In Another World With My Smartphone

4

Patora Fuyuhara
illustration・Eiji Usatsuka

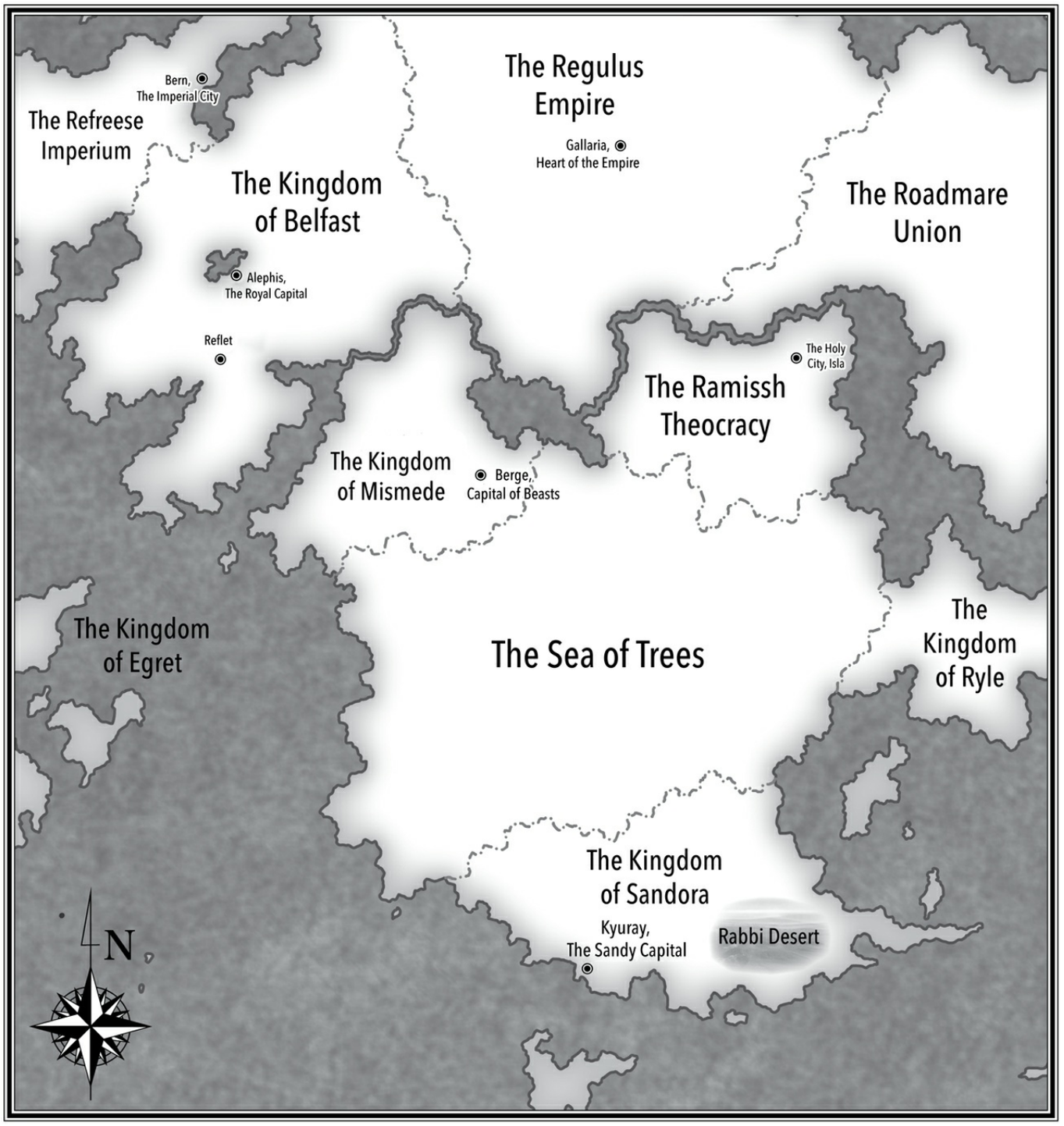



"I'VE FOUND IT! IT'S IN THE RABBI DESERT, SOUTHEAST OF THE SANDORA KINGDOM!"
In Another World With My Smartphone 4


THE READING CAFE "MOON READER"... IS NOW OPEN!
Lucia Leah Regulus
THE THIRD PRINCESS OF THE REGULUS EMPIRE. TOUYA CAME TO HER AID DURING THE COUP. SHE'S AROUND THE SAME AGE AS YUMINA, SO THE TWO OF THEM GET ALONG VERY WELL.


CHARGE ON, FOR THE SAKE OF THE EMPIRE!

Map of the Western Side of the Continent



The Story So Far!

Our young protagonist, Mochizuki Touya, was accidentally killed by God and reborn in another world. As an apology, God grants him the ability to use his smartphone in this new world, along with a body containing far more magic than the standard. Using his newfound abilities, Touya travels the land solving various problems, and meeting precious new comrades along the way. After chancing upon one of Doctor Babylon's ancient relics, the Garden of Babylon, Touya and friends set out to search for the ones that remain.

Table of Contents

Cover

Color Illustrations

Map of the Western Side of the Continent

Chapter I: The Encounter in the Desert

Chapter II: Moon Reader, The Reading Cafe

Interlude I: The Assailants

Chapter III: Trouble in the Empire’s Heart

Interlude II: Grandmother and Granddaughter

Chapter IV: The Duchy of Brunhild

Afterword

About J-Novel Club

Copyright

Chapter I: The Encounter in the Desert

“I’ve found it! It’s in the Rabbi Desert, southeast of the Sandora Kingdom!” We were all calmly eating our breakfast when suddenly the door burst open. Leen and Paula barged their way in, spouting a bunch of gibberish. Leen had a smile plastered to her face, one that was practically screaming “I did it!”

“Beneath the sand! Stone pillars! Just like the Ruins of Nirya! It seems there are six ancient stone pillars with spellstones embedded in them. It’s just buried beneath the sand!”

“Mmngh... that’s nice, I guess.” I replied while chowing down on my toast as Lapis poured me a fresh cup of juice. Breakfast gives you your daily burst of energy. It would be foolish to not eat it properly. Honestly, I didn’t really have time to listen to her ramblings during my morning routine.

“...Sexy underwear.”

“Fine, fine. Tell me about the Rabbi Desert.”

Tsk... she remembers, then. She had made me promise, or rather... threatened me into promising her some skimpy underwear if I refused to search for Babylon with her.

The mood in the room had taken a sudden shift when she brought it up, so I found it prudent not to indulge her. I had no choice but to grin and bear it.

“Far south of Mismede, through the Sea of Trees, you’ll find the Burning Kingdom of Sandora. The Rabbi Desert is just southeast of that place.”

“First the depths of the coastline, and now a blazing desert... Does the good doctor have it in for me?” She could see the future, so I was wondering if she was peeking in on me right at this moment. I shot an irritated glare upward, just in case.

Then again, it’s been thousands of years... The landscape probably changed a lot, huh? I mean, she couldn’t really be that malicious, right? That was what I wanted to think, at least. Still, I couldn’t shake the feeling that she’d be laughing

at me if she was watching this unfold.

“So we should head there, then?”

“That’s right. We’ll go uncover more relics from a bygone age. I hope we find the library this time.” Leen was absolutely up and ready to get at it. I, on the other hand, didn’t really care all that much. I gave a reluctant, cursory glance toward Cesca.

“What’s wrong, Master?”

“Well, I’m just wondering if there’ll be another one of you thrown into the mix if we do go...”

“A whole new realm of debauchery will open then, Master.”

“That’s enough out of you.” *She’s such a pain in the ass...*

I wondered what to do. My initial thought was just to leave it. After all, I’d already come this far without looking for them.

But at the same time, I had made a promise to Leen, and the doctor had made a rather cryptic speech about the Phrase annihilating civilization, so there was that whole thing too.

It was entirely possible that I’d need the power of Babylon to help me in some kind of catastrophic event. I definitely didn’t want to be caught with my pants down if that time ever came.

“Alright, let’s do it. Cesca, prepare the garden.”

“Yes, master.” Leen and Paula rejoiced, and everyone else stood up with smiles on their faces. They headed out the door, presumably to their own bedrooms.

I suddenly remembered the houses that I had teleported from Reflet. They should’ve still been aboard the garden. I figured they’d have made for a nice holiday home, after I fixed it all up of course. They were pretty sizable too, so there’d be no worries about space.

Okay, I’ll start fixing that place up while we ride over to the desert.

We started riding the garden in Belfast, then headed as quickly as we could

south of Mismede, toward the Burning Kingdom of Sandora.

I figured that the speed of the garden was about on par with a commercial plane. Well, that was mostly a guess on my part. I'd never actually been on a plane in my life. Not that I had a fear of heights or anything like that, I'd simply never had the opportunity.

"It will take about four hours until we reach our destination." I couldn't judge whether that was fast or not, but it was still a lot quicker than I had expected. Therefore, I decided to get to fixing up the vacant homes immediately.

The houses had been moved to the corner of the garden. I opened up the door to the largest of the two, then stepped inside. *Hm, it's not bad at all. Guess cleaning the interior up will be enough for the time being.*

"I'll handle everything upstairs," Elze said, sounding almost excited.

"Then I'll take care of the kitchen and the dining room."

"I will take care of the living room, I will!"

"Then I'll be in charge of the landing and corridors. Touya, please handle the lighting and areas that require running water," Yumina calmly decided.

Wait, water... What do I do about the water? Wait, there's a waterway running through the garden, right? Maybe I can make use of that.

I headed toward the central control monolith and asked Cesca if she knew anything about where the water in the garden came from. As it happened, she did. The water was produced by an Artifact that the doctor had created a long time ago.

I was shown to a fountain that produced a seemingly infinite supply of water that flowed down the canal waterway and spread all across the garden. At the end, the water was then cleansed of any impurities it may have picked up, and looped back around to the fountain.

"Does the water last forever?"

"No, there's still evaporation, condensation, and such. But even if water escapes, the source will always produce a level amount." *Then it should be fine to draw water from here.*

“Can you drink it?”

“Yes, it’s safe for human consumption.”

Good, there’s no problem, then. I used the same method that I used back at the Silver Moon, installing a short pipe in the waterway. I decided to install the drainage pipe at the end of the canal. That was where the water was purest, after all.

I went to see Linze, who was cleaning the kitchen, and used **[Modeling]** to create a sink while I was there. I made the sink out of mithril, so it shined with a lovely glow. Then, I installed a faucet that was connected to the primary water source with **[Gate].** After that, I set the drainpipe to flow back into the canal as well.

I turned the handle on the tap, watching on as water flowed out. *Great, it works after all.* Linze was surprised at first, but pretty quickly came to terms with the concept of turning a faucet on and off.

After that, I made a toilet. A proper flushing one, as well. I definitely couldn’t afford to cut corners there. I didn’t connect the toilet drain to our canal, that would’ve been nasty. Instead, I connected it to the sewer at home.

After that, I made a bath in the same way. I also made a shower. All-in-all, I was pretty satisfied.

After finishing up all that work, I figured I’d set up the lighting. A few **[Light Orb]** enchantments seemed good enough, as they’d continue to light the place up for a few hours so long as they were topped up by magical power every so often. **[Light Orb]** was not a spell that drained much magic, so it was fine by me.

After I was finished, I looked around and noticed that I hadn’t seen Leen or Paula anywhere for a while. After searching around a bit, I found them both. Sango, Kokuyou, Kohaku, and Cesca as well. They were crowded around the central monolith, watching something it was projecting.

“What’s going on?”

“I’ve noticed something troublesome. Escapees, perhaps... We’re near the Burning Kingdom, but this is still the harsh desert. There shouldn’t be people braving these wastes.” The projected screen showed the surface below. There

were several feeble-looking people down there, walking unsteadily with a camel in tow. What little they wore was ragged and tattered, offering little protection against the blazing sun. There seemed to be about ten of them, but they certainly weren't carrying enough provisions for that many people.

"If they're in trouble, we should help them, right"

"Are you sure? What if you compromise us by revealing Babylon's existence? They may be criminals, or brigands. It's out of the ordinary to travel these sands on foot, you know? It's a more nuanced call to make than simply helping them out of the goodness of your heart."

I see... That definitely is troublesome. Well, Yumina's Mystic Eyes can determine whether or not they're good people. But I'm not sure what I'd do if there was only one bad person amongst them... Leave them in the desert, maybe?

"Let's save them. We can always just use a **[Gate]** to send them to Belfast or Mismede, that way we won't compromise the garden." Still, I was unsure how to make contact without freaking them out. Just appearing before them through a portal of light wouldn't really be good.

"You may want to speed up your deliberation process."

"Why?" Cesca pointed at the screen, which was now showing the group under attack by a large monster.

What the hell is that?! Is that a bug?! A big worm?! Its long body ended in a face that was practically all mouth, and the maw inside was lined with serrated teeth.

"It's a Sandcrawler. A magical beast that burrows beneath the desert, eating its prey along with the sand." Leen muttered a brief explanation, her eyes fixed on the monitor. Three of the survivors had swords and axes, but their situation didn't seem all that great. They didn't seem especially skilled, and they didn't have any magic users either. In moments flat, their camel was devoured, along with their supplies. They would surely be next on the menu.

"I'm going!" As I spoke, I conjured up a portal of light and made it to the ground.

I emerged from a portal in the air above the Sandcrawler, raining down bullets upon it with Brunhild. They weren't ordinary bullets, either. They were my detonating bullets, freshly enchanted with **[Explosion].** The Sandcrawler contorted in pain, bodily fluids spewing from its wounds.

As I landed on the hot sand, I raised my right arm and recited the chant that Linze had taught me.

"Come forth, Water! Feel My Blade, Both Cold and Clear: [Aqua Cutter]!" I shot off a pressurized blast of water toward what I assumed was the sandcrawler's neck. It was split cleanly on impact. *Oh gross, I definitely overdid it.*

White-green fluids oozed from the gaping wound and slowly pooled on the sand below. Still, it didn't seem to die instantly, and spent a short time writhing and squirming before finally falling still.

That is absolutely disgusting. I remembered reading that eels could survive without their heads, but the image was far more grotesque than I had thought. I made a mental note to burn the next Sandcrawler I met.

I gave a disgusted look at the corpse while I holstered Brunhild. Before long, one of the survivors came over to me. They held a longsword and wore a hood, so I couldn't see their face. It appeared to be a girl, though.

"...Who are you?"

"I'm Mochizuki Touya. I didn't expect to encounter anyone out here in the desert, but I couldn't stand by when I saw you were in danger."

"We're in your debt. We would've died without your interference. My name is Rebecca, I'm an adventurer." She took off her hood, exposing her face to the sun. She had tanned brown skin and ashen, shoulder-length hair.

"Honestly, that was amazing. To take down such a beast like it was nothing..." An axe-wielding man approached from behind Rebecca. He, too, removed his hood. He was a tall, sturdy man with a small beard. There was a boy who seemed to be a bit younger than me standing next to him, panting heavily and attempting to carry a sword.

Even at a glance, I could tell a weapon like that didn't suit him. The blade was

far too big for him.

As I was pondering, he threw the sword to the side and got down on his knees at my feet.

“Uh-Uhm, sir! Y-You used water magic before, didn’t you?! C-Can you please use it to make some water? Please!” I was taken aback by the sudden request, but I quickly understood the situation. These people were seriously dehydrated.

Their camel must’ve held the last of their water reserves. Traveling across the desert now would surely be suicide for them.

“Sorry for his behavior, but we do desperately need some water. We have no money right now, but we’d be indebted to you... If you could find it in your heart, that is...” Rebecca cut in on my thinking time. Guess I was taking too long to reply.

“No, that won’t be a problem at all. I was just thinking about what kind of container I should make for it, that’s all.”

“Hm?” I took out a small lump of iron with **[Storage],** then made a large bowl out of it with **[Modeling].** I then used Water magic to fill it up with water. I knew that the desert heat would cause the water to warm or even boil, so I called forth several lumps of ice to counteract that.

“Ooh!” Hearing the sound of trickling water, the others came shuffling over as I used the rest of the iron to make cups for everyone.

It was clear as day from the way they desperately scrambled to fill their cups, as well as the way they gulped it down. They must have been parched.

After a while, something strange occurred to me. There were ten survivors, all-in-all. Aside from the boy and the man, every one of them was female.

Excluding Rebecca, all of the women had something in common. They all wore thick, black collars tightly bound around their necks. I wondered...

Rebecca noticed my staring, and opened her mouth to speak. Her tone was grave.

“It’s what you think. These girls are all slaves. We stole them all from a group of slavers...” I began wondering if Leen had been right. I might’ve just helped a

group of thieves.

◇ ◇ ◇

They called it a “Submission Collar.” Apparently it was a single Artifact in the old days, but the great sorcerers of Sandora successfully created a mass-produced version hundreds of years ago.

Originally, it was used to enslave ferocious beasts that couldn’t be tamed, but over time it came to be used to enslave people as well.

It started more innocently, being used to bind criminals into labor and servitude. But eventually slavery became the norm, and it wasn’t just the guilty who were forced into it. Those who had the collar clasped around their necks lost everything, becoming commodities themselves as a result.

In that country, slavery was legal, and those in heavy debt could be taken as well as criminals. But naturally that led to a new kind of crime as well.

Slaving merchants would ally themselves with brigands, conspiring to raid settlement for money, merchandise, and young women. The brigands would take whatever spoils they wanted, and the slavers got fresh new stock on the black market.

After all, once the submission collar was around your neck, your free life was forfeit. You’d be registered with the merchant’s guild and formally recognized as a commodity. It seemed that the girls here, Rebecca excluded, were all in that category.

The slavers had hired a female swordsman, a male axeman, and a young boy to help escort their product. These hires were named Rebecca, Logan, and Will. Apparently, the three were completely unaware that the goods they’d be escorting were people. They had listened to the slaves and heard their tragic story, so they chose to take up arms against the merchants in the name of justice. However, just as they made this decision, the slavers were attacked by brigands and killed fairly easily.

Apparently they died rather unceremoniously, so it was all a little anticlimactic. Still, for those to have conspired with brigands to then be killed by them... Easy to think it was karma at work.

Rebecca and the others dispatched the bandits, and then decided they would escort the slave girls out of the country. If they went back to the guild, the girls would simply be transferred to a new master, after all. But traveling through the desert was the only way they could escape the country beyond the public eye. So they tried that, but got caught in a sandstorm, and the rest was history...

“So that’s the story, eh?”

“Yep, that’s about the whole thing.”

I see... Seems they had some bad company... Human trafficking, huh. So that exists in this world too, then.

Apparently the Burning Kingdom of Sandora didn’t have much interaction with other nations, and preferred to preserve its own culture. That made sense to me. It was beyond even Mismede, past a great sea of trees and a desert so boiling hot that even a rock on the ground could scald you.

“So, about this submission collar...” From what I was told, the collar would wrack the slave’s body with pain and give them a horrific death if they tried too hard to remove it. That was goddamn messed up. The person designated as master by the collar could no longer be refused or attacked, either.

All their master would have to do is think “come back to me” and the slave would have no choice but to return. If they did not, agony would rip through their bodies.

Only the designated master could remove the collar, too. But these girls were enslaved to the merchant who had died in the brigand attack. In other words, they couldn’t have their collars removed at all. If they returned to the merchant’s guild, they’d simply be sold off to a new master. They wouldn’t ever taste freedom unless that master decided to let them go.

An idea suddenly formed in my mind, but I wasn’t sure if it would work...

I thought about trying to use **[Apport],** but I wasn’t certain about the size.

Women’s necks were slender, though... It was just a matter of whether or not I could squeeze one in my hand. I grabbed my own neck with both of my hands to get a feel for it. I figured it’d be fine, since my neck was definitely thicker

than a woman's. Plus, if it didn't work, nothing would happen, so there was no harm in trying.

"I might have a way to get those collars off."

"What?"

"You serious?!" Will's reaction was considerably more excited than Rebecca's. He stared at me, eyes wide with hope and wonder.

"Well, I won't know until I try. And there's a good chance nothing'll even happen, so..."

"Try it, please! Please free Wendy!" *Wendy?* Will suddenly went over and grabbed one of the slaves by the hand. He brought her over.

She was about thirteen or fourteen years old... probably around Will's age. Her skin was tanned, and her hair was dirty blonde, hanging down in braids over each side of her chest. She was clearly the youngest of the slaves in the group. She hid herself behind Will's back, nervously peeking over at me. She seemed frightened, perhaps in shock. Then again, I had just completely massacred a sandcrawler in front of her, so that might've had something to do with it.

Well, whatever. Let's give it a go.

"[Apport]." To prevent her from getting any more scared, I tried to call her collar to me without any more bravado.

And there, in my hand, the black collar shone beneath the sun. It had worked.

"Wha—?! Huh?! Ah?!" Will stared at my hand, and then turned to look at Wendy. Naturally, there was no collar clasped around her neck.

"He did it, Wendy! It came off!"

"Eh...?" Wendy rubbed at her neck slightly. When she realized she was no longer beholden to the cold grip of the collar, she put a hand over her mouth and started to cry.

Will pulled her into a tight embrace. *Oh, so it's like that, is it? No wonder he was so desperate. What an adorable little couple.*

“...Hey, how’d you do that?”

“I used my Null spell, **[Apport].** It lets me pull things into my hand when I’m in range.” Ignoring Logan’s astonishment, I continued to remove the other collars. Eventually, I held seven collars in my hand. I promptly incinerated them with a basic fire spell. Rebecca stared at me blankly as the little fire raged, only able to mutter a few words.

“Just what are you?”

“Just a simple adventurer. Here’s my card.”

“You’re a Red Rank?!” The trio noticed the color of my Guild Card and seemed quite surprised. I handed it over to them, and their surprise reached new heights.

“You got the Dragon Slayer and Golem Buster titles, too?!”

“No wonder you could cleave through that sandcrawler like it was butter...”

“Wow...! I’ve never seen anything like this before!” Each of the three gave me their earnest, if not perplexed, words of gratitude. I took my card back and asked Rebecca what their next course of action was.

“Even without their collars, they’re still registered as property within Sandora. It’d be bad to keep them here. I’m thinking that bringing them to another country would be the best plan.”

“How about Belfast? It’s quite nice there. You guys can stay at my place for a while if you want.”

“Well, hold on a moment. I’m not sure how far away Belfast is from here...” I answered Logan by opening a **[Gate].** I poked my head in, then called Yumina to come join me.

“Huh?! Who are you?!”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you. I am Yumina Urnea Belfast, daughter of Tristwyn Urnes Belfast, king of the Kingdom of Belfast.”

“WHAT?!” The trio echoed their disbelief at once. They stiffened up immediately, too. But then again, that was only natural.

Sometimes I forgot it, but Yumina was royalty after all. Even without the regal attire, her decorum and attitude were on point. All of us paled in comparison to the presence she emanated.

“I’ve heard of your unfortunate circumstances. My country would be happy to take you in, but what do you wish to do?” Yumina looked over them one-by-one, smiling all the while. She was definitely using her Mystic Eyes. If any of them had impure thoughts, we’d still take them to Belfast, just in a position where they could be monitored for a while.

Yumina finished looking over them all, gave a small smile, and turned to me with a nod. I figured that meant they were all clear.

Rebecca suddenly got on her hands and knees, prostrating herself before the princess.

“Y-Yes, Milady! Th-Thank you... Thank you so much!” One after the other, Logan, Will, Wendy, and the others all bowed in the same position.

Geez, guys. Ease up on the old-timey genuflecting any time you want.

“Well then, everyone’s off to Belfast! After you, Touya.”

“No problemo.” It would be a hassle to have everyone just go through a **[Gate]** one by one, so I huddled everyone together and created one above them. The exit would start one centimeter above the ground outside our house at Belfast, and slowly move upward as the entry portal moved downward.

I tried doing the classic “beam me up!” routine from a certain sci-fi show, but it didn’t go as well as I’d hoped. I had to stop myself. I looked like a moron.

I felt a strange sense of vertigo as we teleported in that way, like the feeling you get when you think there’s another step at the top of the stairs when there actually isn’t. It felt gross.

Well, that feeling probably only applied to Yumina and I. Everyone else was simply too stunned due to the sudden scenery change.

“Wh-Where are we...?”

“You’ve arrived in the Kingdom of Belfast, friends. The Royal Capital, to be exact. My home. You guys can stay here as long as you need. Hey, Laim!” I

called right away for our resident super butler, and he appeared on the terrace. Our maid squad, composed of Lapis, Cecile, and Renne, appeared alongside him.

“Please take care of this group until we come back.”

“Very well, sir.” Laim bowed deeply, then shot a glance to the maid trio. Lapis began to lead everyone into the house. Rebecca looked around a little restlessly, but shuffled in line with the others into the house.

“For now, we need to continue our course. Let’s head back to the garden.”

“You’re right.” Rebecca and the other two were adventurers, so they’d be able to earn money and find a home through the guild without much of a fuss. But as for the others... I definitely couldn’t afford to hire seven more staff. Hopefully I’d be able to help them find work.

《My lord!》

“Huh? Kohaku?” I was startled by the sudden telepathic message. I wondered what was wrong.

《Kohaku? What’s going on?》

《An unussual creature hasss appeared in the desssert. A crysstal creature, with a beautiful ssshine...》 The one that replied was Kokuyou, rather than Kohaku.

Wait, crystal? It can’t be...! I opened a **[Gate]** and dashed out before the garden’s monolith. Everyone was looking at the screen. On it, an enormous crystal being was flying high above the desert, emitting a high pitched scream.

The one we had encountered in the ruins was shaped like a cricket. The one Leen had encountered was a snake. The form this devil took... was that of a manta ray.

It’s huge... That was all I could think when I saw it. The Cricket Phrase I had fought before was about the size of a small car, but this one was easily larger than four buses.

At the tip of its body, there were two round protrusions, and within each was an orange-looking nucleus, similar to the core we had encountered within the

previous Phrase.

But, unlike the Cricket Phrase, the core on this beast was about the size of a basketball. Scaled up to match the rest of its body, I supposed.

*Crap... I don't think **[Apport]** is gonna work here.*

"What should we do?" Leen turned to me, expecting an answer. We could easily escape without a fight if we wanted to. In truth, we had absolutely no obligation or loyalty to this region, or the nearby kingdom.

Still, it was possible that this creature could pass through the Sea of Trees and attack Mismede. Even worse, it could attack Belfast after that! There'd be a lot of injuries, maybe even casualties. People could get hurt, people we owed debts to, and people we'd met over the course of our travels. I couldn't accept that.

"We fight. I can't leave this creature unchecked." I had made my decision.

Luckily we were in a barren desert. That meant we didn't need to worry about collateral damage.

"But how are we gonna hurt this thing? It's huge! It's probably the same as the last one, too, so not only does it absorb magic and have a stupidly hard shell, but it can fly in the sky as well!" Elze had a point. Yae had mithril weaponry now, but I still wasn't sure how much that was going to help. I didn't even know where to begin with the flying part, too.

"We've no choice, so we should use indirect magical attacks. **[Ice Rock]** and **[Rock Crash]** should work, I think." Linze and Yumina nodded at Leen's comment. After they took it down to the ground using those spells, it'd give Yae, Elze, and myself the chance to attack it with our weapons. We didn't really have much of a choice when it came to strategy, anyway.

"Alright, it's time!" I opened a **[Gate]** and we hopped through to the desert below.

The Manta Phrase was high above us now, calmly soaring through the air as its body gleamed in the sunlight. Seeing it in person only made my dread and awe deepen. The behemoth was looking down upon us, intimidating us with its very presence.

I pulled out Brunhild and let off a few shots. They simply bounced off the Manta Phrase's body with little to no effect.

"Regular bullets are useless, I guess..." Its smooth, streamlined, and firm body was clearly well designed to repel physical attack.

"Come forth, Ice! Grand Frozen Mass: [Ice Rock]!" Linze invoked her spell, and an enormous chunk of ice appeared above the crystal creature.

The ice chunk smacked against the Manta Phrase, but it only succeeded in making the creature bob downward slightly. The ice slid down the smooth surface of the creature and simply crashed to the desert below. It didn't really change the Manta Phrase's course at all. It was a total waste of effort on our part. That was all there really was to it.

It was about as futile as throwing rocks at styrofoam floating on water. It would always just bob back up to its default position.

The crystal creature finally noticed us, though. It turned in our direction. Suddenly, light began to gather between the two core nubs on the Manta Phrase's head. *Something doesn't feel right here!*

"Everyone! Split up!" At my call, everyone spread out in different directions.

At the next moment, missiles of light blasted from the Manta Phrase and rocketed toward the spot where we'd been standing. An enormous wave of sand erupted from the area it impacted. Honestly, it was a shocking display of power.

"You've gotta be kidding me... If one of those hits someone, I doubt there'd be anything left!" *Looks like it has to wait a while between shots, though. That's a relief, at least. We'll be able to dodge it so long as it keeps up like that.*

As if to mock me, the Manta Phrase extended its tail, bending the tip beneath its belly. The tip began to spin up like a Gatling gun, continuing the assault and firing yet more projectiles.

"Oh, what the hell?!" I dashed out of the way and looked toward the sand. I had to see what had just been launched at us.

It looked like a thin crystal arrow, no, closer in shape to a bo shuriken. Several

thin, piercing projectiles. Regardless of what they were, that attack was definitely dangerous.

I looked over to check everyone else was okay, and saw Linze clutching at her ankle.

“Linze!”

“I-I’m okay. It was just a graze...” Linze cast some healing magic and staggered to her feet. But then I noticed that the crystal Gatling tail was pointed directly at her. *Oh shit!*

“[Accel]!” Using her engagement ring, Elze sped up and headed toward her younger sister.

Elze raised her gauntlet covered fist high against the oncoming barrage of blades. Because of her wind enchantment, all of the projectiles were repelled and dispersed.

“Touya-dono! Put me above it with a **[Gate]!**”

“G-Got it!” I hesitated for a second at Yae’s suggestion, but quickly opened up a portal beneath her, sending her a few meters above the Manta Phrase.

“Take this!!!” Yae came down upon the Manta, mithril blade in hand. But the damage she did was far from fatal.

Yae kicked against the creature’s back and jumped off. *Hey, wait! You’ll hit the ground hard if you fall from that high!* “Touya-dono, please create another **[Gate]!**”

Y-Yep! On it! I created a portal just below Yae in the air, and then placed the exit about 1 meter above the ground near me. She disappeared and reappeared in a flash, safe and sound. *What a relief...*

“Don’t do things like that, it’s bad for my heart...!”

“I am sorry, I am!” Still, it helped us figure out how effective mithril was on this thing. Not effective at all, actually. I had no idea how to go about hurting it. I knew we’d have to target the cores like with the Cricket Phrase, but they were the size of basketballs and there were two of them. I couldn’t use **[Apport]** to grab them.

The Gatling tail turned to face me again. *Crap, not again!*

“Whirl, O Wind! Bulwark of Storms: [Cyclone Wall]!” Yumina spoke an incantation, creating a wall of wind around Yae and myself. The piercing shots from the Manta Phrase were deflected away in an instant. *Thank goodness...*

But as the sand subsided, I noticed the creature had shifted its attack. It was preparing another barrage of light missiles.

“Tch, **[Accel]!**” I held Yae in my arms and moved away with my acceleration spell. Seconds later, a massive explosion crashed into the area we were just at. *This is dangerous... It’s a lot smarter than I thought!*

“Rumble forth, Earth! Pulverizing Boulder: [Rock Crash]!” Leen conjured an enormous rock and smacked the Manta Phrase in the head, but the effect was the same as Linze’s earlier spell. Not much.

Damn it... we really don’t have an ace in the hole here. I’ve got no idea what to do. There’s a chance someone could get hurt, too... Just thinking about that makes my blood run cold.

“Should we just fall back with a **[Gate],** maybe? There’s nothing we can do here.”

“Er... Touya-dono? Do you know who that person is, do you?”

“Hm?” I turned around at Yae’s remark, confused.

Even though we were in the middle of a burning hot desert, there was a boy there. A boy wearing a long, white muffler.

“Ende...?”

“Yo.” The monochrome boy I had met in town suddenly appeared. He was smiling and gave a small wave.

What’s he doing here? Wait, why is he even here in the first place? No, more importantly... how did he get here?! It’s barren desert for miles around, we would’ve seen him.

“Long time no see. I came here because I detected the presence of a Phrase, but I didn’t expect to find you, Touya.”

“Ende... you know about the Phrase?”

“Hm? Well, I suppose you could say that... So far I’ve only encountered Intermediate Constructs... I guess this world’s ‘Dimensional Boundary’ is close to the breaking point, though...” *Intermediate Constructs? Dimensional Boundary? What’s this guy talking about?*

“Could you hold on a moment? I have a mess to clean up.”

“Huh?” With a laugh, Ende turned to face the Manta Phrase. The creature turned its aim to the boy, but he vanished from his spot entirely before the piercing shots met their mark.

“What?!” I looked around, but Ende had completely disappeared from sight. *Did he use invisibility magic? Wait, no... that just stops you from being seen, so the attacks still would’ve hit him.*

“Over there, Touya-dono!” Yae suddenly pointed overhead, straight at the airborne Phrase. Ende was there, standing atop the flying beast. *How did he...?!*

“Alrighty...” Ende raised his leg high into the air... And casually brought it down upon the Manta Phrase’s back. A splitting sound rang out, like someone had dropped a wine glass.

A tiny crack appeared at the point of impact, which then spread across the entire colossal body, shattering it into pieces in an instant.



What the hell?! How did he do that?! Ende descended to the desert surface alongside a rain of glittering crystal.

He found the two basketball-sized cores amidst the debris, took one in each hand, and smashed them against each other. They were obliterated instantly. His work done, Ende dusted his hands off.

“What the hell was that?!” I stared at Ende, dumbfounded. That was all I could say.

“Hm? I just attacked it by attuning my own magical oscillations to the wavelength of the creature.” *Magical oscillation? Like in the resonance phenomenon? Wait, it’s magic, so it’s probably a bit different...*

“Ende, earlier on you mentioned something about a Dimensional Boundary... What is that?”

“I guess you could consider it a kind of net that prevents entities from their own worlds crossing over into other ones. For whatever reason, there’s a small hole in it that opened up recently... This Manta Phrase came through, and the other ones as well. But luckily it’s only the small-fry for the time being.” Ende muttered an explanation while looking over the shattered fragments of the former crystal creature.

“These ones are just mooks, pawns working together for a common goal. They’re not the real threat.”

“So what’s their goal?”

“To find the slumbering Sovereign Phrase, their leader. It’s a goal I share, actually...” *What the hell?*

“Oh, I have to go now. I have a prior arrangement to tend to. I do hope we meet again though, Mochizuki Touya.”

“Wai—!” Ende ignored my protest, gave a small grin, and vanished in the blink of an eye. *What the hell kind of magic is that? Teleportation?*

“The Sovereign Phrase...?” I could do nothing but stare blankly as I pondered the mystery Ende had left behind.

◇ ◇ ◇

“That’s way too suspicious,” Leen concluded, folding her arms. Well, I figured much the same thing.

After that I returned to the garden and told everyone about Ende.

“He had this currency from five thousand years ago, and he was able to take down a creature that we couldn’t even scratch in just a single hit. Also, he knew a lot about the monster and was wearing some stupidly hot-looking scarf. Even that attack he did was super huge and dramatic, too.” I didn’t feel like that last point was particularly important, but it didn’t change the fact that it was suspicious. *Just what in the world is that guy?*

“He called that crystal creature a Phrase. But what exactly was it?” Elze brought up the obvious question. It clearly wasn’t an ordinary monster.

What I did know was that the Phrase came to ravage the world 5000 years ago. But the only ones who knew that were Cesca and I. And to be honest, I really didn’t know if telling everyone else was the right thing to do.

Worrying about whether or not to tell them, and thus bring about undue anxiety, just made it even more difficult to bring up.

Staaaaaaare...

Ugh. It’d been a while since Yumina assaulted me with her eyes. My own eyes started to dart around. *Shit. I can’t be lying to Yumina if I’m going to marry her!* “You know something, don’t you, Touya?”

“Urgh...” With Yumina seeing right through my suspicious behaviour, I had no choice but to convey the message I’d gotten from the doctor to everyone.

“Why would you keep silent about something so important!”

“Well, I was going to bring it up sooner or later...” Leen scolded me, to which I desperately tried to make excuses for myself.

“An invasion of tens of thousands of the Phrase. That’s the reason the ancient civilization was destroyed. So there were that many of them 5000 years ago, but barely any eyewitness reports of them nowadays. Until now, that is. Now that they’re appearing again. Just what is going on here...?”

“Maybe it was a survivor, or one that got sealed away?” Leen seemed

worried, but brought up her ideas to Linze. The Cricket Phrase we'd first come across had seemed half dead, so that way of thinking did make sense...

"I've been thinking about what that Ende guy said about the Dimensional Boundary... The Snake Phrase did seem to come out of a crack in space. It makes me think that perhaps the Phrase are sealed in another dimension..."

"So that would mean... someone is breaking down the boundary?"

"I don't have any proof of it, though." Paula crossed her arms and nodded by Leen's feet. *Does that bear really get what's going on?* What was weighing more on my mind was that we had no method of fighting against the Phrase. Ende had called the one we fought an Intermediate Construct. That means that there were Lower Constructs and Upper Constructs too.

The Cricket and Snake Phrase were likely Lower Constructs. But that meant we couldn't even defeat an Intermediate one. If an Upper Construct appeared... I had no idea what we'd do.

Looks like we really need to seek out the other Babylons.

"Cesca. Did humanity fight against the Phrase 5000 years ago?" Cesca turned to face me from in front of the monolith.

"Yes, they did fight. Not that it went too well for them, though. The doctor did manage to finally create an anti-Phrase weapon, but the Phrase had disappeared entirely by the time it was completed."

"What kind of anti-Phrase weapon?"

"The doctor created weapons that are controlled by a person housed within them. She called them Frame Gears." *What?! Sounds like giant robots! Did the doctor really manage to create those too?! Well, she did manage to make smaller, Cesca-sized robots, so I guess making giant ones isn't too much of a stretch...*

"What happened to them?"

"They were stored in the Hangar of Babylon." Cesca answered Elze's question. *Which means if the ruins we're heading toward ends up leading to the hangar... we can get some giant robots for ourselves?! Holy shit. This is getting me all*

excited. I mean, they're robots? Robots that you can get inside of and ride around! All men dream of this! Not that any one here would understand, since they're girls...

"It seems we've arrived at our destination."

"But I don't see anything."

"Apparently it's buried under the sand." Kohaku informed me as he looked at the monolith's screen. The coordinates were spot on, but I couldn't see anything but desert outside.

"Well, let's head down and have a look." Leaving Kokuyou and Sango on the garden in case anything happened, I used **[Gate]** to get down on the ground. Desert spread out as far as I can see, with nothing else in sight. I looked up the ruins again on my smartphone, but the pin dropped on the map exactly where I was standing.

Right below us..." *Well, what do to...* We couldn't just start digging through the sand. We had no idea how long it'd take to dig out with a shovel after all.

"I'll use wind magic to blow away the sand. Stand back." Leen thought up an idea before I did, then stepped forward. I moved away, just as told.

"Spiral forth, O Wind! Raging Sweeping Gale: [Cyclone Storm]!" A tornado sucked up all the sand, whirling it into the skies. It flew downwind from us as a sort of basin opened up in the desert below.

Finally, the ruins came into sight. It was a dome that was made out of some sort of stone or concrete. There was a door at one part that seemed to be the entrance. Not a double door, but a single one.

The tornado died down, so we made our way into the basin, but there wasn't a handle on the door.

I wondered if it was automatic, but it didn't react to my presence. There didn't appear to be any sensors on it, either. I casually reached out to touch the door, but my hand didn't stop there. I passed straight through it.

"Whoa?!"

"Touya?!" I took a step forward to keep myself from falling over, which made

me end up inside the ruins. Six pillars stood in the center, illuminated by a faint light.

I touched the door again, but this time it felt cold and solid. I tried to use **[Gate]** to get back outside, but my magic wouldn't work. *Huh? Am I trapped in here?*

《Are you alright, my lord?!》

《Kohaku? Yeah, I'm fine. There's nothing going on or anything. But I can see a circle of pillars, just like the last time... I'm gonna go on ahead, so tell everyone not to worry.》

《Very well. Please be careful.》

At least I can still use the telepathic link...

I figured there must be some sort of a trick to the door, to stop people coming in and destroying the circle. Like, it only lets in all-attribute holders, or only lets in one person at a time. I didn't know why it wouldn't let me out, though.

I thought back to all those cryptic things the doctor had said.

Well, there's nothing I can do here. I'm not gonna be getting out unless I get this circle moving, so time to get to work.

I sent forth magic into each pillar in turn, one attribute at a time. When all six were filled with magic, the center of the circle began to glow. Seeing that as my cue, I headed to the center. I allowed the Null magic to flow from me, and began to feel myself teleporting away. *Please let this one be the hangar...*

Light swirled around me, glowing, covering my vision, until I found myself somewhere that looked rather similar to the garden. The one difference was the massive building standing before me. The building was a sort of cube, like a massive white die.

I started to head down the path toward it, when a girl suddenly jumped in front of me, blocking my path.

"Stop right there! Yessir!" She held up her right hand, stopping me in my tracks. The girl's orange hair was tied into a bun on either side. The buns were wrapped up neatly under chignon covers with ribbons trailing off them. Her

white skin and golden eyes immediately made me think of Cesca.

Her clothes were a similar design to the ones Cesca was wearing when I first met her, only this new ginger girl had long sleeves and black socks. The cuffs of her sleeves had the number twenty-seven stitched into them.

She must be the manager of this place. She seems younger than Cesca. Mostly because she looks shorter, though...

“Welcome to the Babylon Workshop. I am High Rosetta, the Terminal Gynoid tasked with managing this facility. I’m a nice enough guy, so I’ll be kind enough to allow you to call me Rosetta, yessir.”

Knew it. Wait, she just said she’s a nice guy. Isn’t she a girl? She’s a girl, right? I mean, she’s wearing a skirt. She’s a girl... right?! Wait, this is the Doctor we’re talking about! I can’t trust her! Couldn’t this be a trap?!

“Uhh, Rosetta? You’re... a girl... right?”

“Hmm? I do not understand the intent behind your question, but yes, that is what I am. Yessir.”

Whew, guess it was just a mistake on her part. I mean, Cesca did say the doctor hadn’t made any males. So this is the workshop, huh... It’s not the library that Leen was hoping for or the hangar that I wanted.

“Ahead of us lies the center of the workshop. There is currently a ban on all those deemed incompatible from entering!”

“Well, Cesca said I was compatible, so...” I figured they were sisters, so I tried mentioning Cesca by name.

“Cesca... as in Francesca? I see. So you have already obtained the garden, then. That speeds things up, yessir it does. You must allow me to perform a test on you to verify that you are indeed worthy.” *A test...? I’ve got a bad feeling about this.*

“Guess the color of my panties without moving from that spot.”

“Are you stupid?!” *I knew this would be bad! Nothing made by that doctor could ever be good! Is she actually asking me to flip her skirt up?! What’s with this?!*

“You are only allowed one guess. Your time limit is five minutes, yessir. Now, what color are they?!”

Tch! Why is she in such high spirits! Time began to tick down as I worried about what to do. *Well, I’ll just have to do things my way!*

“Blow forth, Wind! Soaring, Spinning Gust: [Whirlwind]!” Wind picked up around Rosetta’s feet, making the ribbons on her chest and her bangs flutter in the breeze. However, her skirt didn’t budge an inch. *What?!*

“This skirt resists wind magic.” Rosetta grinned.

Grrrr... So it’s not gonna be that easy, huh? Then I’ll just get rid of the skirt entirely!

“Sear forth, O Fire! Oral Incineration: [Fire Breath]!” I conjured forth fire magic, intending to burn away her skirt, but it didn’t catch. I had no idea why that didn’t work.

“Similarly, this skirt also resists fire magic.” *What is this, the world’s strongest skirt?! It’s pointlessly powerful! Tch, don’t think this is over, Rosetta. When I get serious, I can peek at whatever panties I want! Wait, this is silly. Why am I so desperate anyway...?*

I’d had enough. I decided to peek directly. All I had to do was send my line of sight into her skirt.

I don’t have any other choice. This is the only way forward... I’m kind of making excuses for myself here, but whatever.

“[Long Sense]!” I fired my eyesight under her skirt, then opened my eyes. *It’s a bit dark... Can’t really see so well... Wait, what... is...*

...What the hell?! I crouched on the spot, trembling, as I tried to hold back the blood flowing from my nose.



She has those *on?!* Those?!

“Now, what color are they?!”

“C-Colorless... Th-They’re transparent...”

“Yessir! I recognize you as a compatible person. Henceforth, Gynoid Number Twenty-Seven, designation ‘High Rosetta’ shall be assigned to you. May we work together forever, sir yes sir!” Rosetta spoke with a snappy salute, but I honestly didn’t care. They hadn’t been entirely clear, more on the level of commercial cling wrap, but... She definitely should’ve had more shame! They were transparent...

Drip, drop... My nosebleed refused to let up.

“Has it stopped yet?”

“Somehow...” The torrent of blood had finally subsided. I’d managed to avoid death by hormonally induced nosebleed. That was a relief.

I had Rosetta change into a regular pair of underwear. It wasn’t good for my health to have her going around like that. That being said, I hadn’t seen proof she’d done as I asked. Although, I wasn’t exactly able to look at her directly at that point either.

“Well then, let’s get down to touring the workshop. Yessir, let’s.” Rosetta spoke before starting off into a brisk walk. She glanced back at me.

...What is it now?

“Don’t you want to see the pair I’ve changed in to?” Rosetta giggled, then grabbed the hem of her skirt.

“I most certainly do not! Hurry up and get on with the tour!”

“Sir yes sir! By the way, do you prefer large or small chests?”

“Just get on with the tour!”

“Yessir!”

Where does she come up with this stuff?! If parents are parents, then shouldn’t kids be kids? Please just give me a break...

I trudged along after Rosetta, approaching the die-shaped building. Since it was a workshop, I figured it must have been a place where they created things.

The white building was about fifty meters tall on each side. That made it roughly the same size as the Arc de Triomphe in France, but this building was a cube. It was about the same in length as it was in height.

Still, there didn't appear to be any windows... Actually, there didn't seem to be any doors either. We arrived at the edge of the building, and Rosetta gently pressed her hands up against the wall.

In the next instant, several lines ran down the white wall, then turned into a small cube. It transformed into an entrance in the blink of an eye.

Is this building made up of tiny cubes or something?! A building made up of small cubes that can reform themselves based on the orders given to them by Rosetta, maybe? The workshop truly was something else.

We went through the newly constructed entrance, then up several flights of stairs until we entered a wide, open space. *What is this place...?*

It was a completely white space. There was nothing around. There was literally nothing there, as it was a white void. White walls, white floor, and a white ceiling. It was vast and wide. Far too vast, and far too wide, in fact. *It's bigger on the inside, so... is the space being spread out through magical means?*

"What is this place?"

"This is the workshop, yessir. It's a facility outfitted with all imaginable crafting tools, a sophisticated workbench, and mass production capabilities." As she spoke, Rosetta touched a floor panel, which made a white table sprout up before my eyes. The table seemed to have a bunch of tools jutting from it as well.

I see... So the small white blocks that compose the building can reform into tools and equipment.

"Only you and I can operate the workshop! You can build original items here, but also mass produce copies of other items! Well, so long as you have the raw materials, yessir!" That made sense. If it was just a matter of making things, then I already had **[Modeling],** but the mass production of items was another

thing entirely. For example, I could mass-produce bicycles and start selling them... I'd be able to seriously start doing some business, then.

Making something more complex like a smartphone probably wouldn't be doable, though. I had no idea what went into those things.

I figured I'd be able to make the general shape, even the insides maybe, but if I made it out of something like iron, then it obviously wouldn't function.

But really... this place would've been better off being named the Production Plant of Babylon... The name's totally misleading.

I decided to run an experiment. I unholstered Brunhild and asked Rosetta to reproduce it. I took out a lump of mithril from **[Storage],** then asked her to use that for the materials.

Rosetta placed Brunhild on the white table, placed her hand above it, and recited a command.

"Scan." A dull green light blinked briefly from the table. After it was done glowing, Rosetta removed Brunhild from the table and placed the mithril lump where it was.

"Copy." The table opened up slightly, swallowing the mithril lump into it. The green light flashed once more. Then, the hole opened up, and the completed product came out. *That was fast!* The excess mithril was scattered to the sides, but the product in the middle was unmistakably Brunhild. Well, except for the fact that this one shone with a silver luster.

"Get a load of this." An image of the silver Brunhild was projected in front of Rosetta. She traced her finger along it, changing and tweaking the finer features.

At the same time, the silver Brunhild on the table warped and deformed itself to a form that was roughly similar, but definitely different to how it was before. It changed to match the form Rosetta had created on the projected screen.

"You can freely change the design of what you produce through these means, yessir." I took the weapon into my hand and tried to activate Blade Mode, but it didn't extend. That was puzzling for a moment. Then I realized that it wasn't able to copy any programming I'd applied to the base object.

I applied all the battle programming I had put on my original Brunhild to the new one, then stashed the old one using **[Storage].** Mithril felt better to me, after all.

“If you note down an exact number during the initial copy, it’ll continue to produce them automatically after that. Yessir it will.”

“That’s definitely handy.” There was nothing I felt like mass producing, but I knew it would definitely be of use later. *Oh, right...*

“Rosetta. Cesca mentioned something about a weapon that could oppose the Phrase...”

“Sir yes sir! That’d be the Frame Gear, sir! You can definitely produce those here. I helped the doctor make it, sir!” It was as I had thought. The Frame Gear were built in the workshop, and then stored in the Hangar after that. So all I had to do was...

“Rosetta, can we make a Frame Gear?”

“Sir no sir! Right now, the best I can produce is equipment and modifications. The schematics for the actual Frame Gear are not on site. Your best bet would be the storehouse, yessir!”

Damn it... Then we’ll need to find either the hangar or the storehouse... Guess I’ve got no choice...

“I’ll call the others here for the time being. Cesca’ll probably be happy to see you, too.”

“I’m looking forward to it, yessir.” I had completely forgotten about the friends I’d left behind in the desert. I hurriedly opened up a **[Gate]** to where the others were.

◇ ◇ ◇

“So this is the workshop... is it.”

“...Don’t irritate me now, yessir!” Leen made her disappointment immediately obvious, receiving a menacing glare from Rosetta in return.

“This place is far more useful than the garden, yessir it is! That place is only good for looking pretty.”

“Excuse me? The garden is a place of healing, a place to help regain peace of mind, a place of moral support for our master! How dare you misunderstand its use.” I sensed that this might go beyond glaring, so I stood between the two gynoids.

“That aside, can we link the garden and the workshop?”

“Yep. Now that master owns the workshop as well, it’ll be a good idea.”

“We can lower the barrier and link to the garden. We can even combine the control systems of both facilities now, yessir.” There was a terminal monolith, much like the one in the garden, situated in the corner of the workshop. Rosetta led Cesca over to it.

“What shall we do, Master?”

“Let’s send the garden to Belfast. We can move the workshop there, as well. After that, we can start docking while we’re there.”

“Docking...?” The two gynoids seemed confused.

What? Did I say something weird? Why are you staring at me like that?

“H-How indecent...”

“Just do it already!” *Great, we have another troublesome person in the crew now... This is one of the reasons why I didn’t want to do this in the first place! These two are probably similar to the old doctor as far as personality goes.*

《Massster? The garden appearssss to be inexplicably moving.》 Kokuyou sent me a telepathic message. Oh, almost forgot about them.

《Don’t worry. We’re moving it to Belfast from here. We found the workshop.》

I opened a **[Gate]** and everyone moved to the garden. It looked like both facilities were making their way toward Belfast with no trouble, so I opened another portal, picked up my familiars, and took everyone back home to the mansion.

We went across the terrace and entered the living room. Rebecca, Logan, and Will were there. The moment they saw us, they leaped up from their seats and kneeled before us.

“Hey, don’t do that! That’s enough!”

“No, no! We heard everything from Miss Cecile! Please forgive our rudeness. Please ask that the king forgives us!” *Just what did that maid tell them, exactly...* I looked over at Cecile and she stuck out her tongue at me. Plus, she gave me a wicked little smile, too. *Don’t think I’ll forgive you for this!*

“Really, don’t worry so much about it. Formalities aren’t necessary here.”

“But...” The three of them hesitantly stood up. I told them to sit back down on their chairs, and they did so.

“Well, we’ll take a bath.” Elze and the other girls went off to their respective rooms. Leen and Paula had returned to the royal palace to report about the Phrase and other matters. I did make sure to tell her that any mention of Babylon was forbidden, however.

Cesca and Rosetta headed toward my bedroom. That reminded me, I wasn’t sure whether Rosetta would become one of our maids now or not.

“Where are the former slaves?

“Th-They are erm, very-ly... tired, yes. So they indeed-ly, went to rest and... recuperate themselves.”

“Rebecca, I’m not a noble or anything. You don’t need to force yourself to speak formally or anything like that.” Rebecca clearly looked strained and uncomfortable due to her low social status, so she gave a wry smile and gulped down the water that Renne had brought.

“That right? Then I won’t worry about it.”

“H-Hey, y’sure that’s alright...?”

“He said it was fine, didn’t he? There’s no problem here, Logan.” Rebecca disregarded Logan’s remark and gave me a grin. I didn’t mind so much since I was sure he’d come around eventually.

“So, what’s next for you guys? You three can easily work with the guild, but what about the girls?”

“Well, that’s the thing... these girls are originally from poor villages. They have no specialized skills to speak of, and their combat ability is minimal. We won’t

leave them behind until we're all working and stable, I know that much, but..."

"Hm... I understand." *Work, eh...* I considered mass-producing bikes in the workshop and having the girls sell them, but that would be a little difficult...

I preferred to keep the workshop a secret anyway, and I'd rather have asked a professional about distribution and sales instead of doing it myself. That merchant from Mismede, Olba. He was Olga's father, as I recalled. The fox beastman.

When it came to work other than that, I considered running some kind of food stall, but there was the cost of ingredients to take into account. Plus, it wouldn't generate much revenue for seven people.

Hmph, I can't really think of anything good. Business is harder than you might expect...

I wondered what to do.

Chapter II: Moon Reader, The Reading Cafe

I decided I wanted to start a business. But to start a business, I needed funds. I considered selling some more mithril, but it was proving itself to be pretty handy, so I left it be.

Instead, I took some iron, some rubber, and mass-produced about a hundred bicycles in the workshop. Then, I went to Mismede and worked out a trade deal for a considerable sum with Olba, the father of Olga and Arma.

In all honesty, I felt a little guilty for gaining so much just from iron and rubber. But Olba was a merchant, so I was sure he had good business sense. He'd probably profit more off the bicycles than I ever could have anyway, so it was a worthy investment. I tried not to think about it too hard, since business dealings were confusing and all.

Either way, that helped me acquire the necessary funds. I decided to check out a bookstore in Mismede while I was in the area. I made a point to pick up most of their major literary works. I bought several full-length series as well.

I only bought completed works, though. I made sure to avoid any ongoing ones. This world didn't have things like release schedules, so whether or not the next book came was entirely down to the author's discretion. I couldn't be bothered to wait and keep an eye on stuff like that. All-in-all, I bought about five hundred books.

Then I went to Eashen, stopping by Oedo to buy some books there as well. I was a little disappointed, because I expected something like traditional Japanese scrolls and brush-strokes, but they just seemed to be standard books. I focused on books based on folklore and legend. Eashen had a lot of mythological fairy-tale type stories. I bought about three hundred books there and stashed them with **[Storage].**

Yumina had shared her memories with me, so I was able to head to Bern, the Imperial City, which was right in the middle of the Refreese Imperium. I bought about four hundred books there. It was my first time in Bern, but I decided to

save the sightseeing for another time.

Rebecca gave me memories of Sandora's capital, Kyuray. Then, Lapis gave me memories of Gallaria, Heart of the Regulus Empire. I used these to go to those places and get some books there as well.

By the time I arrived at Belfast's bookstore, I had quite the collection.

"Why did you pick up so many books?" Linze looked at the mountain of books I had brought back with me. When I noticed one that caught my interest, I'd thumb through it briefly. But not too much. After all, they were my merchandise.

I enchanted all of my chosen books with **[Protection].** That would prevent the books from being dirtied, and made them resistant to damp air along with general wear and tear. It also prevented them from being burned by fire. Though I wasn't sure if fire magic could bypass it or not.

Elze opened the door and walked inside.

"I was looking for properties, like you asked. Found a pretty good one, actually. It's on the end of of the main street in the south district. It's a decent size, and the place seems in good condition, too."

"Sure thing, we'll look over and buy it if it's promising, then."

"Still, I never thought you'd be starting a bookstore."

Close, but no cigar. It's not a bookstore I want to run here.

"No, I'm not making a bookstore. I'm thinking more of a cafe, actually. You'll pay money to enter for a certain period of time, and then you get free access to as many books as you want." Similar to a manga cafe, basically. Stories were pretty expensive in this world. Commonfolk typically didn't have access to literature. Basic educational texts like the ones that taught you letters through pictures were pretty accessible, though.

This kingdom didn't have anything in the way of public libraries, either. The only library was the one found within the Royal Palace, and obviously not everyone could just stroll on up in there.

After I considered that, I figured a place where you could freely read would be

a good idea. Not just books from Belfast, either. Books from all around. Plus, with the cafe idea, people wouldn't even have to buy them. That was why my idea was ultimately a "Reading Cafe" of sorts.

"I see... Read as many books as you want... and have a bite to eat, too. The idea is lovely. Honestly, I'd spend all my time at a place like that." Linze muttered something as she stared at the mountain of books.

"So you plan on letting the slave girls run the place?"

"That's the plan, at first anyway. If they find better jobs or something they'd prefer, they can leave, of course. I can just hire replacement staff." The girls from Sandora were pretty good in the kitchen, so I felt they'd be right at home working in a cafe. I didn't see any issues with them all working together on foodstuff, at any rate. I figured they'd be able to make a decent living based on customers in the place.

"Let's go check the place out." I took Elze and Linze along with me, and we teleported to the southern district.

The property wasn't too shabby at all. It was a broad building, probably an inn originally. The first floor looked like it was formerly a bar. It could definitely have been made more appealing with some redecoration. The second and third floors had private rooms, which I thought would be great for people who wanted to read in peace and quiet. I decided to set the rate of pay on the private rooms to be a little bit higher, though.

"Looks good to me. Let's get this place." I contacted the agent and signed the deed. The place was mine. Buying it definitely wasn't cheap, but I had a good feeling.

Alright, now to refurbish the place. Let's do our best.

I called over Wendy and the other slave girls from the mansion. Will also showed up, though I hadn't asked him over. I asked all of the girls to clean the upper floor.

I started using **[Modeling]** to transform the seating into soft, fluffy sofas.

I decided on where to put the reception counter, and where beverages could be ordered. *Hmm... should I make it self-serve for first floor customers? Maybe*

just water or tea, free of charge...? That can come out of the entry fee. Decorative plants... I can't really make those, so maybe I should grab some at the garden and bring them over... And let's put various bookshelves on this wall here...

After that, I made some recliner chairs. I made some little tables, too. *Yup, looks good.*

I started taking all of the books out of **[Storage],** then got Will and Wendy to stack and arrange them on the shelving.

"Sir... I have a question." Wendy spoke up while she arranged the books. I really wished she wouldn't address me like that, but she seemed adamant about it.

"What if some customers come and take the books away with them?"

"Ah, I actually thought about that. You mean what if someone enters a private room, stuffs a book into his backpack, and wanders off, right? You're wondering what happens then?"

In short, she was concerned about shoplifting. Books were quite valuable around these parts, which I knew would lead to thieving, so I had already accounted for that. Measures had been put in place!

"Well then, how about we have Will perform a demonstration? Take a book and put it under your clothes or something."

"A-Ah... Me?" Will looked concerned, but did as I asked. He took a book, stuffed it under his clothes, and headed out the door. And then...

"Ahwgh!!!"

"Will?!" Will made a weird noise and collapsed like a damp rag. *Great, it works!* I had set it up so the books emitted a **[Paralyze]** burst when they were taken out of the building.

In addition to that, books that moved more than ten meters from the building automatically teleported back to the front counter. That way, even if someone used a magic-blocking talisman, the book would still come back home.

I restored Will using **[Recovery].**

“W-Wow... Thieves d-definitely won’t get away from that...”

“We’ll hand over the perpetrators to the guards, and they’ll be banned from the establishment. Still, there might be issues every now and then, so I have a proposition. I’d like to ask Rebecca, Logan, and you, Will, to work security for the place. It’d be better to have people we’re familiar with working here, after all. But if you can’t, I’ll try and find trustworthy people through the guild.”

“No, that sounds good to me! I think I can work here three days a week, and another three for the guild.”

That made sense. *Wait, actually... what about the last day? Is he planning on taking a day off?* I tried asking, but Will started blushing uncontrollably and his eyes darted around. Wendy started blushing too, for some reason.

I was confused by their behavior, when suddenly someone smacked me in the back of the head. I turned around and saw that Elze was staring at me like I was an idiot.

“You absolute bonehead! Think about it! It’s a date, obviously. It’s good to clear up one day to be with the one you love, isn’t it?!”

“A-Ah... you shouldn’t say it so boldly like that...” Linze seemed flustered, but that was nothing compared to the beet red color overtaking Wendy and Will. Seemed she was right. Well, that definitely made sense to me.

I figured it was best to leave their feelings be. No reason for me to poke my nose in there anymore.

I left those two to quietly finish stacking the shelves, then whipped up another recliner chair with **[Modeling].** Elze hopped on and adjusted it until she was comfortable enough.

“Y-Your Null spells are incredible, sir. I don’t have any spell aptitude, so I’m quite jealous...” Will stopped working for a moment to comment on my abilities. I really wished he wouldn’t call me that, though.

“My late grandpa could use Null magic. But I can’t... Magic doesn’t really run in the family, so it’s not too strange.” Will let out a small sigh as he continued his work.

So that's how it is? I'd always figured magic had nothing to do with family. Elze and Linze were twins, after all, and their magic aptitude was pretty different. Linze could use three conventional elements, while Elze could only make use of Null.

"What kind of Null magic did your grandpa have?" Null magic was personal magic, of course. People who could use the exact same Null spells were rare as a result, so it was less of a treasure trove of magic, and more of a bunch of mildly uninteresting spells. Like, a spell that made water a little more salty. Just add more salt and save yourself the bother.

But I was still interested in hearing more. Even if it didn't have an immediate use, there might have been an unconventional way to make use of it.

"Grandpa's magic wasn't anything special, so please don't be too excited. It was a spell that made things he touched become slightly heavier."

"Heavier...?"

"Yes, it just added a little bit of weight to things. It wasn't a very useful spell at all.

The spell was named **[Gravity].**" *...Wait a minute. I've got it!*

"Will, do you think you could teach me more about it?"

"H-Hm? Sure...?" *If that spell can do what I think it can, then the potential could be huge! Well, that's only if it has something to do with gravitational force, as the name suggests.*

I decided to deal with the spell later, anyway. For the time being, there were more recliners to create.

I haven't thought up the menu yet, either. Something light and easy to pick at would be best, I think. Cakes, sweets, that kind of thing... Parfaits would probably be a good choice.

◇ ◇ ◇

With our preparations all sorted out, it was time to practice and review the workload in anticipation of the grand opening.

As for who worked where, I assigned two girls to the front counter. Their

names were Suras and Belle.

They both had light brown hair. Suras had short hair, while Belle's was wavy and long. They were both bright and cheery, so assigning them to the front desk was the natural choice.

Shea and Mea were working in the kitchen. They were sisters with black hair. Their cooking skills were pretty decent from the start, and Crea showed them even more techniques, so they had basic kitchen training sorted.

Then there were the waitresses. Sylvie, Wendy, and Marica.

Sylvie was the oldest amongst the seven of them, but she was only twenty-one herself. She was the confident type who kept everyone together. She gave off an air of aloofness, but she was quickly proving herself to be hard-working and reliable.

Marica was the second-youngest, after Wendy. An energetic young girl with a lot of spirit. Sometimes that energy backfired a little and she failed at her tasks, but she always worked hard to make it back.

Wendy was the youngest of them all, but she was an excellent worker. I worried a little about how docile and quiet she behaved, but she didn't seem to be having any trouble. Lapis had taught them all a little about the basics of customer service, so I felt they'd manage just fine.

I asked Zanac to take care of everyone's uniforms. I looked up various outfits online, but the girls all gravitated toward ones similar to the protagonist from Haikara-san ga Toru. They said that the other outfits were a little too seedy around the bust and skirts... I didn't think so, but I wasn't going to argue with them.

For the time being, our schedule seemed to be in order. We'd be closed on Wednesdays and Sundays. Business hours would be from 9 AM to 7 PM. All customers would receive a membership card that would record their stay times. Cafe time would be pre-paid, but if someone stayed longer, then they could pay for the extra time at the door on the way out. People in private rooms would pay additional charges, too. Also, customers could pay for their food and drink as they left.

I photocopied flyers en masse in the workshop, and had them distributed. We needed advertising, after all. We were scheduled to open two days from then.

After I'd checked on everyone, I began another part of my daily routine.

I put my smartphone on a table and sat away from it on a chair.

"Power on." In response to my words, the smartphone turned itself on.

"Run search. How many humans are within this house?"

"...Search complete. There are ten humans within this house. Two male, eight female." The men were likely myself and Laim, so that meant Julio was out in the garden. I only ran a search for humans, so Cesca and Rosetta weren't included, either.

"Run search. How many people are in the garden of this house?"

"...Search complete. One person in the garden. Male."

"Tom isn't included because he's outside the gate, I guess... Display those in the garden."

"Copy that." A 3D projection shot out from my smartphone. It was a live recording of Julio. I achieved this effect by combining **[Long Sense]** and **[Mirage]** spells. Julio was hard at work tending to the flower bed, but he took a moment to stand and stretch a bit. I figured he was probably tired.

"Target lock on Julio. Apply **[Cure Heal]** and **[Recovery]** to him."

"Copy that. Applying **[Cure Heal]** and **[Recovery]** to Julio." A soft magical light appeared about Julio's head, then sprinkled over his face. He looked confused for a brief moment, but then he moved around, free of strain. He turned to face my room. I opened the window to give him a wave, to which he responded in kind.

Great, it all runs smoothly. I gradually added to and updated the **[Program]** on my phone. For the vocal output, I used Cesca's voice. I tried my own for a while at first, but I really didn't like it, so I changed it quite quickly. I assumed most people felt the same way about their own voices, honestly.

It was different from something like Paula, since the recording function made adding commands a little bit simpler. It was a little annoying having to add each

vocal command individually, but it gradually made the phone more useful, so I didn't mind so much. I couldn't really use my smartphone in the heat of battle, so vocal commands would come in handy for situations like that.

"Net search. Daily events."

The 3D projection of Julio vanished, replaced by a display of news from my home world. Seemed that the House of Councillors were having an election. I felt a little sad for a moment, as I never once had the chance to vote in my life back there.

"End tasks. Power off." My smartphone screen went dull, powering off entirely. It worked out pretty well, all things considered. I put my phone in my breast pocket and headed downstairs.

I came down to the first floor and saw Will there. That was lucky.

"Good timing on your part. I'd like to experiment a bit with your grandpa's Null spell... Wanna come along?"

"My grandpa's? But it's just a spell that makes things a bit heavier. I don't think that'll be very useful, sir..."

"That's not it at all. In fact, if I have the right idea about this, it might be one of the most important spells I've ever heard of."

"What?!" Will adopted an extremely confused look, but he still went along with me anyway. I don't think he quite believed what I said, though.

We walked out along the terrace. Julio was tending to the flowers nearby, as usual, as we both headed out into the middle of the garden.

"Will, can you lend me your sword?"

"Hm...? Ah, a-alright, then." He pulled the sword from his waist and passed it over to me. It was a fairly standard blade. It didn't seem bad, but it was a bit big for Will.

"I've been thinking about it for a while, but this sword doesn't really suit you, Will. Why's it so big?"

"A-Ah, well... I just picked it up. It's not really mine. I found it in the desert... so it probably belonged to someone that was eaten by a Sandcrawler or

something worse...” *Damn... So he was just making the best use of what he could get. Novice adventurers probably have difficulty finding proper gear, huh... Guess that’s just the nature of the field.*

I thrust the sword into the ground.

“Try and yank it out.”

“Huh? W-Well...” Will pulled out the sword quite smoothly. It came out without any real difficulty. After confirming the difficulty, I had him put it back in the ground. Will looked quite confused. It seemed he hadn’t realized the point of my experiment yet.

Then, I began to get to the point. I put my hand around the handle of the sword, focusing my magic.

“[Gravity].” The sword slipped down slightly deeper into the ground. I took that as a sign that things were working as intended.

“Try and yank it out.”

“Huh?” Will seized the hilt, then began straining to pull it out.

“Ngh...! Kuh!!! I-It’s heavy...!” The sword lodged itself deeper into the ground. Will tried to lift it, but he couldn’t shift it at all.

“Seems like this spell can alter the weight of any touched object. But your grandpa could only make things a little heavier because his magic pool was small by default.” Honestly, it would’ve been more accurate to call it a gravity changing magic, but maybe it would’ve been more fitting to call it weight shifting magic. **[Weight]** might’ve been a better name for it than **[Gravity],** but I didn’t need to sweat the small stuff.

The only drawback was that the object needed to be directly touched to be altered, but weight could be changed freely and it could be undone at any time, too. Plus, my own body weight could be altered as well.

In other words, if I focused my magic at the point of impact, I could do something cool like a megaton punch. But I’d probably do serious damage to my fists, so that wouldn’t be such a good idea.

Changing the weight of my weapons mid-battle would probably be the

smartest use. I could probably even smash a Phrase with this if I maximized the weight...

I could reduce my own weight to increase the effects of **[Accel]** and **[Boost]** as well.

I could enchant weapons with it too, to make them easier to wield. Although using that on an axe or mace wouldn't be much use... Those weapons were only powerful because of their weight, after all. Either way, this magic was extremely beneficial.

"Your grandpa's magic is amazing, you know. He just didn't have enough magic energy to bring out its full potential."

"I didn't know grandfather's magic was so incredible...!" Will had unintentionally given me a means to combat the Phrase. I had to let him have a token of my thanks, no matter what. I took a mithril lump out of **[Storage],** used **[Modeling]** to transform it, and handed over a mithril breastplate to the boy, along with a pair of gauntlets too.

"I-Is... this okay? Really?"

"Don't mention it, kid. Consider it thanks for the spell. Let me do something about that weapon of yours, too." I canceled **[Gravity]** and grabbed Will's sword. I then enchanted it using **[Gravity],** but this time applied the effect in reverse. It should've become easier to wield, though the weight decrease would give it a bit of reduced strength.

I handed the sword over to him, and he gave it a few swings. His eyes went wide in amazement.

"Wow, it feels so much easier to handle. I might be able to defeat monsters more easily now!"

"Let's not get too cocky, though. Yeah, I know what you're in need of. A crash training course should sort you out..."

"H-Huh?"

I grabbed him by the wrist and led him off with me...

"So, would you take him on?"

“I see...” I took Will to the training grounds of Belfast’s Knight Order. From there, I brought him to Deputy General Neil and explained his situation.

“That’s good timing on your part. We’ve actually been trying to make up for the earlier issue with the nobles mingling in our ranks, so our recruitment has become a lot more fair and broad lately.”

“Heheh, so then... Will can get some training, and join you if he proves his worth?”

“That depends on him.” Neil looked the boy over with sharp eyes.

“Will, was it? Putting aside the entire matter of joining our ranks... do you wish to become strong?”

“I... do want to become strong. There’s someone I wish to p-protect. That’s why I want to become stronger. No, I don’t just want to just become stronger. I want to become a man worthy of protecting what he cares about.” His knees were weak, his palms were sweaty, but he still answered resolutely. I figured he was talking about Wendy. Neil smiled at the boy, letting out a hearty chuckle.

“Magnificent. It is a knight’s honor and duty to fight for what he loves. You have character, boy, and I respect that. Morning or eve, you come to me. You can train to your heart’s content, so will you join us in training?”

“I promise!” Will gave a resolute answer.

Be brave, young man. Be strong.

◇ ◇ ◇

Contrary to what I’d expected, my reading cafe, Moon Reader, ended up being quite popular. Many people dropped by because they heard about the shop being somewhat unique in its function, and many of them ended up sticking around for long periods of time due to how cozy it was.

Because of that, three days after opening, we decided to create a “Whole Day Free Pass Course.” By picking it and paying a fixed amount of money, customers could come and go as they pleased. The charge was somewhat high, but still far smaller than they had to pay for an entire day’s worth of normal courses.

We also began to have a shortage of chairs and private rooms, so we cleared

up the garden and made it possible for customers to read on the benches there. However, that option was entirely self-service and only covered reading. Plus, rainy days rendered the garden completely unusable.

Besides the popularity, another thing that surprised me was the gender balance among the customers. In my mind, this business was much like a manga cafe, so I expected the customers to be primarily men, but it was obviously the other way around.

Almost eighty percent of the customers were female. That was probably caused by the fact that the available books were mostly stories.

In this world, men were more into the more practical stuff, such as scholarly books, field guides, magic manuals, and texts about swordplay, while stories didn't seem to interest them too much. Still, there were some men who came here to read about knights, adventurers, and other such military novels.

Once we realized that most of the customers were women, we began to increase our book selection with them in mind. The amount of female customers saw a particularly great increase when Linze suggested we add a new genre to the selection.

In fact, those books were so popular that I had to **[Gate]** to various places in order to buy more copies of them.

I couldn't bring myself to describe what the books were about. However, I could honestly say that I would distance myself from any man who would've willingly read them. Their presence would've made me feel unsafe.

Anyway, due to the cafe being a great success, we raised a considerable amount of money. I had more than enough for everyone's salary, so after I paid them, they all left the mansion and found their own lodgings.

Rebecca and Logan had left a while ago, and Will followed soon after them with Wendy in tow. They all shared the same place, of course. Not the same room, though. Except for Wendy and Sylvie, anyway. *Do your best, kid.*

"Alright, it's been a while since I've worked my main job, so I guess I'll go to the guild now." After all, I wanted to test the new **[Program]** on my smartphone and the Null spell, **[Gravity].** Yumina was the only one who didn't have any

plans for the day. Apparently, since only her guild card rank was blue, she wanted to finally make it red.

“Shall we go, then?”

“Yes. Let’s have a hunting date!” *Well, that just sounds way too brutal for a date. Definitely something I’d refuse...*

The two of us made our way to the guild, entered it, and noticed it was packed with all sorts of adventurers as per usual.

When we began walking toward the request board, a man of a large stature stood right before us. *Who the hell is this?* He was wearing black trousers and a tiger-striped vest on top of his bare torso. Two large axes were hanging on his waist, and for some reason — probably due to horrible fashion sense — he had chains around his neck. His head was completely bald and he had an unpleasant grin on his face.

“Hey, what the hell are you brats doing here? This ain’t a playground, ya know?” It was my first time seeing him. He was probably new to the capital. After all, there was simply no way I could’ve forgotten someone with such terrible fashion sense.

I looked around and noticed that some of the other adventurers were grinning, too. However, those grins weren’t aimed at us... They were aimed at the man before us.

Now, how do I go about this...?

“Ya listening to me, punk?! Get outta here before I hurt— gah?!” His hands were heading straight for Yumina, so I shot him without any hesitation. I used paralyzing bullets, of course, but the impact was still enough to be equivalent to a body slam. He was still conscious, so I showed him my guild card.

“You shouldn’t judge a book by its cover.” After his eyes opened wide due to seeing the red card, I dragged and threw him out of the guild. I tried using **[Gravity]** to make him lighter, and it turned out to be quite a useful application of the spell. Carrying him was easy.

Once I returned to the guild, the people who were grinning were now laughing out loud. I knew they were hoping for something like this.

“Guy’s got some guts! Not everyone can mess with a Dragon Slayer!”

“He obviously didn’t know. You should’ve just told him, damn it!”

“Are you stupid?! We wouldn’t get our laughs that way!” Everyone else agreed and laughed along with him. *These people are just...*

Well, it actually wasn’t the first time someone tried messing with me like that. As much as it pained me to admit, I didn’t look strong in any sense of the word, so people like the guy from before saw me as a joke. I always ended up beating them up and showing them how wrong they were.

Well, whatever. I made my way to the board and looked through the requests there. This time, it was just the two of us, so bigger hunting quests were no good.

I took one of the red elimination requests and read it.

“Bloody Crab? A dangerous crustacean, I guess?”

“A giant red crab monster, yes. They’re easily identified by their four large pincers and tough shell. The shell is good armor material, while the meat is high-quality. Both can fetch a decent price on the market.”

Interesting... Definitely an attractive quest. Guess I’ll take it.

We only had to take down one of them, and we had no problems getting to it because it wasn’t too far from the mithril golems we’d defeated a while ago.

I took the request paper and brought it to the girl at the counter. Yumina’s rank was blue, but I was red, so we had no trouble taking the quest. However, if we had another person of a blue or lower rank among us, we couldn’t have taken it due to there being more lower rank people in the party than those that fit the criteria.

“Umm... you are the owner of the ‘Moon Reader’ reading cafe, are you not?” Somewhat timidly, the receptionist began talking to me.

“Well, yes...”

“Um! The Refreese Imperium has a book series called ‘The Order of the Rose.’ Do you have any plans on adding it to your selection?!” The woman approached me with an excited air about her and a blush on her face. She really seemed

interested in that book.

“Uhh, well... is the book a completed series?”

“Y-Yeah! It should be about fifteen volumes in total!” I didn’t see any issues with buying a completed story. After all, customers would likely lose interest if I didn’t invest in new titles from time to time. I decided I’d go buy it after my current quest.

“Sure, I’ll get that series, then. It should be available tomorrow or so, is that fine?”

“Seriously?! That’s amazingly fast! Tomorrow’s my day off, so I’ll come read the whole thing all day! Thank you so much!!!” We left the guild after waving goodbye to the strangely enthusiastic receptionist. Yumina, who had been silent the entire time, kept making glances at me.



“Er... Touya... You *do* know what The Order of the Rose is about... don’t you?”

“Hm? No, never heard of it. Is it a famous tale or something?”

“E-Er, well... It’s the tale of a male-only knight order in a certain country, the Order of the Rose. They have a confrontation with the female-only Guards of the Lily, and... Well, it’s a series well known because of the love scenes within the knight order...”

...Hold the hell up! The love scenes within the knight order? What? But there are only men in the group, so...

Yumina’s eyes met mine for a moment, but she quickly looked away. *...Is it really like that?* “...A-Anyway, you’ve already promised to pick it up, so it’d be bad to go back on your word now...”

“You have a point... Well, the bookstore staff might start thinking weird things about me...” *Guh... this sucks. I can’t exactly have Yumina go pick it up for me, either.*

“...Hold on, Yumina. You seem to know that book pretty intimately... Why would that be?”

“Ah, wait. No, er, don’t misunderstand! I don’t read books like that, I just, er... I don’t have that kind of hobby, really!”

I wonder about that... I gave Yumina a look full of doubt. I thought about Linze, too. She was definitely into that kind of thing, but it probably wasn’t a bad influence or anything. Everyone has their own hobbies, in the end. Still, I didn’t need to say anything like that out loud.

“...Touya, I actually know the person who wrote the story. That’s how I came to know about the tale myself, I promise. The author is a public figure, so the stories were published under a pen name.”

“Huh? For real? Anyone I’d know?”

“No, I don’t believe you’d know her. You mustn’t tell anyone her identity either... The author of that work is Reliel Rehm Refreese. Princess of the Refreese Imperium.”

.....What. Hold on, hold on, hold on just a minute! Is she trying to tell me that

the heir to an entire nation writes that kind of weird book?!

"The royal bloodlines of Refreese and Belfast have mingled since the olden days. I know Rili quite well, too. She's like an older sister to me. Before anyone could see what was happening, she developed... a certain kind of interest, and began writing things herself, that's all.

This is... unpleasant to hear about. I don't think I'll go to Refreese much, if I can avoid it. I wouldn't want to meet her by mistake and have her base one of her characters on me or anything... But I still have to get the damn book series, this sucks!

Well, I figured there'd be no way a member of the Imperial Royal Family would be in a regular old bookstore, so I thought I'd be fine.

Still... the receptionist and a lot of my customers are quite... into this stuff now. I'm a little worried I might've introduced a certain subculture to this nation. If this is what I end up going down in history for, I quit. I decided to stop thinking about that nonsense and focus on the Bloody Crab. I opened up a **[Gate]** and dragged Yumina off with me.

◇ ◇ ◇

The Bloody Crab was said to live in a habitat a good deal south of the Steer Mine, the place we had slain the Mithril Golems so long ago. I stepped out of the portal just outside the mine, leaving us with no choice but to head south on foot.

"It's not far enough for us to bother using the garden, so let's run instead."

"H-Huh? Eek!" I picked Yumina up and held her with both of my arms. Naturally I princess-carried her. With that, I began to dash down the road.

"[Gravity]!" I reduced my own weight and Yumina's weight by about half. If I brought our weight to anything close to zero, we'd be way too light and I wouldn't have good control over our balance.

"[Accel Boost]!" I stacked my acceleration magic and my body fortification magic on top to produce an extreme level of speed. But despite that, I didn't feel any resistance or drag. No headwind either. This was part of **[Accel],** of course.

It sort of felt like I was in one of those VR games. I was clearly running at tremendous speed across the landscape, but it almost felt like I was in another world entirely.

Yumina seemed to feel the same, as she didn't respond to the intense speed with fear, but curiosity. She gazed at the flowers as we quickly passed by them.

After running for a short while, the habitat came into sight. I set Yumina down after stopping.

"Run search. Bloody Crab. Radius: three kilometers."

"...Search complete. One Bloody Crab located. Southwest. Displaying." A map of the area was projected before my eyes. The crab's location was marked on the map, about one kilometer away.

"Touya, just now... was that Cesca...?"

"Hm? Ah, right. I decided to use her voice for my programs here. To be honest, I chose hers because it's pretty emotionless and cold, don't you agree? Less of a distraction, at any rate." I took my smartphone out of my pocket and explained the functions to Yumina. After that, I picked her back up and ran in the direction of the crab.

We located it soon enough. It was enormous and red-shelled. It had a pair of pincers on each side of its body, and carried its lumbering form on eight legs.

Man it's big. Around the size of a garbage truck, I guess. It had a rugged, blood red shell covered in various rock-like outcroppings and lumps.

It sort of gave off the image of a king crab that had been grossly mutated or warped. Its pincers were extremely large, too. Almost disproportionately so. If you got caught in one of those, you'd be finished for sure. It would easily snip you in half.

The Bloody Crab suddenly noticed our presence. It turned to face us. There was a large foam of bubbles on its mouth, but I was fairly sure that was an indicator of a land-locked crab beginning the first stages of oxygen deprivation. However, I quickly disposed of that thought because it was rooted in the sense of another world. To begin with, the fact that there'd be a crab out here in the wild was nonsensical enough by my standards. I couldn't think with the logic of

my old world, or I'd be toast for sure.

I set Yumina down, and we prepared our weapons. I set Brunhild to Blade Mode and Yumina pulled out her Colt M1860 Model Army.

The battle began, a barrage of bullets flying at the crab. It was completely unaffected, likely due to its tough shell. It seemed that this creature had a naturally high magical defense. Magic probably wouldn't be too effective, either. This was a Red Rank quest though, so I wasn't too surprised.

"Snare, O Earth. Invoke the Ground's Wrath: [Earthbind]!" Yumina chanted a spell, and the soil at the feet of the Bloody Crab came alive, twining itself around each of its armored legs and impeding its movement. It seemed that indirect magic would work just nicely.

Yumina shot her bullets at the immobilized Bloody Crab, targeting the joints and hinges of its legs. The girl went after the naturally weak points with expert precision. She certainly had the makings of a sniper.

To my surprise, Yumina shot through the joints one after another. The crab's movement became even more impeded with each new blast.

"[Accel]!" Not wanting to miss my chance, I used acceleration magic to leap above the crab and land atop its rugged back. Even though the spell I intended to use was direct magic, I had a feeling things were going to work out well. I squatted down and touched the crab's exoskeleton before uttering a single word.

"[Gravity]." With a mighty creak, the crab's legs bent and groaned, bringing it crashing to the ground. I jumped back down to the ground and looked over the beast, who could now barely move at all.

Heh, now that I've invoked that spell, your weight will change to suit my whims!

"What did you just do?"

"I increased the weight of his body several times with my new spell. His body's way too heavy now, so he can't even move!" Even though it should have been far too heavy to move, the Bloody Crab still tried to make an attack. I added more weight to stop it in its tracks. The pincer that it had somehow

managed to raise came crashing to the ground and didn't come back up.

Hmph... I added an absolute ton of weight, but its shell didn't crack at all... This guy's annoying.

"...Touya? I-I think it's dead."

"What?" The foam around its mouth had already begun dispersing. Bodily fluids were leaking out of various parts of its body, too. I could only conclude that, while it had a hardy shell, the creature's internal organs couldn't handle the sudden weight shift.

I canceled **[Gravity].** The Bloody Crab didn't move at all. I got close and smacked it around a bit with Brunhild. It didn't react at all, so I knew it was dead.

"That was a tad easier than I expected." Yumina holstered her weapon and looked over the dead crab.

"One of the best parts of this spell is that once I invoke it, I can manipulate the weight from a long distance." I tried to lighten the mood a bit and picked up some small pebbles from the ground. I cast **[Gravity]** on them and tossed them into the air. I then multiplied their weight a hundred times or so while they were in flight. Soon enough, there were holes and dents in the ground all over from my scattered pebbles.

"...It's an incredible spell, isn't it."

"Yeah, I could probably even smash a Phrase up with this. The only drawback is I have to touch an enemy to apply it, but I might have found a way around that, too." I took my smartphone out of my pocket. I'd been able to use **[Paralysis]** on people without touching them using this method in the past... so I wondered if I might be able to do the same with **[Gravity].** I thrust Brunhild into the ground, burying the blade partially into the soil.

"Run search. Brunhild. Target lock. Invoke **[Gravity].** Let's see... double its weight."

"...Search complete. Target locked. Invoking **[Gravity].**" I took a hold of Brunhild. It was heavier than usual. Apparently the test had been a successful one. It had worked exactly as I wanted it to. I had no doubts in my mind that

this application of magic would become one of my greatest weapons. Still, I had to remind myself not to get cocky. There was magic that could negate magic in this world, after all, so it wasn't infallible.

I canceled the spell and put Brunhild back on my waist.

"Alright, all that's left is bringing the crab back."

"The proof of the deed is only one claw, but they said that the guild purchases other parts of it, too. Should we bring all of it?"

"Sure, why not? We'll keep one leg though, for Crea. I feel like crab stew today."

"Very well." I put the crab into **[Storage]** and opened up a **[Gate]** to return to the guild.

The receptionist went wide-eyed with shock as she saw us come in with the proof of the kill, but she understood well enough after I explained my portals to her. Guild staff were meant to keep individual abilities like this confidential, so I had no real worries about telling her what I could do. That being said, there were still people who'd doubt my feats as a result.

I took the Bloody Crab out of **[Storage]** in the guild's courtyard and had it assessed. One leg was kept aside for personal use, of course.

All-in-all, shell and meat included, it was worth a pretty penny. We received the reward for the quest at the reception desk, as well as the pay for the sale. Our guild cards were stamped with the mission seal, as usual.

"With this, Yumina's Guild Rank has increased. Congratulations." Yumina smiled with delight as she picked up her guild card, which was now a full red.

"Thank goodness, now I'm the same rank as everyone else." *Heh, was she that worried about being left behind? How adorable... She didn't want to be the odd one out.*

Now all that was left to do was to go to a bookstore in Refreese and acquire the goods. We earned a ton more money than we expected, so I wondered if we should buy other books... Books of that specific type, I meant.

Sales were dictated by the customer base, after all. And luckily enough, I had

someone in front of me who was quite well-versed in that field.

“Er... receptionist lady?”

“Ah, you can call me Prim. Can I help you?” I told her that I was off to make the purchase of that series, and asked if there were any others in that genre she’d be interested in as well.

“W-Wait, you’re going to go and buy a lot of these?!”

“If they’re in stock, sure. The money I made today should be more than enough to cover it.”

“W-Wait j-just a moment, please?!” In a flash, Prim got up and headed to another female member of the guild staff. She spoke to her about something and jotted down stuff on a notepad. Then, she went to another female staff member and scribbled down some more notes. She repeated this process in a cycle, then even asked some female adventurers for their input, too. *C’mon lady, your job’s on hold here...*

“I-If you can acquire all of these, I promise you that all of the women I spoke to will definitely come to Moon Reader tomorrow! Please take note!” “R-Right... I’ll definitely... make a note of that.” I took the torn piece of note paper from her and suddenly looked up to see several women staring at me. They had stars in their eyes.

...Is this really something to get that worked up over? I left the guild and headed home. I planned to go to the bookstore after taking Yumina home, but in a stroke of maybe-good luck, I encountered Linze, who was eating on the terrace. I showed her the note that Prim had given me.

“...A-And you plan on buying... all of these?”

“If they’re in stock, sure.” Linze took out a pen from her pocket and started scribbling some titles down. *Please stop adding to the list, Linze. Please. Please stop.*

“These are must-buy titles. The last volume of this one in particular just came out, so missing it would mean trouble. If it became available at Moon Reader, people would go wild, I promise.” I didn’t really understand any of that, but I decided to trust Linze’s judgment regardless.

I thanked her and decided to look over the various title suggestions.

“The Order of the Rose” - 15 Volumes “The Butler’s Secret” - 5 Volumes “The Disgraced Slave Prince’s Oath” - 8 Volumes “Cage Boy” - 6 Volumes

“Saccharine, Deadly Embrace” - 12 Volumes “The Red-Hot Night Between The Two Who Couldn’t Turn Back” - 5 Volumes “The Magician’s Sweet Trap” - 12 Volumes “Immorality! On His Wedding Day!” - 17 Volumes “Rose-Tinted Magic” - 9 Volumes “Beneath My Master’s Gaze” - 18 Volumes *...Is this okay? Is it really okay if I buy these? My heart is breaking already. But I already said I’d get them... so I have no real choice.*

I felt I should probably separate those books from the others and give them their own section. I’d include a curtain, too, to stop people snooping in. And a waiver to refuse entry to those under eighteen. *W-Wait, actually, no, that makes it the same as an adult corner in a DVD rental store. Ugh... I don’t want to have such a seedy image. W-Well, it’s not illegal or anything, and it doesn’t promote anything bad, so... I guess it’s fine, and wholesome, yeah!* I headed through a **[Gate]** to Refreese, all the while seriously grappling with the idea of just handing the place over to Linze and washing my hands of it entirely.

◇ ◇ ◇

The Imperial City, Bern. The Refreese Imperium’s shining star. To say that “white” was the theme of the city would be an understatement. The entire place was bleached white. From the walls of the buildings to the paving of the road and stairs, all was white. It brought to mind places like Mykonos and Santorini in Greece.

The center of the port city featured the magnificent white Refreese Castle. The blue sea and the white architecture mingled together to create a beautiful atmosphere. It was a little too bright if you asked me, though. Some sunglasses would’ve come in handy.

I didn’t come for sightseeing this time, so it’s off to the bookstore for me. Luckily, I came here before Moon Reader even opened, so there’s no need to worry about getting lost either.

I leaned on the heavy door and pushed it open, entering the building. The bookstore was pretty sizable, so it had a wide selection ranging from old novels

to new releases. A lone black-haired woman sat there at the desk in the middle.

Darn it, it's a lady... Well, even if it was a guy at the counter I'd be pretty nervous. No point worrying about it, just gotta ask her already.

"Excuse me, ma'am. I'm looking for some specific books."

"Yes, sir? Please tell me the titles so that I may look them up for you."

"R-Right, here you are." I took out the note from my pocket and handed it over to the woman at the countertop.

"Let's see here... The Order of the Rose, The Butler's Secret, the..." Her voice slowly grew quieter, and she started to look more closely at my face. I didn't dislike it, but her eyes started to take on the same luster as the eyes of the women who were going to be at Moon Reader the next day. There were stars in there, stars for sure...

Do you seriously think I'm that kind of person?

"Uh, well... give me a little while. I'll need to locate all of the books you requested just now."

"...Got it. Alright, I understand, thank you."

Wait a sec... What am I being understanding and thankful for here? It's not like I'm requesting anything unusual! I'm not trying to make excuses for myself, this is a regular request!

"Thank you for your patience, I'll go and take care of the order now." The woman gave me a gentle smile and made off toward the book inventory. I couldn't understand why she was treating me like that.

Since I had no idea how long I'd have to spend my time waiting, I decided to pick up a basket and look for more books. After all, I needed some more genre variety. If I just let things run their course, my precious business would be corrupted by that kind of literature.

I went to the fiction section and put adventure stories, military epics, real love stories, and unusual tales into my basket.

After I was done gathering stuff up, I returned to the counter to find a pile of books waiting for me. I figured they were mine. But that wasn't the only thing I

found there. There appeared to be a small commotion going on, with a female customer getting quite fussy with the lady at the desk.

“I-I’m sorry, ma’am... We’ve just sold the last one in stock, and I’m unsure when the next shipment will come in.”

“No way... what the hell...” The customer leaned on the counter with a look of absolute defeat on her face. She looked to be about twenty years old, with a youthful face. Her long, chestnut hair was tied up into a single braid that was held together with a fancy-looking barrette. She was wearing a cardigan and skirt combo that looked plain, but was clearly high-quality. I briefly wondered if she was a noble or something. The lady at the desk finally noticed my presence, then smiled in my direction.

“Ah, hello there, dear customer! I’m just putting together your order now. Do you want to buy those books as well?”

“Yep, sure do. Add these on to the current total.” I piled up the books I had chosen along with the others on the counter.

“W-Wait, are you the person that bought the last volume of RoseMag?” The defeated girl at the counter suddenly rose up and challenged me with a question. *RoseMag? The hell is she talking about? Wait, does she mean that “Rose-Tinted Magic” book from my list?*

“What is going on, exactly...?” I turned to the lady at the desk.

“Ah, well... this young lady came to purchase the final volume of ‘Rose-Tinted Magic,’ but the last of our stock is included in your bulk order, you see...”

Hm, so that’s how it is... Just a case of really poor timing on her part. She missed it by a hair’s breadth, really. It’s a shame, but I can’t just hand it over to her. I can’t just go back without the final volume. I need the full set or there’d be no point.

“Excuse me, can you please give me that last volume of RoseMag?”

“Er, no... I came here with the intentions of buying it, and that’s exactly what I did.” The girl seemed determined to get the book. In fact, she even turned and bowed her head to me, but of course something like that wasn’t going to deter me.

“Please, this is my last chance... Every other bookstore has run out of stock, too...”

“E-Even if that’s the case, I still can’t...” Suddenly the girl’s eyes drifted... landing right on the small mountain of books I had purchased.

“Did you buy ‘The Order of the Rose’ as well?”

“Er... well, I, uh...” She looked over the various titles on the book heap. After a while she looked over at me, eyes shining in the same way I’d seen too many times today. *Getting real sick of these misunderstandings, people...*

“My my, you certainly have a good eye for literature, don’t you?”

“Don’t get the wrong idea. It’s not like that at all, alright? This isn’t for personal reading or anything, I’m running an errand.”

“Sure, sure. Don’t worry about it. I totally understand.”

You clearly don’t understand. Quit grinning at me like that!

The girl lost herself in thought for a while, but eventually snapped out of it and called me over to a corner.

“What do you want?”

“I’m willing to make a deal with you. If you give me that last volume of RoseMag, then I’ll autograph all of your Order of the Rose volumes.”

“Excuse me?” *Is this girl an idiot? Why would I want some random girl’s autograph?*

“Why would I want you to do that?”

“That’s because I’m the author! Riel Rifrese herself!” The girl proudly puffed out her chest. *Th-They’re big... around Yae’s level... Er, wait. Gotta focus.*

“Heh... so you’re really the author?”

“I am! You think me a liar?”

Of course I think you’re a liar. What are the odds of meeting the author of the book I just happened to be buying in the middle of a bookstore? Not to mention the fact that I know who the author really is, Yumina told me! Hmph... I guess I’ll have a little fun here and call her out.

“So that means you’re really Imperial Princess Reliel, doesn’t it?”

“Wh...uh...” The self-proclaimed author turned white as a sheet, blood draining from her horrified face. *That’s right, I’ve exposed you as the fraud you are.*

Just as I was thinking that, she started sweating profusely and flapping her mouth open and shut like a fish. It looked as though she’d entered a state of shock. *Er... what is happening here?* “Wh— Huh— Buh— Wha— Ho—How did —?! E-E-Even my father doesn’t know that...!” *W-Wait, seriously? Is it actually her?*

“Wh-Why would you expose my true... Ah! Y-You plan to blackmail me, using me as a stepping stone to get close to my younger brother, first in line to the throne. After that, you plan to steal his purity and claim the country for yourself!”

“You goddamn moron!”

“O-Ouch!!!” I gave the girl a swift karate chop to the head, hoping that it’d pull her out of such ridiculous thoughts. Princess or not, I’d do it again. “Ow... Wh-Why’d you do that?!”

“Shut up! If it wasn’t for Yumina, I’d be totally ignoring this situation right now, but is this country gonna be fine with you as its princess?!”

“Y-Yumina? You mean Yumina of Belfast? Who are you, exactly...?” Princess Reliel looked my way with curiosity clouding her face, though she was still rubbing her head. Despite the fact that she was older than me, I felt no need to be polite or respectful around someone like that. She was only about two years older than me, anyway.

I took a deep breath and tried to compose myself.

“My name is Mochizuki Touya. I’m engaged to Yumina. Yes, that Yumina, princess of Belfast. It’s not official news yet, however.”

“Wh-What?! Engaged? That girl, of all people, is engaged?!” She looked at me, awestruck for a moment. But eventually her eyes began to dart around, as if she was concocting some strange story in her mind.

“Huh? But Yumina is a girl, so... What? Errm, like a fake marriage...? I-Is your true aim to seduce the king?!”

“Enough!”

“Ouch!!!”

That isn’t even remotely how it is! You’re seriously pissing me off now! I returned to the counter and paid for all of my books. It was quite costly, but it still fell under the amount I had gained from the day’s questing, so I didn’t mind so much.

I put all of the books into **[Storage],** then left the store with the princess in tow. There was a magnificently built carriage outside, which I assumed belonged to the girl and her escorts.

I took her behind the store, opened a **Gate,** and pulled Yumina and Kohaku through it.

“It’s been a while, Reli.”

“Yumina?! Eh? H-How long have you been in Refreese?!”

“Gimme a minute, Yumina. I’ll leave the explaining to you. Kohaku, you keep an eye on those two. Tell me if anything comes up.”

《Very well.》 I left Yumina and Kohaku behind, then headed off to the workshop. I took my volume of “Rose-Tinted Magic” out of **[Storage],** made a copy, and immediately returned back to the group.

I handed the book over to Reliel, who was surprised by my sudden reappearance.

“Here, now there shouldn’t be an issue.”

“H-Huh? Is this alright? I thought you wanted it...”

“I’m saying it’s not like that! I wasn’t buying these for me, it was for my store!”

“You know what they say about people who get so defensive, don’t you...? Er, actually... never mind.” Reliel shut her mouth when she saw me preparing to deliver karate chop.

Alright, time to go home... I opened up a **[Gate].** Kohaku jumped ahead and crossed to the other side.

“Please take care of yourself, Reli. I hope to see you again soon.”

“You too, Yumina. Please invite me to your wedding.” Honestly, I’d prefer it if she didn’t attend, but I simply wore a blank expression and persevered.

I headed through a **[Gate]** and went straight home. I slumped down on to the sofa in the living room.

“Man... I’m beat.” *I’m not tired because of the hunting mission, though...* Linze brought me a fresh glass of ice water.

“Thanks a ton.”

“N-No, thank you...” I gulped down all the water she brought me. *Ahh, that’s the stuff.* I savored the cool liquid, but Linze still remained in one spot, looking at me. *What is it now?*

“Er, those... books. Did you get them?”

Heh, I get it... Someone wants to get reading, does she? I took out today’s haul from **[Storage]** and stacked it on the table.

“I asked Rosetta to make a bunch of copies of each volume to prepare. If there’s anything in particular you want, just tell her.”

“Got it!” With that, Linze went to call Rosetta. Rosetta had the ability to recall herself to the workshop, and there was an active **[Gate]** connecting my house and Babylon, so they probably didn’t need me.

I went to the kitchen and gave the Bloody Crab leg to Crea. She seemed quite pleased. Crab stew’s on the menu for today, after all...

I decided that I wanted to go and have a rest. I’d had quite a busy day, after all. I went to my room, flopped down onto my bed, and closed my eyes. I was suddenly and satisfyingly assaulted by sleep.

Zzz...

The next day, Moon Reader was even more lively than ever. Word must have spread, because there was a line stretching right out of the doors. Because

there were brand new books available, it made sense that people would want to come and get their chance to read it first.

The store becoming more popular was a good thing, but I couldn't really feel good about it.

Bah, as I expected... I'll just toss this place over to Linze and open a new store.

As it turned out, a few months later... the author behind "Order of the Rose" released a new series.

Apparently it was the story of a man with incredible power, who attempted to take over a country. To do so he forced the country's knights, beautiful princess, and her younger brother, to succumb to his wicked ways. I asked Linze to show me it, and the illustrations of the man bore a subtle resemblance to me. *This counts as harassment, right?! Next time we meet, I'll thank you with a* ***[Gravity]****-infused karate chop to the head, you wretch! You better prepare yourself!*

◇ ◇ ◇

That morning I woke up with a pressure on my lips and a wet sensation in my mouth. Right in front of my face was the face of another individual. Rosetta. Her eyes were closed.

"Mmmph?!"

"Oho! I've woken you up, sir yes sir!" *Wh— Huh?! What the hell?! Why is Rosetta here?! Why is she kissing me awake?! Wha—?!*

"Genetic registration complete! I was simply storing your genes, master sir! Now it's official! The ownership of the workshop and my delightful self has transferred to you, Mochizuki Touya, sir yes sir!"

Huh? Uh...? Oh, right... the registration for the workshop. I hadn't done that yet, had I... I've been so busy that I'd completely forgotten about it. Even so... this method of registration is trouble. Kind of bad for my health.

I wasn't sure if Rosetta had become a maid like Cesca had, but either way she wasn't wearing a uniform. She was wearing what looked more like a mechanic's jumpsuit. I wondered if that was what an industrial manager should be wearing,

but I didn't bother thinking too hard about it.

From what I understood, she was manufacturing something in the workshop. I had no idea why, but I figured it had something to do with her trying to prove herself.

Well, I didn't mind. She was free to make whatever.

"Master, sir! I would like some more iron and silver, sir!"

"Again? Just what in the world are you making?"

"That is a secret, sir! Need-to-know only, sir yes sir!"

Always with that response... Well, whatever. I'll find out soon enough. I handed over some change to Rosetta so she could go and buy the necessary materials. She accepted the money with a giddy little smile on her face. It was kind of like giving pocket money to a child, honestly.

"Oh, status report, sir! A guest has come to the mansion!"

"A guest...? I wonder who it is." I quickly changed out of my PJs and headed downstairs. Upon entering the living room, I was greeted by Laim and General Leon.

"Ah, Touya my boy! Sorry for dropping by so early."

"I'm surprised to see you, General. Is there something wrong?"

"No, I actually came on personal business. I'd like something from you!"

Hm? What could he possibly want from me?

"You made my Lyon an interesting weapon, didn't you? One that takes the form of both spear and sword."

Oh, the one I gave to him after beating down those asshole noble brats...

"I did. Why, is there something wrong with it?"

"On the contrary, it's great! Which is why I came to ask, could you make me a pair of gauntlets with similar functions?"

"Huh?"

"Today, the Knight Order and the Royal Army are engaging in a joint training

session. It would be most embarrassing for a father to lose to his son, I'm sure you understand."

That's your reason...? Man, it's hard to believe a guy like this raised Lyon.

"But your gauntlets are already imbued with magic, aren't they, General?" As I spoke, the general removed the gauntlets tied at his waist and set them upon the table.

"It is as you say, these ones are imbued with fire magic. But there's no real effect beyond that. If possible, I would like an enchantment that bolsters my offensive force. I'd also like to ask for a defensive enchantment, if it wouldn't be too much."

"I... see..." *Well, if I imbue it with **[Gravity],** I could boost the destructive output for sure... And I could probably make a program that changes it into a shield, too.*

"Alright, I'll work on it for you. Do you want me to apply the effects to these ones? Or should I just get a new set entirely?"

"These gauntlets have sentimental value to me. I'd rather they remain unchanged, so I would prefer you make me a new pair."

"Fair enough." I used **[Storage]** to pull out another lump of mithril. I then molded it into two gauntlets. I lined it with the pelt of a powerful monster, and had the general try them on so I could make relevant size adjustments. The general was right-handed, so I made sure the shield would be on the left. After that, I applied the relevant **[Program]** and **[Gravity]** enchantments.

"Will this do for now?"

"Wow! You did it!" I handed over the newly created mithril gauntlets. The general put them both on and smacked his hands together with a smile on his face.

"Hoho, just as one would expect from mithril, it's certainly light."

"I'll explain how they work in combat, if you'd like to join me elsewhere." I opened up a **[Gate]** to the area where I had fought the Bloody Crab. An out-of-the-way place like that was best for testing out the destructive capabilities,

after all.

“Alright... first off... The left gauntlet can become a shield. You need to say the phrase ‘Shield On’ to trigger it, and the phrase ‘Shield Off’ to return it back to normal.”

“Ohoho... Shield On. Ohohooo!!!” The left gauntlet responded to the general’s voice and expanded into a medium-sized shield. I figured it’d come in handy against enemies wielding blades and such.

“Next is the offensive capabilities. When you say the word ‘Impact,’ your right gauntlet will increase its weight by about two hundred times the standard for about a second. If you say it right as you attack, you should have an extremely powerful strike on your hands. It’s extremely dangerous, so please don’t use it against lightly-equipped people or soft people.”

“Tw-Two hundred times?!” One gauntlet weighed around five kilograms. I figured amplifying the weight by two hundred times would be enough, but maybe it was a little bit too extreme... Kind of like swinging around a massive hammer wildly.

As I lost myself in thought, the general took a battle stance in front of a big hunk of rock. He pulled back his right hand... And struck the mass with startling speed.

“Impact!” The moment his hand hit the rock, it crumbled into tiny fragments before my eyes.

...I-It’s true that only I can make something like this, but maybe I gave him a little bit too much...

“Ohoho! This is superb, my boy! I’ll surely be able to handle heavy infantrymen and great monsters without any worry at all, now!” *Well, he’s the general... so I’m sure he won’t abuse it or anything.*

“Aside from that, there’s the phrase ‘Stun Mode‘ to paralyze your enemies, and the phrase ‘Burning Mode’ to burn your enemies. Just say ‘Mode Off’ to restore it to default.”

“Ooh, you enchanted it with fire as well? I’m so grateful, now I can keep my moniker of Fire Fist Leon.” The general smiled. He seemed really excited,

honestly. He switched on Burning Mode right away and began to shadow-box. After fighting nothing until he was satisfied, he deactivated the gauntlets and looked them over with a happy expression.

“Ah, this is wonderful... When Lyon showed me his weapon, I was quite taken aback. Are you sure you aren’t better suited as a master smith or something?”

“I haven’t got any intention of doing this on a professional level, no.” The weapons that I made were more fit for beast than man. They could be too easily abused. Making them for friends was fine enough for me. I didn’t really want to take money off them, either. But whenever I mentioned that, I was always told “That won’t do, at least let me give you something to make up for the trouble.” I always tended to accept substitutes for cash, at least. Food was the best option.

The general was excited to beat his son immediately... or rather, excited to train with his son, so we opened up a portal to the training grounds.

The general went off to search for Lyon, gleefully clanging his gauntlets together. *Forgive me, Lyon...*

My mission accomplished, I figured I’d go home, but then I noticed a pair of familiar faces. It was Will, and Neil as well. It looked like they were training.

Will made a slash toward Neil, but the older man dodged quite easily and kicked at the boy, tripping him over.

“The opponent may be a swordsman, but that does not mean he can only use his sword! Attacks can come from many places, boy. Never break stance!”

“Y-Yes sir!”

Heheh... Looks like these two are working hard. I rested my elbow on the fence surrounding the training field and watched them go at it. Compared to earlier, Will was definitely improving. I was glad. It looked like Neil was really giving him a serious runaround. I had confidence the kid would be able to become a real knight yet.

“Hm? Touya?”

“Huh? Elze?” Elze showed up, wiping some sweat off her brow with a towel.

“What’s going on? You’re up early. You don’t normally get up until around the time I make it home...” When she put it like that she made me seem like a lazy layabout. In my opinion, they were too early to rise.

“I was woken up by a visit from the general. He wanted me to make him a new weapon.”

“Hmm, gotcha.” If I was more honest, I’d have said that I was woken up by Rosetta’s kiss, but I didn’t feel a need to add fuel to the fire.

“Oh, that’s right, Touya! If you’re heading home with a **[Gate],** can we swing by the Silver Moon first? I wanna use the hot springs!” Elze suddenly brought up something unexpected. We had taken a few group excursions to the hot springs in the past. Hell, we’d gone in the mornings a few times, too. I could understand why Elze would be so eager. She seemed extremely sweaty and had probably been working hard.

“Alright, shall we head off now, then?”

“Yeah!” I opened up a **[Gate]** to Reflet, exiting in front of the Silver Moon. Elze quickly headed inside and called out to Micah, who was manning reception. Since they were technically loaning the land used for the springs, we got to enter free of charge.

“I’m heading in, then!”

“Of course, take your time!” Elze cheerfully gathered her towel and washing gear from the counter, then headed into the women’s side of the springs. I wasn’t sweaty, so I didn’t particularly care for going in myself.

I decided to gossip with Micah a little bit, making sure everything was going well in town. Apparently there was never a shortage of customers, so the springs were more profitable than the lodging at this point. I wondered if the Silver Moon was becoming more of a bathhouse than an inn.

“Howdy there, long time no see.”

“Oh! Zanac? You here for a morning bath or something?” Zanac, owner of Fashion King Zanac, strolled out of the men’s side with a towel on his head.

“Mm, in a sense, I suppose. If I don’t come here in the morning and evening,

my mood tends to get worse... I'm a regular regular! Ha!" Zanac gave a scattered laugh. Something suddenly occurred to me. With the effects of **[Recovery]** being infused into the bath, people in the springs would always feel great.

But, much like dosing someone with a small drug... maybe they'd feel withdrawal if it wasn't a regular thing. I decided not to dwell on that thought too much, at any rate.

"Come to think of it, I've completed a new clothing design based on the concept you gave me. I think it came out quite well, actually."

"Eheheh... is that right?" As he spoke, bubbles of mischief welled up inside me. I would have Micah cooperate with me for this little scheme, after I purchased the outfit from Zanac, of course. This would be fun indeed.

"E-Er, what is this?"

"Well, it's a gift from me, of course." Elze tugged a little at the hem of the outfit she'd gotten changed into. A red dress with a slit in the middle and a diagonally-buttoned collar. It was a cheongsam dress. Though the lower part was a bit shorter, so it was a mini-cheongsam, I supposed. A pair of high heel shoes had also been laid out for her. I based the size of the outfit on Micah, overall.

As I had expected, she wore it well. Moreover, the fact that she was a melee fighter made it look even better on her.

"Yeah, it suits you. You look very cute."

"Wh-What are you saying all of a sudden?! A-And hey, don't just swap out my clothes on a whim!" Elze suddenly looked down, her face blushing red. Her expression was an extremely shy one. She and Linze were definitely more alike than you'd expect.

It was the same back when I had her wear that gothic outfit. For whatever reason, despite liking cute clothing, Elze never wanted to wear them. I was convinced she didn't want to because she felt they didn't suit her. Therefore, I was forced to manufacture a situation in which she had to wear the clothes.

I had Micah take her regular clothing away, swapping them out with this new outfit. At first Elze was mad, but she quickly seemed more pleased.

“So, will you accept my gift?”

“...Y-Yeah. Thank you...” When she said that and looked up at me with her puppy-dog eyes, I was filled with the desire to cuddle her! But... there were people around, so I was way too embarrassed to do something like that. We put her old clothing in a bag, opened up a **[Gate],** and left the Silver Moon.

After we came out the other side, in the garden of our home, Elze wobbled a bit. It seemed she wasn’t used to heels. She clung to my arm for support.

“I-Is it... okay if I... stay like this for a wh-while?” I had no reason to refuse her. Even better, I felt a certain softness from a certain soft couple of things against my arm.

The early bird catches the worm, as they say. Today’s a great day. I’d be fine if the whole day ended now, even!



Interlude I: The Assailants

“Hiyaaah!” Yae screamed out with burning spirit. Her wooden sword plunged forward, catching Viscount Swordrick off guard and stopping right as it reached his neck. The speed of her sword was the very image of lightning striking its target. The Viscount, defeated, relaxed his face into a smile.

“...Impressive. This round goes to you.”

“Thank you for your tutelage!” Yae bowed before the viscount. Still, even though she’d won, she didn’t look all that happy about it. No surprise considering this was the seventh round, and she’d only just finally landed a hit on him. It took her seven attempts for a single hit, and she had to use an incredibly risky move to just barely manage it.

No doubt she was cursing her own weakness, blaming it on inexperience. I felt she really shouldn’t be so hard on herself, considering that her opponent was widely recognized as one of the greatest swordsmen in all of Belfast.

We traveled to Viscount Swordrick’s dojo so that Yae could practice with him. The audience consisted of Yumina and myself. These practice matches had gone on so long that the sun had begun to set. Crows began cawing in the distance.

“Your skills have grown such that I might’ve taken you for a different person. Have you grasped something, perchance?”

“I do not know whether it is yet in my grasp or not, I do not. However, your words that day when you asked me what I sought from the sword are beginning to make somewhat more sense to me now, they are.”

“Oho. Very well. Then it would seem you’ve taken the first step toward realizing your own way of the sword.” Yae’s words brightened the viscount’s expression. With their practice over, the viscount came over to the corner we’d been watching from and prostrated himself before the princess.

“I am terribly sorry that I could not offer better hospitality, Your Highness.”

“Please, pay it no mind. It was I who requested to stand in to observe your

practice sessions.” Yumina offered words of polite forgiveness to the viscount. With that formality out of the way, he cast his attention in my direction.

“I never could have imagined that the young boy from that day would go on to save the king’s life, let alone become betrothed to the princess. And I hear that more recently you’ve even gone and earned yourself the accolade of Dragon Slayer.”

“About that, if you could keep my engagement with Yumina a secret, that would save me a lot of trouble. I know there are plenty of nobles who’d be quite upset about the idea.”

“Fret not, I won’t tell a soul. I, too, am well aware of the many greed-driven, stubborn old nobles of Belfast.” As it stood, I was officially engaged to Princess Yumina. However, we still hadn’t made this fact public.

Marrying Yumina meant marrying into the royal family, giving one great political influence within Belfast. Naturally, that kind of social position drew out the greed in a lot of people.

To those who would think themselves or their children more suitable for the princess, I’d be seen as a rather big nuisance. That said, any who did approach her out of vile intentions would be caught out immediately by Yumina’s Mystic Eye.

“However, if they know about your Mystic Eye, then would villains rather not dare to approach you in the first place?” The topic came up as Yae asked Yumina about her Mystic Eyes during the walk home.

It had already grown dark, but the viscount’s estate was fairly close to the western district, so we figured that it might be nice to walk home the old-fashioned way for a change. The streets were derelict of people, and at most we saw a wagon passing by on the road every now and then.

The street lamps were dim, and there wasn’t a hint of moonlight. Well, that was basically just how things were in this world’s night.

Yumina thought over Yae’s question a little before giving an answer.

“Well, you see... Simply having vile intentions alone does not mean you’ve actually done anything wrong yet. I can’t accuse someone for a crime they’ve

yet to commit. Besides, all people are at least a little bit greedy at heart. Some even approach believing that they've fooled my Mystic Eye... And those are still among the less bothersome types." Yumina spoke with a strained smile. I struggled to imagine having to put up with someone like that putting on an overly friendly attitude, knowing all the while that it was just an act. Sounded like a pain in the ass.

"You mean there were even worse kinds of people?"

"Yes. The most difficult kind of person for me to deal with is someone who has deluded themselves into believing that all of their actions are correct and justified. They tell themselves that they haven't a thing to hide, so they wouldn't worry about my Mystic Eyes reflecting on them. If anything, they expect my Mystic Eyes to find them with an untainted heart, thus proving their own justice. I can't stand those types at all." I think I got what she meant. Those who might claim that their actions are all for the sake of Belfast, that it was they who were best suited to lead the country, that it would be in Yumina's better interests as well... The sorts of people who think like that tend to have no awareness of the fact that they're being nothing but a nuisance. They'd never even considered Yumina's feelings on the matter from the beginning.

It was more like trying to use their own virtuous nature as a selling point, though in fact it came across as more self-righteous than anything.

"Can you not see through those types with your Mystic Eyes, can you not?"

"No, I can still see through them. Mine are the Mystic Eyes of Intuition. They let me see the corruption in a person's soul. The self-righteous have tendency to march forward in a straight line with no care to their surroundings, causing trouble for people without recognizing that fact." Those who would act out on their own personal definitions of justice have a tendency to get into conflicts with others. When that person is acting as the face of the country, it could very easily escalate into war.

I swear, whoever said that "The world has too many Heroes, that's why war doesn't end" really got it right. Yae and I both stopped in our tracks.

"Wh-What's wrong?" Yumina started panicking a little. I took her hand in mine and spoke with a soft voice.

“I don’t know who, but someone has us surrounded.”

“What?!” Yumina cast her gaze wildly around our surroundings. The air was thick with ill intent. *What the hell do these guys want?*

“Get out. We know you’re hiding there.”

“Hmph. Tricky kid, ain’tcha?” Groups of men came crawling out from the back alleys. Every last one of them had the looks of a thief or thug.

They were carrying around swords and clubs openly. Definitely not the kind of person you’d like to get involved with.

“What do you want with us?”

“Only one we’re after here is you. The women are free to go.” *Eh? Free to go? The bandits were letting the girls go free?*

“Touya-dono, what have you gone and done this time, then?”

“I... can’t really think of anything off the top of my head.” To tell the truth, I actually wasn’t too sure about that. I’d gotten into trouble with many sorts over my travels, even becoming rather infamous myself. *Come to think of it, there was that one guy whose face I broke when he came up and picked a fight with me. Are these guys his friends, then?*

“Nothing personal, kid... But I gotta kill you now!”

“Yeah, you and me both.” The man swung at me with his sword, so I ruthlessly shot him down with Brunhild. Ruthlessly shot him with perfectly safe, Paralysis-inducing rubber bullets, mind you. The thug collapsed to the ground, his face contorted in agony. Even though all they did was paralyze a target, there was still the force of the rubber bullet itself to consider. It would still hurt a fair bit.

“You’ve gone and done it now!”

“What, were you expecting me to just stand still and let myself get stabbed?” I took down several more of the closer bandits, but they kept coming. They sure were brave, if nothing else, as not a single person tried to flee even after seeing hordes of their companions get taken down. These kinds of situations were honestly even more annoying to deal with.

“Safety Mode.” I shifted Brunhild into the blunt-bladed shortsword, on stun mode. Then, I dodged a falling sword and used my momentum to slam my sword into his torso.

In truth, there was no real reason for me to swing my sword so hard against them. All it would’ve taken was the lightest graze and the paralysis would set in, so long as the person wasn’t wearing any talismans. That was all the force that was really necessary.

A few minutes passed before all the assailants had been laid down to relax all over the street.

“Phew... Man, what a pain.”

“What should we do with them, do you think?”

“Mmm... I wouldn’t really mind just leaving them here like this, but I wouldn’t want them coming after us again once they get back up... I think I’ll pay a quick visit to the nearest knight’s station and—”

“What are you up to over there?!” The knights that I’d thought to go and report to came to us instead. Apparently they’d headed over upon hearing some kind of commotion going on in the area.

I displayed my Guild Card to prove my identity and explained the situation to the knights. Since it was impossible to forge a Guild Card, they worked as a proof of identity in times like these.

“They just jumped on us from out of nowhere, so we beat them up instead.”

“I see. Some of these faces take up a few wanted posters. I’m guessing they just saw you as an easy target.” *Oh right, anybody who didn’t know me would naturally just see me as a weak-looking kid from their perspective. I’ve run into a lot of people like that, so, honestly, I’ve gotten used to it.*

Still, did they really think that a weak-looking kid like me would be loaded with money or something? I mean, I was, in fact, incredibly rich, but that was beside the point.

“We’ll take care of things from here. We’ll let the guild know about what transpired, too.”

“Alright. Thank you very much.” I bowed to the knights and decided to use this as our chance to make a break for it. Part of it was that I just wanted to get home, but it was also because it would be a pain if they found out about Yumina. If people started getting worked up about an attempted abduction of the princess, we’d never hear the end of it.

It seemed these were lower-ranking knights, however, since they didn’t seem to recognize Yumina at all.

“Misdeeds still occur even in the capital, they do.”

“The crime rate just naturally rises with population size. I’m sure it’s difficult to deal with on my father’s end, too.” Sure sounded tough being King.

We continued chatting like that until we arrived home.

◇ ◇ ◇

“...Come again?”

“As I said, there was an incident yesterday involving a group of men who were slashed to death in the middle of the street. We were investigating possible leads when one of them led to you, Touya.” Lyon came first thing in the morning with unpleasant news. In my tired state, I took a moment to process things.

There’d been a slashing incident? I’m the prime suspect? That is silly! It just doesn’t make any sense!

“It all happened on Fourslet Street in the western district. Several men were found dead with slash wounds. It’s thought that they all died instantly. Right by the scene of the crime, we found this.” At Lyon’s words, Deputy General Neil placed a solid rubber cylinder on the table. *Wait a minute, that’s...!*

“That’s definitely mine. It’s the rubber I use for creating new bullets.”

“Several people from the neighborhood also heard the distinctive noise of your weapon... Brunhild, you called it? They claim they heard that very noise being fired off last night. Do you admit to having been at the scene of the crime?”

“W-Wait, hold on! Yeah, I was there last night, but I didn’t *kill* anyone! Didn’t

you get a report about this from those knights yesterday?!”

“...We haven’t received any reports like that from any of the knights who were on duty.” That didn’t make sense. What was going on? I carefully retold in detail the events of the night prior to Lyon and Neil.

“That is indeed odd. I can confirm that we’ve received no such reports. What’s going on here?”

“What were they like, these knights who rushed to your aid? Can you describe their appearances?”

“Can I describe them...? Let’s see... One of them had eyes that were a bit high up on his face, and the other had a nose that was like... Hang on, I’ve got a better idea.” I cast **[Mirage]** and projected the images of the two knights I’d run into during the incident. I couldn’t recall the faces of any of the bandits who’d assaulted us, but I’d gotten a good look at both of the knights at least. I’d seen their faces, so I could even recall what their voices were like.

Lyon and Neil were surprised by the sudden appearance of the projected images, but calmed themselves down and inspected them in detail.

“I’m afraid I don’t recognize them at all. Lyon, are these men under your charge?”

“To my knowledge, there are no knights like this enlisted, at least not in the First Division. Never mind that, I’ve never even seen these men before.” *Hold up a sec, does that mean they were only posing as knights?* If that were the case, it meant that they were probably the ones who hired the bandits to attack me. And, as soon as we left, those fake knights killed the bandits and planted evidence in an attempt to frame me for the crime. They’d pushed me into a position where it was near-impossible to prove my innocence by evidence alone.

Heck, given that all of my assailants were dead and I hadn’t so much as a scratch on me, it just made it look like I’d one-sidedly slaughtered the lot of them. Even pleading self-defense would be a challenge.

“...I suppose that claiming we were tricked by fake knights would just make me sound even more suspicious in this case.”

“That’s true, but you also have Princess Yumina as your witness in this case. We can’t exactly just march up and arrest you under these circumstances.”

“What do you believe the culprits’ goal was? To frame Sir Touya for the crime and have us imprison him?” This was... some hefty grudge I’d gone and earned myself.

“It’s strange that there were even any bandits out in the western district in the first place. It may not be the nobles’ district, but it’s a well-guarded area, so there’s no way a group like that should’ve been able to move around freely without getting picked up by the patrol or reported for suspicious activity.” He had a point. Without the aid of someone on the inside, it would’ve been impossible to pull off a feat like that.

“The question is, what are *you* planning to do next?”

“I guess I’ll just go catch the real culprit and clear my name. That seems the quickest way to resolve this.”

“Indeed, but how exactly do you plan to do that?

“What do you mean, how? We’ve already got their faces right here.” I pointed to the images of the fake knights projected by my **[Mirage].**

“Run search. Find the fake knights I met yesterday. As for the range... They should still be within the capital.”

“Searching... Search complete. Displaying.” Lyon and Neil were slightly startled when Cesca suddenly began speaking out of nowhere, but their expressions instantly turned sour when they saw the pins on the map now projected in the air.

The search results were pointing to... An area in the nobles’ district. On the inner side, at that. It was an area full of people of very high social status. It was even in the same area as Sue’s, or rather, Duke Ortlinde’s, estate.

The points on the map moved through the nobles’ district before stopping in front of one place in particular, at which they vanished from sight.

“Hm?”

“Targets have entered a barrier preventing the trace ability of search magic. I

am no longer able to track them." Whoever the culprit was, they had a barrier up just in case. Always could count on sleazy nobles to do that kind of thing.

"Whose estate was it that they entered?"

"...That was Marquis Rygel's estate, no doubt about it. It all makes sense now."

"Indeed it does."

Marquis Rygel? I didn't know if they expected me to recognize the name, but he must've been a bigshot to have the title of Marquis.

"Sir Touya, do you recall the incident with Viscount Barrow?"

"...Not ringing any bells. Who was that, again?" The two knights simply shrugged their shoulders with a face that said they'd been expecting as much. *What?! I'm serious! I don't remember the name of every two-bit villain I take care of!*

"Viscount Barrow was the father of a certain ex-knight trainee that you beat to a pulp just recently. They're the family that were disbanded after their boy tried to raid your mansion."

"Oh! The spoiled rich brats! Yeah, I remember them." There was no way I could've been expected to remember their names, though. I didn't exactly care much for them. Still, I'd have understood if it were the remnants of that house who had a bone to pick with me, but where did this Marquis guy fit into the picture?

"A member of Marquis Rygel's bloodline had taken one of the Barrows as a wife. They were pretty close, those houses. They were more like a protege house, I suppose. Also, while it's incredibly distant, Marquis Rygel has *some* royal blood in him from some generations ago. The Marquis has been trying to get his son married to Princess Yumina for quite some time now. A large part of his claim being that his lineage was surely the most suitable. Naturally, His Majesty has been refusing the proposal. The boy himself was judged as being a mere brat who's being propped up on a pedestal due to his family's influence, too."

To sum up, what this meant was that this Marquis Rygel must have found out

about my engagement to Yumina from the Barrows, and now for their own plans as well as to avenge the Barrows' fall, the Marquis was trying to get me out of his way. He'd have had no complaints if the bandits got me, and even should they fail he would just frame me for their murder. Of all the slimy tricks...

"Though you haven't ever openly committed any crimes before, you're plenty infamous among the general populace as it is. The Marquis most likely planned to emphasize this fact as proof that you're not qualified to marry the princess, and that his own son would be a far better choice, no doubt. There are rumors that the Marquis is willing to stop at nothing to marry into the royal family."

Hrmph... I was starting to get pretty pissed, but it had nothing to do with the fact that I was being targeted. Learning that these people only wanted to use Yumina as a tool to boost their own influence had lit my fuse.

"...Hypothetically, let's say these guys were the masterminds behind the whole thing, and that they'd tried to have me assassinated. How serious a crime would that be considered?

"Fairly serious, I'd imagine. I highly doubt His Majesty would take the Marquis' side, either. The Marquis has been a stubborn old coot on par with Count Balsa for years, contesting the king's decisions at every turn."

On the same level as Count Baldy... So basically, a walking ball of sheer incompetence? The more I learned about him, the more I learned that my guess had been pretty much spot-on. There were rumors that he was involved in some crooked dealings, and that he had vehemently opposed the trade and alliance deals with Mismede due to his inherent contempt for Beastmen.

Lyon didn't even try to hide his dislike of the man. I couldn't really blame him, considering his girlfriend was Olga and all.

"Still, even if we confront the Marquis with what we have now, it's obvious he'd play dumb to the end. That would be why he hired bandits, non-representative of his house, for the initial assault. The fact of the matter is, were it not for your magic, Touya, we wouldn't even have *this* lead to go on." That was true, too. Even the fake knights that had tricked me could easily be saddled with all of the blame, letting the Marquis get away scot-free.

Considering the state of things already, that seemed a highly plausible outcome.

“Without solid evidence, even the king couldn’t press an accusation like that. How do you plan to find any such evidence when they’ve gone to such lengths to cover their tracks?”

“Oh, that’s easy. If we can’t find any evidence right now, then we just have to *make* some.” I slipped a ruthless grin onto my face and began plotting my next move.

◇ ◇ ◇

“And? What became of the brat?”

“The Deputy General and the Commander of the First Order paid a visit to his house this morning. He was escorted to the knights’ headquarters last we saw of him. We can assume they’ll launch their investigation into his background before the day is out.”

“Kuhahaha! Yes... Excellent. Those filthy rats that call themselves adventurers should know their place in the world. Any commoner who gets in *my* way *deserves* to end up like this!”

“You did it, Papa! In yooouuur face, commoner! Eehehehehe, now *I’ll* be the one to marry Princess Yumina! Me and me alone!” Standing out on the terrace, facing the garden, was a man laughing in delight. He was a large-built man in his fifties, wearing a luxuriously expensive-looking suit. He sported a very small mustache and was the master of this estate; Marquis Rygel.

By the Marquis’s side stood his only son, who was currently puffing out his cheeks in joy. He was a blubbery little specimen of a man who, despite only being in his twenties, already had a receding hairline. A layer of grease seemed to coat the man’s balding cranium as well.

Standing before these two, out in the garden, were a pair of particularly notable men. They were the false knights who had appeared the night before at the Marquis’s order, as well as the true killers of the bandits in the street. They also happened to be the Marquis’ private guard.

“Next, we *must* sneak stolen goods into his belongings. For good measure, you understand. When that arises during the inspection, his crimes will be

twofold!”

“Stolen... Stolen goods, sir?”

“You know, the ones you brought back after assaulting that one trade caravan last month. We can use that! When it’s announced that the princess’ fiance was a savage bandit, the whole country will be in an uproar!”

“You’re the boss, boss...” The fake-knight also worked part-time doing highway robberies under similar orders. This guy was an honest to goodness Marquis de Bad.

“For the finishing touch, we’ll make sure the fact that the princess’ fiance was a murderer and a thief and a jaywalker is rubbed in the public’s faces. With this, I shall approach the king and demand that the engagement be called off at once. The king will have no choice but to oblige, given the circumstances. The people simply would not accept a man known as a violent criminal as the husband of the princess! We’ll prove to everyone that the king is simply not capable of choosing a suitable partner, then take full advantage of that! I can already see him the very picture of shame!” The Marquis grinned gleefully to himself. So convinced of his victory was he that even his reflection in the glass window seemed alive with a rapturous joy of its own.

“...And this is how you plan to get Princess Yumina to marry your son?”

“Ehehehe! I can’t wait! Once the princess belongs to me, I think I’ll bully her a little! She always looked down on me with those cold eyes, that impudent brat! I’ll have to make sure and spend plenty of time *training* her how to service me as my wife!”

“Do with her as you please, just don’t play with her so hard that she breaks. Remember, your job is to knock her up and get those kids out. She’s only useful to us while she can still get pregnant. Don’t forget that, boy.”

“Ehehehe! I know that, Papa! I’ll knock her up nice and good, and then that’ll make you into the new king’s grandpa!” The boy’s indecent laughter rang out into the night. As though infectious, this filthy laugh spread to the marquis as well. Their whole putrid conversation was loud enough to be heard echoing down where we were in the garden.

“Touya, my boy. I believe this is quite enough. Any more and I fear my ears shall rot off.”

“Yeah, I was feeling the same actually.”

“Wh-What the devil?!” The marquis was intimately familiar with the voice presently emerging from the mouth of what should have been a member of his private guard.

By our good friend’s orders, I canceled the illusion cast by my **[Mirage]** spell.

The marquis’ private guard slowly began to take on his true form.

“Your Majesty! But how!? That’s impossible!” Made to gaze upon His Royal Majesty the King of Belfast, who had been here from the very beginning, was evidently such a fright that it made the Marquis fall to the ground on his backside. By the king’s left and right were Lyon, and Deputy General of the Knight Order, Neil.

“Wha-Wha-Wha... What is the meaning of this?!”

“We took the liberty of *borrowing* your guards. Right about now, the real ones are a prison cell confessing to things we hadn’t even accused them of yet, I’d imagine. We were able to get more than enough information from them to prove my innocence, but I felt that the king should hear your side of the story *personally,* so I took the liberty of escorting him straight to your garden.”

“...Perhaps there is a grain of truth in your accusations, Marquis. I must indeed be a terrible judge of character, what with having learned that I’ve been letting a scoundrel like yourself loose on innocent people.” The king spoke to the marquis in a deep, intimidating voice, not unlike the terror of thunder itself. The king was absolutely and completely enraged.

“This can’t be happening! I set up a barrier around this whole estate, even the garden! You can’t use magic in here!”

“That’s it? A regular barrier? The most that does is exclude you as a target from any spells aimed at the area it’s cast on. That’s why teleportation magic or search magic ceases working the moment the spell interacts with the barrier. However, if it’s *myself* that I’m casting a spell on, then your barrier is powerless to stop that. It wouldn’t protect *you* very well to block any magic cast against

me, after all. So, my **[Mirage],** an illusion spell that I can cast on myself, is able to slip straight past your barrier without a problem. Maybe you should've spent a bit less time on evil plotting and a bit more time studying the very basics, at least."

"Insolent knave! Do you not understand that you are in the presence of a marquis, you bottom-feeder?! Know your place!" Perhaps the lecture was a tad much, as it seemed to have sent the marquis off indignant with fury. Did he even understand his *own* position?

"*I'm* being insolent, am I? Tell me this, Sir Marquis, which of us is the one who committed murder, pinned the crime on an innocent man, plotted against the king he was sworn to follow, and as if that weren't enough, used bandit groups to assault and rob innocent people? That was all stuff *you* did, right? In my opinion, I don't believe you're even deserving of being spoken to in a polite tone of voice. Hey, pigboy, let me hear *your* opinions on the matter. Well?"

"P-Pig?! How dare you?! Don't think you can get away with talking to me like that, commoner! I'll make sure you never—" I wasn't in the mood for these charades, so I closed the distance between us faster than they could blink, then lifted the fat bastard from the ground by his collar.

"...You're the one I'm the most pissed off with right now, piggy. You sure had lots of fun going on about knocking up my future wife... If I ever hear another word like that come out of your mouth, I'll rip your tiny pecker off, shove it down your throat, and then stitch your mouth shut. You'll be sucking yourself off for the rest of your days. Understood? Nod if you get the message, asshole."

"E-Eek?!" I threw all the malice I could muster in the boy's direction with my every word, only to find that he'd wet himself and passed out from fear.

It was absolutely disgusting, so I tossed his piss-stained body against the wall.

"A-Alexander!" The marquis let out a scream at the sight of his son's body being thrown aside.

His name was Alexander? That's the least fitting name I can possibly think of for that sack of shit.

"Intruders! Intruders on the grounds! Take them out!" At the marquis's

command, the full force of his private guard came rushing out from their rooms into the garden.

They were apparently exactly the sort of pathetic underlings you might expect to find, since it was clear that they didn't so much as recognize the king in-person. They drew their swords and pointed them in our direction.

"Marquis Rygel, do you understand the gravity of your actions at this moment?"

"Silence! I'll just subject you to brute force, instead! Guards, cut those men down! Leave not a single one standing!" The marquis was so mad that His Majesty the King's words were no longer even reaching him. He was a completely lost cause at this point. Basically, he'd gone berserk.

"Guess we can safely add 'high treason' to his list of crimes."

"Idiots, the lot of them." Lyon and Neil each let out a heavy sigh.

It didn't exactly take a genius to consider that there was no way the king would come out to a place like this in person without taking any precautions whatsoever. The king made eye contact with me, so I took Brunhild from my hip, then fired a single loud shot straight up into the night sky.

The explosive noise was their signal to move out. The royal knights swarmed the garden in great numbers within an instant.

"Who... Wha... How...?!" Outnumbered this heavily, the marquis's private army had no choice but to surrender. The marquis himself turned pale as he watched his private guard throwing down their weapons one after another.

"Marquis Rygel, your title is hereby revoked on counts of high treason and attempted assassination of the crown, among various other petty crimes. Your guilt is clear as day. Just give up." The king's words shocked the marquis so hard that he fell to his knees. Neil brought some rope to bind his arms with.

◇ ◇ ◇

"Responsibility for this incident rests entirely upon my shoulders. There is no excuse for what you went through, Touya."

"Not at all. You managed to bring an enemy who had kept himself hidden for

a long time to justice. All's well that ends well, Your Majesty." I tried to appease the king, who had taken a bow before me.

The day after the incident, I had gone with Yumina to the Royal Castle. I was curious to find out what happened to the marquis and his son. Naturally, they had both been given severe punishments.

"Won't this be kind of a big deal, though? I mean, he *was* technically a marquis and all."

"Not at all. The whole affair is entirely sorted. He was a man that Yumina was never fond of to begin with, so I never cared to delegate any important matters to him anyway. I now have an open estate to offer to any of the more *responsible* nobles should they perform a great enough service. I consider this a good thing." Meaning he'd known all along that the man wasn't to be trusted ever since Yumina first saw straight through him with her Mystic Eyes. In the end, she was more right about him than any of us wanted her to be, however.

"Both of their souls have been caked thick with mud since I've first known them. I always knew that they were thinking despicable thoughts on the inside, but I didn't imagine that they would go this far... I had taken him for one to participate in petty power struggles, not high treason. It seems I'm still far too naive about the world." Yumina's Mystic Eyes were remarkably sharp, but not so omniscient that they told her exactly what *kinds* of evil thoughts one might be having. Seeing Yumina looking all dejected gave my hand a mind of its own, and I was patting her on the head before I even knew it. *Don't be so hard on yourself,* I wanted to say.

Marquis Rygel was marquis no longer. The incident had set an example for all of the other nobles, and sent a message that none, not even those with blood relations, however distant, to the royal family, would be pardoned for their corruption.

Ex-Marquis Rygel was executed, and his son, Alexander, was sent off to work in the mines for the rest of his life.

It turned out that the boy took after his father a little *too* closely, as his own expansive list of crimes was uncovered after that night. I'd heard that he had even been using his family's private guard to kidnap women from the streets.

Naturally, his father had covered it up each and every time, letting his son do as he pleased. Evidence also arose that Viscount Barrow had been involved in these very dealings in the past, too.

“The thought that those scoundrels had so much as a drop of royal blood in their veins makes me want to vomit.”

“That trace blood connection of his was from following his family tree back over a thousand years, wasn’t it? By that point you’re literally just strangers.” Thinking to protect Yumina’s feelings from going the same way, I offered my opinion. The fact was that if you traced back two people’s family trees far enough, you were bound to find some kind of connection between the two eventually. Well, with the exception of myself, who was just dropped into the world by God one day.

“At the very least, I believe this shall put an end to any harassment from other dissenting nobles for the time being. I shan’t dare to think of any foolish enough to follow the marquis’s example.”

“That almost makes it sound like I’m the one personally responsible for bringing the marquis to justice...”

“That is essentially what you did, is it not?” It looked more to me like he dug his own grave. All I really did was take the king to meet him, after all.

I felt that the most credible form of evidence would be the kind that came straight from the culprit’s mouth. All I had to do was get him to talk about it openly.

My original plan had been to record the marquis’s confession to all of his crimes on my smartphone and present *that* as evidence later, but when the king caught wind of my plans he insisted that I take him along to witness the truth with his own eyes. I felt I would probably never get used to this ridiculous king’s antics.

“And when you snapped at that moron of a child, it sent chills down my spine. Yumina is a fortunate girl indeed to have met a man who cares so intensely for her as you do, my boy.”

“What did he say?”

“Can we please drop that subject...?” Just thinking of that outburst made me red to my ears. I had completely let the situation get to my head when that happened. Yumina tried to pry it out of me, but what I’d said was far more vulgar than anything this girl ever needed to hear, so my lips were sealed.

“Staaaaaare...” *Don’t even count on trying those eyes on me this time. I shan’t breathe a word of it.*

“Touya, my boy. If you truly do care for my Yumina so much, then I believe the best way to go from here would be for you to make a child with her! Well, I’m sure you two’ll be getting to it sometime soon, regardless!”

“Your Majesty, please cease and desist!”

“Father!” Yumina, beet-faced, screamed at the top of her lungs, loud enough to blow out one’s eardrums and echo throughout the entire castle building.

I, too, was undoubtedly red as a tomato, but that was neither here nor there.

Chapter III: Trouble in the Empire's Heart

"The Regulus Empire has been acting strange as of late..." I had finished a guild quest with Yae, so we went to a coffee shop. Logan was there, and he made a passing comment.

"Strange? How so."

"Hm... how should I put it. Much like Belfast, they've split their military force into a standing army and an order of knights. The army is for offense and defense against other countries, while their order is for domestic security and patrolling their capital. But lately their standing army has been actively recruiting a lot more people, even though they're not at war with anyone."

"Do you think they're gearing up for invasion, do you?" Though Yae had asked the question to Logan, it was Rebecca who turned and answered him.

"I doubt it. They say the emperor is bedridden with sickness. His son, the crown prince, isn't even twenty years old and is in no state to be running national affairs, either. There'd be no reason for them to start a conflict." I didn't know that their emperor was ill. Regardless of their internal situation, it was good to know it wasn't in their interests to start a war.

They wouldn't start anything on this side, at the very least. Belfast, the Kingdom of Mismede, and the Refreese Imperium were all on good terms. That meant the west and the south territories immediately adjacent to Belfast were covered. Regulus definitely had no way of going up against three other nations at once.

"Then, once the emperor passes away, will the empire have to worry about being invaded by others, will they? It could be why they're bolstering their army, it could." Yae had a point. Belfast had no such intentions, but they were old enemies dating back over twenty years. It was only logical for them to be cautious.

There was the Roadmare Union to the east of the empire, as well as the

Ramissh Theocracy to the south.

"I think every country's aware that there'd be no real point in fighting the empire these days. Even if they aren't as strong as they used to be, they're still pretty sturdy. Well... if Refreese, Belfast, Mismede, Roadmare, and Ramissh attacked all at the same time... it'd probably be an easy win."

"Then again, dividing the territory after an effort like that would be a whole other battle in itself!" Logan chuckled in response. Well, if sparks ended up flying, I was sure we'd be able to take care of it. Not that I expected any trouble from them.

Yae and I left Rebecca and Logan, then headed back to Moon Reader. Once again, I had received a fresh request for a new title to purchase. I was a little wary, but I did some research and found it was a serious adventure tale, not some dodgy smut.

As it turned out, the book was only available in a certain place... The Regulus Empire.

"Well... I suppose I should go and look into picking up that title. What about you, Yae?"

"Linze-dono is on the second floor, she is. I will invite her to come home with me, I will. It is time to eat soon, anyway." Linze had been spending most of her free time here recently. Luckily, she had moved on to more interesting genres like history and general fiction.

But, if left to her own devices, she often spent whole days reading, so I asked Yae to check on her from time to time.

I decided I'd visit their capital, just to take a look.

I opened up a **[Gate]** to Gallaria, Heart of the Empire.

"Wh-What the hell is going on here?" The scene that had appeared before me was not a peaceful city, but a roaring sea of flames and mayhem.

For a moment, I thought a fire had simply broken out nearby, but this was clearly something else entirely. Everywhere I looked, civilians were fleeing, people were screaming, buildings were erupting into ruin. I was completely

taken aback. Just what had happened here? I invoked **[Gravity]** to lighten my weight, then further amplified my body with **[Boost].** I jumped up right away to the roof of a building, realizing I needed a better vantage point.

"Hey, hey..." I saw civilians scrambling and trying to flee, while soldiers clad in black uniforms ignored them and marched toward the castle. There was a line of men clad in black armor, royal guards and knights, trying to prevent the uniformed men from carrying on. There were blades clashing here and there in the streets. I had no idea what was happening.

I heard a shriek from nearby. I ran along the roof to see where it came from, then caught sight of two soldiers in dark military uniforms who had a knight cornered. The knight was bleeding profusely from the shoulder, having clearly lost the use of one of his arms.

While it was true I didn't know the circumstances, I had to stop them from continuing. I couldn't just stand by and watch a man die, no matter who he might be. I hopped down behind them and fired off some paralyzing rounds.

"Guh!"

"Gah!" The two soldiers fell down instantly. The injured knight suddenly fell to his knees as well.

"You okay, man?!" I cured the man's injuries with Healing magic. He was only barely conscious, however. The man needed rest. His eyes were unfocused, too. It was likely the result of blood loss.

"Just what the hell happened here?!"

"The army... betrayed our glorious emperor.." The knight uttered a few words and fell unconscious.

The army rebelled...? W-Wait, does that mean there's a military coup going on?! For the time being, I slung the man over my shoulder and carried him into a nearby house. It was deserted, so I assumed the residents had fled. I plopped him down on a bed and applied more healing magic. I stopped when I was sure he wouldn't die.

After that, I left the house and jumped up to the roof. I needed to get a feel for the situation.

“Search. Display the two factions in two different colors!”

“...Search complete. Displaying. Royal knights are displayed in blue, one thousand, one hundred and sixty-five units. Army soldiers are displayed in red, twelve thousand, six hundred and fifty-four units.”

Almost ten times as many. The situation before me was absolutely insane. The map was dyed a deep red.

I looked around for more fires, but it seemed that this district had it the worst.

What should I do, though? Should I just leave? It’s not like I have any obligations in this country. I can just return to Belfast, leave the situation as is, and report to the royal family back home. That would be the easiest thing to do, but...”

“I guess I can’t leave like this...” I didn’t even know why a coup was happening in the first place. I figured they were after the emperor’s head.

“I’ll head to the castle... Maybe I can offer the emperor refuge in Belfast if I get to him in time.” The emperor was sick, but I could move the bed too if push came to shove.

I dashed across the rooftops. As I got closer to the castle, more conflict came into sight. Both the royal guard and the army were clashing against each other and getting in my way. I shook them off and continued my course.

I didn’t know a single thing about the Regulus Empire. It could be that the army was fighting for a righteous cause, that they were opposing a wicked emperor. Honestly, I had a few moral questions about my involvement in this whole situation, so I once again briefly considered just leaving and letting it all work itself out.

If the emperor was out of the picture, then the conflict would be settled, and I might be able to peacefully talk to whoever started the coup. Not like I had a choice in how to deal with the situation at that point. If the emperor was indeed wicked, then it might even be for the best.

“H-Hm... Is this the castle gate?” The castle gate was already broken, which meant the army had invaded. I figured I should hurry. As I was thinking, part of

the castle detonated. I was shocked by that, but then I noticed the various fireballs flying around of the impact site. Magical artillery. I hadn't even considered how dangerous that could be.

I made my way over through the castle gate. Security was... definitely lax. But that wasn't exactly surprising. It'd be impossible to patrol at a time like this.

I ran through the royal garden, then made my way to the second floor balcony. From there, I made it into the castle itself through an open window.

"Well, I don't know where the emperor's room is..." I couldn't use the search function to find it, either. I wouldn't be able to determine which room belonged to the emperor. If he wasn't bedridden, I'd have just searched something like "throne" to find him.

I decided there'd be no point fretting about it any further. I decided to leave the room.

As one would expect of the emperor's castle, it was extremely gaudy and well-decorated. I opened up a particularly large, ornate door, and someone fell from the inside.

"Whoa!" The person that fell out was a female knight. She had been leaning against the door before I moved it. Although she wasn't moving, there was still a fight in her eyes. She surveyed me as if to ask, "Who are you?" which wasn't a surprise.

She looked to be around her mid-twenties. I didn't notice any clear injuries on her, until I looked at the back of her neck. Hidden behind her blonde hair was a needle lodged in her skin. I carefully removed it and pulled it up in front of my face. It seemed to have a strange substance in it.

I wondered if it was poison, so I looked around for enemies. I only saw one fallen soldier in the inner hall, so I wasn't entirely sure of the source. Either way, I had to heal her.

"I'm gonna heal you now, alright? I'm not an enemy, so please don't attack me after I'm done!" I briefly introduced myself to make sure she wouldn't panic, then invoked my healing magic.

"[Recovery]." Soft light enveloped the woman. She got up and slowly opened

and closed her hand, seemingly confirming her own strength had returned. After that, she pulled out two blades and slashed at me. *What the hell?! That wasn't part of the deal!*

"[Gravity]!"

"Gah!" I grabbed her arm and invoked my weight alteration magic. I was in a panic, though, so I used a little more than I expected. She began to collapse under her own weight until it almost looked like she was groveling on the ground. I reduced the weight until she was at more of a crouch, then spoke to her normally.

"I told you I'm not the enemy, so why'd you try to attack me?!"

"Name yourself immediately! If you aren't in the royal guard, then you're with the army, right?! If you're with the army, then you're the enemy, right?! That means I need to slay you!"

Does this woman have brain problems? Seems like she doesn't understand a thing.

"First of all, I'm not with the military. I'm not even wearing a military uniform! On top of that, if I was with them, why would I have saved you?!"

"W-Well, that makes sense..."

"I'm not even from this country! My name is Mochizuki Touya. I live in Belfast, I'm an adventurer. I traveled to the Heart of the Empire and accidentally got caught up in this mess! As for why I'm here in the castle grounds, I came in to try and help any of the royal family. I have transportation magic, so I was hoping to evacuate with any important people." As she listened to me, the female knight's expression changed. It slowly shifted from concern to hope.

"You have transportation magic... really?! If that's so, could you help me?!"

"Sure, but could you maybe promise not to attack me again?"

"Very well. I swear, upon both of my blades." I canceled my spell and she stood up. She shook off the sluggishness and moved her body a bit, then looked toward me as she sheathed her weaponry.

"Touya, was it? My name is Caroline Rillettes. Please call me Carol, though. I

belong to the Empire's Third Order. I'm a Second-Class Knight." I didn't really know what that meant, but I nodded regardless.

Carol seemed to have been fighting with soldiers from the army, but was struck down with poison as soon as she turned her back. As I expected, grasped in the dead soldier's hand was undoubtedly a blowgun just short of ten centimeters in length.

"We must meet with His Majesty the Emperor at once! Come, I shall lead you to him!" It was then that I noticed the crest on the hilt of her blade. A griffin, a shield, two swords, and laurels... I felt like I'd seen that somewhere before. Carol hurried on before I could dwell too deeply on it, so I dashed to the castle alongside her.

Knights, soldiers, and other were strewn around the courtyard. All dead, bleeding into a collective pool of gore. The area reeked of fresh blood. *This is bad... If the place is in this state, it's not likely that the emperor is safe.*

I went ahead with Carol, but my mind was already full of the worst possible scenarios.

After running up stairs for a while, we eventually reached a grand hallway.

Carol moved straight forward, but I suddenly stopped. I could hear a faint screaming.

I stopped for a moment and concentrated. *Explosions... the cries of warriors... clashing weapons and... there it is... A woman... no, a young girl... I can hear a girl's voice!*

"Search! A young girl within a 100 meter radius! Anyone who might be trying to hurt her, too!"

"...Search complete. Displaying."

The map displayed a room at the far end of the hall. *Got it... Straight ahead!*

I kicked open the door and burst into the room. I surveyed the room, finding a man in a military uniform. He was straddling a young girl with silver hair. His left hand was wrapped around her neck, while his right was just about to pierce her breast with a knife."

“Huh?! Who are— Gyuuuh!!!” My surprise entry made the man hesitate, so I took the chance to launch a paralysis bullet at him. *That was seriously close! She would’ve died if I got here even a second later!* The man collapsed on the spot, falling on top of the girl.

“E-Eek?!” The girl shoved the man off her and scrambled away to the corner. She clutched her own body, trembling. That wasn’t exactly surprising. She had just survived a murder attempt, after all.

“You okay?” I wanted her to be calm, so I tried speaking in a gentle manner. The girl realized my intentions and looked me in the eyes.

Her eyes were a full, deep jade, and her skin was white as porcelain. She wore a beautiful white dress, but her silver hair was a little messy. She looked close to Yumina’s age. The fact that this man had tried to murder a child of all things was despicable.

Upon closer inspection, I noticed her clothing was slightly torn. She had cuts on her exposed skin. If I didn’t do something quick, she’d end up scarred.

“Come forth, Light! Soothing Comfort: [Cure Heal]!” I suddenly invoked a Healing spell, but her reaction was a fearful one. Luckily, when the soothing light wrapped around her arms, her expression changed to one of wonder.

“Wh-Who are you...”

“I’m Mochizuki Touya. Just a traveling adventurer, really. Not affiliated with your country or military.” I chose my words a little more carefully. I didn’t want her to freak out or attack me like what had happened with Carol.

“M-Mochizuki... Touya.”

“Can you walk?”

“I-I can.” I took her by the hand and helped her up. *Hm? I didn’t think about it until now, but... who is this girl, exactly? Her clothes are quite high-quality... Could it be that... No, she couldn’t be.*



Her eyes were fixed on mine. She wasn't even blinking, she was simply staring... the sensation was a little familiar.

"...What is it?"

"Wh-What?! N-Nothing! I-It's nothing at all!" The girl's cheeks flushed faintly pink.

"I... I don't usually get a chance to interact with gentlemen such as yourself... So, please, forgive me if I seem rather tense..."

"...Don't sweat it." Seemed the girl was sheltered, which only made my suspicions more concrete... Just as I was about to ask her name, I heard someone charge through the door frame I had left in my wake.

"Princess!"

"Carol!" Carol barged into the room and ran over to the girl. It was as I had expected. The girl was the princess of the empire.

"Are you safe?! Are you hurt?! Who is that?" Carol motioned toward the uniformed man on the ground.

"He was here to kill me! But Touya here saved my life..."

"He what?! Unforgivable... to even lay a hand against the princess is high treason! I'll kill him!"

"Hey, wait a sec!" Carol unsheathed her blade and brought it close to the unconscious man's neck. I grabbed her by the collar and dragged her back. She was a frustrating person who didn't think before she acted.

"So you're the princess? That explains your general behavior." I called out to the princess as I dragged Carol. I had a feeling it would end up like this.

"I am the Third Princess of the Regulus Empire. Lucia Leah Regulus. ...My apologies, but you don't seem terribly surprised, Touya. Many people change their attitudes upon learning I'm royalty."

"I've met two other princesses besides you, I guess I'm just getting used to it at this point." *Yeah, one's my fiancee, and the other's a freaky author.*

"To know so many members of royalty... just who are you?" This time Carol

was the surprised one. In all honesty, I had no idea how to define myself at this point. I felt as though my position on the political stage hadn't exactly been well established. Tentatively, I was affiliated with Belfast due to my engagement to Yumina, but... I definitely didn't want to become the king.

"Well, I can explain the details later. For the time being, shall we carry on? I can use transportation magic to send Princess Lucia to safety, if you want."

"That would be wise, I think." Carol started to ponder, I assumed she was thinking of safe places to send her, but the princess herself actually refused.

"I'll go later on. I'm more worried about father and my elder brother right now. Let's all go together." Lucia spoke with bravery and determination in her voice. I thought it was a tad dangerous, but I probably needed her with me to get the crown prince and the emperor to trust me, as well. I decided that once we found her family, we'd all teleport back to my house and take refuge there.

I left Lucia's safety to Carol and focused on the surrounding area. We returned to the mail hall where I had parted from Carol, then continued down it.

"We only need to rescue the emperor and the crown prince, right?"

"That's right. But I'd also like to keep an eye out for the state minister and the aides, too." Carol answered me as we ran along. That reminded me, Lucia called herself the third princess, but where were the other two? I asked, and apparently her oldest sister had married off overseas, while her other sister was studying abroad. They were in countries on good terms with Regulus for the time being, but... But depending on what happened to the empire after the coup, anything could happen. The princesses abroad might even be forced home and subjected to who knows what.

We ran through the corridor and turned the corner. Five soldiers were waiting for us with drawn blades.

"It's Lucia! Catch— no, slaughter the little bitch!" The soldiers turned their blades on us and charged in unison.

"That's dangerous, you know." I pulled out Brunhild and unloaded a barrage of paralyzing bullets. With a ra-ta-tat-tat, the men fell one after the other. It

was pretty simple.

“Y-You killed all five so quickly...”

“It’s not like that. I only paralyzed them. Is the emperor nearby?” Carol was annoying me a little bit, so I asked Lucia a question.

“Yes, the room ahead is my father’s bedroom. He’s ill, so I haven’t been able to see him very much...”

“Is he diseased? Is it infectious?”

“No... he’s just very old and unwell. I think he doesn’t want me to see him like that. I’ve heard that he’s become very frail and weak as of late.” That was worrying... I had no idea how to proceed. The fact that there were five enemies waiting for us this far in didn’t exactly bode well for us. It was entirely possible that the army had made it in there and already slain the old man. I didn’t want to be responsible for exposing someone so young to her father’s potentially brutalized corpse. Lucia noticed by hesitation, and quickly grabbed me by the sleeve.

“I’m prepared to see it through, regardless of the consequences. If I don’t see my father with my own two eyes, even now... I’ll truly regret it. Therefore, I shall come with you.” The girl’s determination was nothing short of admirable, so I couldn’t say no to her after that. Steeling myself, I flung open the door.

The room was very spacious, clearly build for royalty. Several men were standing around a king-sized bed on the far wall, but they turned toward us as we entered.

They were all clad in military-style uniforms. Three regular soldiers, two men who looked like officers, and a single general. There were several corpses dotted around as well. They had been clad in armor, so presumably they were the royal guard.

There was an elderly man amongst them all, lying in the bed. He appeared to be neither a member of the army or the royal guard. It was likely the emperor of the Regulus Empire himself. If that was the case, then we were too late.

“And just who are you? You aren’t with the royal guard.” The man who appeared to be a general spoke up. He had sharp eyes and a hooked nose, kind

of reminded me of a hawk, overall. He looked to be about forty years old.

“General Bazoar! Have you laid hands upon His Eminence the Emperor?!”

“Father...!” Carol furiously roared at the man, and I heard Lucia gasp in horror. So he was a general. I wondered if he was the mastermind behind the coup.

“Hmph, if it isn’t Princess Lucia and the stupid daughter of the Rillettes house. How vexing. I’m sure I had ordered both of you be killed.” The general frowned. It seemed he was annoyed by their survival. I wondered if Carol had a reputation... I gave her a cursory glance before looking back at the general.

“You’re the one behind all this, then? Tell me this, at least. Why? What are you doing this for?” I spoke my question right to General Bazoar’s face. In the end, I was an outsider to this situation. I had to hear him out in order to know which side was the right one.

“The emperor has a sickness. A sickness within his heart. He signed a peace treaty with Belfast and Roadmare, and he even hesitates when we say to trample on such agreements and conquer those territories! The emperor as he was in his prime would never have behaved this way. Truly, age is a frightening sickness with no cure.”

“...And just for that, you’d kill him?”

“For the sake of his people, an emperor must be strong. If he loses that strength, then he must move aside and make space at the table. A new emperor must take his place, one with true strength and drive.”

That’s not how it is, is it? This is just treason, it’s clearly a hostile takeover. The general must command more respect from the military than the emperor does, otherwise he would have never been able to kick off a revolt like this. An unwell old emperor with no plans for his people, and an unreliable crown prince... When you put them alongside a determined general who’ll stop at nothing to win... Well, it’s pretty clear which of those three has the biggest presence. Still, do these guys seriously intend to break the treaty and wage war?

“Belfast, Refreese, and Mismede all stand together in an alliance. Can you even hope to go against all three nations at once?”

“Of course I can! Do you think that I’ve been sitting by, idly twiddling my thumbs for the last twenty years of peace?” General Bazoar raised his right arm toward a nearby window and began to focus.

Oh, is he a magic user?! Wait, more importantly... what kind of magic is this?! I felt an immense pressure. This was clearly a greater force than I had encountered from any magic user before. *What is this feeling...? My body feels... heavier, somehow?*

“Come forth, Darkness! I seek a fiend of the highest order: [Demon Lord]!” The general spoke his incantation. As he finished his sentence, the window shattered to pieces and the room was engulfed in a white light.

When it finally subsided, the wall that the window had once been attached to was no more. More importantly, there was an enormous creature floating outside, clearly visible despite the fact that we were on the third floor. It had the head of a goat, the wings of a bat, the upper body of a well-built man, and the lower body of an owl.

What the hell is that thing?! He called it a Demon Lord? That’s an understatement, the damn thing looks like the Devil himself!

“I-Impossible...! How could he forge a contract with such a creature? Wh-Where is he even getting the magic power to keep it on this plane?” Lucia mumbled to herself, awestruck and horrified. She had a point. Lizardmen, Silver Wolves, and Skeletons were standard summons, but this thing was on another level entirely. I had no idea where the general was getting this kind of magical energy.

“Contracting with the beast was a trifling matter. I simply offered it living sacrifices. Criminals of our great city were offered up as fodder for the creature. The emperor stubbornly opposed the idea, of course. But think of the potential. If one could contract a Higher Demon, then one could also control Lesser Demons vicariously. After fulfilling the contract conditions and feeding the beast with as many lives as it desired, I was able to successfully collar it. And now, an entire army of monsters is at my disposal! As for the magic...” General Bazoar held up his right arm and pulled back the sleeve. He lifted it up to show us a beautiful bracelet wrapped around his wrist. A stunning red gem was fixed

on to it, which shimmered with a terrifying glint. *Is that... an Artifact?!*

"This Drainbracer absorbs the magic energy from places and people around me. Little by little, it has drained the magic from everyone in the vicinity. You people are the ones maintaining the Demon Lord." *It drains magic? That explains the weird feeling from before, I guess... That's bad news, though. I should get out of here or he'll just gain more magic.*

I noticed that Lucia and Carol had fallen to their knees. It looked like they were becoming weaker with every bid of energy they lost.

My magic had already regenerated enough, but there'd be little point in using **[Transfer]** on the girls. Any magic I gave back to them would just be sapped away again.

Then there's only one thing to do... I'm gonna have to wipe it out at the source!

[Apport]! I tried to pull the Drainbracer away with magic. Instead of what was supposed to happen, a strange sound reverberated near the general, and the spell failed completely.

"Hm? My my, you little whelp. You still have magic to spare? It's unfortunate for you that such things will not work on me at all. Why do you think I chose a demon of all things to contract with?" The general gestured toward the monstrous creature that was still hovering in the air nearby.

"This Demon Lord has a special trait. It's called Magical Nullification. Magic attacks, and the effects of enchanted weaponry, have no effect at all on it. And, as its master and contractor, the ability now extends to me!" *Magical Nullification?! How am I supposed to do anything against that?! Guess I have to use physical attacks, then...*

I pulled out Brunhild and reloaded it with paralyzing bullets. If magic didn't do anything, that was likely my best bet.

"Hm?" I pulled the trigger on the general. The gun echoed out, and... the bullet struck an invisible wall in front of the general's face. *The hell was that?!*

"Hm? Was that some kind of projectile weapon just now? You thought you'd switch to physical after failing to strike me with magic? How unfortunate." The

general rolled up his left sleeve to reveal another bracelet with a different red gemstone set into it.

"This is my Blockbracer. It forms an invisible barrier equal to the level of the magic poured in, nullifying all physical damage entirely. My Drainbracer absorbs magic, my Demon Lord grants me a resistance to all magical attacks, and my Blockbracer resists all physical strikes! This is my holy trinity! My ultimate defense! I cannot be damaged, regardless of the means employed!"

H-He's gotta be lying, right?! That can't be possible! I mean, I'm not exactly in a position to be saying anything at all about this, but doesn't that sound kind of cheap? He's way too overpowered! That's not fair at all! And he's using me as a magic battery, too! No fair! So even if I used ***[Gravity]*** *to do an extremely heavy or powerful attack, he could just use my own magic to generate a shield to block it. Wait, does that make sense? How can he draw that much magic out of me at once? Well, I guess others are supplying magic to him, as well...*

Tsk... this is bad. If only I could get rid of his damn bracelets.

"I don't know where you hail from, but you can't be allowed to leave alive. You'll become fodder for the Demon Lord, another sacrifice for the pile."

"Then what? You plan to summon a monster army and wage war? How many of the innocent citizens of this nation do you plan to sacrifice?!"

"I'm not sacrificing the citizens, the only ones that died so far were criminals. In life they were trash, of no use to our glorious empire. Is it not better for them to die for the sake of my ambition? But if that's your concern, worry not. We'll be using Belfast's soldiers as sacrificial fodder soon enough!" The general laughed heartily. It was at this point that I realized he was nothing more than a madman with a lust for carnage.

I didn't know whether the coup was righteous or not, but his tirade sealed the deal. It was *wrong.*

Using and abusing the lives of others for one's own ends was simply an unforgivable sin.

"Uuh..." The emperor, who was out cold on the floor behind the general, moved his foot very slightly. *Is he alive?!* Neither the general nor his

companions seemed to notice. I decided then that my priority should shift to saving the emperor. The two behind me seemed to be on the edge of consciousness themselves, so it seemed like their magic reserves were at their limit.

“Invoke **[Gate].** Target three individuals. Emperor, Lucia, and Carol. Send them to my home, just outside.”

“Copy that. Invoking **[Gate].**

“What?!“ A light appeared around the three individuals, and they vanished in a flash.

“You wretch, you can even use transportation magic?!”

“That’s right. I’ll be retreating just for today, but don’t think for a minute that I’m done with you.” I reloaded Brunhild with a different set of bullets. I leveled my gun and aimed it at the general.

“Foolish child, it’s futile! For as long as I wear the Blockbracer on my wrist, you cannot lay a scratch upon me!”

“Fine. It may not be possible to damage your body, but... I’m sure I can still do a number on your pride.”

“...What the devil are you talking about, boy?” A cruel grin spread across my face. I lowered the aim of my weapon, then fired near his feet.

“[Slip].”

“Augh!” The general fell with a magnificent thump. He put his hand to the ground and tried to get up again, but the bullet I had fired was programmed to create a frictionless zone in a wide area. It didn’t matter where the general put his hands, his feet, his anything. He was entirely at my mercy now.

“G-General! Don’t worry!” His allies ran to help him... like idiotic lambs to the slaughter. The magic effect wasn’t just focused on the general, after all. It was an area of effect spell.

“Whuh!”

“Gah!” As expected, they were pulled into the slippery hell and began to fall over repeatedly. They didn’t have a Blockbracer like the general did, so they’d

definitely take some damage after bashing into the ground repeatedly for a while.

“Ohoho... Ahahaha!!! Yes, writhe! Fall forever! Keep dancing this pathetic dance until you die!” I said a few dramatic things to try and provoke him, but he didn’t bite. He could have used his Drainbracer to absorb the magic I’d imbued into the ground, but he didn’t seem to realize. I didn’t have any obligation to tell him, though.

“Demon Lord!” The goat-headed monster reached for me in response to his master’s call. That wasn’t good. I didn’t think **[Slip]** would work on things in the air.

This thing could definitely be damaged by physical attacks, though. Still, the general would probably be able to call it back if I defeated it... And so, I decided to do the only thing I could do.

“Farewell, dear gentlemen! But don’t think you’ve seen the last of me! Soon enough the Hammer of Babylon shall descend upon you! The thunder of my vengeance shall bear upon you with the gust of a thousand winds! Live in fear until then, vermin! Fuhahaha!!!”

I got a little too into it.

Just before I left, I conjured up a mirage to shock their senses. The image I created was that of cockroaches, maggots, centipedes, and other disgusting squirming animals, all over the floor. That was my parting gift.

“Eek!!! Augugh!!!”

“B-Bugs! They’re everywhere!!!”

“Y-You son of a...! I’ll g-get you for this!” They let out their anguished cries in response to my abuse. Either way, their suffering made me feel a lot better.

I opened a **[Gate]** beneath me and escaped.

I landed in my garden, looking over to see that Lucia was by her father’s side. He looked pale and cold.

“F-Father! Father...!” The situation was looking grim. It seemed I needed to treat him immediately. Lucia was clutching one of his hands, so I bent down and

grabbed the other.

“Come forth, Light! Calm of the Goddess: [Mega Heal]!” My advanced recovery spell created a beautiful light that wrapped around the emperor’s body. The stab wound on his side sealed itself up. Even so, that spell wasn’t enough on its own.

“[Recovery].” I cast another spell just in case there were any unusual effects on him. Now there was nothing else I could do. It was all down to the man himself at that point.

I had the emperor moved to a guest room, then quickly put him in bed. After that, I told Laim to contact the Royal Palace and bring Doctor Raul, then brought Lucia and Carol to the emperor’s room.

While I waited for Raul to arrive, I gathered everyone together in the living room. Then, I gave them all a brief overview of the situation.

“Geez, Touya... why do you keep sticking your nose into these crazy circumstances?” Elze sighed.

It’s not like I’m sticking my nose into things! It’s more like things keep sticking to my nose!

“Even so, disregarding the trouble in the empire... what about the prince?” Linze muttered her concerns, but all I could do was pray. I’d have preferred to teleport everyone out to safety, but I hadn’t seen the prince before, so I was unable to include him in the mass recall.

“But this is terrible... What if the empire makes a move against Belfast soon?”

“The demon army is the most important thing, here. We need to take care of that before anything else.” The easiest way to do that would be to defeat General Bazoar, but... Magic attacks did nothing, and I couldn’t think of a way to defeat him with physical attacks, either.

*If I were to use **[Gate]** and drop him from a great height, his Blockbracer would nullify the damage. Plus, it’s way more likely that he’d summon that Demon Lord before that. Then he could just fly off and make a retreat. **[Gravity]** would likely have the same lack of effect. Man, what a pain in the ass.*

Spells like **[Slip]** and **[Mirage]** worked fine, probably because they were indirect. It was pretty clear that I had to think of something, but more importantly than that... I obviously had to report this to the king of Belfast.

A military coup in the Empire was an enormous deal, and the king had to be informed about the rise of a demon army, as well.

But should I tell him about Lucia and the Emperor...? They do have a tentative peace treaty, but they're former enemies as well...

I briefly entertained the idea of what might happen if the king wanted them out of the country. I decided I'd just let them take refuge in Babylon. I didn't want to ally myself with any particular nation, but I definitely couldn't give up on an injured person just like that.



As I was thinking, Laim brought over Doctor Raul. I figured it was best to leave the rest to the professional. In the meantime, I had some planning to do. I had to devise a way to defeat the Demon Lord, as well as the general controlling him.

Can I get those Artifacts off that general and manage to beat him, too...? Actually... hold on, it might be easier than I expected... Definitely might need some prep time, but I think I can do it... I carefully mulled over my idea and came to a solid conclusion. *Yup, that should do.*

I had formulated my plan. Harassing people wasn't exactly the classy thing to do, but I suddenly imagined the face of the general, weeping and begging. It was hilarious. Before I knew it, a sadistic grin was spread across my face. Everyone that looked at me kind of backed off a little.

What, do I look that weird?

◇ ◇ ◇

"His condition is stable for now. He just needs some bedrest and time to recuperate. He'll be awake soon enough, I'm quite sure." Raul put his stethoscope down and gave us the prognosis. By all rights, the emperor should have been riddled with an illness, but apparently there was nothing symptomatic of that at all.

I wondered if it was the effect of the **[Recovery]** spell I had used on him. But it shouldn't have been able to purge sickness or disease from the body. I once tried to use it on Linze to get rid of a cold, but it did nothing.

[Recovery] was one of those spells where the details were a bit obscure. I wasn't exactly a medical specialist, though, so I didn't have a handle on the intricacies of disease classification. Viruses and tumors might have been a whole other ballgame. I decided not to worry about it too much, since the end result was clearly positive either way.

"Goodness me... I never did think I'd be treating the emperor of Regulus... Life certainly comes at you fast." Doc Raul gave a small wry smile as he spoke. I asked him to keep this matter a secret from the rest of the palace, just for the time being. The plan was to inform the king of the situation once the emperor

woke up.

From a medical perspective, he probably understood that we wouldn't want to put any unnecessary strain on the patient. Yumina's presence probably helped boost his confidence, at least.

Lucia sat by her father the entire time, nursing him gently by the bedside. Naturally, Carol stood by the girl throughout all of this as well.

"Princess Lucia... You should take some time to rest, If you end up passing out from exhaustion, your dad'll get worried, won't he?"

"A-Alright, then... Erm, could you please call me Lu? I-If that's okay, I mean." The princess looked up at me with innocent eyes and a hesitant tone of voice. *Well, if that's what she wants, I don't mind.*

"Alrighty then! Lu, was it? That's nice."

"Y-Yes, thank you. That's much better." Lu looked up with a smile. I noticed someone staring right at me through a crack in the door. That someone was looking right through me. It was unsettling, honestly. *Whoa, that's scary! I-Is that Yumina? Why's she glaring like that...?*

With that, the door opened and Yumina strolled in. She stood before Lu and bowed with decorum and grace.

"A pleasure to meet you. I am Yumina Urnea Belfast, princess of the Kingdom of Belfast. Daughter of Tristwyn Urnes Belfast, king of the Kingdom of Belfast." Carol and Lu both went stiff at the sudden introduction, but quickly snapped out of it. After a few short moments, Lu stood up and bowed in return.

"Good tidings and a pleasure to make your acquaintance. I am Lucia Leah Regulus, third princess of the Regulus Empire. Daughter of Zephyrus Loah Regulus, emperor of the Regulus Empire."

Heh, so this is a formal greeting between royals, is it? It's more adorable than beautiful or awe-inspiring, though. Probably because of their age, actually.

"I've heard the news, how horrible. I'm quite glad you're safe."

"Thank you. Thanks to the assistance of Sir Touya here, I managed to escape to safety." Lu smiled like a flower in full bloom.

“Indeed, that’s wonderful to know. It makes me happy that *my fiance* is so selfless. Touya is a wonderful *fiance* indeed.”

“A-Ah... I-I see...” The flower wilted immediately.

Is she okay?

“My dear Lucia, would you please join me in my private quarters for a while? I think we have a matter to discuss.”

“H-Huh? Right then, of course!” Lu hastily followed behind Yumina. After the door closed, Doc Raul muttered something under his breath.

“...Catfight...”

“P-Please don’t make jokes like that.” I personally didn’t find this to be a laughing matter.

“Well, no matter how you look at it, you’ve swayed that little princess from Regulus. Two princesses enamored by the same man... It’s a recipe for trouble indeed.” *Wait, seriously?! I thought she was just uneasy because I saved her life!*

“...You think Yumina noticed?”

“Sorry kid, but she definitely has. She’s a little lady, but her ability to sense rivals is pretty well-honed, I think.” *That’s... troubling. I hope those two’ll be okay.* A sense of unease suddenly washed over me.

It’s not like I can imagine Yumina yelling something like “Hands off, you hussy!” or something... I was still a bit worried, though.

“...I don’t feel so good.”

“Need a medical checkup?” *That wasn’t what I meant.*

“Doc, if you wanna head back to the castle we can go through a **[Gate].** I should probably report to the king, anyway.”

“I’ll take you up on that offer, then.” I left the emperor in Carol’s care and headed through the **[Gate]** to the royal palace. Then, I immediately reported in to the king.

“And that’s what’s going on in the Regulus Empire right now...” I explained most of the situation and proposed that a defensive line be drawn on the

border closest to the empire. I also recommended that they focus on magical troops to prevent frontline casualties. After that, I made several Gate Mirrors for ease of communication.

Gate Mirrors were small mirror pairs that I had enchanted with **[Gate].** If a letter was sent through one, it would come out the other.

If one was sent out to a fort or the front lines, it would allow near-instant contact with the capital.

“Hmph... to have such good news and bad news all in a short timespan... What a day this has been,” His Majesty the King muttered with a small sigh.

Hm? I only brought bad news, though... What’s the good?

“Well, I’ll be blunt. Yumina is going to have a little brother or sister.”

“Whuh?” I exclaimed.

The king gave me a small grin. He seemed a bit embarrassed.

“Heheh... congratulations! I hope your wife gives birth to a strong successor.” *If it’s a boy, the likelihood of me having to take the throne’ll go way down. That’s just fine by me.*

“Hm... my feelings are somewhat mixed. If you succeeded me, Touya, I’d be quite happy.”

“But if you have a boy, he’ll take the throne, right?”

“Hoho, so you’re saying if we have a girl, you’ll be taking the throne?”

“...No, that’s not what I meant!” The king’s argument was a little irritating. He shouldn’t have been assigning roles to people who hadn’t even been born yet.

“So, what does the emperor intend to do...?”

“Uhh... I’m not sure what’s going on there. He either fled with his daughter or was executed, the details are hazy.” I gave as vague an answer as I could. I wanted to wait until the emperor was at least stable and conscious before explaining everything.

“For now, the general has an army and something needs to be done about that. If I defeat him, then the invasion should be prevented.”

“Hoho... you seem quite confident, lad! I trust you have a plan, then?”

“Well, I won’t know until I give it a shot...” I left the royal palace after giving yet another vague answer as to my intentions.

The Demon Lord nullified all magic, but I still felt I could take it out with physical force instead. I couldn’t use **[Gravity]** on it, but maybe dropping something really heavy from above would do the trick...

But even if I defeated the creature itself, the general would probably still have that passive magic resistance. On top of that, his Drainbracer would just absorb all the magic in the area and call the Demon Lord back immediately.

Everything in this world had magic in it, no matter how miniscule. Animals, plants, tiny insects... all of these things had magical energy. Alone they were nothing worth noting, but combined they were great. If his bracelet could passively absorb magic from everything in the vicinity, then it gave him a fearsome power indeed. It was the very nature of magic that made the Drainbracer something truly formidable.

The Blockbracer was another matter entirely. At first I thought it was preventing my bullets, but it was a bit different. The barrier generated itself depending on what hit the general. If his whole body was hit, then it’d deploy across his whole body.

It didn’t seem to fully block damage when I made him slip over, though... He continued to fall regardless of whether or not he was hurt. In general, it was a troublesome automatic shield, though. I had to do something about it.

There was nothing else for it, I’d have to use *that.*

Well... it definitely won’t be fun for him. He certainly won’t like it one bit. Hey, at least it won’t kill him! There’s one positive for him. Heheh... I’m looking forward to it already.

I decided to get ready for the battle ahead. I went home and asked Linze about a certain item that I hoped existed in this world. As it turned out, the item did not exist here, but there was something similar and considerably more powerful. It would be my ultimate weapon against him if magic proved impossible. I decided to head off and arrange it.

I scoured the marketplace in Sandora, and was finally able to obtain it. The old merchant begged me not to open it anywhere nearby, so I put it in **[Storage].** I wanted to test it out before the big day, but I didn't want it to go wrong or anything. I decided there was no need to get ahead of myself.

I headed off to the workshop and had Rosetta create several thick iron plates. I then enchanted them with **[Invisible]** and made them completely transparent. I had basically created reinforced metal with the visible properties of glass.

I didn't really understand the technical aspects of the spell that Leen often tried to explain to me, but it was good enough as glass for me.

I was amazed to find that no matter how thick I made the sheet, it was completely see-through. I could probably set up some kind of aquarium through this method.

Instead of getting sidetracked, however, I focused on my goal. I put the item I had bought in Sandora right in the middle, then finished the whole thing off with **[Modeling].**

After it was complete, I quickly stashed my secret weapon in **[Storage].**

"Hmm, you said something about the Drainbracer and the Blockbracer..." Rosetta suddenly tilted her head and folded her arms.

"Hm? Do you know something about them?"

"I'm pretty sure those things were meant to be inside the Storehouse of Babylon, yessir!"

"Wait, what?" *Seriously? Did those bracelets just fall out of the sky into his hands or something?!*

"Well, sir! It's been thousands of years, sir! There's no guarantee the storehouse is even still intact, sir! It may be that various artifacts and other such things fell out and are now all over the place, sir yessir!"

"Wait a second... have you ever heard of an artifact that grants its owner immortality and control over the dead?"

"Yessir! That's definitely in the storehouse! Doctor Babylon sealed that one in there good and tight, sir!" *I knew it! So the crisis in Eashen was caused by that,*

too? Wait, doesn't that mean the storehouse might've crashed, or burst open, or something? That also means there might still be a ton of dangerous artifacts out there being spewed out even now, doesn't it...?

"If it crashed, what about the gynoid managing the place?"

"We have short-range emergency teleportation capabilities, so it's possible she escaped, sir! However... The one in charge of the storehouse is quite a careless and unruly girl, sir! So it's also possible that the artifacts fell to the ground through other means..."

Sounds like a troublesome robo-girl... Though, Cesca and Rosetta are just as bad, really.

Oh well, no point worrying about it right now. Not like I can do anything.

All that aside, my weapon against the general was ready. Evening fell, so I returned to my home with Rosetta, and it was here that Carol told me the emperor had finally woken up.

I was glad he'd woken up, but I was still a little concerned. Carol set those fears to rest, however. She said he looked better than ever and was even ready to talk.

She followed behind me as I entered the spare room with the emperor in it. He was there having a casual conversation with his daughter. He actually looked very well.

"T-Touya, my father has awakened!"

"Oh? This is the fabled Mochizuki Touya?" Lu turned around with a huge smile plastered on her face, while the Emperor regarded me quietly. He had a gaunt face and a long, white beard. He almost looked like a mountain hermit.

"Please accept my most sincere words of thanks. You saved my daughter, you saved me... Words alone are not enough, but even so...!" He bowed his head to me. Honestly, it was all a tad embarrassing.

"Don't mind it, Your Highness. I happened to be in your capital on a shopping errand." No matter how you looked at it, it was just a coincidence. If I was there a day earlier, it would've been a very different story.

“Regardless, I am thankful. To have had such a horrible thing happen, it indeed fills my heart with regret.”

“So, what do you want to do now? I haven’t informed the Belfastian government of your whereabouts just yet. If you have somewhere you’d prefer to escape to, I can open up a **[Gate]** and take you there instead.” The emperor suddenly stopped and stared at me.

Is there something on my face?

“Touya... are you not an agent of Belfast?”

“I live here, so I guess I could be called a citizen. But aside from that, I don’t serve the country formally or anything. I’m friendly with the king, but I don’t like to get involved in political affairs.” I figured he should go seek asylum in a safe place away from any political issues. Maybe he could go and see his second daughter, who was studying abroad or something.

The emperor took a small while to think, then finally gave me his conclusion. “I would like to meet with the king of Belfast. Ideally, I’d like to meet him confidentially... Could you arrange this, perhaps?”

“I mean, I could probably arrange that, but... Is that really fine with you?”

“I think so, yes. It’s about time I spoke with him anyway, about the past, and our future together.”

Hm... it’s not too late, so the king is probably still available... I decided that I’d take Yumina with me and speak to her father. I left the emperor and went off to find her.

“Excuse me, can you repeat what you just said?”

“Er, well... I’ve been granting political asylum to the Regulus emperor and his youngest daughter. I, er... I’m sorry I didn’t tell you sooner.” The king was completely surprised by what I had told him. He wasn’t entirely sure how to take it.

“The Regulus emperor? In *my* capital? Today is just one surprise after the other, isn’t it...?” I couldn’t really say anything about that. Everything other than the queen falling pregnant was kind of my fault anyway... Well, not kind of. It

was all totally all my fault.

“So, the emperor wishes to meet with you, Your Highness. What do you wish to do?”

“The emperor wishes to meet, does he?” The king slouched slightly, lacing his fingers together with a sigh. He pondered for a while, then stood up as if he’d made a final decision.

“There’s no point in running from this. I’ll open up negotiations with him.”

“Alright, let’s go to my house.” I used **[Gate]** to bring us directly to the emperor’s temporary room.

The emperor, who was laying in bed, was initially startled by the sudden appearance of my portal. He was even more surprised when we passed through it. The two monarchs locked eyes and, after a short while, the emperor averted his gaze and bowed his head.

“Please excuse my sorry state, O king of Belfast. I have brought trouble for your nation, it would seem.”

“Fret not, O emperor of Regulus. I’ve heard the circumstances from Touya, and I know you are not to blame.” The king sat on a chair at the bedside. A high-level political discussion was clearly about to take place. I left the room. It was best to leave the two royal families to sort this out.

Carol stood guard outside the door. She was initially surprised when she saw me come out of the room, since I’d entered through a **[Gate]** and all. I figured she’d get used to it, so I didn’t mind too much.

“Don’t go inside, the emperor is having a political discussion with the king of Belfast.”

“You what?! When did that happen?!” Carol suddenly spoke up in surprise. She had a habit of overreacting to the tiniest things.

Suddenly, my eyes drifted toward her sword, and I was reminded of something. It was that crest on her blade’s guard. I couldn’t shake the feeling that I’d seen it before. *Now where did I... Oh, right!*

“Excuse me, Carol? What does the emblem on your sword there mean?”

“Hm? You mean the Rillettes family crest? What of it?” She let me look at it up close. It was definitely the same one that I’d seen before. The one that Renne had on her.

“I’ve seen this crest somewhere else before, Carol. On a pendant.”

“What?! Was it a wind spellstone?! Tell me, now! Where’s the owner, where is she?!” Her eyes suddenly grew sharp and focused, and Carol began marching toward me with passion in her tone. She clearly had her reasons, but I didn’t know them yet, so I decide not to mention Renne to her.

“The owner died of an illness. I’m sorry, she was sick.”

“Oh... I-I see...” In response to my words, Carol faltered and the strength seemed to drain from her body. The person must have meant a lot to her.

“The owner of that pendant was my elder sister. When we were younger, our stubborn and strict father expelled her from our household.”

Her older sister, huh...? No wonder she seemed so desperate. Hmm... does that mean Renne is Carol’s niece? They don’t exactly look alike. Carol is blonde, but Renne has auburn hair. I wonder if she took that from her dad’s side.

“Is the Rillettes family a noble house in the Regulus Empire?”

“The house isn’t especially affluent or anything, but we’re descended from one of the Twelve Blades of the Empire.”

“Hm? What’s that?”

“I doubt the people of Belfast would know much about it, but the Twelve Blades were the people who supported the first emperor and helped found the nation to begin with. Kir Rillettes the Twinblade was one of those men, and he’s my ancestor. But the descendants of the Twelve Blades are really just nobles in name only these days...” Carol let out a small laugh as she spoke.

So they’re noble, but they’re still impoverished and largely obscure... Even Laim didn’t even know what their crest was.

“So my elder sister passed away... Our father fought with her until the day he died, and they never reconciled their feelings... On his deathbed, he named it as his biggest regret... I can only hope they made up on the other side.”

“Ah, er... well, about your sister... She has a daughter, which means you have a niece. The girl’s actually here, right now...”

“.....Say what?” Carol was at a loss for words. She just stared. I wasn’t too surprised. After all, it must’ve been a lot to take in.

Just then, in a case of terrible or excellent timing, Renne came charging through the hall.

“Oi, Bruv— Touy— Er, Sir! Dinner’s ready!”

“Ah, thanks, Renne. I’ll get it soon.” Renne gave a short bow to Carol and myself. Carol followed the girl with her gaze, until she turned the corner. Then, she returned to looking at me.

“That’s your niece. Her name’s Renne. Before I hired her, she was living in the slums and picking pockets.”

“What...?!”

“She had to do what she could to survive. Her dad was an adventurer who never came back from a particularly difficult mission. But even though she was on the edge of poverty, she still treasured her mother’s pendant above all else.” Carol looked over at the spot where Renne just was.

“...Would it be fine with you if I spoke to the girl?”

“Right now? I can call her, if you like.”

“No, not while the empire is in such a state. I want everything settled first. I’m glad she’s here, actually. It seems to be a safe and happy place for her. But I would like her to meet my mother. The girl... her hair is reddish, and her eyes are different, but she looks almost the spitting image of my sister.”

Carol’s mother... So that’s Renne’s grandma, right? I hope they get to meet each other soon.

As I thought about that, Yumina appeared in the hallway.

“Touya, my father and the emperor are asking for you.”

“For me?” *What do they want? I deliberately left the room to avoid being roped into this!*

The emperor was seated on his bed, seemingly relaxed. The king looked equally relaxed on the bedside chair, as well. The two of them seemed quite calm, given the situation. I wondered if negotiations had finished already.

“Touya, about earlier today...”

“Hm? What about earlier?” I didn’t understand what the king was getting at, since a lot had happened today already.

“Is it true? The king here says that you had some kind of plan. A plan to defeat General Bazoar.” The emperor chimed in to clarify what the king had meant. *Oh, that.*

“Well, yes. I’m pretty sure I can defeat the general. I can probably take all power away from the army, too. I feel like I could take back the capital in less than a day. Probably tomorrow, honestly.”

“Excuse me?!” Everyone, aside from Yumina, stiffened with shock. Yumina proudly puffed out her chest as if to say “That’s my man!” to the room. *Heh... they’re growing a little.*

“I’m curious. The members of the army that joined the coup... Do you intend to punish them all?”

“Not to the same extent. The general’s execution is inevitable, as he’s the mastermind, but I think I’ll simply banish the soldiers that joined the coup.”

Dismissing them, not a bad call... Pretty fair, really. It’s close to half of their standing army force, so it’s not like they can’t recover those numbers over time.

“Display map. Regulus Empire. Heart of the Empire.”

“Understood. Displaying map.” A map of the empire’s capital was projected in the middle of the room.

“Wh-What is this...?”

“A map of our capital...? This detail is incredible...!”

“This is one of my Null spells. Do you like this?” Lu and the emperor seemed extremely surprised and impressed. The king was quite shocked, as well. That was weird, as I could’ve sworn I’d shown him before.

“Run search. Royal Knights in blue. Standing Army in red.”

“Understood... Search complete. Displaying.” A red wave painted itself across the map of the capital. It felt like there were more people than there were last time I checked. They were likely called in from other towns across the country. In one corner of the castle, there was a concentrated cluster of blue points.

“What’s this?”

“It’s the underground dungeon. The remaining knights are likely there, but this can’t be right. There are so few of them... Did they flee? Or, were they killed...?” The emperor clenched his fists. He was understandably frustrated. Lu suddenly spoke up and asked me a question.

“Uhm, Touya...? Could you please look for my brother?”

“Well... yeah, I think I can do that, but... Does he have any distinguishing features? Something that would let me notice him right away as the crown prince.” The search function was based on my subjective perception, after all. It could find members of the army because I viewed people in military uniform as “members of the army.”

But because of that, I can’t exactly search for people I’ve never met or seen before. It’d be good if he had something that made him stand out. Like how Yae’s brother had a scar on his cheek.

“Something distinguishing...? Um... well, he has silvery hair, but...” Lu was thinking pretty hard. The emperor smiled a little as he saw her trying hard. I guess he didn’t stand out too much, after all. So there was nothing else for it. I just had to enter her memories.

“Lu. Can I have your hand for a moment?”

“Hm? Yes... ah...” I grasped her small hand in mine. Lu’s face suddenly turned a beet red, so I spoke up and tried to get her to calm down.

“Close your eyes and picture your brother for me. The most recent memory of him you can muster.”

“Y-Yes...” I pressed my forehead against Lu’s as she concentrated. Taking a memory from the emperor probably would’ve been easier, but I didn’t want to

push my head against another guy. It just made me think of the Refreese princess. She'd surely have a field day with a concept like that.

"A-Ahh?!"

"Concentrate, now."

"Y-Yes!!!" Honestly, Lu was pretty cute when she was flustered, but it wasn't the time for that. I focused my energy and cast the spell.

"[Recall]." A vague face began to appear in my mind, and the image gradually grew more clear. His hair was a faint silver, but it wasn't especially distinct... His face, on the other hand, was extremely gentle. "Wait... if this is the crown prince... then I've met him already."

"What?!" Everyone in the room yelled out in surprise.

There's no doubt about it. When the capital was under assault... I saved a young knight from a group of soldiers. And... that was the crown prince, apparently. Was he trying to escape in disguise?! Ah crap... I just left him there in a bed!

"Search. The empire's crown prince."

"Understood..... Search complete. Displaying." A green pin fell down on the map of the capital. It was moving around, which meant he must have been alive. That was a relief.

"He's alive, then... Where about is this?"

"That's the home of our empire's western general, Romero. Wonderful, it seems my son is safe."

He's safe? But he's with the army... Just as I thought that, the emperor gave a chuckle. He then spoke up like a true mind-reader.

"Not every division of the army operated under General Bazoar. General Romero was a strong opposing force to Bazoar's proposed plan to use demons to bolster our troops. He likely got a handle on the situation and offered refuge to my son."

I see... So not every soldier blindly follows Bazoar. Guess that makes sense... He'll be safe there for now, but I don't think we have a lot of time left.

“Then we’ll head to the capital tomorrow morning.”

“W-W-Wait a moment! Are you sure that’s alright? The opposing army is massive, and they have the ability to call down demonic reinforcements!” The emperor flew into a panic and tried to stop me. I understood where he was coming from. If it was a normal person, I’d definitely have my doubts, too. But I had no intentions of losing. It was a similar situation in Eashen, as well.

“I’ll work it out, don’t worry. I have companions I trust, after all.” I glanced over at Yumina, and she gave me a firm nod. The emperor also seemed to be relieved by our confidence in one another.

“Tomorrow morning, then... Will you take me with you?”

“Are you sure about that? It’ll be dangerous. It’d probably be safer to wait here.”

“No, I have to see this through with my own eyes. It’s the very least I can do as the nation’s emperor.”

Hmph, if he’s gonna be like that... Well, I can’t just leave him here after that, but I can hardly put him out on the front lines either.

“Let’s have Belfast’s Knight Order serve as the emperor’s guardsmen. I wish to see Touya in battle, myself.” The king put forward an offer, and the emperor gratefully accepted. *I guess things might be fine after all, then.*

I decided that the following morning we’d head to the capital, along with the emperor and a group of Knights.

I used a **[Gate]** to see the king back off to the palace, then left the emperor’s room.

I went out on to the terrace and called over Kokuyou, Sango, and Kohaku. I had to ask them some questions about summoning magic. I wasn’t going to just go in with these guys, after all. I needed to call in reinforcements.

“So what you’re saying is... while the summoned beast is completely random, if you contract a high enough being from a certain family of creatures, then you can freely call upon any lower-level creature in that same family?”

“That’s correct. As my contracted lord, you can summon almost any kind of

brutish beast, typically ones with fangs or claws."

"And in our case, you can summon any beasts with shells or scales." Kokuyou and Kohaku explained their specializations to me. In effect, as an extension of my ability to call on them, I could call on any four-legged mammal or reptilian creature. To command such power... they really were worthy of their Heavenly Beast status.

"It would be best if you could contract with the master of each family. That way, once you've granted their leader a name, the entire tribe would be at your disposal. The practice isn't just limited to demons, after all." Kokuyou chuckled slightly as it spoke.

Well, I'll give it a try... Er... what should I go and summon?"

"If I might suggest one... Cerberus has excellent combat potential."

Oh, I recognize that name. Cerberus is the guardian hound of Hades, right? Large, black, and three heads, if I recall correctly. I don't see any harm in summoning him...

That afternoon, I summoned countless beasts. I summoned one, I named it, I summoned another, I named it... Frankly, I ended up naming them pretty randomly by the end. I hoped they'd forgive me, but wasn't like I had a stockpile of names ready or anything...

After that, I went to bed early. I needed to be prepared for the next day.

Just like that, the next morning came. I stood atop a roof in a corner of the empire's capital.

I took out my smartphone to confirm the time. It was eight in the morning. I tried to open up a portal straight to the castle, but it didn't work. I wasn't surprised. They knew I could teleport, so it was only natural they'd erect a barrier to counter it.

I was accompanied by Elze, Linze, Yae, Yumina, Kohaku, Kokuyou, and Sango. His Majesty the King of Belfast, as well as His Highness the Emperor of Regulus were there as well, accompanied by General Leon, Deputy Commander Neil, Lyon, and some other members of the Belfastian Knight Order. And, even though I didn't want to bring her, Lu was here with Carol as her personal guard.

I told everyone other than my core party to wait here for the time being. I also left a **[Gate]** open by them, just in case we needed to perform a tactical retreat. It was programmed to close one minute after someone went through it, in order to prevent the enemy army from invading through it. I didn't think it'd come to that, though.

"Now, for the declaration of war... Uhh... Video playback. In the sky above this city."

"Understood. Playback initiating." A great big screen was projected across the sky over the empire's capital. It was about two hundred meters across. It was definitely big enough to see at a distance, I didn't think it'd be appropriate to have such a large screen at close range, anyway.

I also included a loud audio track alongside the video, since I had to be sure that everyone below paid attention. The music I chose was Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries." I reduced the volume of the backing music and faded in the audio from the video that we had recorded earlier that morning. The emperor appeared on the video feed.

"People of the Empire's Heart. I am the Regulus Empire's ruler, Zephyrus Loah Regulus. The situation is this. The standing army has staged a violent military coup. Please accept my most sincere apologies for the carnage caused in their name. I intend to quell this rebellion once and for all, so please stay safe until then. Be at ease, and rest easy. As I speak, my warriors make steps to retake the city from the insurgents. Remain within your homes."

"Goodness, is that what I sound like?" The emperor turned to his daughter, seeming quite surprised. I shouldn't have been too surprised he reacted this way. Few people in this world had heard their own voices, after all.

"Now, this is a message for the army staging the coup. I have my faults, I will readily admit that. And so, I will let your voices be heard, but this is not the way to get my attention. I will offer you one chance to surrender. If you remove your uniforms now, you will be pardoned. But for those of you who are still clad in your military uniforms by the time I count to ten... Well, I assure your my judgment shall be swift. The countdown begins now. One... two..." A smaller screen was projected in front of me, showing the uniformed soldiers marked in

red on the map. The city was packed full of them, but one by one their numbers dropped. It seemed that many of them were listening to the emperor, and discarding their uniforms.

“The men who remain in their uniforms... are we to attack them?”

“We’ve no choice. But I’d prefer you to attack to detain or maim, rather than kill.”

“Very well.” The emperor image, high above our heads, continued counting up to ten. As he did, the red dots on my map began to reduce in number. Two thirds of the capital was still red, however.

“Nine... and ten. Your opportunity to surrender has now ended. We will proceed to retake the capital by force.” The giant screen disappeared alongside the giant emperor. A trumpet began to blare. This time it was Suppe’s “Light Cavalry Overture.”

Alrighty, time to begin.

“Lock on to the uniformed soldiers. Invoke **[Paralysis].**”

“Understood..... Target lock confirmed. Invoking **[Paralysis].**” There were various shrieks that echoed out across the capital city, but I noticed something strange. The red dots didn’t decrease in number at all.

What the hell is going on here? Oh, wait... obviously. Paralyzing them doesn’t change who they are. Soldiers are soldiers, regardless of whether or not they can walk.

“Display incapacitated soldiers as yellow pins.”

“Understood.” About half of the pins transformed into yellow ones. Less than I expected, actually. I figured that a surprising amount of soldiers had either magical talismans on them, or abnormally high magic resistance. That wasn’t promising.

“Touya-dono, over there!” Yae pointed over at the castle. The enormous Demon Lord was rampaging over it. Surrounding it was a massive swarm of demons, both in the sky and on the ground. There were a lot of them, a lot of different types too. I counted dozens upon dozens of them on my screen.

“Heh, I think it’s time we called out our own cavalry.” I focused my magic, and a magic circle appeared on the ground.

“Rend forth, Darkness. I seek a Guardian of Hell: [Cerberus]!” A dark mist began to ooze and pool from the magic circle, and a three-headed dog crawled out from it. Right now it was the size of a regular dog, but once it switched to battle mode it’d be the size of a lion.

I continued to call out the various creatures I had spent most of yesterday afternoon contracting with.

I called out groups of Lizardmen, a gang of Griffons, a troupe of Armored Turtles, a band of Blood Ligers, a platoon of Power Bear, and a regiment of Lizard Knights. By their powers combined, they were my very own monster army.

Come to think of it, is it really fair to call Kohaku and the others Heavenly Beasts? All we summoned were terrifying monsters! I guess I shouldn’t think too hard about it. I decided not to dwell on the issue, instead choosing to issue my next command.

“Target lock. The demons. Invoke **[Shining Javelin].**”

“Understood. Invoking **[Shining Javelin].**” Several magic circles appeared in the sky, and light rained down upon my foes... But the demons were unscathed.

“The attacks were repelled by an invisible barrier. No effect recorded.”

Well, that’s not surprising. The Demon Lord offers magical resistance to everything on its side. Just means we’ll have to lay a physical smackdown on them.

“Summoned beasts, you follow the orders of Kohaku, Kokuyou, and Sango. Yae and Elze, you join them. Yumina, Linze, you stand in the back lines with Cerberus and use long-ranged attacks through magic and guns. I’ll make a beeline for the Demon Lord and the general.”

Kokuyou, Sango, and Kohaku suddenly vanished in a puff of smoke. A popping sound rang out, and they reappeared in their full forms. It’d been a long time since they were last in their true forms, so I told them they could go all-out.

“Alright, I’ll be off.”

“...I’ll be counting on you.” I looked back at the emperor and informed him of my plans. Then, I hopped along the rooftops and headed for the front lines.

Elze, Yae, Sango, Kokuyou, and the ground troops charged along the city streets. Meanwhile, Kohaku, myself, and the Griffins made our way up along the rooftops toward a group of incoming flying Demons.

“Don’t overdo it now, and remember... aim for their wings. The guys on the ground should be able to take them out once they fall.” I issued orders to the Griffins. The ground-based demons were engaging the others in the streets already, and a second group of flying ones was already inbound. I needed to take out the airborne ones as soon as possible.

“Erm... John, wait, are you John or Paul? Oh, George? Alright, uh... You three take the left flank. Ringo? You take the right!” The Griffons let out a war cry as they charged from two different sides. Griffons all looked the same to me, so it wasn’t exactly my fault! I made a mental note to buy them some differently colored collars.

As I jumped from roof to roof, I reached into **[Storage]** and pulled out a mithril greatsword. It was forty centimeters wide, and about two meters long. Mithril was light by default, and it became even lighter when I reduced its weight through **[Gravity].** It turned this massive blade into a one-hander.

I used **[Boost]** to leap up high above an enemy demon. Then, as I plunged down toward it, I invoked **[Gravity]** to massively increase the weight of my weapon.

It was so powerful that the demon was cleaved in half instantly. I quickly changed the weight again and reduced it to a manageable amount.

Being able to change the weight of my weapon on the fly was exceptionally useful. A demon charged me from the right, so I quickly cleaved it in half, but it was a horizontal slice this time, rather than a vertical.

I needed to make sure the timing was right or I could really hurt my arms. I felt like I was getting the hang of it, though. Honestly I might’ve even been fine without using **[Gravity],** since the sword was doing a good job of slicing things.

Kohaku leaped up near me and sliced off a demon's wings with a set of fearsome claws.

"Kohaku! I'll leave the rest to you!"

"Very well! Good luck to you, my liege!"

I combined **[Boost]** and **[Accel]** to quickly make a beeline for the castle. I reasoned that if I could defeat the general, all the demons would disappear and the fight would be won.

I jumped from roof to roof, using the momentum to propel myself into the castle courtyard. After I touched down, a group of soldiers immediately surrounded me.

I quickly jumped up in the air and pulled out Brunhild, firing a salvo of paralysis bullets toward the men in the vicinity.

Well, if [Paralysis] doesn't work, then I guess these bullets are useless too. I'll have to hold back against them for the time being.

I had aroused the Demon Lord's attention. It turned toward me and fired some kind of red beam out of its eyes.

Holy shit! The beam hit an area on the ground near me. It was smoldering. *It has laser eyes?!*

It kept firing waves of heat at me from a distance, while the smaller demons swarmed me from all angles.

I managed to cleave them apart fairly easily using my mithril greatsword. The normal demons were definitely not very strong. They were more of a pain in that ass than anything else, actually.

The Demon Lord finally stopped its barrage of heat. *Guh... about damn time.*

Electricity suddenly began to build up around its body. Seemed the Demon Lord's horns were acting as some kind of lightning rod. Eventually, it built up a huge charge, and light flashed around its body in various enormous swirling masses.

I have no idea what it's doing, but it doesn't look safe at all... It's gotta be charging something up, right?!

“Gruuugaaaaaaaah!!!” It attacked and let out what appeared to be several snaking blasts of lightning. I avoided the attacks, but they hit a building behind me and wreaked absolute havoc on a small neighborhood. *Now it has a laser barrage...?*

This was some next-level stuff. It must’ve been the Demon Lord’s ultimate attack. If it kept up like this, it could level the entire city.

“Nngh.” I felt a sudden sensation. My magical energy was being drawn out of my body. *Is it absorbing my energy to make up for the charge it just let off? Is the general nearby and doing this?*

Even if my magical power was absorbed, I’d be able to recover it near-instantly. In other words, the Demon Lord could launch as many bolts as it wanted.

It was a never-ending attack. It could make use of my own magic and use it against me.

I used **[Accel Boost]** to dash up the side of the castle wall like a ninja, then bounced off it.



I jumped up high above the monster's head and turned my blade toward it. Then, I swung down the mithril greatsword right on its head.

"Time to sleep!" I brought the blade crashing down, and the Demon Lord fell to the ground. Even if it nullified magic, that meant nothing. This was still a sword, magic effect or not.

Though it clearly took harm, it didn't seem to be seriously hurt. Well, one of its horns was sliced open, at least. To survive a blow like that, it must've been hardy indeed. It clearly had a thick skull.

The Demon Lord tried to steady itself with its arm and get back up, which was when I unloaded my final assault.

[Slip]. Its arm slipped, bringing it crashing to the ground and exposing its shoulders and back. I leaped into action, cleaving off its wings with my blade.

"GyAaAAaauuUuuuUuggGGghhh!!!" As the Demon Lord screamed, I finished off the job by firing numerous **[Slip]** bullets at its feet.

The Demon Lord began to fall forever. It couldn't fly away, as it no longer had wings. Nobody could possibly come to its aid.

Every time the beast fell, the ground rumbled and quaked. I'd have to apologize to anyone living in the vicinity later on.

Leaving the Demon Lord behind, I jumped up to the grand balcony. General Bazoar was up there, pale-faced and horrified.

"Ready for your divine punishment, General?"

"Wh-Who are you?! That was a Higher Demon! One man alone cannot possibly hope to...!"

"It doesn't matter what you say, bozo. I still did it." As I spoke, I gestured to the Demon Lord, which was still falling into infinity.

It did take a lot more than I expected, though... My mithril sword is all bent out of shape after that last attack! It's seriously damaged...

"Hmph... you won't be doing the same to me, however! My Blockbracer makes physical strikes meaningless, and I still have the ability to nullify spells!

Even if that were to fail, my Drainbracer still absorbs any incoming magic anyway!”

*Tch... guess he’s aware of how my **[Slip]** works now... Suppose that means he won’t be dancing to the same tune if I use it again.*

“The emperor didn’t die, but it matters not. This is no longer his domain! I will become the new emperor. And then, I shall use the power of the demons to strike down Refreese, Belfast, Mismede, and all the other western nations! Under one banner, the Regulus Empire will be reborn! Reborn as the Bazoar Empire!” The general began to laugh like a madman.

How does he expect to maintain his army, exactly? He can’t just keep sacrificing people, it’s not sustainable! This man is completely delusional, there’s no saving him.

I saw no other options, so I elected to remove *that* from my storage. My secret weapon, a three-by-three meter cube, was now sitting on the balcony. Aside from the base, it was entirely made of a transparent, glass-like material. You could clearly see inside.

In the middle of this transparent box was a disgusting-looking slime creature. It was discolored and almost looked toxic. Still, despite the coloration, it wasn’t actually poisonous at all. In fact, it was mostly harmless. *Mostly* harmless.

“Wh-What is that thing?”

“This, my friend, is a Sludge Slime. They’re a wonderful little part of a standard ecosystem. They live in water and clean it up. But, they do have one quite horrible thing about them. About one hour after death, they begin to exude one of the most foul odors known to man. Well, it’s supposed to go away after two hours, or so they say... But this one? Well, it died just about an hour ago.” As I explained, I smiled at the general and gave him a sidelong glare.

“Y-You wouldn’t dare...”

“[Gate].” A magical circle appeared beneath the general and he sank into it like quicksand. It didn’t target him directly, so the nullification didn’t activate. It was a spell that connected two places, after all... And my glorious scheme all hinged on where I’d just sent him.

The general instantly reappeared inside the glass box. And then, the show began.

“GHAGUAAAAAUUUGH!” From within the thick iron plating I had enchanted to look like glass, the general began to scream. He pinched his nose tight, but it was too late. His face turned paler than before and he began to sweat bullets.

“Ghaugh!! Wh-What’s this smell?! It— N-No! Please! It hurts! I-It hurts!” It must’ve stunk just as bad as I thought it would in there. The general began to turn purple.

My original world had something known as surstromming. It was a kind of fermented herring. The smell was said to be among the most atrocious in reality. But it seemed that the smell of the Sludge Slime was even worse than that. The general looked about ready to pass out already. I raised my brow slightly as I watched the man struggle. He attempted to focus his magic on one of the windows, but he fumbled it. It was impossible for him to channel vast magical energy with one hand, and he had his right hand firmly planted around his nose. Eventually, he gave up and began to sit in the corner of the box, rocking back and forth. He was crying.

I wondered if he was trying to wait it out, but I knew it’d be futile.

His surroundings were entirely composed of the foul stench. His face contorted in disgust and agony every time he took a breath. All he could inhale was the fetid, noxious odor of defeat.

“Auugh!!! Make it stop!!!” His stoic facade began to crumble. His face was slick with tears, sweat, and snot. There was a small **[Gate]** at the top of the box to allow fresh air inside, since I didn’t want him suffocating. I connected it to an unsettled place high in the mountains, so at most it would’ve upset some animals.

He began to convulse. He could no longer even concentrate on his own breathing. He fell to his knees and slumped forward. The whites of his eyes were showing, as they had rolled back into his head. He was completely passed out.

I had originally considered just sending him into the middle of the sea somewhere, but... He’d surely just summon the Demon Lord again and have it

fly him off.

Then, I considered burying him in this box at the bottom of the sea, but I'd never been there, so wasn't like opening the **[Gate]** would be especially easy, either.

Alright, guess he's done, I'll transport him out now... I opened up a **[Gate]** and warped him out, but I immediately regretted it.

"Ghaughaguh!?" *What the hell is that smell?! It smells like a bunch of trash took a dump on a pile of used sanitary products! HOLY HELL MAKE IT STOP.* I immediately closed the **[Gate],** but the smell didn't stop. *It's coming from the general? Gross!*

I quickly yanked the bracers off of him and put him back inside the container. The Sludge Slime was said to stop exuding a stink after being dead for two hours, but I seriously wondered otherwise about things the smell had infested. The stench was so strong that I was worried it'd never go away.

In seconds flat, the demon army vanished. The Demon Lord stopped slipping and faded into nothingness, too. With the bracers gone, the magical supply line had been cut.

With that, the demons were vanquished. Only the regular army remained.

I decided to open up a **[Gate]** and call the emperor and others through.

"You've actually done it... Incredible..." The emperor spoke in an astonished tone, staring at the general all the while.

"I-It certainly smells rather foul." Lyon held his nose as he spoke.

"Sorry, it's the Sludge Slime's death stench... A little bit of the stink ended up getting out. Geez, it's pretty potent." The stink wafted out from the two Artifacts that the general once wore.

The Drainbracer and Blockbracer, huh...? They're useful tools, no doubt about that, but... They stink. They stink really badly. Even my fingers stink slightly, and I barely touched them.

Given that this was the state of the bracelets, I dreaded to think about the

general himself.

The Belfastian Knights headed underground to the dungeon to free the Regulus Knights. As they did that, the emperor and I set up on the balcony for another broadcast. We needed to update the people about the situation, after all.

This time, the broadcast was live. I held up my smartphone and started filming the emperor.

“Citizens of the Empire’s Heart, I apologize for what has transpired this day. The leader of the coup has been detained, and our capital city is once more in the hands of the just. Thank you for your understanding.” The projection panned over to show the general. He was unconscious, eyes rolled over white, snot running down his face, and drool leaking from his mouth. I hoped that the other members of the army would surrender after seeing something so horrid.

This might be seen as a little cruel, but... it’s necessary.

“I promise to you now that I will work harder. This shall never again happen to us as a people. From the bottom of my heart, please accept my sincere apologies. I am truly sorry.” The emperor bowed his head slightly.

Huh, he’s apologetic... I had honestly heard he was quite arrogant, but perhaps the illness had instilled some humility in him.

After the broadcast, the emperor looked over the general with sad eyes.

“Is something wrong?”

“It is nothing... I just feel this man is a pitiful sort. His feelings for the empire were sincere, I know that much. He joined the army at a young age and wanted to make a real difference. In some ways he reminds me of myself when I was younger. Had I not fallen ill, I may have ended up treading a similar path. It makes me sad to think about it...”

“Even so, this man’s crimes are unforgivable.” He summoned a legion of demons and monsters. Each one was summoned at the cost of several human lives, meaning he had to have slaughtered many people in his mad campaign. Not all of those people were condemned to jail or execution, either. And honestly, it wouldn’t really have been okay even if they were.

“I understand it well. A crime is a crime. He must atone for his sins. He has caused great sorrow to our people, and I will show no leniency.” The emperor let out a small, sad laugh. He was a victim in all of this too, after all.

“Milord!” A group of knights charged out onto the balcony and prostrated themselves immediately.

Oh, were these the ones who were confined in the dungeon? An older, black-haired man with one eye came forward and bowed down on one knee.

“Milord, how can this be?! You seem to be in full spirits once more!”

“I am rather well, Knight Commander Gaspar! It’s all thanks to the amazing young Touya, here. By his might, I am restored to full strength. It is also by his might that General Bazoar was vanquished!”

“What?!” The knight commander stared at me, wide-eyed and shocked. The emperor simply nodded and smiled. I wasn’t so sure that it was down to me, but... I figured it was probably that **[Recovery]** spell I cast.

Elze and Yae showed up, riding on Kohaku’s back. He was in his full form, after all. Sango and Kokuyou were floating nearby, but they were in their mini-forms.

“It’s all done, for now at least. Most of the soldiers collapsed!” Elze hopped off Kohaku and reported in.

Good. I’m glad the remaining soldiers have been taken care of. Even better to see these two are safe and sound.

“Now then, detain the unconscious soldiers. However, spare those that surrendered their arms during the initial call.”

“Yes, Milord!” The emperor issued an order to Knight Commander Gaspar, who departed at once.

I guess the riots’ll die down now... I’m glad that nothing major ended up happening in the end. Now I’ve got nothing to do but leave it to the people of the empire.

Oh, whoops... I gotta recall all those creatures I summoned first, don’t I...

All of the Regulus Empire’s soldiers who had collapsed were rounded up and placed in custody. They were immediately dishonorably discharged from the

standing army, then interrogated about their other potential crimes.

Aside from a specific band of instigators, it was found that most soldiers simply went along with orders and didn't partake in any serious criminal activity. Naturally, those who deliberately instigated the rebellion would be subject to the most grave of sentencings, but those who participated would have to be punished as well. Still, I was sure they'd be thankful to learn they weren't going to be killed, at the very least.

The emperor ordered the remaining troops out to the various towns and cities within the country. Peacekeeping was the number one priority for the coming days, it seemed.

The captive heads of state were also freed from their confines. General Romero brought the crown prince back to the palace as well. When the boy saw me, he was taken aback. He really was the kid that I saved back during the crisis.

He had disguised himself as a knight in order to escape the castle, but because of that outfit he found himself under attack by the rebel soldiers.

I wasn't thoroughly impressed by what I saw in him, to be honest. He didn't have much of a commanding presence... But he did seem to have a gentle heart, so I was sure he'd turn out alright.

"We are truly, so truly, in your debt this day. Touya, you most dignified man... you have not only saved my life, but the life of my only son and daughter. Please, name your price. How might I reward you for this feat?"

"Please don't worry about it, it just happened to turn out this way, honestly... It was more coincidence than heroism or anything." I politely declined the emperor's ludicrous offer. I didn't really want anything at all from him. After hearing that, however, the king of Belfast let out a chuckle.

"Such things matter not to my boy Touya. Indeed, we tried to give him a noble position in Belfast, but he declined that as well. In the end, we managed to settle on a sizable home and a lump sum... But I'd prefer for him to settle on my daughter! Hohoho!"

"Ohoho... Then how about this, I would be honored if you would accept my Lucia. If both the princesses of Belfast and Regulus were joined to the same

man, it would create a more powerful unification between the two nations than there has ever been before!”

“Now hold on a moment there.” The discussion started to go to weird places, so I was about to tell them to knock it off. Instead, however, Yumina was the one to speak up. I wondered what she was going to say.

“This is no mere political arrangement, I have spoken with Princess Lucia. She feels the same as I and the others do about Touya, and would therefore be more than happy to become his fiancee. You are indeed right, it would improve relations between our nations, but what’s important here is that it’s what she wants as well.” I was dumbstruck. What the hell was Yumina saying?

“I... think it’s fine, too...” uttered Elze.

“Y-Yes, as do I,” chimed Linze.

“I have no objections to such an arrangement, I do not,” spoke Yae. All the other girls who were engaged to marry me had spoken up in support of this new addition.

All I could think of in that moment was the simple line, “Et tu, Brute?” I’d been betrayed on the deepest possible level! I mean, why weren’t they considering my feelings in the matter?!

“W-Wait just a darned minute, don’t I get a say in this?!” The conversation seemed to be heading on a one-way track to “Touya’s opinions are invalid,” so I had to say something! In response, Lyon simply shrugged his shoulders and smiled wryly at me.

“Hmph... really, Sir Touya... this is your own fault, in a way.”

“What? How could this possibly be my fault?!”

“From the first moment I met you, Sir Touya, I realized that your power is abnormal. For a single country to be tied to such a... superhuman, it would only be perceived as a threat on an international scale. Try to see this from our perspective. If you’re viewed as dangerous, then Belfast would be viewed as dangerous. But if you were engaged to the princess of Regulus as well? Well, then we’d be able to say your power isn’t simply consolidated in one place, and that you aren’t going to instigate some kind of horrific war.”

“The Empire is the Empire, and the Kingdom is the Kingdom. No shady political dealings. It is a simple political alliance using Sir Touya’s body!” Knight Commander Gaspar continued on from where Lyon had left off. I could understand what they meant, but my opinion still had to count for something, surely! I glanced over at Lu, who was blushing madly and playing with her hair. Every so often she’d shoot a glance my way, as well. *Ah, crap.*

“Ahaha! Touya, my boy! There’s no real difference between the number four and the number five, is there? What’s there to worry about, lad?!”

“W-Well, even so, I don’t...” General Leon strutted over and smacked me hard on the back in his usual fashion. He seemed very upbeat about this whole thing. I couldn’t really think of a way out of the situation. *But we’ve only known each other for two days, isn’t this a little sudden?! It’s a huge commitment...! Wait, I also got engaged to Yumina the same day I met her, didn’t I...? I-I guess that means... It’s okay...?*

“What of you, Lucia my love? Are you against marrying brave young Touya?”

“Not even slightly, Father! I’m so happy that I might burst with pride and faint! I’ve never felt this excited in my life! I-I wish to be his and his alone!” Her hands were clasped in front of her chest, her eyes were practically glittering... there was steam shooting out of her nose...!

Oh, damn it... I don’t think I can get out of this at all, huh?

I couldn’t really begin to grasp how people in this world viewed marriage. In my world it was more of a sacred institution between two people, but here... it seemed much more light-hearted. Part of me was a little afraid of just how different this world was from my old one on a social level.

“Well then, what say you? Will you accept my Lucia into your arms and take her as your bride?”

“Hrmph... w-well, can we at least wait until I’m eighteen until any ceremonies happen, please?”

“That’s no problem to me! It’s settled, then.” It’s not like we actually had to wait until I was eighteen or anything, but I needed to put up some kind of resistance or I’d look like a complete pushover.

Gah, Lu's running off to join the other girls already?! Th-They became friends pretty fast, huh... What is this, a "let's marry Touya" club?!

"Very well, then. I would like to offer you another reward alongside this, naturally. Now that my Empire and the Kingdom of Belfast are on equal footing, I'm sure we'll have a lasting alliance." What the emperor said was something truly astounding. With this, almost all of the major western powers would be unified. Belfast, Mismede, Refreese, and now Regulus, all connected peacefully...

"In addition, we will formally announce your engagement to both Lucia and my Yumina in both nations. Due to this, it is prudent that we grant you a true, proper title. I spoke with the emperor of Regulus, and we've both agreed to split off some of our own territories and grant the combined land portion to you."

"I'm sorry, what?" *I'm having trouble processing what was said just now. Giving me a portion of each country's territory? It's gonna be a pain in the ass if they want me to rule over some place like a lord or something...*

"It's less of a bestowment of land, and more of a transferal of territory. In other words, we intend to form a small country between the border of Regulus and Belfast. The sovereign of this freshly-birthed nation will be you, Touya. Please be just and kind in your rule."

"Excuse me?!" *Founding a country? Wait?! Sovereign?! Me, what?! Stop!*

"Well, we say it's a country but there are no people to rule over quite yet. It's a fairly uninhabited stretch of land, and under your rule it will be bound by the laws of neither Regulus nor Belfast. Our two countries, in support of your fledgling nation, will naturally sign a peace treaty with you as well. Whatever happens within that country, we vow not to interfere. The country will be solely yours, Touya. With this, the issue of your social standing is completely invalid, and you may marry both princesses without any concerns!"

So what, kind of like the Vatican? Or I guess it'd be more like a sovereign duchy or a principality... Augh, I really don't know about this...

"Touya, my boy. Can you pull up that map?"

“Huh? Er, sure. Display map.”

“Understood. Displaying map.” I was unsure what the king wanted exactly, but I did as he asked and let the map project itself in the air.

Belfast was on the left, and Regulus was on the right. The king pointed his finger at the border line between them.

“Now, between our great nations is the Melicia Mountain Range. It extends down a good way, but at the bottom here is a forest and a great plain. Although the land is fertile, there are many demonic beasts that infest the area. For that reason, neither country has involved itself in that territory very much. To the south of that area is a road that will become the nexus of trade between the two nations. That’s where we’ll found your country!”

What?! Didn’t you just say that place is infested with man-eating monsters?

“You plan on having us settle a dangerous place like that?”

“Now now, nobody said you have to actually live there. That being said, that area’s completely independent and out of our hands now. Even if something happened there, neither Regulus nor Belfast could do a thing. Even if a group of brigands holed up there and used it as their base of operations, it’s completely out of our jurisdiction. Touya, my boy. You’d be the grand duke, so the responsibility of clearing out the mess falls to you.” Both the emperor and the king were grinning ear-to-ear.

You no-good crooks... you’ve saddled me with cleaning out your new trade route, haven’t you?! After the alliance is announced, a lot more people will start to take the only road between the two nations. So this is your plan to make the path safe, is it? You... bastards!

Wait, was this their plan the whole time? Did they just offer Lu up so I’d fall into the palms of their hands?! These guys are seriously scary... I walked right into it!

“I feel like I’m being cheated here, but...”

“No, no! Perish the thought. It’s a rich and plentiful area with wide borders. The people passing through it will receive safety and peace of mind, and in turn you’ll receive status, praise, and accolades. Isn’t that good in itself?”

So that's how it is, huh...? I feel like these two are using me, but whatever. They're a little too conniving for my tastes, but I guess I can understand. They've both had troubles with their neighbors in the past, so having me there would be good for peace of mind.

Hmph... It's not that bad of a deal, I guess... In order to marry both of the girls, I do need a suitable position. Plus, it's not like there are any citizens there to worry about, either... Not to mention the fact that having a large expanse of land I can do whatever I want with is definitely a plus. Well, why not? Having a country of my own might come in handy.

"Yeah, fair enough, then. You just want me there to make it safe, right? I'll do it."

"Our apologies, lad. In that case, we shall formally declare the formation of a new nation! Both countries shall formally recognize your right to rule!"

Right to rule, huh... I can't even begin to imagine how I'll be as a head of state. Well, I don't really have that many responsibilities to deal with, I guess. Am I gonna have to build a castle?

"You have finally taken a royal position, you have. Our husband-to-be is truly magnificent, he is..."

"I know, right? I never thought he'd take it this far, but it's seriously amazing!" Yae and Elze began chattering with each other. In all honesty, I never expected anything like this to happen, either. I think I was more shocked than they were.

"Uhm, what do you want to do in regards to the name of the new nation?" Linze looked over at me, asking an important question that I hadn't really considered.

Uhh... a name? Maybe... Mochizukiland? N-No, that's way too embarrassing! No way...

Nihon? Eh, that's a little uninspired... Japan? Japang...? Ugh... None of these really feel good as names at all! Oh... wait, maybe...

"Brunhild... I think. The Duchy of Brunhild."

"Isn't Brunhild the name you gave to that weapon of yours, Touya?"

“Yeah. Though where I come from, it’s a derivative name taken from a legendary shieldmaiden.” *Yeah, the Duchy of Brunhild... Sounds pretty nice, if I do say so myself. Plus, it’s more like a micro-nation than a real kingdom, so it’s more like I’m just giving my land a fancy name.*

“The Brunhild Duchy, was it? A rather splendid name. Very well, the Kingdom of Belfast will formally support this fledgling nation in an alliance!”

“Indeed. As will the Regulus Empire.”

“Now then, shall we get to work on making the land safe?”

Just how big is the territory, anyway? I better use my phone to check, just to be sure. Just as I’d asked, the phone read back the exact size.

“Total Size: Approximately four hundred and ten square kilometers.” *I honestly have no idea what that means... Lemme compare it to the size of the 23 Special Wards in Tokyo...* I ran a search for the size of that, and the phone told me it was around six hundred and nineteen square kilometers.

Wait what?! That means my country’s about two thirds the size of the special wards?! That’s a little much, isn’t it?!

◇ ◇ ◇

“There’s really nothing around, huh?” We looked over the forest and the plain. There were some hilly areas, as well as the mountains off in the distance. There was also a river nearby, so that was nice.

We’d decided to go and visit the land that Regulus and Belfast had oh-so-graciously bestowed upon me. I found it to be rather barren. Though, to be honest, that was better than it being too noisy.

“Alrighty then... Run search. Monstrous creatures that could cause potential harm to human beings.”

“Understood. Displaying.” With several “pings”, red markers dotted themselves all over the surrounding area on the map. There were a lot. *I mean it is a huge area, so it’s not too surprising... I guess? But I didn’t even include lesser monsters in the search query!* Now it was simply a matter of figuring out what to do.

“Should I just wipe them all out at once with magic, maybe?”

“If you dealt with them all like that, I-I’m not so sure it’d turn out well...” Yumina furrowed her brow.

Hmph, I guess... if I did that, then there’d be a huge pile of dead bodies. Carnivorous animals might eat some of them, but I highly doubt they’d be able to clear all that meat before it became an issue. The smell would definitely end up being a major problem for everyone. Plus, it’s more likely that the carnivorous ones would be the ones being killed in the first place.

I considered just sending them somewhere through a **[Gate]** or something, but that would cause trouble for the people on the other side. I thought about just sending them all into the sea to drown, but then Elze spoke up.

“Some of those monsters might have valuable raw materials, you can’t just send them off like that!” She had a point, too. Sending off monsters like that would mean less potential finances for us. Teleporting them to the sea was a needlessly wasteful act.

Even so, since we were looking over the territory from Babylon, it was possible to make a **[Gate]** anywhere down there, so I didn’t want to waste that opportunity...

“What if we used **[Gate]** to teleport dead ones to us? We could defeat them, and then transport them here... Then we can harvest them manually for materials... But uh... what about the dead bodies?”

“It would be good for the natural order of things if we spread their corpses across the mountains and countryside, it would. So long as there are not too many, we could provide food for the animals, and nutrition for the ground and plants, we could.”

Hm, let’s just do that then. Yae’s sense seemed fair enough to me, so I rolled with it.

“Let’s do it, then. Target Lock. Invoke **[Shining Javelin].**”

“Understood. Invoking **[Shining Javelin].**”

“I-Is it finally over...?” *I’m done, damn it... Harvesting materials from monsters is too difficult...! Every monster has different parts and different features with different values. It’s way too much to keep track of! Fangs, claws, hides? How am I meant to know what all of this is worth?!*

Partway through we quickly realized that we weren’t the best-equipped to be determining exactly what was worth what, so we called over Will, Logan, and Rebecca from the capital. We decided to give them half of the harvest, so they graciously accepted the job.

I also called over my maid, Cecile, and my gardener, Julio. Then, I grabbed Lyon for good measure, because he was off-duty today. Honestly, it was a pretty decent part-time job for them.

Lyon ripped, tore, and furiously shredded the monsters apart. Something made me think he seriously needed the cash. Something to do with Olga, perhaps... Was he getting engaged, I wondered. The polar opposite of Lyon’s enthusiasm was Lu, who was clearly struggling to take apart the dead animals. I decided to give her a helping hand.

I was surprised by how well she took to it once she got a handle on it, though. She seemed to be pretty skilled in preparation.

“You’re a princess, so it’s only natural. This is your first time doing something like this, right?”

“Yes, it is. But I still want to do it to the best of my ability. I wish not to be a burden to you, dear Touya. I wish to be as much of a help as the others.” After she said that, I gave her a little pat on the head. She blushed a bit red. *Heh, she’s a cutie...*

The third princess of the Regulus Empire, Lucia Leah Regulus, became my fiancee. At the same time, on Yumina’s recommendation, she came to live with me in Belfast.

I thought the same around the time I met Yumina, but the princesses of this world sure had a lot of autonomy...

She wasn’t wearing a big regal outfit like she was the first time I met her, either. She was wearing some more easily-manageable clothing.

She wore a long-sleeved shirt with a big bow about the neck, and black tights under a white pleated skirt. At her waist, behind her back, were two holstered short-swords.

From what I understood, Lu was a dual-wielder. It seemed she had learned a little about the style from Carol and developed a taste for it. Her magical aptitude was completely in the red, so no spells for her.

Apparently Yae tried training her a little, but Lu just wasn't compatible. Since twin blades were based on speedy and deceptive movement, it was only natural it wouldn't mesh with Yae's samurai style.

I certainly wondered if she'd be fine with just two swords on her side... But I decided that it'd be better to wait and see her in action.

"Well, now the really dangerous stuff is taken care of..." I fired up my map app again, just to be sure. Not a single hit registered in the area. Mission accomplished.

However, I had a sudden thought and decided to run a search for humans in the vicinity. Sure enough, there was a whole bunch of them in the forest...

Do people really live out here? It's kinda dangerous, so I didn't think this was a place someone could call home...

"It's likely a band of brigands." Lyon let out a mutter as he looked the map over.

"Really?"

"From what I've heard there have been a lot of bandit attacks in the surrounding territories lately... Such a gathering of them is surely their main base of operations. They likely have a great price upon their heads." The forest was huge, and dangerous, so logically it made sense as a place for cutthroats to hide. If there were enough of them, and they were tough, they'd be fine to repel the monsters.



“...So what should we do?” Linze spoke up, as if she didn’t know already that we’d be clearing them out. This place was to be part of my territory, after all, so clearing out bad people was for the best.

“Well, I’ll go take care of it.”

“Mind if I accompany you?” Surprisingly, Lyon offered to tag along. I had no reason to say no, so I let him. We left the handling of the monster bodies to everyone else, and the two of us walked off to the hideout. It was only a thirty minute trip on foot, so there was no need to overcomplicate the travel method.

“Heh, you’re after the bounty, aren’t you?”

“H-Huh? Aah... ahaha, well... Guess you figured me out, Sir Touya.” Lyon chuckled a little, scratching the back of his head all the while. I could feel the desire to earn money emanating from him when he was stripping the monsters bare, so this was only natural.

“Are you saving up for an engagement ring to get Olga?”

“Ah, no... I-I’ve actually already given her one of those.”

“You serious?!” I was completely taken aback. Talk about left field. *He might’ve had it in mind since the beginning, but isn’t he moving things a little bit too quickly?* It didn’t take me long to realize I was in no position to speak about that of all things.

“Wow, man... congratulations. So then, why are you trying so hard to get money?”

“Well, weddings are quite expensive... as will be cost of living after the fact. Ideally, I’d like to purchase a home for the two of us.” Lyon let out a slightly worried laugh, but he seemed happy all the same. I understood his feelings well enough, money was definitely necessary to maintain a happy married life.

“Can’t your parents help you out?”

“Ah, well... my folks believe in cutting your own path in life, and her folks believe that money is something you need to earn yourself...”

Oh dear... The resolute natures of iron-clad military tradition and merciless mercantile tradition are both bearing down on him.

“We both live with our respective parents right now, but... As I am the second son, I must move out after I marry.”

“So will Olga be coming to Belfast?”

“Her father needs a successor for his mercantile empire, but... I’m really hoping I can afford to call her over soon enough.” Lyon let out a small, irritated sigh. *Hmph... I can loan him the cash, but that would probably make General Leon angry at both me and him, so I better not...*

“Oh, what about any of the stolen goods that the brigands’ll have?”

“Ideally, we’d like to get those returned to their original owners. Anything other than that rightfully belongs to the ones that bested the bandits, I’ll say. There’s no real profit in rooting bandits out, so they usually manage to hole out for a good bit of time.”

“So you’re saying their leader probably has a ton of money, right...?”

“That’s what I’m hoping for, actually. Obviously I’ll return anything that has a known owner, though.” *So if there’s nobody to claim the goods, he gets to pocket it. Makes sense.*

The map indicated a roughly-constructed hut at the forest’s edge. I assumed that to be their hideout.

“So what bandits in this area have bounties?”

“Three of them. A trio of thieves, all siblings.” I confirmed their presence on the map, three markers dropped down. Seemed that was all of the big-named bandits, though. Lyon drew the weapon that I’d made for him and morphed it into blade mode.

I’m gonna leave this one to Lyon, I think... If I got involved, then he’d probably want to split the reward with me, and I’m fine with him having it all.

In the end, Lyon wiped the entire camp of brigands out. Well, I say wiped out, but he used Stun Mode to paralyze them all. I thought they’d be tougher, given that they had a reputation, but it seemed I didn’t have anything to worry about after all.

The bandits had accumulated a pretty big pile of loot, which I was quite

pleased to see. With a smile on his face, Lyon bound up all the brigands and I opened up a **[Gate]** to the Royal Capital.

I stashed all of their ill-gotten gains in **[Storage],** making a mental note to hand it over to Lyon later. After that, I crushed their miserable shack using **[Gravity].** It would have been a pain in my ass if any other guys got the bright idea of squatting there, after all.

After we returned to the others, it looked like they were pretty much done with the material harvest. We bagged them up and I put all the good stuff in **[Storage],** making a point to label two bags "Rebecca," and "Cecile." It would've been bad for them to lug around so much stuff, after all.

We returned to the guild in the capital and headed straight to the trading desk. Immediately, I pulled a ton of stuff out of **[Storage]** and hefted it on to the counter. The amount of stuff was so obscene that the man at the desk had to take a few minutes to collect himself.

While he figured out the value, I took Lu over to Prim's desk.

"I'd like to register this girl with the guild. There should be a notification from the Regulus Empire?"

"Ah, yes! We did get that, but... D-Did you really suppress a military coup all by yourself?!"

"Well, I didn't quite do it alone, but... yeah."

"H-Holy... I-I almost can't believe it's true. I should have known that Moon Reader's owner was such a magnificent man..." As Prim stood around admiring my accomplishments, another employee gave Lu the basic explanation, and Lu explained her reasons for becoming an adventurer. Naturally, I listened in. From what I understood, Lu definitely didn't need to become a pro adventurer, but she couldn't bear the thought of staying at home and being excluded from the rest, so she took it upon herself to become stronger.

"Ah, please hand over your Guild Card." I handed over the card, just as Prim asked. She stamped down on it with a different seal than usual.

"This is proof that you took down a Greater Demon in the Regulus Empire. On behalf of the guild, please accept this new title. You're formally a Demon Killer!"

Dragon Slayer, Golem Buster, and now Demon Killer, huh? I'm just racking up titles like crazy.

"With this, you have acquired three titles in total. This, combined with the formal recommendation from the Kingdom of Belfast and the Regulus Empire, means your Guild Rank has increased by one. Congratulations!"

"Huh? Is that how it works?" The Guild Card she returned to me was a shimmering silver. It was really pretty. I guess the guild had no issue promoting me to this level after realizing the extent of my power, not to mention my political backing.

"Well, this is certainly something special! It's almost been two decades since our country had a Silver-ranked adventurer." I was surprised it had been that long, but it was true that I'd never seen any Silver or Gold-tier requests on the job boards.

"When you stand at Silver, and Gold above that, you typically receive quests right from the guild." That made sense enough to me. It made sense to limit who could see such jobs, since they'd probably be sensitive or only be able to be handled by the most proficient of people.

Lu finished registering and happily showed me her black guild card.

I took Lu over to the trading area, and it seemed that the man had finally figured out how much everything was worth.

Rebecca and the others from Sandora seemed extremely pleased by the unexpected boon. Cecile and Julio also looked very happy. That was to be expected. They'd all come out of this quite well off, after all.

The portion for myself, and the portion for Lyon, had been set aside and handed to us as I left the guild. The bandits were apparently apprehended without any trouble. Lyon had to report it in solo due to the bounty on their heads, but he was able to receive it without any hassle.

The money from the materials, coupled with the money from the brigands... It was a pretty penny for Lyon, all-in-all. With that, he'd definitely have enough to secure his wedding at the very least.

I suddenly realized that I should get Lyon and Olga a wedding gift. I made a

mental note to ask the girls for suggestions later on.

Interlude II: Grandmother and Granddaughter

Even though I'd gotten land — or, rather, a country — from both Regulus and Belfast, I was still living in Belfast's capital.

The effects of the coup d'etat in Regulus were still being processed, so we had to postpone both the declaration of the creation of the new country and the announcement of my, Yumina's, and Lu's marriage.

That was when a certain person visited my abode in Belfast.

"It has been a while, Sir Touya."

"Welcome to Belfast, Carol." The visitor was Carol. She was a knight from the Rillettes family and one of the "Twelve Blades of the Empire," a group that had served Regulus since the first emperor took the throne.

Due to a lack of notable achievements for many years, the Rillettes family was on the verge of collapse, but she was recognized for her "valuable contributions" during the coup and thus restored her family's honor.

I'd even heard that she was going to get an important position among the knights. And honestly, that made me feel uneasy.

"So, what is your business he— Oh, it's obviously Renne, isn't it?"

"Yes. May I see her?" A short while ago, it came to light that Renne, the ex-thief girl that works for us now, was actually the daughter of Carol's elder sister, which meant that they were aunt and niece.

It wasn't completely confirmed, though, so it was necessary for me to get it all clear.

I called over our head maid, Lapis, and had her bring Renne to the parlor.

"Is there anything you are in need of, sir?" Either due to her being tense because of the guest's presence or simply because she wasn't used to saying those words, they came out somewhat weird. As that made me form a wry smile, I beckoned her over to me.

“Renne. Can I ask you something?”

“Wh-Whatever do you wish to know, s-sir?”

“Oh, there’s no need to talk like that. Do you know your mother’s name?”

“...Mum’s?” Visibly puzzled, she began to think.

“Umm... I think it was ‘Steph.’ I heard daddy say it a lot when he was drunk. I didn’t ask him about it, though.” I glanced at Carol, who gave me a slight nod. *No mistaking it, huh?*

“Renne, can you show me your pendant again?”

“Eh? Okay, but why?”

“It’s extremely important, so please.” The fact that that was said by Carol — the guest — made Renne somewhat confused, but she didn’t take long to remove the pendant from her neck and place it on the table.

Just like it was when I saw it last time, it had the shape of a downward triangle and had a large wind spellstone inside it.

Carol fearfully took it in her hands, turned it around, and examined the crest on the back.

“There’s no mistaking it. This was in my sister’s possession. It’s a Rillettes family heirloom.”

“You wot?!” Perplexed by her words, Renne began making excuses to Carol.

“P-Pops told me it was a memento from mum! I-I didn’t steal, I—!”

“I know. This belonged to my sister. So now, it belongs to you.”

“Eh...?”

“My sister’s name was Stephanie. Stephanie Rillettes. It’s more than likely that she was your mother.” As Renne turned stiff and her mouth opened due to surprise, I gently told her to sit down.

“Listen, Renne. Your mother was the daughter of the Regulus Empire’s nobility. But she ran away from home after having a fight with her father. Then, she went on to meet your father and give birth to you.”

“Th-Then this lady is...”

“I am your mother’s little sister... That makes me your aunt. My name is Caroline Rillettes. I am a knight of the Regulus Empire.”

“Aunt...” When Renne said that word, Carol grabbed hold of her chest as her face distorted.

What the hell are you doing?

“What’s wrong...?”

“Well, it’s just that... It’s hard to put it into words, but being called that slightly stings...

“Why? You *are* an aunt, aren’t you, auntie Carol?”

“Stop repeating it! I know I am! You’re not wrong, but it’s just...!” With tears in her eyes, Carol began writhing.

Man, she’s such a pain. Though, it’s true that her age is kind of in the danger zone...

“Renne. Instead of ‘aunt,’ please use ‘Carol,’ ‘Lady Carol,’ or something else along those lines... I know it’s a pain, but still.”

“Eh? Then how about... Sis?”

“Ah, that’s perfect!” Carol excitedly approved of Renne’s choice.

‘Sis,’ eh...? Well, she calls me ‘bruv,’ so I guess it’s appropriate.

Apparently, the pendant Renne had was actually an Artifact. It was imbued with Wind magic that could only be activated by members of the Rillettes bloodline.

We went to the garden, where Carol held the pendant in hand and spoke a keyword that caused a defensive wall of wind to appear around her.

*Is this a **[Cyclone Wall]** or what?* Artifacts were tools that made it possible for those with no aptitude for magic to use spells, but one that could only be activated by a certain bloodline seemed like a rarity.

I wonder if it’s programmed to do that or something. Should I assume that it’s like the fantasy RPG-favorite ‘sacred sword that can only be wielded by the

descendants of the legendary hero?'

As a final confirmation, I had Renne activate it, too, and it worked without a problem. It was clear that the blood flowing through her veins was that of the Rillettes family.

Also, it didn't do anything when I was the one to try it.

"Renne. With this, it's obvious that you're a member of the Rillettes family. Meaning that you're one of the Regulus Empire's nobles."

"I-I see..." Renne looked completely befuddled. It was only natural. She didn't know how to react to that. After all, she was a maid who'd just been told that she was actually the daughter of nobles.

"So... what do you say? Do you want to go to the Regulus Empire?"

"... I... I want to stay here." Though low in volume, her voice was clear.

"You'll just be a maid here, you know? In the empire, though, you'd be a lady of a noble family. Wouldn't that make you happier—?"

"I'll decide what makes me happy! I like living here. I love everyone in this place! That's why I want to stay here forever! Everyone here is my f-family...!"

"I see..." As Renne became teary-eyed and clung to me, I gently held her back. If that was what she decided, I would simply do my best to protect her way of life. That was all.

"I had a feeling this would happen..." Carol spoke with a wry smile on her face. She then walked up to Renne and crouched to put their eyes on the same level.

"If that's what you want, then I will say nothing against it. However, please don't forget that this isn't your only family."

"Aunti—"

"Guh?!"

"S-Sis... Thank you." I was exposed to a scene where a niece was being considerate of an aunt that was holding her chest, trying to bear some mysterious pain. *What the hell?*

Soon enough, Carol stood up and faced me once again.

“Well, I don’t mind her living here, but I would like to let her meet my mother at least once. The girl is her sole granddaughter, after all.”

“Eh? You’re not married, Sis?”

“Ghuh?!”

Whoa! She got figuratively backstabbed by her newly-discovered niece!

With a seriously pained expression, Carol turned to Renne with a grinding sound and forced a smile.

“Y-Yes... I’m not married... yet...”

“R-Renne, just so you know, female knights can become so busy that they don’t get any chances to meet the right person!” I didn’t enjoy the feel of the negative aura that was beginning to spread, so I took it upon myself to help Carol out. There were probably many reasons why she couldn’t get married, but it was no lie that that was one of them.

“I see. Sis is pretty and cool, so it seemed strange to me. You’re beautiful, so if you weren’t a knight, men would never leave you alone.”

“Oh, what a good girl!” Carol quickly hugged her niece.

If you ask me, this side of her is what makes her such a... regrettable character... However, I will say nothing.

“The Rillettes mansion... Carol’s house is in the Regulus Empire’s capital, right?”

“Yes. Though on the small side, our residence is in the noble district. Though, I live in the knight’s lodging house on weekdays and only come back on weekends, so most of the time, there’s only my mother and servants there.”

I could easily get to the capital by using a **[Gate].**

“Did you tell your mother... Did you already tell Renne’s grandmother about her?”

“Yes. In fact, she wanted to join me in coming here to Belfast, but I stopped her, obviously.”

Well, isn't that something... The distance between here and the Regulus Empire's capital was pretty great. Though it was perfectly viable for Carol, who was a knight, the journey would certainly be taxing on a senior. Seriously, they'd even have to camp outside.

Hmm... It certainly doesn't seem like she's shunning Renne. I guess it's a good idea to let them meet. Better hurry up, then.

"All right, let's go see Renne's grandmother."

"Eehh?! Right now?!" Ignoring her surprise, I went to Lapis, told her that I was borrowing Renne for a moment, then went to Lu's room and had her come with us.

If we were going to Regulus, having Lu with us should've made plenty of things a lot faster. In Belfast, I could get stuff done just because I knew people, but the same couldn't be said for Regulus.

"My apologies, Princess. I am sorry to have you involved in our family matters..."

"No need for that, Carol. If it weren't for you, there's a chance that I would've never even met Touya. This is the least I can do." In response to Carol bowing her head, Lu simply smiled. Standing next to them, Renne also hastily bowed. Before I'd realized it, Renne was holding a handbag. *Souvenirs for grandmother, I assume?*

"All right, let's go. Lapis, take care of everything."

"Take care." Once I opened a **[Gate]**, Carol, Renne, Lu and I went through it.

We came out in a back-alley in Gallaria, Heart of the Regulus Empire.

Once out on the street, we were surrounded by such hustle and bustle that it was hard to believe that there was a coup d'etat just a few weeks ago. Compared to Belfast, Regulus seemed to have an air of "composure" about it. Regulus was akin to a straight line, while Belfast was more like a curve. The tidy townscape had an air of historical significance around it, making it gleam with confidence about its state as the capital. Though not too gaudy, it still had a certain personality. That was an apt description of this city.

Here and there, I could still see some wounds the coup left on this city. Some houses were still being rebuilt and some street lights were still being re-installed.

Well, some houses were completely blown away by the Demon Lord. It's gonna take a little while for everything to get back to normal.

"Touya. Over here." As I was looking around, Lu took my hand and began leading me somewhere. When the coup happened, the fires started only in the commoner areas and the slums, while the noble residential district remained completely untouched.

I guess that general didn't want to make any enemies among the more important people.

After a while of walking, we reached an area with estates of many varying sizes. In a corner, a short distance away from the rest, was our destination. It was medium in size — not too large, nor too small. The estate had a red roof that had obviously shielded against many winters, giving it an "antique" sort of feel. Its gates were quite impressive. There were two shield-bearing gryphons at its sides and a crest displaying crossed swords and a laurel above it.

"Lady Carol!" The moment we stood before the gates, a man who looked as tall as two meters called out to us from the inside. He had white hair, a handlebar moustache, and a face of someone in their sixties. However, his muscular build made him look considerably younger.

Just what is this old man...?

"My name is Robinson. I've been a butler serving this family for years now."

"I... see?" It wasn't just me. Renne and Lu were taken aback, as well. Indeed, he was wearing butler's clothing. However, he looked more like someone whose calling in life was martial arts.

"I am glad to see you back so soon! Oh... Ohh! Is that Lady Renne?!"

"Indeed she is. This is Stephanie's daughter."

"I knew it! She looks just like Lady Steph when she was young! Oh, this takes me back... Truly, it does... Dear me, I have to inform the Madam! Madam!

Madam!”

“Ah, hey, Robinson!” A moment later, the muscular butler turned around and ran off into the garden.

...What am I supposed to think of this?

“That silly butler...! It’s fine to be excited about Renne, but not greeting the princess is just inexcusable!”

“I don’t mind. This time, I am but an extra.” As Lu giggled, Carol turned around and opened the gates. Once we entered the estate grounds, Carol led us to the front door.

Despite the Rillettes family being on the verge of collapse, the building was both elegant and grand.

“Th-This is mum’s home?”

“Yes. Steph lived here until she was seventeen.” Carol answered Renne as the girl looked up at the estate.

So Renne’s mom ran away when she was seventeen, huh? Must’ve been a pretty strong rebellious stage...

As if responding to my nonchalant thoughts, Carol began elaborating.

“Despite being a woman, my sister had a talent for swordsmanship. Because of that, our father made her go through some severe training. However, it was quite clear that my sister disliked being part of a family of knights and having to be subjected to all its strictness. She was quite the free spirit.”

“Indeed. She loathed being bound and always tried resisting her father. However, she was a gentle child nonetheless.” I looked to where the unfamiliar voice came from and saw a lady with hair as blonde as Carol’s. She seemed to be in her late fifties. Her clothing was casual and rather plain. However, over her apparel, she had a cape that, although not gaudy, looked truly well-made.

Is it safe to assume that she’s...

“So you are Renne, I assume? Truly, you look just like Steph.”

“U-Umm... A-Are you my g-grandmother?”

“Grandmother... Well, that’s how it is, yes. Oh dear, this is quite overwhelming. It seems that suddenly having such a big grandchild has left me a bit perplexed.”

The lady turned awkward, bashful, and embarrassed at the same time.

Be at ease. You’re not nearly as bad as your daughter.

“I-It’s nice to meet you. I am Renne.”

“Oh my, so polite. My name is Mary. Mary Rillettes. I happen to be the head of the Rillettes household. And yes, I am your grandmother.” Mary replied with a smile as Renne slightly bowed her head.

A bit of a stiff greeting, considering they’re related, but I guess that’s to be expected. They’ve just met, after all.

A moment later, Mary looked toward me and gave me a deep bow.

“So you are Mochizuki Touya. I would like to thank you for your deeds during the turmoil... and for saving the capital. You even went on to help my daughter and granddaughter... I don’t even know what to say...”

“Ah, no need for that. It’s nothing, really.”

“And this lady here is... Oh? No, it can’t be...” The moment Mary shifted her gaze toward Lu, her face turned stiff. Suddenly, she got on her knees and bowed her head once again.

“Y-Your Highness?! Wh-Why are you wearing tha...! No, why have you graced this residence?”

“That’s because Mochizuki Touya here is my dearest. There is nothing strange about me being here, Mary.”

“I... I see?” Completely taken aback, Mary switched between looking at me and Lu, who was wearing a casual set of clothing that was easy to move around in.

I wasn’t aware that Lu and Mary had met before.

Later down the line, I found out that, every new year, there was an event where the Regulus Empire’s nobles had an audience with the emperor.

Naturally, Mary, the head of the Rillettes family, participated in it, as well. And, being the third princess, Lu took part in it too.

“Stand. This time, I came here as nothing but an extra. I do not mind if you don’t give me any special treatment.”

“I-I see... I will do as you say, then.” Lu smiled as Mary, still visibly tense and perplexed, stood up. She then invited us inside.

As I was impressed by the non-gaudy, yet calming architecture of the guest room, the muscular butler brought us some tea. In his hands, the tea cups looked like toys. We then went on to tell Mary about all that had happened with Renne and her decision. Carol had already told her about Stephanie’s death, so she was listening to us without saying a word.

The butler, however, bawled his eyes out. Apparently, he’d been looking after her since she was young, so it kinda made sense for him to react like that. Also, I was told that Renne’s mother was laid to rest in a graveyard next to a small church in a village in Belfast.

“I wonder if she was happy...”

“I don’t know... But pops said that she smiled a lot whenever she looked at me. I don’t remember that, though...” She’d just been born, after all.

I hope her parents are now happily living together in heaven. It would be even better if they also met up with her grandpa and began to get along.

“I was happy to see you visit the Rillettes household... But I can see why you would be reluctant to start living with us as a family. Not to mention that your mother actually ran away because she loathed things like that. If I forced you to become a noble, I feel that Stephanie would get very angry at me when it’s my time to go and I meet her in the afterlife.”

“I’m sorry... However, I want to stay with Touya and the others. Everyone there is very kind and they teach me lots of things.”

“Also, though she would be a maid, she would be working in a new country’s palace-like place. She would be treated as good as the maids of the Imperial Household. There’s no need for worry there.” Lu added to Renne’s words.

Some nobles already knew about the creation of the new country. There was quite a commotion at first, but it cooled down the moment they realized that it was just a country in name.

After all, the country was small in size. Plus, they probably thought that a single adventurer couldn't do much. It was actually smaller than the smallest territories in both Belfast and Regulus. That was enough reason for them to believe that it was harmless.

It was safe to assume that information of my engagement to Yumina and Lu still hadn't leaked. The reaction could change when that was announced.

After hearing Lu's words, Mary bowed her head to me.

"Please take good care of her."

"Certainly. There's no need for you to worry. Renne is a smart girl with lots of tact. She's a fast learner, too. I'm sure she'll grow up to be a fine woman."

My praise made Renne turn bashful and look down. However, she soon had an idea and looked toward Mary.

"Um, can I borrow your kitchen?"

"The kitchen? I don't mind, but why?"

"Crea... the mansion's chef is teaching me how to cook. I-I would like you to try some of my food, Grandmother..."

"Oh my! Oh dear me, that's wonderful! Steph and Carol... my daughters were never good at cooking. In fact, I don't remember them ever giving me anything that wasn't overcooked or undercooked. Their swordsmanship may have improved day by day, but neither of them seemed to have even an ounce of femininity." Mary's words made Carol look away.

Is that the reason why she can't get married...? With a smile on her face, Mary looked on as the butler led Renne, who was still holding her bag, to the kitchen.

"What a good girl. I wouldn't expect less from Stephanie's daughter. You could learn a thing or two from her, Carol."

"Mother... you make it sound like I'm incapable of anything."

“I’m simply worried about a daughter that’s still unmarried at such an age. You should, at the very least, learn how to cook. Do you properly get up in the mornings when at the lodging house? Or do you actually say ‘just five more minutes’ like you do when you’re at home? Men are extremely perceptive to such slovenliness, you know? Please, do anything you can to bring a good son-in-law into the Rillettes family. I truly believe that you don’t want to go where Steph is before seeing your children’s faces.”

In but a moment, Mary changed her class from “grandmother” to “mother” and began gunning down Carol with her words.

Carol listened to Mary, looking seriously fed up all the while. *Looks like a mother’s scolding stings no matter how old you get.*

“Did you try arranging any marriage meetings?” Seemingly interested, Lu joined their exchange.

With how things were going, Carol would become the head of the Rillettes household. That would make it impossible for her to become a bride on her own accord. Someone willing to be the groom would have to come to *her* instead.

Assuming that he was a noble, it could never be the first son due to them always inheriting the household. That would mean that only second, third, or other sons could be potential grooms.

“There have been quite a few requests... However, according to what Robinson found out, most of them were of extremely dubious character. In fact, some of them went on to be arrested in the rebellion.”

“There! See, mother? Hurrying might lead to me ending up with the wrong man. I want to be completely certain about my choice.”

“Oh, how many times have I heard that... At this rate, Renne will get married before you do.”

Come on, there’s no way that... Wait, if Renne were to marry at sixteen, then she has about eight years to go. Maybe it’s not completely impossible.

There were tons of unmarried women in their thirties in my previous world, but they were quite a rarity here.

Even if she didn't think it was a problem, those surrounding her would begin to consider it weird. That would lead many of them to believe that there was a reason why she couldn't get married. As a result, Carol's difficulty in getting married would only increase.

Is it just me, or is she actually hopeless at this point?

As such a rude thought went through my mind, Renne and Robinson opened the door to the room and came back in. Both of them were pushing a table with food on it.

As we sat around the table, all of us got a wooden plate on which there was an iron one. *Oh boy, here we go.*

The hot iron plate released a sizzling sound and the aroma of food.

"I-I've never seen this dish... I-Is this wriggling thing a-an animal?"

"I-It's not a... worm, is it?" Mary and Carol made some complicated expressions.

Well, I guess it's natural for most seeing it for the first time to be surprised. Though, that doesn't apply to those from Eashen.

"This is made by taking a katsuobushi, which is a fish dried by heating, and reducing it into thin pieces. They're so thin, in fact, that the heat of the food forces them to move and makes it seem like they're dancing."

"Katsuobushi... So this is fish?"

"It's among the basic cooking ingredients in Eashen. Though, it's not well known here in the western countries."

Once they found out what the moving objects were, the two sighed in relief.

That aside, I was slightly surprised to see that *this* was the food Renne had chosen to make.

Though, not like it's a difficult dish. Just get some flour, vegetables, eggs, and meat and you're done.

It was safe to assume that the contents of Renne's bag were katsuobushi, sauce, and mayo.

“What do you call this dish?”

“That’s ‘okonomiyaki.’ It’s a popular dish in the mansion.” Mary’s question was answered by Renne. I was the one who started it by giving Crea the recipe.

It was both tasty and easy to make. You could also use the ingredients of your choosing. Seafood, noodles... everything worked. Due to its flexibility, it was a popular choice whenever the servants were busy.

“Such a nice smell. It certainly stimulates my appetite.”

Lu, who was sitting at my side, was quite interested in the okonomiyaki, as well.

Oh yeah, she didn’t get to try it yet.

“This is best when eaten warm. Renne, I’ll start eating now.” I took the nearby knife and fork into my hands. I’d have preferred to eat using chopsticks, but I wasn’t in my own home, so I had to adjust.

A moment after I did, Mary and the others picked up their own utensils.

Once I put the knife in, cheese poured out of it in great amounts.

Well, I didn’t expect that. This looks really good.

When I took a piece of this okonomiyaki into my mouth, a familiar and nostalgic taste overwhelmed my taste buds. The compatibility between the soft texture and the sweet-salty sauce was simply perfect. The cheese, too, was thick and rich in taste.

“Oh, oh dear me! This is delicious!”

“It really is... It’s so good! I’ve never eaten anything like this before!”

“I couldn’t agree more! So this is okonomiyaki...!” The three looked surprised, but in a good way. The hands taking their food to their mouths showed no signs of stopping. Renne looked at us, clearly happy with her work.

By the time everyone had emptied their plates, Renne and Robinson brought us some tea.

Oh? This is green tea, isn’t it? Guess she brought this from the mansion, too.

It was made from the high-class tea leaves I’d gotten from Ieyahsu. I handed

them over to the maids and gave them permission to use them as they saw fit.

“This tea is quite delicious, as well. Thank you, Renne.”

“No, thank *you.* I don’t know what I would’ve done if you didn’t like it, grandmother...” Renne smiled in a bashful manner. Seeing Mary smile back made me realize that the distance between them had shortened, which put me at ease.

I took out a pair of gate mirrors from my **[Storage]** and handed them over to them.

“What is this?” Upon taking hers, Mary tilted her head in confusion.

“It’s an Artifact I made. When you put a letter into this small mirror piece, it comes out through the other. Use it to exchange letters with Renne.”

“Touya... are you sure we can have this?”

“Yeah. The capitals are pretty far apart, so it would take a while for your letters to reach. Faster horses would be expensive, too. Also, I’ll send you over here when you have consecutive days off, so you’ll be able to see your grandmother pretty often.”

“Thank you so much, bruv!” With a bright smile on her face, Renne clung to me.

Whoa, now.

Once I hugged her back, Lu looked at me with her mouth open wide.

“Th-Th-That’s so unfair! I-I want to cling to Touya, too!”

“Uh, Lu...”

“Huh?!” Once she noticed the strange looks, Lu cleared her throat and elegantly brought her tea cup to her lips. *That won’t be enough to play it off, you know?*

“W-Well, she’s a child, after all. There’s no need to get worked up about it.”

Okay, no. You got seriously worked up just now. That both confuses me and makes me kinda happy, though.

Lu seemed to have a competitive side to her. Though, there really was no

point to competing with Renne.

Everyone was trying to contain their laughter at how charming Lu appeared just now. Renne, who merely seemed confused, was the only exception.

“I see. I am glad to know that it went well.”

“Yeah. With Renne, this house becomes a much more cheerful place, after all. Not having her around would be sad, so I’m glad it turned out this way. Do continue taking good care of her, okay?”

“Certainly.” I told Laim about what happened in the Regulus Empire’s capital and once again asked him to look out for our little maid. Since Renne chose to stay, I didn’t want to do anything that would’ve made her regret that decision.

As I was sitting in the balcony and sipping the tea that Laim had prepared for me, I looked up at the moon up in the night sky.

“Where’s Renne, anyway?”

“I already had her return to her room. She asked Cecile to give her some paper and envelopes, so I believe it’s safe to assume that she’s already writing a letter to the empire’s capital.”

I see. A part of me felt envious. After all, no letters that I wrote would ever reach *my* family.

However, the family I had here in this world was just as dear to me. And that might’ve been a beautiful thing.

“Would you like some more?”

“Yes, please.” Laim took the empty teacup and left the room.

As I looked up at the moon in the night sky, I prayed to God for the happiness of the family I’d left behind.

Chapter IV: The Duchy of Brunhild

A month had passed since the trouble in the empire. The emperor honored and praised me as the hero who saved Regulus. I was formally recognized as an adventurer from Belfast who happened to be in their capital on the day of the incident.

Taking advantage of the situation, Regulus also announced its renewed friendship with Belfast, as well as the Duchy of Brunhild, which would be formed using territories from both nations.

And, of course, the grand duke of that duchy was me. A lot of people seemed surprised at the sudden announcement of a new nation, but the commotion died down shortly afterward. The interest in it actually lasted a lot less than I had expected. I didn't mind, since I had no plans to move there any time soon or anything.

Plus, it wasn't like there were any actual people living there, either. I began to think about what to do with the vast amount of land that the duchy consisted of, though. I thought maybe making some kind of orchard or cultivated field would probably be a good start.

The formal announcement of my engagement to Yumina and Lu was put on hold. The reason was that the sex of the baby being carried by Belfast's Queen Yuel was still unknown. The child's sex would determine my position as well, so we stalled the announcement until that was confirmed. The announcement of my engagement to Lu was also put off as a knock-on effect.

General Bazoar and most of the upper-ranking military officials were sentenced to death. That was only natural, since they'd committed high treason. The Blockbracer and Drainbracer that the General had wielded were also confiscated, just in case those with similar ambitions decided to take up the mantle once more.

It was decided that since they'd cause nothing but trouble for Belfast or Regulus if misused, that they had to be destroyed. Part of me wanted to stand

up and say “Excuse me, but those are ancient treasures from Babylon, which makes me the rightful owner,” but obviously I couldn’t do that.

I also considered creating fakes in the workshop and switching them out, but I didn’t want to cheat the king or the emperor. They were going to both be my fathers-in-law, after all.

And so, in front of a royal audience, I crushed both bracers flat with **[Gravity].** I regretted it, but to be honest... They still smelled kind of bad.

After all was said and done, the land was formally broken from the two countries and granted to me, which marked the official founding of the Duchy of Brunhild.

“...So then, are we going to move to the new country?”

“Eh... do we have to?” I sipped some tea that Laim had brought me as I replied to Linze’s question. *Really more of a pain in the ass... It’d be better to stay here.*

“I do not think it’s a matter of concern, I do not. I believe we have already made arrangements to move there, we have.”

“Wait, what?!”

“You’re a total dumbass. If your engagements to Lucia and Yumina get announced soon, then living here’s only gonna make it look like you’re favoring Belfast.” *Oh, fair point. I guess that’d reflect pretty poorly on the empire, huh? But honestly, I don’t see it as a huge deal. I have **[Gate],** so it’s not like I can’t be at either location in a flash anyways...*

“So we’ve got no choice but to live in Brunhild? Then what, do you guys want me to transport this whole house there?”

“I think it’d be smarter to leave this house right here. That way it can act as an embassy of sorts for Brunhild.”

Alright, that also makes sense, I guess... But that means I’ll have to build a whole other place there. Damn it...

“Should I just buy a mansion and have it transported to Brunhild? Oh, wait, can’t we just use the housing complex I have in the Hanging Garden of

Babylon?”

“If we’re going to the trouble of moving to begin with, why not construct a castle? For all intents and purposes, Touya, you are the head of the state. It would be wonderful if you could create something more magnificent than a mansion.”

“Ahh, that sounds superb! A pure, beautiful white brick castle... Oh my...” Lu reacted well to Yumina’s proposition, and the two began chattering amongst themselves about ideas. They really were getting along well. I had a feeling that the two being of similar age had something to do with it. Not to mention the fact that they had similar circumstances growing up. To be honest, I’d much rather they got along handsomely than if they were clawing each other’s eyes out, so I couldn’t complain.

“Hm, a castle...” I pulled up my smartphone and connected to the internet, running an image search for “castle.” In a flash, several images of castles were projected out by the hologram setting.

“Touya, what’s this?”

“Heh, I guess you could consider it a castle catalog... or maybe more like an illustrated guide.” I shrugged off Linze’s question, then scrolled through each image as they passed by.

“Goodness me, there are even castles here like the ones in Eashen, there are.”

Because I’d ran a search for “castle,” it was only natural that there’d be a few Japanese-styled ones in the mix as well. To be honest, there were a ton of castles, more types than I had imagined. I wanted to see if I could see any similar to Het Steen. It’d be an appropriate type of castle for a **[Slip]** caster like me, after all.

“This castle is so beautiful and white...” The castle that Lu was going crazy over was Hluboka Castle, that big one from the Czech Republic. It was white, and very beautiful but...

“Isn’t it a tad too large? We don’t have any staff or servicemen right now, so a place like that would only be a burden.”

“Aw... I suppose you’re right.”

“For now, let’s start with a relatively small castle, and we can make extensions to it as needed, alright?” *Come to think of it, I don’t actually know how to build a castle.*

I reasoned that as long as I had the necessary materials I could definitely cobble together a solid exterior with **[Modeling].**

I couldn’t guarantee that it’d look great, though... Not to mention the fact that the interior would almost definitely be terrible. I could maybe use Belfast Castle as a mental reference, but I had a feeling that putting all that together bit-by-bit would take more time than I had.

“I don’t suppose there’s a castle lying around that just isn’t in use, is there...?”

“Sir, yes sir! I had a feeling this might happen, sir!” With a war cry and a loud noise, Rosetta exploded into the room. *Damn it, that scared me!*

“The time has come, sir! I can finally show you the true potential of the Workshop, *sir!*”



She clenched her fist tightly and raised it high up to the heavens. She had way too much enthusiasm, if you asked me.

“The Workshop doesn’t just replicate stuff, y’know?! We have an automated remodeling system, too! Yessir we do! We can scan objects and reshape them to suit your tastes, sir yes sir!” Rosetta’s ragged breath spewed from her mouth as she explained it all at once. *Automated remodeling system? So we can manipulate objects that get scanned?*

“Let’s hustle, on the double! Right-left, right-left! To the workshop!” Lu couldn’t contain her awe when she saw the workshop for the first time. We all walked over to the great cube that housed the actual facility.

There were smaller cubes piled up in various places around the floor, and a structure somewhat like a monitor was built up near the middle of the room. In a similar fashion, there was a cobbled-together chair composed of the white cubes right in front of the monitor. Rosetta plonked her butt down on the chair and reached her finger toward the monitor.

“Ten-hut! Gonna scan this country’s castle good, sir!” Babylon had been moved to the skies of Belfast, just above the royal castle, a bit earlier. Naturally, it wasn’t noticed by anyone due to the built-in stealth field.

I was a bit perplexed by the fact that it didn’t even cast a shadow over the city, though... No matter how many times I looked at it, it was unreasonable to think about. But maybe it made sense... Shadows were cast when light was blocked by an object, but in this case light was still going around the object...? I decided it was best not to think too hard about how magic and science worked. I’d simply lose sleep for no good reason.

The monitor displayed an aerial view of Belfast’s Castle. Suddenly, a green light covered the castle for a split-second, only for the display to be replaced by a three-dimensional model of the building.

“Scan completed, sir! I’ll switch to the automated system now! Did you have something specific in mind?” Rosetta turned around and posed a question.

“Uh... anything specific? Well, it definitely doesn’t need to be so big, so could you start by shaving off some of the rooms?”

“Mission orders received, sir!” Rosetta frantically swiped here and there on the screen, slashing and slicing away various rooms on the 3D model. I wondered if it had some kind of smart learning system that automatically picked changes in relation to cuts and tweaks.

“Oh, this rampart tower is pointless, too. You should get rid of it. I’d like the courtyard to be a little wider, as well.” As if responding to my whims, the castle transformed again. I could definitely get used to this kind of remodeling function. It was really useful. I didn’t realize that the workshop could also be used for such intricate designs and renovation. Then again, it was pretty much the same as when I modified my Brunhild, just on a larger scale.

“Anyone else got any changes to make?”

“Ah, yes... I would prefer a wider balcony.”

“I desire a magnificent dojo, so that I might spar and train there, I do.”

“Oh, if she’s getting one, then I want a training zone for unarmed combat, too!!”

“I-If it’s not too much, I’d like a library installed...”

“I’d love a broad moat, and a magnificent drawbridge as well!” As everyone made their own changes, the castle model distorted. It was no longer recognizable as the Belfast Castle it originally was. It had become completely unique. A moat, a gate, a drawbridge, even little buildings around the castle now made it distinct.

“Well then, sir! Is this quite alright?!”

“Yeah, looks fine by me. So, how’re you gonna make it real?”

“A paltry matter, sir! We simply take off to the desired location and plot this data. I flatten the landscape and begin automatic assembly! I estimate it’ll take three days, sir!” I was amazed that she could do it in such a short amount of time. The workshop was truly an amazing tool. Why stop at a castle? We could easily construct a town or hamlet with it.

“Well, that is if the materials are readily available, sir!”

“...Sorry?” What did she mean, exactly? Materials for the castle?

“You mean like the basic stuff, right? Marble, brick, metal, and so on?”

“Not just that, sir! Lumber, glass, brass, iron, cloths like cotton and silk! All these materials are necessary to complete your castle, sir!”

“I don’t have all of that!”

Besides, do you know how long it’s take for me to gather all that stuff?! It’d end up costing me the same as if I just went and bought a regular castle, if not more! We’d maybe save on labor, but it’s not like it’d be a considerable sum to begin with!

“Uhm... d-do the materials have to be brand new?” Lu suddenly spoke up, nervously addressing Rosetta.

“No, ma’am! Old materials are disassembled and rebuilt from the ground up like new anyway, ma’am! Only extremely decayed material would be totally useless!”

“I-If that’s the case, then... there’s an abandoned castle fort to the north of the Regulus Empire. If we harvested it, wouldn’t we have enough materials for our new home?” That made good sense to me. If we used a building that pretty much used to be a castle anyway, we’d save massively on material needs. Even if stuff was tattered, shattered, or worn down, it could be recycled and used again! Lu was a genius.

I didn’t think it would be a big deal if an old abandoned fort was torn down, either, so I decided to go and get permission from the emperor at once. The plan was settled.

Lu suddenly spoke up in concern, despite being the one to suggest it in the first place.

“A-Ah, uhm... actually... about that fortress, perhaps we shouldn’t... or they might be disturbed...”

“What might be disturbed?”

“The... The ghosts...”

Oh come on... Was she serious? A haunted castle?!

◇ ◇ ◇

So the story goes, there was once a benevolent young lord who lived in a castle fortress to the north of Regulus. He had the full trust and support of the emperor, and the people loved him for his kind nature, wonderful work ethic, and generous policies.

But one day everything changed. The young lord's wife passed away. Afterward, he became reclusive, shutting himself inside his castle. Not long after, strange incidents began to occur in the surrounding area...

One by one, people went missing. And one day, a young girl was seen being carried away by the very lord who had locked himself up not so long ago. The people of the village all went to the castle, wanting answers.

Strangely, there were no people guarding the great gates of the castle. Even more strangely, they found the castle completely barren. No servants, no men-at-arms, no guardsmen.

The people pressed on, desperate to find their missing families and friends. What they found instead... were corpses. Mounds of corpses, piles of the dead, lazily discarded and strewn around. The young lord had been committing the most vile of acts. He had researched the art of necromancy, all in the name of returning his beloved wife to the world of the living. Those who lived inside the castle were culled like lambs, used for his twisted experiments. And when they were all used up, the young lord simply started reaching into the nearby village for new livestock.

The people, horrified, clambered and ran their way out of the castle. They appealed directly to the emperor and gave testimony. The army was sent in, and the young lord was easily caught. He was executed without trial.

But it didn't end there. Before long, a new lord was appointed to the castle. He died of a withering disease, so another was appointed. The second fell off a horse and broke his neck. The third lord? Stabbed to death by his wife in a furious rage. Rumors spread that the young lord had left behind a most malignant curse. The fourth lord assigned to the territory refused to live in the castle, and it slowly decayed, with no residents to call it home.

Naturally, the abandoned structure attracted the dregs of society. Brigands and bandits took up lodging there, seeing it as the perfect base. But none of

them stayed for long. All the thieves who were captured had only one thing to say...

“A revenant spirit walks those halls...”

“It’s that castle, isn’t it?”

“Well, that story is from over a hundred years ago.”

A cursed castle... That kind of thing might be super spooky at night, but in the daytime it wasn’t terribly frightening. The air was clear, and there wasn’t a cloud in the sky. If anything, it was quite pleasant.

I brought the usual suspects, along with Lu, to the castle. My monarch trio, consisting of Kohaku, Sango, and Kokuyou were with us too. Before our eyes was an enormous, ominous-looking old castle. I unconsciously crossed my arms. It gave off the vibe that a monster was going to pop out or something.

“We got the emperor’s permission, right?”

“Yes, we do! Destroy it, recycle it, rebuild it, we’re permitted to do as we like.” Sounded good to me. I figured the best course of action would be to move the whole thing off at once. The castle was a little bigger than the one we had designed at the workshop, so there was even a chance we could get all the materials we needed right here. Even if it wasn’t enough, I’m sure we’d be able to afford whatever leftover stuff we required.

“Alrighty, should I just expand a portal underneath this thing to move it all to Brunhild?”

“Please wait a moment... Shouldn’t we make sure everything inside is fine before we do that? It’s possible that thieves, or monsters, or the undead might be inhabiting this place right now.”

“Maybe even the ghost, h-heh...” Elze suddenly cut in as Linze was advising me. Linze definitely didn’t believe that old story, but Elze almost looked a little nervous...

Either way, there was a fair point being raised. It was probably important that we at least check out the interior before moving anything potentially dangerous onto my land. *Hope I don’t run into any weird slimes.*

We passed through the gates and entered the castle, making our way to the entry hall. The interior was just as gloomy and downtrodden as the exterior, dust and cobwebs all over the place.

“Alright gang, let’s split up and search for clues. We can pair off, and have the Heavenly Beasts go with each group that isn’t mine. That way, we can stay in telepathic contact in case something goes wrong. Kohaku, you go with Yumina and Lu, Sango and Kokuyou, you go with Linze and Yae. Elze can come with me.”

“Wh-What? I-Is that okay...? Th-Then let’s, uhm... Yeah, let’s go this way, ahahah...!” Elze spoke up noisily and began a brisk walk to the interior. She abruptly stopped once she got far enough and turned to yell at me.

“H-Hey, Touya! C’mon already!” Linze suddenly smiled and let out a small giggle. I wonder if she knew Elze would end up like this. I briskly walked to catch up with my adorable partner, then started to walk by her side. The other groups all dispersed in their respective directions, too.

I looked outside, noticing a gathering of clouds. *That’s weird, it was clear earlier, wasn’t it?*

“So, Elze. You’re the type who’s scared of ghosts, huh?”

“Huh?! Wait, what are you saying?! Ghosts, where?! There’s no such thing as ghosts...”

“Then what’s that white thing behind you?”

“Eeeek!!!” Elze shrieked out loudly and clung to me.

Ow, ow! This is supposed to feel good, don’t squeeze me like that! It’s like a goddamn bear hug!

“Sorry... was... curtain... Can’t... breathe...”

“Curtain?” Elze turned to see a slightly-yellowed old curtain that was now blowing slightly in the breeze. After she ascertained that it was not, in fact, a ghost, she released me.

Man, I really thought she was gonna break my spine.

“O-Of course it was just a curtain...” An expression of relief came over Elze as she placed a hand over her chest.

“So you’re not good with them after all, then?”

“Ugh...” Elze turned to face me, her cheeks a bright crimson. Her mouth was flapping open and closed like a fish. Honestly, I think she was trying to find some kind of excuse.

“There’s no shame in having fears, everyone has one or two!”

“Well, I guess so... Didn’t expect you to say something like that, though.”

“It’s just that you can’t hit them, so they’re a pain, that’s all...” Elze frowned and turned away. Her face was still red, regardless. That reason felt pretty weak to me. I didn’t think Elze had any issue smacking skeletons or zombies, so ghosts shouldn’t have been that frightening to her.

I grabbed Elze by the hand.

“E-Eek!”

“You don’t need to pretend like that with me. If you’re scared, just take my hand.”

“...O-Okay...” Elze nodded, just a little bit. With our hands locked together, we began searching for suspicious stuff. We started peeking our heads into rooms to confirm whether or not there was anyone around.

As expected, the castle was remarkably big, but it was also covered with dust, looking largely unused. For this amount of dust and spider webs to gather up, you’d expect there to have been nobody in here for a long time. Just as I fell into that comfortable line of thought, something moved in the corner of a room we were checking.

“A-Agh!” Elze freaked out and pulled her whole body against my arm. Two soft, round objects squeezed up against my arm as well.

I’m okay with this.

The bringer of my good fortune, in this case a rat, scuttled out from the corner and left the room.

“I-It was a rat...”

“You’re fine with rats, right?” Normally you’d expect girls to be scared of

things like mice, rats, and roaches, but the girls of this world were quite tough. I didn't think it would rattle her that badly.

"Should we check out the second floor?" As we ascended the stairs, I noticed a massive portrait hanging up at the top of the landing. It was of a fairly young-looking woman in a lovely green dress. She was seated in a rather luxurious looking chair and looking out with a smile.

Is this the wife of the last lord who lived here? She's really beautiful. They're pretty big, too...

"What are you staring at?"

"Huh?! Nothing! Nothing at all!" Elze glared right through me, so all I could do was look away. She definitely didn't lose to Yumina or Lu in the bust department, but perhaps she was worried about being slightly smaller than her sister. It wasn't like I cared, but that was probably just how she felt.

Still holding Elze's hand, we marched up to the second floor. I looked outside a nearby window again, and noticed the clouds were getting darker and more intense. But it was so clear earlier on that it made no sense to me.

《Kohaku, Sango, Kokuyou. Report in, what's the situation on your ends?》

《Nothing to report, my master. Not even a mouse.》

《There'ssss nothing to report here, either.》

《There was only a rat here, a little boring if you ask me.》

It seemed that nothing was happening anywhere. While it was true that you couldn't expect six people to scour every room of the place in this amount of time, thieves or brigands would've definitely made themselves known already. Not to mention the fact that the rooms we'd been in so far were clearly long-abandoned. Every corner of the place was covered in dust. We'd even left footprints in some places. If an animal, monster, or person had been here, they surely would've left a trace.

"Hm, were they just rumors after all, then?"

"Y-Yeah, as I thought... there's n-no way ghosts could exist, right?"

"Well, I mean, there are probably spirits in the world like Wraiths, Phantoms,

and Specters, so I guess you could consider monsters like those to be ghosts. In fact, just yesterday Linze was—”

“Augh! Sh-Shut up! I can’t hear you, I can’t hear you!” Elze stuck her fingers into her ears in an attempt to blot out my words. How childish of her.

Monsters like Wraiths and Phantoms were well-known in this world, but there was no evidence that actually linked them to the souls of the departed. That being said, I think it was proven that zombies and other undead monsters were still linked to formerly-living people.

Hm...? Oh, it’s raining.

I took a look outside, and noticed heavy raindrops pelting down from the sky. I hoped that the roof wouldn’t leak or anything, but given that the building was over a hundred years old, it definitely would.

With Elze clinging on to my arm ever-tighter, I made my way deeper into the castle. It was a lot darker than it was back at the entrance.

Before long we reached the end of the hall, a great big double-door. I wondered if this was the door to the lord’s chambers. I turned the knob. It creaked slowly and spookily, and the door opened.

The room was huge, and the ceiling was high up. A beautiful chandelier surely swayed up there once in the olden days, but now it was a smashed and scattered pile of glass on the floor. The metal parts must have gotten rusty or something.

There was an old worn-down chest of drawers near a ruined fireplace that had a row of vases sitting atop it. In the corner of the room was an old rusted suit of armor, giving an unusual feeling to the situation at large.

“Something doesn’t feel right about this place...” Elze nervously tightened her grip on me. She sure was acting bold for such a frightened girl.

There was a portrait on the wall of this room, too. This one depicted a sturdy-looking fellow in military dress, who sported a fine beard. Beside him was a fairly plain looking woman in a simple dress.

Is this the lord who killed all of his servants? Wait, that can’t be right. The

ownership of this castle changed hands three times after he died. So, does that make him the most recent resident of the castle, then...?

Suddenly, a cold chill went down my spine. Something was very wrong.

Wait, but... this can't be right. If the woman in this portrait is the last lord's wife, then... they're... not big.

"What's wrong?"

"The person in this portrait... she's not the same as the one in the landing portrait, is she?"

"Oh, maybe you're right..." Just as I turned to take a closer look at the portrait, the wide-open door that we entered the room through slammed shut with a bang.

"E-Eeeek?!" Elze screamed and squeezed me even tighter.

Ow, ow, ow!!! Are you casting **[Boost]** right now or something, woman?!"

"Was it the wind or something?"

"Th-The wind?"

This place is falling to bits, so I wouldn't be surprised if there's a wall with a hole letting in the wind somewhere... Wait, what's that? I perked up my ears and suddenly heard a faint clattering noise.

A rat again? No, this sounds more like... a shaking vase? One of the vases atop the chest was shaking and gyrating like crazy.

Suddenly it stopped spinning and lunged at us.

"Gah!" I leaped out of the way, dragging Elze with me. The vase shattered on the wall behind where we stood.

What the hell?! Isn't this a stereotypical horror movie event?!

Another vase jumped up toward us in a similar fashion. I shattered that one mid-air with Brunhild. Right after that happened, an old ink pen and a pair of scissors laying atop a desk came flying at us, then books came flying off some shelves.

I shot them all down with relative ease. Elze wasn't much use at all in the

situation. Just when I thought it was out of things to throw at me, I heard a creak from the corner of the room. The old, rusted suit of armor drew its blade, then began staggering toward us.

“H-Hey now...” Outside the window, lightning crashed and thunder roared. Heavy rain continued to brutally pour down.

The armor stomped and rattled, slowly making its way toward me.

“Strike true, Light! Sparkling Holy Lance: [Shining Javelin]!” The spear of light impaled the suit of armor, and even went through the wall behind it. The armor itself was reduced to hunks of twisted metal.

“O wretched fiends that dare to invade my castle... I will murder you... murder you all...! This is divine retribution... Leave now, this is your final chance...” A disembodied voice echoed through the room. I was mostly surprised by the fact that it was giving us a chance to leave. I’d have expected it to be more unreasonable, to be honest.

“So you’re saying that if we leave, you won’t hurt us?”

“That’s riiight... nothing will happen If you leaaaave.”

“Then I refuse.” With that, I fired off more light spears into a nearby wall. A huge hole burst open, exposing the pouring rain outside.

《Kohaku, Sango, Kokuyou. Tell everyone to get outside and take cover. I’ll fight the ghost alone up here.》

《Very well. Leave the safety of the ladies to us.》

《Of courssse, darling.》 I fired off another light spear as I sent my telepathic message off. I broke through to the room next to this one. The main pillar was still intact, so I didn’t have to worry about the roof collapsing on me just yet.

“Y-You theeeere, wh-what do you think you’re doiiiing?”

“I’m trashing the place. It’s all coming apart anyway, so it doesn’t matter how I do it!”

“W-Wait, you mean... you’re gonna destroy the castle?! Er, stooop this at once, mortalll! The curse will claim your liiife!” Something felt off. I didn’t feel any kind of pressure or intensity at all from this supposed malignant spirit.

“Hey, ghost... Are you actually a ghost?”

“*Cough, cough!* Th-That’s correeeect! I am a wicked ghoooost, bound to this castle by faaate!”

This thing just coughed. Why would a ghost cough?

“If you’re bound to this castle, then you’ll disappear along with it!”

“Thaaat’s trueee, er— Wait, no! It’s not! Even if you trash this place, I’ll live on and haunt you foreeeeverrrr.”

You’re really not impressing me anymore, fake-ghost. Even Elze, who was completely terrified, was now just staring ahead with a blank expression.

“Hey, ghost. Who are you, then? If you just explain what’s going on, I’ll listen. But here’s your last warning, if you don’t explain, I’ll turn this place into rubble.”

“.....” The ghost didn’t reply. I had no idea who they were, but they were definitely here in this castle. With that in mind, I figured they might be up for a reasonable chat.

“Fine then, if you have nothing to say, I’ll bring this place down.”

“Agh!!! W-W-Wait, please! I got it, I got it! Loud and clear! I’ll explain everything, just go to the landing again.”

“The landing?” We left the now-extremely-ruined lord’s chambers, returning to the stairs. Just like before, the portrait of the woman in green was there. I looked at the image of the woman, who was standing up with a chair behind her.

Just as I thought, they’re really big... That meant this portrait wasn’t a portrait of the last lord’s wife.

“Hold on a minute...”

“Something wrong?”

This portrait... it can’t be the wife of the first lord who lived here, can it? This place has changed hands three times already, and I definitely wouldn’t have placed a picture of some dead crazy guy’s wife in my hallway. And hold on, wasn’t this portrait of a woman sitting down?! Why is she standing up now?!

“Agh, h-hold on...”

“Wh-What?! How is that— T-Touya, someone’s coming out of the painting! It’s a ghost!” Elze once again held onto me for dear life. It was no longer, soft, delicate, and playful. It was actually causing me extreme pain, so I wanted her to stop already!

“I-I’m not a ghoooost. I am a maaaagical being. The portrait frame is my true body, and this form is merely a projection of my wiiiill.”

A magical being? So she’s a creature made from magic or something? Does she mean like a homunculus or a golem, maybe? But why a picture frame of all things?

“I see... Well, obviously something like that is gonna get you confused with a ghost. Why’d you try to chase us away?”

“W-Well, that’s because thieves and baaandiiits used to come heeere, and they’d make a real mess of the plaaace. My real body is this fraaame, so if it were to be damaged or destroooyed, then I could dieee!”

Hm, that reminds me, I heard that thieves and bandits made this place their home a few times... Did she drive them out or something?

“So was it you who murdered each new lord who moved in?”

“N-No, that’s a misunderstaaanding! I didn’t murder anyone, got it?! The first lord had a terrible illness and died in the night. The second lord fell from his horse and died of a tragic accideeent! The third lord got into a really bad argument with his craaaazy wife, and she stabbed him! Honeeeest!” As she spoke, she pointed right at Elze with a dramatic flair. Elze suddenly shrieked and took a few steps backward.

So the murdered feudal lords weren’t murdered by a ghost... In fact, they weren’t even murdered at all!

“After thaat, nobody came here for a looong time. Sometimes thugs would come insiiide and start traaashing the place just for fun. It was then that I staaarted to worry about my preeeecious picture frame being damaged...”

“So you donned the guise of a vengeful spirit to protect your own life.” The

woman from the frame nodded her head and gave a small bow.

"Who even created something like you?"

"A briiilliant doctor from a long-dead civilizaaation. She was a true geniuuuus, but certainly a little off-beat and eccentriiic."

"...Wait just a damn minute."

Doctor, woman, eccentric, and genius...? When all those keywords line up, I can only picture the smug grin of a certain individual...

"...What was the name of that doctor?"

"Doctor Regina Baaabylon!"

"That bastard!" *Well, I guess bastard isn't quite right, but why her again?! Why does she keep causing trouble, and why does that trouble always come to me?! What sorcery is this?! I've had enough, damn it! Ugh...*

I decided that freaking out wasn't wise, so I calmed down and resolved to approach the situation sensibly.

"So, you're something that Doctor Babylon created, but why are you here?"

"Uhmm, weeeell... for the longest tiiime I was floating up in the storehouse in the skyyy, but the administrator up there is suuuper clumsy, and about three-hundred yeaaars ago she totally broke part of the wall in theeere! So by accideeent, me and a few other items of intereeest fell aaaall the way down to the ground. Luckily, we were at a looow altituuude, and I fell on to a snooowy mountain, so I made it out intaaact."

"Wait... do you mean the Storehouse of Babylon?!"

"Oh myyyy, do you know of it?" I felt like I was repeating a lot of old events.

First that damn jewel that Kansukay had, then the Blockbracer and Drainbracer combo that General Bazoar had, and now this. The culprit has to be the administrative gynoid running that place. I'll have to find her and mete out justice.

"I'm just a picture fraaame, so it's not like I could do much. I waiiited around until a hiker found me, and from there I was treated like an antiiique. I just went

with the flooow, y'know? For whatever reason, once this old looord put a portrait of his dead wife inside my fraaame, I gained the ability to use magiiic! So I would waaalk around in the dead of night, but slooowly that guy went crazy..."

Oh no... Anyone would go insane if they saw their dead wife walking around every night, wouldn't they?

"So eventually, he started to research reaaaally weird stuff. And just when I thought I'd enjoy some peace and quieeet, the royal army came in and killed hiiim! After that, a new lord moved in. I waaaanted to see what kind of peeerson he was, so I went into his rooom in the middle of the niiight. When he saaaw me, he suddenly stopped moving and dieeed! Then, the next lord saaaw me while he was riiiding his horse. As soon as he did, he lost control and fell oooff!! The lord who came after, well, his wife must've been craaazy. She ran around yelling about how he was a cheaaaater, and hiding another woman in their hooome! Then she stabbed hiiim!"

"But that means—"

"Elze, just don't." I cut off Elze, who was trying to state the obvious. This picture frame person was clearly the source of everything and she didn't even realize it.

The first lord went insane at the supposed phantom of his dead wife roaming his halls. The second clearly went into shock or had a heart attack when he thought a spirit was approaching his frail, ill self. The third obviously went into a panic on his horse after seeing her and lost control. And the wife of the last lord here must've mistaken the frame-woman as her husband's secret lover.

This was most unpleasant.

"Is there something wrooong?"

"No, not really... But now at least we know the story, so I can demolish the castle without any worries."

"Wait, whaaat?! How could you be so wickeeed?!"

"At least hear me out first. I'm offering you alternative accommodations. If you come with us, you can live freely and not have to worry about being

trashed. How does that sound?”

“Oh, really? Is that trueee?! I’d definitely be happy with thaaat!” With that, the negotiations were complete. I had her return to the picture, then unfastened the frame from the wall. As I did so, I was struck by some curiosity and wondered why the lords after the first kept the painting of the first’s wife around. Typically, one would expect a painting like this to be removed during the redecoration process.

“Uhhm, they were gonna toss me out a few tiiimes, but it turns out the guy who painted this thing is really faaamous, so they kept it because of thaaat!”

Well, that made sense. So the artwork itself was actually quite valuable. I wondered if I shouldn’t just remove the picture and sell it off, then. Wasn’t like I wanted to keep the portrait of a long-dead lord’s wife laying around, anyway. I could just put another picture in the frame and the frame-person would be fine, probably.

We returned to the entry and reunited with the others. I roughly explained the circumstances and let them know the truth behind the ghost story. Remnant of the ancient civilization or not, it was a pain in the butt to me. Still, it was hardly something I could change at this point.

Now that the problem was sorted, I opened up a portal and sucked the whole castle back to Brunhild. As you might expect, I was a bit nervous moving something so huge for the first time, but it turned out just fine.

After that, I went to the workshop and spoke with Rosetta. According to her, we still didn’t have quite enough materials. The missing material wasn’t much, though. Just some lumber, glass, and cloth. I had no choice but to cover the cost for that stuff myself. Glass would be easy enough to acquire from old structures, but cloth should’ve probably been bought new. It seemed you could only recycle and reuse fabric up to a certain point.

“Alright, sir! Bring the relevant materials to the workshop whenever you can! They’ll automatically hop to it and be added to the build site based on my projection data, sir! Ah, a query, sir! Where do you want the castle?!” I pointed to the dead center of my territory on the map. That was only natural. Brunhild had a fairly level terrain, so it would be easy to get around and expand for the

most part. In my opinion, it was most sensible to put the castle in the middle. After all, we had no other building plans at the time. If it caused an issue, I'd be able to move the castle again using a **[Gate].**

The castle should take three days to complete, so I should get to work finding the remaining materials...

◇ ◇ ◇

"It really only took three days..."

"Yessir! That's the power of my workshop, sir!" Rosetta pridefully puffed out her chest. Not that there was really anything to puff out.

I looked at the monitor in the workshop. It was displaying my brand new, white castle. Though it was rather small for a castle, it was still considerably larger than my mansion in Belfast.

Apparently worn-out fabrics and cloths couldn't have their integrity restored even if we recycled them, so I ended up buying most of that stuff brand-new. I could've gone out and harvested from silkworm cocoons, but it was easier to just buy it. Making stuff out of raw materials was a pain in the ass anyway. I'd rather spend money than time and effort.

That being said, I chopped a lot of oak and hinoki for the lumber. That was faster and easier than buying.

So, with a bit of elbow grease, the castle was finally built.

We brought down the drawbridge over our vast moat and advanced on toward the inner walls. The water in the moat was crystal clear, and was being sourced from a nearby river. The water purifier was similar to the one employed in the Hanging Garden of Babylon.

It was also possible to manipulate the flow of the water by using floodgates situated both up and downstream. That would be handy during flash floods or heavy rain.

We passed the castle walls, through the sturdy castle gate. We made sure to take time to admire the defensive buildings in the area. There was a station for guardsmen, as well as some well-built towers for men to be stationed inside.

There was a trail that led around to a fully-equipped training field around the back, as well.

We continued on toward a fine marble staircase that opened up into a magnificent garden with a water fountain in the middle.

We crossed through the garden until we finally came across the double doors to the castle interior. We opened up the large doors and went inside. What greeted us was a magnificent hallway with a high ceiling. A beautiful chandelier was suspended in the middle of the room, just above a vast staircase. The staircase split off to the right and left partway through, leading to two other entrances. The stairs were also covered by a beautiful red carpet.

That smoothly curving staircase really reminded me of the royal castle in Belfast. That shouldn't have really been surprising, though. This place used Belfast Castle as a base, after all.

"Ah, how wonderful. There's just something calming about this place." Yumina seemed to feel the same. It was probably because the place was based on the place she had called home most of her life.

We went up to the second floor and came to an enormous door that opened out into a vast room. There was a huge skylight fitted on the ceiling, which seemed to focus the light down in a single ray on to an extremely beautiful elevated chair. *Is this the royal audience room?*

"I-Isn't this a little bit too extravagant?"

Who's supposed to sit there, me?

"This is surely the room where you will entertain visitors from other nations and so on. If it isn't a little gaudy, you may be looked down upon. My dear Touya's magnificence must shine on display at all times!" I could understand what Lu was getting at, but I still found it embarrassing. After a bit of coercing, everyone eventually convinced me to try sitting on the chair. I felt extremely uncomfortable. But everyone said stuff like "Wow!" and "Incredible!" without considering my feelings.

Who's going to send representatives to a country that has nothing in it, anyway? We don't have any vassals, either. This room'll probably go unused for

a good while.

After we left that room, everyone scattered off to look around the castle at their own leisure. I tried to look around too, but wasn't able to see every single specialized room in one go. The ones I did look at included a ballroom, a dining hall, a library, a music hall, a training hall, and a nice courtyard.

Isn't this place a little big? I thought the plan was to make it small-ish and manageable...

After everyone finished looking around, we all gathered together to relax in a large room with a balcony attached to the outside.

"It certainly is spacious here, it is. Cleaning it up will be quite the feat, it will..."

"Nope, we'll be fine. The whole castle is enchanted with **[Protection],** so dirt and wear won't affect it. Well, dust will still pile up, I guess..." As I answered Yae, I looked out to the balcony and saw Yumina and Lu happily chatting with each other and looking out across the landscape. *Ah, youth... Such an energetic time. Wait, that makes me sound like an old man.*

Lapis, Cecile, Renne, and Cesca came into the room bearing tea and cakes. Laim dutifully followed behind them, as well.

"Ah, sir. This is a magnificent castle. I didn't think that I'd be serving inside a castle again just one year after re-entering service."

"Ah, I'm sorry, Laim. You stopped working in a castle, finally became a mansion butler, and then I went and did this..."

"Think nothing of it, sir. Youngsters nowadays certainly seem more hot-blooded. I'm sure things will get even more exciting as the days go by." Laim let out a small laugh as he spoke. Well, if he didn't mind working in a castle again, then I wouldn't mind either.

"Master, there is a garden here with a fountain, but I'd like permission to restructure it." Cesca made a curious request as she poured my tea. She managed the floating garden of Babylon, so it went without saying that gardening was her specialty. Julio was in charge of the courtyard, so I decided to let Cesca do what she wanted with the general garden area.

“By the way, where can I find the naughty training room?”

“Enough!”

This girl really doesn’t know when to stop! As I picked up my teacup, Renne brought a selection of cakes to me.

Renne was slowly becoming a very proficient maid. She was helping out a lot more compared to when she started out. Sometimes she messed up, but that really wasn’t a big deal. As an aside, it seemed that Renne was happily exchanging letters with her grandmother in the empire almost every day. She was making good use of the Gate Mirror.

“Heyyy, sir. Isn’t it a little inconvenient for us to live heeeere? It’ll be difficult for us to go and buy stuff, you knoooow?” Cecile spoke up with her usual soft, elongated tone. She had a point. There was nothing but this castle in this country, so no shopping could be done here at all.

“Well, the current plan, at least for the time being, is to connect the castle to our Belfast home with a **[Gate].** It’s not perfect, but it should help.” I intended to create a special **[Gate]** that could only be used by certain people. By combining **[Search]** and **[Gate],** it should have been simple enough to create a portal that only opened for certain people. Better to be safe than sorry, after all.

“I’ll ask Tom and Huck to continue being the gatekeepers at the mansion. That way, if anything happens over there, they can contact us about it. As for the guard here... should I just summon Cerberus and let him live in the garden?”

“He’s definitely the strongest watchdog we could ask for.” Elze chuckled. The Hound of Hades was now my watchdog. I was fairly sure he’d be able to sniff out any intruders with that powerful nose of his.

It should be fine to summon lizardmen and werewolves to guard the castle, right...? Wait, no... if I go that far, people might start thinking this is some kind of monster territory or something...

“Hm...? What’s that...? Is it a puppy? No, wait, it’s... a bear? Is that a stuffed bear...? Lu, who was out on the balcony, suddenly spoke up. *A stuffed bear? It can’t be...*

I ran out on to the balcony and shifted my gaze over to where Lu was looking. Sure enough, there was a little stuffed bear toddling along through the castle gates. A little stuffed bear accompanied by its master, who was strolling along with a black parasol...

“Goodness me, I look away for a moment and you end up becoming a grand duke or whatever... That’s quite the step up, isn’t it? Color me surprised.” Leen sipped tea and commented on my situation as she reclined on a couch. Paula was nearby, prostrating herself and rubbing her paws together in my direction. The programming of that bear never ceased to confuse me.

“Not to mention the fact that you’ve claimed the Regulus Empire’s princess, too... What a carefree life you’re living now.” The sardonic nature of her sentence did not go unnoticed. It wasn’t like I’d claimed anyone, if anything I got a princess and a country as a package deal.

“Well, I won’t bore you with the details, but here’s the short and long of it. Starting today, I’ll be living here as the ambassador for Mismede. Yep, yep. Nice serving you, Your Dukeliness.”

“What?! Hold on a second, aren’t you serving as the ambassador to Belfast right now?”

“I already delegated that role to another. This place is far more interesting.”

Are you for real...? It’s not like I mind, but changing your place of work on such a dumb whim isn’t exactly good... Well, if the beastking is fine with it, I guess it’s alright.

“There’s one final, personal matter. There are a few youngsters who asked me if they could work here... Could you possibly allow it?”

“They want to work here... in this country?”

“That’s correct, yes. They want to serve the Duchy of Brunhild.”

H-Hrmph... it’s true we don’t have a lot of staff right now, but I don’t want to needlessly employ anyone. I don’t want anything to get complicated, or for bad people to end up being employed by me. Oh, Yumina has her Mystic Eyes, at least. I guess I can use that to see if anyone has any bad intentions.

“Well, I may as well meet with them. Where are they?”

“They’re waiting for you outside the gates.” I took Yumina and Leen along with me to the end of our drawbridge. There were three young people there. Well, I said young people, but it wasn’t like I was old or anything. They were around my age, maybe younger. When the three of them saw me coming, they bent down to their knees and lowered their heads in reverence.

Augh, stand up! That’s not comfortable for me or you!

All three of these people are beastmen... There’s a rabbitboy, a foxboy, and a wolfgirl... I think. Hold on a sec... this rabbit, don’t I know him from somewhere...? Oh, I know!

“Excuse me, you’re Lain, right?”

“Ahaha... it’s been quite some time, but I’m glad you remember me, Sir Touya.” The short, redheaded boy grinned at me.

He was one of the subordinates of the wolf beastman Garm, from the excursion to Mismede. But wait, shouldn’t he be in service to the Kingdom of Mismede, then?

“I’ve retired from the employ of my country, so I’ve come to ask if I may serve your nation instead.”

“I see... But why? Garm definitely seemed fond of you, so I’m sure you were going places in that army.”

“Sir Touya, when I saw you strike down the Black Dragon, I... I was moved beyond words. When I heard you had founded a country, I knew I had to serve you here. I asked Lady Leen for your details immediately.”

Wow, talk about dedication. I don’t deserve that kind of devotion at all... As Lain spoke, the wolfgirl next to him gave a short giggle.

“Now now, Lain, calm down a little. You’re gonna scare Sir Touya off!”

“A-Ah... Forgive my overzealous tone.” Lain turned beet red and bowed his head in shame. The silver-haired wolfgirl glanced sidelong at me, bowing her head.

“The name’s Norn. You worked with my big bro some time ago.”

“Your bro?”

“Norn is Garm’s younger sister, Sir Touya.” Lain piped in with a brief explanation.

Ah, that makes sense.

The foxboy was the only one who remained. He quickly bowed his head. He definitely seemed the overly-serious type. From looks alone, he seemed one or two years older than me. That much was clearer up close. He was really tall, too. His gold-blond fox ears twitched, and his tail wagged dutifully.

“Nikola Strand. The pleasure is mine, my liege.” He stood at attention as he spoke, his posture firm and upright.

Please don’t say “my liege”... I know I’m the head of this duchy, but apparently the term “duke” is a bit more flexible in this world. My title’s different from the “duke” in Duke Ortlinde’s title, too. Over here I guess it’s just something akin to “king of a nation.” Well, there’s no point sweating the small stuff. More importantly...

“Did you say Strand? Are you related to Olga Strand?”

“Olga is a cousin of mine from my father’s side. Her father, the famous merchant Olba Strand, is my uncle.”

Aha, just as I thought. Wait, doesn’t that mean all of these guys have some kind of personal connection to me? Well, I guess that’s not unreasonable. I only just founded this country, so only people related to me, however tangentially, would bother coming to work for me.

“These three are rather skilled individuals, so they’re more than fit to protect your castle.” After hearing out Leen’s recommendation, I looked over at Yumina. She looked back at me, giving nothing but a small nod and a silent smile. It seemed that her Mystic Eyes of Intuition hadn’t picked up anything bad about them.

“Hm... well, nothing’s final just yet. I don’t have a formal Knight’s Order or a standing army, either, so I think your duties will mostly just consist of odd jobs for the time being. If that’s still fine by you, then I’d be happy to have you here.”

“Thank you for having us!” All three of them exclaimed those words in unison. I was pleased by their response.

Now, for the time being... where should they sleep? I should probably divide their quarters by sex. I guess they can just live in the castle for now... I decided to think about that more later.

If they ended up becoming the foundation for a formal Knight Order, then I’d probably end up giving them a separate building.

“Alrighty then, two men and one woman. It’s not quite enough to call a Knight Order yet, but I’m pretty sure we’ll e...ventually... get there... Uhh...?” The air around Lain grew heavy as I spoke. Norn smiled somewhat awkwardly and averted his eyes, while Nikola just looked at the ground as if he’d just heard something awful.

Huh, what’s wrong? Did I say something stupid?

“You absolute twit. Lain is a girl, you know.”

“.....What?” Leen suddenly shot those words out, and I noticed Paula put her paws to her own face as if to say, “Oh man, what are you doing?” Sweat began to spill from all of my pores as I started to process my mistake.

Wait, seriously? I slowly turned my head toward Lain, who was now looking somewhat dejected, rabbit-ears dangling in resignation.

But... that short hair... that handsome, androgynous face... I-I guess it looks a little womanly if I look close enough... Oh geez, oh no.

“...She’s a woman.”

“Oh no, I’m so sorry! Really!!!” I suddenly fell to my knees in apology. It was unprecedented for a sovereign to prostrate himself before his subordinate, but that was just how my country began.



Afterword

Hello again, it's me. Patora Fuyuhara.

Well, we've finally gotten around to releasing the fourth volume. Did you like it?

In this volume, Touya technically became a sovereign ruler, but I don't think that should change up the adventuring formula that much. He'll carry on with his friends, just like he always has.

One of the things you should look forward to is the kind of things that'll happen in Brunhild. Naturally, it won't just be a quiet country that sits there and does nothing, oh no. The surrounding countries will get involved, there'll be riots, explosions, all the good stuff.

As you may have been able to tell, Moon Reader was based on the general idea of a manga cafe.

I used to work in one of those places, so I had some pretty fond memories as I wrote that section. I never expected the experience there to come in handy while I was writing, but here we are. In all honesty, I wish I had the **[Paralysis]** spell, since it would've made dealing with shoplifters a lot more convenient.

Although it was a good job, I never really made use of the services because it was hard for me to feel settled there. I'm the kind of person who can only really settle down with a book he bought and took home.

Honestly, my idea of how those venues work might be a little outdated. I only worked at one a long time ago and haven't visited one since...

But that aside, here are my special thanks.

Eiji Usatsuka, your illustrations are as wonderful as ever. Thank you for so lovingly rendering the new characters that appeared in this volume. Your rendition of Lu is absolutely wonderful. She's truly adorable.

K, as always, thank you so much for what you've done for me. Please stay in

good health, and I look forward to working together even more from now on.

To everyone at Hobby Japan's editorial department, it's all thanks to you that we've reached four volumes. Thank you so very much.

And once again, to all of those who supported me on "Shousetsuka ni Narou," you have my deepest gratitude.

— Patora Fuyuhara



Sign up for our mailing list at J-Novel Club to hear about new releases!

Newsletter

And you can read the latest chapters (like Vol. 5 of this series!) by becoming a J-Novel Club Member:

J-Novel Club Membership

Copyright

In Another World With My Smartphone: Volume 4

by Patora Fuyuhara

Translated by Andrew Hodgson Edited by DxS

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Copyright © 2016 Patora Fuyuhara Illustrations Copyright © 2016 Eiji Usatsuka Cover illustration by Eiji Usatsuka

All rights reserved.

Original Japanese edition published in 2016 by Hobby Japan This English edition is published by arrangement with Hobby Japan, Tokyo English translation © 2017 J-Novel Club LLC

All rights reserved. In accordance with the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, the scanning, uploading, and electronic sharing of any part of this book without the permission of the publisher is unlawful piracy and theft of the author's intellectual property.

J-Novel Club LLC

j-novel.club

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.

Ebook edition 1.0: August 2017