In Another World With My Smartphone

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illustration: Eiji Usatsuka



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Chapter I: A Double Confrontation with the Wicked Devout

After successfully getting engaged to Kuon without (?) incident, Allis was immediately thrust into lessons to learn how to present herself as a lady of noble standing. She was thoroughly taught proper etiquette, social dances, and any necessary social skills. Her current basic education was also expanded on.

Though it was primarily Yumina doing the teaching, Lu, Hilda, and Sue also assisted with the skills they picked up due to their royal backgrounds. Leen took up the role of teaching Allis the way of diplomatic negotiations using her experience as an ambassador of Mismede.

Hang on, isn't this way too much for a kid to be learning all at once? I feel bad for her, I couldn't help but think to myself. To my surprise, however, Allis sucked up all the knowledge like a sponge, and before long, she had already mastered many of the skills expected of a grand duchess.

"Allis's ability to learn things is unmistakable. Once she puts her mind to it, she can do anything," Kuon remarked of his now-fiancee.

So she's a born genius then? Like father, like daughter, I suppose.

As an additional benefit to all of this, Linne and Steph began warming up to the idea of receiving the same teachings as Allis out of a desire to not be outdone.

"We aren't asking you to change who you are, we are simply telling you to take on an appropriate persona when in a public setting. You don't commence battle by showing your whole hand to your opponent, do you? Much like that, we women take on the visage of a fair lady to encourage those around us to let their guards down."

Leen's explanation appeared to have been easier to understand for the girls, as they immediately began taking steps to improve their manners, even if the change wasn't as quick as Allis's.

Well, what kind of father would I be if I sat here watching my daughters doing their best putting in the same amount of effort?

I had been putting all my energy into condensing my divine essence since that morning in an attempt to create the sacred core required for the forging of a sacred treasure.

“Gwooooooh...!”

The ball of essence was gradually growing smaller and smaller.

Don’t get impatient. If you lose your cool and add too much strength, it’s just gonna blow straight back into your face.

I managed to get it to the size of a softball, but the resistance that came afterward was immense.

Is this actually possible?!

Making it even just the tiniest bit smaller seemed to take double the effort as before.

And that’s it for today!

It sure would have been convenient if I could just save my progress like that.

“Oh no.”

Having my mind distracted by such pointless thoughts caused the ball of divine essence to rebound, and before I knew it, particles of light scattered everywhere around me.

I couldn’t help but let out a sigh.

And that’s another failure to add to the list. Just how many is that now?

The extreme fatigue that always accompanied the process did nothing to improve my mood. Even running a marathon wouldn’t have tired me out so much.

“Daaadyyyyyy!”

“Oof!”

Getting charged into with a full-on tackle right after my body had been

sapped of all its energy resulted in me unceremoniously toppling over.

I'm pretty sure my body bent right in half there!

Steph was clinging to my aching side.

"Steph, how many times have I told you not to dive into me with **[Accel]** like that?"

"Daddy! I wanna go to the sea!"

"The sea?" I repeated back at her, rubbing my tender body to soothe the pain.

Where'd this talk of the sea suddenly come from?

"I want to see a Zallytan too! Linne told me all about the one she saw!"

"A whatty-now...? Oh, a Zaratan?"

When I went to go hunt Fiendrakes with the kids in the Sea of Trees, we ended up coming face-to-face with a stampede. The cause had been a magical beast that looked like a large turtle known as a Zaratan, which woke from its slumber.

With how ridiculously massive it was, you would think it was a Behemoth, but apparently, that was the normal size for a Zaratan. It was insane, honestly. According to Karina, the goddess of hunting, they were a very peaceful sort, but the sheer size of them meant that the creature simply walking could cause devastation on par with a natural disaster.

"You won't find a Zaratan by just going to any old part of the ocean, you know?"

"Quun said that you could find one for me!"

Ugh... I mean, it's not like I can't*, but there's not much I can do if it's deep under the sea.*

The Val Albus was a whale-type Over Gear, so technically, it was possible for us to just use that, but I'd rather avoid taking that option. It was mainly being used in the search for the wicked devout right now, so I didn't particularly want to take it away for less serious business.

Deciding it couldn't hurt to at least give it a shot, I pulled up a map of the world on my smartphone and ran a search for any Zaratan.

"Damn, there's a lot of them, huh?"

Seemed they weren't so scarce after all. Though even then, there were only about thirty of them in total.

I say only, but given their size, that's already pretty significant.

It seemed they could be found on both land and in the sea. Were the ones on land hibernating like the one we found in the Sea of Trees? Whatever the case, I had been told they hibernated for thousands of years. If we assumed the ones on land were, in fact, hibernating, there wasn't much point in going to see them. However, if the ones in the sea were too deep, that didn't exactly make them a better choice.

Let's try filtering out the ones in the depths.

"Oh? Looks like there's one near Egret. Wonder if that's the Zaratan we found before?"

It wasn't out of the question, really. The Kingdom of Egret was an island nation near the Sea of Trees. Their people viewed a local Sea Serpent as their guardian deity. An overpopulation of Tentaculars had greatly injured the beast, but it soon recovered and returned to maintaining the peace in their seas.

Even a Sea Serpent would have some issue against a Zaratan, but Zaratan were so docile that I couldn't imagine them ever fighting. I was fairly sure we'd be able to catch sight of the Zaratan if we traveled to Egret. Plus, we *had* been discussing going to the beach for a dip with the kids at some point, so I'd be killing two birds with one stone.

"All right, then, how about we go see that Zaratan?"

"Yaaay!"

Steph was quite literally jumping with joy. It kinda felt like I was planning a trip to the beach with some whale-watching on the side. Though if a whale really did appear, swimming in the ocean was off the table.

Going on a trip to the beach with the kids... Man, we really sound like a typical

happy family, don't we?

The kids would probably ask to bring Allis along, and being the overprotective father he was, that likely meant Ende would be tagging along too. Actually, if Allis and Kuon were officially engaged, would that not make us family as well?

Karen and Moroha likely wouldn't want to be left out, but the Babylon crew seemed like they might refrain.

You know what, the party's already this big, so it wouldn't hurt to let any off-duty knights join us. It can be like a company-endorsed vacation!

I was getting a little ahead of myself, though. Had to get permission from the king of Egret first, after all.

"We really get to go to the sea with everyone!" Steph excitedly cheered. I then began thinking of all the preparations we would need to make as I tried to calm her down.

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"It's the seeeeeeaaaaaa!"

The second I opened my **[Gate],** Steph zoomed onto the beach with **[Accel],** floatie in tow. *Who taught her how to do a Rocket Start?*

"Steph, you get back here right now!"

Steph's mother, Sue, and the golden crown, Gold, frantically chased after her.

Well, at least this won't be an uneventful trip.

Everyone had already gotten changed into their swimsuits before setting foot on the private Egret beach. Surrounded by rocks on all sides, it was a secluded little place. It was an ideal beach for royalty to enjoy time to themselves in private. The king of Egret was more than happy to give us permission to use it under the condition that, if a Zaratan really did start approaching his country, I would do something to stop it.

"It has been quite some time since I last swam in the ocean, it has."

"Everything's been so busy since the children arrived, after all."

Hilde and Yae remarked to each other as they walked along the beach.

“It has been a while since we’ve been to the sea ourselves.”

“All the adults have been so busy back in the future that it’s been a few years since we last went.”

Hearing Yakumo and Frei’s words, I suddenly understood why Steph had been so excited.

I would like to sincerely apologize on behalf of future me.

Yakumo and Frei’s swimsuits were the same color as their respective mothers. In fact, it wasn’t just them, the other mother-child pairs had all done the same. Apparently, when it was decided we would be going to the beach, they had all gone on a trip to Zanac’s fashion shop and ordered matching swimsuits.

Kuon was the exception, of course. He had settled on a pair of white Bermuda shorts with black stripes. Sure, he looked rather feminine, but even Yumina would make sure to get him a boy’s swimsuit.

My sisters had also gotten changed into their swimsuits and were making their way to the ocean. Moroha was making sure to caution the rowdy knights that had come with us. Even though I had invited the knights to give them a vacation of sorts, Moroha being here somehow made it feel as though they were about to be subjected to marine corps training.

“Lady Melle, is it really necessary for us to wear this ‘swimsuit’ garb?”

“Everyone else is wearing them, so we must abide by the customs of this world.”

“We couldn’t refuse Allis’s request now, could we?”

Allis’s three Phrase mothers arrived at the beach alongside their daughter. They were all wearing one-piece swimsuits of different colors. Allis was wearing a swimsuit of the same icy-blue color that Melle was wearing.



Thanks to the pendants enhanced with **[Mirage]** they held, their skin looked

like any ordinary human's. Previously, they only created the illusion of clothes, but that meant that if anyone were to end up touching them, they would feel the rough texture of their skin rather than the clothes, so they decided to use **[Mirage]** on their skin and then wear clothes on top of that.

Though apparently, this was their first time wearing swimsuits, which was leaving them a bit uncomfortable.

"All three of you look so good in them! Right, Daddy?"

"Y-Yeah, you all look perfect."

Ende looked almost flustered at the sight as if he'd never seen anything like it before.

You still in middle school or something, man?

"Oh, Kuon! What do you think of my swimsuit?"

"You look stunning. It suits you well, Allis. Very cute."

"How do you always know the perfect compliments to give to someone?" Allis mumbled. She was squirming at Kuon's words, face turning bright red.

"I simply spoke the truth."

"Gah, he said it with absolutely no hesitation! Is that really your kid?! If you were in that situation, you'd definitely have been all, 'Uh, what are you talking about?'"

"Oh, shut up," I snapped as I glared at Ende, who was making unnecessary comments.

Listen, even I can compliment a girl when something suits her. I'm not that socially inept. Or at least, I don't think I am...

While we had been chatting, the knights had all been swiftly setting up tents, canopies, beach umbrellas, and beach chairs across the sand. It looked like they had set up a net for some beach volleyball too.

These guys are way too excited to play around.

Not that I minded, of course. They were off-duty, and this was meant to be a trip for them to relax anyway.

“Sango, Kokuyou, mind keeping an eye on the surrounding area for me?”

“As you wish, my liege.”

“But of courssse, darling.”

With the way they happily floated away, it seemed even Sango and Kokuyou were excited about being back at the sea after so long.

The water around the Kingdom of Egret was the territory of the Sea Serpent, so I didn’t expect there to be any strange monsters to worry about. Still, I thought it best to have them keep an eye out just in case. It would be a pain if any more Tentaculars appeared, after all.

The younger kids were more than ready to jump right into the sea, but when the older ones warned them to do some stretches first, they all listened without complaint. I was glad our children made sure to listen to their siblings. It sure saved us all a lot of trouble.

After they had finished stretching, they all ran into the sea in sync.

Despite being the one who said she wanted to go find a Zaratan in the first place, Steph was the first to dive right into the water. Well, searching for the Zaratan could come later. It didn’t look like it was moving around out there, anyway.

Everyone else had already started their own activities. The knights had begun their matches of beach volleyball, while my wives were having a little tea party underneath the canopy.

Now, what exactly should I do?

“Touya, over here.”

As I was considering my choices, Karen beckoned me over from underneath a beach umbrella. The gods, dressed in swimsuits that perfectly suited them, had spread out a sheet over the sand and were already drinking away. Suika, the goddess of alcohol, looked well and truly drunk. I silently begged her not to try and go swimming in that state.

Well, it wouldn’t hurt to spend time with this group now and again, I thought to myself as I sat down alongside them. It felt as if the sheet felt was made from

the hide of some magical beast. Despite the blazing heat of the sand, it wasn't making it through the sheet at all.

Granny Tokie and Uncle Takeru were absent, it seemed. Being the goddess of Space-time, Granny Tokie was even now dealing with the aftershocks of the timequake, observing to make sure it wouldn't turn into a time tunnel. Uncle Takeru, meanwhile, was watching over the on-duty knights in place of Moroha while we were away. If he came with us, I was sure Ende would never be able to just sit back and relax, so perhaps it was a blessing in disguise.

"Whoa, itsh Touya! C'mon, c'mere, here'sh yer shots for bein' late."

"How many times do I need to tell you that I don't drink? I'm still underage."

"Yer shtill thinkin' with yer old common sensh? Ya already have a buttload of kids!"

That doesn't mean I'm not a minor. And wait, present me hasn't had any kids!

I still hadn't turned twenty in Earth years, so I refused to drink even a drop of alcohol. Not that I could deny that I'd been made to drink some here and there, but that was different.

Suika downed the glass that she had originally offered to me, prompting her face to melt into a grin. She really did always appear to be having the time of her life when drinking. And honestly, that kind of tempted me to have some myself.

Beside her was Sousuke, the god of music, strumming a tune from Hawaii on his ukelele. It was a well-known song in Japan about the Hawaiian volcano known as Diamond Head. Though the view was different from that of Hawaii, I thought it fit.

"By the way, Touya, how are you getting along with making the sacred treasure?" Sousuke inquired.

"Well, I guess I'm... getting there?" I awkwardly responded, averting my eyes.

I still hadn't even managed to make the core that acted as the power source for the weapon. I walked in knowing it wouldn't be so simple to make, but failing so many times in a row was a real blow to my confidence.

“A sacred treasure isn’t really something just anyone can make, anyway. You’d usually take a hundred years to forge it, so don’t beat yourself up over it. Take your time.”

I knew that Karina was just trying to cheer me up, but with the threat of the wicked devout looming overhead, that wouldn’t fly. For some reason, they were allowed to use the power of the wicked god, yet I wasn’t allowed to use any of my own divine powers. Talk about double standards.

In order to solve that conundrum, I had to make a sacred treasure infused with my divinity, then have a mortal use it to defeat them. Even then, though, the only candidates I had in mind at the moment were my children.

If I made a sacred treasure in the form of a katana, for instance, I could have Yakumo wield it and she’d potentially be able to completely annihilate the wicked god even if he resurrected. But if we put all our eggs in one basket, there was a chance our strategy wouldn’t be flexible enough to succeed. And so, I really had no idea what the best course of action was.

“If it aids in your troubles, Sousuke’s instrument is a sacred treasure too.”

“Huh?!”

At Uncle Kousuke’s words, I turned to stare at Sousuke where he sat still playing Hawaiian music. Or more specifically, I stared at the ukulele he was playing said music with.

“That ukulele is a sacred treasure?”

“He he, Sousuke’s sacred treasure ish called ‘Everchanging Wonder’. It can change into aaaaaany instrument he wantsh!”

To show what Suika meant, the ukulele in Sousuke’s hands morphed into all kinds of instruments, from a guitar, to a banjo, to a sitar, to a shamisen, and even to a yueqin.

It wasn’t just stringed instruments it could change into either, it could morph into drums, a piano, a trumpet, a flute, and so many other things. Finally, it changed into something that fit snugly into the palm of his hand.

It was a musical note letting off a soft silver glow. It had a strange texture to

it, like metal and yet not. The light it was letting off was the light of divine essence. This was likely Everchanging Wonder's true form.

"What may seem a marvel to those in the mortal realm is but simply a convenient tool for us gods," Uncle Kousuke stated. "Every one of us has some kind of sacred treasure in our possession."

"Wait, really?"

I looked around at everyone present. Every god sat here had their own, too?

"Indeed. For example, I have a sacred treasure related to farming tools, Karina has one for hunting, and Suika has one in the form of a sake cup and a sake bottle."

"What about Karen and Moroha?"

"Rather predictably, I have one in the form of a sword," Moroha told me. "I could end up blowing a whole continent off the map without trying if I used it though, so I don't really bring it out much."

She could get rid of a whole continent? God, that sounded insane. Apparently, her sacred treasure was so powerful that no human could ever wield it.

"What about you, Karen?"

"Mmm, mine is a silver bow and golden arrows that makes someone fall in love with whoever they first lay eyes on after getting hit. I made it on a whim as a young goddess, but I sealed it away in the Divine Realm's storehouse. Love isn't really love if it's artificial, y'know?"

A bow and arrow that could make love sprout, huh? She really was just Cupid.

There are so many kinds of sacred treasure out there. One that can change shape depending on what we need at the time like Sousuke's sounds good, I thought to myself, as the sound of the waves gently entered my ears.

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"Kuon, that meat's ready, so feel free to take it. Oh, Frei, not that one!"

Arcia was shouting instructions to her siblings while turning over the meat skewers that were sizzling away deliciously on the grill.

When you're at the beach, what better meal for lunch than a barbecue? The meat and vegetables we had brought along with us were cooked one after the other before swiftly disappearing inside our stomachs.

Karina had somehow managed to get us a whole bunch of fish and shellfish as well. It was an absolute mystery how one person could manage to gather so much without assistance. Did her powers as the goddess of hunting apply to seafood as well?

"Frei, slow down. No one's going to steal your food," Hilde admonished her daughter in exasperation, watching as she shoveled skewers into her mouth.

"But we've been swimming so much that I'm absolutely famished."

Not to be outdone, Yae and the three Phrase girls displayed their own voracious appetites without reserve. Even the knight order was chomping away at their food.

Well, at least they're enjoying it.

Suddenly, I saw something behind the knights.

A large sand castle silently stood in the distance. The detailing was so meticulous that there were windows carved out and even stones used in its structure. It honestly looked like a real castle.

Naturally, Kuon was the one behind it. My son created such a massive piece of art in only two hours. I couldn't help but take a photo of it.

I was expecting Allis to pout and whine that Kuon wasn't playing with her, but to my surprise, she seemed to be enjoying herself just sitting there and watching him build the castle. I was so sure that she would try to drag him into the sea too.

Is this the effect of her lessons?

I couldn't help but pity Ende when he asked Allis if she wanted to play together and she immediately refused him, though.

I really wanted to preserve the castle with **[Protection],** given how well-made it was, but Kuon refused.

"It's fine. This kind of work cannot be preserved. I would say the ease with

which it will crumble is part of the appeal, in fact."

And so, I reluctantly gave up. I could understand the angle he was going for with beauty in impermanence at least.

Not that I was trying to do it in retaliation or anything, but I decided to use Earth magic to make my own sculpture and cast **[Protection]** on it to make some semblance of a water slide.

There was only one thing left to do after that: slide down it and dive-bomb into the ocean. I originally made it for the kids, but the adults joined in as well.

Not that I mind.

"Hiyah! Huh?"

A blindfolded Steph swung down a wooden sword, slicing the air right next to a watermelon.

And that's a miss.

Some of the other kids had taken to splitting watermelons that Uncle Sousuke had grown to help settle the food they had just eaten. I'd had a bit of one earlier and it was delicious and sweet.

Linne gave it a shot after Steph, but she missed as well.

Wait, weren't there usually people there to shout directions of where to swing?

"But then it wouldn't count as training," Elze chipped in. "So long as you have a solid grasp of where the watermelon is before you put the blindfold on, you just need to consider the length of your steps and the sword, and you've got it. It shouldn't really be that hard."

Uh, no, I'm sure that's a hard thing to do.

She was talking about it as if it was the easiest thing in the world, but you were literally spun around at the start.

And hey, don't go turning a fun game into training like that.

"Aw man, I swear I would know where the watermelon is if it wanted to kill me," Linne muttered in disappointment after her failed attempt. If I

encountered a watermelon that wanted to kill me, the last thing I would want to do is eat it.

Yakumo was the one to have a shot after, and she managed to split it clean in two. Or more precisely, she *sliced* that thing straight in half. With a *wooden* sword. At the very least, it was better than it splattering all over the place and being wasted, but still.

As per Steph's request, we were going to go see the Zaratan in the afternoon. It was only going to be me and the children, though. Everyone else planned to stay on the beach. Still, at the very least, I would make sure to record the trip for them to see later.

《My liege, something to report.》

《Oh, darling, terrible newsss!》

"Sango, Kokuyou, that you? What's up?"

A telepathic message suddenly came from Sango and Kokuyou, who were out on patrol. Was the Zaratan making its way over here?

《No, not the Zaratan, but there are hundreds of giant Gollems advancing along the ocean floor in your direction. They will likely make land within a few hours.》

"There are what?!" I shouted out loud without thinking, attracting the gaze of everyone around me. Was it the wicked devout?!

I opened up my map and tried a **[Search],** but there were no matches.

What is going on here? It's not the Kyklops?

I tried searching for just Gollems, but there were no matches for that either, so the most likely scenario was that my magic was being blocked by the same power of the wicked god that kept the Ark hidden.

"Is everything approaching us the Kyklops?"

《No, there are also ssseveral thousssand Fishmen and Four-Armed Gollemsss. Alssso, one of the Kyklopsss is of a different color to the ressst. It looksss consssiderably larger and sssturdier than them.》

Could that be the commander unit? In which case, one of the wicked devout could be in there. Had they come after us? There was no way. The only ones who knew we were here were the Egret Royal Court. That would make Egret itself their likely target.

Well, really, I don't think it particularly matters to them whether it's Egret or some other random country.

Their goal wasn't to plunder a specific location, but rather to plunge people into fear and anxiety, then gather those overflowing negative emotions to offer up to their wicked god. Or at least, that was how it came across to me.

I can't just sit around here and do nothing—we have to begin planning a counterattack immediately.

I opened up a line to the king of Egret without hesitation.

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"They're here."

I could see a horde of Kyklops rising from the sea with **[Long Sense].** Egret's seas were shallow, so you could see an army arriving from a mile away.

Just as Sango and Kokuyou had reported, the Kyklops leading the group was much larger than the rest. Its body was shimmering a metallic brown in the sunlight. At just a cursory glance, it looked built enough to be heavily-armed. It was about the size of Sue's Ortlinde Overlord, and there was something like a horn on its head that the other Kyklops lacked.

It held a weapon like a meat cleaver that was the same color as its body. I felt that same sense of strangeness from the knife as I did from the purple spear the previous wicked devout I met wielded.

We'll need to be careful.

On our side, we had Egret's knight order, my wives' Valkyries, Ende's Dragoon, and a few hundred of our own knights' Frame Gears. The only problem was that my own Reginleif wasn't here.

"Hey, you don't have any right to complain. As I recall, the one who insisted on prioritizing the Valkyries be installed with a second seat was you, Touya,"

Doc Babylon pulled me up over the phone. I could only lower my head in shame.

“That is true...”

I had asked for the Valkyries to be remodeled so that they would come equipped with a second seat for the children to also ride in. Additionally, it was installed with a function that made it possible to switch who was in control. Only the mothers could toggle it, though.

Why did I add that feature? Please don’t ask... What father could refuse when all of his daughters were begging him at once? Kuon was my sole ally at the time, but that still made it two against eight, and before long, he was also forced into submission.

Our kids were used to handling Frame Gears, so it wasn’t exactly a problem, per se, but I had still been hesitant.

Most of the children rode with their respective mothers, but Elna and Linne had swapped places, placing Linne with Elze and Elna with Linze. They appeared more comfortable with the other’s Frame Gears, so there was no reason to object.

I had a feeling that the reason Kuon had been against the idea of double-seaters was because he felt embarrassed riding with Yumina. After all, boys go through that period of their lives where they’re embarrassed to do anything with their mothers. Still, there was nothing I could do about that. If we could use Reginleif, I’d have been more than happy to let him ride with me.

Honestly though? Yumina looked so happy at getting to do this with her son that I’d rather he humor her.

“Touya-dono, is the plan to simply charge at it head-on?” Yae asked, her voice coming from the speaker of the Schwertleite.

“It’s probably best to do that while we have him so clearly in our sights. If anything happens, I’ll immediately be in to support you,” I responded through my phone.

We may have been losing in numbers, but I was pretty sure we had the upper hand in strength so long as the other side wasn’t hiding some trump card.

“We will handle that big ugly oaf!”

“Steph’s gonna be the one to beat the big bad guy!”

Sue and Steph’s voices came from the Overlord.

Given the Overlord’s size, I believed they would be best suited to combat the Horned Commander, but we had no way to know what the enemy had up their sleeve. That cleaver it held was still creepy, too. There was more than enough reason to want to be as cautious as possible.

“We can leave the Fishmen and the Gollems to the Egret knights, right?”

“Yeah, we won’t let the Kyklops step foot on land, but the small fry that make it past will be handled by them.”

I’d already relayed the plan to the king of Egret during our phone call. Those of us from Brunhild would generally be the ones handling the Kyklops. We’d be in trouble if they got targeted by any long-range attacks though, so I’d made sure to station a few Chevaliers over there.

“We really need to hurry and get those underwater Frame Gears developed for cases like this. That way, we can actually launch attacks before enemies come on land,” Doc Babylon remarked.

“The problem is that even if we get them developed, mass-producing them would take time.”

As advanced as the workshop was, not even it could mass-produce Frame Gears in a short amount of time. And that wasn’t even taking into account the cost of materials. Demolishing some of the Chevaliers and reusing whatever we could take from those would help reduce them a bit, but…

“Hm? What’s that?”

“Huh?”

I was pulled from my thoughts by Doc Babylon suddenly speaking up. She was likely looking at the footage from the unmanned surveillance drone we sent out.

“Look, behind the Horned Commander. They’re standing something up...?”

I used **[Long Sense]** to investigate where the Doctor was referring to and saw several Kyklops pointing some long cylinder skyward.

Is that a cannon?

“But if they’re not aiming here, then...”

Just as I began questioning their target, there was a sudden massive boom as something was fired from the cannon. Whatever it was burst like fireworks high in the air above us.

The explosion wasn’t that large; it really did seem like fireworks.

But then what is it? Was it just a shot fired as a battle declaration?

“What is this?”

Whatever they had shot into the air scattered a golden powder around us. When the powder landed on my hand, it instantly melted like snow.

No, seriously, what actually is this...? Wait, no way! Don’t tell me...!

“Daddy! Mommy says she feels sick!”

“Father! Mother suddenly has a headache!”

One after another, the children reported their mothers falling ill. There was no doubt anymore what that powder was.

“It has to be divine venom,” Moroha spoke up. “Don’t worry, this amount won’t kill them. I guess we can call it diluted divine venom, or diluted venom for short.”

Diluted venom? Is that really all you could come up with?!

“It’s definitely divine venom, but it’s like they’ve taken the tiniest remnants that remained and diluted it even further,” she continued. “There are a lot of impurities in it, and they’ve clearly adjusted various properties. Truth be told, you couldn’t kill even a servile god with this, let alone a lesser god. It doesn’t change the fact that it’ll still affect them, though.”

“Moroha, I feel kinda sick... It might be worse than we thought...”

I heard Suika’s voice pipe up from behind Moroha.

Wait, is the divine venom affecting her too?!

“Nah, you’re just too drunk.”

Oh, for the love of...!

“It’s fine, man, seriously. It’s not strong enough to affect actual gods like us, though your wards seem to be feeling it a bit. Even if it isn’t a threat to their lives, it’s probably making them feel a little worse for wear.”

“And the kids? Will they be okay?”

“They’ll be just fine,” Karen reassured me. “Your kids are demigods, y’know? If it was the real deal, it might be a problem, but something like this is no bother, y’know!”

Oh, of course. Our kids would have my divine blood running through them. If it had been the original divine venom, there was a good chance they’d be feeling the effects even worse than my wives, but I guess that “diluted” was the important part. We were fine because we had the genes of a god, but since my wives didn’t, they were being affected by it. Were they really going to be okay?

“Yeah, I’ll be good, I think. Just feel kinda rotten...”

“It feels like one of those mornings after eating too much...”

“I feel like I’ve just ridden on an incredibly bumpy carriage ride...”

Elze, Sakura, and Lu spoke up, voices completely lacking energy. Their bodies really were reacting badly to it. Despite how weak it was, I didn’t think even **[Recovery]** could get rid of the negative effects.

It didn’t seem like it was bad enough to knock them unconscious at least, but it really did come across as a weak poison. They seemed to have light headaches and stomach pains at worst. That said, even symptoms as small as those could be deadly in a battle, since it was enough to disrupt one’s concentration.

Is that what the wicked devout are aiming for?

“No, Father, it appears they had a different aim. This gold powder is interfering with the circulation of ether liquid through the Frame Gears. Their output has decreased to around 62%. The effect it has on our mothers was

likely an unexpected side effect from their end.”

So their aim was to decrease the power of the Frame Gears, then?

Back during the fight with the witch-king when he had become Hecatoncheir, he released some kind of gas that paralyzed the Q-Crystals. Was it something like that?

The wicked god had created Fake Gears before, and given the Kyklops we were faced with right at this moment, they likely had some degree of knowledge of the structure of a Frame Gear.

“Actually, are *they* okay? Should their Frame Gears not be affected as well?”

“They aren’t stupid. I’m sure they have their own measures in place to account for that. Honestly, given those Kyklops are made solely from Gollem technology, I don’t even think the effects of the powder would be all that significant on them in the first place. We’ll need to think of a good countermeasure ourselves... Touya, could I ask you to grab a sample?”

“Hm? Yeah, sure.”

Though I accepted, whenever this diluted venom touched anything, it just melted away.

So, uhhhhhh, how should I get a sample of this exactly?

I couldn’t help but think it impossible as I stared at the powder dancing in the air in front of me.

“Oh, duh! I should just use **[Prison].**”

Though thinking back, the divine venom couldn’t be blocked with **[Prison]** before. Maybe the fact that it was weaker would make the difference?

Using my divine powers here wouldn’t count as influencing the surface world, right? Surely it’s fine.

I used a **[Prison]** enhanced with my divinity and created a 10x10 cube in the air, before then compressing it to about the size of a dice. Some of the glimmering diluted venom was floating about inside.

Hey, it worked. Guess I’ll shove it in my pocket for now.

“Father, it will be difficult for Mother to pilot the Schwertleite in this state. I would like permission to take over.”

“Oh, me too! I’d like to pilot the Siegrune!”

“Me as well, Dad! I’ve piloted the Gerhilde before, so it’ll be fine!”

“Don’t leave me out! I’ll fight instead of Mommy!”

Before I could respond to Yakumo’s suggestion, Frei and Linne followed by Steph all piped up.

Ugh, I was thinking to myself that it would be okay for them to get a shot at some point, since they would have someone supervising them, but I wasn’t intending for it to be right from the start.

Still, I knew it would be wrong for me to force Yumina and the others to fight in their current state. If it was the same as the divine venom we had to deal with before, the symptoms would pass with time, so maybe it would be okay to let them pilot the Valkyries just for now.

“Hmm, fine, but only if you promise not to go overboard. And make sure to swap with your mothers once they’ve recovered, got it? I repeat, do *not* go overboard. I’m being serious here.”

“Yaaaaaay!”

The girls all cheered at having been granted permission. Did they even pay attention to my warnings? I was especially worried about Steph and Linne.

My worry wouldn’t halt the enemy army’s advance, though. They had already made it within firing range.

“They do say the early bird catches the worm. Let us first signal that the battle has begun!”

Quun and Leen’s Grimgerde was the first to advance. The Frame Gear’s shoulder and leg armor slid open, revealing the multi-shot rocket pods installed inside. The gatling gun on its right arm and the vulcan cannons in the fingers of the left hand were aimed at the Kyklops as they hooked both heel anchors into the ground.

“Full Burst!”

The Kyklops at the vanguard were bombarded by the full brunt of Grimgerde's weapons. However, despite being barraged with a rain of phrasium fragments, the Kyklops continued their march forward undeterred.

"They're rather tough, are they not? Is it because Grimgerde isn't working at maximum output?" Leen asked the question that I had also been wondering.

"Since it uses **[Explosion]** to fire the fragments, the drop in efficiency is likely partly to blame, yes, but aside from that, their frames are simply just that resilient!" Quun replied.

Though they managed to withstand it for longer than expected, the endless assault of bullets eventually made a few of the Kyklops topple over. However, the Horned Commander that led the army still showed no signs of stopping, even after being hit with many of Grimgerde's rounds.

Grimgerde's attack came to a halt after letting out a white plume of ether-filled smoke. Usage of Full Burst had reached its limit, so it would need to go on cooldown.

"I leave the rest to you, Steph."

"I've got you, Quun!"

The Ortlinde Overlord circled its right arm as it stepped forward.

"Here goes nothing! Cannon Knuckle Spiral!"

The Overlord's right arm detached at the elbow, then rotated at high speed toward the metallic-brown Horned Commander.

Just as it had done with Grimgerde's phrasium fragments, the Horned Commander took it straight to the chest. When the fist collided with its thick armor, the rocket punch managed to form a crack.

However, it didn't manage to completely shatter it, so the arm ended up getting deflected back. The arm then changed course and slotted itself back into place.

"It didn't break! Mommy, that big thing's really tough!"

"Hmm... I wonder if it's because of that strange gold powder..."

Sue sounded incredibly weak. I wanted to let her off the Overlord, but I needed someone to be there to step in if anything happened to Steph.

It's okay. She should start to feel better in a bit.

Honestly, the decrease in output was way more of a hassle than expected. It was a bit like a human afflicted with altitude sickness. We knew the Babylon crew was working on a countermeasure, though, so we just had to focus on defeating the enemy in front of us.

The Horned Commander lumbered forward with loud, earth-rumbling footsteps before swinging down its cleaver on the Ortlinde Overlord.

"Stardust Shell!"

Starry lights gathered in the outstretched left hand of the Overlord before transforming into a wall of light. The Kyklops' weapon clanged off the luminous barrier.

"You… You block the way. I…break you."

Despite being blocked by the shield, the Horned Commander continued relentlessly swinging down his cleaver. The man's voice I heard coming from the Kyklops was stilted and didn't sound very intelligent. At the very least, I didn't think it was the wicked devout I had met before.

As if to make a point of that, the Horned Commander still did not stop.

It's clearly not doing anything no matter how many times you try, so why bother? Just as I thought that, the Stardust Shell began to shatter little by little.

"What?!"

Was that the special ability of the cleaver? Or was it because of the reduced strength of the Overlord due to the diluted venom?

"Steph, the Overlord can't handle any more! Shove him away!"

"Got it, Mommy! Cannon Knuckle Spiral!"

Steph took the moment when the cleaver was raised to spiral the Overlord's right knuckle smack-bang into its chest. A point-blank-range surprise attack appeared to have been too much for the Horned Commander as it staggered a

few steps back.

The Overlord released a follow-up shockwave from its chest, sending the horned Kyklops even further away.

Before Steph could catch up to her opponent, though, three Kyklops stood in her path.

“Oh, come oooon! Get out of the way!”

She charged forwards and attempted to punch one of the Kyklops, but it easily dodged her strike. The Overlord lacked speed due to how large its movements were, so it wasn’t very difficult to dodge if you could see the attack coming.

The Overlord was made as a defensive unit in the first place. When it came to protecting its allies, there was none superior, but it was lacking in choices when it came to having to directly attack. It had an anti-Upper Construct weapon known as the Gold Hammer, but its main way of attacking was its fists.

It didn’t help that the size of the enemy the Gold Hammer was made to counter was far bigger than a Kyklops. If they made use of it here, it was possible they would just completely miss their target, or get caught in the gravity wave due to being in too close proximity. Plus, the burden on the Overlord for using it was also huge.

“Cannon Knuckle Spiral!”

The Overlord’s right arm was shot out. Naturally, a rocket punch was much harder to dodge than a simple swing, so the Kyklops took it right in the face and exploded into pieces, but more Kyklops immediately appeared to surround the Overlord again.

After being punched away, the Horned Commander used its cleaver as a support to push itself back up.

Are these guys managing to coordinate their attacks somehow?

According to Doc Babylon, the Kyklops were like Soldats where they could share information between a few units at a time. That meant these Kyklops were likely standing in front of the Overlord in order to protect the Horned

Commander.

If they actually have some semblance of coordination, this is gonna make things much harder...

Just as the commander unit managed to stand itself up and begin making its way back over, it suddenly stopped. And it didn't seem like it stopped voluntarily either, it was more like it was actively stopped by some outside force.

"Is that—?"

Right as I went to turn around, something flew past me way faster than I could look. In the next moment, the Horned Commander and the Kyklops surrounding it were sent catapulting out into the sea as if pushed back by some invisible wall.

Managing to look back properly this time, I saw the Rossweise standing poised with its Symphonic Horns on both of its shoulders, as well as Brunhilde armed with its sniper rifle.

"Kuon, was that you that stopped it?"

"Yes, Father. Yoshino said that she required the target to remain still to ensure her aim would be accurate."

So Kuon used his Mystic Eye of Immobilization. Can't believe he can use it on a massive mech like that.

If he was able to immobilize any enemy and take that opportunity to snipe them, was my son not basically unbeatable?

Then again, using the power of a Mystic Eye even once took a massive amount of energy, never mind using it a bunch in quick succession, so maybe not.

The Kyklops that were directly around the Horned Commander had been blown away alongside their leader in the attack, but the others that were closer to us had been spared and began approaching the Overlord again. However, one of the Kyklops that was approaching suddenly stopped in the same unnatural way that the Horned Commander had, and then in the next moment, a gunshot rang out and a bullet went straight through his head.

Wait, that was Kuon again? Accurate headshots aren't easy to pull off.

He was already piloting Brunhilde as skillfully as Yumina.

The head of a Frame Gear typically only contained cameras and sensors, so ordinarily, it would have had little to no effect, but it seemed like the Q-Crystal of a Kyklops was situated there, much like with a Gollem. The Q-Crystal was basically the brain of a Gollem, so if that was broken, then naturally, it couldn't function.

I could still remember Doc Babylon criticizing Gollem manufacturers for refusing to throw out their old preconceptions of how they should be built.

She had a point, though. What need was there to place a Q-Crystal in the exact same place if it wasn't necessary? It would be so much safer to place it somewhere hard to strike like their back, or even just place it in the same area as the G-Cube that powered it. They couldn't function without the other, so if even one of them was destroyed, it would be game over anyway.

Though if you considered it from the perspective of intending to retrieve the frame afterward, it was probably better to ensure at least one part would remain intact.

"We can't let Kuon take all the glory!"

Frei charged forward in Siegrune and slashed a Kyklops right in half. Her usual battle style was to adapt to the situation and pull whatever weapon would be most suitable against her opponent from **[Storage].** It was a rather unpredictable and crafty way of fighting. It may have been because of that that her control of Siegrune felt less sharp, at least compared to when Hilde was piloting it, anyway. But despite that, she was managing to take down the Kyklops much better than the other Frame Gears.

Yakumo was also cutting down Kyklops one after the other in the Schwertleite. She fought very similarly to Yae, so controlling her Frame Gear came much easier to her.

“Hiyaaah!”

“Come at me!”

Two of the fighters were much wilder and rowdier than the rest: it was Linne piloting the Gerhilde and Ende piloting the...

Wait, hang on. Is that Allis *piloting the Dragoon? When did she get on?*

The Dragoon hadn’t been remodeled to add a second seat, but the cockpit was probably spacious enough for a child to fit inside.

I opened communications with the Dragoon to see what was going on.

“Ende, what’s happening?”

“I suddenly started feeling like crap...and then Allis jumped into the Dragoon saying that...she’d take over...”

Oh, of course. Ende was Uncle Takeru’s ward, so the diluted venom would affect him too.

When he said that she took over, did that mean she was the one in the pilot’s seat? Which meant that he was shoved into the narrow space up the back while feeling ill to boot. I felt kinda bad...

Just hang in there, man.

Allis’s fighting style wasn’t the same as Ende’s, but she was still doing well piloting the Dragoon. It lacked the precision and control that Ende had, but if it worked, it worked.

“Allis, one’s headed your way!”

“Aye, aye!”

The Dragoon sliced the Kyklops that Linne had accidentally let slip past in two with its twin blades. The two mechs covered each other’s backs as they cut down the enemy one after another.

Their coordination was amazing. I had to wonder if Ende and Elze were

advising them. They were making sure to support each other while taking down the enemies in front of them. They weren't half bad at all.

But just then, a Kyklops that Gerhilde had failed to completely destroy moved to swing its blade down on the Dragoon from its blind spot.

Before the attack could hit its target, however, the Kyklops was assaulted by a rain of phrasium fragments, collapsing into the water with a splash.

"Linne, don't let your guard down."

"Elna!"

The Helmwige flew past the Kyklops that the Gerhilde was currently battling. The blades built into the wings sliced the enemies in two before ascending back up.

Though Elna and Linne weren't in their own mothers' units, they were both controlling them well. Aerial support fire was appreciated. In fact, Elna seemed more suited to that sort of support role.

Talking about support roles...

"Let's rock and roll!"

The sound of a guitar came blaring from the Rossweise that Yoshino was piloting. She was playing "Danger Zone," the theme song of a famous movie about a group of fighter pilots. It felt a little strange hearing it here.

Is Yoshino playing the guitar live?

Suddenly, Sakura's vocals joined in beside the echoes of the electric instrument.

Even though this song had gentler vocals, her voice sounded weaker than usual. The diluted venom must have been affecting her as it had everyone else. Her voice hadn't regained its usual vigor, despite the amount of time that had passed. Still, it was clear the song was having an effect regardless—the Kyklops' movements were slowing. They were being forcefully delayed.

Thanks to how dull their movements had become, Kuon's phrasium rounds were able to hit their mark one after another. He was succeeding at consecutive headshots almost as if he was a robot made just for that task.

Was our son actually an S-tier sniper? Should I make sure not to stand behind him like that famous sniper from that one manga?

“You’re too slow!”

Following up after Kuon’s string of headshots, Arcia’s Waltraute, which had been refitted with a booster unit, charged into the Kyklops. With swift, accelerated movements, the Waltraute swung the sword it held in both hands, sending two Kyklops’ heads flying into the air.

She can put on some show despite the decreased output...

The Waltraute turned and waved at me.

“Did you see me, Father? I’ll kick these small fries right up their bottoms!”

“Arcia, turn back around! Losing focus on the battlefield can be deadly!”

“Wah!”

“Not so fast. **[Slip]!**”

The spear-wielding Kyklops charging at the Waltraute tumbled right over into the sea. Arcia wasted no time thrusting her twin swords right into it.

That was a close one!

Arcia wasn’t the thorough type that would make sure the job was done before celebrating; it was a little worrying, honestly. At least for now, Sue was with her, so she’d probably be fine.

We appeared to be at the advantage on this battlefield. The Four-Armed Gollems and Fishmen who had slipped past the Frame Gears were being taken out by Egret’s knight order. Given enough time, I was sure we’d be able to eliminate them all. However, there was still one problem...

I saw the Horned Commander rising from the water from where the Rossweise had sent it flying. The attack from earlier had been more of a delay tactic, so it had barely taken any damage.

“A-All of you…in my way! Destroy all!”

The Horned Commander took its shimmering meat cleaver and slashed it down into the ocean at full force.

“What is he doing?!”

The sea split in the direction the cleaver had been brought down, and sharp rocks from the ocean floor began sticking out one after another, forming what almost looked like a mountain range of swords.

The wave of rocks was heading toward the Ortlinde Overlord with tremendous force.

“Guard, Steph!”

“Got it, Mommy! Stardust Shell!”

The stellar barrier blocked the attack’s advance, but that road of rock swords was still left standing.

“It’s very similar to **[Earth Wave].** Everyone, be careful. That large sword he wields appears to have the ability to manipulate the terrain,” Leen informed us from the Grimgerde that had finally finished its cooldown period.

It can manipulate the terrain? Why are these guys so annoying?

Guarding against that would be difficult if you weren’t using an aerial unit.

“Oh, wait.”

I looked up at the Helmwige soaring through the sky. It fired a concentrated barrage of phrasium fragments on the Horned Commander from above. Unable to avoid the attack, the Horned Commander raised its cleaver and used it as a shield.

Though the shots that hit its body were lodging themselves into the frame, any that hit the cleaver reflected straight off it. The only reason that would happen would be if whatever material the weapon was made of had the same strength as phrasium, meaning it was likely a sacred treasure of the wicked god—a wicked vessel. It would make it the same as the rapier and spear the wicked devout I had met before were wielding.

“F-Flying one…noisy! I…make fall!”

The Horned Commander slammed its cleaver into the ocean floor once more, causing the land underneath it to shoot up into the air and create a large rock tower with the Kyklops standing on top.

Having made its way right in front of the aerial Helmwige, the Horned Commander leaped off the tower and swung its cleaver down on the Frame Gear.

Shit!

I went to unleash a **[Prison]** at the Helmwige, but then a loud gunshot rang out. The wicked vessel flew out of the Horned Commander's hand, twirling into the air.

Stood nearby was the Brunhilde, sniper rifle at the ready.

Thank god Kuon's here!

The horned Kyklops fell into the sea together with its cleaver.

"Mom, Elna, are you two okay?!" Linne shouted worriedly from the Gerhilde. I couldn't blame her for being worried.

"It gave me a bit of a fright, but I'm fine."

"We're okay, Linne. Thank you for your concern."

The Helmwige did a loop in the air to show that there was no problem.

They don't seem to be putting up a front at least.

It definitely made me panic, though. I don't think any of us expected him to suddenly jump like that. Turned out we couldn't just assume the Helmwige would be safe just because it was up in the air.

The Horned Commander stood itself back up. A moment passed after it held its hand out to the side, and then suddenly, the meat cleaver shot out of the water and into its grip.

"We really did nothing to him," Leen despaired.

He fell from that height and it did nothing*? Like, sure, the damage would've been mitigated by the water, but I was expecting something to be damaged, at least.*

The Horned Commander began walking toward us again, cleaver in hand.

"Cannon Knuckle Spiral!"

Steph sent out the Overlord's right arm. Spiraling like a bullet, it collided right into the enemy.

"I…already see!"

The Horned Commander tilted its cleaver, using the large surface area of its blade to bat the Overlord's arm into the sea as if it was a fly. Ignoring the arm now lodged into the ground, it continued its advance and swung its cleaver down toward them, but the Overlord held its left hand in front.

"Stardust Shell!"

The luminous barrier blocked the attack. Just as it had done before, the Horned Commander kept slamming its cleaver down into the shield again and again to try to forcefully shatter it.

He's relying entirely on brute strength here. Don't think there's any doubt this dude isn't the brains of the operation.

"You dummy! No hurting Steph!"

"Gwah!"

Just as the Stardust Shell was beginning to crack, the Gerhilde landed a clean hit on the Horned Commander's head with a flying kick. It seemed as though the kick had been fortified with **[Gravity],** since despite how heavy the Kyklops looked, it still fell with great force into the water.

As it tried to get back up, the Gerhilde followed up with a roundhouse kick. Though the Horned Commander was practically twice the size of the Gerhilde, the heel of our Frame Gear had hit it in just the right place to knock it off-balance. Once again, the Kyklops fell into the ocean.

Its horn had broken off, and its head was all malformed, but it was still functional. The Horned (literally past tense) Commander stood up once more, battered head and all.

"That still wasn't enough?! Why not just stay down already!"

"Linne, no!"

Before Elze could stop her, Linne had already jumped into the air, holding out Gerhilde's right arm, preparing to fire the pile bunker into the Horned

Commander's stomach. However, it was immediately grabbed by the Kyklops's massive left hand.

"S-Stop…being so a-annoying!"

The Kyklops lifted the Gerhilde and swung it down toward the sea.

This is bad!

"Envelop all, o Wind! Gentle Embrace: [Air Sphere]!"

Seconds before the Gerhilde hit the surface of the water, the invisible wind cushion that I had sent out gently caught the red frame and softened the blow. Having absorbed most of the damage that would've come from the collision, the Gerhilde made only a gentle splash as it hit the water.

How many close calls does that make?!

As tough as the exterior of the frames may be, even the Gerhilde would've suffered some real damage if it hit the water at that speed. Of course, the automatic emergency evacuation would have kicked in and teleported Linne and Elze away before they were hurt, but it was still seriously bad for my heart.

The Horned Commander took its cleaver and went to continue with a follow-up attack, but two units stood in its way before it could.

"What do you intend to do to our sister?"

"Death be upon you."

Yakumo used the katana of the Schwertleite, and Frei the sword of the Siegrune to slash both of the Horned Commander's wrists. The joints of a mech weren't very strong, so they were right to aim there, but I never imagined they would be able to aim for it so precisely.

The Horned Commander's hands fell into the water together with the weapon they held. However, its assault did not stop: it simply took the stumps and tried to punch with them instead. The Schwertleite and Siegrune dodged the attack in opposite directions.

Behind where they had been standing was the Grimgerde, all guns aimed right at the enemy commander.

“Uh, guh...”

“Full Burst!”

The rain of phrasium fragments hit the Kyklops’s head one after the other, turning it into a honeycomb. That strike had likely shattered the Q-Crystal, as the unit stopped moving before falling backward into the ocean.

“That’s what you get for bullying my little sisters.”

The angered attack from the third oldest had decided the result of the fight.

Your father’s proud that you guys get along so well that he doesn’t need to interfere.

“Ngh...”

The cockpit in the torso of the metallic brown Kyklops suddenly flew open.

A large man crawled out from it. His muscles were bulging, and he had a cylindrical full-face iron mask on. He wore an apron stained with blood and thick leather gloves. That strange appearance, together with the fact his weapon was a meat cleaver, made me think of an actual butcher. The iron mask even brought to mind an executioner.

“C-Come! Yellow Ocher!”

When Iron Mask held his right hand out to the side, the meat cleaver shot up from underneath the sea toward him. It shrunk in size before landing in the man’s hand, but it was still about the size of a large sword more than a regular knife.

That’s what happened with the purple spear that one wicked devout had. That has *to be a wicked vessel.*

“I...I destroy…towns of this country. I destroy lots.”

I used **[Teleport]** to make my way onto the destroyed Kyklops’s shoulder.

“Why do such a thing? Are you trying to revive the wicked god?”

Right now, we needed information. This man didn’t come across as the brightest, so I thought that I would maybe be able to pull something out of him.

“W-Wicked god? Dunno. Gold, Scarlet…told me to destroy...so I destroy. N-

Not complicated.”

Gold and Scarlet... Could those be names of some of the other wicked devout?

The gold crown was known as Gold, but...there was no way they were related, right? I was just letting my imagination get the better of me. But for him to not even know who the wicked god was? Wasn’t he meant to be one of the wicked devout? It would have been pretty sad if that NEET god wasn’t even loved by his followers.

“I…I destroy when people…get in my way too. Head feel good when kill humans. Feel happy...so I destroy.”

If we could see his face right now, I was more than sure that he would’ve been giving the creepiest smile.

Seemed this guy was someone that couldn’t function unless he was following orders.

Well, no, that’s not quite right. He kind of just seems faithful to his own desires. He’s no more than a pleasure killer.

I used my divine sight with **[Analyze]** on the man. Gods weren’t allowed to use their divine powers to directly influence the mortal realm, but using it to analyze an opponent wasn’t considered a violation of that rule.

Hmph. His heart isn’t beating, and he has no soul either. Is he an Undead?

Actually, it seemed like his soul had been transferred to the wicked vessel instead. It was attached to his body through some kind of spirit thread, which likely meant that unless we destroyed that weapon, this guy wouldn’t be going down any time soon.

He seemed far from human by this point, so it would be a good idea to deal with him here and now, but destroying a wicked vessel without using any divinity? There was no way. The rules being enforced on me here felt way too strict.

“S-So…I destroy you too!”

Iron Mask leaped toward where I stood on his Kyklops’s shoulder. I took out the Brunhild sheathed at my waist and fired three shots at him, but even when

they hit, it did nothing to deter him, and he immediately went to slice his cleaver down on me.

"Blade Mode!"

Now in its sword form, I was able to use Brunhild to block the attack. I felt the shockwaves run through my arms, but since he was attacking from the air, it wasn't impossible to take.

"**[Power Rise]!**"

"Guh?!"

I activated strengthening magic and swung Brunhild, sending both Iron Mask and his cleaver flying all the way toward the Kyklops's stomach area. Despite how large his body was, he was actually quite nimble, so he made a skillful landing.

"M-My Yellow Ocher can't cut...? Th-That sword…strange."

"That should be my line."

My Brunhild was made of phrasium. This was the first time I'd found a weapon that it couldn't cut. If I enhanced it with my divinity, I could probably cut it in two easily, but that was against the rules.

Just how exactly was I meant to defeat this guy? If I didn't destroy that wicked vessel of his, he likely wouldn't go down for good. But to do that, I would need to use my divinity, which was taboo. A human using a sacred treasure that I had made would be able to break it, except I still had no success in making one.

Could I have softlocked my progress?

Wait, no, there is *a way out of this! I still have those twin divine blades that Ende stol—I mean,* borrowed *from another world in* ***[Storage]!*** *Maybe that can... Hang on, I'm not allowed to use those either!*

My wives were my wards, so they weren't allowed to wield them, and if it was true that Ende had become Uncle Takeru's ward, then he was out as well. I could technically ask the Phrase girls, but considering the fact that they couldn't bring out the full potential of the divine blades, I would feel a bit uneasy pitting them against a wicked vessel.

That left only one option...

“Ngh...! Are my kids really the only ones I can ask?”

My children were demigods, so no one was more suited to this than them, but...

“Mmmnnnghhh!”

Iron Mask restarted his assault while I was debating what to do. With the Kyklops’s shoulder still our battleground, I blocked his attack with Brunhild again.

Ow, there was much more force behind that one!

“**[Boost]!**”

I strengthened my body so that I could push the cleaver away again, then took that opportunity to slash his arm off from the elbow.

“Guh? Gaaah!”

Right after Iron Mask screamed out, his arm suddenly regenerated in a flash.

He has regenerative abilities?! And so fast too!

Was this his own ability, or were all the wicked devout like this?

This sure was becoming a pain in the ass. I looked up and saw Schwertleite and Siegrune lumbering toward us. Most of the Kyklops had already been destroyed, which meant the defensive battle was basically complete, so why were they coming to me?

“Father!” Yakumo and Frei cried out as they exited their cockpits. They then landed lightly on top of the fallen Kyklops I was fighting against Iron Mask on.

“What? What’s going on?! It’s dangerous here!”

“Auntie Moro—Miss Moroha told us to come help you.”

“She said we were most suited to the task!”

Morohaaaaaa! Stop reading my mind!

It pained me to admit it, but it seemed I had no choice but to rely on my kids here. What a pathetic father I was.

I took out the twin divine blades from **[Storage],** then handed them to the girls. They gasped when they unsheathed the shortswords that emanated divine essence.

“Th-These are incredible...”

“Yeah. The sword I got from Father was already amazing, but this is something else.”

Now listen up, those are divine swords*, you know? You’re comparing that to something made by a complete amateur.*

“I want you to destroy that iron mask guy’s cleaver with those swords. They might be a little tough to use at first, but you should get used to them pretty quickly. Or at least, I think you will.”

“You *think*?”

“Father, Father! If we do well, is there *aaany* chance that we could perhaps, maybe, possibly get to keep them as a treat?”

“Absolutely not.”

“Boo! You’re so stingy!”

Frei was clearly in a huff at my response, but even if her weapon maniac blood was screaming at her, this was one thing I couldn’t budge on.

“Your opponent has a pretty strong regeneration ability, so be careful. Of course, I’ll support you as much as I can.”

“There’s no need. We saw your fight with him while we were making our way over here. I’m sure that Frei and I will have little problem.”

Hang on...was she indirectly dissing me? Like yeah, I was having some trouble because I couldn’t use my divine power, but that didn’t mean I was doing terribly.

“Y-You two…in the road. I destroy together with that man.”

“Excuse me?”

What did that bastard just say to my daughters? Maybe I should just use my divine power after all...

I took a step forward, murderous intent practically radiating from my body, but Frei stepped in first.

“Stop right there, Father. This is *our* opponent.”

“There is no need for you to interfere. Leave this to us.”

Um, Yakumo? You do realize I was the one fighting him before you two arrived here, right?

I had no idea whether they knew what I was thinking, but the two took their swords and prepared for battle.

“D-Destroy!”

Iron Mask swung down his cleaver at Yakumo. The attack was so slow that she was able to simply sidestep it before cutting the man’s side open.

“Hmm…” Yakumo mumbled, frowning down at the divine blade. “This really is fairly difficult to wield. It feels like it’s rejecting my mana. It isn’t the most pleasant feeling.”

Those of a higher rank like myself or Grandma Tokie didn’t really feel it the same way, but I heard it was difficult to get used to another’s divine essence. Yakumo and Frei were demigods though, so at most, they just felt a little uncomfortable using it. Were it a normal person, using an attack filled with divine essence would put great strain on their body, mind, and magic reserves, so they usually couldn’t wield these kinds of weapons.

I imagined this was the reason that both sacred treasures could only be wielded by heroes chosen for them. I was fairly sure that it would also be affected by whether or not they had the protection of the god that had created the blade.

The area where Iron Mask had been slashed immediately began to regenerate, but it seemed like it was taking longer than last time. Was this the effect of the divine blade?

“Gaaah!”

“**[Power Rise]!**”

This time, he aimed for Frei, but she blocked his attack with her own blade.

Iron Mask seemed surprised that his attack had been stopped by a girl less than half his height.

“C-Crush!”

Iron Mask put more force behind his cleaver to try to squash her flat, but when a piece of his cleaver chipped off instead, he frantically pulled back.

“Y-Yellow Ocher got hurt?! This strange! That sword strange!”

Even if it was from a different world, a divine sword was a divine sword. Despite his name, the wicked god had failed to truly become a god. Did he really think a divine sword would lose to the weapon of a failure?

Frei retaliated by striking the cleaver. A crack broke down the metallic brown blade from where it had been chipped.

“M-My Yellow Ocher!”

“Yakumo!”

“Understood.”

Yakumo had circled to the man’s rear and slashed off his thick left arm. Meat began bubbling up around where the arm had been cut off in an attempt to regenerate the lost limb, but it was clearly much slower than before.

“I-It not go back to normal?! Why?!”

He was beginning to panic. So much so, in fact, that he was too late to notice the girls aiming for his cleaver. By the time he realized what they were doing, the two of them were already driving their swords toward his weapon.

“You’re too slow.”

“That’s a point to us.”

They slashed it with all their might from both sides. A high-pitched clang rang out, and the cleaver was cut into two. In the next instant, Iron Mask let out a guttural cry. His body turned to stone, and that stone then crumbled away into fine sand.



The now-masterless weapon clattered down onto the Kyklops’s body.

The metallic brown gleam the meat cleaver previously held was no longer present, and it turned into a sludge that was emitting a black smoke, very similar to the sight we saw when defeating a mutant.

“He turned into sand?”

“I don’t think he was ever truly alive. He was probably more like an Undead... No, a Golem, in fact.”

He had simply been a puppet of the wicked god.

The wicked vessel broke apart just like the mutants did, so it was probably the source of his power. Still, it was strange. I thought that diver helmet guy would appear to teleport his cornered companion away. Then again, maybe it was just chance that happened last time. I couldn’t say I knew how much they really cared about their fellow devout. Even if one was to die, they could easily have another take their place. Though really, I’d rather they not...

Well, we needed to take solace in the small victories at least. The battle was already mostly over. All of the Kyklops had been destroyed, which left only the Fishmen and Four-Armed Gollems the Egret knights were battling on the shore.

“This sword really is amazing... Hey, Daddy?”

“Beg all you want, no means no. Give it back now.”

“You’re such a meanie!”

I confiscated the blade from the whining Frei. Yakumo handed it back over without a fuss, though. Honestly, I’d probably need them to wield these again when the other wicked devout showed up, but I decided to keep quiet about that for now.

My phone started ringing as I placed the divine blades back in **[Storage].**

It was from Shirahime, the mikado of Eashen.

Did something happen?

“Hello?”

“Apologies, Touya-dono. This is an emergency. Per the pact between the League of Nations, Eashen requests an immediate loan of the Frame Gears.”

“An emergency? What happened?!”

Members of the League of Nations were permitted to borrow Brunhild’s Frame Gears, so long as they weren’t to be used in a personal war. Primarily, they were to be used for Behemoth extermination or rescue operations after a natural disaster, but for it to be an emergency request, and so suddenly too, something big must have happened.

“An army of one-eyed Gollems are assaulting the capital of Kyo, and many Fishmen are aiding them. The barrier has succeeded in repelling them thus far, but it will not hold for long. We require assistance.”

“You’re kidding!”

There were Kyklops appearing at Eashen as well?!

Damn it, this was a two-pronged attack all along.

I had installed barriers around the capitals of the countries that were part of the alliance that could be used in case of enemy invasion. Only the representative of that country could activate it, and it could hold back the attacks of even Behemoths to some extent. However, that was in the case of a few Behemoths, not a whole massive army of Kyklops.

I’ve gotta get to Eashen!

I told Shirahime I would be over right away, then phoned His Majesty to tell him of the situation.

“All right. There aren’t too many Fishmen or Gollems left. My knights will find some way of handling it. Please make haste to Eashen.”

“Thank you!”

I informed everyone about the situation after the phone call with the King of Egret. Our knights were still fine, but I was worried about how my wives would hold up given they were ill.

“Are you underestimating us? This is nothing. We’ve gotta hurry to Eashen.”

“We may only be able to sit in the passenger seat, but we have enough strength to advise our children.”

Everyone else seemed to agree with Elze and Linze's words. My wives were such strong women. There was just no matching them.

Moroha and the other gods were going to remain in Egret, so they would be fine. We had to transport our Frame Gears to Eashen as fast as possible.

"In that case, everyone should prepare for battle once again. I'm going to teleport us to Eashen all at once."

I took out my phone while standing on top of the Ortlinde Overlord's palm and locked on to all the Frame Gears.

Shit, this really takes a lot of time!

Our destination was the land near Eashen's capital of Kyo. We'd charge into the rear of the enemies that were swarming the barrier.

"**[Gate]!**"

A teleportation gate opened up beneath the Frame Gears, and they all fell through to Eashen. I accidentally transported some sand and seawater together with them, but I doubt they would mind. The gate opened fairly high above the ground of Eashen, and the Frame Gears dropped in one after another.

"Whoa!"

The force with which the Ortlinde Overlord landed had me almost falling off its hand.

"You certainly aren't very careful. Can you not teleport us more gently next time?" Sue complained.

"I was in a rush, okay? Gimme a break," I fired back.

I couldn't deny how far from graceful that teleportation was. Even the coordinates weren't very exact, not that I had been that far off. In front of us were several hundred Kyklops and a whole herd of Four-Armed Gollems with a bunch of devil-looking monsters with mechanical arms and legs by their feet.

Were those the cyborg devils Yakumo had spoken about? I suppose we could call them Cydevils for short. They had bat-like wings that they used to fly around.

“Father, over there.”

Quun had the Grimhilde point toward the army of Kyklops, and walking among them were two Kyklops of the same type as the one that we had been fighting in Egret. They had no horn, but their bodies were a dark gold and they were about twice the size of the rest.

There was also a Kyklops a little larger than the regular ones with a horn attached to it. That had to be the commander unit. Unlike the others, it was letting off a metallic purple sheen, and it wielded a long spear of the same color. It was most likely Orchid, the wicked devout I had the pleasure of running into back in Panaches. His mech seemed to have been upgraded compared to before—it had something that looked like a vernier attached to its legs now.

“I think they’ve noticed us.”

Just as Yakumo spoke, the one-eye cameras of the Kyklops all turned to face us at the same time.

“Oh? Well, isn’t this a pleasant surprise? I thought there was a chance we might get to fight again, but to think it would be so soon. Aren’t I a lucky man?”

The purple Horned Commander spun its spear, and then the Kyklops behind it shot something up into the air. Golden powder was scattered about together with the explosion.

Gah, not the diluted venom again!

“Is everyone okay?!”

“I’m okay…” Yumina painfully squeezed out. “I do feel a little ill, but it’s no worse than before.”

There were no additional effects from before at least.

I doubted the enemy side was specifically out to weaken my wives, anyway. They were just thinking about weakening the Frame Gears by disrupting the flow of ether liquid.

A double confrontation with the wicked devout was before us.

Can we really manage this? No, no thinking like that. We have *to manage this.*

I reaffirmed my resolve as the purple-horned Kyklops walked toward us.

◇ ◇ ◇

As the capital city of Eashen, Kyo was surrounded by fortress walls to defend against magical beasts. However, those walls only went up six meters high, a height that Frame Gears and Kyklops could cross with ease. The only reason Kyo was still safe was because of the barrier I had erected around it, but I had no idea how long that would last.

The most dangerous enemy here was no doubt that metallic-purple Horned Commander. Given the barrier was only formed with regular magic, and it contained none of my divinity, the wicked vessel it wielded could very easily break it. Even the Kyklops who had only a little of the wicked god's power enhancing them were doing some real damage to it over time.

"Father, we cannot use Full Burst like this. Kyo would be caught in the crossfire," Quun informed me. That would only weaken Kyo's barrier further, which was far from ideal.

If only we could get the Horned Commander away from here somehow…

As I got lost in thought, a gunshot was fired from behind me. And at around the same time, the leader swung his purple spear.

Clang!

The sound of metal colliding rang through the area.

I looked back and saw Brunhilde aiming its sniper rifle. Kuon must have fired a shot.

"Wow, that was almost a direct headshot. You're an interesting one, aren't you?"

The Horned Commander twirled its weapon.

"This is great! I was actually just thinking about how boring it was to just destroy a city and do nothing else. I'm gonna have you fight me whether you want to or not! Let's go, you lot!"

The army of Kyklops charged at us with the Horned Commander at its lead.

"He fell for it much easier than anticipated. It appears he is quite the impulsive man. Father, please retreat with all due haste."

Kuon analyzed the man in front of us as if it was nothing. Did that mean he had deliberately provoked him to pull him away from Kyo? This kid seriously seemed way older than six.

Following Kuon's request, I retreated to the rear while making sure to keep an eye on the approaching Kyklops. Fortunately, they were heavily armored, so they weren't all that fast. That said, they were only a little slower than our Chevaliers.

"Get back here!"

Suddenly, the Horned Commander came barreling toward me at high speed using the verniers built into its legs. He caught up in the blink of an eye, aiming for the Chevalier at the end.

"Not a chance!"

Frei dashed to intervene with the Siegrune. After being blocked by Siegrune's shield, the purple Kyklops jumped back.

"You stopped my Wistaria? I'd expect nothing less from Brunhild's Gollem army. But what about this?!"

He took the spear that he called Wistaria and twirled it above his head. Sparks flew as it rotated, and he swung the spear encased in lightning straight toward us.

At that moment, thunder and lightning crackled near us. Siegrune dodged just in time as a thunderbolt struck down where they had been standing. Many of the Chevaliers didn't manage to escape, though, and the lightning made them fall to their knees. The cockpits of our Frame Gears had a protective shield encasing them, so the pilots were most likely okay, but I couldn't say the same for the frames themselves.

The attack didn't only strike our side, though. The lightning was so indiscriminate that some of the enemy Kyklops were also hit.

Does he not care even a bit about his allies?!

The Kyklops likely weren't being controlled by actual pilots, and if they were, it would be Gollems at best, so you could argue there was no reason for him to

be all that concerned, but still.

The enemy took the moment in which the Chevaliers had been stalled by the lightning strike to charge at us all at once.

“We should be far enough from the city now that there’s no need to hold back.”

Quun fired a rain of phrasium fragments onto the approaching Kyklops. Any that she had failed to strike, Kuon methodically finished off with headshots. The damaged Chevaliers took that opportunity to fall back.

The fight only grew more intense as the Chevaliers who hadn’t been caught up in the lightning stepped forward to return fire.

Meanwhile, the purple Kyklops and Siegrune continued an endless back-and-forth. Frei’s usual style of fighting involved utilizing multiple weapons she had in **[Storage],** using whichever one benefited the situation most. That meant that she was proficient at not just swordplay, but many other weapons as well, including, of course, the spear. And being proficient with the spear meant that she could predict the movements of a spear wielder to some degree.

Frei blocked the Horned Commander’s spear thrust with her shield before pushing it away with her sword and dodging backward. Siegrune was more than a match for the horned Kyklops, but it was clear he wasn’t being pushed to his limits, and there was a noticeable difference in the strength of their weapons as well, however slight. The enemy had a spear enchanted with the essence of the wicked god, after all, whereas we only had phrasium weapons infused with my magic. Every single time that spear hit either Siegrune’s sword or shield, they were taking damage.

“Take this!”

“Huh?”

Taking a heavy hit from the enemy’s spear, Siegrune’s shield was cut clean in half. The metallic purple spear once again closed in on the head of Siegrune’s faltering form. Schwertleite dashed in just before the spear found its target, slashing with its sword to completely divert its trajectory.

“I would like to request you stop bullying my little sister.”

“Yakumo?! He wasn’t bullying me!” Frei protested at Yakumo’s choice of words.

Apparently, it takes triple the skill for someone wielding a sword to beat the wielder of a long weapon such as a spear or a naginata. Given Frei had been fairly evenly matched against the horned Kyklops regardless of that fact, I could understand why she felt a little hurt.

There was no denying the situation had been dangerous, though, So Frei and Yakumo decided to take on their opponent together.

“Oooooh, you’re both so annoying!”

I turned at the sound of Steph’s whining and saw the Ortlinde Overlord having a fistfight with the two largest Kyklops.

Being attacked by two mechs of roughly the same size made it hard for it to get out its signature rocket punch. Cannon Knuckle required the user to fire off its fist, so it would leave Steph without two hands to work with. With two opponents present, that would make it difficult to counterattack. As a result, she had no choice but to try and punch them both far away and create some space between them.

However, these large Kyklops seemed incredibly durable—they refused to fall. They would stagger, regain their balance, and then begin their assault again, almost as if they were zombies.

“Fine, let’s try this instead!”

The drills on the Ortlinde Overlord’s legs detached, then fused with its right arm.

“Take this special move! Drill Breaker!”

The drill rotated at high speed and made a clean hit into the Kyklops’s chest, drilling out a large hole.

With its chest now gouged out, it collapsed to the ground. There was no way it could survive that one.

“Now it’s your turn! Drill Cannon Knuckle!”

The Ortlinde Overlord took its right arm and fired it at the other Kyklops

without mercy. The drill-attached Cannon Knuckle spun viciously into the Kyklops's stomach, running it right through. The Kyklops fell to the ground with a loud crash.

"I did it!"

The Ortlinde Overlord's right upper arm was lifted into the air in joy, and the detached forearm connected back into place.

Suddenly, white smoke filled with sparkling ether spurted out of the Ortlinde Overlord's joints.

"Huh? What's going on?!" Steph screamed.

The Overlord fell to one knee.

Oh, I see.

"You put too much strain on the frame. The Ortlinde Overlord is far, far less efficient with its fuel consumption compared to the other Frame Gears. You already used Stardust Shell multiple times back in Egret, so it was likely already at its limit," Quun explained.

So the ether liquid wasn't flowing to all the parts of the Ortlinde Overlord's body properly? Essentially, it was anemic, if we went by human terms.

Whatever the specifics, the fact that it couldn't move was bad. The Ortlinde Overlord was massive; it was practically a sitting target. The Kyklops had clearly thought the same thing, as they instantly began crowding toward the Ortlinde Overlord.

Like hell I'll let you do that!

"**[Gate]!**"

"Whoa?"

The Ortlinde Overlord sunk into the ground. I had it teleport just a little bit further to the rear. It would be able to move again given a bit of time.

"Awwww! Daddy, I still wanna fight!"

"Come on, Steph. Stop being so selfish," Sue admonished. "Haven't you already had plenty of fun? Let's rest for now."

“Mmm, okay...”

“Good girl.”

Their conversation almost sounded like a sweet mother-daughter discussion, but having a serious battle be viewed as “fun” was somewhat problematic… I would have felt like a failure of a father if she turned into some crazy battle maniac.

I should find some time to have a chat with Sue about this at some point.

That was the two large Kyklops down, but the battle between the Chevaliers and the more regular-sized ones was still at play. The movements of our men were growing sluggish. Were they exhausted after the battle in Egret?

Suddenly, a voice reverberated around the battlefield as if to get us out of that exact situation.

“Knights of Brunhild, charge!”

“HOO-AAAH!”

At the orders of Commander Lain, who was currently piloting the Shining Count, the Chevaliers cut through the enemy lines in a wedge-like formation. I think Baba had referred to it as a fish scale formation? He must have taught them how to do it. Given he used to lead Takeda’s cavalry, it would only make sense that he was accustomed to that sort of thing.

Their commander’s encouragement and the support magic from Yoshino’s Rossweise gave the knights a second wind. They skillfully managed to take down the Kyklops one after another.

Frei’s Siegrune and Yakumo’s Schwertleite stood out most amongst the bunch as they were still locked in battle with the Horned Commander. Linne’s Gerhilde and Allis’s Dragoon were fighting back any Kyklops trying to interfere in their battle. Despite being pincered by two Frame Gears at once, the purple Kyklops was only evenly matched in the battle.

“C’mon, is that all you got?! You’ve gotta do better than that!”

“Ngh, you...!”

“Shut that stupid mouth of yours already!”

Both of their swords slashed at the Kyklops from either side, but he grabbed his spear in the middle and managed to deflect them at the same time. Without giving them a moment to think, he spun his spear and thrust it right toward Siegrune. Yakumo used the moment that Siegrune dodged to once more slash with her sword, but the horned Kyklops swiftly pulled his spear back to block the strike, then fell back.

It was as if he was perfectly reading their movements. Had he learned just how Yakumo and Frei fought over these past few minutes alone? It was true that the girls' Frame Gears weren't at their best output because of the diluted venom, but I hadn't expected them to be played with like this.

When he fought me, I only won because I managed to catch him by surprise with my Fragarachs. If only I'd finished him off then...

Iron Mask had been more of a musclehead, relying on his brute strength to swing his cleaver around rather than any real skill, but this one was different. He was a skilled warrior whose abilities were derived from experience. The girls were managing to hold him back for now, but if they let their guard down, they were almost certainly going to get injured, and badly.

"Whoa!"

Suddenly, something bounced off the spear. It was one of Kuon's bullets!

The Horned Commander had deflected one of his attempted headshots earlier, so this wasn't a surprise, but just how experienced was this man that he could see through Kuon so easily? His overwhelming skill had brought even Siegrune and Schwertleite grinding to a halt.

No, come on, the number of Kyklops are already decreasing. If it comes down to it, we can take him down with numbers. There's no way he can dodge Kuon's shots while also battling two Frame Gears.

Siegrune and Schwertleite resumed their assault.

"Now that's more like it! But you're too naive! I've already seen right through you!"

The horned Kyklops dodged Siegrune's slash, and then went to strike with his spear, but though Siegrune's sword had slashed down just a moment ago, it

immediately pulled back up and blocked the spear.

“What?!”

Schwertleite took that opportunity to slash at the enemy’s open flank.

“You cheeky little shits!”

The Kyklops managed to maneuver his body enough to avoid a fatal strike, but the blade still scratched the frame. Now that he had been knocked off-balance, Siegrune went in for the kill.

“Ngh!”

Unable to dodge, the horned Kyklops’s left arm was cut clean off from the elbow. He immediately made some space between himself and the two girls.

What’s going on here? Their movements are completely different from before. Did Yakumo and Frei do something...? Oh, wait!

“Hang on, Hilde, Yae, are you the ones piloting Siegrune and Schwertleite right now?!”

“Yes, we are.”

“We contacted Kuon and asked him to create an opening so we would have time to swap, we did.”

That explained why Kuon suddenly fired that shot earlier. But were the two of them really okay?

“I would be lying if I said that I felt better, but I can manage for at least a few minutes.”

“A long fight will be difficult, it will, so we would like to keep our fighting to a minimum.”

Schwertleite and Siegrune readied their weapons and then dashed toward the Horned Commander.

“Get off your damn high horses!”

More thunderbolts rained down where the spear was swung. However, Siegrune and Schwertleite continued their advance, seemingly ignoring the lightning strikes.

Hold on, you're gonna get hit!

Suddenly, the lightning dissipated into a fog.

"What just happened?!"

"Our son is a dependable ally, he is."

"He puts us to shame sometimes, honestly."

It was Kuon's Mystic Eye of Negation!

Wait, he can use it from all the way over there?! How much of a cheat code can one kid be?!

Schwertleite and Siegrune's swords swung down. Schwertleite's katana cut off the Kyklops's head, while Siegrune's sword cut the torso in two. The wreckage of the metallic purple frame scattered in the wake of its destruction.

It was a close call, but we managed to win somehow.

I do wish they hadn't just charged straight into the lightning like that, though... Gave me one hell of a scare.

"Kuon told us to leave the lightning to him, so we chose to trust him and dove right in."

"I am exhausted, I am... I feel nauseous, there's a strange ringing in my ears, and my head feels heavy... My whole body is so lethargic that I'm not sure if I can do anything more, I'm not..."

That had to be due to the diluted venom. Having participated in a fight like that, they were both likely at their limits. I had to let them rest.

"First, we need to figure out what happened to that wicked devout."

The Kyklops had been cut right in two due to Siegrune's strike. If it was anything like the Kyklops in Egret, the cockpit had likely been in the torso area. It would be great if that strike had put an end to him, but...

"No way!"

From underneath the wreckage of the Kyklops came the wicked devout, crawling out and looking just as worse for wear. If my memory wasn't failing me, his name was Orchid. His left arm was cut to shreds, and there was a

notable gash in his side, but just as Iron Mask's body had done, Orchid's instantly repaired itself.

"Wistaria!"

When Orchid held out his hand, the wicked vessel that had fallen to the ground decreased in size and flew into his hand.

He's still *not had enough?!*

I used **[Teleport]** to bring myself in front of him. I checked with my divine eye out of curiosity, and as I thought, he was an Undead with his soul connected to the wicked vessel.

"My, what a pleasure this is. Are you Brunhild's commander?"

"And if I said yes?"

"Hmph! Then I'll kill you, of course. Apparently, you're our natural enemy."

High praise, and not incorrect, either. From where I was standing, they were all just some persistent little pests, though.

"I can't blame you. We did just kill one of your friends not too long ago."

"One of my friends? Who?"

"The big dude with the meat cleaver."

"Oh, what? That idiot Hazel kicked the bucket, huh? How lame. Well, he *was* just a musclehead."

Orchid twirled his and pointed the tip toward me.

"Well then, how about I take you down as a little revenge, eh? I'm not suited to fighting in those big old hunks of junk, anyway. It's *much* more fun getting to fight face-to-face like this."

I pulled out Brunhild, which was hanging by my waist, but just as I went to change it to Blade Mode, I suddenly noticed two large shadows coming down from above. Unsurprisingly, the two people who made their graceful landing beside me were Yakumo and Frei.

"Huh? Who're these brats?"

“We’re your opponents for this fight.”

“Father! The divine blades!”

Yakumo glared scathingly at Orchid, entering a battle stance. Meanwhile, Frei was staring at me with hungry eyes, beckoning me to give her the blade.

I dunno how I feel about this...

It was true that even if I were to fight Orchid, I wouldn’t be able to deal the killing blow, so in that respect, it made sense to leave it to them, but at the same time... Resigning myself to my inability to aid in this fight, I took the twin divine blades out of **[Storage].**

Was the divine essence infused in the blades weakening? It definitely felt like there was much less compared to the last time I pulled them out. Was it because they had destroyed a wicked vessel once already?

The sacred core within a sacred treasure worked a little like a battery filled with divine essence, and right now, it was running low. If I was able to refuel it somehow, the blades would return to their usual power, but according to Kraft, the god of crafting, a sacred treasure would only take the divine essence of the god who crafted it or their wards.

We’d been messing around with them for a while now, but...

“Father?! Hurry up!”

“Whoops!”

I was pulled out of my thoughts by Frey urging me. Yakumo and Frei each took a divine blade and turned to face Orchid.

“You may be kids, but if you intend to fight me, I won’t hold back.”

“We would ask for nothing less.”

“Come at us!”

“Hah, got a mouth on you, huh? Better brace yourselves!”

Orchid kicked the ground and dashed straight toward them. He was aiming at Yakumo first. Yakumo just barely managed to dodge the amazingly fast strike by twisting her body. That form of dodging was terrible for my heart, though, so I

really wished she wouldn't cut it so close.

With no excessive movement, Orchid pulled the spear back and once more thrust it at Yakumo. This time, she deflected it with her sword and jumped back.

Frei took that moment to jump in and slash at Orchid with her sword. Orchid twirled the spear after having had it deflected from Yakumo's attack and blocked Frei's attack with the butt of his weapon. He then twirled the spear again and this time aimed the tip at Frei, who jumped back to dodge the slash from the side.

Orchid's way of using his spear was more akin to how one would wield a staff. His ability to handle the spear in a flexible manner was unmistakable, and the girls were struggling.

Even though the fight was two-on-one, he was more than successfully fending off their attack. Usually, at a moment like this, his next move would be to switch from defense to offense, taking advantage of any openings and taking them down one after the other.

Usually.

"**[Gate]!**"

"Huh?!"

Orchid instinctively turned and thrust at where the sudden attack from behind had come...except there was no one there. Only the tip of a blade was floating in the air.

"What?!"

Yakumo had used a small **[Gate]** to teleport only part of her sword. Now full of openings due to his surprise, Frei swung her sword down directly in front of him.

"You bastard!" Orchid angrily yelled. He managed to hold his spear out to the side and block it, but Frei's attack did not end there.

"**[Power Rise]!**"

"Ngh?!"

Under the weight of Frei's greatly-increased strength, Orchid fell to his knees. A crack appeared in his wicked vessel.

"Wistaria's been damaged?! No, there's no way!"

"ORYAAAAAAAAAAA!"

At the same time as the wicked vessel shattered, Frei's divine sword cut Orchid right in two.

"Gah, ah...! You've gotta be kiddin' me... Heh. I...get it now. No wonder...you're our natural enemy..."

Orchid's body turned to stone before crumbling into dust. The metallic-purple wicked vessel let off a black smoke as it melted into sludge.

Chapter II: A Moment of Calm

The day after we defeated the wicked god's armies in both Egret and Eashen, we were notified by the Beastking of Mismede that one of the cities of Sandora had been destroyed. According to the testimony of some of the survivors, it was carried out by an army led by a blue horned Kyklops.

So it wasn't a two-pronged attack, but a three-pronged one. Given it was blue, I could only assume that its pilot was the guy with the diver helmet. That would explain why he hadn't appeared to support the other devout.

Each city in Sandora was self-governed, and many of those cities viewed themselves as autonomous. It was one of those larger coastal cities that were attacked.

The place was thoroughly destroyed; there was nothing left. The citizens who had managed to escape with their lives were in the depths of despair.

Perhaps I should note that I had a particularly bad reputation in the region.

Back when Sandora had been a kingdom, I had been the one who both freed its slaves from the nobles, and caused the downfall of its monarchy, so I wasn't particularly liked by former nobles or slave traders there.

At the end of the day though, that was only because the King of Sandora had declared war on us. We accepted the fight, and the emancipation of the slaves was reparations, that was all.

Slaves were pretty much non-existent in Sandora nowadays, and apparently, many of the people who remained there resented me to varying degrees for that reason.

It seemed I was being suspected as the one behind the attack by the wicked devout, as well. Not that I could blame them for this one—the only country known to really own such massive mechs was Brunhild, after all.

For countries part of the alliance, it was easy enough to clear up any misunderstandings, but I couldn't see my words being believed so easily over there. I had no obligation to help a country that viewed me in such a manner,

but I would have wanted to help them if I could have.

“All I can do is somehow try to make up for it after the fact.”

“It is impossible to save absolutely everyone. All we can do is help where we can manage, no? Thankfully, your reach goes far. I believe you will be able to do better next time.”

Ugh, having my son attempt to console me over matters like this left me with complicated feelings. I couldn’t deny what he was saying, though.

There was still another problem, too: the twin divine blades.

As a result of being used continuously by someone who wasn’t a ward of the god who had created them, they had run out of divine essence. Those sacred treasures couldn’t be refueled with my divinity, so they were essentially just slightly more sturdy swords like this. There was no way they would be able to destroy another wicked vessel when the time came.

When I tried asking Karen the other gods what I should do, they said that my only option was to complete my own sacred treasure.

I suggested just finding the god who originally created the swords and asking if they could recharge it, but given the swords were literally stolen from them, they would probably just get angry at me. I wasn’t the culprit, though...

“Well, worse comes to worst, you can just use your smartphone, y’know?”

“Huh? What do you mean by that?”

“You might have forgotten already, but that’s a sacred treasure too, y’know? And from God Almighty of all things. If you gave it to one of your kids, they would just need to keep whacking it against the wicked vessel and it would break eventually, y’know.”

I know there are brute force methods out there, but hitting something with a smartphone over and over is a first for me. This might come as a surprise, but I was a little reluctant to entertain the thought. I couldn’t put my children into battle wielding a smartphone. Though Linne might actually manage to get somewhere with it...

“The wedding rings you and your wives have are also pretty much sacred

treasures, so that's an option, too."

She was completely missing the problem. But at the same time, if I failed in forging my own sacred treasure, that really might be the solution I would have to go for. I really did not want to have to turn to my wives and tell them, "I need you to smack the enemy with your wedding rings!"

I still was having no luck in creating the sacred core, though...

In terms of the actual vessel itself, seeing how the wicked devout were able to change the size of their weapons at will, I began thinking it would be neat if my sacred treasure could do that too. It didn't totally sit right with me that I was essentially using the enemy's idea of all things, but I couldn't deny that it would be useful if a Frame Gear could use my sacred treasure, as well.

If the kids could use the Frame Gears to break the enemy's weapon, it would make their jobs much easier.

Even if I had all these fun ideas though, at the end of the day, I still hadn't made the core.

"Nghhhhhhh!"

And so here I was once more putting every ounce of my energy into trying to forge one.

I slowly but surely condensed the ball of divine energy. Just like before, the resistance was insane, and I was reaching the stage where I couldn't make it any smaller again. Honestly, I thought it was impressive I'd managed to get it to the size of a baseball.

If I could just shrink it down to golf ball size, and then marble size, I'd have cleared the first stage.

"Ah?!"

But the moment I let my mind wander for just a moment, my divinity blew back on me. *Aaaand that's another failure. You know what, nope, no more today.* I was exhausted in mind, body and soul.

As a change of pace, I decided to go to Babylon's research lab.

They were in the middle of analyzing the what-we-now-called weak venom I

had managed to get a sample of back in Egret.

The weak venom was still sealed inside the **[Prison]** I had formed. I had adjusted it so everything *but* the venom could make it through the **[Prison]** so that they could still do tests on it.

Doc Babylon was tilting her head with her arms folded—a rare sight—in front of the 10x10cm cube.

“Mmmmngh... I got nothing.”

“Were you not able to run the tests on it?” I asked.

“No, we were. We’ve discovered that it disrupts the flow of ether liquid. But we don’t have even the slightest lead as to what exactly this substance is made of, or how to get rid of the substance itself and its effects.”

Well, even if the god who made it was wicked, it was still a god. It would be difficult for regular mortals to analyze it.

“Are you able to block the effects with your **[Prison]**?” she asked.

“I can block out the powder itself, but the effects still persist.”

The powder itself was just a regular substance so naturally it could be blocked. But the effects were almost certainly derived from divine power, so a **[Prison]** not infused with my divinity was useless.

The worst part about it was that if even a single speck of the powder were to touch something, it would instantly taint the area, and that would then spread. In other words, it would literally turn the battlefield into a swamp of poison. Unlike the undiluted divine venom though, it seemed to turn back to normal over time without interference, at least.

We had the Frame Gears as proof of how fast it could spread, too. To a regular person, it had no effect, so we didn’t need to worry about most of the pilots, but even though a few days had already passed, the Frame Gears still weren’t working at maximum efficiency.

“Output efficiency being down 40% sucks a lot.”

“No kidding. It’s impressive you all still managed to win regardless.”

“Well, we can kind of make up for it with skill and coordination. Our knights are veterans, after all.”

They had been riding the Frame Gears from their initial versions. And it wasn’t as if the enemy Kyklops were showing off the most stellar example of teamwork either.

“Rossweise’s support magic was probably helping too. It increases the output by stimulating the ether liquid, right? So in reality, you were probably all fighting at about less than 20% the usual.”

“Ah, that makes sense.”

The Frame Gears should have been strengthened by Sakura’s support magic, that was true. Given the state she had been in at the time though, it likely wasn’t at the same efficiency as usual. Or maybe Yoshino’s assist would’ve brought it back to its usual levels.

“It might be worth trying to amplify her buffs.”

“Like raise the effect enough so it evens out?”

Well, it sounded simple enough.

“And then there’s the Over Gears.”

“What about them?”

“The Over Gears aren’t structured in a way that the ether liquid is the primary component. It’s the G-Cube that serves as the power reactor, kinda similar to the Kyklops, so it shouldn’t take too much of an effect from the venom.”

So that was an option too.

But we only had three of them: Norn and Noir’s Leo Noir, Nia and Rouge’s Tiger Rouge, and Robert and Blau’s Deer Blau. Or wait, technically four since we had Yumina and Albus’s Val Albus, as well. But we were using that in the search for the Ark right now so I was a little reluctant to count it in.

We only had three at our disposal, but even that would add a decent bit of power to our side. *Should I ask them to assist next time they attack?*

We could technically make an Over Gear for Gold as well, but his master was

Steph. She'd have to return to the future eventually, so would it not just be a waste to make it? Then again, there was the option of keeping it aside until the future when we could give to her as a present once our timeline Steph was born and grown up.

"Sorry to ruin your fun, but the dev team's really starting to feel overworked," Doc Babylon glared at me. "We have to both research and develop the aquatic Frame Gears, we have to repair the Frame Gears damaged in the last battle, and we have to analyze the Kyklops frames that you managed to retrieve. Your Reginleif is also still dismantled, we haven't gotten to start overhauling it yet."

"Ah, yes, sorry…"

I *had* been throwing a bit too much their way recently.

"Honestly, I think you should be spoiling me a little more here, Touya. Y'know, giving me big ol' hugs, little smooch here and there, going for baths with me, and then spending the rest of the night in bed all—"

"Okay, see ya."

"Boo, you're no fun."

I quickly fled from Babylon before things turned into even more of a pain.

As I walked down the castle hallways, I suddenly heard a soft tune playing from the ballroom. *Is this Waldteufel's Skater's Waltz?*

I peeked in out of curiosity and saw Kuon and Allis dancing together.

"Allis, your smile is very stiff, and you're starting to dance off-rhythm. Keep up with Kuon's lead."

"Yes, ma'am!"

The one instructing Allis and clapping her hands in time with the rhythm was Lu.

Yumina and Lu were the two main girls teaching Allis the required etiquette, given they were originally princesses.

Hilde was too, but in Lestia, much more importance was placed on strength. That wasn't to say that she didn't have her own grasp of social dancing and

proper etiquette, but she said she wasn't very good at teaching it. She was so good at teaching swordplay, though.

I decided to observe Kuon and Allis dance for a little. *Hey... Aren't they pretty good?* Kuon wasn't much of a surprise, but for someone that had never really participated in social dance before, Allis was doing a good job at keeping up. Even at this level, she could go to a ball and she wouldn't embarrass anyone. She had always been the athletic type, so maybe it wasn't that much of a surprise.

Oh, I guess I should record this and send it to Ende. He'd love to see how good his daughter's getting, I'm sure.

I used my phone to video a dance from start to finish and then sent it to him. *That's me done my good deed for the day.*

"All right, that's enough for today. I'd give you a passing grade for that performance. Next time, try paying more attention to your expression while you dance. You were sometimes slipping into a frown."

"Will do. Thank you very much!"



Allis bowed her head at Lu. That was just a passing grade? A bit harsh, no? I

thought that was plenty good...

I decided to tell her what I thought.

“Normally, I’d agree with you. But Allis is the fiancée of a prince, and that means people will expect perfection from her. When she becomes grand duchess, she will become the representative of all noble women of Brunhild, so I cannot afford to give her any slack.”

Oof, talk about a tough crowd...

It wasn’t as if Brunhild even had a proper class system to begin with.

Kousaka had recently been pushing me to come to a decision about all of this. We needed a system of titles not only for our people’s identity domestically, but also internationally as well, and one that would be understood. Essentially the noble titles like dukes, marquesses, earls, viscounts, barons, and knights.

The issue was our territory was small, and we didn’t exactly have land for nobles to own. The most we could give them was a plot of land to build a house. And in terms of the titles, it kind of just felt like they’d end up being in-name-only eventually.

Belfast and Regulus had actually approached Brunhild offering to give us more of their land, but even if we did accept it, we would have to be the ones to develop it. Ever since the children had arrived in our time though, I had begun thinking that it might be good to expand our territory.

Why? Because I realized that if my daughters had their own land, there was a chance they could accept a husband rather than having to leave and become the wife of a different land! They could remain in the country as branch families of the royal family.

My wives all had wry smiles on their faces when I told them that, but I was being serious!

My phone suddenly got a notification. It was Ende replying to my message. “They’re too close! Tell them to dance farther apart!”

How else are they meant to ballroom dance, you dolt? Technically there were dances that had the two stand further apart, but not this one.

“How was my dance, Your Grace?” Allis asked me.

“You were great. I let Ende see your dance and he agreed.”

“Ehehe, yay!”

It was a bit of a white lie, but it wasn’t wrong either, really. It was definitely what he would say if he had been here right now.

“Onto your next lesson then,” Lu spoke. “Next is cooking.”

“Okay!”

“You’re even teaching her how to cook?!”

Why would a grand duchess need to learn how to cook? They may need to develop their culinary tastes, but there shouldn’t need to be any reason for them to know how to make the food themselves. Was this just Lu forcing it on her?

“Because I wanna let Kuon eat my delicious food. My moms and dad, too.”

What a good kid. Kuon was lucky to have someone thinking so much about him.

“Kuon, you better make sure you take good care of Allis, too.”

“I am aware. Allis has displayed the resolve to be by my side. I must respond in kind.”

I had just meant to tease him a little, not get such a serious response out of him. My son was the definition of a smooth talker. At this rate, the son was going to surpass the father.

I had to do better. For now, I should just get to work! Yeah!

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Determined not to be outdone by my son, I was putting my all into my office work together with Yumina and Kousaka. That said, the job of a grand duke mainly consisted of considering people’s requests or reviewing any plans for the city and stamping them off. On occasion, I’d also be sent out to assist with

construction or infrastructure, but that was about it.

“Hm? Wasn’t this concert hall already opened?” I asked, tilting my head slightly.

“The construction and interior design are complete, but it appears they are struggling to find people to perform. They put out a call for any willing participants once more,” Kousaka informed me.

Though we called it a concert hall, it was more intended to be a multi-purpose hall that could accommodate not just concerts, but also plays, ceremonies, and other miscellaneous gatherings. It was originally planned at Sakura’s request as she wanted to make music more accessible to the public, but it had been completed before we knew it.

The reason it wasn’t open despite construction being complete was simply because they couldn’t find anyone to perform there.

Typically, music was only accessible to the wealthy, lessons even more so, which meant the average citizen wouldn’t have the ability to volunteer in the first place. What was more, anyone who was skilled at an instrument was generally summoned by the nobility to perform in their own personal orchestra, and naturally, the pay was good.

What reason would there be for a performer to come all the way to such a small country such as ours if they had that opportunity instead?

That said, there *were* bards who went from town to town, singing stories with their instruments in hand. I was sure they would happily perform here in Brunhild, but the issue was that they didn’t generally stay in one place. There would be no way to guarantee the timing.

“We might have no choice but to have Sakura sing for us.”

Our orchestra (though not an official one) consisted of the more musically-inclined members of our knights; music itself was not their main profession. Thinking it would be an issue if they were to dedicate too much of their time to it, I had decided to not have them participate.

I wanted to make it a place people could go to listen to music whenever they pleased if possible, so it would be much more ideal to have a range of

performers and singers available.

“It doesn’t need to be exclusively music that is performed there, right? What about inviting a theater troupe?”

“That’s what I was thinking. I’d rather they had Brunhild as their main performing country, but I wonder if that would be too much to ask...”

“Our population is not that large, after all. Perform for just one week and already most of the country will have seen it, so it is a question of if it would be sustainable for them.”

Hmm. It was true that you wouldn’t go to see the same performance twice unless you were a massive fan, and it was too draconian to expect them to perform a new show every single week.

You know...Sousuke is *the god of music. I’m pretty sure he could keep playing music for forever if we needed him to.*

The sound of a sad melody being played on guitar drifted in just as I was thinking that. *In other words, please don’t entertain such a terrible thought. I understand.*

As far as theater performances were concerned, we *could* record the performances of different countries and then screen it, but...that would just make it a cinema.

Why would that be a problem, though? It would still be a place of leisure. It wouldn’t cost much in terms of labor so maybe it wasn’t that bad of an idea.

I guess I could go visit Theatro’s troupe and record some of their performances.

“Yoshino appeared to be rehearsing something together with the orchestra. Perhaps she plans to perform?”

“Yoshino does?”

The idea of building a concert hall originally came from Yoshino telling Sakura about the future. Apparently, she performed there a lot, so it would make sense if she was attached to it.

Out of curiosity, I headed to the soundproof practice hall in the castle, and as I

was told, Yoshino was there conducting the orchestra.

The orchestra consisted of first and second violins, viola, cello, contrabass, flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, trombone, timpani, cymbals, and harp... No way, that meant it had strings, brass, woodwind and percussion. It basically was an actual orchestra!

“Woodwind, please reduce the vibrato. Brass, match your volume with everyone else from start to finish. Cymbals, pick up the tempo here!”

Yoshino, as small as she was, was barking instructions out to the orchestra. The members made no complaints, quietly listening to her and adjusting accordingly.

What?! When was my daughter in charge of an orchestra?! And hey, that’s Sousuke sitting in the concertmaster’s chair!

“Once more, from the top!”

And so under Yoshino’s command, the orchestra began once again. *...Hang on, isn’t this that one famous JRPG’s overture?!* Sure, maybe it would be suitable for the concert hall’s inaugural performance, but...!

Damn you, Yoshino. You just wanted to perform on a stage, didn’t you? Well, it’s not like I would have had reason to refuse, in all fairness.

Mayyybe it wouldn’t be too much of a bother to adjust the knights’ schedule just a smidge. We *were* starting to introduce Knight Gollems, so it would give them a bit more free time.

They’re working so hard, there’s no way I could refuse...

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We ultimately decided to have our orchestra perform the opening act of our concert hall with Yoshino as the conductor. Honestly, I thought it a bit of a joke to have a nine-year-old take the position, but the members all said that it *had* to be her, so I had no choice but to give permission.

I was pretty sure Sousuke could take up the role just fine being the god of

music, but Yoshino seemed determined to do it herself and there wasn't really much reason for me to refuse. She'd be going back to the future eventually though, so we'd need to find and train up a successor for her before then.

Many of Sakura's songs had also been incorporated into the performance, but it meant that her and Yoshino were so busy putting together the program and rehearsing for it that our meal times didn't match up at all recently. I really didn't want them to push themselves too hard.

《My liege, may I have a moment of your time?》

"That you, Kougyoku?"

Kougyoku contacted me just as I was finishing off the last of the documents that needed to be signed off.

《The birds under my command have sighted bandits gathering on the road to Brunhild. They do not appear to be based here, so it is but a tad suspicious.》

Bandits, huh? There never seemed to be an end to them. Just where did they keep coming from? I'd heard that adventurer dropouts or mercenaries would often turn to a life of crime in order to earn money, but given they were often quite fit, I'd much prefer if they came to help Brunhild with construction work instead.

Then again, a lot of these guys wanted to make a large sum of money quick and easy, so they probably wouldn't be ecstatic about the labor expected of them.

"Where *are* they based then, if not here?"

《Deep in the woods of Belfast.》

Given it was Belfast, I marked a map with their base and sent it to His Majesty.

And with that, my work was done.

"Bandits, you say?" Kousaka asked, as he walked in and dumped a whole other mountain of documents on my desk. *Oh, come on, not even more...*

"...Yes. I sent the location of their base to the King of Belfast."

“Brunhild is located far from Belfast and Regulus’s capitals, so it is difficult for their knight orders to keep an eye. Regardless, many merchants gather here, so it is no surprise that there are those with bad intentions who travel here.”

That was very true. Merchants came to our country to buy rare goods, including treasure and materials from the dungeon islands. That meant that they were often quite well-off, so to bandits and thieves, they must’ve looked ripe for the picking.

The scummiest thing about how these bandits operated was that they didn’t attack the merchants when they arrived in Brunhild, but rather in the areas of Belfast and Regulus where there were less guards stationed.

Brunhild was simply the feeding ground where their prey approached. Pissed me off just thinking about it.

“The adventurer’s guild has been receiving many more escort requests as of late, too. There are merchants who band together and come to Brunhild as a group for increased safety in numbers.”

It was true they were at much less risk of getting attacked if they had adventurers escorting a whole caravan of them. That did mean they were at least actively trying to deal with the situation themselves.

But at the end of the day, only merchants that had a decent bit of money could hire someone to protect them. For traveling merchants just starting out, all they would have is a carriage and the clothes on their body as they traveled from town to town.

I would have to develop Brunhild’s cooperation with Belfast and Regulus further in order to make the roads safer.

“Actually, where’s Yumina?”

Yumina was entrusted with a portion of the country’s internal affairs, essentially making her both grand duchess and minister. She was always assisting me with my work. Honestly, if she hadn’t been helping, I definitely wouldn’t have gotten through everything in one day.

“Lady Yumina is having a tea party with the other duchesses, so she has excused herself for the afternoon.”

Ah, the usual, then. I had no idea who named it, but every week, they would have what they called a Queens' Tea Party. All of my wives took part. Apparently, they took that opportunity to discuss various matters. I say apparently because naturally, I was not invited to their tea parties, and they refused to tell me what topics they discussed.

There *were* many things that girls only felt comfortable discussing between themselves, after all. Like complaining about their uncaring husband...? No, no, there was no way. ...Right? Right?!

"I'll just focus on my work..."

I sped up my stamping while that anxiety clouded my heart.

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Meanwhile, at the aforementioned tea party...

"And then! Kuon kindly took my hand and went, 'Mother, are you alright?'"

"The clothes I bought for Elna the other day fit her perfectly! Look, here's a photo! Isn't she just adorable?!"

"Linne slacked off on her studies again..."

"Arcia intends to cook lunch, so I better be precise with any feedback I have."

"I got to read Steph a picture book! I wonder which I should go for next?"

"Yakumo's swordplay has only gotten sharper, it has..."

"Frei bought yet another strange weapon..."

"Quun got so engrossed in her research that she's trying to skip meals again. Is there really nothing I can do?"

"I have a session with Yoshino later. Looking forward to it..."



Never mind complaints, they weren’t even talking about their husband to

begin with. Everything was about their children.

They would each talk about their time with their kids in turn, and then if there were any issues, they would help give each other advice. If their kids had done something praiseworthy, they would all nod their heads in approval.

Now that Steph had arrived, all the kids were gathered, and that meant they no longer had to hold back talking about them to not make the others feel bad. Nowadays, they spoke about their kids non-stop.

They didn't only talk about their own children, though, they also made sure to tell the other girls about their kids, too. It essentially became a place for them to stay informed.

"Ah, right, Allis's dancing has been really improving recently. She is still rather reliant on Kuon's lead, but she's at the level where she could go to an actual dance and not disappoint," Lu reported to Yumina as their dance instructor.

Allis would become in-laws with Yumina when she married Kuon, so Lu thought it pertinent to inform her.

"Allis really is a ball of potential. She makes anything she learns her own in a flash. I wonder if it's because she's Ende's daughter?"

"You know, I can see that. He literally manages anything through talent alone. It's so frustrating," Elze grumbled. Given she had been Takeru's apprentice before Ende, she couldn't help but feel frustration at Lu's words.

"Let it not escape your mind that her mother is also the Sovereign Phrase. I think she just naturally has a lot of talent in her blood."

"No! This has to be the result of her pure love for Kuon! A maiden in love is invincible! The power of love is unparalleled!" Yumina rebutted, standing up in her passion. She hadn't noticed how awkward the other eight were feeling.

"Yumina is starting to sound just like Karen, she is..." Yae quietly muttered to Hilde.

"Allis *will* be her daughter-in-law one day. It's much better than them having a bad relationship, don't you think?" she responded.

Frantic for Yumina to not hear what they were saying, Linze quickly

continued: “I thought they were a bit young to be getting engaged already, but they both seem fine.”

“It isn’t rare for nobility to get engaged at that age,” Leen explained. “There are the interests of the state to consider, after all.”

Yae tilted her head. “But Yumina, Lu, and Hilde didn’t get engaged until later, did they not? I heard that in Yumina’s case, it was because of her Mystic Eye, I did.”

Yumina’s Mystic Eye of Intuition meant that it wasn’t so easy for her to decide on a fiancé. If she were to refuse a partner because their personality or tastes didn’t match up, the other nobles may have taken it as she refused them maliciously. That would have been uncomfortable for both Yumina *and* the other party.

“How was it for you, Lu?”

“I was the third princess so there was no rush for me to decide on who to marry. Keep in mind that the reason these early engagements happen is usually because there is a need to secure a successor to the throne.”

That said, when there was an offer of betrothal from another country, the case was a little different. In that case, they may end up becoming engaged early, but Regulus didn’t have good relationships with other countries until the coup d’état, so no country really wanted to take on any of the daughters as their queen. Regulus had no interest in giving away its daughters to a country where a war may start, either.

“Given the kind of man my father is, I’m sure he intended to marry me off to a Regulus noble when I came of age.”

“Entrust his daughter to his vassal so trust may be furthered, I see. And Hilde? What about you?”

“Umm... I did receive several proposals from upper-class nobles and the royalty of neighboring countries, but...” Hilde quietly responded, showing slight discomfort.

Everyone’s head tilted at how unnaturally avoidant she was of answering.

“So, you see, um...I had no intention of marrying someone who was weaker than me...and I ended up beating everyone who proposed...”

“Pfft.”

All it took was one person to crack and suddenly, the whole room apart from Hilde burst into laughter.

“O-Oh come on, you don’t need to laugh that much, do you?! You’re all terrible!”

“Sorry, sorry,” Elze apologized. “I was just thinking about how like you that is.”

“That is how you were able to meet the grand duke. You did nothing wrong. You’re in the right, Hilde,” Sakura added.

Lestia honored both chivalry and strength, and that was always apparent in how Hilde handled matters. They could understand why she wouldn’t want to marry someone weaker than her, and it wasn’t acceptable for a knight to be able to be beaten by the one he married.

“Our daughters will likely have trouble searching for their own partners, too,” Sue muttered, causing uncomfortable smiles to appear on everyone’s faces.

“Their smitten father will likely be their biggest hurdle,” Leen sighed.

“I don’t think that’s inherently a bad thing, but... yes,” Linze chuckled.

“I refuse to give our Elna away to some half-baked man, though. They have to *at least* be stronger than her.”

“I completely agree. I won’t hand Yoshino away to anyone strange. It has to be someone that will protect her with his life.”

“Those standards may be a little high, they may...”

To begin with, their kids were demi-gods; it wouldn’t be so easy to find someone who could surpass that sort of strength. *I don’t think Touya is going to be the only problem here, I don’t,* Yae thought to herself.

The girls were split into two sides: Yae, Lu, Hilde, and Leen, who were happy to leave their kids to find whoever they wanted, and then Elze, Linze, Sue, and

Sakura, who were much more careful and felt they had to take the time to scout out their children's potential partners.

Kuon was already engaged, but if he was considering taking on any more wives, Yumina would definitely come under the more cautious type. If he took on a bride that was no good, it could lead to the decline of their country.

There were countless stories of countries falling into ruin because of the rivalry between queens. She didn't want Kuon to take a wife who was liable to cause discord amongst their family.

And so, the grand duchesses continued their talk concerning their children.

"Ever since our children have come to our time, we always turn to this topic without meaning to," Leen wryly laughed as she sipped at her tea that had gone cold while they had been so focused on their discussion.

Their gathering was originally meant to be about how they could support Touya as the grand duke and about managing Brunhild, but now it felt no different to idle gossip.

"I've begun thinking recently that maybe our kids came from the future to help *us*."

"Indeed. If the children hadn't been there for the battles at Egret and Eashen, our victory may not have been so easily achieved."

"The weak divine venom, was it? Trying to fight in our condition would've been incredibly tough."

Remembering the sensation from that battle, Hilde shivered and shook her head. Everyone felt the exact same way. The discomfort that clung to their bodies, and the disgust that welled up from within them had been tremendous.

"Touya and Karen didn't appear to be affected, did they?"

"It was not strong enough to affect gods, it was not. It appeared to have a slight effect on wards, or angels and fae that hold divinity, however."

"Wow, so we're basically the same as angels and spirits by this point, huh?" Elze breathed out in slight wonder. Leen chuckled at her response.

Their bodies were already enveloped in divinity. They couldn't use it how they

wished yet, but there was no denying they were the wards of a god.

“Our husband is a ward of God Almighty, so is there any surprise, really? I don’t believe the wicked devout intended it to have any effect on us though, they were likely simply aiming to weaken the Frame Gears.”

“It was an unintended side effect, it was. Do we really have no choice but to rely on our children next time, too...?”

“Um, what if we made masks from the leaves and bark of the Puretree?” Linze suggested.

But Leen shook her head. “Even if we do not ingest the powder, it will still affect us if it is in close proximity to our skin.” They had managed to bring a sample back to Brunhild with **[Prison]**, but even that couldn’t completely block out the effects.

The Puretree that Sousuke had cultivated had the ability to purify the effects of the divine venom. If they were able to have a Puretree present on the battlefield, then they could perhaps nullify the effects, but that was a huge ask.

“Then what if we covered our bodies with the leaves? Were there not people wearing similar clothes in the movie Touya showed us the other day?”

The clothes that Sue was talking about were the ghillie suits that snipers and hunters used up in the mountains as camouflage.

When the girls recalled that grassy outfit, all of them, including Sue despite being the one who had suggested it, refused it with a, “No, definitely not.” Though it wasn’t wrong to think that covering their bodies with the purifying effects of the Puretree may serve to nullify the effects of the divine venom.

“The idea itself is not a bad one,” Sakura said. “If we can take the fiber from the Puretree, and use that to make thread...”

“Then we can make clothes made of the fiber of the Puretree!” Linze finished, excitedly clapping her hands together at the suggestion. When it came to sewing, she was absolutely the master of the girls, having received training directly from Granny Tokie, the goddess of space-time, herself. Her ability already exceeded that of a pro.

“So in other words, we will be making one of those ‘battle suits’, we will?”

“That sounds good! Having matching battle outfits sounds wonderful!”

“We must make the thread and weave the fabric first, however. We will need to test to make sure it will actually resist the effects of the weak venom.”

The nine excited duchesses began to clamor about what kind of outfit they wanted it to be.

“They should be cute!”

“No, functional beauty is best!”

The racket simply didn’t end.

Even if they suddenly had to become mothers for their children from the future, at the end of the day, they were still teenage girls. Getting worked up about fashion was a constant no matter the generation.

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“Farnese, Yoshino! You two were the best!”

“Ehehe, thanks!”

“Yeah, yeah, I get it already.”

We held a party at the castle after the concert, and naturally, the Overlord of Xenoahs was there bawling his eyes out. The reactions from his daughter and granddaughter were complete opposites. He was endlessly repeating his praise for them so I couldn’t blame Sakura for finding him annoying. Even I was starting to feel it, not that I would say that out loud.

Generally, we wouldn’t bring the kids to parties like this where representatives of various countries were gathered, but this time was a little different. The party wasn’t like our usual summits. It was more of a social gathering as an after-party for the concert, so we had invited ministers and royal children as well.

The number of countries who had joined the League of Nations had already

well-exceeded thirty if you included both the east and west, and there were more guests here on top of that. Just how many hundreds of people had we invited to this thing?

Of course I remembered the kings and the representatives of their countries, but anyone else underneath them, my memory was hazy, honestly speaking.

“Grand Duke, I must thank you for the wonderful performance today. I hope that one day your orchestra may perform in my country as well.”

And just as I was thinking that, here I am faced with some important person that I cannot for the life of me remember the name of. He was just a regular old guy, not even a handlebar mustache or monocle in sight to maybe tip me off. Ummm, who were they again...?

《My liege, they are Lord Rozels from Gardio.》

“Thank you for your kind praise, Lord Rozels. Should the opportunity arise, I would be more than happy for them to perform in Gardio.”

With Kohaku’s reminder, I was able to respond with a polite smile. *Shit, that was close.*

I glanced to the side and saw Cesca holding Kohaku in her arms giving me a thumbs up. Thanks to her being an artificial human, her memory was unmatched, letting me use tricks like this should the situation call for it.

Looking around the party venue, I spotted the representatives of Eashen and Orphen, countries on two completely opposite sides of the continent, happily chatting away with each other. It was probably easier for them to get along given their two countries had very similar cultures.

“Hm?”

In a different part of the room, I saw Quun and Arcia chatting with some other kids. They were all girls around the same age. I couldn’t recall seeing them before, so I imagine they were the daughters of the ministers.

They were both very skilled at acting the part of the noble lady while hiding their true selves, so I wasn’t particularly nervous watching them interact with other nobles. Though worded differently, it also meant that they were both

very good at putting on facades…

Since we had disclosed that the children were my relatives, they were still treated like noble ladies of Brunhild. They were probably talking about how good the concert was.

And then suddenly, three boys who were also about their age approached them. *Hm? Are they about to try and hit on them?*

You're a hundred years too early for that, kids.

I wanted nothing more than to go in and interfere directly, but given my position, I couldn't be rude to a noble's sons out of nowhere, so I stuck to glaring at them instead. If I knew this was going to happen, I should've assigned bodyguards to them.

The three boys were chatting away to the girls, but they weren't getting the most engaged responses. In comparison to how proud they looked of themselves, the girls had smiles that weren't reflected in their eyes.

Are they seriously that dense? It was more than clear that the conversation wasn't going smoothly. It looked as if they were boasting about something, and the girls were getting annoyed by it.

They may have been hiding it well, but even Quun and Arcia were starting to look annoyed. Parla was standing by Quun's feet, and she held a stun gun in her hands that let off a little *bzzt. Hang on, that's just a little bit too far!*

Just as I was hesitating over whether or not I should step in, the three boys' pants suddenly fell, revealing their underwear to the girls.

"Huh?!"

"Eeek!"

At the girls' screaming, the boys quickly pulled their pants back up and ran out the room with their faces bright red.

I noticed Arcia subtly drop a few little buckles to the floor, and then Parla quietly picked them up in order to dispose of the evidence. Was that the buckles for their belts? Damn you, Arcia, you totally used **[Apport]**, didn't you? What sort of child did I raise...? Good job.

Genuine smiles returned to the girls' faces and they began chuckling amongst themselves. Their conversation once more resumed as if the boys had never existed.

"Your daughters don't hold back, do they?"

"Is there any need to hold back against an enemy?"

"Enemy, huh? You guys really are alike..."

Ende was suddenly standing beside me. It seemed he'd seen the whole thing. He was standing in as security for this party, too, given how many guests we had.

Ende had a different reason for wanting to do so, though.

And speak of the devil, here his reason is.

Lilting music began to float through the party hall—Yoshino had begun conducting the orchestra. Men and women began dancing together with the music, among them, a couple much smaller than most.

It was Kuon and Allis.

This party also served as Allis's test to see if she could dance well at a real occasion. She wouldn't be punished if she messed up, though. Kuon and Allis weren't present here today as the prince and princess of Brunhild, so the people gathered here today wouldn't be that harsh on them.

The two danced gracefully to the music. Allis had a dazzling smile on her face, looking just like an ordinary noble girl. No, actually, she looked like even more than that. She'd really exceeded expectations.

Sighs of admiration escaped those around me at seeing such a young boy and girl dance so splendidly. *...We ignore the grinding teeth and tongue clicking coming from beside me.*

Despite his complaints, Ende was still a doting father, and he was making sure to record the whole dance. He was likely going to show it to his wives later.

Kuon and Allis blended in perfectly fine with the adults, Kuon with his tailcoat, Allis with her ice-blue evening dress. Their clothes suited them well. As a prince and his fiancée, I had no complaints about their performance.



I glanced at Lu from the other side of the room, and she gave a strong thumbs

up. Guess they passed.

The song came to an end, and everyone bowed to their dance partners to a shower of applause. Even Ende had stopped recording and was clapping. While crying. *Come on, not here.* As if the Overlord wasn't already bad enough.

"Look at how dazzling Allis is right now! But the fact it's your son doing that is so frustrating!"

"We really need to sit down and have a chat about this at some point, my dude." At this rate, he was going to become a clone of the Overlord. If he wasn't careful, he was gonna be locked into that route, and then Kuon would be subjected to endless suffering. "At least have the decency to accept your daughter's boyfriend."

"You better remember what you just said! 'Cause I'm gonna say it right back at you with your daughters! Eight whole times at that!"

"Oi!"

This bastard... He should know that I didn't want to think about that! *You wanna go, huh?!*

"You two really are just a couple of big kids. Stop glaring at each other like that."

Elze yanked us apart. Though she wasn't that used to wearing dresses, she was wearing one just for today.

I suddenly realized that we had been garnering a fair bit of attention with our argument.

We both gave awkward smiles and bowed our heads. "Nothing's wrong here, sorry for the commotion."

"It was about the kids again, wasn't it? I really can't envision a future where you two actually let your kids leave the nest."

Elze gave an exasperated sigh, shaking her head. *Hey, the kids aren't even born yet in our time! It's way too soon for them to be leaving the nest.*

"You're one to talk," Ende immediately retorted, seemingly ticked off by Elze's remark. "I hear you've barely left Elna alone recently."

“Uh, excuse me! Elna’s a real good kid! What’s wrong with me wanting to spoil her?”

“Yeah, there’s nothing wrong with that, at all! Elna’s an absolute angel!”

“Huh?! Why are you on her side?!”

Ende was hurt at my supposed betrayal, but like I would ever side with him over Elze!

“What are you three even doing?” Leen cut in, with as exasperated a look as Elze had earlier. Paula was by her feet shaking her head. *Hey, don’t you join in.*

“Please don’t make an embarrassment out of Brunhild. What good is it for the children to raise people’s opinion of us, only for the adults to plummet it back down again?”

Leen looked over at Kuon and Allis who were currently surrounded by onlookers praising them for their dance.

Naturally, even we couldn’t ignore those words, and we immediately pulled ourselves together. *C’mon, Touya, you’re supposed to be the role model here.*

“Now then, darling, stop carrying on over here and go say your hellos, will you? That is the job of the grand duke, after all.”

“Yes, ma’am...”

I began walking around the venue at Leen’s insistence. *I guess I should start from the fathers.*

“Hey there, Touya! The concert was amazing!”

Having already started drinking, the King of Belfast raised a wine glass to me in greeting together with the King of Regulus. I returned the greeting. Both of them looked satisfied with smiles on their faces.

“Kuon’s dance was splendid. I’m proud that he is my grandson. Oh wait, I’m supposed to keep that secret.”

The wine appeared to have loosened his lips, and he chugged the wine in his glass as if to cover up what he’d said.

“Your Majesty, Lucia was the one who taught Kuon how to dance. Of course

he would be so skilled. I'm proud that she is my daughter."

Aren't there one too many doting fathers at this party? 'Isn't that the pot calling the kettle black?' you say? Hahaha, good one.

"That aside, Touya, I heard from Zadonia that there have apparently been sightings recently of the Phrase over there."

"Of the Phrase?"

I couldn't hide my surprise at the king's words. All the Phrase should have been absorbed by the wicked god and become a mutant. Did that mean there were survivors? I definitely did a **[Search]** of the whole world for them after the confrontation to make sure.

"Yes, at least that's what they said. It should be noted that the eyewitnesses were merchants lost in a blizzard, so there is the chance they were simply hallucinating from exhaustion, or simply mistook an ice monster for one. I thought it pertinent to inform you, regardless."

Being the Land of Frost, Zadonia was a land covered in, well, snow and ice. There were even Ice Turtles with glaciers sticking out their backs. It wasn't out of the question for someone to mistake that for a Phrase.

If there really were Phrase there, though, there was no way that Dominant Constructs or the former Sovereign wouldn't be able to detect them.

"Hm, perhaps it was just a mistake, after all. I was a little afraid we were about to face another one of those large-scale invasions."

I reassured the king that everything would be fine, but...would they really? Could it be that there were latecomers that arrived here from Phrasia? The anxiety refused to stop pricking at my mind like little thorns.

At the end of the day, if they really were Phrase, Melle and the other Dominant Constructs would be able to deal with it.

I took out my smartphone and ran another **[Search]** for the Phrase.

"No targets detected."

There really were no Phrase. If they were within a barrier or had a warding amulet, my magic wouldn't be able to detect them, but they were *Phrase.*

There was no way they held something like that. It *had* to be a misunderstanding.

But I just couldn't take my mind off of it, so I decided I should talk to the king of Zadonia about it directly.

Prince Frost...or should I say, King Frost of the Kingdom of Zadonia was chatting away happily with the king of his neighboring country of Dauburn. Given how much their parents had argued, it was fascinating to see them get along so well. It probably helped that their fiancées, who were also attending this party, were siblings.

"Ah, Your Grace! I must thank you for inviting me to this concert."

"It was a beautiful performance. I hope the day arrives where we may see your orchestra perform in our own country one day."

The two of them greeted me as I walked up. Their fiancées, the princesses of Alent, gave me curtseys.

After exchanging some casual chit-chat and catching up, I asked the King of Zadonia about the supposed Phrase sighting.

"Thanks to the spirits, Zadonia is gradually becoming a much more livable climate, but there are still areas of extreme cold. Some merchants who ended up lost in one of those regions saw a large transparent snail within the blizzard that looked as if it was made of ice."

An ice snail, huh? If I recall correctly, there was a monster known as a Cold Snail in the region that was a snail with a shell of ice.

"I've seen a Cold Snail myself; they're about a meter tall at most. Meanwhile, the snail witnessed was at least three meters."

Yeah, that was way too big to be a regular monster, but there was still the possibility that it was just a Behemoth.

"One of the merchants said something else interesting: inside that transparent shell was a round blue core."

"A core?"

Now *that...*made it more possible that it was a Phrase survivor. Still no

confirmation, but...

As I said earlier, even if it was the Phrase, we had Melle. There was no way they would defy her. It had to be okay... It had to.

I parted ways with the two kings, and then watched everyone dancing with the music that had begun again. As I was lost in thought about the Phrase sighting, Yumina appeared in front of me, wearing her white evening dress. She smiled and held her hand out to me.

“If you have finished your duties, how about a dance?”

“Um...I’m not as good as our son, but if you don’t mind that, then sure.”

I took Yumina’s hand, and we joined the circle of twirling dresses.

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“Hazel and Orchid were both defeated. Your strategy was entirely useless.”

“I never anticipated how quickly the enemy would attack. I did think that worst case scenario, one of us would end up being defeated, but not two,” Indigo responded to Tangerine’s remark matter-of-factly. Not that it appeared Tangerine had been trying to criticize him, in fact, she was almost teasing him.

Their group didn’t particularly view each other as companions anyway; they simply viewed each other as game pieces for the other to use however they needed. They may think it a shame that they lost one of said pieces, but nothing more than that.

“Such a shame that they both died for no meaning.”

“There was meaning,” Scarlet piped up. “We were able to gain vital combat information from their battles. If we make use of this, we can enhance the Kyklops even further.” He was scanning the data that had been sent from Hazel and Orchid’s Kyklops.

“Yeah, okay,” Tangerine spat out with disinterest.

One of the rooms of the Ark had been refurbished into a research laboratory for Scarlet. The Ark held not only artifacts left over by one of the rare Gollem

engineers, Chrom Ranchesse, but also the Gollems that had assisted him in his work. Scarlet was using them as if they were an extension of his limbs as he began designing the next Kyklops. Everything else held no space within his mind.

Having lost interest in Scarlet, Tangerine began looking around.

“Where’s Gold?”

“Next door. Seems he’s as obsessed with the core as always,” Indigo informed her.

Tangerine made her way through an automatic door to the neighboring room. In the dimly-lit room, she saw a small golden Gollem standing in front of a large glass cylinder. The cylinder was filled with a dull purple liquid, and within that was some kind of spiky object about the size of a golf ball.

The small Gollem was simply looking up at it. Tangerine sighed. It was the exact same sight as always.

“Seriously, I don’t know how you can just stand there looking at that every day without getting bored. Are you sure that’s going to become our trump card?”

“...It will. It still sleeps. But when it wakes...”

Without turning to look at Tangerine, the little Gollem let out a gravelly mechanical voice.

“Hope it wakes up soon then. Before we lose all the cards we have left.”

The Golden Crown returned nothing but silence.

Chapter III: The Sacred Treasure, Complete

“Are there any Phrase other than us still in this world, you ask?”

The apparent Phrase sighting in Zadonia still bothered me, so I decided it would be worth asking Melle as the former Sovereign.

“The chances are very slim. And should one have appeared here, we would absolutely hear its echo.”

“But there are times barriers have prevented you from hearing it, right?”

It was a bit of an unrealistic assumption, but if they had appeared somewhere with a large and powerful barrier like a castle, then maybe that could be possible.

“Is that not a bit of a stretch?”

“Honestly, yeah, but...”

Melle was looking at me like I was talking nonsense, so I chose to rethink things. It was true that if a Phrase appeared somewhere like that, there was no way it wouldn’t cause a commotion.

“They likely would not be emitting an echo if they were in a state of suspended animation, however.”

Like if they were sealed after using up all their magic? That was similar to the first Cricket Phrase we encountered in the ruins of Belfast. It was a survivor of the Phrase that had appeared in Belfast 5000—no, 1000 years ago. The Arcana Clan had left it behind in order to make sure their descendants would know of the horrors of the Phrase.

If it was similarly sealed, then Melle wouldn’t be able to detect it, but the one in Zadonia was said to have been moving, so that didn’t match.

“Hmm...”

I crossed my arms in thought for quite some time before Melle suddenly spoke up.

“Oh, there is one other possibility.”

“And that is?”

“If it was an artificial Phrase, then it wouldn’t emit an echo.”

Wait, a Phrase could be artificial? Didn’t a Phrase asexually reproduce a next-generation core that would grow into its child? I’d heard from Ende that Dominant Constructs were the one type that could make a core between a male and female Phrase.

“Oh, do you mean like those crystal beasts you created during the Prismatis Rite?”

They had made Kuon fight a crystal chimera back then.

Ney shook her head from beside Melle and replied, “That was indeed artificial, but only us Dominant Constructs can make such creatures, and since they have no cores, it wouldn’t be quite right to call them Phrase. They only listen to the orders of the Construct that made them, so they don’t make for very good soldiers.”

“There was research being done to try to produce Phrase cores artificially without the power of Dominant Constructs in order to create crystalline soldiers different from the Phrase. As far as I’m aware, though, it didn’t succeed,” Melle added.

If they were trying to make something that wasn’t a Phrase, it would make sense for it to have no echo.

“I am unsure if this is relevant, but...the one who led that project on Phrasia was Yula.”

“Yula, you say?”

Yula was a Dominant Construct who had sold knowledge of the Phrase to the wicked god and had attempted to take control of both Melle’s power and this world. Honestly, the only image I had of him was a foolish man who had been tricked by the wicked god, but over in Phrasia, he was seen as a genius.

That meant the possibility existed that what was sighted was a creation that Yula had left behind. And if that was the case, it would make sense for there to

be no echo. But then, why did my **[Search]** not pick anything up? If it looked like a Phrase, then it should have registered it as such.

I didn't like how little we knew about all this.

"The artificial Phrase were generally referred to as Quarth back in Phrasia, but I have no idea what became of that project after I left. Yula could have succeeded and I simply was not aware."

"I believe the project was abandoned," Ney said. "When Lady Melle left, Yula switched his research focus to how to cross worlds."

The Quarth Project came to a stop, did it?

"I do believe that Yula completely removed himself from the Quarth research. This world would be in much more havoc had he managed to complete it."

That wasn't half ominous. Hadn't the Phrase already been causing havoc even without the Quarth being fully-developed? There had already been three large-scale invasions.

Given my search magic didn't pick anything up, surely that ice monster had to be just that, a monster. When I tried searching for Cold Snails, there was a lot in Zadonia's coldest areas. The size could easily be explained away by it being in the process of turning into a Behemoth.

Whatever the case, it didn't seem like I was going to get any answers right now, so I decided to leave it at that. It just made me feel anxious continuing to think about it.

"By the way, Touya, how are Allis's lessons going?"

"Hm? Oh, the girls said that she's a really fast learner. She sucks up everything like a sponge no matter what kind of lesson it is, so they really enjoy teaching her."

"I see! As it should be! Allis is our daughter, after all!" Ney proclaimed as she proudly puffed out her chest.

This girl really had changed. Before, she permanently had a murderous intent surrounding her that felt like it could cut you if you got anywhere near her. Children were a powerful thing.

“When that girl decides she wants to do something, she’ll keep striding forward until she reaches her goal. Though that does come with the issue that she gets tunnel vision very easily...”

“She’s awfully similar to you, Lady Melle. You abandoned your position as Sovereign and ran straight for Endymion, after all.”

“Don’t say that, Lycee!”

Melle’s face turned bright red. It was true that they were alike. When they decided they wanted to do something, they refused to back down.

“Allis has been doing nothing but studying every single day recently, though,” Lycee said. “She’s lost a lot of her liveliness.”

Ney nodded in agreement and added, “Indeed. She only ate two plates of curry yesterday. Perhaps she is becoming exhausted mentally.”

Curry? Hang on, was that not just because she already had curry at our place yesterday? Even I would start getting a little sick of it if I got faced with the same thing when I went home. It probably didn’t help that we had lunch late yesterday, either. The fact she was able to eat two more plates at all was pretty impressive, honestly.

Melle put her hand to her cheek, looking troubled.

“I wish I could do something to cheer her up...”

“Like when we went to the beach together? That whole trip was wasted due to the wicked devout’s attack.”

“She seemed to find her own sense of fun in that. Endymion was far more exhausted than she was.”

That was likely because he had been feeling the effects of the divine venom. Allis no doubt had the time of her life getting to pilot the Dragoon all she wanted. The girl was better suited to being lively and full of life than trying to be a proper lady.

Given that she was going to become a grand duchess, she needed the lessons, but we weren’t trying to change who she was. We simply needed her to be able to adjust how she acted in public.

Ney let out a small sigh and then glared at me.

“Shouldn’t it be your son’s responsibility to console her, given he’s her fiancé? He should give her a gift or something.”

Oh, turning our anger onto the father-in-law now, are we?

Kuon was doing well at being considerate of her, in my opinion. Sue was even kind enough to tell me that I don’t have the consideration that he does. Having such a put-together son made me feel proud as his father, but it was a bit conflicting about what that meant for my own image...

It was true that we’d likely been giving Allis way too much to do in a short amount of time. She did well when she danced at the after-party the other day, so there was nothing wrong with giving her a little treat.

What would make her happy, though? A whole day to have Kuon to herself? Wait, no, I couldn’t treat my son like some rental.

“What do you think Allis would like as a treat?” I asked the girls.

“She’d be happy if she could have Kuon to herself for a whole day.”

“...Besides that.”

Lycee was giving me a smug look, but I had already rejected that in my head.

“Allis’s likes... She does enjoy sweets.”

“Hmm...”

Ney’s suggestion wasn’t *bad,* but it almost felt too easy. And besides, whenever she had lessons that ran into the afternoon, there were always snacks there, so it felt a bit like overkill to give her some as a treat, too.

“What about clothes?”

“Mmm, I just bought her that dress to wear at the party.”

I had paid for Allis’s dress and shoes out of my own expenses, not because she was Kuon’s fiancée, but in commemoration of the occasion. You could argue that was a treat, but it didn’t sit quite right for me.

“Man, this is so difficult...”

“Why not just ask her directly, then?” Ney suggested.

“Oh.”

That *was* an option. I had wanted it to be a surprise, but asking the person directly was always the safest bet. I could see if there was anything she desired, and whether or not I could fulfill any of those desires, I would deal with at the time.

Yeah, let’s just go ask Allis.

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“A treat?”

“Yeah. Anything you’d like to get or want to do? Or maybe someplace you’d like to visit?”

I went up to Allis after her lessons for the day and asked her directly if she had anything she wanted. Ende was there as well to pick her up.

“Then I’d like to have Kuon to my—”

“Apart from having Kuon to yourself all day.”

Allis pouted at my refusal.

Them going on a date wasn’t an issue, but ordering Kuon to do something as a treat just felt wrong.

“I don’t mind, though.”

“That doesn’t matter.”

Even if Kuon was okay with it, it wouldn’t really be a treat from me, it would be from Kuon, since he could do that himself.

Allis stood in thought for a moment, before suddenly clapping her hands together.

“Ahah!”

Oh? Has she thought of something?

“Actually, I was hoping I could get trained by Mr. Takeru.”

“What?! Allis, don’t throw away your life like that!” Ende squawked. Just what

had he been made to do, seriously? Uncle Takeru may have been strict, but even he wouldn't do anything that could kill her, surely.

...Though he may put her at slight risk of injury.

As the god of combat, Takeru was similar to Moroha where their definition of power was completely twisted. A little for them was gigantic for us.

"Did he not train you in the future at all?"

"Mr. Takeru's always off traveling to hone his skills, so he's not really at Brunhild much. And Dad would always stop me when I tried, so I never got the opportunity."

That made sense. Uncle Takeru would just wander off a lot, and then randomly pop back up before we knew it. He'd recently been to Lassei, in fact.

Lassei was known for its martial arts, so a lot of muscleheads—excuse me, many skilled martial artists lived there, and that meant you could see all manner of fighting styles if you visited. In the hopes of doing just that, Uncle Takeru had gone around issuing challenges to dojos across the country. Honestly, I kind of wished he wouldn't cause such a ruckus in other countries like that...

At the very least, Lassei's king had reassured me that if a fight was fair and square, then he had no reason to interfere.

Uncle Takeru should have come back not too long ago, so it personally wasn't an issue to ask, but...

I glanced at Ende and he was frantically shaking his head.

It wasn't like I didn't get where he was coming from. This was meant to be a treat for Allis, but was putting her through Uncle Takeru's demon training really a treat?

"You don't mean you want to become his apprentice, right?"

"Nope. I'd considered it once before, but there are other things I have to do now."

She was probably referring to her training in preparation to become the grand duchess. She was dedicating so much to becoming an asset to our country, and

to my son, that there was no way I could refuse her wish.

If he wasn't taking her as a disciple, then surely he wouldn't subject her to training that was too harsh? He'd even been helping out our knights here and there, which meant the biggest problem was figuring out how to persuade Ende.

"Umm, I think that you're maybe still a bit too inexperienced to be trained by Uncle Takeru right now," I said, earning another pout from Allis. Ende nodded fervently in agreement. "So how about watching Ende spar with him? Being able to steal techniques from others is also a form of training."

"Wh—Uh—Huh?!"

Ende's face suddenly lost all color as his eyes widened. Couldn't blame him. What father wanted to be beaten up in front of his daughter?

"N-Now, come on, Touya, old pal, maybe we could reconsider?! What if she gets discouraged after seeing the level of our skill? O-Or, y'know, what if she tries out a move way above her level and it ends up stalling her improvement?! What happened to good old-fashioned training?"

"Hmm, okay. Maybe we should just ask Uncle Takeru to train her after all, then."

"Yeah! Uh, wait, no! Maybe reconsider that, too...?"

Ende was struggling with his words, but it was too late. He'd already said yes.

"All right, then. How about we pay Uncle Takeru a visit, Allis?"

"Okay!"

"Mnrghhh!"

Ende looked utterly furious, but we let him be as we headed to the training hall.

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"Hm, I certainly wouldn't mind. I was actually going to use something a little more interesting today in the knights' training, so I can spar with Allis in the meantime."

When I explained the situation, Uncle Takeru agreed without complaint. I felt a little uneasy about this “interesting” thing he was intending to use, though. Even the air around the knights felt somewhat somber.

Generally, Moroha was in charge of teaching them swordplay, but any martial arts or endurance training was Uncle Takeru’s field of expertise. His training was often quite spontaneous, though, since he just took them out when he felt like it.

You might ask if knights really needed to learn martial arts, but you would be surprised. There were many situations when knights patrolling the city needed to disable someone without harming them, like in a fight between drunkards. And anyway, it was good to be able to fight without a weapon just in case the situation called for it. That was why I’d assigned Uncle Takeru as their trainer for now.

Though I’d heard his training was rather...unique.

“I was thinking about using this.”

Everyone in the training hall froze when they saw what Uncle Takeru took out with his storage magic.

A monster with the body of a lion, the tail of a scorpion, the wings of a bat, and the face of a monkey was tied to the ground with black chains. It was trying to open its mouth to screech, but the muzzle over it muffled all the noises it attempted to make.

“Uncle Takeru, is this...?”

“It’s a Manticore. I captured one that was wreaking havoc in Lassei. Not only is it strong physically, but it can breathe fire and even use its own magic. It’s quite the troublesome little creature. Oh, and it also likes human flesh.”

Small yelps rang out from the knights.

Don’t just casually bring a man-eating monster into my castle!

Ignoring how rowdy the knights were getting, Uncle Takeru threw a couple stones to break the Manticore’s wings.

“I’ll at least prevent it from flying. Touya, surround the training hall with

[Prison], please. Make it so that only the Manticore cannot escape."

I did as I was told. If the situation became too dangerous, it would be easy enough for the thirty knights to escape.

Is this really going to be okay?

Myself, Allis, Ende, and Uncle Takeru exited the **[Prison],** leaving the knights alone with the Manticore that was still restrained by chains.

"You're allowed to use your weapons for this battle," Uncle Takeru informed them. "Let's see… I'll give you twenty minutes. Defeat the Manticore in that amount of time."

"Are you serious?"

He was putting a time limit on it?! The moment the knights looked away, the chains and muzzle keeping the Manticore down shattered.

"GRAAAAAAWWWWWWWWWWR!"

"Holy shit, i-it's coming this way!"

"Get into formation! Shields up!"

"It really can blow fire! This is way too scary!"

The knights began coordinating with each other to try to fight off the Manticore. It's not like I wasn't aware before now, but this dude's training was freaking *Spartan.*

"That looks so fun," Allis muttered to herself as she watched the chaos.

"Uh, no, it doesn't, no matter what way you look at it," I interjected.

Why was *that* her opinion while watching the knights scream and frantically run around?

"How about I train with you until they're done, Allis? Maybe a spar first?"

"Oh, okay, Mr. Takeru! I'm in your hands!"

Allis's eyes may have been twinkling, but Ende looked about ready to keel over.

It'll be fine, man, seriously.

From what I knew, Uncle Takeru was actually better at being considerate of the girls than he looked. I'd heard Elze call him strict, but never scary.

"Hiyaaaaaaaaaaah!"

I thought they were going to do some light sparring to start, but Allis just went in full force. Takeru calmly dodged the attack, though. He seemed to be having fun.

Does this really *count as a treat?*

"She appears to be enjoying herself," Kuon commented.

"Well, I can't deny that."

Sure, Kuon was right, but I still wasn't sure if this sufficed.

"She seemed a little down recently, so this should be a nice change of pace for her. Thank you for granting her the opportunity, Father."

If she was enjoying herself, it was fine, but every time Allis was sent flying by Takeru, I had to hold Ende back.

Why did I have to be the one to handle this overprotective father?

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"Feast your eyes on the brand new series of marine Frame Gear, the Nereid!"

Quun was proudly standing in front of the new turquoise Frame Gear sitting on the dungeon island beach behind her as if she was the one who'd created it. Though it was specialized for battles taking place in the water, it had legs, so it could probably fight on land as well. Did that make it more like an amphibious?

It had a large hydro jet-like propulsion unit on its back, and four sliding claws on each arm. If you dropped a weapon under the sea, it would be almost impossible to retrieve it, so the Babylon Dev Team decided that they may as well just have the weapons built in. The overall curved shape of its body was to make it more streamlined for moving through the water.

"It's exceedingly mobile and boasts high attack power even in the water. Equipped with eight rocket pods in its shoulders and four torpedoes in its legs, it can deal with both close and long-range battles. Its main weapon is a spear,

but the Abyss Claws attached to its arms are made of phrasium, so they can easily slice through an enemy's armo—"

"All right, all right. It's amazing, we understand. Now, may we see it in action?"

"Grr! The unveiling of an inventor's work is a once-in-a-lifetime event of the utmost importance. We can't just skip it, Mother!"

Quun was infuriated by Leen cutting into her proud explanation so nonchalantly.

You realize Doc Babylon and her crew are the actual inventors here, right?

It was true that Quun had also assisted, so I could understand her desire to boast about it, but still...

"So who's gonna pilot it first?"

"Daddy, I wanna try!"

Steph was the first to whip up her hand. Would that really be okay, though...? She *did* handle the Ortlinde Overlord well, but...

"The evacuation system definitely works, yeah?"

"Don't worry," Doctor Babylon reassured me. "Even in the case it floods, the cockpit is set to deploy a barrier *before* activating the teleportation magic to provide extra security for escape. The destination is set for Val Albus's transportation room."

That sounded safe, at least.

When I gave my permission, Steph immediately boarded the Nereid. Gold made sure to accompany her, but I wasn't sure how necessary his presence was. At least they were both small enough that they wouldn't feel cramped in there.

Apparently, it controlled just like a regular Frame Gear. The only real difference was that it could traverse water so it naturally became necessary for the unit to travel in three axes, much like an aerial unit. Steph already had experience controlling an aerial Frame Gear, so I had no doubt she would become accustomed to controlling the Nereid in no time.

“Okay, time to give this a shot!”

With that, Steph began moving the Nereid toward the sea. The mech gradually sank lower and lower under the water until even the head couldn’t be seen.

“Is she really going to be okay?” Sue muttered in worry as she watched her daughter disappear. I pulled out my smartphone and displayed the footage of the drone I had accompanying her from the air. The Nereid was still on the shallow seafloor. It seemed fine so far.

Having gotten used to the controls, Steph started lightly skipping through the ocean in slow motion. After gaining enough depth, she did a large jump and activated the hydro jets.

“It’s awfully fast, it is.”

As Yae said, the Nereid was zooming around in all directions. She was just testing out the movement, right? It wasn’t going out of control, *right?*

The propulsors attached all over the frame helped keep it steady even with the increased speed.

“Even our Valkyries would struggle fighting in the water,” Linze muttered. But was that really the case? Leen and Yumina could easily handle any aquatic enemies from long range, and Yae and Hilde just needed to be close enough to cut them in half.

“Huh? Daddy, there’s a big monster over there. Can I go defeat it?”

“There’s a monster here?”

I turned the drone’s camera forward and caught sight of a creature swimming this way. It had the body of a dolphin, the head of a dog, and the fins of a fish.

The hell is that?

It almost looked like a mutated seal that was double the size of the Nereid. It was probably 30 meters in length.

“Oh, that’s a Cetus. They’re said to be fierce creatures that attack ships at sea and eat those onboard whole,” Leen explained. The aforementioned Cetus was headed straight for the Nereid.

I had summoned a Kraken to patrol the area around the dungeon islands, but I guess the Cetus had slipped through. If it attacked ships, then it seemed best to get rid of it now, but would Steph manage?

“The Nereid should be more than capable of handling a Cetus of that size. What do you take our creations for?”

Doc Babylon sounded confident so it was probably fine to trust her, but I couldn’t deny that I was still a little nervous.

“Take this!”

The shoulders of the Nereid opened up and sent missiles toward the Cetus.

Fearing the attack, the Cetus opened its mouth and let out a whirlpool-like breath attack. The missiles were caught in the rotation and missed their target, but the attack didn’t stop there, and Steph had to nimbly dodge out of the way.

The Cetus fired that same attack two more times, but both times, the Nereid dodged like a fish in water. Steph was getting used to it.

“Now for this!”

The four phrasium claws attached to the arms slid forward and attached to the front of the fists. It looked like that one comic book hero. Actually, wait, didn’t he only have three claws on each hand?

Steph maneuvered the Nereid to avoid the incoming whirlpool breaths, and in the blink of an eye, was right in front of the target.

“Hah!”

The claws on the Nereid’s right arm slashed through the Cetus’s neck. That alone managed to cut it right in two (or four?). The Cetus’s head and torso sunk to the seafloor, blood floating everywhere.

“Nooo, those would’ve made for good materials!”

Quun glanced over at me.

You want me to retrieve them? I’m not a miracle worker, little lady.

“It’s not half-bad. Can our Valkyries perform as well as that?” Lu asked.

“The Valkyries weren’t initially built with water battles in mind, so if those

features were to be added, they wouldn't be as good as the Nereid, no matter what we did," Doc Babylon told her. "Wouldn't lose to the Kyklops, though."

The Kyklops we had managed to take back were filled with all kinds of tech to make them able to fight in the water. The Babylon crew had stole—*referenced* their structure and improved it.

The more they took them apart, the more they realized that one of the five great gollemancers, Maestro, seemed to have been involved in their development. That increased the possibility that Maestro was on their side. Whether that meant he was working with them of his own volition, he was being threatened to work with them, or because he was one of the wicked devout, there was no way for us to know.

"Can the Nereid counter the diluted venom?"

"The Nereid has a spirit furnace installed so it isn't using ether liquid as its sole fuel. It borrows the power of the sea spirits, amplifies that power, and then uses it as an energy source. It'll still be affected by the venom, but it'll only be about a 10% output loss, which is much better than the original 40%, at least."

The Doctor seemed a little bothered by that.

I guess she's not content that she can't completely counter it.

"Will the Valkyries still be affected by 40%?"

"Unfortunately. We can't just go in and suddenly change their energy source to a spirit furnace. We did adjust the ether liquid output though, so it should limit to 30% instead."

Honestly, even making it affect them 10% less was impressive.

"We can deal with the Frame Gears, but what about your wives? Have they found a way to block out the divine venom?"

"Why, do we have good news for you!"

I inadvertently jumped upon hearing Linze's sudden loud call out from behind us.

"Holy sh—! Don't do that!"

“We took fibers from the Puretree and had Flora and Rosetta help us make a fabric that can repel the divine venom!”

Oh, they’d finished it. They seemed unsure if they could manage when they brought it up before.

Linze pulled out a piece of clothing from her smartphone’s **[Storage].** Made from a soft gray fabric, it looked like a flight suit with protectors all over it. They even had a full-face helmet with a transparent visor. Was that made out of phrasium? The back of the helmet was protruding slightly, making a smooth line.

“The inside of the helmets are lined with the Puretree fabric to serve as a filter, and we’ve enchanted it with wind magic so it’s not too stuffy. The visor won’t steam up either.”

“Wow, so it’s complete protection, huh?”

You’d almost think they were going out to space, but it just showed how much protection was necessary.

Doc Babylon took the suit in hand and pulled at the fabric.

“This has elasticity and embroidery magic infused in it, right? Are there any special effects?”

“Oh, you can tell? It’s been designed so the size automatically adjusts to fit the user. Yae, Sue, can you try them on?”

“What?! Me?!”

“Sure, sounds fun.”

Their reactions were complete opposites. Without waiting for Yae to agree, Linze pulled out two simple dressing rooms from **[Storage].** Was she telling them to get changed here? The only boys here were Kuon and I, so I guess there wasn’t much need for them to worry, but it still felt a little awkward.

Linze shoved Yae into the dressing room before she could get the chance to complain. She had really changed since Linne had arrived. Though still fairly reserved, she was much more confident in herself than before. Had her motherly power awakened that aspect within her?

“Oh, make sure to remove your underwear as well, otherwise it won’t be as effective.”

“Huh?!”

This time, the surprise came from both of them, but I pretended I hadn’t heard anything. We may have been married, but that didn’t mean moments like this didn’t require tact.

Steph finally returned to land on the Nereid at the same time as one of the dressing room curtains opened, revealing Sue in her pilot suit.

“It’s much easier to move around in than I was anticipating. The armor doesn’t even get in the way,” she said, lightly tapping one of the protectors.

It really did look just like a flight suit. Though they were made to fit their bodies tight, there were protectors on their shoulders, chest, arms, lower back, and ankles, so Sue’s bodyline wasn’t particularly prominent.

“Why not try on the helmet too?”

“Not a problem. Like this? Whoa!”

When Sue put on the gray helmet, her long blonde hair that had been trailing behind her was sucked up inside it. So it even automatically stored the hair of the wearer? Was that why the back of the helmet was shaped the way it was?

“Can you hear us?”

“Yup, I can hear you perfectly fine,” Sue responded with the visor still down. “It’s not suffocating me in here either.”

Good, seems like there’s no issue.

Sue ran and jumped, testing the flexibility of the suit. When Steph exited the Nereid, she curiously walked over to her mother and began patting her hands all over it.

What happened to Yae? Was she struggling to get the suit on?

Just as I was thinking that, Yae peeked her head out the door. Her face was bright red.

“...What are you doing?”

“Um, these clothes...are just a little bit tight, they are...”

“Oh, come on. It’s fine. Hurry up and come out.”

“Ahhh, L-Linze-dono?!”

Linze pulled Yae out far enough until we could see her wearing the same gray pilot suit. Though, uh...unlike Sue, you could more clearly see certain assets...

“Linze, you chose Sue and I precisely because of our contrasting body types, didn’t you?”

“Well, um... you see, it’s important to show that it doesn’t matter what the size difference is, right?”

Sue puffed her cheeks, but immediately cleared her throat when she remembered she was in front of Steph.

“Your body line does show quite clearly.”

“But you would very rarely be in front of other people while wearing it, so it shouldn’t matter too much, no?”

“It is much less embarrassing than the clothes we had to wear in the Sea of Trees.”



The other girls all crowded around the embarrassed Yae, looking intently at

the outfit with no real hesitance. Doc Babylon nodded to herself as she felt the material of it.

“Hm, I may actually be able to make use of this. If we can protect the ether lines with this fabric, we might manage to further weaken the effects of the divine venom. It would probably lessen its effect by another 10%.”

“I would very much like you to stop touching my buttocks with such a serious face, I would!”

Having had enough, Yae removed her ribbons and placed the helmet on, her long black hair being sucked up inside it in the process.

“If you press the button on the side of the helmet, you can make the visor opaque from the outside. You can also change the color of the suit with the bracelet.”

Yae pressed the mentioned button, and as Linze had said, it immediately turned black, and we couldn’t see her face anymore. She looked like some mysterious warrior like this.

“You can see us from your side, right?”

“Yes. It is a little darker, but I can see you fine, I can.”

Sue did the same and confirmed that it was fine on her end. I assumed it was meant to be used in a similar way to sunglasses.

Each time Yae pressed the button on her bracelet, the suit, including the helmet, changed into a variety of different colors. Yae settled on a light purple, while Sue settled on yellow for her personal color. Nice. I thought the colors seemed natural for them, not that I could say for sure if it suited them given I couldn’t even see their faces.

“Whoa! Mama Yae, Mama Sue, you both look so cool!”

“Yeah! You look just like sentai heroes!”

Linne and Steph’s eyes were sparkling as they looked at them. Did future me decide to show the kids some tokusatsu?

“Mom, I want a suit like this too!”

“And me, Mommy!”

You guys don’t even need them...

I could already envision a terrifying future where they wore them like regular clothes.

The other kids didn’t seem to be all that interested. Frei seemed a little curious, but more just about the defensive properties of it as a piece of armor.

Kuon had realized that they wouldn’t need to pilot the Valkyries anymore if their mothers no longer felt the effects of the divine venom, so even if they had suits made, it would be little more than something to dress up in.

Usually, it was the boys who would be all over the sentai aesthetic, but our son was the complete opposite. Not that I was terribly surprised by this point, of course.

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A large shadow slowly lumbered through the depths of the sea. Frightened by the intruder, the fish that lurked there scattered. It moved steadily through the murky ocean depths before coming to a stop and releasing a hundred small probes around it.

“V00 to V99 dispatched successfully.”

In the bridge of the white whale-shaped Over Gear, Val Albus, the white crown, Illuminati Albus, started up the many probes. Despite the sheer number of them, he scanned through every single monitor in search of any abnormalities.

Suspicious shadows, strange terrain, man-made deposits... Whatever caught Albus’s eye, he had the probes analyze them in detail. The Gollem never missed even one moment that something strange was in sight.

“Enlarge frame data V21.”

One of the monitors was projected much larger than before. It showed what appeared to be an ordinary rock face on the ocean floor, except there was a large fault on its surface with a crack running straight through as if it had been sliced clean in half.

The probe rolled down into the crevasse, falling further and further, until eventually, it revealed something on Val Albus’s monitor: a large, box-like hull with suspicious lines of light running through it, propellers on either side.

Albus matched the captured data with the records, then changed from exploration mode to observation mode.

“The Ark has been discovered.”

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Upon receiving news of the discovery of the Ark from Albus, we immediately used a **[Gate]** to teleport to the Over Gear.

As reported, we saw the Ark being displayed on the monitor.

“There’s no mistake, that has to be the Ark. We’ve finally found it.”

What was our next step, though? Just launching an all-out attack?

“No, remember what happened the first time we found the Ark,” Doc Babylon said. “All it took was the few seconds that we were blinded by that smokescreen for the Ark to vanish. If we aren’t careful, it’ll just be a repeat of that situation.”

Yeah, she had a point. There was little reason to doubt anymore that that had been the special power of the diver man’s wicked vessel. All it took was the smallest opening, and he could teleport anything away, which meant we had to either defeat him or render his weapon useless.

“We shouldn’t stay in these waters for too long, anyway. Albus, leave some of the probes and get Val Albus out of here. Our advantage will go to waste if we end up getting caught.”

“Understood.”

On Doc Babylon’s orders, Val Albus slowly retreated from the Ark. Like she said, if we were caught, the chances were high they would just teleport away again.

“Could we not use **[Teleport]** to infiltrate it directly?” Sue suggested.

“They likely have a barrier up, so I can’t say that’s the best idea,” Doc Babylon said. “The chances of you bouncing off that barrier and ending up teleporting into the water instead aren’t zero.”

I’d rather avoid that, thanks.

The last thing I wanted to do was to get crushed by the water pressure.

“Well, we can keep an eye on the Ark now, we can. There is no longer any need to worry about any more port towns being attacked, there is.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure,” Leen replied. “Nothing says they need the Ark to go with them when they make their attacks, they simply need to teleport the Kyklops directly there.”

“O-Oh, I see. Teleportation magic sure is a force to be reckoned with, it is...”

Myself, Sakura, Yakumo, and Yoshino all frowned a little. We knew Yae hadn’t been directing her words directly at us, but we also knew what everyone was thinking. It was frustrating not being able to infiltrate the enemy’s base when it

was literally right there in front of us.

While the risk existed that they could escape the moment they were made aware of our presence, we couldn't afford to make any reckless moves, which only left breaking that diver helmet guy's wicked vessel. But that would mean we would need a new sacred treasure to carry that out in the first place, so I had to complete the sacred core already.

I was already most of the way there with it. I had managed to get the condensed divinity to the size of a golf ball, so now I had to get it from there to the size of a marble and it would be complete. But this had really increased the urgency.

"For now, let's keep an eye on it and see if we can sneak a probe or a transmitter inside. There has to be somewhere that small objects can get in, like a ballast tank or a drainage pipe."

Oh, so we can track them even if they make their escape? That sounds good in theory, but...

"Even if we managed to get something inside, wouldn't the barrier block any transmissions?"

"You just leave that to me. I'll work something out."

Doc Babylon's face stretched wide in a confident smirk. Who was really the villain here with that look on her face?

"You act that way a lot too, Touya."

"Yeah. Her evil face looks just like yours."

"Ha ha ha, come on now, Elze, Linze, whatever are you two talking about? I would never make such an evil face. Right, everyone?"

I looked around seeing if anyone would support me, but not a single person nodded.

Dammit.

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"Gnnnrrrrrrggghhhhhhhhh!"

Sweat was streaming down my face from the exertion as I tried to condense the sacred core the last little bit it needed to become smaller than a golf ball.

If I let myself get distracted for even a second, the divine essence would just rebound, so I had to slowly and carefully condense it as evenly as possible.

I had been battling with it for a whole two hours by this point. Even the kids who had been watching me out of curiosity at the start had eventually grown bored and left. I was feeling a little lonely, honestly...

“Do your best, my liege!”

“Don’t lose focus!”

Feeling sorry for me after I’d been abandoned by the children, Kohaku and Luli were cheerleading, while Sango, Kokuyou, and Kougyoku watched over me from the side.

And so, the battle in the courtyard continued for another two hours.

Noon had already passed, and I was two steps away from complete exhaustion, but I finally managed to bring the core to the size of a somewhat large marble.

“Now I just...need to...lock iiiiiiiiiiiiiit!”

As if I was scrambling a Rubik’s Cube so much that it was near impossible to solve with ease, I placed a lock around the sacred core that was so sturdy it would never open again. And with that, it was complete.

“I...did it...”

I fell face-first onto the ground.

I can’t move anymore... I don’t think I could even lift a finger...

“My liege, are you all right?”

“No ‘mnyot...”

I was so exhausted that my mouth was barely moving properly. I had never been this exhausted in my whole time of being in this world. I didn’t even have the energy left to use restorative magic. If an assassin approached me now, they’d get me easy.

You damn wicked devout... This is the perfect chance for you to kill me. If you let this pass, you'll never get a chance again. You had your one chance...! Wait, this isn't good. My thoughts are starting to go to weird places too...

Even if an assassin did come, the Heavenly Beasts would protect me. Though if we didn't have that mana tank up on Babylon, they'd no doubt have all dematerialized by now.

I stared at the core lying on the ground beside me. It was a crystalline sphere letting off a platinum haze of divinity. It was definitely a complete sacred core.

"I finally finished you…" I murmured.

*I'd better get it in **[Storage]** before I lose it…*Though even if I did accidentally lose it, it would be easy enough to recall it to myself.

I managed to open a marble-sized **[Storage]** and drop it in.

I'm seriously at my limit here...

Kohaku and the others watched over me as I finally gave in to the comfortable exhaustion and lost consciousness.

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"Hmm... For your first time, it is made quite well. It will serve its job as a sacred core perfectly fine."

Oh, nice. If I've gotten the seal of approval from Kraft, then there's no doubt about it. Finally, no more of that horrible grueling process.

I had gone to see Kraft in Mismede after I finished creating the sacred core to receive his appraisal.

"Have you decided on a vessel for it?"

"About that... Is it possible for me to make a sacred treasure that can change shape however the wielder likes, kinda like Sousuke's?"

"Sousuke? Ahhh, the god of music. There are two types of sacred treasure that can change form: the first is the type that reads its user's thoughts and changes form accordingly—that is what Everchanging Wonder is doing—and the other is the type that has various forms determined from the start which it

can morph between. Both have their own merits and demerits."

The issue with the type that could change shape at will was that it required the user to be able to imagine the desired form in detail. It meant you had to understand the exact shape of what you wanted and be able to mentally reconstruct it at will—in Sousuke's case, he had to completely and thoroughly understand the structure of his instruments. For example, if he wanted a piano, he had to comprehend the inner structure of the hammers.

Isn't that practically impossible? Maybe it's just a bit more complicated in Sousuke's case because it's an instrument he's forming.

I thought that simple weapons like swords, spears, or axes wouldn't need that complicated of an image, but apparently, you had to fully envision the weight and durability as well. That would be such a pain...

The natural merit of that type was that it could change into anything you wanted, including anything that you made up with your imagination. But of course, even that came with the demerit that the image had to be perfectly thought out. It also took special adjustments made in the forging process, so it was difficult to craft.

And then, there was the type that involved swapping between predetermined forms. The merits here were that the time taken to have it change shape was much shorter, it put less burden on the user, and creating it was simple. The main demerit was, as you would expect, it could only morph into the forms already decided for it, and you couldn't make any additional changes after completion.

"Hearing that, the switch type might be best…"

Reducing the burden on both the user and the crafter sounded ideal. I was still a beginner at this sort of thing, after all, so I'd rather avoid trying to get too ambitious.

"I can assure you the chances of failure are much decreased with the switch type. The small adjustments required for the freely-morphing type aren't something a beginner can deal with easily, both for the crafter and the user."

"Oh, right, is it possible to expand these weapons? The wicked vessels were

able to.”

“Expand them? Ohhh, I understand. That would be the Optimization feature that allows the sacred treasure to automatically change size to fit its wielder’s stature. That has nothing to do with the sacred core, so it should be comparatively easier to add on later.”

I see. So it wasn’t a feature tied to the sacred core, but to the materials used for the vessel. The wicked vessels did have a lot of extra abilities like being able to call down lightning too.

“As for any other special effects to be added to the weapon, you wanted Divinity Neutralization, right?”

“Yes, if you can do that.”

Divinity Neutralization was, as the name implied, an ability that could disable the power of an enemy’s divinity. That meant it would be possible to seal off any abilities that stemmed from that, including the diver dude’s teleportation. The only issue was that we would need somehow to get him in range to have it affect him in the first place.

“However...when you think about it, it is rather strange.”

“What is?”

“These wicked devout have their own sacred treasures, and multiple of them at that. Just where are they coming from?”

“Huh? Uhhh...from the wicked god, no? Only gods can make them, after all.”

Why was he asking this question now? Yura gave birth to the wicked god, was then taken over by the wicked god, became the NEET god, and what was left was the wicked vessels, right?

“Let us not forget that you are a ward of God Almighty. And yet, despite that, it took you many months just to create your own sacred treasure. Are you telling me that a simple former servile god could make so many in such a short time?”

“You’ve got a point there...”

The weapons that the wicked devout had *were* sacred treasures, I think. Or

maybe they weren't? Were they just imitations? But they were definitely coated in divinity.

"Maybe he...made a bunch of them over time when he was still a servile god?"

"Would someone putting in that much effort fall into depravity in such a way?"

Probably not. He was the type of guy to blame any issues on those around him, despite not putting in the effort himself, and then he'd pretend as if he wasn't showing his full power yet. There was no way someone like that had slowly been chipping away at making sacred treasures.

"But then, where did the wicked vessels come from?"

"Did they revamp an already-existing sacred treasure? Or perhaps...they aren't sacred treasures at all?"

So they *were* just fakes? The wicked god wasn't considered a proper god to begin with, so could we really call these sacred treasures?

"There are cases of the wicked god creating weapons cloaked in divinity, such as with the wicked blade, but those were one or two, not multiple."

We had seen at least five wicked vessels by this point: the brown meat cleaver and purple spear that Yakumo and Frei had destroyed, the diver guy's blue hand axe, the plague mask man's red rapier, and the orange mace belonging to the masked woman that Yakumo had encountered. That *was* quite a lot.

"Could it be...?" Kraft mumbled before falling into thought for a moment. Then, he shook his head and looked back at me. "Well, nothing to be gained by continuing this line of thought. Let us return to your sacred treasure. How many forms would you like it to be able to morph into, excluding the expanded form?"

"Oof, that's a tough one to think up on the spot."

"Usually, these kinds of weapons are made so that anyone can use them or so that you can respond to any situation on the fly, but have you already decided

who you would like to wield it?”

Who did I want to have wield it? Me and the girls were out, so it fell to our kids, loathe as I was to admit.

Yakumo was the oldest, so maybe her? Could style it like a katana. Or no, maybe it should be the eldest son? As Brunhild’s successor, Kuon wielding it would make sense. But then, what weapon would he want? Maybe a sword? He did use Silver right now. Though if we went by natural combat sense, Linne was also a candidate for it, so maybe gauntlets. Ugh, but then Frei would definitely complain about not getting to use it. And honestly, so would the other kids.

“Mmmnnngh...”

Trying to decide this was tough... The only reason I thought about making it a sacred treasure that could change shape in the first place was because I saw the wicked devout have their weapons grow in size to fit their Kyklops. If we couldn’t counter with a weapon of similar size, then we’d be in trouble. But if what Kraft said was true, we could just apply that ability afterward.

In that sense, I technically didn’t even need to make a weapon that could morph. *Technically.* But if I made a sacred treasure that suited only one of the kids, they’d definitely get into a fight about it.

Okay, no, the best course of action here was to make a sacred treasure that could morph into weapons that suited all of them. It would give us a lot more flexibility if everyone could use it, and it meant no one was left out.

That *did* mean it would need to switch into nine forms, though, which was a *lot.*

“A weapon that can morph into nine different forms, eh? Sounds good to me. But we’ll need to make the preparations for it. I would recommend you use a divinistone.”

Kraft produced a pure white stone out of nowhere that was about the size of a pickling stone. Divinistone was a special ore that had also been used to make our wedding rings. You could make it hold special properties depending on the divinity it was infused with.

In fact, I was pretty sure Kraft had been the one to design our rings in the first

place.

I took the divinistone that Kraft had materialized and began feeding it my divinity. It gradually changed from a pure white to a platinum sheen.

.....

...Uhhh, how long was I meant to keep infusing it?

I've been at this for a while now. Am I done yet?

"Preferably until you hit your limit. That will allow the stone to become accustomed to your divinity and become much stronger. This isn't something you can change after, you see."

...You've gotta be kidding.

The act of infusing it with my divinity wasn't difficult in and of itself, but putting it in until I hit my limit? Making the sacred core had been tough enough, and no one told me that making the vessel was going to be just as bad.

Suddenly, I understood why the other gods hated making sacred treasures. Just making one for yourself was plenty…

A few hours later, I had infused almost all of my divinity into the divinistone and was one step away from keeling over. Kraft was standing beside me, looking satisfied with the result.

"Wonderful. This will be perfect. What would you like to do about the actual weapon base? I'm perfectly fine with designing it, or you can do it yourself."

Usually, asking the literal god of crafting would be best, but this was something I would be bestowing to my kids, so I wanted to see it all through to the end. Even if the design sucked, so long as it did its job, that would be fine, right...?

It was well and good that I wanted to do something for my children, but I was absolutely exhausted after completing the divinistone, so I wouldn't be able to do anything about it right now.

Yeah, we'll deal with it tomorrow.

And then, Kraft swooped in and dropped the horrific news:

“I should’ve mentioned this earlier, but you’ll need to make a sacred core for every form you want the weapon to take, so you’ll need to make eight more.”

“.....Excusez-moi?”

Is this god completely off his rocker?

Did he even realize just how much effort it took me to make *one* sacred core? And now he wanted me to make *eight more*?! Did I look like I had a death wish?!

Give me strength...

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“I...I finished the...bloody cores, mate.”

Why my accent suddenly changed to a place I hadn’t been, I could not tell you, but regardless, I collapsed on the spot after saying that.

I had been fooled by Kraft’s belief (which held absolutely no basis, by the by) that having done it once meant the next time would be easier, but by the time I was done, I really did feel as if my soul had been sucked out of my body.

One whole week. For one whole week, I was confined in Kraft’s house, made to do nothing but create sacred cores. I think I was actually quite amazing for making eight whole cores in only seven days!

For all my complaining, it wasn’t as if what he had said *hadn’t* been true, since I did manage to make the rest of the cores without even failing once. Was this what they called a breakthrough?

But even if they were easier to make, it didn’t change the fact that I was still utterly exhausted by the end.

Honestly, knowing where the end goal was had made the journey there just seem even longer. I was exhausted before I even started.

What I’m saying makes no sense? Yeah, I agree.

Anyway, I was pooped. I was ready to sleep for three whole days straight. Kraft said the switch type was supposed to be easier to forge than the freely-morphing one, but you literally only had to make one core for the freely-

morphing variant! That would have been way easier…

“Usually, when people make the switch type, they limit it to two or three forms. When you start reaching numbers as high as nine, then yes, the other type would probably be easier. But that’s only if the wielder is a god. If you’re giving it to a human to wield, then this is just the better option,” Kraft explained while evaluating the cores I had just made.

The kids were only *demi*gods, which meant that half of them was human. If I considered how the increased burden put on me lowered the burden placed on them, it made my struggle a little easier to swallow. And besides, it wasn’t as if sacred treasures were ordinarily something to be made this fast. Keeping that in mind, the switch type was much less difficult overall if you were taking your time with it.

“Honestly, would it not have been easier for me to make nine separate sacred treasures instead?”

“I can’t exactly approve of making so many, no. It would bring chaos to the surface world, and the one who would have to manage them is you. Sacred treasures are generally unbreakable, which means that responsibility would follow you around for time immemorial. I do think you should do what you can to lower the possible risk.”

I couldn’t argue with that. One wrong move and I’d have created a breeding ground for a new wicked god. That danger only increased the more sacred treasures there existed in the world.

Yeah, you know what, maybe just one sacred treasure is good.

“Though, if you store them in the Pantheon’s treasury, then there’s no fear of them being stolen.”

“Doesn’t it take thousands of years to find something in there once you throw it in? I thought it was basically the gods’ junkyard.”

“No need to fret the details.”

Is that really something to wave off? Is there no god who can manage it? I feel like it would benefit you guys a ton if you could pull out a sacred treasure that does what you need when you need it.

I was afraid I would end up being the one forced to do that if I said anything, though, so I chose to remain silent. Like hell I was going to waste tens and thousands of years sorting that mess out.

“With the sacred cores complete, all that’s left is finishing off the vessels. Have you decided what exactly you want to make?”

“Pretty much. Though there’s still one I’m a little unsure of.”

A katana for Yakumo, gauntlets for Linne, a staff for Elna, a dagger for Arcia, and a gun for Quun. That was easy enough. But that then left Kuon, Frei, Yoshino, and Steph.

Kuon and Frei were all-rounders, so they could likely handle anything. Steph could use **[Prison]** and did a lot of very aggressive tackles, so a shield that would let her do a shield tackle sounded good.

The issue was Yoshino. What exactly was her weapon of choice?

She wasn’t really a fighter, more of a supporter. I guess her signature weapon was...an instrument? Maybe a guitar to bash into enemies? Wait, no, that was not how you’re meant to use a guitar. Yoshino would be sad if she had to mistreat an instrument like that.

Though I did see something like a guitar axe in the past. As it sounded, it was just a guitar and an axe joined together. Maybe that would be good.

At the end of the day, it wasn’t as if the children were only allowed to use their signature weapon. They could fight with a spear, or they could fight with a gun, whatever they felt like at the time. I just selfishly wanted to make sure they each had a weapon that suited them best. They were welcome to choose whatever weapon they needed at the time.

“Alrighty, how about we start getting this divinistone changed into those weapons, then, hm?” Kraft smiled.

“Oh, yeah, okay...”

I felt only despair as I considered how much longer this was going to take.

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“So that is what you ultimately decided on for Yoshino’s weapon, is it?”

Yae was looking at the completed sacred treasure being held in Yoshino's hands when I had met them in the castle's courtyard.

Put simply, the weapon I had given Yoshino was a bow. Of course, it was not just any old regular bow. Bows would usually have only one string, but this one had multiple. It was both a bow and a harp, a harpbow, if you would.

Yoshino pulled back one of the many strings, assumed a firing stance, and in that moment, a light arrow formed between her fingers.

She aimed it up to the blue sky and fired, the arrow soaring away into the distance.

It was a divine arrow. If that struck one of the wicked devout, there was no way they would get out unscathed. Though Yoshino had never wielded a bow before, so I was worried about her accuracy.

Maybe I should have Karina teach her?



This time, Yoshino plucked one of the strings and a clear sound echoed

around us.

Growing adjusted to the weapon, she began playing a tune on it.

Hang on, is this what I think it is?

It was the prelude for another RPG that rivaled the RPG of which she had conducted the overture for at the concert the other day.

Had future me done nothing but made her listen to game music?

A beautiful melody as fantastical and final as the game's title suggested floated through the courtyard of the castle.

"She is most certainly treating this as an instrument first, weapon second," Kuon muttered in slight exasperation.

"It still has an effect even as an instrument, so there's no real issue there," I replied.

To show him what I meant, I sliced my finger a little with a knife. The wound immediately sealed itself, leaving only a streak of red. It was a restorative effect.

This wasn't due to any special ability of the sacred treasure, so I could only assume it was Yoshino's performance magic amplified by the weapon. It was an unexpected side effect, but not a bad one.

Annoyed by Yoshino's continuous harp playing, Linne barged her way forward.

"It's not fair that Yoshino gets to hog it! Let me try it too!"

"Aww, I'm having such a good time, though."

Though Yoshino complained, she did let go of the harpbow.

At that moment, the weapon immediately changed into a metal sphere cloaked in platinum light that was about the size of a baseball. It was the true appearance of the sacred treasure I had forged.

Yoshino took the sphere and lightly tossed it over to Linne. Rather than landing in her hand, the sphere began circling Linne like a satellite.

This was the defensive mode of the sacred treasure. It would shoot down

projectiles like arrows or bullets and protect its wielder. In a way, it was very similar to my Reginleif's gear.

"All right, sacred treasure equip!"

Linne made a dramatic show of crossing her arms in front of her chest, and then the platinum sphere separated into various threads that wrapped around them.

The sacred treasure instantly morphed into sturdy gauntlets that went from her fingertips to her elbows.

"Dad, gimme something I can break!"

"Of course that's how you'd want to test it, you little rascal..."

Did I really have to find something specifically for her to break? Did I even have anything like that stored?

It was a pain to think too hard, so I took out a piece of an Upper Construct that was about the size of a kei car from **[Storage]** and plopped it in the middle of the garden.

I enhanced its durability to about that of a Frame Gear's body with some of my magic. Then, to ensure no shards would fly off somewhere it shouldn't, I also erected a **[Prison]** around the area. I didn't think anything like that would happen, but better safe than sorry.

"Let's do this! **[Gravity]!**"

When Linne's signature smash hit the body part, the enhanced gauntlets shattered the piece of Phrase with tremendous force. With a clear, crisp sound, the tiny fragments of Phrase scattered in an instant.

*Holy shit, she completely shattered it... It's a good thing I put up the **[Prison].***

The sacred treasure itself had no enhancements that increased the strength of the wielder, so it must have been related to the divinistone. It was a divine ore that many gods used in the creation of sacred treasures, so it wouldn't be so strange for it to have a divinity-enhancing effect, but it still caught me by surprise.

Linne was only a demigod and she still had that much strength. It seemed like

it might be a good idea to make a specialized sacred treasure for myself one day. Not that I would be allowed to use it on the surface world, but still.

“That was insane! Dad, one more!”

“That’s not fair, Linne! I wanna give it a try too!” Steph whined just as Linne had a moment before.

Though often marching to the beat of her own drum, Linne was clearly weak to her younger sister’s requests, so she handed the weapon over to Steph without complaint.

“Saycrid treasure aquip!”

Steph grabbed the treasure once it returned to the sphere, held it out, and this time, it turned into a large shield that was about the same size as her. It was a platinum-colored shield with the crest of a war maiden engraved in it. The divinistone would allow the weight to adjust in accordance with the wielder, so it shouldn’t have been too hard for her to hold.

Although it was a large shield, it was like a mini version of one, since it was adjusted to fit Steph. It was quite cute, honestly.

“Daddy! Bring out the same thing you did with Linne!”

“Again?” I sighed. But regardless, I took out another piece of a Phrase from **[Storage]** once more.

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“Seems there’s no issue with its abilities at least.”

After giving a rough test of all the weapons, it seemed that there were no fatal issues. Divinity Neutralization appeared to be working as intended as well, given none of us could use divine power when anywhere near the sacred treasure. I tried using a divinity-enhanced **[Search]** to see, and I could say for certain it didn’t activate.

According to Kraft, neutralizing divinity was a fairly common ability to put on a sacred treasure. In common magic terms, it was similar to **[Silence].** Interfering with your opponent was a normal strategy to want to take.

The part that caught me by surprise was that the range of Divinity

Neutralization was different depending on the form the treasure was in: close-range weapons had a much smaller range than long-range weapons.

When taking the form of a melee weapon such as the katana, sword, or dagger, it could only neutralize divinity in a five-meter radius, whereas weapons like the gun or harpbow could neutralize in a *fifty*-meter radius. However, the more the range expanded, the more the effect would diminish toward the edges. That meant if we wanted to completely seal the enemy's divinity, we would need to fight them up close and personal.

The other issue was that when Divinity Neutralization was activated, our own divinity was also neutralized.

Since the kids were demigods, they'd unconsciously been using a small steady stream of divine power since they were born. That was what resulted in their inhuman strength. So while Divinity Neutralization was active, their physical capabilities would also lower somewhat. Naturally, that meant the same for the other side too, though.

At the very least, the ability was something you had to trigger, so as long as they didn't use it willy-nilly, it wouldn't become too much of an issue. But considering there were times they could be caught by surprise, I'd feel a lot safer if they generally always had it turned off.

Frei and Elna could use **[Power Rise]** and **[Boost]** respectively, so their strength wasn't *too* affected, but Elna wasn't really the type to be at the frontline anyway, so I couldn't say it meant much. Maybe it would be best to have Yakumo, Frei, or Kuon defeat the diver guy, and then take down the other wicked devout individually after losing their means of escape.

Still...it would be quite the blitzkrieg to infiltrate the Ark, find the diver helmet guy, and then defeat him with the sacred treasure as soon as physically possible. It would be fine if he was by himself, but if he wasn't, it may actually be much more dangerous for us to just charge in.

Anyway, I should check with Doc Babylon to see what the Ark is doing first.

With that decided, I opened a **[Gate]** to Babylon.

When I entered Babylon's laboratory, Doc Babylon was staring at the wall

monitor with a frown on her face as usual.

“Any progress?”

“Maybe not progress, but...just look at this.”

Doc Babylon used a small remote control to swap screens.

Huh...? Is the Ark moving?

The Ark was currently located in the southwest waters of the continent where Isengard used to be. It was hiding in the depths of a trench, but now it appeared to slowly be moving.

“Is it heading for Isengard?”

“Sure looks like it. Do they intend to attack another port? Or...”

Isengard had been hit by a string of disasters, from the witch-king’s rampage, to the appearance of the wicked god, to the outbreak of goldflower pox, and it had resulted in the land becoming fairly desolate.

Regardless, many people still lived there. No new governments or countries had formed since its fall, but there were a lot of small city-states dotted about, and for those city-states, it was much easier to develop coastal cities than ones in the middle of the region.

As Isengard had been an industrial nation, there were many skilled craftsmen, allowing them to continue trade even after its destruction. They were blessed with neighboring nations such as Strain, Gardio, and Lassei, who were more than willing to engage with them.

Fortunately (?), the cataclysm had completely cut off any land routes into the country, preventing any direct invasions. Of course, Isengard was not all that appealing of a country to invade regardless due to its various unresolved issues. Goldflower pox was still rampant, bandits were roving the land, and there remained a refugee problem, so trade was the only reason for countries to interact with it.

However, the only part of the country benefiting from said trade was the northeast that actually faced those major powers; the coastal cities in the southwest were nowhere near as developed. If the Ark continued to head

straight for Isengard, there was a chance that was their goal.

There thankfully were no major coastal cities in that area, but to the ones who were attacked, that meant nothing.

“Hm? It stopped. What are they doing?”

Doc Babylon tapped the screen, swapping cameras yet again.

The night vision probes that we had deployed were displaying the Ark, but the dust clouds were so thick that we could barely see.

Are they digging a hole?

“I see now. They’re digging up underwater resources.”

“Oh, to help them produce more of their Kyklops?”

“Most likely.”

The Ark was like a submarine that came attached with a Babylon workshop. The idea of them managing to produce more fodder was far from reassuring, but we couldn’t do anything to interfere with them at the moment. If we interfered and they teleported away again, we would be back to square one.

“Hold on, if they’re mining here, does that not mean they have a way to gather whatever they’re excavating? Hm… Let’s take advantage of the dust cloud to make our approach. See if we can infiltrate it like this.”

“Huh? Are you sure that’ll work?”

“Just watch, yeah?”

Doc Babylon fiddled with the console, and one of the probes the size of a ping-pong ball approached the Ark.

It looked like the Ark would dig up the ground in front of it, sort out which ores had the desired components in the middle, and then discharge any sediment or unnecessary materials behind it.

Our probes were made of mithril, so it should be detected as something to retrieve, but was this really safe? What if it got dropped down into a blast furnace and completely melted?

“If that happens, they’ll just think they happened to find some mithril,

nothing more. Oh, hey, it actually got picked up."

After the screen shook at a sickening intensity, the probe was moved to an indeterminate location together with a bunch of crushed ore.

"Wasn't the Ark meant to be surrounded by a barrier? Can you use the probe inside there?"

"If I relay a signal to it from an external probe, we can connect to it through the magical energy in the air and sea. It's a fairly tenuous connection, but it'll stay connected while the Ark's digging at least. By the way, it's set to explode if the signal cuts off, so don't worry, we won't leave any evidence," Doc Babylon said before chuckling maniacally to herself.

Isn't that a bit extreme?

The probe was placed on a conveyor belt alongside the excavated ore. Doc Babylon took that opportunity to have the probe fly off and make its escape.

The interior of the Ark was dim enough that made it difficult to see. Though the probe did have a light attached, we didn't want to risk getting caught.

Currently, the probe was in what appeared to be a storeroom for all the ore. The whirring of the conveyor belt was the only sound we could hear. Several hatches along the wall seemed to lead somewhere, but such a small probe had no chance of opening them.

"Look, there seems to be an air vent. Let's head out through there."

The probe approached a vent near the top of the door, then used a laser to hollow out the cover and get itself inside.

"These kinds of air vents are generally connected to every room, but if we don't hurry, they'll finish excavating before we're done."

The probe floated soundlessly through the narrow corridor. The footage we were receiving from it made it feel like we were going through some dungeon. The size of the vent was little more than 20cm x 20cm, but the little sphere continued moving through the branching tunnel.

"There's some noise coming from that direction. Let's go that way."

When the probe turned the corner, noise suddenly interfered with the

footage for a moment as it dropped to the ground. However, it immediately picked itself back up and continued its advance.

“Mmm, seems like the signal’s gonna drop soon. I’d like to get some useful information before that happens, though... Oh?”

The area the probe was headed for was bright. On the right side of the ventilation pipe was a vent connected to another room.

Peeking through the slits of the cover, the footage showed a whole row of Kyklops lined up. The room somehow managed to look wider than the ship itself from the outside. Had they expanded this one space? It looked just like Babylon’s hangar.

“They didn’t hesitate to mass produce them, huh?”

“There are some frames we haven’t seen here before too... Are they a new type? That means we’re not the only ones making new developments,” Doc Babylon sighed despondently.

Could we not set up a bomb or something? It would save us a lot of hassle if we could deal with them all here. Or maybe we could even just let the probe self-destruct?

When I asked Doc Babylon about it, she said that the probe’s self-destruct mechanism was designed so it would disappear without leaving evidence. It was imploded using Space-time magic, so it was impossible to use it to actually blow up the surroundings.

Tch!

“Hm? What’s that?”

Doc Babylon changed the angle of the camera and leaned forward. I leaned forward together with her and immediately saw someone I recognized: it was the guy with the black coat and the plague mask. He was the wicked devout that had been present when they stole the Ark... Well, I guess the Ark wasn’t really ours to begin with, but that wasn’t important.

He seemed to be fiddling with the computer terminal on a desk by the wall. Next to it, a red crystal the size of a balance ball was affixed to a large funnel,

and beneath it was a large container filled with a murky red liquid.

I felt like I had seen that large crystal somewhere before. Was that not the artificial spellstone I had seen when I went to that one Felsen auction with Frei? Why was that here?

“Hm?”

Was I just imagining things, or did a bit of that liquid distort slightly? No, it wasn’t just my imagination. The liquid was doing this eerie undulating motion. The way it was rippling like some worm made the sight so much creepier.

“No way, is that a Gluttony Slime?” Doc Babylon murmured to herself.

“What’s that?” I asked. I had never heard of a Slime like that before.

“The Gluttony Slime was an artificial Slime developed during the ancient era. It takes in anything it finds, feeds on it, and endlessly grows. Originally, it was created to help dispose of dangerous waste, but its creators failed to control it, so it ended up going wild. It grew so ginormous it managed to swallow up the country whole. Apparently, the allied forces of the neighboring countries managed to seal it in a magic crystal and get rid of it, but...”

Then did that mean it was the Gluttony Slime that was inside of that artificial spellstone? What were they trying to do using something like that? I had a bad feeling about all of this.

“Oh, someone entered the room.”

I lifted my head and saw someone enter the hangar through a hatch in the wall.

The moment we saw who it was, we both froze.

“Wha—?!”

“How could this...be...?”

The one who entered the room was not a human, but a Gollem. One that looked exactly like someone we saw on the daily.

It looked just like Seraphic Gold, the gold crown. The Gollem that had Steph as its master was here, right now, in the Ark, *the enemy stronghold.* What was

going on here?

“Run search: Gold, the gold crown.”

“Searching… Search complete. One match found.”

When I ran the search, all that appeared was a pin in Brunhild Castle. The one in the Ark was blocked by the barrier, I imagined.

“Gold’s in the castle, so who’s that?”

“Is it just the same type of unit? I heard that Chrom Ranchesse only made one of each crown, but maybe there were two gold crowns.”

While they had the Ark in their possession, I had surmised that they would also have a crown, but I assumed it would have been a yet-undiscovered one, not one of the exact same type that we had.

Noticing the gold crown’s presence, the plague mask said something to it, but the air vent was too far away to clearly hear what he was saying.

“Is that plague mask guy the master of that gold crown?”

“I couldn’t tell you, honestly. Remember that Steph met Gold after he came falling out of the sky. If that was a rip in Space-time, then it’s possible they were both sent from the past.”

The black crown Noir and the white crown Albus both arrived in Belfast after crossing time from a thousand years in the past due to Chrom Ranchesse’s rampage. The possibility existed that both of the gold crowns ended up arriving here in the same manner due to a timequake.

“Huh? What’s going on with the Slime?”

The red Gluttony Slime began undulating much more violently inside the container. As if to mock how intently we were staring at the screen, noise suddenly interfered with our view as we were trying to discern what was happening before it completely cut off.

“Oh, for—! We’re out of time!”

When Doc Babylon pulled up the footage from a different probe, the Ark had finished excavating and was already moving to another location. The probe that

had been used to infiltrate had likely self-destructed and turned into dust.

“Well, it’s not like we learned nothing. We saw the new Kyklops, the Gluttony Slime, and the other gold crown. All of them seem like a pain in the ass to deal with, though.”

You can say that again.

Just what did they intend to use that Slime for? It was a terrifying Slime that had once destroyed a whole country. We really needed to think of a good counter-strategy for it. My wives didn’t particularly like Slimes, either, so I’d probably need to come up with a plan for that, too...

Chapter IV: The Sovereign Phrase

“It is unknown whether there was a Gollem made with the same model as myself. Therefore, I cannot answer.”

I found Gold in the castle together with Steph and asked him about the other gold crown we saw, but he knew nothing.

“Well, Gold *did* have his memories erased when he was rebooted, so I expected this,” Doc Babylon said, taking in the reality of the situation without looking even the slightest bit dejected.

Gollems, especially legacy Gollems, had the option to clear their data when rebooted. That meant all of their built-up knowledge and records would be deleted, so under normal circumstances, no one would choose that option. If you got rid of all of that, you’d have to start from scratch—their fighting capabilities, interpersonal skills, and any learned knowledge would be completely discarded.

If a Gollem was in sleep mode for too long, it would forcibly reset its data, but if it still had any records remaining in it, there was no reason not to keep them.

Gold was in sleep mode when he ended up crossing to our time, and he still retained his data at the time, but apparently, Steph ended up deleting it all when she activated him. That meant valuable information from five thousand years ago had disappeared just like that. He still retained fundamental knowledge, such as his own specs, but that was why he didn’t know about any other gold crown possibly existing.

“What about you, Silver? Do you know anything?” Kuon asked the silver crown resting in his hands where he sat on the couch next to Steph.

“Nah, never heard nothin’. Ya gotta remember that Chrom’s one of those guys who just loses interest in the stuff he makes the second he finishes. He ain’t the kinda guy to make the same thing twice. Uh, though if he made two of ’em as one project, that’d maybe be a bit different.”

So the gold crown could be a twin unit? Or one was a copy and the other was

the actual crown? I had no clue. What we *did* know was that the wicked devout also had a Gollem that resembled the gold crown for some reason. And it was most likely one that had not lost its data, which meant the chance existed that it had knowledge of Chrom Ranchesse. I could only hope that it didn't bite us in the butt later.

That said, Silver was also a crown Gollem that hadn't had his data cleared. In his case, though, he was kept confined in Ranchesse's laboratory for most of his life, so he had little information to provide. Besides, he was an Artificer, so he wouldn't have had a conscience at the time of his creation, which meant his memories were all hazy.

Regardless, there was something he still remembered: Ranchesse had been researching how to use the black and white crown skills without paying the price, and so, he had created the gold and silver crowns as support.

"I'm just throwin' out a random guess here, but I'd assume that I came about through research into the sproutin' of an ego upon the fusion of a Gollem and an Artificer."

"You *do* come across as more human than the other crowns."

"Right? I'm actually pretty darn incredible if ya ask me."

Even if Silver's personality was nothing more than a pseudo-personality, it was amazing. Among even anthropomorphic Gollems, very few had advanced to his extent. It was proof of how high his capability to learn was.

"Well, I've already created artificial lifeforms that are capable of far more than that. Cesca, more tea."

"I quite like this immature side of you, Doctor. Nice to meet you, I'm a much more capable artificial life."

"Gngh!"

Clearly showing off her superiority, Cesca poured tea into her master's empty cup.

You guys are so immature.

Still, she wasn't lying. The Babylon Numbers (including Doc Babylon's body)

were much more advanced artificial lifeforms. They didn't have any special abilities like the Gollem Skills, but their ability to learn was far more advanced than a regular human.

"I guess this leaves us with no clue as to what that Gollem on the Ark is, though."

The natural conclusion was that it was the same type of unit. Like maybe one was a failed attempt, and the other was a success? But if we kept raising baseless suggestions like this, there would be no end in sight.

"Next is deciding how to deal with that Gluttony Slime. Any ideas?"

"Wouldn't it up and die if we used your **[Prison]** to confine it, then teleport it into a volcano?"

"But I thought there were Slimes that could survive in volcanic areas."

Like Red Slimes and Flame Slimes and I think there were Magma Slimes as well? Ones that lived in, well, magma. Wouldn't it be impossible if it had similar properties to them?

"Theeen, what about just throwing it into a **[Prison]** and then making it smaller 'til it's smooshed?"

It *was* the simplest option. **[Prison]** could shrink together with what was inside, ultimately compressing and crushing the contents.

If it was a Slime, then it had to have a core, so all I had to do was crush that and the deed would be done.

"So are we going to infiltrate the Ark directly after all?"

"If we don't do something about the diver guy, there's a good chance they'll just make their escape, so the first thing we need to do is seal his sacred treasure with ours."

My sacred treasure's range of effect was about fifty meters at most. There was no way that could cover the whole of the Ark, which left us with no choice but to infiltrate it and get as close to the diver guy as possible.

"So we *are* sneaking in?"

“Yeah, we pretty much have to...”

How would we infiltrate the place, though? It would practically be a death sentence if we tried to enter it the same way the probe did. Best case scenario would be to have the diver helmet guy just wander on out without us needing to do anything, but that obviously wasn’t going to happen.

If I used a divinity-enhanced warp to cross the barrier into the Ark, would that be safe? It wasn’t as though I was directly interfering with the surface world, right?

“Regardless, we still need time to work on the Valkyries and your Reginleif. Let’s just continue observing the Ark for now.”

True. May as well put this aside until they’re done. Just need to make sure we don’t end up too relaxed. If they make any moves, we need to be available to intervene right away.

Suddenly my phone started ringing.

Hm? From King Frost? This is rare.

“Hello?”

“Greetings, Your Grace. There has been another sighting of the Phrase-like creature we previously discussed.”

“Huh?”

Was he referring to that big ice snail? But I thought we had concluded that it was just a Cold Snail.

“I have heard that it was in the form of a horse this time. But rather than having a clear body like ice, it was slightly purple.”

“A...purple Phrase?”

What could that be about? If it was gold, I could understand that, since the Mutated Constructs were the same. But with the wicked god gone, all the mutants should’ve turned gray with a few special exceptions. And yet, this wasn’t gold or transparent or gray, but purple? Was this really a Phrase?

According to King Frost, the witness was a local from the village near where

the apparent Cold Snail had been sighted. They had seen a purple horse fighting with a Four-Armed Bear. It defeated the bear by running it through with a sharp blade that jutted out from its head, before then leaving the area without even sparing the body a second glance.

A blade coming from its head does *sound like a Phrase...*

"Run search: purple Phrase."

"Searching... No matches detected."

Okay, so that was what I expected, which meant it wasn't a Phrase. But it should've reacted if it at least *looked* like a Phrase.

The only other thing I could think of was that it had an ability or natural trait that prevented it from being picked up by search magic, similar to an amulet. *Or* it could be that the area was surrounded by some sort of barrier. Honestly, this sounded less and less like a Phrase the more we discovered, but something still felt off.

"Has a Phrase appeared?" Kuon asked after I put down the phone.

"Can't say for sure. I'm gonna head off to Zadonia to check myself."

"In that case, may I accompany you? I would like to witness these Phrase myself."

Well, that was a surprise, coming from Kuon.

...Right, the Phrase were already annihilated by the time the kids were born, so they wouldn't have seen them before. Was he not content with the Dominant Construct girls he saw all the time, though?

I didn't have any particular reason to say no, regardless.

"It's unfair if it's just you! I wanna go too!"

Perhaps thinking Kuon was simply going off to play, Steph started throwing a tantrum.

"No, you cannot," Kuon refused.

"But whyyyyyy?!"

"You promised to study with Mother Sue after this, did you not? Breaking a

promise is a very, very...?”

“Bad thing... I know,” Steph mumbled, scrunching up her face.

Wow, look at Kuon being the perfect big brother here.

I was quite touched at the sight, honestly.

“I will at least take pictures while I am there. Be a good girl while I’m gone, okay?”

“Okay...”

Kuon smiled softly as he gently patted his pouting sister’s head.

I couldn’t help but feel just the tiniest bit jealous of Kuon in that moment.

I had a little sister back home too. It was a different world, so I couldn’t just go and meet her whenever I wanted, but I hoped she was doing well.

Sorry your older brother is so useless, Fuyuka.

Would there come a day that I could let my family meet my kids? I could go to Earth at will if I just managed to perfect the usage of the dimension warp, but right now, all I could manage was any neighboring worlds at best. Apparently, it would get easier to control if I made a sacred treasure to help with it...but for now, all I could do was keep trying my best.

“Shall we be off, Father?”

“...Yeah.”

Kuon tied Silver around his waist, then walked toward me.

Thoughts of family back home still clouding my mind, I opened a **[Gate]** to Zadonia.

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“Whoa, it’s cold...!”

That was Kuon’s first words after stepping through the **[Gate].**

Yeah, no wonder when you’re wearing clothes as thin as that.

I was wearing a cold-resistant coat, so I was perfectly fine.

...No, that was a lie, it was freezing.

“Come forth, Heat! Thermal Barrier: [Warming]!”

I used warming magic on both myself and Kuon, since at least that way we could protect our bodies from the cold.

I had the **[Gate]** connect to the forest where the purple horse had been sighted. The sky was filled with dull clouds, but no snow was falling.

*Now then, how do I search for a creature that can’t be picked up by **[Search]?***

“If it is impossible to find any results for a purple horse, what about any hoofprints left behind?” Kuon suggested, looking at his own footprints from where he’d come.

Not a bad idea, but the issue then came from whether or not I was able to distinguish a horse’s hoofprints from a deer’s. There was no guarantee the Phrase even left hoofprints like a horse’s.

“Maybe if I looked for any unnatural animal carcasses?”

“A word, if I may. Would a fresh carcass in a forest such as this not immediately be swiped up by a wolf or some other predator?”

Mngh, he’s not wrong.

Snowy mountains didn’t have much in the way of prey, and Zadonia was in a perpetual winter. It must be challenging to live in an environment like this. Any available prey would be immediately snatched up.

“And besides, there’s a bit more of a pressin’ question here: why was that purple horse fightin’ with the little bear fella in the first place? He didn’t eat it after or nothin’.”

According to His Majesty, the horse simply left the bear alone after it had killed it, which meant it hadn’t hunted it as prey. If a wild lion wasn’t hungry, it would simply let its prey stroll on by.

That meant the purple horse fought with the bear even though it wasn’t hungry. If it was a Phrase, then it couldn’t even feel hunger, so it made sense it didn’t eat it, but that thought didn’t make the situation any less puzzling.

The objective of the Phrase was to find the Sovereign Core that was hidden inside a mortal of this land, so they wouldn't eat people, but they *would* attack them.

"Basically, what I'm tryna say here is that there had to be some reason for that horsie to attack our little bear friend. Some sorta reason that it found the bear a nuisance and would rather it be gone."

A reason to want to remove the bear, as in, it was viewing the bear as a threat? But why? I couldn't imagine it was something like the bear had killed its parents. Or well, maybe the possibility was there. But did it even have feelings like that?

"That would mean it was protecting something from bears and other wild animals. Maybe a child...?"

Oh, of course!

I had a light bulb above my head the moment I heard Kuon's suggestion, but the light bulb soon turned into a question mark.

Oh, of course...?

I tilted my head.

A Phrase child? But Phrase didn't have an adolescent phase, they evolved as crystals from the core and then were instantly born as an adult. Even Dominant Constructs were born the same way. The only exception to that had been Allis.

"Well, whatever it is, what if our big ol' horsie's actually huntin' a number of these beasts? Maybe there's an area where there are reduced numbers of 'em."

"Oh, yeah! Hey, you're actually pretty smart!"

"Ha ha ha! Ya flatter me!" Silver guffawed from Kuon's belt, morphing Kuon's face into one of irritation.

"Run search: monsters and wild animals in the area."

"Searching... Search complete."

Red pins dotted themselves all over the map.

Damn, there's quite a lot, huh?

The pins were pretty scattered, but there was one area in particular that was left blank. Could that be the place?

"That's pretty close to here. Let's go. **[Teleport].**"

I wrapped my arms around Kuon's shoulders and teleported to the area. The scenery around us immediately changed, planting us in a dense coniferous forest.

"Well, I certainly don't see any monsters or wild animals around here."

Though it did feel like a bear could jump out at any moment.

Suddenly, I heard the sound of something whizzing through the air, so I instinctively pulled out my Brunhild to counter it. With a high-pitched clang, it deflected off my weapon and hovered in the air in front of me. It was something purple and translucent, shaped like a belt with a sharp tip.

There was another whoosh as the band returned to where it had come from: an amethyst horse with six legs. As much as I referred to it as a horse, it had no eyes, mouth, or ears. It did at least have something resembling a tail, however.

"There it is."

"Indeed."

It was purple as the sighting suggested, but it still definitely looked like a Phrase. I could see a dark purple core around the base of its neck, but something about the core seemed...strange. It looked like some spiky polyhedron.

The amethyst Phrase kicked the ground with its legs that thinned as they neared the feet, then charged right at us. Protruding from its forehead was the same blade that had extended and then contracted like a measuring tape.

"**[Apport].**"

I cast **[Apport]** to attempt to quickly extract the Amethyst Phrase's core. However, nothing came back to me other than thin air.

Magic didn't work against the Phrase. Or more specifically, if magic struck the

surface of its body, it would absorb it and turn it into its own energy. It essentially worked the same as **[Absorb].** What that did mean was that anything that could interfere with its insides, such as **[Apport],** should theoretically work...

And then it occurred to me. **[Apport]** couldn't forcibly remove that which it was directly connected to. Or, well, it wasn't that it *couldn't*, but it had to be something that I could feasibly pull off with my hands. Bit of a gruesome example, but it meant that I couldn't pull out something like someone's liver or heart by itself. I could maybe manage an eyeball, but...I couldn't say it was something I particularly wanted to try. I could also pull out bullets or arrows that had entered the body.

A Phrase's core wasn't fused with its crystalline body. If you destroyed the body, the core would just come tumbling out. However, perhaps this Amethyst Phrase was different, and its core was integrated with its body crystals.

Continuing to deflect its sword horn that it kept firing out, I changed Brunhild to Gun Mode and aimed it at the core to see what would happen. But before I had the chance to shoot, cracks suddenly appeared in its core and the horse's body shattered into pieces.

The sudden development left me dazed, mouth wide open.

H-Huh? Why?

When I turned around, I noticed that one of Kuon's eyes was a red-gold.

Ohhh, he broke the core with the Mystic Eye of Compression!

The fact that actually worked almost felt unfair... There was a limit to its strength, so it may not be possible against anything greater than a Lesser Construct, but being able to break it just by glaring was an incredible power...

"Whew, look at you go, kiddo. Showin' up yer dad there. He was strugglin' and you just beat the thing in one go."

"Hey, I wasn't struggling..."

I was just...observing the situation a little.

I walked over to where the Amethyst Phrase was in pieces while muttering

my excuses and picked up one of the shards.

Hm, it just looks like a regular piece of amethyst.

It was shimmering just like a gemstone. Could this become phrasium, too? Doc Babylon and Quun would have a field day with it.

I put all the pieces including the shattered core into **[Storage],** realizing we'd probably understand it better with research.

"Um, Father?"

"Hm? What's up?"

I turned around and couldn't help the gasp that slipped through my lips.

There were crystal beasts of all colors, red, blue, yellow, purple, green, and black, all marching toward us.

"Guess the group's here to crash the party."

"It appears so."

Time for me to show my son what I'm really capable of, I thought rather immaturely to myself as I prepared for battle.

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"Father, there are some on the ground over there, too."

"Got it."

I collected the scattered pieces of colored crystal on the snow and shoved them all into **[Storage].**

As ready as I had been to show off, Kuon practically turned it into a one-man massacre. I barely got the chance to do anything. Like, seriously, the kid could take them down by just glaring at them, how was I meant to beat that? I *did* manage to get at least two or three down by myself, though...

Because of that, there were crystals scattered all over the place. Collecting them all was a pain in the ass. Usually, I could just open up **[Storage]** on the ground and have them all drop in, but if I did that here, I'd get a massive chunk of snow in the process.

Thinking about it, are these crystals actually phrasium?

They honestly seemed closer to gemstones given their color.

I tried flowing magic through one of the shards and, right enough, it had the same effect as phrasium. It appeared worse in quality than a regular Phrase's phrasium, though. It hit max mana capacity pretty much right away, and it wasn't very durable either. It was like fake phrasium.

"Could these be the artificial Phrase that Melle mentioned Yula had been researching...?"

After collecting the shards of the Gemstone Phrase (as I decided to tentatively call them), we made our way through the snowy forest to the center of the monsterless area. Flying wasn't necessarily out of the question, but with the trees being as dense as they were, it would be hard to see between them, so searching on foot was the better option.

"Kuon, you doing all right? Make sure to let me know if you start getting too tired."

I turned back to look at Kuon, who had to march to make his way through the snow. I could use **[Levitation]** to carry him if it seemed he was struggling too much.

"Yes, I am fine. This isn't too bad. Oh, Father, wait a moment."

"Hm? Something happen?"

I heard a *crack* and turned to the side just in time to see something looking like a blue Gemstone Phrase crumbling to pieces. Kuon's eye was shining red-gold.

No, seriously, Kuon must be their worst nightmare by this point.

I made sure to collect the shards of that Phrase as well. It seemed to be sapphire. Was it ruby and sapphire that were meant to be counterparts? Suddenly, there was a rustling sound coming from deep within the forest. Sounded like another horde of them.

Holy shit, just how many of them are there?!

The Gemstone Phrase made their attack without an answer to my concern.

Before I could pull out my Brunhild to fight back, the Gemstone Phrase were shattered one after another by Kuon's Mystic Eye.

Make way for another one-man massacre...

We made our way through the forest, defeating the Gemstone Phrase along the way (most of the victories were won by Kuon, admittedly). Though the number of Phrase attacking us seemed to increase the further we went, all of a sudden, there stopped being more of them.

Did they just give up...? Yeah, no way.

"I've been having this weird ringing in my ears for a while now. I wonder what it is..."

"You too, Father?"

It appeared I wasn't alone in hearing that high-pitched ringing. Silver spoke up as we covered our ears.

"That ain't just any old ringin' in yer ears, I'm afraid. Somethin's lettin' off all kindsa funny sound waves ahead of us. Most of it's sounds that regular humans can't pick up, mind you."

Guess that confirmed we were on the right track, at least.

We proceeded with even more caution than before. The moment we made it out of the forest, we were greeted with a sight that left us speechless.

There was a massive crater in front of us that was about a hundred meters in diameter. It wasn't just a regular crater either: several large crystalline pillars were standing tall inside it like crystal clusters. The sight of all those colorful pillars was frighteningly beautiful.

Looking closer, I noticed that each of them had cores of the same color that were about the size of baseballs enclosed in them.

Is this what I think it is?!

"Father, over there."

Kuon was pointing at a yellow pillar that was shattered at its base. The fallen pillar began crunching as the crystals multiplied, turning into a yellow crystal

bear that stood itself up tall. And then, it was immediately crushed by Kuon's Mystic Eye.

"Is each and every one of these pillars a Phrase?"

"It appears so. I imagine the ones that attacked us previously came from here."

Was this how regular Phrase were born, too? When I stole a glance at the central part of the crater, I saw something standing there. Was it another crystal pillar? Something about it looked different from the others, though. It was tall and transparent. Didn't change the fact that it was a square prism with a pointed tip, though.

Naturally, I didn't feel comfortable just walking right into the middle of a crater, so I gave Kuon a piggyback and used **[Fly]** to approach it from the air.

It looks just like an obelisk. Did this fall *here?*

The crater and clusters had formed with that pillar as its center, so I felt like that was a natural conclusion. It would have to have fallen from pretty far...but when I looked up at the sky, there didn't appear to be anything unusual.

"Don't tell me... Is that...?!"

"Hm?"

I heard Kuon gasp from behind me. Kuon, acting surprised? Now that was rare. What happened? It didn't look like there was anything strange to the obelisk.

...Actually, no, there was something inside it. I couldn't see clearly, but it looked round. Was it another Gemstone Phrase core?

When I landed in front of the obelisk, Kuon dashed off of my back toward it.

"As I thought, this has to be the one from back then..."

"What's up? Do you recognize it?" I asked Kuon as he placed his hand on the obelisk.

There was indeed a Gemstone Phrase-looking core inside of the clear obelisk, but it was slightly different from the ones we had seen. The previous cores had

been about the size of a baseball, but this was about the size of a ping-pong ball, and it was a very strange color. It looked red, but also blue, and also yellow. It looked like a rainbow, I guess.



“This may be what resulted in us arriving in this time.”

“Hm...? Weren’t you guys sent here ’cause of a timequake, though?”

“Back in the future, we took commissions from the guild on the weekends. The latest one was to defeat a horde of Kaiser Apes in Belfast Forest. We approached it almost as if we were off on a picnic.”

Hang on, a Kaiser Ape is like an evolved form of a King Ape. That isn’t something you go hunting so casually.

Resisting the urge to retort, I listened to Kuon’s story.

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“Prisma Guillotine!”

“**[Gravity]!**”

“Gwaaaaaah!”

Allis and Linne’s coordinated attack sent the Kaiser Ape flying, its body exploding into pieces.

“Yeaaah! That makes number thirty-four!”

“I defeated it first! That’s *my* thirty-fourth!”

Yakumo, Frei, and Quun all let out deep sighs as the two girls began arguing over who had actually defeated it.

“How many times do we have to tell you to take them down without damaging their body parts? Those are precious materials...”

“Yakumo, I have a feeling this is a lost cause.”

“Well, Kaiser Apes don’t sell for much, so perhaps this isn’t such a big deal.”

Or so Quun said, but the amount of money that could be made from selling the body of a Kaiser Ape could feed a regular family for two whole years. Her idea of monetary value had clearly been skewed by the costs involved with magitech.

Despite their somewhat ruined state, Frei put the scattered body parts into **[Storage].** Even if their value had decreased, money was money. It would be wrong to waste it.

“Arcia, where’s the next Kaiser Ape?”

“Umm...” Arcia trailed off, then used **[Search]** at Yakumo’s question. “There appears to be five to the north.”

“Five? I thought we’d hunted quite a lot already. I didn’t expect there to still be so many left,” Yakumo muttered.

“Kaiser Apes have explosive reproduction rates once every few decades. It could be that this was the year for them,” Quun explained.

All species of magic beast had a breeding season in which their numbers

increased rapidly if conditions were ideal. This would sometimes result in all the prey in an area being depleted, so the group would mass migrate to a different area in search of more food. Predators would then follow their change in territory, resulting in a stampede. It was for that reason that an overpopulation of magic beasts was seen as problematic.

“It’s not fair for you guys to keep all the fun to yourselves! I wanna hunt them too!”

“But Steph, you’ll just end up destroying all the trees around here.”

Steph’s main fighting style involved encasing herself in **[Prison]** and then using **[Accel]** to do a tackle at high speeds. It was very simple, but if she used that in the middle of a dense forest, she would end up destroying all the trees unfortunate enough to be in her path. It was a troublesome destruction of the environment.

“I intend to make sure I gather any of the trees that Steph knocks down to sell wholesale to the lumber yard, so it is no issue,” Kuon somewhat clumsily followed up.

“No, I...think there’s still an issue,” Elna replied with an awkward smile.

Kuon likely thought that so long as the wood didn’t go to waste, it was fine, but deforestation to that level wasn’t a good thing.

“Are you listening? This is an official commission, so be careful. Steph, make sure you pay attention to your surroundings as well, you hear me?” Yakumo scolded.

“Yeees,” Linne, Allis, and Steph all responded somewhat dejectedly.

“Okay, in that case—”

“Hold on. Can you hear that?” Yoshino asked, interrupting me.

“What?”

Yoshino looked upward, then put a hand to her ear. Though not quite as sensitive as her mother’s, Yoshino’s hearing was better than the average person’s, and right now, something had caught her ear. Everyone held their breath, remaining silent. The sound of the twittering birds, the leaves rustling in

the breeze... Sounds of nature came at them from all sides, but nothing seemed particularly strange.

“It’s coming from that direction. It sounds like something being broken into two... Listen, there it is again.”

Everyone tried their best to hear what Yoshino was pointing out, but they simply couldn’t.

“I can’t hear anything myself, but if you say there’s something there, Yoshino, then I have no reason to doubt,” Quun replied. “Shall we go see what it is?”

Kuon nodded and said, “Yes, that would be a good idea. We are aware of where the Kaiser Apes are, so we should have no issue returning to them.”

As there were no objections, Yoshino walked in the direction of the sound and everyone followed. When they finally reached a clearing in the forest, *that* was floating in front of them.

A crack in space.

The crack looked as if it was in a mirror or a piece of glass, and the sounds of it shattering never ceased as it grew bigger and bigger.

“What is this?”

Having never seen such a sight before, the children’s eyes were glued to it. If their parents had seen this, there was no doubt they would’ve instantly backed away.

Eventually, the sound of glass cracking reverberated through the area, the space in front of them shattered apart, and a massive gash was left floating there. Something was dripping out of it. It was some sort of clear liquid, but thick and gloopy almost like a Slime. It kept leaking out of the tear and dripping onto the ground. The puddle that had formed started rippling.

“Is it a Slime?” Arcia wondered.

“Do you not think it’s a little big for a Slime?” Yoshino replied.

She was right. A regular Slime was about the perfect size for a bucket, but this slime was about the size of three or four of them.

“I have heard of Big Slimes before, but...”

The Big Slimes that Quun mentioned were Slimes that were larger than usual without being Behemoths. When a large gathering of Slimes remained in the same area for a long time, they eventually combined into one huge Slime. However, these Big Slimes were slow to move and easy to discover, so they were dealt with pretty swiftly.

“Are we sure this is a Slime...? If it is, I feel like it would be a Water Slime.”

“The ones that camouflage themselves as bodies of water? It’s transparent, so you could be right.”

Allis nodded her head at Elna’s deduction. Water Slimes often camouflaged themselves as puddles or other bodies of water in order to capture their prey. They were cowardly little things, never attacking anything bigger than themselves. They weren’t normally a danger to humans, but if they grew as big as this, then that changed things.

“Hey, it’s moving!” Frei exclaimed.

When everyone turned to look, a part of the Slime suddenly stretched toward the children in the shape of a spear, arcing through the air straight at them.

However, before that transparent spear could find its mark, Kuon’s eyes shone a yellow-gold, halting its advance.

That was Kuon’s Mystic Eye of Immobilization at work.

“Hiyah!”

Yakumo unsheathed her katana and slashed the Slime’s tentacle right in two. When Kuon blinked, the petrified body part fell to the ground, dropping with a weightier sound than expected. Frei tapped it with her spear, and it gave off a metallic twang.

“The part we cut off immediately hardened. Is that what happens when it’s removed from its body? Are Slimes always like this?” Frei asked, tilting her head.

“Slimes *do* come in various types, so it could just be a unique one...” Quun replied. “Though given it literally came from a tear in space, I doubt we can

view this as a regular Slime.”

That unique Slime was still squirming, but it didn’t appear to be planning to attack like before.

Is it cautious of us? Yakumo thought to herself.

“Wait, look there! There’s something round inside it!” Linne exclaimed as she pointed at around the middle of the Slime where there appeared to be a small, round metallic object about the size of a ping-pong ball. It was changing into all different colors, from red to blue to yellow to purple.

“Is this like a Gollem’s core?” Quun pondered to herself. “In that case, we may be able to defeat it if we destroy the core.”

Yakumo and Frei nodded in agreement and brandished their weapons as they advanced.

The Slime, meanwhile, only backed away slightly. Its undulations had become much less violent, almost looking weakened.

“...Something’s strange about this little guy.”

Kuon frowned at his little sister’s sudden observation.

“Well...yes? I can’t say I’ve ever seen a Slime like this before.”

“I don’t mean like *that.* I can kinda understand what it’s feeling. It’s like it’s...protecting something?”

“What? Steph, what do you mean you can understand what it’s feeling?”

Before Steph could answer her brother though, there was a sudden loud bang and the kids were hit with a force as if something had exploded. And yet, even though it was strong enough to knock them off their feet, they felt no pain.

Having lost their sense of balance, they had no idea where they were standing anymore. By the time they’d regained their senses, they were all in different positions than before—though not completely different locations, just positioned either a few more meters forward or backward.

“Look at the sky!” Linne shouted. When they all looked up, they saw the sun setting at an incredibly swift pace. As if in a rush, it disappeared over the

horizon before the moon chased after it as it rose from the east. This time though, the moon suddenly stopped, and then it began reversing, the evening sun doing the same.

“What is going on here?!”

Part of the forest disappeared, revealing a town instead. After that, the ground beneath their feet turned into cobbled stone, then into a wasteland, and then into ice. Just as the trees around them seemed to wither, young trees were sprouting up with fresh foliage.

“Time and space are spinning out of control...?” Quun muttered to herself as she looked at her surroundings.

Just then, space began to distort even further. The tear in space noisily widened, and the Slime’s rainbow core began sparking before letting off a blinding light.

“Yakumo! A **[Gate]!**”

“I’m trying, but it won’t open!” Yakumo shouted back.

“**[Teleport]** won’t work either!” Yoshino also informed them.

Quun felt herself become flustered at that knowledge. Teleportation magic wasn’t working? Was it because of the space distortion making it impossible to pinpoint the coordinates?

As she was running through possible explanations in her head, a shockwave even larger than before slammed into them, knocking them all unconscious.

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When everyone awoke, they were surrounded by a pitch-black void of darkness. And yet, for some reason, they could all see each other clear as day. Everyone had regained consciousness and was without injury.

They were floating all over the place as if they were in some zero-gravity simulator. Well, since they could see no ground or any ceiling, it was impossible to tell if they could really be said to be floating in the air.

Kuon took a look at their surroundings, regardless of how little he could see, but he saw no one else other than his siblings and the endless darkness.

For a moment, the worst-case scenario of them having died flitted through his mind. He lightly gripped his fists and noticed there was sensation there. He could breathe and feel his own pulse. He was alive, which meant the dilemma of where they were right now remained.

“Just where is this?”

“This is a dimensional gap. You are in the realm outside the boundary of your world, completely cut off from other worlds.”

When they turned to find the source of the voice, they saw a familiar old lady looking back at them.

“Granny Tokie!”

“Why yes, it’s Granny Tokie here.”

The goddess of Space-time gave a gentle smile.

Just as the children had found themselves lost in this pitch-dark space where they could barely tell their left from their right, Granny Tokie, who had known them since their birth, appeared in front of them. That alone granted the children an indescribable sense of relief.

No one in Brunhild could defy her. Both the goddess of swords and the god of combat were basically children to her, and even Touya, as the grand duke of Brunhild, was reverent of her. Everyone, including Allis, loved Tokie, regardless.

“Granny Tokie, what is a dimensional gap?” Quun inquired. “And how did we end up here?”

“Well, you see, dearies, you were all wrapped up in a timequake.”

“A what now?” Quun asked as she tilted her head. She had never heard that term before.

“It is not a phenomenon that occurs all that frequently on the surface realm, but, hm, how to explain... Oh, you all are aware of what a trampoline is, yes?”

“The jumpy thing in the game room? I love that!”

Linne excitedly raised her hand at Tokie’s comparison. The game room in Brunhild Castle was one of the places where kids played most. Linne greatly

enjoyed physical exercise, so she especially loved the trampoline.

“Now imagine you’re sitting on that trampoline. What would happen if someone came along and dove onto the trampoline with you all still on it?”

“Hm? Everyone would get bounced up, wouldn’t they?”

“Precisely. That is what has happened to all of you here. You were sprung out of the time and space of your original world.”

Tokie’s metaphor helped the children understand their current situation a little better. Except for maybe Linne, Allis, and Steph.

“When you get wrapped up in a timequake, you are made to float endlessly through the gap between dimensions. If you’re lucky, you’ll manage to make it out into another time period, but there is no guarantee of that. Oh, don’t worry your little heads, though. I will take responsibility here and send you back to your original timeline.”

Kuon had felt chills run up his back at hearing what their potential fate could have been, but there was unmistakable relief at the thought they would be able to return home.

“Only there’s a slight problem... As you have all fallen into a reverse flow heading toward the past, you will not be in your own time were you to leave here now. Under normal circumstances, I would simply transport you back to your own time from there, but there is an issue with that too at the moment...”

Tokie placed a hand on her cheek, seeming troubled.

“There is a group of horrible people known as the wicked devout who may do terrible things in the near future. It would be troublesome if they were to get up to something nefarious and I wasn’t around to assist, so once we leave this place, I’ll need you all to stay in the past for a while. It will be a time when you all are yet to have been born, when your mothers and fathers are much younger than they are now.”

“The past, you say? If we are to do anything that would change history, would that not influence our timeline?” Kuon voiced his concern. Quun, worrying about the same thing, was looking intently at Tokie, awaiting her answer.

“You needn’t worry. Even if the timeline happens to branch, I can return it to normal with my power. However, the wicked devout may cause a parallel world to occur should they get involved, and that is what I wish to avoid, so I’d like for you all to relax for a while in the past until it is time to return.”

“You want us to simply...relax?”

Kuon tilted his head with a conflicted look on his face. Regardless, it seemed they would have no choice but to travel to the past.

“You will end up appearing in the past timeline weeks apart from each other, so don’t fret if you are unable to contact each other right away. You will end up scattered around as well, so make sure to head straight for Brunhild. Do you understand?”

Kuon nodded and replied, “We all have our phones on us, so we should be able to confirm our locations once we arrive.”

Little did he know that many of them would end up losing their phones on arrival, himself included. That said, Kuon still had his concerns over whether they would all really head straight to Brunhild in the first place, especially Steph, Linne, Quun, Yoshino, and Allis. They were heading to a past era where the world wouldn’t be the same as they knew, after all.

Tokie made the kids promise various other things, such as not telling their parents too much about the future. But honestly, even if someone *did* say too much, she could just fix it with her powers as the goddess of Space-time.

Kuon preferably wanted to avoid giving Tokie too much trouble, though. Trying to fix various time paradoxes sounded like a huge headache.

“How about we get ourselves out of this oppressive darkness then, hm? Good luck, everyone!”

When Tokie clapped her hands together, the kids all got dragged away into the darkness as if hit by a large tsunami.

When the scenery finally shifted away from the darkness, Kuon was met with a blue sky and a pure white snowfield. And then, the cold air hit his fair skin.

“Huh? Whoa!”

The place where Kuon had exited was a steep slope covered in snow.

His fall did not lead to a clean landing, his foot catching on the snow as he began tumbling down. He tried to stop himself, but the slope was at such an angle that he couldn't even slow down.

"Ow!"

His body ended up bouncing over a bump, causing his tumbling to accelerate.

After rolling for so long that he was practically encased in snow, he finally came to a stop as he collided into a tree. Pushing his way out of the snow that had fallen atop him, he somehow managed to make it out into fresh air.

"Th-This wasn't quite in the plan... Oh gods, it's cold!"

Kuon unsteadily stood himself up, holding his head. It appeared he had landed on a very uneven snowy mountain. The weather was fine, but the cold was too much for him.

"I-In any case, I should head for a town. Let's see... What?"

Huh? Wait. No way.

Kuon patted every part of his clothing that even resembled a pocket, but his phone was nowhere to be found.

"Don't tell me I dropped it...?"

Kuon looked back up the slope he had tumbled down. He appeared to have rolled down from fairly high up, trails of his descent weaving left and right down it. He must have dropped his phone somewhere along the way.

"It would be foolish to carry out a search for it at this moment..."

Kuon hugged his shivering body. He would absolutely freeze to death if he tried to search for his phone in such thin clothing. And so, he immediately went for a different option. Rather than search for his phone, he would be best off heading for a town first, and then trying to find a route to Brunhild from there. He had no idea where he was at the moment, but he did have the world map somewhat memorized. If he could at least learn what country he was in, he would be able to find a solution.

For now, Kuon began making his way to the foot of the mountain.

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“...And that about sums up how we got wrapped up in the timequake.”

“Hmm, I see. So you think that the mysterious Slime core that got you all wrapped up in this is this one here?”

I looked back up at the core inside the obelisk.

Looking at the situation, it didn’t seem off the mark to think that it fell from above. Could the glass-like obelisk actually be what that Slime had transformed into? From what Kuon had said, any detached parts of the Slime had turned metallic, so could its body not be similar? In which case, maybe it was dead.

Whether it caused the timequake and accidentally involved the kids, or it was unrelated to its occurrence and was also a victim of the timequake, it had come to the past through that phenomenon just as they had. Regardless, the way that it appeared similar to the Phrase had me feeling confused.

Those Gemstone Phrase as well. I couldn’t think they were completely unrelated to the Phrase we were used to.

“I’ll put it away in **[Storage]** and we can show it to Melle later.”

She was the former Sovereign Phrase, after all. She had to know something.

“**[Prison].**”

Just in case, I made sure to encase the obelisk in a **[Prison]** before then slotting it away into **[Storage].**

After that, we just needed to go around breaking all the gemstone clusters left in the crater. After all, it would be a pain if more Gemstone Phrase appeared because we left this alone. In fact, a few of them did actually come to attack us while we were going around breaking them, but Kuon single-handedly took them all down with his Mystic Eye. He was taking photos before he did, apparently to show to Steph later.

Oh yeah, he did promise her something like that, didn’t he? What a good big brother.

I made sure to collect the shattered clusters, just in case we would be able to use them for something later. Plus, Doc Babylon would be able to analyze them.

After spending a few minutes of our time ensuring we had collected every last thing we could from the crater, we went on a hunt in the surrounding area to ensure there were no stragglers left behind. We had no choice but to do it on foot, since **[Search]** couldn't pick them up. It was a real pain in the behind.

We found a couple nearby that we destroyed and gathered, but that appeared to be the last of them.

Just what were those Gemstone Phrase? They almost seemed like bodyguards for the rainbow core.

Whatever the case, I would bring all of this back and let Melle and the others give them a look. Hopefully, we could glean something from them.

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"This is...!"

Unfortunately, when we returned, Allis was still in the middle of lessons and Ende was carrying out work for the adventurer's guild, but we still managed to meet with the Dominant Construct girls and show them our spoils.

We had laid out the obelisk and some of the shattered Gemstone Phrase pieces in Ende's garden. Melle, Ney, and Lycee were all looking at them curiously.

"Have you seen them before?"

Melle looked at a deer-like Gemstone Phrase that had managed to retain much of its original form compared to the others. "I believe...it resembles the Quos that Yula had been developing."

So these really were those artificial Phrase they had mentioned?

"However, the Phrase that Yula created did not have cores like these."

The cores of the Gemstone Phrase were made up of pentagons joined together to make a dodecahedron. Melle came to her conclusion upon examining one cut in two. However, the possibility remained that they became this shape after further development.

“Do you recognize the rainbow core?”

“No, I’ve never seen it before. However, as slight as it may be, it appears to be emitting an echo. It’s so weak that I almost can’t hear it, though.”

The echo was like the heartbeat released by the Phrase, which meant... that obelisk was a Phrase...

When I asked Melle to confirm my theory, she shook her head.

“I cannot be certain. It is somewhat similar to the echo of a Phrase in a state of suspended animation.”

“Judging from Kuon and Allis’s story, could that Slime not have been a crystal beast? This crystalline pillar looks similar to their corpses,” Ney suggested, looking up at the obelisk.

A crystal beast was what the girls had summoned in Kuon’s trial to become Allis’s betrothed. If the Slime they had seen was a crystal beast, that would mean there was a Dominant Construct who created it.

“They were likely planning something, similar to how Yula summoned Zeno, but before that plan came to fruition, they perished.”

Zeno had been a general that Yula summoned from Phrasia in the final battle with the wicked god. I hadn’t personally met him, but he was apparently quite the fighter and even Ende had ended up cornered. Melle had been the one to take him down.

Yula had been the very cautious type. It was likely he had come up with all kinds of backup plans. Though at the end of the day, the moment he mistook the wicked god for an actual god, most of the plans he had come up with were rendered useless. In other words, these were Yula’s legacy. And not particularly a legacy to be thankful for, of course.

“If this is a crystal beast, does that mean the rainbow core inside it is something else entirely?” Kuon asked.

“Most likely. The crystal beast seems more like an armor designed to protect itself. Though the armor’s dead now, so it’s not really doing much to help it anymore,” Ney replied, lightly knocking on the crystal obelisk.

I guess it died because of the timequake or the shock of its fall. I was starting to feel more and more like this had nothing to do with the timequake occurring. It was all simply a coincidence—one that Kuon and the other kids all got wrapped up in as well.

"Oh."

My phone started ringing: it was from Doc Babylon. Had she finished analyzing the Gemstone Phrase? She worked as fast as ever.

"Hello?"

"Results of the analysis are in. As it turns out, it does, in fact, have the same characteristics of a Phrase that allow it to amplify, accumulate, and release mana, but not as powerfully as the real thing. Calling it an imitation is not incorrect. But interestingly enough, their properties and makeup are not so far from actual gemstones. The red and green ones are almost identical to rubies and emeralds, respectively. I imagine they grew by absorbing minerals from underground. When they stop living, they essentially become a gemstone of degraded phrasium."

What? Hold on a sec, did that mean they weren't so different from real gemstones? I assumed it was similar to the difference between a natural diamond and an artificial one, but that still meant they could possibly sell for a hell of a lot!

But then again, they were fake...

No, no, I once heard on TV that cubic zirconia, an artificial diamond, was worth only ten percent of a real diamond, but the rate of light dispersion was higher, making it shine more beautifully than a real diamond. The difference in value came about from their rarity, not from which was more appealing to the eye.

I imagine barely anyone in this world could determine whether or not these were fakes. Maybe if they were able to use **[Analyze],** but that would be about it.

...Should I sell them?

We'd already blown a good chunk of our funds on developing the Val Albus

and the Nereids. They practically looked alike to the real thing, so it would be fine, surely. Cut it properly and it would make for quite a big gemstone. There was no way the nobles would be able to keep their mitts off them.

The devil in my mind was shouting, “Just sell it! This is your chance to make the big bucks!”, while the angel was shouting back, “No, you mustn’t! Those are fakes!”

The angel and devil began throwing punches at each other.

C’mon, Devil, right there! Yeah, go for the straight!

“Father? Is something the matter?”

Kuon spoke up and ripped me out of my thoughts.

“Huh?! U-Uh, no, what makes you say that?!”

A-Anyway, I don’t need to think too much about this for now.

“What should we do about the rainbow core?”

“Couldn’t tell you, honestly. This is a Dominant Construct in hibernation, right? Doesn’t that make it dangerous?”

“Yes, they may be threat, but it is also untrue to say that all Dominant Constructs are—”

Just as Melle went to respond to me, the obelisk suddenly cracked. The rainbow core dropped out from the obelisk and tumbled along the ground, instantly absorbed the mana from the surroundings, and began growing.

We had seen this once before! It was exactly what happened when I used **[Apport]** to remove Melle’s core from inside Prince Yamato’s body as she had been hibernating.

“**[Prison]!**”

Without hesitation, I encased the core.

[Prison] may be able to create sturdy barriers, but it was unable to stop time like **[Storage].** Now that the Construct’s core had begun to awaken, it was considered a living organism, so I couldn’t use any storage magic on it. The body, which was as rainbow-colored as the core it was growing from, only

continued to grow bigger and bigger until it started to take the form of a human. So it *was* a Dominant Construct!

When it reached a certain size, it stopped and began to thin instead.

It seemed...smaller than I had been expecting. Was it even smaller than Kuon? Their body was partially covered in armor, and their hair was a slightly long bluish-white bob cut. I wasn't sure if they were a boy or a girl.

"What is going on here? Is this...not a Dominant Construct?" Ney said, frowning at the crystalline structure as it morphed into a human.

"The Phrase do not go through an adolescent period. They are immediately born as adults," Melle muttered. "The only exception is Allis as she is a child between Ende and I. We cannot think of this as a regular Phrase."

The pale-haired child Phrase's eyes finally slowly opened. They were the same icy blue as Melle and Allis's.

Suddenly, the child dashed straight at us, slamming right into the wall of the **[Prison]** and being sent tumbling backward.

Oof, that had to have hurt.

The child stood back up holding their head, then encased their fist in a crystalline armor that they proceeded to punch ferociously into the barrier. Of course, a **[Prison]** couldn't break that easily, but the child inside never stopped, continuing their assault as if they had gone insane.

Holy shit, this kid's small, but they sure are violent.

It looked like they were shouting something, most likely yelling to be let out. We couldn't hear because of the effect of the **[Prison],** though.

"Father, could you disable the sound prevention of the **[Prison]?** I would like to hear what they're trying to say."

"Hm? Well, sure, I don't mind."

I did as Kuon asked.

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I was expecting to hear a barrage of profanities, but instead, all I heard was a string of incomprehensible words.

Oh, right, I can’t speak their language.

Before I could decide whether or not to apply translation magic, Melle grabbed my shoulders and began shaking me.

“Touya! Please dispel this barrier!”

“What? But...”

“It’ll be fine! Please hurry!”

You sure...? They’re kinda going on a bit of a rampage in there.

Well, I could just encase them in another **[Prison]** if they didn’t cool down, so there was nothing to really worry about. Plus, it seemed the Phrase girls could understand what they were saying.



I did as Melle asked, dispelling the whole **[Prison]** this time, and the bob-cut

kid swung into the air, falling over. But they then immediately stood back up and ran straight to Melle, tears streaming down their face as they dove into her arms.

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“Halle? Is that really you?”

Melle had a look of surprise on her face, as if she couldn’t believe what she was seeing, as she gently ran her hands down the child gripping onto her. Ney and Lycee looked similarly shocked.

“What, Lord Halle? But...”

“The echo is truly the same... Is that really you, Lord Halle?”

“Lord Halle?” I asked.

“Lord Halle is...Lady Melle’s younger brother...and the current Sovereign Phrase.”

“You’re kidding?!”

I could only look on in shock at the boy clinging to Melle.

Intermission: Waterpark Rhapsody

“Wow, this is incredible!”

“It is huge, it is!”

My wives, gathered together after changing into their swimsuits, all expressed their amazement. The representatives of foreign countries and their families who I had invited were also marveling at the sight.

We were currently standing in Brunhild’s newly-constructed all-weather indoor water park. It was an amusement park with all manner of water facilities, from wave pools to pools that you could simply float down, to whole water slides. It was the culmination of Babylon’s magical research and a combination of Water and Earth magic.

All the water being utilized here was provided by a massive water spellstone, and it was constantly circulated to maintain the water quality, with any dirty water being purified by Slimes before then being rotated back in. I’d suggested using Sludge Slimes at first, but the Babylon dev team instantly rejected the idea. Apparently, when Sludge Slimes died, they released a horrific odor, so it was best to avoid them on the off-chance one somehow lost their life.

Though their efficiency at purifying water wasn’t as good as the Sludge Slimes, we settled on regular Water Slimes. After all, we could make up for the weaker purifying ability with numbers. Naturally, they were kept separate from the pool so the guests would never see them. Thanks to the Slimes, the water in the facility could be kept clean 24/7.

The royals, their families, and my wives were all praising how great and amazing the water park was, but my kids weren’t all that surprised. They were just at the same level of excitement as they usually are. It wasn’t quite the reaction I wanted, but I knew it made sense. The water park already existed in the future, so it wasn’t that new of a sight to them.

Kuon, wearing swim shorts as I was, flashed an awkward smile at me when he saw my disappointment.

“We have paid a visit to this water park several times already, you see. We’re used to it.”

“Mmm, I just thought you guys would be happier, I guess.”

“But we are. It has been quite some time since we were all able to come here as a family.”

If that was true, then it made me feel a little better. I had gotten a little overconfident and made the water park quite elaborate, so the kids’ reactions being so comparatively reserved had me feeling worried. If they were still happy regardless, though, then that was all I could ask for.

“Mommy! Let’s go to the lazy river!”

“Oh, it certainly does flow like a river, doesn’t it? It looks fun!”

Steph and Sue ran toward the lazy river with one of those floaties shaped like an eight that was meant for two people in tow. The foreign princes and princesses grabbed their own floaties and followed after them.

Incidentally, we had all kinds of items available to rent such as floaties and beach balls at the poolside.

“Kuon, let’s go down the water slide together!”

Allis yanked on Kuon’s arm, dragging up the stairs to the water slide.

“I’ll go with you!” Ende tried to shout. However, Ney stopped him dead in his tracks.

“You stay put. Don’t get in the way of the children.”

Melle and Lycee were observing the scene in exasperation from the side.

I had also invited the Ende family (or I guess it would be more accurate to refer to them as the Melle family) to the water park. The Dominant Construct trio were coating their skin with a mirage as per usual, but they were wearing swimsuits this time as well. Nothing about them looked out of place.

“Touya? I don’t think it’s very polite to stare so much at another’s wives, do you?” Linze said. She was smiling, but that was most definitely not reflected in her eyes. I felt a chill run down my back.

“Oh, um, yes, I do apologize...”

Was I really staring that much?

It wasn’t only the foreign royals and their families that were dressed for the occasion, but their guards as well. Bringing weapons to a pool wasn’t allowed, as one would expect, but we had them wear swimming caps so they would be easily identifiable. It made them look like lifeguards, but they were essentially playing that role, so it wasn’t so far off the mark. They were looking out for anyone at risk of drowning from the lifeguard towers. We had to be careful, since there were so many children here.

“WOOOOOOOOO!”

The king of Belfast slid down the water slide and went flying off to the pool below.

We had many kinds of water slides at our water park. The one His Majesty went down was just your ordinary twisty-turvy water slide, but we also had those that were a simple straight slide down, ones that would twist all over the place, and even those that went round in circles like a whirlpool. There was also a large water slide that was much wider than the others, whcih allowed guests to slide down on boats or floaties.

The most extreme water slide out of all of them definitely had to be the one that was practically a straight drop. It was a terrifying waterfall that made you feel like you really were falling as you slid down it. I gave it a shot and it was one hell of a ride. Of course, we’d made sure it was safe, but there was still that sense of, “What if something *does* go wrong?” and that feeling of falling gave you quite the rush.

Hearing my description, the daredevils of our group had instantly ran off to give it a try.

“Th-This is rather high!”

“Stop wasting time! Get sliding!”

“Hang on, I need to brace myself fir—AHHHHHH!”

A scream rang out from the waterfall as an escort knight fell... I mean, slid

down. His lord must have made him go down first so he could see if it really was safe.

For those who were unable to persuade themselves to take the plunge, the waterfall was made so that you had no choice but to go down by having the floor of the capsule-like starting area suddenly disappear from under you. You could activate it manually, but it would also automatically do it if you had been standing there for more than thirty seconds. If we didn't implement something like that, we wouldn't be able to have a good turnover for the queue. The line would just pile up if they all took too long.

At the far end of the water slide area was the wave pool where, as the name implied, the waves come and go just like the ocean. This was also split into several areas with varying strengths of wave. The weakest area was like the calm sea, which was safe for young children, but the strongest area was where large waves were created with magic.

The king of Egret was currently having the time of his life surfing on those waves.

"These are some good waves, even if they're not natural!"

The Kingdom of Egret was an island country to the south, and before the Tentaculars started making their home there, the king and his people would enjoy surfing every day. No wonder he was so good at it.

Me? I'd tried surfing before, but I got caught up in the waves straight off the bat and ended up having a pretty bad time. His Majesty invited me to join him, but I refused.

It wasn't all wild water slides, though. There were regular pools, deeper pools to divebomb into, and pools where you could enjoy water polo.

Brunhild's water park was a water paradise where you could spend the whole day having fun.

"Father, there are some stalls over there! Let's go get something to eat together!" Arcia exclaimed as she pulled both myself and Lu towards the food court area.

"Okay, okay, I'm coming."

“Oh, do calm down, Arcia!”

The food court had various stalls lined up, as well as terrace seats for people to sit on. We allowed guests to enter the area with swimsuits still on.

The stalls ranged from drinks to shaved ice, ice cream, hot dogs, and even yakitori.

The food court area was separated from the pool area so that guests wouldn’t bring their food over to it. It would make one hell of a mess if someone dropped their ice cream or something into the water.

While the three of us were eating some ice cream, Linne came running over, absolutely soaked.

“So this is where you went! Dad, let’s go down the water slide!”

The girl grabbed me and started pulling me along just as Arcia had.

Man, being popular sure is tiring.

Lu and Arcia accompanied us until we all realized that Linne had meant the waterfall...

“We’ll watch from the bottom with Linze,” Lu laughed nervously, rejecting Linne’s request. Meanwhile, I was dragged up the stairs by Linne.

It’s just as tall as I remember...

I’d seen the Beastking of Mismede enter the starting capsule a few moments earlier. He had been nervously looking around, wondering what was going to happen, and then he just instantly vanished. All I heard after was his fading screams. This was not good for my heart.

“It’s your turn now, Dad!”

Linne pushed me right in.

No matter how many times I did this, it got no better. Entering the space that felt just like a closed-off coffin, I gripped my hands in front of my chest so they wouldn’t collide with the walls and prayed.

God Almighty, please keep me safe!

Just as I thought I heard a voice say, “I’m not sure what you want me to do

about this,” the platform underneath me disappeared and gravity pulled me down.

What left my mouth wasn’t even proper vocalized sounds as I simply let myself fall. I doubt it took more than three seconds, but it felt much longer. Regardless, before I realized it, I was suddenly sliding down at a much less vertical angle, catapulting into the pool.

That was the thing with this ride. You panic a little when you’re dropped, but then you’re sliding down and are suddenly made to actually fly into the air.

I wobbled a bit as I stood myself up.

“Wah-hah-hah! One more time!” the Beastking joyfully bellowed as he began climbing up the stairs again.

I can’t believe there are people like him... I’m sure the daredevils are having the time of their lives, but I just can’t handle this kind of thing...

“Eeeeeeeeek!”

There was a huge splash, and then Linne started laughing while she swam over to the edge.

“Dad, let’s do it again!”

“Sorry, I don’t think your dad can take anymore...”

It seemed my daughter was a comrade of the Beastking.

“You’re no fun,” Linne pouted. But then, she immediately ran over to Arcia and began dragging her up the stairs instead. Did she not feel confident enough about doing it without making someone else go down first?

Exhausted, I sat down at the poolside, but then the back of my head was suddenly squirted with water.

Bwuh?! What was that?!

“Ha ha ha ha! Bullseye!”

I turned back and saw that Frei was pointing one of those huge water pump pistols at me. It was one of the ones on loan with the other waterpark goods. Usually, they would only be allowed in designated areas, but since we all knew

each other and it was the pre-opening, we'd given special permission to let people take them to other areas.

"You're wide open!"

"Pwah!"

Quun caught me in my flank next.

"Heh heh heh, do you really think you can match up to my modified Super-Ultra-Super-Duper Water Pistol, Frei?"

Hey, those are children's toys, they're not there to be modified! And do you even realize you used "super" twice in that name?

A fierce shootout started between Frei and Quun. The little princes and princesses from the other countries also joined the fray, and a lively water fight ensued.

I took that opportunity to make my escape and headed to the lazy river area. A wise man does not court danger...

"Oh my, did you make your escape as well?"

Leen was gracefully floating in the pool on a floatie, reading a book.



“Won’t your book get wet if you read it in there?”

“I’ve cast **[Protection]** on it, so there is no need to fear. Have a look.”

Leen shoved her book into the pool, then pulled it back out, and right enough, it wasn’t even slightly damp.

I see.

“It gets hard keeping up with the kids, does it not?”

Why are you out here sounding like an old woman? a thought I made sure not to say out loud entered my mind. Making any age-related comments around Leen was taboo. Speech is silver, silence is golden.

“They *are* going absolutely crazy out there.”

Thankfully (?), there were other children and their grandparents here who were able to keep them company whenever we needed to rest.

Even right now, Xenoahs’s overlord was trying to show off to Sakura and Yoshino by leaping off the diving board.

Oh, Paula pushed him off...

He slammed into the water right on his stomach. Was he okay?

...Oh god, he’s just floating there.

When one of the lifeguard knights started to approach, he came to and unsteadily exited the pool while holding his stomach. He seemed all right, at least. Good thing he went from the lowest board. Yoshino was naturally angry at Paula for what she had just done.

Yeah, apologize to His Wickedness. Misbehaving by the pool is dangerous.

I swam breaststroke against the current of the lazy river. Yeah, this was the perfect speed. I could just swim in the same place forever, and the pool was pretty wide, so I wasn’t getting in anyone’s way. Though if the place was packed, it would be impossible.

Sango and Kokuyou comfortably floated on by me. They really were making sure to get the most out of this.

Oh, and was that the Phrase trio making their way down on a large float? Where was Ende?

“Endymion is over there if you’re searching for him.”

I looked at the poolside where Ney was pointing and saw Ende glaring in one direction. As I thought, following his gaze led me to the sight of Kuon and Allis playing together. He was staring fixedly right at them.

That furrowed brow and narrowed eyes of his felt dangerous, so I threw a beach ball that had floated down the pool right at him.

“Ow! What was that for, Touya?!”

“Quit giving my son a death glare. You’re looking like some pervert.”

“Excuse me?! The only pervert here is your son! He’s clinging to Allis while half-naked! What a despicable thing for the prince of a duchy to be doing!”

Uh, no, Allis is the one doing the clinging here. But it really shouldn’t even matter. They’re betrothed.

“That’s different! A relationship remaining innocent until marriage shows your sincerity to your partner! Try giving him a better education!”

“Oh-hoh. You have some guts saying that in front of me, a previous retainer of Lady Melle. How about I let everyone here know just what this innocent relationship you speak of looks like, hm?”

“Stop, Ney. You’re going to make me look bad as well...” Melle frantically cut in.

Guess they didn’t have the purest relationship, huh? Well, it is true that they eloped.

Still, I didn’t think it was a parent’s place to interfere in their child’s love life. A father should simply calm themselves down and...

“Hey, Touya, I saw your daughters get chatted up by some foreign princes just a bit ago.”

“Tell me their names. I just want to have a chat.”

What little brat tried to pick up my daughters, huh?! I need to sit ’em down and have a nice. Lovely. Chat!

“They’re both rather similar, after all.”

“Birds of a feather flock together.”

“Both are so overprotective. It’s embarrassing to watch.”

“Don’t lump me in with him!”

Shit, we harmonized!

We glared at each other for a bit before we turned away with a huff.

Hm?

I saw Elze and Yae running along the floating bridge in the athletics area. Hilde was there too. I was impressed, since it wasn’t easy running across a surface as slippery as that.

The obstacle course was made up of balloons floating in the pool. You had to jump, leap, climb, and drop, weaving your way around the course. It wasn’t really supposed to be something to do time trials on...

“Ah!”

“Whoa?!”

Neither were able to complete the curve and they slid right out of the course. After a splish and then a splash, they landed right into the water one after the other. Everything that made up the course was wet so going that fast around the corner was just asking for disaster.

At one of the pools to the side, Yakumo and Elna were having fun inside the water ball. The water ball was just a big transparent sphere filled with air that you could roll around on top of. It was able to take in air with spatial magic so there was no risk of suffocating if they stayed in too long.

It was already hard enough controlling it with one person, but with two it was practically uncontrollable. They were stuck rolling around everywhere inside of it, but they both seemed to be enjoying themselves, so I was glad I had made it.

Starting to get tired, I got out of the pool and spread out over one of the deck chairs. I sipped from the tropical drink I had prepared and took a break.

“This really is paradise...”

“Haaah... I very much agree... This *is* absolute paradise... Getting to see young

girls frolic and play in their swimsuits...ahhh...is just such a sight for sore eyes that my nose won't stop bleeding. Mmmh..."

Beside me was Atlantica, the gynoid terminal of the laboratory, breathing heavily while she held a tissue to her bleeding nose.

Why would you bring her *here?!*

"Rest assured. Atlantica has been strictly forbidden from laying a hand on any of them."

Doc Babylon was lounging on a deck chair beside her. Couldn't say that gave me much reassurance.

Also, this barely mattered, but why was she wearing a lab coat over her swimsuit?

"That's not the only problem here. The kids are gonna get scared off if they see someone stare at them like that!"

"Hmm, then how about we put a paper bag over her head?"

"That'll just make it worse!"

She was going to give them some weird trauma at this rate!

Whatever. I could just use **[Prison]** so she couldn't move from her spot and then place **[Mirage]** around it to hide her presence. Oh, and I should shut out any noise while I'm at it.

"You're awfully harsh, aren't you?"

"Why, in any scenario, would you bring someone like her down here?"

"All the rest of the gynoid sisters are getting to enjoy their holiday to the fullest, so why shouldn't she?"

I wasn't so heartless that I didn't understand where she was coming from, but Noel had been sleeping in that deck chair this whole time, and Fam was reading a book beside her. They weren't doing anything different from usual.

"Awawa! We've got-a big trouble!"

Just as I was making remarks in my mind, I saw Lileleparshe come running over in a one-piece swimsuit.

“Master, it’s-a big trouble! Ouchie!”

Unable to see the **[Prison]** I had encased Tica in, she slammed right into it... She was usually clumsy anyway, but this time was definitely my fault.

Sorry about that.

“What’s wrong, Parshe? Has Touya’s infidelity finally been discovered by his wives?”

“Where’d you get that one from?! I’ve done nothing wrong!”

This damned lady was playing a dangerous game with her jokes. That was absolutely taking it too far! You’re meant to laugh *with* others, not at them!

“So, what’s the matter?”

“The Water Slimes-a in the purifying tanks have all-a escaped!”

“What?! How did that happen?!”

The Water Slimes were being used to keep the water clean. How did they escape?

“Sooo, to make a long-a story short, I accidentally slipped on a banana peel-a, and I yanked the tablecloth I had grabbed without thinking off the table, and all the plates-a on top of it came-a tumbling down, and they all hit the champagne in front of them, and the impact made the cork go-a *nyoom!* and land a direct hit on the button to open the purifying tank.”

Hold up, when did this become a YouTube prank show?!

Why was there a banana peel, plates, and champagne in the room with the switch to the purifying tank?!

“Logic doesn’t work when you’re dealing with someone as airheaded as Parshe.”

“Personally, I think she’s gone way beyond just an airhead...”

This was starting to feel like a curse. Though when you considered the personality of her creator, it definitely wasn’t out of the question for her to do something like that.

“What happened with the Water Slimes?”

“I closed-a the water tank right away, but a number of them made it out. They probably made it to one of the pools-a through the water system...”

This was bad. Water Slimes were typically docile creatures who wouldn’t attack anything bigger than them, so there was almost no danger of them attacking the guests, but there was no doubt that if they saw Slimes swimming about in the pools, our water park’s reputation would be ruined before it even opened.

I have to gather the Slimes before someone spots them!

I took my phone out of **[Storage]** and did a search for them...or I tried to, at least. However, the Slimes were camouflaging themselves as water, so how was I meant to detect them?! When I fell to my knees in defeat, Parshe spoke up.

“Doctor! We still have-a the Slime Radar in the warehouse!”

“Oh, so we do. That’ll make our job a whole lot easier.”

“You’ve got a radar for these things?”

“Of course. Slimes are useful creatures depending on their type, so we have artifacts to help us find them more easily.”

True, if you weren’t able to use magic like **[Search],** trying to find Slimes would be a pain, so an artifact like that existing made sense.

“Well, whatever. Then Parshe, can you go grab that Slime Radar and... Wait! No, if you go, you’ll definitely break it or lose it or something. Tica, can you go?”

Tica glared at me, clearly unhappy with my request.

“Whaaat? I want to continue observing all these angelic girls, though...”

“...If you go grab it, I’ll let you use these binoculars.”

“But of course, Master! I’ll get them right away!”

The moment she saw me pull out some binoculars from **[Storage],** Tica teleported off at the speed of light. She was certainly honest about her desires, that was for sure.

“I got it! Now give me the binoculars!”

“It’s been, like, two seconds!”

And she was way too desperate. I really wanted my daughters as far away from her as possible...

“This is the Slime Radar! Now, the binoculars, haaah... Haaah!”

I began thinking I had made a very terrible decision as I watched Tica standing there, breathing intensely, but I *had* promised to give them to her. She whipped the binoculars out of my hand and began staring, nose bleeding, at the girls playing about in the pool, letting out all sorts of excited noises.

I had at least made it so they couldn’t see her. If they weren’t being bothered by it, then there was no harm, I guess... At the very least, I added a ward against teleporting to the **[Prison].** Perverts should be quarantined.

“So, this is the Slime Radar, is it? Gonna be honest, it just looks like some shades.”

The frames of the radar were a flashy red. It had a design that made it look like I would transform into a giant red and silver ultra alien by putting them on. At least it wouldn’t look *too* strange for me to be wearing these.

I wasted no more time and gave the Slime Radar a try. Similar to wearing sunglasses, my sight got a little darker after putting them on.

“Feel that button on the side of the frames? Press that and it should open up a map showing you the location of the Slimes. It’s made so that it can detect the Slimes no matter where they’re hiding.”

“Neat... Huh?”

There was a dimly glowing light wavering side to side in the pool in front of me. Was that a Water Slime? Oh no, it was heading right toward the holy king of Allent!

With the Slime Radar equipped, I dived into the water without hesitation and swam to where the Slime was before sending it back to the purifying tank with **[Teleport].**

I made it just in time too! A few centimeters more and it would’ve ended up touching him!

I splashed my head out of the water, gasping for breath.

“Hah, hah... Th-That was so close...”

“A-Are you quite all right, Touya? Did your foot cramp? Do take care you don’t drown.”

“I’m... I’m good, thanks. Sorry for...all the racket...”

Exhausted, I stumbled my way back to the poolside.

This isn’t good for my health...

As much as I wanted to rest, I had to deal with the rest of the Slimes as soon as possible. And so, I pressed the button on the frames and with a little beep, a map appeared in the right lens. There were three glowing spots, most likely the

Slimes, which meant a total of four Slimes had escaped.

The closest one from here would be...the wave pool. I used **[Teleport]** to get there as swiftly as possible.

Same as before, the small kids and their parents were in the area with the weak waves, while the adults who loved surfing were in the strong wave area. And as my terrible luck would have it, the Slime was in the surfing area!

I looked down at the surfing guests' feet with the Slime Radar, and right enough, there was a little Water Slime left at the mercy of the waves, spinning round and round as if it had been shoved into a washing machine.

I didn't think it likely it would be spotted like that, but there was always the chance one of the surfers could fall and touch it by accident. As such, retrieving it as soon as possible was for the best.

I had no idea how to approach this, though. With it being twirled around the way it was, it would be difficult to use **[Teleport]** on it. And if I messed up, I'd end up teleporting one of the guests instead. That only left touching it directly.

Okay, I can do this!

Having steeled myself, I grabbed one of the rental surfboards by the poolside and entered the wave pool.

"Oh, coming to join us, Touya?"

"W-Well, I thought I could try it just for a bit."

I gave as vague a response as I could to the tanned king of Egret, then crawled on top of my surfboard as it floated on the water. The waves were coming at me from diagonally behind, and being an advanced course, they were high.

Just as the surfboard started to be pushed by the wave, I stood up with perfect timing and began riding the wave.

I was putting on a cool show, surfing smoothly along the massive wave, but to be honest...I was actually using **[Fly].** The most I was doing was keeping my feet planted on the surfboard. There was no way I could ride a wave like that normally!

When I made it to the problem Slime, I deliberately lost my balance and fell

into the pool. Even while I was gurgling through the tumbling waves, I somehow managed to touch the Slime and teleport it away back to the cleansing tank.

All right, two down!

"Oh, you were so close! You were riding the board a little strangely. Try lowering your hips more next time and you'll be able to keep your balance better!"

His Majesty gave me advice as I wobbled to my feet.

Sorry that my surfing technique was weird, but I wasn't even trying to surf properly... Oh well, onto the next!

When I checked the map again, I realized the next closest was inside the longest water slide in our park... It wasn't moving, though. What was going on? If it was somewhere along the water slide, you would think it would be getting swept away along with the water and other people sliding down it. There didn't seem to be any panic going on either. Guess I would just have to go and find out for myself.

"Oh! Did you come for the ride, too, Your Grace...? What's with the weird glasses?"

Allis and Kuon were happily lined up in front of the long water slide when I made it to the top of the stairs. They were still sliding down this thing?

I know that the glasses look strange, but you could at least have the tact to not mention it.

"Just doing a little spot check. No problems here?"

"I can't say there is anything particularly strange, but...has something happened?"

My boy was as sharp as ever. I'd momentarily considered just asking Kuon to help me with the search, but realized it would be bad for my reputation if I interrupted my son's date over something like this.

"No? There's nothing wrong at all. Look, it's your turn."

Kuon looked at me with suspicion, but with Allis dragging him along, he had no choice but to enter the slide.

Due to its length and height, the long water slide wasn't the usual semi-circular shape, but a whole tunnel. There were see-through areas dotted about so people could still catch glimpses of the outside while sliding down. Kids were small enough that you could fit two side-by-side, but it was really made for one adult. The slide itself was about 1.5m in radius so that one's body would sway side to side while going around the curves.

Apparently, if you got enough momentum, you could even end up doing a whole twirl. Of course, we'd made sure to test the safety of the slide with magic to ensure people didn't fall weirdly and injure themselves. Not that that changed how scary it was, mind you. Or, I guess it did. It would be way scarier if safety wasn't guaranteed.

I braced myself and pushed my body down the slide with the radar still displaying the map.

"Whoa! This is faster than I thought it would be!"

My body swayed left and right as I zoomed down the slide. Were the kids really all right with this? I would think the speed with which you slid down would change depending on your weight!

No getting distracted, I'm almost at the point in question. Just where is the damn thing?

I ran my eyes along the slide as I went.

Hm?

I could see something sparkling ahead!

"Is that it?!"

It is! It's attached to the ceiling of the slide! Wait, hang on, noooooo! Neat, I found it, I sure didn't think about how to stop myself, though! I'm telling you, this is way too fast!

The course went round and round like a whirlpool before finally spitting me out into the pool. Allis and Kuon were there waiting for me.

"Ha ha ha! How was it, Your Grace? Did you find it fun?"

"Ha ha, yeah, it was greaaat. Thinkin' I might give it another go..."

Allis was innocently excited, unaware of the true feelings behind my words as I went up the stairs once more.

This is bad... If I don't catch it this time, I'm gonna have to keep sliding down this until I do.

I mentally prepared myself and slid down the tube once more.

Aim carefully this time so you don't miss it... There!

"**[Teleport]!**"

This time, I definitely managed to transport the Slime to the cleansing tank, and I continued my descent down the water slide at a much more relaxed pace than before, leaving my body at the mercy of the water and the slide. Was this what it was like to be a piece of nagashi somen?

With no takers, the human somen was spat out into the pool.

Kuon and Allis had already gone off somewhere, so I felt kind of lonely...

In any case, there was only one more left.

I lifted my weary body out of the water and checked the radar map again.

It's at the obstacle course, huh? Talk about choosing the worst places.

I returned to where Elze and Yae had been running about earlier. At least they were all still having fun. I had to find that Slime as soon as I could so those smiles didn't disappear.

"Now, where did it run off to?"

With my darkened vision, I continued looking around for the Water Slime.

Any sparkling spots here...? Oh, there it is.

It was clinging to a corner of the course made up of balloons. It really just looked like a pool of water to the naked eye. But hey, at least it was in an easy-to-reach place.

I entered the pool for the obstacle course and swam my way over to the Slime.

Just as I was about to reach it, though, one of the guests running the course

kicked it with their feet, and the Slime ended up bouncing along the water's surface like a skimming stone.

No way...

The one who had kicked it must have assumed they were just feeling the wet balloon, since they didn't even stop to look.

Dammit, where'd it go?

I scanned the area and caught sight of it attached to the water ball that Elna and Yakumo were playing in. It was attached to the outside of it, and it spun round and round every time the two moved too much.

I approached their water ball to try to catch the Slime, but when the two girls noticed me, they excitedly rolled the sphere in my direction.

No, I didn't come here to play!

"Gwah!"

I was run over by the water ball and it pushed my head under the water. With it sitting where it was, I couldn't rise to the surface.

I swam sideways so I could find a spot to get myself back up, breaking the water with a sharp inhale. Turning back, I tried looking at the water ball for the Slime, but it was no longer there.

Huh?! Where'd it go now?!

I scanned the place with the radar glasses before eventually choosing to climb onto the poolside for a change of angle. I finally found it squirming away at a surprisingly swift pace. It just looked as if there was water flowing down the poolside—and it was likely what it looked like to the guests as well.

Dammit, not that direction!

The Water Slime was headed right in the direction of the girls' bathroom. I couldn't let it get in there. If it did, and the girls noticed it, there was no doubt they would cause a commotion.

The best option right now may have been to teleport myself in front of the restroom in order to capture it. Or at least, that was going to be my plan until

the Slime suddenly stopped.

Huh?

“So it *was* a Slime.”

Kuon, standing in front of the girls’ bathroom, was looking at the Slime, eye turned a yellow-gold. That was his Mystic Eye of Immobilization.

“I did think the water was moving awfully strangely. Was this why you were acting so odd earlier?”

“Oh, uh, yeah...”

Kuon handed the still-petrified Slime over to me when I reached him, and I immediately teleported it away. He must have guessed what was going on. I could feel my dignity slowly withering away...

“Sorry to keep you waiting, Kuon!”

Allis came out of the restroom, and the two held hands as they went off together. Kuon had caught me, but for now this was mission complete. It was a good thing it didn’t become a much bigger deal.

Exhausted, I dragged myself back to where the Babylon crew were waiting.

“Good job out there.”

“I am goddamn pooped...”

I handed Doc Babylon back the glasses and slumped down onto one of the deck chairs.

The whole point of a pre-opening was to check that there were no problems before the official opening, so the fact that we were able to resolve this trouble in advance was the silver lining to the whole mess, at least.

“Change the purifying tank lock to a password-style one, would you?”

“Sure. Parshe won’t usually be down here, though, so I doubt you have to worry that much.”

“Just playing it safe.”

All it would take is someone accidentally stumbling onto the switch for this to

happen again, so it was better safe than sorry.

“Actually, where *is* Parshe?”

Tica was still there being a creep toward the little girls, but the source of all this trouble wasn’t here, and that gave me a *very* bad feeling.

“Oh, she went off, saying that she’d clean the purifying tank—”

“Awawa, big trouble! When I was cleaning up-a the purifying tank, I accidentally slipped on a yam, and then I ended up throwing the bass guitar I had into a stepladder, which then fell over into the silk hat that we keep for magic tricks-a, and then the pigeons inside it got all surprised and flew out straight into the switch for the tank-a!”

“GRAHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!”

I’d had enough of this clumsy dolt! Why was there a yam, a bass guitar, and a silk hat all there in the first place?!

I yanked the Slime Radar out of Doc Babylon’s hand when she silently held it out to me.

“You’re forbidden from ever going into *any* of these pools.”

“What? But why?!”

Was she really acting as if she didn’t know? There were SO many reasons.

I’d better make sure there was a double lock on the tank. Anything to make sure this didn’t happen again.

Afterword

Thank you for reading *In Another World With My Smartphone Volume 28*! Did you enjoy it? Volume 7 of my other work, *In a VRMMO with My Rabbit Scarf*, has also just been released. I'd appreciate it if you'd give that a read as well.

By the time this volume releases, season 2 of the anime should already have started airing. I hope you're enjoying it.

In order to have all the heroines appear in the second season, the timeline has been altered a little from the original novels, but I hope you find those differences fun to watch.

And now, for the usual thanks.

First, thank you to my illustrator, Eiji Usatsuka. Your art for this book's cover of everyone having fun together has become one of my favorites. And of course, thanks to K, the Hobby Japan editorial department, and everyone involved in the publication of this book.

Finally, thank you to everyone reading the webnovel, as well as everyone reading this book right now.

Patora Fuyuhara