been a bad plan,” said Dorothy. “I mocked you before, but I will admit that a hundred million lives is a somewhat troublesome amount. It would take far too long to work my way through all that by normal means. So...I’m going to have to get a little mean.”

Hazama let out an alarmed noise as he was instantly assaulted by an intense but mysterious chill. He felt like he’d met eyes with something behind Dorothy. He had no idea how long whatever it was had been there or what it was. It was transparent like a ghost and didn’t seem to have a defined form. However, it was certainly there, and Hazama knew it was staring right at him. Its gaze was terribly unpleasant and gave him severe anxiety.

“Deathspan.”



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Hazama Shemhazar, one of the Three Great Authorities, was known as a brutal, cruel god. The concept of mercy and compassion didn't even exist in his heart, and he only accepted whatever he considered to have value. He was the type of person to, for example, not hesitate to step off the righteous path for the sake of his goals. When it came to his objectives, he had no scruples. Many gods complained, saying that Hazama was not fit to be one of them, and there was no small number of deities that came to deliver divine punishment upon him.

However...not one of those challengers had ever claimed victory against him; they all ended up in his stomach after being defeated.

"Grk...urgh..."

"This is what I have always thought: Greed and desire are proportional to strength," Hazama had once said. *"In other words, your hatred of me could not match up to my love of enjoying delicacies. Khah hah! Well, I suppose it doesn't matter in the end. Anyway, you should obediently let yourself be eaten by me. Don't worry, you'll just feel like you're dying while I chew you. You actually are dying, though! Khah hah hah hah hah hah hah!"*

Fusion, the Authority Hazama had been given by Addams, allowed him to amass more meat the more he ate, increasing his stock of lives. Since the ability was so simple, there was no limit on how powerful it could grow. He'd made significant use of this ability during the great war of myth, allowing him to feed on the bodies of various deities and continuously grow stronger. By the end, he'd been feared by his fellow deities as the Foreign God, anathema to all of them, while also joining the ranks of the Three Great Authorities. Because of his abuse of Fusion, Hazama had lost his original form, instead assuming a terribly unsightly shape. But since he placed the highest priority on fulfilling his appetites, such a thing was trivial.

Even so, there were two deities whom Hazama felt he could not stand up to and should never oppose. One was Addams, leader of the freedom faction in the great war, and the only god Hazama had

ever admitted was above him. Addams was so powerful that even with all of Hazama's might and effort, he wouldn't be able to estimate the full scope of the other's abilities. It was enough that Hazama never chose to challenge that god. Addams was so obviously in a different league that even Hazama, a self-righteous being drowning in his own desires, gave his best effort not to displease him.

The other was Cheruvim Ripita, a fellow member of the Ten Authorities. As his God of Death title suggested, he possessed the Authority of Lethality and could deal death to all with a single stroke (or, to be more accurate, it only applied to enemies he slashed, though Cheruvim kept this a secret even from his allies). Even Hazama, with all his lives, would be affected—probably. He felt it was too dangerous to tempt fate, though, in truth, his cunning and careful nature did him no favors in this regard, as he never even tried to verify his assumptions.

"But even if Addams is impossible, I would definitely be able to bring down the likes of Cheruvim someday, depending on the situation. Khah hah hah hah!"

Hazama continued to prepare for the time he would go giant-killing, building up his strength while allowing his desires to smolder. All this for the day that an opportunity—for example, a huge melee just like this—came. That was exactly why he'd positioned himself close to Eld, as he was sure Cheruvim would make a beeline for their leader. Now that Cheruvim had turned coat, he didn't have to fear reprisal from the other Ten Authorities or Addams. Depending on the situation, he might even manage to eat Eld without much fuss. That would truly be killing two birds with one stone—three birds, even, if the intruder was to die as well. No wonder he couldn't stop his laughter.

At least, that was Hazama's plan, but he'd ended up encountering Dorothy, which ruined everything.

"Grkhhh! Impossible... This can't be!" Hazama shouted.

Right now, his body was much smaller than it usually was when he manifested his Authority. The corrupting aura he emitted in such a state was also much weaker.

"I showed her my form with my Authority manifested! How could I be reduced to running away again after going this far?! Damn her!" he yelled.

As his words implied, Hazama was currently on the run. He'd only barely managed to keep his life. He was truly in dire straits.

Hazama had let out so many decoys, it was incomparable to when he'd first started running. They'd scattered across the continent, all running at the greatest possible speed. By letting out the maximum number of decoys he could make, he'd somehow managed to deceive Dorothy, but the price was huge. Since he'd thrown away so many decoys, his main body had weakened considerably as well. How much of his stock had he gone through in such a short time? Right now, his voice lacked its usual vigor.

"Grrrrrr! Buh... But I've still managed to escape. I've divided my presence and made them all move just like me," he said to himself. "No matter how monstrous she is, she won't find me so quickly!"

He spoke as if to reassure himself, repeating those weak-willed words over and over. He kept flashing back to the fearsome sight he'd been forced to witness just a little while before, which only put more pressure on his heart. Right now, he was deep in the depths of despair.

"Deathspan," said Dorothy's voice in his memories.

"Grk...urgh!" Hazama cried out.

Just remembering it sent shivers through his body. Dorothy had intoned some sort of spell, he'd at least been able to realize that much. However, he could make no sense of whatever had happened next.

"There was something behind that little girl," Hazama said aloud. "I met eyes with whatever it was...I think. After that, my body was assaulted by an overwhelming storm of death. I still don't know exactly what happened, but I know that my lives were being lost at a frightening speed. Tens of millions in a matter of a few seconds? Impossible. There's no way...but...damn! What did that little girl do?!"

Hazama had abandoned the battle immediately after being exposed to that mysterious attack, running with all his might from

the area. That was what had led to the current situation. He'd given up shockingly fast, but chances were high that he'd have lost his entire stock of lives if he had stayed to fight. His cunning and willingness to give up created its own luck, and though Hazama was dealt a deep psychological wound, he was still alive. The biggest problem now was what he should do.

"I can tell. She and I are alike. Vengeful, and with a terrible personality. She'll chase me to the ends of the earth, I'm sure of it," he said to himself. "I may be safe now, but she'll eventually catch up to me... Then what do I do? Regroup with Eld, who's the closest? No, I can't do that. Cheruvim will likely be there, and I can't oppose him as I am now. Should I go to Isabel or Hao, who are also part of the Three Great Authorities? Hmm...not Isabel. She's too far away. Hao is— Hrm?!"

An incredible shock wave shook Hazama to his core as his mind spun at full speed. He looked toward the source to see Hao and...some sort of peach-colored monster locked in an intense battle.

"Hao is fighting...the false goddess? But Isabel's seal... Why did it come undone? It can't be... Was Isabel defeated? No, I know we're using artificial bodies, but she isn't the type of woman to be defeated by mortals!" he exclaimed. "N-No, wait. I should think of myself first. Is there something I can use? Hmm..."

He continued to be wary of Hao's battle as he surveyed his surroundings.

"From what I can see, Hao's battle is totally even... Hrm?! I can see three mysterious creatures that feel like a mixture of human and dragon! And they're even on the verge of death thanks to Hao!" he exclaimed excitedly. "I should be able to recover some of my body by eating them. No, that would be a bad move. Hao hates having his battles interrupted. It's possible I'd make an enemy of him the moment I touch his prey. That must be avoided at all costs. Gah! To think the perfect feeding ground is right there, and I can't partake... No, wait a second..."

Hazama seemed to have hit upon an idea as he looked over at Hao and his opponent, and his huge mouth warped into a smile.

The way for Hazama to overturn his situation was to eat both Hao and Goldiana, who were engrossed in their battle, and use them to make a new body. By his estimation, the two were even in strength, which meant it would surely come to a final blow, a time when everything was on the line. Even as powerful as they were, they would be focused entirely on their opponent in that instant. He estimated that he would be able to pull it off if he aimed for that perfect chance.

Hao may be powerful, but only physically. Even if he counterattacks when I try to consume him, it won't eat through my stocks like that little girlie's strange attack. But the body he's trained to its limits will be a powerful weapon against her. If I hit the perfect timing, I might even be able to eat the false goddess! Khah hah! I'll eat them both! Hazama thought.

He masked his presence and burrowed into the ground, slowly approaching the battlefield. He even had his remaining decoys do the same so as to not let Dorothy sniff him out. At the very least, it would buy him some time.

"Heh heh, my thanks," Hao replied. "Well then, it's about time we finished this. We will see who is truly the strongest!"

"That is exactly what I wanted!" Goldiana cried.

Hazama reformed his body into one with excellent hearing so he could accurately hear the conversation taking place above him. He noticed that the time was nigh and prepared himself. He transformed into a quadruped, optimizing his body to allow him to act with the utmost speed the moment he emerged from the ground. And then, his chance came.

Now! Hazama thought.

He jumped out of the ground and quickly found his targets. Both of them were right about to unleash their ultimate attacks—the perfect chance for him.

"Khah hah! My apologies for interrupting at this time, but do excuse me!"

They let out noises of surprise. Hazama had been on the move, and once he was close enough, he split his body, creating a new decoy that even had the ability to speak in his voice. He made it

speak to the combatants to interrupt them, opening its sinister maw to draw their attention. The plan was to have the real Hazama come from below to swallow them up while they were distracted by his decoy.

"Hrmph!"

"Hnggh!"

They stopped their attacks just short of each other with grunts of effort and immediately turned toward Hazama's decoy. Despite being enemies, the on-the-spot teamwork they displayed was fluid. They made an instant about-face to become allies so as to crush the ambusher.

Khah hah hah! They're mine! Hazama thought.

Even so, their reaction speeds weren't enough to catch his real body, which was approaching quietly from under them. He opened his mouth as wide as it would go to swallow both of them whole.

"Oh my! No!" Goldiana shouted.

"Khah hah! You realized too late!" Hazama gloated.

His Authority, Fusion, required the target to be in his stomach to take effect, meaning it didn't require the target to be dead or for him to even chew them into digestible pieces. No matter how tough Hao's and Goldiana's bodies were, as long as they were both in his stomach, they wouldn't be able to stop him from absorbing them.

"Hrrrnnnghhh!" Goldiana grunted.

"It's no use!" Hazama shouted.

Hao forcefully changed his stance, clearly trying for an attack similar to a kick. But Hazama didn't stop. Even if he had to take a painful counterattack, as long as he had lives left, he would continue to regenerate.

This is the end for you! He thought. He was sure he'd won this gamble. But then...

"Hmph!" Hao grunted.

"Ghhhark?!" Goldiana let out.

Hao's kick—so powerful, it was unthinkable that he'd unleashed it from such a position—was aimed not at Hazama but at Goldiana.

Huh? Hazama thought.

Though he didn't stop his swallowing motion, this act confused

him. Attacking the false goddess in this situation? Why? A surprise attack? Did Hao seriously still consider him a friendly? So many questions flitted through his mind, as he was unable to see the reason behind the other's actions.

Hao's not an optimist. The moment he noticed I was about to eat him, he would have moved to kill me without mercy. So the purpose behind this move is...saving the false goddess?

The conclusion he reached after some thought was frankly absurd: Hao was trying to save Goldiana. Even now, Hazama couldn't figure out why Hao would do that. He frowned, wondering what good could come of saving an enemy at the cost of one's own life.

"Hao-chan?!" Goldiana yelped.

Naturally, she was ejected to safety. Actually, she'd taken a fairly large amount of damage from the attack, but her life wasn't in danger. Still, she seemed equally surprised by Hao's actions, her expression confused.

So, you've awakened to the spirit of self-sacrifice, have you?! Then you should be happy to be eaten by me! Hazama thought.

His questions still hadn't gone away, but that was no reason to stop. He mercilessly swallowed the defenseless Hao. It all happened in but an instant, and there was no sign of Hao attacking from inside.

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"Wh-What...happened?" Dahak asked, watching from nearby.

"Some weird clump of meat appeared, and the enemies disappeared..." muttered Mdo.

"I have...a bad feeling about dis..." Boga commented.

At this point, the Dragonz had finally realized the situation had changed. The three of them were already covered in wounds and couldn't move.

"Khah! Khah hah hah hah hah hah hah! Hao is such a fool! If he had the time to save an enemy, he should have tried to escape himself! It matters not, though; he is part of my body now!" Hazama

exclaimed.

With Hao having been swallowed, Hazama wiggled his limbs creepily as he laughed uproariously. The effect of fusing with Hao was already showing itself. His body was infused with an enormous amount of energy, and the air about him changed drastically.

"What did you do to Hao-chan?" Goldiana asked. "Whether you walk out of here alive depends on the answer!" Her tone was uncharacteristically angry, the kind of rage that quietly bled into everything instead of openly blowing up.

"Hmm? Ah, right. You're here too, false goddess," Hao said dismissively. "Khah hah! You should have taken the opportunity to pounce rather than ask questions. Either way, you are no longer a threat to me. With the power of two of the Three Great Authorities, there is nothing in this world that is— Wha? Grghh...grkhhh?!"

Goldiana grunted in confusion upon seeing Hazama suddenly stiffen and let out pained noises. She observed him warily, thinking it might be an act that would turn into a surprise attack, but it seemed to be real.

"Gah! Hurk! Aaagh!" Hazama screamed. "Wh-Why...won't you listen...to me?! It's...as if..."

"As if your body is being taken over?"

A portion of Hazama's head had split into another mouth. The voice coming from this one was not his own.

"Hao?! Impossible! You should have become...part of...me!" Hazama gasped.

"Indeed. I regret to say that you are correct. However, you've overlooked one important thing," Hao replied.

"What?!"

"My spirit will not disappear so easily, even if you've absorbed me."

"S-So...what?! People like that...do appear on rare occasion!" Hazama admitted. "But they always...disappear...in time! Taking over my body...is..."

"Also, my Authority allows me to manipulate my own muscles, that is all. However, it seems to mesh well with your Authority," said Hao.

The next instant, the unsettling mass of meat that was Hazama shrank into human form, making crunching and snapping noises all the while.

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Hazama's body never stayed in one shape. It was constantly morphing to be more suitable for the situation. The result of this was a freedom of form; he wasn't trapped by the shape of his body. To him, that was proof of strength and, in a sense, the manifestation of his style of living. But this latest change was different.

"Hmph...I suppose this is fine for now."

After condensing and compacting in on itself, the meat had turned into a black, muscular humanoid. One arm was missing—it looked like Hao before he'd been absorbed by Hazama, only a size bigger and with traces of the body's original abnormal parts at various points. This shape imitated that of a human but comprised a mix of many different life-forms squished down into a humanoid shape.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," Hao said. "We've suffered an unexpected delay, but now we can continue."

"Should I...call you Hao-chan?" Goldiana asked.

"Indeed you should. To be honest, I wasn't sure this would go well, but it seems luck was on my side," "Hao" answered. He clenched and unclenched his fist several times, as if to check the movement of his body.

"I know we're enemies, but I suppose I should say I'm glad? So, there's another Ten Authorities member inside that body, right, Hao-chan?" Goldiana asked. "Judging by what you said and this situation, you're sharing your form with another from your ranks?"

"I am," Hao confirmed. "I'm not sure how much meaning this title has to you, but the consciousness of Hazama, the Foreign God, is mixed into this body as well. Of course, I have control of his ability to speak, so you don't have to worry about hearing him."

"Oh, I'm starting to feel sorry for him," said Goldiana.

"Heh! How compassionate of you," said Hao. "Such emotions

would normally not arise after the craven move he just pulled. However...it's unclear how long my spirit will last. If Hazama was speaking the truth earlier, I might disappear eventually. Of course, at that point, his Authority will be unleashed."

Hao clenched his fist as powerfully as he could, so much that his palm started bleeding. It didn't take long for blood to start dripping from the gaps in his fingers. It was colored a muddy green instead of red.

"Am I hearing things? It sounds like you *want* me to defeat you," said Goldiana.

"Indeed you must be hearing things," said Hao. "None of the Ten Authorities take anything Hazama says seriously, and even if he was telling the truth, I am not one to lose to him mentally. Still, I want to do battle with you, putting it all on the line as both of us try to kill each other. If what was said was to somehow stir your compassionate personality, I would be grateful. So, what do you think? Was I able to give you a reason not to lose?"

"Who knows?" Goldiana said coyly. "I was always planning to fight with all my might and win—"

"Um, excuse me," a voice interrupted. "Did any of you see a weird lump of meat passing by?"

"Oh?" Goldiana reacted.

The lovely intervening voice had come from above the pair. When they looked up, they saw Dorothy, looking unhappy, her arms transformed into wings.

"My, if it isn't Dorothy-chan," said Goldiana. "You look terribly upset. Did something happen?"

"Well, yes... I encountered a member of the Ten Authorities with the worst personality, mouth, and face who is only good at running away, and I was chasing him..." Dorothy sighed. "It seems this is a rather complicated situation." She was looking at the changed Hao.

"I'll tell you this now: He's not the one you were chasing," said Goldiana. "Well, his body may be the same, but..." She proceeded to patiently explain all the events that had brought them to the present moment, from how they'd been ambushed during their fight, to Hao being absorbed, to him being able to take over Hazama's body using

his Authority.

Hao spent the whole time nodding repeatedly in response to Goldiana's explanation. Dorothy wondered why he, one of the Ten Authorities, was participating in the discussion, but she decided not to question it for the moment.

"I...see," said Dorothy. "No wonder I don't feel Hazama's wicked presence, despite them having the same body. Still...he seems much stronger than when I was fighting him."

"Hmm, you are strong as well," Hao commented. "It is a different kind of strength from mine, but I am not picky. If you have a grudge against this body and a desire to vent it, I will engage with you."

Dorothy sighed again. "Please don't say that so cheerfully. Is this world just full of battle junkies?" She sounded exasperated, but she was also wearing a smile that said she was excited to do battle. At this point, she didn't care who was inside as long as she could destroy that hateful body.

"Hey, wait a second, Dorothy-chan," said Goldiana. "Hao is my opponent. We have our own score to settle, so I won't let you cut in."

"Yes, I know, but...if he has been absorbed by Hazama, you don't have a chance of winning as you currently are, Goddess of Reincarnation Goldiana. Your battle so far has been fierce, but now he has a new, almost undamaged body. And he also likely has Hazama's whole stock of lives too. Meanwhile, you obviously..."

"You really get right to the heart of things, don't you, meanie?" Goldiana pouted slightly. "But...you're right. At best, I can manage one all-out attack. We were planning to end the battle before we were interrupted anyway."

"Indeed. I was planning to do the same. Truly a shame that we were interrupted," Hao agreed.

Goldiana added in a powerful wink, but Hao was unfazed. He had been quietly observing Goldiana and Dorothy's conversation, showing no intention of going on the offensive.

"His appearance aside, I see he's upright and honest, unlike Hazama. I have an idea, Goddess of Reincarnation Goldiana," said Dorothy.

“What is it? Oh, and including my title every time feels way too formal, so you can just call me Prettia-chan!” Goldiana replied, emphasizing her point with a heart mark.

It took a moment for Dorothy to continue. “I don’t mind allowing you to continue fighting. But would you let me play the part of your backup?”

“I feel ignored, but fine,” said Goldiana. “When you talk about backup, does that mean you’ll be casting buffing magic?”

“Yes, essentially. I’ll apply Time Magic in a way that synergizes with your fighting style to give you as much of an advantage as possible, though if I see an opening, I might launch some attack magic as well. We’re facing what’s basically a fusion of Hao and Hazama, so I think it’s only fair to team up to fight them.”

“Hmm, you have a point,” Hao agreed. “I personally love that idea.”

“You’re so understanding, it’s actually throwing me off,” Dorothy muttered.

At any rate, it was decided that Goldiana and Dorothy would team up, complete with Hao’s approval.

“Yes, you’re right. That might be our only option if we want to win,” admitted Goldiana. “But are you sure you’re okay with this? We’ll be working as a team without any prior training.”

“That won’t be a problem,” Dorothy assured her. “I’ve got *him* possessing me.”

“Oh!” Goldiana exclaimed.

“Hmm?!” said Hao.

In that instant, Goldiana and Hao felt some sort of presence behind Dorothy. It was hard for them to put it into words, but they got a really bad feeling from it.

“I can’t explain this ability here and now, so you’ll just have to wait to be introduced to him after this fight is done,” said Dorothy. “You might feel his gaze on you, and you might be distracted by it, but I promise we’ll be the perfect backup. Feel free to concentrate on the fight, Goddess of Reincarnation Goldiana.”

For the final time, they reset. Hao tensed his muscles as he took a combat stance, and Goldiana did the same while facing him.

Dorothy positioned herself up in the air behind Goldiana, allowing her and the being possessing her a view of the entire battlefield.

"We don't need any signal to start, do we?" Goldiana confirmed.

"No, we don't. Feel free to start as you please," Hao agreed. "Please act as you please too, Dorothy."

"I will, to the extent that I won't get in the way. I'll hit you with magic without mercy if you show me an opening, so don't say I didn't warn you."

"Heh! How terrifying!" Despite his reply, there was no way there would be any such opening for either Hao or Goldiana, now that they were prepared for battle. They were both combat ready and waiting for a chance to make a move. Meanwhile, Dorothy was waiting for things to take off.

The fastest way to defeat him would be to hit him with Deathspan using Ancestral Vision, but... Dorothy's Unique skill, Ancestral Vision, was something she'd gained from Deatotal after the ritual. When she activated this skill, a guardian spirit in the form of Deatotal appeared behind her, pointing its heated gaze at her enemies. Actually, the gaze was so cold that it sent shivers up the spine of anyone in its vicinity. It was terribly unpleasant and caused a variety of mental and spiritual problems, big and small, accruing aggro unconsciously.

However, the true worth of Ancestral Vision lay elsewhere: It could transmit magic through its gaze. She'd used it in her battle with Hazama earlier to hit him with the Time Magic spell Deathspan, shaving away a large number of his lives.

This is a spell that greatly speeds up the passage of time by narrowing its area of effect to the limit. The speed at which it fast-forwards time is incomparable to Maul and Decadence, which are already able to make their victims rot away. But its range is far too narrow to be of any use in battle. At least, without the skill I got from Deatotal, which allows me to hit enemies with it just by looking at them.

Deathspan's original range was only about the size of a grain of rice, but with Ancestral Vision, it would basically never miss as long as the target was within her ghost's line of sight. Even the sturdiest

of bodies with the most powerful of abilities would be sent forward thousands of years in an instant without any chance of resistance. It affected all living things, and even if a race existed with a lifespan that could survive that, not eating or sleeping for thousands of years would naturally kill any living thing.

Hazama, with his cunning, cowardice, and massive stock of lives, was uniquely positioned to run away, but just barely. As long as whoever was hit with it didn't have such an unusual ability, this strategy was unbeatable.

The problem is whether Ancestral Vision will work on him... Dorothy pondered.

She knew that the skill had its weak points. The guardian spirit's gaze was equally unpleasant to everyone in sight, but a condition needed to be met to allow her to transmit magic through it: The target had to have a certain amount of hatred or a large enough grudge against Dorothy. Basically, the skill acted like driving a stake into a doll that was cursing its hated foe with its gaze. Since it didn't automatically work against all enemies, it was both powerful and strangely hard to use...maybe.

Since pent-up resentment was the key to unlocking the ability, one might wonder how Dorothy had been able to activate it against Hazama, as it had been their first time meeting. In his case, she'd been able to irritate and enrage him with her words and actions to fulfill the condition without much trouble. Now, she needed to do the same with Hao. Thinking back to the way Hao had acted, she figured it would be hard to fulfill the skill's special condition, but...

Hao's personality aside, the body is Hazama's, so I think it will work. Hazama's body must be destroyed! Absolutely!

Regardless of Hao's personality, she decided that Hazama's hatred was more than enough to make the body a target. It seemed the amount of hatred required was dependent on Dorothy's mood. The standard was surprisingly rough.

I likely don't need to worry about meeting that condition. But Hao's the one moving the body, not that idiot Hazama. If I'm not careful, he might actually dodge the gaze somehow...

Hazama, with his Authority activated, took on a fighting style that

took his stock of lives into account. He tried to overwhelm with mass, no matter what kind of attack he received in return. It was a brute-force method, and given how large he got, there was no way he was even thinking about evasion, so Deathspan had been able to easily hit.

However, Hao wasn't nearly as slow as Hazama. Also, now that he'd formed the body into a humanoid shape, he could make use of his insane martial skill. It was possible he might detect her gaze of doom and dodge it.

Considering what happened with Kelvin during the exhibition match, even if I use Eternal, it's possible for the gaze to be dodged in the instant the spell comes undone. Hao's physical abilities can't even be compared to Kelvin's, so I need to be all the more careful. That's why I need Goldiana to distract him for just an instant. I need the ability to guarantee a hit.

Dorothy was aiming for the instant Goldiana struck Hao with her all-out attack. Dorothy had decided that Goldiana would beat Hao physically while she simultaneously erased Hazama's pool of lives. It also allowed her to respect the fight between Hao and Goldiana.

I'm relying on you, goddess of the new age! she thought.

Ugh, this time, I'll be sure to burn the sight into my memory, Prettia-chan! Dahak thought at the same time.

With Dorothy (and a Dahak who was awake mostly through sheer willpower) watching over them, Goldiana and Hao continued to face off in silence. They were busy reading each other, and it was anyone's guess what kind of exchanges were going on in their minds.

Nothing was said, but it seemed they were even enjoying this imaginary fight, as they were both smiling while refusing to look away from each other. Some time passed with them shedding waterfalls of sweat—and then finally, the moment came.

They both shouted as they disappeared, their fists clashing together instantly. Each opted for the same moves they'd used for their intended final attack earlier: a Doki Doki Smash from Goldiana and an Absoluteness from Hao. But this time, the attacks seemed even sharper, stronger, and faster to Dahak. Was that because

Vouivre had been cast on Goldiana and Hao was in a fresh body?

Either way, Dahak was correct. With how they were now, there was nothing in the world they couldn't destroy, nothing they couldn't wipe away with only their fists. The pair's punches became the strongest spears and also the strongest shields.

However, as the classic contradiction stated, both could not exist at the same time. So which of them would crumble when they clashed? Actually, that wording wouldn't be correct. What would happen would be simpler and more obvious. Essentially...the strongest would prevail.

"I'm glad I was able to have you...as my final opponent," said Hao.

"It's been...an honor," Goldiana replied.

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In the end, Goldiana was the one to claim the victory of her lifetime. Her attack, strong and resolute, imbued with all the feelings of those with her, had proven superior to Hao's.

"RAAAAAAGGGHHH!!!" She shouted her victory.

Her voice seemed like it would carry to the ends of the earth; it certainly filled the entire battlefield. Hao's fist had shattered, and the impact of the attack was reverberating through his entire body, which was already only barely maintaining humanoid form. The amount of lives lost from this attack was barely anything when compared to the amount the body contained, but Goldiana still won. She'd undoubtedly beaten Hao in this life-and-death battle.

This won't do, thought Hao. *We're in battle and yet I'm feeling uncharacteristically sentimental. Is it because I'm feeling so fulfilled right now? I suppose that's fine. It was a good match.*

For some reason, Hao was feeling calm even as the destruction of his body was progressing and despite having lost. As for Hazama, who was the original owner of the body...

Hao, you idiot! Hurry, we need to regenerate and retreat! That little girl's attack is coming! He made no attempt to hide his wariness, afraid of Dorothy's mysterious attack, as he called for Hao

to retreat.

Though Hazama was prevented from speaking physically, he could still communicate with Hao, and he'd been shouting nonstop throughout the entire battle. Of course, this was all internal. No one else had any idea this was going on, as the telepathy he was using could only reach Hao, who shared his body.

If you're not willing to get a move on, then return control of my body to me! Hazama demanded. *I'll kill them quickly and make them into new facets of my body's strength!*

You? The one who lost to Dorothy before losing to me as well and having your body taken? That was a pretty good joke, but I'm not laughing, Hao replied.

Grrr! Agh, who cares about the details! At this rate, both of us will die! The attacks from that false goddess are nothing, but the little girl's attacks are an exception! We'll be killed, even with my Authority manifested! Anyway, just move! Split your body and make decoys! Run away, no matter what it takes! Hazama continued to petition him desperately.

Run? Heh, what happened to those confident words from earlier? Well, either way, it would be impossible to do so. Thanks to the last attack, I can no longer move. At the very least, we'll be here for another few seconds, Hao replied.

Wha... Wh-Wh-What the hell?! You idiot! Stop messing with me! Hazama raged.

I will turn those words right back at you, Hao calmly shot back. *It was so difficult to concentrate with your ceaseless yammering in the middle of battle. If you want to win even a little, you should have been quiet inside me.*

The internal conversation between Hao and Hazama, who shared a body, occurred at a speed equivalent to that of Kelvin's Follower Network. Even someone as patient as Hao was fed up with being harried constantly at speeds like that during battle. In a sense, he'd been handicapped the entire time.

What do you mean, inside you*?! This is* my *body!* Hazama angrily pointed out.

Well, I suppose I was just not good enough, this incident

included, Hao admitted. *I shouldn't have been disturbed. If I had just possessed a tougher mentality... Heh, to think I could still have regrets after all that's happened. I guess life just doesn't go the way one wants, whether it's a human's or a god's.*

Listen to me! Hazama insisted. *And don't just reach some sort of satisfying conclusion on your own! I still want to—need to—survive! There's so much more for me to eat! I am Hazama! The Foreign God Hazama—*

My apologies for interrupting your speech, but the time has come, said Hao. *But how should I put it... Our souls will be offered to Addams if we die, right? Personally, I find this regrettable, but the outcome still isn't terrible as a member of the Ten Authorities. Not enough to really interest me, though.*

As if! You idiot! Fool! How can you be so stuuupiiid! Hazama continued expressing his anger.

Goldiana's mercy-filled strike was slowly destroying their body. But what came next was a merciless spell that would one-sidedly execute them.

"Deathspan," said Dorothy.

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The battle was over. Their enemy's body had been forcefully sent to the future, taking its stock of lives with it. In the end, the body turned to dust and was blown away by the wind, leaving no trace of its unsettling form.

"Looks like it went well," Dorothy remarked.

Goldiana was silent for a moment before speaking up. "Hao-chan, the result might have been different if you had been in perfect condition. But this time, I won. I've avenged you, Grostina, my cute sister disciple!"

"Aaahhh! You did it, Prettia-chaaannn!" Dahak yelled.

"Um, hey, wait a second, Dahak. Don't just fly off...all of a...sudden..." Mdo gasped.

"How are you so energetic...when you're in...tatters..." Boga added.

“The incarnation of beauty has descended before us! Naturally, the very sight gives me energy!” Dahak replied.

Dorothy put her hand to her chest in relief as Goldiana looked up at the sky, shedding tears. That was when the Dragonz approached. Though the battlefield was far from intact, their emotions were, and they were swirling around tumultuously.

“Mm-hmm, you’re as energetic as ever,” Goldiana gushed. “If even one person was absent, I wouldn’t have been able to grasp victory. I’m so moved!”

“Roooaaarrrgh! Prettia-chaaannn!” Dahak yelled.

“Shut up!” Mdo responded. “Please don’t lump Boga and me in with that idiot Dahak, Goldiana... We’re not energetic at all. Look at us...”

“I want to eat...rice balls...” Boga muttered, exhausted.

While Dahak was energetically making his emotions known, it looked like it was taking everything Mdofarak and Boga had to stay in the air.

“Jeez, you guys just lack guts and willpower!” Dahak scoffed. “Prettia-chan’s the one who had it hardest—I’m so sooorrryyy, Prettia-chan! Grooosss!” Of course, Dahak’s emotions quickly turned to grief. He seemed to be pretty unstable at the moment and began wailing.

“Dragon Kings don’t cry so easily, Dahak,” Mdo said. “But you’re right...Grostina’s final moments were...” She sniffed sadly.

“Ugghh...zorry!” Boga apologized. “I wasn’t powerful enough!”

Goldiana paused for a moment before letting out a giggle. “It’s great to see that girl was so loved. Allow me to express my gratitude in her stead. Thank you all so much for fighting beside her. I’m sure she’s proud that she was able to fight with you...so rejoice in our victory for her as well.”

“But... But!” Dahak protested.

None of the Dragonz showed any sign of stopping their tears, and the waterfall moistened the blasted ground under them. It was enough to make a small spring.

“My, my, she sure was loved, wasn’t she? Truly...” Goldiana trailed off.

After a moment's observation, Dorothy spoke up. "Sorry to interrupt, Goddess of Reincarnation Goldiana, but I should be moving on to the next battle now." She spread her wings after that declaration.

"Oh! So soon? You used a very *intense* spell, didn't you, Dorothy-chan? Do you have enough magic?"

"No need to worry. I've been given goddess-approved recovery potions from a certain gluttonous deity. I have a small stomach, so one is my limit, but...well, it should be enough to hold me for one more battle."

"Is that so? I guess I needn't have worried," said Goldiana. "Have you already decided where you're going?"

"I have," Dorothy affirmed. "I want to ascertain Luquille's movements rather than chase another of the Ten Authorities. I've just confirmed that her presence has left the Holy Stake. I...have a bad feeling."

She looked off into the distance. It seemed she already knew where Luquille was.

"Oh my, no! Is this a flag?!" Goldiana exclaimed.

"Flag?" Dorothy repeated, confused.

"That's right! An omen of the future!" Goldiana exclaimed. "Serge-chan told me about them before! I'm worried, so would you mind if I come with you? My wounds should recover as I run!"

"As you...run? I know I'm not one to talk, but your body is pretty ridiculous, Goddess of Reincarnation Goldiana," said Dorothy.

"Urgh!" Dahak sniffled. "If Prettia-chan's going, then we are toooooo! Right, Mdo?! Boga?!"

"No, come on. That'd be impossible," Mdo retorted.

"Rice balls..." Boga muttered.

And so, the Dragonz, heavily wounded, withdrew. Meanwhile, Dorothy and Goldiana chased after Luquille.

Chapter 2: Unification

The battle in the Chamber of Wisdom, located at the center of the angels' capital, San Zelles, had finally begun. Actually, since the chamber was too small, the combatants had moved outside. At any rate, the battle had finally started. The enemy was the leader of the Ten Authorities, Eld Astel, a worthy opponent.

"Obsidian Edge!"

"Do you seriously think you can hurt me with that blunt thing?" Eld asked after a moment of disbelief. "As long as I am turning the metal around me into material, those will be decomposed long before they reach me."

As he said, he was using his Authority, Unity, to copy other Authorities, entrancing me greatly. He was currently manifesting the white wings of Baldogg's Tempering, turning every bit of matter near him into energy for him to use. In other words, if I carelessly got too close, all my equipment would be taken apart and I would be left just like Cheruvim, who was buck naked. Not only that, but considering the equipment I'd lent to Cheruvim had been Rank S and was now gone without a trace, the strength of the equipment didn't make a difference to the process. Truly a troublesome ability.

That didn't mean long-range attacks were working either. As Eld said, even if I were to launch my Obsidian Edge blades at him, they would be broken apart before reaching him just like any equipment. I even tried making an attack using my scythe, but he simply switched to Hard's Unbreakable and negated the damage. I knew that the Authority's weaknesses were spells that ignored imbued properties, like Divine Saber or Sacred Bless, but...I would need to approach Eld to be able to make use of them. And as noted before, I would lose all my equipment and join Cheruvim as a nudist if I did that. Yeah, rejected. I didn't want to lose all my stuff that had served me so well over the years, and neither did I want to be

stripped naked.

Now then, what to do? I could cast Divine Saber on Cheruvim and send him in, but the spell targets equipment. He's naked, so there's nothing to cast it on. I also considered hitting him with both physical and magical attacks at once, but I've already confirmed he can activate Temperance and Unbreakable at the same time. It would be convenient if his ability allowed each to only be used once, but it doesn't seem like it'll be that easy. Both of them are still totally usable. Heh heh...what an annoying opponent you are, Eld! It was worth choosing to come here!

"What are you spacing out for, Kelvin?! We're in the middle of battle! Get it together!" shouted Cheruvim.

"Oh, right...sure."

Right, I know I don't match up great with our enemy, but, like, um...well...yeah.

I was being addressed by Cheruvim, self-proclaimed subleader of the Ten Authorities with a name very similar to mine, who I'd formed a temporary working relationship with. Not only was his name similar to mine, he even had the same black hair and style. We basically resemble each other a lot. We'd crossed blades once and affirmed that we were both strong, so I'd given him my seal of approval.

Also, he seemed antagonistic toward Eld, so his morale was high. That was a good thing, a very good thing. Since he'd lost all his equipment, he was standing on the front line in my place while slamming him with slashes imbued with this Authority. He was doing his part as the linchpin of our offense.

But! I'd been looking forward to this battle so much and now he was standing in front of me, hiding nothing from my eyes as he fought valiantly while showing me everything!

I know that, tactically, this is the correct choice, but my morals are warring within me, saying I need to follow him into battle! And it's getting fierce as the fight gets more intense! Hey, even battle junkies have scruples about how they fight, you know?!

"Cheruvim, I know you're fighting hard, but you know that your Authority doesn't mesh well with Unbreakable," said Eld. "Now is your chance to surrender. If you do, I will give you the honor of

being sacrificed to Addams."

"Hmph, I won't be tempted by your smooth words!" Cheruvim responded. "Abandoning the fight just because your abilities are a bad match is what weaklings do! I will follow my own path and bury you!"

Whether or not they knew of my conflicted mental state, Eld and Cheruvim continued to fight passionately as if nothing were wrong, all while exchanging heated words.

Oh man, why are both of you making that face? Do fallen angels have no sense of shame? You know, our DarkMel is much more proper. In fact, she's more proper than Mel! Like, she's the type to not allow someone to walk around naked even in the house. And, well, I'd like both of you to learn from her. My little girl is the paragon of fallen angels!

"YOU TWO NEED TO TAKE A LESSON FROM DARKMEEELLL!"

Both combatants reacted with shocked noises as I slammed Eld with the strongest casting of Air Pressure I could muster with my Magic Overclock, as if to let out my frustration. The damage done was minimal, but it should have made it harder for him to move.

"What kind of cryptic nonsense are— No, I should be saying 'well done' instead! Abestag!" shouted Cheruvim.

It seemed he'd understood my intentions, and he slashed at Eld with his jet-black scythe, aiming for what would be vitals on a human, like one's eyes or neck. Hard was made out of metal, but Eld was only flesh. It was possible that there could be a hole in his defenses...

"It's useless," said Eld.

Thought not. Right, got it. As expected, Unbreakable covered his vitals as well. Cheruvim's scythe, which could grant death to people and spells alike, was able to erase my Air Pressure, but still was unable to kill Eld.

"Hup!" Eld grunted.

"Hrngh?!" Cheruvim let out.

Eld had counterattacked using black blades that were...very similar to my Obsidian Edge swords that had been broken down earlier. The wings of energy on his back were even now creating

new weapons to throw at us. I wasn't sure whether to gripe about it or consider myself lucky, but the speed at which these weapons were being thrown was nothing special, and we had plenty of time to dodge even if we didn't react until after we saw the weapon get thrown. They didn't suddenly change vectors in midair either; it was a very standard attack.

"Your defenses may be formidable, but your offense leaves much to be desired! Is this really the extent of your strength, leader of the Ten Authorities?!"

"That's right! Keep it up, Kelvin!" shouted Cheruvim. "Tell him that I'm more fit to be the leader of the Ten Authorities!"

No, no, I didn't say that.

"You expect too much of me, Grim Reaper," said Eld. "How many times do I have to say that Unity isn't that convenient? Now that this is a two-on-one fight, I'm naturally forced onto the defensive."

"Then die already! I will succeed you!" shouted Cheruvim.

"Heh! Allow me to refuse," replied Eld.

Though he was saying that he was on the back foot, his defenses were pretty much perfect. There was no doubt that this battle was falling into a stalemate, no matter how fiercely we attacked.

Still...not that convenient, huh? If I take his words at face value, maybe it's something like he can use different Authorities at the same time but not at full power? Hard's Unbreakable combined both offense and defense, and the one with Tempering who fought Serge should have been able to make a larger variety of weapons. Hmm...that's too bad.

But what was even more concerning was how composed Eld was in this situation. Currently, he was neither winning nor losing. And yet, why was he so calm?

Wait...don't tell me he never intended to win in the first place? Like, he could just be doing this to buy time... Agh, that does seem possible. Which means we'll need to hurry this up.

"Okay, let's change up the strategy a little. I'm counting on you, Clotho."

I put my Black Staff of Disaster into Clotho's Storage and took out a different weapon instead. *I wonder how long it's been since I used*

this.

"It's been a while, Clive-kun!"

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"What is that, Grim Reaper?" Eld asked after a pause.

In a rare show, his brow was furrowed as he looked doubtfully at the sword I brought out.

Ha ha! He's got some good instincts.

"This is the current Demon Lord's weapon, only I brought it back onto the straight and narrow. Its name is Clive."

Despite the black longsword being in the same category as Willjillion, anyone who touched it would suffer a huge mass of curses; it was a very warped little thing. And, most importantly, the sword was alive. From what Serge had told me, Tempering couldn't break down anything that was living. In other words, Clive was the best weapon for the job!

"For *reasons*, I can't use this sword against women, but that doesn't apply to you, Eld. You can go wild, Clive!"

It felt like Clive responded to that.

That's weird. Is it just me or is Clive refusing? No, I'm sure it's just my imagination. I've beat it back into shape so many times that it's reached the level of Willjillion. Its personality should have been reborn as something pure and honest too. I'm sure it'll display its power, no matter who it's against!

Then again, by the time I'd obtained the sword—basically when I'd defeated Demon Lord Zel—Clive's personality, which had been inside the sword, had already been nearly gone.

There were only the dregs of a personality left, and when I think back to how Tristan and Jildora were in Trycen at the time, I can't imagine they used any decent method to put him in the sword. At any rate, given the state his soul was in, it should be impossible for the weapon to show any sort of independent will... Either its ego is especially strong, or somehow the massive amount of curses just happened to synergize? Every once in a while, the sword seems to show some personality. By the way, that never went away, no matter

how much I fixed it. Well, anyway, that's why I decided never to use Clive against a girl.



"Hey, is it just me or does that sword hate the idea?" Cheruvim asked.

"No way. It's just excited to be released for the first time in so long. Now then...let's test whether or not that Tempering Authority can take this apart."

"I see... That's quite an interesting blade," said Eld.

"No, it's just weird and disgusting. You have bad taste, Kelvin," said Cheruvim.

Finally, the look in Eld's eyes turned serious. It seemed he considered Clive-kun a threat. And, for some reason, Cheruvim criticized my taste.

Heh heh, I want to slice him up, but now's not the time. My weapon may be fine, but if I charge in as I am, everything else will disintegrate.

"Hard, Astaroth Form."

I summoned Hard and had it transform, pulling the hood far over my face. I put all of my clothing and other equipment inside Clotho, and now my preparations were finished. I was seriously only wearing Hard, so it felt kind of weird, but...well, I was still much better than Cheruvim.

Also, I made sure not to imbue Clive-kun and Hard with Divine Saber and Sacred Bless, because while the spells were powerful, they would dispel the equipment's original abilities.

"So that's what happened to Ridwan?" said Eld. "Bold of you to not only make a member of the Ten Authorities your follower but to also wear him. Are you sure about this, though? Ridwan's soul is already within a stake. Even with Unbreakable, he might get disassembled by Tempering if you get too close."

"He's not Ridwan anymore, he's Hard. And as for your question...as the name suggests, Hard isn't weak enough to fall prey to that. But why don't we test it out along with Clive-kun?!" I pointed my sword at Eld and emanated pressure his way.

"My word, so the Grim Reaper finally comes to the front line," said Eld. "This might prove to be a bit too much for me."

"Then you can always surrender—" Cheruvim started, but I cut him off.

"Let's go!"

"Ah, hey!" shouted Cheruvim.

Before he could say anything more, I stepped into range of Tempering. As expected from his reaction speed, Cheruvim quickly followed.

"Go," said Eld.

He created a mass of swords with his wings and hurled them at us. However, while the numbers were great, it was just a rehash of the earlier attack. The weapons made with Tempering weren't imbued with Unbreakable, so if I felt like it, I could even crush these projectiles with my bare hands. Basically, such things weren't real obstacles to us!

"Well done, given how recently you learned that! But from what I heard, they should be better!" I made my way through the storm of weapons in front of me to reach Eld's side.

Meanwhile, Cheruvim was loudly and continuously agreeing, but I'd expected that to happen. I was used to it by now. Still, it seemed to me that the original owners of these Authorities would be better at using them. Even if Eld were to use several at once, it didn't seem like he could mix or fuse abilities together.

Is that the limit of Unity? If possible, I'd like him to say something more. Okay, let's try taunting him a little.

"Why not add Unbreakable to your attacks too?! Are you still holding back on producing mythical weapons?!"

"I'd appreciate it if you would cut me some slack, Grim Reaper, or else you'll get infected with Cheruvim's stupidity," said Eld.

"What do you mean, *my* stupidity?!" shouted Cheruvim. "Damn you, you'll regret your words! I hereby manifest my Authority!"

Why the heck are you the one getting riled up, Cheruvim?!

Anyway, erm...Cheruvim manifested his Authority and changed form. He was still naked, but now he had curled horns on his head and black bone wings, making his nakedness seem a little less bad... *Nope, it's still terrible. I won't say what, but it's still out and clearly visible. Oh man, I don't know what to do...*

At any rate, it was clear that Cheruvim was at a disadvantage between how short-tempered he was with Eld and his continuing

nudity. But that didn't mean he was without a plan.

"Azem!" he declared.

"Mm?!"

The ends of his bone wings grew, split, and branched off across a wide area toward Eld.

I see, so he's deploying them to cut off Eld's escape routes. With this, even if he doesn't take any damage, we'll be able to limit his options with the constantly spawning wall of bone wings. It should be hard for Eld to destroy these wings with just the weapons he makes from Temperance. So, I should be...shining bright with Clive-kun!

I threw out an attack at Eld now that he'd lost his ability to leave. Believing in that fact, I cast Sonic Acceleration while he was distracted, instantly closing the distance.

Now then, I wonder what Unbreakable will do to someone with no lives...

"I won't fall for that," said Eld.

A loud rumbling sound swept over us.

"Whoa?!"

"Tch!" Cheruvim let out.

I was so close to getting into sword range when Eld suddenly made the ground under his feet swell.

No, wait, is he trying to create towerlike footholds using Temperance?

Unfortunately, those were quickly destroyed by Cheruvim's bone wings. Still, Eld got himself up, flapping his energy wings and flying high up into the air.

"That was close. I don't want to touch that sw—" Eld started.

"I mean, you know I can just chase you, right?"

Eld let out a noise of shock.

You shouldn't underestimate the effect of an overclocked casting of Sonic Acceleration. Now that I can get close to you, there's no point in trying to run away with only your level of speed.

I quickly swung Clive-kun, assaulting Eld with a slash laden with

curses.

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The speed boost given by Sonic Acceleration also raised the speed of my sword swings. I estimated I was fast enough that by the time Eld would be able to turn to face me, the number of slashes I'd have launched would be in the double digits.

During the first slash, Unbreakable showed its effect and he was not cut. My sword bounced off of him with a metallic clang, and there was no change in his appearance. This continued up to the fourth slash, but on the fifth one, something changed in his Authority.

"Grk?!" Eld grunted.

The moment Clive-kun's edge touched him, it started slicing through his flesh, even though up until now, it had only returned a metallic clanging. The sixth and seventh slashes also succeeded, making this a combo of attacks on the hitherto untouched Eld. Apparently I was right: He had been cursed by Clive-kun, and Unbreakable had ceased to function.

Curses brought about a variety of debuffs and bad status effects —a truly annoying thing. In Clive-kun's case, I'd adjusted it so that I'd be fine as long as I was holding on to its grip, but that wasn't the case for other cursed items in the world. And if anyone was to try to use a cursed weapon, they'd definitely have to have some sort of work-around. When I fought Viktor, I had avoided the curse by essentially "shooting" it out of storage, like I was using Clotho to block it. Ah, that reminds me, I used the same method back then to peel away Viktor's magic. Who would've thought I'd use the exact same method now, with Clive-kun and everything? It wasn't quite moving, but it went to show that anything could happen.

"Ha ha ha! Let's keep going!"

Without slowing down, I continued to swing my sword with all the speed I could muster. Clive-kun's curse would take effect just from touching its blade, but it would be much stronger if the blade were to cut into the target. In other words, the more I slashed Eld,

the more curses would stack on top of each other. The more damage I inflicted on him, the worse his situation would get.

Since I hadn't seen Eld get damaged before now, I hadn't seen him use any recovery magic or the Auto Healing skill take effect.

Now, what will you do? I'm much faster than you. Aren't you going to undo the curses or heal yourself? If you don't do something soon, the curses will only continue to stack and a certain pervert wielding Lethality will come to murder you from behind, you know? Hey, come on, what're you going to do? I want to see your all-powerful solution to this. Hurry up and show it to me!

"I suppose it's my turn now," said Eld.

"What do you— Whoa!"

My combo against Eld was suddenly stopped. It felt like a weird power had gotten in the way out of nowhere, even though Clive-kun had been going through him like a hot knife through butter before. I couldn't even pull my blade out of him. It didn't seem to be because of Unbreakable, but while I was trying to figure it out, he formed a fist and seemed about to try to engage me in hand-to-hand combat. He breathed out heavily.

"Hyper Impact!"

His fist was about to make contact with my cheek when I cast my spell through Clive-kun to unleash a storm of shock waves inside him. With that, I managed to force him off-balance, dodge the incoming fist, and pull Clive-kun out of his body.

Ah, I see. The power that stopped my blade was pure muscle. I tried to pry open his defenses because it didn't seem like I'd be able to win in a contest of strength, but...if I'd been facing the original user of this Authority, that would've been pretty dangerous, huh?

But still...I see. I've been considering a whole host of different conditions he'd need to activate Authorities using Unity, but finally the truth has shown itself. Before, he only used Tempering and Unbreakable, but now he's also used Brawn. That means he can most likely use Fusion as well. From Network conversations with Dahak and the others, Hao and Hazama were defeated just now. Basically, the Authorities become available to Eld as his fellow Ten Authorities are killed...which means the loss of his comrades is

actually a benefit to him.

Whoops. Sonic Acceleration's about to run out. The effect of Magic Overclocking is enormous, but it always makes spell durations shorter.

"What a warped little Authority you have!"

"Hrngh!" Eld grunted.

I'd kicked him toward Cheruvim.

"Cheruvim!"

During the time it would take me to reenchant myself, it would be best to have Cheruvim deal with him.

Yeah, this is great teamwork.

Even if Eld was able to use Brawn, now that Unbreakable was unavailable to him, his absolute defense was gone. That meant Cheruvim's Lethality would be effective.

"Right! I'll kill you myself, EEELLLD!" Cheruvim shouted.

"Hrngghhh!" Eld grunted again.

This time, the muscles on Eld's back swelled, and his white wings of energy wrapped around them to form the wings of muscle that Goldiana—now the Goddess of Reincarnation—had once shown. They buzzed at high speed like a bug's wings, allowing him to forcefully correct his heading. He flew up into the sky above San Zelles, putting some distance between us.

"Hey now, is that really allowed?!"

"This isn't the time to celebrate, Kelvin!" Cheruvim shouted. "And Eld, you bastard, are you really going to run?!"

"Who wouldn't if certain death was awaiting them at their destination?" Eld replied. "However, I have to admit you got me. I didn't expect things to be this one-sided while I'm using multiple Authorities. I can only continue to curse my own weakness."

Even as he spoke, he was remodeling his body. He was originally of medium build and height, but before my very eyes he grew until he became like Goldiana. Only, his face remained the same, so it felt a little...unbalanced, I would say. Still, he was moving through the air much faster, probably because of his new muscles.

"I suppose you'd call this a silver lining. This ability still works through all the curses," he announced.

"Great for you. So...Hazama's been killed. Are you not going to use Fusion?"

"What? Hazama? I see...so that's how it works," said Cheruvim.

Naturally, with what I just said, Cheruvim finally started to understand what was going on.

"That's a pretty mean-spirited question," said Eld. "From that tone, you already know, don't you? Fusion is powerful, but it's basically useless in this situation, where I've done no prior preparation. Even if I could employ it, it wouldn't do anything."

"Is that so? You answered pretty easily."

"You seem to have realized a lot about my Authority already," Eld replied. "So there's no point in trying to hide anything now. Not to mention, even if I told you, it's not like it would affect the situation at this point. Anyway, if you ask me, I'd have preferred to have Gloria's Gap or Isabelle's Border. Either would have been easier for me to use, but..."

Ah, right. He probably can't use either of those. Gloria's being held on the Northern Continent, and there was a report saying that Isabelle drew her match with Sera and Gerard, despite being one of the Three Great Authorities. As for the last of that trio, Rem... She's currently being "appreciated" by Serge, I think? Not that I know what that means. Anyway, Mel and Shutola are also there, so it probably won't turn into anything weird. Er...probably.

"Pretty much all the other battles have already been settled. But, wait, you do have *one* other ally remaining, don't you?"

"Are you talking about Patrick?" Eld asked. "I suppose I'm glad that I still have allies, but unfortunately, his Authority isn't something I'd be able to use pro— Grfwhh?!"

We were in the middle of some snappy banter despite also conducting aerial combat. I extended Clive-kun's blade and used it like a whip, applying Concealment to it so that it could cut one of Eld's muscle wings from a blind angle. Meanwhile, Cheruvim secretly sent out an extended bone wing in concert with my attack to pierce Eld's heart from behind.

"Heh hah hah hah hah hah! Sorry, Eld!" Cheruvim exclaimed. "You were talking for so long that my hands—no, my wings—moved

on their own!”

“I get it,” I said. “Anyone would reflexively make a move after being shown such a big opening. I struck with my sword too, after all. Still, this is honestly pretty unsatisfying for the end of the big boss. Or as Mel would say, I haven’t quite eaten enough...”

With that, I looked down at Eld. He’d lost a wing and had also taken a blow from Lethality and had fallen to the ground. He was currently lying on the streets of San Zelles, neither talking nor moving. He didn’t even seem to be breathing. His enhanced musculature remained, but it likely wouldn’t change anymore. It was a little bit of a letdown, but the battle was over...though I was still half in disbelief.

I’d figured not even the leader of the Ten Authorities could negate a hit imbued with Lethality. And it wasn’t like he had any stock of lives (I think that’s what they were called?) like Hazama did using Fusion, so he should definitely be dead. Only, I had my doubts about the way he fought, and there were several things that didn’t make sense to me as well.

“Did he say he was manifesting his Authority just before you hit him with your wing? It kind of looked like his mouth was moving that way.”

Cheruvim didn’t reply immediately. He had been laughing loudly during this time, but at some point he’d closed his eyes and fallen silent.

What? That’s kinda creepy, dude.

“Hey! Are you listening, Cheruvim?”

“Hmm? Ah, my apologies,” said Cheruvim. “My joy at having been able to bury Eld with my own hands is permeating my entire body. Now that my dream of many years has come true, I am flying incredibly high. I can confidently say I’ve never felt such a feeling of exhilaration before.”

This time it was my turn to not reply. *Yeah, okay. Well, I guess in a sense he would be feeling “exhilarated,” given how he looks right now. No, wait, that’s not what I want to say!*

“You were talking about him manifesting his Authority? Well, I wouldn’t know. I didn’t even know that his Authority was Unity up

until now. There's no way I'd know what his true strength would be like, given his ability."

"You *do* have a point..."

"Heh! But don't worry. My Lethality is absolute, and it definitely worked. No matter what his power is like when awakened, it's too late now. Heh heh heh... That's right! I killed Eld!" Cheruvim yelled. Once again, he started to laugh loudly. From my perspective, that line had just set up a flag. Still, there was one more thing that bothered me.

"Right up to the end, I never felt any desire from him to win. Was that really his true strength?"

"You're still worried about that, Kelvin? You're more of a worrywart than I expected. I mean, it's true that compared to Eld before, that was a little unsatisfying."

"Hmm? Before? What do you mean by that?"

"Exactly what I said. Despite what you may think of me, I *am* the subleader of the Ten Authorities. I may not have known about his Authority, but I have a general understanding of the relative strengths of all the organization's members. Eld never revealed his Authority to anyone, but during the war, he loved to use some sort of magic that emitted a black light. If I were to try to describe it as you would, I'd say it was like a fusion of White and Black Magic."

"What?! S-So he had that kind of trump card?! Wouldn't he have been stronger using that than degraded copies of Authorities?!"

"Isn't that what I said?" Cheruvim replied. "Even if he was suddenly able to use other Authorities, there's no way he'd be able to do so with much skill. Using weapons he's familiar with would have made him a much more formidable foe than resorting to degraded copies he was unfamiliar with. Hmph, well, in any case, that just means he made a pitiful choice in the end. Actually, in this case, I suppose we should pity the Authority he was given instead? Anyway, it's too..."

Cheruvim continued speaking, but I was in too much shock to process what he was saying.

Eld...why didn't you use your full strength? You would have had a much better chance of winning with that magic...

"Urgh...I wonder if Eld won't suddenly come back to life..."

"What're you saying?!" Cheruvim shouted.

"I mean, it was a joke, obviously, but I'm seriously disappointed here. You've gotta understand that, at least."

"Sure, but the only thing I can say to that is, 'I see...'" he replied.

It would be enough for me if he would just realize how I felt at some point. Anyway, my dissatisfaction aside, I supposed I should resolve the source of my unease first. I gathered magic in my empty left hand.

"Hey, what're you doing?" Cheruvim asked.

"There was a lot about Eld's actions that made no sense, even with your reasoning, Cheruvim. So I'm going to resolve this in a simple way."

"Ah...you're going to attack the body further," he noted.

"It's good that you're so quick on the uptake. Analyze Eye says that Eld is at 0 HP, but stat displays can't be relied on. I get a vague sense of uneasiness from it too, so I'm going to make sure he's dead at least. Honestly, I don't like beating on a corpse, but...do you object?"

"No," answered Cheruvim. "Eld is a cautious man. I don't believe you'd be going too far by doing this. Heh! I, Cheruvim Ripita, the God of Death, assure you of that!"

"Huh? Oh, okay..."

Honestly, I can't place much trust in that, since it's coming from a naked deity, but...whatever. I'd welcome something unexpected happening that would continue this battle. However, that didn't mean I'd pull my punches either. I had Cheruvim's approval, so... *Don't think badly of me for this, Eld.*

"Radiance Lance Quad!" I declared. I created an especially thick lance of light and threw it with all my might at Eld. It was slower than the normal spell, but it was much more powerful. If it hit him without any resistance from his side, his body would turn into quite the disaster scene.

Now, what will you do?

KaTHOOOM!

The spell flew straight for the middle of his chest and hit. Eld was

run through along with the ground beneath him, and a huge hole was bored into his torso. The result was so terrible that his upper and lower halves had been completely severed save for a single flap of skin.

"He didn't move at all."

"Indeed. He didn't even blink when the attack hit him," said Cheruvim. "It seems our worries were unfounded. Eld is dead; that is certain."

Despite that, I didn't say anything.

Hmm. So, in the end, I wasn't able to show everything I had.

"Ugh, oh well, fine. Let's move on to the next thing."

"Huh?" Cheruvim replied.

"Our original objective was to defeat Eld, but...what will you do now? Technically, our alliance ends here. Do you want to fight me now?"

Although it was too bad about Eld, I did indeed still have some things left to enjoy. Now that our common goal was gone, Cheruvim and Luquille no longer had a reason to cooperate. As a silver lining, both of us were basically unharmed. There would be no problem with simply starting another fight! And with Cheruvim—someone with similar thoughts about combat as me—I was sure he would happily...

"What are you saying, Kelvin?" he asked.

"Huh?"

In contrast to my expectations, he rejected the proposal with an exasperated look. Since I thought he'd be totally on board, I couldn't help but give a dumb response.

"Think back hard. Didn't I promise that girl that once Eld was dealt with, we would finish our talks? First we must find Luquille and quickly prepare a place for a conference. If you want to fight, it will have to be after that!" he exclaimed.

I gasped. *That's right! Shutola used her Unique Skill, Retributive Persuasion, to force them to have a discussion after our alliance was dissolved! Damn, it's true that—my own preferences aside—talking things out is the smartest method! And given how skilled Shutola is with words, it will be easy for her to run roughshod over Cheruvim*

and Luquille! Oh crap, I can't even argue against it! More than that, I can't waste the opportunity Shutola worked so hard to create! So basically...I'm screwed!

"Hey...your expressions have been shifting quickly this entire time. It's basically a comedy show. Are you okay?" Cheruvim asked.

"I... I'm fine. Definitely. I'm oka—"

In that instant, we both made noises of alarm as we put our backs together and shifted to maximum wariness.

Hey now, what the heck is going on? I'm feeling a delicious presence coming from all directions!

A noise was coming from somewhere. A mechanical noise that I'd heard before—or rather, recently. There was no mistaking it: This was the sound of a Holy Stake on the move. It was very loud, like an alarm bell, as it reverberated throughout our surroundings. But while the sound was certainly concerning, what was this presence that was spreading along with it? It felt similar to Demon Lord Zel's, whom I'd fought in Trycen.

"Could this be...? No way," Cheruvim muttered.

"Do you know what this is?" I asked.

After a moment, he answered. "Most likely, this sound signals that enough souls for the sacrifice have been gathered. The Holy Stakes are on the move."

"Ah, so it really is the sound of Holy Stakes moving. Hey, wait a second...all of them? As in, all six?! Even the ones under our control that we hid? Art should still be inside; if it suddenly starts moving on its own—"

Out of nowhere, I heard Shutola through the Network. ::It's terrible, dearest brother! The Holy Stake we were on suddenly started moving on its own! Principal Art is nowhere to be found either; I can't get ahold of him!::

"Whaaat?"

Such timing! Shutola's panicked report confirmed what I was afraid of. *Actually, where the heck did the principal go?!*

"I just confirmed it through the Network. It looks like you're right," I told Cheruvim.

"Messages from your comrades, huh? So, Kelvin, how many have

died on either side from the other battles?" he asked.

"How many have died? Uh...from the Ten Authorities, there's Hao and Hazama, and it seems Grostina died on our side."

"Gros... Ah, that one. Right, that makes sense. However...heh! You're surprisingly calm, aren't you, Kelvin? I suppose I should expect that of you. Dying in a battle with your pride on the line is nothing to be ashamed of. In fact, such a feat should be praised. You know that well—"

"Hey, we're in an emergency right now. Just get to the point already. You promised to talk things over, didn't you?"

"Mgh...right, my apologies. You're right," he mumbled. "I couldn't help but ramble in my excitement."

I returned a questioning look. *What?*

Shutola's ability seemed to be at work, but Cheruvim was acting strange. He should have been as wary of our surroundings as I was, but he also looked weirdly excited.

Oh right, didn't he just say something about sacrifices and souls? Hey...wait. It can't be...

"So, with Eld's death, each of the six Holy Stakes has been given a soul, all to sacrifice to the wicked god Addams."

"Exactly," Cheruvim confirmed. "The stakes have judged the souls to be worthy of sacrifice. I didn't know this either, but it seems the stakes can collect souls from any distance. Not only that, but it seems they're programmed to move automatically to proceed with the ritual."

In other words, the ritual to revive the wicked god was already underway. Up until now, this planet had regularly extracted the wicked god's power and released it onto the surface so as to not allow him to regain his full strength. By my reckoning, that was what caused Demon Lords to spawn, which was likely why the presence I was feeling so resembled a Demon Lord's. My powerful enemy sensors were already going off loudly, and he hadn't even been revived yet. How powerful could the wicked god Addams be?

"Damn you, Baldogg. You only told Eld about this, didn't you?" Cheruvim cursed. "That gigantic fool...but still, well done!"

I said nothing in reply. The revival of Addams was one of

Cheruvim's ultimate goals, which explained his joy.

Hm? Wait... "Oh, so that's what he meant when he said it was his turn."

"What are you talking about?" Cheruvim asked.

"Eld said it during the battle. I thought he was saying that it was his turn to attack, since he'd obtained the Brawn Authority, but...now I think that he'd realized Hao and Hazama died after receiving their Authorities and figured out that only one more soul was needed, so he'd be enough."

"What?! Th-Then...Eld lost to us on purpose?!" Cheruvim shouted in disbelief.

"The battle continued for a while afterward, so I can't say for sure, but...don't you think that, to him, it didn't matter who died when or where, whether the person was a friend, an enemy, or even Eld himself? It probably didn't even have to be from our battle. The Holy Stakes' ability to collect souls is better than you thought, right?"

"So... So you're saying that's why he treated the Ten Authorities like disposable pawns from the beginning? And that he never had any interest in us winning?!" Cheruvim shouted.

"Well, I don't think you can blame yourself. Obviously he'd try to hide his plan by giving at least some explanation so as to not be suspected. After all, there's no way that many people in the Ten Authorities would've been willing to sacrifice themselves to revive the wicked god."

"Of course not! At the very least, I never would have allowed my friends to die, and Hazama definitely didn't have that spirit of self-sacrifice! None of the others would have volunteered to die either! And regardless, choosing death of your own volition can't be allowed. I won't allow it as a god of death, especially from my comrades... Damn you, Eld! You committed the gravest of sins!"

Despite aiming for the same goal, Cheruvim's and Eld's opinions had never really aligned. Cheruvim was like me and couldn't really be called a saint. Yet, he'd never make light of his friends' lives. That might have been the biggest difference between him and Eld, who would do anything for his goals.

"Eld's goal was to revive Addams. That was the most important

thing. If only one more sacrifice was needed, he must have figured that dying himself would be much more certain than banking on beating us. After all, if he lost and his powers were sealed, he wouldn't be able to sacrifice anyone, let alone himself. To be fair, though, it doesn't matter now what he was thinking. A lot's happened, and the conditions for the wicked god's revival have been met. That's all that matters. Do you know what will happen next, Cheruvim?"

Cheruvim was panting, and it took a moment for him to respond. "Ah, if that's what you want to know—"

He was out of breath from anger, but he was still about to explain what would happen. Then, another voice cut him off.

"The stakes will move to a predetermined point. Once that's done, they will start burrowing into the ground."

Both of us let out noises of shock. The voice had come out of nowhere, but it sounded like it was natural for it to be there. Both Cheruvim and I took great leaps backward. At first, the voice had come from below us, where Eld had fallen, so we looked down. But the source had moved faster than we could turn, ending the sentence right next to our ears—all without either of us realizing it despite being back-to-back.

"Once each Holy Stake reaches the core of the planet, it will convert the sacrificed souls to energy and inject that energy into Addams. With his strength restored and his consciousness revived, he will slowly awaken and once again descend upon this world."

Eld stood where we had just been, a huge hole in his gut. However, while the body was his, the will behind the voice wasn't. I realized at once what was going on. The moment we recognized the owner of the voice, we were surprised but also overjoyed.

"That's the official scenario, anyway, although in truth, nothing that large-scale will happen. It'll all be over shortly. Ah, right. I haven't introduced myself yet. I am Addams. Just Addams. This is a good world. I like it."

◇ ◇ ◇

"What happened to make such youngsters come together and make that kind of face? Back where I come from, that would be considered blasphemy, you realize? Well, at the moment I am no god, just Addams, so I will forgive all," he continued.

The face that should have been Eld's changed out of nowhere. Or rather, it turned black...I guess? It looked like the face was becoming shrouded in shadow, and I couldn't make out his expression. Was it a mask or some kind of spell or ability? At this stage, it was still a mystery. The hole in his gut had also filled up neatly. In fact, his entire body had grown larger somehow.

Ha ha, what the hell? I can't tear my eyes away even though he's just standing there.



Analyze unavailable Analyze unavailable Analyze unavailable

Analyze unavailable Analyze unavailable

Level: Analyze unavailable

Title: Analyze unavailable

HP: Analyze unavailable

MP: Analyze unavailable

Strength: Analyze unavailable

Endurance: Analyze unavailable

Agility: Analyze unavailable

Magic: Analyze unavailable

Luck: Analyze unavailable

Skills: Analyze unavailable

Then there were his stats. I tried to look with Analyze Eye, but none of them displayed properly. Everything was labeled with the same text. I'd never expected to be wholly unable to analyze his stats instead of having to deal with falsified ones. If I remembered correctly, a Rank S Analyze Eye should have been able to see the stats of someone up to a hundred levels over the user's...

Ah, didn't something like this happen before? Right, it was when I was first reincarnated here. I tried to look at Mel's stats and got the same results. But at least back then, I was able to see her name and age, I think. Which means...there's an even bigger level gap between me and Addams?

"Heh ha ha ha ha ha! He's over level 300?! That's ridiculously strong!" I was so excited, I lost my vocabulary.

"Addams? Are... Are you really Addams?!" Cheruvim asked.

"Mm-hmm. I am not a god, but I am Addams," he replied. "But what a nostalgic voice. You should be...yes, Cheruvim. Cheruvim Ripi — Why are you naked?"

Even through all my excitement, I could tell how reasonable an observation that was. Even the leader of a whole faction of gods didn't expect to be greeted by a naked subordinate after being revived.

"I-I was stripped by Eld!" Cheruvim shouted, trying to defend himself. "I didn't want to be greeting you like this!"

Oh, Cheruvim. You're not wrong, but the way you said it will cause misunderstandings.

"Wait, no, more importantly, I need you to explain this situation to me! Isn't that Eld's corpse?!" Cheruvim continued.

"Hm, you desire an explanation from me? Well, fine. If that man over there is willing to wait, I am willing to accede to your demands."

The faceless man's gaze seemed to turn my way. I was already desperately trying to fight my urges; he really wasn't holding back.

"Wait, Kelvin! I get it, but wait!" Cheruvim pleaded.

"Do you think I'm a dog or something?" I retorted. "But yeah, fine. I was wondering the same thing, after all. Uh...Addams, right? Can I ask this of you as well, despite being uninvolved?"

"We'd only be chatting for a little while longer, so I see no problem with it," he replied. "In truth, it's been so long since I've had a chat with anyone, and I'd like to enjoy it too. I haven't been free for quite a long time, you see. No need to be reserved. Ask your questions."

"Oh...sure?"

What the heck is with this friendly older guy feeling he's giving off? Was that ambush earlier just meant to give us a little surprise or something? No...there's no way he approached us so suddenly for such a petty reason. Yeah, no way. He's the wicked god!

At any rate, despite his overwhelming presence, Addams's speech was flowing as he gave a thorough answer to our question. Why had Eld's corpse transformed into him? The answer had something to do with Eld's Authority. In the first place, Authorities were abnormal abilities given by Addams. They had dregs of him as a god in them, and by gathering them with Unity, Eld had tried to remake his body into something Addams could use. That was the effect of Eld manifesting his Authority.

"So, essentially, Eld's artificial body became specialized for your use? That's not your real body, though, right?"

"Oho, what a strangely fitting description. You are essentially

right," said Addams.

"An artificial body...for you?!" Cheruvim exclaimed.

"That is why I told you that, right now, I am simply Addams."

"Th-Then what need was there to gather souls in the Holy Stakes?! Eld could have just used this power from the beginning!"

"No, that would not have worked. Eld needed souls in the Holy Stakes as well as a certain number of Authorities already under his control to manifest his own. Hm, I believe he needed a minimum of four Authorities; that was the restriction I placed upon his soul."

"Four... Okay, so he just managed to make it. But why did he use this method to revive you? From what I'm hearing, haven't the conditions for your real body's resurrection been met? You'd be stronger that way, wouldn't you?! Am I wrong?!"

"Your eyes are bloodshot, Kelvin..." muttered Cheruvim.

I mean, this is important! Super important!

Addams didn't answer right away, so I pressed him further. However, he simply stayed silent for some reason. He crossed his arms and seemed to be worrying over something.

"Hey, what's wrong?"

After a long while, Addams finally said, "I'm bored."

"What?"

"Oh, nothing. I'm just satisfied by the conversation as it is," Addams replied.

"Wh-Whaaat?!"

You aren't going to give us the most important answer?!

"Give it up, Kelvin," Cheruvim advised. "Addams will not be bound by anyone. He is a free god."

"And you're fine with that?!"

All he did was explain Eld's Authority! Why did I hold myself back waiting all this time?!

"Now then, that should generally explain everything, but... Hmm, what to do first?" Addams mused. "Should I save Rem, who's been captured by a former Hero? Or should I start with Isabel, who is drifting in the ocean's embrace? Or possibly the faraway Gloria? I'm also curious about the powerful one who defeated Hao and Hazama, and I must also make Cheruvim's stance clear. I'd also like to

eventually hold a memorial for Eld, who offered his body up to me. Heh heh heh...so many important tasks, I can't decide what to do first. I haven't been free for so long... How wonderful."

Even though he was right in front of us, Addams was muttering to himself without a care in the world. He was thinking, stuck inside his own head, as though he were making plans for a day off. His utter lack of wariness ticked me off a little.

But at the same time, I understood that the difference in our strength was just that big. And for him to be at such a level even without being at full strength...

His true body must be...ha ha! Yes! So this is the strongest god!

"At this point, I'll set aside my questions about the difference in strength between his real body and this artificial one. I just want to fight you, Addams!"

"Hmm, I see... It seems there's something else I need to prioritize," he replied.

I changed my equipment as we spoke, and my preparations were complete. My excitement and the resulting murderous intent finally seemed to get through to him, as he looked my way. Then...

"Well then, let us meet again," he said.

He walked off in the opposite direction, as if ignoring all of my expectations.

"Hey...really?! You're not going to fight me, even with all this killing intent I'm throwing at you?!"

"No, unfortunately not," he answered. "Facing off against you, Eld's killer, is not a bad choice. However, it is not at the top of my to-do list. Do not worry, though. You do rank about third or fourth...maybe? Well, anyway, I'll get around to you eventually."

"Third or...fourth?!"

"Are you unsatisfied? Then allow me to share something with you in exchange. Something interesting is being summoned in the direction I'm going. Witnessing that is currently at the top of my list. If you're curious, you may come with me. Well then, goodbye."

With that, Addams disappeared. Or rather, he speedwalked through the air in the direction he had indicated.

Chapter 3: God of Another World

In the eastern reaches of Isla Heaven, relatively untouched by the fierce battles that were raging all over the continent, lay a small ceremonial place that the angels used for funerals. The area was enveloped in a solemn air, given the headstones that were right next to the venue.

"Hey, Luquille. I'm relieved that you made it here unhurt. You weren't followed, were you?"

Luquille answered after a beat. "Well, who knows? I do think I managed to pull the wool over the eyes of those who were excited to fight, but there were some rather more cunning individuals among them."

Luquille had just arrived, and she was welcomed by someone wearing a smile. The welcomer was a man in the prime of his life, with long hair and a well-maintained goatee. He was flashy, something that seemed incongruent with the holy atmosphere of the continent. Whether he was out of place or just too well-dressed for the environment, he stood out in both color scheme and personality.

"Uh, hey. Are you sure you're okay? I'll say it right now, I'm totes useless in combat, so expect nothing on that front. Yeah, nothing at all."

"Yes, well, I never had any expectations of you in the first place in that regard," said Luquille. "What I expected from you were...different things. Patrick, do you think today is a lucky day?"

"Wow, that's some pressure you're putting on me."

Luquille pointed her sharp gaze at the man who had greeted her: Patrick Pluto, the last of the Ten Authorities. He was titled the God of Destiny, but there was no divine aura about him. If anything, he seemed fully mired in the colors of the mundane world.

"Hmm, maybe it is. There's no avoiding that such a thing is up to the goddess of fate. Yeah...it's all up to chance!" Patrick finally

answered.

Luquille sighed. "*You're* the deity who controls fate...though I suppose this personality is why I decided you were the only one of the Ten Authorities I could ally with."

Patrick giggled. "That's nice of you to say. You're right, I don't think any of the other Ten Authorities think like me. But still, I was surprised! You managed to get them to descend to inhabit the artificial bodies, starting with Eld, and even got us to wake up! But you still woke me up first and came at me with that ridiculous proposal, telling me to help you call upon gods from other worlds. I couldn't help but do a spit take!"

Patrick started laughing uproariously, holding his gut, obviously remembering the moment he had described. Luquille watched him with not just cold, but freezing eyes.

"Are you about done?" she asked.

"Ah, erm...sorry. If possible, could you...stop with that cold look? I'm fine with being looked at by pretty women, but that's not the kind of look you're supposed to give a god, okay?"

"You may be right, because I am looking down at a piece of trash," Luquille replied.

"Wow, mean."

He made a show of shrugging. His actions only served to anger Luquille more, but it seemed he knew that and did it anyway. In turn, it seemed that Luquille was aware that he knew and refrained from saying anything more.

"You immediately agreed to my 'ridiculous' proposal," she said. "What complaints could you possibly have this late?"

"Oh no, no complaints here," Patrick replied. "I mean, it's so exciting! Calling down a god from another world stronger than Addams and making use of them?! I desire the unknown and prize entertainment most of all! Your proposal stirred my hunger and gave me a huge shock. It moved me a *lot*! What kind of God of Destiny—no, God of Gambling—would I be if I didn't respond?!"

He stood and took something jangly out of his pocket. Rather, multiple somethings: a colorful pair of dice.

"Is that so? Hearing that puts me somewhat at ease," Luquille

admitted. “As I thought, you are exactly the god I thought you’d be.”

“I’m in an artificial body now, though!” Patrick exclaimed. “Ah, right, this body is, well, the product of long years of research on your part, no? Oh man, to think you’d be doing such research for so long on the floating continent where angels reside. I mean, would *anyone* think that? At the very least, I’d be a little creeped out if I found out!”

“Everything was originally the technology of those on the surface,” said Luquille after a beat. “I simply picked it up and put my own spin on it.”

“Do you really think anyone other than you would do something like that? Making angel clones in secret and using them as prototype artificial bodies?” Patrick shot back.

“There’s a limit to the number of powerful leaders out there, and everything requires practice, doesn’t it?” asked Luquille. “Failure isn’t allowed for the sake of my great goal.”

“Wow, that’s a fanatic for you. But I like it! That’s why you’re so interesting!” Patrick exclaimed. “Ah, right! Speaking of clones, you also—”

“Now’s not the time to be enjoying idle conversation, now is it, Patrick?” Luquille interrupted. Her tone was terribly cold, stabbing into the God of Destiny.

“Whoa there! Yeah, you’re right. Totally right! Oh man, you sure are scary...” Patrick said.

But Luquille was stonily silent.

“Um... *Ahem!* Now then, it’s about time we end this long conversation and get to the preparations,” said Patrick. “Some of the fights happening all over the place have been decided already. The worst thing would be having the winners with good intuition coming here to put a damper on things.”

“What do you mean, preparation? All we need to do now is deploy it,” said Luquille. “Hurry up and manifest your Authority.”

“Ah, right. Okay,” said Patrick.

Overpowered by the aura she was putting out that brooked no refusal, he responded honestly. It seemed he realized that she wouldn’t allow any more messing around. “Er...mic test, mic test...

Now then, everyone... Come one, come all! You won't be getting the same flavor of me tonight! Not that it's night right now... I hereby manifest my Authority!"

Patrick threw the dice in his hand up above him. As they flew through the air, they grew larger and larger before ending up around the size of a person's head. They also produced a storm of colorful confetti that came together to form a pair of fallen angel's wings. The dice flowed in a circuit around the confetti wings, spinning all the while.

"Okay, I'm all manifested up," Patrick said. "What do you think? Do I look all manly?" He also had a crown-shaped halo floating over his head. He'd been flashy before, but now he was even more so. Considering the current situation, he was absolutely not suited to any covert action.

"It's too much visual information. I've already filled up on everything my eyes can take, and I don't want to look at you anymore," said Luquille.

"Well, that was awful of you. Seriously, ouch."

"I'm just honest about my own feelings. Well then, I'll make my move too."

Luquille had likely made her preparations long before today. The floor was covered with text, forming a giant magic circle. She walked to the center of it before taking out a knife and making a shallow cut on her right hand.

"My right arm is that of a cloned Oracle of Deramis. With it, I'm able to make limited use of esoteric Oracle techniques. I will now proceed to do not a Hero summoning but a deity summoning."

Blood beaded at her fingertip before dropping onto the magic circle.

"The source of all Demon Lords, Addams, has been revived. This is perfect timing. I understand the system this world is built on, and with even limited use of an Oracle's power, I can in theory become essentially the real thing."

"Mm, good! You're going above and beyond my expectations! But can you really accomplish something so big with only limited powers? I don't think your chances of succeeding are realistic," said

Patrick.

"Are you really saying that, knowing what your job is?" Luquille asked. "I just need to create the slightest chance of success. Please do your job and force my luck higher, even if you think my chances are astronomically small. Use your Authority, Gambling!"

"Hah! Hah! Hah! You sure ask for a lot! But that's what makes this so intere—"

Baaang!

Patrick was interrupted by a resounding gunshot.

Not even that sudden sound could make Luquille budge. In fact, she didn't so much as look away from what she was doing. It seemed she perfectly understood what had just happened.

"What a rude visitor we have. Weren't we supposed to be allies?" Luquille asked.

"You would have been technically right, while you were putting on a mask, at least!"

The attacker was the director of the Adventurer's Guild, Shin. The gunfire she'd unleashed as part of her ambush scattered in two directions, heading for both Luquille and Patrick.

"Wawawawaaagh?! H-Hey, wait! Stop! Time out! I'm against violence!" Patrick shouted.

The moment he was attacked, Patrick took off, running and dodging the storm of bullets with all his might. However, no matter how much he avoided the bullets, they simply changed direction to attack him once again. Patrick pleaded for a ceasefire, but the bullets didn't seem to listen to him. He ran and they chased, then he ran and they chased some more. Thus, a merciless game of tag began. But from the fact that he'd managed to dodge all the attacks so far, it seemed he was pretty good at evasion.

Bam bam bam bam bam bam bam!

"Whoa?!" Patrick yelped.

"It's no use," said Luquille. She remained calm and didn't move, in contrast to the panicking Patrick, and took all the bullets with her body. However, it didn't look like the attacks caused her any harm at all. It was as if she were using Hard's Unbreakable Authority. No matter how many times she was shot, she didn't budge.

"That's...Tabernacle, an esoteric Oracle technique?!" Shin exclaimed.

"Correct. I should have expected the leader of all adventurers to identify that in an instant," said Luquille.

"It's obvious after hearing that you implanted an Oracle's arm onto yourself!" Shin shouted.

Tabernacle was an esoteric Oracle technique; a powerful barrier that was used during Rank S promotion ceremonies, as an example. It shut out all attacks, whether they were physical or magical, and was known to be the toughest of all existing barriers. Normally, it had a wider range, able to cover the entire ceremonial stage, but Luquille's limited powers could only sustain a much smaller version of it. Also, she could only keep it activated for a little over ten seconds. Her powers were shabby compared to those of a true Oracle like Colette.

Still, Luquille didn't mind. By only covering the surface of her body with it, she could experience the effect of Unbreakable and cover for the demerits of her limited range. In fact, by eliminating the gap between her body and the barrier, Shin's attacks no longer had any room to warp inside the barrier. Shin's attacks had the property of never missing, but once they did hit, they would stop regardless. Setting aside any time limitations, as long as Luquille deployed Tabernacle a moment before being hit, she would never be hurt.

"Luquille! What about my barrier?!" Patrick yelled.

"You don't have one," Luquille replied.

"Thought not!" Patrick shouted back. "But my ability to run is literally divine! I'll show you! I'll escape all thiiisss!"

He was even now continuing to run around desperately. Given how much he stood out because of his flashy looks, it was no wonder he was good at running away.

Hmm...this isn't great. Everything else may be off, but the defensive ability of that barrier is just like the real thing. Looks like I was a bit late in attacking, thought Shin. *The time I wasted tracking Luquille made a difference.*

Shin had started suspecting Luquille before anyone else, which

was why she'd taken independent action. But tracking her target didn't go well. In fact, all traces of Luquille had totally disappeared immediately after she'd left the Holy Stake.

I heard she could disappear with some sort of spell or something, but no one told me it would be such a high-level thing. Even I had trouble with that sort of thing, Shin complained internally. *If only I'd arrived a little earlier, I could have at least prevented her from getting into position in that magic circle...*

Meanwhile, Shin had changed her bullets to flashbangs and those that emitted poisonous gas, all while ceaselessly attacking. Patrick seemed to be having a hard time, as it seemed not even he could dodge everything. However, Luquille—the most important target—was still unaffected.

"Heh heh heh, I admit that's a pretty powerful ability!" Shin exclaimed. "But you still only have one fake arm! How long will that barrier last?!"

"True, it won't even last for ten more seconds," Luquille admitted. "But..."

"*Koff! Kerhack!* The dice...have already...b-been cast!" Patrick said in the midst of a coughing fit.

The dice inside his wings had at some point been thrown to the floor.

"Yeah, I knew that!" Shin countered. Of course, she already knew. She was certain something would happen when the dice stopped, which was why she'd tried to destroy them.

Cli-Cli-Claaaang!

But no matter how many bullets hit the dice, they never broke. They were never even damaged. In fact, the impacts didn't so much as change their trajectory. Luquille hadn't protected them with Tabernacle either, which went to show how absurd their toughness was.

"Gah! Those too?!" Shin shouted.

"Heh! Heh heh! Heh ha ha ha ha ha! They won't stop, and they won't break! Not now that I've manifested my Authority! *Hurk! Koff!* Once I throw my dice, nothing can interfere with them until they stop naturally!" Patrick exclaimed. "This is a fair gamble! Though of

course, it also prevents any attempts at cheating through different ways of throwing the dice and whatnot. Ha ha ha*rrkk! Hack hack!*"

He continued to talk in a loud voice, all while dodging bullets and coughing from the poisonous gas. It was as if yapping were his life's calling.

"Le...L! L... Let me explain!" Patrick shouted through pants and coughs. "My Authority is called 'Gamble'! It allows me to interfere with the luck, or destiny, of a target! The effect changes depending on the number shown on the dice! This is a d100, and as the name implies, there are one hundred possible outcomes! Depending on the number shown, the situation can be improved or worsened! Ah, right! Of course, my target this time was Luquille's summoning!"

"Oho, what an interesting ability! I love gambling too!" Shin exclaimed.

"What, really? Mmheh heh, I think we'll get along well!" Patrick said, sounding very pleased. "Wait, no! Let me continue! Normally, it's set so that the lower the result, the better it is for me, and the higher the number, the worse it is! However, there is one exception! That is, if the result is one hundred, then it becomes what I call my *special*! If and only if that result comes up, the result will exceed all reason!"

"All reason? What does that mean?!" Shin asked.

"You're awesome! I love how you play along!" Patrick exclaimed. "Anyway, let's continue. Whether good or bad, the result will be something not bound by common sense! Honestly, I don't even know what'll happen until I see it! This is just coming from experience, but it'll be something that can't be measured in simple terms like good or bad! That's why the number we're aiming for here is one and the number you want is ninety-nine! Do you get it?!"

"Okay, I get it!" shouted Shin. "For now, I just have to put you down before the dice stop!"

"Noooooo!"

Shin's bullets now concentrated on Patrick, and his success rate in dodging finally dropped. He was pierced by bullets, poisoned by gas until he vomited blood, and paralyzed. But even so, he stubbornly survived.

"*Whoo, haah, hee...* D... Doing that is pointless! I've already thrown the dice, so there's no stopping my Authority now!" he shouted. "But still, I'll run! I'll live! Why? Obviously, because I want to see the unknown result; I want to see a power that might exceed Addams! The dice are stopping, Luquille! Now, do it— Oh crap, I'm getting a cramp!"

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The magic circle activated after being exposed to Luquille's blood. It must have sucked up an incredible amount of blood and magic power in an instant, as her Oracle's arm shriveled up and mummified. At the same time, cracks ran through the barrier that was protecting her.

"Grk, urgh! Good! I like this arrogance...that has no concept of restraint!" Luquille said slowly through gritted teeth.

Already, her body couldn't take any more, and it showed on her face. Blood flowed from every orifice, and sweat flowed from everywhere else as her life was steadily eaten away. It was obvious to anyone who could see her that the damage she was taking was incomparable to what Patrick had received. There was no way she could continue to fight.

"Hey, stop the magic circle right now! You'll die!" Shin shouted.

"I...will not!" Luquille struggled to get out. "Not until Melfina-sama...becomes the Goddess of Reincarnation...again! No, actually, I must continue supporting her after that!"

"Gah, this damn fanatic!" Shin spat. The barrier that was blocking her attacks would likely fail within a couple seconds. Still, there probably wasn't any attack that would make Luquille stop.

"Isn't there something...more...important...you should be paying attention to?" Luquille suggested. She pointed a shaking finger toward the dice that were protected by Patrick's Authority. They clattered as they rolled and eventually stopped...on one hundred.

"The special, huh? Oh man, what luck," said Patrick. "I'm the god of destiny and even I'm shocked..."

"Heh heh heh... No way... What'll happen now?" Shin asked.

"How about you...believe in...your own destiny? I believe in...mine..." Luquille said. "In...a better...future...with Melfina-sama!"

The magic circle started to emit a powerful light, which meant that the summoning was in its final stages—that a god was close to descending.

Agh crap, I won't make it in time. What the heck does "special" even mean? Shin wondered. *They're just leaving it all up to luck in the end. And I felt some sort of strong pressure that seemed like Addams before too, so he's definitely been revived. Addams alone is a danger to this world, and if another disaster of the same class is summoned... Yeah, the world would be over. That's bad. My lively retirement life will disappear. Okay, time for a change of plans!*

Shin removed her eye patch, revealing her hitherto closed eye. This evil eye—no, divine eye—was a remnant of power, something she'd stolen from the person who was once her successor-slash-apprentice.

"Sorry, fanatic," said Shin. "You're not the only one with a transplant."

"What?" Luquille responded.

"Take this! Fake God's Eye!"

Luquille let out a noise as Shin's eye shone mysteriously. The light swallowed up both Luquille and the magic circle. From the fallen angel's perspective, it felt like only a moment, and even if she wanted to dodge, she hadn't the time to even take a step back.

The skill Shin had just used, Fake God's Eye, was unable to use two different eyes at once because she only had it in one eye. The cost of using the eye was extreme aging—basically an imitation of the true God's Eye. Still, it was able to fully replicate any eye skill that could be used with one eye. The light that swallowed up Luquille was the result of an eye that could teleport anything within sight. Shin used it to send Luquille, the barrier protecting her, and the magic circle off the planet entirely. In other words, she was in space right now. Even with the protection of the strongest barrier, she would die without air to breathe. As for the summoned deity, even if whoever it was could survive in a vacuum, they wouldn't be able to interfere with this world.

But...Shin's plans did not come to fruition. Rather, they were made not to.

"Hey, wait a second! Why was I forcefully teleported to a totally unfamiliar world?" The voice belonged to a young girl, but the cute sound of it couldn't hide the slight tone of irritation it had.

Shin let out a shocked noise as the irritation itself seemed to stab into her skin, and everything within her sounded alarm bells, telling her of the danger. The spot where Luquille had just been had been gouged out, the spot on the floor with the magic circle totally gone. The teleportation due to Fake God's Eye had definitely worked. And yet, the new girl could be seen standing near Patrick, holding a weakened Luquille by the nape of her neck.

Hey, come on, I should have made it before the summoning with time to spare!

No matter what god was being summoned, they shouldn't have been a threat as long as the summoning itself was stopped. That was undeniable truth, and the plan should have worked since Luquille should have needed another second or so to fully summon the god. Shin should have made it in time, and yet the summoning had succeeded.

"And what? Did you just try to teleport this girl and me somewhere?" asked the newcomer. "I don't really get it, but it was like a...warp? Type thing? Yeah, basically something like that. Trying to ship me off before the summoning was finished? How rude. I couldn't help but jump over to this world myself, because getting teleported after being summoned would have just been ridiculous. I'm real mad right now!"

"You...jumped over to this world yourself?" Shin repeated. She wasn't sure if such a thing could really be done. But she did know this: The young-looking girl knew everything she was thinking.

"So, where are we? Feels like this place is on the verge of destruction, so maybe we're at the climax or something?" the new goddess asked. "You seem pretty strong. Yeah, this is interesting! I might have come at the perfect time."

The innocent, beautiful young girl's dazzling silver hair fluttered as she laughed amiably. She was wearing clothes of excellent quality

and looked almost no different from a human. Only, she had horns on her head similar to Sera's, showing she clearly wasn't. To be fair, she had appeared as the result of a summoning ritual, so there was no way she would be a normal human.

"A child?!" Patrick exclaimed. "Luquille, it looks like our dream is over. Heh heh, it was so fleeting..."

The moment he saw the little girl, he made a deft show of falling to the ground in despair, his shoulders slumped. He assumed that his ability had shaken out in a bad way.

"You're...wrong..." Luquille muttered.

"Huh?"

"We...succeeded. Yes...it was a success," Luquille uttered slowly. "Her strength...undoubtedly rivals Addams— Grrphh!"

A spray of blood interrupted what she was trying to say. But what she had managed to get out allowed Patrick to understand what she was trying to say. And yet, he couldn't believe it.

"I... I can't believe that. Does that girl really... With Addams?" he said.

"Addams? Who's that?" the girl asked. "Oh well, whatever. I've gone on a lot of vacations, but this is the first time I've been kidnapped to another world like a hero. You're all amazing! Are you prime examples of this world or something? From what I can tell, you seem like an angel— Wait...angel? Uh...are you an angel too? Or some sort of subspecies?"

"Ah! Pleased to meet you," Patrick said.

The girl's brows knit together as she looked at Patrick and his flashy appearance.

"Uh, so...may we have your name for now?" Patrick asked. Whether or not he believed it, he admitted that there was a possibility she equaled Addams, so he took a clearly submissive stance. It seemed that despite what he'd said about the unknown, he still valued his life.

"Ah, right. I haven't introduced myself yet. My name is Maria Illegal! I'm an idol-type vampire who's pretty confident in her strength! Nice to meet'cha!"

With that, she struck a cute pose.

Patrick's response was silence. Whether or not she was really a goddess who rivaled Addams, his brain was full to capacity trying to process what she meant by idol-type and the fact that she'd introduced herself as a vampire.

"May I ask a question?"

"Hmm?"

Shin was the one to ask a friendly question immediately after Maria's introduction. She was still wary, but she'd lowered her guns and was making at least a minimal effort to avoid looking like she was about to fight.

"My name is Shin Rainyheart. First, I'd like to apologize. I didn't want this summoning to succeed, if possible, especially since it was going to force someone as powerful as you here. It would be terrible for the power balance of this world, you see."

"Ah, no need to worry about that!" Maria exclaimed. "You apologized properly, and my heart's as spacious as the sky and deep as the ocean."

"That's wonderful to hear; thank you," said Shin. "But you...erm... May I call you Maria-chan?"

"I'm good with anything that's cute!" Maria replied.



"Ah, really? Heh heh heh, that's great. Seriously! By the way, about your question: First, to confirm the situation, the ones who summoned you are the fallen angel you're holding by the back of her neck and the flashy one rolling on the ground at your feet."

"Looks like it," said Maria. "By the way, does this angel have a name?"

"A name? Oh, right. The girl is Luquille, and the boy is...uh..." Shin hesitated.

"It's Patrick!" he shouted.

"As he says," said Shin.

Compared to Luquille, who was clearly at death's door, Patrick was still energetic.

"Anyway, as I just said, those two are responsible for summoning you to this world, Maria," said Shin. "I'm opposing them, and I'll be direct: Would you side with us?"

"Ah, that's sneaky of you," said Patrick. "The way you're talking makes our side sound like the bad guys. Could you stop this shameless headhunting right in front of us?"

"We're enemies, so isn't it normal for me to do things you don't like?" Shin asked. "Also, Maria-chan was just summoned, so her allegiances aren't clear yet. She's not necessarily my enemy, just like she isn't necessarily your ally. So isn't it only proper to try and scout her?"

"Th-Then this is our chance to recruit her too!" Patrick responded. "If you side with us, Maria-chan, we'll treat you well! Three squares plus snacks and time for naps! *And* when everything is over, we'll send you back home if you want!"

"You're absurdly bad at recruiting people..." Shin commented.

It seemed Patrick was still being affected by his first impression of Maria's looks.

"I'm a vampire, so I'm normally asleep during the day," said Maria. "So I guess I don't need naps?"

"Then what about night naps?! You can have night naps!" Patrick responded.

"Come on, you know that's not the problem," said Shin. "In fact, can't Maria-chan do something about returning back to her own

world herself? She described this as a vacation earlier, didn't she? It was pretty ominous."

"What? Really?!" Patrick exclaimed.

"Hmm, well, technically I wouldn't be doing it myself, but yeah I think it would work out? So really, there's no need for you to worry about whether I can go back," said Maria.

"Did you hear that, Luquille?" said Patrick after a shocked pause.

Luquille, of course, didn't say anything. She couldn't, with how weak she'd gotten. However, her eyes still said that she believed that Maria would help them.

"So, as for who I'll side with..." Maria started. "Well, first of all, I make sure to act well-behaved and ladylike in other worlds! I mean, it would be rude to go on a rampage where you're vacationing, wouldn't it? So really I'm kind of against doing something so barbaric as fighting. Wouldn't just watching from afar like a tourist be better?"

"Maria-san!" Patrick yelped.

"Huh, I see," said Shin. "I'm good with that. In fact, I'd prefer it. If you want, I can be your very own personal guide and show you the best time—"

"Ah, but maybe I *do* want to have a taste?" Maria interrupted.

Immediately after, Patrick was assaulted by a severe impact that came with the sound of metal clashing together.

"What?! What happened?!" Patrick shouted.

Though he was suddenly thrown into the air by the force, he made a heroic effort to catch Luquille, who had been tossed up as well. Finally, he showed even more mettle by forcing himself to look around desperately to confirm the situation.

"Is this really going our way, Luquille?" Patrick asked.

"Of course...it is..." muttered Luquille. As always, she had unshakable faith in her own destiny.

Patrick wasn't paying attention to her, though, as he was gazing steadily at the center of the storm. He was looking at Shin and Maria, who'd approached each other and were clashing with their weapons.

"I have to say, this isn't a very good joke," said Shin. "I don't

think that slashing at someone out of nowhere is very ladylike. Nope, not at all. You should be better behaved."

"You say that, lady, but you seemed pretty ready to cut someone up yourself," Maria replied.

Maria used the demon's tail she had hidden in her skirt like a whip, striking at Shin as she closed in. Meanwhile, Shin crossed the guns she had in both hands to defend against the attack. They seemed to be pretty even in strength, as neither side was moving after the initial clash. But every time the tail and guns clashed, sparks flew and intense shock waves were generated, so the area around them was already a disaster zone. There were no safe zones left in the area.

"Unfortunately, I've never really been...very ladylike!" Shin exclaimed.

She made a sweep with her guns, flinging Maria and her surprisingly bladelike tail back.

"Agh! Wow, amazing!" Maria exclaimed. "You not only survived my surprise attack, but you even pushed me back!" She'd used the momentum from being pushed away to flip in the air, all while clapping. Her expression was one of pure joy. She was totally playing around.

"Thanks for the compliment," said Shin. "I can tell you're holding back basically everything, so I'm not sure how to feel. My guns are totally ruined too. Well, whatever. So, how was your so-called 'taste'?"

"It was good," Maria replied. "I might want to get a little more serious with you, lady."

"Is that some sort of vampire joke?" Shin asked.

"About half of it is," Maria admitted.

Both were silent as one took out new weapons and the other smiled bewitchingly. Shin and Maria glared at each other. The air between them was filled with skin-prickling tension.

"Mmm, good. Very good," said Maria. "But I guess I should ask the opinion of the master who summoned me, just to be sure? Hey, hey, this lady is Luquille-chan's enemy, right? Can I just deal with her now? I can, right? You take responsibility, okay, Luquille-chan?

As long as you do, I'm okay with taking her on."

"What? Really?!" Patrick exclaimed. "What a stroke of luck, Luquille! We should leave this to her! There's no other choice!"

"No, we can't... Don't...defeat her," Luquille struggled to say. "I naturally can't...turn against her...while we're working together...and afterward, we need to have...a discussion. The promise...is absolute..."

"Awright, that's how it's gotta be— Wait WHAAAT?! Discussion?!"

Surprisingly, Maria's and Patrick's reactions were in perfect sync.

"Oh, Luquille-chan, I know you're not the type to... Wait, huh? Ummm? Are you bound by some sort of curse? The type that'll punish you if you break a promise or something?" Maria asked.

In the blink of an eye, she appeared close to Luquille, fixing her with a steady gaze. It was faint, but she could see the effects of Shutola's Retributive Persuasion binding her.

"What are you...talking...about? I'm...perfectly sane..." Luquille replied.

"Ah, it's the kind you're not aware of," Maria said. "Did you do something with that eye of yours, lady?"

"Unfortunately for you, I have nothing to do with that. This eye has a huge demerit, you see," Shin explained. "I only use it for emergencies, like just now. I still failed, though."

"Is that so? Then this happened before I was summoned. I'm not good at healing others. If only old Vakara were here, he would've been able to get rid of it without question. Hmm, oh well. It's too annoying, so it can stay! You keep that curse company, Luquille-chan!"

Luquille didn't say anything. She just seemed puzzled. Maria's "advice" made no sense to her since she didn't even know she was cursed.

"I'll just follow what you want this time, Luquille-chan," said Maria. "After all, you're the one who risked your life to summon me, introducing me to this world. I'll have to play with you next time, lady."

"That's good to hear. Seems like my life has been saved," said Shin.

“Aha ha! Oh come on, you haven’t shown your entire hand either!” Maria said teasingly.

“Oh no, that couldn’t possibly be true,” Shin giggled.

“Oh really now?” Maria giggled as well.

Though two beautiful girls were laughing at the same time, the heavy atmosphere didn’t change. Even Patrick, who was in good shape comparative to Luquille, seemed like he’d be crushed by it soon.

“Uh, erm, Maria-san?” he ventured. “Luquille’s passed out, so keeping up this pressure would be a bit...er...”

“Ah, sorry! I tend to lose sight of everything around me when I get excited. Oopsies!” Maria apologized.

“I-Is that so? Uh, well...so, do we all just go our separate ways now? That’s all that’s left if we’re not fighting anymore, right?” Patrick asked. “Yep, it’s the only ch—”

“Be quiet for a little, Pattie,” said Maria. “There’s something else I’m curious about.”

Patrick immediately shut up.

“You brought friends, didn’t you, lady?” Maria asked. “Would you introduce them to me? We aren’t fighting anymore, so it’s fine.”

“Tch! You’re sharp. When did you notice?” Shin asked.

“Pretty early on. Almost from the beginning,” Maria answered. “They’re hiding well, though, so I can’t pinpoint exactly where they are.”

Shin sighed. “I see. Art, you can come out!”

A moment later, a reply came. “My word, you have no class. You don’t need to shout so loud; I can hear you anyway.”

Art appeared beside Shin seemingly out of nowhere, an instrument in his hand.

“Wow, you’re a real looker of a man,” said Maria. “My heart’s pounding!”

“A looker, huh? I *am* often told that I am stunningly beautiful, the most beautiful woman of the age, even, but I wonder how long it’s been since someone has identified me as a man at first glance,” Art wondered aloud. “Well, let’s set that aside for now. Greetings, adorable vampire from another world. My name is Art Desire. As you

can see, I'm a dark elf. Pleased to meet you."

"Wow, that was a cool greeting. My heart's pounding even more now!" Maria exclaimed.

Art had given her an elegant bow, which sent her all in a titter. Their personalities seemed to harmonize surprisingly well.

"Still, it seems you have incredible detection abilities, given that you noticed me despite the fact that I stopped trying to stand out. I'd planned to hit you with the greatest performance I could muster after you killed Shin, but it seems that plan's a bust."

"Hey, you, Art, you should back me up while I'm still alive," Shin said unhappily. "Why the hell were you waiting for me to die?"

Art looked at her in confusion.

"Don't give me that 'What is this woman talking about?' look! I'll send you to the afterlife!" Shin said.

"Hmph. Your thinking is as barbaric as ever, Shin," he scoffed. "In the first place, I didn't come here to help you. I came to wipe your ass for you when you failed. I even abandoned my lofty goal of delivering my inspiring performance to the entirety of this continent. And, as expected, you're the only one of our allies in a losing position. How do you plan on taking responsibility, Director Shin? The world's in danger, you know?"

"That's *exactly* why you should prioritize helping me over your petty pride! The world's in danger!" Shin shouted. "If I'd been buffed from the start with your music, I might have been able to bust through the oracular barrier!"

"Whoa there, who was it that said she didn't need my support?" Art asked. "Not to mention, if you'd just used your eye's power earlier, that vampire wouldn't have been summoned. Knowing you, you hesitated because you hate the idea of getting old. Hmm?! Those crow's feet..."

"I'm really close to just killing you, get it?!" Shin shouted. "You would never use this eye if you were its owner, I know it! You'd spout some nonsense about how the degradation of your beauty would be a loss for the world and refuse!"

"You don't need to state the obvious! Of course I would never use it!" Art countered.

Patrick was silent as he thought, *They're both just as bad as each other.*

"Mm, yes! It's nice that you two get along! I totally get it; my daughters often fight like that too," said Maria.

"We do *not* get along!" said Art and Shin in unison.

"Yep, you're far enough along that you can speak in perfect unison," Maria said.

Once again, Patrick, remaining silent, thought, *Did she just mention that she has daughters? With that appearance?*

"More importantly, you two," said Maria, "there are more coming this way. Are they also friends of yours?"

"Oh, wow, you're real astute, Maria-chan," said Shin. "Rather than friends or enemies, I'd say both at once, kind of?"

"I'd add that it seems uncertain whether they're all actually people," said Art. "The answer's obvious, but do you really plan on waiting here for them?"

"Of course!" Maria answered. "Those possibly-not-people are coming to meet me, aren't they? As an idol, I have to respond to their wishes! Oh, but no handshakes, okay?"

Still completely silent, Patrick thought, *Huh? Isn't Addams among the group approaching? Won't he find out that I betrayed him? This is bad, isn't it?*

"Hrrnggh! I, the Goddess of Love, Goldiana Prettiana, have ARRIVED!" Goldiana exclaimed, complete with a heart mark.

"You have wings, Goddess of Reincarnation Goldiana. Please don't dash through the air like that," said Dorothy. "I have to chase after you, and it's awful for my concentration. Wait...what kind of situation is this?"

The first one to arrive was Goldiana, running through the air at a speed that would put sprinters to shame. Dorothy followed a little ways behind, using her magic to fast-forward herself.

"It's exactly what it looks like. Luquille summoned this Maria-chan," Shin answered.

"No, that doesn't help me understand the situation one bit..." Dorothy muttered.

"Wow, it's a monster," said Maria.

"*Non non!*" Goldiana countered. "I am a goddess, you cute little angel. Mmm! Actually, maybe I should call you an angelic demon?"

"Nope, I'm a vampire," Maria replied. "The princess kind, not the monster kind."

"My, how wonderful! I should learn from you!"

Dorothy sighed. "I see. So it's pure chaos. By the way, it seems a large presence is coming from that way..."

A presence that rivaled Maria's was approaching at extreme speeds from the direction where Dorothy was pointing.

"Oh? What an interesting group. Well done gathering together just to welcome me," said Addams.

The presence in question suddenly joined the scene after speed walking over to them. That wasn't a joke; he truly did speed walk. Dorothy was at her wit's end, seeing someone speed walk in the air after watching Goldiana dash through the air.

"We didn't come here to greet you, but whatever. So, you're the rumored wicked god Addams?" Dorothy asked.

"I don't know about any rumors, but I *am* Addams. Just Addams, though, not a wicked god."

Naturally, not many could make sense of that. A fair number of them gave him confused looks. But while all this was happening...

"Ha ha ha ha! So this is where the after-party is?! It's better than the real party! I'm not full yet!" Kelvin shouted.

"Hey, we need to talk first! Promises are promises, Kelvin!" Cheruvim called after him.

A frustrated Grim Reaper and a still naked God of Death arrived, making the situation even more chaotic.

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The place I reached after chasing Addams was a true paradise. Starting with the clearly physically oriented pair of Addams and Goldiana, there was also the special ability combo of Director Shin and Principal Art. Luquille was in the back...

Wait, is she unconscious? She's totally ragged. One of her arms is in terrible shape too. Hmm...oh fine, I guess I'll count her out this

time.

To regroup, there was another very flashy fallen angel in the back with Luquille. He was probably one of the Ten Authorities. However, he was already looking exhausted even before any fighting had started. From what I could see, he'd taken almost no physical damage, so why was he like that? This was shaping up to be such a fun party and yet he was wasting it.

"Wow, so many people came! I might get nervous!"

So that's the interesting one Addams was talking about. Judging purely by looks, she's around Shutola's age and gives off the impression of a cute little girl, but...that's not who she is. I mean, the power she's giving off is way too different. So, this is the one Luquille had to nearly kill herself to summon. I see... You were right, Addams. She really did summon an interesting one!

"Hmm, I can feel a power even I am not familiar with. You, with such great power despite your size: What are you?" Addams asked.

"I'm Maria, a god from another world. Wait, weren't *you* a god?"

"Indeed. Now I am simply Addams. Of course, there is also a version of me with a divine body," he answered.

"I said this before, but I am the official Goddess of this world," Goldiana insisted, forming a heart mark.

"I'm a bit off the beaten path, but I would technically be categorized as a god too," Patrick added.

"I can't have you forgetting that I was also the God of Death. Also, Kelvin over here's title is Grim Reaper!" Cheruvim boasted.

"That may be my title, but I'm a daemon. Not to be confused with a demon!"

"Uh...huh? Um, it's a bit late to be asking this, but how many gods does this world have? Isn't this way too many?" Maria asked. She was met with silence, since none of us had an answer for her.

She did have a point. There were Mel and DarkMel, and then if you included the Ten Authorities, the number of divine beings swelled considerably.

"Anyway, we have such a diverse group here...so what now?" I asked. "There's no way we end this with just a friendly chat, right? Why don't we go with the oldest, clearest, and most time-tested

method of—”

“I’m fine with just talking!” Maria interrupted. “That’s what Luquille-chan said to do, and I want to learn more about this world anyway, so I’d actually rather talk!”

“Huh?!” I yelped in surprise.

“What a coincidence. I was thinking the same thing,” Addams chimed in. “I may have been a great deity, but this is my first time talking to a guest from another dimension. There are so many other unique members in this group as well. I’m sure I won’t be bored right away, at least.”

“Ah, wai—” I began.

“It would be foolish to start fighting without knowing your opponent’s goals. I believe we should start by exploring other options. Heh heh, see what decisions I’m capable of making now that I’ve been purified by Rion-san?” Luquille boasted.

“Personally, I’d like to exchange blows with a certain distinguished gentleman, but I’m pretty full to bursting with emotions already. I’m the type to save the best for last anyway, so I’m fine with talking for now,” said Goldiana in her usual coquettish tone. “Why don’t we eat while we talk? I know a good place!”

“Wow, that sounds nice! Let’s do it! Do they have good wine?!” Maria asked excitedly.

“Now that I think about it, I haven’t consumed anything since gaining this body. Heh! Having a meal for the first time in such a while does not sound like a bad idea,” Addams agreed.

I didn’t say anything. I’d given up. *This is weird. Why doesn’t everyone prioritize combat when they’re all so strong? I mean, I’m interested in talking with wicked gods and unknown entities too, you know? But we can do that while we fight. And food tastes so much better after shedding some sweat during a fight. Yeah, this is definitely weird. Why don’t they understand that?*

“It’s about time you faced reality, Kelvin,” said Cheruvim.

“Ah, yeah... I thought I could push things through with force, but it didn’t work out...”

“That laugh was an act? Such a waste of effort,” Cheruvim answered.

"I was just clinging to what little hope I had. To me, it wasn't a waste. In the first place, your promise to talk was with Luquille, so it doesn't apply to Addams or that silver-haired girl, or so I thought. It makes sense, doesn't it?"

"I think you're mistaking good reason with sophistry..." Cheruvim muttered.

"That's right. It's sophistry. I wish you wouldn't do such boorish things because you prioritize your own desires, Kelvin-kun," Shin interrupted. Unexpectedly, given her title, her argument was full of common sense. Still, she seemed extremely tired.

"Are you tired, Director Shin?"

"Who wouldn't be after having to face that monster?" she replied.

"I suppose on that point alone I'll agree with Shin. Just like Addams, that girl does not belong in this world." A comment from Principal Art followed Shin's.

I know it's a bit late, but what are you doing here?!

"I...see you're healthy, Principal. You went missing from the Holy Stake, so everyone was worried about you," I commented.

"Ah, to tell you the truth, I chased after Shin and Luquille, which is why I'm here. But I do feel guilty about disappearing. I'd planned to provide my transcendent performance to the entire continent, but I ended up having to postpone it. I'm sure your friends were looking forward to it too...to my beautiful song reverberating throughout the battlefield!"

"Uh, right... Ha ha ha..."

He was definitely interpreting my words differently than intended, but I figured continuing to retort would only make things worse, so I let it go. Still, Principal Art had declared that he would play support. I'd just forgotten because I was so engrossed in the prospect of fighting.

Maybe the others didn't notice either? No...let's stop. This is boorish.

"Getting back on track, what is she? Maybe a secret trump card of Addams, like a member of a secret Ten Authorities, or maybe his true right hand or something? Do you know something, Cheruvim?"

"Stop making up weird organizations!" Cheruvim shouted. "Did

Addams not just ask that girl who she was?! Obviously I don't know either!"

Oh, of course.

"Allow my too-beautiful self to explain in his place. She seems to be a vampire from another world with power equal to Addams's. That's all!" Art declared.

"That's all... You mean you have no other information?"

"We've only met her just now," he replied. "Everything other than her ridiculous strength is unknown."

"Hmm, the mystery deepens. Luquille and that flashy fallen angel aside, when that girl ambushed me, I wanted to cry," said Shin.

"Ambushed... Hey, wait, you fought her?!"

"Only a smidge. Look, here's proof. Look at the state my precious guns are in," said Shin.

She then took out her pair of guns and told us her story.

Huh. So they were reduced to this state after just a simple skirmish, you say... Wait, now that I look closer, these guns are amazing. I could learn something from the skill that went into making them.

"Creator said he'd made these tough enough to withstand close combat. He lied to me!" shouted Shin.

"No, no, this is already plenty tough for something as delicate as a gun. I hate taking his side, but you shouldn't be blaming Jildora for that. Still...what incredible power," I mused.

Just from a quick glance...well, let's see. The guns would be about as tough as Rion's Aklamas, I think? Do Maria's thin arms contain Goldiana levels of strength?

"Hey, hey, you people over there who are having your own private conversation! The continent's about to fall! Shouldn't you take this chance to escape? I want to talk on solid ground!" Maria called out to us.

"Oh!" All of us reacted at once.

Suddenly, I remembered that this floating continent was in the midst of crashing.

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Isla Heaven, the home of the angels, was falling. If I had to guess, the fighting all over had affected the core of the continent in a bad way. We'd clashed head-on with the Ten Authorities—beings who used to be gods. I had kind of expected this result. Rafaelo, who led the angels, had given me permission to go as wild as I wanted, but...still, I couldn't call this a good result. If possible, I had wanted to retake the continent intact.

"Actually, I can pretty much tell who the culprit is..." I murmured.

"What are you talking about, Kelvin?" Cheruvim asked.

"Hmm? Ah, nothing much. I was just feeling jealous that Sera and Gerard got to have a good challenging fight against their enemy. Where should I let out these feelings?"

"Again with that? How should I know?" he scoffed.

Gkhh, Cheruvim is so cold! Came on, with all your ability, you could at least meet me halfway! Like, sparing some thought for me won't kill you or anything, you know?!

"Hmm? You seriously haven't had enough of fighting, even in this situation, my guy? Aha ha, are you some kinda battle junkie or something?" Maria asked.

"No, no, not just *some* battle junkie. I am a rational battle junkie. Wait, when did you move right next to me?"

"Just now, of course!"

The otherworld vampire, Maria, was grinning directly next to me. She'd moved at incredible speed. I could still just barely follow her with my eyes, but she wasn't trying hard at all yet. I seriously couldn't get a read on her, and her impish personality didn't help.

"The gods talked over there and decided to evacuate for now. I came to invite you to come with us, but...mm-hmm, you really do still look frustrated, bro!" Maria exclaimed.

"So what if I do? Are you willing to be my opponent? You didn't seem all that enthused about it earlier."

"Yeah, I can't fight you. Luquille-chan really pushed that point home."

"Then please don't lead me on. I knew you wouldn't—"

"But it's fine as long as *I'm* not the one fighting," Maria cut in. "Should I make a perfect opponent for you?"

It took me a moment to get the words out. “What?” I hadn’t expected this to happen. But...*make* an opponent? How? Like the way I created golems?

No, she’s a vampire. Maybe she meant in “that” way? If so, then hrm...

After taking some time to think, I answered her. “I appreciate the offer, but I can’t accept if you’ll need some sort of sacrifice to do so. Even if it’ll result in a really appetizing opponent, the terrible aftertaste would ruin the whole thing.”

“Hmm? I think you’re misunderstanding. I won’t need a sacrifice or anything,” said Maria. “I’m going to make it using only my power. If I had to be specific, I guess I *would* need your will. If you wish for me to make one, bro, then I’ll make one here and now. So? Do you want one?”

I didn’t answer right away.

“Hey, Kelvin, don’t do this. Speaking from experience, this pattern of events never makes things better,” said Cheruvim.

“Yeah, I know.”

It was too good to be true. Cheruvim was right to be wary. Basically, the common trick was that I would be taking on some sort of risk somewhere I didn’t realize.

Right, so this is a true devilish whisper.

“Well, erm...to tell you the truth, I’d love to take you up on it, but...what do you gain from it?”

“A lot,” Maria answered. “First, it would be fun to watch. Colosseums exist in every world, so I’m assuming that watching a bout would be a common form of entertainment here, right? Also, I was thinking that this would be a good chance to measure the power level of this world. Just watching would serve as a good reference for me. I could, like, find out how people fight. Some worlds are really different, down to the magic they use. I suppose you’d call it a difference in the managing deity and the system they employ? Anyway, something like that. Basically, watching you would give me good info. Are you satisfied with my answer?”

“Um, yeah, sure.”

She had straight up told me what she would gain without hiding

anything.

Does that mean this Maria girl goes to a lot of different worlds?

From the way she talked, it sounded like she'd experienced worlds other than her home and ours.

"I guess it's worth a try. Why not take her up on the offer, Kelvin-kun? I'll watch from a safe place too," said Shin.

"Would you like me to play a beautiful battle theme for you?" Art offered. "Creating the right mood is as important for battles as it is for love."

"You're acting like this doesn't affect you guys at all..." To be fair, this *had* happened because of my selfishness. After a moment's more hesitation, I relented, turning back to Maria. "Okay, I'll take you up on it, please. Just to confirm: I know this place is already crashing, but could you ask your creation to not damage the continent any further? It's technically my wife's homeland."

"Your wife? Wow, sounds complicated," said Maria. "If that's the case, then okay. I'll make sure they don't, so don't worry!"

"I'm glad you and Addams listen better than the Ten Authorities...though I'm also a little disappointed."

"Hey, why did you look at me?" Cheruvim complained.

"No, erm... Ah, don't worry. I'm trying my best not to look down."

"Don't worry about what?!" he shouted.

"Eek! Why are you naked?! No! Pervert!" Maria shrieked.

"You react like that *now*?!" Cheruvim yelled.

This girl was fine with him just a moment ago. Is she putting on some sort of act?

"Hmm? What's going on?" Addams asked.

"Maria-chan's familiars are going to have an exhibition match against Kelvin-chan," Goldiana replied. "I wonder what her familiars are like."

"I recognize this situation. Rion-san taught me that in times like this, you should watch with popcorn in hand," Luquille said before sinking into thought for a moment. "What is popcorn? Do they sell it at stalls?"

Addams was silent.

But Patrick wasn't. "Hang in there a little longer, Luquille. I'm

interested too, so I don't want to miss this. Look, a fight like this has never happened before. So...everyone, wanna place bets?! Of course, I'm betting on Maria-san's side!"

Before I knew it, the gods over in their own corner had totally shifted into spectator mode. *How did you start getting along so fast?!*

"I'm the head of all adventurers, so I wouldn't want Kelvin-kun, who stands at the highest Rank, S, to lose. So I'll bet on Kelvin-kun!" Shin exclaimed.

"Hmm, if that is how Shin is betting, I'll do the opposite," said Art. "Don't read too deeply into it. I just don't want to be the same as that woman. So please don't let it affect you as you fight, Kelvin!"

Don't you dare place bets, you two! "Gah, everyone just does whatever the hell they please!"

"Then do you want to call this off? I'm fine with it either way," said Maria.

"I'll do it."

Given how far everyone had gone to rile me up, there was no way I could call it off even if it *was* a trap. If it did turn out to be a trap, though, I'd just bust straight through, betrayal and all.

"Heh heh heh, then it's decided," said Maria. "I'll whip one up right quick! Hup!"

Crack! Snap! Pop!

With her lovely smile still on her face and who-knew-what going on in her head, Maria tore off her own right arm. Yes, she literally tore it off in the goriest sense possible. A massive spray of blood fountained from her right shoulder, staining her expensive-looking clothing crimson.

"Hey!"

"Ah, don't worry. I know this is a little shocking, but I'm totally fine," said Maria. "This side is next!"

The snapping and popping sounds came once again, and more blood flew. This time, she had torn off her other arm.

Wait, huh? She tore off...her other...her left arm...with her right arm? Hey now, seriously? Her right arm's already grown back!

"That's surprising. And while I was busy being surprised, I see

your left arm's back to normal too..." I said.

I could regrow limbs with a spell too, but what she was doing was on a whole other level. She wasn't using magic. She simply and instantly regenerated as easily as she drew breath. Did she possess some sort of superior version of Auto Healing?

"Howzat?! I'm confident in my regeneration abilities," Maria boasted. "Now check this out, I'll use my lovely little arms as vessels. Awaken, my brilliant arms. Jabberwock of my right, and Bandersnatch of my left. Hurry and show me your adorable faces!"

In response to Maria's words, the severed arms ballooned to the point where I had to look up at them. The next moment, I was looking at two lumps of blood—no, two shadows of blood? Either way, they were large monsters giving off an eerie feeling.

"■■■!"

"■, ■■■."

Words from a language I didn't understand reverberated in my brain. Needless to say, the creepy monsters were the ones speaking. They sounded like my father-in-law when he snapped.

The monsters' bodies were oozing mist that seemed to be made of blood. Thanks to that, I couldn't quite get a clear look at them. I could just barely tell that they were humanoid in shape and that they were approaching Goldiana or Addams in size. Basically, they were monstrous, even speaking conservatively.

Next on the list of standout features was the part of what seemed to be their heads that had a blood-colored glow. The part was like a large mass(?), and I wasn't sure whether it was their eye or some other organ. Indeed, they were complete mysteries at the moment. Even when I tried to use Analyze Eye on them, the results seemed...bugged? I wasn't sure how to put it.

Yeah, something's off. The words are all gibberish. Do these things somehow mess with the world system? Ha ha...interesting!

"They're strong."

"Indeed they are," Cheruvim said, agreeing with the words that had reflexively spilled out of my mouth. It seemed that he'd also sensed the power of these monsters.

Heh, no surprise there.

"Hmm, but I'm not letting you have them, Cheruvim, no matter how strong they are. Maria made them for me. There are two, but I'm not sharing. Sorry."

"I don't need you to share!" Cheruvim retorted loudly. "Hmph, I don't find any meaning in this fight, unlike a battle junkie like you. I will be going to Addams's side." With that, he left to join the peanut gallery.

Hah, he's so not honest about his feelings.

"Now it's just us, my guy!" Maria said in a singsong lilt.

"Oh, come on, you should at least count the two monsters you made. So, are they the result of some sort of otherworld magic?"

"Yep! It's the level 100 Mad Whirlwind Magic spell, Celestial Zoa. The spell calls to add a little blood to wind to create animalistic familiars, but this is a special version of it. Instead of just blood, I add a part of my body to the mix so their abilities spike a whole lot," Maria explained.

Ah, so it really is magic. Wait, huh? Mad Whirlwind?

"They may look cute, but they're pretty strong since they're born from a part of my body," she warned.

"They...look cute?"

"What's with that face?! They're totes adorbs!" Maria said, pouting.

Is she serious? No, hang on, I'm more curious about the magic she was talking about. Is Mad Whirlwind Magic not Green Magic? And she said level 100. What does that mean? Is this just like the case with her stats, where everything is different because she's from a totally different world? Hmm...the questions never end.

"Well, let's set aside whether they're cute or not for now. Everyone's aesthetic sense is different, after all. But I can tell that they're strong and very appetizing. So, they're going to be fighting me?"

"Oh? That's the smile of someone having a lot of fun, my guy. Good, that's a really good expression. My heart skipped a beat!" Maria exclaimed.

"I don't need your clumsy, empty flattery."

"Aww, but it wasn't empty flattery at all! I was saying it pretty

seriously, you know? Not to mention, with a peerless idol like me so close to you, shouldn't you be a little more flustered?" Maria complained. "You've been so cold to me this entire time, bro!"

"I have no idea what you're hoping for, but I *am* married..."

"Hmph, you say the same things as Dellis. I wish you wouldn't use an excuse like that to completely ignore my charms. If you're going to be like that, bro, I'll pile on the freebies!"

"Freebies?"

"Yep, blood freebies!" she answered in a singsong tone.

As soon as she said that, I remembered the gory scene from earlier. "That makes me happy, but what exactly do you mean?"

"Wow, like, you're actually interested? Or maybe you were interested in me from the start?" Maria asked teasingly.

"That makes me happy, but what exactly do you mean?" I repeated.

"Urgh, he finally totally ignored me..."

Because you're making your little honey trap too obvious. It's on the level of a childish prank.

"Um, well, these kids are strong enough to destroy countries, but I was thinking of making them a little stronger," Maria explained.

"A little? So, they'd be able to destroy more than entire countries? Wow, those are some monsters."

"You don't have to put on an act for me, bro. I know you're secretly super happy! Come on, you!"

"Hey, stop with the elbow!"

Maria was really reinforcing my impression of her as a mischievous kid by teasingly elbowing me in the ribs. But it didn't seem like she was acting. Her grin told me she was truly enjoying this. How should I put it? If this *was* an act, then she would be truly scary.

"I gotta say, the kind of opponents you'd want would all have to be on that level, wouldn't they? So I'm going to use this!" Maria exclaimed. She took out two small bottles filled with a dark-red liquid. They were definitely not colored like healing potions.

"Are those filled with blood?"

"Yep. The blood of some very promising kids from my world.

Awesome, right?”

“Unfortunately, I’m not a vampire, so I don’t really get it. What’re you gonna do? Drink it?”

“Hmmm...I *could* drink it, but there’s a more fun way to use these. Watch closely, okay? Here!”

She tossed the two bottles like she was feeding the monsters. They disappeared into the mist the monsters were putting out, and before long I could hear the sound of glass breaking.

“■, ■■!”

“■■■.”

They’re definitely eating it. I can hear the chewing in between their mystery language. So, are they vampires, despite how they look?

“The plan is to power them up by having them consume the blood?”

“Now, now, just watch. The fun starts here. Come on, you two, do you remember your true forms?”

The monsters started to change. I could hear the cracking and snapping of their bones breaking and their meat splitting as I saw their humanoid forms swell through the mist.

Hey, this works because they’re being hidden by mist, but it’s a pretty gory and grotesque scene you’re showing me, isn’t it?

The two monsters were silent as their transformations eventually settled down. They’d become quite a bit smaller. While they were still emitting mist and making their shapes indistinct, from what I could see, they were now about half as tall and much lighter. In fact, after the transformation, they looked even more human—and more female, at least to me. One had a long ponytail, and the other had “her” long hair down, which was one of the reasons for my assumption. As if to go with their female forms, the lights shining from their heads also split into two—in exactly the same places a human would have eyes.

“Good, good! Looks like you’ve remembered,” Maria said happily.

“They sure changed a lot. You’re not going to tell me that they’ve adopted the forms of the people you got that blood from, are you?”

“Whoa there, you’re good. That’s some eye you’ve got on you!

I'm glad you're quick on the uptake!"

Still, the two monsters were silent.

So they've stopped using that unintelligible language now that they've transformed... But now they're not speaking at all. I felt that just made them even creepier and more unreadable.

"Okay then, I'll introduce them once more," said Maria. "This lively and energetic giant killer is my brilliant right arm: Jabberwock Spring! And this worrywart honors student is my brilliant left arm: Bandersnatch Summer! Try your hardest not to die, okay?"

"Wait, which one's which— Oh!"

Just as Maria finished speaking, the two monsters named something spring and something summer shoved their hands into their bellies and pulled out weapons.

It's a blood-colored...halberd and katana?

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Blood-colored weapons? I'm sure they're not exactly the same, but let's assume they have similar abilities to Sera's Blood Dominion. Also, they were created by a Mad Whirlwind spell, meaning it's very likely that both their bodies and weapons are aggregates of wind. In the worst case, merely touching them could slice me apart, so melee combat is a no-go.

Spring and Summer rushed at me as I was deep in thought.

They're pretty lively, despite how they look.

"Oh? We've already started?"

"It's not like you need a formal starting signal, right?" Maria asked. "Hey, hey, where's my share of popcorn? I love a dreamy salted caramel flavor."

I had no idea when she'd moved, but Maria was already with the spectators. Since she had asked for popcorn, she was probably thinking of this fight as something like a movie.

Heh heh, okay. So this is like a movie, huh?

"I'm grateful for that!" I called. "Because of that, I've been gifted such a wonderful enemy after all!"

I instantly manifested a Boreas Death Scythe as well as Obsidian

Edges clad in Vortex Edge, sending dozens of the blades at the monsters in lieu of a greeting.

These swords are strong, and their sheathes are vicious. They're similar to you, strange beings made of magic. Now, what will you do about this attack?

Both my opponents were silent. They showed fierceness in suddenly rushing me, but they still refused to say anything. Still, they met my expectations.

The ponytailed one ran freely through the air as though using a Sky Walk-like skill, dodging my series of attacks. It was crazy fast, even though its weapon was so big. In fact, it wasn't just fast, its movements were also abnormally skilled. On top of that, the ferocious savageness it'd had before the transformation was nowhere to be seen, as if it had all been a lie. It now calmly—coldly—observed its surroundings.

How should I put it? It's like I'm watching a tiny Goldiana... Yeah, that's real scary.

As for the one with the katana, it stayed behind the ponytailed one and deployed a barrier to block my attacks. I had totally assumed it would try to close into melee combat range given its weapon, but I was apparently mistaken. Given it had blocked my attacks head-on, the strength of its barrier was top-notch, and it would be trouble if I allowed it to go into full support mode. It made me want to ask why it had a katana, then, but...all this only made me more certain there was something going on with that katana.

Should I try getting close to it?

Anyway, taking all this in aggregate...

"What a nasty little combination we have here. I love it!"

I gave praise in my personal style as I sent a slash along using my scythe. I figured Ponytail would dodge without any trouble, but how would Katana fare? A simply tough barrier would be able to stop my slash.

"Hah!"

Right after that thought flashed through my mind, the one that I thought would dodge used its halberd to swipe at my slash and cut it apart. My slash dispersed before my very eyes.

Wait, hey, seriously?! Is that halberd made of Hard or something?! And the voice is cute like a girl's! Not only is it surprising that it split my attack, it's also surprising that it has a voice at all—and that the voice is a girl's! What the hell kind of magical creature is it?!

"My slashing attacks don't work on anything these days; it makes me a little sad! It's supposed to be able to cut anything!"

"And yet you seem real happy about it!" Maria teased.

Oh man, Maria just commented on how happy I look. But doesn't that just mean I live in a terrible environment where I was forced to evolve that way? I need to aim upward. Unknown fears still lurk where I am...but isn't that just the best?! It makes my heart pound!

I was on a real high, but at the same time I assessed the battlefield calmly. Once Ponytail cut my slash, it—*she*—accelerated, reaching speeds close to what Ange was capable of. Now, that dangerous weapon was aiming for me. I could also feel ominous magic coming from Katana girl behind her. I couldn't see their expressions, but I could feel their desire to kill. The intense will to crush me was incredibly strong.

I laughed joyously. "I can't even begin to predict what either one of them will do! This is so fun!"

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While Kelvin's battle started, Isla Heaven was still gradually sinking along with the spectator seating—though, rather than seating, there was nothing that could really be considered a seat or chair. The spectators had simply gathered together, sitting on whatever they deemed appropriate as they watched the battle unfold. One puffed on a cigar, while another drank alcohol, and another created popcorn and cola, totally ignoring the situation they were in.

"Huh, so this is popcorn. It's delicious in a way that makes you crave more. No wonder Rion-chan recommended it," said Dorothy.

"I know, right? This is the salted caramel flavor, but there's lots more to try," said Maria. "Personally, I like soy wasabi! Oh, do you

want some cola? Do you? I recommend you down it all in one gulp!”

“No, well, you see, Mr. Addams, I’m just not the kind of man who would ever attempt to betray you! Ah, no, in fact, I just wanted to pay Luquille back for healing me, that’s all. Heh heh...” Patrick sputtered excuses.

“Hmm. I understand what you’re trying to say, Patrick,” Addams replied. “But I really don’t care about such trifles. Just enjoy this rare event for now. I am an old god, so this is all the hospitality I know how to show. Here, have a drink first. It’s from my personal collection, I’m quite proud of it.”

“Heh...heh heh heh! Don’t mind if I do!” Patrick exclaimed.

“Shin-chaaan, don’t you think you’re smoking a bit too much?” Goldiana asked. “You’re such a heavy smoker, I’m worried.”

“And who asked for that, Peach Ogre?” Shin shot back. “You should mind Rimless over there instead. That attention seeker’s being oddly quiet, don’t you think? It’ll probably rain spears tomorrow—or maybe today?”

“Heh! It seems she’s gone senile in her old age. You can ignore her prattle, Prettia-kun,” said Art. “Instead, you should listen to my song!”

“My word, you two get along as well as always. I’m jealous!” said Goldiana.

“We do not!” both replied in unison.

“How about you pay attention to the fight instead?!” Cheruvim shouted. He was the only one of the spectators actually watching the battle, and he added a sigh to his retort. “And while I’m at it: Addams, he’s a traitor! Why are you offering him a drink like everything’s water under the bridge?!”

“Isn’t that the pot calling the kettle black? You totally mutinied against Eld,” said Patrick.

“That doesn’t count, because Eld was in the wrong!” replied Cheruvim.

“Whaaat? That’s ridiculous...”

“Calm down, both of you,” said Addams. “Both of your actions are but trifles to me. More importantly, Cheruvim, you should drink too. If you have a problem, spit it all out at the drinking table.”

"I *told* you, I don't dri— Gwhlp?!"

Cheruvim was interrupted. Addams had approached at incredible speed and shoved an entire bottle into his mouth. His actions brooked no refusal, and Cheruvim couldn't put up any resistance.

"Aha ha! That's total alcohol harassment! You'll get canceled for that! But drink anyway!" Maria cheered in a singsong lilt. "I love this kind of energy!"

At some point, she had somehow produced her own glass and poured some sake from the bottle Addams had opened. In a sense, she was enjoying this party the most.

But could any sense of order be brought to this gathering? Only the gods knew.

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"Still, I never expected Kelvin-kun's slash to be swept aside. That ponytail girl has some sort of special ability, doesn't she?" Shin mused. She had been puffing on her cigar as she watched when that unusually proper question left her mouth. It seemed she'd tired of arguing with Art, because she was now distancing herself from him.

"Whoa there, you've got a good eye, lady!" Maria exclaimed. "You're exactly right! The Unique Skill of the girl whose blood I used influenced them, so now they're able to do stuff like that! Like, wowzers, right?"

"Yep, totally wowzers. Super amazing," Shin agreed. "You're amazing for being able to recreate a Unique Skill, Maria."

"Mm...heh heh...izzat so?" Maria replied bashfully. "I'm always evolving, after all. For Celestial Zoa, I made sure to use Jabberwock's abilities as a base while adjusting the spell to make the creations closer to the original source in both composite skills and personality. Basically, I tried a lot of different stuff. But this sort of thing requires a fair amount of blood, and I'd need to know a lot about the source, so it's not like I can do the same for just anyone. I guess that limitation is a problem to solve for the future?"

"Even so, there's no doubt such a thing is a godlike feat," Shin muttered. "By the way, would you be willing to share the details of

the Unique Skill that defeated Kelvin Celsius's slash?"

"Sure, why not? Um, Spring has this ability called Slightly Unparalleled, you see—"

That was close! Kelvin thought as he just barely managed to cast Silent Whisper in time to stop himself from hearing what Maria was saying despite the distance.

Hey, come on! Seriously?! Don't just give out spoilers in a voice loud enough that I can hear you while I fight! That's not cool! My ears have gotten really good since I Evolved!

Of course, the full-souled retort he let loose in his head never reached Maria. However, he couldn't help but shout internally. After all, this was like a movie being spoiled for him while he was in the theater watching it.

Still, at least I made it in time. I heard the name of her Unique Skill, but I managed to avoid hearing what it does. If I'd failed, that would make all my observations during battle meaningless. Yep, I'm safe.

Kelvin, relieved as he was, was currently in the middle of throwing out a huge power move that would change the landscape around him. He was casting the Rank A Green Magic spell Turbulence—a spell that would toss its victim every which way with a torrent of wind while accompanied by the pressure of heavy gravity. In concert, he was casting the Rank S Green Magic Spell Air Void, which would lower the atmospheric pressure of the entire area. This pair of spells used together would forcefully turn the battlefield into the peak of Enberg while also forcing the enemy to fight inside a disaster-class storm. Of course, the web of thin air and strong gravity wouldn't affect Kelvin, the caster. With the environs only influencing his enemy negatively, he would be at an overwhelming advantage—or at least, he should be.

I guess a magical creature doesn't care about air.

No matter how much Kelvin lowered the atmospheric pressure, Spring and Summer wouldn't be affected since they didn't need to breathe. Also, the pair still moved at extreme speeds in the buffeting winds.

"Vega Aspida," Summer chanted.

Not even Spring and Summer could avoid being knocked off-balance by the combination of increased gravity and turbulent winds. However, every time they were, Summer would chant a spell and create several walls of light. As for what that would cause...

They're using the barriers as footholds again!

Barriers were simple things that could only function as walls. But that was exactly why they could withstand Kelvin's gravity. The pair used these barriers as footholds to brace them against the gravity and wind, allowing them to move around in this environment without losing much mobility. While the barriers were the linchpin of their defense, they were also the linchpin of their mobility.

"Vega Aspida," Summer repeated.

"Again?!" Kelvin yelled. He had miscalculated.

Actually, in a sense, this was a happy accident, but the usefulness of the barriers didn't end there. If Kelvin showed even the slightest opening, a barrier would be deployed to prevent his retreat. They were also using it as a way to block movement. In addition, they would use bright light to blind him momentarily, while bending light to become transparent and blend into the background to try for a surprise attack. There was a lot of variety in their actions. Every time he was blinded, he'd use Blind Cure to recover his vision, and every time he bumped into a barrier, he had to cut it with his scythe. Both Kelvin's mind and body were being worked overtime.

"Impact Quad!"

"Grk!"

But he would counterattack whenever he found an opportunity. The powerful impact the spell imparted wasn't stopped in time by Summer's support, and Spring was forced to step back. With that, if only for a moment, their positions had been reversed between front and back lines, destroying their hitherto solid formation. Common sense said that this would be enough to turn the tables.

But you guys aren't the type to be held down by common sense, are you?!

Kelvin got his hopes up even further, his expression warping into a smile. His hopes weren't dashed this time.

"Mirage Decoy," Summer chanted.

"Rosary Hole Bead!" Spring chanted.

The moment their positions were reversed, Summer chanted a new spell, creating many illusionary copies of herself. As for Spring, she created some sort of ball even while she was still flying and threw it.

"So they're gonna return the favor, huh?!" Kelvin shouted.

Summer disappeared into her crowd of illusions, charging with her blade raised. All of them parkoured and wall jumped using barriers to close in. Though she wasn't as fast as Spring, she was still several stages faster than Kelvin without any buffs. Given how fast she was going, it was almost impossible to pick out the real thing from the fakes.

On top of that, the ball that Spring had thrown from the back came flying in at speeds greater than Summer. Of all things, it sucked in the winds Kelvin had deployed around him in an attempt to correct its own heading. It was like a miniature black hole, absorbing everything in its path.

No, that's a real black hole, isn't it?!

Kelvin used Analyze Eye and instantly parsed the spell Spring was throwing out of the multitudes of new information he was seeing. Apparently, Rosary Hole Bead had the property of sucking in matter from outside to make itself—a black hole—bigger. As for how she could handle such a dangerous thing bare-handed, he honestly had no idea. Rather than try to make a snarky comment about it, Kelvin decided to just accept it as a ridiculous thing that otherworld magic could achieve.

"Hup! Hah! Ho!"

Even after the black hole, Spring continued to throw balls. This time, it wasn't a black hole but a different spell. This one wasn't affected by Analyze Eye—it returned the same bugged-out strings that Kelvin saw in Spring's stats.

I can't read the stats... Hey now, don't tell me that these balls are the ponytailed girl herself?! Is she seriously turning parts of her own body into balls to throw?!

When Kelvin looked closer, he noticed that Spring, who'd always been small of build, was now a size smaller. This was something only

a magical creature could accomplish—something that no living being could copy.

"Heh heeeh! I may have modeled them after those girls, but that's not all there is to Spring and Summer!" Maria boasted in a singsong lilt. "They're just as cute and free as I am!"

She seemed to be in a great mood as she munched on popcorn. However, Kelvin was too.

"I love it! I never would have thought of such a thing!"

He was in a similarly great mood.

The illusions made by Summer continued to multiply, and now there were hundreds of them. There was basically an army of her. Not only that but they were all still running around, making Kelvin's field of vision even noisier.

The miniature black hole Spring had thrown further destroyed Isla Heaven, sucking in the ground as it went and becoming quite large. Its gravity only increased as it got larger, and at this point, getting close to it was suicide.

Looking at all that, Kelvin felt like he was facing avatars of light and darkness themselves. Of course, such a feeling only made him happy as he puzzled over the problem. Being in a pinch was nothing but a reward to him. The only sticking point was that he was forced to wonder what had happened to the promise not to destroy Isla Heaven, but in general it all shook out to be a positive thing. He knew there were more important things to think about.

The black hole coming toward me...looks like it's going to reach me first. I can feel quite a lot of pulling force even from this distance. Yeah, I guess it would be best to kite the katana girl army to the side while dodging it. I do want to try challenging the thing head-on, but it's not good to be greedy. I'll try that out next time.

The speed at which the black hole was approaching was incredible, but its trajectory was simple: It was going straight. Kelvin could just get out of the way—dodging wouldn't be that hard. He figured her aim probably wasn't to deal damage, but to stop the turbulent storm while also limiting his maneuverability. And in truth, the advantage that Kelvin had been enjoying before was now on the side of Spring and Summer.

Even with this much distance, I'm still feeling such a pull. If I was closer, I'd likely find it almost impossible to get away. Not only that, but for some reason, that black hole isn't affecting the katana girl army. Well, they're almost all illusions, so I guess it just looks that way, but still...

In fights of this level, it wasn't strange for attacks and effects to only affect the enemy (Kelvin). While expecting (hoping) for the worst, he intercepted the Summer army.

"Holy Enchantment," a whole host of them called at once.

"Whoa, that's dangerous!" Kelvin yelled.

Just before they clashed, a total of several hundred katanas all gave off a bright light in an attempt to once again blind him. But Kelvin had predicted that and had Hard transform into a pair of sunglasses. These sunglasses were really futuristic, likely because of Hard's penchant for transforming into futuristic weapons in his previous life. At any rate, he'd managed to neutralize the blinding light.

Crrrrrrk!

But it was out of the frying pan and into the fire. Just as he was about to exchange blows with the Summers, Spring interfered. A magic projectile came flying in fast. Unlike the black hole, this one was able to spin very fast to curve its trajectory, and it flew right at Kelvin while splitting the air as if it were furnished with a homing function. More came, with some coming from Kelvin's blind spot and others flying through phantom Summers. This resulted in them being able to boldly make surprise attacks. Though Kelvin made some Obsidian Edges to intercept Summer with, he was forced to use them as a shield, since the projectiles were heavy, like highly condensed wind.

Seriously, they're nearly broken after just one hit? I strengthened these with Magic Overclock, you know? But I can't afford to just pay attention to these balls, can I?!

After who knew how many deflected projectiles, the Summer army reached Kelvin. He had no idea where the real Summer was, so he made a slashing attack with his scythe, figuring that he might as well try to hit all of them. Meanwhile, he used his remaining

Obsidian Edges as well as a Helix Barrier to intercept the rest.

"That one, that one, and this one are all fake... You're pretty cautious, katana girl!" Kelvin shouted. He kept swinging at illusions, so of course it didn't feel like he was hitting anything. If it did, that would mean he'd hit the real Summer, but no such thing had happened yet. The only response he got was the usual heavy magic projectiles flying at him suddenly.

I know the army in front of me is just an illusion, but that doesn't mean I can just ignore their numbers—

Out of nowhere, Kelvin felt a sharp pain in his gut. With the experience he'd built up from taking all sorts of damage, he immediately realized he'd been stabbed. The feeling of a sharp blade meant, of course, that Summer had attacked him.

"You... Did you seriously turn invisible even with all these fakes?!" Kelvin yelled.

Indeed, Summer had given herself optical camouflage in order to sneak behind Kelvin. The reason she'd created so many phantom copies and had all their blades shine so brightly was for this strike. This amount of planning was unthinkable for a magical creation.

Even so, Kelvin managed to grip the blade with all his might before the katana could go all the way through. With that, he managed to slow the blade down a little and make sure that the real Summer couldn't get away. He'd taken major damage, but he'd make sure to give back more than he got. The malicious hand of Kelvin's retaliation came for Summer.

"Clear-Sky Sword," Summer intoned.

Kelvin let out a loud, surprised yelp, stopping his malicious hand. The attack didn't just stop with his innards being pierced and gouged by the blade. Summer had said something, that was all. But in that instant, an intense mental burden assaulted him. If it had to be likened to something, it would be intense stress, much like when he'd been assaulted by Colette when her faith had exploded or when he'd been forced to eat a full course meal cooked by the three cooking failures, Mel, Sylvia, and Ariel. It was an unimaginable instance of despair. It echoed within Kelvin's head, making a moment stretch to infinity.

Gkhhh! A blade that affects my mind directly, huh?! This is bad; I think this is the most pain I've ever felt!

Even though he was in the throes of despair, the situation continued to mercilessly evolve. Summer kicked his gut, as if to rub salt in the wound. This removed the blade from his belly, but now Kelvin was flying through the air. The hand he'd used to grab the blade had been covered with Hard, so it was unharmed, but the situation was so bad that such a little trick basically didn't matter.

I wasn't just sent flying. I'm being sucked backward...

As he flew, Kelvin sensed another threat coming from behind. The identity of this threat was the black hole that should have long moved past the battle. Also, behind it was Spring, who'd used the time to move.

So, she secretly recombined herself here after being deflected? No, what's more important right now is...

Kelvin paid attention to the pose Spring was in. It looked like she'd kicked a soccer ball. That meant...

No way! She kicked it? That black hole?

That was exactly what she'd done. As if to emphasize that one could kick anything they could throw, Spring had kicked the black hole after she had recombined herself behind Kelvin to correct the ball's course. Since he'd been sent flying by Summer's kick, dodging would be extremely difficult. The black hole's speed was also the fastest it had ever been. Either Kelvin had to directly destroy the threat or he had to figure out some way to defend against it. He thought hard, but...

First, this stressed feeling is the worst. I never thought I'd be feeling like this in the middle of a battle... I can't think straight. No, I can't. So...

Jang-a-lang.

Summer let out a confused noise. Immediately after kicking Kelvin away, she had noticed that something had been equipped to her neck. It looked like a collar with a chain.

"So I'll just wing it. Katana girl, you'll be coming with me into that black hole," said Kelvin.

Summer's neck had been equipped with a chained collar created

by Kelvin's Rank A White Magic spell, Silencing Collar. It was as tough as a barrier and wouldn't be destroyed by any normal means. Not only that, but the person the collar was equipped to was prevented from using any magic. In other words, they were "silenced." The downside was how close Kelvin had to be to the target to use it, but once it was activated, the spell was pretty useful, so he liked it. It could, for example, be used like this.

"Won't you join me on this journey through the sky?!" Kelvin shouted.

"Grk?!"

He tugged on the chain connected to Summer's collar as hard as he could. He also used wind to lift her body into the air, and since she couldn't use magic, she couldn't resist being pulled toward Kelvin.

I know it's uncomfortable with your neck constricted like that, but you did just stab me in the gut, so we're even! Kelvin apologized internally before moving on and tugging on the chain without regrets. He had some consideration for his opponent, but no mercy. *Now then, I'll at the very least take someone with me into the black hole! No, wait, letting this happen will just mean I'm MIA. That's no good. So, sorry, but...*

"You go on ahead!" Kelvin yelled. He used adrenaline-infused strength to manipulate the chain and throw Summer over his back toward—of course—the incoming black hole. Thanks to her chained collar and Kelvin's "help," Summer passed Kelvin, flying toward the black hole.

The suction of the spell created by Spring only worked on Kelvin. There was no doubt about that. However, what would happen if Summer were to directly touch it? Would she still be unaffected? If not, then everything would be great since Kelvin would have taken out one of his opponents. If she ended up being fine, then he'd still be very happy because his opponents would truly be amazing.

Kelvin considered both sides as he excitedly awaited the result. But unfortunately, his hopes were dashed as the black hole disappeared just before it was about to hit Summer. Then, Spring caught Summer before tearing apart the collar attached to her.

She can tear it apart with her bare hands, huh? Jeez, it looks so easy with her mysterious strength. Still, judging from the fact that she erased it, the black hole would definitely have hurt her friend if it hit directly. That's unexpected. I totally thought she'd try to defeat me even if it meant sacrificing her friend.

Did she prioritize her ally's life because her personality was close to the blood's owner? Thanks to that, Kelvin had been saved, but he still looked a little unhappy...

"Even though you were just created, you show concern for your friends and have teamwork on the level of my party! No wonder I'm having such a hard time! Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!" Kelvin exclaimed.

Or not. He found joy in a different aspect. The stress he'd just been afflicted with seemed to have disappeared, as he looked totally fine now. He was still bleeding from the stab wound in his gut, but to a battle junkie, a wound he could heal with magic basically wasn't a wound at all. He no longer cared about it.

"Phew! Anyway, let's reset. In total, it seems like I've taken more physical and mental damage, but I think you two have less magic left? Not that I even know if you use magic in the first place."

He dismissed the chain that had finished its job and once again turned to face his two opponents. He was coming off an incredibly fierce exchange, and yet his expression said that he still hadn't had enough and that he wanted more already. Meanwhile, Spring and Summer also seemed raring to go as they faced off against the battle junkie that was their opponent. They stepped on air as they wrapped their weapons with more darkness and light.

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"Oooh, he's pretty good to be able to fight evenly with those two. I'm a little surprised. It looks like he's around level 11?" Maria remarked as she ate what little popcorn was left.

"Hmph, that's a given. After all, Kelvin is the man I saw fit to ally with," Cheruvim replied proudly for some reason. "But wait, you said level 11? Maria, or whatever your name is, do you have holes for eyes? There's no way Kelvin could be at such a low level. He is easily

over level 200."

"Huh? So my guy's over level 200? Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, so that's how levels in this world work. Interesting!" Maria hummed happily.

"Hey, it isn't interesting to me. I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Well...it seems like this world and Maria's world have different level standards," Addams replied. "Someone like him would be over level 200 here, but in Maria's world he would be level 11. Is that correct?"

"Yep, yep, that's exactly it!" Maria exclaimed. "You're so understanding, Addam-chan!" She slapped him on the back with a big smile in congratulations.

Seeing that, Cheruvim's jaw dropped to the ground. "A— A... A-Are you an idiot?!" he yelled. "That's more than just disrespectful! Addam-chan?!" The shock of that statement seemed to drive him into a state of confusion.

"Calm down, Cheruvim," said Addams. "I am not a god, so this is not blasphemy of any sort. Addam-chan is fine. It is a nickname, no? It has a fresh sound to it."

"No, but...still!" Cheruvim sputtered.

"Oh, come on; the man himself approves of it!" Maria teased. "Okay, I'm totally forgiven! There's no ifs, ands, or buts about it!"

"Grrr!"

"Aha ha, teasing you is so fun! In a different way from the guy fighting my children."

"Your name is Maria, yes? I understand how you feel, but I advise you to leave it there," said Addams. "If you go too far, he may retaliate with Lethality."

"Lethality?" Maria asked. "Is that an effect that'll instantly kill me? Hrm...I have no idea if something like that would even work on me."

"Oh? You seem quite confident," said Addams. "Then allow me to speak honestly. Seeing as how I am not currently a god, I am much more interested in your strength than the fight over there that has yet to get serious. Would you be able to defeat me?"

"Who knows? Maybe," Maria replied. "But I'm at least strong enough to be able to see your real face."

“I see.”

Addams seemed satisfied with her response, as he downed the alcohol in his cup all at once and stopped talking. Maria also returned to spectating mode and was still shoving popcorn into her mouth. Only Cheruvim didn’t seem happy.

“Hey,” he said.

“What’s up?” Maria replied.

“Can you really see his true face?” Cheruvim asked.

“I can. He’s a pretty dandy guy. Not my type, though.”

Cheruvim let out a noise of shock. After a moment, he said, “It doesn’t seem like you’re lying. How strong are you? What is your level?”

“What’s wrong, guy? You’re being pretty aggressive. Oh, maybe you were charmed by me?”

“As if!”

“Wow, your face is totally red. You don’t need to be so embarrassed, I get it!” Maria replied with a singsong lilt.

Cheruvim just let out a wordless, angry noise. It looked like he’d pop a vein.

“Hmm, exposing an idol’s personal info is off-limits, but since you’re being so bold, maybe I can give you a hint? Maria’s so magnanimous!” she said of herself.

“A...hint?” Cheruvim repeated.

“Yep, a hint. In broad terms, I’m about ten times stronger than Spring and Summer...or somewhere around there? Yeah, that’s probably right.”

“Ten...times...?”

Maria returned to spectating, but Cheruvim couldn’t tell whether she was telling the truth or not.

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Who knew how many times the combatants exchanged spells and blades after that? Maria’s popcorn and the booze Addams was drinking were about to run out. One reason for that was Kelvin’s bad habit of wanting to experience his opponents’ full strength, but still,

this fight was reaching its end.

"Astaroth Form," said Kelvin.

"Chaos Mire."

"Grey Arms."

Kelvin had Hard transform into a mantle and wore it. Meanwhile, Spring created some strange mud in the palm of her hand and coated her halberd with it. Summer's weapon shone with a different sort of light than before.

"I gotta say, this is some stalemate, all thanks to that katana girl there being able to use healing magic. But you show me your tactics with every clash, and I'm not bored at all!" Kelvin exclaimed. "In fact, I'm super excited. I'd be happy if you felt the same way. Do you?"

Neither of his opponents answered.

"You should be able to understand me...but I guess you really won't talk to me. That's too bad, really," he continued.

After the black hole disappeared, Kelvin had tried to talk with his opponents several times. Unfortunately, the result was always the same: Spring and Summer refused to break their silence to him. They understood him, and they could definitely speak, given how they gave each other signals and audibly cast spells. Kelvin knew they had the ability to converse...but he wasn't having any luck.

"Fine, then I'll just keep talking," he said. "I can down recovery potions in an instant to heal myself and fill up on magic, but what about you? Let's make this next move the last. Use the strongest attack you can manage to try to finish me off, because I'll be doing the same."

His opponents didn't answer. However, given how they'd been meeting all his expectations, he was sure they would follow his proposal. That was why he decided to use his strongest move.

An invasive attack that completely ignores Hard's armor, skills that completely stop my movements just by touching me, a spell similar to Divine Dress that undoes Hard's ability, and the most annoying of all: that stress-inducing sword. Even in Astaroth Form, I can't let my guard down even for a moment in the face of their attacks. Oh man, this other world seems like quite the realm of conflict! I want to go

there someday to exchange blows with the originals!

Precious memories gained after so much pain ran through Kelvin's mind. Actually, it was a little early to call them memories, but these experiences were very valuable to him. He wanted to give this fight a proper ending so as to not have any regrets. He wanted to repay the favor these two were doing for him in fighting him so well twice over.

Magic swelled as Kelvin's body moved and his mind spun. His strong will to absolutely defeat his opponent and the various factors that would go into that kicked into high gear, waiting for the time to come. Not yet? Was it time yet? Now? His Parallel Processing-affected thoughts were impatient, each causing him to smile more and more. The more he was made to wait, the more his heart filled.

Finally, the moment came. The time to defeat his opponents' unreasonable, ridiculous power with something even more unreasonable and ridiculous. What would Kelvin, Spring, and Summer manifest upon this battlefield? The spectators all focused, not wanting to miss it. But...

Crack! Snap! Crackle! Pop! Snap!

A fissure opened in the space above Spring and Summer with a crack. It wasn't a preemptive attack by Kelvin, and neither was it the pair's trump card. Neither side had been expecting this. It might have been a simple trick of fate.

"Sorry, Maria! I yielded to the temptation to take a nap, so I'm late!"

The fissure burst open, and a figure appeared from inside. It was clear this person knew Maria, but everything other than that was a mystery. Not only that, but as soon as they appeared, they grabbed both Spring and Summer by the head and slammed them into the ground (or in Summer's case, her barrier). The pair's heads instantly burst, making for a gory scene.

"Huh? I meant that to be a bit of skinship in place of a greeting. Did I mess up? Wait, these are fakes. Huh, forgeries these days sure are well-made."

The voice sounded light and airy, but the person it belonged to moved with absurd speed—so fast that Spring and Summer couldn't

even react, despite how strong they were. With their heads destroyed, the magical creations couldn't be maintained anymore, so the rest of their bodies could only twitch in place. The battle was over.

"Uh...what?"

Indeed, this totally unexpected occurrence spelled the end of Kelvin's battle. He'd survived fully intact, all's well that ends well, though of course, he didn't think that. This should have been the best, most satisfying ending, but it had been spoiled. To a battle junkie like him, it was like being cast from heaven into hell.

"Hey, what're you doing?" Kelvin asked. He sounded calm, but he was clearly unhappy. He glared at the interloper, putting all the pressure he could behind it and wishing looks could kill.

"Skinship, of course. Ah, but I guess this is a case of mistaken identity. Whoopsie! Gah ha ha..."

Even under Kelvin's menacing glare, the interloper laughed cheerfully. Her clothes had an orange theme, and she wore her long black hair in a ponytail. She was short and looked to be in her teens.

Suddenly, Kelvin realized something. *Doesn't she look a lot like Spring?*

"You... Are you—?" he started.

But Maria interrupted him. "You're late, Kuon! I took the time to contact you, so you should have responded in seconds! Leaving me on 'read' is the worst!" She was holding up some sort of small board. It looked like a smartphone, and a text conversation could be seen on the screen.

"I said I'm sorry," replied the new girl. "I did my best to get here, so forgive me with your magnanimous heart, okay? Wait, actually, I've been feeling a lot of gazes on me this whole time. Especially that guy there. The heated look he's giving me... Gah ha ha! This is kind of embarrassing. Have you told anyone why I travel to other worlds?"



“Huh? Ah, uh... Heh heh, of course! I told them. Totally, I did. I think,” Maria replied.

“Hey, you didn’t tell us anything.” Kelvin was starting to realize what had happened. Given the flow of the conversation, he was sure that the interloper had come from Maria’s world.

“Oho, that one is also pretty good...” Addams muttered.

“It’s not the time to be impressed, Addams,” Cheruvim said, but he quickly changed his tune. “Wait, she’s strong enough to impress you too?”

Addams gave a low rumble in reply. That meant Cheruvim was right. This knowledge instantly relieved Kelvin’s thirst and blew away all his dissatisfaction. Basically, his interest had transferred entirely to this newcomer.

“Agh, shut up! Kuon is my mom friend, okay?!” Maria shouted. “I called her so we could take this vacation in another world together! That’s all! Is that so wrong?!” She’d snapped.

“Come now, you’re supposed to be an idol; you can’t be getting angry in public like this,” Kuon chided her. “Hmm, maybe I should introduce myself? I am Katsuragi Kuon, a mother of three. You can call me her mom friend, or a drinking buddy. Either way would be basically correct. Nice to meet’cha!”

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The battle had ended without my consent. Still, the cause was the appearance of a new threat, so it was actually like my opponent had been replaced with a better one. I’d have another opportunity to fight the magical creations Ponytail and Katana Girl later should Maria feel like it anyway.

Maria chose that moment to say, “Oh, by the way, my stock of blood is empty, so I can’t make Spring and Summer anymore, okay?”

I figured. I do regret the ending a little.

But if I was planning to fight these opponents again anyway, I decided I might as well fight the originals. I had only ever seen them as shadows, but they had seemed to be in their teens, which meant

they were younger than me. And yet, their instincts for battle had been so well-developed. I knew I'd love to have a taste of the real thing.

So I wanted to ask something I had missed the opportunity to ask before. This sudden newcomer...Katsuragi Kuon? She looked *so* similar to Spring that I had to at least entertain the possibility that she was the original, but...I also vaguely recalled her and Maria saying something just now about her being a mother of three and a mom friend or whatever. It made me want to whip out a retort, saying that there was no way she was past her teens; that she looked like she was in high school, if not middle school. While it was possible if she'd Evolved and had a longer lifespan like me, with those looks, the introduction had to be a joke, right?

I hesitantly asked her as much.

"My, you sure know how to make an old lady happy, you know that?" Kuon replied. "It's true that I have three kids, and I'm definitely in my forties, okay? What? My lifespan? No, no; humans live to be about a hundred at most, of course. I'm planning to be active my entire life, but there's no way I could go beyond that."

"S-Seriously?"

According to her, she hadn't Evolved or anything of the sort; she was just maintaining her current looks as a human. Not only that, but she was serious about having three kids, the oldest of which was already in high school. Also, that oldest child was apparently the original Spring, and people often took mother and daughter to be sisters.

Ha ha! I give up on trying to understand anything.

"By the way, I have seven kids!" Maria chimed in. "They're all cute girls who look like me! Yay!"

I was silent. I no longer had anything to respond to her incredible statement with. I already knew that she looked younger than she was. I really did, but after hearing her say it so plainly, I felt a headache coming on.

Oh...but what if Maria's kids are as strong as she is? If that's the case, I think I'd like to meet them, maybe.

"I'm getting a bad feeling, so just stop it, Kelvin," said Cheruvim.

"If her children resemble her, meeting them would result in nothing good. That's for sure."

His sincere warning came as I was deep in thought. He seemed tired somehow. Had something happened while I was fighting? Why did he smell like booze?

"Don't worry about me," said Cheruvim. "More importantly, this continent is about to hit the ocean. Are you sure you shouldn't make contact with your friends?"

"No need to worry about that. I already did through the Network. Sera and Gerard are in the ocean below with one of the Ten Authorities, enjoying a swim."

"I see, that's good new— Wait! They're playing?! During this crisis?!" Cheruvim yelled. "Who is with them?!"

Well, one of the Ten Authorities.

"Uh...if I remember correctly, they said her name is Isabel, and she uses barriers."

"ISABEEELLL!" Cheruvim yelled at the ocean.

Yeah, he's definitely drunk. No wonder he smells like that.

At any rate, the party of rampaging drunks in the spectator group had started, but...what to do? Things looked to be settling in a pretty friendly manner, but Addams was back, and now we had to deal with a vampire from another dimension and her mom friend. It was all so unexpected. Personally, I welcomed it, but I couldn't just prioritize my own desires.

"I know the party is in full swing, but the fight is over, so I think we should get out of here soon. As for what we'll do next...I'm planning to prepare a place to talk, as Luquille and Cheruvim promised. Are there any objections?" I asked.

"I'm fine with that," Maria replied. "But I think Luquille-chan's gonna need a break for a while. Can you use healing magic or something on her, Kuon?"

"Unfortunately, that's out of my wheelhouse," Kuon answered. "If only Chinatsu-chan were here."

"Cheruvim agreed to it, yes? Then I have no objections," said Addams. "I have been sealed away for an immeasurable amount of time. I feel no need to hurry anything now."

"ISABEEELLL!" Cheruvim yelled again.

Cheruvim, one of the people who had made the agreement in the first place, was still drunk, but for now...it seemed that there would be no objections or arguments, which was too ba— I mean, which was perfect. Yeah, totally perfect. To the general public, this had worked out great.

Okay, I got agreements from both sides. There's the question of whether a verbal agreement can be trusted, but Addams's and Maria's goals aren't exactly to destroy the world or anything. Addams and Cheruvim want to defeat the incumbent gods, for which they'll be invading other worlds. Maria and Kuon just want to enjoy a trip to another world. And their "employer," Luquille, has plans to return Mel to the position of Goddess of Reincarnation, but thanks to Shutola, she needs to at least talk it over first, so she probably won't do anything reckless. For now, she's no harm to anyone. Of course, she'll need to be watched, and I'll need to pay attention to what we do with the Ten Authorities other than Cheruvim too.

"I'll be in control of the Ten Authorities we captured until the talks are held. I guarantee they'll be well taken care of and won't be harmed. You have no problem with that, right, Addams? Cheruvim?"

"You won this battle, no? Then that is your right as victor," Addams replied. "Do as you please."

"But remember, you may need to release them depending on how the talks go, Kelvin! Urp..." Cheruvim suddenly covered his mouth.

Hey, now! Don't barf, okay? Not here!

"Also, Maria, do you need help healing Luquille? If you do, I can heal her or even bring her to a medical facility."

"I'll take the healing, thanks," Maria replied. "But no need to worry about anything that comes after that. I asked Shin a lot of questions while you were fighting, my guy."

"Really?"

"Yep, yep. That's right, Kelvin-kun," said Shin. "Leave Maria and the others to me. I'll get them a place to sleep, among other things. Ah, and this Pat-whatever guy counts as part of the group, apparently. Addams gave his permission, so don't worry about that."

"I give thanks for the miracle that is permission from Addams."

Pat-whatever... Ah, right, the last of the Ten Authorities. The appearances of Maria and Addams were more impactful, so I totally forgot about him. But unlike Luquille, who's not even awake, he's totally fine. It seems he has some regenerative power.

"Understood. I'll leave them to you, Director Shin. What about Addams and Cheruvim?"

"Hmm, let's see... We—" Addams started.

"Urp... Urgghwhheeehhh..." Cheruvim gulped.

"First, we need to get to a lavatory," Addams finished.

"Yeah...I think that's a good idea."

Ah, I knew this would happen in the end. I know we're in the process of crashing, but I really wanted to avoid having a guy spew rainbows onto Mel's homeland while naked. Let's bring him some sort of drug that works on drunkenness later.

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I left Addams to nurse Cheruvim and put the restroom behind me. Goldiana said she'd do something about those two, and I handed over a Mel-stamped potion, so I didn't think I had to worry about them for now. That said, I wasn't sure it was a great idea to leave a wicked god in charge of nursing a drunk. But I'd stopped sweating the small stuff now that everything had gone insane. I was told that Addams had forced Cheruvim to drink too much, so he needed to take responsibility anyway.

While forcefully convincing myself of that, I hurried to meet up with Sera and Gerard. The Dragonz, led by Dahak, and Mel's group, which included Shutola, Viktor, and Serge, had escaped Isla Heaven already. Serge had taken Rem, one of the Ten Authorities, with her, bound—or rather, hugged—so it sounded like they were fine too. In a sense, they might actually not be, but I decided to treat that as part of Serge's payment for helping.

So...rest in peace.

However, unlike those groups, there were some who were unable to escape on their own: Sera and Gerard, who I was heading toward now. I'd told Cheruvim they were having a swim, but it actually

sounded like they were in the water and couldn't move along with their opponent. They were drifting with the waves. In other words, they'd sent out an SOS and were waiting for rescue. Gerard was worse off, since he'd sunk to the bottom, though that was no surprise.

"Oh, Kelvin!" Sera shouted. "Over here! We're over here!"

I'd found Sera. The woman floating next to her was probably the Ten Authorities member named Isabel. Was it just me, or...was she swimming strangely? It wasn't just the ocean waves playing tricks on my eyes; the way she was swimming was really suspicious. She was looking really troubled to me too.

"Sorry for taking so long. There was a lot going on."

"Oh? So you prioritized a fight over saving me, huh?" Sera replied.

"Urgk! N... No way! That fight was unavoidable. I definitely didn't ignore you just to fight! In fact, I made that decision because I trust you, Sera, so...I'm so sorry!"

I did my best kowtow onto the ocean's surface. I was forced to hold that pose for a moment before I heard Sera burst into laughter.

"You look so sorry, Kelvin! It's so funny! I'm sorry too; I just wanted to try teasing you a little. You don't need to apologize! I get it. Heh heh!"

"Please stop with the pranks in situations like this, Sera. My glass heart can't take it."

I rubbed my chest in relief as I healed her. It was just a stopgap measure, but she would be able to evacuate on her own now.

"Thanks, Kelvin!" she exclaimed. "Now I'll be able to swim to shore!"

"No, just fly instead of forcing yourself to do something weird."

"Wowie wow wow wow! The sudden love scene! It's started...started... Wait, wait, what do I do? I'm totally a third wheel, but I can't mooooooove!" Isabel shouted.

Sera and I were just conversing as usual, but Isabel, who'd been acting strangely, started to panic even more. She might have intended to talk so that only she could hear herself, but her voice didn't escape my ears. As I've said, my ears are really good.

"Uh...your name's Isabel, correct? Sorry to ask while you're in this state, but you understand what's going on, don't you?"

"Y-Yeeessshhh! Sorry! I'm so sorry!" she shouted in reply. "I understand I am nothing but an irritating third wheel! I am so sorry something like me is even heeerrreee!"

"Yeah, uh...seriously, calm down, okay?"

That wasn't what I meant. I was talking about the whole situation with Addams and stuff. And what did she mean by "love scene"?

"She's acting crazy right now, but she should know everything I do. I shared information from the Follower Network with her while we were floating here," said Sera.

"I...see." I'd heard Isabel had multiple personalities, but still, looking at her now, I couldn't believe that she was one of the Three Great Authorities.

I guess you shouldn't judge a book—I mean, a fallen angel—by its cover.

After that, I continued trying to communicate with the confused Isabel to tell her I would send her to be with her little sister, Gloria. After hearing Gloria's name, she seemed to calm down somewhat. She stopped acting so egregiously and got to the point where we could just barely hold a conversation. Still, this was only the first step, so I was still struggling.

"Urgh...I want to see Gloria..." Isabel muttered.

"I'm the one who wants to cry. This is the most exhausted I've been all day, I think..."

"Heh heh! Thanks for the hard work!" said Sera.

"Honestly, I'm so tired. Her other personality was the fighting type, right? I think I'd be happier talking with her."

"Hmmm...I think that one's pretty exhausting too, though," Sera replied. "She just kept saying 'wonderful' the whole time during battle."

"What the heck?"

According to Sera, Isabel was the type to be overjoyed at the growth of her enemy during battle.

Ah, that's certainly weird. So, people like that exist! Sera...what's with that look? I'm just agreeing with you.

"Also, it seems this Isabel and the other Isabel are good with different types of barriers," Sera informed me. "This one is good at defensive and sealing barriers, while the one I fought is better at offensive barriers."

"Huh, so strengths and skills actually change between personalities? That's interesting. No, wait, what do you mean by 'offensive barriers'?"

"Exactly what I said! Both Isabels can use every type of barrier, but it seems like their personalities make a real difference in strength. If we'd fought this personality, she might have produced a barrier we couldn't destroy!"

Mm-hmm, I see. So even if the other Isabel is good at offensive barriers, that doesn't mean all her combat abilities are higher. It's just a difference in how they use their abilities. This personality would be better at supporting from the rear. Right, which means even in her current state, she would be a formidable foe. That's good...

"Honey! Are you okay?!" someone shouted.

Whoa! That voice... Mel? Where's it coming from? Why here?

"Didn't you evacuate with Shutola and the others, Mel?"

"You took so long to come, I decided to come get you! As your true wife!" she replied.

"O-Oh, I see. Thanks?"

Um...but is it okay to leave Shutola and Serge alone? Well, Viktor is there too, but... It's fine...right?

"A-A-A... A triangle?!" Isabel screamed. "It went from a love scene to a scene of carnage?! Hmmm...but this isn't *bad*, per se..."

Actually, whatever's going on in Isabel's head right now might be more concerning. Why is she looking at us like that?

"Isla Heaven will be touching down any time now. We've already finished preparing for the shock wave and tsunami that will result from that. Now we just need to evacuate," said Mel.

"Great work, as expected with so many powerful people around. Sera, use your Blood Dominion on Isabel."

"Leave it to me!" Sera replied.

"Wait, does that mean this isn't a triangle, but a square...or

maybe even a pentagon or more?!" Isabel shouted. "Depending on the perspective, this could also be a signifier of incredible ambition! Urgk!"

She lost consciousness after being hit on the head by Sera's Blood Dominion. It sounded like she was saying something really terrible, but it was probably better not to dig any deeper. Nothing good would come of it.

"With this, we're all set. Let's head home!" Sera exclaimed.

"Yes, good food is waiting for us," said Mel.

"Wait a second. We haven't saved Gerard yet."

"Oh, right," both of them replied in unison.

"Oh come on, you guys!"

I salvaged Gerard in the midst of this awkward atmosphere. And that was how the battle of Isla Heaven ended.

Chapter 4: New Life

In the end, we were able to fully counter the physical effects of Isla Heaven's fall. In fact, we had more trouble deciding what to do with the place afterward. After crashing, the continent split into a group of islands—an archipelago. It seemed they still had the ability to float, since they didn't sink below the surface of the water. Many of them were large enough to have an entire mountain on them, so they were definitely livable if one put one's mind to it. That in itself was fine, since the evacuated angels would be able to repopulate the land. However, to the rest of the world, it seemed like land had suddenly appeared in the middle of an empty ocean. It would normally be a huge incident, so the real question was how to explain it, which would doubtless be a lot of trouble.

Anyway, Director Shin would be the one to take all that trouble on! Huh, me? No way, not a mere adventurer like me. There was no way I could intervene on events of such a large scale. We were just frontline combatants. So... *Do your best, Director Shin!*

"Well, to be fair, Shutola and Colette are here, so it's not like I'm totally uninvolved," I said.

"What's wrong? Why do you look so tired?" Shutola asked.

"I don't just look tired, I *am* tired."

Shutola's kindness, despite having gone on this worldwide romp with me, warmed my frozen heart. She was warm, so warm...but this entire event had turned out to be so disappointing, and I couldn't make sense of it. I was currently in a private room inside a certain castle in a certain country, coordinating and preparing for the next meeting. What? It looks like I'm just taking a break, you say? Well, to be fair, I was lying back on a sofa.

After Isla Heaven, I'd at first optimistically planned to prepare for Addams, Maria, and the negotiations as we'd all agreed to beforehand. But there were so many demands from the parties

taking part that I'd been forced to tour the world taking down statements, which I'd never intended to do. It seemed that countries had more trust in Rank S adventurers than I had expected, and since I'd ended up going around with Director Shin, that effect was even more pronounced. Yeah...I truly didn't care, but Shutola was right—not that I cared. I just wanted to go home.

At any rate, as we went around, things were going well aside from the fact that my heart was on the verge of dying. In the end, Isla Heaven was to be treated as the Southern Continent.

But is it really a continent? I said this already, but isn't it more like an archipelago? I pointed that out to the director, but...

"Wouldn't it be weird for just the south to be an archipelago when we have northern, western, and eastern continents? It's like it's being left out or something. Also, it'd be a pain to remember otherwise, and it was called 'the floating continent,' so Southern Continent! Yep, decided! We have the right to name it, as the ones who discovered it!" Shin had said.

"Whaaat..."

That was how she'd worn me down. Principal Art also seemed to want to complain, but she kept him quiet too. She even included us at the end, that damn free spirit.

I sighed. "Well, I guess there's no use crying over spilled milk. What's important is what happens next. Yes, next. While we're doing this, Addams and the others could be doing something terrible. We could be missing the festival."

"Again with that? Aren't you just trying to figure out a way to get out of this?" Shutola asked.

"Oh, you can tell? Wait, Shutola, don't just revert to your original form all of a sudden. You surprised me."

And, though I didn't say this, you're sitting on my lap, okay? It might be okay in your child form, but in your original form, it's... Well, it's terrible in a lot of ways. I'm not going to explain this aloud, but you get it, right? Please, get it.

"My apologies. I confirmed that you'd received enough little sister nutrients, so I thought it would be all right to return to this form," she replied.



"Sure, in terms of healing, you'd be right, but...jeez, you're so cunning, Shutola. Actually, rather than cunning, I'd say it's more mischievousness? Hasn't that side of you been coming out in this form too, recently?"

"I have no idea what you're talking about." With that, she got off my lap to sit on the sofa across from me.

She's definitely guilty.

"Let's get back on topic. I don't believe Addams or Maria will break their promises. You know that, right, Kelvin?" Shutola asked.

"Oh, well...yeah. According to reports from those assigned to watch them, Addams is enjoying touring arenas around the world, while Maria and Kuon are having a normal vacation. They're enjoying everything from food to sightseeing to recommended cosmetics. Neither side seems to be doing anything weird. If I had to say, though, Cheruvim seemed to be really unhappy with the current situation, like he wanted to yell that now wasn't the time for them to be enjoying themselves."

In fact, I was much more worried about where Cheruvim was going. Seriously, I was hoping he wouldn't just start stripping out of nowhere. I mean, it wouldn't be my responsibility even if he did, but since he looked so much like me, I was worried that it would all come back to bite me somehow.

"You've got that exhausted look on your face again, Kelvin-san," said Shutola. "Do you need more little sister nutrients?"

"You know I can't just nod and say yes when you put it like that. But thank you for worrying."

There was a beat before Shutola said, "O-Of course, this is only natural for your betrothed."

Come on...it's not fair for you to blush now of all times. The gap between this and your child form, it's... Gaaahh!

"By the way, how did Efil-san's birth go? I was unable to be there because of all this, but you were, weren't you, Kelvin-san?" She'd instantly calmed down. She could switch emotions terrifyingly fast.

"Right. I was able to secure free time while Efil was expecting thanks to you, Shutola. She gave birth safely, and both mother and child are healthy. It's a half elf, and the name— Wait, didn't I already

tell you through telepathy?”

“I wanted to hear it directly from your mouth, Kelvin.”

“Oh...really?”

“Hee hee! There’s no deep meaning to it. I’m just a little tired myself, so I wanted to be healed too,” said Shutola. “We have time now, so why don’t you tell me what happened in detail?”

“I don’t mind, of course, but... Hmm, now that I think about it, I was so useless then.”

“I expected you’d be.”

“Hey!”

She was reading me like a book, but it was Shutola making the request, so I thought back hard and started telling her my story.

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A devilish maternity ward had been hastily set up in an annex of the Golden Sparrow, an inn in Pub. While it sounded ominous, it was really just a regular ward staffed by the medical demon Vegalzeld and his subordinates, who would act as midwives. At any rate, Efil was finally going to give birth today.

“Not yet? It’s taking a really long time, isn’t it?”

Until that time was to come, I was waiting restlessly in front of the maternity ward, wearing circles into the floor. Yes, I was ceaselessly walking around. You know, I never thought I would be like some husband out of a sitcom trope, but now that I was in a similar situation, I could relate; I couldn’t sit still either. I could hear Efil’s pained moans coming from inside the ward, and no matter how much I waited, time seemed to be flowing like dense mud. It was seriously awful. At first, I’d intended to stay in there, holding Efil’s hand, but I was being such a bother that Vegalzeld had thrown me out. Gah! I’d thought I was being pretty quiet too!

“Heh! Calm down, my liege. In times like this, husbands should just brace themselves and support their wives.” Gerard advised me.

“He is absolutely right, my foolish son-in-law. You just barely, BARELY make the cut as a husband to my Sera, so don’t let something like this shake you. You won’t last if you do.” Gustav

added.

While I was restlessly moving around, Gerard and my father-in-law were trying to encourage me. Given their experience, they seemed a lot more reliable than usual. I was seriously grateful to them. But despite my feelings, my body was restless.

"Agh, jeez! Just sit still, all three of you! The sound of you stomping around is so noisy! Making noise as you worry like that is just going to bother Efil!" Sera scolded us.

"But..."

"I-Indeed, but..." Gerard echoed.

"You're so reliable, Sera! I'd expect nothing less of my beloved daughter!" Gustav exclaimed.

"Don't 'but' me! Okay, you three, line up here and sit down!" Sera commanded.

"Ah, okay." The three of us followed her orders.

Sera used her might (read: Blood Dominion) to force us to sit. Gerard and my father-in-law were flanking me, making it really stuffy and uncomfortable. Needless to say, this was fatally bad positioning, but since we were being controlled by Blood Dominion, we couldn't move.

It's cramped, so cramped. I'm dying here... But thanks to this, I've calmed down. Good job, Sera. But please, next time leave me some space.

"Ahh! My emergency rations are gone!" Mel lamented.

"Come on, Mel-nee, at least hold back on eating a little bit. Still...this is taking quite a long time. I'm not quite to the point of Kel-nii and the other two, but I do understand why they're so worried..." Rion said.

Ange comforted her. "Rion-chan, we can't be the ones to feel weak-kneed. Efil-chan is fighting right now, bearing incredible pain. As her best friends, as family, and as comrades, we must believe in her, no matter how far away we are. Right?"

"Ange-nee... Yeah, you're right. Do your best, Efil-nee! We're with you!" Rion switched to cheering Efil on.

Sera joined in. "Heh heh! That was pretty reliable of you. As the spearhead of our league of children, Efil, you better get a good start

off the line!”

“Everyone feels the same way. By the way, I’ll spare no effort in raising this child. Specifically, I’ll be willing to cook about once a week instead of Efil—” Mel started.

“Please don’t,” Sera, Rion, and Ange all interrupted her at the same time.

The fact was, Mel’s cooking skills were such that she could make mysterious substances just by heating up milk. I was truly grateful for her good intentions, but I could only say their decision was right. For both Efil’s and our child’s sake.

Then, the next instant, I thought, *Ah, crap. Now that I’ve been reminded of the substances Mel’s created before, I’m getting worried again.* The mental trauma I’d been dealt by Summer merged with these thoughts to instantly unsettle my heart. *C...uh... Agh, calm down, me! Just calm down!* I desperately tried to resist the panic, but I couldn’t win against the thoughts of mysterious substances.

“Uh...hey, Gerard, Gustav...I really do think this is taking too long. She’s okay, right? Right?!” I asked.

“Uh? Er...” Gerard gave a loud, forced laugh. “Be at ease, my liege. I’m sure there is nothing to worry about. Yes, surely...right? There is nothing to worry about, is there?!” He quickly fell into the same hole.

“Errr, uh, hmm. Vegalzeld is the best on the Northern Continent. Things must be going swimmingly...I think, right? VEGALZEEELLLD?!” My father-in-law also started panicking.

“Agh, jeez, they’re starting up again,” Sera groused. She used Blood Dominion to seal our mouths. Unfortunately, before that, a move was made.

“HEEEYYY! SHUT UUUPPP!” a demon nurse of the giant variety yelled.

Our concerned, overbearing dad shouts must have carried into the maternity ward, as she came flying out from the other side of the doors in a rage, with great momentum. Her words were coupled with a punch to the face. The power behind it equaled a blow from Sera, and I was sent flying quite a ways back. Of course, my father-in-law and Gerard met the same fate.

"Graaagh?!"

"Grfh! That penetrated right into the core of my armor," Gerard muttered painfully.

"Huh? But...I'm the Demon Lord..." my father-in-law mumbled in numb shock.

"It doesn't matter if you're some Grim Reaper or Demon Lord or whatever! Where do you think you are?!" the nurse yelled. "It may have been hastily set up, but this is a hospital! What kind of idiots shout in a hospital?! Oh, wait, I'm looking at them!"

The look on the (giant) demon nurse's face was terrifying. Not to mention, the punch I'd received really hurt. Now wasn't the time to be feeling this, and while the flow of events naturally painted us as the ones at fault, erm, well...I couldn't help but be a little excited, though that was a secret. After all, even though it was basically a surprise attack, all three of us had been sent flying. I couldn't help but wonder who she was.

"Grk! You may say that, Beauty, but didn't you also— Oh...nothing. Never mind," Gustav stammered. His attempt to argue had been stopped in its infancy by a murderous glare by the nurse. He averted his gaze in an obvious attempt to avoid locking eyes with her.

"Er...Gustav-dono, who is she?" Gerard asked.

Gustav paused for a moment before answering. "She's Vegalzeld's wife, and a nurse. Her name is Beauty. As you can see, she's terrifying in both looks and speech— I mean, she's a bit of a tomboy, but her skills are genuine. I'm sure our concerns are unfounded. Yes, I can guarantee that. Yes..."

He gave this explanation while keeping his gaze averted from Beauty. With that, I became sure that she was very strong.

"My word. You're all adults! What were you thinking? Ah, that's right...now's not the time for this. Please come inside, Kelvin-san," she said.

It took a moment for me to react. "What? Did something happen?!"

"Something happened indeed. Now, Mr. New Father, hurry to your wife's and daughter's sides to show them your crying face," she

replied.

I let out a noise full of mixed emotions before saying, “R-Right!”

I ran off, practically flying into the room.

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Inside the room was Efil, and she was holding our daughter gently in both arms. As proof of the child being a half elf, her ears were half as long as an elf’s, and the golden hair she’d inherited from Efil seemed to be brightly shining.

No, wait, that’s not all. I think...the tips of her hair are black? Hrm...she’s so bright I can’t look at it directly. Gah! She’s so lovely and bright!

Needless to say, I was extremely moved. Her crying voice was wonderful too, a beautiful tone similar to Efil’s. I was sure she’d be a great singer in the future. Absolutely.

“Hee hee! What are you doing, master?” Efil asked.

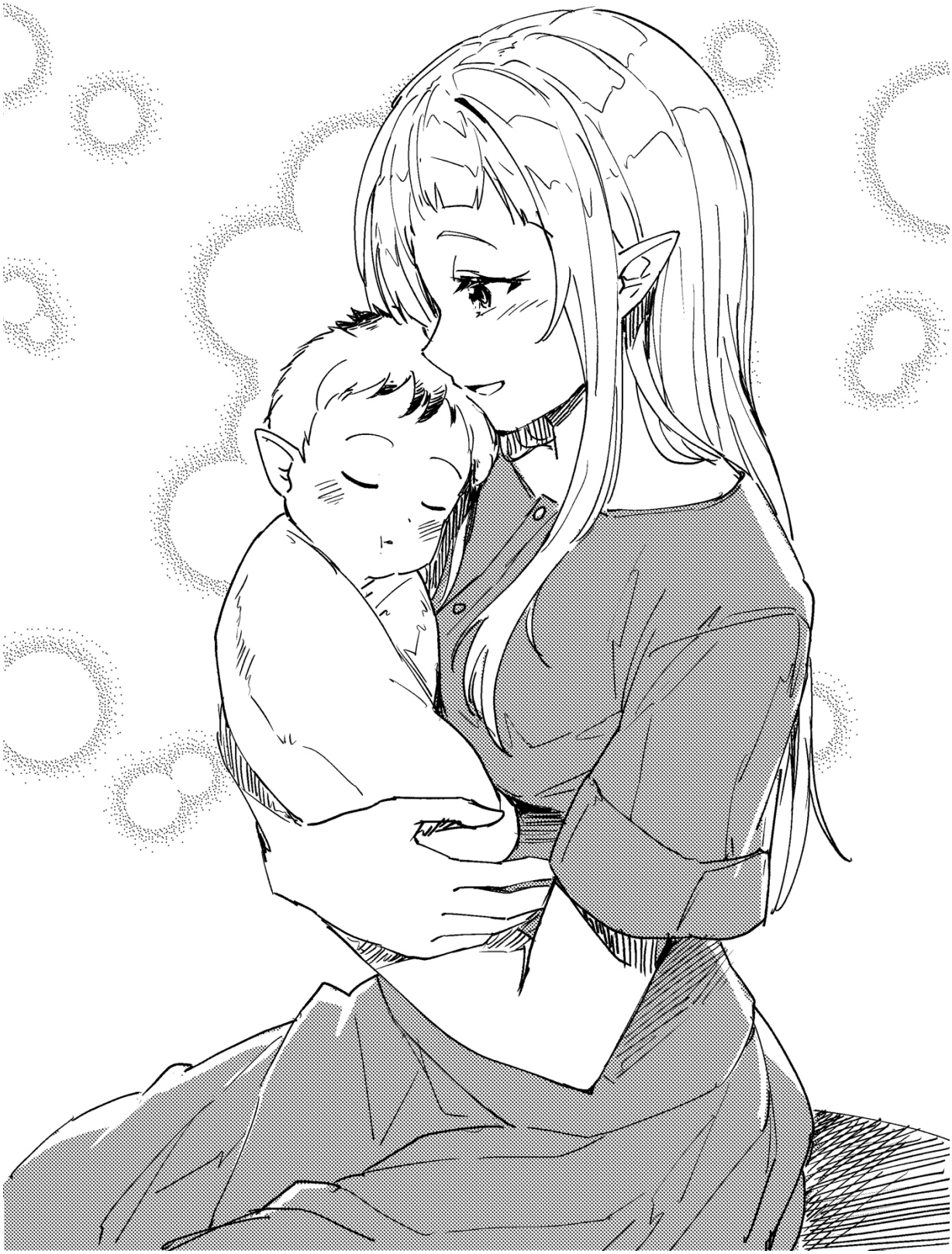
“Uh, ah, sorry! You did well, Efil! Really well!”

I started casting scads of healing magic out of joy. Vegalzeld’s treatment was perfect, so there really wasn’t any change in her status, but that didn’t matter. I was just so excited that if I didn’t let out some magic, I honestly might have gone crazy.

“Oh, um, well, a-anyway, may I cast some serious barriers and buffing spells on our daughter?! She needs protection! It would be terrible if something were to happen to her!”

“Please calm down, master. And isn’t there something you should do before that?” Efil asked.

I sucked in a breath. “Oh! Sorry... Er...may I touch her?”



"You should hold her instead of just touching her. She's our daughter, after all."

"O-Oh, right! You're right about that. Um...how do you hold babies?"

Vegalzeld sighed. "You're way too nervous. Look, just relax." He'd been standing nearby, but after seeing how awkward I was being, he stepped in to help.

Following his advice, I received the baby from Efil and held her in my own arms. I had no words. She hadn't opened her eyes yet, but I could feel the weight of her tiny life. Compared to the various burdens I'd felt while fighting... Actually, there was no need to compare. She didn't weigh much at all, physically.

"She's light...but also incredibly heavy."

"She is. I thought so too," Efil agreed.

She was my precious child, whom Efil had gone through a great deal of pain to bring into this world. When I thought about that, she felt much heavier all of a sudden. It really was strange.

"Ah, I'll tell you this now," said Vegalzeld. "Both mother and child are healthy. It was an ideal birth. Or I guess I should say, an easy one. Congrats."

"Really? But it took so long, I totally thought something went wrong..."

"It might have felt slower to you while you were waiting," said Vegalzeld. "Anyway, have you decided on the child's name? I'm sure you already know, but parents have the right to name their child. You should be able to see the option on your status screens."

Efil and I exchanged looks before breaking into smiles.

"Yeah. Thankfully, everyone gave us plenty of ideas. We had so many options to choose from. But in the end, Efil and I chose one ourselves. Lalanoah. Your name is Lalanoah."

When I called her by her name, Lalanoah once again cried out in her beautiful voice. *Hey now, are you really going to be a world-class singer in the future? Will you be traveling all over the world?*

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"And, well, that's how it went. I was pretty bad the moment I first laid eyes on Lalanoah, but Gerard and Gustav were even worse, okay? They were crying tears of joy; they were basically fountains for about an hour."

Shutola giggled. "They must have been so happy! I expect that part at the end was embellishment, though, right?"

"No, I'm serious."

Her amazement kept her silent as she made an unusual face. Naturally, I would never lie to Shutola. Everything I'd said up to this point was the truth. Also, Gerard and my father-in-law were confined to their homes for a while. They had objected, but any arguments they made had all been shot down by Beauty.

Isn't she the strongest person—no, demon—from the Northern Continent?

"I wanted to stay with Efil and Lalanoah, but I had to come here."

"I'm sorry. I would've gladly done this myself if I could, but I couldn't..." Shutola apologized, wilting with guilt.

"Huh? Ah, oh no, there's no need for you to apologize, Shutola! It's because you freed up time that I was able to be there for the birth, and I'll be able to take some time with them after this anyway."

"But..." Shutola protested weakly.

"In fact, I want to thank you. I want to thank you many times over. I'm so grateful that I'd honestly be willing to do anything within my power for your sake!"

"Then I'm happy," said Shutola. "But in the end, were you really not embellishing that last part?"

"No! Never!"

"Really?"

"Really!"

I nodded confidently. But I couldn't help but wonder why she was so suspicious today. She should know that I would never lie to her.

No, wait a second... I'm getting a bad feeling about this.

"Then, since you're willing to do anything, I'd like you to grant a wish of mine," Shutola said.

I see, so that's her angle. Shutola's pretty cunning. She might

even have been making me dance in her palm, trying to make me say those words. Well...I'm sure she won't ask for anything too ridiculous, unlike Sera or Mel. Seriously, though, she doesn't need to be so roundabout. She should know I'm always on her side. Wait, actually, is this Shutola asking to be spoiled? Heh! I see, so that's what's going on! I'll just have to meet her expectations as best I can, then!

"Ha ha ha! I never would have expected you to emphasize that point. Okay, I get it. I'll do whatever you want, Shutola. So what do you want?"

"Make a child with me."

"A child? Right, a child. If that's all you want, then..."

Hey, wait a second. Um, Shutola-san? What the heck are you spouting with a straight face? Oh, could this be some sort of punishment game? If so, what a mean one! I know no one from my house would try something like this, but should I hint that I think someone did on the off chance it works? Ah, it won't. That's her serious face.

"You've completely frozen, Kelvin-san. Are you okay?"

"Ah, right. I was just thinking at high speed for a moment. Thank you for worrying. So...what did you want?"

"I would like you to make a child with me."

It took a long moment for me to say, "Bu— Why?"

I should have been trying to maintain my calm, but I knew that how shaken I was came out in my voice.

"You're asking why? Certainly, I suppose I should have explained that first," Shutola replied. Unlike me, she was calm.

She's calm...right?

"You used Gerard and King Gustav as punch lines in your story, but I believe there's more to it. Did Sera-san and Mel-san really not say anything when they were with you too? Say, for example...that it's their turn next?" Shutola asked.

"H-How did you know?!"

She was right. They'd waited until we were alone to bring that weird topic up, but...

No, wait! Given the situation, there was no way I got down and

dirty! They were just pressuring me!

"Aha, so it's true," said Shutola. "I took a page out of Sera-san's book and tried relying on my intuition, and it worked."

I kept silent. There was no way I could win a verbal battle against her! It really felt like I was just digging my own grave.

Now that my defeat seemed inevitable, I could no longer recover on my own. Even without the threat of Retributive Persuasion, the only ones who could talk evenly with Shutola were those of Colette's caliber. In essence, I was already guaranteed to lose. All that was left was to fight to lighten the consequences of my defeat. But whether that struggle would even yield anything was up in the air.

"In our case, Kelvin, we are officially recognized as family. Though we are supposedly engaged, it took some time for feelings of love to sprout within me. In the Celsius house, which is a raging torrent of love, you could say I was quite late to the starting line," Shutola explained.

I was only given a moment to think before she continued.

"As things stand, I might never be seen that way in your eyes, Kelvin-san," she said. "So I made a decision. For Trycen, for my esteemed brother Azgrad who works so hard, and most of all, for me, I resolved to be more aggressive in this relationship."

"Aggressive...?"

"Yes. Unlike in battle, Kelvin-san, you tend to be very passive in matters of love, don't you?" Shutola asked.

I didn't answer.

Huh? Am I really like that? No, no. There's no way. Certainly, I have a lot of experience being approached, but that only happened with Efil, Sera, Mel, Colette, and Ange. Wait...

"I'm sure your feelings on this are complicated, but that is the long and short of it," said Shutola. "Still, don't worry. I don't intend to pursue—er, share a bed with you until we are officially married."

With perfect timing, she averted her gaze and blushed. The sight hit me right in the heart and affected me deeply. In the end, we'd spent a lot of time together, and I knew that she wasn't acting. Still, I had no idea how I should answer. Once again, I sank into thought, my brain spinning at the highest speed I could muster to come up

with the best answer. Or at least, that was my intention.

"But, in exchange, I'd like to remove any obstacles to that," said Shutola, making her next move lightning fast.

"Uh...obstacles?"

"Yes. Specifically, I'd like to introduce you as my fiancé to the other world leaders on the next world tour."

"Oh, the other world leaders... Uh, whaaat?!"

Um, Shutola-san? You've been with me the entire time, right? And yet I didn't see even a hint of this groundwork? My ears should have gotten weirdly good after Evolving, and yet I haven't heard a peep about any of this! In fact, why do your 'obstacles' involve the whole world?!

"Furthermore, in order to lend credibility to my words, we should room together for the duration of the tour. That would have the most impact on third parties."

"What? Uh...I guess you're right?"

That reminds me, Shutola and I have always shared a room! We had twin beds, and we only used them to sleep, and she was always in her child form when inside so I never really thought about it, but she's been staying with me the entire time! Not only that, but whenever we meet someone important, she's in her adult form...she was definitely trying to imply something!

"It will just be an extra announcement tacked onto the major news of discovering a new continent, so there's nothing extra for you to do. After all, it's obvious that you aren't totally present. I've been thorough in making sure that this secret won't be leaked until Trycen makes the official announcement. If necessary, I'll even use Retributive Persuasion to reinforce that," said Shutola.

"Y-You'd go that far?"

Certainly, with that method, even those with ill will toward Shutola and Trycen wouldn't be able to leak the information. The relevant people would just be left with the memory that we were engaged. Though there would probably be some who would spread the news with good intentions, at the very least, the information wouldn't be used for ill from the very beginning were she to use her Unique Skill. But...this was all about having the leaders of all the

countries in the world share the knowledge of our relationship. *Now that I think about it, this "obstacle removal" has gotten massive in scale.*

"There's no going back now, Kelvin-san," said Shutola. Her smile was the best of the day, and incredibly beautiful. "Actually becoming pregnant may have been relegated to the last step, but I don't mind. What's important is to take the proper path for that conclusion. Ah, right. Would you be willing to leave planning the ceremony up to me? I don't think you're familiar with Trycen-style weddings, and a royal ceremony is even more special. You're planning to marry everyone all at once, right? If that's the case, allowing me to take over would lighten your load considerably—"

"Wait. Wait just a second, please. You're going way too fast..."

I couldn't handle the overwhelming mass of her attacks. And it wasn't just mass; each individual blow was strong as well, better than anything I could put out.

This is impossible. I give!

"There is no 'too fast' when it comes to planning ahead," said Shutola. "Even if there was, we would just have to go in order. You think so too, don't you, Kelvin-san?"

"Uh...yeah, I was just thinking that," I said robotically.

I'd known this would happen. Personally, I would have preferred to go through the steps slowly. I never expected Shutola to be this proactive once she got serious. Honestly, I was shocked.

"You sound stiff, Kelvin-san," she commented.

"Urgk..."

She giggled. "I suppose I went a little too far! I should like my future husband's spirit to maintain some balance, so, er...um, may I sit on your lap again?"

"Shutola...I don't think it's fair to ask that with upturned eyes."

I let Shutola onto my lap and completely recovered. As for what form she was in, well, that would be a secret only between me and her.

Knock knock.

"Excuse me, the preparations for the meeting have finished, so I will lead you to the venue n...ow?"

Both Shutola and I froze, silent.

"Um...should I give you two some time? Yes, I will make sure to do so! Don't worry! Please, enjoy yourselves."

"Wait! Hey, wait! It's a misunderstanding! I swear it's a misunderstandiiinnnggg!"

Our secret had already been discovered by one of the castle maids.

Chapter 5: Paramita

The conference announcing the discovery of the Southern Continent finished, and I decided to return home to Parth for now. So much trouble was happening everywhere, one thing after another, so I hadn't been able to go back for a while. That was why this little gap in my schedule was the perfect opportunity. Were Ellie and Ruka doing okay when I'd left them to take care of the whole estate? Actually, I received regular reports from the Clotho clone, so I did in fact know they were doing just fine.

"Ah, you're home, Kelvin-kun. 'Scuse me for intruding!"

Because of the regular contact, I also knew that Kuon was visiting as well. Despite her lovely youthful looks, she claimed to be around forty years old, and she was currently relaxing elegantly in my yard.

"Welcome home, master."

Ellie, who was on standby behind Kuon, gave me a very maid-like welcome. She was actually the one who had told me about Kuon visiting, and I'd told her to welcome Kuon as a guest.

"Yeah, I'm home. Sorry for pushing this on you all of a sudden. Did she do anything weird?"

"No, nothing as such," Ellie replied. "She simply enjoyed some refreshments in peace."

"I sure diiid!" Kuon called out in a singsong voice. "Actually, Kelvin-kun, don't you think it's rude to ask that with the person in question right here? Not that I mind, since this old lady here has a big heart!"

With that, she scarfed down a high-end confection for guests that Ellie had no doubt served to her. When I looked closer, I saw traces of quite a lot of food around her.

Hmm...I feel a similar air to Mel or Sylvia about her. I mean, it's a vague feeling, so maybe it's just my imagination? I hope it is... Well, anyway.

"I really can't even muster up the will to fit in a retort here, but I'll ask just in case: How did you figure out where I live?"

"Huh? My drinking buddy Shin-chan told me, obviously," Kuon answered.

Drinking buddy...Shin-chan? Shin-chan! Damn you, Director Shin! You bastard!

"That damn free spirit... What the hell is she doing?"

"I gotta say, she showed me a whole bunch of good places! Why don't you join us next time, Kelvin-kun?" With that, Kuon tilted the glass in her hand and poured her drink into her mouth.

"With your looks, doing that is really dangerous. But seriously, why are you here? You didn't just come to invite me to drink with you, did you?"

"Huh? I did, though," Kuon replied.

"Come on, no need for jo— Wait, you look serious..."

No way. Is she for real? She actually came all this way just for that? Hey, you should've been touring the center of the Western Continent, right? Did you really come all this way to the Eastern Continent like you were just popping out to the convenience store?

"Out of curiosity...how did you cross the ocean?"

"Heh heh heh. I had a little swim," she answered.

"A little swim, you say..."

So it really was like she was just popping out to a convenience store. I heard that Grostina swam across the ocean to come to Gaun's Beast King Festival, but in Kuon's case...it feels like she got here in no time at all. She probably really did feel like she was just having a little swim, this damn monster of physicality.

Grostina... Grostina, huh? Ah, right, speaking of Grostina, Goldiana said she'd be holding a service for those close to her. If I remember correctly, she was planning to build the grave on Goldia's holy ground. I couldn't attend, since other stuff like Efil's birth and the international conference stacked up, but I'll need to make some time to visit soon. Also, I'm a little worried about Goldiana. She seemed to be doing fine right after the battle, but there's no way—

"You look like you're worrying about something, Kelvin-kun," Kuon said, interrupting my thoughts. "If you're fine with this old lady here,

I can lend an ear. Come on, just sit. There happens to be a seat open across from the old lady in question." She lightly rapped on the table, urging me to take a seat.

Um, this is my yard, you know. But I guess it's a bit late to sweat the details. Let's just sit.

"I can't believe it showed on my face."

"It didn't, though? Nothing changed, but it felt like you were thinking of something else, so I tried fishing for an admission," Kuon said.

Silence was my reply.

"Aha ha, and this time the change was real obvious," Kuon teased me. "Sorry, sorry. It's just so fun talking to young kids like you. So, what's on your mind?"

Apparently, Kuon was my senior in life, and she was willing to give me advice. But she would be asking for more treats as payment.

Yeah, okay. Ellie, bring her more. Not the stuff for guests, but the stuff for Mel.

"It's not really a worry, but...in the previous battle... Oh, this happened before you and Maria came to this world, but we lost a precious comrade. I was just thinking that I should visit her grave sometime soon."

"Uh-huh..." she replied with a slight lilt, her eyes widened into circles.

"What, is it really that surprising?"

"I mean...come on. You totally seem like a dyed-in-the-wool battle junkie to me," she said defensively. "Look, didn't you pester Maria to fight before? I ruined that in the end, and you totally looked ready to kill me. You totally looked like one of *those*."

"One of *those*? I mean, well...I guess I'm used to that. Still, I do have human emotions. Even if someone dies in battle, I'd be sad if I was close to that person, and I'd naturally feel down too. I sparred with Grostina before, and we understood each other well. Yeah...it's sad and hard."

"Huh... Then are you going to stop fighting?"

"What? Why would you think that? Are you planning to take away

my reason to live?”

Did Kuon not know that some things could be completely separate? I was supremely confident that if I distanced myself from combat to live in peace, I would quickly become a useless person.

There was a beat, then... “Pft! Heh heh! Aha ha! Yeah, you’ve definitely got a crazy side. You may seem like you’ve got normal emotions at first glance, but you’re fascinatingly insane!”

“Well, that’s rude. From my perspective, you look nothing like a housewife from Japan.”

“I guess it *is* hard to believe, since I’m friends with Maria. But— Hu— Wha? Did I ever tell you I was from Japan?” Kuon asked.

“Hmm? Ah, well...”

Her name, face, and hair color were all clues. I explained that I had been reincarnated from Japan. There was no need to hide it from Kuon.

“Oho, well, that’s unexpected. So, you’re originally Japanese, Kelvin-kun,” she replied.

“You say that, but you seem to be handling it better than when we were talking about me being a battle junkie. So, what? Does this kind of thing happen often or something?”

“Hmm...I wonder. I’m not that knowledgeable on the subject. But my daughter was sent to another world with her friends and the rest of her class...so maybe it’s more common than expected?” Kuon said.

What? The entire class? From the way she talks about it, it sounds like they were teleported, not reincarnated, right? But wouldn’t that be a huge incident? Like, it’s way past just being missing... Hey, Mel, have you been doing your job properly?

::The Earth she lives on is not the Earth you know. Please think of it as a different dimension or a parallel world. Well, in short, her world isn’t under my purview, so I take no responsibility,:: Mel interjected through the Network.

And...then a telepathic comment out of nowhere. How many times do I have to tell you not to read my mind? Even from so far away.

“Ah, but don’t worry. More than half of them came back safely,”

said Kuon.

"And...what about the other half?"

She didn't reply.

"Don't just fall silent with that smile on your face..."

I mean, I can tell a lot happened.

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After that, I ended up hearing about Kuon's circumstances. Her daughter and friends, having returned from the other world, were able to regularly go back and forth between Earth and that world. One time, Maria happened to visit Earth on a vacation, and they'd met and really hit it off. That had led to her being given a truly spur-of-the-moment invitation to Maria's house, so she visited another world, found she really fit in, and ended up enjoying her time there, or so I was told. She said a lot, but...

Huh, that's weird. I should be the one seeking life advice from her, and yet here I am being flooded with small talk.

"I gotta say, a world with a concept of levels is pretty interesting and nice in a different way from Earth!" Kuon exclaimed. "I learned self-defense in my original world, but in the other world it turned into a whole fantasy-like thing. Of course, my level was low at first, and I lost to my daughter a hundred percent of the time. I was *so* frustrated, you know? But thanks to that, some quality that was sleeping within me woke up, get it? I got so absorbed in training, it was all I did. I would be training from dawn till dusk every day for a while, and it was so fulfilling. Ah, but don't worry, I told my sons that I was visiting other fighting schools overseas."

"Um...right..."

"And listen to this! I decided to really visit fighting schools in the other world, and I ended up in the country controlled by Maria's daughter. It seemed like a very calm, adult country to me, but that didn't change what I had to do, so I plowed on. That led to Maria's daughter being the one to spar with me, and I was so, so happy! Like, totally moved! Everything from the sparring to the actual match was so fulfilling! I could feel myself becoming so much stronger! If I

had to say, it was like being in my teens again, that time when you grow the most. Well, in my case, I've never not been in my prime! Just kidding!"

"Ha... Ha ha..."

"Anyway, that's how I ended up getting really good before soundly beating my daughter! Oh man, that was the first time I'd ever seen anyone actually use the drunken fist style, so it was a really good experience. Hmm? Wait, that *was* drunken fist, right? Oh well, who cares about the small stuff! Like, Maria ended up coming in the middle of our fight and in the end, she invited me to join this organization called the Big Eight. But I don't have any interest in such a questionable thing given my age, so I refused. After that, Maria took an interest in me, and then we ended up fighting as well. Hey, Kelvin-kun? Are you listening? This is the important part!"

"I'm listening, I'm listening. Totally listening."

Kuon seemed to have realized that I was just giving random, appropriate-sounding responses. She was talking about a different world, and that was definitely interesting; I was curious about what kind of battles unfolded there. But...she was just going on and on! The story had finally proceeded into the other world, but there was way too much unrelated stuff leading up to it! From what she had for breakfast that day to how her son had scored a hat trick in a soccer match to her other son hitting a grand slam in baseball! I'd been forced to listen for over an hour at this point!

May I at least go to the restroom or something?!

"Really? Well, fine, whatever. Anyway, I naturally had a tough time fighting against Maria. Uh...then... Ah! It's about time for dinner! You'll have to excuse this old lady here; I can't impose on you for dinner too!"

Wait, you're really going to just leave without getting to the good part?! I couldn't help but internally retort with all my being. Even so, I didn't voice it out loud. I'd like to be praised for that.

"Peek! Glance peek!" Kuon said. She was...shooting me repeated glances.

What's with that look like you're some small pet trying to beg for treats? She was even actually saying "peek" and "glance."

I sighed. “Want to eat here?”

“What, really?! Can I?! Oh no, I’d feel guiltyyy!” Kuon exclaimed.

“You’re not convincing anyone with that face. Sorry, Ellie, but would you please prepare dinner now? I think you’ll need to treat this as if Mel were here.”

“That much? If both Ruka and I cook with all our might, we may be able to produce that much food, but...” Ellie trailed off.

“I think we’re going to need that much, yeah. If there are leftovers, that’s fine. I can just bring them to Mel.”

“I understand. Then I will begin right away,” said Ellie.

She bowed to Kuon and me before speed walking inside. Who would have thought that our anti-Mel ingredients would come into play like this? The world is full of surprises.

::Honey, you’re using my food, aren’t you? Remember to refill my share...::

Once again, I received a message from Mel through the Network.

I keep telling you not to read my mind! It’s at the level where I have to wonder if you’re watching me. It’s kind of scary, and I have my hands full dealing with Kuon right now.

“I gotta say, you’re a lifesaver! Honestly!” Kuon said flippantly. “I only came with the clothes on my back, so I don’t have any money at all... Peek!”

“What the heck are you ‘peeking’ at me for now? Do you want me to put you up for the night on top of the meal?”

“You know, this old lady just *loves* people who are quick on the uptake!”

I didn’t have an immediate reply. *See? Totally full.*

“So, first...you didn’t actually come here just to chat, did you? What happened to inviting me out to drink?” *Because if that’s all, I was actually just made to sit here and listen to you ramble and eat my food for nothing.*

“To drink?” Kuon repeated. “Ah...uh...I did say that! I definitely did, didn’t I!”

Yeah, that was a real reaction. I just don’t get anything anymore. Just do what you want.

“I talked with Maria, Addam-chan, and Shin-chan, and we all

decided to go out drinking. I mean, look, we need to talk anyway, don't we? That's how it felt at any rate, so it seemed like a good opportunity," said Kuon.

"Hey now, are you really planning to turn the talks into a drinking party? You know we'll be discussing important topics that will shape the future, right? Are you okay in the head?"

"Aha ha!" Kuon laughed. "It's not like we'd be impaired by alcohol, right?"

"Say that to Cheruvim. I'm sure he'd love to hear that."

"Wouldn't that lead to me eating his Lethality? Hmm...seems worth trying to dodge!" Kuon said. "So, you'll be joining us, won't you, Kelvin-kun? You're the one who suggested having these talks or whatever in the first place, after all."

"Well, of course I'm joining, but...when is this so-called drinking party? And who's organizing it?"

"Shin-chan will be taking care of the whole thing," Kuon explained. "So she'll be telling me the date later, I think?"

So, Director Shin is the organizer, huh? Well, that's worrying.

"Apparently, she's already talked to the other main actors, so I think we can just sit back, relax, and wait. My, my! Things are so easy with someone around to take the initiative, don't you think?"

"The fact that she took the initiative means she's scheming something, though. My stomach hurts just thinking about it. I won't be able to relax."

"Really? Hmm...I didn't think you were that type, Kelvin-kun. Hey, there's a good smell coming from inside! Okay, let's eat!"

Kuon got up, her hands raised in excitement. She was so simpleminded, it was hard to believe she was around forty.

"Well, I'm glad you're so energetic. I'll show you to the dining room."

"Okay, thanks!"

"By the way, want to have a mock battle afterward to work off all the food? We have a sturdy training area underground."

"What? A training area?! Yeah, I'll go! I'll totally go!" Kuon replied.

"I'm glad you sound so excited."

I acted calm, but I was actually cheering hard inside. Who would have thought it would be so easy to create an opportunity to spar with her? All my pain and hardship until now, and all the money the food would cost was worth it! *Let's all dig in!*

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The dinner I invited Kuon to was thankfully relatively peaceful. Still, from a third-party perspective, the sight of her absorbing dish after dish into her small body while repeating the word "delicious" was shocking. It was a truly huge amount. So by "relatively peaceful," I meant when compared to Mel's meals. That was why I wanted to make sure to keep in mind that such a thing would not apply to any normal person.

"I'd say less than Mel, but more than Sylvia..."

"Mfwha?" Kuon made a noise through a full mouth. "Mgmg... Did you say something, Kelvin-kun?"

"Oh, nothing. I'm sure you're just imagining things. Don't worry about me; just enjoy yourself."

"Okaaayyy! I'm digging iiinnn!" Kuon shouted happily.

Yep. This is the kind of black hole stomach I'm used to. She's clearly eaten more than her body weight, and yet she still looks the same. That's how it goes for Mel and Sylvia too, but I have to wonder, does it just get instantly compressed the moment it enters their stomach or something? That's not what I'm most curious about either...

"By the way, will you be able to exercise after eating so much? You've eaten quite a lot."

"Mmm! I'll be fine," Kuon replied. "I can fight anytime, regardless of whether I'm asleep or eating, so there's no need to worry about me. Nom nom!"

"I see, so you're ready for combat at all times. I love that phrase, combat at all times."

"Huh? Are we talking about phrases and sayings? I prefer 'Manchu-Han Imperial Feast.' My daughter makes them for me on my birthday!"

"What the heck are you making your daughter cook? Also, that is definitely not the kind of thing a single household can make."

Kuon always turned everything back to food like that. After about ten more minutes, it seemed she was finally satisfied.

"Whew! I'm full!" she exclaimed.

The moment the table was cleared, she rubbed her belly happily. As she'd said, it seemed she was full.

"Wow, you really do eat like Mel! The world sure is large," came a voice. Ruka, who had been fighting a fierce battle in the kitchen until now, chose this moment to show her face.

I gotta say, good work doing all this without Efil. I want to give you a gold star in place of Mel.

"Isn't it just?" Kuon agreed. "The world is always wider than you think. Not that the old lady you see in front of you is even from this world!"

"You're...from a different world?" Ruka asked. "Hmm...I don't get it, but I guess that's amazing!"

"Eheh heh, thanks! But speaking of amazing, you're plenty awesome too!" said Kuon. "I was surprised when I heard you cooked all that food! I wanted to call out the chef to give my compliments, it was that good. Especially the stew! That was a masterpiece!"

"Really?! Mom taught me that recipe!" Ruka replied happily.

"Is that so? I would love to spread that flavor everywhere so it's present for all time!"

Ruka was also in a great mood after hearing her mother's stew recipe complimented. A pleasant, comfortable mood took over in this after-meal time.

I'm done with it, though.

"Should we head down to the underground training room now, Kuon?" I wanted to get in some after-meal exercise already; I could barely contain myself. It was enough that I found myself able to ruin the nice mood.

"Oh, right, yeah. Wanna watch, chef?" Kuon asked. "You might get to see your master in the dirt. I'm sure that doesn't happen often."

"Oho, you sure can talk." I could tell that Kuon wasn't just making

empty boasts. She was just so confident that the words came out naturally.

"Hmm...I'll come after I finish washing up!" Ruka replied. "Master actually ends up in the dirt during mock battles fairly often, so it's not that rare to see!"

"Huh? Really?" Kuon replied.

I said nothing. Though I reflexively averted my gaze, I could tell that her stare was boring holes into me.

Yeah, Ruka watches a lot of the sparring we do within the party. I'm glad she does. But I didn't want her to say that. I mean, come on, you're hurting my dignity, or something like that.

"Okay, it's a race to the underground training facility!"

"Ah! He got away!" Kuon exclaimed.

"You shouldn't run in the hallways, master!" Ruka called out after me.

Right! Sorry!

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We walked down the hallway, heading underground without particularly racing or anything. As we walked, I suffered a whole heap of teasing about being covered in dirt—basically, the trip was a huge pain in the ass.

"I'm telling you, me getting put in the dirt just means my comrades are all amazing, that's all. In terms of personal record, I'm about even with them, which means I put my opponents in the dirt just as much as I get put in the dirt by them."

"You know that doesn't make you sound any cooler, right? In the first place, I have no idea how strong you or any of your friends are, Kelvin-kun," said Kuon. "So, I'll just have to defer judgment until you put *me* in the dirt!"

"I don't know about being judged by someone who's also in the dirt."

That was basically how our conversation went. Being underestimated too much would cause my opponent to hold back when we fought, so personally, I didn't approve, but I decided to

believe that Kuon would be able to properly flip that switch. She was strong enough to be mom friends with Maria, so I was sure it'd be okay.

"And we're here."

"Ohhh, it's bigger than I expected," said Kuon. "There's even spectator seating. Good! It really is pretty tough." She lightly knocked on the walls and floor of the training area, checking the feel of them. Apparently, she approved.

"It *is* designed to withstand a fairly intense battle. But there's a limit, okay? Make sure to hold back on any skills or spells that go over the line, or stuff that's too large-scale. No matter how tough the walls are, they won't be able to stop something like a black hole."

"Got iiittt. I owe you for treating me to food and letting me stay, so I won't go *that* far."

Kuon started stretching while she talked. I was grateful for her assurances, but I hadn't yet agreed to let her stay, so she really only owed me for the food. Still, she was about to repay me in spades, so I guess I had no complaints.

"As for the rules of our mock battle... Let's see... Why don't we make it so the first one to put the other in the dirt—in other words, to make their opponent fall—wins?"

"Oho, that's interesting. Like sumo," said Kuon. "There's no ring, so does that mean we can go anywhere? Also, are you sure? I'm pretty good at making people fall."

"I'm fine with it. Also, challenging you in your field of specialty means I'm closer to experiencing the real thing, right? I welcome that! Bring it on and make me fall, I say!"

"Aha ha, you're just making it worse. Then I won't hold back," said Kuon. "I'm pretty sure we're going to be going for multiple rounds anyway, after all."

She took a stance with her grin still on her face. She'd just agreed to keeping me company for multiple rounds, so she wasn't one to talk about making things worse.

"I'm glad you're so quick on the uptake. Then let's star—?!"

I took a good distance from Kuon and tried to give the signal to

start. The moment I tried, though, I suddenly encountered something very strange, and before I knew it, my field of view flipped.

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Just before my field of view inverted, I could feel some strange force around my neck and one of my feet. How should I describe it? It was like I'd been grabbed by the robes and had my feet swept out from under me. Not only that, but I couldn't do anything about it, much like when I was done in by Goldiana or Sera. Anyway, I was currently spinning around like a windmill. I could only surmise that I'd been thrown.

So, she approached at superspeed and threw me before I even had a chance to recognize what was happening? No, that's not it. Even now, where everything I see is upside down, Kuon is still at the starting point. She's still in her starting stance too. The cause of this phenomenon is unknown, but I'll leave pondering that until later. If I keep spacing out like this, my head will hit the ground.

"That was close!"

"Whoa, there! You withstood it on your first try. Impressive," said Kuon.

I cast Rubber Counter, surrounding myself with a cushion of air that acted like rubber as an emergency measure. Furthermore, I used some of the tough materials from the training area to create several Obsidian Edge blades. With that, I managed to stop my spinning while also clearing some space near my head, which had almost hit the floor. By doing so, I prevented myself from losing immediately after the battle started.

I guess this was a good on-the-spot reaction? I got some weapons out of it too.

"And so...go."

I sent my Obsidian Edges flying at Kuon. If she truly was stronger than Spring, this much harassment wouldn't even keep her in check. But it would still buy a little bit of time. I needed to use this chance to reco—

"Hup!" Kuon grunted.

And I couldn't help but let out a noise of shock and pain. Out of nowhere, I had heard the sound of something fiercely impacting my chest. But it wasn't just the sound. I actually was hit with an incredible force. One that was as powerful as taking a real blow from Goldiana or Sera. Put conservatively, it was easily enough to send me flying.

A loud boom resounded through the underground space. I was sent flying at a tremendous pace, easily going all the way to the wall and slamming into it. I once again used Rubber Counter to cushion the impact, but if I hadn't, it would definitely have more than just hurt.

Still, though, I took an invisible blow after an invisible throw. This is seriously troublesome. I can see some remnants of magic, though, so it should be some sort of spell.

"Owww... Just making sure, but hitting a wall doesn't count, right?"

"Hmm... It feels kind of unfair bringing this up after it's happened, but I guess we can say it's okay," Kuon replied. "I took a bit of a head start, after all. Still, you seem more okay than I expected. I was trying to hit you fairly hard."

"We both are, aren't we?"

The strike to my chest had definitely had lethal force behind it. However, Clotho, with its Blunt Damage Invulnerability, was hidden under my robe, so I'd taken almost no damage myself. Still, I couldn't prevent myself from being thrown back so far.

I'd sent my Obsidian Edges after Kuon right as she'd landed her blow on me, but she had handily deflected them with her fists. The black blades, which should have been extremely durable, were broken where they lay stuck in the floor. Of course, Kuon was completely unhurt. She'd defended herself with her bare hands, so she should have had *some* wounds on her fists, at least. She *was* a person, after all.

"So, you look like a pure martial artist, but you're actually quite skilled with magic, I would say. You're more like Sera than Goldiana."

"You say that, but I have no idea who either of those people are.

Still, I guess I'll tell you that my job is 'mage,' at least."

"Ha ha! So someone who can swim across the great ocean so quickly and effortlessly claims to have a backline job. What an amazing mage we have here."

"This is just my intuition talking here, but I don't think you're one to talk, Kelvin-kun. Am I wrong?"

"You are. I don't believe I'd be able to swim across the ocean at all."

"That's not what I'm talking about," said Kuon flatly.

I had Hard change into Astaroth Form while we made small talk. With him, I should be able to resist her blows as long as they didn't hit my face. As for the throws...honestly, I could only react to those when they happened. Hard's transformation would be undone if I used Divine Dress.

"Well, whatever," said Kuon. "As a reward for withstanding that on your first try, I'll teach you about this as well."

"Why, thank you."

"To tell you the truth, I'm not that skilled. I can't cast a whole bunch of different spells like my daughter can."

"Huh?"

By her 'daughter,' she means Spring's original, right? True, Spring did create a black hole and throw it and kick it around. She showed me a lot of interesting things.

"The only spell I can use decently well is the one I just used on you, Kelvin-kun. It's a Darkness spell called Vector. It's a beginner spell, and all it does is apply a little bit of force to a target within range," said Kuon.

"A little bit of force?" Was it just my imagination? Had I not been sent flying by that Vector spell? It had felt like there was some major power behind it.

"Aha ha! You shouldn't be giving this old lady such a charming look. But I do think you make a good point, Kelvin-kun. Normally, it can only exert enough power to pull along a puppy. But...I felt potential in the spell."

Kuon changed her stance. At the same time, magic manifested beside her. Something fist-sized was floating there, and I could tell

she was doing this to make her point easier to understand. If I hadn't been able to detect magic, I never would have been able to feel the transparent thing. But I could definitely tell it was there.

"I see. So I was grabbed, kicked, and hit by that."

"Exactly," Kuon replied. "I trained this spell and this spell alone until I was able to use Vector with as much force as I myself am capable of putting out. Furthermore, I can control the spell precisely, as if I were acting with my own hand. Which is how I threw you while sweeping your foot."

"Ah, no wonder I spun around like that. It was incredible."

I wasn't exactly happy with Kuon's decision to reveal her ability, but the more I learned, the more I realized how troublesome Vector was. When I was ambushed at the beginning, I hadn't noticed until I was already being thrown. And I'd been cautious. In other words, I couldn't detect or react to Vector until it was already attacking me with martial arts. I would be late to all exchanges of attack and defense, forced into an overwhelming disadvantage.

Ha ha! I love this. And there's more to be excited about on top of that!

"Didn't you just say that Vector is a beginner spell? Does that mean the MP cost is equivalent?"

"Of course! It's nice and totally cheap to cast! I'm the perfect picture of a housewife, saving on costs like that!" Kuon exclaimed.

As expected, the MP cost was low as well. By completely mastering a beginner spell, she gave it a truly unfair amount of versatility in that she could easily use it at any time or place without much care or thought. I was still slightly in disbelief, wondering if it really was a beginner spell, but judging from everything she'd said up until now, Kuon wasn't the type to lie.

No, wait...now after thinking about it, being a beginner spell makes more sense.

Since it only used a small amount of magic, it was hard to notice the signs of the spell manifesting. Thanks to her developing such a simple spell to its extreme limit, she could cast it at a speed I was unable to react to. These days, when exchanges of larger and larger Rank S spells were becoming more and more common, such a

strategy gave me a huge shock.

"What an interesting fighting style. I'm going to learn a lot from you!"

"Whoa there, you sure are studious," said Kuon. "Maybe I should try to learn something myself."

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The mock battle would continue! But if things stayed the same, I would only suffer a repeat of what had just happened, so I needed some sort of strategy.

Let's see...why not start going at it head-on first?

"Euthanasia!"

I deployed a coffin-shaped barrier so that I was inside it. With that, I shut out any physical or magical interference from the outside. Since magic couldn't seep into the barrier, Vector couldn't affect me.

Now, what will you do?

"Ah, are you trying to test me?" Kuon asked. "Then maybe I should do this?"

Two invisible hands appeared, grabbing the outside of the coffin. It seemed I was correct and they couldn't slip through the coffin like Ange could. But what was she trying to do?

"Shuffle!" Kuon shouted.

I let out a strangled noise. Right after her shout, the inside of the coffin turned into a mess. It was shaken fiercely this way and that, and I crashed into the walls over and over as if I'd been hit by Hyper Impact. Since I was wearing Hard, I took almost no damage, but...

Urp...I'm feeling sick!

"Huh? You're dispelling the barrier?" Kuon asked. "There was still stuff I wanted to try, like swinging the entire barrier around like a giant centrifuge!"

"No, this one's on me for not expecting you to do that!" I gasped. I was unable to bear the shaking, so I dispelled Euthanasia to release myself from the terrible but tiny storm before immediately casting Relief.

Aaah, that's better...

Seriously, though, shaking me around with the barrier was pretty insane. I could have used Magic Overclock to make the coffin bigger, but it honestly felt like there was no point continuing with that tactic. It wasn't like I could attack while inside anyway, so there was no way for me to turn things around even if I kept at it. The only profit I gained was the knowledge that magic from Kuon's world could be defended against just like magic from this world. Though the status and systems differed, their basic essences were the same.

Okay then, let's regroup and move on to the next idea.

"Mud Bind."

"Oh?" Kuon uttered.

A bottomless swamp manifested under her feet. Though she let out a noise, she didn't seem particularly surprised; she simply kicked off the air and dodged.

"That's not all!"

I set my sights on her, aiming at where she was going as I unleashed a variety of attack spells both big and small. A dizzying amount of them, at that.

"Wow, this is so pretty. It's like I'm in a theme park," Kuon remarked. "But I see... You want to exchange blows from a distance like real mages, huh?"

"I do. But I'm not actually a mage; I'm a Summoner."

If my enemy's attacks could never miss and couldn't be defended against, I just had to get her before she got me. It was a very simple answer, but such were the laws of battle.

Now, let's have our fill of fighting!

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After that, we flooded each other with crazy moves and spells. I was constantly blasting away with as many spells as I could simultaneously cast. Meanwhile, Kuon continuously punched, kicked, threw, and thrust with Vector, matching my attacks. I was busy attacking, but I also had to use quite a bit of my head and body to dodge and avoid the loss condition. After all, my opponent was

trying all sorts of methods to slam me to the floor. I maintained the scale of my offense while expending a lot of effort to protect myself.

If she had just been striking at me, that would have been fine, since it would all have come to nothing if the attacks hit anywhere other than my face. Unfortunately, it seemed like it hadn't taken long for Kuon to realize that, as she started adding some strange ability to her blows. Her attacks now passed through Hard, dealing impacts directly to the inside of my body. I should have totally blocked any damage coming from her fists, and yet the damage reverberated right through to my core. Or rather, my core itself seemed to be exploding. For some reason, my insides hurt terribly. I wasn't sure what was going on, but I couldn't help but wonder if she was using qigong or a similar ability. If I remembered right, Spring had also used this ability, though her mastery of it couldn't even be compared to Kuon's. At any rate, I couldn't let my guard down around her attacks anymore.

On top of that, Kuon mercilessly targeted my vitals, specifically going after areas like my eyes, my eyes, my eyes, and my balls...and did I mention my eyes? I couldn't count how many times they'd been crushed during our fight. Seriously, it was tough dealing with her unavoidable throws, but I nearly threw my hands up at the similarly unavoidable eye destruction. No matter how quickly I noticed, Kuon's Vector fingers would have already stabbed into my eyes.

I tried putting up transparent barriers that I could see through, but she just used her strength to force her way through, and it hurt like hell every time. The fractured pieces of barrier stabbed into my face too, making it even worse. I really wanted her to put herself in my shoes, having to heal my face and eyes every single time. Though thanks to Hard, I was able to protect the *other* target she favored—though if she used her penetrating attack targeting them, I was sure this would turn into a tragedy. I really was.

Anyway, at this point, Kuon revealed a truly fantasy-like move. I wasn't sure if it could be classified as martial arts anymore, but let me explain: The moment a part of my body was grabbed by Vector, I ceased being able to move. Kuon herself said she was applying

Aikido techniques, but I couldn't even move a finger. This included my mouth and tongue, so I couldn't chant spells either. Even so, the silver lining was that I was still able to cast silent spells. Still, if I were to be hit by this in this fight, where even a fraction of a second mattered heavily, I would be done.

And so...I was handed my own ass.

"Mmmnnn! I worked up a good sweat!" Kuon exclaimed. "That was some perfect after-dinner exercise!" She stretched out her arms with a wide smile.

"So, in total, it's thirty-seven losses out of thirty-seven matches. Ha ha! To think it would be so one-sided. But...I wonder why. For some reason, my heart feels so full. It takes me back to those days being trained by Mel."

"Oh, now *that's* youth!" Kuon gushed. "So, did this Mel-san crush your eyes and balls too?"

"Of course she didn't go that far. At most, she put me in a joint lock and broke my bones if I let my guard down."

"I see. Seems like a healthy relationship!" Kuon remarked.

"Really? Well, whatever. There's something else I want to ask you."

With that, I directed my gaze at her hands. I put out so much magic, but Kuon had dealt with it all using only her body. She was far from unhurt. Her fists, which had come into contact with my spells the most, were especially damaged and looked very painful. It was enough that I had to wonder how she was smiling.

"What is it, Kelvin-kun?"

"Your wounds seem too shallow for all that fighting. Is it just my imagination?"

In spite of the damage, the wounds were still lighter than light considering all the spells she'd gone through. It was unbelievable. I'd mercilessly applied Magic Overclock to some spells. I'd even filled her plate with status effects and seals. It didn't make sense that I hadn't taken at least one of her arms. But there was something even stranger than this seeming imbalance.

"I hit you with supergravity during the battles and even put magic seals on your joints, which you need to use martial arts. And yet,

despite all that, you moved as if gravity were normal, and it seemed to me like anything I cast on your joints broke themselves rather than you breaking them. Does magic just not work on you? Ah, no, you did take damage, so I don't think that's strictly true, but..."

I was imagining something like Sylvia's Unique Skill, which made her invulnerable to magic, but I felt this was different.

"Ohhh, you noticed that too! Hmm...what to do? Is it okay to talk about this?" Kuon wondered aloud. "Oh, whatever. It's not like it's a secret! Yeah, it's the effect of my Unique Skill, Paramita."

"You have Unique Skills in your world too?"

"Of course we do! Probably as many kinds as there are in this world, I would think. It feels like 'this is my special power!' By the way, Maria has a Unique Skill too. It's called 'Sage's Blood,' and it's a ridiculous power too—"

"Stop right there! Don't spoil other people's abilities for me, please!"

"Ah, so you're the type to enjoy the fight more than winning, Kelvin-kun? My bad!"

That was close. Too close! Jeez, I can't even let my guard down after the fight's done.

"I guess I'll just explain Paramita, then? You see, this power is one specialized for conquering other worlds," she continued.

"Conquering other worlds, huh? Your explanation explains nothing, miss teacher."

"What? You don't understand the nuance?"

Don't ask for the impossible! I raised my arms to form an X.

"Well, basically, it's a Unique Skill that only activates when I'm standing in a world I'm not originally from. Or, in this case, a world and dimension I'm not originally from. This is your world, right, Kelvin-kun? That's why I can use it."

"That's an annoying condition. And weirdly strict too... Wait. Wait just a second. If what you're saying is true, then wouldn't it be completely useless back home?"

"Yep! Totally useless! Aha ha!"

"That's not something to laugh about..."

Unlike being reincarnated in my case or being teleported in Touya

and friends' case, which happened every once in a while, going to a world in another dimension was a truly rare occurrence. In fact, Maria and Kuon were being treated as rare beings by Addams. It felt like rather than truly rare, it was almost unheard of. So why did Kuon have a Unique Skill that only activated in the rarest of rare cases? Actually, if people from her world gained Unique Skills in the same way we did, it was probably more that she'd happened to get it rather than proactively wanting it. Still, the condition for activation was bizarre.

"Seriously, though, I guess it wasn't a good idea to suggest taking trips to other worlds to Maria before I'd even leveled up properly," Kuon mused.

"Wait...just wait one more time. Do you go to other worlds often?"

"Huh? Uh, we go once every couple of months, just about?" she replied in a questioning tone. "One of Maria's people can connect two points through a gate. This time was pretty unusual because she was summoned, but we usually use those gates. Ah, and I used that gate to join Maria here."

"What the heck is that super convenient power?!"

I actually want that ability. Maybe I should shake the hand of whoever makes the gates later? With Skill Eater equipped, that is.

"Hmm...I don't think it's as convenient as you think," Kuon replied. "The person who opens the gates could originally only do so in the same space-time, and after opening a gate, time is needed to recharge."

Hmm... Hmmmm? Which means it's kind of like the teleportation ritual used by the Oracle of Deramis? No, wait, she said "gates," which makes it more like a super long-range teleportation gate that connects planets, probably. Even though it needs time to charge, I think it's an incredible ability. But still, she's right that it won't necessarily connect to other dimensions.

"So how can those gates connect to other dimensions?"

"Well, it seems that by setting the other side of the gate to be random, the rare chance to connect to a different dimension is created. I don't know the details myself, but by having Maria help

with creating the gates, the chances of connecting to another dimension rise dramatically. That being said, the destination is random, so there's a chance it could connect to empty space if our luck is bad. It's super dangerous!" Kuon explained, ending with a humming affectation.

Sorry to interrupt while you seem to be having fun, but that's way more than just dangerous, isn't it?

"Not only that, but nobody knows what the other side of the gate will be like until the person makes it. It's pretty hilarious that we could walk through and immediately die of suffocation, isn't it?" Kuon said.

"How do you find that funny? Actually, do you really risk your life like that every time you go on a trip?"

"Oh, no. No matter how much I've trained, I'm still just a human, and an old lady at that. Maria always takes the first step into the unknown to make sure it's safe."

"Ah..."

Certainly, given how much vitality Maria had, I didn't think she'd die right away even if she was thrown out into space. She would just propel herself through space and make it to a nearby planet.

"So, once she decides that it's safe, she contacts me with her smartphone," Kuon continued. "Maria's phone has GPS, so the person who creates the gates will know exactly where to open one the second time."

"I...see?"

GPS works in other dimensions?

"Um, anyway, I understand how you can go to other worlds fairly regularly, Kuon. But, getting back on topic, despite the strict activation condition, your Unique Skill is pretty powerful, right?"

"Well, yeah. What you just said, Kelvin-kun, about it nullifying magic... You were really close, including your comment about how I took damage."

She showed me her wounded hands. Though the damage was comparatively light, they were still covered in blood, so I wanted to tell her not to shove them in my face with a smile.

"My Paramita prevents all harm other than pure damage as long

as I'm in another world," Kuon explained.

"All harm?"

"Yep, all harm! For example, in that mock battle, you used gravity manipulation, binding spells and status effects, and attempted to blind me with a bright light, didn't you, Kelvin-kun? It works against all of that, and thanks to it, the magic I actually have to deal with is limited, which is why I only suffered this much damage! Heh heh!"

"I see. I had an inkling, though."

While puffing out a chest she didn't have—my apologies, that was rude—Kuon seemed totally confident as she lectured me about her power, Paramita. It was a powerful Unique Skill, commensurate to how difficult its activation condition was. As long as she had it, Kuon would never fall to sneaky tricks. Since it worked on more than just magic, it might have been more troublesome than Sylvia's Double Magic Armor.

"I suppose it's similar to Sylvia's Unique Skill, or rather, a Demon Lord's Mara Pisuna? That one negates all damage but only affects those from this worl—planet. Other similarities include *mmbl mmbl*..."

"Hey, what're you entering your own little world for? I'm still right here, you know?" Kuon asked.

"Hmm? Oh, ah, my bad. Your Unique Skill is really powerful, so I got lost in thought. It's been a while since I've been stumped over how to beat a Unique Skill even after learning what it does."

"Well, it's not a power I can use back home, and I wouldn't be happy seeing it overcome so easily. People from other dimensions often have really weird abilities that are outside the realm of common sense, so I owe a lot to my Unique Skill. I think it's absolutely necessary for otherworld trips!"

"Necessary? Are people from other dimensions really that dangerous? I mean, that makes it sound like you go there to fight rather than take a vacation."

I'm only asking out of academic curiosity. Yes, purely academic curiosity.

"Even if that's true, there's no guarantee the world we end up in will be nice and orderly. Honestly, it's more common for the world to

be hostile right off the bat," she answered. "I mean, look, as long as we don't talk, Maria and I are pretty good-looking, aren't we? Especially Maria, since that dress she wears is clearly very expensive. So if we end up in a place with bad public order... You get it, right?"

"I see, so they're the ones who start it."

That's a pretty good idea. I'll keep that in mind.

"You're definitely thinking something weird again," said Kuon. "Oh well, it's not like I hate that. Uh...where were we? Ah, right. Public order. Most of the people who try to mess with us are pure rabble, and it doesn't even end up being a real fight. But every world has its standouts, and people of that caliber tend to have ridiculous, absurd powers. Uh...in recent memory, there was one person who could cause instant death just by looking at you, for example. Paramita spoils all that, forcing opponents into pure fistfights if they want to defeat me."

"Huh, instant death with a glance? Hey, even if you'd be fine, Kuon, wouldn't that kill Maria? It's instant death, right?"

"Maria? Aha ha! No way! No instant death effect would ever get rid of Maria, no matter how absurd it was and no matter how many hundreds or thousands of times she's hit with it. She'd just revive the instant she died, after all. I saw it happen with my own eyes, so I'm almost sure of it!" Kuon exclaimed.

"Almost?"

"We're mom friends, but not even I understand everything there is to her," Kuon answered. "Still, even if every bit of her was destroyed, as long as a single strand of hair was left, I'm pretty sure she'd instantly revive using that. This is just my intuition talking, but yeah, that's how I feel."

"If that's true, I'm in awe."

"In awe with that smile? You're really clever, Kelvin-kun!" Kuon said with a lilt.

Oh, come on. Like, doesn't that mean she might be truly immortal? I get the feeling she's even more unbeatable than Kuon, and my heart's going a mile a minute. By the way...maybe I should join them on their next trip. Huh? I can't? It'll be a honeymoon, so—

Oh, I see...

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The fun mock battle was over, and as promised, Kuon stayed over. Well, rather than a promise, it was more like she forced me to allow her as a guest. Still, she didn't do anything weird other than eating way too much. It was a little bit of a letdown.

"Oh, come now, what do you think you're saying about someone who's around forty?" Kuon asked. "Of course I wouldn't do anything weird after you let me stay and all. I'm just going to spend my time normally and politely here."

That was her reply when I brought it up to her at breakfast. It was a reply filled with common sense and a dash of a "how rude!" attitude. What the heck? It really felt like she was staying because she was broke, and it actually threw me off. I almost couldn't stop myself from suggesting that it was okay for her to try to kill me in my sleep.

"Actually, if Maria was here too, we might've gotten into some trouble," Kuon admitted. "That girl doesn't do 'drunk' very well."

"Hey, didn't you say that alcohol wouldn't impair you before?"

"Aha ha, that depends on the time and situation. But don't worry. That girl knows when she wants to be drunk and when she doesn't and can regulate herself properly. If she felt like it, she could probably down some really strong stuff and not change at all."

"Wow, how efficient is her body?"

I wanted her to share at least some of that ability with Sera. Then her alcohol habits might at least get a little be— *No, wait. If she did get better, that would be kind of sad, wouldn't it?*

As I was thinking about Sera, a jaunty tune suddenly sounded; an electronic one that was impossible for this world. I was instantly on alert, wondering what was going on, when Kuon fished something out of her pocket.

"Ah, it's Maria. May I get it?" she asked.

"Ah, yeah. Please, go ahead."

Kuon's phone was ringing. It looked almost too normal, and I was

jealous, though the fact that it worked in an entirely different dimension made it weird. I wondered how it was receiving a signal.

"Heya, it's Kuon! What's up? Hmm? Mm-hmm, huh. I see, right. Got it, so I just have to relay that? Sure thing! Later, then! Love and peace!" Kuon said into the phone.

What? Is she going to relay something to me? Also, what the heck was with that "love and peace" thing at the end? Is it some sort of popular goodbye where she's from?

"Hey, sorry to do that to you," said Kuon. "It's so early in the morning, and Maria's still so excited, it's hard to believe she's a vampire!"

"I guess in human terms it would be that midnight energy? So, what did she say?"

"She said that the time and place for the drinking party is set. It's going to be in the bar quarter in Toraj, and you can pick the date and time yourself, Kelvin."

"Huh? Me? Does that mean she's passing off the organization to me?"

"Oh no, no, she isn't. It looks like Maria and Addams are already there. They're enjoying sightseeing until you arrive, so they're just saying you can come whenever you want."

"Ah, I see."

Kuon was pretty proactive, but that vampire and wicked god seemed even more so. They were the embodiments of the saying "there's no time like the present."

"Then why not today? You're coming, right, Kuon? It would be boring to use a teleportation gate given how close it is, so why don't we run there?"

"Wow, are you inviting me on a date? You naughty boy, this old lady is already married!" Kuon teased.

"Yeah, and I'm betrothed, so I'd love it if you would stop talking like that. It could put my life in danger."

Of course, I preferred my life to be in danger. Being able to clash with all our might was something I desired. But I also didn't want to make those I loved sad. My rational and battle junkie sides were sensitive in that way.

"Well, jokes aside, I'm totally fine with that," said Kuon. "I heard from Maria that Toraj is like Japan, right? I think it would be fun, like I slipped through time. I wonder if they sell katanas."

"Hey now, are you planning to buy one and bring it back home?"

"Of course!" Kuon replied.

"That's...a little surprising. Are you interested in weapons?"

"Huh? Oh, you're surprised because I'm a mage?" Kuon asked.

"That's part of it, but you seem more like a martial artist to me."

"Hmm... I *was* strictly using my bare hands during our mock battles yesterday. But I *can* use weapons, you know."

"Please, tell me more."

"Whoa there. Pressure!"

The conversation had suddenly become very interesting, so I couldn't help but really lean into it.

Ah, erm, you don't need to go into too much detail. I just wanted to know if you're stronger with a weapon or without.

"Hmm... I guess I'll keep it a secret for now!" Kuon said teasingly. "You'll have more fun that way too, won't you, Kelvin-kun?"

"Urgk! So that's how you're going to play it. I feel disappointed but also excited..."

"Oh my, that's a hilariously complicated expression you have there. Okay, how about this? Why don't I tell you the name of the weapon I brought with me? It's called..."

"Yes?"

"Kaboom Stick!" Kuon revealed excitedly. "What do you think? Sounds super strong, doesn't it? My daughter named it!"

I didn't reply. I didn't know what to say about her daughter's naming sense.

Chapter 6: I Object!

After finishing breakfast and getting ready, I once again left Ellie and the others in charge as Kuon and I left for Toraj. These days, teleportation gates had been my main method of movement, so it felt good to use my own legs to run. After all, wouldn't encountering bandits or thieves on the way be super nostalgic? Like that, erm...what was the name of that bandit group from way back when? Wind... Wind... Right, the Gentle Breeze Bandits! I'm pretty sure guys like that existed. It felt like I was looking at their pictures in an album, that kind of nostalgic feeling. Anyway, the strength of such people never changed, so it was hard to get truly excited for them.

"Whew, I worked up a nice sweat. And this even earned some money too. I like the weight," I said.

"Color this old lady surprised," Kuon replied. "I've never actually experienced running around while carrying evildoers on my back. Agh, I can feel it in my hips..."

We'd just exchanged our loads for cash at Toraj's Adventurer's Guild, and she was making a show of massaging her hips. Of course, I knew her hips didn't hurt at all.

"You liar, there's no way your hips are that weak. You can carry over a dozen people with one hand, can't you? Also, I used magic to clump them up and make them easier to hold!"

"You're right, they were pretty easy to carry, I think. But the pained faces those bandits were making were incredible. Does that count as motion sickness?" she asked.

"Who knows? We handed them over with all their limbs intact, so I don't think there's a problem."

"You're right about that!" she agreed after a moment's thought. With that conclusion reached, she flashed me a lovely smile.

I'm glad you're satisfied.

"So, changing the subject... Who are these people?" Kuon asked.

With that finished, she had turned around. I did the same, despite not really wanting to. Still, I couldn't pretend I hadn't seen them.

"Why are you in Toraj, Master Kelvin?!" the first one shouted. "I can't believe it! Did you come to see me?! I-I'm so moved that you think of me so much, master! But don't worry! I continue to train, even while doing my job as guildmaster!"

"It's been a while, Kelvin," said the second. "I would have prepared a fitting welcome if you'd only let us know beforehand. No, you needn't say it. I know you didn't want to take the time to do so because you wanted to see me that badly. Am I right? Heh hah hah, how adorable!"

The moment we turned around, my arms were captured by Suzu and Tsubaki.

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"Master! Master!" Suzu exclaimed.

Oh, right. Suzu is the guildmaster of Toraj's Adventurer's Guild. She did say that she would return to Toraj and go back to her work after things calmed down for a moment. Of course we'd run into her after visiting the guild. And she's got a solid hold on my right arm. This isn't good; she looks so happy clinging to me that I can't bring myself to shake her off.

"I heard the news," said Tsubaki. "Efil gave birth safely, didn't she? A wonderful, auspicious event! Come, I will give you a special gift to celebrate your child. No need for thanks, given our relationship. Don't hold back, Kelvin!"

And of course, the person on my other side was Tsubaki, who needed no introduction. She was the ruler of Toraj, after all. So, what was the country's leader doing in the streets like this? As usual, she was trying to curry favor with me a bit too forcefully. She also had my left arm in a solid hold.

This isn't good. If I forcefully free myself from her, it'll cause trouble later on...

"No way, Kelvin-kun! You're dating people other than your wife?"

Kuon asked. "Oh wow, this may just be an old lady's nosiness, but I don't approve of cheating. Especially since there's been a crackdown on compliance with fidelity laws recently..."

"Hey there, don't misunderstand! Suzu is my apprentice, and Tsubaki-sama is just a human resources maniac!"

"Yes! Suzu is master's disciple!" Suzu confirmed.

However, Tsubaki objected. "Hold on, I do not approve of that description! I only attack those I like!"

While Suzu seemed happy with her introduction, Tsubaki was the opposite. But despite her protests, she liked a large percentage of people. I knew she'd recruited Sylvia, Ema, and Graham, after all. And if I remembered right, she'd brought up the subject to Serge as well, hadn't she?

"So, Kelvin, who is this woman with the glossy black hair?" Tsubaki asked. "She looks similar to a Torajian... Hrm, but I do not recognize her. Also, she possesses an extremely adorable face. I know I would already have memorized someone who stands out like her."

"I don't remember meeting her either," Suzu added.

"Huh, you too, Suzu?"

"Huh? Ah, yes. Why?" Suzu asked.

No way. That's weird. Suzu should have been with Paul and the others, watching from the Holy Stake. She should have seen Kuon then— Ah, wait, no. I'm wrong. I remember now that they weren't around at that time. The Holy Stakes moved thanks to Addams being revived.

They did tell me that they weren't around to see the end, though they managed to get back home on their own. I remembered Paul laughing as he recounted that it was a good thing he had Identify Position. They'd pretty much been stranded, so it was impressive they managed to get back.

"Ehe heh, she called me adorable, Kelvin-kuuun!" Kuon gushed. "Even though I'm an around-forty-year-old lady!"

"Around forty? What does she mean by that?" Tsubaki asked.

"Ah, about that..."

It would only cause trouble to allow them to speculate further, so

I gave both sides a thorough introduction. Of course, I left out Kuon's status as an otherworlder and similar land-mine information. It all boiled down to Kuon being strong, Tsubaki being important, and Suzu being a put-upon hard worker. I did my best to explain everything in those terms.

"I see, so she is strong enough for Kelvin to have his eyes on her," said Tsubaki. "Interesting."

"Please don't put it like that, Tsubaki-sama. Though...I am also interested in her."

"A fighter strong enough to rival master!" Suzu exclaimed. "And old enough to be my mother but so gorgeous?!"

"Happily, I am often mistaken as my daughter's sister!" Kuon boasted.

"Well, one's lifespan does extend to that of an elf's after Evolution," said Tsubaki. "You have already Evolved, have you not, Suzu? So you should be familiar with this. Though it should by all rights be a rather rare occurrence."

"Ah, you're right!" Suzu replied.

Sorry. She looks like that naturally, no Evolution involved. But if I said that out loud, it would unnecessarily extend the conversation, so I kept it a secret. Tsubaki was already interested, so it would only guarantee more *interest* from her.

"By the way...mmm, you have a nice body, don't you? You look thin, but you're veeery well trained," said Kuon. "From the way your muscles are developed, I'd say you use martial arts like I do? Ah, but looking at your palms, you might use something like a club too? What is this feeling of kinship?!"

"Ah? Eh? Huh?" Suzu stammered.

Now, Kuon had taken an interest in Suzu, and she started to touch my apprentice all over. I wanted to find Addams and Maria, though, so I didn't think we should stay long.

"Yeah, yeah, okay. You can't just start touching someone like that, even if you're both girls."

"Waahhh! Let me gooo!" Kuon let out a fake yell.

No good. I have to let go and try to get out of here.

"It is about time for us to leave, Tsubaki-sama. To tell you the

truth, we're set to meet up with some people—actually, they might not be people. Anyway, we agreed to meet them."

"Hmm, really? Then I suppose there's nothing else for it. We will go with you!" Tsubaki announced.

"Uh...what? Ah, no, that would be..."

"No need to hold back on our account! Kelvin's friends are my friends. In essence, we are soul bonded!"

She just wants me to introduce them, doesn't she?

"Th-That may be, but please consider your own station. Look, you don't even have any guards with you."

"Heh, how naive of you. If it's guards you want, look," said Tsubaki. With that, she elegantly clapped her hands.

"Huh? You rang?" Sylvia popped out from a nearby teahouse.

Whaaat...

"There's...a lot I want to retort to, but for now, I'll just say, 'I see.'"

"Mm. I have summoned my guest general, Sylvia the Ice Princess," said Tsubaki. "You know her, Kelvin. There cannot be a greater bodyguard than her!"

"Uh...right. No wonder you were walking around without a care, Tsubaki-sama. By the way, Sylvia, thank you for taking on my request to capture the Divine Pillar. You really helped."

"Mm, Serge helped, so it was easier than expected," Sylvia replied, her face impassive as she slurped on some noodles that looked to be udon. She definitely had the chops to be a bodyguard, but...

Huh, that's weird. Usually Ema would have come in with a common-sense retort by now, but there's no sign of her.



“Hey, isn’t Ema with you?”

“She’s doing something else right now. Standing watch over some weird people who came out of nowhere,” Sylvia replied.

“Weird people? Ahh...”

She most likely meant Maria and Addams. It made sense, since even if they had no ill will, people of their strength couldn’t just be left to their own devices.

“Then I guess I’ll take up the job of watching them. So, Tsubaki-sama, it could be dangerous. I don’t think you should be accompanying us.”

“Oh, they were the ones you agreed to meet, Kelvin?” Tsubaki asked. “And you view them as dangerous. Hmm... Heh! Then all the more reason for me to come. I wouldn’t be any safer staying in the castle against people of that level anyway. In fact, you could say it’s safer to stay close to you and Sylvia. And so, you may take me with you!”

“Ah...okay...”

She’d come back with a sound argument. At this point, Tsubaki would dig her heels in and come with me no matter what, so it would be easier to just do as I was told and let her tag along.

“Then I will go as well, master—” Suzu started.

“What are you doing out here, guildmaster? The paperwork isn’t finished yet. There’s still so much to do.”

“Ah, wai— There’s something more important than paperwork for me to do!” Suzu yelled. “Master! Masteeerrr!”

The rest of us watched on in silence.

The guild employee grabbed Suzu by the scruff and dragged her back into the building. We could still hear her sad wails.

“What a good subordinate you have, Suzu. It’s impressive she has the strength to drag you along. You could comb the entire continent and only find a few like her. I feel great pride as your teacher.”

“Indeed. Okay, then let us be off!” Tsubaki exclaimed.

“Yeah!” I agreed.

“Mm,” said Sylvia.

“I wonder if there’s a place that sells katanas around here,” Kuon mused.

With Suzu's noble sacrifice, we moved on.

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Even though we'd already suffered Suzu's noble sacrifice, and despite the fact that a wicked god and a vampire from another world—both terribly fearsome people—were here, Toraj still seemed as peaceful as ever. Actually, if I had to be specific, there was a slight fuss going on around us as people realized Tsubaki was walking around town before also noticing that she was being accompanied by two Rank S adventurers in Sylvia and me. But that was still well within the realm of peaceful.

"I experienced the same on the Western Continent, but now that I'm home on the Eastern Continent, it really does seem like my face is fairly known."

"Heh! Remembering your face now is far too late. I have known of the strengths of the adventurers Kelvin and Sylvia before they even became Rank S!" Tsubaki boasted.

"Don't say it like you're an old fan, Tsubaki-sama. Also, Kuon, don't draw the katana you bought in the middle of town. You'd have been arrested already if Tsubaki-sama wasn't here."

"Aw, man, but the blade pattern is so pretty!" Kuon griped. Still, she reluctantly sheathed her katana with a clink.

Since Kuon was currently broke, Tsubaki had bought her the katana with her own money. What's more, it was a very well-made sword. I'd warned Kuon repeatedly that this would only cause trouble later on, but Kuon seemed defenseless in niche situations like this and had folded to Tsubaki's incessant and aggressive favor-currying. Now that it had gone so far, there was nothing I could do but cheer her on, hoping that she would be able to repay the favor.

"Mm, we should be seeing Ema soon," said Sylvia. "Actually, there she is."

"Where?" I looked to where Sylvia pointed and found her. "Why...is she slurping udon too?"

"It is a camouflage tactic I devised. Yes, she blends into the townscape perfectly. No one will notice her like this," said Sylvia.

"Truly perfect. So natural."

Of course, Ema's red hair stood out pretty starkly in Toraj, so she was actually drawing quite a bit of attention from her surroundings. Whether she herself seemed to belatedly notice or whether she just couldn't deny Sylvia's suggestion, it looked to me like she was blushing a little as she slurped on her noodles. If I had to bet, I would say it was the latter. I had the impression that Ema was pretty soft on Sylvia when it came to it.

"Let's hurry up and join them for Ema's sake. I feel a little sorry for her now."

"It's a little surprising to hear that from you, Kelvin," said Sylvia. "Is watching over them such a dangerous role? I did not get that feeling from the targets."

"That's not the reason I... Anyway, let's just hurry."

And so, we safely (sort of) joined up with Ema's group. By the way, Ema's udon had stretched a lot, probably because she'd been "slurping" on the same bowl this entire time. A double tragedy.

"Urgh...it was a little too much to try to use one bowl of udon for so long," Ema said with remorse. "And it looked like I stood out a lot anyway..."

"I think it would be better to just come out and say it when you don't think something is possible, Ema."

"Would soba have been better?" Sylvia wondered aloud. "There are some good soba places around her as well. Should I introduce you to them?"

"No no, that's not— Wait, now's not the time for that. Ema, where are the people you're supposed to be watching?"

"Huh? Ah, right. In there," Ema replied.

I looked over at where she had indicated and found—

Um, does that sign say "yakitori" on it? And the huge red paper lantern hung in front of the store says it too. Maria-san? Addams-san? You may call it a drinking party, but this is supposed to be the grand talks we've been going on about, you know. You aren't just thinking of drinking, are you?

"Oh? So the people you have come to see are inside there?" Tsubaki asked. "They have good taste."

"Mm, that place opened recently and sells grilled chicken on a skewer," Sylvia explained. "You might think that grilled skewers aren't unusual, but that is a huge mistake. The skewers here are grilled with charcoal and are very fragrant. Also, their flavoring is unique. They offer a large variety of cuts too."

"Ahh...do they do salted as well as sauced?" I asked.

Sylvia let out an impressed but surprised noise. "As expected, Kelvin, you are well-versed! Naturally, as you are betrothed to my comrade, Mel!"

I had no idea about the me from my previous life, but the current me obviously had knowledge of Japan's food culture. Also, I had to wonder what she meant by "comrade," though I already had an inkling of what the answer was.

"Yakitori is delicious, isn't it? I like livers and gizzards! And bonjiri as well!" Kuon exclaimed.

Sylvia made the same noise again, but longer. "Whuh! How do you know the menu already?! Not only that, but you've mastered terms I have yet to learn! Are you some sort of yakitori regular?! But I don't remember your face! H-How?!" She seemed unusually confused.

Are you a regular at this store too, Sylvia?

"Sorry to interrupt you while you're disoriented, but let's go inside first. We can talk after."

"Huh? Um, wait, Kelvin-san?!" Ema shouted. She seemed panicked, but in this case it would be faster to just meet them rather than try to explain things outside. I hadn't expected to bring in such a crowd, but if they were going for a drinking party, I would just have to counter with a banquet!

With that mindset, I slid open the door and stepped inside first.

Ohhh! The interior is more like a bar than expected! Also, I could see the grills as I'd imagined. This entire restaurant gave off the exact feeling of a typical yakitori restaurant. *Did someone from modern Japan create this place? It's even playing a song that sounds like enka.*

"Welcome. Are you Kelvin-san?"

While I was busy being impressed by the interior, the owner of

the store who was grilling skewers behind the counter called out my name.

"Ah, yes, I am."

"Izzat so? Then go into the back room. Your friends are waiting for you." The owner had close-cropped hair and wore a towel twisted into a headband, and he flicked his eyes to tell me where to go.

Hmmm...he's got a good, sharp look in his eye. Are you from Japan? Are you strong? I had a mountain of questions I wanted to ask him, but I had to bear with it for now.

"Thank you. Then if you'll excu—"

"Heya! I'll just take a beer for now! Huh? You don't have any? Then sake!" Kuon interrupted.

"Mm, I will take the usual pile of skewers combo," said Sylvia.

"I'm coming in, good sir," said Tsubaki. "You may prepare liver, gizzards, and bonjiri."

Don't just order right away. Let's at least get into the room first!

"Are you here in secret, Tsubaki-sama?" The owner asked after a long pause.

"I am. Pretend you never saw me," she confirmed.

"You didn't have to come now, of all times! I refuse to be blamed if you get scolded by old master shadow."

"Agh, shut up! I don't mind, so just leave me be for now!" Tsubaki yelled in reply.

Seeing the owner talk on even terms with her only deepened my curiosity, but I made sure to hold it in.

Now then, are Addams and Maria drinking quietly? With worry in my heart, I opened the sliding door and peeked inside.

"I wanna see your good side, Addam-chan!" Maria shouted. "Ahoy! Go! Go!"

Glug, glug, glug.

Addams chugged the drink. "Phew, this is no problem!"

Maria whistled. "Nice!"

Maria was in a kimono and Addams in a happi coat. The way they were drinking was just slovenly.

"Hey now, what were you doing while I went to pick some flowers?!" Goldiana complained. "You shouldn't chug things like that!

It's bad for your health! Wait, oh? Kelvin-chan?"

"Um...hello..."

Goldiana suddenly appeared beside me, dressed extravagantly like a high-ranking geisha.

Uh-oh, I don't think my stomach will even hold out until we get to the drinking and eating portion...

"Oh no! What do you mean, 'hello'?!" Goldiana exclaimed. "Don't act like we're strangers! My muscles are so shocked!"

"M-My bad. I would never have dreamed of seeing you dressed like this, Prettia-chan. And you appeared so suddenly, I thought my heart would stop..."

I really did think I would have a heart attack. It was a good thing I didn't have Gerard with me. If he was here, he would have taken even more damage than I had.

"My word, you're as good at flattery as Dahak-chan!" Goldiana gushed. "But I'm still happy! Mm-hmm!"

She shot off a ferociously snappy wink. Of course, I was the target. Instantly, every single detection skill I had sounded alarms, telling me that I absolutely must not allow it to touch me.

Goldiana had become the Goddess of Reincarnation, and the power behind her wink was incomparable to how it had been before. It contained fathomless lethality within, *and* it was fast! But I would still evade it. I would evade it with all my might. I willed myself to dodge, even at point-blank range. Indeed, I acted as if my life were on the line.

Ugh, grrroooaaahhh!

I didn't have the time to shout, so I did so in my heart as I tried to rouse my body. My efforts bore fruit, and the heart-shaped wink passed by me at lighting speed. Thank goodness it only flew straight! It would have been dangerous if that thing had curved! I breathed a sigh of relief. However, that was when I noticed that Kuon was right behind me.

Get away, Kuon!

I didn't have time to warn her; all I could do was try to think the warning as hard as I could. I didn't think that even someone as strong as Kuon could survive intact after getting hit by such a thing.

However, I also knew that what I was doing was meaningless. Unlike people in my Network, I couldn't send thoughts to her. I could only pray that she would do something about it on her own!

"Bwha?!" Kuon yelled.

As I prayed, Goldiana's wink hit her full on and shattered into pieces. It was like a balloon popping, and it made a huge sound.

"Did...your Paramita activate?"

"Looks like it...I think?" Kuon replied hesitantly. The sudden occurrence seemed to have confused her.

Wait. Wait just a second. The fact that Kuon's Unique Skill activated means that that wink had some sort of special effect to it, right? It doesn't activate for actual damage, so that's gotta be it. What the hell! That's terrifying!

"Uh, Prettia-chan...what did you imbue that wink with?"

"Isn't it obvious? My heartfelt L-O-V-E!" Goldiana declared, forming a heart mark.

"I don't think love explodes..."

"Non, non, all love is an explosion," Goldiana replied. "If you follow the lines of your feelings of love, it will naturally draw a pretty heart that gets your blood pumping!"

I mean, maybe, but I still don't think it physically explodes. Did this goddess awaken some sort of new power? And she's the type not to have noticed either.

"Ah, well, let's just leave it at that... Er, did you come here with Maria and Addams?"

"I couldn't just leave them to their own devices," Goldiana replied. "I am still incomplete as the Goddess, which is why I am still able to interfere with earthly matters. I need to make good use of that! Also, it sounds like they wanted a traveling companion."

"Oh, I see."

"Hey hey, how long are you planning to stand in the entrance and talk? I've been waiting to raise our glasses, so come in already!" Maria called out.

"I feel like you've been drinking heartily already," I answered.

"It was just light entertainment; we have too much time on our hands," Addams explained. "Also, this minimal amount does not

count as drinking. No need to worry."

But I saw you throwing back a bottle like it was going out of style. It looked like the wicked god was absurdly resistant to alcohol, just like Maria, who could adjust her drunkenness level. I sighed internally. *I'll need to be careful so I don't get swept up like Cheruvim did.*

And so, we streamed into the room where Addams and Maria were. I'd planned to hold these talks with only a small number of people, but now that Tsubaki and the others had butted in, the number had ballooned to eight. It was a bit much for a private room at a bar.

"Uh...well then, let us raise our glasses in greeting. As the representative of Toraj and its current ruler, I, Tsubaki Fujiwara, will lead this," said Tsubaki.

"Tsubaki-sama?!" Ema shouted in surprise.

"Wow, what a greeting!" Maria exclaimed.

"Good. This welcome is almost too much for someone as regular as me," said Addams.

"I wonder if the skewer set is coming soon..." Sylvia muttered.

Out of nowhere, Tsubaki took the stage at the drinking party, shocking Ema. The rest of the group seemed to find it normal, which I suppose showed her leadership skills. Maria and Addams welcomed it, while Sylvia...

Well, okay. I hope you enjoy your food.

"Such stiff formalities mean nothing in the face of good meat and drink. In other words...cheers!" Tsubaki exclaimed.

"Cheers!" the rest of us called back in unison.

With the shortened opening speech over, everyone clinked their cups. This started the event, held at a yakitori shop, which was actually a drinking party.

"You called on Toraj's ruler as well, Kelvin-chan?" Goldiana asked. "You even brought Sylvia-chan and Ema-chan!"

I had no idea when Goldiana had taken the seat next to me, but she started to pour me a drink.

"I didn't call them so much as they ended up joining... To tell you the truth, I didn't want to bring them here. But this is Tsubaki-sama

we're talking about. I think she gathered information in secret and is doing this with full knowledge of what's going on without me needing to explain anything to her."

With that, I shot a glance at Tsubaki, who was talking with Maria.

"Hey hey, are you a ruler too?" Maria asked. "What a coinky-dink! We also refer to ourselves in the same way, so this is like fate!"

"Oh? Truly? You rule your own nation as well?" Tsubaki asked. "That *is* a coincidence. Then this is the opportunity for us to build a good relationship. And we have more similarities as well. Look, I am quite lovely too, no?"

"Wow, you're right! Of course I'm cute, but you're packed with just as much charm, just in a different way! Should we team up? Make a ruling-class idol unit?!" Maria offered.

"They sure are having fun," Goldiana said.

"They sure are."

Luckily, Tsubaki and Maria fit together perfectly. They were so in sync I almost couldn't believe this was their first time meeting. But as for the people beside them...

"Yesterday we drank until the sun came up. Because of that, I have found the drink that most suits my tongue. Its name is 'God-Killer'! It is as dry as its ambitious name would imply, and burns while coming down the throat. It is enough to make my regular old self enamored with it, which is rare enough. Now, if you are confident enough to imbibe this, do so all at once," said Addams.

"I don't drink, so recommending something so strong is a little..." Ema replied.

"Do you not know?" Addams asked.

"What?" Ema asked.

"You can train yourself to be more resistant to the effects of alcohol!"

"Don't ask the impossible!" Ema exclaimed.

"That's alcohol harassment, isn't it?" I chimed in.



“I told you, Addams-chan, you shouldn’t force people like that!” Goldiana called out.

In a stroke of misfortune, Ema had been targeted by Addams. Unlike Maria and Tsubaki’s pairing, her compatibility with Addams was terrible.

“Om nom nom! The fattiness of this bonjiri is amazing!” Sylvia exclaimed, enthusiastically chowing down.

“Right? I think you’d like this too!” Kuon said.

“Nom nom nom! The gizzard is nice and firm!” Sylvia replied, her mouth full. “And the liver is creamy and rich! I was mistaken. I shouldn’t have been eating only the chicken and scallion skewer!”

At least those two were getting along famously.

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The purpose of this event was to determine the future of various parties, and it also doubled as a drinking party. Or at least, that’s how it started, but before I knew it, the drinking party aspect and talking aspect had flipped positions. A little less than an hour had passed since the start, and there had yet to be so much as a whiff of productive conversation. At this rate, any productivity wouldn’t even be an afterthought, but rather relegated to a faint wish. I attempted to partake in alcohol as little as possible during this time, but Addams and Maria showed no such consideration and were drinking like fish. No matter how resistant they were, there had to be a limit. Even if they claimed to be okay, Ema had already been made into a noble sacrifice.

“Ema really isn’t a drinker...”

She’d drunk herself under the table very early on. Apparently, she’d made a classic mistake, thinking the booze was tea. Still, conking out after one sip meant she was quite weak in that regard, though this was much better than having her limiters fall off like in Sera’s case...I think?

“Don’t worry. I will eat enough for Ema’s share,” said Sylvia.

“I’ll help, Sylvia-chan!” Kuon exclaimed.

“Yeah, that’s not what I’m worried about at all... Er, are you

planning to keep eating?"

"Of course!" they replied in unison.

Don't sound so enthusiastic while you're eating. Still, the fact that these two are being provided skewers at a regular pace means the owner of the restaurant is no ordinary cook. I wonder if he'll give me his business card if he has one.

"Then it's decided. Tsubakicchi, Prettia-chan, and I will form a three-person idol unit!" Maria declared. "We will carve a new path for idols in this world!"

"Heh! Heh! Heh! As a ruler, becoming a singer as well does not seem like a bad proposal," said Tsubaki. "The more famous I become, the more Toraj's name will spread. And if I cultivate more of those fans you speak of, those willing to serve me will increase as well."

"I think I'll only be able to participate for a short time, and I'm *so* embarrassed thinking about it...but I'll just have to put my all into it, since you two seem so set on the idea!" Goldiana exclaimed. "Us three pretties will take over the world!"

"Hey, how did it come to this?" I couldn't help but throw out a retort after seeing the trio so fired up about coming together. Seriously, what was going on? I could understand the initial pair unit idea, but the current iteration was way too much like an interspecies mixed martial arts league. They had to see it. The concept of an idol didn't even exist in this world yet.

"Everyone travels down a yet-to-be-worn path. That is another form of strength," said Addams. "Maria, I support you, as normal as I am. You may do as you please in this world."

"What the hell are you doing, snacking while drinking, Addams? That's all you've been doing since this all started, isn't it?"

"Gods and alcohol have an inseparable relationship," Addams replied. "Of course, I am also entwined within this fate."

"What? You're the god of booze, Addams?"

"Heh! That is quite the interesting statement, God of Death. Unfortunately, the god of alcohol is someone else," Addams replied.

"'Unfortunately,' huh? Wait, I'm no god. My adventurer title, Grim Reaper, just implies that I am. Not to mention, your underling

Cheruvim is supposedly the god of death. You should know that."

Cheruvim and Luquille were absent today. Though the two of them were the ones who had promised to talk things out, Cheruvim was busy organizing the remaining Ten Authorities while Luquille was still convalescing. Of course, I knew exactly where both were.

"Hey, why don't we start these talks already? As things stand, this whole meeting will end with everyone just drinking."

"Hmm? Talks, you say? Now that you mention it, Cheruvim seemed strangely keen on the idea," said Addams. "I, regular as I am, have no objections. However, I also do not feel it particularly necessary at this stage."

"Not necessary? Why?"

"The Ten Authorities gathered sacrifices from across this world in order to revive me, though I am now simply a normal mortal. They attempted this despite me being hailed as a wicked god, throwing caution to the wind when everyone else would find me untrustworthy. I understand why you fought Eld and the others: to try to stop it. That is a worthy enough reason," said Addams.

"Well, yeah. No matter the reason, it is good that we managed to fight." I gave a big nod.

"I feel that nod came at a somewhat strange point, but I will ignore that for now," said Addams. "Still, now there is no reason to fight at all. This world is a wonderful place. My normal self's ideal, even. I would never destroy such a good exemplar of my ideals, unlike those who were touched by my miasma—Demon Lords, I believe you call them? Mm? You have run out of sake; allow a normal mortal such as myself to pour your next cup."

"No, I've had enough."

"Hmm? Well, then..." Addams responded.

I couldn't see his face, but he somehow seemed disappointed to me.

Seriously? The first hint of real emotion you show me is over booze? I'll introduce you to a real boozehound named Gerard, so don't be so sad about something like this.

"Anyway, back to what we were talking about. I also do not intend to wrest the world under my control," said Addams. "I have

been revived as a regular mortal, so the next objective of my normal self, along with the Ten Authorities, will be to free the worlds under the chief god's yoke."

"In other words, you're saying that we're not your enemies, but the gods running the worlds are. With that logic, though, Goldiana would be your enemy as well, since she is the Goddess of Reincarnation, no?"

"That one?" Addams asked. "Certainly, her position is complicated, but she told you before this party started, did she not? She is yet to become a full-fledged deity. The Goddess of Reincarnation is a position bestowed by the chief god or his subordinates onto one elected by the angel leaders. As of now, she is but an officially approved candidate by her predecessor, and as a deity she is half-baked. In essence, she has no connection to the chief god as of yet."

Ahh, I do remember that Goldiana went to see the angel leaders for some sort of ritual. But their bodies were hijacked by the Ten Authorities, so the ritual was ruined. If not for that spot of trouble, she would have become the Goddess of Reincarnation in full by now.

"I see, so that's why she's not your enemy."

"If I had to be specific, she is neither enemy nor friend," Addams replied. "She will fall into either category depending on how she acts. Will she join the chief god's side, or endorse me, normal as I am? Or maybe she will maintain neutrality. But no matter what, she will have to choose. I will not do anything to affect that, and as long as she does not treat me as an enemy, I have no plans to harm her. That is why there is no point in her talking to my normal self."

"Huh, really? I think there is," Maria said, popping up suddenly between us.

"Maria," said Addams. "You have come at just the right time. How goes your new idol unit?"

"Great! We've gone through everything that can be decided on right now!" Maria replied. "Our names will spread throughout the world!"

The other two are already quite famous...but I won't say anything.

"That reminds me, you're acting as Luquille's spokesperson, aren't you, Maria?"

"Wow, the way you phrased that was super cool! Yep, I'm Luquille-chan's spokesperson!"

"Hmm...so what does the spokesperson want to say?"

"Well, ya'see... Okay, everyone! Attention on me!" Maria shouted out.

She got on top of the table as if taking the stage—though, rather than standing on it, she was floating above it.

I wonder how okay this is, manners-wise. It's okay because she's not actually touching the table...I think? Anyway, she managed to gather everyone's attention.

"Luquille-chan's objective is, you guessed it, to return Melfina to the seat of Goddess of Reincarnation and work under her! So I've decided to oppose Addam-chan!" Maria announced.

"Uh...what?" the rest of us all responded at once.

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Maria's antagonistic announcement came out of nowhere. If it had been directed at me, I'd have been overjoyed, but it was directed at Addams, of all people.

Hey come on, look at me.

"Oh? You are referring to me, a normal person? I would like to know your reasoning, I suppose," said Addams.

"Aww, come on now, Luquille-chan's objective can only be achieved under the current system, right? If you win against that super important...god? That one, you'll end up changing everything. If that happens, the entire role of Goddess of Reincarnation might disappear. I can't allow that, since Luquille-chan was the one to call me here!" Maria declared. "So I'm going to defeat you and seal you away again! That's a good enough reason, don't you think?"

"Hmm..." Addams muttered. He put his hand to his jaw, obviously sinking into thought.

I did the same. *I see, so Maria wants to maintain the current world order. Certainly, Addams is trying to change the order of many*

worlds, and even if his actions don't affect our world specifically, new management may still bring on some sort of change. If, as a result, the role of Goddess of Reincarnation were to vanish, it would be a waste of Luquille's efforts. But is such a thing really possible?

Honestly, I had no idea what the Goddess of Reincarnation's job entailed in its entirety. However, I did know that the Goddess's biggest task was to maintain the seal imprisoning the wicked god Addams. After all, it was like the system the world was based on itself was sealing Addams away, since it drew power from him, weakening him while creating Demon Lords, whom Heroes had to be summoned to defeat. Even though he was in an artificial body, Addams had been revived, so even if the chief god prevailed and the current system was preserved, would the Goddess of Reincarnation still be needed? I had to wonder. In essence, it might not matter which side won.

"I see. So it's Addams and his current revived status that you can't allow in order for Luquille to fulfill her objective," I mused.

"Exactly!" Maria exclaimed. "Addam-chan, I'll reserve a seat right up front for our new unit's next live performance, so won't you make a deal? Who knows when you'll get to see us again if you let this chance go!"

What? Is that really what she's offering? I mean, if he's sealed away, I don't think he'll care about any sort of "next chance."

"That is an attractive offer, but as a normal person, I don't think I can accept," Addams replied. "Though I am not possessed of a divine body, this regular, mortal one is something my followers put their lives on the line to create. No matter what you offer me, I cannot let you have it."

"Really? Too bad," said Maria. "Then what do we do?"

"Who knows?"

They both sank into silence. Then they locked gazes, and the space between them started to warp.

Whoa there, I like this mood— Wait, no.

"Hey, don't do this in public. Also, stop pushing things forward without me."

"He's right, Maria," said Kuon. "It would be a great tragedy for

the world if this place were to disappear! Mgwph nom!”

“Mm, indeed,” Sylvia agreed. “Grilled chicken is humanity’s treasure. Nom nom!”

“Urgh, I don’t like it in here... I feel terrible...” Ema muttered.

Hey, guys, I’m glad you all agree with me, but could you at least finish eating before voicing your support? Also, Ema, you should down some stomach medicine and take a rest.

“You have a point,” Maria admitted after a pause. “I’ve been a good girl in other worlds, so I’ll listen to you here.”

“Hmm, that was a mite thoughtless of my mortal self,” said Addams. “I apologize. Also, manager, please bring me more sake.”

Maria obediently stopped floating over the table and got back to her seat. Meanwhile, Addams ordered his umpteenth booze refill of the day. The mood fully reverted to its previous state, and my hopes and worries that a battle would break out right there and then dissipated.

“Well, I do understand now that your objectives cannot coexist. Also, this is a bit late, but has the chief god’s side caught wind of your revival yet, Addams? If he has, he might end up doing something about you before you can make your move.”

“I am normal now, so I don’t actually know,” Addams answered. “But given that nothing has happened so far, I would say that he has yet to notice.”

“Aren’t you being way too casual about this?” Maria asked. “They used this entire planet just to seal you away, Addam-chan. Wouldn’t they normally have an alarm or something to tell them the instant the seal is broken?”

“That is a reasonable assumption,” Addams admitted. “I do believe they would have at least done that much back in the age when they fought my divine form, but...an immense amount of time has passed since the war, so they may have grown so soft they were unable to put such an obvious measure in place.”

“Oh come on, there’s no way—” I stopped short as I thought back on preceding events.

While the black goddess DarkMel had been moving in secret, following her desire to reincarnate me in this world and provide me

with fun, there had been no action taken by the chief god. The world Addams had been sealed into was involved, so it would make sense for the administrators to be a little more concerned, and yet there'd been no response.

After that, Mel had resigned from the post of Goddess of Reincarnation, nominating Goldiana to take up the reins. The chief god and his ilk had done nothing then either. For them to stand by despite the role changing hands was nearly unthinkable to me. Doing so was clearly a bad move by my reckoning, and yet nothing had happened. Nothing at all.

No, wait. Maybe something did *happen, and I just didn't know about it. Maybe something made contact only with those involved: Mel and Goldiana. Yeah. I'm sure that's it. If not, that would mean the current gods have been addled extensively by peace.*

::You seem to be worried about something, honey. As your true wife, I will resolve these concerns of yours,:: Mel suddenly told me through the Network.

Mel?! I replied in kind.

And then Mel-san comes in with a perfectly timed telepathic message! I thought privately. *Did she read my mind again?! From such a distance?! But still, nice!*

I switched back to the Network. *This is perfect timing, Mel. I have something I want to ask you. To tell you the truth...* I relayed my question about the chief god.

Mel's response was, ::I see. Your question is well warranted.::

Right. This has to do with gods, so I guess you can't answer me?

::Wrong. While that may have been true while in my artificial body, I am now here in my real body. So allow me to answer you in full,:: Mel answered.

Ohhh! I responded. I never expected to get an answer so easily.

This has to be a reward because I behave so good all the time! I thought to myself.

"Hey, hey, why is Kelvin-kun's expression changing so rapidly?" Kuon asked.

"Mm, Kelvin does that sometimes," Sylvia answered. "It is a kindness not to point it out."

"Aha ha! Hilarious! What is that, some sort of party trick?! It's a party trick, isn't it?!" Kuon exclaimed.

I think peeping at me while I'm in the middle of a conversation is just rude.

::It seems things are pretty interesting over there, so I'll be quick,:: Mel offered.

Y-Yeah, thanks, I replied through the Network.

::To be frank, during my entire tenure as Goddess of Reincarnation, I was almost never contacted by the chief god, or any other god for that matter—even after DarkMel showed herself or when Goldiana took over for me,:: Mel confessed.

What? None at all? I asked.

::No, none at all. The Goddess of Reincarnation is essentially just an angel temporarily fulfilling a role. No other god is succeeded that way, since their lifespans are essentially infinite. Their sense of time is fundamentally different from ours, so they tend to be quite loose with it,:: Mel explained.

Whaaat? That's way more than just lackadaisical... I answered in disbelief.

::Well, to be fair, there is a meeting to confirm the status of each world's administration once every few thousand years. But I never had the opportunity to participate in one... Ah! Elearis might have had one during her tenure. The information is old, so I'm not sure of the details, though.::

I-I see, I thought privately. *Still, just once every few thousand years? That's way too loose and careless in every way possible. But certainly, if that's how they are, I can understand why they wouldn't have noticed Addams being revived.*

::I haven't met any other gods, but I do have some knowledge about them. For example...:: Mel continued.

According to her, these days the gods relied almost entirely on their own power to manage their worlds. Basically, it was like they were each in their own separate worlds, and none would even consider going out of their way to get help from some other god. Then again, while "management" was the word used, in truth, almost none of the gods did anything, leaving their worlds to their

own devices. On the rare occasions they did interfere, all they tended to do was hand down a minor oracle. In the worst cases, they literally did nothing. To gods of the current age, what was most important was how they could spend their time in a worthwhile and peaceful way, for which they would often shirk their duties to play in an extreme show of sloth.

By the way, from what Mel said, the current trend was creating trading card games, and the gods put much of their great power toward that purpose, which was quite ama—

Hey, can I fit in a retort now? I thought, then switched to speaking through the Network once more. *How should I put it? It feels like they've perfected laziness...* I concluded.

::Any god will become like that the longer eternal peace drags on,:: Mel replied.

Our world was actually the exception now that such slothfulness had spread. It was because Addams had been sealed away and would cause great harm to the gods should something happen that only the Goddess of Reincarnation had an actual job to do.

When the current me had first met Mel, she'd said she was taking a paid leave. That was probably how busy she was. Of course, there were some lies mixed into that thanks to DarkMel. Stuff about how my previous self had died due to an unfortunate accident, or that it was a mistake from a different god.

Anyway, I understand now that the gods are in a bad situation. While, according to history, the chief god won that war of myths, I bet he'd lose if they were to fight now, wouldn't he? He's totally fallen into laziness, right? I asked Mel.

::I wouldn't know the answer to that. Other gods aside, the chief god is the highest-ranking one, and there've been no records of him appearing in public since. Considering he beat Addams in his prime, Addams may actually be at a disadvantage because he's in an artificial body,:: Mel replied.

Hmm, that is valid, I thought privately. *So, putting everything together, the current gods are lazy in the extreme, and it's possible they've gotten weaker compared to the past. However, the chief god is a mystery, and we don't know who would come out on top if*

Addams was to fight him again. Also, because laziness has consumed the gods, as long as Addams and his faction don't do anything, it's likely no one will even notice that they've been revived. Maria was correct: It would probably be possible to maintain the status quo should Addams be sealed away again now. And...I guess that's where we are?

::Ah, it's almost my turn. I'm going to cut the line, honey,:: Mel warned me.

Your turn? Mel...where are you and what are you doing? I asked.

::I am in line at a hidden gem of a store. Been so for almost an hour!:: she announced proudly.

Um...I see. Well, enjoy every bit of flavor, I told her.

::Naturally! Now then, I'm going to see for myself whether or not this place will be worthy of being included in the book I plan to write in the future, titled *Goddess Gourmet Tour(temp)*!:: Mel announced.

With that, she cut the line. There was a lot I wanted to retort to, but I was just happy she seemed to be having fun.

Like, I guess it's nice that she has dreams?

Still, I hoped she would consider the place's stock of ingredients.

Anyway, what do I do? I've learned about every side's circumstances and opinions, but at this rate Maria and Addams will clash. Both want to preserve the world's peace, so I don't think any other casualties will be caused by their battle. But...I can't let this stand. I can't allow myself to be left out of battle. I wonder if there's something I can do.

"You seem to be worrying about something, Kelvin."

A voice brought me out of my reverie.

"Huh? Ah, Tsubaki-sama." I hadn't seen her move, but Tsubaki was now sitting right next to me, close enough that our arms were touching. She smoothly wrapped my arm up in hers. *Um, Tsubaki-sama?*

"The subjects flying about this time go way over my head, between gods and ideal worlds and whatnot," Tsubaki said. "It's truly puzzling. So, Kelvin, may I assume you're involved in this somehow?"

"Uh, yes, well..."

Tsubaki's arms were now completely wrapped around mine. *Um...*they're *touching me, you know?*

"Specifically, I think you want to get in between those two and participate in their fight," said Tsubaki. "You're trying to figure out what you need to say to get them to agree to what you want while having fun yourself. Am I right? Heh heh! You're so predictable."

"Um...Tsubaki-sama..."

I hadn't told her *that* much, and yet she was totally right, like she'd seen through everything.

Hey, I feel like you know me way too well! Actually, wait, you're basically draped all over me at this point...

"Oh, fine," she said. "Come! Tsubaki of Toraj will give you a perfect idea. Closer, now; lend me your ear."

"You're basically on top of me... There's no getting any closer..."

Tsubaki began whispering in my ear.

I am betrothed and waiting for the ceremony, so this closeness is — Wait, what?! No, hey, that's gotta be... Hmmm?

"Um, Tsubaki-sama? There's no way those two will accept such a proposal. But you're right in that if that were to pass, I'd be very happy."

"Oh no, I'm almost sure they will accept," said Tsubaki. "We drank together, after all. While we may not have known each other long, I have a general understanding of their personalities, tastes, and hobbies. Just pretend I tricked you and make the proposal."

"Are...you serious?"

"I am always serious," said Tsubaki.

With that, she gave a hearty laugh. I was still half in disbelief, but...regardless, her proposal wasn't something I could decide on by myself. I still thought the chances of making it happen were low, but I decided to use the Network to check just in case.

::What the heck? That sounds so fun! I'm all for it! Bring it on!:: Sera replied.

::Wow, can we really do something like that? Ah, I want lots of people to come, so I'm for it too!:: Rion replied.

::That sounds like it would be a big festival. Hee hee, it would really liven up the village,:: Efil replied.

::If Efil-chan's okay with it, then there's no way I'd be opposed. In fact, I think it's great that we're livening things up!:: Ange chimed in.

::You'll need to secure a stock of Trycen's most famous alcohol. Please, leave it all to me. I will be able to deal with anything that comes up,:: Shutola boasted.

::More! Keep bringing on the supersized helpings!:: Mel called out.

::I...want more too... Just like Mel-sama... Urp...:: Colette struggled to reply.

I hadn't expected literally everyone to be on board. Mel and Colette, who were the last to reply, seemed to be talking about something different, but we'd known each other for so long that I knew those were words of consent. In fact, it even sounded like they were in the same place. Were they eating together?

"I...checked over the Network. They said it was okay for me to go forward with the idea."

"Ohhh, that's great news," said Tsubaki. "Then all that's left is to invite them, no?"

"Now that things have gone this far, I'll just have to steel myself."

Tsubaki finally let go of me. It was her signal, telling me to go.

"Maria, Addams, I have an idea. Want to hear it?" I asked.

"Hmm? What is it?" Maria asked.

"My mortal self has the ears to listen," said Addams.

"Well, erm...I'm going to get married soon. I want you two to come as part of the entertainment. It's going to be a pretty weird ceremony that spans a couple days, but—"

"What, a wedding?! I'll go! I'll totally go! I'm never not going!" Maria exclaimed excitedly.

She latched onto the idea with amazing enthusiasm.

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"Hey, hey, so when's the ceremony?" Maria asked. "And what do you mean by 'weird'?! Like you're going to exchange sake cups equal to the number of your wives? If I'm going to be helping, we'll need

to go big enough for it to be worth it, okay? So, what do you want me to do? Be the main attraction? The main attraction, right? I gotta be! That means I'm the lead, right? I get to come dancing out, stealing attention from the brides, right?! Oh, just so you know, there's no way I'm serving as anything like a veil girl, no matter how much of a devastatingly cute world's strongest idol I am, okay? That's the one thing that's off-limits, I'm not going to be some crowd softener!"

"Wait! Wait a second."

The pressure coming from Maria was way more than expected. *I know Tsubaki-sama was the one who suggested this, but is it really something to get so excited about? I only mentioned a wedding and she's already going nuts.* I had to wonder what kind of feelings she had about weddings.

"It seems like Maria is on board," said Addams. "However, Grim Reaper, I cannot approve of your idea, normal as I am. We may have shared drinks, but that is the extent of our relationship. Our vague relationship, in which we are not yet friends or enemies, is not one that inspires wedding invitations. Even if your future spouses were to give permission, I cannot call this idea a faithful one. This would be like bringing a bomb to your wedding that could go off at any time."

"W-Well, yeah, but..."

Addams had refused, arguing a point that had no counter. His words weren't fitting for a wicked god, but because they were so unassailable, I couldn't say anything more.

Sorry, Tsubaki-sama, looks like I can't bring Addams in. Despite his name and looks, he seems to only make real, proper points.

"Well, if you put it like that, there's nothing I can say. Sorry for bringing up such a weird idea. You're right, Addams. I'd planned to prepare all kinds of drinks using any means I could, from world-famous brands to a legendary bottle said to be myth, but...I suppose we'll just have fun by ourselves, as you say we should. It's too bad, but I can't win against your logic."

"Hey, wait now, Grim Reaper. Why are you giving up so quickly?" Addams asked. "Such logic is nothing but common sense, which

changes with the times. Who cares if I rejected you once? If you feel that badly about it, it's most important not to give up. Also, if your opposite has a rather twisted personality, who knows? That person may accept the second time. Indeed, to tell you the truth, I, in all my normalness, am something of a tsundere. Now that you've revealed such a big secret, I may just accept a second invitation. You never know. Actually, I would surely accept. There's no doubt about it. Now, what will you do? What is the correct action to take next? Wring out your courage and say the words, Grim Reaper. I, a normal person, am waiting."

You're the one who should hang on a second, wicked god. If you're just going to sound so disappointed yet forceful, why are you talking like a different person all of a sudden? If you're going to prattle on and on while speaking so fast, I'm going to get confused.

Anyway, I can kind of figure out what he's getting at, but it seems like this wicked god changes his tune really quickly when booze is involved. And would anyone normally claim to be a tsundere? I know he said something about gods and booze being inseparable, but I'm pretty sure Addams just likes alcohol.

"Now, come, you just need to put your feelings into words," said Addams.

"Uh...I guess I'll try inviting you again, just in case? Yeah, I'll steel myself this time. Addams, I really do want you to come. Will you still refuse? You must come, Addams, please!"

Now that we've come this far, I'll keep at it until the end.

With that feeling in my heart, I put my emotions to the fore and bowed deeply.

Heh, who cares if I bow my head? If a battle lies in the future this way, I'll bow as many times as I need to! So please!

"Hmm... While I am a normal person, and we are neither friend nor enemy, I cannot refuse such a sincere plea out of hand," said Addams. "Though I would rather not, I will come—for you. But since I am participating, allow me to give you some advice. The alcohol you use for the ceremony should be of the highest grade. You must not slack on that. Both quality and quantity must be provided in the extreme. If you manage this, the ceremony will proceed without

problems. And even if it doesn't, I will erase any such problem personally, normal though I may be. Indeed, I will. As for entertainment? Of course, I will help."

"Uh, well...thanks?"

Is this what he meant by tsundere? I couldn't help but wonder, but it was surprising that Addams would be so cooperative, and that included all the stuff about booze.

"See? It went just as I told you it would, didn't it?" Tsubaki said. She was hiding her mouth behind a folding fan, but I knew she wore a smug smile. Also, she was really close again.

"Honestly...I didn't think it would go this well. Did you really know how it would play out from the start, Tsubaki-sama?"

"Of course I did. You may use this chance to fall for me all over again."

"Falling aside, I'm impressed by your observation skills."

"Don't just set that aside," Tsubaki replied. "I don't need your admiration. Fall for me!"

"I'm so impressed by you."

"Grrr! You're so dishonest about your feelings," she complained.

I can't fall for you "again" if I never fell for you in the first place, and I don't remember ever confessing such a thing to you.

Still, it was thanks to Tsubaki that I'd managed to take a step forward in this situation. In a sense, I might have owed her more than Kuon did for the katana. That thought made me a little scared about the future.

"So, hey, when's the ceremony? I'll get started preparing right away, so give me the exact date!" Maria exclaimed.

"Indeed, details are necessary in any era," said Addams. "I would like you to tell my normal self the quantity of alcohol you managed to procure, as well as where it was brewed and the history of its brewing."

"Didn't I just say to hold on a second? I'm glad you two are looking forward to it so much, but calm down. It's going to be a long while before we hold the ceremony. Rion needs to graduate first, so... Oh, wait, is Luquille coming to my wedding with Mel?"

"Luquille-chan? I can't say for sure, since she's still convalescing.

But is the Melfina from Luquille's objective your Mel-chan?" Maria asked. "If so, I think she will? Yeah, don't worry! I'll take responsibility and bring her along!"

"Is...that so? That's reassuring. So, how long do you think it'll take for Luquille to recover?"

"Around half a year, I heard?" Maria answered. "It looked like she pushed herself quite a lot to summon me."

"That long, huh?"

I'd only heard about this after the fact, but apparently Luquille had cultivated an Oracle's arm and transplanted it onto herself to be able to brute-force the use of an Oracle's power. However, the price for such a thing was large, and she was still recovering from what she'd done. Healing magic had almost no effect as well. By the way, she was resting in a medical facility overseen by a certain demon named Beauty.

"In that state, I guess even with healing, she couldn't be part of the entertainment. I can't force a recuperating person to do that..."

"Oh no, no need to worry. I'll do something about her," said Maria.

"Huh?"

"I'll do something!" she repeated with a singsong lilt.

I looked at Maria and her grin, and my worries only grew at an alarming rate. She was definitely plotting something. I just couldn't decide if I liked the premonition I was getting.

"Of course, I will talk to the Ten Authorities, though I may only be a regular person. I believe they will happily come. And drink. Yes, they will drink a lot," Addams said.

"R-Right. Don't feel like you need to force them, okay?"

At any rate, now Maria (and Luquille) were set to come to the wedding along with Addams and his faction. The date was set for roughly half a year in the future, so we would need to finish preparations by then.

It's going to get busy from now on.

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While Kelvin and the others were deepening their friendships (sort of) at the restaurant, the surviving Ten Authorities, Cheruvim, Rem, Gloria, and Isabel, visited a building on the Western Continent. They'd hidden their pitch-black angel wings and halos, disguising themselves as humans while walking all the way to this building in the mountains.

"*Huff...* Whoo... I... I'm gonna die..."

Also, there was a significant distance between this building and the nearest town, which included mountainous roads. Thanks to that, Rem, who wasn't very physically fit, was exhausted to the point where she felt like she was dying. Her legs were shaking like a newborn deer as she walked.

"You're far too weak, Rem," said Cheruvim. "That is because you focused so much on your ability that you left your body by the wayside. You'll drop out of the Three Great Authorities if you keep on like this, you know?"

"You're not even in the Three Great Authorities, Cheruvim, so nothing you say on the matter means anything," said Gloria. "You should at least get strong enough to beat my big si—Isabel before talking so big."

"Shut up, Gloria," Cheruvim shot back. "No matter what you say, with Eld gone, I am the leader of the Ten Authorities. I was personally nominated by Addams as well; there is no changing that fact now."

"Addams only did so as an apology for making you pass out drunk," Gloria replied. "Once things calm down, I know that Isabel will be named the next leader. Also, I haven't forgotten how you betrayed us."

"I-I-I-I'm fine, Gloria, so let's s-s-s-stop arguing, please!" Isabel stammered. "S-S-Sure, Cheruvim is weaker than me, and he often can't read the room, but everyone has their weaknesses!"

"Hey! What you said was way more hurtful!" Cheruvim exclaimed.

The road to their destination was long, but the conversation was lively, so the time passed quickly.

"Bweeh, yesh... Please, someone, carry me..." Rem pleaded.

Of course, they'd been instructed by Addams to refrain from

using their powers because it would stand out, so one of them was now near death, unable to summon her underlings. In the end, though, Gloria took on the duty of carrying Rem.

"Ah, there it is. That mansion is our destination. I think?" Gloria said.

"Indeed, that is the place Kelvin prepared as our hideout," Cheruvim confirmed. "I was told it will be furnished for us as well. You should thank me for negotiating for all of us."

"You say negotiating...but I think...Kelvin just took pity on you...while you were drunk..." Rem said between heavy breaths.

"You too, Rem?!" Cheruvim exclaimed. "And seriously, the moment you get to rest a bit on someone's back, you come out with that?!"

"It's been a while since I've walked so much. I want to put this hideout to use already," said Gloria.

"I agree. I hope there's good tea inside..." Isabel added.

"Urgh...I'm so tired... I want to lie down on a sofa..." Rem complained, sniffling.

"Oh, hey!" Cheruvim exclaimed. But to his annoyance, the rest of the group ignored him and entered the building.

"Oh! This is pretty nice. Easily a passing grade," said Gloria.

"Wow, this is so nice!" Isabel exclaimed.

"Sofa... Sofa..." Rem gasped.

Though it was located in the mountains, the Western-style building was fairly large. All the provided furnishings were of high quality, and there was enough food to last several weeks. They would be able to live there without problems.

"I found the kitchen. I'll make some tea now," said Isabel.

"I'll help," Gloria offered.

"Sofa, relieve me of my exhaustion..." Rem muttered.

"Don't you think you're being way too adaptable?" Cheruvim retorted.

Despite all the fuss, tea was made, and the group took a breather together in the salon. Cheruvim leaned against a wall while Gloria and Isabel sat around a table. Rem, however, lay down on a sofa.

"Wait, what am I doing, relaxing like this?!" Cheruvim shouted

suddenly.

"Uh, um, sorry to interrupt while you're thinking, but I was hoping you could explain the situation soon," Isabel said meekly.

"Isabel's right. It's all well and good that we came to this hideaway, but we've heard almost nothing about the current situation," Gloria agreed. "I was a hostage, so why was I freed? Why was I allowed to meet up with all of you, and why were we offered this place? It seems that spell prohibiting certain actions is still in place, but this treatment is absurd regardless. The limitations on our artificial bodies are gone too, probably thanks to the floating continent being destroyed... Cheruvim, if you're going to claim to be our leader, explain everything properly. Now!"

"Agh, you're as annoyingly naggy as ever!" Cheruvim complained. "If you're going to go that far, then fine, I'll tell you! Listen well!"

"Ugh, my exhaustion is turning into sleepiness. I can't..." Rem drifted off.

"Hey, you there! Don't lose to the temptations of that soft sofa!" Cheruvim yelled. "What I'm about to say is important!"

His efforts bore no fruit as Rem lost to the allures of the sofa. It seemed not even Addams's confidante could resist such a powerful object.

"That thing makes gods useless. There is nothing we can do," said Gloria.

"Yeah... Um, we'll listen well enough for Rem, so please forgive her..." Isabel offered meekly.

"Tch! All of you are way too soft on Rem! Fine. Luckily, we have time," said Cheruvim. "As you wish, I will explain everything *thoroughly* to you two."

According to him, the Ten Authorities were in a state of ceasefire. Addams had been revived, so they no longer had any reason to harm the mortals on the surface. Also, no other victims had appeared beyond those lost in the battle of Isla Heaven. Cheruvim told them who had died, including Hazama, which had led to the Ten Authorities, including those who had been captured, being released with conditions.

The reason the limitations on their artificial bodies had been

undone was still unknown, but right about now, Addams was surely talking to Luquille's faction about it, Cheruvim explained. Regardless of what was actually happening, it seemed he really believed it.

"The condition is that we cannot use our Authorities without permission from Addams. Also, Kelvin has placed a spell on us," said Cheruvim.

"I said the part about the spell already. Damn, this is so annoying!" Gloria groused.

"Mmnnn... What was the spell about? Something like only being able to attack Kelvin? Why is it okay to attack Kelvin?" Rem asked sleepily.

"Because he's a weirdo," said Cheruvim flatly.

"Huh?!" Rem squeaked. She was suddenly on the verge of tears, wondering if it was safe to have a spell cast on her by a weirdo. Also, as one might be able to divine from the conversation, Rem and Isabel had been enchanted with Heart Calm, just like Cheruvim and Gloria.

"Hmph, I even said that I would comply with whatever was agreed on, even without such regulations. Kelvin is such a worrywart," said Cheruvim.

"Uh, erm...Cheruvim-san?" Isabel spoke up.

"Hmm? What is it?"

"I'm just a little concerned that, um...other than the limiting spell, you also have a brainwashing curse cast on you. Have you...noticed?" Isabel asked.

"What? A curse? What are you talking about? I'm normal," said Cheruvim.

"Oh, no, the curse is just of the type that makes you think that," said Isabel. "It's very cleverly hidden, enough that I only noticed now. Uh, erm, well...I'm sorry if I'm mistaken!"

"Heh, then it must be a figment of your imagination," Cheruvim scoffed. "I was cursed without my knowing, you say? Do I really look that foolish to y—"

"Isabel, just hurry up and uncurse this fool," Gloria interrupted.

"Ah, right," Isabel replied.

"Hey, now!" Cheruvim yelped.

Gloria ambushed him with a binding spell, allowing Isabel to attempt to uncurse him in the span of a single breath. As one might expect of a pair of sisters, their teamwork was perfect. Finally, the curse was lifted.

"Was I...a fool?" Cheruvim asked.

"Good for you; you finally realized the truth," said Gloria.

Cheruvim's thoughts had been railroaded thanks to Shutola's Retributive Persuasion. Now that he'd realized that, he hung his head and fell to his knees in shock.

"Hey, calm down, Cheruvim-san," said Isabel. "From what I can tell, there's a high possibility Luquille was also cursed. So, um, it would probably have been very hard to avoid..."

"Well, as a result, Addams was very receptive to talking. Shouldn't this count as a good result?" Gloria asked.

"I agree...I think? Honestly, that vampire's strength is an unknown," Isabel said, trailing off hesitantly. "Addams is strong, but it wouldn't have been a good idea to fight right after being revived. It's all thanks to you, Cheruvim..."

"Is that so?" he asked after a pause. "I had an inkling that was the case. So I acted like a leader without even meaning to, as expected of me."

That caused the other three to pause in silence.

He'd rallied quickly, and the three girls directed awkward, incredulous looks at him.

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"Hey, was Cheruvim always like this? I thought he was a more formal, proper person," Gloria whispered.

"Um, it may just be temporary, but he's still the leader now. He must be riding a high from that. I'm sure he'll get better once he gets used to it, so I think we should just be nice and watch over him for now," Isabel whispered back.

"I feel like he's too motivated, and he's going to end up going around in circles... Eld really was better as a leader."

At any rate, Cheruvim's curse had been safely lifted.

“Addams being revived is a joyous thing, but it hurts that we lost half our number in that battle. Will Patrick and Ridwan not be returning?” Gloria asked.

“They’re not here, so that should be your answer. Ridwan became Kelvin’s Follower, and Patrick turned coat and joined Luquille’s camp,” Cheruvim answered.

“Uh, erm...I understand that Ridwan-san lost to his foe and had his will broken, but, um...why did Patrick-san go to the other side? He didn’t seem like he was being threatened or anything,” Isabel said hesitantly.

“Apparently, Luquille’s side will be more fun and full of surprises. Tch! Betraying us for such a ridiculous reason...” Cheruvim muttered.

“You’re one to talk, Cheruvim. You betrayed us too,” Rem retorted sleepily.

“Rem...is it just me or has your attitude toward me gotten much harsher?”

“It’s...just you...I think?” Rem replied innocently. Her reply was immediate, but her gaze was flitting around suspiciously.

“Still, you’re right. Assuming a battle with the false gods is awaiting us, our lack of combat strength is a problem,” Cheruvim admitted. “Baldogg’s ability to create was unparalleled, and there was a lot I could have learned from Hao. As for Hazama...well, despite his personality...”

“Right... Hao-san was the only one who could rival my other self in combat, and Addams-sama trusted him,” said Isabel. “Um, as for Baldogg-san, if not for the large amount of divine tools he created, we would never have been able to fulfill our wish to revive Addams. And Hazama-san is, well, yeah...”

“Hazama would definitely have betrayed us someday. In fact, I noticed him shooting weird looks at everyone from time to time. Just remembering that makes me want to cry,” Rem muttered.

“You three are even harsher toward Hazama,” Cheruvim noted. “Though, to be fair, I agree with basically everything you said.”

Dorothy had judged Hazama quite harshly, but his comrades in the Ten Authorities didn’t see him in a much better light.

“Hmm, our loss of strength really does hurt,” said Addams. “Even

more so because we've gone through so much together. My heart hurts as if I am missing parts of my own body. Hao, Baldogg, Hazama—and finally, Eld. Though they were each strong in different ways, they had wonderful potential. But it's because of their sacrifice that I am able to be here as a normal person. So I will work hard enough for their share too, though I am just a normal person."

"Yep, exactly. Eld aside, the rest were our comrades, despite the problems they each had on the inside," Cheruvim admitted. "Addams is right, we should stop speaking ill of the dead— Wait, Addams?! When did you arrive?!"

He turned around as he spoke to see Addams holding a large barrel of sake on one shoulder and some grilled chicken skewers in his other hand as souvenirs. He was wearing a happi coat with the kanji for "festival" written on the back.

Cheruvim did a double take out of sheer surprise. He was silent, but his expression said multitudes. He hadn't expected Addams to appear, but the other three were in the same boat.

"Addams-sama?! Um, er...what are you...?" Isabel trailed off, too unsure to finish the question.

"Ah, yes. I have returned from the drinking party we called 'a meeting' with some good sake and good food as souvenirs. You may partake," Addams said.

"Oh, um, well, thank you...for the consideration?" Isabel replied uncertainly.


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With that, Isabel took the paper-wrapped package of grilled chicken from Addams. The food was still warm and tasty. He had likely returned from the Eastern Continent quite fast.

"No, no, don't bury the lede. What's with that outfit, Addams?! Did you not go to talk with Kelvin and Luquille's camp?!" Cheruvim shouted.

"Mm...hmmm? That is traditional garb from Toraj, a major country on the Eastern Continent. The character on the back is quite chic," Rem answered sleepily.

"Oh? As expected of my confidante, though I am but a normal person, Rem," Addams interrupted. "You not only know where this outfit came from but were able to distinguish at first glance how stylish it is as well."

"Ehe... I studied in the library during my free time when we were on Isla Heaven. Mweh heh heh..." Rem sounded quite proud. She was breathing heavily, excited and happy that Addams had complimented her.

"Rem, you... What did you think you were doing during those trying times?!" Cheruvim scolded her.

"Huh?! But... But I thought it was important to always act composed no matter where or when... *Hic*..." Rem's mood instantly turned around.

"Hey! Vim, you idiot, don't make Rem cry!" Gloria shouted.

Isabel backed her up. "Yeah, I mean...don't you feel sorry for her?"

"I'm the one at fault here?!" Cheruvim exclaimed in shock. "And...'Vim'?!"

"Stop this. You are all comrades who have survived battlefields together. Stop arguing over silly things. In times like this, just drink," Addams advised them. "Drink will make you more honest and allow you to overcome your barriers." With that, he set down the large barrel of sake with a heavy thud and took out enough large cups for everyone.

"Addams...just one question: You said you went to a drinking party you called a meeting, yes?" Cheruvim asked.

"I did," Addams confirmed. "It was a fruitful party."

"And after all that, you plan to drink more?" Cheruvim asked.

Addams seemed confused. "The grilled chicken I bought as a snack is still warm, you realize that? I hurried here just fast enough that I wouldn't affect my surroundings."

"No! That's not what I was getting at!" Cheruvim yelled.

"Cheruvim-san...please, calm down!" Rem interjected. "Addams-sama has been sealed away for a long time, which prevented him from enjoying his favorite pastime: drinking. This is probably recoil from that, so just let it be for now. Erm, would you...be okay with that?"

"Shouldn't there be limits on these kinds of things?!" Cheruvim yelled again.

In the end, aside from Rem, who couldn't drink, everyone participated in the unexpected after-party.

"This sake is a good brand," said Addams. "Its name is 'God-Killer,' and I was told today that it's capable of downing even the strongest of the land it came from in one sip."

"God-Killer, you say?! I don't know how we should respond to that name..." Gloria muttered.

"More importantly, Addams, you caused trouble again over there, didn't you?!" Cheruvim shouted.

"Now, now, Cheruvim-san! Let it go, remember?" Isabel said.

Rem sucked in a breath. "This chicken is delicious."

"Right? Enjoy the chicken as much as you like, Rem, to make up for not being able to drink this sake," said Addams. "As for those who *can* drink, do so with the accompaniment of the snacks. They pair better than you expect."

"Mm? You're right," said Gloria.

"They do!" Isabel exclaimed.

"Tch! You damn drunks," Cheruvim cursed.

In the end, the Ten Authorities enjoyed themselves.

"More importantly, Addams, don't you have something to say to us?" Cheruvim asked. "You went to see Kelvin and the others with a specific purpose, didn't you?"

"Hmm? Ah, right," said Addams. "I am a normal person now, so I forgot. Truthfully." The air he was giving off instantly changed from

someone who was happily enjoying a party to a very serious demeanor. Even his voice changed. “There is something I must tell you all. This is an important matter that will determine our future. Listen carefully.”

“Oh? It’s that serious, Addams?” Cheruvim said. “Heh! Finally, a development I like.”

“Wh-What happened?” Isabel asked.

“Let’s listen to Addams first,” said Gloria.

Rem simply gulped audibly.

One member reacted with joy, his mouth forming a smile. One prepared herself elegantly. One reacted with panic, and another continued to eat grilled chicken. The reactions were varied, but everyone was paying close attention to Addams.

“All of us will be attending Kelvin’s wedding ceremony!” Addams announced. “It will take place about half a year from now, and we must prepare thoroughly for a surprise event! Let us liven up this joyous occasion with all our might!”

Immediately after, Cheruvim made the biggest pratfall of his life.

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The Grelbarelka Empire was a great nation that ruled over the entirety of the Northern Continent. This nation, where many different species of demonkind live under the rule of Demon Lord Gustav, was surprisingly advanced in the medical field. The reason for that was one of the Four Demonic Generals, Vegalzeld. His efforts were essential to their progress, and listing the things he’d done would take quite a long time, so it will be omitted for now. At any rate, he had brought the empire’s medical technology into a new age. Because of that, Luquille, whose condition made healing through magic difficult, was sent there, where she was even now continuing treatment.

“And then, I said this: ‘Stop with the cheating. It’s boring. Trusting yourself to fate is what makes gambling exciting, isn’t it?!’ And I’ll never forget the face he made then. My passion and the shock of his cheating being discovered hit my opponent straight on,

so of course that was the natural outcome...” Patrick said.

Luquille said nothing in response.

“It’s a little weird to say this about myself, but my line delivery was genius,” Patrick continued. “Ah, no, I wasn’t really acting or anything, per se. It all came from me, naturally. It was just so cool that I couldn’t help but think to myself, ‘Wow, I am so cool right now!’ Oh man, if I’d known I’d say something that good, I’d have tried to record myself. Yeah, that’s my only regret. So, the god I was facing was so impressed he swore not to cheat anymore. I gotta say, being an influential god sure is tough...”

Still, Luquille said nothing. But Patrick kept going.

“But the goddess of gambling is a fickle mistress. I ended up losing everything after that! The way I lost was insane. I said something so cool, but my opponent didn’t hold back at all! I was taken for everything I had, including the clothes off my back. I didn’t even have underwear by the end... Now that I think about it, he was definitely cheating! If not, I would never have lost like that!”

The deserter of the Ten Authorities, Patrick Pluto, rambled without end. It was good that Luquille gave no response whatsoever, but it only allowed him to continue stringing words together about anything he felt like. He was supposed to be a visitor and well-wisher, but he went on, unrelenting, as he peeled an apple.

Finally, Luquille spoke up. “Could you not fill my head with such useless talk?”

Up until now, she had been lying down silently; this was the first time she’d opened her mouth today. Also, she was clearly angry, with a vein twitching on her face as she tried to send a message for him to just leave through her sharp gaze.

“Ohhh, you were awake, Luquille?!” Patrick exclaimed. “Your eyes were open, but you didn’t say anything, so I thought it was just a weird sleeping habit!”

“There’s a lot of problems in that statement I’d like to call attention to, but instead I’ll ask: Why did you keep talking to me despite thinking I was asleep?”

“Oh, I was just sharing one of my secret stories in place of a lullaby. You would’ve been able to sleep pleasantly, no?” Patrick

replied.

After a pause, Luquille said, "Oh yes, definitely. I'm surprised how absolutely filled with unpleasant emotions I am." The sharpness of her gaze suddenly leveled up.

"Heh heh! If you can talk like that, it's proof you've recovered a lot. That's good; I was worried for a moment there," said Patrick. "When you first arrived, you really weren't in any state to talk. I know I've said this a lot, but you pushed yourself way too far."

"While your advice is sound, I really don't want to be told that by someone who gambled away everything they had until they were naked," Luquille shot back.

"Good, good, that's the spirit," said Patrick. "You're acting more like yourself. Ah, want an apple? I cut it into the shape of a leaf." With that, he offered Luquille an apple cut into a strangely elaborate shape.

There was a pause before Luquille spoke. "This is quite skillful work. Normally people cut apples into rabbits, at most."

"Oh, no need to gush. It's actually easier than it looks," Patrick replied. "Hmm, or would you have preferred a rabbit? Do you actually like cute things, Luquille?"

"I'll burn you and that apple to a crisp," she said flatly. But in the end, she accepted the apple and ate it slowly.

Patrick and the apple were able to escape being burned.

After eating, Luquille said, "Thank you. By the way, where are Maria-san and the others?"

"They're wandering around the world as usual," Patrick replied. "Or so I'd like to say, but today is the day for those talks you kept going on about. The two of them are going in your place since you're stuck here."

"I...see," said Luquille. "I am extremely disappointed I'm unable to attend myself, but I suppose that would be impossible. I'll leave it to Maria-san."

"Whoa there, that's a surprisingly meek response. Aren't you worried?" Patrick asked. "*That* Maria-chan is the one going, you know? She said stuff about being ladylike in this world, but she's definitely causing a fuss. Something interesting is going on there. I'd

bet on it."

"You really do like gambling," Luquille muttered. "But I've already placed my bets. I struggled all I could against the dark clouds hanging over Melfina-sama and me, and placed all my hopes for a wonderful future on Maria-san. I am content with whatever she does. Everything she brings about will surely lead to the future I hope for."

Patrick let out an impressed sigh. "You sure can talk. So let's get you healthy again first. According to that doctor, Vegalzeld, it'll take about half a year for your recovery, including rehabilitation, right? Too bad your arm won't come back, though."

Patrick's eyes shifted to Luquille's missing arm. After summoning Maria, Luquille's transplanted arm had mummified. After she'd been brought to this medical facility, the arm had been judged to be unsalvageable and was amputated, which had led to her current state. The fact that she hadn't died after summoning a god from another world was already considered a good outcome, yet the price was a painful one, considering her future.

"If only Isla Heaven's research facility remained, I would have been able to make another arm for myself," said Luquille. "But from what I've heard, that will be impossible."

"Yeah. A certain someone destroyed the entire continent," said Patrick. "The fallen pieces are floating on the surface, but I think we can assume the underground parts are all gone. Wouldn't searching for a prosthetic be faster? I heard that the female Hero who beat Rem has one."

"Ah, a prosthetic from Toraj," said Luquille. "That's not a bad idea, coming from you. But resorting to that would lead to trouble down the road..."

"Huh? What trouble?" Patrick asked.

"Oh, nothing. Just that in order to acquire a prosthetic of that level, I would need the help of the country's ruler, which is something I'd rather avoid if at all possible."

"Uh...well, first...why don't you start with who this ruler is? Who do you want to avoid so badly?" Patrick asked.

But Luquille said nothing. Instead of replying, she gave him an

extremely annoyed look.

"I'm comin' iiinnn!" came a singsong voice. "The diva vampire, Miss Worldwide, Maria-chan has come to see you!" The awkward mood was broken by the cheerful voice of Maria as she entered the room. She was accompanied by a distinct smell.

"Maria-chan?!" Patrick yelped. "Huh? Aren't you supposed to be on the Eastern Continent? Wait, what is that smell?"

"A treat I brought from the Eastern Continent," Maria answered. "I actually wanted to bring back some sake as well, but the giantess at reception got mad at me and took it. Oopsie! But I protected this chicken with my life, so enjoy it! Here!"

"Ah, how considerate of you. Thanks. Wow, it's still warm?!" Patrick exclaimed.

"Well, I did rush back to preserve its tastiness," Maria boasted. "Oh, more importantly, I have a huge announcement!"

"This is a hospital, Maria-san, so please lower your voice a little," Luquille requested. "What did you talk about over there?"

"Right, so...Kelvin's getting married, and we're attending the wedding!" she replied.

It took a moment for Luquille to process her words. "What?"

The atmosphere in the room immediately froze over.

There was a pause before Luquille said, "What do you mean by that? Please tell me in detail. Quickly. Right now."

"Calm down first, Luquille. You're making the food cold," Patrick said.

The freezing pressure Luquille was emitting didn't just weigh on the others mentally, but physically as well. As proof, the hot chicken was now frozen.

"Oh, sorry," Maria said, the singsong lilt still in her voice even in this situation. "Was that a land mine for Luquille-chan? Oopsie!"

"If you step on a land mine by accident, you usually don't escape with your life, but... Anyway, what did you mean?" Patrick asked. "That Grim Reaper didn't propose this idea to incense Luquille, did he?"

"Close, but not quite, I think?" Maria replied.

"Patrick, make the arrangements for my discharge right now,"

Luquille commanded. “That damn lust-addled Grim Reaper will die by my hands.”

“No, no, no, wait, calm down! And Maria-chan, don’t say such misleading things, please!” Patrick yelled.

Maria giggled tauntingly. After that, Patrick used Mel’s handkerchief, something he’d prepared for a moment like this (or rather: something he’d luckily picked up on Isla Heaven) and somehow got Luquille to settle down.

“Ugh, Melfina-sama...what a nice smell...” Luquille muttered.

“And now she’s crying. What do we do?” Patrick asked.

“Hmmm...even I’m full of guilt over this, I think? So let’s talk seriously,” Maria said.

“Do that from the beginning, I’m begging you...” Patrick muttered.

Maria plopped down on a stool and started talking again. “The thing about going to the wedding is real,” she began. “But the form is different from normal.”

“Form? What do you mean?” Patrick asked.

“For starters, Kelvin isn’t getting married to just Melfina. There will be seven brides, Melfina included, which means there will be that many days of weddings in a row,” said Maria. “Meaning it’ll be around a week long.”

“Wow, giving off that real harem feel,” Patrick spat. “But I guess I shouldn’t be surprised, given I used to be a god. Is it unusual for mortals?”

“*Who do you think you are, Kelvin?!*” Luquille screeched.

“Seems like it’s unusual,” Patrick said after a pause.

Luquille had started gnashing her teeth with bone-crushing strength. Seeing that, Patrick quietly realized that she really was on the verge of breaking her own teeth, so he gave her another of Melfina’s belongings.

“Whew, thank goodness Kuon pilfered some goddess goods from Grim Reaper’s place. If not for her, Luquille would have destroyed herself,” said Patrick.

“It’s literally just stealing, so I really had to ask a lot of Kuon,” said Maria. “Well, I left one of my limited edition goods as payment,

so I'd say they actually profited in the end!"

"Limited edition goods, huh?" Patrick muttered with a strained chuckle.

In the end, it would take some time before Kelvin and Mel realized that her belongings had been switched out.

"Getting back on topic, this string of weddings will be held in different places," said Maria. "Each bride will have her turn, and the ceremony will be somewhere important to her."

"Uh-huh... That's a bit of a trip," Patrick commented. "Wait, then it could turn into a world tour depending on where the locations are. While it'll be tough on the people the weddings are for, won't it be even tougher for the guests to keep up?"

"On that front, the guests for each bride will be different, so I think it'll be pretty rare for someone to attend all the weddings," said Maria. "An entire week has gotta be a bit much unless that person is really close to all of them. But I plan on attending them all anyway!"

"Um...does that mean we'll be attending all of them too?" Patrick asked.

"Oh no, of course not. In the first place, the only one Luquille-chan is interested in is Melfina, that former Goddess, right? You two will only be coming for that one!"

"I see. Hearing that makes me a little reli—" Patrick started.

"Kelvin's dead meat," Luquille said out of nowhere.

"Scratch that, I guess," Patrick finished.

Are we really going to take Luquille to a wedding when she looks ready to kill? He tried to communicate that question with his gaze. They already knew that Luquille had no interest in any wedding other than Melfina's. However, it was because she was so interested in Melfina that it would be a bad idea to take her along. Patrick knew that perfectly well.

"Now, now, no need to be so worried," Maria said. "I haven't even mentioned the most interesting part of these ceremonies we've been invited to!"

"It's going to get even more interesting? Please, I'm begging for this to stop while I'm still able to digest all of it," Patrick muttered. "So, what's the interesting part?"

"Well, ya see, this wedding—all of them, actually—allow people to object!" Maria revealed.

"Uh...what? Erm...meaning?" Patrick asked. He tilted his head as he continued trying to mollify Luquille, who was growling like a rabid dog and biting the former god's arm.

"Like I said, the plan for the ceremony includes a moment where you can declare your objection!" Maria exclaimed. "Of course, it's part of the entertainment, but I hear there will be some people actually objecting. Kelvin says that his goal is to deal with these dissatisfactions in one fell swoop."

"Deal with... What does he plan to do, specifically?"

"A good old-fashioned punch-out of youth, of course!" Maria exclaimed. "Or I guess a slash-out would be fine too? Blows, cuts, and attempted murder are inseparable from weddings, after all!"

"Uh...hrmmm..."

Patrick was doubtful. Was this a joke? Of course, he understood that it wasn't, but from his perspective as a former god, including this aspect of "youth" at a wedding seemed insane.

"Now that I've said it out loud, I realize this event is just an excuse for the groom and brides to have a series of battles with their detractors," Maria said. "Like, 'If you have objections, object with your fists!' or on the other end, 'I'll only accept if you show me you can overcome this obstacle!' Maybe they think something like, 'If we can get through this, everyone will accept us as husband and wife!'"

"There's gotta be a limit to how much force is allowed," Patrick said. "But I guess...it kind of works?"

It was a surprise to him that someone would take such a stance during their own wedding, despite how "might makes right" this world tended to be. Inside his heart, Patrick's emotions went past exasperation to a sort of respect.

"Is that all true, Maria-san?" Luquille asked. "If so, I will of course be going to Melfina-sama's wedding to exercise that right."

"Argh! Luquille!" Patrick yelped. "Don't just turn all calm so suddenly..."

Unlike before, Luquille was now totally calm. Maybe her rage had

boiled so hot that she'd gone back around to being cool. Her current vibes were actually scary, but at least she'd stopped biting Patrick's arm. He hesitated as he rubbed the clear teeth marks that were still on his skin, wondering if this was an okay sort of calm.

"Yeah, thought so," said Maria. "So here's the invitation. Write down what you want to do on it."

Maria handed over the letter. On it were entries for whether or not the invitee would be attending, and also one in case the invitee wanted to participate in the entertainment portion.

"There are scheduling limitations, so only one person is allowed to object at each ceremony," said Maria. "If no one else wants to object, then you'll have the right to challenge him, so I guess it's all up to the other participants now."

"Only one... What happens if there are more who want to object?" Luquille asked.

"The organizers will gather up all the invitations to make sure there's no overlap," Maria relayed. "Then, if there are multiple hopeful participants, they will be contacted and one of them will be chosen by the day of. I was told they'd leave how the person is decided to those who want to participate, but I can say now it doesn't seem like any method will be peaceful. Apparently the organizers will step in in the rare case that no decision can be reached, but... Hmmm, I'm getting so excited! There's definitely gonna be trouble!"

While pondering why Maria looked so happy and why being in this room was so fun, Patrick looked up at the ceiling and bit down on an apple.

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Today was a really tiring day. If this exhaustion had been from battle, I would have been able to sleep well tonight, but unfortunately it was exhaustion from what was basically wining and dining people.

Seriously, I'm so mentally tired. Yeah. Totally exhausted.

The drinking party with Addams, Maria, and Tsubaki that resulted

in Ema's noble sacrifice got really wild before it eventually ended. The "talking" portion of it resulted in more progress than I'd expected too, so I was quite satisfied. Still, I couldn't help but feel like everyone was drinking too much, and being forced to keep up with them was troubling.

Anyway, after the drinking party ended, I was about to go home, but Tsubaki insisted I accept her goodwill and stay in her castle for the night. But rather than goodwill, it was more like she didn't give me a choice, even though it was still nice...the line was a little blurry. Also, it looked like Kuon, who was penniless and homeless, would be joining me, so Kuon and I, along with Sylvia and Ema, who had been guests in Toraj for a while now, all made for the castle as a group.

What awaited us inside was an after-party in the form of karaoke—or rather, Tsubaki on a stage, since she was totally already feeling like an idol. We were treated to her wonderful voice, so I was actually quite happy. However, all the songs she sang were enka. Is an idol really allowed to sing enka? Out of her unit members, while Goldiana might have, Maria at least really didn't fit the bill of an enka singer.

"Oh man, I totally ate!" Kuon exclaimed. "I think I ingested an entire year's worth of chicken!"

"Mm, and the real charm of grilled chicken is you still feel like eating again tomorrow," said Sylvia.

After the mini-concert, I availed myself to a Torajian cypress wood bath before running into Kuon and Sylvia in the lounge, which led to a light chat.

"You're still talking about grilled chicken?"

"Of course," Sylvia replied. "I am about to return to my room and enjoy the chicken I bought as a souvenir."

"Same here!" Kuon said.

"You're going to eat even more..."

Even though they didn't consume as much as Mel, these two were basically living stomachs.

"That reminds me, are you sure you shouldn't have gone back with Maria, Kuon? She said something about heading to the Northern Continent to visit Luquille, didn't she?"

"Unlike her, I can't fly," said Kuon. "She was excited about giving Luquille the grilled chicken while it was still warm, and I can't swim nearly as fast as she can fly. There was no way we could go together. In the first place, it's dangerous to swim after drinking."

"Oh...sure... Of course?"

Hearing Kuon bring up common sense like that was weird. *I wonder why...*

"More importantly, this old lady's more interested in wedding talk. Are you sure about inviting that wicked god and Maria? Also, that objection system you've set up just seems like suicide to me," said Kuon.

"You look like you're having fun despite your worried words. Am I wrong, or are you thinking of participating?"

"Hmm... I think I'll consider it depending on what everyone else does," Kuon answered. "If there aren't many participants, I might want to slip into an open slot."

"Huh? That seems unusually half-hearted of you."

"I mean, there've got to be people with actual grudges or objections to your marriages, right, Kelvin? They have way more right than someone who just got here like me. And since only seven people can participate, I don't want to push them aside for a spot."

"I'm thankful for the consideration, but personally, I'd have liked you to come at me with more gusto."

"Heh heh! A maiden's heart is complex," said Kuon.

"Who's a maiden now? Not to mention, I can only think of a few people who would want to participate off the top of my head."

"Even off the top of your head, I think knowing a few people who would object to your marriages is a bad sign," said Kuon.

"Huh?"

Isn't it...normal?

"Mm, if I participate in this objection event, will I be fed?" Sylvia asked.

"Fed? I mean, we'll feed all our guests whether they object or not. So this isn't something to do to get more food."

"I see. Then I don't care."

"Uh, okay?"

Oh, Sylvia, were you planning to object strenuously if you'd get food out of it? Would you have participated? I'm not in a position to talk, but I don't think that's a good habit.

"Aha ha! Sylvia-chan's really consistent, huh?" Kuon said.

"Mm, my curiosity is insatiable," Sylvia agreed.

"What does that even mean?" I asked.

"I think I get those feelings a little!" Kuon exclaimed.

Uh, hello? Kuon-san? Where did the common sense you just brought out go? Did you throw it away somewhere? Well, while you're at it, why don't you participate in the entertainment?

"Then who do you think is going to object, Kelvin-kun?" Kuon asked.

"Hmmm, let's see... Maria and Addams are probably shoo-ins since they were so enthusiastic about the idea. Then there's Luquille—she's almost certainly going to object to Mel's wedding. My father-in-law, Sera's father, definitely wants to kill me, and Azgrad from Trycen has a sister complex, so I think he'll object too."

"Mm-hmm. Then there are about five entrants so far? Huh, that's surprisingly few, no?" Kuon commented.

"Those are just the definite participants. There are also some who might apply just for fun, but I can't say any of those people will apply for sure. I mean, look, there's the Former Hero, the director of the Adventurer's Guild, a certain Beast King, and someone you met very recently may be plotting to send someone as well."

"Uh...sorry that this old lady's slow on the uptake, but aren't those all people close to you? You were roundabout, but you called out Tsubaki-chan as well," Kuon commented.

"Heh! So you noticed."

Indeed, this world was full of people whose actions were even more unpredictable than Addams's. To me, that was a great thing, but anyone who tried to measure it on the scale of common sense was often met with pain.

"Keep this a secret, but Tsubaki-sama was the one who suggested the objection event. I figure she's going to use it to make some sort of move. In fact, I'm sure of it. I'm even thinking she might send Sylvia and Ema after me, since they're under her employ

as guest generals right now."

"What? Me?" Sylvia asked. She pointed at herself, her head cocked. She probably thought this subject had nothing to do with her. To be fair, she'd literally just dismissed it.

"It's true that as the organizer of this event, I can say that there are no plans to use food as a prize. But I can't say that Tsubaki-sama won't try to lure you into participating by promising to treat you to Toraj's most delicious dishes if you beat me or something like that. If she does, what will you do then, Sylvia?"

"I would...become quite motivated, I guess?" Sylvia replied, sounding confused.

"Right?"

I wasn't sure how I felt about someone objecting to my marriage just for food, but the purpose of the event was already kind of hazy, since Maria and Addams would be participating. I had stated the possibility of such a thing happening just now, but I planned to allow pretty much anything. Indeed, if everyone would just battle me with no hard feelings, who cared about the reason? That was how I felt.

"I see, well, if participation is that breezy, I'll think about taking part too," said Sylvia.

"Whoa there, so you're in the mood now? Even if the participants increase, Kuon will probably manage to secure a spot anyway, so I'm actually getting my hopes up real high."

"It's gotta be weird for a groom to get excited about objections, but I guess it was inevitable," said Kuon. "I'm an old lady now, but I'll think about it."

"Depending on the circumstances, I will also try my best," said Sylvia. "I will be sure to make good on the promise I made during the promotion ceremony."

Her breathing was slightly elevated. She must have been hoping for a feast.

Still, what is this about a promise from the promotion ceremony? Did I promise something?

"A promise, huh? Smells like romance to this old lady," Kuon teased. "What was the promise, Sylvia-chan? Tell me tell me!" She was even more interested than me.

"Mm, I promised to kill Kelvin with all my might," said Sylvia.

And that's Sylvia's answer. Ah, I think I remember that. How nostalgic.

"Wow, not even a hint of romance," Kuon said after a pause. "This promise is weird and worrying too, Kelvin-kun. But I guess this old lady will just have to chalk it up to the whims of a battle junkie?"

"O-Oh, no, the circumstances were just special back then. I needed to avoid instant death."

This time around, I planned to have Colette use her techniques to avoid instant death during the ceremonies.

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When it was time to return home the next day, I was thankfully allowed to use the teleportation gate under Toraj's castle. That made the journey really quick.

"Oh, Kelvin, why not stay a little longer?" Tsubaki offered. "I would allow it. It would come with permission to get a sneak peek at my singing practice, you realize? What a great deal!"

"I'm thankful for the offer, and I would love to take you up on it, but I have a newborn child at home waiting for me."

Tsubaki had a hold on my arm and wouldn't let go. And she'd been making impassioned appeals for me to stay since morning. Since my party wasn't present, she was being far more aggressive than usual.

"Grrr, when you put it that way, I can't very well keep you here, can I?" she grumbled. "I'm looking forward to the ceremony, Kelvin...though the day I debut as an idol might be closer."

"Oh...uh, you mean that talk about forming a new idol unit? I'm curious, since it'll be like looking at a horr— I mean, I would love to see your debut, so please tell me when the time comes. I'll be sure to clear my schedule."

"Good. It is a promise," said Tsubaki. "When the time comes, I will be sure to save you a seat at the very front."

A seat at the very front, huh? I'll just have to pray that I don't end up right in front of Goldiana.

"See you later, Sylvia, Kuon."

"Mm, later," said Sylvia.

"Later! I'm always up to spar, so invite me anytime!" Kuon said.

Ema wasn't present due to a hangover. Since Tsubaki was generous enough to offer her a free room and meals, Kuon had decided to stay in Toraj for a while.

I wonder if the next time I see her, Kuon will be part of Toraj's military. I mean, I don't mind, but I'm scared because I can see her being tricked so easily by Tsubaki-sama's words. Maria, your friend is on the verge of being absorbed by a local power.

"Activating the teleportation gate."

"Oh, I guess now's not the time to be worrying. Well then!"

I jumped into the teleportation gate, leaving Toraj.

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"Heya, Kelvin-kun. Welcome back. I heard about what you're doing, Kelvin-kun. You've got something fun planned for your wedding, don't you, Kelvin-kun? Hey, Kelvin-kun, I'm wondering if I should participate too."

"You're like this as soon as we see each other..."

As soon as I stepped through to the other side of the gate, I found Director Shin lying in wait for me with a wide smile on her face. I wanted to ask why she was there, but this was the teleportation gate at the guild headquarters, the only one that existed in Pub. Since Director Shin, the one in charge, had to give her permission to use this gate, she'd obviously known I was coming. Still, it was surprising that she'd already heard about what I was planning for my wedding. It had only been put in place yesterday... Word traveled really fast.

"I'd welcome your participation, but are you sure? There are a limited number of slots, and you might end up competing with the likes of Maria and Addams."

"Oh, Kelvin-kun, I bless your marriages from the bottom of my heart!" Shin exclaimed. "Now that I think about it, you've come from my former hometown and contributed so much to my guild. Not to

mention, you're going to be marrying Ange-kun! I shouldn't be messing around pretending to object; I should be fully celebrating this! Yes!"

"Ha ha! Your tongue is as slick as ever."

She had instantly made a perfect about-face on her previous stance. It seemed that not even Director Shin, the super free spirit, wanted to compete with those two.

"By the way, who did you hear this news from? Certain drinking friends?"

"Nope. Unfortunately, my drinking friends haven't come this way," Shin replied. "Instead, I heard a snippet from one of your wives-to-be. She sounded so happy as she told me about it!"

"So not just a snippet; you heard the whole thing!"

Then the culprit is either Sera or Ange. Oh well, it's not like it was bad to tell her. In fact, I'd prefer there to be more entrants.

"Actually, won't you try to enter, director? You might have a chance, even against them."

"I won't, even if you butter me up like that," Shin replied. "Unlike you, Kelvin-kun, I am not a battle junkie. In fact, I know that I don't stand the slightest chance. I will use my freedom and take the option of not participating!"

"You'd go that far?!"

"Yes, I would," said Shin. "It's a bit late, but I'll warn you now: I don't think it's a good idea to fight those two, and this is coming from *me*. You're really strong, Kelvin-kun, but even you can't assume you'll be safe, even if this is just a bit of entertainment and you have the Oracle of Deramis on your side. Those combatants are strong enough that any attack they put out for fun might be lethal to people like us. That's how wide the gap is."

"Ah, you think so too, director?"

"I super think so," Shin emphasized. "And this isn't the kind of situation to be smiling in."

Sorry, but I can't really control that.

Shin sighed. "Well, whatever. There's no stopping it at this point no matter what I say anyway. What a weirdo you are."

"This...isn't like you, director. Are you actually worried about me?"

"I am," Shin replied. "I'm worried that the fight might have terrible effects upon this world. This world is absolutely necessary for me to have a nice retirement and old age. Of course I'm concerned about its safety. It's fine to pursue your desires, but you need to make sure to think of other people too."

"Ah, so that's what you're worried about..." *And here I was getting a little misty-eyed, thinking she was actually worried about me...*

"Well, my drinking friends—that is, Addams and Maria-chan—are good people despite all their power, so I think it'll be fine. Even so, they're living beings, so there's no telling what'll happen if they get excited. So seriously, be careful, okay? Take responsibility for whatever happens," said Shin.

"I'm surprised you made such a good argument, director. I can't argue because your point is so unassailable. I know, okay? I get it. I still can't fathom the power those two have. I roughly estimate their levels to be over 300, but there's a good chance they're even higher than that. Honestly, I can't even tell how likely I am to win, if I can win at all."

On top of their absurd amounts of pure power, Maria had a ridiculously strong regeneration ability, while Addams was a complete mystery. I couldn't say anything irresponsible like I had a real shot at winning. But not saying that was also irresponsible, after a fashion.

"And yet you still want to fight them to the point of setting up this bit of entertainment?" Shin asked.

"Of course I do. I've never thought about my chances of winning, no matter what powerful enemies I've faced—Rank S monsters, Demon Lords, Apostles of a Goddess, the black goddess, the Ten Authorities... What lies at the bottom of my heart is just the desire to fight strong opponents. Even you, director, should understand my feelings a little, despite not being a battle junkie, right?"

"Hmm... I can't say I don't, but...I don't think you needed to use your wedding to do it," Shin replied. "You should think of your wives a little. Who would want the first thing they do as a married couple to be fighting against those who oppose their marriage?"

“When I proposed this, they were actually all excited about it.”

“Oh no, the battle junkie syndrome is spreading!” Shin exclaimed in mock horror.

“Don’t treat people like infectious diseases...”

That bit aside, I truly did want to fight those transcendent beings. It was rare to find someone I could fight with all my might against as a Summoner instead of a mage. My heart was beating like an innocent maiden finding her first love as I wondered how strong they really were.

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I said goodbye to the director and left the guild headquarters, returning to the Golden Sparrow.

“So in the end, the director, one of the unknowns, isn’t going to enter, huh?”

I’d somewhat expected her to back out because she didn’t want to fight Maria and Addams, but I had to wonder if she really was the type to just stay quiet in a corner. I had the feeling she’d find an unexpected way to get involved, just like Tsubaki. Even if she did, though, I would welcome that, so I wouldn’t say anything to stop her.

“Oh, and meanwhile, I managed to get all the way back to the inn. Time sure does fly while I’m thinking—”

“Kelvin-samaaa!” a voice shouted.

“Huh?”

The shout came from above me, and it was getting closer. In fact, it was basically right on top of me now. Judging from the situation, the speaker had jumped off the roof of the inn. Who would do such a thing? Well, I already knew from the voice.

“Whoa there!”

She came back-first, and I caught her just like she wanted. *What a silly stunt.*

“What are you doing, Colette? Why did you...”

The Colette who dove into my arms out of nowhere wasn’t in her usual Oracle clothes, but in casual streetwear. Honestly, it was quite

a refreshing sight, and I had to say she was cute. Her eyes seemed unfocused as they looked up at me, but that was charming in its own right. Or was it...humorous? Either way, I'd felt her presence, and I was right, she really had come to Pub.

"I caught your scent before anyone else, Kelvin-sama, so I came to an upper floor to wait for my opportunity!" she exclaimed.

"No, that's not what I'm talking about."

I wanted to know why she'd jumped down from an upper floor. But before my curiosity was totally erased, she pushed her head into my chest.

"Ah, it's been so long since I've been blessed with Kelvin-sama's scent!" she exclaimed. "How wondrous this is! There are no words to express this joy in my heart! It exceeds human language. Yes, undiscovered happiness hormones are flooding through the likes of me at this very moment! Furthermore, this scent mixes with the scent of Mel-sama, which I just received, in a golden ratio of harmony! Mel-sama Kelvin-sama Mel-sama Kelvin-sama Mel-sama—This perpetual motion engine is incredible!"

"Ah, uh, yeah...I see. It's been a while, Colette. Glad to see you're the same as always."

Hearing her ceaseless tasting notes—or rather, smelling notes—gave me a certain sense of relief. I wiped away the blood coming from her nose as I sighed, expressing that relief. Colette was Colette, for better or worse.

"Ah, no, Kelvin-sama. My blood is on your divine accoutrements!" Colette shrieked.

"That's not a problem; don't worry about it."

"Kelvin-sama!" Colette gushed.

What was important was that we were still taking up the entrance to the inn and were therefore in people's way. In fact, I was starting to be very conscious of the looks we were gathering.

So, Colette-san, it's about time you stopped burying your face in my chest, okay? I'm going to let you down now, got it?

At any rate, as I swallowed that dose of embarrassment, we entered the inn and went up to the floor where everyone was waiting for me. In the meantime, the proprietress, Ouka, was

watching me with a heartwarming smile on her face, which I ignored.

"In the end, I had to carry Colette the whole way..."

Colette, however, did not react to what I said.

"Huh? Colette? Heeeyyy, answer meeee."

Still, no answer from her.

"Are... Are you dead?!"

Her charming yet unfocused eyes were closed, and she had a peaceful expression on her face as she slept in my arms. As we moved, blood started coming out of her mouth as well as her nose, staining her entire face.

"This... It's too late—"

"What are you doing, standing out here like an idiot, honey?" Mel asked.

"Ah, Mel."

I was just outside the door acting out this farce when Mel came out to welcome me. She had a huge rice ball in her hands, which she was currently munching on.

"Oh, I just happened to pick up this holy woman who descended from above. A lot happened, and now she has broken down from happiness."

"I see, so the usual," Mel said.

"Yep, the usual."

That was enough for Mel to get the whole picture. She understood everything. This was the power of a husband and wife, though one might also call it the work of karma.

"It's about time you woke up, Colette. It's too soon for you to actually die," Mel said.

Colette gasped as she awoke. "I-I hear Mel-sama's voice! And as soon as I awake, I am greeted by such a wonderful scent! I'm...dead..." She immediately slumped over again, lifeless.

Colette had woken up for a moment before instantly fainting again. Having both me and Mel pincering her as she regained consciousness must have done it.

I see, the positioning was the problem. It was too stimulating for her nose.

"Guess it's been a while since all three of us have been together. Yeah, there was no avoiding this," I muttered.

Mel sighed as she chewed. "This isn't something to act so nonchalant about, *nom nom*... Listen here... Colette will be marrying you as well in half a year. *Nom nom...* She is a symbol of Deramis, almost synonymous with it, and seeing her in this state would cause a huge loss of trust! *Om nom...*"

"Yeah, you're right. If not for that huge rice ball in your hands, I'd have taken that advice seriously, Mel."

At any rate, we couldn't leave Colette lying unconscious like this. But even if I used magic to wake her up, she would just be instantly knocked back down again by the aroma around her. We needed to let her rest somewhere until she could get used to our scents.

"I know it's a bit late to be asking this, but why is she here? It seems like she's been here since yesterday, given what's on the Network."

Specifically, from the updates on meals.

"Heh heh! She's just on a bit of a vacation," Mel answered.

"A vacation? That's sudden."

"This girl will keep working forever unless I order her to rest, you know that. And everyone needs to be released from their duties once in a while, don't they?"

"You're right; Colette would use her faith as fuel to work forever. Her work and her hobbies totally align, so in a sense, the job is perfect for her. But I see... That's why you invited her, Mel."

"Indeed. Or rather, I used the Network to invite her yesterday. It was something rather light, like, 'Let's make plans when you find yourself free,' but..."

"Ah...so she came immediately after the invite?"

"She did. She used the teleportation gate to come. The moment she saw me, she prostrated herself and started to say things like, 'As expected, Mel-sama! I was just about to run out of your scent, which fuels me! May I smell you?! I'm going to smell you!' *Om nom...*"

Mel got a faraway look in her eyes as she recounted the story, seeming somewhat regretful. But it did also sound like Colette had

managed to scarf down a meal and generally enjoy herself afterward. It seemed like this was a good bit of relaxation for her.

Okay, then all's well that ends well!

"Hey, Kelvin, how long are you going to be loitering around the entrance? There's lots we need to talk about regarding the weddings, so come inside already!" Sera called out to me.

"Oh, Sera. Okay, got it. I'm coming."

"Lalanoah is waiting for you, you know?"

That got a reaction out of me. "I see! Okay! I'll be there as soon as physically possible! Sonic Acceleration Septa—"

"Divine Dress," Mel intoned. "Honey, please don't pull out your maximum speed in a place like this. The shock waves will ruin my rice ball."

She had instantly undone the buff I'd tried to cast as she lectured me.

"O-Oh no. Come on, that was just a joke. Look, I'm carrying Colette right now, so I would never do something like that for real."

"I wonder," said Sera. "Your eyes had a rather serious look."

"Well, yes. Half joke and half serious, I would say," Mel agreed.

Grk! Oh, come on! How can you treat me like a stupid doting parent! Can't you have at least a little trust in me?!

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"Hewwo, Wawanoaahhh! How are you doing? Oh, I'm sowwy, so you were sleeping! Your sleeping face is like an angel's, huh? So angelic it makes me wanna kiss you! Maybe I should?"

Five others looked on silently. Their expressions were confusing.

"What's up with you guys? You look like a pigeon got hit with a peashooter." I was enjoying seeing Lalanoah again for the first time in a while, but everyone else was just staring at me with their mouths open.

What? Lalanoah on her baby bed is the perfect angelic picture. Do any of you disagree? Huh? You mean she's a goddess instead? True, that is a perfectly valid objection. Certainly, Lalanoah is the greatest of goddesses.

"Uh, no, I was just surprised that that is how you act with a baby..." Shutola muttered.

"I'm flashing back to when I was young," Sera said.

"S-So your father did that to you too, Sera-san?" Shutola asked.

"Doing that is fine at home, but I think you should be careful about acting like that outside. Your face and choice of words are even worse than when you're fighting," said Mdofarak.

"H-Hey, Mdo! Don't say stuff like that!" Dahak chided her.

"I get it... I totally get it, my liege!" Gerard exclaimed.

I wasn't sure what was going on, but I could feel them pulling back a bit. Among them, though, only Gerard seemed to support me. I wasn't sure if I was happy about that or not.

"Was it...really that weird?"

"Yeah," they all replied in unison.

The reply was instant and unexpected. It was also unanimous.

Wait, wait. Just wait a second. Please, be more considerate of my glass heart. Ghk! Rion would have supported me, but she's in school right now. I'm so sad!

"Hee hee! Master is the one who loves Lalanoah most in the world," said Efil. "This doesn't surprise me at all."

"Efiiilll!"

There she is! There's my ally! I knew Efil would be my oasis!

"Yeah, yeah. You're not allowed to flirt here," said Mel. "Honey, it's about time we got to the main subject. *Nom nom.*"

I was just about to jump into Efil's arms when Mel stopped me.

If you want to move on to serious matters, you shouldn't have picked up a second giant rice ball— Oh, never mind. Rice balls are like water to Mel, and having a glass of water while you hold a serious conversation is totally normal. Yeah, exactly. So please, stop reading my mind, okay? That scary pressuring look you're giving me has to stop. Hey, please.

"...and so, I went around the world with Shutola and took care of everything. The wedding planning is also going perfectly."

After Mel had calmed me down, I made this announcement for the second time, as I'd already informed everyone through the Network earlier. Of particular note, I'd gone into great detail about

the strengths of the people I predicted would participate in the objection event.

"Uh-huh...I already felt she was kind of strong. So was this Kuon lady really that powerful?" Sera asked.

"Yeah. Her physical prowess and transcendent mastery of her spell are threats, but what's most troublesome is her Unique Skill. It nullifies everything but pure damage. Neither Sera's Blood Dominion nor Shutola's Retributive Persuasion would work on her."

"I see. If that's true, she is a terrible match for my liege," said Gerard. "It makes sense that you lost repeatedly."

"I'm still not satisfied with the result, though. I'm currently fired up thinking of ways to defeat Kuon!"

"Hey, wait a second. You're not planning on fighting, are you, Kelvin? It's my wedding, so I'm going to fight!" Sera exclaimed.

"What?!"

"Oh no, don't 'what' me!" Sera said.

Of course, that was just a light joke. Part of me thought that would be nice too, but it was just a joke.

"Actually, is it okay if any of us appears to fight during whichever ceremony? For example, if your big sis Ange takes up the fight during Efil-chan's wedding?" Ange asked.

"That *is* allowed, but I think it'd be best to have the main characters of each wedding take the stage. Using that example, it would be both me and Efil. Well, it's only meant to be entertainment, that's all, so I don't think anyone will complain even if something changes."

"You're so smart, bro," said Dahak. "Then even if you lose the match, it's not like that's going to stop the ceremony!"

Dahak laughed in understanding.

"No, that's not necessarily the case. If the opponent truly wants to stop the wedding, we'll have to treat that appropriately. In other words, if we lose it's over."

"What?! Wh-Why?! It's just entertainment, isn't it?!" Dahak yelled.

"It may just be entertainment, but it's serious entertainment. If our opponent seriously comes to stop the wedding, I want to

complete the wedding while making them accept our marriage. I don't want to go through with the ceremony having lost; that would be a half-assed conclusion."

"I-I get that, but what about your wives' feelings?" Dahak asked.

"You've got it all wrong, Hak-chan. We feel the same as master," Efil answered.

"Whaaat?! Big sis Efil?! What is this? Did bro's battle junkieness infect you or something?!" Dahak shouted.

"Hey."

That's rude. But I think I've heard that line before.

"We aren't infected or anything serious like that," Sera added. "We just want everyone to accept our marriage. Especially in my case, my dad is a problem."

"Aha ha, yeah. Gustav-san is definitely going to enter," said Ange. "He'll say something like, 'This is the final trial!'"

"I know, right? Jeez," Sera scoffed. "Well, when he does, I'll just have to be his opponent! I'll beat him black and blue!"

"Even you, big sis Sera? Ah, no, you've always been like that, I think?" Dahak said.

"Daaahaaak? Do you want to be my first opponent?" Sera threatened.

"Oh no, never!"

"This is a good chance for you to have a serious match against Sera, Dahak. Are you sure you don't want to accept the invitation?"

"You're the only one who'd be happy about that, bro!" Dahak replied.

That's rude. I think Azgrad would be happy too.

"Being able to object to our wedding is proof of that person's confidence and strength. This is a good chance to display our readiness to be married, and also a good chance to satisfy my honey's desires," said Mel.

"Oh, Mel's into it too!"

"Yes. This will be the perfect opportunity to settle my relationship with Luquille as well," said Mel. "Rather, if I don't take this chance to put a stop to her, I have no idea what she'll do next. *Haaah mg mg haaah...*"

"Um...right. You've got it the worst, Mel-san..." Dahak muttered.

Mel was being serious, but the sight of her sighing between bites was just comical.

Still...Luquille, huh? According to Vegalzeld-san's report, even if she does participate, she will be doing so after a long break for recovery. Does she honestly think she has a chance? Or maybe she's going to attempt to power herself up using some sort of unexpected method? I'd be glad if she did.

"By the way, where are you all planning to hold your ceremonies?" Shutola asked. "Of course, I'm going to have a huge one in Trycen's castle!" Currently in her child form, she jumped up and down in excitement.

"Isn't it obvious? I'm going to have it in my homeland of Grelbarelka!" Sera replied.

"I would like to say Deramis, but that would overlap with Colette's. I want to hide the fact that I used to be the Goddess, so I'm planning to have it in some delicious restaurant," Mel answered. "Ah, but as a backup, I have to say Isla Heaven."

"I, um, would love to share my happiness with the others at the elven village," Efil said bashfully.

"I was thinking of having my ceremony with Efil-chan's, but Director Shin's really been pushing Pub," Ange replied. "It's true that I know a lot of people at the Adventurer's Guild, so it's definitely an option. Hrm..."

Some had already settled on a location, while others were still undecided. It wasn't as if I were totally unrelated, but I had decided to let my partners pick the locations they liked. There wasn't really anything I could say.

Wait, that reminds me... Where does Rion want to have her wedding? She's not here. She told me where she's considering, but I doubt she decided on a spot yet.

Afterword

Thank you so much for buying *Black Summoner Volume 21: Iron Vampire*. Recently, my main source of nutrition has been tomatoes and broccoli. I am a healthy Doufu Mayoi. To those who have picked this volume up after reading the web novel, thank you as always.

To be fair, I still eat curry, ramen, and meat in general. In fact, I'm a bit troubled because there are so many good restaurants near where I moved. Gah! Am I being healthy in name only?! Ah, but I did lose three kilos recently, so maybe I *am* being surprisingly healthy. Instead of having hidden muscles, I have hidden healthiness.

Changing the subject, this volume marks the arrival of Maria and Kuon. Those who know, know, but they're cameos from my other series, *Mage of Black Iron*. To be fair, Kuon has basically only appeared in name in that series, but she's actually quite strong. Mothers always turn out strong in any world or era. My mom is strong too.

Finally, I would like to thank those involved in the production of this volume of *Black Summoner*. My illustrators DaiXt-sama and Kurogin-sama, my proofreader, and let's not forget about all you readers as well. Now then, I'll be praying we meet again in the next volume. Please continue to read *Black Summoner*!

—Doufu Mayoi







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Chapter 3: God of Another World

Chapter 4: New Life

Chapter 5: Paramita

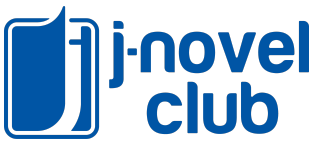
Chapter 6: I Object!

Afterword

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Black Summoner: Volume 21
by Doufu Mayoi

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