In Another World With My Smartphone

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illustration・Eiji Usatsuka

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Chapter I: The Golden Gollem and the Littlest Lady

The situation with Tatsuma had been resolved. The one who attacked him, as well as the one responsible for his original death fifteen years ago, had been stripped of their status and exiled from the nation.

Since neither Tatsuno nor Tatsuya were bad people, I offered them refuge in Brunhild. They refused my offer, however. Apparently, they had some friends in Triharan that would help them build their lives back up closer to home. And so, I figured the very least I could do was open up a **[Gate]** and send them off to Triharan safely.

The day of the exile came, and Tatsuma saw his brother off with a smile. He handed off a pouch of money into his brother's hand.

"I know the two of you will make it, no matter where life takes you. But if you need anything from me, please write. Exile or not, you're still my brother, and I love you."

"Tatsuma... Thank you..."

The two bowed their heads to the former ryutei, then bowed to the current houtei, before joining hands and departing for Triharan.

Despite the fact that they'd been stripped of everything, they smiled gently as they walked through the portal together. It was plain as day that they felt more free than they'd ever been.

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"Sorry, say that again?"

"Of course. We received a report of an enormous monster, one resembling a winged cow. It was spotted in the northern region of Xenoahs."

As soon as I'd returned from my business, Tsubaki had a report waiting for me. According to Fam's investigation from up in the library, the creature was known as a Zagan and was believed to have died out completely around two

thousand years ago.

“So, uh, what happened?”

“The first prince of Xenoahs reportedly went out and killed it himself.”

“Seriously?! He didn’t just leave it to the adventurers?”

Prince Faron definitely had that kind of gung-ho personality, so the report made sense to me... He was Sakura’s older brother, and her family wasn’t exactly weak... He certainly wasn’t out of place as my brother-in-law, at least.

Still, what was he thinking? The second prince, Farese, had no succession rights to the throne. Faron was the only heir! It was far too reckless to put himself in harm’s way. That said, the overlord had a long life ahead of him... It wasn’t like he couldn’t just have another kid or something. Though, he didn’t have a partner at the moment.

In the worst-case scenario, maybe Yoshino would have to take over. I wasn’t exactly a fan of that idea, however.

Xenoahs didn’t really have much in the way of adventurers, unfortunately. Foreign adventurers didn’t usually plant their roots in that country, and the people who lived there were stronger than ordinary humans. Nobody put in requests for dealing with monsters they could easily crush by themselves, so there weren’t many quest listings in Xenoahs as a result. From what I’d been told, even youngsters from backwater villages in Xenoahs were about as strong as your average blue-rank adventurer.

One of the big reasons why adventurers from other nations didn’t really stay in Xenoahs was their cuisine. Unless you were already used to it, it was generally considered too much to stomach. That said, there’d been some recent improvements to the culinary scene over there. Lu’s cooking blog had a part to play in that. Though it would be more apt to call it a development rather than improvement, as it wasn’t exactly my place to say their food culture was bad. Food was said to be a reflection of the culture surrounding it, so it would make sense that the people of Xenoahs would eat things as inhospitable and hardy as the lands they lived in.

But back to the main point, the appearance of another extinct species meant

a time distortion had happened. It was an echo of the broader timequake that my kids had gotten caught up in, and Granny Tokie's time spirits were hard at work repairing it already.

Still, I had to count my blessings. We were only getting the occasional monster rather than a full-on displacement of beasts through time. Then again, the average extinct monster was way stronger than any of the monsters that existed in the current day, so was that really a blessing to be counted?

"What happened to the prince?"

"Some minor injuries, but he'll live."

Injuries, huh...? Well, they'll be fine. We already sent some of those alchemy lab potions over to Xenoahs for emergencies.

"The issue this time around has less to do with the appearance of the beast, and more to do with the stampede it ended up causing. From what I hear, an entire village was reduced to rubble..."

Damn it, again?!

It was only natural, since these monsters from the past were suddenly appearing in different areas. The modern monsters didn't know how to respond to the sudden territorial dispute, so they ended up fleeing. This act sent other animals fleeing, creating a chain that resulted in a stampede. In fact, there'd been a lot of stampedes all over the world lately, all presumably caused by yet-unreported ancient monsters.

I decided that the various nations needed to be made more aware of the threat they faced. There were some warning signs that a stampede was about to begin, after all. You could tell by the absence of certain animals, or flocks of birds flying off together in the distance. If the various countries could see those signs in advance, then they'd be able to take better precautions to prevent damage.

Just as I was thinking about ways to implement that, the phone in my pocket began to vibrate.

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“Hoh. They’re larger than those Gollem warriors of Brunhild, it seems,” Indigo muttered quietly as he looked over the contents of the Ark’s hangar.

The dull gold bodies of the massive Gollems contained within gleamed in the dim light of the lightstones above them. The golden machines were engraved with black lines running through them, which was some manner of magical circuitry. The angular mechs were lined up in a row, completely unarmed, with a somewhat heavy, rugged air about them, like they’d been crafted coarsely. Indigo had a feeling that design was to the preference of the plague-masked man that stood before him.

“It’s a shame, but I couldn’t really make them any smaller. Well, I could’ve, but that would’ve reduced the output quite a bit. And at that point, why even bother?” the plague-masked man, Scarlet, casually shrugged as he offered a half-baked apology.

The dull-gold Gollems in front of them were far bigger and sturdier than the massive Chevaliers of Brunhild. The design wasn’t all that different from Brunhild’s standard-issue Frame Gears, it was just bigger and their heads bore a large, single eye.

“The performance on these isn’t bad at all, though. I’d say they could give Brunhild’s machines a run for their money.”

“Hoh!”

Indigo was somewhat impressed by Scarlet’s confident musing. Scarlet wasn’t one for empty boasting, after all, so that had to mean he was sure about what he was saying.

“And we can begin mass-producing these?”

“We’ve already begun. Though we’ve only managed to make a few dozen with the materials we recovered from the underground dock in Gandhilis. I imagine we can harvest plenty of raw materials from the seabed, however.”

The Ark was currently deep beneath the world’s oceans, trawling and mining the very bottom of the depths for ore. The wicked god’s divinity shrouded the entire vehicle, preventing it from being traced by conventional search magic. They were well-hidden indeed.

“Scarlet... I was wondering something.”

“What’s that?”

Indigo walked over to a gap between two of the giant Gollems, his diving suit clunking as he walked.

“What happened to the machine that presumably stood here?”

“That idiotic Orchid took it for a joyride. I’m not entirely sure what became of it.”

Scarlet clicked his tongue as his explanation elicited a sigh from Indigo’s mouth. Despite what Scarlet had said, Orchid wasn’t necessarily an idiot. It was more that he had a one-track mind when it came to doing certain things. He worked intuitively rather than using his head, and his happy-go-lucky approach was rooted in embracing his wild side and disregarding groundwork. In short, he was a hedonist who preferred feeling over thinking.

There was no way a person with that kind of personality could resist taking a giant robot for a spin. The first moment he saw one of them, he decided he needed to take it on a rampage.

Indigo didn’t necessarily think a rampage was a bad idea, but he saw the tactical disadvantage of revealing their hand too early. That was why he quietly resolved to go and bring Orchid back before he drew too much attention to himself.

“Where did he go, then?”

“If it’s Orchid you’re after, then the Kingdom of Rhea is where you will find him.”

Indigo turned toward the source of the voice, spotting a woman in a domino mask lined with fancy feathers. She was remarkably tall and slender, and wore a flamboyant outfit coated top to bottom in blue and green plumes. That appearance had led to Orchid nicknaming her ‘bird lady.’ She also held two metallic-green chakrams in her hands. They were remarkably oversized when compared to her slim build.

“Peacock... You know where he went?”

“Isn’t it obvious? My Viridian excels at both seeking and destroying. It’s a truly magnificent gift from above. Tracing my fellow devout is as simple as breathing.”

Peacock let out a strange, haughty laugh. Threads of light weaved through the holes in her chakrams. Peacock could pull on these lights and measure their intensity to find whatever it was she was looking for. Thus, there was no doubt in Indigo’s mind that Orchid was over in Rhea.

“He’s there, eh? I’ll go recover him, then... We can’t have these Gollems of ours being public knowledge just yet. And on that note, do we have a name for them yet?”

“We certainly do. Kyklops.”

“Kyklops? Sounds kinda like Cyclops, doesn’t it?”

“It’s what they called the Cyclops five thousand years ago. Isn’t that right, Gold?” Scarlet asked, grinning over at the small shadow that lurked by the hangar’s entrance. The shadow then stepped forward, revealing a small golden Gollem with glowing red eyes.

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“That’s it! That’s the thing that attacked the port!” the elven soldier yelled out as he saw the illustration I managed to recreate using **[Recall].** The soldier, a local captain, still had a bandaged head and a cast on his right arm despite my healing. After getting his confirmation, I showed the image to other soldiers who quickly said the same thing.

I was in Khadan, a port town in the Kingdom of Rhea. I’d been summoned here after hearing news of the place coming under attack by something that greatly resembled a Frame Gear.

King Rhea and Grun the green crown had accompanied me, along with an entourage of guards. I’d brought the king with me to assure him I wasn’t the one responsible for this attack, and also to help escort any refugees to Rhea’s capital through one of my **[Gate]** portals.

Rescue teams from the capital charged into the billowing smoke in search of wounded survivors.

King Rhea took a look at the illustration I'd generated and asked, "Then you say this Gollem isn't the same as your nation's Frame Gears?"

"That's right. It's not the same thing. I get what it looks like, but it really isn't..."

At this moment in time, Brunhild was the only country in the whole world with access to Frame Gears. That was why I wanted to clear this situation up as fast as possible. Before I could say any more, four people by my side interjected.

"It's obvious at a glance, isn't it? It looks nothing like my Frame Gears. The fundamental design philosophy is completely different. To have such shabby construction compared to my product is absurd."

"Indeed. From the parts alone, you can see that whoever made these must be from the western continent. It's not nearly as refined as Regina's workmanship."

"Hmm... I do suppose I'd call it half-hearted, at a glance? Whoever engineered it was so focused on optimizing output that they didn't spare a minute to consider rider comfort..."

"As interesting as it is, it's a design created in poor taste. I'd be pretty angry if I made the Frame Gears and someone compared this to them."

Babylon, Elluka, the professor, and Quun all took turns dunking on the machine that had destroyed the port. They were so offended by the drawing that I almost hoped we'd never find the real thing.

According to the townsfolk, it came shambling out of the ocean and started laying waste to the town. It trashed stuff at random, as if it was testing what it could do, then started to break more things until it seemingly got bored and went back into the water. The fact that it came from the ocean made me think that this fake Frame Gear was the work of the wicked devout.

I remembered that the wicked god had created mutated Phrase variants that resembled Frame Gears, but that was more like a lifeform imitating a machine. This thing was something completely different. It was a machine, created from Gollem tech and artifacts, which meant there was someone out there capable

of producing war machines, and he wasn't on my side.

"Do you think this could be something that was left in the Ark that the wicked devout found?"

"Doubtful. The craftsmanship is far too crude for the genius behind the crown Gollems. There's also new technology here mixed in with the legacy parts."

"Might it be a refurbished version of an older design?"

"That's not impossible, but..."

"I think it would make more sense to just design a new robot from scratch if you had to modify an old one. Though supposing it actually is a legacy remnant, then..."

My off-hand question prompted a flurry of technobabble that I wasn't nearly equipped enough to understand. Clearly, I was just adding fuel to the proverbial fire in their hearts.

"Negative. Chrom Ranchesse never manufactured Gollems of this scale. This is someone else's doing."

The small green crown Gollem dumped a proverbial bucket of water on that fire, quelling it in seconds. Grun was created by the Ark's creator, so its word was as good as anyone's. In other words, this fake Frame Gear was not Chrom's handiwork.

That was probably worse, though, because it meant there definitely was an incredibly skilled Gollem engineer working with the wicked devout. Hell, he might have been one of the wicked devout with their blessings and everything.

Man, this is really starting to be a real pain in the ass.

"After all you've done for Rhea, I can't begin to suspect you as the culprit behind all this. I was only asking to be sure, you needn't worry. Though if a country without our relationship were to be attacked, they might not be so understanding."

The elf king was absolutely right. If a country without any friendly relations with Brunhild came under attack by this thing, they'd have no reason to believe me if I tried to clear things up.

Was that the goal here? To besmirch my reputation? No, that couldn't be it. If that was their intention, then they'd have made it look more like our Frame Gears instead of these hulking one-eyed monster robots. But in that case, why even make them? What was the endgame? It was too confusing.

"Now that we're aware our enemies have access to something similar to my Frame Gears, we should probably let our allies know about it before we lose control of the narrative. I'd advise that we let countries that aren't allied with us know that as well, since I'm sure we can communicate with them through the other world leaders."

"Yeah, you're right."

Doc Babylon was right on the money. If our allies vouched for us, it would be easier to smooth things over. The only way to prove this one-eyed Gollem wasn't one of ours was probably to capture it. I tried using my search spell to trace it, but I didn't get any results. Presumably, it shared the same protections the Ark had.

"Hm..."

"What's wrong?"

The professor grumbled quietly as he mulled over the image of the fake Frame Gear.

"It's nothing precise, but I do recognize the peculiarities of this Frame Gear's design... Where have I seen this before?"

"Oh? You as well? I thought I was just imagining things, but there are subtle quirks to the construction that seem familiar to me..."

Elluka leaned in and slowly nodded, her brow knitted in thought.

"Peculiarities to the design? I don't get it."

"All mechanical constructs betray their creators with subtle details. It's just like with paintings. There's an individual mark in all art."

Doc Babylon grinned as she explained that to me. I could sort of get what she was saying. Babylon's aesthetic sense was pretty clearly present in the Frame Gears and Over Gears, after all. You could tell they were hers. Similarly, the

crown Gollems all looked pretty in line with Chrom Ranchesse's aesthetic sense.

It was kind of like how you could tell when two manga had the same artist even if they changed their pen name.

"If you both recognize it, does that mean the creator might be someone famous? It's not the witch-king, is it?"

"Oh! I know!"

"I've got it!"

Huh?! Don't tell me the witch-king's actually behind this!

"This reminds me of the maestro's work! The Gollem looks very much like his designs!"

"Exactly! It looks exactly like the type of Gollems the maestro creates!"

...The maestro? Isn't that one of the five great gollemancers of the western continent?

That would mean he was on the same level as Elluka and the professor...and he was on the wicked devout's side? Why?

"He's a skilled crafter, but he's a bit of a fussy sort. He often got into heated conflicts with his aides."

"Indeed. He's always been difficult to work with and often kicks up trouble in the countries he roams to."

According to the professor and Elluka, the maestro was something of a conceited man who took extreme pride in his vision...which meant he was kind of similar to the witch-king in that regard, so I wasn't totally wrong!

"Unlike the witch-king, who took advantage of other people, the maestro doesn't really care about others. He looks down on just about everyone other than himself. Young Elluka and I were treated as equals, but that's about the closest I got to seeing him express any human warmth."

"Yeah, he treated Fenrir horribly right in front of me and said he was of inferior make. In short, he's a bastard."

Elluka frowned, clearly still bitter over that particular memory. Fenrir wasn't a

particularly strong or complicated construct, he was just a talking Gollem that looked like a wolf. I thought that was cool, personally...but apparently, not everyone was so easily satisfied.

But back to the matter at hand, the situation was obviously worse than I thought. The wicked devout had a Gollem engineer on the same level as Elluka and the professor. Was he just working with them, or had he been converted into one of them? The Ark was Chrom Ranchesse's personal factory, which meant, in theory, there was a facility within it for him to mass-produce the one-eyed Gollem design.

I'd probably have to consider giving out Frame Units to our most recent diplomatic allies so they could train pilots to prepare for an emergency.

"Now that we've seen this, we can't afford to drag our heels. Let's accelerate our production schedule."

"Your production schedule? You mean the Albus Over Gear?"

"Indeed. We've already come up with a name, even. Val Albus. We'll have to create an Over Gear that the maestro won't be able to look down on."

Doc Babylon grinned wide, a scornful sneer appearing on her face.

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After we returned from Rhea, Doc Babylon seemed more motivated than ever to finish Albus's Over Gear. She didn't let me see what parts she was working on, though. Given that I was sponsoring the project, I thought I'd at least be able to get a peek at what she was doing, but I didn't care enough to push the issue. I'd get to see it when it was done, which was good enough for me.

Quun was helping out too, though in a pretty limited capacity. She wasn't cooped up in Babylon the same way Elluka and Doc Babylon were. She at least came out to have tea with her siblings every once in a while, which was nice.

We needed her help to tweak the Frame Units in time for the current world conference, anyway. Rosetta from the workshop and Monica from the hangar were both fully focused on helping out with the Over Gear construction, so we were a bit short on manpower.

I was watching the houtei face off against the iron king of Gandhilis in a Frame Unit mock battle. They were getting used to the controls via the simulator.

Oh, looks like it's over. Seems like the houtei won. Though they're both beginners, so I feel like either one of them could've pulled it off with the right button press...

"I won! Tatsuma-sama, I won!"

"Mh... Seems I lost."

The houtei and the iron king stepped out of their simulation pods and back into the hall. The room was filled with representatives and delegates from various nations around the world. Our new friends from the western continent were somewhat apprehensive about the Frame Units, but they were curious enough to try out the training modules. It was more of a way to nurture friendly competition, really.

When I brought up the incident that had happened in Rhea, the other nations agreed that we should train people from every nation to pilot Frame Gears. It was a similar situation to when the Phrase threat was looming, after all.

The beastking of Mismede raised his hand and spoke up with a question.

“Grand Duke, do you think there could be the chance of a large-scale invasion much like the Phrase incursion?”

“It’s not impossible. It depends on how much Chrom Ranchesse’s Ark can create, but I think it’ll be more than a handful. Given enough time, they should be able to create enough Gollems, since their output’s probably going to be at least similar to an average national factory.”

My words prompted gasps from the delegates who’d come from the western continent. Given they were more used to Gollems in their daily lives, they’d grasped the scale of the threat much more quickly.

Doc Babylon told me the enemy was probably going to be mining undersea resources to mass-produce their one-eyed Gollems. If they were trawling the sea bed for such things, then they’d be able to create a lot of them if given enough time to do so.

After a brief moment, King Belfast raised his hand as well and asked, “So, these wicked devout... What is their aim, exactly?”

“We believe their aim is the resurrection of the wicked god, or the birth of a new one entirely. That’s only our speculation at the minute, though. Whatever it is they have planned, it’s not a good thing.”

If I had to guess, they probably needed a massive quantity of negative emotions from people all over the world to kickstart their true aim. And obviously, the fastest way to do that was to send the world into a state of anxiety and unease, just as Yula had done.

If that was why they were planning to mass-produce those Gollems, then we needed to take action before we found ourselves playing right into their hands. If the wicked god was properly reborn, then neither I nor my family would be able to directly interfere with it. I was a god, after all.. and my wives were beneficiaries of my divinity. We needed to stop that situation from coming about at all costs.

Brunhild was also one of the only countries in the world that didn’t border the sea, other than our territory on the dungeon islands. The only other landlocked nations were Roadmare and Ramissh. Every other country could become a possible target, so the only way to prevent that was to set those countries up

with Frame Gears.

The only difference from the Phrase invasion was that we had no advance warning of attack. If I heard about it, I'd be able to warp there in no time at all, but if they ended up attacking a remote location, I wouldn't be able to hear about it until it was too late.

Elluka said if we could capture one of the one-eyed Gollems, we might be able to dismantle it and put together some kind of sensor or radar...but we had to actually capture one first, so there was nothing we could do before the next attack. That was why we had to divert all our resources to prepping for the next attack.

"I see... So you propose allowing the western nations to access the Frame Units and become Frame Gear pilots as well?" Knight King Reinhardt of Lestia said, then nodded slowly at my explanation.

"That's right. We'll be loaning out Frame Gears to countries as and when they need them, much like when the Phrase invaded. Please keep a stronger watch along your coasts."

All the world leaders I was on good terms with had smartphones and could call me at any time, but I also took the time to create and hand out a bunch of extra gate mirrors. If they had gate mirrors in more remote or rural locations, we'd have a much better chance of responding to attacks on those places in a timely manner.

The western continent had short-range communication devices, but they wouldn't be able to reach me all the way in Brunhild through one of those.

"Given the nature of this threat, I can only hope that the other nations join our alliance before long..." Elf King of Rhea let out a small sigh as he spoke. The vampiric Archfiend of Helgaia, another newcomer to our alliance, nodded in agreement.

Though I'd arrived too late to stop the one-eyed Gollem attack on Rhea, the other nations had all provided donations in the form of gold or resources to help them rebuild. The affected port town would be able to recover in time thanks to that.

Though it was only a small town in this instance, some nations had full cities along the coastline. If the wicked devout attacked one of those, we would have a serious disaster on our hands...and I had a feeling they'd do it sometime soon. What better way to make people afraid than attacking a large population center?

"The Kingdom of Curelia has been considering our offer more seriously, especially after what happened on their coast. I think they may well join us soon!" Prince Robert of Panaches, the pumpkin-pants prince, spoke up merrily. King Panaches nodded alongside him.

Curelia had one of its settlements recently come under attack by Fishmen, giant stone constructs, and four-armed Gollems. That was the work of the wicked devout as well. The random guerilla warfare was really pissing me off, as I had no way of determining the next target. I was pleased that Curelia was coming around on joining us, but they weren't the only ones who needed convincing… There was also the Kingdom of Langaeis, the Kingdom of Rephan, and the Gem Kingdom.

Assuming Curelia would be joining us, what of those three? From what I'd heard from Triharan, the Gem Kingdom had been talking with them and there was the possibility they'd join soon enough. Langaeis could also be open to joining us if they saw their neighbors in Curelia do so. They'd be surrounded by allies at that point, after all.

That really only left Rephan, which I didn't know all that much about. I'd have to ask the king of Primula about them, given his nation bordered theirs.

"Rephan, eh...? They're our neighbors, aye, but the Daola Mountains form a natural border between our two nations, so there's not an awful lot of foot traffic. I suppose the most notable thing about them is that their territory is extremely rich in mithril..."

Oh. Mithril's just about the worst thing you can use to make a Gollem, right? It drops their potential output by as much as half and is used in tools for sealing more dangerous Gollems away. It's a valuable magical metal on the eastern continent, but over on the western side, it's little more than useless junk. Given the western continent is so reliant on Gollems, it'd only be natural that a country

sitting on a bed of mithril would be a place people would want to avoid.

Even Gollem airships were likely to crash if they got within range of the ore there, though not all Gollem functions were affected so badly.

“I’ve only heard rumors, but apparently, Rephan is in the midst of a civil war. I doubt they’re in a position to join us right now.”

A civil war? I wonder if it’s a struggle for supremacy like what happened in Eashen a while back.

The Kingdom of Rephan was made up of various clans, but apparently, their king’s power recently waned and his clan was driven out of their capital. Now the situation was more chaotic, opposing clans were said to have taken up positions around or in the capital city, other clans were taking advantage of the situation to expand their territories, and smaller clans were banding together under new agreements to try to take some real power for once.

It was kind of an inevitability, really... Power vacuums always ended this way. It wasn’t a matter of people, it was just how things went. Even a small country like Brunhild wasn’t immune to that kind of thing, which was why I needed to remain vigilant in terms of succession.

“Actually, my people have heard that their warring period is finally coming to an end. Apparently, a prodigal Gollem meister has allied herself with the king, and he’s reclaiming his power.”

“Oho?”

Crown Prince Lupheus of Triharan suddenly interjected, accompanied by Princess Berlietta of Strain. It made sense he’d have some knowledge of the situation, as his country bordered Rephan as well.

As an aside, apparently, the two of them were making strides with their ether vehicle development. I had a feeling that Triharan could become quite the successful car manufacturer in the future.

“But isn’t Rephan on a whole bed of mithril? Gollems can’t operate well there, can they?”

“That doesn’t seem to matter for this particular Gollem meister. I’ve heard

her machine works just fine. It could be that the witch-king of Isengard's invention fell into their hands..."

...The old guy who ruled Isengard? Oh yeah, he did *make something like that, if I remember right... A device that neutralizes the effects of mithril, right? Think he made it based on one of the beast emperor Gollems from the former Kingdom of Lowe. This Gollem meister couldn't have one of the beast emperors, right? There are twelve of them, I'm pretty sure... I thought all the others were destroyed in the war with Gardio, but one might've survived...*

"I hear the king's mysterious benefactor wields a Gollem with a golden sheen. She's said to be a terribly young girl, as well. A mere child, despite her prodigal skill."

"...What."

Lupheus's words started to turn a few cogs in my brain.

...A Gollem with a golden sheen? Why is that making me think of the gold crown?

There were a few golden Gollems across the world, mostly in the hands of the ridiculously wealthy. I'd run into a few in the past when I'd tried searching for the gold crown.

Having a shiny golden Gollem in your repertoire was considered the ultimate status symbol in some social circles, though mostly among the nouveau riche. I couldn't really say anything about that, though...since I had a shiny golden Frame Gear sitting in my hangar. Plus, I was technically part of the nouveau riche too...

I wondered if the girl in Rephan was some noble girl from a new money family... If she was just a little kid, then that probably meant she was some rich guy's daughter. Was she helping out the king of Rephan with her dad's wallet or something? That sounded pretty funny.

"They say she's only five years old or so, yet she repels every single enemy that crosses her path. Her Gollem is equipped with the ultimate defense wall, if the stories are to be believed."

...Huh?

“Even putting the Gollem aside, the girl herself is said to be a formidable force on the battlefield. She charged through an advanced line of soldiers like a wrecking ball, scattering them instantly. And yet, even though she went charging right in, nobody could put so much as a finger on her!”

Huuuh?! W-Wait, hold on... Could she be...? No, no... That’s ridiculous...

“Father. I’m fairly sure I know who they’re describing.”

Even though I didn’t want to believe it, Quun’s whispering voice danced over and brought reality crashing down around me.

Don’t tell me...it’s really her...

“I’m trying to remember what her name was… That strange, powerful girl is named...Staph? Or is it...Step? Something like that...”

Hey! Prince Lupheus, her name’s Steph! She’s called Stephania, dammit! That’s my daughter whose name you’re messing up, pal! Wait. That’s my daughter. Oh no. Why’s she involved in a civil war?!

“Quun, what’s she thinking?”

“She’s not thinking of anything at all. Steph never does. She’s probably just helping because they’re giving her food.”

Are you serious right now? Is she gonna be okay over there? Aren’t they basically just using her, then?

“She’ll be fine, I think. Steph has something of a good instinct when it comes to people, so I’m sure those she’s helping are nice. Honestly, she reads people just as well as Kuon or mother Yumina’s mystic eye does. It’s some mighty animal intuition.”

What?! Is she a feral kid or something?!

If Quun was right here, then Steph was helping out King Rephan because he deserved the aid. Did that mean the king was genuinely a good person? When I asked King Primula and Prince Lupheus about that, I was surprised to learn that Rephan was actually ruled by a queen. She was apparently close to sixty, but there were no tales or rumors about her being a bad person. Though her qualities as a leader did leave something to be desired.

One could be a good person while being a bad monarch, that was for sure. Given that Rephan was made up of multiple smaller clans, whoever was in charge needed to be the perfect mediator for their disputes. And above all else, the ruling party needed to command respect and authority enough to make those smaller vassals bend the knee. That, it seemed, was what Queen Rephan was lacking.

I guess Steph's making up for her lack of backbone, then? Wait, nuts...what if she accidentally becomes the new queen or something?! Now I'm just more worried... I can't say I know much about this gold Gollem she has either, but we need to bring her home!

Even though I was concerned, I was still in the middle of an international conference...so I couldn't just bail out. Steph's mother, Sue, was also here, but I couldn't just tell her what I'd learned because she'd probably panic. And so, I resolved to stay quiet until the evening's events concluded.

A few hours passed. It was a little frustrating trying to make it through the evening without letting anything slip, but we managed and I saw all the delegates to their homes. Now came the important part.

I gathered my family in the living room and told them about the situation with Steph. The reaction was, interestingly enough, mixed. Yumina and my other wives were shocked, some even gasped and looked terribly concerned. My children, on the other hand, simply nodded and told me that it sounded about right.

"You're not all that surprised, are you?"

"That's just kind of how Steph is... She's a free spirit, for better or for worse."

Weird... She's kind of an eccentric girl, isn't she? Is this really not that unusual for her? It's unusual for me, that's for sure! I'm still worried!

As I was struggling to respond to Kuon, Sue suddenly and impatiently ran to my side.

"Touya! We must go to Rephan at once! I must see my Steph! I'm sure she's lonely, afraid, and missing me... I'm her mother, so I have to see her now!"

I understood her feelings, but I'd never even been to Rephan before, which

meant I couldn't open up a **[Gate]** portal. I asked Yakumo if she'd be able to open up a portal for us, but apparently, she'd never been either. What a bother...

I had no other choice but to try getting myself there directly. I wasn't sure where I'd land if I used **[Teleport],** so all I could really do was pray I wouldn't pop up in the middle of a battlefield or some important noble's bedchambers. I wasn't very keen on starting an international incident over this, after all...

I quickly reconsidered when I remembered that I could just use **[Gate]** to go to Primula, then cross the Daola Mountains.

"I'll be joining you, of course!" Sue exclaimed as she stepped forward and grabbed my hand. I was surprised when Yoshino came over as well.

"I'm an expert at catching Steph. I have **[Absorb]** and **[Teleport],** after all."

That made sense. Yoshino also had **[Prison],** which she presumably used to catch her sister. Her **[Absorb]** could nullify any spells Steph might start slinging, and if the girl fled, then Yoshino could pursue her with **[Accel].** If all else failed, she had **[Teleport]** for instant transmission. In a sense, Yoshino could be considered Steph's natural predator.

Apparently, Kuon used to use one of his mystic eyes to stop his sister too. And upon hearing that, I realized we were starting to feel more like animal control than a rescue party...

"If Yoshino goes, I go..." Sakura said as she stood up, understandably concerned. She didn't want her child rushing to a warzone unattended, which was fair.

I headed to Babylon's hangar and asked Monica to bring out our rapid transit vehicle, Gungnir. The Gungnir was also a support unit for Sue's Ortlinde, so bringing it along made perfect sense. Plus, it had a stealth function that would make it easier for us to approach any area of conflict.

I considered just using **[Fly],** but I felt like Sue was running out of patience.

"Now then, let us be off. We're gonna, like, punch it! Gooo!"



Monica piloted the Gungnir through the **[Gate]** I'd opened, blasting us

through into Primula's airspace in an instant. She then immediately activated the stealth mode, rendering us invisible to the naked eye.

"So? Are we heading straight to the Rephan royal capital?"

"No, the capital's supposedly occupied by other clans right now. She won't be there. She'll be with the king, uh...I mean, the queen..."

I ran a search to try to identify her within the region of Rephan, but multiple results popped up. There were probably so many results because there were other clan leaders who were women, and I didn't know which one the current queen was...

"Why not search for the gold Gollem?"

"I've searched for that before, but it always gets me junk results..."

"If you limit the results to Rephan, shouldn't it be easier?"

That was true. Most of the results from my gold Gollem searches showed up in wealthier nations on the western continent like Allent or Strain.

Comparatively, Rephan didn't really have all that many.

When I took Sue's advice and set the search terms to only show results within Rephan's borders, I got three results. Two of them were in the capital city, meaning the one outside had to be Steph's. It was far east of the capital, quite a distance from our location, so we needed to hurry.

"Monica, send us eastward."

"Roger that. We're like, going east!"

Gungnir crossed over the mountain range and continued due east. I hoped my daughter wasn't in any trouble...but there was a good chance she was already neck-deep in it.

"How come my kids always get involved in stuff like this?"

"You're really asking that, Touya? You, of all people?"

"We learned from the best, father. You're just as bad as us."

...Dammit. My bad, I guess.

◇ ◇ ◇

We crossed the Daola Mountains, but there was nothing but barren wilderness for miles after that. Occasionally, we'd see a town or road, but there wasn't much in the way of people. Given that this was the territory nearest to Primula, the people of Rephan probably treated it more like a far frontier.

There were only two routes that connected the two countries, a road to the north that went through the mountains and a sea route to the north. However, even those roads had little traffic. Primula wasn't interested in sending people to a land that was effectively in the middle of a civil war, plus, Rephan's warlords along the frontier strictly policed the border.

With all that in mind, it was no wonder the country was so isolated... If only they were more open, things would have been a lot easier for me.

"I must ask, master. We've, like, gotten to Rephan's territory... So umm, where to now?" Monica, who was sitting in the Gungnir's pilot seat, tilted her head and asked me a question. I projected a map from my phone and pointed to a flashing location on it.

"Here. That's where we wanna be."

"The Citadel City, Acyra? It's quite a ways east."

"How long'll it take?"

"You needn't underestimate Gungnir. It'll, like, take thirty minutes or whatever."

Monica sounded confident, so I kept quiet about the fact that I definitely could've made it there faster just by using **[Fly].** She was right, anyway. Underestimating Gungnir in cases like this was pointless. It was much more convenient to take it when you had a large group with you.

We continued flying east in stealth mode until we came across a group that looked like an army. I asked her to stop us in mid-air for a moment so I could take a closer look. It was a large group of men riding on animals that resembled horses. They were headed east.

It was rare to see a group like this on the western continent, as most standing

armies over here were made up of Gollems. Some of the men were wearing pieces of equipment that made it look like they were decked up in power suits. I recognized them as a kind of wearable Gollem, but I figured all the mithril ore in the land would've made those things pointless.

"Mithril impacts a Gollem by interfering with the line of command from contractor to contracted machine. So, like, interference causes Gollems to do things they weren't told to do and stuff, or to do things more lazily. With equipment-type Gollems, the commands are transmitted directly through ether lines via the wearer's body, so the interference is much less pronounced."

That made sense. In that case, Gollems that functioned like body enhancers or mech suits were probably the most popular ones in Rephan.

Hmm, if equipment-type *Gollems have autonomy like other Gollems do, does that make them AI-controlled? If you could get one that covered your whole body, it'd be like a certain superhero I've seen in a couple movies...*

"Hey, Touya! Enough gawking! We need to get to Steph!" Sue, clearly impatient with my pondering, yelled out.

"Oh, oops! My bad."

I was somewhat concerned about this army, since they were headed in the same direction as us, but I had bigger fish to fry.

At my command, the Gungnir began speeding forward once more. Eventually, we came to a large hill. A heavily-guarded settlement with multiple walls sat atop it. This had to be Acyra, the Citadel City.

"Touya, where's the gold Gollem located?"

"Gimme a minute, I'll check... Yep. Figures. It's in that big castle in the middle."

I projected a map of the local area into the air and noticed that the flashing light on it was smack bang in the middle of the city. Given the gold Gollem's association with the queen, that made sense...

"Let's go, then!"

"Hey, hey. Hold on. Sue. Wait."

My smallest wife was being a little too hasty, so I frantically tried to calm her down. This was another country, so we couldn't just crash in there and land right in front of the queen.

"What are you saying? You've done exactly that countless times, Touya. Why do you show restraint now?"

Ugh... When you put it like that, I can't exactly disagree... Whenever I say something like this to someone who's known me long enough, it's basically like launching a massive boomerang.

Still, barging in there wasn't wise. We hadn't even confirmed Steph was in there, we were only chasing the rumor of a gold Gollem. If it was someone unrelated to Steph in there, we ran the risk of being misinterpreted as foreign insurgents.

"Grand Duke, maybe you should try your specialty? You know, creeping around."

"D-Don't say that! You're making me sound like a weirdo!"

Plus, you're one to talk! You do plenty of creeping around too, Sakura!

That wasn't really an option, though. On the western continent, there were more than just gatekeepers around to stop intruders. They had sensor-based security systems. Stuff like infrared, heat vision, and so on. There were even autonomous Gollems that had such technology imbued into them. Thus, even if you used **[Invisible]** to sneak in someplace, they could find you using that tech.

I decided that the best course of action was to send in a more inconspicuous spy to look on our behalf. And so, I had Gungnir remain in stealth mode and stay hovering above the castle. Then, I used **[Teleport]** to warp down to a back alley of Acyra along with Sue, Sakura, and Yoshino. After that, I used a summoning spell to call Kohaku to my side in tiger cub mode.

"You called for me, my liege?"

"Yeah. Need your help."

Kohaku was a Heavenly Beast, which meant she had dominion over whole groups of animals. So, with that in mind, I asked if she could get any small

rodents in the area to investigate the castle on our behalf.

“As you command. Please wait a moment.”

All she had to do was let out a roar, and numerous rats came scurrying our way.

“Eep...”

“Th-There’s a bit too many, don’t you think?”

Sakura and Sue clung to my side, frightened by the mass gathering of rodents. Yoshino, however, didn’t seem bothered at all.

Kohaku gave a silent command to the rat horde, and they scattered off in the blink of an eye.

“We’ll know the best path of infiltration in an hour or two, my liege.”

With such a huge number of rats swarming the castle from every angle, I expected we’d get a full report on all its weakest security spots. Hell, we could probably make an accurate blueprint of the place based on their reports. Though what truly mattered was that we’d be able to make it in safely after that.

I also made sure Kohaku communicated to the rats that we needed to check if Steph was in there.

“We have to wait that long? That’s ridiculous, Touya! Just garb us all with **[Mirage]!** We can go into the castle and abduct Steph. Nobody will be any wiser than in Brunhild, no?”

“Sue... Please don’t endorse child abduction in front of Yoshino... It’s bad for her development.”

“Aww, sorry...”

Sakura narrowed her eyes slightly as she chastised Sue. I didn’t think it was that big a deal at this point, since we were already planning on infiltrating the place. Plus, Yoshino seemed fine with everything that had happened so far. She could use **[Teleport]** on her own, so something told me she was already used to infiltration. It was probably way too late to try and teach her lessons on not going to places without permission.

Sue had a point about **[Mirage],** though. Casting that would have made things a bit less complicated if we got caught. Still, I decided not to think about that until we had hard confirmation of Steph actually being in there or not.

“Ugh, I don’t just wanna wait around...”

“If you’re bored, Mother Sue, let’s eat! Mother Yae always says one can’t fight a battle on an empty stomach,” Yoshino said that, then grabbed Sue by the hand and walked out to the main streets of Acyra. I shrugged and followed them with Sakura.

Acyra was a fortified city dotted with sturdy walls and brick houses reinforced with wood. There was little in the way of decoration either. It gave the place a rustic, historic feel.

There were no Gollems to be seen in the streets, so the few vehicles I noticed were being pulled along by those horse-like not-horses I’d seen earlier. The people on the streets seemed a little gloomy too. Perhaps that was to be expected, though. The nation was going through a civil war, and the queen had been forced out of the capital. With that in mind, anyone would be on edge.

Hmm, where to eat? We’ve got Kohaku with us, so we can’t really go to a restaurant...

“Oh, over there! I want that!” Yoshino exclaimed as she pointed over to a sweet-smelling stall.

When I looked over, I noticed that there were a lot of small round foodstuffs for sale. At a glance, I thought they were takoyaki, but they were actually little bite-sized sponge cakes.

“Mister, I’d like a big bag, please!”

“Comin’ right up!”

The man at the stall filled up a large paper bag with the little cakes... I was paying, of course, even though they were ordered before I knew the cost.

We headed off to find someplace to eat, settling on a nearby park area. Luckily, there was an unattended picnic bench near the entrance.

“Here you are.”

“Thanks. Oooh, it’s hot...”

Yoshino passed me a cake, which, based on the heat, must’ve just come out of the oven. I popped it into my mouth, breathing fast to try to cool it down. That didn’t go so well, so I burned my tongue.

As I’d assumed, it was indeed a mini sponge cake.

“Want some, Kohaku?”

“...Not right now. I’d sooner wait for it to cool.”

Yoshino offered some to Kohaku, but I had a feeling she didn’t want to chance any of her nine lives after seeing me try to eat mine.

Sue and Sakura waited a little while for the cakes to cool, then popped some into their own mouths.

“Oh, this is good. The batter has just the right level of sweetness to it.”

“Mhm. Hey, Touya, we should buy some for everyone back home.”

The two of them seemed to enjoy the treats quite a bit. Yoshino also seemed quite keen on them, given how she was shoveling them out of the bag by the fistful and cramming them into her mouth. How could one girl eat so much? She was so small too...

...You know, if you eat that fast it might get stuck in your throat.

Just as I thought that, Yoshino started to sputter and pound on her chest. I sighed and passed her some orange juice. Thankfully, I had **[Storage]** for moments like this. Once she’d had a few sips, my silly daughter let out a relieved sigh.

I glanced over to Sakura and Sue...only to find they were sputtering and thumping at their chests as well.

...Seriously?

I didn’t know whether to be shocked or impressed, so I simply handed over some orange juice to them as well. These girls were a real handful at times.

Sue was right, though, so after we were done eating, I headed back to the store and bought a few more bags to take home. I also made a mental note to

ensure drinks were available at hand whenever I decided to share these cakes. Hopefully, we'd all be able to eat them together with Steph after this was all done...

"Mmm... My liege, the scouts have finished their work," Kohaku stated as she glanced up from a cold cake she'd been licking at.

I glanced over to the park entrance and noticed a lone rat there. It was staring at us.

"A child resembling Miss Steph was located in the castle. She had a small gold Gollem by her side."

Kohaku's report caught my attention. The description of it being a small gold Gollem really made me think of the crown series... But as far as I knew, the gold crown was in the hands of the wicked devout. That made me a little bit concerned. Could one of the bad guys have gotten to my daughter?

"We'll need to get to her as soon as we can. Let's infiltrate the castle."

"Of course, my liege. The rats have already transmitted the best routes to me, so please rest assured that I'll guide you well."

"Mhm! Let's go get Steph!"

"That's our Grand Duke... Our lovable breaking-and-entering Grand Duke..."

Please don't call me that. That's not who I am!

After we confirmed the presence of a person resembling Steph in the building, we set off to invade the castle fortress in the middle of the city. I used **[Invisible]** to conceal our group as we moved inside.

"It's so high up!" Sue exclaimed as she glanced up at the towering walls, blinking in surprise. It definitely looked bigger up close. I was more concerned about it being midday... There were more people around, but hopefully, our invisibility would take care of that.

"Let's move."

I used **[Levitation]** on Sakura, Sue, and Yoshino (who had Kohaku in her arms) to float them by my side as I used **[Fly]** to scale the towering walls in front of us. I'd gotten pretty used to this kind of thing...but I didn't want to acknowledge it

because that would have meant Sakura was right...

There was a gatekeeper by the main entrance, but we slipped by him with no issue.

“Sakura, tell me if any Gollems are coming.”

“Okay...”

Sakura’s ears were sensitive enough to catch a spider’s footsteps, so she’d be able to easily pick up on anything headed our way.

We headed down a red-carpeted corridor, following Kohaku toward the area where Steph was supposed to be. It was kind of a complex series of hallways, with lots of twists and turns, but given that this place was supposed to be a defensive fortress, it wouldn’t have made much sense for it to just be one straight path. It was clearly meant as a last line of defense, and part of me expected there to be traps around... I glanced up at the ceiling, hoping it wasn’t about to fall on us…

“There’s a Gollem...around the corner. It’s coming this way,” Sakura said, suddenly giving me a warning.

Mmm, what to do...? Our invisibility might not save us here because there are Gollems that can sense heat or the slightest sound.

If it was a cheap factory-grade Gollem, then it might not be outfitted with such features, but given that this one was deployed in the deeper reaches of a fortress, it was a safe bet that it’d have something.

The corridor we were proceeding down was L-shaped, meaning there was no place to hide...so what was the best course of action?

“How many Gollems?”

“Just one.”

Just one, huh? Then I can disable it before it calls for backup.

Assuming the Gollem couldn’t see around corners, if it heard me, it would just assume I was a staffer from the castle or something. If it had its guard down, I’d have enough time to grab it, trigger **[Cracking],** and cut off its ether line to disable its functions.

I motioned for everyone to move up against the wall, then waited for the Gollem to appear. I saw a small shadow appear from around the corner and took my chance to activate **[Teleport]** and appear behind it.

"**[Crack]—** Wah?!"

"Mh."

When I put my hand on the Gollem, I hesitated...because the thing I'd just touched looked astonishingly familiar. It was a tiny Gollem, standing at about three heads tall. It was a legacy model. A model I knew all too well. A crown. There were five back in Brunhild. Black, white, red, purple, and silver. And the one in front of me...was a striking gold. There was no doubt in my mind. This was the gold crown.

My mind raced, but I suddenly remembered that the gold crown was in the hands of the wicked devout, which meant there was no reason not to shut it down.

"**[Cracking]!**"

I touched the gold crown and activated my spell. However, my cracking didn't even reach the Gollem. It bounded off some kind of invisible barrier instead.

What?!

The gold crown jumped backward and spun around, drawing a sword from its waist. Its sword wasn't unlike the one wielded by Noir, the black crown, except it gleamed gold like the rest of the chassis...and there were two of them. This little Gollem was a dual-wielder.

It was similar to Noir in general shape and form, but the gold crown looked a bit more knightly. It had a flowing cape of sorts running down its back and a helmet visor-like protrusion on its face.

"Warning to: Formless Intruder. Surrender to: Arrest."

I'd been caught, so I quickly cast **[Mirage]** on myself to obscure my appearance, then deactivated my invisibility. Now that I'd been found out as an intruder, I could at least be found out as an intruder who wasn't Touya Mochizuki.

[Mirage] was a convenient method of creating illusions. It wasn't anything that directly interfered with someone's mind, but it actively cloaked me in something that could be photographed or recorded. Even Gollems could be deceived through their camera eyes, and any images recorded to the gold crown's Q-crystal would show the figure of someone who wasn't me.

Still, that wasn't really important right now. I was concerned about something else entirely. The ward that had blocked my **[Cracking]** attempt...I recognized it.

"Look out! Something's coming toward

us at a high speed!" Sakura's voice called out to me in a panic.

I turned around only to catch sight of a small, blonde-haired girl charging toward me at an impossible pace.

"Hiyaaaaaaaaah!"

"GWUBGH!"

The little girl came barrelling toward me headfirst, smashing into my belly like a rocket. She'd literally flown at me.



I felt an atrocious sense of pain spread out across my core. The impact was

like a steel hammer had pelted me at full force, and I was sent tumbling down the hallway.

“Baddie! Don’t you bully Goldie!”

The girl, who couldn’t have been older than five, stood defiantly as if to defend the Gollem. Her hair was blonde and wavy, while her eyes were a pretty green...just like her mother’s. Those eyes stared directly at me. She wore a white-collared bolero over a navy blue dress, along with white socks and black Mary Jane shoes.

There was absolutely no mistaking it. This girl was Steph...and the spell that had warded off my **[Cracking],** earlier? That was **[Prison].** She must’ve preemptively set it up to keep the gold crown safe from magical interference. And that tackle she’d just landed on me... She’d cast **[Accel]** on herself, clad her entire body in **[Prison],** and let loose at me... I’d heard about it from the kids before...the infamous Steph Rocket.

The impact hurt. I staggered to my feet...only to see Steph on the other end of the hallway imbuing herself with **[Accel]** all over again.

No, wait!

“**[Prison]!**”

I quickly cast the spell around myself, configuring it to repel any impacts from other **[Prison]** casts. And like I’d hoped, my spell nullified Steph’s. There was a clunk as the two wards clashed with each other and undid themselves.

“Huh?!”

Steph stared at me in disbelief. Magic nullification wasn’t unusual, but she had to be confused to see someone else casting her signature spell. She quickly recovered from her surprise, garbing herself in **[Prison]** again and preparing another charge.

“Whaaat?! W-Wait! Wait! Stop, Steph!”

“Steph! Stop that right now!”

Steph was about to come barrelling into me at full speed again, but she suddenly stopped when she heard her own name. We found who we were

looking for, so there was no point in hiding our identities. Thus, I decided to just suck it up and apologize for the intrusion later.

I deactivated my **[Mirage],** then deactivated the invisibility on the others.

“Daaad?”

“We’re here to get you, Steph.”

Her shocked face immediately broke out into a smile, then she began running to me as fast as she possibly could.

“It’s daaaaaad! Daaaaaaaaad! Daaaaaaaaadyyyyyy!”

“Gwufh!”

I was struck by Steph yet again, but the impact wasn’t quite as hard this time... In fact, it felt warm...and a little comfy. I tried to return the embrace, but she suddenly slipped out of my grasp and pivoted away from me.

What?!

“Mommyyyyyy!”

“Steph!”

Sue and Steph jumped into each other’s arms, swinging each other around as they were united at long last.

No, that’s...fine. Don’t mind me...

“Don’t move! Who are you?!”

Our tender moment was cut a little short by the sudden appearance of the castle’s guards. They’d surrounded us and had their spears out. I almost forgot we were illegally intruding for a moment. Plus, I’d deactivated all the disguise stuff, too...so yeah, we’d be pretty easy to identify.

I briefly considered using **[Teleport]** to flee, but since Steph was a guest here, I figured it’d be better to talk to the queen about everything. I doubted they’d believe she was my daughter, though... I’d have to say she was a different kind of relative, just to be on the safe side.

“Noooooo! This is my family! They’re not baddies!”

Just as I was about to explain the situation to the soldiers, Steph stepped forward and began yelling. The soldiers glanced at each other, unsure of how to react. Eventually, one of them, presumably the one in charge, gave the order to lower their weapons.

“If you’re truly Guest Commander Stephania’s family, then I apologize. However, I would’ve preferred you to have made use of the front gate.”

“I’m sorry about that. We were worried about Steph, so we felt it prudent to enter and make sure she was safe.”

I gave a plain and straightforward explanation to the guardsman. I could completely understand where he was coming from, but I wasn’t so sure coming in normally would’ve worked. If I’d just shown up and randomly said that I was a member of Steph’s family, they could’ve easily chosen not to believe me. Also, had he called her a guest commander? It was a little crazy to give a position like that to a child who was five...

“So then, can we take Steph home?”

“E-Er, no... Could you wait a little, please? If Commander Stephania leaves, the castle will surely fall.”

My words sent the man into a bit of a panic. I had a feeling it’d be like that... It seemed like the queen’s group was relying on my kid, so it wouldn’t be convenient for them to lose Steph at this point. But that was them, not us. I had no reason to let them keep her just because it made things easier for them.

“Heeey, daaaaaad? You can find the regallier, right?”

Just as I was thinking about how to get Steph home with the least amount of fuss, the girl herself asked me a question.

What was a regallier? Did she mean...regalia? Like a sign of royal authority? Something similar to the three sacred treasures of Japan, or China’s Imperial Seal, perhaps? Did the Kingdom of Rephan have something like that?

“I-Is that true? Sir, could you find the regalia?!”

“Uhhh...I could maybe use my search magic to find it, but there’s no guarantee...”

“Magic?! Like the spells wielded by Commander Stephania?! Please, sir! You must see the queen at once!”

Uhhh...I think I’d like to see my way out of here, thanks.

I must’ve looked reluctant, since Steph tugged on my sleeve.

“Daaad, pwease? The queen was reaaal nice to me, y’know? I gotta pay my detts.”

“Huh?!”

Did you say you gotta pay your debts?! What’s with that sense of duty?! Who taught you to be like that?! It was me, probably! You stupid idiot from the future!

I sighed. If my daughter felt she had to pay a debt, then I couldn’t ignore her. I turned to see if Sue could get me out of this, but Steph was already in the middle of working her.

“Mommy, pweaaase?”

“Umm... Sure... I-I guess it’s only right to pay someone back if they’ve taken care of you. Let’s hear the queen out, Touya.”

“Yippee!”

Sue immediately fell victim to Sue’s puppy-dog eyes. I’d never quite seen Sue this charmed by someone before. It was really something else. She was probably just extremely happy to finally meet her daughter.

Still, I knew Sue was right. If the queen had given food and lodging to our daughter, then it would have been wrong of us to leave without even acknowledging that. It’d be a bad example to set for my kids too.

“This way, if you would.”

The guard captain led us toward where Queen Rephan was waiting. The gold Gollem toddled behind us.

“Steph... I’ve been wondering, but is that the gold crown?”

“Gold clown? What’s that mean? His name’s Gold!”

Steph tilted her head in confusion, apparently unsure of what I meant. I

wasn’t sure how to phrase the question... The white crown, Albus, was probably still at Brunhild castle in the future...but it probably wasn’t called the white crown in day-to-day conversation.

“Uhhh... Where did you meet Gold?”

“Umm...by Pyce Town! He fell from the sky!”

“What?”

Steph began to explain. Apparently, she had materialized in the Corson region to the south of Rephan. Despite the fact that she’d been told to be careful by Granny Tokie, she was so excited by her new surroundings that she ran into a nearby forest and started fighting wolves and bears...only to lose her smartphone in the process.

I felt a little sorry for her, but Yoshino interjected to say that losing her phone was a common occurrence for Steph. Whenever she got preoccupied with something, she barely paid attention to anything else.

Steph started to get hungry, so she activated **[Accel]** and **[Prison]** to start barrelling through the forest and find civilization. On her way out, she’d toppled multiple trees and ran directly through at least one hill.

I made a mental note to teach her about environmental damage and deforestation later on.

It was at that point that Steph said she saw a hole in the sky above a field outside the forest.

“A hole?”

“Mhm! It was like...brrrrrr... Then it was all, fwaaah... and kachow! Then, I heard, worblebrrraaassshhh, then bzztbzztpkhsaaaaaah!”

I had no idea how to process any of that.

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“A Gollem!”

Steph approached the gold Gollem that had fallen from the sky, not taking any manner of caution at all. Her **[Prison],** which repelled any threats around

her, was deployed. Steph tended to have it unconsciously active most of the time.

To her, the **[Prison]** around her body was akin to clothing. She'd never remove it in unfamiliar surroundings. She only felt safe around her family. When away from home, her defensive spell was active even as she slept. Due to this, she was incredibly carefree in her daily life, as she had no real reason to feel like she could come to any harm. And while it was true that she had no reason at all to exercise caution, this often led to her getting into risky situations.

The Gollem was leaning against a nearby tree when Steph approached. It wasn't broken or bent out of place anywhere, but it had cracks and splits running across its outer plating. It looked as if it had been damaged by an extreme amount of pressure on its body.

The Gollem didn't move at all, even when she knocked her fist against its chassis a few times. She looked up at the sparkling hole in the sky it had fallen from. It was shrinking at a rapid pace, and before long, there was no trace that there'd ever been an opening there to begin with.

"Did the fall break it?"

Steph looked down at the Gollem, thinking of her technology-obsessed sister. Quun would've been very excited to see this, after all. Surely she'd have known how to repair it too.

Steph suddenly remembered Parla, Quun's little bear-shaped Gollem, and she tried to think about the times she'd seen Quun repairing her. What was the first command, again?

"Umm...oh-pehn?"

Steph tried her best to imitate what she remembered her sister doing, placing her hand on the gold Gollem's chest, focusing her magic, and reciting the **[Open]** command. With a hissing sound, air suddenly escaped the inside of the Gollem and its chest hatch opened. The G-Cube, the Gollem's core, glimmered in the sunlight.

Unfortunately, Steph had absolutely no idea what that meant. And so, she

timidly reached out to the G-Cube. Her sister had told her that this cube was an important part of any Gollem, so she remembered that much at least.

She reached through the gel-like substance and plucked the cube out. Nothing happened, so she placed it back inside.

“ERROR. MASTER DATA FAILED TO REGISTER. TRY AGAIN,” the Gollem suddenly spoke, prompting Steph to stumble back slightly.

“What?!”

It was nothing but rudimentary voice assistance, but Steph took it to mean that the Gollem was speaking to her.

“ERROR. MASTER DATA FAILED TO REGISTER. TRY AGAIN.”

Steph just stared curiously at the Gollem as it repeated itself over and over again.

“What do I do?”

“PLEASE INSERT MASTER SAMPLE INTO THE G-CUBE. HAIR, NAIL, SKIN, AND OTHER DISCHARGES COUNT AS VALID SAMPLES.”

Steph shrugged, then plucked out a strand of her pretty blonde hair, which greatly resembled her mother’s. She then took the strand and placed it inside the G-Cube. She remembered her sister doing something similar with another Gollem in the past, so surely this was the right thing to do as well.

“REBOOTING... PURGE DATA BEFORE RESET? DATA PURGE MAY RESET MACHINE’S MEMORY FUNCTION, LEARNED BEHAVIORS AND OTHER ABILITIES. IS THAT ACCEPTABLE?”

“...Perge? Umm...mammary funkshun? I don’t get it...but okay?”

“ACKNOWLEDGED. PURGING... DATA PURGED.”

The chest hatch hissed as it closed once more. Steph hadn’t really understood what the machine had just asked. She just figured answering positively to whatever it was asking was the smartest thing to do. She had no idea she’d just initiated a factory reset on the gold Gollem’s Q-Crystal, effectively wiping its mind entirely.

Steph listened to the robotic voice as it guided her through the rest of the process, prompting her to flow more magic through its core.

“Crown Series Model CS-10: Seraphic Gold... Initializing... Awaiting master name registration.”

“Master name reggie station?”

“State your name.”

“Steph. Stephania Brunhild.”

“Registered. Master handover: confirmed.”

The Gollem, Gold, narrowed its visor eyes as its cameras adjusted to see Steph’s face. The tiny machine then slowly pushed itself upward as it took a few steps toward the girl.

“Designation: Seraphic Gold. I shall serve as your loyal attendant. Your every wish is my command, master.”

“Wait, so you made a contract with it?!”

Gimme a second to process this... Steph’s the gold crown’s master?! I know Yumina and Albus the white crown have a temporary contract because her ancestor, Arthur, once had a contract with Albus...but this is different!

A temporary contract was nothing to worry about because the crown skill that required a price from the contractor couldn’t be utilized without a full contract. But Steph had gone and made a full one! It was signed, done and dusted! All agreed and above board! That meant she could make use of the gold crown’s skill, and pay whatever price it took...

“You’re the gold crown, right? What’s your crown skill?”

“Former question: Affirmative. Latter question: Negative. I have no such skill in my repertoire,” Gold, who’d been standing behind me, answered my question. I remembered that Silver had mentioned Chrom had wanted to make Gollems that didn’t incur such heavy prices for their skills… So then, did that mean Gold was like Silver and didn’t come with some unreasonable manner of payment?

But how did Steph even manage to make a full contract with the gold crown, anyway?

I paused for a moment, then blinked hard.

Wait...Arthur Ernes Belfast, the ancient master of the white crown...was an ancestor of the Belfast royal family, right?

In that case, it was not just Yumina who had his blood. Sue does too. Silver, the silver crown, was able to make a contract with the son I had with Yumina...and Gold, the gold crown, was able to make a contract with the daughter I had with Sue… Could it be that Kuon and Steph inherited Arthur’s innate quality needed to contract with a crown?

Then I guess this was meant to be...

I made a mental note to have Doc Babylon and Elluka do a thorough analysis of Gold once we got home. I couldn’t stand by and run the risk of it being some kind of danger to Steph, after all.

But now I was just plain confused. If this was the gold crown, how did the wicked devout steal the ark? Was there yet another crown we didn't know about?

"Hey, Steph. How'd you meet this country's queen?"

"Umm..."

"Here we are, the queen's room."

Steph's response to Sue's question was cut short by the guard captain's announcement. He gestured to a large door in front of us. I shrugged and decided we'd just get the answer from the woman herself.

The door was opened and we stepped inside, finding ourselves face-to-face with the queen. She looked to be in her fifties and didn't really resemble what one might imagine a queen to look like at all. Her clothing was remarkably plain, just an unadorned dress. She had a faint smile on her face, and gentle eyes hidden behind round glasses. Something about her reminded me of Ellen, Sue's mother. Ellen was much younger than this queen, of course, but I got the feeling she might end up looking like this at an older age. Perhaps it was this resemblance to her grandmother that drew Steph in.

"It is a pleasure, Grand Duke Brunhild. I am this nation's queen, Sonya Quill Rephan."

"Hm? You know who I am?"

"That I do. Young Steph has been rather boastful when it comes to her family," Queen Rephan laughed softly as she spoke, making me wonder exactly what it was that Steph had been telling her.

"But I must say...you're terribly young for a father, aren't you? And are you the...mother? Erm..." Queen Rephan stammered slightly when her eyes settled upon Sue. I could see her blink in confusion.

People in this world commonly got married between the ages of fifteen and eighteen. But if Steph was five, that meant I became a father at thirteen and Sue had given birth at eight. Queen Rephan was obviously trying to process the logistics of that.

“Oh, no. Sorry for the confusion. Steph is a relative of mine, not my daughter. She sometimes calls me dad as a...joke. It’s like a nickname...”

“Huh? That’s not tru...bgh!”

Sue smiled as she slipped a hand over Steph’s mouth.

Nice catch.

“Oh, I see. Steph has tried her hardest to explain a great deal about herself to me, but there’s much about it that has simply gone over my head.”

Yeah, that doesn’t surprise me... If Steph likes mixing in a bunch of weird sound effects into her usual explanations like she did with the story about the crown, she’d be hard to follow at the best of times.

I sat on the couch opposite the queen. Sue sat by my side, with Steph sandwiched between us. Sakura and Yoshino sat next to Sue. Kohaku curled up by my feet, while Gold stood by the side of the seat.

“First thing’s first, thank you for keeping Steph safe,” I said as I bowed my head to the queen. The situation was pretty complicated as it stood, but it was undeniable that the queen had kept my daughter warm and fed. As a parent, I had to be thankful for her doing that.

“Oh no, not at all... If anything, she’s kept me safe... If it wasn’t for Steph, I’d most certainly be in the grave.”

According to the queen, she was attacked by a group from an enemy clan while riding in her carriage along the road. Steph and Gold were in the area by chance, and they saved her life.

I glanced over at Sue. The situation felt oddly familiar... Sue was under attack in a carriage the first time I’d met her. I’d call it a weird coincidence, but Steph was the one doing the rescuing in this case...

Later on, an army from that same clan attacked the town where the queen and her retainers had fled to, but Steph made short work of them as well. It was all thanks to her **[Prison]** spell... Apparently, she’d set it up around the bridge that led to the castle, then configured it to prevent any enemies from being able to pass through. What was she trying to do? Imitate Zhang Fei from the

Battle of Changban? The fact that she faced down the enemy alone like that was nuts...

“Well, she wasn’t exactly on her own... There were soldiers from our side as well, but well...Steph sort of blew them away alongside the enemy...”

The queen looked somewhat apprehensive as she said that. The way Steph fought was by fortifying her body with **[Shield]** and then enhancing her speed with **[Accel],** turning her into a high-speed battering ram. Unfortunately, she was a battering ram that made no distinction between friend and foe. If she expanded her **[Prison],** she could effectively turn herself into a mobile wall that smashed into people at high speeds, which wasn’t good for her enemies or her allies.

In the end, the queen’s army determined that it was too much of a risk to keep Steph’s allies in battle with her, so they just started deploying Steph on her own.

“It shames me that we must rely on a child so young...” the queen sighed as she glanced over at Steph. I couldn’t tell if her expression showed lamentation at being so weak as to have to rely on a child or guilt for sending a child into battle.

“That’s fine by me! I get money and candies and food! And it’s normal to help people in need! Charity is its own reward!”

“That’s right, Steph! You’re such a good girl!”

“He he he, yay!”

Sue smiled and patted Steph’s head. Steph seemed a little embarrassed, but she was still happy to snuggle up to her mother. I wanted to cuddle her too, but I maintained my restraint.

...Charity is its own reward, huh? That’s another weird saying, like the one about debt she mentioned earlier too... I must’ve taught her this stuff, damn it...

I quickly realized I was getting lost in my own thoughts again, so I glanced up to look at the queen.

“Oh, right...so I heard from Steph before, but you’re after something called a

regalia?”

“That’s correct. The regalia is ancient proof of one’s right to rule. Whoever holds it is recognized as Rephan’s monarch. Rephan as it stands is divided into three forces. There’s my queen faction, the anti-queen factions who are targeting me, and the neutral factions who are fighting amongst themselves. If I gain possession of the regalia, then the neutral factions will lean in my favor, so those opposing me will have no choice but to bend the knee or bear the brunt of—”

“Apologies, Your Majesty! Marquis Bellius has brought his army to our doorstep! There’s twenty thousand of them!” the guard commander from earlier burst into the room, yelling.

An army?! Wait, is it the one I saw earlier?!

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“Hm... Yes, there’s no mistaking it. It’s the army we saw on the way here. Like, the number or whatever? Umm...twenty thousand, three-hundred-and-forty-eight. Of them, uhhh...two thousand and thirty-seven are equipped with Gollems. They all seem to be of the same type, color aside, so it’s fair to assume they’re factory models. There’s, like, no flying types among ’em. Estimated time of arrival, ten minutes or so.”

“Got it. Stay on standby for now.”

I ended the call with Monica, who was still floating above us in stealth mode. Then, I shook my head over at the queen, who still sat anxiously on the nearby couch.

“There’s been no mistake from your men. There’s a twenty-thousand-strong army heading our way right now. They’ll be here in around ten minutes. Oh, and the banner they’re hoisting has some kind of purple serpent on it.”

“Then it is Marquis Bellius. He’s an ally to Duke Blueson, the man who currently occupies the capital. Well, ally may be overselling it. Bellius is effectively Blueson’s subordinate.”

Apparently, this Duke Blueson was the leader of the largest clan that opposed the queen, contesting her claim with the fact that royal blood also flowed

through his veins. He took over the royal capital, ousting the queen in the process, and now the citizens there were being oppressed beneath his tyrannical rule. He probably wanted to make a show of things for any other clans who might've sought to take the city from him.

"How many men do you have here?"

"Five thousand or so. It would take at least two days for reinforcements to arrive," the guard captain answered my question. That meant we only had about a quarter of the enemy's forces. If we had reinforcements, we could probably handle a siege...but it didn't look likely.

"That sirpent man again? He tries too hard!"

"What's that, Steph? You know him?"

Steph, who had been listening in on our conversation, finally let out a little grumble during a lull in the discussion.

"He tried to attack the queen earlier! But we all grouped together and chased him away. He yelled at me, though! Said, um...die, you little shit? Fack you! Or something..."

"Okay, he's dead."

...He called my five-year-old daughter a little shit AND said 'fuck you'? I'll kill him. Wait, no. He can't repent if I just murder him... I should give a taste of hell first, really grind that punishment into him...

"Grand Duke, please calm down. I can sense your childish bloodlust from here... It's not good for the children."

"...H-Huh? What bloodlust. H-Ha ha, just kidding... Whatever I was thinking, I was just kidding..."

"A-Ahem..."

Sakura's words made me notice that both the queen and my children were leaning a little bit away from me. My thoughts must have been clear on my face

Gimme a break, guys... I wouldn't really do anything crazy to him just for swearing at my kid... Well, maybe I would. Just a little. Only a little, though.

“I’ll fight him again. Let’s go, Gold!”

“Understood.”

“Hey, wait!”

Steph began toddling out of the room with Gold in tow.

“I can take care of this. Steph, you wait with Sue.”

“You can, dad?”

“Father, don’t go overboard...”

I wanted to show I was a dependable dad, but Yoshino’s comment kind of made me feel like I was being doubted.

...I won’t go overboard. I’ll just drive him off, it’s fine.

“W-Will it be all right with you just going on your own?”

“Don’t worry about that. I’ve driven off armies like this before, so it’s not something I’m unfamiliar with. Give me a little bit, I’ll be back soon.”

I brushed off the queen’s concerns before projecting my phone’s map into the air in front of me.

“**[Multiple].** Target lock. All members of Marquis Bellius’s army.”

“Understood.”

Small red dots started appearing on my map as each individual member of the army was targeted. Given how many of them there were, it took a little while. Thankfully, it was pretty easy to track them all, since they were all marching in formation.

“Target lock complete.”

“Hmm... Activate **[Gate]** beneath their feet. As for the destination... Let’s drop them by the plains near Primula’s border.”

“Acknowledged. Awaiting input.”

I retraced Gungnir’s path along the map, determined the right spot near Primula’s border, then tapped where I wanted the portal to open.

“That should do it.”

“Hm?”

The queen raised a curious brow. It wasn’t unreasonable. I doubt she could even wrap her mind around what I’d just done.

After a few moments, a flustered messenger charged into the room.

“Y-Your Majesty! News from the scouts! Th-The enemy army has...vanished! They’re no more! Swallowed up by the ground itself!”

The queen, along with the knights who’d been in the room, slowly turned their heads toward me with slack jaws.

“E-Erm... Grand Duke, did you...?”

“Yep. I sent them somewhere closer to the mountain range that borders Primula. It’ll take them a few weeks to get back here, most likely.”

“Well, that’s not overboard by your standards.”

“See? Told you...”

Sue giggled slightly, and I took a small sip of my tea. It was quite nice.

“I thought Steph’s magic was obscene...but I see now that yours is far beyond ever hers, Grand Duke...”

The queen seemed completely stunned, but she turned and advised her soldiers not to completely lower their guard.

Heh. You’re finding it hard to believe, right? That’s fine by me. This kind of thing happens all the time.

“So, about that regalia of yours...”

“Oh, yes. The regalia is the proof of rule in Rephan. It’s been handed down from each monarch to the next, as is tradition. Unfortunately, two generations before me...during my grandfather’s time, there was a dispute over the throne. The regalia vanished during this dispute, and it hasn’t been seen since.”

“If you had it, would that Blueson guy leave the capital?”

“If I hold the regalia, then the clans currently neutral to my plight will pledge their support to me. With that overwhelming support, Duke Blueson will have significantly less power in comparison. I’ll request his surrender at that point,

and I'm sure he'll accept the offer."

The regalia was, in effect, symbolic of the monarch's right to rule. Its absence gave more credibility to Duke Blueson's rebellion, so its return would hypothetically be enough to make him fall back into line.

But what if I couldn't find the regalia for the queen? It wasn't like I was capable of finding everything in the world, after all. If it was gone from the world entirely or masked with some kind of ward, I wouldn't be much help.

"What does the regalia look like? Is it a holy sword or jade seal, maybe? Or some kind of sparkly tiara?" Sue asked the question that was on my mind. I needed to know what it looked like before I could even think about not finding it.

"Oh, no. The regalia of our nation is a musical instrument."

"An instrument?!"

Those words suddenly brought Yoshino snapping to attention. Sakura, who was sitting right next to her, quirked a curious eyebrow as well. I could understand their interest, given their passion for music, but they were freaking out the queen, so I had to quietly gesture for them to calm down.

"By musical instrument...do you mean a functional instrument? One that actually makes sound?"

"Yes. It's a small metal instrument, a vertical flute. It's known as Stella's Flute."

"Stella sounds like me! Steph!"

"He he, it does sound like that a little bit."

The queen smiled at Steph's excited interjection.

Steph and Stella, huh? I guess they're kinda similar.

The queen went on to explain that members of Rephan's royal family were taught to play the flute from a young age. On the day of crowning, it was customary for the new monarch to play a song on Stella's Flute for the people of the nation. Those in attendance would listen to the music and gain an understanding of what kind of person their new leader was.

Huh, is it like a pressure test? Like if they botch the song, then the people will know they've got a weak ruler? Or maybe it's more of a personality thing...like the song choice can give you an idea of what a person is like?

"Then, Your Majesty, did you play the flute as well?"

"Stella's Flute was lost by the time of my coronation, so I didn't play it, no. I can still play the flute, though. I have been taught since childhood."

Yoshino's question prompted the queen to walk over to the nearby fireplace and pick up a small instrument that had been on display above the hearth. It was a wooden flute that was around thirty centimeters in length. The queen placed the end piece in her mouth and began to play. The tones she created were slow in tempo and pleasing to the ear. Obviously, the song was unfamiliar to me, but I found myself drawn in and relaxed by the sound.

Once her performance came to an end, everyone in the room applauded.

"That was incredible. I didn't know you were such a talented musician."

"Oh, no... Anyone in my family could play to that level..."

The queen was incredibly modest, but even I could tell with my untrained ears that she was clearly beyond the level of your average professional.

Sakura and Yoshino were murmuring and fidgeting amongst themselves. Apparently, the performance had inspired them to do something themselves.

"We'd love to play for you as well, Your Majesty!"

"Huh? Yoshino? Sakura? I don't think we should..."

"I'd be happy to hear. In fact, I'd be honored to listen to Brunhild's music."

I tried to tone down my wife and daughter, since they were teetering close to rude in terms of etiquette, but the queen allowed it.

Hmm... It's not really Brunhild's music, though. It's more like Earth's music.

Yoshino tapped a few things on her phone and created semi-transparent instruments from thin air. That was a feature of her performance magic.

Huh... Guitar, bass, and drums?

"You play too, father!" Yoshino exclaimed as she passed the bass guitar over

to me.

“Huh?! Me too?!”

Wait, I’m not really very experienced with the bass... Plus, what are we even playing? I can only do the bass a little, you know?

Yoshino told me that we’d be playing a song I learned from my grandfather.

Hmm, I can probably do this one. I’ve practiced it a lot in the past, so maybe... I might end up messing up during the quiet parts, though... Okay... Let’s try plucking these strings a little... I should be fine? Maybe?

I glanced up from my bass guitar and suddenly noticed Sousuke sitting in front of the drums.

...Hey, when did you get here, exactly?

I looked over at the queen, who seemed extremely confused. She simply shook her head as if to let us go ahead with our nonsense.

“Let’s go!”

I began plucking the guitar strings to form the rhythm. The bassline was super lively in this one, and Yoshino’s guitar brought out the good feelings of the song even more. Sakura’s vocals added to the mix in perfect harmony.

The song was by a band that the King of Pop was a member of when he was just a child. It was their debut single, which rapidly hit number one on the USA’s charts. The band ended up being the first group to debut with four consecutive number-one hits, which was a monumental achievement. The bass was one of the best parts of that song, at least in my opinion. It functionally served as the vital backbone of the whole thing...

Ugh... It’s too hard to keep up with Yoshino and Kousuke!

Sue and Steph sat on the couch, clapping along to the sound of Sakura’s voice. The guards and even the queen began following suit.

The title of the song, “I Want You Back,” might’ve had a little more meaning in the context of the queen’s search for the regalia. I didn’t think Yoshino had thought that far ahead when she picked this song, though. It was probably just a funny little coincidence for me to enjoy.

Somehow, I managed to see the song through to the end, and everyone applauded.

Whew... I could only barely keep up with that daughter of mine...

“That was spectacular! I didn’t understand those words at all, but I could feel the heart behind them!”

Yoshino blushed as the queen praised her, giggling faintly. Sakura simply stood and gave everyone the peace sign. I looked to see what Kousuke was doing, but he wasn’t there anymore. Had he seriously just teleported here, played the drums, and left without explanation?

“Oh, sorry about the detour there. Back to the main topic at hand, could you describe the flute to me? If you can tell me any finer details, I’ll have a greater chance of locating it.”

“There are actually some photographs of it. Please give me just a moment.”

The queen fumbled around a desk drawer in the room before producing some photographs. Photos weren’t uncommon on the western continent, as Gollem camera eyes had existed for centuries. The photos the queen had shown us were very old, however, as evidenced by their sepia tint. Given that the flute had gone missing around two generations ago, though, that didn’t surprise me.

There were two photographs. One depicted a young boy about Steph’s age. He held a flute in his hand. The other was a family photograph featuring a group of people standing around a flute, which was boxed and in the middle of the room.

“The boy here is my grandfather. He’s holding Stella’s Flute.”

Ho ho ho... This is your grandfather as a young boy? This photo must be a hundred or so years old, then...

Unfortunately, the flute in the boy’s hand had no real defining features. All the picture told me was that the flute was around the same length as the one the queen owned.

“And what’s this family photo?”

“This depicts my grandfather, along with his parents and his younger

brother... My granduncle. It was my granduncle who would enter a feud with my grandfather for succession rights to the throne. My grandfather won the dispute, which resulted in my granduncle setting their estate on fire in an act of suicide. It was only a while after the blaze that Stella's Flute was found to be missing."

Hmm... Maybe the granduncle hid it away somewhere?

"Did your granduncle have any children?"

"He did, but they were executed as a result of the political conflict. The loss of the flute was discovered only after that purge, so nobody was able to ask his side of the family for any information..."

Hmm, I get it. Since the regalia isn't the kind of thing that would be brought out often, I bet the grandfather only noticed the flute was missing when he needed it for the coronation ceremony, finding the box to be empty or whatever.

Apparently, the loss of the regalia caused a huge stir across Rephan. It was probably the equivalent of Japan losing the Three Sacred Treasures or Britain losing the Crown Jewels. No doubt any such incident would incite mass panic.

I glanced at the flute in the photos. The queen's grandfather was blocking part of the flute in his grip, and it was a bit of a grainy image, so I couldn't quite make the whole thing out. The family photo wasn't much better, but I could kind of make out the general shape.

"You mentioned it was made of metal, right? What kind?"

"Orichalcum."

Whew, a flute made out of orichalcum? That's definitely the kind of thing people would consider sacred, yeah... Crazy durable, too... So we can probably rule out it being broken or burned. Though it's not impossible that it was melted down and used to make something else, given how rare that metal is...

I didn't think anyone who knew the true value of the nation's regalia would do something as stupid as melting it, though.

Ahhh, whatever. Let's just try searching for it.

I took out my smartphone and pulled up a map of the country. It could have

been taken out of the nation's borders, but I figured it would be wise to start local.

"Run search. Stella's Flute."

"Searching... Complete. Displaying."

A single dot lit up on the map.

Hell yeah! Only one hit?! Then it's gotta be it! Wait, but that location...

The queen must've noticed my unease.

"I-Is there a problem?"

"Well, not exactly. I think I've found it, but... Here. Look where it is..."

I projected the map into the air so the queen could understand my reservations. With that, everyone in the room could see where the regalia supposedly was...

"Th-The capital?! Rephancia?!" the queen shrieked.

...Yep. Just as I thought. It's the capital. The regalia's in the royal capital, enemy territory... But what does this mean?

"Could that Duke Blueson have gotten his hands on it before you, Your Majesty?"

"No, that's simply impossible. If he had Stella's Flute in his possession, he'd have made a spectacle of it long ago and forced me to step down," the queen answered Sue's question. That could only mean one thing.

"Stella's Flute is in the capital. It's deep in enemy territory, right under their noses...and they have no idea it's there."

"Ugh..."

The queen clutched at her chest as I came to the conclusion she'd obviously reached as well.

Damn. I shouldn't have said it so bluntly. The queen was in the capital for years without realizing it, too...

"Grand Duke, please have more tact..." Sakura shook her head and told me

off.

“Sorry...”

W-Well, you know what they say...to see what is in front of one’s nose needs a constant struggle.

“Where in the capital, Touya?”

“Hmm? It’s, uh... Let’s see... Just gotta zoom in... Right here... Oh?”

My smartphone map zoomed in on the precise location. The dot of light showed that the flute was in a specific building...and even I could understand at a glance what the building was.

“Wh-What?! The royal castle?! A-After all these years of searching, it was there?!”

The queen stared at the map with an expression that I could barely read.

Oh crap, she’s gonna lose it.

I could understand how she felt, though. It was kind of like when you lost your wallet, or your passport, and you started tearing up your house looking for it in a panic. You’d retrace your steps looking on the streets for it, and you might have even filed it as missing with the police...and then it was in your back pocket the whole time.

“Why?!”

“Umm... Sorry...”

The queen cried out, so I instinctively apologized. Still, I knew she wasn’t really shouting at me or anything. She was just staring at the map in disbelief, yelling out of sheer exasperation.

“Why didn’t we find it in the castle?! Why didn’t we just look harder while I was there?! Why?!”

...They were probably looking wherever you told them to look. I get it, but please calm down.

“Isn’t it good we found it, at least? Try to look on the bright side...”

“I’m happy, obviously! I’m really happy, yes! But, ohhh, I’m so upset! I’m

about ready to flip my lid! Sheesh! Augh! Raaargh!”

The queen clutched at her own head and stomped her feet. Not even the guards in the room knew what to do.

“Why is the queen all stompy?”

“These things happen when you’re a grownup, Steph.”

“Really?”

“Really. These things and a lot more...”

“Being a grownedup sounds tough...”

Sue and Steph quietly watched the queen have an absolute meltdown. I felt sorry for her. She’d obviously been under a lot of stress. She hadn’t been the one to lose the regalia in the first place, and she’d probably been living under constant scrutiny from others due to her not having it.

The whole thing made me think about Brunhild, though. We didn’t have any proof of royal status, after all...

...Maybe my smartphone? That’s kind of a sacred treasure at this point, though. I guess I can’t leave it behind in the mortal world when I pass on. If one of my descendants ends up being a jackass, they could spawn a wicked god with it or something. Oh, you know what would be a good idea? Brunhild, my gunblade! I’ll give it to Kuon when he inherits the throne. Silver might get a bit mad about it, but that’s not my problem...

I was lost in thought by the time the queen finally recomposed herself.

“I apologize for that...outburst.”

“Don’t worry about it.”

Seriously. I’ve been there. Think most of us have, honestly.

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Queen Rephan cleared her throat as if to brush away the entire miserable rant she'd just subjected us to.

"So tell me, where exactly is Stella's Flute?"

I zoomed in a little more to answer her question, but all I could really see was that it was just in a certain area of the royal castle. The map was only a map, after all. It wasn't like I could see any real details about the room just by zooming in enough. If I went to the capital, I could probably pinpoint it more directly using **[Search],** however.

The queen looked over the map, tilting her head in thought.

"This area... If I recall correctly, it's just a small corner of the castle... Nothing particularly important, at least. Has the flute really been there this whole time?"

"Are there any hidden passages or secret rooms there?" Sue suddenly raised a question. It was a reasonable thing to ask. Royal families had secret passages and escape routes built into their homes all the time, so it was practically a tradition. Even Brunhild Castle had a secret escape route. It was an underground passage located right behind the throne. It was placed there so we could make an easy getaway in case something seriously bad happened right on our doorstep. Obviously, it was the kind of thing I hoped I'd never have to use, but I'd be a fool not to have one.

"There are some hidden passages in the castle, but none in that area... Or at least, not to my knowledge. The maids would have surely found it though, since they clean every inch of the rooms they're assigned... I can only conclude it must be hidden away somehow."

It wasn't exactly a very big instrument. You could easily stash it in a fireplace or behind a bookshelf, especially since it was just a small metal tube. Thus, the queen's granduncle might have had his family stash it somewhere out of the way in the castle, thinking they could come and get it later on. But of course, the family was executed in the ensuing political purge and it ended up being stuck in its hiding place for over a hundred years. Kind of a pointless story when

put like that, really.

"So we know where the regalia is, then? What next?"

"If we can reclaim the royal capital, we can take the regalia as well. We must drive out Duke Blueson at once!"

"I've got this! Leave it to Steph and Gold!"

Steph followed the queen's remark with a triumphant proclamation...but I wasn't so convinced. I didn't really think it was a good idea for us to get involved in a foreign civil war, or at least, not involved any more deeply than we already were.

Wait, though...as far as anyone knows...Steph isn't my daughter. She's just a relative. In other words, Steph's involvement isn't Brunhild's involvement. It's just what she's doing. I guess with that in mind, it'd be fine if Steph wants to help take part in the civil war... No, no! Hey! That's not a good idea, stop convincing yourself it's okay! You can't just let your little girl take part in a military operation... Well, I mean, take part in a military operation again! She's already done it before, but...she can't do it again...

I was grumbling quietly to myself when Sakura suddenly set down her teacup and spoke, saying, "Your teleportation magic may be getting rusty..."

"Hm?"

"That **[Gate]** you cast earlier. Are you sure it took your targets to the right destination? Maybe you should try using it again."

Huh? No, I'm pretty sure it worked. Why are you doubting me now? That's one of my most used spells, so it'll be fine.

"Why not try warping something around the capital? Many, many somethings. Scatter a bunch of rocks around the capital, why don't you? It'd be good practice."

...A bunch of rocks? In the capital? Why would I do something dumb like... Oh? Ohhh... I get it.

"Got it. Yeah, you're right... I guess my magic training's been off a little lately. There are a lot of loose stones around this fortress that might work well, so how

about I practice and send them all to the capital? I'll need to take care not to send any people or animals along with the stones, of course. Wouldn't want to warp them right into the capital."

If I laid it on any thicker, I'd be winking. Hopefully, they understand what I'm getting at here.

The queen's expression shifted in surprise as she realized my implication. The guards around her noticed as well.

"G-Grand Duke, when do you intend to practice such a thing?"

"Hmm, I've got some things to attend to right now. Maybe three days? Would you prefer day or night?"

"Night might be better, for the sake of the citizens and all... Would you mind if we observed your training? I wouldn't want to crowd you."

"Oh, by all means, bring as many soldiers to watch as you'd like. Just be careful, okay? They'd best keep back. It'd be awful if they got caught up and warped away with the stones."

The queen and I spoke in veiled terms, but it was plainly obvious what we meant. If any of the queen's soldiers happened to get teleported off, that would be a simple accident. I warned her that her soldiers had better keep back, so if they ended up being swept to the capital along with the stones...well, that was Rephan's business. I couldn't be responsible for that.

"Mmm... The queen and dad are talking weird. I don't get it..."

"Steph, there are many things you'll come to understand when you're an adult."

"Really?"

Sue smiled and brushed a hand through Steph's hair as she replied, "Really."

With our conversation over, the queen sent out a message to her soldiers. She ordered her guard captain to rally as many men as he could within three days.

I had no issue leaving the actual fight to the people of the country.

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“Steph! You’re back!”

“Welcome home, Steph.”

“Home at last, I see.”



“Yay! Sisters!”

“I’m here as well, you know...?”

“Yay! Big brother!”

When Steph arrived at the castle, all the children came to welcome her. They must’ve all been worried, since they took turns ruffling her hair and hugging her.

One of my children was more excited by the sight of the gold Gollem, however, even brushing Steph off to run toward it.

“Th-This is the gold crown! My goodness, it follows a similar design specification to the others in its e-series, yet you can plainly see that the magic engraving is done in such a way to specifically block magical interference...”

“...Why am I not surprised?”

I watched Quun inspect every inch of the gold crown and raised my brow. To be honest, I was impressed by her interest. Leen was less enthused, however.

Lu clapped her hands together, catching the attention of all the excited children.

“Okay! I know we’re all excited about our latest addition, but it’s nearly dinnertime! Everyone go and wash your hands!”

“Yippee! Mama Lu’s cooking, yaaay!”

Steph stomped off to the washroom like a rhinoceros.

*...Please don’t use **[Accel]** indoors like that... You’re gonna bump into someone and cause a horrible accident.*

I made a mental note to warn the castle staff and residents about the possibility of being struck in the halls by a living battering ram.

I was about to go wash my hands when Sue stopped me.

“Touya. Did you recover Steph’s phone?”

“Oh, not yet...”

I can’t just leave it, but it’s a pain to go get... I wish my kids were a bit more responsible with their stuff. How many have lost theirs now? Elna, Linne, Kuon, and Steph... That’s almost half of them! Talk about irresponsible.

I briefly considered designing some kind of smartphone case that they'd be able to wear around their necks.

"Let's see... It should be in the forests to the south of Rephan..."

I searched for it on my phone and that was precisely where it was.

*Hmm... Never been there, so I'll have to use **[Fly]** or **[Teleport].** Guess I could use **[Recall]** on Steph if I wanna **[Gate]** there.*

I shrugged and decided to just go there myself.

"Oh... Wait a second. Is it moving?"

I zoomed in on the map and stared at the little blip that represented Steph's phone. It was moving. Someone must've picked it up, which meant I definitely needed to get it before it became a bother.

I used **[Gate]** to warp myself to Rephan again, then cast a quick **[Teleport]** to the forest where Steph had dropped her phone.

Okay, this should be the place... Where's the phone at?

I walked through the woodlands, consulting my map every now and then. It was almost dark, so I wanted to just grab it and go.

Steph's phone was moving, just like before...which made me wonder what kind of person could've picked it up. Why were they out here in this gloomy place? It was moving in a bit of an erratic pattern, so was the person lost? Would I have to save them? I started to pick up speed, running toward my destination...and the little blip on the map started moving toward me as well.

"Hey, lucky me. Guess we'll cross paths soon..."

I stopped running as I got closer. There was some kind of rumbling coming from the ground in front of me... The ground itself was trembling more forcefully by the second. I looked up and noticed birds flying away.

Something's coming this way...but Steph's phone is right on whatever this is... Oh, is it a monster? Did it eat her phone or get it stuck to its side or something?

I waited in the depths of the tangled forest to see what would emerge...only to be confronted by a massive spider.

“Kyashhhaaaaaaaaah!” the spider, jet-black and as large as a bus, screeched loudly as it came barrelling toward me. Spikes were jutting out of its body, and each of its eyes was deep red. It was creepy as hell.

Get away! Gross!

“**[Shield].**”

“GFSHAAAH!“

I conjured an invisible wall, bringing the beast’s charge grinding to a halt. It staggered on its long, slender legs, but gradually regained its composure.

“Shyaaah!”

It spat up some kind of foul-looking liquid from its mouth, but that was also deflected by the formless barrier in front of me. The spider seemed frustrated by that. It leaned back on four of its legs and began to furiously swipe at the shield with the other four.

Ugh. This thing’s disgusting. My grandpa always told me not to kill spiders because they’re helpful little guys, but this thing? This thing helps nobody.

I decided it had to die.

“Billow forth, Ice and Lightning! Electrifying Ice Fog: **[Voltic Mist]!**”

“BYGHAAAH!”

The spider was struck by a bolt of lightning from within the compound spell’s cloud of smog. It died immediately.

Damn, did the lightning scorch it black? It’s honestly hard to tell. It was black from the start...

“Well, at least it’s dead... But what about the phone?”

I cast **[Search]** to check the location.

...Yep. Figures... Ugh... I have to fish it out of this thing’s stomach? Annoying...

My mass-produced smartphones were made of a special alloy and enchanted with **[Protection],** so it would’ve definitely been resistant to whatever kind of acids were in the spider’s guts… But seriously? I was supposed to take something this disgusting apart and search for the phone myself? No way in

hell.

Oh, wait. I can just take this to the guild and have them do it for me... maybe?

"Wait, no. I can just use **[Apport]** to pull it to me."

*Obviously! Why did I forget I had that spell? I could've just done that before the fight even started! What a dumbass I am sometimes... Okay, hold out my hand and cast the... Wait, should I? If I use **[Apport],** will only the phone appear in my hand? Or...is it gonna come out covered in juices and other horrible slimy stuff...*

I remembered using **[Apport]** to pull an arrow from a man's body once, and it came out with the blood still on it... With that in mind, I shook my head and put the giant spider in **[Storage].** Better to be safe than sorry, after all. This was a matter better left to the professionals. I then glanced around for any other creepy crawlies before opening up a **[Gate]** to Brunhild's adventurer's guild.

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"I see you've brought us another ridiculous beast..." Guildmaster Relisha couldn't help but mutter as she saw me pull the giant spider out of **[Storage].** I'd never seen this kind of creature before, so I just assumed it was something native to the western continent. But apparently, it was another one of those ancient species that had slipped through time.

Relisha brought out an old scroll and spread it out across a nearby countertop. The spider illustration on it looked identical to the dead one I'd just hauled in.

"It's an ancient arachnid species known as the Atla-Nach. It's a species of monster that was said to cause chaos during ancient times on account of its rare, yet explosive mating periods."

"Ancient times? So it really is another one..."

"That's right. It was previously believed to be extinct. Nobody's seen one of these creatures in the last two millennia...but now we're getting more common reports of long-dead creatures resurfacing in every corner of the continent. Please tell me, Grand Duke...just what is going on in the world?" Relisha asked as she looked at me, her sharp eyes indicating she knew something was afoot.

Hrm... I should probably be honest here. There are bound to be more weird monster sightings from here on out, after all.

I explained to Relisha that space-time distortions were happening and that monsters from the distant past were now emerging in our era.

“Then you’re saying these kinds of sightings will only increase?”

“It should eventually calm down and subside. We’re just kind of in the thick of it right now...”

My words seemed to put Relisha at ease, if only a little. Given how frequent the sightings had become, she could at least take solace in the fact that it wasn’t going to last forever.

“Your Majesty, is this what you wanted?!” a burly guild member, still in the middle of taking the spider apart, asked as he held up a phone he’d plucked from the spider’s guts. He’d wiped it down with a cloth and it looked good as new.

What a considerate guy! It still kind of smelled funky, though, so I cast **[Clean]** and the smell was gone in a flash. I made a quiet mental note not to tell Steph where I’d recovered her phone from...

Once I’d returned to the castle, the children were all finished with dinner and everyone was relaxing in the living room. I noticed a distinct absence of Quun, however. Gold was gone as well, so presumably, she’d taken him up to Babylon. I could only hope that Doc Babylon, Elluka, and the professor would keep her from doing anything too out of pocket...

Hmm, now that I think about it...I found that ancient monster in the same forest where Steph met Gold... Is that just a coincidence? Does that mean there’s a space-time disruption in that area, maybe? Wait, could it be that Gold came through time from the past as well? I should probably have Doc Babylon investigate this stuff, and then I should also...

“Welcome back, daaad!”

“GWUBGH!”

Steph catapulted into my stomach, leaving me stumbling backward and just

barely on my feet.

*P-Please don't use...**[Accel]**...at home...!*

"Got my phone?"

"...Yep, I found it. Here you go. Don't lose it again!"

"Yay! Thanks!"

Steph took her phone from me, then dashed back to Sue's side.

*Hey! Don't use **[Accel]!** Someone's gonna get hurt...*

"Good work out there, Touya."

I rubbed my sore tummy as I took a seat in the living room. Yumina smiled and brought me some fruity water before sitting down by my side.

"Everyone's finally here."

"It sure is noisy with nine more people around..."

"That just means it's lively, Touya. Besides, this is how things are going to be in the future. Better to get used to it now, don't you think?"

She had a point. The day was fast approaching when this kind of hustle and bustle would be an ordinary part of our life.

I'm glad everyone's here, but we'll have to send them back to the future at some point... I wonder when Granny Tokie's gonna let that happen. I should ask...

For the most part, the timequake's effects weren't too bad, but the wicked devout and their traces of divinity made some elements too unstable. In other words, I had to take out the wicked devout if I wanted to safely send my kids back to the future. It'd be hard to say goodbye to them, though, since I knew it'd still be a while before they'd actually be born.

I quietly resolved to make as many fun memories with them as possible before we had to part.

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Three days later, I "accidentally" sent over thirty-thousand soldiers directly to

Rephan's royal capital during a "training exercise" that had "gone wrong."

After some time had passed, I flew over to the capital and found that Duke Blueson and his forces had completely surrendered to Queen Rephan, giving the city back to her. What other option did he really have, though? Tens of thousands of enemy soldiers had basically materialized right around him in the dead of night...

Under Blueson's rule, the citizens of the capital were kept under strict curfew. Thanks to that decree, everyone was indoors and no noncombatants came to harm.

Once the news got out, the night rang out with cries of freedom and support for the queen. The duke must have really been putting the squeeze on the people because their relief was palpable. He'd probably feared some kind of uprising.

Thus, the capital of Rephan was retaken in a conquest virtually free of any bloodshed. Though, that wasn't the end of it. Until the queen held the Rephan regalia in her hands, history could just repeat itself.

The queen impatiently urged me to help, so I pulled up my phone map and began to track down the regalia's location. I walked down a hall in the castle and stopped at the crossroads of a T-shaped hallway.

"Should be around here..."

There were two rooms near this hallway. One to my left and one to my right. Further down one side of the hall was a staircase to the second floor, and further down the other side was a window that peered out toward a courtyard.

It definitely wasn't out in the courtyard, so I could only assume it was in one of these two rooms.

*I should just use **[Search]** directly instead of through my phone.*

"Okay, **[Search]!** Wait, huh?"

"Wh-What is it?" the queen noticed my surprise and anxiously asked what was wrong.

...It's not in either of these rooms at all. It's down this hall...on the stairs?

The staircase was set in stone with an old wooden handrail along the side.

...It's not on the stairs... Wait, the...handrail?

I narrowed my eyes and carefully looked over the handrail...and one of the wooden support posts on it shocked me to the core. I was staring right at it. I twisted the post, heard something detach, and the rail sank downward about ten centimeters. I then pulled it upward and removed the post from the broader structure, which broke off with no issue.

...Oh boy.

The decorative wooden post was, in fact, completely hollow on the inside. I had to admit it, this was a creative hiding place. How would anyone ever even think of finding something in here?

I handed the broken-off wooden post to the queen. The regalia was the symbol of this country's royal authority, so it didn't seem right to directly handle it as an outsider.

The queen took the post into her shaky grasp, slowly tipped it upside so the hollow opening faced her hand, and then...a tiny metal flute slid out into her palm. It was exactly the same as the flute I'd seen in the pictures.

"A-Ahhh! This is it! Stella's Flute! F-Finally! It's finally returned to us! G-Grandfather! We've got it back! We found the flute!"

The queen sniffled and sobbed as she held the orichalcum instrument to her breast. The knights around her were also moved to tears, each of them trying their best to remain stoic as a flood of emotion overwhelmed them. I could understand what a big deal this was for them.

I was just glad we'd found the damn thing. With any luck, this would end Rephan's civil war.

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The queen stood upon the castle's rampart and began to play the flute. I cast a null spell, **[Speaker],** and amplified her performance so it could reach the citizens gathered outside the royal gates.

News spread that Stella's Flute, the royal regalia of Rephan thought to have

been lost for almost a hundred years, had been recovered. The clan lords of Rephan were all aware before long. One by one, the neutral clans all swore fealty to the queen. Her active enemies gradually began to back down as well.

From what I'd heard, Duke Blueson nearly burst a blood vessel in the royal dungeons when he found out that the queen had recovered the flute in the very royal castle he'd been occupying. He must've been frustrated knowing that it was right under his nose the entire time.

If the regalia had fallen into his hands, it might've been the queen who was imprisoned instead... And if that had happened, I probably would've at least assisted in exiling her somewhere more comfortable.

Still, that wasn't how things went down, and it seemed like Rephan's internal war was over.

"Venerable Grand Duke Brunhild. I must give you my heartfelt thanks for all you've done."

The person speaking to me and bowing their head was not the queen, but her son. He was a man with dirty-blond hair, who looked to be around thirty. His tall build and sturdy demeanor suggested he was a military man.

He'd actually been in the middle of rallying an army to take back the capital while I was doing my thing. In that regard, I'd kind of stolen his thunder a little. I felt a bit bad.

"See?! I told you my dad was the bestest, Mister Frank!"

"That you did, Steph. He's certainly a marvel."

I awkwardly cleared my throat as Steph puffed her chest out with pride and the prince offered up a weak smile. I wasn't sure what to think about her so casually calling a member of foreign royalty "Mister Frank," but Steph was royalty herself...so maybe this was just a normal way of acting for her.

"I can only hope that this will bring true peace to Rephan."

"There's still a little issue that needs to be fixed, but it should all be done away with by the time Frank succeeds the throne," the queen replied to Sue, smiling and taking a sip of tea. Her son only looked slightly uncomfortable at the

mention of his future succession.

The issue was that he couldn't play the flute. By the time he was born, the regalia was already long-lost, so he did not expect to have to play the flute in order to succeed his mother. Sure, the regalia was already lost when the queen was born, but her grandfather still ensured she had the proper training and education that he'd received as a boy.

Now the regalia was found again, it would only be natural that they'd reinstate the tradition of the successor to the throne playing the flute on his coronation day. If Prince Frank were to give a horrendous performance, it could break apart a slowly-mending nation with unease. Because of that, his mother informed him he'd need to play the flute every single day until he'd mastered it. Traditions sure could be rough...

"I'd be quite happy to join your alliance, Grand Duke, but until things are more unified and settled in Rephan's borders, I'll have to refrain from committing."

"That's fine. It's not like we'd be forcing you to join. Still, I think it's important that we have a network where we can exchange information about what's going on around the world. That way, we can all respond to that information in whatever way we deem the best. So even if you're not a member, it's fine if you just want to hear what we have to offer information-wise. What you do with that info is down to you."

Though the alliance was an alliance, it was really more of a conference for gossip or chitchat. Sometimes conflicts between nations could be avoided with an easy conversation, so I wanted as many countries to come together in discussion to make things easier for everyone. Sometimes, I did have to intervene in stuff with brute force, but I usually got something out of it so it wasn't too bad.

I gave a quick primer on the wicked devout to the queen and Prince Frank.

"Any settlements along the coast should take precautions. It'll depend on the situation, but if you find yourself struggling to fight back, then it would just be better to flee. Otherwise, people will just die for no good reason."

"A coastal settlement destroyed by a massive Gollem, you say...? How

horrid...”

The one-eyed Gollem, presumably created by the wicked devout, had attacked Rhea not too long ago. This was alarming to the queen, as Rhea bordered Rephan. However, it was even more alarming because Rephan’s border was almost entirely coastal. It’d be foolish not to heed my warning in this case.

I provided her with about a dozen gate mirrors to send out to coastal settlements in case of emergency, then handed over two mass-produced smartphones. I didn’t know if I’d make it in time if something happened, but it was better than them not having a line to me. At the very least, I’d be able to help them rebuild.

The queen said she’d attend the next international gathering as a tentative member, advising me that she couldn’t offer much in the way of cooperation due to her nation’s instability. I said that was fine. She’d gain a lot just by being able to hear from the other countries.

Thus, the Kingdom of Rephan was put in safe hands. And with that over, I had something I needed to investigate...something that had been weighing on my mind for quite some time...

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“In summary, this is absolutely the gold crown. But it’s very different from the other crowns, from its construction to its general vibe. Really, it’s a crown in name only,” Doc Babylon puffed a cloud of smoke from her pipe as she spoke. We were looking at the gold crown, Gold, as it was on the workbench in front of us.

Elluka suddenly spoke up and added, “The magic engravings all over its chassis are remarkably intricate. I can understand most of it, but some functions are alien even to me. If I were to put it in metaphorical terms...I guess it’d be like having a toothbrush for a shoe. It might have some purpose, but it doesn’t quite add up visually.”

...A toothbrush for a shoe? What the hell does that even mean? Aren’t you supposed to be some kind of genius Gollem engineer, Elluka? That just sounded dumb... Well, whatever. I guess the whole point is that they don’t fully understand what his functions are.

I remembered hearing that there was a fine line between genius and idiocy, and I couldn’t help but feel I understood that saying as I looked at the supposed geniuses in front of me.

“Performance-wise, it’s no different to your standard crown Gollem. But the Q-Crystal that operates its Gollem skill system and general motor control has a unique structure I’ve never seen before,” Elluka stated as she pointed toward the Gollem’s head.

The Q-Crystal was basically a Gollem’s brain. It controlled skill activation, communication, and movement. In other words, so long as the Q-Crystal was intact, you could restore just about any Gollem by putting it into a new body. There’d still be issues, though, since the machine might not adapt to its new form very well.

“Q-Crystals typically have quirks that betray who created them. Thus, there’s no doubt to me that this is one of Chrom Ranchesse’s creations,” the professor stroked his white beard as he offered his input.

“There’s a part of this Q-Crystal that I can’t properly analyze. It’s completely

covered up, but it probably pertains to the Gollem's skill. In your world, I'm pretty sure they'd call it a black box, Touya."

"Didn't Gold say he doesn't have any crown skills, though?"

"And he very well may not. A crown skill is something that requires compensation from the contractor. There's no reason why he couldn't have other skills available to him. Norn's black crown has a crown skill that allows it to manipulate space-time and parallel worlds, but it has an ordinary skill that functions much like your **[Storage]** and requires no compensation."

That made sense. So crown skills were different from regular legacy Gollem skills, and crown Gollems could have multiple...

"So there's no skill that needs compensation? Nothing that would cause harm to Steph?"

"Not that I can see. Though you never know, if the hidden skill I can't access is something like self-destruct, then there could always be collateral damage."

That sounds bad!

"I'm sure the young miss was joking. Gold here is still a Gollem, after all. He couldn't initiate any skill that would bring his contracted master to harm."

I let out a relieved sigh as the professor spoke.

Damn brat... Don't scare me like that!

"What stands out to me is that this Gollem doesn't have any past data logs. If it did, we'd be able to learn a lot more."

"The data might have been formatted when Steph contracted with it... I wonder what kind of things would've been in there?"

"It could've been valuable data from Chrom Ranchesse himself... Perhaps this Gollem was something of a research assistant? Oh, what a horrible waste..."

The three of them moped and sighed as they lamented the loss of information that may or may not have existed.

Whoops, did my kid do something bad?

"At any rate, she's safe, right? There's no risk to Steph from being contracted

with Gold?”

“As far as I can tell, she’s fine. It’d only be about as dangerous as Kuon’s contract with Silver, you know? Depends on what she does with it.”

That made sense to me. In the end, all I cared about was making sure there was no price my daughter would have to pay...and it seemed like there wasn’t one.

I didn’t want Steph to be too worried, so I decided to take Gold back...but then, a thought struck me. When Steph and Kuon went back to the future, would they take Silver and Gold with them? I didn’t care if they did, but I wondered if it’d be an issue... Then again, even if that removed them from the world for a while, I had a guarantee they’d show up again down the line...so it was probably fine.

“Silver said the Gold crown was based on artificers, just like Silver himself, but I can’t really see any artificer elements in Gold...”

“Artificers come in many shapes and sizes. They range from gargoyles to mimics to slimes. Even Gollems themselves could be considered artificers, from the right perspective. If it lives through magic and is an artificial creature, it’s an artificer.”

Q-Crystals enabled thought, action, and a simulation of nervous control. If those were components related to intelligent life, then a Gollem could be considered an artificer... That was true. Kind of made them closer to the regular Golems on the eastern continent than I’d thought.

“In Silver’s case, he has a pseudo-personality imbued into his sword that makes him more chatty than usual... Does Gold have anything like that?”

“Nothing in my **[Analyze]** cast dredged anything similar. The only other thing I couldn’t quite wrap my head around was the material it’s made of. They must’ve mixed something into the orichalcum plating, something I don’t quite understand.”

Doc Babylon tilted her head and crossed her arms in mild annoyance. So the golden gleam wasn’t just orichalcum, eh? It was some kind of alloyed metal.

“Could it be mixed with a slime, perhaps?”

“...An orichalcum and slime alloy? That’s ridiculous... Or wait, is it? There’s the infamous metal slime, after all...so maybe this world has an orichalcum slime, and then...”

My stupid comment caught the doctor’s attention, so I had to clarify I was referring to something fictional from my world.

Crap. I’ve gotta be careful with stuff like that.

“Hey, where’s Quun?”

She’d been so interested in Gold earlier, but now she was nowhere to be found. Just where was she?

“She’s in the hangar with Monica. It seems they’re running some fine-tuning on Val Albus.”

Val Albus was the Over Gear for the white crown, Albus. Doc Babylon and the others had been keeping it a secret from me, so I hadn’t even gotten a peek at it yet. Bunch of spoilsports, they were...

“Actually, now’s a good opportunity. Let’s give Touya a proper look at Val Albus. Touya, bring Yumina along, would you? Albus as well.”

Oh? You’re actually going to show it to me? I guess grumbling internally really pays off. That means it must be close to completion, huh...? And I guess they want Yumina to come along because of her temporary contract with Albus.

Yumina would presumably be piloting Val Albus alongside Albus, much like how Norn piloted Leo Noir...so it would be better to show it to her sooner rather than later.

I called Yumina on my phone, and it didn’t take long for her to show up with Albus in tow... But for some reason, Kuon was with them as well. Well, it was less that he’d come with them, and more like Yumina had dragged him by the hand. Poor little guy.

“I wanted to work on one of my dioramas today...”

“Hush! It’s better to go out and see new things once in a while! You’ll ruin your eyes if you keep squinting at such small things in your room, Kuon!”

The other world leaders liked the diorama of Brunhild Castle so much that

they'd commissioned my son to make dioramas for them as well. And so, he spent any free time he had in his room constructing them. Allis was quite bothered by this as it took away from her time with Kuon, and she'd taken to blaming me for it.

Yumina was right, though. It wasn't good for him to be cooped up in his room all the time. I didn't want him to become some kind of shut-in.

We headed for Babylon's hangar with a reluctant Kuon trailing behind us.

"Kuon, is Val Albus around in the future?"

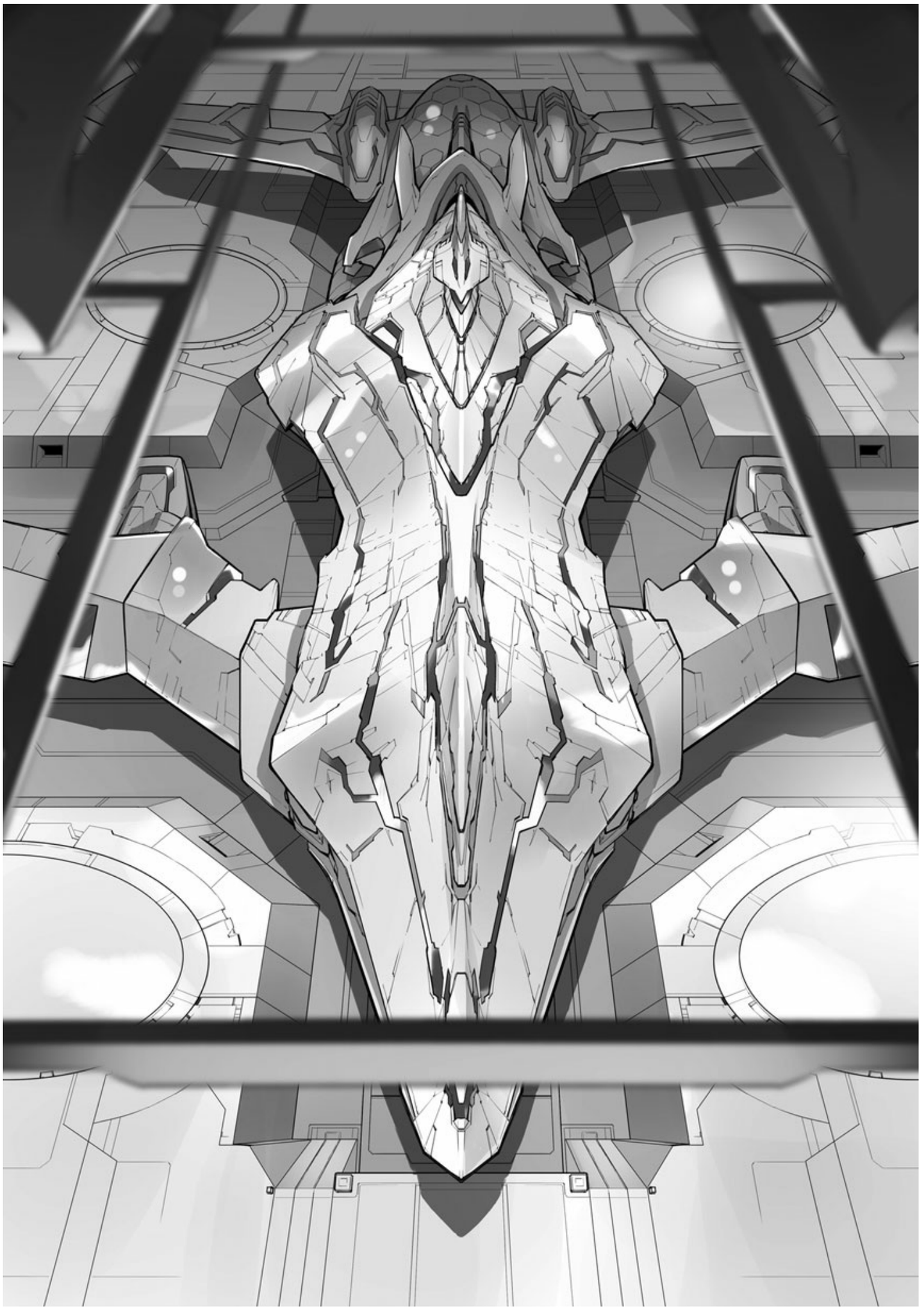
"It is. I've ridden in it a few times, actually."

Really? I thought it could only be piloted by Yumina. Maybe she let him hang out in the cockpit? I guess there'd be space in there for a kid.

We headed into the hangar and walked down a different hallway to the usual one that led to the Frame Gears. I didn't realize the place had so many hallways... Doc Babylon opened up the door to a space I'd previously assumed was simply disused, and the sight that greeted me brought a single thought to mind immediately.

"A space battleship?!"

I could only describe what I was looking at in those terms.



It was massive. Babylon’s hangar was enchanted with space-time

compression, so it was bigger on the inside, but the vehicle in front of me was far bigger than I could've ever anticipated. How many hundreds of meters long must it have been? Surely it wasn't a kilometer long...but it was massive nonetheless.

Even the galaxy-class space battleships I'd seen in old American sci-fi dramas weren't nearly as big as this thing. Why, they rarely topped seven hundred meters in length, and I was fairly sure this thing was bigger than that. It was a pure, sterile white. I looked more closely, and then I realized what it was. It was a whale. A white, mechanical whale.

"This is the Super-dreadnought Over Gear, Val Albus. It is fully flight capable, fully dive capable, and capable of transporting multiple Frame Gears within the interior. It's also outfitted with a variety of armaments, and in theory, it is our most versatile war machine."

It can fly? Seriously? Wait, I guess Babylon itself can fly... That was probably really simple to implement...

"I personally wanted it to be able to transform into a Frame Gear far larger than the Ortlinde Overlord...but that was ultimately deemed impractical. It would be too much of a strain on the Gollem and reduce overall durability."

I feel like a Frame Gear that massive would do more harm than good... It could probably cause a deforestation crisis or a tsunami just by taking a step... What kind of stuff could it do if it launched an attack?

"I knew it would be for underwater use, but to think it can fly as well..." Yumina mumbled as she looked up at the white machine with awe-tinted eyes. I wondered about the practicality. Wouldn't something this loud be noisy as hell in the sky?

"It utilizes the same concealment magic as Babylon, so you needn't worry about it being noticed. Though we'll have to deactivate the cloak if we enter a combat scenario."

Can't attack if it's using the cloaking field, huh? But that's good. We're basically undetectable so long as we don't engage.

"So wait, does this thing work with G-Cubes?"

“No. Val Albus is primarily powered by a spirit kiln. I ran an analysis on the one Quun got from Rhea’s treasury, then built an enhanced version for this Over Gear. We take in ambient spiritual power from the spirits in the atmosphere around us, and then we amplify that power through the kiln in a similar way to Babylon’s tower for use as a power source. We do have G-Cubes installed onboard, but that’s really more as an emergency backup.”

...So this thing’s powered by elemental spirits? Seriously?

Spirit power was definitely more potent than just using ambient magic. You could easily see that by comparing a regular fire spell to a fire spell used when borrowing a fire spirit’s power. I guess we needed that kind of extra juice if we wanted to make something this big move around freely.

“Come this way, I’ll show you around.”

A ramp jutted out from the whale’s belly, and Doc Babylon led us inside. It was surprisingly bright in there, probably because the halls and rooms were lined with lightstones.

I’d originally envisioned a metallic interior like the kind of bleak metal hallways you saw in sci-fi shows, but it was actually more like a luxurious hotel on the inside. The entrance opened up into a big lobby room lined with a luxurious red carpet. It even had decorative plants. Hell, there was even a chandelier peering down from the ceiling.

“Step on this.”

“A magic circle?”

“It’s a big vehicle. Just walking around would take too long. This’ll instantly transfer us to the bridge.”

A magic circle stood in the corner of the room. We all stood on it, and Doc Babylon channeled some magic power into it via a nearby wall.

The scenery around us changed in an instant. I hadn’t even felt the move, it was that seamless. The area we were now in was much more like what I’d originally expected it to be. We were in a room that resembled the command bridge of your typical space battleship. A large monitor sat at the front of the room. There was a higher seat in the middle of the room for the captain to sit

facing it, flanked by rows of seats with control panels and screens in front of them. Various panels and buttons lined the walls too, some with faint lights and beeping sounds coming from them.

I knew I shouldn't have shown her so many anime and sci-fi movies... This is basically just a mishmash of a bunch of them.

"Oh? Father, Mother Yumina...and even Kuon. So you've finally come to see it?" Quun, seated in the captain's chair, said as she turned around to peer at us. The chair was bigger than she was, so I hadn't noticed her at first.

"Done with the final checks?"

"All done. Just need to do the final process tuning, and we should be good to go. Oh, is that why you brought her?"

"It certainly is. Let's give it a test run. Come, come. Yumina, you sit right here. Albus, you sit in the one below."

I noticed a smaller seat immediately in front of the captain's chair. Albus sat there, and Elluka connected a plug-like device into his back.

Quun hopped down from the captain's chair and Yumina took her place. Suddenly, a visor came down from the ceiling and fit itself around Yumina's head.

"Well? How is it?"

"Huh?! A-Amazing! I can see multiple angles at the same time!"

"Val Albus has a vast network of cameras. They're currently linked to your vision through the helmet you're wearing, Yumina. We can patch the camera feed through to the front monitor as well."

As if to illustrate Doc Babylon's point, the big monitor in front of us flashed on. It showed a view of what was in front of Val Albus, a set of massive shutters in Babylon's hangar.

"No image issues. Very good."

"No problems with the ether lines either."

"Yumina, can you fire up the spirit kiln? Just order Albus to do it."

Elluka had stationed herself at a nearby console and was now guiding Yumina on how to get the Over Gear up and running.

“Um...Albus? Fire up the, um...spirit kiln?”

“Understood. Firing up spirit kiln.”

The consoles on the bridge all began to light up and emit a low whirring sound. I felt a slight rumbling across the room as the image on the monitor began to shift. Val Albus was rising.

“Stealth magic activated, field deployed. Monica, open the shutters!”

“Copy that!” Monica, overseer of the hangar, exclaimed as she opened up the shutters. The sight of a cloudless blue sky came into view, along with the Melicia Mountain Range that straddled Belfast and Regulus in the distance.

“Okay, Albus...start moving forward slowly... Er, he’ll only listen if you tell him, Yumina.”

“Oh, um...Albus, slow advance forward.”

“Understood. Advancing.”

At Yumina’s command, the great white whale began to soar through the sky-blue ocean above the clouds.

Chapter II: The White Whale

The whale-shaped Over Gear, Val Albus, emerged from Babylon's hangar and set sail through the clouds.

"It's not as fast as I thought."

"It could go as fast as Gungnir if I wanted it to, but we need to be mindful of the spirit energy and ambient magic we're drawing in. If we go too fast, it will put too much of a strain on the system and we'll probably lose other functionality like cruise control."

"Wait, we're not gonna crash if we run out of ambient fuel, are we?"

"No, don't worry. We'd fall like a feather if that happened, just slowly losing altitude."

...Yeah, but we'd still fall, right? What if we came feather-floating down on top of a city? That'd be bad!

I made a mental note not to go too fast unless it was an emergency.

"So, we're out of Babylon for now...but where should we go?" Yumina, still seated in the captain's chair and wearing her navigation visor, asked Doc Babylon for further instructions.

"South for now. Let's move between the borders of Mismede and Ramissh. We'll do a submarine test there."

Oh yeah, there's that inland body of water between those two countries, right? The Sapir Sea.

I suggested opening up a **[Gate]** and taking us straight there, but it was flatly rejected. Apparently, they wanted to do a flight test. After hearing that, I decided to just suck it up and wait. We weren't going super fast, but we were certainly faster than a carriage.

I guess it'll take a couple hours at this rate...

Yumina continued giving instructions to Albus, the two of them learning more about how to pilot Val Albus at the same time. The vehicle ascended,

descended, came to a halt, reversed, then sped forward again. I was a bit surprised, since I'd expected to get motion sickness...but I was completely fine. Even though we were jerking around, I didn't feel woozy or anything.

Doc Babylon, Elluka, and the professor were all tapping away at various consoles. Quun was helping them here and there. Kuon and I weren't doing anything at all, however. We were just kind of staring at the big monitor, slowly getting bored at the unchanging scenery.

My son eventually grew bored enough to pull out diorama parts from his smartphone's **[Storage]** app. He set them down on the floor and started putting them all together.

You brought your hobby out with you? You really do march to the beat of your own drum, kid...

I was kinda bored too, so I shrugged and started to help him.

Kuon started assembling small blocks, gluing them together to create walls. The castle Kuon was working on was the Regulus Empire's. It was a sturdy castle with a rugged exterior that betrayed a long and storied history. I wasn't confident enough in my diorama skills to help with the actual assembly, so my work was mostly relegated to preparing the pieces for Kuon.

I kept on stirring a slime-based material in a pot. If I didn't keep it viscous, it'd get bubbles trapped in it. I wondered what it was used for.

"When it's hardened properly, it'll serve as water for the moat."

Kuon must've sensed my curiosity, since he took the pot from me and started pouring it into a little moat he'd dug out.

Oh, so it's for water...

Once he was finished pouring it out, he used a toothpick-like tool to draw little streaks across the surface. At first I didn't really know what it was he was doing, but then I realized he was creating little waves to show the movement of the water. The intricacy of his craft was nothing short of amazing to me...

"The Sapir Sea is coming into view, Touya."

Yumina's voice prompted me to glance up at the monitor. Sure enough, I saw

glistening waters on the horizon. The Sapir Sea was about the size of a country all by itself, and the Great Gau River flowed into it all year round. There'd be no issues for Val Albus diving into it, at least as far as I could see.

"All right, time to start the dive. Go slow at first."

"Got it. Albus, commence diving."

"Acknowledged."

At Yumina's command, Val Albus began to slowly descend until it breached the water's surface and sank beneath it. The image on the monitor was briefly blurred, but it quickly showed a clean feed of fish scattering away through the water.

"Monitor switched to submersible mode. Visibility all clear."

"Water pressure nominal. Underwater navigation systems also fine."

"No aquatic Behemoths detected. Continuing scan."

Val Albus was diving without any issues. I was a bit surprised by how bright the monitor was, since I always thought it'd be darker underwater.

"The feed is adjusted to look that way. In actuality, it's fairly dark outside the vehicle. If you were to go to the absolute deepest points, there'd be no light there at all."

Doc Babylon had read my mind. I had no way of checking just how dark it was outside right now, as there were no actual windows on Val Albus.

We made it to the bottom fairly fast. It was about three thousand meters below the surface.

Hmm... I'm not really an expert or anything, but I don't think the Sapir Sea is all that deep, is it? I think the deepest part of the ocean on Earth is the Mariana Trench. If I remember right, that one's around ten-thousand meters deep, so this one doesn't even scratch that.

"Diving all good. Let's initiate an exploratory test. Yumina, release the unmanned probes."

"Okay. Ummm...let's see... Albus, launch unmanned probes A00 through

A99.”

“Understood.”

...Probes?

I glanced up at the monitor and saw a large number of small spheres streak through the water ahead of us.

Oh. Those probes.

They were about as small as ping-pong balls, but they sure seemed to move faster.

“So we use those things to explore the water?”

“The fact that your **[Search]** doesn’t work when trying to trace the Ark tells me that it’s probably blocked by some manner of ward. That’s why direct visual confirmation is the best way to go. My probe spheres were engineered to do just that. They can cover a wide range and detect anything enchanted with invisibility. Heck, they even have the same cloaking device that Val Albus does. We can see them, but they can’t see us!”

Damn, they’ve got stealth too? I guess that makes sense, I wouldn’t want any giant underwater monsters thinking they’re tiny morsels to chase after or something.

Medium-sized monitors jutted out from the left and right of the main monitor. The two monitors were each split into fifty different segments showing a different camera feed on each. It kind of made me feel like I was in a stereotypical security guard room from a movie or game. Those feeds were obviously artificially lit up too. The surroundings looked a little gloomy, so I could tell it was actually darker on the outside...

“How can you keep track of all the video feeds?”

Just staring at a hundred simultaneous videos of fish and rocks for a minute was enough to make me wanna zone out.

“Obviously, the human eye can’t pay attention to all of those things at once. That’s why we have Albus here. He can process all of it and notify us if anything unusual comes up.”

“Unidentified object detected on feed A42. Responding.”

At that exact moment, Albus notified us about something strange.

...It isn’t the Ark, is it? That’d be mighty convenient.

The video feed from A42 was enlarged, and we saw the image of something on the seabed.

Damn, it’s big... Wait, what is that?

“Is that a shipwreck?”

There was a sunken ship on the feed, split down the middle, but something was off about it. It had all the features of a regular ship, but there was a propeller attached to one of the masts. Something told me it wasn’t an ordinary seafaring vessel.

“Wait...is that a skyskipper?”

“A what?”

Doc Babylon opened her mouth wide in shock as she watched the live feed.

“It’s a type of flying ship that was fairly common in my era. I had no idea one had crashed in a place like this... I imagine it must’ve been downed during the Phrase War, some five thousand years ago. It doesn’t seem to be military-grade, though...”

“You mean to say this is a legacy of the ancient magic kingdom?!”

“Oooh! If it’s enchanted with preservation magic, then it should still be good for analysis.”

“Oho ho! Most interesting.”

Quun, Elluka, and the professor all responded excitedly upon hearing Babylon’s words.

...Damn nerds.

“Yumina, change course for A42’s location.”

“Got it.”

Val Albus turned and continued through the sea. After a short amount of

time, the front monitor showed the wreck that A42 had found. It was pretty huge. Not as big as Val Albus, of course, but it was easily fifty meters across. Two of its three masts were broken off. There was a large propeller at the back, as well as large oars sticking out the sides of the hull.

...If it can fly, why does it have oars?

"The oars are for capturing ambient magic and using them for propulsion. It functions just about the same as an average ship's oar."

...Huh, so are they powered automatically, or would people actually move those things like a galley?

"So what's our plan here?"

"We'll recover it, of course! It's a precious relic from an ancient kingdom! You think we'd just leave it at the bottom of the sea?!"

"R-Right..."

Quun shot me a menacing glare. Apparently, she'd already decided the course of action before I'd even raised the question. Doc Babylon also seemed fine with retrieving it, so I just shrugged. The only question was how.

"How? Don't you have **[Storage],** Touya?"

"Oh yeah."

Doc Babylon's incredulous sigh made me realize the stupidity of my own pondering. Here I was thinking about some specialized diving robot or a retrieval-specialized Frame Gear. But yeah, just using **[Storage]** was the obvious solution...

I went with what Babylon said and used **[Storage]** to recover the skyskipper.

"Okay, I got it...but where should I put it?"

"Val Albus's hangar should be fine. This way."

We left Yumina, Albus, and Kuon on the bridge and followed Doc Babylon through another teleporter. The hangar was ridiculously big, so I could only speculate that it was another "bigger on the inside" situation.

I pulled the skyskipper out from **[Storage].** Thankfully, none of the seawater

or other residue was included in that, so the hangar remained completely dry. The ship had not a trace of wear and tear on it. In fact, it looked brand-new. There wasn't even any rust. Just as Elluka had assumed, it had protective magic enchanting it. It was the same as Babylon in that regard.

Speaking of Babylon, the doc tapped her chin as she looked up at it.

"Hrmm... It seems to be a mercantile vessel from the Talwes Commonwealth. Must've been caught in the crossfire of combat."

Talwes? Never heard of it. Guess it must've died out thousands of years ago.

"If it's a merchant's vessel...then what's the cargo?"

"Oh, perhaps it could be interesting artifacts from the ancient era..."

"Even if there aren't any interesting artifacts aboard, the ship itself is a treasure! What a fascinating vessel..."

The magitech geeks were getting hyped up again.

Don't you guys have any other interests?

I walked up to the skyskipper and tapped its side. It looked like it was made of metal, but it felt different. If I had to guess, it was some kind of hard rubber.

I ignored the entrance hatch and walked through the fractured midsection.

"Gah!"

The interior was filled with what seemed to be wood shavings and sand. It was presumably the result of stuff on the inside of the boat that hadn't been enchanted with protective magic. Since I'd pulled the boat into **[Storage]** with the explicit rejection of seawater, anything inside that was muddied or waterlogged must've instantly dried out and collapsed into a heap.

Wait, there were people on this boat, right? I hope their bones aren't mixed in with this sand and stuff.

I gave a silent prayer before stepping deeper inside. It'd been five thousand years or so since they'd died, so I could only hope they'd found peace by now.

I searched through the front half of the broken ship, but I couldn't find anything notable inside. The cargo must've been perishable, like food or

something. It could've been that they'd loaded up a vessel with food to escape the Phrase invasion but got shot down.

I came out of the broken skyskipper and noticed Quun excitedly running out from the back half.

"Father, father! The reactor is still intact! We could restore the ship if we reactivate it!"

Hmm? It's kinda cool that the reactor's still in working condition, but aren't you a little too excited for something that minor?



“Well, we’re not all that interested in the boat, so we brought up the idea

that the young miss could have it...”

“She got awfully excited when she heard about that.”

“Well, Touya? Whaddya say? Gonna give your girl an airship?”

Huh? Why’s this on me?

I looked at my excited daughter, and in that moment, I knew I couldn’t say no! If Leen had been there to support me, I might’ve been able to offer up a little resistance, but I was on my own.

“...You can have it if you manage it carefully. Don’t get too drawn into it and upset Leen, okay?”

“Thank yooouuu!”

Quun smiled wide and gave me a big hug.

...She’s not planning to fix it up all on her own, is she? It might be too big a gift for just one child.

“Warning. Enormous life-form detected. Approaching starboard,” Albus’s voice reverberated through the hangar, accompanied by red lights and a warning klaxon.

“Hm. Seems something’s happening. Let’s return to the bridge at once.”

We followed Doc Babylon back through the teleporter and met up with Yumina and the others on the bridge. The monitor ahead of us showed an enormous sea snake swimming in our direction.

“Oh, a Leviathan?”

The Leviathan was a sea creature that could grow hundreds of meters long. It was one of the most feared creatures in all the seas, along with the Kraken. I used both as casual summons, though.

This one seemed a fair bit bigger than your usual Leviathan, however. The monitor display estimated its size at three hundred meters, but it looked like it was double that to me.

“That’s not just any Leviathan. It’s a variant species, the Leviathan Lord.”

...Leviathan Lord? I guess it’s bigger, and now that it’s getting closer, it looks

like it has spines along its scales. It's also a deeper blue hue. Huh, how about that?

The Leviathan Lord fired off a vibrating ring in our direction, blasting the side of the hull.

Val Albus shook slightly.

...It's attacking us?

"It's hostile, apparently."

"It must be the biggest fish around here. Maybe it's mad that we intruded on its territory?"

Kuon and Quun talked among themselves, and I was inclined to agree with their conclusion. It clearly saw us as a big intruder.

Just as I was thinking about that, I noticed the massive grin plastered across Doc Babylon's face.

What are you planning, you witch?

"Perfect. We'll have this be Val Albus's first opponent."

"We could certainly process a dead Leviathan Lord into raw production materials."

"This is a finer treasure than the skyskipper, that's to be sure."

"Mother Yumina! Let's fight that thing!"

It only took one mention of raw production materials to hype Quun up beyond the limit. I was a little concerned about how gung-ho she was. I didn't want her getting tricked by some shady guy who enticed her away with engineering equipment or research stuff in the future...

Yumina slid her fingers across the console by the captain's chair.

"Attack, then? Uhhh...Albus, use the fire manastorm missile #36...?"

"W-Wait! Don't use that! It's too powerful! You'll turn the Leviathan Lord into unsalvageable scrap!"

"Not that one, Mother Yumina!"

...Just how absurd is this thing's power level?

While Yumina and Doc Babylon spoke, the Leviathan Lord kept on rocking us with shockwaves. Fortunately(?) the ship didn't really take much damage. Though, that didn't mean it was good for us to just take a beating.

"Albus, fire manastorm missile #6."

"Understood."

I heard a small beeping noise, then I saw a missile come through on the monitor. It zoomed toward the Leviathan Lord at incredible speeds.

A flash sparkled across the monitor, lighting the display up for a few moments. Once it had cleared, the feed displayed live footage of what had once been the Leviathan Lord. It was almost bisected, viscera and other giblets spilling out from its inside into the sea.

"Oh, darn it. Seems even that one packed too much of a punch..." Doc Babylon grumbled quietly to herself. The missile found its mark a little too well, killing the Leviathan Lord instantly. I knew regular Leviathans weren't exactly built for defense, but I couldn't believe we'd just killed this thing in one hit...

I sighed and collected the remains with my **[Storage]** spell. I didn't want to dump it out in the hangar and have it stink up the place, so I just kept it in stasis for later. I could have the guild help me dismantle it later. Given the size of the thing, though, I'd probably have to have them do it in a field outside town. It'd take a lot of time, and they couldn't afford to slack off or the carcass would start to go bad. I couldn't help but feel sorry for the guild workers, since they had a long day and night ahead of them...

"Well, that's enough combat data for one day. We'll head back to Babylon, fine-tune it a little bit, and then we should be able to begin our exploration in earnest."

"You mean like sending it out into the oceans to find the Ark? Yumina can't sit in the ship all the time, you know...?"

"Don't be absurd. Just Albus is enough for probe operation. We'll only need to contact you if we find something, or if an emergency happens."

So Albus is gonna be in charge of the underwater search? I guess he can work all day, every day, but it's gonna be a hell of an effort scouring every single body of water in the world...

"We'll also establish markers around the coastlines of our allies. If any of the wicked devout decide to come out of the water, we should be able to detect it. Be sure to brief the world leaders on this at your next conference."

"Gotcha."

We'd delayed long enough, thereby letting the wicked devout just do whatever the hell they wanted. It was time to find them, crush them, and put an end to this annoying game of cat and mouse.

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The search for the Ark was ongoing. It was a slow, but sure, process. It wasn't an easy task, of course. Val Albus had to scour all the bodies of water in the world, so I knew it would take some time. We hadn't found our quarry, but we'd found no shortage of wrecks and undersea treasures.

According to Doc Babylon, the ancient war against the Phrase saw the use of magical weapons that transformed the very landscape. Some of those weapons even sank entire cities deep into the seabed, and we'd ended up coming across some of those ruins. There was a similar situation on the western continent, with ancient cities having been leveled and sunk during the Great Gollem War.

We'd also found various spots where there was clear evidence of mining operations having gone on. We could only assume that it was the work of the wicked devout digging up seabed resources. They were probably gathering materials to make more of those one-eyed Gollems like the one they'd used in their most recent attack. Even though the Ark was Chrom Ranchesse's personal Gollem factory, they still wouldn't have much in the way of mass production capability...or so I hoped, at least.

In any case, I didn't think this would be a situation like the Phrase invasion with tens of thousands of them coming after us, but they could still attack us at any point and any time, which was a scary thought.

We'd placed hidden markers to alert us of activity in all the areas Val Albus had already surveyed, but that only covered Belfast, Refreese, and some parts of Panaches.

Setting them up on the coastlines was deemed too inefficient. Ideally, we wanted to know if they were on the approach before any settlements were attacked, not during the attack itself.

Still, there was no point in worrying about things beyond my control.

"Wooow! Ed's so little! So cuuute!" Steph said, smiling wide as she peeked in on Edward, Duke Ortlinde's heir, who was napping in his crib. Much like Kuon, Steph referred to her uncle rather casually.

"He he... Ed's getting some rest now, Steph. Come here, would you?"

“Granny!”

Steph ran over and hugged Ellen, Sue’s mother.

Sue smiled over at the two, but she couldn’t help but heave a small sigh.

“Steph’s quite the spoiled child, isn’t she?”

“Well, she is the youngest. It’s just one of those things. I’m sure there are plenty of people in the family who fawn over her.”

“Are you sure you’re not the one who does that the most, Touya?”

I ignored Sue’s cutting clapback and took a sip of the black tea in front of me. Duke Ortlinde had very good taste, apparently. It was wonderful.

“Ellen! You’re not the only person here! Come, Steph! I’ve got some treats for you!”

“Thanks, Grampy!”

Duke Ortlinde normally had such a stoic and respectable air about him, so seeing him all lovestruck by his granddaughter was a rare sight indeed... In fact, I was pretty sure I hadn’t seen him act this doting before, not even with Ed or Sue. Was this one of those things where it turned out grandchildren are even more lovable than children?

Maybe I’ll get like that when I have grandkids. Wait, won’t my girls be married and in their own relationships if that happens? Unacceptable! Wait, no... I can still have grandkids if Kuon finds a wife. That would be fine, I think. But wait! Won’t any of those grandchildren be one of Allis’s children too? Then the kid would be Ende’s grandkid as well...and if that happens, things’ll get dicey, I bet... What if the kid says “I like Grandpa Touya better than Grandpa Ende!” or something?! It’d be an all-out war!

“...Are you okay, Touya? You’ve been making an awful lot of weird faces...”

“Oh... Um, I’m fine. Just fine. Just thinking about the future a little.”

Sue narrowed her eyes slightly, and I realized I’d gotten a bit too lost in my own fantasies.

Steph was sandwiched between Ellen and Duke Ortlinde, chowing down on a

tasty-looking cookie. They looked more like parents with their child, rather than the grandparents they actually were. Though that wasn't too surprising, given that Steph and Sue weren't even ten years apart in age right now.

"...Something's annoying me about this. Steph's my daughter, not theirs..."

"Yeah, I get it. I sorta feel the same."

Sue wedged herself between Duke Ortlinde and Steph before giving the latter a big hug.

"Oh my. Jealous, Sue?"

"This is not jealousy, mother. It is simply maternal love."

"Maternal love? I shall have to express my grandmaternal love, then," Ellen stated as she cuddled up against Steph from the opposite side as Sue. The sight made me feel a bit jealous. I wanted to hug her too.

Duke Ortlinde, who'd been kicked off the couch by Sue, walked over to me as I pouted.

"My, I really never thought I'd meet my grandchild so soon. She's so much like her mother. So well behaved."

"Right? Isn't she? That's my girl. She's perfect in every way."

"I never would've thought you'd be such a proud and doting father, Touya."

Huh? I was just stating a fact!

"Incidentally, how long will Steph be sojourning with us?"

"...A while longer, I think? She won't suddenly vanish or anything, if that's what you're worried about."

Duke Ortlinde looked a little relieved to hear that.

We couldn't return my kids to the future until the wicked devout had been dealt with. There was a chance their interference could cause a ripple effect on the future, and it'd prevent the kids from getting back to the one they'd come from. Granny Tokie said there was a very low chance of this actually happening, but I didn't want to run the risk.

With newfound determination, I said goodbye to the Ortlindes and returned

to Brunhild. I then walked down the castle hall where I bumped into Allis, who was dragging Kuon by the hand.

“Oh, father. Nice to see you. Mother Sue, Steph. Welcome home.”

“Good to be home. You two going somewhere?”

“Kuon’s been in his room all day, so we’re gonna go play!”

“But I need to finish my dioramas...” Kuon grumbled quietly. Even though he’d been commissioned to make dioramas for various foreign leaders, it wasn’t like he had any hard deadlines. I didn’t think he needed to focus on it that hard or anything.

To be honest, I was with Allis on this one. It wasn’t good for him to remain cooped up in his room all the time. A little sun would do him some good.

“Me too! Me too! I wanna plaaay! Mommy, can I play?”

“Of course. But don’t bother Kuon or Allis, okay? And come back by sundown!”

“Yaaay!”

Steph bolted down the hallway after Kuon and Allis. I could only hope she wouldn’t cause any collateral damage in the castle town...

“Kougyoku, could you?”

“Of course, my liege,” replied Kougyoku, who’d been perched on a nearby windowsill, before flying off into the sky.

It was better to be safe than sorry. I didn’t think Steph or the others were even capable of endangering themselves, but it was best to keep a watchful eye.

“You’re overprotective.”

“Am not. Just pragmatic.”

Sue didn’t seem to mind letting her daughter wander free. That didn’t mean she was completely lax, though. She knew when to parent as necessary. If I had to guess, Steph’s naive and curious personality, along with her rambunctious and energetic attitude, was probably from Sue’s influence on her.

I started to think more about that when the smartphone in my pocket went off. It was Doc Babylon.

“Hey, ’sup? Found the Ark?”

“Afraid not. But they’re making a move.”

...A move? With their one-eyed Gollems?

“Some of our detectors in the waters south of Panaches recorded movement. There’s a group headed toward land over there as we speak.”

“How many?”

“If you include the small fry, about two thousand detections. The vast majority of the group is made up of those fish people and those four-armed Gollems. As for the giant one-eyes? About twenty.”

Twenty? Reginleif should be more than enough to take care of those. I’ll stop them out at sea before the first Gollem makes landfall.

“You want to take Reginleif? That’s a no-go.”

“What, why?”

“Don’t you remember? We’re running refurbishments on it right now. You know, the waterproofing? It’s not in an operable state.”

Hmm... It’s good that we’re getting the waterproofing done, but the timing’s pretty bad. Fine, I guess I can just take a regular Night Baron...

“Want me to send Val Albus your way?”

“...Nah. I think the longer we keep Val Albus a secret, the better. We don’t want them catching on to the fact we’ve got a way to find the Ark.”

If they knew about Val Albus, they could start hatching some plan to counter it. It was always best to keep one’s trump card stashed away.

I ended the call and quickly contacted the King of Panaches. He said he’d send troops to assist, so I told him to gather them outside his castle’s gates. Then, it’d just be a matter of taking them with me through a portal.

“Touya! Take me too! If we’re defending someplace, then Ortlinde’s perfect!” Sue suddenly butted in, having overheard my conversation.

Ortlinde Overlord specialized in defensive warfare... We could use it as a bulwark to keep the giant Gollems from coming in close, which would allow the soldiers of Panaches to fight the Fishmen.

I was just planning on going on my own, but it wouldn't be a bad idea to have Sue ready and waiting in case some of them got past me. As I'd said earlier, better safe than sorry.

I nodded my head before warping Sue and I to Babylon's hangar.

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A large group advanced through the dark of the ocean floor. The group was a mismatched assortment of half-fish creatures, mechanical marionettes, giants of stone, and enormous Kyklops Gollems. And yet, there was one that stood out among this patchwork band more than any other. A large Kyklops that gleamed metallic purple.

Given that it was at the very front of the charge, one could only assume it was the commander. It was slightly larger than the muddy-gold Kyklops that walked behind it. The one piloting it was one of the wicked devout, one who kept his purple spear close at hand. His name was Orchid. The muddy-gold Kyklops were piloted by Gollems that had been infused with the wicked god's divinity. They'd all been programmed to follow Orchid's orders to the letter. Soldat Gollems had group control systems as their default, but there were many drawbacks to commanding too many at once. This problem was remedied by Scarlet, another of the wicked devout, who had found a way to increase the total number of Gollems one individual could command.

Now Orchid was leading a group toward the town of Kwapp, a port town in the Kingdom of Panaches. He aimed to destroy the place. In doing so, he'd spread the wicked god's curse and fester it deeper within the hearts of man.

Orchid chose to do this all on his own, but his comrades had effectively given silent consent. They all knew that Orchid was brimming with destructive urges. That if he didn't have a way to vent them every now and then, he could wind up damaging or even destroying the Ark. All members of the wicked devout were mentally deranged in some manner, big or small. Excessive curiosity, abnormal brutality, fanatical piety... These were only a few of the symptoms exhibited by

their number. To suppress such urges would be tantamount to denying themselves.

Orchid's destructive impulses were his guiding light. He took simple, unbridled pleasure in breaking things or killing others. That was why Orchid marched toward Kwapp. For personal satisfaction.

"Let's trash 'em in one go, eh?"

As Orchid's Kyklops rose from the waves to descend upon the harbor, he suddenly spotted something unfamiliar. It was an enormous golden Gollem, some ten meters taller than the Kyklops he piloted. And, strangely enough, it was making a punching motion in Orchid's general direction.

Orchid suddenly sensed danger, hitting a control that made his Gollem duck back down below the waves again.

"Cannon Knuckle Spiral!"

The massive golden Gollem, Ortlinde Overlord, sent its right arm firing off and rotating in a high-speed rocket punch. It fired at the purple Gollem, but just barely missed as its target sank below the ocean water once again. The rocket punch instead smashed into a regular Kyklops that stood behind where Orchid had been. The Kyklops fell backward and sank as the flying fist whizzed back in an arc and docked with Ortlinde's arm again.

Orchid brought his Kyklops to a standing position again.

"What is this? A Gollem soldier from Brunhild? And some strange others too..."

Orchid used his Kyklops camera to zoom in on the image of the harbor. There, he saw multiple black mechs by the giant golden one, as well as an odd-looking, deer-shaped machine. He couldn't understand how, but he'd walked straight into an ambush.

"I don't get it...but this is pretty nice. Oh man, this is real interesting."

Orchid didn't seem to care about his disadvantage. A smile crept across his face. He was only thinking about one thing. It was fun enough trashing weak enemies, sure...but how fun would it be to trash one of Brunhild's brilliant

creations?

“Wisteria, it’s time.”

The moment Orchid spoke, a gleaming purple spear appeared in the hands of his Kyklops. Wisteria was his wicked treasure, a corrupted instrument of the divine with the wicked god’s malediction buried deep inside. Changing its size was trivial.

Orchid roared gleefully as his Kyklops twirled the spear, pointing its tip straight at the shoreline.

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“Mmm... I missed the purple one...” Sue’s frustrated voice leaked out of the Ortlinde Overlord’s cockpit.

I looked over at the metallic purple Gollem from within my own Night Baron’s cockpit.

How’d that thing duck the cannon knuckle? That must’ve taken some serious precision. I wonder if it’s down to the mech or the pilot... Given that it’s a different color from the rest, it’s either the commander’s or a special one. Or well, at least that’s what my gut tells me.

The metallic purple...or just purple for simplicity’s sake, Gollem suddenly held up a weird-looking spear and pointed it at us. There was something off about the spear. I could sense a strange feeling of unease immediately.

“I’ll deal with the purple one. Sue, focus on defense. Panaches’s soldiers can go on the offensive,” I opened my comms and told everyone what to do. The other Night Barons were piloted by soldiers from Panaches. There were about fifty of them in total, though mine was the only one equipped with my remote-controlled fragarachs.

“Leave it to us! Behold the power of Panaches!” Prince Robert of Panaches, AKA the pumpkin-pants prince, exclaimed as he stepped forward in his Deer Blau Over Gear. On the ground, regular Panaches foot soldiers stood ready. They had the dock secured against the advancing Fishmen and Rock Giants.

“Charge!”

We began our counterattack, not wanting to lose pace with the invaders. Two of the four fragarachs on my Frame Gear’s back detached, turning into twinblades that I grasped in both hands.

The purple Gollem ahead of me came charging in with its spear. I slashed, but he ducked and came in with a spear thrust. It was so fast that I could barely react, but I just barely managed to step back in time. He followed up the attack with a sweep, and I ducked sideways.

“He’s fast...”

I'd heard it was more important for spear wielders to learn how to draw back their spears rather than thrust them. By pulling back fast, you could easily chain attacks into combos and match pace with your enemy. In that regard, it was kind of similar to boxing or martial arts, but I was too much of an amateur to really grasp the nuance. All I really understood was that it'd be dangerous to get too close to this guy.

I had to avoid his spear as it came out, and use my swords to parry them. Given that we were fighting mech-knee-deep in ocean water, I was at a bit of a disadvantage when it came to fancy footwork.

"Heh, pretty good! You're the first one who's ever dodged my Wisteria this much!"

A voice rang out from the Gollem in front of me. It was the voice of a young man.

...There's a human in there? No, I guess it must be one of the wicked devout. Can't really call them human, can I?

I turned on my Night Baron's external speakers.

"Are you a follower of the wicked god?"

"Guess you could say that. But that's not really important right now. I'm about to kill ya, anyway."

The purple Gollem kept on thrusting its spear my way. It moved so fast that it felt like several spears were coming at me at the same time. I moved backward to maintain distance between us.

"Ha ha ha! I don't think so! Run him through, Wisteria!"

Lightning began to build up and lash from the tip of the spear.

Wait, wait. You shouldn't put electricity near water, you moron!

"**[Absorb]!**"

I used my absorption magic to dissipate the lightning and draw it in. It spread out like a mist and evaporated.

That was a close call... If the lightning had hit anywhere, it would've spread

and caused damage I couldn't control.

I needed to take care of this guy before he had a chance to do anything dangerous.

"Fragarachs!"

The two inert sword pieces on my back came to life and floated in the air behind me. At the same time, I let go of one of the fragarach blades in my hands. It floated as well.

"Go!"

The three blades whizzed through the air like missiles, seeking out their target. The purple Gollem tried its best to bat them down with its spear, but one of them got through and sank deep into the machine's shoulder.

My enemy's movement stalled. I saw my chance and wasted no more time, closing the distance in an instant and sending my sword smashing into the Gollem's side.

The purple Gollem shuddered, then fell still. Had I really beaten it so easily?

"Gimme a break... It stops working just when things start getting interesting? I've gotta get Scarlet to make me something sturdier next time."

The purple Gollem's chest hatch popped open, revealing the man inside. His hair was gray, he wore an iron mask over the lower half of his face, and a tattered, bluish-purple cape sat on his shoulders. He looked a little bit older than me... Was this guy really one of the wicked devout?

"Name's Orchid. This here's Wisteria."

In the blink of an eye, the spear in the Gollem's hand vanished. A smaller, identical spear appeared in Orchid's hands. What was up with that?

"Gollem fights are fine, sure...but how about we go toe-to-toe with our real bodies? That sounds way more interesting..."

"Sorry, I'm afraid that won't be happening."

A puddle of what looked to be water suddenly spread out across the Gollem's open chest hatch, and a man wearing something resembling a full diving suit

emerged from it.

Hmm... Isn't that the same phenomenon I saw when I faced the Gigantes in Gandhilis? He made off with those machine parts back then.

"Hey, Indigo. You can't just get in my way."

"I can and will get in your way. Look around you, fool."

"Hm?"

The words spoken by the man in the diving suit prompted me to check my monitor. I saw that around half of the one-eyed Gollems had been trashed by the Night Barons. We had Prince Robert's Over Gear and more than twice their numbers, though, so that much was to be expected.

"There's no point in continuing to fight. Our Kyklops are losing. Let us away."

Kyklops? Is that what those things are called?

"Tch. Maaan... Fine, fine. I did have a little fun, so it ain't a total wash. I dunno who you are, asshole! But next time I see ya, I'm gonna—" Orchid brandished his spear toward me as he spoke, but his words were cut off as Indigo dragged him into a puddle. They vanished in an instant. It was definitely the same teleportation magic they'd used in Gandhilis. I needed to do something about this Indigo guy, or any of my future encounters with the wicked devout could just turn into a wild goose chase. The best I could think up on the spot was putting down wards to counteract his magic or beating him before he could use whatever ability it was...

As I pondered the matter, I checked my monitor again... and realized all the remaining Kyklops Gollems had been defeated. They'd gotten away again, but we were able to defend the town without any civilian casualties. I could be happy about that, at least.

◇ ◇ ◇

"They're certainly trying, but it's no match for my Frame Gears," Doc Babylon spoke pridefully as she finished up her analysis of the Kyklops wreckage.

Given that our side had suffered basically no harm while their side had been totally trashed, even I could've said as much. Well, it wasn't that we'd come to

no harm. Some of the Chevaliers we'd called in for support were a bit bashed up. But even including that, it was a total victory for our side.

"One of them called these things a Kyklops."

"Kyklops? Oh, like Cyclops. Cute. It's what they used to call the Cyclops back during my era. Kind of an uninspired naming sense, if you ask me."

...Pot calling the kettle black, much? Frame Gear isn't exactly the most imaginative name.

"It's quite an ambitious construction, I must admit. The magic engraving here is extremely competent. Without that, the movement would be dulled by a factor of one or two."

"It's also completely waterproofed. I never even thought of using slime membrane to achieve this kind of effect. In fact, the extra viscosity of the coating gives it superior underwater movement."

Elluka and the Professor were both a bit more enthused about the wreckage, prompting Doc Babylon to mutter something or other about it not being all that bad.

I suddenly remembered that I needed to ask her something.

"Is there a way to stop teleportation magic? Or like...prevent it from starting?"

"Hmm? Why not just put up some wards?"

"Don't wards just stop people from warping to us? I'm talking about preventing someone from escaping a certain area..."

"Oh, you mean the wicked devout. I think it's a bit naive to consider whatever they're using to be magic, don't you think? Your **[Gate]** can bypass wards, after all."

Oh yeah, that's a good point. Their abilities are probably infused with divinity, huh...? Hell, I can use my own divinity to travel literally anywhere I want.

"I guess your only solution is finishing him off before he warps?"

"Hmm... I think it only takes him a second or two to activate it, though..."

If it was anything less than instant death, he could probably get away. This was a bit tricky... Even if I put a tracker on him or something, it'd probably go dead if he teleported back to the Ark.

"Well, there's recorded footage of the phenomenon on the Night Baron you piloted. I'll check it later, maybe work something out."

"Thanks. Sorry for the extra work."

I was hoping Doc Babylon would be able to figure something out, so I decided to leave that to her in the meantime. There was another place I could go to for advice, after all...

◇ ◇ ◇

"Stopping someone from warping away, huh? You might be able to use **[Prison]** infused with divinity..."

I'd brought my question out to the castle terrace, questioning Karen and Moroha, who were sipping tea together there.

"I thought about that too, but wouldn't the guy be able to use his own divinity to break out?"

"Silly! A fraudulent wicked god's follower wouldn't have nearly the degree of divinity as you, you know? You're a dependent of God Almighty!"

"Indeed. It'd be like a praying mantis going up against an orichalcum shield..." Moroha smirked as she followed up on Karen's response.

Oh...that actually makes sense.



“But you have to remember, you know? Using your divinity against denizens

of the mortal realm is against the rules. Now that you're well and truly one of us, you can't use your power as a god."

*Crap. I guess I'm screwed, then. If I don't use my divinity, he'll just break out of my **[Prison].***

How come they could use the wicked god's divinity down here while I couldn't use my regular divinity, anyway? That hardly seemed fair. Police were allowed to run red lights if they were in pursuit of a suspect, right? Couldn't we just treat this situation like a car chase and bend the rules a little?

"Wait...I've used my divinity to enhance my **[Search]** before..."

"That's fine. The specific rule is that you can't use your divinity to exert influence upon the mortal world. If you're just using it for little stuff, that's basically fine. Defeating those wicked whatevers would be pretty easy with your divinity, but it'd affect the world too much, so you're not allowed."

...So I've gotta beat them on mortal terms, huh? It's not like I can't, it's just kind of a pain in the ass...

"What if I weakened them using my divinity, then had some regular people deal the final blow?"

"I guess we could overlook a couple of divine hits, but if you do ninety-nine percent of the work, it'd be basically the same as you defeating them, don't you think?"

Guess that's true... It'd be like a parent showing up to a dispute between two kids, beating the crap out of one of the kids, then letting their kid throw the last punch. If they tried telling anyone that their kid was some kind of badass for that, nobody would believe them.

"I suppose we could use a loophole, you know...?" Karen, who'd been quiet for a short time, spoke up again.

"Hm? What kind?"

"We could have someone from the mortal realm wield a divine weapon capable of preventing any kind of transportation magic, you know?"

"Wait, there are weapons that can seal stuff like that?"

“I think so. There’s probably something like that in the divine realm treasury...but there are conditions to keep in mind that make this something of an unideal solution.”

Moroha hummed to herself and crossed her arms. She seemed to agree that it was a possibility, though.

Conditions? Like what? They won’t lend it to me from the treasury or something?

“No, I think they’d be happy to let you take things from the treasury. The problem is that the treasury itself is a large, unorganized vault filled with all manner of sacred treasures that gods either made for fun or completed as their masterworks. There’s so much stuff in there that it would take a very long time to track down just one item. God Almighty is supposed to be in charge of maintaining order in there, but he’s not exactly the most organized...”

“So how long would it take to find what I need?”

“At least a thousand years, I think.”

“A thousand?!”

How much crap is in there?! I can’t wait a whole damn millennia for it!

“It’s officially named a treasury, but...well...it’s more of a junkyard, you know? We use it to throw out stuff we don’t need anymore. Most gods keep the stuff they need to themselves.”

In other words, it was just like my **[Storage].** A convenient space for all manner of junk to get thrown out of sight and mind... Yeah... That tracked.

I definitely didn’t have the time to waste trawling through a place like that. But wait, couldn’t I use **[Search]** to find it?

“Since the treasury is a repository for sacred treasures we wanted sealed, any kind of tracing magic is nullified inside it.”

“Dammit!”

Guess that makes sense, though... Doesn’t matter if it’s the divine realm or a mortal world, sacred treasures are a big deal. You’d want them sealed away with the utmost security.

“So I’ve just gotta be the early bird and get the worm before it teleports away, I guess...”

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that. As they say, if they have no sacred treasure, let them craft one!”

...Huh? I dunno why, but Moroha’s words sound close to Marie Antoinette’s famous line there... Actually, wait...Marie Antoinette wasn’t even the original person who said “Let them eat cake,” right?

“Touya, you’re a god. You can make a sacred treasure of your own. You can’t use it to defeat the wicked god’s followers yourself, though.”

“You’ll also have to keep a close eye on whatever it is you create, lest it become a vessel for more wicked divinity after being abandoned for too long.”

“...Wait...me? Make a sacred treasure?”

I had no idea that was even an option. That’d definitely be a huge help.

“Touya, why are you acting so surprised? You made use of that very ability to defeat the wicked god.”

“Wait! That’s right, I did!”

“That wasn’t exactly normal, though. It was a hastily-formed disposable divine tool. It’s not really something regular humans could use, either. When crafting a sacred treasure, you have to think more general, something mortals can easily make use of.”

More general, huh? I don’t even know where I’d begin making something like this, though... Hell, during my battle with the wicked god, I was so caught up in the moment that I didn’t stop to think about what I was doing...

“I think it’d be better if you were educated properly on the creation of a sacred treasure. Karen and I aren’t gods in the production sphere, though. We’d surely be bad teachers.”

Production? So like...Uncle Kousuke, the god of agriculture? Surely not Suika... She’d be too drunk.

“Allow me to rephrase. You’ll need to learn from a god in the manufacturing sphere.”

Manufacturing? So a god that makes stuff? Do I even know any gods like that? Should I just ask God Almighty?

“You know one. Lots of gods came down for your wedding, you know? Including one perfect for what you need .”

“Uhhh... Oh! The god of crafting?”

“Bingo.”

This world was ultimately going to become a resort for the gods, so ten gods had come down in advance to sample the place before it opened fully. The goddess of dance, the god of strength, the god of crafting, the god of glasses, the god of theater, the god of puppetry, the god of wandering, the goddess of flowers, and the goddess of gemstones. There was Granny Tokie as well, the goddess of space-time.

If I remembered right, the god of crafting took the form of a man in his forties with streaked-gray hair and a mustache. He wore Japanese-style clothing that resembled a samue, a monk’s working clothes. Basically, he fit the image of a traditional craftsman.

“You could also speak with the god of glasses or the god of puppetry, but the two of them are...eccentric,” Karen muttered slightly as she gazed off into the distance. I had to agree. The god of glasses was a little too into spectacles for my tastes, and the way the god of puppetry spoke via ventriloquism freaked me out. Compared to those, the god of crafting was probably the most normal.

“So he’d be able to teach me how to make a sacred treasure?”

“Not overnight, but he’d certainly be able to teach you in a shorter time frame than it’d take to rummage through the treasury.”

...Okay, sure, it won’t take a thousand years, but is it gonna take a hundred? Wait, can’t I just ask him to make me the exact kind of sacred treasure I need?

“If he made it for you, he’d be responsible for keeping an eye on it. It’s not right to put that responsibility on someone else’s shoulders, you know?”

“He could probably just toss it in the treasury once you’re done with it, to be fair...but this is a good chance for you to learn, so you should take it.”

My sisters had a fair point. I didn't want to just be irresponsible and have others take care of my problems for me. This was a good opportunity. Apparently, responsibility for sacred treasures could be transferred between gods, but even with that in mind, I needed to make this one by myself.

"Okay, so we've determined he can help me. Where would I find him, though?"

"Huh? Can't you just use **[Search]** for that?"

"Oh...right."

Duh! I've met the guy before, so I can just look him up. That was a pretty stupid question.

I turned away from Karen, who was staring at me like I was a moron, and looked over my phone's map for the god of crafting.

"Hmmm... Oh? He's in Mismede's capital. Guess he didn't stray too far from Brunhild."

The god of crafting was clearly in Berge, Capital of Beasts. He wasn't in the central metropolitan area, but he was definitely in Berge.

"Makes sense. There's plenty of good quality ore, lumber, soil, and so on in Mismede. It's the logical place for a natural-born craftsman to settle."

Makes sense. The sea of trees is nearby too, so that gives him easy access to wood... Probably high-quality wood to boot. Thank the gods for the gods. I've got a way to deal with this!

I could use **[Gate]** to get to him since I'd been to Berge multiple times in the past.

"Then Ih'm coming witsch ya!"

"Gaaah! Don't just appear outta nowhere!"

Suika suddenly teleported in front of me, scaring me half to death.

What the hell was that for?! I'm getting real tired of you people doing that!

"...Why do you wanna go with me?"

"I wanna try sumh Mishmede booze... And get, hic! Getsch me a new sake

bottle and sake cup fromh the god of crafting...”

Can he make those? I guess they’re traditionally made of ceramics, so they count as crafting work...

He was surely an incredibly skilled craftsman, but part of me pictured him creating those things for Suika only for her to smash them while cackling in a drunken stupor...

“Well, whatever. Let’s go see him.”

I opened up a portal to Berge and stepped on through. As I passed through to the back alley, the strong glare from the sunlight caught my eyes.

“Man, it’s hot...”

Mismede’s climate was far hotter than Brunhild’s. It wasn’t nearly as humid as Japan, though. It was a kind of dry, more bearable heat.

We started walking through the bustling streets. Mismede’s palace, which resembled the Taj Mahal, loomed over the cityscape in the distance. Mismede’s population was mostly made up of beastfolk, and many different kinds passed by us as we walked. These streets would become even busier after the train lines reached the city.

“Let’sch start at the booze stooore...”

“Hey, no way. Why would we?!”

Suika started to merrily skip down the path ahead of me. Wasn’t our priority the god of crafting? Suika swiveled around and smiled wide before letting out a happy sigh. She was kinda pissing me off.

“You don’t get it, Touyaaa... D’ya think he’ll jusht teach’ya if you barge in withouht a lihttle gift?”

Ugh... I hate to admit it, but she’s got a point.

It’d have been rude of me to go to the god of crafting seeking his assistance with nothing to offer. I should’ve prepared a selection of cakes or something.

“Thaaaht’s whyyy...we’ll give him a lihttle booze frum Mishmede, and shum booze from Earth that I know you keep hiding in your, hic! In your **[Schtorage].**

He likes a good drinky, so he'll 'ppreshiate it."

*...You're just looking for an excuse to drink, aren't you? My grandpa's secret booze stash is limited, you know? I put it in my **[Storage]** for a reason... I guess one bottle can't hurt, though.*

She might've been annoying as hell, but she was still the goddess of alcohol. She had the best intuition when it came to finding good booze. It was just about her only talent, so I could afford to let her help this once.

"...You mahkin' fun of me in your head?"

"Of course not."

I ignored Suika's surprisingly sharp senses before entering a nearby liquor store with her. There were all manner of drinks lining the walls. The kind of selection you'd come to expect from a store in a capital city.

Oh, interesting... There are different specialties by different species. I wonder how the honey wine from the bear beastfolk tastes... Won't this do?

"Lemme handle this. All you gotta do is, hic, foot the bill!" Suika said as she toddled off to check more of the goods.

I don't exactly like being her walking wallet, but I have to defer to her superior taste in alcohol. I might be married, but I'm still a minor. How am I supposed to develop a taste for booze?

In this world I was already classified as an adult, but I'd promised myself that I wouldn't take up drinking until I at least turned twenty. That being said, I had already had a few drinks by this point... My wives had drank their fair share with me, after all...

After a while, Suika came back and lined up various bottles on the counter. I shrugged and paid for them all. Over half of her purchases were for her personal collection, apparently. I even noticed that she'd bought the honey wine I'd been eyeing up.

"Thank youuu!"

We left the store, and a very happy shopkeeper, behind us.

"Okay, time to go find the god of crafting..."

“Time for bar snacks!”

“C’mon...”

I stopped Suika from running off to another store. I had plenty of snacks in my **[Storage],** so we didn’t need to go shopping.

She sulked, but tagged along behind me as I headed to a house on the outskirts of the capital. It was a single-floor home, built slightly elevated and next to a large tree. A man was sitting out on the front porch, whittling at a piece of wood with a small knife.

“Here you are, eh?”

“God of crafting! It’sch been too long!”

The god of crafting smiled as he saw Suika run over to him. Apparently, he’d been expecting me. If I had to guess, he’d probably sensed my **[Search]** spell.

“Nice to see you again, crafting god.”

“They call me Kraft down here. You’re welcome to do the same, new god.”

“Then you can call me Touya.”

“Sure thing, Touya.”

Even as we spoke, his hand never stopped whittling away at the wood. Before my very eyes, the rough and raw material took the form of a little bear with a salmon in its mouth.

Wait, I’ve seen something like that at my grandpa’s before.

“What is it?”

“Just a little side fun. Should be worth a tidy sum.”

The god of crafting, Kraft, tossed the little figurine my way. I was shocked by how realistic it looked... The surface was astonishingly smooth, even though it had only been whittled with a knife. Just how had he gotten it to this state? I couldn’t wrap my head around it.

“Well, come on in. I take it you need something?”

Kraft’s home was filled with all kinds of objects. He had a potter’s wheel for

ceramics, a carving chisel, one of those tubes people used for glasswork, and tons of other things related to crafting. He even had a weaver's loom in the corner. Just how many different kinds of crafts was this man capable of creating?

We set out the alcohol we'd brought as a gift, then explained what I needed.

"I see... A sacred treasure, eh? I'd be glad to teach you. Hell, you're one of God Almighty's favored, so it's not like it'll take you long to pick up. Might take a month or two, though. Maybe three."

H*o ho ho... Finally, an answer for the time frame. But...up to three months? That's kind of a long time.*

"Normally, it'd take a hundred years or so for a total newbie to figure it out. If you keep that in mind, I think you'll find a couple of months is no time at all."

A hundred?! Okay, you're kinda selling it better...

I was basically a brand new god, so in terms of status, I was still a small fry. But apparently in terms of divinity, I was actually on the same level as a tenured senior among the gods. That was all thanks to the fact that I had God Almighty's blessing.

One's divinity was a major factor in determining sacred treasure creation, so my extra divinity lessened the time severely. It kind of felt like I was cheating, to be honest...but I decided not to dwell on that.

"So, there are a few restrictions. You can't make a sacred treasure that's stronger than you. You can't give a sacred treasure an ability you don't have either. In short, a sacred treasure is an extension of you. It's just a tool that lets humans use godlike power."

Huh, really...? I thought I might be able to make a sacred treasure that tracked down the wicked devout, but I guess I can't do that. Even if I could make something like that, it'd only be able to search about as well as I can... Mass-producing that kind of thing is definitely off the table.

"Now I'll explain the next bit."

"Thanks."

Kraft popped open a bottle of booze and began to slowly pour it into a glass. I could only assume he'd crafted it himself. Suika needily waggled her empty cup, prompting him to pour some into hers as well.

...She really just came here to drink, huh?

"So, the first thing your sacred treasure needs is a vessel."

"A vessel?"

"Something you pour your divinity into. Could be a sword, a ring, or a vase. Anything like that can be used as a base vessel."

Okay, something to pour my divinity into... Noted.

"You've gotta pick the vessel while keeping the kind of ability you wanna give it in mind. If the ability you want it to have is, let's say...super sharpness, then it makes sense to infuse that into a sword, right? Conversely, you wouldn't wanna infuse that into a wooden bear statuette."

"Uh-huh..."

...A super sharp wooden bear statuette? Would it shred your hands to bits if you picked it up?

"So if a wooden bear was the vessel, would an ability like, uh...warding be better?"

"That's right. That fits much better. So in your case, you need to find a suitable vessel for whatever can prevent teleportation magic and whatnot. You could do that with a wooden bear statuette as your vessel, but it wouldn't be ideal."

Yeah, it doesn't have to be that one specifically. It could be any other kind of object. If I had to use a statuette, I'd prefer a carving of a cute girl over a bear, anyway.

"You also need to consider whether the effect you want is actually based around stopping teleportation magic. If you ask me, it's not likely that this fella's actually using magic. If you go to all the trouble of making a sacred treasure, but it's ineffective... Well, that's just a useless item."

That's true. Like Doc Babylon said, it's probably more a result of the wicked

god’s power than magic.

Simply trapping the enemy would be enough, so perhaps infusing it with the ability to deploy a divinity-charged **[Prison]** was what I needed... After all, it wouldn’t be me wielding the sacred treasure, so I wouldn’t be breaking any rules. Clearly, I had a lot to think about.

Interlude: A Very Normal Day for Brunhild's Grand Duke

In a little corner of the Babylon workshop, there was a spot where machines and junk were piled up high. It was a space that Quun had carved out for herself. She'd requested, pleaded, and begged for her own little area to work on her projects...and since the workshop was the best place for that, I let her have it.

It was a very convenient engineering space, that was for sure. It was basically the ultimate factory. Tools in abundance, replication and printing facilities around every corner... Still, it wasn't perfect. It could only be operated by Babylon's master and the facility's assigned gynoid. That being me and Rosetta. Even though Quun was my daughter, she couldn't freely operate the things around her.

I came up with a solution to that problem by building a little prefabricated room in Quun's corner. I called it the mini workshop. It was a smaller version of the workshop contained within it. There were actually a bunch of these little prefab buildings around Babylon. There was an ammo workshop that specialized in supplying the Frame Gears used by Yumina and my other wives, and a smartphone workshop that specialized in making those mass-produced smartphones I gave to other world leaders. In effect, they were miniature automated assembly lines.

Quun had requested one for her personal use, and I had been initially reluctant...but then I realized it was a way to relieve some of the burden on her when she worked, so I let her have it. She still had a habit of staying up here without eating or sleeping, though...which I wasn't exactly the biggest fan of. I wasn't the only one with a problem either.

"...Well? Anything to say for yourself?"

"N-N-No... Not... Not really..."

The younger of the two, the daughter, sat stiff on the floor, sweat beading on

her brow. The older of the two, the mother, stood in front of her with narrowed eyes and folded arms. As for me? I was just kind of standing behind Leen, imitating her angry cross-armed pose as best I could.

“It’s fine to appreciate your hobbies, I understand that much. But if you get too into it to the point of sickness or exhaustion, then you’re going to cause trouble for yourself and everyone around you. Understand where to draw the line.”

“That’s right, ma’am! That’s definitely not hypocritical to hear from someone who’s spent days at a time cooped up in the library, no ma’am!”

“Silence!”

Rosetta butted in, prompting Leen to go red in the face and start yelling. Rosetta responded by whistling to herself and scampering off.

...You really shouldn’t have interfered there, Rosetta. We’re the parents, so we need to reprimand our kid!

Leen looked at the object sticking out of the mini workshop.

“So this is what you’ve been neglecting your health for?”

“Yes! I restored and successfully miniaturized the skyskipper we picked up from the Sapir Sea! I’ve improved the ether lines connecting the power reactor to the mana oars, so now it’s much more magically efficient! I’ve also replaced the propeller floating system with an antigravity dean drive. Then, I—”

“So you regret nothing?”

“Agh!”

Leen’s glare only intensified in the face of Quun’s excited explanation. She began to give another sermon, and I just stood there nodding. It wasn’t the place for a father to interject... Probably, anyway. My dad never joined in when my mom yelled at me.

It wasn’t neglecting my parental responsibilities! Leen was just saying enough for the both of us. It did kind of erode my authority, though...

“And you, Touya. What were you thinking when you gave her this thing?! Wasn’t it obvious what would happen?”

“Gah!”

Oh crap, now she’s pointing her anger right at me!

“I mean, it was Doc Babylon who gave her the stuff, so...”

“I’m not bothered about the fact that she got it, but shouldn’t you have seen this coming and told her to be mindful of her health?”

“I did, though... Didn’t I? I told her she should only be using it for certain periods and stuff...”

“But you never followed up on that, Touya. You just gave her these things and left her to her own devices. Of course she’d take advantage of that!”

I glanced over at Quun and noticed a small grin on her face. Leen was right on the money...

Ugh... I guess I could’ve been a little clearer when I let her work here. Compared to Leen, I’m definitely super lenient...

I sighed, then raised my hands in surrender.

“All right. Quun, you’ve gotta be punished. I’m confiscating this...flying boat thing. Okay?”

“Not okay! I’m so close to finalizing it!”

Quun looked up at me with big, teary eyes. I could feel my heart waver. Leen glared over from the side, quietly communicating her feelings to me.

Forgive me. I’m a powerless father...

“Wait! Please! Just a little bit more! Just one more day!”

“No more complaining. Or do you want to be banned from Babylon entirely?”

“I don’t! Please don’t do that!”

Leen’s words brought Quun crashing to her knees. It was a complete and crushing defeat. I was pretty impressed by how much Leen had developed her daughter-wrangling skills, personally.

Quun was at fault here. There was no getting around that. If anything, her not being banned from Babylon entirely was pretty merciful. It was like saying she

could still do some work, but she needed to be more punctual about it. If she pushed her luck again, though, she'd have her access revoked... The mini workshop would be temporarily restricted too.

"Ugh... Why punish me like this?"

"You reap what you sow. Think about that in the future. You can assist Monica and the others in the hangar until your things are returned."

"Okaaay..."

Quun listlessly obeyed her mother. Helping Monica and the others involved stuff like Frame Gear maintenance, as well as other menial tasks like checking drives and inspecting weapons. If anything, the lack of stimulating work was probably the real punishment.

After that, Leen headed off to the library. I decided to head for the alchemy lab. When I entered the alchemy lab's facility, I came across the managing gynoid, Flora, sitting across a table from Elze.

It was rare to find Elze up here. She basically never came up to Babylon. She usually spent her free time honing her physical skills in our castle basement's gym or the knight's training grounds, after all.

It was then that I spotted Elna sitting a short distance away, shaking a test tube in her hands.

Ahhh, now I see. You're escorting her.

"What's Elna got there?"

"She's trying to see if she can make effective potions with cheap raw materials."

My question was casually answered by Elze.

Potions, eh? I know high-grade potions can be pretty damn expensive, yeah...

Very few people in the world could use restorative light magic, and magical tools that had healing properties were remarkably expensive. Thus, the average adventurer had to rely on healing herbs or potions to keep them in tip-top shape out in the field. But since good potions were often on the pricier side, most had to settle for the herbs.

Both Linze and I were capable of casting healing spells. That was why I'd really never thought about potions during my adventuring career. My experience with them was fairly limited. We'd taken on a few foraging quests to get medicinal herbs, though.

Brunhild's guild branch sold low-tier potions produced in the alchemy lab, alongside potions that could heal harmful status effects like poison, paralysis, and petrification. I'd actually gotten into a small argument with the guild over pricing. I wanted to sell them on the cheap, but Guildmaster Relisha told me that if I did that, it'd cause trouble for the alchemists that brew potions elsewhere, as well as the adventurers who collect ingredients to earn a living.

I didn't feel right knowing adventurers could die out there while a cheap means of survival existed, so we reached a middle ground by agreeing that adventurers who couldn't afford potions could freely take emergency potions with them. Any potions used would be incurred as debt to the guild, but it would be better than being dead. They'd be able to give the guild a cut from any quests they did after that and slowly pay off their debt.

Ideally, we'd soon have Elna's high-tier potions to help improve the chances of survival for any adventurer on the go.

"How's it coming along?"

"Well, we don't really know what the best ingredients are, you see? It's been a lot of trial and error. There are many new ingredients that didn't exist five thousand years ago, as well as old ingredients that are now extinct."

So we're just mixing things at random and hoping for the best? I wonder if we can actually make the high-grade potions we need purely with modern ingredients...

"Eureka!"

My negative concerns were blown away by the sound of Elna's voice. She ran over toward us, a vial of yellow liquid in her hands.

Flora took the vial and poured it into a small flask on the table. Suddenly, something resembling the page of a book was projected on the table. It kind of looked like a list of ingredients to me.

“I can see you’ve done a good job, you see? This one heals much more than the last.”

“Good job, Elna! That’s my girl!”

“Thank you, mother. Oh? You’re here too, father?”

...Ouch. You only just noticed me? I-I guess you were really into your work...



“Good job, Elna. Now we can sell cheaper potions to the adventurers.”

“It’s even better than that. The herbs used in this one are quite abundant. Novice adventurers should be able to make good money collecting them,” Elna replied, then smiled widely in response to all the praise she was getting.

Huh, I didn’t even think about that kind of benefit. Look at my girl, creating jobs!

“Can we help you, master?”

“Oh, I brought a spellstone for the ether liquid...”

I opened up **[Storage]** and handed over a blue spellstone roughly the size of a basketball to Flora. We excavated it from Rephan after getting permission from the queen. The queen had originally wanted to reward me for finding her country’s regalia, but I declined. She’d been looking after Steph to begin with, after all. But then, she reminded me that Steph had been the one to fight for her and put herself at risk, and that was something worth more than what I had done. With that in mind, I ran a search for large spellstones in Rephan’s territory. Sure enough, I found one, so that’s what I asked for as my reward.

There weren’t many spellstones of that size around anymore, and it was harder still to find ones suitable for ether liquid extraction, so this was a pretty lucky find. The current model of Frame Gears I used and maintained didn’t actually need ether liquid to operate, but the various ether vehicles and other magical tools still required it to function, so it was never bad to have a steady supply.

“Oh, right. Touya, can you take Elna’s new potion to the guild? You need to talk to the guildmaster about it,” Elze asked as she held up the vial.

“Sure, how many?”

“Just these three for now, you see? But we can begin mass production at just about any time,” Flora stated as she handed over a list of ingredients needed for Elna’s potion.

Bellflowers, moonbeam dew, and arrowsnuts. These are all pretty common, nice. I can’t believe these things actually improve potion potency when combined...

“I’ll make sure to mention we need quests up for gathering these materials

while I’m down there.”

“Glad to hear it, you see.”

I gave Elna a little pat on the head, then opened up a **[Gate]** to the local guild branch.

I exited my portal in a small alley behind the guild, then entered through a door that had effectively become my personal entrance at this point.

“Oh? Fancy seeing you here.”

“Hm? Frei? Oh, Hilde, Yae, and Yakumo too.”

Once I stepped into the guild, Frei approached me from the side. I turned toward her and saw Hilde, along with Yae and Yakumo.

“Questing today?”

“Sure were. We got a special request from the guild. Just finished up. It was a quest all the way in Roadmare, but with Yakumo helping us, we were back in a flash.”

Though Frei and Yakumo were still children, their exceptional abilities meant they technically could register with the guild as special exceptions.

I kind of wondered if them being registered in the past would cause any issues in the future, since they were registered there already... Granny Tokie would hopefully just be able to wave that away with timey-wimey stuff, but I didn’t want to cause any possible complications. Therefore, we never formally registered Frei and the other kids. So even though Frei was talking about this quest as if it was her own, it was more likely that Hilde or Yae had officially accepted it. Yakumo and Frei were along to assist.

Yae and Hilde were probably more than happy to have their daughters come fight with them, even if the tykes were just tagging along.

“What did you have to fight?”

“We needed to dispose of a Calamity Boar, we did. It was quite a large one at that, it was.”

...Calamity Boar? If I remember right, those things even give top-tier red-rank

adventurers serious trouble.

Yae and Hilde had recently attained the silver rank in the guild. Silver-ranks could receive quests directly from heads of state and were more like mythical champions than regular adventurers. But my daughters were actually even higher than that. The two of them were ranked gold, same as me.

This was only in future terms, though. It was foolish to compare the present Yae and Hilde against my kids from an age yet to come...but I could tell it was worrying my two wives. They were both somewhat annoyed that their daughters ranked higher than them. Their pride as parents had driven them to come to the guild a lot more in recent weeks, taking on as many jobs as they possibly could. They were obviously shooting to overtake their daughters, but that would be a long way off at this rate.

I asked the guild receptionist to call over Relisha, then headed to the dismantling yard with Yae and the others. The monster dismantling yard in Brunhild was a relatively large, open space. There weren't many large monsters in the local territory, but Ende and I were gold-ranked and could warp our hunts back home, so making it large enough to accommodate that was kind of a necessity. It was pretty much only people related to me who hauled the unreasonably large stuff over to our guild branch, though.

Frei took the Calamity Boar out of storage, thwapping it down on the dismantling table. A few of the guild workers went wide-eyed, but the sight of huge beasts was definitely much less sensational than it used to be. When you considered that stuff like Dragons were regularly brought around here, even a massive boar became a bit less impressive.

The Calamity Boar was around ten meters long, making it quite a hefty creature. Its fur was a gleaming sapphire color. If I had to guess based on the injuries, either Yae or Yakumo had cut it down...but there wasn't much damage to the pelt at all. It'd fetch a high price.

"Thanks for your patience, Grand Duke," Guildmaster Relisha said as she appeared before us. I handed off the three potions and informed her about the relevant ingredients.

"I see... What a relief. With these ingredients in demand, we should have a lot

more opportunities for fledgling adventurers to earn their keep. Fewer will be forced to trawl the dungeon islands for treasure."

Adventurers who came to Brunhild usually weren't residents here. They came from all over the world. Many of them wanted to pillage our dungeon islands, which were connected to Brunhild through a portal. Most of them were well-equipped for such a dangerous venture, so they navigated the catacombs with ease.

The problem, however, was the large number of newbie adventurers who'd come in from Belfast and Regulus. Newbie adventurers typically did basic assistance quests or gathered ingredients. These kinds of jobs were in abundance, but there wasn't much good money in them. A lot of these newcomers got impatient about making such a low income and decided to try braving the dungeon islands in the hopes of finding riches, only to find doom instead.

It was true that the monsters over on the dungeon islands could be dismantled and sold for a high price, but they were also very dangerous. A common trap these newcomers fell into was thinking they had safety in numbers. They'd party up, thinking if they had five or six people, then they'd at least be able to take down one tough beast and split the earnings...

That wasn't a bad line of thinking, of course, since there was definitely strength in numbers. But it wasn't necessarily enough to contend with the monsters in those dungeons. The reason parties made people stronger was because they introduced the element of teamwork. But a bunch of newbies who'd only just met wouldn't be half as efficient as adventurers who'd been questing together for years. If anything, they'd just slow each other down or get in each other's way...causing the entire group to collapse.

Ideally, we'd have novice adventurers gradually developing their skills and experience in safer areas, even if that meant waiting a while before going for real challenges. With any luck, these new ingredient-gathering quests would be just what they needed to keep stable money while still staying safe.

"Once we have these ingredients, we'll be able to mass-produce the potions."

"Wonderful. I look forward to doing business."

Relisha told the receptionist to begin drawing up quest listings for the herbs. And with that, my work was done.

I returned to the castle via **[Gate],** bringing along Yae and the others. They quickly went to the bath together, having worked up quite a sweat in their fight against the Calamity Boar.

I was a bit parched, so I went to the living room to brew a cup of tea. When I opened the living room door, I was greeted by the sight of Linne in a beautiful dress. She seemed a little awkward in it.

“Hmm... Not quite right...”

“Mother...” Linne mumbled as she wearily glanced over at a pile of dresses on the nearby couch. Linze sat nearby, stitching at one with incredible speed.

“You said we were going to re-tailor some of your old dresses, so how come you ended up making them fit me?”

It seemed my daughter had been pulled into a trap. But I had to admit, she looked really adorable in that outfit. Quite rightly too. Any daughter of mine would look beautiful in any dress!

I took out my phone and snapped a photo of her. Linne didn’t normally wear this kind of stuff, so I had to seize the moment.

“It’s not like I don’t wear these things every now and then. When we have parties, I have to wear them, you know? I don’t really like them, though. They’re all fluttery and frumpy.”

According to Linne, my children participated in royal parties in the future. Not any official royal events, however. Apparently, it was just get-togethers hosted by royals, basically family parties. It was a time for adults to chat with adults, and for children to chat with children.

I’d assumed that family events would be a bit more casual, but it was seemingly proper to have children wear formal clothing when attending them to mentally prepare them for formal events in their adult life.

“It’s done!”

A sense of accomplishment was present on Linze’s face as she waved the

dress high. It was a gothic lolita dress, similar to the kind Leen often wore, but this one was white. If I remembered right, this style was called white goth or something... It definitely seemed fluttery and frumpy, just as Linne had said.

“Oh? You’re here, Touya?”

“I’ve been here a while...”

Ugh... People just keep failing to notice I exist... It wouldn’t kill you guys to be a little more aware of your surroundings!

“Okay, Linne. Try this one on! You’ll look amazing!”

“You told me the last one I wore would be the last one, and the one before that!”

“This really is the last one! I promise! Come on!”

Linne sighed in defeat and submitted to being dressed in the white goth dress.

Just as I was wondering where Linne was going to get changed, Linze pulled a dressing room divider from her **[Storage]** and walled me off.

“Even if you’re her father, you can’t go peeking at a lady changing.”

I agreed with the sentiment, but she didn’t have to say it like I was at any risk of wanting to peek in the first place... I wasn’t exactly keen to watch my daughter change her clothes.

“Okay, this is the last one!”

Linne was a little grumpy as she walked out of the changing area, but I thought she looked really cute.



Just as I was snapping a few more shots of her in the white goth outfit, we

found ourselves joined by Steph, Sue, Yumina, and Kuon. The gold crown, Gold, toddled behind them.

"Wooow! Big Sis Linne, you're sooo cuuute!" Steph exclaimed, going bug-eyed at the sight of Linne's dress. She then charged over at full pelt.

*What did I say about using **[Accel]** indoors?*

"It's so different from your normal clothes! I love it!"

"I-I know it's different... Don't you think it's weird, though?"

"No way! It looks so good on you!"

The praise from Steph must've done something for Linne's confidence. She gave us a little twirl, and shortly thereafter, a smile spread across her face.

...You got your opinion swayed a little too easily there, didn't you? It's fine if a girl compliments you, but don't go getting charmed by boys that easily, Linne. You'll make me panic.

"The garment is different from your usual look, that's true...but I think it suits you very well. You're as beautiful as a white lily, dear sister."

"He he he... You really think so?" Linne asked, smiling bashfully as Kuon lavished her with praise.

Who taught you to smooth talk like that, kid?! Agh... Yumina's probably right, I'm gonna have to beat the ladies off him with a stick. This could be tough... Then again, I get the feeling he'll probably be able to slip right by any possible girl problems all by himself. Kinda feels like Kuon's the kind of kid who can handle just about any woman who comes his way... I'm jealous of guys who can do that, to be honest... Girl trouble is the worst... But I'm happy too! No trouble is always better than some trouble. Keep up the good work, son.

"So pretty... I want a pretty dress too..."

"Come now, Steph. Don't sulk like a baby, okay? Those are Linne's dresses."

"Five minutes! No, give me three! I'll have a dress ready for you right away!" Linze exclaimed as she began sewing at a nearby pile of clothing. She was going so fast that it was like watching a video on fast-forward.

That speed is obscene... I genuinely fear what she could become in the future...

The sheer level of skill displayed by Linze had stunned Sue into silence. I couldn't tell if she was simply dumbfounded or just envious.

In precisely three minutes, Linze had created a smaller white goth dress to match the one Linne was wearing. I couldn't believe how good it looked. I had the feeling Linze would be more than capable of launching her own fashion brand all on her own... That wasn't actually a bad idea... I made a mental note to ask Zanac about it at some point.

Linze handed the dress off to Steph, who immediately headed past the changing partition.

"Well?!"

Steph had swiftly changed her clothes before charging back out. She looked positively adorable.

"Mmm... It suits you nicely, Steph."

"It really does! Oh, Linze, could you make one for Kuon as well?!"

"But of course!"

"Er, no! M-Mother Linze! I'm quite fine without one, I promise!"

Kuon actually spoke out against his mother for once, but given the ludicrous request she'd just made, I couldn't exactly blame him.

...Kuon in a white gothic dress, dolled up like a woman... Why do I get the impression he might actually be able to pull that off? Better not say that out loud, though.

"We're back!"

"We're back..."

"Hwhah?!" I let out a frightened yelp as a certain duo materialized right next to me.

Yoshino! Sakura! How many times have I told you not to teleport right in front of people?! You'd never catch me doing that! Whenever I use my transportation spells, I always aim for quiet areas and back alleys! Follow my example, please...

If I recalled correctly, the two of them had been out at Brunhild's schoolhouse. Sakura's mother and Yoshino's grandmother, Fiana, was the headmistress at our castle town's main educational institute. The two frequently went there for lunch. They often brought food to the students and helped Fiana out with chores, but sometimes they gave music classes to the students.

The school was equipped with a range of instruments like recorders, castanets, harmonicas, melodicas, and mini guitars. The students kept their own mouthpieces for their recorders and melodicas, of course, what with public health concerns and all. Sakura and Yoshino taught them how to properly use the instruments, as well as basic music theory. Our knight order had some musicians in their ranks, so they'd been going along to teach the lessons with Sakura, and eventually, Yoshino found herself tagging along as well. Her presence helped the students improve a lot, probably because she was closer to their age.

I was of the opinion that studying the arts was a good thing for any child, and I hoped that some of them might grow up to be talented musicians. At the very least, presenting them with the opportunity felt like the right thing to do.

"Wow! Steph and Linne look so pretty!"

"Would you like one too, Yoshino? If you just give me three minutes..."

"W-Wait! Wait! It's almost dinnertime. How about we all eat first, and then we can think about dressing up. Okay?"

I quickly put an end to Linze's seamstressing before she ran completely rampant. Steph and Linne couldn't exactly eat dinner in their pretty dresses, so I politely asked them to change back into their regular ones. Their new outfits were white, so I didn't want to run the risk of stains. Then again, I did have magic that could clean them up pretty much instantly...but I didn't see why we should start relying on such things.

We all headed to the dining room in high spirits. Yae and the others were already there, feeling warm and refreshed after their bath. Elze, Elna, Leen, and Quun were seated at the table as well. Quun still seemed to be a little sulky about her punishment, so I quietly promised to talk to Leen about potentially

shortening her sentence.

We all gathered around the table as one big family. Karen and a handful of the other earthbound gods were there too. As far as anyone outside of the castle was concerned, Karen and Moroha were my sisters, while Kousuke, Takeru, Sousuke, Karina, and Suika were other relatives of mine. Thus, it wasn't out of the ordinary for us to dine as a family. Given how many of us there were, it often led to some lively dinnertime interactions. It was almost like having a little party on a daily basis.

Once we took our seats, the dishes started coming out to the table.

...Hmm? There's twice as much food as usual, and it's all being served on two different plates... Don't tell me...

Lu and Arcia came through the kitchen door, carrying more food. They had their eyes narrowed at each other and I could feel the tension emanating from both of their bodies.

Oh boy. Not again...

"Another cooking contest?" Elze muttered in mild exasperation.

That was precisely what it was. This mother-daughter duo competed with one another at any opportunity they could get. I personally didn't see the point. They were both capable of creating incredible meals, so who cared which was marginally better?

I wondered if the colors and patterns on the plates represented which ones were made by Lu and which ones were made by Arcia. They weren't going to tell us, of course, since it had to be a blind test, but I couldn't help but feel curious.

Once we were finished, Lu and Arcia would go back to the kitchen to quietly determine the results. This was another unspoken rule of their weird dinnertime game. In all honesty, though? I could tell who made what. It was very obvious to me. Because when we sat down to eat, Lu only ever ate the meals Arcia made, while Arcia only ever ate the meals Lu made... Arcia also made this annoyed expression every time she ate Lu's cooking, while Lu made a kind of determined expression whenever she ate Arcia's cooking, so it wasn't

really a mystery at all.

The kids didn't really seem to notice, though, at least not all of them. Yakumo and Quun probably caught on, since there was also another tell...

"Mmm, this soup sure is nice."

"Isn't it?! The sweet and sour aspects of the tomato bring out the flavor just enough, I think! I mean, er... I'm sure it's nice."

Arcia often responded very positively when something she cooked was openly praised. I wasn't lying about the soup being nice, though.

"Steph, eat your carrots."

"Gah... Don't wanna..."

Sue noticed that Steph still had a lot of carrots on her plate, so she nudged her daughter along. Kids tended to dislike carrots. Or well, I know I certainly did. I was fine eating them now that I'd grown up a bit, though. It was often said that your tastes changed as you grew older, but I knew plenty of people who'd grown older and still hated carrots.

"You won't be able to grow up big and strong if you ignore the parts you don't like, Steph. It's very childish."

"But mommy...you left all your green peppers..."

"Gah... N-Not at all! I just left them for last because I like them so much, see?!"

Steph had apparently hit a sore spot for Sue. Desperate to save face, she jabbed a pepper with her fork, stared at it for five long seconds, then shoved it into her mouth.

"M-Mmm... Yuhhh... Yummy..."

Everyone else at the table knew Sue absolutely despised green peppers, but we didn't say anything. She had parental respect to maintain, after all. She'd sooner swallow her least-liked food before swallowing her pride.

"There we are, all done. Now it's your turn, Steph."

"...Okay."

Steph jabbed a carrot with her fork, stared at it for five long seconds, then shoved it into her mouth.

“Ahhh, great job! You beat the carrot! That’s my girl! You’re the best!”

“He he he...”

Sue’s praise spurred Steph on to eagerly swallow the rest of the carrots she’d left.

Huh, what’s this? My girl’s growing up... I can feel myself tearing up...

“...Touya, are you crying?” Elze asked as she stared at me like my face was arranged the wrong way.

Ugh... Don’t blame me for this. You’d do the exact same thing if it was Elna, I know it!

We finished the meal and had after-dinner tea. Then, I started checking on world affairs. It was more me calling various world leaders over the phone than anything fancy, though. It wasn’t exactly state-level confidential stuff, since we were just catching up and checking that things were fine. Usually, I’d just hear stuff about the weather or interesting stage plays some of the royals had seen lately.

It was kind of fun, to be honest. It was like having a little window into the private lives of various royals. I still dreaded my talks with the overlord of Xenoahs, though. He’d often interrupt our chats with random demands for pictures or videos of Yoshino. I usually just complied with his demands to save me the hassle...

After getting another request from him, I started to record Yoshino as she played the piano in the living room. Sakura stood in front of the piano, singing alongside her daughter’s performance. It was one of the main songs from a particular animated movie about a genie in a lamp.

The part sung by Sakura was supposed to be performed by the man, so it felt a little out of place. Since it was a duet, I wondered if she’d sing both parts...but then Yoshino came in for the woman’s lines. The two of them matched their breathing in perfect harmony. They knew each other well as mother and daughter. Everyone in the room was drawn in by the beauty of their voices.

Once they were done, we all gave them a standing applause. Yoshino and Sakura looked at each other and smiled. That was my cue to end the recording.

I attached the video file to a message and sent it to the overlord. He'd definitely start blubbering like a baby when he watched it, I could just tell.

Man, it's been a long day... I'm gonna take a bath and then head to bed, I think... Huh?

My phone suddenly started vibrating. I wondered who it was.

...Oh no. It's Kousaka.

"Y-Yes, hello? Oh, right. Okay. I'll be over in a minute..."

Crap... I still have some documents I need to approve. I wish Kousaka could just handle it all, but I can't ask that of him... Guess there's no rest for the wicked...

I finished up my tea, then slowly dragged myself up from my couch and shuffled off to my office. It wasn't easy being the grand duke... And it wasn't easy being a dad either.

Chapter III: The Prismatis Rite

“Hngh... Come ooooooon! Hrrrrrrghghgh!”

Linne and Frei looked at me from afar as I made a bunch of loud noises, a volleyball-sized clump of light in my hands all the while.

“Dad, your face is very strange...”

“Well...he’s often got some kind of strange look on his face, right? It’s not that weird. He’s just eccentric.”

Their words reached my ears, prompting my eye to twitch.

Eccentric? I’m just trying to make a sacred treasure here! Auuugh!

My concentration broke, sending the clump of light blasting off into a corner of the room. It dissipated into particles that rained down to the floor.

“Failed again...” I mumbled as I slumped back, depressed. The process was taxing not only on my body, but my mana and divinity reserves as well.

“I don’t really get it, but you messed up, didn’t you?”

“Yeaaah...”

Linne asked an innocent question, but all I could do was sigh out a response.

What I was trying to create right now was the sacred core, the centerpiece of any sacred treasure. It was the source of a sacred treasure’s power. Basically, a souped-up divine battery.

The process of condensing your own divinity down into a core was more than a little demanding. As a dependent of God Almighty, I had enough divinity within me to match a senior-level god already. But that didn’t make it any easier. It was like folding a piece of paper in half, then folding it in half again, then folding it in half again. It was easy to make that first fold, but it would become progressively harder to compress.

I remembered seeing some factoid on TV once, that if you could fold a piece of paper a tenth of a millimeter thick over twenty-six times, it’d be thicker than

Mt. Fuji's height... I found that hard to believe, personally. In any case, it was just hard to control the amount of force needed to condense my power into this core. If I pushed on one side, it'd bulge out the other side. If I pushed that bulge, then it'd just push out somewhere else. I was finding it almost impossible to focus my power the right way.

The god of crafting had given me this exercise as my first piece of homework. He'd also told me to figure out a suitable vessel for the sacred treasure, but I hadn't worked that out yet either.

I didn't know if the diving suit guy was using simple transportation magic or if he was utilizing the wicked god's divinity to warp himself. That was why I needed to create a sacred treasure that would have the effect of blocking that ability. But what kind of item would make a suitable vessel for that function? I couldn't be sure.

If I used a bow, I'd thereby create a sacred weapon with the ability to block warping for anyone hit by one of its arrows. It would have to be wielded by someone who was a brilliant archer, and they'd have to actually hit the guy before he managed to warp away. What if he was riding in one of those Kyklops things?

I considered making an accessory or jewel with an effect that blocked warping for anyone within a certain range, but apparently, my current abilities could only make something that could cover about a ten-meter radius at best. And if you were in a situation where you were within ten meters of the guy, then you'd be better off just having a weapon...

Another frustrating aspect was that I couldn't wield whatever I made myself. If I could do that, I'd just make a shortsword with the ability to prevent warping from anyone stabbed by it, then cast **[Teleport]** to appear behind the guy and stab him. Nothing personal, easily done.

But unfortunately, I was among the gods now, so I couldn't do that. Yumina and my other wives were also touched with enough divinity that you could consider them angels, so they weren't allowed to wield anything in my stead either.

I was thinking of just having Ende do it, but apparently, he wasn't allowed to

either. He'd spent so much time training with Uncle Takeru that he'd become a full-on dependent of the god of combat. That meant I had a very narrow list of people I could trust to actually wield whatever the hell I made. I didn't even want to think about it, but there really was only one suitable choice...

I glanced over at my children. They were demigods, obviously, but they were mortal. They weren't beneficiaries of my divinity. They were the ideal candidates to entrust with this kind of thing, but a big part of me really didn't want to get them involved in the fight against the wicked devout.

"What's wrong, dad?"

"Nothing. Don't worry about it."

Linne caught me pondering to myself. I brushed off her question and patted her on the head.

The Phrase girls could probably handle it. I could definitely ask Melle, Ney, or Lycee to do it...but we were dealing with divinity here, even if it was muddied. My demigod children were the ideal picks to fend that kind of thing off...

Plus, apparently, I'd be making a sacred treasure with enough divinity for a senior-grade god infused into it. The god of crafting told me it probably wouldn't be usable by any old regular human. There were post-creation methods of whittling some divinity out of the item so it could be used by normal humans, but I was such a novice that any chance of mastering that skill in the near future was completely out of the window.

My children were born with half my divinity, which meant they'd be perfectly compatible with anything created from my divinity. They had my blood, so there'd be no problem with them being able to handle things that came from me.

I decided to worry about this mess later. I'd perfect creating the sacred core before worrying about the vessel.

"Awright! Let's do this!" I exclaimed as I started to condense my divinity again.

"Hngh... Come ooooooon! Hrrrrrrghghgh!"

“...You really look weird.”

I found myself distracted by Linne’s cruel words, and my divinity began to bulge out of shape again.

Yeah, I’ve hit a wall here. I should stop for now.

“I’m beat... Time for a little rest and relaxation.”

I sat down on a bench in the courtyard and leaned back. Part of me was concerned about slouching and looking so lazy in front of my kids, but a larger part of me really didn’t care at this point. They’d probably seen me in worse states in the future, anyway.

I was still blessed by God Almighty, so I didn’t exactly lose much divinity...but trying to make a sacred core was just really tiring. I thought after becoming a god I’d never get this fatigued again. Clearly, I was wrong. Not even using **[Refresh]** did anything to alleviate my tired state, so the cause had to be something more than magic.

I rested for a while, wheezing and grumbling. Linne and Frei got bored of staring at me, tottering off someplace else.

How could they abandon their own father in his hour of need?

I spent a while longer resting on the bench before Yumina came charging across the courtyard. Was something wrong?

“Touya! It’s Kuon! Kuon!”

“Huh?! Kuon?! What’s wrong?!”

I hadn’t seen Kuon all morning, and now something was wrong? What had happened? I hurriedly rose from the bench.

“He’s on another date today!”

“Huh? Oh...right.”

I glanced once at Yumina’s smiling face, sighed, then sat back down on the bench. She’d gotten me all worried for nothing.

“With Allis, I assume?”

“Mhm. They’re basically made for each other, don’t you think? Both head

over heels.”

Yumina giggled to herself as she sat by my side.

Both head over heels? I dunno, it felt kind of one-sided to me.

“What would you think of Allis, anyway? As Kuon’s fiancée, I mean.”

“Aren’t you moving a bit fast? He’s only six.”

It was true that he was the prince of Brunhild and we’d need to ensure he had a stable future, but he technically hadn’t even been born yet.

“The earlier we get any succession concerns out of the way, the better. The sooner he finds a fiancée, the sooner we can properly educate her to make sure she’s a suitable royal partner.”

“I get what you’re saying from a pragmatic perspective, yeah...”

Yumina had a point that queens, or grand duchesses in the case of Kuon’s future wife or wives, would need to have an air of regality, decorum, and civility to them. Hell, without Yumina to help me out, I’d have been completely lost in terms of royal manners. Hilde and Lu grew up with a royal education, so they were fine. Sue was brought up a little more casually, but she still mostly knew her manners when they counted. Yae, Elze, and Linze weren’t quite so good with it, though. The three of them definitely didn’t enjoy going to royal parties overseas.

“Should we even be pairing him up with Allis? Isn’t she a commoner by birth?”

“...Touya, aren’t you a commoner by birth?”

Oh yeah. Damn. I just got hoisted on my own petard. Not that I actually care about whatever social status Allis has, of course. I just want to make sure it’s okay!

“If you’re worried about international image, we could just make Ende a Brunhild noble. Then she’d be a well-to-do young lady from an upstanding house.”

“That might take some work...”

Ende as a noble? I don't even know if he'd accept that proposition. Hell, I could see him rejecting the position specifically to lower his daughter's chances of being wed to my son.

"Then why not make Melle the noble?"

"That might take some work..."

It was true that if Melle was promoted to nobility, then Allis would be noble by relation...but could Allis even be taught proper noble manners? I was a little bit worried any lessons in that area would just fall on deaf ears.

"That's exactly why we need to bring it up while she's still here in the past. We can start her earlier. I suppose if Allis isn't the main wife and takes her place as a backing duchess, then it'd be less important, but..."

In my case, all my wives were the main wives. None of them served as supporting or backing royals. I would personally have been happy to see Brunhild keep that as a tradition, but if all future wives remained equal there could be succession disputes.

The general custom of the firstborn son ruling was probably fine, but there was always the risk of future firstborns being ill-suited for the job or just unpleasant people altogether. I didn't want to see my country collapse in the future due to petty things like that, so I still had to properly iron out what we'd be doing in terms of future succession plans.

"How do you know Kuon's even gonna have a backing wife? He might only get married to the one."

"Ridiculous! Don't you see how suave, intelligent, and gentle our son is?! We won't be able to keep the bachelorettes away from him! He'll make all the women of the world fall in love with him, Touya! He'll have more wives than you!"

...Wow, you're being dead serious, aren't you?

Yumina's eyes were blazing. Our son was definitely a pretty cool kid, though. I agreed with that. Still, I personally felt he should try to keep his wife count down... It could cause dicey situations. In fact, Kuon probably already knew that, having grown up with so many mothers.

“I’ll be a mother-in-law to all of them, so we’d all better get along. I’m sure there’ll be lots and lots of children too... We’ll be grandparents to a beautiful bunch, I know it!”

“Hey, hey, hey. Slow the heck down!”

Why the hell are you talking about grandkids? Our son hasn’t even been born yet! Calm down!

Yumina couldn’t calm down when it came to Kuon, and her helicopter parenting had only gotten worse lately. Surely I didn’t look as ridiculous as she did from an outside perspective, right? I wasn’t that bad, right? Surely not...

Putting the matter of grandchildren aside, I told Yumina that it was still too early to decide on marriage and whatnot. I wanted my children to get married for love, not for political purposes, so I was fine with the only person knowing that part of the future being Granny Tokie.

It was possible that Allis could fall for someone else over time, or Kuon might decide to pursue someone else too. If we rushed them into matchmaking only for the engagement to break up down the line due to things like that, it’d only hurt the two of them. I knew for a fact if something like that happened, Ende would go ballistic on us too...and I didn’t want the country to be at risk of ruin because of his overprotective nature.

I was definitely on board for educating Allis like a proper lady, though. She was a good girl, so I wanted her to be able to join in on playing with my kids. I was sure if we included Melle in the lessons, she’d take to it quite well.

The future me would probably make a point to bring it up while Allis was still young. Probably.

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“Hey, Kuon! Look! Look how cute this is!”

“Hmm? A wooden cat? It’s definitely detailed, and it has a nice finish. Good find, Allis.”

Allis smiled as she held out the little cat figurine toward Kuon.

Kuon’s analysis was rather dry and direct, probably because he was

something of an artisan himself. Allis only really cared about the cute aspect, however.

“You’ve a good eye for crafts, lad. That one was made by a master woodworker who recently popped up in Mismede. It’s cheap right now, but I bet the value’ll only go up over time.”

The Strand Company shopkeeper approached the two youngsters. The canid beastman showed them a selection of other wooden crafts that were made by the same man. Kuon could tell even at a glance that they were of the highest possible grade. It was no lie that they’d only appreciate in value.

“That wooden bear carving is so realistic... That must be one godly craftsman...”

Kuon had no idea how accurate his assessment actually was. In truth, however, the carving he was marveling over was only a casual creation. If the god of crafting really focused, his output would be far higher in quality.

“I kind of want this bear...”

“Why not buy it, then? The grand duke gave you pocket money the other day, right?”

A short time ago, Kuon had taken down a long-extinct monster known as the Marchosias. Kuon had asked for help from his father to auction off the beast’s carcass, and he’d netted himself a reasonable allowance of gold coins from the venture.

It was an absurd amount of money for any child, really. It was about the equivalent of a hundred thousand yen. Though, truth be told, Kuon had access to far greater riches in the future he’d come from. Compared to that, this felt a bit paltry.

Kuon was definitely interested in buying the bear carving, but his mother had raised him with a strict mentality related to not squandering money on petty or wasteful things. The poor boy was struggling with his desire versus his values.

“Hrm...”

“I’ll buy it, then. Hey mister! I want that bear!”

“Hm?”

“Of course. Thank you for your patronage.”

Before Kuon even knew what was happening, Allis had already taken the bear over to the counter and purchased it.

The girl grinned, waggling a paper bag in front of Kuon. He grumbled quietly.

“Here you go, a present!”

“Huh? Um... Th-Thanks?”

Allis casually handed the bag over, and Kuon awkwardly accepted it. The girl smiled wider, then not-so-subtly glanced over at the cat figurine she’d been eyeing up earlier.

Kuon suddenly realized the implication and took it over to the counter to buy it with his own money. This time he took his paper bag and handed it over to Allis.

“Here you go. A present.”

“Thanks, Kuon!”

He’d received the bear he wanted as a present, then he’d spent his money paying back that gesture. Logically speaking, he couldn’t call that wasteful or frivolous spending.

Kuon couldn’t help but be impressed by Allis, who’d noticed his hesitation and acted on the spot. She’d grown up with him, so she had a good understanding of how his mind worked. Kuon didn’t know if she simply knew by instinct or by careful observation, though.

“Thanks, mister!”

The two left the Strand Company store, placing their new trinkets in their phone **[Storage]** as they walked out the front door.

“So, where to next?”

“Somewhere relaxing. We need to take all the time we can get away from that stupid sword.”

The stupid sword Allis mentioned was the silver crown, Silver. The sword was

currently with Elluka in Babylon's research laboratory. She was attempting to stimulate Gold's lost memories by interfacing the two crowns.

Since Silver and Gold were created around the same time, Elluka theorized that she could determine their structural similarities and maybe uncover more information about the two of them by scanning them simultaneously.

Allis saw the opportunity to go out on a date without anyone butting in, so she dragged Kuon out almost immediately. Kuon was also a little thankful, as he was starting to get a bit fed up with his sword and his friend constantly bickering in his presence. The boy was ready to have a peaceful day...or at least, that was what he'd hoped.

Unfortunately, Kuon had been sensing someone gazing over at him for a while now. It was a gaze laced with grudge, malice, and envy. An indescribably focused gaze that was solely squared on him.

Only he'd noticed it, though. He cautiously glanced to the side, hoping to catch a glimpse of who was following him. When he realized who it was, he let out a deep sigh. It was definitely going to be a pain in the ass.

"What's wrong, Kuon?"

"Uhhh... I mean..."

Allis glanced over at where Kuon was looking, noticing the person he was looking at.

"Huh? Dad?"

"O-Oh, hey Allis! Ha ha! Fancy seeing you here!"

A young man with grayish hair and a long white scarf awkwardly walked out from the shadow of a building. Kuon knew that this was no coincidence. Ende had been tailing them for a while now. He held his tongue, though, as he didn't want to make a scene.

The boy simply smiled and gave a polite greeting instead.

"Good day to you, sir."

"Yo."

Ende smiled brightly, but Kuon could see through it. His eyes weren't nearly as bright. The man was just like this in the future as well.

"Oh, Endymion. That's where you ran off to. Hm, Allis is here as well? Is something wrong?"

"Mother Ney!"

Ney, one of Allis's mothers, came around a nearby corner. She held a paper bag in her arms that was overflowing with fruit.

Ende had apparently come out shopping with Ney. When he'd spotted his daughter happily coming out of the Strand store with Kuon, he felt like he had to investigate. Even at this young age, he'd become a hopeless stalker...

"Good day to you, ma'am."

"Oh, hello. Out with each other, are you? Enjoying your day, Allis?"

"Yup!"

Ney smiled gently, an expression far and away from any she would've made in the long past. She gently stroked her daughter's hair.

"Kuon. Would you like to come to ours for lunch?"

"Huh? Really?"

"Of course. I enjoy entertaining guests from time to time. But there's more than that. Lycee and Lady Melle have a matter they want to discuss with you."

Kuon was surprised yet intrigued by the sudden invitation. It was already past noon, so he and Allis were already considering going back to the castle for a late lunch. The two of them could've just gone to a diner or coffee shop, but they were just two young children to anyone looking in from the outside. That in and of itself would inevitably attract attention, and Kuon didn't want to get mixed up in anything troublesome. He just wanted a relaxing day.

"Let's go, Kuon! My place is closer than the castle!"

"Mmm..."

Kuon was fine to go back with Ney, but he cast a glance over at Ende before saying anything. Ende's expression seemed normal enough, but the young boy

had noticed that his eyebrows were knitted closer together.

Kuon was well aware of Ende's strange animosity toward him. He was fairly sure that the man just didn't like him at all. He was also aware of the reason. Fathers were often unreasonably protective of their daughters. His own father, Touya, was certainly no exception.

In the future, Touya had made Kuon use his mystic eye to check the hearts of just about any boy that got close to the girls in his family. Kuon didn't necessarily have a problem with doing this, though. He didn't exactly want any bad people getting involved with his sisters, after all.

The situation was a little dicey, but it was just lunch... Surely it couldn't go that badly.

"...I'll gladly accept your offer, then."

Though he was still a bit nervous about Ende's presence, Kuon accepted Ney's offer.

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After heading through the main street of Brunhild Castle town, you'll eventually reach a residential district. There were residents who'd been in the country since it was founded, and immigrants who'd come in later on. The older settlers were in an area called Old Town, while the newcomers were in New Town. There wasn't actually any real difference between the buildings, though. Brunhild was still a pretty young country. Old Town did have a little more Eashenese flavor to it, though, as many had come from Eashen during the earliest days of Brunhild's founding.

The home that Ende, Melle, Ney, and Lycee lived in was in New Town. It was a reasonably sized estate with a red roof that was situated on a little hill.

Touya hadn't prepared the home for Ende and his family. It was actually built by Ende himself using the money he'd earned from his guild quests. He could've built a bigger one, but the one they had right now was more than enough for their family. Melle and the other Phrase girls said that if they had money to build a bigger house, it'd be better spent on food.

The home was pleasant, with a large garden out front. It looked mostly the

same as the house Allis remembered from her time period, minus a few extensions which were yet to come. It felt familiar. Kuon had visited the home multiple times in the future he'd come from, so he felt about the same.

Ende, Ney, Allis, and Kuon passed through the gate. They then walked down the garden path until they reached the front door.

"I'm home."

"Welcome back, Ney. Nice to see you, Kuon."

"Thank you for having me."

Melle greeted them at the door. She'd apparently been called in advance and told about Kuon's arrival.

Melle was very much the lady of the house. Ende, Ney, and Lycee were all married to her, and the household revolved around her. Ende was the primary breadwinner, though.

"Where's Lycee?"

"In the kitchen, doing some preparation. Go help her."

Ende nodded and did as Melle told him. He was also the one responsible for most of the household's meals. The girls hadn't ever learned to cook, as their species did not need to eat food. That was why Ende found himself relegated to the kitchen so much.

Lycee had been learning enough to help him out, but it hadn't reached the point where he completely trusted her to cook on her own, especially not when it came to cooking with fire... There'd been a few incidents already that led him to that conclusion.

Kuon was shown to the living room. He settled down on a nearby couch. Allis, naturally, planted herself right next to him.

"You two are close, aren't you?"

"Yeah! We've been together since we were little!"

"We're quite close, yes."

The two replied to Ney's observation, prompting Melle and the other woman

to smile at each other.

“This may come off as premature, but...” Melle turned to Kuon and began speaking. “Do you intend to take my Allis as your wife in the future?”

“Aaah! Mooom! You can’t just say things like thaaat!”

Melle’s words caused Allis to fidget, her cheeks flushing red. Kuon, in stark contrast, simply looked up at the ceiling and furrowed his brow in thought.

“That’s a rather difficult question to answer right now, don’t you think?”

“Huh? What do you mean, Kuon?! Is there some other girl you like more than me?! Who?! Hey! Do I know her? Is she stronger than me? Hey! Is she better than me? Kuon! Aren’t I your best girl? Hey, c’mon. Hey. Heeeey...”

All the vigor in the young girl’s eyes faded as she loomed over Kuon. Melle and Ney were both caught off guard, having never seen their daughter act so crazy before. It was as if a dark aura was manifesting around her...

Kuon didn’t seem all that worried, however. He just shook his head and calmly began to speak.

“No. It’s not that. There are certainly no other girls.”

“Oh! Yay!”

Allis smiled wide, leaning back again. The light had returned to her eyes. Melle and Ney were both a bit stunned by the sudden transformation, but they turned back to Kuon.

“What’s difficult about it, exactly?”

“Consider my position as heir to this country’s throne. My future wife would become the grand duchess. If I marry a woman unsuited to that role, then the country would suffer for it. It’s a choice I have to take great care with.”

“What?! You’re saying I’m not worthy?”

“Allis, listen, being royalty is a great deal of work. There’s court etiquette, dancing, socializing in high society, entertaining foreign royals, and much more. Can you say with a straight face that you have the necessary skills for all of those things?”

“Grrrgh!” Allis grumbled and pouted, unable to refute Kuon’s point.

“Necessary skills? You speak of being royal as if it’s a job.”

“I don’t think it’s unreasonable to think of it that way. A grand duchess is the same as any other queen or empress. She has much to do. There are those born with the right aptitude, and those who want it enough to adapt,” Kuon calmly replied to Ney’s inquiry.

Kuon’s own father, Touya, had basically been forced to learn and adapt to the realities of royal life after becoming engaged to royalty. If Allis were to do the same, then she’d have to adapt to the realities of it as well.

Elze, Linze, and Yae had to do so when they became grand duchesses of Brunhild. Yumina, Lu, and the others didn’t have to do this as they’d already been raised in high society.

“It’s certainly true that a royal’s partner would need to have the appropriate aptitude for high society. I could easily see low confidence inspiring negativity in the populace, and perhaps even social collapse if she performed poorly enough,” Ney replied, displaying a levelheaded understanding of Kuon’s point. This was a bit unusual, as Ney typically doted over Allis and defended her fiercely.

Melle cleared her throat and spoke up to refute her point, however, saying, “Goodness, Ney. You’re being oddly supportive of Kuon here, aren’t you?”

“With all due respect, Lady Melle, I did have to suffer the social fallout that ensued after a certain sovereign fled our home world with a partner who her people disapproved of.”

“Ugh!” Melle grumbled softly. Ney’s words stung a little. As the Sovereign Phrase, Melle had undoubtedly failed in her purpose. She’d damaged the society of her people. Melle certainly didn’t think her choice of partner was a mistake, but her subjects who remained back on Phrasia must’ve absolutely thought that was the case.

“B-But if we have Allis get a proper ladylike education, then there’ll be no issue, yes?”

“That’s true enough. I’d be thankful if you could do that, actually. Allis is the

person closest to me in my age bracket, so her companionship would be preferable in the long term."

It was at this moment that Melle realized Kuon still didn't have much of a grasp on what love was. If he ended up falling for someone else in the future, Allis would surely be heartbroken. To prevent such a future from coming to pass, she resolved to imprint Allis upon him in the here and now, to make sure she'd be the only one for him.

If Kuon were to become the leader of Brunhild, he could take supporting wives...but from Melle's perspective, having her daughter be anything but the primary wife was simply unacceptable. Allis needed to reign as a magnificent grand duchess, to live a happy and fulfilling life with her one and only.

Fortunately, Kuon was clearly a young man who placed importance on things both official and personal. Thus, if they could simply prove Allis as a capable royal in his eyes, her position would be all but secured.

"Allis, we're going to have Yumina provide you with a proper education in formal etiquette."

"Weeeh? But that sounds lame..."

Melle's words caused Allis to grumble. Ney gave an awkward smile before following up with some words of her own.

"You'll surely lose Kuon to a foreign princess if you don't learn proper manners, Allis. You don't want that to happen, right?"

"...That'd be bad."

"If another girl became Kuon's fiancée, she'd be right by his side for the rest of their lives. You'd be second-best... No, you might even be third or fourth..."

"What? No way! I'm Kuon's best girl! We've been together since we were really little, so there's no way I'd be second. I'm number one, right? Right, Kuon? Right? Look at me."

The luster faded from her eyes once more, and Allis began looming over Kuon, who was not shaken by this in the least, his response remaining as casual as ever.

“I’d say so, yes. Putting my sisters aside, you’re the closest girl to me in my age bracket.”

“See?! There you go!”

The light easily returned to her eyes again.

“But that’s not really the point of concern. As grand duke, I’ll need to carry the weight of Brunhild. If I’m to take a wife, it’ll need to be someone ready and suited to share that burden.”

“You’re young, but you sure know your stuff...”

“Thank you.”

Ney couldn’t help but be impressed by Kuon’s manner. She admired his readiness to rule. It reminded her of how Melle had once been back on Phrasia. A noble and resolute sovereign who did not bend or break. To stand behind that figure, it would only be natural you’d have to have an equally powerful will.

Ney looked over at Allis.

“What do you want out of this?”

“...Well...Kuon, will you be happy if I get that education and become good enough to be royal?”

“I’d say so, yes. I’ll have to get married at some point, so it’d be much easier if I was to marry you.”

“Then I’ll do my best. I wanna be with Kuon, so I’ll do it!”

Kuon noticed a spark of motivation that hadn’t previously been present in Allis’s eyes.

Upon seeing her daughter’s newfound resolve, Melle realized why her future self hadn’t properly educated Allis in royal etiquette from birth. It was so the girl would be able to find her own motivation in her own time. Committing to the royal lifestyle was something you could only do with the right mindset, and it seemed like Allis was ready at last.

Melle could almost picture it in her mind’s eye. She knew then and there that Allis could become a proper duchess if she put her mind to it. Besides, the girl

was the direct offspring of the Sovereign Phrase. Surely she held the innate qualities of leadership that her mother had... Probably.

“That being said, Allis...if you become Kuon’s wife, you might not be the only one. Will you be okay sharing him with secondary, tertiary, or even more wives?” Ney quickly asked, not wanting the girl to go into this unprepared.

“Like how Kuon’s dad has other wives? That won’t matter if I get to be with Kuon. Besides, I don’t think Kuon would marry anyone I don’t like!”

“That’s certainly true. I’ve read up on many a royal family that dissolved due to problems within the castle. I’ve no intention of taking up any additional brides that don’t get along well with my first one.”

Kuon’s words brought a small measure of relief to Ney. She’d remembered that dark aura emanating from the girl earlier and had been frightened by the idea of it coming out in the direction of another woman. But apparently, Allis was happy with anything so long as she was Kuon’s number one.

“Very well, then. Let’s put the engagement talk aside and ask Yumina about educating Allis in royal manners.”

“Good luck, Allis.”

“I’ll do my best!”

Kuon got the impression something major was being decided here, but he didn’t seem to care all that much. He was just fine accepting any fiancée that wasn’t a hassle, and Allis would probably be the least amount of hassle. It wasn’t that he was coldhearted or that he had no love in him for Allis...but more that he had familial feelings toward her rather than romantic ones. It was an innate downside to her being his childhood friend.

Kuon quietly sipped tea with the trio. After a short while, Lycee appeared with a large tray.

“Sorry for the wait. We’ve got cutlets and curry for lunch.”

“Yay!”

“Oooh. Cutlets and curry? That’s great.”

Allis and Ney were positively glowing at the sight before them. Kuon thought

that curry was a bit heavy for lunch, but he didn't say anything. He was a guest, after all. He liked curry well enough, and he could certainly eat a portion of it.

Ende came into the room with a big pot in his hands, which contained the curry itself.

Ney and Melle headed into the kitchen, bringing in a massive bowl of rice and what Kuon could only describe as an actual mountain of fried pork cutlets. Apparently, they were for second helpings...and third, and fourth... Melle, Ney, and Lycee ate large amounts of food regularly. Allis did as well, which wasn't a surprise given she was their daughter.

Kuon knew about their mealtime eccentricities, so he wasn't quite surprised by this...but he had to admit the sheer quantity of the food in front of him was impressive.

Melle placed a bowl of food in front of Kuon.

"Eat as much as you like. We've got more than enough for seconds."

"Thank you kindly."

Kuon definitely didn't think he'd be asking for seconds, but he gladly picked up his spoon and began to eat. The meal in front of him wasn't the national dish of Mismede, but instead the typical Japanese curry that Touya had introduced to this world. Kuon had regularly eaten it since he was a child...not that he wasn't still a child, of course.

The boy brought a spoonful of rice and curry into his mouth. He then took a moment to enjoy the spice and savory taste. It was a bit spicier than the curries he was used to. Not so spicy that it lingered overlong, but it had a kick strong enough to make you want to take another spoonful. The meat wasn't anything particularly out of the ordinary. It just looked like a bunch of pork cutlets, breaded and fried. The vegetables mixed into the roux were a simple mix of potato, carrot, and onion. Overall, it wasn't an unusual dish from his perspective. It was as normal as curry could be.

Kuon turned his attention to the cutlets. They were sliced thinner than he was used to. He wondered if they'd beaten them to flatten them out and make them easier to eat. He stabbed at a piece with a fork before mixing it with the

roux and putting it in his mouth. The crunchy texture of the fried meat mingled with the taste of the curry, creating a harmonious sensation in his mouth. Kuon found himself taken aback slightly.

The curry roux had pork mixed in, so he'd assumed these would be pork cutlets...but the taste in his mouth wasn't that of pork at all. It wasn't beef, poultry, or lamb either. It was something else...

"Are these Dragon cutlets?"

"Oh, you noticed? We got some good cuts, so I decided to put them to use. It's mature Dragon meat, so it's got a richer and fuller flavor to it."

"I'm the one who sourced the meat and cooked it, you know?" Ende sighed slightly in the face of Lycee's unwarranted bragging.

The more magic in a magical beast's flesh, the tastier it tended to be. A better way to put it would be that the stronger a beast, the nicer it would taste. That was why it only made sense that a mature Dragon, mightiest among its kind, would taste great.

Kuon was royalty, so he'd eaten Dragon meat plenty of times already, but even he had to remark on the quality of the meat on his fork. He began to chow down more vigorously. One of the mottos of the Mochizuki family was to enjoy good food whenever presented with the opportunity.

"Enjoying it, Kuon?"

"Yes, it's very nice."

Kuon nodded to Allis as he brought another bite of Dragon cutlet to his mouth. The curry was incredibly good. To Kuon, the most surprising thing about the meal was that it tasted as good as the curries made by Lu or Arcia.

"I'll learn to cook too, then!"

"Oh, you wanna learn?! Your old man'll teach you, Allis. We'll have you cooking basic recipes in no time at all. I started learning when I was little too."

Ende got excited when his daughter mentioned being interested in cooking. In that moment, he pictured a wonderful scene in his mind. Him and his daughter standing side by side in the kitchen, laughing and smiling together as they

prepared a meal... However, that illusion was shattered by what his daughter said next.

“If I learn to cook, I can make nice things for Kuon every single day!”

“Gwagh!”

Ende felt physically struck by the remark, and it took all of his energy not to slump forward and drown in his curry. Allis kept on eating her meal, completely oblivious to her father’s misery.

“Hmm... Learning how to cook sounds smart to me, Allis. It’ll be good for you to know how to feed your family.”

“If you think that way, Ney, then why not learn as well? I’ve picked up a thing or two since I started learning.”

“M-Me? Cook? I’m not built for that. You wouldn’t want me wasting our precious ingredients, would you?” Ney awkwardly muttered to herself, poking at her rice as she fended off Lycee’s teasing. Melle stifled a gentle laugh.

“My, I think it’d be wonderful if Allis learned. I wonder if that’s similar to what Yae was saying, preparing to be a good wife and such?”

“H-Hey, don’t you think Allis is a bit young to be talking about that? She’s way too little to think about marriage, and she doesn’t even have to get married if she doesn’t want to...”

Ende’s hands trembled as he tried to eat his curry. He couldn’t prevent his eye from twitching. Melle ignored him completely and went on to say something that would no doubt cause catastrophic damage to his soul.

“For now, yes, but I’ll be talking with Yumina about getting Allis some proper etiquette lessons so she can be formally betrothed to Kuon.”

“What?! Nobody told me about that!”

Ende rose from his seat, the spoon in his hand bending slightly. His face had grown paler than usual and his expression was a union of frustration and despair.



Lycee spoke up, her expression unchanging as she wiped her mouth.

“That’s news to me as well.”

“Mmm... It was decided some time ago. Allis would like to be the grand duchess of Brunhild someday, so we’ll be supporting her to that end.”

“Oh my... That’s a wonderful goal, Allis. You truly are our daughter, aren’t you?”

“He he he... Thank you, mom.”

Allis purred like a kitten as Lycee stroked a hand through her hair. The reaction was so cute that the head pats continued for a while longer.

“Why are you making such absurd plans so soon, and without my input to boot?!”

“It wasn’t a trivial decision. It’s just a conclusion we came to after taking stock of any feelings Allis might have.”

“So the discussion’s concluded already?!”

Ende was furious that something so huge had been decided without them even consulting him.

“I can’t possibly approve of this!”

“...Dad?”

“Forget I said that. It’s okay.”

All it took was one glum glance from his darling daughter to get Ende calmed down and back in his seat. He truly was a moron in this department.

The man suddenly regained his composure, making a strange and almost giddy expression as he began to speak.

“...Allis is my daughter, but she’s also the daughter of the Sovereign Phrase... In other words, that makes her Phrasian royalty. Isn’t there a special trial that all royal suitors-to-be must undergo back on Phrasia? It’s an ordeal I had to go through when I told Melle my feelings, as I recall...”

“Endymion, you can’t mean...”

Ney’s eyes went wide. Melle and Lycee also looked stunned.

“To think you’d dig up that of all things...”

“Ever the sore loser, aren’t you?”

Ende tactically ignored the comments from Melle and Lycee as he turned to Kuon with a grin.

“If you want to marry my daughter, you’ll have to brave the Prismatis Rite.”

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“The Prismatis Rite? What’s that?”

“Phrase life-forms reproduce through parthenogenesis... Er, I mean, they can have babies all on their own. By nature, they don’t require things like husbands or wives. However, children birthed through that method are functionally copies of the parent. They have similar capabilities and appearances. If they wanted a different or stronger child, they’d require a nucleus, a core in other words, from another Phrase. That’d be equivalent to a partner in human terms.”

“Indeed. Though in this case, the partner is really more of a nucleus donor than anything else. They aren’t usually involved beyond that,” Ney added to Ende’s explanation.

Dominant Phrase life-forms can produce offspring on their own, but you can’t really consider them to be children. They grow out from cores as fully formed adults, after all. Any offspring produced this way would never be able to exceed their parent in terms of strength. Thus, if they wanted to create a newer organism, they needed to take the nucleus, the core, from another dominant Phrase and combine it with their own.

“A Sovereign among the Phrase, as the apex of the species, must create stronger offspring for the good of the next generation. That’s why past Sovereigns rarely created offspring on their own. It was only a method employed in emergencies.”

“A Sovereign’s partner couldn’t just be anyone, of course. That’s where the Prismatis Rite comes into play. It’s the method by which the Sovereign’s mate is decided.”

“I see.”

Kuon nodded along with Ney and Ende’s explanation. In short, it was an elaborate method of determining a partner. It was a traditional way for the Phrase to establish a royal betrothal.

There were similar traditions back on Earth, involving dowries and such. Proposals were verbal promises, but dowries solidified the marriage process as

a transaction. It made it a formal agreement. In recent years, marriage had become seen as more of a matter between the husband and wife, so families are much less involved. The vast majority of modern marriages didn't involve things like dowries or gift exchanges. The families of the couples usually did meet before the ceremony, though.

In this world, there was a long-standing custom of gifts being prepared by the bride or groom's family. It was often a symbol of the family's pledge to look after their new son-in-law or daughter-in-law as a member of their own, but there were still political marriages made purely for the sake of the gifts. That wasn't really related to what was going on here, though...

"So you're saying that for Allis to be my fiancée, I have to go through this Prismatis Rite?"

"Precisely."

Ende smirked as he spoke.

Melle curled a brow before raising her hand and speaking.

"That rite is for the Sovereign of the Phrase, isn't it? We've abandoned my home world. Why should we stay bound by its traditions?"

The one to speak up was, surprisingly enough, not Ende. It was Ney.

"Lady Melle, Allis is the inheritor of the Sovereign's Core. With that in mind, she is our people's princess. Even if we're an offshoot branch in another world now, it would be uncouth of us to neglect our people's traditions."

"Hm..."

Melle quietly thought about how rigid Ney's thinking could be, though she didn't say that out loud. She did feel responsible for causing a great deal of trouble for her people through her reckless disregard, so she didn't feel like she had much wiggle room to argue here.

From Melle's perspective, she was no longer the Sovereign and thus was no longer bound by the customs associated with such a title... But from Ney's perspective, Melle was still very much the Sovereign she had always looked up to.

“So tell me, how does this Prismatis Rite work?”

“You need to go through some trials set out by the royal family. It’s different each time. In my case, I had to fight against a royal Phrase retainer. I managed to win, of course.”

“Hmph. Don’t act so smug after your shoddy display. I faced you at Lady Melle’s behest, but I didn’t use my full power.”

During Ende’s Prismatis Rite, it was Ney who’d been his foe in order to assess his strength. Whatever they felt about Ende, the Phrase royalty had no choice but to accept the results of the bout.

“Wait, Endymion! Don’t tell me you plan on fighting Kuon! You’re basically Allis’s father, aren’t you? Think of your actions! You wouldn’t beat up a child, would you?”

“W-Well, obviously I wouldn’t do that... Hey, wait a minute. What do you mean basically? I’m her father, aren’t I?!”

“Er, I mean...you will be in the future. She’s not born yet. That’s all I meant. Don’t worry about it,” Melle said, brushing off Ende.

“We’ll determine your trial. Don’t worry, we won’t make it something insurmountable,” Lycee reassured Kuon.

Apparently, it wasn’t something he needed to do immediately, so that was a relief. Still, the whole point was getting proper recognition from Allis’s family. Thus, it didn’t matter what the ordeal was. Kuon had to accept it.

“Very well, then. I’ll undergo this rite. But this doesn’t just concern me, so would you mind if I discussed this with my family first?”

“That’s completely fine. I want to ask Yumina about the etiquette training anyway, so I can explain the situation to her tomorrow.”

“That sounds agreeable,” Kuon replied as he calmly nodded. This would settle the issue of him finding a fiancée, so it was good enough for him. Allis was a safe bet, as the girl was on good terms with Kuon’s sisters and his parents.

Typically, royal marriages were made out of political convenience, but Touya didn’t really believe in that kind of thing, so Kuon couldn’t imagine there being

any objections. The only real issue was whether or not Allis would be able to make it in terms of etiquette... She was a stubborn young lady, but she had the guts to stick to anything she put her mind to. In simpler terms, she hated losing. Kuon figured that principle could easily apply here and push her past the finish line.

If Allis was resolved to work hard, then Kuon had to give that the respect it deserved. He found himself impressed by her resolve. It was only unconscious for now, but the boy was starting to have positive feelings about getting engaged to her.

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"...Why are they even talking about stuff like this? I mean, I'm fine with it, but..."

"Then it's settled. We've been briefed on the general conditions, so I see no reason not to accept."

Kuon had come home and told me this crazy story about getting engaged and having to do some kind of ritual challenge...and I wasn't about to sit there and pretend like I wasn't completely baffled.

Then again, I think my own engagement happened at a faster pace than this, right? Maybe this is actually more normal... I can't tell.

"I see, I see! So it's a trial to claim Allis as your bride? What an exciting turn!"

Yumina stood nearby; I could see her getting amped up. She was far more excited about this situation than Kuon himself was.



“Are you really okay with this, Kuon? If you’re just kinda going with the flow,

you can tell me."

It happened to me, kid. I kept going with the flow and now I have nine wives. I am pretty happy with them, though...so maybe it's not actually a cautionary tale.

"I appreciate your concern, but I've given this a lot of consideration. If anything, I just wanted to make sure you and mother would accept Allis as a potential future grand duchess."

"Mm... She's a little boisterous, but she's a good girl. I certainly wouldn't object."

"I've no objections either. I'd be happy for her to be your wife. As far as her being grand duchess, however... Well, I think that's a concern for the future. If she tries hard, I'd wager she'd be able to play the part well."

Yumina and I were of one mind. The only minor concern was that she didn't have much in the way of trained etiquette, but that was something that could be worked on over time. Allis was honest to a fault. She didn't have much political decorum to her, but she'd be able to get better... Probably...

"There's no risk involved in this Prismatis Rite, is there?"

"I heard the ordeal is different every time, so I have no frame of reference. I'm told there's no risk of death, however."

Hey, hey. Being pushed to the brink of death would still be too much! I can't be blamed for being apprehensive about all this. If Kuon ends up getting beaten within an inch of his life, I'm pretty sure Yumina will just kill Ende. Hell, Allis might help.

To be honest, I wouldn't have minded seeing the two of them beat on Ende a bit, but I didn't want that to come at the cost of my son's health. I'd definitely be able to heal Kuon if he got hurt, but I'd prefer him to just not be injured in the first place.

"If I'm honest, I'd prefer my children to...you know...actually be interested in the people they're getting engaged to."

"Hm? But I do find Allis interesting."

“R-Right...”

My son tilted his head slightly. It was then that I realized he had no idea what I was talking about. I got the feeling that his interest in Allis wasn’t quite what I was referring to.

Kuon went to bed early that night, leaving me alone with Yumina. I was still thrown for a loop by the whole thing.

“Come, now. Don’t you remember when we were engaged? I’m sure you were still a bit confused at first, no? I’m sure your interest in me wasn’t quite where it is now.”

“Well, I was interested in you, but...”

“Kuon cares for Allis, I know that much. Linze showed me something called shojo manga. It’s a form of media from your home nation. I’ve read many a story in its format featuring love that blossoms between childhood friends. Why couldn’t that happen in this case?”

...Yeah, I don’t know if manga Linze picked up on our honeymoon is the best frame of reference here... Media tropes are one thing, but this is real life!

Then again, people in this world didn’t travel much, so there weren’t as many opportunities to meet people far from one’s birthplace. Many people married people they grew up alongside in their villages.

Growing up in a similar environment would often give you similar values, and there wouldn’t be any worry about needing to change for someone who’s always known you. It was basically an easy and safe option. If we applied that to Kuon, then him marrying Allis wouldn’t be much different from many marriages in this world.

The trial wasn’t that unusual either. There were known cases of there being conditions set by fathers if a man wanted the daughter’s hand. Though usually, in cases like that, it was when the man was of a lower social status than the woman. Like a farmer wanting to marry a merchant’s daughter or something.

In this case, Kuon was the one of a higher station... But if I had to guess, Ende had butted in and made up some annoying terms. That moron was so obsessed with fawning over his daughter that he caused trouble for people! He was a real

pain in the ass.

I vented some of my frustrations about Ende to Yumina, and she just replied by saying, “Wow... You’re really not self-aware at all, are you?”

I truly wondered what she meant by that.

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“Both families are present, so we can begin the Prismatis Rite. Are we ready?” Ney spoke solemnly to Kuon, but I still didn’t know what the hell was going on. I felt like I had the right to ask some questions, so I butted in.

“The Prismatis Rite is a kind of Phrase ritual, yeah? So what does Kuon actually need to do? Have you decided yet?”

Ney and the others had called us out to the wilderness in the area that had once been Yulong. We were in the central region where the city of Shenghai had stood before being annihilated by the Phrase railgun attack. People didn’t come by this place anymore. It was a desolate wasteland that only monsters and beasts called home. And since the Yulongese state no longer existed, there were no issues with entering the territory without permission.

Honestly, hanging out here with Ende’s family kind of made it feel like a field trip.

“We Phrase are divided into various types. What you call the Dominant, the Upper, the Intermediate, and the Lesser Constructs. But there’s another type you’re unaware of. Technically speaking, it’s not a type of Phrase, but more akin to a crystal beast. I suppose a close analog to it in this world would be the Gollems.”

...The Gollems? So like, an autonomous creature they can make at will or something? I guess it’s true that Gollems and Phrase alike can be forced into submission by their superiors and also mass-produced to an extent. There are more similarities there than I considered.

“We’ll create some crystal beasts and have you face them in battle, Kuon. Protect Allis from them and prove your strength.”

Upon hearing that, my suspicions were confirmed. When I’d fought the

Dominant Constructs in the past, they made it their priority to assess their enemy's strength. They tended to subscribe to the idea of survival of the fittest. Ney especially believed in a kind of law of the jungle concept, where the strong thrived and the weak barely survived.

I was of the opinion that even weak things could adapt to their circumstances, but the Phrase focused on strength above all else. It was the power to dominate one's foe and keep them lower than you. Without sufficient power, they couldn't do as they pleased.

"So you want me to fight these Gollem-like creations of yours?"

"Correct. You can use that weapon of yours. Bring your full strength to bear...and show it to us." Ney pointed at the sword hanging around Kuon's waist as she said that. Namely, Silver.

Silver let out a small sigh, or whatever the breathless equivalent of a sigh was, before muttering to Kuon, "Why do we gotta fight for that pipsqueak, kiddo? Can't we just go get you a better lady? The world's your oyster... Think about it..."

"Hey! Shut up, you dumb sword! I'll throw you into the ocean!" Allis barked at the sword. Silver didn't seem keen on her getting engaged to his master.

"I've never fought a crystal beast before, but I'm sure it'll be no match for me and Silver."

"Darn tootin'! There's nobody in the castle who's a match for me and the kid...! Well, maybe a few in the castle..."

Silver went from confident to spineless in the span of about five seconds.

Off the top of my head, I could think of multiple sword-wielders who could beat Kuon and Silver: Moroha, Yae, Hilde, Yakumo, and Frei.

I was curious about these crystal beasts. Kuon could probably fare just fine with swordplay alone, but he had his mystic eyes as well, so I was sure he'd be okay. If things got too dangerous, though, I planned on butting in.

"Let's begin, then. Ney, Lycee. Ready?"

"We are, Lady Melle."

“Always.”

The three of them faced each other in a circle, stretching their arms out wide.

A small piece of pure crystal appeared in the empty space between them, gradually growing in size.

“...It looks a little like rock candy...”

It kind of looked like the process of making konpeito sugar candy that I’d seen on TV once, but it was forming a hell of a lot faster. The round mass fell to a clump on the ground and began growing larger and larger.

Melle and the others walked away. Apparently, their part was done, as the crystal mass continued growing on its own. It just wouldn’t stop expanding in size. It was already bigger than Kuon. Just how much bigger was it planning to get? It began to crack along its surface, gradually taking a more distinct form. It was four-legged, maybe a dog or a cat? Given that it was a crystal beast, that made me wonder if it was going to resemble an animal I knew.

“...Touya. Is that the three-headed one?”

“...It is, yeah.”

Yumina had realized what it was transforming into as well. It was a Cerberus. Or at least, it was kind of like a Cerberus. This one was a bit different. All three of its heads were different. The middle head was a lion’s, while the left and right ones were a Dragon’s and an eagle’s respectively...

“Hm, so that’s the form it’s taken.”

“It looks strong to me.”

“Of course it’s strong. It’s the product of our combined might.”

Melle and the other two Phrase girls nodded proudly. The crystal beast had grown to the size of a juvenile Dragon. It had a large crystalline body that was kind of like a lion’s, but it had a thick tail like a Dragon and bird wings sprouting from its back.

Melle was probably the lion here, while Ney was the Dragon...so that left Lycee as the eagle?

“Kuon’s fighting this, then?”

“Not quite yet. It’s not finished. Right now it has no directive or understanding. It needs to be taught how to fight. You’re up, Endymion.”

“Yep, yep.”

Ney waved over Ende, who stepped forward and held an open hand out toward the crystal beast. A faint light surrounded the two of them, flowing from Ende’s body into the monster’s.

“What are you doing?”

“Teaching it how to fight. I’m showing it how I’d move, how I’d attack, and combat patterns.”

...Uhhh, so what? He’s like...uploading combat data into it or something? You damn bastard, are you seriously trying to break up this engagement before it even happens?

“That should do it,” Ende said as he pulled away his hand. The crystal beast stirred to life, opening up its Dragon mouth to spew flames high into the air.

...Is this really safe?

Despite my unease with the situation, Kuon had already started doing a few stretches.

“...Aren’t you worried at all?”

“Not especially. There’s a lot of us gathered here, so I can’t expect it to be too dangerous,” Kuon replied as he nodded over toward a group of gods who were sitting not too far away. They had a bunch of tables and chairs set up and seemed to be enjoying snacks as they looked on at us. Just when the hell had they gotten here?

Karen, Moroha, Kousuke, Sousuke, Karina, and Suika were all there...treating this like a picnic or a family outing.

“...Well, do your best.”

“Of course. I’ll certainly strive to.”

I gave some words of encouragement, and then Kuon headed off toward the

crystal beast. I couldn’t help but be impressed by his courage. Hopefully, it’d carry him through this trial.

With that, our son’s battle began. The battle for his future engagement, that is...

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Kuon effortlessly drew Silver from his waist. The blade gleamed in the sunlight as it filtered down to the plains. The crystal beast opposite him gleamed even more, however. Every bit of its body caught the light, reflecting it in all directions.

I thought it was a little too bright, honestly. Wouldn't that give Kuon a disadvantage?

"Now begins the Prismatis Rite. Prove your might, child," Melle declared, formally announcing the beginning of the trial. The moment she stepped back, the beast lunged forward.

Kuon casually dodged two swipes as they came from the front. The crystal beast kept on swiping, but Kuon was able to duck and weave. He dodged each incoming blow with minimal effort.

I suddenly noticed that one of Kuon's eyes had turned an orange-gold hue. If I remembered right, that color indicated that he was using his foresight. That mystic eye ability let him glimpse into the future, so he was presumably using it to read his enemy's movements.

"Won't he just be able to win by using his eye?"

"No. Just like my own mystic eye, he can't use it constantly. There'll be a point where he'll have to rest it. It varies from person to person, but the stronger the ability the longer the rest required," Yumina answered, having walked over.

That made sense. Though, back when we'd done the interviews for new members of Brunhild's knight order, Yumina had used her mystic eye to assess the entrants pretty much all day...so I didn't know there was any penalty for overuse. Then again, since there was a small break between each interview, Yumina hadn't been using hers continuously.

Given that the ability allowed him to look into the future, it must've been strong. If what Yumina had said was true, it was about to lose all utility...

The crystal beast suddenly stopped dead in its tracks.

Oh yeah, Kuon has a mystic eye ability like that... Yeah, it's turned yellow-gold

now. If I remember right, that ability fixes things in place until he blinks.

The beast stopped only for a few seconds before it began lunging forward at Kuon again. Kuon had apparently not accounted for that, as he backstepped and put some distance between himself and his foe.

Huh? It overcame Kuon's power? It seems like it kinda worked, but then the crystal beast broke out somehow...

"I think mystic eyes used against enemies in combat are generally less effective due to the stress of the situation. Plus, that thing's a Phrase, isn't it? Don't they have the ability to absorb magic?"

I could see that. This crystal beast didn't seem to have a Phrase core, but that didn't mean it couldn't have similar characteristics to the rest of the species.

If it did, then it wasn't as powerful as a real Phrase's ability. That was probably why the mystic eye had managed to stall it for a brief moment instead of being fully nullified.

Kuon had seven mystic eyes. The Mystic Eye of Subordination, which allowed him to tame animals and magical beasts. The Mystic Eye of Immobilization, which allowed him to stop the movement of anything he looked at. The Mystic Eye of Nullification, which allowed him to nullify any magic in his line of sight. The Mystic Eye of Intuition, which allowed him to read a person's nature. The Mystic Eye of Pressurization, which allowed him to exert gravitational pressure on anything he looks at. The Mystic Eye of Precognition, which allowed him brief glimpses into the future. And finally, there was the Mystic Eye of Hallucination, which allowed him to form illusions.

In this fight, Subordination, Intuition, and Hallucination wouldn't do much for him. The crystal beast was neither animal nor magical beast, and using his Intuition to gauge its intentions was pointless. Creating illusions wouldn't do much here either, as it didn't seem like the enemy was tracking him using its eyes. And given that Immobilization didn't really work, Pressurization wouldn't be much use here either.

As I pondered what he could do, a fireball came flying from the Dragon head's maw. However, the flames evaporated before they reached Kuon. He'd used his Mystic Eye of Nullification, so at least he was getting some utility from that one.

“Oh?”

Kuon had been on the defensive end since the start, but he was finally ready to move. He charged toward the crystal beast from the side, swinging Silver high.

A loud clang reverberated through the area, and it seemed that the crystal beast was unharmed. It was just as physically resistant as any other Phrase, apparently.

“Hah. Your pathetic sword is meaningless in the face of our crystal beast. Give up,” Ende declared as he sneered over at Kuon from across the plain.

“He’s kind of irritating me...”

“Calm down. I’ll tell him off later.”

I tried my best to settle Yumina’s budding frustration.

...Look next to you, idiot. Your daughter’s noticed you being an asshole.

The crystal beast didn’t relent, but Kuon kept on dodging the attacks using his Immobilization and Precognition eyes. I was a little worried about him draining his mana reserves, personally...

I’d noticed that Kuon’s escape attempts were taking longer and longer each time, probably because using his mystic eyes so much was starting to take a toll. The crystal beast wasn’t showing any signs of slowing down, however. It put some distance between itself and Kuon before charging at him like a speeding truck. But for some reason, Kuon didn’t move.

What are you thinking?! Not Immobilization again, surely? You won’t be able to stop it if it’s moving that fast! It’s gonna smash into you!

“[Slip].”

The crystal beast’s front paws suddenly skittered and stumbled. It plummeted at high speed and smashed into the ground, crashing and rolling to the side of Kuon.

That’s my boy. I must’ve taught him well!

“Oh, I see. The beast was taught to fight by Ende, so you used a simple trick

he'd fall victim to."

"What'd you say?! I only gave it combat concepts! It's not like it fights based on me or anything! Our bodies are way too different! Got that?!" Ende growled at Yumina's snappy comment. She must've still been mad about his earlier smug behavior.

Ende had a point that the crystal beast would obviously fight differently from him...but I had a good feeling he'd have fallen for the ol' slipperoo just as easily.

"Go Kuooon! You can do iiittt!"

"Gah! It's not over yet!"

Allis cheered for Kuon to win, each excited word a knife to Ende's heart.

While the daddy-daughter duo roared on the front lines, their feelings on full display, the three Phrase girls quietly assessed the match from afar.

"Hm... He seems to have a solid grasp on the kind of enemy he's dealing with. His dodges are all calculated."

"Yes, he's analyzed his enemy's capabilities and isn't exerting too much energy when avoiding incoming attacks."

"Of course. In combat, you must always make sure you know what you're up against. Do something rash when you're unprepared, and that's when you get hurt. He's got the fundamentals down."

I was pleased to hear their feedback seemed positive. He was having trouble making attacks land, though. If I were up against a Phrase, I'd simply use **[Gravity]** to make my sword heavier or **[Ice Rock]** to crush my foe. Kuon only had Null spells at his disposal, though. And he could only cast two, **[Slip]** and **[Paralysis].** He'd demonstrated he could use the former well, but the latter probably wouldn't have any effect on a crystal creature.

Kuon brought his sword high over his fallen foe. But once again, the blade bounced off, a high-pitched clang ringing out for all to hear. He had yet to do any actual damage. Or so it seemed at first... I narrowed my eyes and noticed a little splinter in the impact zone. He'd chipped it, just a bit. The beast suddenly started to get up, spreading its wings wide and floating off the ground.

“Oho. Now it’s very slightly airborne... Is this to counteract **[Slip],** perhaps?”

“Yeah. Guess it’s not flying all the way up because that’d be too one-sided.”

Ende’s comment gave me pause. That was strangely sportsmanlike for what seemed to just be a monster made of crystal. Maybe it had gotten a little more from Ende than he’d expected.

But now Kuon couldn’t use one of his mightiest spells...so how would he respond?

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“Mgh... It’s tougher than I thought.”

Kuon smirked as he backed off from the crystal beast. According to Quun’s findings, Silver was easily as sharp as the phrasium blades their father made, which meant this foe was at least as strong as a magically charged Phrase construct.

“But I got a little bit off, kiddo. Didja do something special?” Silver asked, curious about what had happened.

“I briefly used my Mystic Eye of Pressurization and aimed for that spot. It only did a little damage, but it worked.”

The Pressurization ability, which crushed matter, didn’t really work on the crystal beast. But as a small test, Kuon had focused the power on a specific spot and smacked at it. Then, after a short while of backing off, he looked back at the spot he’d struck. It was still damaged...which meant this enemy didn’t regenerate.

“We’ll just have to keep chipping away at it.”

“You’re the boss!”

Kuon ducked beneath another lunging attack, then struck at the same spot as before.

The spot was on the eagle head’s neck, and it was barely even a scratch. But with the combination of Kuon’s ability and Silver’s strength as a blade, he was able to chip away a little bit more. It wasn’t a very efficient method of fighting, though... If they kept going little by little like this, the fight was likely to last

days. Not that Kuon would last that long, of course. His stamina wasn't infinite.

"Hmm, maybe I should kick it up a notch... It's a little more tiring, but I should be able to..."

Both of Kuon's eyes began to glow a reddish gold. While his mother, Yumina, could only manifest the power of her mystic eye in one of her eyes, Kuon had the ability to manifest his powers in both. The seven eyes he wielded could be channeled through either eye. He could use his right eye for Immobilization, while using his left for Pressurization at the same time, for example. Though, he could also use the same ability in both eyes.

Kuon's Pressurization focused on the spot with twofold focus, and he brought Silver smashing into it. This time the impact knocked a large shard from the crystal beast's neck. Using both eyes was clearly the right play here.

"Oh?! We might manage this, kiddo!"

"The recoil's still a problem."

Kuon blinked hard. His head hurt. Activating two eyes at once put a lot of strain on the boy, and it wasn't something he'd be able to do repeatedly.

"If only you were a stronger sword, Silver..."

"...You tryin' to rile me up, kiddo?"

"No, that wasn't my intention. I just thought that a Gollem blade created by Chrom Ranchesse himself would have more in the way of utility, you know?"

"Krhhh..." Silver growled and began to lightly vibrate in Kuon's hand.

"Fine, fine, fiiine! I'll show ya the power ol' Silver's got up his sheath! Infinite Silver...first Seal Release!" Silver yelled out, and then he began to glow. His blade was clad in silver-white light, a visible aura of energy emanating from it.

"What is this...?"

"This is just my first trick, kiddo! Take me and smack that thing just like ya did before!"

On Silver's instruction, Kuon activated Pressurization in both eyes and struck at the crystal beast once more. He aimed for the exact same spot at the base of

the eagle head's neck.

Silver's blade, still clad in that glow, bit into the side of the crystal beast's neck...and a sound akin to a rock being crushed rang out as the eagle's neck was shattered.

Kuon clearly hadn't seen that coming. It was written on his face. The crystal beast, sensing the new threat, leaped back and put some distance between them.

"How's that, kiddo?! Like that taste of my true power?!"

"...I'm surprised. What did you do? How did you get that powerful?"

Kuon couldn't wrap his head around the mysterious power Silver had just demonstrated.

"I don't know the exact details, but I can amplify the effects of stuff touching me! I didn't know if it'd work with those eyes of yours, but it seemed to do the trick!"

Kuon blinked in surprise. Did that mean that just wielding Silver amplified any of his magical effects? So with Silver in his hand, the power of his Pressurization eyes had been amplified enough for him to take the beast's head off.

This was an extraordinarily convenient ability! He could probably instantly heal himself if he tried casting restoration spells with Silver in his hand.

"So you could do this, huh? I'm starting to think better of you."

"...Wait, doesn't that mean you thought bad of me before this?!"

"That's not it. I just never really saw the point in lugging around a talking sword."

"That's too honest! At least lie to me!"

Kuon ignored Silver's plaintive cries and turned to face the crystal beast once more. The earlier attack had left the boy's foe on guard. It was glaring from afar, taking care not to get too close.

Kuon used his Precognition eye, but the monster remained still. That ability only allowed the boy to glance a second or two into the future, so it was useless

if the opponent wasn't doing anything. It was also too much of a burden on his body to constantly keep it active while waiting for his enemy to fight, so the only way he'd get any use out of it was to wait until his enemy started to fight in earnest again.

He waited and waited...but the crystal beast was waiting too. His translucent foe was completely motionless, like a sculpture made of glass.

How long were they going to keep staring like this? Just as Kuon began to contemplate his next move, the lion head opened its mouth wide. Then, before he even knew what was going on, the young lad was blasted backward.

Kuon's whole body had been struck by a shockwave that sent him flying. He bounced and rolled along the ground a little, but quickly regained his footing and brandished Silver once more.

"That caught me by surprise... Didn't have enough time to activate my Nullification."

"Kinda hard to block what's invisible, kiddo."

"Not impossible, but certainly close to..."

Kuon's Nullification eye canceled out any magic in his line of sight. That wasn't just limited to things he had to actually see, though. For example, he could cancel out imperceptible spells like **[Silence]** by simply perceiving that they were there through their effects. The only issue he had against invisible offensive spells like the shockwave was that he could only perceive it was there when it hit him.

"Can'tcha turn it off if you know it's gonna shoot at you?"

"Only if I know when it'll shoot at me."

Kuon was struck by another shockwave and sent flying once more. The lion head had its mouth constantly open, so there was no way of telling when it was going to launch another blast. He had to recognize when his opponent was releasing the magic, then counteract it before it hit him. In this case, he could only recognize it once it was hitting him, so there was nothing he could do.

"We've gotta bridge the gap, kiddo."

“Yeah. The only thing I can think of right now is using Immobilization to hold it in place, then loop around the back.”

Kuon suddenly channeled Immobilization through both eyes, freezing the crystal beast in place. He had only a few seconds to run forward and strafe around to strike his foe. And so, he leaped into action, bringing Silver swinging down mere inches from the enemy’s head... Unfortunately, the mystic eye’s power ran out. His enemy quickly swiveled and launched another shockwave.

Kuon, again, was blasted away by the impact.

“Damn it, kiddo... We almost had it. I shoulda extended myself.”

Silver’s blade could change shape at will. Most of the time it took the form of a shortsword to better pair up with Kuon’s size, but it could also transform into a longsword.

“...I see now. All you have to do is hit it while my mystic eye’s at full power, right?”

“Eh? W-Wait, kiddo. What’re you raising me like that for? Wait, don’t tell me —?!”

Kuon suddenly lobbed Silver in a wide arc as if he were launching a javelin. At the same time, he activated his Immobilization ability and trained it on the crystal beast.

“Hup!”

“You seriously threw meeeeee?!”

Kuon had thrown Silver toward his foe with all his might. And yet, even though Silver sailed through the air like an arrow, the crystal beast still let loose a shockwave from its open mouth. Thus, the silver crown found itself knocked off course. It seemed like even though its movement had been halted by the Immobilization eye, the crystal beast could still generate magic from its open mouth.

Silver had been knocked to the side, but...Kuon was no longer in the beast’s line of sight. Where was he?

“Over here.”

The crystal beast suddenly turned around, responding to the voice. Though Kuon had moved behind it, the beast didn't seem too bothered. It prepared to launch another shockwave in Kuon's direction. But before it could, both of Kuon's eyes suddenly flashed red-gold.

"Now, Silver!"

"I gotcha, kid!"

Kuon called out to Silver, making it come hurtling down from above. The blade smashed into the lion head's neck. A dull crushing sound rang out and the lion head splintered into pieces just as the eagle one had.

Kuon never needed to throw Silver, since the blade was always able to fly. But he knew that even if he let Silver attack independently, there was a good chance the attack would just be avoided. That was why he let his enemy think Silver was out of the running. The moment Silver was blown away, Kuon had communicated the plan telepathically. The blade had been floating in wait the entire time.

With the lion head dealt with, Silver returned to Kuon's hand.

"Howzat?! We tricked ya good, you big glass-carved dumbass! Wahoo! Wa ha ha ha ha!"

"Ugh... Shut up," Kuon sighed and shook his head at Silver's jubilation.

The crystal beast had only one head remaining: the Dragon's. It quickly spewed fire from its mouth, but Kuon canceled it out immediately.

"It's time we ended this."

"Sounds good, boss!"

Kuon charged toward the crystal beast. His foe spread its wings wide and tried to swipe at him.

Kuon's left eye suddenly glowed orange-gold. He'd used his Precognition to see what was about to happen, diving beneath the beast's crystal belly to dodge the incoming attack. His eyes, now focused on his enemy's underside, both glowed red-gold. Silver, in his right hand, glowed with that silver-white light.

“HYAAAAAAGH!”

Silver yelled out as Kuon thrust him upward, shoving him right into the crystal beast’s proverbial guts. The translucent monster was cleaved nearly in two, its body splintering like cut glass. Its entire body began to crack, then tremble, cascading until it collapsed into broken pieces.

“Woohoo!” Silver cheered as Kuon quietly dusted off his clothing and got up.

“That’s that, I suppose.”

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“That sure took a while...”

“You did it, Kuon!”

Allis charged in to give Kuon a huge hug, but she was beaten to it by someone who’d charged even faster.

“That’s my Kuon! You were amazing! Simply amazing!”

“Aaagh! D-Duchess Yumina! I should be doing that!”

Yumina had already pulled her scruffy-looking son into a tight embrace.

“I can’t do this when my son grows up, so I get mother’s rights for now,” Yumina said as she nodded triumphantly toward a despondent Allis.

...Could this be the beginning of a rivalry I really don’t want anything to do with? Whose side am I meant to take here?

“I don’t think it was as strong as it could’ve been. Lycee, did you perhaps cut some corners when forming it?”

“...Maybe a little. I didn’t want Allis to be sad, so...”

“You too, Lycee? I might’ve held back a little too...”

“Lady Melle... Doesn’t this fly in the face of the rite...?”

“Well, if the fusion left it shoddier than expected all-around...doesn’t that mean you cut some corners as well, Ney?”

“Ugh...”

The three mothers quietly talked among themselves. Apparently, their soft

spot for their daughter's happiness had won out.

"Grrrgh! Then it wasn't done right, was it?! Was it?! The rite is invalidated! We'll call the whole thing off, I say!"

"...Dad? Kuon only had to fight because you said he did... If you keep saying stuff like this, I'll never talk to you again..."

"Stuff like what? I never said anything..."

Ende's eyes glazed over in misery as he gave in to his daughter's threat. I was used to this kind of exchange between them at this point. Why did he even bother?

In any case, this meant that Allis and Kuon were to be formally engaged.

So she's gonna marry my son and become grand duchess someday? I have to admit, I have some misgivings about her fit as a royal...but I think as a person, and as my son's wife, she's a fine choice.

I had to leave the rest in the hands of Yumina and the others, to pray they'd be able to educate her properly. In the absolute worst-case scenario, we could find an additional wife for Kuon who had a better understanding of court manners, then she could handle that side of things. I didn't exactly want to make any decisions my son or his fiancée were uncomfortable with, though.

Well, whatever. That kind of worrying was for the far-off future. No point fretting about it so soon. For now, all I needed to do was smile and congratulate the happy couple. It was a new dawn for us all.

Afterword

Hello again, and thanks for reading *In Another World With My Smartphone* volume 27. I hope you enjoyed it!

Now that we've got Sue's daughter, Steph, in the mix, all the children are together at last.

I originally decided there'd be eight daughters and one son and also that the son would be Yumina's...but I had to think about his birth order in relation to his siblings.

Three patterns came to mind right away. An elder brother with eight little sisters, a little brother with eight older sisters, or a middle brother with younger and older sisters.

In the case of him being the eldest child, I could only imagine him becoming a protective big brother who fawned over his sisters all the time...so I had to nix that.

The eight older sisters idea was what I ended up going with, but then I thought it wouldn't hurt to give him one sibling who's younger than him. That was when I settled on making him the eighth child. After that, it was only obvious that Sue's daughter would be the youngest. She's the youngest bride, after all.

As far as Steph goes, it's good to finally have her in the story. She'd been mentioned a few times, but now she's properly here. Quun first showed up back in volume 22, so it took five full volumes to gather all the children... I wonder if that was a fast or slow pace, all things considered... Personally, I think introducing nine central characters in the span of only five volumes is pretty speedy. Part of me felt it was a little rushed, and that I could've taken a bit more time with it.

Anywho, the second season of the anime is coming along pretty nicely. There's been some communication back and forth about what exactly it'll cover, but at the very least, I know all nine heroines are gonna be in it. That was

a relief to hear.

Some of the heroines will only show up in the second half and onward, though. Kind of like Leen not getting as much presence in season one. Nothing you can do about that, unfortunately. It's not like we could start season 2 with a time skip to include all of them from episode one. Anime-only fans would be way too confused. They'd go, "Who are all these women?"

The voice actors for Lu, Hilde, and Sakura are the same as the cast for the Drama CDs. If you've listened to those, you should feel pretty used to them already.

It should be broadcast in the Spring 2023 season. By the time this volume's out, it shouldn't be far off. Or maybe it'll be airing. Just wait a little bit longer, please.

Anyway, it's time for me to give my usual thanks.

To the illustrator, Eiji Usatsuka...thank you so much for your work on this volume. I love Steph's design. I look forward to seeing what you can do with the next volume.

To the mecha designer, Tomofumi Ogasawara, thanks so much for taking some time out of your busy schedule to create designs for the gold crown and the illustration of Val Albus.

As always, thank you to K and the rest of the editorial staff at Hobby Japan. And thanks to everyone involved with getting this book published.

I would also like to thank all my fans who've been following along from the web novel until now.

Patora Fuyuhara