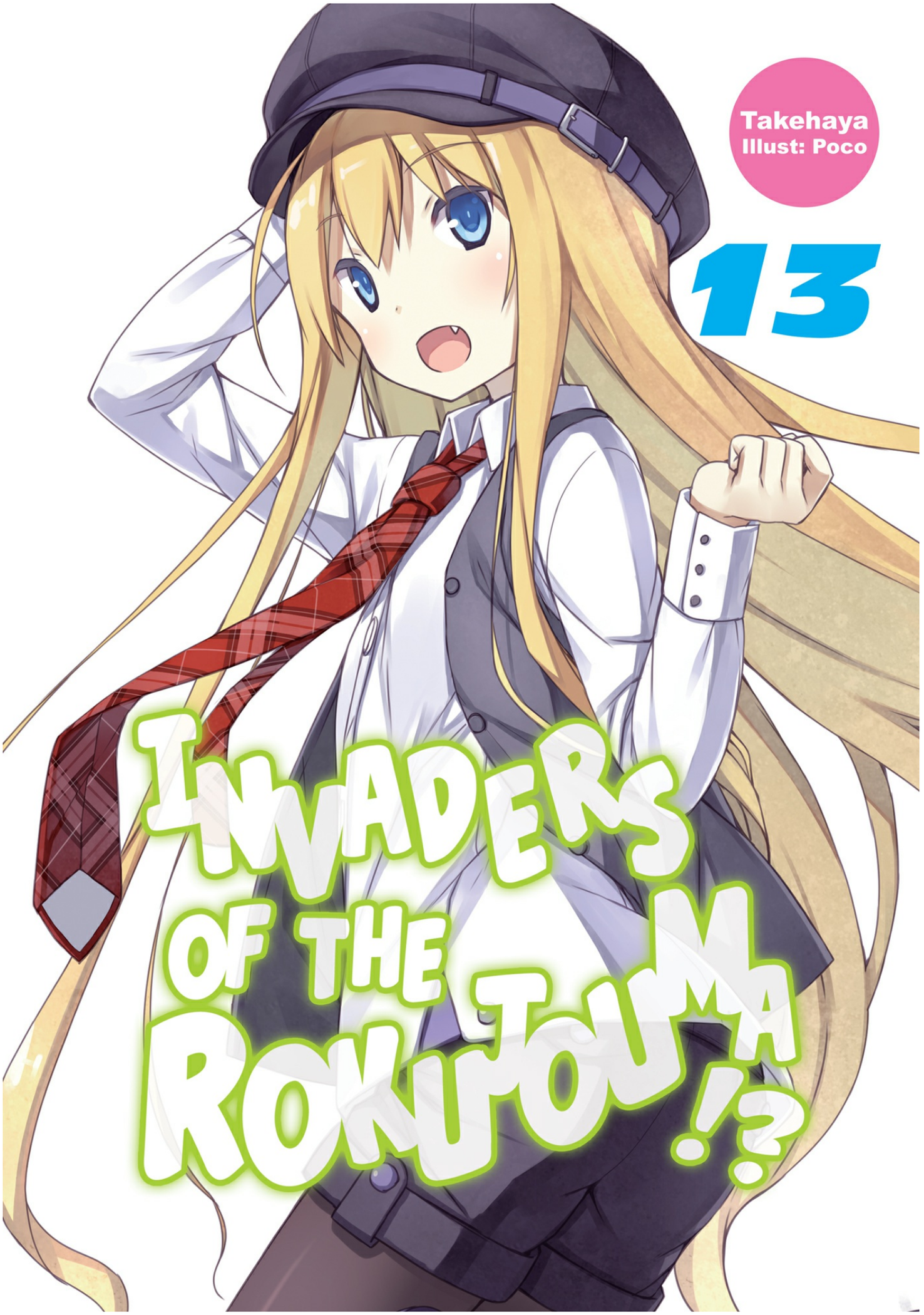

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INVADERS OF THE RYUTOUMA!?


INVADERS OF THE ROKUJOUMA!? 13


INVADERS of the ROKUJOUMA?!
THE BIGGEST CRISIS YET APPROACHES CORONA HOUSE!


"CAN YOU BELIEVE EVERYTHING I'M ABOUT TO TELL YOU?"
"SAY, THEIA..."

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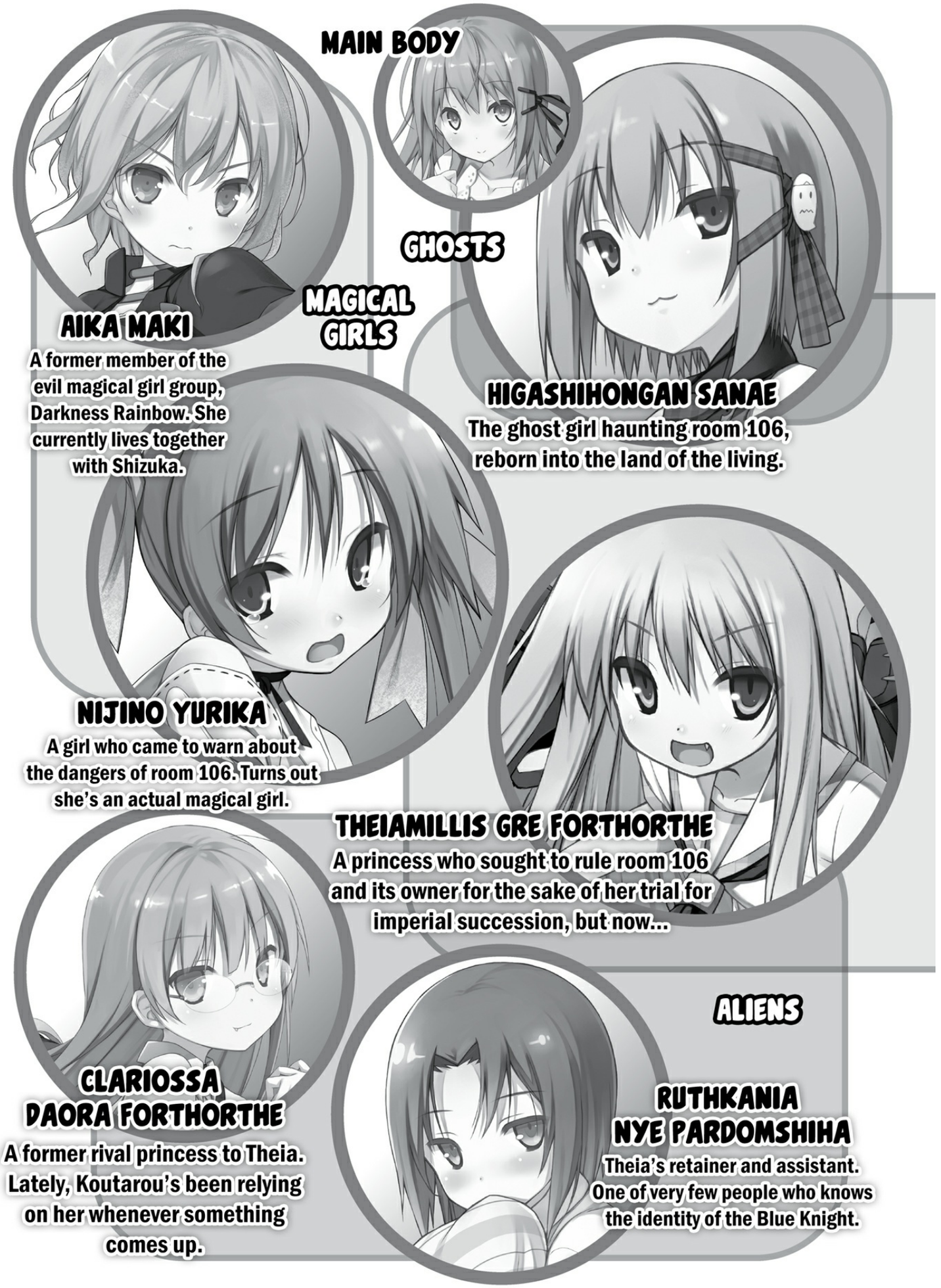
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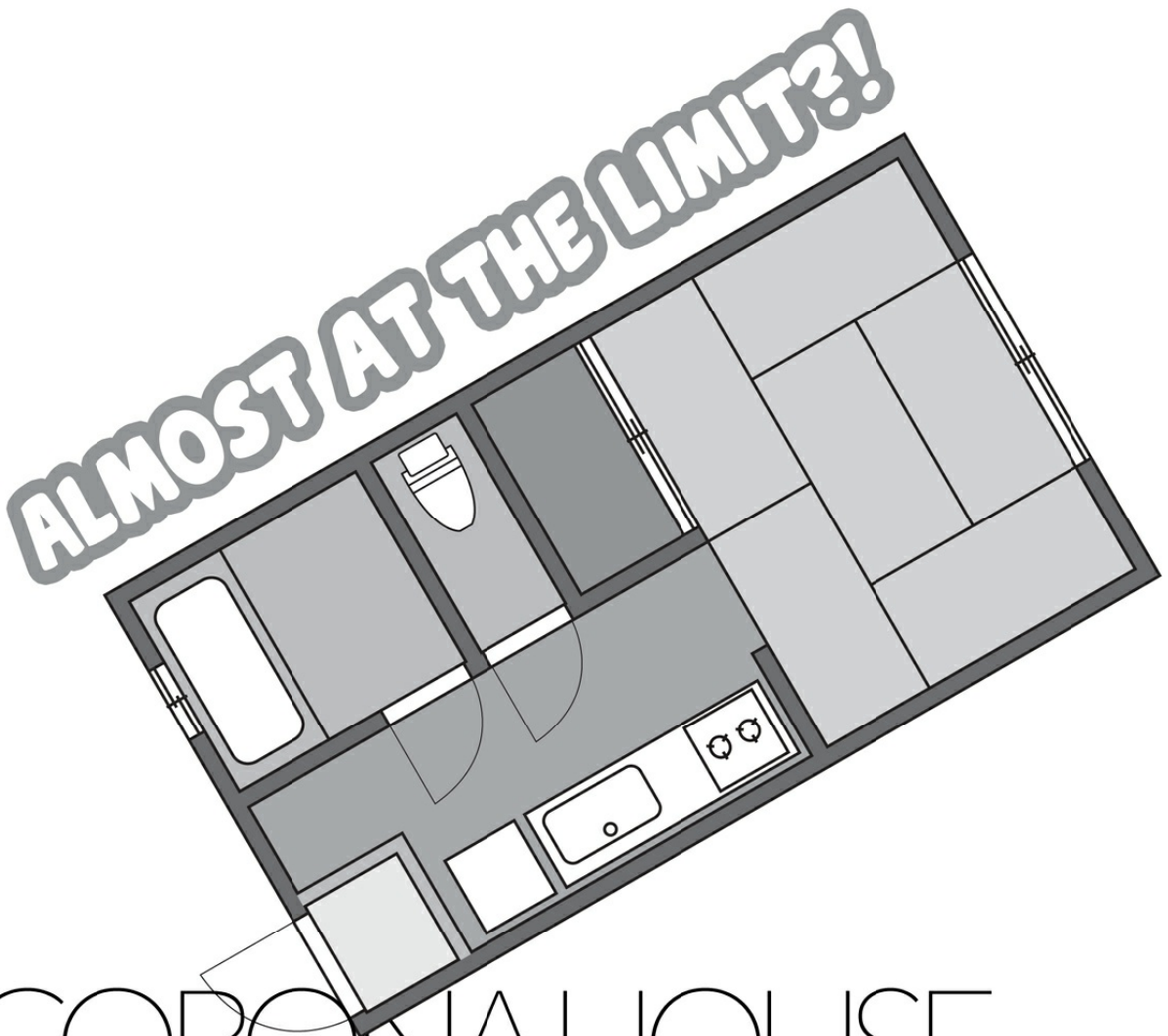
Afterword



INVADERS OF THE ROKUJOUMA!?

FACTIONS MAP


MAIN BODY
GHOSTS
MAGICAL GIRLS
AIKA MAKI
A former member of the evil magical girl group, Darkness Rainbow. She currently lives together with Shizuka.
HIGASHIHONGAN SANAE
The ghost girl haunting room 106, reborn into the land of the living.
NIJINO YURIKA
A girl who came to warn about the dangers of room 106. Turns out she's an actual magical girl.
THEIAMILLIS GRE FORTHORTHE
A princess who sought to rule room 106 and its owner for the sake of her trial for imperial succession, but now...
ALIENS
CLARIOSSA DAORA FORTHORTHE
A former rival princess to Theia. Lately, Koutarou's been relying on her whenever something comes up.
RUTHKANIA NYE PARDOMSHIHA
Theia's retainer and assistant. One of very few people who knows the identity of the Blue Knight.



CORONA HOUSE
ROOM 106

Homecoming

Sunday, April 25th

Even on Sundays, mornings began early in room 106. The reason for that was Koutarou and Ruth's daily training. While everyone else was sleeping, they would go out, just the two of them. That was how things had been for several months now.

However, Ruth didn't appear today. And without her here, there was no one to wake Koutarou up. As a result, he was still lying on the floor, rolled all the way over up against one of the walls of the inner room.

The sound of unhesitating footsteps could be heard passing by Koutarou. The cause of said footsteps sat down in front of the TV and grabbed the remote to turn it on. Lots of anime aired on Sunday mornings, so this was an important time of the week for any anime fan.

"...Ah, Sanae-chan, if you run around like that, you'll wake up Satomi-san!"

Someone was already sitting in front of the TV, and they scolded the new arrival. They were apparently worried about the sound of loud footsteps waking up the owner of the apartment.

"So what? He can wake up if he wants."

"If he wakes up, he'll make me study!"

"So just study. You want to go to university, right?"

"If I'm studying, I can't watch TV!"

"It's okay, you can just record it. God bless modern technology."

"But I want to watch it now!"

The new arrival sat down next to the person who was already there, and they began watching TV together. Fortunately, not even their ruckus was enough to disturb Koutarou. And when their show came on, they began talking less and

less, so in the end, they didn't wake up Koutarou.

"Satomi-kun, sleeping in a place like that... Heehee."

"That's dangerous, Aika-san. If you get too close to Satomi-kun when he's sleeping, you'll regret it."

It wasn't long before another two people appeared in the small room. They intimately exchanged words as they looked at Koutarou, who was sleeping by the wall. After talking with each other all night long, they'd gotten closer.

"Kasagi-san, what do you mean by that?"

"Not only does Satomi-kun sleep in odd positions, but he also tends to hug things while he's half-asleep. When Yurika tried to wake him up last, he caught her in some wrestling moves. Ruth was even mistaken for a tree covered in beetles once."

"Heehee, that's just like him."

"I told you it was dangerous."

"...But I want to experience such interactions between friends too."

"You sure are eccentric, Aika-san..."

"This is the first time I've lived with truly nice people, you know..."

"It's lots of fun. Every day is like an adventure."

"Ahaha..."

Because neither of the two new arrivals had families, they related to each other a great deal. Though they didn't look like it on the surface, deep down inside they were very similar. After the long talk they'd had the night before, they'd come to understand each other and now had a very friendly atmosphere between them.

"We should just wake him up. The room is small enough as it is, and he's all sprawled out on the floor like that..."

"Clan-san, what did you do when you were travelling with Satomi-kun?"

"Lifting him up a little and then dropping him was effective. Fortunately, it was easy to do because that armor could be remote controlled."

It was then that yet another two people appeared, and compared to the others already in the room, these two had a much calmer air about them.

“Hmm, I’ll keep that in mind.”

“I imagine that would be hard for you since you don’t have any strength, Harumi, but... Oh wait, you could just use magic instead.”

“It still doesn’t feel like I’ve really become a magician...”

One of the two new arrivals had a weak constitution and required regular medical care. They even had a checkup scheduled for later this morning with the second figure that had arrived with them. This person had access to extremely advanced medical equipment and was able to treat them much more efficiently than modern medicine could. To the person with weak constitution, this was extremely reassuring. They’d chosen to meet up here at room 106 before proceeding on to the medical exam.

“Has everyone gathered?”

There was one last person on the scene. They poked their face out from the kitchen in the hallway to the inner room. They were often singlehandedly in charge of most of the housework around room 106. And even now, they were wearing a hairnet to hold back their luxurious black hair as they prepared today’s breakfast.



“Theia-chan and Ruth-chan aren’t here yet.”

“Hmm...”

“Kiriha, what’s for breakfast today?”

“Salmon, miso soup, and boiled spinach.”

“All right! A jackpot breakfast!”

“Um, what should we do about Satomi-san?”

“It’s about time to wake him up.”

“Whaaaaat?! Why?!”

“What’s with that reaction?”

“Whenever Satomi-kun wakes up, he forces Nijino-san to study, so she doesn’t want to wake him.”

“Quit being so picky, Nijino Yurika.”

“Maki-chan, you can only say that because you don’t know what it’s like!”

Apart from Koutarou, there were seven others in the room now: Yurika, Sanae, Maki, Shizuka, Clan, Harumi, and Kiriha. These teenage girls had all gathered in room 106 over the past year, each for their own reasons. But as a result, they had all come together and formed a tight bond of comradery.

In addition to Koutarou and the girls, there were two more comrades in their circle. And after washing his face in the bathroom and getting ready for the day, Koutarou realized that they were missing.

“Huh? Where are Theia and Ruth-san?”

Theia was a prideful girl with beautiful golden hair that really stood out. Ruth was serious and honest, and extremely trustworthy by nature. They were a princess and her attendant knight that had come from the other side of the universe. Normally both of them would have shown up in the apartment by now as well, but neither was present.

“...Actually, they ran into a little trouble last night, so they’re busy trying to

deal with that.”

Kiriha was the one to answer Koutarou’s question. She continued her explanation as she filled a bowl with rice.

“They said they’d drop by this morning, however, so they should be here soon.”

“What kind of trouble?”

“The situation is complicated, so it’s better if you hear it from them directly. Just be patient, Satomi Koutarou.”

“I see...”

Koutarou began thinking with a complex expression on his face as he sat down at his usual spot. He then looked at the gate connecting the apartment to the space battleship Blue Knight. Noticing that he looked more serious than usual, Harumi called out to him from the other side of the table.

“Are you worried about Theiamillis-san?”

“I mean, I’m worried about everyone. The situation is more complicated than we thought.”

Yurika and Kiriha’s enemies were secretly working together. And because of that, everyone was in danger. That was an endless source for concern for Koutarou.

“But since I can’t see Theia and Ruth like I can all of you right now... Yeah, it makes me a little anxious.”

If they weren’t right in front of him, he didn’t know for sure if they were okay or not and felt like he couldn’t do anything for them. It put him a bit on edge.

“There’s no need to worry that much, Satomi-kun.”

“Sakuraba-senpai...”

“If this was about something important where Theiamillis-san’s life was at stake, Kiriha-san would have woken you up much sooner.”

“That’s... true.”

Koutarou nodded and looked to Kiriha. She responded with a smile.

I guess that means there's some difficult decision she has to make on her own...

If Theia was in any kind of danger, Kiriha wouldn't be so carefree about it. That said, if it was something simple, Kiriha would have explained what was going on already. That meant it had to be something in the middle. Theia wasn't in danger, but it was serious. It was likely something along the lines of an important decision that had to be made.

"Nothing's going to come from worrying, so let's eat first!" Sanae shouted.

She cheerfully wrapped her arms around Koutarou's neck like always. Breakfast was a source for energy, and she wanted to be able to wait for Theia with her usual enthusiasm.

"...You have a point. All right, let's have breakfast."

"Yeah!"

Thanks to Sanae, Koutarou was looking less stressed now. And thanks to that, the atmosphere in the entire room relaxed a little. In truth, Theia and Ruth's absence was something everyone was concerned about.

Theia and Ruth appeared in room 106 just as Koutarou and the others had finished with breakfast. The two girls looked tired, and their expressions were dark and gloomy.

"...Good, you're all here."

Immediately after arriving, Theia addressed everyone in a serious tone. Ruth quietly stood behind her, watching. Just seeing the two like that was enough for Koutarou to get an idea of the severity of whatever was going on.

"Everyone, there is something I'd like to say. May I have some of your time?"

With that, the other girls who had been doing various and sundry things gathered around the tea table without a single complaint. Waiting until everyone sat down, Theia slightly lowered her head.

"Thank you, I appreciate it."

"Theia, what happened?"

As Koutarou urged Theia to continue, their eyes met. After looking at him for a long moment, Theia slowly began explaining as she started to tear up.

“Actually... it seems my mother has fallen ill in Forthorthe.”

“Your mother? You mean Elle... Um, you mean the current empress, Her Majesty Elfaria?”

Koutarou pulled Theia’s mother’s name from his memory banks, and Theia nodded solemnly in response.

“Yes. My mother’s body isn’t as hardy as mine. It seems that she was a bit overtaxed with her official duties and has taken ill because of it.”

“Oh yeah, present Forthorthe is...”

Koutarou wasn’t very knowledgeable about the political state of present-day Forthorthe, but he remembered what Theia and Clan had told him. Theia’s mother, Elfaria, was a pacifist whose political agenda included disarmament on a national level. As a result, her relationship with the army soured, and all reforms ground to a standstill. Since Elfaria was up against extreme backlash from the military, Koutarou could easily imagine how busy she must be. It simply sounded like she was overworked.

“That’s why... though I am very reluctant to do so...” Theia paused for a moment to look at everyone gathered around the tea table before finally continuing. “I am thinking of returning to Forthorthe, and... I will be giving up my right to the throne.”

When Theia spoke those words, room 106 practically froze over.

Theia had originally come to room 106 in order to claim her place in line for the imperial throne. She’d been given a trial to prove she was worthy, and for that, she needed to seize control of Corona House room 106. That’s why she had come to Earth and how she had met Koutarou and the others. She was determined not to return to Forthorthe until she claimed rulership of the apartment.

At least, she had been until her mother had suddenly fallen ill. Theia’s real reason for wanting to become the crown princess was so that she could

strengthen her own influence and be of help to her mother, who was in a tough position politically. Her admiration for the Blue Knight also largely came from her desire to protect her mother. But that desire was so strong that, with her mother ill, Theia felt she had no other option but to return to Forthorthe and help take care of her. She wasn't childish enough to give up her mother for the sake of her own happiness.

And so Theia had decided to leave Earth and return home. She still hadn't completed her trial, but this was all so sudden that she was pressed for time. If she waited until her trial was complete, it might be too late. So though she was reluctant to leave, it was something that she had to do.

In order to leave Earth, there was a lot that needed to be taken care of, which was why Theia hadn't slept at all. She worked well into the night, and even as the sun was dawning on a new day, Theia was still preparing for her journey home.

"I didn't think there would be much... but looking at it now, there's a lot more than I imagined."

"That's just a sign of how much we've gotten involved with the people of this planet."

"Indeed..."

She had to submit a leave of absence to Kisshouharukaze High School, say her farewells to all her close acquaintances, and finally, pack up her luggage for her return to Forthorthe. She was currently in the middle of carefully putting all of her belongings into plastic containers in her private room on Blue Knight.

The schoolbag she carried to class. The notebooks she used during class. The uniform and accessories she wore to school. The swimsuit she wore to the beach last year. The books and CDs she'd bought while on Earth. The game console and games she would stay up at night to play.

She had things both from room 106 and from her own private room on the Blue Knight. They were all associated with precious memories, and she fondly recalled each of them as she put the items away. Like Ruth had said, these weren't just belongings. They were precious mementos that served as proof of

the time Theia had spent on this planet and how much she'd grown.

"It's hard to leave this planet behind..."

"Yes..."

When she'd first come, Theia wanted to clear her trial and return to her mother as quickly as possible. She only thought of the locals as neanderthals, and had no intentions of staying in an underdeveloped place like Earth for long. But now, she wanted to stay on this planet for as long as she could. She'd begun thinking of this little blue planet as something special.

Theia stopped organizing her luggage and looked towards a wall in the room. There hung a crimson tulip, carefully preserved. That flower was the most valuable treasure Theia had obtained while on this planet. Seeing Theia staring wistfully at it, Ruth stopped organizing as well and called out to her.

"...I expect Satomi-sama is your number one regret about leaving, Your Highness?"

There was a second crimson tulip decorating Ruth's room. They were both gifts from the same person.

"Yes. We won't be able to fulfill my promise of always being with him..."

In the past, Theia and Ruth had decided to live together with the man who'd gifted them the tulips. But with the sudden development of the situation concerning Theia's mother, they'd have to go back on that decision. The man who'd given them the tulips couldn't leave room 106 as things were. But Theia had to return to her mother no matter what. It seemed inevitable that they'd be separated now.

"I wonder if this was the extent of our will..."

"Your Highness..."

Theia had resolved themselves to walk this path with him, yet it had come to such an abrupt end. Theia was unbearably saddened as she got to learn how weak her love was in the end. Ruth felt the same way. She too had resolved herself to walk the same path as Theia.

"I'm sorry, Koutarou... Forgive me..."

Theia instinctively spoke the name of the person who'd given her the tulip. Filled with bittersweet emotion, her trembling voice hung in the air.

"Theia, do you have moment?"

That was when a visitor appeared outside of Theia's room.

Koutarou had been given full authority to operate Blue Knight and all of its available functions, which included permission to enter the living quarters reserved for royalty. Koutarou had used that authority to come visit Theia and Ruth.

"Just a moment..."

Koutarou could hear Theia's voice coming from the intercom placed by the door to her room. He was standing in front of it, waiting for her to let him in and giving his outfit one last look-over. Since this was such an important moment, he didn't want anything to be out of place.

Thinking about it, this might be the first time I've come to see Princess Theiamillis...

In the past, Koutarou had only ever come to visit his friend Theia, and never Princess Theiamillis. That made this a milestone in a way, since it was a sign of acknowledging her as a proper princess. As a result, he was feeling a little nervous.

"...All right."

The door silently slid to the side as Theia invited him in. It revealed a petite girl in a dress who had long, blonde hair flowing over her shoulders. Upon seeing her, Koutarou looked down and kneeled.

"It is an honor to meet you, Princess Theiamillis. I am Satomi Koutarou, a wandering knight without a lord."

Koutarou spoke something similar to a line he'd practiced for the play. Thanks to that, the words fell from his lips quite naturally.

"Koutarou...?"

"I came here today to make a request of Her Highness. I seek your permission

to enter the room.”

“What are you...”

Theia was puzzled by this version of Koutarou, who had a completely different air about him than usual. That’s why, despite his polite request, she simply stood there and stared at him.

“Your Highness, Satomi Koutarou-sama is seeking permission to enter.”

Sensing that Koutarou was up to something, Ruth urged Theia ahead on his behalf.

“Ah, yes... Permission granted. You may enter.”

And finally, she invited him in.

“I am honored. Please pardon the intrusion.”

Still a little nervous, Koutarou entered Theia’s room. Since Theia didn’t know what Koutarou was thinking, she was equally nervous. Her heart was racing. The two of them stood facing each other as if this was the first time they’d met.

“Allow me to introduce myself once more. I am Satomi Koutarou, a wandering knight without a lord.”

Koutarou walked up to Theia and kneeled again as he introduced himself once more.

“Wh-What business do you have? Let’s hear it.”

Theia answered in a somewhat shrill voice. She was still quite confused. Koutarou’s way of speaking and his attitude were completely different from normal. Despite it being a Sunday, he was wearing his school uniform. But unlike usual, he had the top button of his shirt buttoned and his collar properly straightened. He was even wearing his school cap, which he rarely ever did.

Your Highness... Master...

Ruth gently watched over Theia, who still looked confused, and Koutarou, who looked very serious. She felt like something special was happening.

“I came here today to make a request of Her Highness.”

Still looking down, Koutarou began to speak again. Seeing him like that, Theia

only grew more and more disquieted. She started wondering if the person in front of her was really Koutarou at all.

“And that is...?”

Theia urged Koutarou on. She couldn’t stand the unease that had come over her. Koutarou responded by raising his head and staring straight into her eyes.

Ah...

In that moment, Theia’s anxiety vanished without a trace and she returned to her usual self. There was a smile on Koutarou’s face—his usual smile that Theia and Ruth so loved.

“My skills are average, and I am a mere country knight with a domain just six tatami mats large.”

Koutarou pulled out a large sheet of paper and placed it on top of a nearby container.

That’s...?!

Theia’s eyes opened wide. The sheet was the scoreboard that they’d used to compete for rulership of the apartment. It had Koutarou and the other invaders’ names written across it alongside their scores. However, only two of the names remained now: Theia’s and Koutarou’s.

Theia had 218 points, just like she recalled. But Koutarou had 862 points. Everyone else’s points were gone, apparently given to Koutarou based on the total. They were the only two left in the running.

“Princess Theiamillis, please make me one of your vassals.”

“What...?”

Theia’s brain ground to a halt when she heard those unexpected words. She couldn’t understand why he’d said that.

“Congratulations, Your Highness!”

Ruth shouted out with a joyous expression in her stead. Having observed all this from the sidelines, she understood exactly what Koutarou meant.

If Theia accepted Koutarou’s request, Koutarou would become her vassal in

both name and reality. That would mean all of the points on the scoreboard would effectively become Theia's, which would in turn mean that the apartment would be hers. Adding it all up...

"Rejoice, Your Highness! Your trial is complete! With this, you will have earned your right to the imperial throne, Your Highness!"

"My right to the throne...?"

It would mean that Theia had successfully completed her trial, cementing her place in line for the imperial throne.

"Yes, Your Highness! You have splendidly overcome the trial and fulfilled your obligation as a princess!"

"I... acquired the rights to the throne...?"

Theia looked at Ruth with blank surprise written all over her face. But even as Ruth happily smiled back at her, it didn't feel real. As if to get a secondary confirmation, Theia looked to Koutarou.

"Koutarou, is what Ruth is saying true? Have I completed my trial?"

"Almost. You have yet to give me an answer, Your Highness."

"My answer?"

"Yes, Your Highness. Will you accept me as your vassal?"

"Ah..."

Based on Koutarou's calming tone and gentle look, Theia gradually began to understand the situation.

Koutarou has accepted me as his master...

Before long, her understanding evolved into great joy. Theia's heart was pounding like the bassline of a rock song. She suppressed her impatient feelings and called out to Koutarou.

"S-Satomi Koutarou..."

Theia was desperately trying to calm herself, but she was stuttering and her voice faltered. Her vision began to blur with the tears filling her eyes. There was no way she could stay calm at a time like this. The magical day had finally come.



“Yes.”

Koutarou kept his head bowed as a sign of subordination. Seeing that, Theia made her declaration.

“I will accept you as my knight, and formally grant you the title of Theiamillis’s Blue Knight.”

“...I will humbly accept, my princess...”

Thus the pledge between master and servant was made.

Learning that Theia would be returning home, the first thing Koutarou worried about was her right to the throne. With her mother ill, the chances of Theia returning to Earth any time soon were extremely low. And if she couldn’t make it back, that would essentially mean she’d be throwing her trial and giving up her place in the line of succession for good.

So Koutarou had gone to the other invaders and begged them to trust in him and in Theia, and to temporarily entrust him with all of the points. Each of the girls had accepted. Koutarou then became Theia’s vassal. And with that, Theia became the rightful ruler of room 106 and thusly completed her trial.

However, with the threat of the radical faction and the evil magical girls looming, room 106 couldn’t be left under Theia’s sole rule. Something would have to be done about that, but they had a plan.

Corona House room 106 would be appointed the Satomi territory of the Mastir family, and Koutarou would become its lord. And when Theia had returned to Forthorthe, she would grant him control of the points he’d borrowed from the other girls, and he would return them accordingly.

By doing that, Theia would complete her trial and the situation would return to as it had been. It was a somewhat forced method, but there should be no problems in theory. It was a tricky solution to a tricky problem, only made possible thanks to the mutual trust between Koutarou and the invaders. Normally, Theia wouldn’t have accepted such charity, but in her current predicament, it was the only option.

Immediately after making their pledge, Theia rushed towards Koutarou and threw herself at him.

“Koutarou!”

“Whoa!”

Completely unprepared, Koutarou hurriedly tried to catch her while still kneeling. Theia didn’t doubt for a moment that he would catch her, and leaped at him with all her might. Koutarou had no choice but to reciprocate and embrace her with all his might.

“You said you’d become my vassal, Koutarou! I heard it with my very own ears! You won’t get away with taking it back now!”

Her intense joy streaked down her face in the form of tears, and she held on to Koutarou’s head with both arms. She was like a child that had just gotten the stuffed animal she’d always dreamed of, and she hugged Koutarou as hard as she could as if to close the distance between them as much as possible.

“I am your master! No matter how far apart we may be, I am your sole master now!”

“H-Hey, Theia... you’re getting a little ahead of yourself. What about the sword?!”

In Forthorthe, it was tradition to touch the left and right shoulders of the knighted person with the flat of a royal sword to officially bestow their title upon them. But Theia had skipped all that and gone straight to hugging Koutarou instead.

“It’s fine! I already did that half a year ago! Your answer is just half a year late!”

“What?”

“Heehee, Her Highness is right, Satomi-sama. The ceremony of bestowal was actually performed half a year ago after your first fight with Clan-sama. Of course, you were asleep at the time...”

With a smile, Ruth explained what Theia meant to the confused Koutarou.

Half a year ago, during their first play, Koutarou had saved Theia from an

attack by Clan. And as thanks, Theia had performed the ceremony to declare Koutarou her knight. Back then, Theia still wasn't being entirely honest with herself, so she had secretly conferred the title on him while he was asleep. And with Koutarou finally giving her his answer today, the ceremony that had been initiated over half a year ago was finally complete.

"The ceremony is now complete! Take pride, my knight!"

"Don't be unreasonable! How can I take pride when you're hanging on to me like this?!"

Koutarou was still in a kneeling position with Theia's arms wrapped around his head. He found it hard to take pride in that.

"You can do it if you try!"

"I can't! Jeez... Here I was taking this all serious and everything..."

Since he was officially going to become Theia's vassal, he'd expected there to be a formal ceremony. Theia, however, had completely overlooked and bypassed that. Dumbfounded, Koutarou shrugged off his knightly persona and returned to speaking the same way he usually did.

"What's important is confirming that your feelings and oath have forged a new bond between us, not the ceremony itself. There's no ceremony more meaningful than this," said Theia.

"You're absolutely right... But you're just using that as an excuse, aren't you?"

"Auuugh... Could it be... that you really hate me?"

Theia's expression turned gloomy. She eased her grip on Koutarou a little and peeked at his face with a worried look.

"Of course not!"

"Then it's no excuse. This is fine."

But she soon returned to a smile and embraced Koutarou's head with even more strength than before. Since she knew it wouldn't be long before they parted, she wanted to hold the boy she loved for as long as possible.

"Come on..."

“Make sure you remember that, Koutarou,” Theia whispered into Koutarou’s ear as she gently stroked his hair. “This is me. This who I am. I am not a perfect princess. I am rough, full of flaws, and selfish. Even if we’re far apart, make sure you don’t forget that...”

“Say, Theia...”

“Yes?”

“You don’t have as many flaws as you say... You’re just unfair.”

“Heh, I’ll take that as a compliment.”

The hand stroking Koutarou’s hair was unbelievably gentle.

“I’m not going to say goodbye.”

“Yeah. We’ll meet again, right?”

“I don’t know when... but that’s what I’m planning.”

Theia would be returning to her mother in Forthorthe. And until the problems back home were resolved, she wouldn’t be able see Koutarou again. But she knew she didn’t want to leave it at that. Someday, she would return to Earth and live together with Koutarou. And if the problems around room 106 were resolved by then, she might even take him back to Forthorthe with her. So though she reluctantly had to leave for a while, she hadn’t given up on a bright future.

“But... it’s strange,” Theia muttered quietly, still stroking Koutarou’s hair.

“What is?”

“Just a while ago, I was feeling guilty over not being able to keep my promise to you. Even though I decided to live here with you, here I am leaving you behind...”

“As long as we meet again, there’s nothing to feel guilty about.”

Koutarou too had decided to believe that their future would be bright.

“Yes... Maybe it’s because you’ve became my vassal, but that’s how I feel myself. Aren’t I self-centered?”

“It’s better that way. You’re a leader, remember? People will feel more at

ease if you remain optimistic.”

“Is that how it works?”

“Of course. You’re my princess, you know?”

“...”

“What?”

“I... I’m really happy, but... it’s a little embarrassing...”

“You... You’ve been saying that for an entire year, so don’t get embarrassed now.”

“But... now that I’m actually your princess, I... you know? I guess I wasn’t mentally prepared...”

“...I think that’s the part of you that’s unfair.”

As if answering Theia’s feelings, Koutarou hugged Theia back.

“You’re my knight, after all...”

And so the two formed their bond as master and servant as the scheduled hour of their separation drew nearer. However, neither of them were pessimistic. They both believed that bond would draw them back together one way or another.

Once they were done talking, Theia sent Ruth to see Koutarou off the ship, while she stayed behind in her room. She said that she was going to go back to organizing her luggage.

“I better thank Her Highness later...”

As Ruth was walking down the hall, she looked back over her shoulder for a moment. Glancing at the door to Theia’s room, she felt a little apologetic.

“What do you mean?”

When Koutarou asked that, Ruth turned to look at him. Because it was just the two of them now, Koutarou and Ruth had their arms linked together as they walked. They were close enough together that they could kiss.

“Her Highness most likely did this in order to give me some time to say farewell to you.”

“Theia...”

Hearing that, Koutarou turned to look behind him too. The door to Theia’s room was slowly getting further away, but Koutarou felt like he could see her smiling.

“She’s been a little too kind lately. She should be just a little more selfish...”

“It might be just as you say, Master.”

“Huh?”

Koutarou stopped and looked at Ruth. She stopped and looked back at him in response.

“If Her Highness knew who you really were, I wonder if she’d still be so quick to return to Forthorthe...”

Ruth questioned whether or not Theia would be able leave Koutarou behind on Earth if she knew that he was the Blue Knight. Objectively speaking, leaving behind the Blue Knight, the most beloved knight in all the history of Forthorthe, wasn’t something a royal would do. But as things were, she couldn’t take him with her, either. For that, she would have to wait until Kiriha and the other invaders’ problems were resolved. But she didn’t know what would happen to her mother during that time. And if, in the worst case scenario, Elfaria were to lose her life while Theia was away, then in an equally worst case scenario, she might choose to take her own.

Worried about affecting Theia’s decisions, Koutarou had asked Ruth not to reveal his identity as the Blue Knight to her. Back then, Ruth had mixed feelings about it, but now she felt like Koutarou had made the right choice in keeping it a secret.

“All things considered, a Forthorthian royal would never be able to abandon the Blue Knight, huh?”

“That’s right, Master. I believe you acted wisely, and I am profusely grateful for that.”

Ruth bowed deeply to Koutarou. She was extremely thankful that he'd held her back. If, overcome by her excitement, she'd told Theia the truth, things might be playing out for the worse right now.

"But, personally speaking... both Her Highness and I deeply regret having to part with you."

Tears formed in Ruth's eyes as she looked up at Koutarou. Just like Theia, she had sworn to live by his side.

"Ruth-san..."

"I'm sorry. I, I..."

The tears driving her to silence, Ruth threw herself at Koutarou. To her, parting with Koutarou was just as painful as having to part with Theia would be. Their meeting had been like a miracle, yet now they had to leave him. No matter how much they swore to meet again, having to say goodbye was still extremely painful. And unable to bear it any longer, all Ruth could do was cry.

"Master, why did you appear to us like this? You should have done it in a much more normal way!"

If their meeting had been simpler, they could just take Koutarou with them. But fate hadn't allowed for that. There were other people that needed Koutarou, so Theia and Ruth couldn't keep him for themselves.

"I'm sorry..."

All Koutarou could do was apologize. It was hard for him to part with Ruth and Theia too. But there was nothing else he could do. Koutarou had things he needed to do on Earth, and Theia had to return to Forthorthe to be with her mother. And so all he could do was apologize to the crying Ruth and gently hug her.

"Satomi-sama, Satomi-samaaa!"

Ruth continued to hold on to Koutarou and cry for a while longer, as if she were shedding tears for both her sake and Theia's.

Finishing their preparations, Theia and Ruth were set to leave that night.

“Everyone, thank you for everything up until today.”

“We had a wonderful time. Words of gratitude are not enough for you all.”

Standing at the far end of room 106, Theia and Ruth were saying their farewells to everyone. Behind them was the glowing wall that connected the room to Blue Knight. Just like they’d arrived through it a year ago, they’d be departing the same way tonight. And once that gate disappeared, it would be a long time before anyone saw it again, if they ever did at all.

“Theia, this isn’t the end, right?”

Even Sanae, who was always energetic, wore a gloomy expression now that the time to say goodbye had come. She looked at Theia and Ruth with a frown as she thought back to something Theia had said to her once.

When Sanae was about to reenter her body, Theia had told her that there was a time when she was worried about being an alien, but that she had decided to forcibly overcome that fear and any obstacles in front of her. She told Sanae she’d have to overcome the loss of her memory the same way.

That’s why Sanae wanted to overcome this parting with just as much bravery. Though Theia had to leave, Sanae believed that they would meet again someday.

“Of course. I won’t give up over something like this. I’ve decided to live with you all. It might not be possible right away, but I will definitely return.”

“You promise?”

“I don’t lie. You can count on my return. Just wait for me.”

“Yeah!”

Living up to Sanae’s hopes, Theia nodded confidently. Sanae smiled brightly to see it. It wasn’t like they would never meet again. In that case, she should see them off with a smile.

“Theia-chan, for you...”

Yurika approached Theia and Ruth after she was done talking to Sanae. She presented them with a shopping bag from a nearby convenience store.

“Hmm? What’s this?”

“It’s some snacks and the latest manga. I figured you might get bored on your spaceship...”

The bag was filled with parting gifts. Forthorthe was ten million light years away. And even with Forthorthian technology, such a long journey would take several days. That’s why Yurika had thought of getting them something to kill time with, and after consulting the contents of her wallet, she decided on snacks and manga.

“Thank you, Yurika, I’ll make sure to enjoy these.”

Theia accepted Yurika’s present with a smile. Truth be told, she had tons of ways to kill time aboard Blue Knight. Such entertainment was considered a necessity for space travel. And if they froze the time aboard the ship during their journey, there wouldn’t be any need for it at all.

But Theia was happy to receive Yurika’s token of consideration, so she accepted the gift without a peep to the contrary. She didn’t say that she didn’t need them, nor did she question who would give a princess snacks and comic magazines from a convenience store.

“When I return, I’ll make sure to bring some books and snacks from Forthorthe.”

“Yes, please do!”

Theia was happy that Yurika didn’t think of her as anything other than a good friend. She was far happier over that than being treated with respect as a princess.

“Theia-dono.”

“Kiriha... I’m sorry for having to leave so suddenly.”

When Kiriha approached after Yurika, Theia apologized politely. The balance of power in room 106 would shift when she left, and that would cause the most trouble for Kiriha. She was worried that the radical faction that opposed Kiriha would pick up momentum.

“Satomi Koutarou will be your representative, and the existence of the evil

magical girls has been proven now. My adversaries will likely not take any more action for some time.”

However, Kiriha herself didn’t seem too worried. Koutarou, now a lord, would still preside over the apartment like he always had. And in addition to that, the evil magical girls had revealed themselves. The radical faction was secretly connected with the evil magical girls, but since they couldn’t officially acknowledge that, they wouldn’t be able to work together in the open. Thanks to that, Kiriha had plenty of time to prepare for whatever might happen next.

“I see. Well, if you say so, it’s probably true.”

“Leave it to us. We will protect this place until you return.”

“Please do. I’m trusting you.”

Theia knew very well just how tough Kiriha was. Even though she could overwhelm Kiriha in terms of sheer firepower, she had never actually been able to beat her. She was a worthy rival, and Theia felt comfortable leaving things in her competent hands.

“Pardomshiha.”

While Theia and Kiriha were talking, Clan tugged on Ruth’s sleeve.

“Clan-sama... This is goodbye for now.”

“Yes. It will be lonely here without you.”

Clan was going to remain on Earth instead of returning to Forthorthe alongside Theia. Officially, she was here on a scientific research mission, but in truth, she was staying behind to back up Koutarou and the others.

“More importantly, Pardomshiha, I think you might need to brace yourself.”

“Oh?”

“I haven’t heard anything about Her Majesty Elfaria falling ill from my information network. She might be bad off enough that they don’t want the information public... so please take care of Theiamillis-san.”

“Thank you very much, Clan-sama. I am very grateful.”

Clan’s family, the Schweigers, was at odds with Theia’s family, the Mastirs.

And since the Schweiger family was renowned for its prowess and advancements in the fields of science, they had a favorable relationship with the military, unlike the Mastir family under the rule of the peaceable Elfaria. As a result, Theia and Clan had access to different networks of information through their families.

Information regarding the current empress's health would undoubtedly be something the military and the Schweiger family would be interested in, so if it hadn't reached Clan's information network yet, that likely meant the royal family in power—the Mastirs—was keeping it on a very strict need-to-know basis. Though she didn't dare say it out loud, Clan even feared that Elfaria might have already passed away.

"What are you two talking about?"

That was when Theia, who had finished talking to Kiriha, came over to her two fellow Forthorthians. As she did, Clan and Ruth abruptly cut off their conversation and offered her smiles.

"I was just passing on some things to Clan-sama."

"Th-That's right."

"I see. We'll leave the rest to you after we're gone, Clan."

"Yeah... Leave it to me."

Clan and Ruth had quickly changed the subject, but fortunately, Theia didn't seem to suspect anything. She smiled and gave an honest farewell to Clan as well.

"Theia-chan, this is from me and Aika-san."

"It's only been two days, but... take care."

"Thank you. You two take care too."

Shizuka and Maki had also prepared a parting gift. When Theia peeked into the paper bag they handed her, a wide grin spread across her face.

"Clothes, huh? What a lovely surprise."

Shizuka and Maki had gotten her clothes and accessories from the shop in

front of the station. The fashion was unique to Earth, and a gift like clothes would last for a while, so Theia would be able to enjoy them for some time to come. As a girl, Theia was happy to receive something like this.

“...I feel like I’ve lost...”

Yurika, comparing the price point and quality of her present with Maki and Shizuka’s, slumped her shoulders.

“That’s not true, Nijino-san. Theiamillis-san will enjoy your present too.”

“Yeah, Harumi’s right. Yours was nice in its own way, so there’s nothing to be embarrassed about.”

“Thanks...”

“Also, Nijino-san, if you’re that embarrassed over your present, then I’ll have to be even more embarrassed over mine... Here, Theiamillis-san. I got this for you.”

“What’s this?”

“It’s the manuscript for the play. I had everyone from the drama club sign it.”

“Oh!”

Harumi presented Theia with the manuscript from the January play. The cover had been signed by the members of the drama club and everyone who’d participated in the production. Harumi had worked hard to gather them all.

“This must have been difficult to manage...”

“No, when I called everyone, they all came on their own. They all told me to give you their regards, too.”

“I see... If I had more time, I’d like to go give my thanks to the drama club as well...”

Theia affectionately ran her hand across the cover of the manuscript for a while before eventually looking out through the window in the direction of Kisshouharukaze High School. The play had been a memorable event that had helped Theia grow immensely.

“Thanks to Theiamillis-san’s play, I was able to make a lot of friends... And I’m

very sorry to see you go...”

“Harumi... I am too. I wanted to have a nice, long talk with you someday.”

Theia and Harumi shook hands. Deep inside, they’d always both acknowledged each other and had a mutual respect for each other. Theia admired Harumi’s behavior as a princess during the plays, and Harumi admired Theia’s sun-like presence. Because they each had something the other didn’t, there was a lot they stood to learn and gain from each other, and that’s why they were both disappointed to part ways so soon.

“Theia, Ruth-san...”

Waiting for the girls to finish saying their farewells, Koutarou finally stepped forward.

“Koutarou...”

“Satomi-sama, thank you for everything up until today...”

Theia and Ruth looked at Koutarou as he approached. They’d made a lot of friends at this far edge of the universe, and through what felt like nothing short of a miracle, they’d met their love. Holding back the tears was the most either could do in the face of their parting.

“Theia, you did good. You can go home proud. Go get doted on by your mother after all this time.”

“Yes... I’ll do just that...”

“You too, Ruth-san. Go see your family and spend some time with them. And then the two of you can come visit us again someday. We’ll be waiting.”

“Satomi-sama... Yes!”

Unable to bear it any longer, tears began flowing from Ruth’s eyes. She loved this boy enough that she was a fool to think she’d be able to hold them back in the first place.

“Koutarou, I will leave this room to you. Even though your territory might be small, don’t let your guard down. Defend it as the lord of this land until my return.”

“Don’t worry. I’m the man who defended this room against the Holy Forthorthe Galactic Empire’s Princess Theiamillis without backing down even a single step.”

“Indeed you did...”

Unlike Ruth, Theia held a brave front and managed to hold back her tears. Her eyes were moist, but she didn’t relent a single tear. It was a demonstration of her pride as a princess, and of her strong will to return to Earth.

“I think it’s about time to go.”

“You’re leaving already?”

“Yes. The longer I stay here, the more I will wish to take everyone with me. So, Ruth...”

“Yes. Everyone, thank you so very much... Goodbye.”

“Farewell.”

Theia and Ruth said their final farewells before turning around and heading for the glowing gate leading to Blue Knight.

“Theia, send letters from time to time! I’ll send some too!”

“Farewell, Theia-dono. I’m looking forward to the day we meet again.”

“Theia-chan, I’ll get the rest of the manga and hold on to it for you!”

Each of the remaining seven girls called out to Theia and Ruth as they began walking away. Hearing all of those voices made Theia and Ruth realize once more just how blessed they’d been.

Sensing their approach, the passage to Blue Knight opened. As it did, Koutarou felt a sudden urge to stop the two girls.

Wait, don’t go!

Yet in the end, he was unable to say those words. He knew that it would only cause them trouble. Holding it back, the words just echoed inside him. Koutarou was the only one who didn’t say anything as they left.

But just as Theia and Ruth were about to disappear, they both nonchalantly looked back behind them. It was as if the silent words in Koutarou’s heart had

reached them after all. But they gave no answer. They simply stared at him as though they were trying to burn his appearance into their minds.

Theia, Ruth-san...

The two girls then disappeared in the light.

Silence fell over the apartment. None of the eight people left behind said anything, and it would be quite some time before they did. Meanwhile, a blue shooting star streaked through the vivid, starry sky.

Harumi and Alaia

Saturday, May 1st

Several days after Theia and Ruth departed on their voyage home to Forthorthe, Koutarou paid Clan a visit.

With the Theia and Ruth gone, Corona House's defensive capabilities were considerably lower. Not only were they down Theia and Ruth, they were also down the support of their spaceship, Blue Knight. Though Maki and Harumi would make up for the lost manpower, only another spaceship could fill in for Blue Knight. So in its place, Clan had summoned her own spaceship, the Hazy Moon, from Forthorthe. The Hazy Moon had less offensive power than Blue Knight, but since it came equipped with proprietary Schweiger family technology, it was extremely useful when it came to stealth or search operations. Essentially, the two ships had their own strong points. Under the Hazy Moon's protection, room 106 was just as well defended as it had been previously.

And there was one more important advantage that came with the Hazy Moon. Because it was outfitted with the Schweiger family's most cutting-edge technology, its med bay had some of the most advanced medical devices in the universe. Thanks to that, the Hazy Moon's presence was particularly reassuring for someone with chronic health problems.

Koutarou had come to see Clan to get more details on Harumi's medical exam the day before. He wanted to hear Clan's opinion on Harumi being able to control Signaltin like Alaia.

"Because this is very personal, I will omit any data regarding Harumi herself. Are you fine with that?"

"Yeah."

Clan was sitting down at her desk and brought up the file regarding Harumi's

exam. She then started explaining its contents in a way that Koutarou could understand.

“Generally speaking, there weren’t any outstanding problems. She was born with a weak constitution, but I can assist with that using Forthorthe’s medical technology.”

Forthorthe’s medical technology was far superior to Earth’s. Though Harumi had been born sickly, with Forthorthe’s medical advancements, Clan could help her live a life much closer to a normal, healthy person’s.

“Because she’s involved with us now, the chances she’ll be targeted by our enemies in the future are much higher. But at the same time, now that I can treat her, the risks from her condition can be significantly mitigated, so overall, things might not be much different.”

“I see... Looking at it like that, I feel a little less guilty about getting Sakuraba-senpai involved with us.”

Koutarou was worried about the consequences of getting Harumi involved with their problems, but if she could get better medical treatment because of it, he felt like it wasn’t just all negatives.

“There’s a silver lining to everything,” said Clan.

With that, she stopped moving her hands operating the computer and seemed to look off into the distance. The eyes on the other side of the glasses looked gentler than usual.

“Even us meeting.”

“Now that you mention it...”

Koutarou and Clan had been enemies at first. They’d fought in battles so intense that it wouldn’t have surprised anyone if either of them had lost their life in the process. Needless to say, things had started off very badly, but that was different now. They treasured and supported each other, so ultimately good had come of their meeting.

“And good will come of this as well. Theiamillis-san may have parted ways with us, but she’ll get to meet her mother after all this time.”

“Yeah, you’re right.”

Though Theia had left her friends on Earth, she was going home to see her family again. From Theia’s point of view, it wasn’t all negative.

“Now then, moving on to the main topic...”

Saying that, Clan adjusted her glasses and began tapping away at the computer once more. The information displayed on the screen changed.

“I’ll start from the conclusion. The result of the psychological analysis says that Harumi is indeed Harumi.”

“I see...”

Hearing Clan’s verdict, Koutarou nodded his head once and exhaled slowly. He’d actually come in hopes of hearing her say exactly that, so he was relieved.

Recently, Koutarou had witnessed Harumi control Signaltin as if she were Alaia herself. It had made him suspect that there was some kind of connection between them. That’s why he’d suggested that Clan give her a mental examination in addition to her physical one. Those results were what Clan was sharing with Koutarou now.

“Harumi has Alaia-san’s memories, yes, but her personality has not been affected by it. Alaia’s memories inside of Harumi’s mind have perfectly overlapped with Harumi’s memories about her role in the play. As a result, there is a clear line between Harumi’s memories and Alaia’s, meaning that though the two coexist, they haven’t commingled.”

“Wait a minute, where did Her Majesty’s memories come from in the first place?”

“Magic is not my expertise, but... I believe they came from Signaltin.”

“From the sword?”

“That’s my theory. In order for Signaltin to manifest its true powers, it needs Alaia-san. But Alaia-san is no longer around, so Signaltin found a replacement.”

“And that was Sakuraba-senpai?”

“Yes. Harumi had a clear image of Alaia-san in her head thanks to the plays,

right? She has a lot of what would, I assume, resemble Alaia's memories thanks to that. So by inserting Alaia's real memories over top of what she recalls from the plays, Harumi became able to use Signaltin without causing her any confusion."

"So that's how it is..."

Koutarou nodded at Clan's explanation.

Like it had with Koutarou and Maki's contract, Signaltin tended to avoid interfering with people's minds any more than necessary. It might have inherited that proclivity from Alaia, the one had undone its seal.

In that case, when Signaltin sought someone to serve as Alaia's replacement, it would naturally choose the person who would be the least affected by it. And it wasn't hard to guess who that would be. In that sense, Harumi was convenient for Signaltin. Thanks to her work in the plays, she could easily imagine what it was like to be Alaia without it compromising her identity.

And conveniently, Alaia's memories stored in Signaltin ended at what lined up with the final scene of the second play. Thanks to that, inserting Alaia's memories into Harumi's worked out perfectly. All said and done, there was no one else more suited to accept Alaia's memories than Harumi.

"Her Majesty probably would have done the same thing."

"Actually, there is one more possibility... Though it's more farfetched than even magic, so I don't think it's really the case."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean the possibility that it was just a coincidence. That Harumi, who can do the same things Alaia could, just happened to be there. But that isn't exactly scientific."

"Yeah, I bet that's hard for you to accept."

"That isn't something my pride as a scientist will allow."

Clan had just referred to it as a coincidence, but she actually had a somewhat more complex theory drawn up in her mind.

Harumi is the reincarnation of Alaia-san, and by pure chance, she happened to

be Veltlion's upperclassman. And once Signaltin came into contact with her, it revived the memories of her past life... But such a convenient explanation has no scientific backing whatsoever!

As a scientist, it was hard for Clan to suggest something so fantastical. It sounded far too much like a fairy tale, and her pride wouldn't allow it.

"Anyway, the bottom line is that Harumi is Harumi. She's not Alaia-san."

"Got it. Thank you, Clan. I feel better now."

Koutarou had been worried about whether or not some part of Alaia existed inside Harumi ever since that day. Because of that, he hadn't been sure how to interact with her, and all of their conversations over the past few days had been awkward.

But thanks to Clan, he now knew that while Harumi had Alaia's memories, she was still herself. Learning that, he felt a little sad he wasn't able to meet Alaia again, but was primarily relieved to hear that Harumi was Harumi.

Empress Elfaria

Wednesday, May 19th

It had almost been a month since Yurika began studying with the ultimate goal of getting into university. She'd been drilled under Koutarou's strict guidance, and thanks to that, her math skills had improved by an entire grade level every week since. She was now solving fifth grade math problems.

"Um... Tarou-kun's average score for three subjects is 60 points, and he got 80 points on his literature test, so his average score for four subjects should be 70 points?"

Yurika was now learning the basics of averages, but she still hadn't fully gotten her head around the concept. Her calculation this time was off the mark.

"Ah! No, that's not right! This must be a trap!"

But after a month-long math boot camp, Yurika realized her mistake just in time.

There's no way the last problem Satomi-san would give me would be this easy! I'm sure there's something I'm overlooking!

Specifically, it wasn't that she'd realized anything was wrong with her math. It was that she'd developed an instinctive sense of danger after studying under Koutarou's guidance for so long. A glimpse of light at the end of the tunnel usually led to even greater despair, and Yurika knew not to fall for that too easily.

"That's right! I can't just average the average! First I have to add up the total score of all three subjects, and then add in the additional 80 points before calculating the average of the four subjects... Um, that makes it 65 points! Satomi-san, I'm done!"

Thanks to her instincts telling her she needed to rethink the problem, Yurika had arrived at the correct answer. She proudly presented her solution to

Koutarou with a smile.

“...”

However, Koutarou was completely silent and staring out the window. She had to call out to him a second time to get his attention.

“...Satomi-san?”

“Hmm? Ah, sorry. Are you done?”

“Yes! Tarou-kun’s average score is 65 points!”

Yurika smiled again and handed her notebook to Koutarou. And checking her work, he nodded.

“Correct.”

That problem was the last one for the day, and having gotten it correct meant that Yurika had adequately mastered the day’s material. And with that, Koutarou had no reason to be strict and push her further. Instead, he gave her a satisfied smile.

“Well done, Yurika.”

“Thank you!”

Sensing Koutarou’s approval, Yurika presented her head to him. It was a gesture common for Sanae, and as of late, Yurika had started to copy her.

“I did my best!”

“Good work, good work.”

Koutarou’s large hand patted Yurika on the head. Yurika smiled happily. Though she had to work hard for it, she adored his praise. As a girl, she wanted to show Koutarou her good points. So not only did she get to show him how hard she could study, but he would then treat her to an affectionate gesture like this. And because of that, she’d begun working especially hard at studying and looked doubly forward to her reward.

“Hmm? You don’t have to study any more today, you know.”

Koutarou was done for the day, but for some reason, Yurika flipped to the next page of her book.

“Yes, but, but... I wanted to prepare for tomorrow.”

“I’m impressed. But don’t go overboard, okay?”

“Okay!”

If she prepared today, her study session tomorrow should be easier. And that meant she could get praise from Koutarou faster. And showing her determination and preparing ahead of time earned her praise too. Studying was a necessity for the future they had planned out for themselves, so Yurika’s hard work, determination, and optimism all seemed like they’d pay off.

As Yurika got started on the next day’s lesson, the cellphone in Koutarou’s pocket started vibrating. Koutarou pulled it out, and saw the name of his best/worst friend flash across the screen.

“Mackenzie? It’s rare for you to call at this hour.”

Cellphone in hand, Koutarou got up. Feeling like there were too many people in the apartment to talk on the phone, he left Yurika at the tea table and walked out of the room.

“Bye, Satomi-san... All right, I’ll do a little more.”

Yurika said goodbye to Koutarou as he walked off before turning back to her workbook. Seeing that Yurika and Koutarou’s study session was over, the other girls started gathering around the tea table.

“Satomi-kun was looking up at the stars again...”

The first one to say anything was Harumi, who took a seat next to Yurika.

Harumi’s room was connected to room 106 via Clan’s ship. Technology-wise, it worked the same way Theia and Ruth’s gate did. As a result, Harumi had been making more frequent appearances in room 106 as of late.

“He must be worried about Theia. Well... that’s true for us too...”

Sanae took a bite of a rice cracker and replied to Harumi as she looked out the window herself. A beautiful, starry summer night sky twinkled overhead. Theia and Ruth had disappeared somewhere far beyond it. That’s why, just like with Koutarou, the girls of room 106 found themselves looking up at the stars more often these days.

Sanae's room was actually connected to room 106 the same way Harumi's was. Since Sanae's parents trusted Yurika, she was in room 106 even more frequently than Harumi. With the threat of Darkness Rainbow looming, they wanted Sanae by Yurika's side as much as possible.

"We've spent more than a year together. It's only natural."

Shizuka joined Sanae in looking up at the stars. She considered Theia and Ruth close friends as well. At first she'd only yelled at Theia for being reckless, but that was just the beginning. Most of her memories of them together since then were happy ones. And now that she and Ruth were gone, Shizuka felt like she'd lost a big part of her everyday life.

"I really won't work as Theia-san's or Ruth-san's replacement..."

Maki, who had only just started coming by room 106 recently, had less of a connection than the others with Theia and Ruth. As a result, her feelings were directed towards Koutarou and the girls who were grieving their absence.

"Nobody can serve as someone else's replacement. We would feel the same if any one of us were missing."

Kiriha called out to Maki, who had a lonesome expression on her face. Maki responded by raising her head and slowly lifting her hand to her chest.

"Even me?"

"Of course. You're already a part of our lives."

"I... I see..."

Thanks to Kiriha, Maki's expression turned a little brighter. She felt like she truly understood Kiriha's words. A month had passed since she first came to introduce herself to everyone, and since then, she'd begun feeling like the time she spent with everyone in room 106 was an important part of her everyday life. So when Kiriha said what she did, Maki felt a true sense of belonging.

"But... I don't think that would be enough for him."

It was Clan who'd spoken up this time. She hated sitting in the cramped room, and was using a device of her own invention to float in the air. She looked rather similar to how Sanae had in the past.

“It’s okay. We only have to work together to support him,” Yurika said boldly as she put her pen down.

After the sudden and tragic loss of his mother, parting with someone close to him held a special meaning to Koutarou. However, Yurika wasn’t going to be pessimistic about how this would affect him. She firmly believed that they could protect Koutarou together.

“...What’s wrong? You all look so serious.”

It was then that Koutarou finished his call with Kenji and returned to the room. Noticing the serious atmosphere that had fallen over everyone, he cocked his head to the side and looked at them all.

“Hyaaaaah!”

In response, Yurika sprung up and ran over to him. She grabbed on to him and tried to execute a joint lock technique like the ones he always used on her. Yurika knew that neither words nor silence were what was needed now. What was needed now was action. And Yurika wanted the same thing, so she was doing this for both of them.

“What’s going on?!”

“Take thiiiss!”

“I don’t know what you’re trying to pull, but you’re too naive!”

“Gyaaaaah!”

However, Yurika’s wrestling skills were extremely basic. Koutarou easily broke free from her hold and turned the tables on her. Yurika’s expression contorted in pain, but she was satisfied with this result.

“Yurika-chan...”

“Well done, Nijino Yurika. She knows exactly what we need and how to do it.”

At first glance, it simply looked like Yurika’s surprise attack had failed and she was now being punished for it. But it was so much more than that. She was engaging Koutarou, and she hadn’t hesitated in the slightest to do it. That fact slowly sunk in to the hearts of the girls watching.

“Hah!”

“Uwah! Who is it this time...? S-Sakuraba-senpai?!”

Inspired by Yurika, the normally modest Harumi took action too. She was the one who had helped Yurika come to an understanding of what needed to be done, and because of that, she understood the meaning behind her actions better than anyone.

“Um... Hiyah!”

Relying on a vague memory of a similar situation, Harumi tried to perform a joint lock technique on Koutarou’s leg. Being so weak, however, she was unable to hold him down. She then called to the other girls for backup.

“Everyone, come help!”

“Martial arts is my specialty!”

“Leave this to yours truly, Sanae-chan! I’ve clung to Koutarou’s back for over a year, so I know all of his ticklish spots!”



Shizuka and Sanae were the first to respond. The two of them joyfully joined in and pounced on Koutarou.

“Jeez... Fine, I’ll help, but physical labor is outside of my field of expertise.”

“I’m surprisingly good at it. And besides... It looks fun.”

Clan and Maki soon followed suit. They didn’t want to be left out.

“Heh, it looks like things are getting interesting.”

The last to join in was Kiriha. Since she loved being mischievous around Koutarou, there was no way she would miss a chance like this.

“Wh-What now all of a sudden?! Wahahahaha! Owowow, ahahaha!”

With seven girls attacking—some using wrestling moves, others tickling him, and others simply holding him down—even Koutarou was powerless. All he could do was helplessly resign himself to enduring the tickling and pain.

“What are you all doing? Owowow, not there, not there— Wahahaha!”

“Give it up, Satomi Koutarou. Resistance is futile.”

“Waaaaah!”

Koutarou’s umpteenth scream echoed throughout room 106. But not a moment later, a far louder sound rang out. It was a noisy alarm warning coming from the bracelets that Koutarou and Clan were wearing, and with it came a great sense of unease.

“Large-scale spacequake detected. It is presumed, with 98 percent certainty, to be a warp out signature.”

Hearing the warning blaring, everyone instinctively stopped moving. Silence returned to the room, and the only thing that could be heard was the artificial voice being emitted from the bracelets. It was a warning from the AI of Clan’s ship, the Hazy Moon.

“Mass calculated from the warped space. Warning. Within a few minutes, a fleet of four ships will warp out. The formation is one royal class battleship, one spaceship carrier, and two medium-sized battleships. Certainty is 90 percent. This is an emergency situation, my princess.”

The contents of the warning report signaled that a serious fight was about to break out.

After receiving the AI's report, Koutarou and the others all moved to the bridge of the Hazy Moon. If it was Theia returning, she would have sent a message ahead of time, and it was hard to believe she would come back with four ships. Regardless of who was about to warp out, it was quite clear that something was up.

"Emergency rescue signal received via hyperspace communication. Unable to verify signal source, but based on signal strength, certainty is over 99 percent it is being sent from one of the four ships."

The moment they entered the bridge, they received a new report. One of the four ships, though it was unclear which, was sending out an SOS. There was even a possibility it was all four ships sending the emergency signal. Transmissions during warp were difficult to interpret, and the situation was hard to grasp.

But upon hearing the new report, Clan spoke the name of the sender.

"...It's Theiamillis-san."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. I can't imagine it being from anyone but her in this situation."

Clan was certain that Theia was the one sending out the rescue signal.

If it had been a mere mid-warp accident, the hyperspace signal would have made use of all frequencies. But the signal the Hazy Moon was detecting was only on the frequency Clan normally used. In other words, it meant that it was a transmission from someone who knew that the Hazy Moon was close to Earth. And considering that one of the four ships was a royal class battleship, it was only logical to assume it was Blue Knight.

"And she's probably in big trouble..."

"I bet."

Koutarou nodded with a stern expression. Sanae, on the other hand, didn't understand what was really going on and simply tilted her head in confusion.

“Hey, glasses girl, how can you tell?”

“She’s asking *me* for help. How bad do you think it would have to be for her to do that?”

“I see... You get along well with us, but your family and Theia’s are rivals or something, right?”

Normally, Theia would take steps to conceal the fact that Clan was on Earth. If anyone found out where she was and what she was doing, Clan very well may fall from her own family’s graces. But despite knowing that, Theia was essentially asking Clan directly for help. That meant it had to be serious enough for her to risk doing so.

“Clan, we’re going to help. Move us toward the position where Blue Knight will appear.”

“I thought you’d say that, so we’re already on our way.”

“Thanks, I owe you one.”

Koutarou thanked Clan and placed his hand on her shoulder. Clan responded by placing her hand on top of his and smiled.

“I don’t mind. I can’t let Theiamillis-san run off with a victory, after all.”

“That’s true, you’re absolutely correct.”

Koutarou lightly squeezed Clan’s shoulder before letting go and heading to the front of the bridge. In front of him was a large monitor showing the stars twinkling ahead. It functionally served as a window into space. And in addition to displaying their surroundings, it also had all kinds of information overlaid on top of it. It was on this monitor that four ships would soon appear.

First, four blue lights appeared right where the Hazy Moon’s AI had predicted. There was one close by, and three further away. They were in the same formation the Hazy Moon had forecast.

“Spacequake detected. A fleet of four spaceships have warped out. One royal class battleship, one spaceship carrier, one battleship, one defensive ship. The ship in front belongs to the Holy Forthorthe Galactic Empire. ID: the seventh

royalty class battleship, Layous Fatra Veltlion. The other three ships and their IDs are unknown."

The four lights that appeared shone like shooting stars with long, blue tails streaking behind them as they flew. When the lights gradually faded away, four massive spaceships appeared in their places.

"A gravitational wave communication was received from Layous Fatra Veltlion as it exited warp. Message reads: 'We are under attack by ships of unknown origin. Immediate backup requested.'"

Three ships were chasing after one. The ship being chased was over a kilometer long, and was built in a humanoid shape. Chasing after it were three other ships in a line formation.

"Isn't that Theia's spaceship?! She's being attacked!" Shizuka shrieked as she pointed at the monitor, horrified.

The ship being chased, the Blue Knight, had taken a considerable amount of damage. The guts of the ship could be seen from the punctures in the hull, and the areas around the holes were charred black. The luster of the ordinarily white and blue craft was gone.

"Koutarou, they're shooting at Theia! We have to hurry!"

The damage was, of course, from the three ships chasing after it. They were still shooting even now, and colorful lasers and beams danced through space. From time to time, the light show was punctuated with fire spewed out from missiles. Though Blue Knight was returning fire, it had taken significant damage, and its counterattacks were sporadic at best.

"Not good! Clan, can't you do something?!"

"I'll try!"

Obliging Koutarou, Clan tapped away at the device by her seat, ordering the Hazy Moon to cover the Blue Knight and open communications.

"This is the second princess of the Holy Forthorthe Galactic Empire, Clariossa Daora Forthorthe. To the three unidentified ships, you are to stop your attacks immediately and surrender. Do so now and I will spare your lives."

Clan sent her gravitational wave message across all frequencies. If the ships were from Forthorthe, there was no way they wouldn't receive it.

"Kiriha-san, do you think they'll obey the order to cease their attacks?"

Koutarou stared at the monitor with a serious expression as he asked Kiriha for her opinion. After thinking for a while, she answered.

"There's a chance it'll work, but the situation might become more complicated if it does."

But before Kiriha even finished her sentence, the three ships stopped firing and slowed down.

"Clan!"

"I know!"

Not missing her chance, Clan positioned the Hazy Moon between Blue Knight and the three other ships. Though the Hazy Moon was ordinarily weaker than Blue Knight in terms of sheer combat capabilities, now that Blue Knight was badly damaged, that was likely no longer the case. It was dangerous, but the Hazy Moon stepping in was necessary to protect the compromised Blue Knight.

And so the Hazy Moon and the three ships faced each other. It seemed like the three ships weren't sure what to do, as they remained unmoving.

"Clan, if it comes to it, work with Blue Knight to counterattack."

Koutarou could feel a bead of sweat run down his forehead, and he placed his hand on Clan's shoulder again. Clan could tell he knew how serious the situation was when she felt him put a little strength into his grip.

"Yes, I know..."

Clan adjusted her glasses and stared at the monitor intently. She didn't actually know if the Hazy Moon and the damaged Blue Knight could win against the three ships.

"Now then, what will they do...?"

"Go away, just go away..."

"I don't want to die in a place like this!"

“God...”

“It’s frustrating not being able to do anything.”

“This would be so easy if I could just punch them to solve everything!”

If things turned into a battle between spaceships, there was almost nothing the girls of room 106 could do. Apart from Clan, the others would only be able to pray for their safety and Theia’s. And just as the atmosphere on the bridge was reaching peak tension, a new message came from the Hazy Moon’s AI.

“A small container has been fired from the carrier. Spacequake detected. Generation of a warp field confirmed. The three unidentified ships are retreating.”

The three ships were wrapped in blue light once more. It was a sign they were activating warp technology, which allowed them to travel long distances in a short amount of time. They had chosen to cease the fight and retreat.

“Koutarou, what do we do?”

“Let them go. We don’t really understand the situation.”

“Okay.”

Though the ships hadn’t surrendered as Clan had demanded, she let them leave without attacking them. Wrapped in light, the three ships accelerated and flew off like shooting stars, streaking trails behind them.

“The three unidentified ships are leaving the region.”

As their tails of light became as long as they had been when they first arrived, the three ships completely disappeared. They were moving far faster than the speed of light.

Once they were gone, only Blue Knight and the small container left behind by the carrier remained.

Blue Knight, slowly growing larger on the monitor, was seriously damaged. Being very familiar with how it usually looked, Koutarou was shocked to see it in its current state. Theia and Ruth had somehow managed to escape whatever crisis had befallen them by themselves.

Theia, just what happened on Forthorthe?

Seeing the severe damage made Koutarou uneasy. He wanted to make sure that Theia and Ruth were safe as soon as possible.

“Clan, can’t we head over to them right away?”

“Just wait a moment. This region is still a bit unstable from the three ships warping out. It’s too dangerous to transfer live people right now.”

“I see...”

Koutarou endured his impatience as he stared at Blue Knight closing in. It would take several minutes before the two ships connected.

“More importantly, Koutarou, I figured out what’s inside the container they ejected.”

Clan operated the panel in front of her and displayed a hologram for Koutarou. Strangely enough, what he saw was a Forthorthian-style men’s suit. It was neither a pilot’s uniform nor a military uniform, but brand new, fashionable and elegant formalwear.

“Is this really what’s inside?”

“Yes. There was practically no meaning in sending an unmanned ship to investigate.”

Because it was dangerous to directly collect the container using the Hazy Moon, Clan had sent an unmanned work machine to inspect it. However, the contents of the container were nothing dangerous. It only gave off a reaction for textiles. And when the container was opened, the suit was all that was revealed.

“Is there anything else?”

“There was nothing else inside. If it was a present, they should have at least left a card...”

Clan had a puzzled look on her face. She had suspected that they might have left a bomb behind as a souvenir, but it was really just the suit. Based on that, it was hard to judge if they were enemies or not.

“A suit... A suit, huh?”

Koutarou had an idea of who the suit might be from and who it was intended for.

To think he would really keep his promise... What a troublesome guy...

If Koutarou was correct, the suit wasn’t a present, but rather the opposite. It was a challenge. And as Koutarou was contemplating the identity of the sender...

“Koutarou!”

He heard a voice he hadn’t for the past month. It was an unforgettable, welcome voice that everyone on the Hazy Moon had been waiting to hear.

Once the owner of the voice entered the bridge, she started sprinting. Without any hesitation, she kicked off the ground with all of her might and hurled herself through the air. The golden hair flapped behind her like a golden flag waving in the wind.

“H-Hey, wait, wait!”

“I am back! Greet me with all your heart too!”

She shot through the air and headed straight for Koutarou with her arms stretched out before her. It was obvious to anyone watching that she was planning on embracing him on first contact.

“I told you to waaaiiiiit!”

“As if I cooouuuuuld!”

If she had just been planning on embracing him, Koutarou probably wouldn’t have budged. But she had a running start and jumped from several stair steps above him, so she flew towards Koutarou at a terrific speed. And with that kind of momentum, she easily knocked Koutarou to the ground. It was a violent expression of love that could only be described as a tackle.

“Ouch...”

“You fool! Why did you fall?! Are you telling me you can’t accept my

everything?!”

The girl who had knocked Koutarou to the floor straddled him and looked down at him with a frown. Her golden hair fell over her shoulders and tickled Koutarou’s face.

“That’s just a metaphor, Theia...”

“That’s not what I wanted to hear, my knight!”

The girl puffed her cheeks out in a pout. Her expression reminded Koutarou of a young girl he had met in past Forthorthe. Partially thanks to his nostalgia, Koutarou found himself unable to complain about the situation he found himself in.

“...Welcome back, Theia.”

“Heh... I told you I’d come back, Koutarou.”

And so Theiamillis Gre Forthorthe returned to Koutarou and the others.

Because Theia couldn’t wait any longer, Ruth had transported her over from Blue Knight to the Hazy Moon using a small spaceship. Ruth herself had to stay behind to perform some necessary procedures from the Hazy Moon’s hangar, so she arrived on the bridge shortly after Theia.

When she did, she was greeted with the sight of Theia gracefully flying through the air and then knocking down Koutarou.

“Ah...”

Theia and Koutarou were playing around. Just seeing that familiar sight made large tears fall from Ruth’s cheeks.

We’re back... We... managed to come back to Master and everyone...

Ruth had assumed that they wouldn’t see each other again for at least another few years. If Empress Elfaria had collapsed due to illness, she was certain they wouldn’t be able to do anything until it was determined who would become the heir to the throne, which could take quite some time. And even once that was over, they wouldn’t be able to return to Earth until Elfaria recovered from her illness. If Elfaria had died, the situation would become even

more complicated.

But through a strange twist of fate, Theia and Ruth were back to Earth within a mere month. Though the current situation was bad, Ruth couldn't help but feel relieved to see the faces of her close friends.

"Theia, you're heavy..."

"Heavy?! Is that what you would call your highly esteemed master?!"

"Highly esteemed or not... I guess we know it's not your breasts weighing you down."

"There you go being mean again! Didn't you say that the size of my breasts didn't matter?!"

"It matters now. I've had a change of heart."

"Is this the mouth spouting such refuse? Take that, and this!"

"Ow, ouch, owowow!"

Most of all, Ruth was happy to see the boy she loved again. Theia hadn't behaved as anything but a proper princess over the past month, but thanks to Koutarou, she was now acting like a child once more. Ruth knew what he meant for Theia, because he meant the same thing for her.

But...

But on the other hand, though she was happy to see them, meeting with their beloved friends under such circumstances would mean getting them caught up in problems from Forthorthe. Joy and guilt intermixed, creating a complex emotion within Ruth.

"Koutarou, there's Ruth!"

That was when Sanae spotted Ruth and reported it to Koutarou.

"Really?!"

"Kyah!"

Koutarou forcibly lifted up Theia and ran over to Ruth with her.

"Koutarou! Don't treat me so roughly! Be more gentle! Show some affection!"

“You know you tend to treat the things you love with less care, right?”

“Oh, well in that case... No, no, no! I won’t fooled by that!”

“Fine, jeez...”

“Go on, do that thing.”

“What thing?”

“Hold me like a princess.”

“Okay, okay. As you wish, my princess.”

“Hmmhmm!”

Even as Koutarou and Theia approached Ruth, they continued to quarrel. It was even more intense than normal, but their faces were brighter than ever. And seeing that, Ruth’s tears wouldn’t stop flowing.

“Ruth!”

Once they reached Ruth, Theia slipped out of Koutarou’s arms and moved behind her.

“Your Highness?”

When Ruth instinctively chased after her with her eyes, Theia whispered in a quiet voice only Ruth could hear.

“Now it’s your turn.”

“Huh?”

The next moment, Theia pushed Ruth forward.

“Kyaaah!”

Having completely lost her balance, Ruth wildly flailed with her arms as she fell towards the ground. But since Koutarou was right in front of her, he easily caught her.

“Are you okay, Ruth-san?”

“Mas— I, I mean Satomi-sama! I’m fine, th-thank you!”

Caught off guard from being pushed so suddenly, Ruth almost called Koutarou

“Master” in front of the others. Shaken by both of those things, Ruth’s voice was faltering. And then on top of that, she realized Koutarou was holding her in his arms. She blushed furiously.

“Ah, uh, I... Umm...”

Ruth could barely speak. Noises came out of her mouth rather than words, which only flustered her even more. There were so many things she wanted to tell him, but her mouth only moved up and down meaninglessly. She tried over and over again to form a sentence, but all that came to her was more tears.

“Ruth-san...”

Koutarou realized she was crying in his arms, and wiped her tears away with his right hand. That didn’t stop them, however, so he patiently wiped them away a second and third time.

“U-Um... I...”

Ruth didn’t know what to do or what to say, so she simply entrusted herself to Koutarou.

“Welcome back, Ruth-san.”

“Ah...”

The moment she heard that, Ruth realized what she wanted to say to him most. Finally, she was earnestly able to channel all of her feelings into words.

“Yes, I’m back... Satomi-sama...”

They were words she’d spoken countless times since being born, but she’d never worked so hard to say them.

Koutarou, Theia, Ruth, and the other seven girls all rejoiced over their reunion for a while. After some time had passed and they were all able to calm down a bit, Theia began explaining what had happened once she returned to Forthorthe.

“The truth is that my mother being sick was a lie.”

Theia, who had been smiling with joy just a moment ago, now wore a very

gloomy expression. Thanks to their time together, Koutarou could read a lot just from the faces she made, and he had a very bad feeling about what she was going to say next.

“Lie? You mean you lied?” he asked.

“No, why would I have to lie?” Theia retorted.

“Fair enough... Then who lied about it?”

“The people trying to depose my mother. In other words, a coup d’etat was happening in Forthorthe.”

“What?!”

“Just wait a minute, Theiamillis-san! Is that true?!”

Since this was news regarding Forthorthe, Clan was standing beside Koutarou and listening to Theia too. When she heard the words “coup d’etat” come out of her mouth, Clan slammed her hands into the table everyone was gathered around and leaned forward intently towards her.

Clan was royalty of Forthorthe as well. And recently, she’d started to become conscious of her position and matured as a princess. A coup d’etat was a serious matter for the country, and it wasn’t news Clan could take sitting down.

“Unfortunately, yes, it’s true. It seems the military was unable to overlook my mother’s calls for disarmament any more, and have placed her under house arrest.”

Theia’s mother, Empress Elfaria, was a pacifist pushing for national disarmament. The military of present-day Forthorthe had grown too strong, and a powerful force was hard to control. Elfaria insisted that if the military wasn’t reduced to a reasonable size, it would eventually end up running amok and causing a serious incident.

The military staunchly objected to that. In order to uphold their pride as the long-standing protectors of Forthorthe and to safeguard their vested interests in profits from weapons manufacturing and other military technologies, they did everything in their power to obstruct Elfaria.

And that kind of obstruction was exactly what Elfaria was worried about.

Their interference began to build and build, until they eventually developed into a full-on coup d'etat movement. Ironically, in the very act of opposing Elfaria, they had proven her point.

"Which means that Elle... uh... Theia's mother being sick was just a trap to lure you out, Theia?"

"Yes. Since my captured mother wasn't listening to them, they were going to capture me and use me to negotiate."

The out of control military placed Elfaria under house arrest under the pretext of her being ill. But even then, Elfaria wouldn't change her stance on disarmament, so they had decided to capture Theia and use her as a bargaining chip. They were the source of the encoded message sent to Theia, calling her back to Forthorthe.

"No wonder there was no information about Her Majesty Elfaria's sickness in my network... She was never ill in the first place. What's more, the military has placed her under house arrest. It's not that they didn't leak the information, it's that they couldn't."

"Wait, so what happened and how did you get back here? You were tricked, right?"

"That's because we realized that it might be a trap just before it was sprung... Ruth."

"Yes."

Ruth continued to explain from there.

"Actually, just before we left Earth, Clan-sama told me that she hadn't heard anything about Her Majesty's illness on her end."

"Now that you mention it, yeah, I did."

Because the Mastirs had a bad relationship with the military and the Schweigers had a good relationship with them, the information Theia and Clan had access to via their family connections could vary drastically. Clan noticed that she hadn't heard anything about Elfaria, and had warned Ruth accordingly.

"Back then, I too believed that Her Majesty might be seriously ill... But when I

told Her Highness about what you said just before we arrived at Forthorthe, she had a bad feeling about it.”

The military, who opposed the empress and would pounce on any sign of weakness, had overlooked something as important as her falling ill. Theia couldn’t help thinking it was strange. She recognized that there was a possibility the military was silent on the matter because they were involved. That’s what Theia’s intuition had warned her.

“So instead of returning home according to schedule, we returned home secretly with the aid of an old retainer. If Her Majesty really were ill, we would have been able to laugh at ourselves for being overly cautious, but it was better to be safe than sorry. After all, if Her Majesty weren’t ill, it would be no laughing matter at all...”

“And as Theia-dono suspected, no one was laughing, I see,” said Kiriha.

“Yes,” Ruth said with a nod. “Behind the scenes, the military was planning a coup d’etat, and they had placed Her Majesty Elfaria under house arrest in the imperial palace.”

“So what did you do?” Sanae asked excitedly.

Since she knew that Theia and Ruth had safely gotten away, she was anxious to hear the details of their dramatic escape.

“With the help of loyal subjects, we rescued Her Majesty and escaped to Earth aboard Blue Knight.”

“So it was coup d’etat forces chasing after you?”

“Yes, part of it. Thanks to the efforts of Pardomshiha’s and Wenranka’s bands of knights, only three ships managed to come after us.”

Wenranka was a distinguished family of knights on the same level as the Pardomshihas. They were known for their absolute loyalty to the royal families since the Silver Princess’s era, and they hadn’t hesitated to side with the Mastir family in this crisis either. Together with the Pardomshihas, they played a major part in letting Blue Knight escape.

“But, but... Why did you flee to Earth? Wouldn’t it be better to hide

somewhere else?” the cowardly Yurika asked.

It was known in Forthorthe that Theia had spent a year on Earth, so even the coup d’etat army could guess where she’d run off to. That’s why Yurika was concerned that it wouldn’t be a good enough place to hide.

“There are two reasons,” Theia explained in answer to Yurika’s doubts. “The first is a matter of diplomacy. Forthorthe follows a policy of nonintervention in regards to planets we have no formal diplomatic relationship with. That’s why if I hide on Earth, the coup d’etat army can’t carelessly attack here.”

Using a contrived illness as a front, the coup d’etat army had put the empress under house arrest. It wasn’t like she or her daughter, Theia, had committed a crime or any other kind of breach of trust with the people. So if the coup d’etat army suddenly launched what appeared to be an unwarranted attack on Earth, doubts would be cast on the coup d’etat army instead, and it would weaken their position in terms of public image. Since they couldn’t do anything that would bias the citizens against them in favor of the royal family, they couldn’t launch a major attack on Earth until they concocted a way to frame Elfaria and Theia.

“The other reason is simply that we have no safe territory elsewhere right now.”

“Safe territory?”

“Yes. The coup d’etat is pressuring the planet of Forthorthe, as well as the territories on other planets that have fallen into their hands. The only territory spared their influence is the one right here.”

“Theia, by territory, you mean...”

“The only territory that’s rightfully ours that hasn’t fallen into the hands of the coup d’etat army... is Corona House room 106. It is our only safe haven.”

Theia had established Koutarou as the lord of his apartment, but she maintained indirect control of it through him. And with all the other Mastir territories under pressure from the military, room 106 was Theia’s last stronghold.

“In other words...” Upon reaching this point in her explanation, Theia clasped

her hands together in front of her chest and looked up at Koutarou's face. "We came seeking your protection, Koutarou, though we were well aware that this would involve you and everyone else here in our fight..."

Theia was always bullish and proud, but right now she was uneasy and timid. Koutarou could hear it in her voice and see it on her face.

"We alone can't do anything anymore... We don't have enough help, wisdom, or power. But it's not like we *want* to involve all of you! We want all of you to be happy and safe! But... But there's no one else we can rely on!"

Theia desperately pleaded their case to Koutarou and everyone else. Theia and Ruth had been cornered and had nowhere else to go. That's why they'd come back to Earth. Come back to Koutarou and the other girls.

Sanae's psychic powers. Kiriha's brains. Yurika, Maki, and Harumi's magic. Clan's science, Shizuka's martial arts. And Koutarou who combined all those powers. To Theia and Ruth who were lacking in numbers and support, they would make a perfect team.

But it wasn't like Theia and Ruth had wanted to get them involved in all this. They simply had no recourse but to reach out to their friends.

"Please help us, Koutarou! Everyone! I am aware how selfish I sound! I have gotten you involved in a dangerous fight you have nothing to do with! But you are the only ones who trust us! And you're the only ones we can trust!"

And in the midst of her crisis, that's who Theia wanted to rely on—her friends. Not a legendary knight or the Goddess of Dawn. Though her friends each had various powers, they weren't all that different from Theia herself. They were all normal people deep down.

"So, please!"

But together, they would surely be able to do something. That's what Theia believed. Her friends were her last hope.

"Please... lend us your power..."

As Theia made her request, she lowered her head and closed her eyes. Her body was stiff and her hands were tightly clenched. Why was only obvious. She

knew she was asking for something unreasonable.

“...What are you doing? Raise your head, Theia.”

The decisive will behind those powerful words drove them into Theia’s chest.

“...What?”

They unfroze her body and made her look up. When she did, her eyes met Koutarou’s. The look in his eyes was just as powerful as his words.

Koutarou...?

Theia had never seen Koutarou with eyes like that before. She didn’t know what kind of feelings were behind them.

“Raise your head. Pull yourself together. Stick your chest out. Now, that’s what a ruler should look like.”

Koutarou was being especially harsh. He wasn’t even this strict when teaching Yurika.

“Koutarou, what are you...”

Theia felt a pressure from Koutarou. She hesitated, like any normal girl would.

“You’ve fundamentally misunderstood something.”

“I don’t understand... What are you saying?”

“What is our relationship?”

“That’s...” Theia momentarily hesitated before answering. “I am your princess. And you are... You are my knight.”

“Then there’s an attitude that you should take, and words you should say.”

That was when Theia realized what Koutarou wanted.

“B-But...”

But even though she understood, she couldn’t quite bring herself to do it. The kindness and love she had developed over the past year held her back.

“I’m only talking about the formality. Not the feelings you put into it.”

“Koutarou...”

“Do it properly.”

“...”

Understanding Koutarou’s intentions, Theia closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She then opened her eyes wide, like she’d just awoken. Her expression changed completely. Her eyes glinted with a strong will, and her expression was sharp. She was no longer the anxious girl from a few seconds ago, but a ruler that had decided to fight.

She then made her declaration.

“My knight, Koutarou, carry out your duty to recapture our motherland.”

It was a royal order. And Koutarou from one year ago would have absolutely refused.

“That’s better.”

But once he heard it, Koutarou nodded and smiled at Theia. She’d done exactly what he’d hoped she would, so it was a bright and satisfied smile. But he quickly wiped it from his face and replaced it with the expression of a proud knight. He kneeled before Theia and placed his right hand on his chest.

“As you wish, Princess Theiamillis.”

That was as long as Theia was able to keep herself from crying.

Koutarou wasn’t the only one who wanted to help Theia. All of the girls on the bridge of the Hazy Moon had the same intention from the start.

“You’re an idiot from time to time, Theia. There’s no way we’d say no.”

“Yeah. Everyone loves you two.”

“Eventually, I will need everyone’s help for my fight as well. If you were to hold back here, I’d have to hold back when my time comes.”

“Theiamillis-san, I consider you a precious friend. You’re also an amazing playwright.”

“Theia-chan and Ruth-san are my tenants. So your enemy is my enemy.”

“I just became friends with you, Theia-san, but I know friends help each other

out. Besides, Satomi-kun is getting all fired up... so I don't need any more reason than that."

"I really don't like the idea of sneaking into the castle and launching a coup d'etat at all. If they had a problem they ought to have been upfront with the matter."

"...Didn't you first come here to assassinate Theia?"

"It's about time you forget about that, Koutarou!"

Koutarou and the others considered Theia a friend too, so they naturally wanted to help her in her time of need. Besides, they'd all saved each others' lives more than once or twice by now. There was no reason for them to refuse this time.

"Thank you... for doing so much for us..."

"Thank you very much, everyone. I will never forget this day..."

Theia and Ruth offered their tearful thanks.

Since they'd escaped Forthorthe in a hurry, they didn't have anything to offer in the way of a reward. But nevertheless, Koutarou and the others hadn't even hesitated to offer to help.

And so Theia and Ruth thanked them over and over, and over and over again. They had no other way of showing their gratitude and joy.

Once some time had passed and everyone had calmed down, Koutarou returned them to their original topic.

"So, Theia, what will you do now?"

"Th-That's right... Wait a moment."

When Koutarou asked her that, Theia hurriedly wiped her tears away and slapped her cheeks a few times to psych herself up. As she did, she regained her composure some. Apart from a slight blush when she looked at Koutarou, she looked like her normal self again.

"For starters, I will be gathering information. While few, I do have allies on

Forthorthe. After obtaining intelligence from them, we'll wait for a chance."

"So even if we went to Forthorthe, we wouldn't be able to do anything without intel, huh?"

"Precisely." Theia nodded and continued. "At the same time, we have to protect ourselves. The coup d'etat army will eventually attempt to capture me and mother after creating some false evidence against us. Of course, we can't let them do that. We'll most likely have to defeat all the enemies they'll continuously send at us."

The coup d'etat army would eventually change their policy to silence Theia and her mother, either by capturing them or murdering them. In order to do that, they would need to frame them for something beforehand. Following through on that, they could kill the empress and her daughter by claiming they resisted during their arrest.

"Which means that the current problem will be the strength and numbers concerning the forces they send."

Once she heard Theia's idea, Kiriha addressed the most immediate concern they'd face. Theia's side was still lacking the information required to make a move. So while they waited for it, defending themselves would be their number one priority. And if that was the case, they'd need to predict the enemy's numbers and strength to prepare for them. If they made a mistake here, they would pay for it dearly.

"What do you think?"

"In order for them to operate in Japan without being noticed, there will be an upper limit to the number of soldiers. At most it would be around fifty men."

Fifty soldiers was what Kiriha and the People of the Earth had used for their simulations in a surface invasion. Having more soldiers would of course make the force more formidable, but they would stand out even more. Capturing or assassinating Theia and Elfaria would be a mission that needed to be done in secret, so sending more than fifty men would likely mean blowing their cover out of the gate.

"What if they stay in space?"

“A space battle is hard to imagine. Even with Forthorthe’s technology, it would be hard to pull off without being observed from Earth, right?”

“Is that true, Clan?”

“Well, with stealth capabilities on par with the Hazy Moon’s, a battle in orbit might be possible, but it’s not very realistic. And I find it hard to believe that Blue Knight could win in that state...”

Not wanting to be discovered by the people of Earth still applied in space. Since there were even less places to hide in space, any battles in the vicinity of the planet would certainly stand out. In order to avoid being spied, they would need to fight somewhere far away from Earth, or make use of ships with stealth like Clan’s. But ships equipped with stealth functions often sacrificed combat potential for it. If the coup d’etat army sent a lone stealth ship, it likely wouldn’t be able to beat Theia’s Blue Knight. They could increase their numbers, certainly, but it would be difficult to cooperate in the battle like that while maintaining stealth, making the possibility rather unrealistic.

“Which means that Blue Knight won’t be attacked as long as we leave it in orbit like this.”

Normally, Theia and Ruth left Blue Knight orbiting Earth, pretending to be an asteroid. Finding it would be hard, and even if the coup d’etat army did come across it, they wouldn’t be able to attack due to its proximity to Earth. So as long as the Blue Knight didn’t move, they had no reasonable need to fear an attack in space.

“Can I ask something?” Shizuka said, raising her hand.

“What?”

“If the Blue Knight won’t be targeted, why don’t you two just hide in it?”

“That’s not a bad option, but I would fear leaving my mother and myself in the same place. And if our link to Earth were cut, we’d eventually starve to death. So we’re most likely looking at a ground attack ahead of us.”

Considering the worst case scenario, it would be bad for Theia and Elfaria to be in the same place. Hiding separately would eliminate the possibility of them both being captured or killed at the same time.

On top of that, Blue Knight didn't have an unlimited amount of supplies. They had to resupply from the ground at regular intervals. So if the coup d'etat army locked down the planet, they would essentially be under siege. And without supplies, they wouldn't be able to stay hidden.

It seemed, then, that the ground was the safest place to be, meaning that they were inevitably staring down a surface attack.

"Yeah, I'm against setting ourselves up to get sieged too."

But there was one more reason Koutarou was opposed to it.

"If that guy's on Earth, there's no guarantee that the Blue Knight won't be found in orbit."

"That guy? Who are you talking about?"

"DKI's Elexis. He's back on Earth."

"Satomi-sama, are you sure?!"

The moment Elexis's name popped up, Ruth's face turned pale. And for good reason. He was her former fiancé and the CEO of Dragon Knight Industries, a Forthorthian conglomerate working with the military.

"There's no doubt about it," said Koutarou with a nod.

Koutarou was sure that Elexis was on Earth. He only had one reason to suspect it, and that was the contents of the small container left behind by the unknown ships.

When Koutarou had fought Elexis in the past, his clothes were ruined in the explosion from one of Elexis's missile attacks. At the time, Elexis told Koutarou he'd give him one of his old suits. And the small container left behind held exactly that—a suit. Koutarou just knew it was from Elexis.

"Since he's here, those unidentified ships are probably new models from DKI. Who knows what kind of equipment they have on them..."

Elexis's enterprise, DKI, was a frontrunner in technological development. And when Koutarou had fought Elexis previously, he'd made full use of that. He had all kinds of technology at his disposal, and wasn't afraid to use it. While Koutarou had fortunately managed to fend him off then, DKI's power couldn't

be underestimated. They might even have means to find Blue Knight.

That suit might even be it... I might be playing into his hand, but we can't just leave Theia and Ruth in space forever...

Koutarou had a suspicion that even the suit might be part of his plans. By delivering it as promised, Elexis was revealing DKI's involvement. Perhaps that was a way of telling them it was pointless to hide. That's what Koutarou thought.

But even putting that aside, Koutarou still thought hiding in space was a bad idea. The risks were too high. Having their supply route cut off would be devastating. So even if it was a trap and Elexis was only trying to scare them into leaving the spaceship for Earth, they had to do it. They would face whatever forces came at them on the surface.

"We'll have to factor this all into our plans," said Kiriha.

She'd come to the same conclusion as Koutarou. Her expression was severe.

"Can I trust you with that, Kiriha?"

"It's a tricky problem to approach, but... I'll give it a shot."

In situations like this, the attacking side had an overwhelming advantage. It was difficult for the defending side to prepare for each and every kind of a potential attack. It would be a challenge even for the quick-witted Kiriha.

"Your Highness, the passage is almost stabilized."

With the explanation over for now, Ruth pulled up a hologram of some kind of data and showed it to Theia.

"Hmm, very well. Contact the other side."

"Yes."

After giving Ruth some instructions, Theia turned towards Koutarou and the others.

"Actually, Koutarou, everyone... There's someone I would like to introduce to all of you."

"Introduce?"

If Theia was introducing them, there couldn't be that many possibilities as to their identity. In fact, there was one person in particular who had been mentioned a few times already that wasn't present.

"This is my mother, Elfaria."

When Theia spoke her name, a beautiful woman appeared behind her. Now that the instability from the previous warps had diffused, a gate connecting Blue Knight and the Hazy Moon had been opened, and this woman had travelled through it.

"It's nice to meet you, everyone."

This woman was none other than the one hundred and twentieth empress of the Holy Forthorthe Galactic Empire, Elfaria Dana Forthorthe.

Elfaria had fled with nothing but the clothes on her back, so she was wearing more toned down clothes and accessories than normal. But even casual for her was exceptionally luxurious. Her well tailored dress made from expensive looking textiles made that quite clear. She also had brilliant golden hair like Theia, which was crowned with a jeweled headpiece. Even her pure white shoes were lined with gold and jewels. Everything she had was exquisite. Elfaria truly looked like the empress of an empire that ruled over many worlds.

"Thank you for taking such good care of my daughter. I'm Theia's mother, Elfaria. It is a pleasure to meet you."

But she was a very openhearted person. Befitting of a pacifist, she spoke with a gentle tone and smile.

"Y-You could buy three mansions using just what she's wearing..."

"Yurika, keep it together! She might be ridiculously rich, but she seems like a nice person!"

"Hahh... So this is the empress of a country that's been around for over two thousand years..."

"So that's Theia-dono's mother... I'm glad to see she's in good health."

"Will Clan-san and Theia-san turn out like this too eventually?"

“That’s my plan. In order to become the next empress, I’d have to at the very least be on equal grounds with Her Majesty.”

“A real empress, huh...? I’ll make sure to absorb all of this for reference in the next play...”

The girls all instinctively held their breath when they beheld Elfaria. And it wasn’t just her outfit; Elfaria herself was beautiful. She had the attractiveness of a grown woman, but a youthful look that made it hard to believe she was a mother. And on top of all that, she had an aura of benevolence seemingly overflowing within. Thanks to that, what she was wearing didn’t appear gaudy in the slightest. Her clothes and accessories all served to amplify her beauty. Empress Elfaria was truly picturesque, even just standing still.

“She sure is making herself look young...”

And though the girls all beheld the beautiful Elfaria with wonder, there was one person who abstained. Unfazed by her beauty, this person threw a frosty gaze Elfaria’s way.

“She should be in her late thirties... yet she looks like a young woman...”

It was the only man on the bridge, Koutarou.



“Ah?!”

Hearing those disrespectful words, Elfaria noticed Koutarou’s presence. It certainly hadn’t been a compliment, yet she smiled brightly. And like a young girl, her eyes sparkled as she ran up to him.

“Long time no see, Layo—”

“Aaaaahhh!”

Realizing what Elfaria was about to say before anyone else, Koutarou hurriedly stopped her and covered her mouth. He then wrapped his arm around her neck, forcibly drew her closer to him, and whispered into her ear.

“Elle, if you say any more than that, I swear I’ll punch you even if you are the empress.”

“Hmmh, mhhm!”

Sensing that Koutarou was serious, Elfaria frantically nodded her head. Koutarou then let go of her, but Elfaria didn’t move right away. Instead, she whispered into his ear.

“Layous-sama, you still haven’t told Theia the truth, even in this situation?”

“How could I tell her? Do you want her to be in even more danger?”

“I don’t think there is anything more dangerous than a coup d’etat...”

Koutarou had shouted over her and treated her roughly, yet the empress allowed it. On top of that, they were now secretly talking about something. Koutarou and Elfaria’s strange behavior astonished most of the girls on the bridge.

Theia spoke for all of them when she asked, “Koutarou, do you and my mother know each other?”

As far as Theia knew, Koutarou and Elfaria had never met before. Theia had mentioned Koutarou to Elfaria a few times in the past, but it had only been small talk. However, considering how they were behaving, this certainly didn’t seem like the first time they’d met. Theia suspected that Koutarou had somehow managed to contact Elfaria after she’d given him full access to the

Blue Knight's systems.

"N-No, it was a misunderstanding on my part. She just happened to look like someone I know. Right, Elle?"

"'Elle'?"

Theia cocked her head to the side at hearing that strangely intimate nickname. Seeing Theia's reaction, Koutarou realized his blunder and hurried to correct himself.

"Um, I mean... Your Majesty Elfaria."

"That's right, Theia. This is my first time meeting Layous-sama—"

A thud rang out.

"You're doing that on purpose, aren't you, Your Majesty?!"

"Ouch... And that's not true. This is our first time meeting, after all."

"Oh yeah?"

But every time Koutarou was about to convince Theia, Elfaria mixed things up. It would take a little while longer until he was able to convince her.

Seeing how Koutarou and Elfaria were behaving, Ruth came up with a certain theory.

"Could this be..."

That theory was that Koutarou and Elfaria had met in the past when Koutarou was returning home from Forthorthe. Going off that as a premise, a few other things would start to make sense. A prime example would be Blue Knight's maneuver suit, Koutarou's blue armor.

When Koutarou had first put it on, it matched his physique perfectly. There hadn't even been a need for minor adjustments. At the time Ruth had thought it was sheer happenstance, but thinking back on it, was far too strange of a coincidence.

As an archeologist, Elfaria had allegedly reproduced that armor based off descriptions in ancient documents. It was easy to think that Elfaria had

redesigned the armor based off of Koutarou's measurements recorded in documents from past Forthorthe, but that wasn't the case.

A few months passed between Koutarou first putting on the armor and him being sent to the past. It was hard to believe that Koutarou, who was in the middle of growing, hadn't changed at all in that time. Just going off of height alone, there should be a few centimeters' difference. So if Elfaria really had based her measurements off of an old document, the armor still should have needed adjusting. But in spite of that, it hadn't.

So if wasn't that and it wasn't outright dumb luck, Ruth could only think of one other possibility. And that was that Elfaria had met with Koutarou before starting her work on the armor, and obtained the initial data at that time. That was the only way for her to know what Koutarou's measurements would be when he first put on the armor.

"As things stand, it might not have been a coincidence that Her Highness's trial was to invade Satomi-sama's room..."

Elfaria was a famed archeologist, but she was also a specialist when it came to computers. That was because being an archeologist in modern Forthorthe required extensive knowledge of ancient computers.

And with that knowledge, Elfaria might have made some alterations to Theia's trial. She very well may have even intentionally made it so she'd have to invade Koutarou's apartment. All she would have had to do was hack into the computer before Theia's trial was decided. And taking everything into consideration, Elfaria had a strong motive to do so.

Elfaria, who had a lot of political enemies, would want to put her daughter somewhere safe before making any major political moves, like proclaiming disarmament. And if asked where the safest place would be, any citizen of Forthorthe would surely reply the same: With the Blue Knight, Layous Fatra Veltlion.

We might have been moving according to Her Majesty's plans all along...

Ruth started to suspect that this was all by Elfaria's design. From raising Theia as a fan of the Blue Knight to choosing Ruth to be her guard. It might all have been to protect Theia, and to have Koutarou choose her.

Once Elfaria had introduced herself, Koutarou and the others started their own introductions. The introductions took place one at a time in parallel with the strategy meeting. And since there were eight people who hadn't meet Elfaria before, it took nearly an hour before it was the final person's turn to go see Elfaria.

"It's been a while, Clan-san."

"I see you haven't changed at all, Your Majesty."

"I'm glad we could meet again."

As Elfaria said that, she smiled like she was greeting an old friend.

"Truth be told, I've always been watching over you until today."

"Me?"

Clan put her hand on her chest. Her eyes behind her glasses showed surprise.

"Yes. I watched over as you matured and started to look like you did in my memories, eagerly awaiting for you to become the you that I know."

"Then, when I left for Earth..."

"I danced for joy, thinking that the time had finally come."

"You weren't worried for Theiamillis-san?"

"Why would I be? I already knew how things would turn out. And besides, Layous-sama was with her."

Elfaria and Clan both turned to look at Koutarou. He was currently in the middle of a serious discussion with Theia and Kiriha. He didn't look like the high school boy Satomi Koutarou, but the legendary hero, the Blue Knight. It was the version of him that Clan had monopolized until today.

"In fact, I'm more worried now."

"That's true. We're currently in a very serious situation, and—"

"No, no, I'm not worried about that."

Clan had assumed that Elfaria was worried about the coup d'etat. However,

she smiled and shook her head. That wasn't what was on her mind.

"Whatever happens with the coup d'etat happens. And if I am defeated walking alongside the Blue Knight, then so be it. As long as I do my best for the citizens, then I will have no regrets."

"Then what are you worried about?"

"That girl. The one who called herself Harumi..."

"You're worried about Harumi?"

It turns out what Elfaria was worried about was the girl behind Koutarou listening in on the strategy meeting, Sakuraba Harumi. But Harumi didn't look like a threat to Clan. She couldn't understand why Elfaria was concerned.

"She looks just like the Silver Princess. It's like she's her very reincarnation."

"Surely that can't be... She might be able to control Signaltin and it's true she has Alaia's memories... But Harumi is her own person; she's not Alaia-san."

"If I had met you first... If... I had asked you to help me first... what would you have done, Koutarou-sama?"

"What?"

"That's what the Silver Princess said before Layous-sama left. I found it recorded in the history of the translation device that came with the data you gave me from the armor."

Twenty years ago, Elfaria had asked Clan for the data from Koutarou's armor. Since the data had direct recordings of important history to Forthorthe, it was something she was eager to get her hands on.

"Harumi met him before anyone else, and now she is serving as the Silver Princess's replacement. There's nothing I'm more worried about than that."

Elfaria flashed a pained smile. If that wasn't by pure chance, then what did it mean? There was nothing that worried Elfaria, who wished for her daughter's happiness, more than that.

"...Fate might not be on Theia's side."

"There's no need to worry, Your Majesty."

However, Clan wasn't worried like Elfaria was. Now it was Clan's turn to smile.

"Even if your worries come to fruition, Veltlion isn't so simple a man that he'd accept just Harumi."

"You sound confident, Clan-san."

"I guess you could call it a woman's intuition."

"Well, that's a problem. It seems I've found yet another reason to worry."

"I won't back down easily, you know?"

"My, my, heehee... But still, it feels very strange to hear Schweigers' daughter speaking of a woman's intuition."

"Even if you're the empress, I won't forgive such rudeness... Though I know exactly what you mean, heehee."

"Teeheehee... Then allow me to formally apologize, Princess Clariossa."

Before long, the two women were laughing together. Their first meeting in twenty years was a joyous, peaceful occasion. But something would soon put a stop to that. Clan's bracelet began vibrating.

"Oh?"

"What's the matter?"

"Um... it's a message from my family. What could it be?"

Clan went to a nearby terminal to bring up the message.

"This is..."

And once she read it in its entirety, the smile on Clan's face vanished in an instant.

The message Clan had received was actually a demand from the military sent through her family. The military wanted Clan and the Hazy Moon to retreat.

The military didn't know about Clan's change of heart or how she'd changed over the past months, so they still thought she was after Theia. In order words, that she was on their side, and they didn't want her involved in the commotion.

There was also the chance that Theia might use Clan by sending an emergency rescue signal again. So in order to avoid that, they wanted Clan to fall back.

All things considered, as a Forthorthian, it was only natural that Clan would try and rescue the princess. And after receiving an emergency rescue signal like that, Clan was practically forced to side with Theia upon seeing Blue Knight being attacked by unidentified ships. The three unidentified ships knew that, so they'd left without putting up a fight against Clan.

The military enjoyed their close relationship with the Schweiger family, and didn't want to do anything to endanger that. But as long as Clan was in the area around Earth, Theia would inevitably try and use her for help again. That's why they sent a message through the Schweiger family asking her to return home.

Immediately after receiving that message, Clan consulted with Koutarou and the others. She was now Koutarou and Theia's ally, and she had also been friends with Elfaria since twenty years ago. She wasn't cruel enough to retreat without consulting with those close to her.

"This is bad. Having me retreat is proof that an attack is on the horizon. We can also assume that they're planning to attack in space."

"Clan, fall back to a safe area."

"No!"

Koutarou recommended retreating, but Clan shook her head.

"Are you telling me to obey the coup d'etat army?! That's not a funny joke! I might still be immature, but I am a proud member of the Forthorthian royalty!"

After the growth Clan had undergone, she couldn't accept the coup d'etat's cowardly way of doing things. She was planning on standing with Theia and Elfaria and fighting.

"Please, Clan. Take the civilians with you and retreat."

However, Theia's words got Clan's attention.

"Civilians?"

"That's right. There are other people aboard Blue Knight who helped me and

my mother escape. We can't fight with them still on board. Please protect them on your Hazy Moon, just in case."

"That's..."

Clan started to hesitate.

Theia had considered her way of fighting. Her standard MO included dangerous attacks and maneuvers, but she would be hesitant to do any of that with people she wanted to protect on board. Escaping would be easy if it was just Theia and Ruth, but that wasn't the case with so many civilians onboard. And that would limit the kinds of plans they could use.

"I'm asking you too, Clan. If there's real danger, it will be your job to escape with Theia and Her Majesty. Until then, I want you to keep away and hide."

Because the Hazy Moon had excellent stealth capabilities, Clan wouldn't have to fall back far in order to keep herself from being detected by the coup d'etat army. That would allow the Hazy Moon to remain on standby until it was needed.

"I... understand..."

Though mortified, Clan reluctantly agreed to Koutarou and Theia's request. She knew it had to be done. But doing nothing while seeing the princess and the Blue Knight off into battle was frustrating.

Fate might not be on my side either...

Clan was reminded of what Elfaria had said just a moment ago. She couldn't help feeling like a side character seeing the main characters off before the climax.

The coup d'etat army chasing after Theia and Elfaria was using newly built, unmarked ships. At a glance, it was impossible to tell their faction or purpose. Essentially, they were operating as a ghost fleet that didn't officially exist. That was why they couldn't contact Clan directly, and had to go through headquarters and her family. Because of that, there was a considerable delay in communications, and any detailed discussion was difficult.

“Elexis-sama, we have received a reply from the Schweiger family.”

“And the results?”

“It seems princess Clariossa is retreating. But if she falls back without reason and we attack shortly thereafter, she will be suspected of being a part of it, so she wants us to wait before we strike.”

“How long of a delay did she request?”

“Three days, sir.”

“Hmm... Well, it was pretty sudden, and the top brass didn’t leak any information to Her Highness Clariossa, so three days seems fair.”

Having received a report on Clan, Elexis leaned back in his chair, deep in thought. He was sitting in the commander’s seat on the bridge of a carrier ship.

As Koutarou had suspected, the three ships that had come after Theia were under Elexis’s command. DKI had secretly produced a fleet of ships, and they were being operated by Elexis and the Melcenhein band of knights, which he had a deep connection with thanks to one of his distant relatives. Everyone with rank of captain or below was from the Melcenhein family, and Elexis was the one at the top giving the captains instructions.

“That’s just within our time limit.”

“But it will do. Either way, we’ll only have time for one attack, so there’s no need to worry about the loss of a few days. Just think of it as showing respect for the lovely Schweiger family.”

The military was chasing after Theia and Elfaria in a highly secretive and illegal way with the help of Elexis and DKI’s manpower and equipment. But there was a restriction on how much time they could spend on this mission in such a fashion. If they took too long, they wouldn’t be able to cover it all up.

After that, they would need to act through legal channels, and in order to do that, they would need to frame Theia and Elfaria for some kind of crime in order to pursue and detain them. Of course, the empress and princess hadn’t done anything illegal, so finding a way to frame them would take a considerable amount of time and effort. And while that groundwork was being laid, the

empress and her daughter would be untouchable.

That meant they had to act quickly, before anyone caught on to what was going on, in order to prevent there from being a large gap of time between this and their next attack. But Clan had agreed to retreat within the timeframe they had for this mission, so Elexis didn't think much of it. He knew, regardless of when they attacked, they'd only have one chance at it, so this had no effect on his plans.

"In fact, I'm more worried about him."

"Him?"

At first the captain didn't understand who Elexis was referring to, and gave him a puzzled look.

"You don't know?"

"Ah, the man you sent the suit to?"

Elexis was now making the same face he had when he'd packed his suit into the container and launched it. Thanks to that, the captain was quickly able to connect the dots and determine who Elexis was talking about.

"That's right. You could say that everything hinges on whether or not we can beat that extraordinary boy, Koutarou-kun."

"Can we win?"

"We will. I've made preparations to ensure exactly that."

Elexis was smiling. There was tension in his expression, but he was confident above all else. To the captain, it looked like Elexis was about to play a game with a good friend.

"You look like you're having fun, Elexis-sama."

"Oh, I most certainly am. This might sound imprudent, but I'm having a blast."

"I'm afraid I don't have the composure to enjoy myself the same way. This will decide the future of Forthorthe, after all."

"I'm not worried for Forthorthe's future in the slightest. No matter who takes the throne after Her Majesty Elfaria, their political views will be closer to my

ideals.”

“Even if that’s Princess Theiamillis?”

“That’s what I believe.”

Elexis believed that any future ruler would take the coup d’etat that happened during Elfaria’s reign into consideration in their politics. There would be a certain amount of wariness, and an increased emphasis on defense. And by capitalizing on that, DKI would rake in a tidy profit while making the world a better place—at least, according to Elexis. So no matter what, as long as the coup d’etat took place, that was enough for Elexis to get what he wanted out of this.

“Besides, I am confident I can survive no matter what way the world turns out.”

“You stand to gain from this no matter how it goes down, and you’re confident you’ll survive no matter what... Yet you’re concerned about this boy?”

“Yes. Not even my most desperate efforts might be enough. I’ve never met an opponent like him before. Can you tell? I’m going all out for the first time in my life.”

Before he met Koutarou, Elexis had always been the victor. He could repel all of his enemies without even getting serious. Because of that, he’d never felt like life offered him much of a challenge. Part of why he’d agreed to work with the military in the first place was for exactly that—a challenge. That was also why he was present on-site. Normally, there would be no need for the CEO of DKI to be on the front line.

But things had changed when he met Koutarou. Koutarou had powers that surpassed his understanding, and composure far beyond his years. Elexis couldn’t even imagine what Koutarou had experienced for him to be the man he was. And that all made him leap for joy. What excited him even more was that he’d lost to him. He was thrilled to finally find an opponent that required him to push himself to the limit.

“You make it sound like you don’t even mind if you lose.”

“Oh, that wasn’t my intention. Despite how I sound, I hate losing. Though, I suppose if I do lose, my enjoyment will only be prolonged.”

“Then I’ll be putting my hopes on your determination to win.”

“Don’t worry. That side of me is diehard.”

Elexis and the captain both smiled, partly because they were related and partly because the bond between Elexis and the Melcenhein band of knights was so strong. They were smiling because they trusted one another.

Ground Battle

Saturday, May 22nd

The three days Clan had asked the military to wait was used for various preparations back at Earth. That included performing emergency repairs for Blue Knight, securing a shelter on the surface, moving the civilians that Theia had with her to the Hazy Moon, and much more.

After repeated information gatherings and multiple discussions, Kiriha decided on everyone's deployment as follows.

First, Theia, Ruth, and Koutarou would be placed aboard the Blue Knight. That was to keep Elfaria and Theia separated so they couldn't be attacked at the same time. In the worst case scenario, Theia and Ruth would have to leave Earth. Koutarou had been placed on Blue Knight so he could respond to trouble no matter where it appeared. If the girls ran into trouble on the surface, he would descend and support them. And if the enemy attacked from space, then he would stay on the ship to control it. Since getting off the ship was easier than boarding it from Earth, Kiriha decided he would start on Blue Knight to be prepared for either event.

Clan took the Hazy Moon and the civilians and moved away from the expected battlefield. She would find a place to hide and use her ship's stealth mode, so there was no fear of her getting dragged into the conflict. Essentially, Clan's role was to protect the civilians and stay on standby to assist Koutarou and the others in the event of an emergency.

The remaining six girls would protect Elfaria on the surface. Kiriha's subordinates had been called to assist with that. But since Kiriha and her subordinates were from the conservative faction of the People of the Earth, there weren't that many among them who were skilled in combat. She'd also had to leave people behind to keep the radical faction in check. Because of that, Kiriha had only been able to gather about a dozen people in the short time she

had. So with the other girls and her subordinates, they had about twenty people all said and done. Kiriha expected they'd be going up against a force as large as fifty. So though the girls were exceptionally strong, it was hard to tell if they would be able to protect Elfaria under these circumstances.

The battlefield Kiriha had chosen was a small mountain on the outskirts of Kisshouharukaze City. That was to keep any fighting from affecting the city, and allow them to set traps beforehand. Kiriha wanted to stay as far away from civilization as possible, but moving too far away meant increasing the risk that their enemies would send a larger force after them. Kiriha had spent most of her time trying to determine the right place for the battle—somewhere far away enough that the city would be spared any damage, but close enough that their enemies would still be wary of being discovered. The nearby mountain was what she'd decided on.

Ruth's tense voice filled the bridge of the Blue Knight, now filled with vacant seats.

"Your Highness, Satomi-sama, I've received reports that the deployment on the ground has proceeded as planned."

"So we somehow made it in time..."

After glancing at Ruth, who was sitting in the operator's seat, Theia leaned back in the captain's chair and let out a small sigh of relief. She'd been concerned about being able to finish all the necessary preparations in time, so hearing that everything was complete was good news. Now all that was left was to wait for the enemy.

"We're fortunate our opponent is Elexis."

Looking at the monitor displaying the status on the ground, Koutarou made sure the last preparations were complete himself before sitting down in a nearby seat and turning to look at Theia.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"He's considering what happens after this battle, so he won't attack until quite some time after Clan has left. If our opponents were just knights and soldiers, they might have rushed in already."

Koutarou saw Elexis as a calm, calculating man. That's what his experiences back in past Forthorthe had taught him also. And since Elexis looked very similar to Dextro, a man who had given him a lot of trouble, he naturally became more cautious around him.

"That's what we're up against, the kind of opponent he is. So, Theia, don't get too obsessed with the battle in front of you. Against him, we need to be concerned about a lot more than the immediate victory."

"..."

Theia's eyes opened wide in surprise upon hearing those words. But it wasn't because she didn't understand what he was saying. In fact, it was quite the opposite. What he said made perfect sense. Koutarou was speaking just like a knight, or even a commander.

"What's wrong, Theia?"

"N-Nothing... It's just, you're so calm... I..."

As far as Theia knew, Koutarou might have some experience fighting, but he shouldn't have any experience with war. This should be his first taste of it. Yet Koutarou was as calm as any veteran.

Oh crap... Well, I guess it's not like I can hide it at times like this...

That was when Koutarou realized that his behavior was indeed very unusual for a high school student. But he couldn't simply go back to being a normal high school boy after what he'd been through, so he decided to try and cover it up instead.

"After fighting so many times, even I've started thinking about that kind of stuff, you know."

"...That's fair. Sorry for suggesting otherwise. Don't pay me any mind."

Fortunately for Koutarou, Theia didn't say anything more. She had too much else to worry about right now other than Koutarou's behavior.

"Your Highness, Satomi-sama, there's movement on the surface!"

And with Ruth's report, Theia put it out of her mind altogether. She grew tense, and so did Koutarou.

“What happened?”

“We’ve lost connection with two of the scouting drones patrolling the outside of the operation area.”

“If it’s two, that means it wasn’t an accident or a wild animal! Theia, they’re here!”

“Yes!”

The next moment, the previously quiet bridge became rather noisy. All kinds of data popped up on the monitors and an alarm rang out as the AI reported additional information.

“Just before the connection with the scouts was lost, they detected a weak spacequake! It seems the forces on the ground are receiving support from the fleet in orbit!”

By “support,” Ruth meant in the same fashion that Theia and Ruth used Blue Knight. Elexis had summoned a weapon to destroy the unmanned scouts.

“So that’s how you’re doing it, Elexis!”

“What do you mean?”

“Elexis is planning on attacking from the surface and from space at the same time!”

“I see... Then if we don’t help, the ground forces will be wiped out!”

Following Koutarou’s lead, Theia picked up on Elexis’s plan.

Blue Knight had currently reduced its power output and was pretending to be an asteroid orbiting the planet. That made finding it difficult. So Elexis had chosen to lure it out. By summoning weapons and destroying the two scouting drones, he was sending them a message. He was saying that his three ships would support the forces on the surface, meaning that if Blue Knight didn’t come out, Koutarou and the others would be in trouble. While they might have a chance against just ground forces alone, they wouldn’t stand a chance against ground forces *and* the aid of three spaceships. So in order to protect Elfaria, Theia and the others would have to reveal themselves.

“Ruth-san, where is the enemy fleet?!”

“It’s currently being calculated!”

Ruth busily moved her hands along the operator’s panel. She was trying to locate the enemy fleet by tracking the signal that was sent as weapons were transferred.

When sending weapons back and forth, a message using gravitational waves was required. Using the data from the two scouting drones before they were destroyed and the data Blue Knight could gather, Ruth was trying to narrow down the signal’s origin. While she didn’t know what weapon had been transferred, she did know the strength and direction of the gravitational waves used. From there, she would be able to calculate the source location.

“I’ve found it! The three ships are all on the far side of the moon!”

Ruth displayed her results in hologram form. As soon as she did, even Koutarou could understand Elexis’s intentions.

“I see. By hiding there, they can fight without holding back!”

The moon rotated around Earth. Because of that, it was impossible to observe what was happening on the far side of the planet’s only natural satellite. And that was where the fleet of three ships had taken up positions. From there, they could fight to their heart’s content without being discovered by the people of Earth. The only potential problem was being detected by satellite, but because Earth had so few satellites capable of observing the far side of the moon, it wasn’t hard to selectively block them out with Forthorthian technology. Ultimately, Elexis was calling Blue Knight to the far side of the moon so that they could fight freely.

“Blue Knight! Release camouflage! Set the generator output to the maximum! Enter a lunar orbit using a short warp!”

“As you wish, my princess.”

Upon hearing Ruth’s report, Theia ordered Blue Knight to relocate. It was obvious that this was a trap, yet they had no choice but to waltz right into it.

“Theia, bring out my armor! I’ll control Blue Knight’s body!”

Koutarou’s armor was originally a device meant to control the ship. The ship

could be set to replicate the wearer's motions, so the ship could be controlled simply by wearing the armor and moving accordingly. While Blue Knight was a warship, it was made in the shape of a person, making it possible to change the direction of its weapons and boosters. That was a characteristic unique to Blue Knight.

"Wait, Koutarou! You should head for the surface!"

However, Theia shook her head at Koutarou's offer. In a three on one fight, it would be hard to win without making use of Blue Knight's directional mobility and flexibility, but despite knowing that, Theia wanted Koutarou to help the people on the ground.

"What do you mean?! You two will—"

"Listen! Even for Blue Knight, it will take some time to reach the far side of the moon! And I don't want our people on the ground annihilated before then! So you head for the surface right away!"

By bending space-time to move, also called warping, it was possible to reach the far side of the moon in an instant. But since they would end up getting shot down immediately if they dropped out of warp in the middle of the three ships, they would need to warp to a nearby location instead. That meant after they reached the vicinity of the area via warp, they would need to use normal means to go the rest of the way, which would take some time. But if their people on the surface were annihilated during that time, there would be no point in even going. That was why Theia wanted Koutarou to head down to Earth immediately.

"...I understand. Be careful, Theia."

Koutarou suppressed his worry and decided to obey her instructions.

"I know. I won't try to push for a win. I'm just going to run around while jamming their communications."

Theia made it sound like she was going to stay on the move, but that would be difficult to pull off in reality. Koutarou knew it was dangerous as well. However, both he and Theia well aware that it was necessary, so they didn't discuss the matter any further.

“Ruth-san, I’ll leave Theia to— Wait, I guess don’t need to tell you that.”

“No, but I shall carve your words into my heart.”

As Ruth said that, the floor of the bridge parted and a blue set of armor standing upright rose up from below. After putting it on, Koutarou would head for the surface.

“Koutarou... Before you go, say something to us.”

“Something? Like what?”

Koutarou replied to Theia while sliding into the armor that had just opened for him. The armor closed automatically and started making adjustments. The armor’s motors started up, and changed the position of the joints to take the load of its weight off of Koutarou. This was the usual startup process.

“Anything that will raise our morale.”

“You make it sound so easy, but that’s the hardest part.”

“Just say something.”

Theia knew that this might be the last time they ever saw each other. That’s why she at least wanted to hear one final sentiment from his lips. She didn’t care if the words themselves were pointless. What she needed to hear was the feeling behind them.

“Theia, once this is over, I’ll play games with you for as long as you like.”

“...Now that you’ve said that, I’ll hold you to your word. Understood?”

Theia got to hear exactly what she wanted. And the feelings behind those words brought tears to her eyes. But Theia held them back and answered with a smile.

“Yeah. And Ruth-san...”

“Yes?”

“Please think of something you’d like. Once this battle is over, I’ll listen to any request you have.”

“Anything?”

“Yes.”

“...I understand. I have a very special request, so I’ll pick that one.”

Tears formed in Ruth’s eyes as well. But knowing she couldn’t show weakness before a battle, she wiped them away and braced herself.

“That’s unfair. Why do I get games, while Ruth gets anything she wants? You’re too kind to just her. I demand you correct this disparity.”

“Who do you think you are?”

Koutarou smirked as he headed for the bridge’s exit in his armor. He would use a small lifeboat to head down to Earth on his own. The readied pod was waiting just outside of the bridge.

“I’m your princess! Treat me with more care!”

“Then you already know why.”

“I don’t.”

“Stupid.”

After stepping off the bridge, Koutarou turned around to face Theia and Ruth one last time.

“Theia, you have the right to request anything from me whenever you please.”

“That...”

Theia was struck by Koutarou’s words, and her expression went blank. She was so overcome with surprise that she completely forgot what she was about to say. But Theia only remained motionless for an instant. Seeing that the sliding doors leading out of the bridge were about to close, she desperately called out to Koutarou, who was about to disappear behind them.

“Then you better come back to me!”

“As you wish, my princess.”

With those words, the door closed and separated Koutarou from them.

“Isn’t that great, Your Highness?”

After the door shut, Ruth smiled at Theia. Theia, however, slumped her slender shoulders.

“...I should have said something more encouraging...”

Theia had seen Koutarou off with a selfish wish. She regretted it.

“Heehee... But Your Highness, you can just tell him that when you meet again.”

“That’s true... If we see each other again, I’ll do just that.”

Theia flashed a small smile and narrowed her determined eyes. Since she was about to jump headlong into a trap of her own volition, chances were high that she would never get that chance.

But thanks to those few words, Theia had found a reason to win no matter what. She would fight her hardest to make sure she could see Koutarou again. To say something more worthy of his princess.

That resolve filled Theia’s small chest and drove her forward.

As Koutarou began re-entry into the atmosphere on the lifeboat, the battle on the ground between Kiriha’s group and the coup d’etat army was about to commence. That information was sent to Harumi, who was with Elfaria.

“Harumi, the battle is about to start. Sadly, this is as much as I can help.”

Clan, who had given Harumi the news, positioned her smaller ship, the Cradle, in the sky above the battlefield to observe it. But regardless of how well the Cradle was able to conceal its appearance, chances were high that once the battle started, the enemies would move in and be able to detect it at such short range. Before that happened, Clan would cut off her communications and move to higher elevation.

“Thank you very much, Clan-san. I’ll see you later.”

“I’ll be praying for your victory.”

“Yes, thank you very much.”

After Harumi thanked her for a second time, Clan ended the call. Once Harumi

did the same from her own bracelet, she turned to Elfaria.

“Your Majesty Elfaria, it seems the battle is about to start.”

“I see...”

Elfaria looked out the window. Harumi and Elfaria were inside a small cottage in the mountains. Because the cottage was in the middle of a thick forest, all that could be seen through the window was a dim forest. But Harumi knew that Elfaria wasn’t looking at the trees. She was looking through them towards Kiriha and the others, far, far away on the other side of the woods. She was worried for her distant allies.

“To think I would make people completely unrelated to me fight in my stead...”

Elfaria rued the situation she found herself in. Because she had advocated the disarmament of the army, she’d ended up forcing people she didn’t even know to fight for her. Worse yet, that included several young girls. Though she had little other recourse right now, Elfaria wasn’t happy about it.

“Your Majesty, please don’t say something so sad. We might not be connected to Forthorthe, but we certainly are to Theiamillis-san. She is a very wonderful girl and our precious friend. And Your Majesty is Theiamillis-san’s mother. That’s why we all decided to stake our lives on this. Your Majesty is important to us too.”

“Harumi... but...”

“Is it that Your Majesty can’t accept that we are Theiamillis-san’s friends?”

Well aware that she was addressing to the empress of a galactic nation, Harumi spoke her mind without flinching.

If I knew more about modern Forthorthe and its circumstances, I might not have been able to say this...

Everything Harumi know about Forthorthe was about Forthorthe of the past. She’d learned as much as she could while doing research for the plays. She’d memorized every detail of that setting and any other information she could get her hands on, but she had no knowledge of present-day Forthorthe. Because of

that, she thought of Elfaria as Theia's mother rather than an empress, which made it much easier for her to speak her mind. Harumi knew that what she was saying was quite bold, and couldn't help but be amused at herself.

"Harumi, you..."

Despite the serious discussion, Harumi had a gentle and happy smile. Seeing Harumi like that, Elfaria's impression of her changed.

The conviction in her words... Her dignified behavior and elegant gestures... She is far too well made for a common girl... She really is...

Harumi was a timid girl, but in times of crisis, something deep inside of her would surface. It was noble and beautiful, and, Elfaria thought, very becoming of a princess.

"I'm sorry. That was rude of me... I'm sorry."

Misinterpreting Elfaria struggle for words as something negative, Harumi apologized and lowered her head. She began to regret overstepping her bounds.

"That's not true, Harumi. I was just moved thinking about what great friends Theia has made here."

Elfaria smiled at Harumi. There were no lies in her words. She really felt like Theia had been blessed with wonderful friends. So great, in fact, that Elfaria started worrying for a different reason. They were complex feelings of a mother who wanted her daughter to be happy.

"Really? Hearing you say that makes me happy."

"That's why I hope everyone will be all right..."

"It will be okay. I'm sure that everyone will return safely."

"...You're strong, Harumi."

"I'm a girl, after all... Weren't you the same in the past, Your Majesty?"

"That's true... Then I too shall believe in those strong feelings of the past and wait patiently."

"Good."

But that was as long as the two could smile. After hearing the boom of an explosion in the distance, they knew the battle had finally begun.

A blinding light appeared in the corner of the monitor Clan was staring at. The image then shifted; the camera positioned the light in the center of the screen and zoomed in. What was being displayed now was the aftermath of an explosion, a cloud of dust kicked up into the air. It was a sign of the first strike, and proof some sort of weapon had been used.

“It’s finally started...”

Clan was sitting on the bridge of the Hazy Moon, hastily operating a panel and giving orders to the Cradle, which was currently positioned above the battlefield. While she couldn’t actively help anymore, she still wanted to observe what was happening in case of the worst possible outcome. Clan activated all of the Cradle’s sensors and attempted to confirm the situation. Data sent from the Cradle was processed and appeared as images on the monitor, one after the other.

“Your Majesty...”

“Princess, be safe...”

Each time an image appeared, the whispering voices on the bridge increased. Clan wasn’t the only one on the Hazy Moon. The civilians that had helped Theia and Elfaria escape were on the ship too. They feared for the safety of their beloved royals, and some pleaded with Clan to be present on the bridge under the condition that they didn’t get in her way. Clan approved, and as a result, a dozen or so men and women were worriedly looking at the monitor with her.

Honestly, I’m envious, Theiamillis-san...

The past Clan most likely would have chased them off the bridge. But now, not only did she let them stay, but she also felt envious of Theia. If she were in the position Theia was now, would the citizens be this worried for her? Clan didn’t have the confidence to say yes, and that proved that she was lacking the qualities of a princess. It made her realize once more how foolish she’d been.

“There’s no need to worry, everyone. Theiamillis-san and the others are

strong. And in the worst case scenario, the Hazy Moon will come to the rescue. So you can continue watching at ease.”

But Clan was now much different than she once had been. How the citizens felt about her would gradually come to change.

“Princess Clariossa... We are grateful for your consideration.”

“B-But of course. You are all citizens of Forthorthe, and I am your princess.”

And a glimpse of that change could already be seen. The people bowing to Clan proved that much. But since Clan was so unused to dealing with others, it slipped by her unnoticed.

The explosion in question had occurred a short distance away from where the scouting drones had been destroyed. The enemy was getting closer to where Elfaria and Harumi were hiding, and the explosion was a trap that had been placed beforehand being triggered.

“As I expected, it seems they can’t detect the traps. But it seems they’re aware that Elfaria-dono is hiding in this region... I can’t make light of my foes.”

Forthorthe used advanced sensors, which Kiriha had suspected would be easy to fool with mundane bombs. After some careful consideration, Kiriha decided to use talismans charged with explosion magic cast on them as a trigger for the main explosive, dynamite. It was a completely nonmetal bomb. As the enemy approached, the explosion magic would activate, which would in turn set off the dynamite. It was a highly efficient and powerful bomb that couldn’t be detected by Forthorthian sensors.

On top of that, the bombs served as indicators of where the enemy was located. And thanks to the explosion they’d heard, Kiriha was able to tell that the enemy was getting closer. Reacting accordingly, she and the others hurried in the direction of the explosion and set up a defensive formation.

“I can’t make anyone out yet...”

Shizuka was staring into the forest, squinting her eyes. She had the best eyesight out of anyone in the group, but in the forest at night, she still couldn’t spot any approaching enemies.

“What about you, Sanae-chan?”

“Hmm, they’re still too far off to see clearly, but I can feel a cloud of hostility.”

Sanae could sense the auras of their enemies on the other side of the forest. Because the forest itself had a thick aura to it, she couldn’t clearly see through it and detect individual people. There was no mistaking, however, the mass of approaching hostility.

“How does it look?”

“There’s one big cloud in the front. And there’s a smaller cloud to its right. There might be more, but I can’t tell from this distance.”

“Which means that, at a minimum, there’s a main force and a detachment... Sanae, keep using your spirit sight and let me know if there are any changes.”

“Okay!”

Based on all the information she had, Kiriha made adjustments to her plan. Since the enemy had split up into at least two groups, she had to account for that now.

“Yurika.”

“What is it?”

“Take three of my subordinates with you and stop the detachment moving to our right. I don’t intend to let them just do as they please.”

“Me?!”

Yurika’s eyes shot wide open. She had just assumed that she would be following someone’s orders, so being given soldiers to command and a mission to carry out was completely unexpected.

“Yes. There’s no one else with as varied a power as yours. You’re the only one I can ask.”

In terms of offensive power or overall fighting capabilities, Theia and Shizuka were in a league of their own. But the only one who had the versatility to adapt to any situation was a magician like Yurika. It made her an excellent candidate for handling operations on her own.”

“I-I don’t have any confidence...”

“Kiriha-san, this is too much for Yurika. Should I go instead?”

“M-Maki-chan’s right! She’s much better at attacking than me!”

Darkness Rainbow specialized in frowned upon uses of magic. In other words, something like a surprise attack would be right up their alley. Maki herself had experience with that kind of thing, which was why she offered to take Yurika’s place.

“No, I’ll need you to confuse the enemy’s main force. Yurika will have to go.”

“No waaay...”

However, Kiriha was set on using Yurika to handle the detachment. Since Maki specialized in mind manipulation magic, she would be vital for dealing with the larger force. Moreover, because of her specialization, she was less adaptable than Yurika. In Kiriha’s mind, Yurika was the only one fit for the job.

“You can do it, Yurika!”

“Sanae-chan, please don’t make it sound so easy...”

“You only need to drive them away, so go give it your all.”

“But they’re coming to kill us, regardless of what *we’re* trying to do!”

“So are you just gonna sit here and do nothing? Once Koutarou shows up, he’ll be really angry...”

“Uh... I-I’ll do my best...”

Since Yurika was a coward, she had been reluctant at first. But once she realized a fate worse than death awaited her if she didn’t comply, she took three underground soldiers with her and vanished into the woods.

“Without Koutarou, Yurika sure is useless, isn’t she?”

“I wonder if Yurika-chan will be okay...”

“Maybe I really should have gone instead...”

“We can’t afford any second-guessing. The enemy coming our way won’t be easy to handle either. Shizuka, Sanae, get up front. Maki, come with me.”

Each of the five girls from Corona House were given three subordinates from the underground to back them up. As a result, five squads were formed. As the commander, Kiriha would make use of them to produce the most favorable results. Currently, Yurika's squad was deployed to handle the enemy's detachment. Next, Shizuka who was skilled in close-quarters combat, and Sanae who was capable of strengthening others and short-range attacks, were sent to the front to attack the enemy's main force. Maki and Kiriha would take up positions in the rear, and were in charge of long-range attacks and distractions using magic.

I just hope Theia-dono's absence won't affect us too much...

Though she had plenty to worry about, Kiriha wasn't in a situation where she could afford to complain. They had to win no matter what. If they didn't, the future they all desired would never come.

A young man wearing a white suit was standing in the middle of the forest at night. That alone was a bizarre sight, but what made it even more bizarre were the men in black combat uniforms surrounding him.

"Elexis-sama, the vanguard has come in contact with the enemy. The battle has begun."

"Despite that, it's been awfully quiet since the first explosion."

"Neither side must want to be found by the people of this planet."

"I guess I'm the only one who wants to stand out, then."

Listening to the report from his subordinate, Elexis smiled wryly as he looked at himself. His pure white suit stood out, especially in the dark of night. He was easy to spot, even from a fair distance away.

"The weapons our enemies are using are even more covert than ours."

"So they're not weapons from Princess Theiamillis... which means there can't be that many of them. Somewhere between twenty and thirty, I would wager."

Being a fair distance away from the city, there was no fear that the relatively silent laser and beam weapons that Elexis's forces used would attract any

attention from unwanted bystanders. So if his enemies were using even more covert weapons than that, it seemed a frank declaration that they didn't have the firepower to match. Elexis thought it was fair to assume he had them outnumbered.

"However, sir, there are several powerful people amongst them. We have already taken some damage."

"Mmm, that's more like it..."

Hearing that there were several powerful people in the enemy force, Elexis flashed a breezy smile.

"Is there a boy using a knight's sword among those powerful enemies?"

"I have received no such reports."

"I see..."

Not getting the answer he'd hoped for, Elexis's shoulders drooped. He looked like a child that had been stood up by a friend for a playdate. It was so drastically different from his normal energetic and spirited behavior that the soldiers around him were a bit confused.

"What should we do, sir?"

"I'll leave it to you. Since we have the numerical advantage, we'll probably be fine if we just hold back and corner them using the you-know-what."

Elexis gave instructions as if he was bored. Since his friend hadn't appeared, he would proceed according to plan. It would all be boring from there, and Elexis saw no need for further instruction in that regard.

"Understood."

"But if a boy with a knight's sword appears, don't carelessly attack. Report to me instead. I'll face him myself."

"Is he that dangerous?"

"That boy is like a living joke."

"I'll take that to heart... Let's go, men! Don't let the vanguard have all the fun!"

With the commander in the lead, the men in black combat uniforms moved out, leaving Elexis and a few soldiers acting as his bodyguards behind.

“Hurry up, Koutarou-kun. I’m getting tired of waiting.”

Elexis looked up into the sky. The stars were twinkling brightly, but the star he was looking for was nowhere to be found. The blue shooting star he wished for was still far away.

Yurika’s ambush had been a success. Since she was a magician, it was easy for her to sneak up on the Forthorthian soldiers without being detected. Her opening attack was equally splendid, and she knocked three soldiers unconscious with one go.

“Kyah! Kyah! Kyah!”

The problem came after that. The three soldiers she’d knocked out had seven companions, who spread out and opened fire after being attacked. Beam upon beam came raining down on Yurika.

“Nooooo! S-Save me, Satomi-san!”

The weapons the coup d’etat army were using were far more powerful than the weaponry available on Earth. And with superior numbers, they unleashed a counteroffensive beyond imagination. With it all directed at her, Yurika quickly retreated. Fortunately, thanks to the covering fire from the three underground dwellers, Yurika was able to dive into a trench before all of her defensive spells were broken through.

“I-I thought I was going to die...”

Still lying in the trench, Yurika let out a sigh of relief. Of the five layers of defensive spells she’d cast beforehand, only one remained. If the trench had been even a little further away, she might not have made it.

“Yurika-sama, the enemy is falling back.”

“R-Really?!”

Hearing the good news from one of the underground dwellers, Yurika poked her head out of the trench. And just like she’d been told, she could see the

enemy falling back, dragging the three unconscious soldiers with them.

“I hope they just leave after that...”

“The chances of that would be quite low.”

“I was afraid of that...”

Tears formed in Yurika’s eyes as she clutched her staff. She was desperately suppressing her urge to run away in fear. Yurika had heard that there would be up to fifty soldiers, so there was no way they would retreat after losing only three.

“And it looks like their teamwork is excellent...”

On top of that, the enemies hadn’t pushed forward. Instead, after driving Yurika away, they fell back with their unconscious companions. That proved how cautious they were and how much they trusted each other. It wouldn’t be hard to imagine that their next attack would be far more dangerous now that they had an inkling of what they were up against.

“Yurika, fight! Yurika, fight! Yurika, fight!”

Yurika encouraged herself and cast a few more spells in preparation for the next attack. The truth was that she was terrified, and she would run away in a heartbeat if her conscience would allow it. But if she escaped, her precious friends would be hurt, or maybe even killed. The thought that she might wake up all alone in room 106 tomorrow morning scared her more than anything. She would rather stand her ground and fight here than let that happen.

“Yurika-sama, the enemy is coming!”

“This time we’ll use everything we’ve got! After that, we’ll fall back to the next trench!”

Mustering her courage, Yurika gave directions to her three subordinates wearing the face of a magical girl. One year ago, Yurika had wished she was the only occupant of room 106, but now that was the last thing she wanted.

“This is Yurika! Kiriha-san, can you hear me?! The surprise attack was a success and three people have been defeated! From here on, we’ll be fighting for real!”

After shouting into her microphone, Yurika pointed the tip of her staff towards the approaching enemy soldiers and started her incantation.

“Poison Cloud! Effective Area: Maximize!”

Yurika cast a spell that created a large poisonous cloud. Though the poison wasn’t fatal, it was particularly effective for weakening a group of people all at once. Yurika wasn’t a big fan of the spell because she felt that it wasn’t very magical girl-like, but she absolutely needed it for this battle. She had to stop the soldiers here no matter what, using any means necessary.

As Yurika’s battle on the right flank began, Kiriha and the others back in the center got their first visual on the enemy. Since Kiriha and the others were hiding in trenches like Yurika was, the enemy soldiers didn’t advance right away, but began taking cover behind trees and rocks.

“Kiriha, they’re about to start shooting.”

With the soldiers closing in, though still a fair distance away, the effect from the forest’s aura had lessened enough that Sanae could now clearly sense the enemy’s intention to attack.

“...So it begins. Maki, detonate the first through fifth.”

“Roger that. Transmitting the first through fifth detonation codes.”

Maki confirmed her order and concentrated on her staff. Seconds later, several of the bombs connected to Maki’s magic detonated.

The single muffled boom Maki heard after told her that the five bombs had exploded at the same time. The explosives weren’t designed to be lethal. Kiriha wagered that since her opponents were professionals, they would find any other bombs placed in strategic locations even without a means to detect them. So instead, Kiriha had planted these explosives to destroy the trees and rocks that the soldiers would use for cover. It would make them harder to find, and lower the amount of explosives used overall.

Having their cover literally blown, the soldiers were momentarily stunned. As they stood there, bright lights that had been placed beforehand activated and shone on the surprised men. With the enemy exposed, lit up, and blinded by

the light, Kiriha didn’t miss her chance to attack.

“Begin the attack! Fire!”

“Sanae-chan God Arrow!”

“Multiple Mind Blast! Target Option: Sidewinder!”

“Spiritual Energy Armament safety released! Target acquired, ho!”

“Commencing fire, ho!”

At Kiriha’s command, everyone in charge of ranged attacks opened fire as one.

Sanae was using a bow and arrow created from her own spiritual energy, Maki used her magic, and the haniwas and underground dwellers used spiritual energy weapons. Each attack was mystical. Since the soldiers had cutting-edge Forthorthian technology protecting them, simple physical attacks wouldn’t have much of an effect. But they were wholly unequipped to deal with magic and spiritual energy.

That’s why they’d all chosen to use nonlethal attacks. Maki used her mind manipulation magic, and everyone else had spiritual energy weapons, which had almost no effect on the body. Instead, they directly attacked the soul and deprived their opponents of their freedom, which was something both the girls of room 106 and Kiriha’s subordinates from the conservative faction were grateful for. Knowing that their opponents wouldn’t die when shot, everyone could open fire without any hesitation. And because they attacked full-force, the preemptive strike worked as planned.

“Uwah!”

“Agh!”

The coup d’etat soldiers collapsed one after another. Including Kiriha, about a dozen people were attacking from a distance. Under their fire, seven of the coup d’etat soldiers collapsed to the ground. Kiriha estimated there to be fourteen soldiers in the front, which meant that the first attack had cut their numbers in half.

“Don’t flinch! Fire back! Destroy the lights!”

But the coup d'etat soldiers didn't take the attack lying down. As expected from professionals, they quickly dropped to the ground to make themselves harder to hit and returned fire. Their first targets were the searchlights blinding them.

The coup d'etat army was equipped with large beam rifles. Their accuracy was spot on, and they had a lot of power to them. The lights didn't stand a chance. They were destroyed in an instant, and the surrounding are went dark once more, making it harder for Kiriha and the others to aim.

"And now it's my turn!"

But the moment the lights went down, Shizuka leaped out at the enemy. While the soldiers were blinded by the light, she'd snuck up on them and had been waiting for her time to strike. She jumped right into the group of soldiers, swinging her arms and legs around in a flurry. She swept away her enemies like a small tornado.

"Uwah!"

"Ugh!"

And with Shizuka's ambush, several more men fell.

"What's going on?!"

"An enemy snuck up on us!"

"Whoops!"

Shizuka looked like she was about to continue her attack, but stopped short and jumped into a nearby bush to escape. She didn't have much time to attack before her enemies would strike back. After the lights were destroyed, the soldiers would be practically blind for a few seconds until their eyes adjusted to the darkness. And Shizuka knew she had to retreat before then.

The soldiers that had come around first fired beams into the bush after her.

"Oh, how scary!"

However, since Shizuka had already escaped further into the woods, the beams only scorched the bush and the ground.

“Now, Kiriha-san!”

Shizuka shouted into the headset microphone hanging by her cheek. Not a moment later, a dazzling light appeared behind her. It was a flash that Maki had created using magic. Almost all of the coup d’etat army’s vanguard were caught up in the flash. As a result, just as they had readjusted to the darkness, they were blinded again. Not even their night vision goggles could help them.

Shizuka hadn’t jumped into the enemy’s midst just to take out a few soldiers. The goal was to gather all eyes on her so that the second flash would be as effective as possible. The flash also lit up the soldiers for Kiriha and the others, allowing them to fire upon them once more.

“Say, Kiriha... Are you always thinking about vicious things like this?” Sanae asked, firing one arrow after another from her bow.

Several enemies easily fell prey to Kiriha’s plan. Though they had special powers like magic and spiritual energy on their side, Sanae was still amazed at what Kiriha could do with all of it.

“No, only when I have to.”

Kiriha answered nonchalantly as she fired her spiritual energy rifle. In total, they’d taken out fifteen soldiers now. It was as good as they could have hoped for with a preemptive strike.

“Good to know. Oh, and Kiriha...”

“Hmm?”

“Could you teach me some mischievous tricks I could pull on Koutarou later?”

“Very well.”

“All right!”

“I’m back!”

Shizuka emerged from the underbrush, slightly out of breath but with no serious injuries. She had a few scratches here and there from her attack and subsequent retreat, but overall, she was practically unharmed.

“Aika-san, how does it look?”

“Um, it looks like everything went according to your plan, Kiriha-san. In total, fifteen people have been knocked out.”

“It’s a great success. This is thanks to Yurika doing her best over there, too. I’ll have to thank her properly later.”

If it weren’t for Yurika’s efforts, they might not have achieved this level of success. If the enemy’s detachment had flanked them as intended, then they wouldn’t be in any position to attack.

Hearing the news that was better than what she expected, Shizuka smiled. Maki and Sanae did the same, and they all let out sighs of relief. Only Kiriha still had a serious expression on her face.

“A message from Yurika.”

Kiriha touched her earphone. When she did, everyone could hear Yurika’s voice through their own headsets. She sounded desperate, and was practically screaming.

“Th-This is bad! A bunch of robots just appeared out of nowhere! Just like when Theia-chan summons her guns! Kyaaaaaaaah!”

As the message deteriorated into actual screaming, communication with Yurika was cut off.

“Yurika-chan?!”

“Yurika! Hey, Yurika!”

Shizuka and Sanae called out to Yurika in panic over their microphones, but no reply came.

“The main show starts here. DKI will show us how serious they are.”

Kiriha continued trying to contact Yurika as she looked in the direction of the enemy with a sharp glance. A strange spectacle was developing far beyond what she could see. Machines in the shape of people were appearing from a black hole in the air. They were as tall and bulky as full-grown men. Since they could use the same weapons and protection that people could, they didn’t require any special equipment, which made it very easy to field them.

They were Dragon Knight Industry’s human shaped, all purpose robots, Motor

Knights. They were mechanical knights sent to Earth from the three ships in space.

As Kiriha and the others were facing off against a new threat, danger loomed for Harumi and Elfaria in their mountain cottage. Moments after the battle had started, the enemy sent out small observation devices to look for Elfaria and Theia.

What is this strange feeling...?

Thanks to her heightened senses after her awakening, Harumi could sense the incoming observation devices. She didn't know what it was, however, and only felt vaguely anxious.

"Is something the matter, Harumi?"

"Your Majesty... All of a sudden, I started feeling restless... I feel like we're in danger somehow... even though I have no reason to say that..."

Harumi tilted her head from side to side as she explained what she was feeling to Elfaria. She was confused as to why anxiety would creep over her in such a strange fashion for no apparent reason. She had only recently awakened as a magician, so she didn't yet know that her magical powers could affect her.

Is she just imagining it? Or is this the Silver Princess's powers?

Since Elfaria had her suspicions about Harumi, she immediately began thinking along those lines. And in order to confirm her suspicions, she came up with a proposal for Harumi.

"Harumi, you can use magic, can't you?"

"Yes, though I only learned to do so just recently..."

"Why not use a spell to search the surrounding area, then? If you're just imagining things, then this should help you feel better, but if danger really is approaching, it would good for us to know."

"You're certainly right there... Okay, I'll give it a try."

Harumi agreed to Elfaria's idea and decided to try using her magic.

What should I use...?

Harumi had a wide repertoire of spells available to her, and she had to find one suitable for scanning the area. While Yurika or Maki would know what they needed to use right away, a beginner like Harumi had a tough time figuring it out.

“What’s the matter?”

Seeing Harumi’s hesitation, Elfaria called out to her. Harumi blushed a little, but answered honestly.

“I... um... was just wondering what spell I should use...”

“That’s a good question... Since the enemy is from Forthorthe, it might be a good idea to look for metal. The gear the soldiers use is largely metallic.”

Weapons, armor, communication devices, cars, planes, and even spaceships. Pretty much all modern technology contains metal in one way or another. As civilizations develops, so does its use of metal. The two are inextricably related. That’s why Elfaria thought scanning the area for metal should reveal any enemies.

“Metal, I see... I’ll give it a try!”

Harumi knew a spell that could detect metal. More precisely, it was a spell to locate rocks, but it could be narrowed down to minerals, and then expanded to include refined metals. Harumi clasped her hands in front of her chest and closed her eyes to focus. She then called for Signaltin’s power and chanted a spell in Ancient Forthorthian.

“Gather, spirits of earth. Kneel before me and reveal your name. Speak, Lineage of Earth!”

Harumi flawlessly recited her incantation as if it were a song. Since it was in an archaic language, not even Elfaria, who was also an archeologist, could pronounce it that well. But Harumi spoke it as if she had been taught the language since birth.

The ritual language of Ancient Forthorthe... Could she have such perfect mastery of it just from having memories of it?

Elfaria had heard from Clan that Harumi had the Silver Princess's memories. However, Elfaria didn't think that was all there was to it. She couldn't shake the suspicion that there was something else, something surpassing human intellect, hidden within Harumi.

"...All right."

As Elfaria was contemplating that, Harumi completed her spell. In her mind, she could sense the presence of all kinds of metal around her. The framework of the cottage, the nails holding down the floorboards, the cables running inside of the walls. The TV, a mass of spun wires on the inside, appeared like metallic cotton candy.

"What is this, I wonder? Something is... flying?"

As Harumi's extraordinary senses expanded beyond the cottage, she detected something strange. A clump of metal the size of a volleyball was moving around a hundred or so meters away. Over the rest of the mountain, a flying piece of metal stood out like a sore thumb.

"It's not just one... There's two... No, three?"

"Did you find something?"

"Yes. I don't know what it is, but there are three lumps of metal about this size flying around."

Knowing that comparing them to volleyballs wouldn't make sense to Elfaria, Harumi held up her hands to indicate their size.

"Those are most likely scouting drones. They must be searching for me and Theia."

"Oh no! They'll find us at this rate!"

Even as they were talking, the three drones were approaching Harumi and Elfaria's cottage. At this rate, they'd soon find the cottage and scan the inside.

"Let's escape right away!"

"That's impossible. The scouting drones use sound, heat, optics, and radar to find their targets. If we exit the building, we'll be found right away."

The only reason they hadn't been found yet was because the cottage was preventing the scouts from seeing and hearing them. But if they went outside, there would be nothing shielding them from detection. Just like Harumi had quickly spotted the scouts, Harumi and Elfaria would stand out in the largely quiet and desolate forest.

"It's safer to stay hidden like this."

"But if those things come inside..."

If Elfaria fell into enemy hands, the efforts of the girls who were fighting even now would go to waste. Harumi racked her brain, trying to think of a way to protect Elfaria.

If we leave this cottage, we'll be found right away... But if we stay here, they'll eventually show up... And if we destroy the machines, the enemy will show up to investigate... That means we'll just have to wait it out inside the cottage, but... would that work against alien technology?

The drones would show up soon. And before they did, Harumi would need to think of a way to keep Elfaria hidden. To Harumi, who had lived a completely normal life up until now, this was an incredibly difficult problem to solve.

One drone detected the cottage as it was surveying its assigned area. Determining that the cottage was a high priority target for investigation, it hailed the other drones in the vicinity. Since it was obvious buildings were prime locations for people to hide, the drones were programmed to prioritize their search around buildings if they came across any. Once the three scouts converged, their roles were split up. One would stay outside to survey the entire building while the other two would head inside.

The two drones used lasers to cut open the wooden wall and entered without a sound. Inside they found signs of people, including a boiler that was still hot. Since it was alien culture to them, it took some time for the scouts to determine what it was and what it signified, but it was clear evidence that people had been here. And based on the circumstances, the chances of it being their target was high. The drones then began to examine the building in more detail.

"Ahahaha!"

Suddenly, a woman's laughter could be heard from a different room. Since the scouts had been given the order to find two women, one of them entered the hallway in response to the voice. Passing through a door and entering the hallway, the drone detected more sound from two rooms over. It was several men and women talking.

Hearing a woman's laughter and voice among them, the drone's AI prioritized investigating the source and moved towards the room in question. Once at the door, the drone confirmed that there were people on the other side through the use of its heat sensors. But it couldn't get any more details than that, so it extended a cable from its body and squeezed it through the gap under the door.

"That looks so great. I'd love to visit a place like that..."

Inside the room were two women with black hair. One was a girl in her teens, and the other was a woman who looked to be in her forties. It was only the two of them in there room. They were sitting on a sofa and looking at an ancient video device, a TV. The other voices had come from the video device, which the girl and woman were watching intently. They were each holding a mug with steam rising from it.

Observing this, the drone put all of the information it had together and came up with a logical explanation.

First it connected the heat from the boiler to the contents of the mugs. They were drinking something that required hot water. Next was the laughter from before. It belonged to the girl and woman who were happily watching the TV. Finally, there was the talking, which had come from the video device.

Discerning a logical explanation for everything, the drone lost interest in the two women. They were local residents, relaxing and watching their video device. That was the AI's conclusion. There was the possibility they were in disguise, but not only did their hair color not match, facial analysis had indicated they were completely different people.

The drone didn't have the time to bother with local residents. After retracting its cable, it began searching other rooms. There were no signs of other people in the cottage, and there were no signs anyone had run away, so the scouts

determined that their targets were not present. Upon reaching that conclusion, the two drones began to retreat back the way they'd come. They'd exit through the hole in the wall, and continue their search elsewhere.

However, as the drones passed by the room with the women, an alarm rang out from the two drones all of a sudden. They had been operating covertly until now, but after the alarm, they gave up all attempts to be stealthy.

Hearing that alarm, the two women inside of the room jumped up in surprise. Startled by the sudden sound, they stared at the door. The next moment, one of the drones crashed through the door and entered the room. Surprised by the strange metal machines, both women looked terrified.



But in the next moment, the drones flew through the room and right out of the glass window, fleeing the cottage. After joining up with the drone on the outside, all three flew off into the distance.

“What just...”

The girl with black hair looked out the window. There she saw the starry sky, and a particularly large blue meteor streaking through it.

“A meteor...?”

It was obviously artificial. The blue light it was emitting was not caused by friction within the atmosphere, but was a sign of the energy protecting it. Its long tail trailing behind it, the meteor was headed straight for the forest. And the scouts followed after it.

“Satomi-kun has descended...”

The girl, Harumi, realized what the meteor was almost right away. And why the drones had left. They had detected Koutarou descending from Blue Knight, and prioritized him over surveying the area. It also meant that Harumi and Elfaria had successfully managed to deceive the drones.

“W-We’re saved... I thought it was all over when they came into the room...”

Harumi felt all the tension drain from her body and sat down on the spot. However, her heart was still beating rapidly, and it would be some time yet before she calmed down.

“Your plan worked, Harumi.”

The older woman approached Harumi.

“Your Majesty...”

As Harumi looked up at the woman with black hair, her outline temporarily blurred as her appearance transformed. The woman standing before her now wore an expensive looking dress and a crown on her head. It was Empress Elfaria, one of the two women the drones were looking for.

“I was surprised when you said I had to hide because the scouts were coming, but your plan was a complete success.”

“I’m glad it went well.”

Seeing Elfaria’s calm smile, Harumi was finally able to smile herself. And remembering what she had done, she was relieved that they had survived the crisis.

Upon realizing that the scouts were approaching, Harumi’s first thought was to hide somewhere in the cottage. But she soon gave up on that idea. The scouts were using advanced Forthorthian science. She didn’t think she could completely fool all of their sensors. For instance, if they had heat sensors, they wouldn’t be able to hide at all. And in order to make the cottage look empty, they wouldn’t just need to hide, they’d need to cover any trace that they’d been there. Doing that in such a short amount of time would be difficult, even with the help of magic. So Harumi had come up with the bold plan of not hiding at all.

Harumi used magic to make Elfaria look like her own mother. She didn’t do anything more than that. She’d just hoped that a simple magical disguise would be enough to fool the drones into thinking it wasn’t Elfaria.

Using that plan, they wouldn’t need to cover their tracks. And it was certainly easier to change Elfaria than it was the whole cottage. But on the other hand, there was the risk that the drones might still discover it was Elfaria somehow. For all Harumi knew, aliens had a different body temperature, so they drones might be able to tell it was her just by their heat signatures. All in all, Harumi’s plan was a big gamble.

But fortunately, the drones didn’t gather data that detailed. They were pressed for time and didn’t want to be discovered by local residents. And then Koutarou showed up, which changed their priorities completely. Thanks to that, the drones had easily given up on Harumi and Elfaria and left the cottage.

So even though Harumi’s plan had been a gamble, it was the reason Elfaria was safe. Like Elfaria had said, it was a big success.

“I still can’t believe it went this well...”

“Lots of things are like that. No matter how hard something might look, when you give it a try, you just might find it to be surprisingly easy.”

However, Harumi still didn't feel like she had come out on top. Since she had lived like a normal girl up until now, she couldn't imagine herself pulling of a stunt like that. It was like something out of a movie or a play. It must have been dumb luck.

"Thank you, Harumi. You were a big help."

"Ah, n-no, not at all!"

All Harumi could feel right now was relief that the ordeal had ended safely, and embarrassment from being praised by a friend's mother.

Like Kiriha had expected, once the humanoid robot soldiers appeared, the coup d'etat army gained the upper hand in the battle. The robotic weapons called Motor Knights had even more agility and power than humans, and they were also a lot tougher. Because of that, the coup d'etat army used the robots to replace their fallen allies and attacked Kiriha and the others once more.

In total, fifteen robots had appeared. They replaced the soldiers Kiriha and the others had defeated one for one. But thanks to the robots' power, the army's overall strength was greater now than it had ever been. They were big and strong enough that they were using the largest handheld weapons the coup d'etat army had, and it didn't hold them back one bit. Their movements were still agile, and they could take quite a few hits. What was even more problematic was that the robots didn't have souls, meaning that spiritual energy weapons would only deal about as much damage as normal weapons against them. Usually those kinds of opponents were defeated by overwhelming them, but Kiriha and the others lacked the numbers to do that. To them, these were very troublesome opponents indeed.

Of course, the robots had their own weaknesses. They stood out too much to be used in urban areas, and their decision-making wasn't as trustworthy as a human's. But in a simple firefight, that wasn't a problem. And that being the exact scenario, the robots closed in on Kiriha and the others with steady steps, using wireless communication to coordinate perfectly.

"Wh-What's up with these things?!" Shizuka, who was fighting in the front lines, shouted out.

The robots were tough, but even they were no match for Shizuka in close combat. If it were one at a time, she could defeat them all easily. But when they worked in groups, it was quite a different story.

“Th-This is just cheating! What am I supposed to do?!”

Forming a high-speed network to exchange information, it was possible for the robots to coordinate their attacks perfectly. Their coordination surpassed what humans were capable of, and worked even in close-quarters combat where such coordination was ordinarily impossible. In other words, it was even possible for several robots to work together and unleash a combination flurry of punches.

As Shizuka was fighting against one robot, a second one would jump in and attack. A combination of three punches would suddenly turn into four. And they would defend each other the same way. Many blows Shizuka thought were surefire hits would be blocked by another robot jumping in the way.

With that, even a martial arts expert like Shizuka was stumped. It was like she was going up against human-sized war gods. She was only still standing because Sanae had heightened her physical abilities, but it was the most she could do right now just to block the incoming enemy attacks. And worse yet, her opponents didn’t get tired. It was obvious she’d be outmatched before long.

“You can do it, Shizuka! Show your guts!”

Sanae cheered Shizuka on while providing covering fire. She wasn’t using a bow and arrow anymore, but her Poltergeist powers like she had in the past. Since the robots didn’t have souls, attacks using pure spiritual energy against them had little effect. There wasn’t much else she could do other than use her supernatural power to hurl nearby objects at them.

But as expected, Sanae was having problems too. There weren’t that many objects lying around that made good weapons. There were plenty of rocks, but the robots didn’t so much as flinch when hit by them. Larger rocks would do some damage, but the robots could swiftly dodge them. And because they were robots, Sanae couldn’t use her abilities to read their movements. They were tough opponents even for a psychic like her.

“Thunder Lance! Modifier: High Concentration, Armor Piercing!”

Out of the group, only Maki was able to do any real damage. Since she was a magician, she could adapt her way of fighting by changing what spells she used. Maki concentrated her power to forcibly break through the robots' defenses and shoot electricity through their internal workings.

But realizing that Maki was a threat, the coup d'etat army wasn't about to stand by as she hammered them over and over. The human soldiers that had arrived at the battlefield as backup made her their priority target. Because of that, she had to deal with the onslaught of bullets and shells coming her way, and was unable to attack freely. Knowing that Maki was the only real threat, it wasn't that hard to single her out.

"As I suspect, not having Theia-dono and Ruth hurts."

Kiriha bit her lips as she used her haniwas to protect Maki. She knew that if Theia and Ruth had been there, they'd be able to launch a much more powerful offensive. They could summon weapons from Blue Knight, or bombard the battlefield with lasers directly from space, which should be able to take out a large number of the robots. But right now, Theia and Blue Knight were headed towards the far side of the moon in order to deal with the three ships hiding there. Since those ships were the ones sending the robots in, stopping them was just as important.

But Theia's absence didn't just impact their offensive capabilities. Her strong willpower and her leadership abilities were sorely missed too. Kiriha had some talent as a commander herself, but she was aware that she wasn't as good as Theia. Kiriha's specialty was formulating plans, while Theia would take them to the front line and execute them. That was how things had always been until now. Theia was their shining beacon, and without her, they didn't know who to turn to.

"Everyone, hurry! Get to Kiriha-san and the others! Quickly!"

That was when Yurika's three subordinates jumped out of a bush to the right. Yurika had sent the underground dwellers ahead of her while she stayed back to buy them some time to escape. Her squad had been dealing with the coup d'etat army's detachment force up until now. And since it had been just the four of them against a squad twice their size, they'd all come away from the

fight worse for wear.

All three subordinates were seriously injured, and no longer capable of fighting them. One of them taken a hit so grievous it may yet be mortal. The other two were carrying her towards Kiriha and the others.

And the one protecting them was Yurika. She'd taken the least amount of damage, but she was still covered in bruises and burns. She wasn't in good shape herself, but as long as she had something to protect, she would never fall back. Between slinging spells at the robots and using her barriers to block their attacks, she desperately fought to buy time for the subordinates who had been protecting her until now to escape.

"Nijino Yurika, that's enough, hurry and get over here!"

Thanks to Yurika's efforts, all three subordinates managed to safely reach Kiriha and the others. They collapsed into a trench, and seeing that, Kiriha called Yurika over.

"O-Okay!"

"Yurika-chan, hurry up, ho!"

"We don't have much time, ho!"

"Thank you, Karama-chan, Korama-chan!"

Yurika retreated as the haniwas covered for her. And before long, she was able to reach Kiriha and the others herself. Between ragged breaths, she asked Kiriha a question.

"Kiriha-san, how is it going here?! Is everyone okay?!"

"It's hard to say that we're okay. It might be better to fall back before we take any more damage."

Kiriha and the others had prepared several defensive positions around the cottage where Harumi and Elfaria were hiding. One of them had now almost been completely overrun by the enemy, so it was about time to fall back to the next.

"Wait, Kiriha-san! If we retreat from here, the detachment to our right will be completely freed up! Sakuraba-san will be in danger!"

Maki objected to falling back. Since they'd made prepared defensive positions, they could make use of more traps if they fell back to another one. However, it would also give their enemies a chance to regroup. And since they'd also be moving closer to Harumi and Elfaria, it could be a dangerous move.

"I know! That's why we'll contact those two and have them—"

That was when a laser fired from one of the enemy robots pierced through Kiriha's shoulder. As Kiriha was distracted with planning their next move, she'd taken her eyes off the battle entirely and left herself wide open, which, unfortunately, had coincided with one of the robots firing.

"Ugh...!"

Kiriha's face contorted from the pain as she fell to one knee. The wound had been instantly cauterized by the laser, so there was no blood, but she had lost the ability to move her right arm and dropped her rifle.

"We're running, everyone! Yurika, use that bad guy magic or something!"

The moment Kiriha was hit, Sanae decided on a retreat. She felt everyone's morale drop the instant their leader, Kiriha, was wounded. Though they might still be in as much danger while falling back, it wouldn't get them instantly killed like standing still would. That was what Sanae's intuition told her, and in a rare display of leadership, she led the retreat.



“Kiriha, can you stand?!”

“I’m okay... Only my arm is hurt.”

Sanae gathered spiritual energy into her palm and placed it over Kiriha’s wound to ease the pain, and once Shizuka got back, the two of them worked together to stand Kiriha up. Immediately after that, a sinister looking fog rolled over the battlefield. It was a combination of poison and acid clouds that Yurika had summoned. The enemies shrouded in it took slow, constant damage from it and had their view of the battlefield obscured. With that, the enemy soldiers’ attack was interrupted, but the robots were equipped with heat sensors and continued attacking regardless.

“Then how about this?! Fire Wall!”

Maki created a wall of flame between them and the poison cloud. The robots couldn’t detect any human heat signatures over the blazing heat of the fire, so even they stopped attacking for the moment. At last, everyone a chance to escape.

“Now, everyone! Hurry up and go!”

Maki signaled her allies, and once they had all moved out, she retreated as well. That was when the unthinkable happened. In the center of Maki and her escaping allies, a massive explosion went off without warning.

“Kyaaaaaaaah!”

The girls all screamed. The shockwave created by the blast sent them flying. Most of them were knocked out as they hit the ground. The only one still conscious was Maki, who’d been bringing up the rear and was farthest away from the explosion.

“Wh-What just...”

Maki endured the pain and tried to get up, but the shockwave had disoriented her and she was unable to move as she pleased. The only thing she could really move was her head. She turned to look in the direction of the enemy behind her. There she saw several robots, who had apparently walked right through the poison and the fire to give chase.

I see... They're all disposable... I was too naive...

If their opponents had been human, Maki and the others would have been able to escape without a problem. For normal humans, pushing through the flames and acid fog would have been nothing short of suicidal.

But robots were different. They didn't hesitate to put themselves in harm's way, and their commander didn't care about machine casualties. Their singular goal was to eliminate Maki and the others. Without regard for anything else, they pushed forward. And unfortunately, Maki and the others hadn't accounted for such superhuman opponents in any of their strategies.

Will we die here...?

Maki couldn't move anymore. As she realized her death was imminent, strength left her body. But even staring down the end, she felt no fear. She knew that the scary part wasn't death, but solitude. And since she was with her friends, she wasn't scared.

Satomi-kun... I'm sorry...

Her only regret was Koutarou. She felt deep regret about leaving him alone, but there was nothing she could do with her body unable to move.

I wish I could see you... one more time... before I died...

With that, Maki's consciousness began fading away. Tension left her, and a wave of fatigue washed over her in its place. The pain wore away at her remaining consciousness.

A blue light...? Is that... Satomi-kun...?

Just as she was about to pass out, Maki spotted a blue light. In the center of that blue light was a boy wearing blue armor. Seeing that, Maki smiled and lost consciousness. It didn't matter to her whether it was an illusion or the real deal.

Most of the anger the boy called Satomi Koutarou felt was usually directed at his own powerlessness. He was a simple, expressive boy, so it often looked like he was angry when he was frustrated or annoyed, but it was quite rare for him to openly display genuine anger.

But right now, he was unmistakably incensed. And it wasn't some half-assed anger, either. The rage he felt now was about as fierce as when Alaia and Charl had been kidnapped.

"Why can't you just leave us be...? We just want to be close to one another..."

Koutarou's was squeezing Signaltin's hilt in his hand. The metal of his gauntlet screeched as it clenched tightly around it. It was as if the screams in Koutarou's mind were leaking out.

After descending on the lifeboat, Koutarou used the coordinates he had gotten from Clan to head towards the battlefield. Upon arriving, he saw his twenty comrades lying on the ground, all unable to move. Most of them were seriously injured and would die if left untreated. And amongst those twenty injured people were five girls that were very important to him: Kiriha, Sanae, Yurika, Maki, and Shizuka. Each of them were struggling with their own solitude and sought the warmth of others. They were his friends that supported each other to live. Koutarou couldn't stand to lose even one of them, no matter what. He wouldn't be able to take it if they weren't all smiling together. And now they all laid collapsed on the ground with life-threatening injuries. No, Koutarou wouldn't stand for this. And he would never forgive those responsible.

"...I'm glad you're machines."

Koutarou readied his sword. In front of him were fifteen robots. It didn't matter how strong they were. He would destroy every last one of them. He had to save his companions as quickly as possible.

"Because I don't think I could hold back right now..."

Koutarou was angry. If he could project the fire in his eyes, the robots would surely all have melted in an instant. That was just how intense his fury was.

More people gathered on the bridge of the Hazy Moon to watch the fight unfold through the monitor. Since they were the ones who'd helped Theia and Elfaria escape, they were well aware of what this battle meant. That's why sobbing broke out when the girls collapsed. At this rate, it was only a matter of time before their beloved empress fell into the hands of the coup d'etat army.

“Who is that knight...?”

“I’m not sure... but sure he does look eccentric...”

However, when a lone knight appeared on the screen, the onlookers began whispering.

The knight was wielding a traditional knight’s sword and wearing knight’s armor. It was a very classic look that most of them had only ever seen on TV and in movies in this day and age. What stood out the most, however, was the knight’s youth and the color of his armor.

The knight was quite clearly an adolescent, still young enough to be called a child. He was just about princess Theiamillis’s age. And the armor he was wearing was an unmistakable vivid blue color. It was a color rarely used by knights anymore. After it was used by a legendary knight once in the past, people had avoided using it out of respect and homage. Besides, no one wanted to be compared to...

“It’s the Blue Knight! It has to be! Look at that armor!”

A young boy who was watching the monitor alongside the adults gave voice to what was on everyone’s minds. If the armor was blue, it had to be the Blue Knight.

“The empress and princess are in trouble, so he came to save them!”

“Child, even if you call him the Blue Knight, he can’t be *the* Blue Knight. He’s only wearing blue armor because he thinks he’s special. He’ll only end up losing.”

To the people of Forthorthe, the Blue Knight was a national hero and a cultural icon. The Blue Knight was a legendary hero from two thousand years ago that was still respected even to this day. But legends were only legends. There was no way the person on the monitor was the real Blue Knight. It was just some knight in blue armor. And since most knights avoided the color blue out of deference, this boy must be quite the show-off. That wasn’t just the opinion of the person who had spoken to the young boy, but the opinion of all the adults on the bridge.

“No way! That’s the Blue Knight!”

However, this young boy believed that if the empress and princess were in trouble, the Blue Knight would appear. And after he defeated the bad guys, everyone would be happy. He was this boy's hero, after all—a legendary hero.

"He'll definitely win! There's no way the Blue Knight would lose to some robots that haven't even sworn any oaths!"

And just as the boy declared that with all his might, the knight in question unsheathed his sword and made his move. He was far too fast to be observed, however, so to the people watching through the monitor, it looked as though he'd disappeared. The next moment, he reappeared in a different place after swinging his sword. Three robots exploded in quick succession. They were the robots that should have been in the way of the knight.

"What?! Did that knight do that?!"

"There's no one else there! It has to be!"

"Those are the latest model robotic soldiers, right?! And he destroyed three of them just like that?!"

The people on the bridge were all shocked. They had been watching the fight all this time, so they knew just how strong those robots were. Yet the knight in blue armor had destroyed three of them in one fell swoop. It was an unbelievable spectacle.

"See?! I told you! He'll win! He's the Blue Knight!"

Feeling like his claims had been validated, the boy rejoiced and turned back to the monitor. It was more important for him to cheer on the Blue Knight than to talk with the adults.

"You can do it, Blue Knight! Beat down those bad guys!"

As if the boy's cheers reached him, the knight swung his sword once more. Another robot was destroyed. The sword's sharpness was terrific as it cut the robot and its weapon in two.

"Could it be..."

At first, everyone had rejected what the boy was saying. But for each robot was destroyed, they all started to change their minds. The knight and his

fighting were so striking that everyone began to see him as that knight.

The legendary hero and his trademark armor. The Blue Knight, Layous Fatra Veltlion.

“Fly! Fly, Blue Knight!”

However, at this point, there was only one who truly believed it from the bottom of his heart.

The Great Summoning

Saturday, May 22nd

Kiriha and the others were a poor match against the robots, but they were perfect for Koutarou. They'd been lacking in pure attack power, which was what Signaltin specialized in. Moreover, while the robots were fast and had excellent cooperation, they didn't have any weapons that could break through Koutarou's defenses. It was impossible for them to break through the dual shield of a distortion field and magic barrier combo. The robots had been designed as all-purpose machines, and they were wielding mass-produced weapons. Compared to Koutarou who was only using items that had specifically been made or tailored for him, the robots stood no chance. While they reminded him of her, the robots were nothing like Maya. It was accurate to say that the robots were now in the same position that Kiriha and the others had been just moments ago. If Koutarou had been on their side from the outset, Kiriha and the others might have won with ease. It was kind of like a game of rock-paper-scissors born from their individual abilities.

"And that's five!"

Koutarou swung Signaltin and cut through another robot without the slightest bit of resistance. If his opponent had been human, he would have held back, but not now. There was no problem with pouring his everything into his attacks against machines. Moreover, he was furious right now. And just as Koutarou locked on to the sixth robot...

"As expected, the Motor Knights alone are no match for you."

He heard a familiar voice coming from behind the remaining ten robots. A steel giant at least five meters tall then appeared behind them.

"You're finally here, Elexis."

"You remembered me. I'm happy, Koutarou-kun."

The giant's head slid up a little, while the armor on its chest slid down. On the other side of the moving steel armor was a young man that Koutarou remembered quite distinctly. He was Ruth's former fiancé, and the CEO of DKI, Elexis Borannam. As if facing a friend, Elexis greeted Koutarou with a graceful and refined smile.

"I'm not happy... Looks like you've been doing as you please, Elexis."

Koutarou glared sharply at Elexis. There was no way that Koutarou could remain calm when facing the man who was the reason his friends had been hurt. To him, those girls were like the sun. They lit up his everyday. And here they lay, collapsed and injured on the ground. It was as if Elexis had stolen the light from the world, and Koutarou couldn't forgive him for that.

"It's not like I *wanted* to. Hurting women is so distasteful... However, alas, it was necessary to defeat you."

"Me?"

"That's right. You are the biggest obstacle in the way of taking down Empress Elfaria and Princess Theiamillis. I can't fulfill my objective if I don't defeat you first."

Elexis creating those robots and sending them up against the girls had all been done to defeat Koutarou. After their last encounter, Elexis considered Koutarou his top priority. If Elexis and the military tried to attack the empress and princess, Koutarou would undoubtedly get in the way. That meant defeating Koutarou first would lower the risk. That was Elexis's take on the situation.

"And you live by the good old code of chivalry. While I believe that spirit of yours is worthy of respect, in terms of fighting you, going after that is quite effective. It'll be hard for you to win while protecting all of your friends."

"So that's your plan..."

He was up against Elexis and the ten robots by his side. Meanwhile, the remaining coup d'etat soldiers that had been lying in wait now advanced forward while avoiding Koutarou. Their targets were the collapsed girls with the intention of hamstringing Koutarou. Koutarou would need to defeat Elexis and the robots while keeping the soldiers from getting to his fallen friends. Elexis

had launched a large-scale attack on the girls of room 106 in order to create exactly this kind of scenario to his advantage. The reason Elexis had deployed a force larger than what Kiriha had foreseen was because he was after Koutarou, not Theia or Elfaria. And since Koutarou was his target, he didn't care too much about leaving evidence behind. Once he had eliminated Koutarou, he could take his time handling the empress and princess in a more tactful way.

"Now, let's begin, Koutarou-kun. You don't have much time left."

"...Even after two thousand years, you're still my most troublesome opponent, Dextro..."

Koutarou strengthened his grip on Signaltin and pointed it at the steel giant Elexis was in.



The battle progressed in Elexis's favor thanks to his new giant.

"Tch, that thing is tough!"

"Of course. I made this explicitly to fight you, after all."

Despite the fight having only just started, Koutarou's armor had already taken a lot of damage. Koutarou was stuck on the defensive and under constant, fierce attack. Because he was wearing his armor, he was stronger than the last time he'd fought Elexis, but still found himself at a disadvantage. That was just how strong Elexis was.

"And these robots move completely different from before!"

"It took a lot of time for me to get them just right."

The steel giant Elexis was using was a new model that had been overhauled using the data Elexis got from his last fight with Koutarou. On top of that and the general upgrades, the giant—named Warlord—had one more unique feature to it. It could fight in cooperation with the Motor Knights.

Modern battles in Forthorthe were largely a matter of breaking through an opponent's barrier. In their last fight, Elexis had effectively launched a surprise attack on Koutarou, so he hadn't used much in the way of defenses. However, knowing that there would be a battle beforehand, Koutarou would definitely have a barrier this time. That's why Elexis had tried to come up with a way to overcome it ahead of time.

He'd had the idea of using a synchronized attack. While single attacks wouldn't breach Koutarou's defenses, a simultaneous attack just might. If several attacks hit at the exact same time, it would be difficult to maintain a barrier. However, a combined attack like that was impossible for humans. That's why he'd created the Motor Knights.

The Motor Knights could cooperate with one another on an extremely sophisticated level, but their true power was only unleashed when they were with Warlord. The high-end strategy support computer that Warlord had installed calculated the proper timing for each attack, and sent instructions to the Motor Knights accordingly. With that, the Motor Knights attacked in perfect synch with Warlord. Because Warlord's attacks were already dangerous on their

own, the synchronized barrages were especially deadly. And because the Motor Knights changed their weapons constantly on Warlord's command, their attacks were various and hard to predict. It was especially problematic for Koutarou, who was fighting on his own.

Truth be told, Warlord itself hadn't gotten much stronger. On its own, it wouldn't stand a chance against Koutarou. And the same was true for the Motor Knights. However, even if they were insufficient as individual units, their odds were greatly improved when they all worked together. On top of that, Elexis had devised a strategy to hold Koutarou's power back, and turned the victory condition into something simpler.

"All for one and one for all. Don't you think that's a fitting strategy for a knight's opponent?"

Elexis's voice was projected from the speakers installed on Warlord's head. In contrast to his calm tone, his attacks were fierce. With a loud boom, the large-caliber beam shotgun that Warlord was holding in its left hand flashed. The fired beams spread out over a wide area and assaulted Koutarou.

"Tch!"

Koutarou tried to dodge, but it was difficult avoiding a blast from a beam shotgun designed to cover a wide area. On top of that, with the Motor Knights getting in the way of his evasive maneuvers, Koutarou wasn't able to fully avoid the attack even with the help of his armor.

"Distortion field load increased. Alert message: Due to continuous damage, the distortion field will exceed tolerable levels within a minute. Continuous combat is dangerous. Immediate withdrawal is advised."

"I know! But I can't fall back, so do something!"

"As you wish, my lord."

Having been hit by the shotgun, Koutarou's armor was practically screaming. Damage reports just kept coming in, and it issued one ominous forecast after another. Koutarou's roaring had shut it up, but he felt the same way the AI did.

Warlord had been made specifically to fight against Koutarou. In order to hit a fast-moving target like him, it came equipped with lasers that moved at the

speed of light, shotguns that covered a wide area, guided missiles, and more. Since they were weapons that prioritized accuracy, Warlord had less power than comparable mobile weapons of the same class. But it still had more than enough firepower to handle Koutarou, who was only a fraction of its size. Moreover, the Motor Knights would support Warlord, and launched synchronized attacks when needed.

Koutarou had fought against countless enemies that were strong on their own. He had also fought against groups of weak opponents. However, that was his first time fighting against a group of strong opponents. They were hard for him to handle, and though he'd shut up his screaming AI, he felt like screaming himself. He also had more to worry about than just the enemy in front of him. Overwhelmed by it all, he started to panic a little.

At this rate, everyone will... What should I do?!

Koutarou moved around while evading attacks, and focused on his left hand to create a fireball using Kiriha's gauntlet. The ball of flame went flying towards the encroaching coup d'etat soldiers. In the middle of dodging, however, Koutarou hadn't had the time to take proper aim. As a result, the explosion caused by the fireball didn't have the effect he'd hoped for, and wasn't enough to stop the soldiers. Though lightly burned, they continued advancing to where the girls lay collapsed.

"Damn! Okay, one more time!"

In a fluster, Koutarou tried to attack the soldiers once more. But it wouldn't be that easy.

"I'm your opponent here."

Warlord's laser cut through the ground in front of Koutarou, leaving a large crack behind it. Sensing danger, Koutarou jumped over it and activated his posture control thrusters.

"Don't get in the way, Elexis!"

"I'm afraid I have to!"

The thrusters spewed out propellant and forcibly changed the direction of Koutarou's body. Next, he activated the emergency boosters on his legs and

flew towards Warlord.

“I can’t waste time here! I’m going to finish this right now!”

The soldiers were getting close to the girls. If they fell into enemy hands, Koutarou would have no choice but to give up. That’s why he had to finish the battle. And fast.

“Focus the barriers on the front! Booster output to maximum!”

“As you wish, my lord.”

Koutarou charged forward with all of his might and Signaltin at the ready. He looked like a meteor with a long, blue tail behind it.

Koutarou-kun, even if you do have ridiculous power, you’re only human...

Despite Koutarou charging towards him with a terrific speed, Elexis was feeling relieved. Everything had proceeded as he had planned. Elexis had constantly been thinking about what he could do to keep Koutarou from using the full extent of his powers. And in the end, he’d come up with the idea of using Koutarou’s humanity against him.

He tore away Koutarou’s composure by hurting his friends, put a time limit on the battle to put pressure on him, and had the soldiers approach the girls to divide his attention. As a result, Koutarou was in a hurry to end the battle, and wouldn’t be able to fight to his best advantage.

Because he was rushing, Koutarou had to forcibly attack without waiting for an opening from Elexis. He was also fighting carelessly, leaving his opponents with plenty of openings to attack. His movements also became simple and predictable, since he always took the shortest route possible.

With all that, Elexis saw no fear of being defeated. He simply calmly fired the grenade launcher attached to the bottom of the beam shotgun. The grenade flew low and heavy, straight towards Koutarou.

“One of those won’t stop me!”

Koutarou continued his charging, paying no mind the grenade. If it was only one, then even it broke through his barrier, his armor should be able to withstand it. Thinking like that, Koutarou was prepared to meet it head-on.

“The normal you probably would have dodged it...”

The grenade fired was slow and unguided. Koutarou should have realized the significance behind that, considering that Warlord was equipped specifically to deal with him. But he was so focused on hurrying that thought never occurred to him.

The grenade exploded before reaching Koutarou. No, more accurately, it wasn’t an explosion. Rather, something inside was deployed.

“This is...?! Oh crap!”

The grenade didn’t contain explosives, but a net woven using special fibers. Since Koutarou had his barrier deployed, the net spread across the surface of it evenly and completely wrapped around him. Completely entangled, Koutarou lost his balance and fell to the ground.

“Guh!”

The heavy impact upon hitting the ground knocked the wind out of him. The next moment, a coordinated beam barrage from the Motor Knights assaulted him. And because of the net, Koutarou was unable to move. All of the beams struck him.

The impact and heat kicked up dirt and rocks all around Koutarou. And as a result, he was temporarily hidden from view.

“How’d it go...?”

Elexis strained his eyes and stared at where Koutarou had been without letting his guard down. He also used the sensors to track Koutarou’s movements. He’d lost in their previous fight because he had let his guard down in a similar situation, and he wasn’t about to make the same mistake again.

“...Did it work?”

As the wind scattered the dust and debris, Elexis could see Koutarou lying in a small crater created by the attack. According to the sensors, it wasn’t a hologram, but the real deal. That was when Elexis was finally able to relax. He had bested Koutarou.

Would I have still won if Koutarou-kun was the kind of man that only thought

about himself? I'm glad he's a very humane Earthling...

Having overcome the most dangerous part of the mission, Elexis felt deeply relieved. In terms of individual strength, he was nowhere near Koutarou's level. That's why, if Koutarou had chosen to abandon the girls, he might have been the one lying collapsed instead. That was a risk with his plan, but Elexis had placed his faith in Koutarou and chosen to put the plan into action. Though it sounded bizarre, Elexis was rewarded for his belief.

"H-Hngh..."

That was when the collapsed Koutarou's hand twitched slightly.

"He's still alive after all that?!"

When he saw it on the monitor, Elexis couldn't believe what he was seeing. He quickly opened up the hatch to the pilot's seat and confirmed it with his own eyes. There was no mistaking it.

"How could that be...?"

The Motor Knights had all scored direct hits with their beams. Koutarou's barrier had overheated in an instant and the ten beams should have burned him to a crisp. In fact, the net that had entangled Koutarou had been incinerated without a trace. But Koutarou himself had survived, and more surprising yet, he was trying to get up. Elexis couldn't believe it.

"I-I can't lose... N-Not when everyone is in danger..."

Signaltin had protected Koutarou. Sensing that his life was in danger, it unleashed its mana to save him. As a result, Signaltin's glow had weakened considerably. It was less than a third as bright as it normally was. Both it and Koutarou were exhausted.

"Rrgh... Raaaaah!"

Koutarou mustered what strength he had left. Using Signaltin to support himself, he stood up.

I have to protect everyone, no matter what!

He couldn't stay down. He couldn't give up those girls. He wanted to save them, even if it came at the cost of his own life. That strong emotion was what

got Koutarou back on his feet.

“E-Elexis... I’ll be taking everyone back...”

After standing up, Koutarou glared at Elexis. His whole body was hurting, but the fire in his eyes was burning strong. It was so fierce that Elexis nearly recoiled upon seeing it.

“...Splendid, Koutarou-kun. Truly splendid. I wish that I had a friend like you. But your wish won’t be fulfilled, I’m afraid. You’ve lost.”

Controlling Warlord, Elexis pointed the sword in its right hand at Koutarou’s throat. Yet even as he did, Koutarou couldn’t do anything. Standing up was all he’d been able to manage.

“Not yet... Not...”

“If you can’t accept it, then look behind you.”

His sword still at Koutarou’s throat, Elexis pointed behind Koutarou with his free left hand.

“Your precious friends are already under our control. There’s no longer any need to fight. Drop your weapon. That’s the best for everyone.”

Koutarou looked behind him as he was told. There, he saw the coup d’etat soldiers around the area where the girls from room 106 lay collapsed. They had closed in while Koutarou was on the ground.

“Everyone... I didn’t make it...”

Koutarou felt a strong sense of despair come over him as he looked at his fallen friends. One of coup d’etat soldiers approached the girls. He looked at each of their faces until he reached Sanae.

“...! ...!”

It was too far away for Koutarou to hear, but the soldier was cursing at Sanae. He grabbed her unconscious body by the hair, lifted her up, and kicked her. Her thin, delicate body fell to the ground like a ragdoll. The soldier remembered being attacked by Sanae before, and was retaliating now that he had the chance.

“Sanae!”

And the violence didn’t end there. The other soldiers wanted their revenge too, and began attacking the other unconscious girls.

“Elexis, stop them right now! What could they possibly have against those girls?!”

Koutarou immediately turned back to Elexis and desperately pleaded with him to put an end to this. Elexis was the one in charge, so he should have the authority and responsibility to stop them.

“What a painful sight. Of course I’ll stop them. But... Before that, I want you to tell me something. Where are the empress and princess?”

The soldiers’ violence wasn’t something Elexis had planned, but he used the opportunity to interrogate Koutarou.

“There’s no way I’d tell you that!”

“Then choose, Koutarou-kun. The earthlings you’re so close with, or the troublemaking aliens. You don’t even need to think about it, do you?”

“To hell with that!”

Elexis was practically demanding that Koutarou hand over Elfaria and Theia for the safety of his friends. However, both options were essentially the same to Koutarou. If he handed over Theia and the others, Sanae and the others might be saved, but then Theia would be in danger. Either way, his friends were in trouble. That’s why Koutarou couldn’t choose. Aliens or Earthlings... That kind of thing didn’t matter anymore. They were all equally important to him.

“Theia’s not a troublemaker! I won’t sell her out to the likes of you!”

“That’s too bad. Then I guess you’re just going to have to sit there and watch your friends get beaten up.”

Punching, kicking, stomping... One soldier even pulled out a knife. Their violence was gradually escalated, and was about to go beyond what could be considered revenge. It might just be an act to threaten Koutarou, but it was hard to watch.

“You...”

A fierce rage and the frustration of not being able to do anything made Koutarou grind his teeth so hard that it seemed like he might crush his own molars.

“...What do you take people’s lives for?”

Something deep inside Koutarou’s mind was screaming. Every time the girls were hurt, he felt like something inside of him was being torn apart and broken.

“I have always asked myself that question. That’s why I decided to end Her Majesty Elfaria’s reign.”

“And to that end, you’re willing to use other people’s lives as your pawns? Trample them with weapons?!”

“Without that much resolve, you can’t change the world! This world isn’t kind enough to change without some kind of sacrifice!”

Elexis sounded agitated. This was something painful for him as well. There were things he had to do that he didn’t want to, people he had to hurt that he didn’t want to, in order to save the world. If he didn’t, nothing would ever change. It was a dilemma that Elexis had been wrestling with for several years. In the end, he’d steeled himself to go for it and change the world. But it wasn’t that he felt no guilt for what he had to do.

Koutarou silently watched the change that came over Elexis. His excitement from before seemed like a lie now. But now that he touched upon Elexis’s resolution, Koutarou had regained his calm.

“I never thought I’d do it in the middle of a battle...” Koutarou muttered with his eyes closed.

“What are you talking about?”

Noticing the change in atmosphere, Elexis suspiciously watched Koutarou’s face. The soldiers noticed the same thing and stopped harming the girls in order to pay attention to Koutarou.

“...He said we were friends. That’s why I didn’t want to get him involved in our troubles. I was planning on doing it once all this was over and everything was peaceful...”

Koutarou clenched his right hand. But it wasn't out of anger. He was currently feeling very sorry, and was mortified over his own powerlessness.

"...I wanted to go sightseeing, have some delicious food, have fun with everyone else, and make some great memories..."

"Just what are you talking about, Koutarou-kun?!"

Elexis was perplexed by what Koutarou was saying, but he could sense something strange and powerful in the tone of his voice. It put him on edge.

"...Nothing at all. I was just talking about how foolish we were. Fools that can't stop a fight that has continued for over two thousand years..."

Koutarou raised his head and looked straight at Elexis.

Light had returned to Koutarou's eyes. It was a strong light supported by a strong belief. And there was power in his words. He no longer felt panic or timidity. No, Koutarou was himself again. And ready to fight.

"Elexis, you said that you can't change the world without sacrifice, didn't you?"

Koutarou had made up his mind. At this rate, the girls might die. And to change that, Koutarou accepted his own powerlessness and foolishness, and decided to save the girls using any method he could. He wouldn't regret the sacrifices he'd have to make. Even if that meant involving a precious friend in his fight. Just like Theia had made up her mind when she returned to Koutarou and the others.

"That's right! That's what reality is like!"

"Then... have you resolved yourself, Elexis?"

Koutarou's sharp glance pierced right through Elexis. He was asking if Elexis had the same level of determination he did.

"What are you talking about?!"

Feeling pressure from Koutarou, Elexis did his best to suppress his unease, and replied with a loud voice to hide it.

"That you yourself might become a sacrifice. Or are you an exception when it

comes to sacrifices to change the world?”

“I don’t know what you’re trying to pull, but stop this useless resistance! You can’t change anything!”

Koutarou was trying to do something Elexis couldn’t understand. In order to quiet his growing anxiety, Elexis raised his voice even more. He was reaching the point where he could no longer hide how shaken he was.

“You’re absolutely correct. I’m not the one that’s going to change it. I don’t have that kind of power.”

All of Koutarou’s power was borrowed. All the power he had on his own was his skill with a sword. Everything else was something he’d gotten from someone else. It always had been, and it always would be. And what he was trying to do now wasn’t through his own power either. But Koutarou would no longer hesitate, even if it meant having to rely on the power of others and humble himself. As long as it could save those precious to him, he would do it.

“Prepare yourself, Elexis. Nobody will be able to stop this one!”

Koutarou raised his right hand and clenched it tightly. As he did, the back of his hand began to glow. The light formed a geometrical pattern. Since Koutarou’s hand was covered by a gauntlet, the pattern looked like it was being carved into the armor.

“By the pledge of old, for the reunion once promised! Answer my summon and appear!”

Koutarou spoke in the ritual language of Ancient Forthorthe. For each word he spoke, the glow on his hand grew brighter and brighter. It shed on his surroundings, and began to make the air itself tremble.

“What is this?! A spacequake?! What is about to appear?!”

Elexis couldn’t understand the situation he was in and looked around frantically in a panic. His subordinates were equally dumbfounded, and stood stock still, frightened by the light and the trembling air.

The only one who understood what was coming was Koutarou, who continued his chant unfazed.

“Pass through endless time and immeasurable distance and appear, old king!”

“Stop it, Koutarou-kun! Don’t you care what happens to your friends?!”

“You’re too late!”

Koutarou ignored Elexis’s demands and flashed a frightening smile before shouting out the last verse of his chant.

“Shake the light and appear! Great champion of purgatory, Fire Dragon Emperor Alunayaaa!”

The light then grew big and blinding. It filled the area so that nobody could see anything. It was as if they’d all been thrown into a world of pure white.

“...Rest easy, friend. This is no foolish act. In fact, I feel honored that you called on me in your time of need,” said a deep and full voice like the rumbling of the earth.

As it spoke, the light that had covered everything began to gather into a single point. That point was behind Koutarou, off in the direction where the girls lay collapsed. Hearing the voice, Koutarou looked around.

“You came!”

His expression eased up a little with a mixture of relief and nostalgia as he looked for the owner of the voice. They had a very unique appearance and should have been easy to find, but Koutarou didn’t see them anywhere. He was puzzled by that, but the deep voice rang out again.

“You finally called for me, Blue Knight.”

The voice was much closer than Koutarou had imagined. As he turned to look in its direction, he saw one of the collapsed girls trying to get back up.

“L-Landlord-san?!”

It was the landlord of Corona House, Kasagi Shizuka. She slowly stood up, put her hands on her hips, and smiled calmly.

“It has been a while. I am glad to see you well.”

The voice Koutarou was looking for was coming from Shizuka’s mouth. And the smile on her face was different than usual. It was a powerful and composed

smile fitting of a king.

“Landlord-san?! Why is Landlord-san...?!”

Koutarou was confused. He had summoned a friend he met in a different world two thousand years ago, not Shizuka. But his voice was unmistakably coming from Shizuka, and something about her felt completely different than normal.

“Could it be...?!”

Koutarou had a thought and poured spiritual energy into his eyes. As he did, he understood the situation Shizuka was in.

So that’s how it is! Alunaya-dono is inside of Landlord-san!

It was Shizuka’s body, but there was another soul overlapping hers. Koutarou could see its overwhelming amount of spiritual energy. And Shizuka’s eyes were shining red. That glow was something that Koutarou had seen before.

“You! Don’t move!”

“Stop your useless resistance!”

However, the soldiers had no idea what was going on. They had been wrapped in a powerful light, and feared what would come after it. But in the end, nothing had happened. As that anticlimactic scene ended, a lone girl had gotten up from the ground. That was all they knew. And not knowing any better, they moved to stop Shizuka.

“Don’t you dare lay a hand on me, scum! Only my friends are permitted to do so!”

Shizuka’s expression flashed anger, and she roared at the soldiers.

“Uwah!”

“What?!”

Despite her not doing anything else, the soldiers that had touched Shizuka were sent flying.

He blew them away with just his spirit... He’s the real deal!

Seeing that, Koutarou was convinced that a powerful existence was inside of

Shizuka.

“Burn it into your memories! My name is Alunaya! I am the king of the proud race of dragons and the lord of flame! Don’t you forget it, even after you’ve left this life!”

It was the legendary dragon that had answered Koutarou’s summons, the Fire Dragon Emperor Alunaya.

The moment Shizuka spoke the legendary dragon’s name, she was wreathed in crimson flames. But the fire didn’t hurt her. Instead, it covered the surface of her body as if to protect her. After a few seconds, the flames dissipated, and Shizuka’s appearance had greatly changed. She had transformed into something halfway between a dragon and a human.

She had a horn on her head, and her eyes and hair had turned red. Sharp fangs fitting for a beast peeked out from behind her lips. Her arms and legs were covered in crimson scales like a plated set of armor. On her back sprouted dragon-like wings, and a long tail stretched out from the back of her waist. She looked like a child born between a dragon and human.

“Blue Knight, leave this to me! While my power is limited in this form, I won’t lose to normal humans!”

“I’ll leave it to you!”

“Here I was wondering what it would be, but it’s just a mutant? How desperate can you be, Koutarou-kun?! Just taking on the characteristics of other creatures won’t make humans that much stronger!”

Elexis had been surprised at first, but he’d regained his composure now. He didn’t think Shizuka’s transformation was much of a threat. Though she might have been biologically strengthened, she was still a living being. She wouldn’t stand up to Forthorthian weaponry. She might put up a fight now that she was a little stronger, but she’d be no match for the soldiers.



“I think so too. In this small form, I can only use a fraction of my power.”

In that moment, Shizuka opened her mouth and spewed fire. No, it was too hot and fast to call fire. It was more apt to say she’d fired a plasma beam cannon. The white-hot ray cut through the air with ease.

“Impossible!”

Small fighter drones were smashed into pieces and tumbled to the earth in front of the shocked Elexis. Those small fighters were automated, unmanned weapons designed to support the soldiers. Comparing them to technology available on Earth, they would be like light assault vehicles. Though they were small, they weren’t weak by any means. Yet they had been destroyed in a single attack. And it wasn’t just one of them, either. The majority of the fighters had been shot down by that one attack.

“So I really couldn’t shoot them all down...”

Shizuka wasn’t pleased with this result, and regrettably shrugged her shoulders. However, the side that had suffered the attack was speechless. That one blow was all it took to communicate to the soldiers that the girl standing in front of them was something completely out of the ordinary.

“Uwah! Aaahhhhh!”

“Don’t come over here!”

The soldiers who had seen Shizuka’s power up close all fell into a tumultuous panic. They reacted in all kinds of ways. Some ran away, others blankly fell down on the spot, and some fired their guns at random. But one thing was sure across the board. Their teamwork had completely collapsed.

“Hmph. The quality of soldiers sure has dropped these past two thousand years. Alaia-dono’s soldiers would have come at me... They’re so reliant on their technology that they’ve lost their willpower.”

Shizuka moved forward, feeling somewhat dumbfounded by the soldiers’ behavior. She had a regal presence as she walked along, and the ground crumbled beneath each step.

“Lidith and Fauna, even Caris who parted with them is here... And I suppose

the one I am dwelling in would be Mary... I also feel other nostalgic presences... I see, then I guess it was only inevitable for me to appear here as well!”

Shizuka had moved forward to protect the other girls. If she didn’t, there was a chance they might get caught up in the soldiers’ confused attacks.

“I’ll make you pay for harming my friends!”

“A monster!”

Realizing how strong Shizuka was and what state his subordinates were in, Elexis hurriedly closed up Warlord’s hatch. If Shizuka was left be, the soldiers would be annihilated. So Warlord and the Motor Knights would need to defeat her right away.

“Change coordination mode! Switch to anti-infantry— No, anti-mobile weapon!”

“Understood. Changing coordination mode. Proceeding with anti-mobile weapon strategy. Tactics optimization: changing to weapon preset F.”

Once back inside Warlord, Elexis spat out orders to the AI. Only a short amount of time had passed, but Elexis started to panic as he watched Shizuka attack the soldiers. He had to keep them from being annihilated. To him, they were precious companions who shared the same goal.

“Let’s go, Warlord!”

“I’m your opponent here, Elexis.”

But as Elexis was about to head towards the soldiers, Koutarou stepped in front of him.

“Get out of the way, Koutarou-kun! I don’t have the time to deal with you!”

“That’s too bad... That’s what you told me earlier.”

While somehow managing to support his staggering body, Koutarou leveled Signaltin at Warlord. Though he was severely weakened, there was still fire in his eyes.

“What can you even do now?! Are you still going to fight in that state?! Stop this nonsense and get out of the way!”

“Come on now. That’s not how this goes, Elexis.”

Koutarou conjured what willpower he had to smile at Elexis. He couldn’t let him go since his target was obviously Shizuka. But Shizuka was strong. Rather than fighting directly against her, he would likely use the collapsed girls as hostages. And it was because he knew that that Koutarou desperately struggled to stay conscious and stand in Elexis’s way.

“Weren’t you prepared to make sacrifices for your goal? Forget about your subordinates and fight me. You were after information on Theia and Elfaria, as well my life, weren’t you?”

“So our companions’ lives are at stake for both of us...”

Realizing Koutarou’s intention and what he’d resolved himself to do, Elexis changed his mind. Koutarou would never step down in this situation, so he would have to defeat him first.

“Very well. Let’s finish this, Koutarou-kun.”

“Don’t think things will go the same as before.”

Koutarou and Elexis both readied their weapons. Thanks to summoning Alunaya, the battle was now proceeding in the direction Koutarou desired. But he was still prepared to die. He knew that with his armor so badly damaged he wouldn’t be able to stall Elexis for long.

“I have to at least buy enough time for Alunaya-dono to clean up on his end... Everyone, lend me your strength...”

Koutarou muttered to himself in a quiet voice as he tightened his grip around Signaltin. Now was the time to use all the power at his disposal. There was no need for it to be his own. Even a borrowed power would be fine. He didn’t care anymore. As long as he could protect what he needed to, Koutarou would use any power he could.

And as if answering his request, he heard a girl’s voice.

“I would prefer it if you came to me first.”

That voice hadn’t reached his ears, but his mind directly. It was being transmitted through the power of the sword in his hands.

“Your Majesty?!”

When he heard that voice, the first image that popped into Koutarou’s mind was a silver-haired girl he once knew. She’d said those exact words to him once. However, he quickly realized it couldn’t be her. There was no way that silver-haired girl would be here, but he could think of someone else who might be.

“Sakuraba-senpai?”

“Heehee, you already found me out. I thought that was a pretty good act, too...”

The voice belonged to Harumi. She also had the power to control Signaltin. That’s why she called out to him the way the girl in his memories had.

“Why are you here? What about Empress Elfaria?”

Koutarou closed his mouth and sent his thoughts to Harumi the same way. He didn’t want Elexis to hear the rest of this conversation.

“If Signaltin’s powers grow weaker, I will know, no matter where I am. That’s why I had Her Majesty hide and came here.”

After avoiding the unmanned scouts, Harumi and Elfaria stayed hidden in the mountain cottage. They believed it would be safer to stay in a place that had already been searched then to carelessly move around. Of course, she didn’t forget to use a spell to hide them anyway, just in case.

But then Harumi sensed Signaltin’s powers weakening. It was a sign that Koutarou and the others were in an incredibly dangerous situation. So Harumi left Elfaria behind in the cottage and made her way to Koutarou.

“How reckless...”

“Either way, I can’t protect Her Majesty on my own. I had to do this.”

There was a high risk in leaving Elfaria on her own, but it was unrealistic to think that Harumi would be able to protect Elfaria by herself in the first place. Harumi knew it was unrealistic to think they could escape from the enemies that had defeated Koutarou and the others. They’d likely never make it to the safety of Theia or Clan’s ship. That’s why she had decided to lower the chance of that happening by coming to help Koutarou. And Elfaria had agreed.

“And besides, you’re planning to fight in that wounded state, aren’t you, Satomi-kun? Then I should be allowed to fight with my own body as well.”

“Sakuraba-senpai...”

“Satomi-kun, we will fight together. I will always stay at your side and protect you.”

That was a declaration of Harumi’s love as much as anything else.

“The Silver Princess couldn’t do it because of her position, but I am just a normal girl, so... I will stay with you until the very end.”

Harumi felt like she was very blessed. While the Silver Princess loved the Blue Knight, she had to give up on her feelings for the sake of the country. But Harumi was different. She was just a normal girl born to a normal family. She had the right to decide what to do with her own life. And now she had the power to protect the person she loved, just like the Silver Princess. Having experienced the Silver Princess’s life like it was her own during the play, Harumi couldn’t think of her as a stranger. That’s why she wanted to fulfill the Silver Princess’s wish. If Harumi, who shared the same feelings as the Silver Princess, could live with Koutarou, then she believed the Silver Princess would feel like her own feelings had been requited.

That’s why Harumi had decided to fight, not just for herself or for the Silver Princess, but to fulfill both of their desires.

“I understand. Please lend me your strength, Sakuraba-senpai. It’s quite pathetic, but I can’t beat Elexis on my own.”

“I’m here for you!”

Harumi released all of the feelings that had built up inside of her and answered Koutarou without hesitation. She didn’t know if those feelings had reached Koutarou or not, but he’d said that he needed her. That alone was enough to satisfy her.

Silver Princess... Please, lend me your emotions! So that I can forever protect the man we both feel for!

Harumi clasped her hands together in front of her chest and called out to

Signaltin's powers. Harumi carried both her feelings and Alaia's. The power awakened by both girls' hearts greatly exceeded the power of them separately, and the sword glowed brightly once more.

"Did you finish your prayers, Koutarou-kun?"

"I have no need to pray. I have someone who will do that for me."

Just as Koutarou and Elexis were about to start their fight, Signaltin began glowing brighter. The light that had been dim until just now was shining once more. It was almost as bright as when Alunaya was summoned.

"What are you planning?! I won't let you have your way!"

Sensing danger as the sword started glowing, Elexis squeezed the trigger without hesitation. When he did, the beam shotgun in Warlord's left hand roared, and the ten Motor Knights fired their beam cannons. Their synchronization was perfect, and the shotgun and beam cannon assaulted Koutarou at the same time.

"Good judgement, but you're too late, Elexis!"

Eleven beams poured down on where Koutarou was standing and left a large crater. But Koutarou was no longer there, and all Elexis's attack had done was gouge a hole in the earth.

"You should have shot me before that prayer began!"

Koutarou rapidly closed in on Elexis. His movements were fast, and he didn't appear to be in as much pain as he had been just a moment ago. Though not completely, Koutarou had been healed and regained his stamina when Signaltin began glowing.

"That light from before...! But even then, you can't move faster than what that armor's designed for!"

However, Warlord was tracking Koutarou's movements. The laser cannon mounted on Warlord's right shoulder repeatedly fired at him. Since lasers moved at the speed of light, it would hit Koutarou virtually the instant it was fired. Lasers weren't something that could be dodged.

“It’s not just about moving quickly. You should be well aware of that since you’re using those things.”

However, the moment the laser hit Koutarou, he vanished like smoke. The Koutarou that Elexis had shot was an elaborate illusion created by Harumi.

The next moment, two of the Motor Knights to Warlord’s right exploded at the same time. Koutarou was standing right next to the destroyed robots. His target hadn’t been Warlord, but the Motor Knights.

“Satomi-kun, get back!”

Koutarou followed Harumi’s instructions and quickly fell back. Three nearby Motor Knights were taking aim at him.

“Gather, spirits of water! Dance, spirits of wind! Combine these two powers and appear, spirits of lightning! Oh draconic dark cloud, open your jaws and destroy! Roar of Thunder!”

But before they could attack, a blast of lightning came down from the sky and struck the three robots. Against the power of nature containing over a billion volts, the Motor Knights’ barriers didn’t stand a chance. Unable to do offer any resistance, the three robots bathed in the lightning and exploded.

“Amazing...”

If Koutarou hadn’t fallen back, he would have been caught up in that lightning as well. Harumi’s warning hadn’t been to tell Koutarou about the attacks from the Motor Knights, but about her own.

“I-I’m surprised as well...”

The results were a shock to Harumi as well. Since her opponent wasn’t human, she could attack without holding back. And the resulting spell was far more powerful than she had imagined. Harumi grew a little frightened of her own power as she looked at the charred ground and fragments of the robots scattered about. If she misused it, she might end up hurting her own allies. Harumi took a reverent moment to appreciate the terrific power she possessed.

“I went too far...”

“It was a sudden fight, so don’t worry too much about it! You’re doing great,

Sakuraba-senpai!”

“Th-Thank you, Satomi-kun!”

Hearing the vigor returned to Harumi’s voice, Koutarou took a look at his next target.

You probably think that I’m just targeting your attendant robots, so I’ll give you a reminder who I’m really after!

Koutarou’s next target was the weapon that Elexis was controlling, Warlord. Since the remaining Motor Knights were on the other side of Warlord, there was no fear of a counterattack. Now was his chance to close in.

“Just who are you, Koutarou-kun?!”

Having lost five Motor Knights in the blink of an eye, Elexis was starting to panic again. He fired missiles at the approaching Koutarou and simultaneously fired off his laser to obstruct Koutarou’s path.

“I told you before, I’m just a victim!”

Koutarou swung his sword and cut through the air while Harumi, controlling Signaltin’s power, unleashed a shockwave. The shockwave destroyed the incoming missiles. The flames from the explosions hid Koutarou and greatly diminished the power of the lasers. With them weakened, his magical barrier would have no problem blocking them. Koutarou advanced without hesitation while soaking up the lasers.

“I’m just a normal high school boy!”

“I don’t think that’s all there is to you! Your power is far from normal!”

The abilities Koutarou had at his disposal were rich in variety, and all of them were on a very high level. Koutarou’s skill with the sword, the science and spiritual technology his armor was using, the spiritual energy and magic inside of him, and even the supernatural being he summoned... Koutarou was using all of those abilities in harmony. And as a result, his combat capabilities defied logic.

“My power is insignificant. It’s all borrowed from other people. I’m sure if you used it, you would be even more amazing!”

Approaching Warlord, Koutarou swiftly thrust Signaltin forward. He was aiming for the laser cannon on the right shoulder. Since he couldn't avoid the lasers, that was his primary target.

As Signaltin crashed through Warlord's barrier, Koutarou shot out electricity from his left hand. That electricity passed through Signaltin and into the laser cannon. With a crackling sound, the laser cannon exploded into pieces.

"That's not a funny joke! I don't have the ability to borrow that much power!"

Elexis suddenly swung with his left fist in an attempt to beat Koutarou down, but Koutarou swiftly kicked off of Warlord before it could reach him. As he did, the remaining five Motor Knights tracked his movements, putting him in the sights for their beam cannons.

"Gather, spirits of water! Dance, spirits of wind! Combine these two powers and appear, spirits of lightning! Like a coiled snake, like a rising tornado, show yourself! Whirl! Thunder Spiral!"

However, the fired beams never reached Koutarou. Using the magnetic field of the powerful electric current she had created, Harumi altered the direction of the beams. Thought it was just a marginal change in direction, it was enough to shift the beams away from Koutarou.

"Sakuraba-senpai, that's amazing!"

Koutarou brandished Signaltin and attacked the Motor Knights. The powerful magnetic field was interfering with their onboard computers and, though it was just for a short while, the robots remained still until they could resolve the system errors that occurred. Harumi's choice of spell was incredibly viable, and served to both defend and attack. Koutarou made full use of the opening Harumi had created.

There was the sound of metal slicing through metal, and all five of the remaining Motor Knights were cut into pieces. Elexis watched as the robotic parts fell to the ground, and looked up to see that Shizuka had beaten down his final soldier.

"Your true power is not something that can be seen. It allows others to entrust their powers to you. It is your very existence..." Elexis practically

gasped.

It was far too brilliant of a comeback. Elexis had been one step away from total victory, yet Koutarou had turned the tables on him. Koutarou's power far exceeded his imagination. If Koutarou had borrowed his power from others, then just how much did those people trust him? Moreover, it wasn't just one person. Considering his strength, Koutarou must have borrowed his power from many others. Elexis couldn't see himself gaining the help of that many people. And so he was forced to admit that his caliber didn't compare to Koutarou's.

"Then I will take pride in that true power. And I will never betray the trust placed in me."

If Koutarou's true power was as Elexis said, then it meant that Koutarou was himself, just as the girls of room 106 were each their own person. But the bond formed between the ten of them was real, and made them each all the stronger for it.

"This is our win, Elexis."

And Koutarou took pride in that bond. He thought to himself that he would never betray it.

Koutarou wasn't alone. He always had nine girls at his side.

"Not yet, Koutarou-kun!"

Elexis punched a red button installed in the corner of Warlord's control panel. When he did, the control seat separated from Warlord and flew backwards from the machine. The button Elexis had pushed was an emergency eject.

"Oh no!"

"Even if I can't defeat you, there are still ways to win against you!"

Leaving behind his men was a painful decision to Elexis. But he was forced to recognize that in the current situation, it would be next to impossible to retrieve them. And the odds of Warlord defeating Koutarou and Shizuka alone were slim to none. That's why Elexis had no choice but to choose flee.

"I see, you're after Theia!"

"That's right! Fighting you directly is not the only way of fighting you!"

Elexis wasn’t escaping just to save his own skin. If he could capture Theia, who was fighting in space, then he would be able to use her for negotiations. Though it would be limited to those who survived, Elexis could use her to get his men back at a later time.

“I won’t let you get away!”

“You’re too late!”

The moment Koutarou readied to attack Elexis, the control seat he was sitting in opened a space-time hole and entered it.

“I won’t let you off that easy!”

Koutarou activated the emergency boosters on his armor and chased after Elexis. He was going to plunge into the open space-time hole too while it was still open.

“I told you that you’re too late!”

However, just before Koutarou could enter the hole, Warlord, which had been left on the surface, exploded. In that instant, the space-time hole vanished before Koutarou’s eyes. As a result, he simply passed through where the hole had been.

“Damn it! In that case...!”

Though he’d let Elexis get away, Koutarou wasn’t about to give up. He quickly activated the armor’s comms system and tried to contact Theia and Ruth, who were engaged with the enemy ships in space.

“The connection to the network has been cut. Communication is not possible.”

“What?!”

However, the AI in his armor told him loud and clear that his plan wouldn’t work.

The reason Koutarou couldn’t contact Theia and Ruth was because of Warlord exploding. It was specifically meant to jam communications.

Forthorthian spaceships usually made use of gravitational waves to communicate. It was more reliable than electromagnetic waves, but it was still susceptible to interference. Just like electromagnetic fields could be used to interfere with electromagnetic waves, gravitational field could interfere with gravitational waves. That was why Warlord's reactor had purposely been overloaded.

"Because of this interference, not only is communication jammed, but transferring objects isn't possible either! And certainly not live humans!"

Since communications using gravitational waves couldn't be used now, Koutarou was using electromagnetic waves to contact Clan. Since she was further away than the moon, there was a time lag in their communication. And right now, even that slight delay was enough to irritate Koutarou.

"At this rate, Theia's in trouble!"

Thanks to Clan, Koutarou could get a grasp of Elexis's strategy. Like he'd said, his goal was to defeat Koutarou. Forcibly launching an attack on the surface to draw Koutarou down from space was the first stage of the plan.

The second stage was to lure Blue Knight to the far side of the moon. In order to keep them safe, there would be a high chance that either Theia or Elfaria was on the ship. Elexis was supposed to either capture or kill them. And when Elexis threatened to support his ground troops with all three of his spaceships, Theia had no choice but to reveal herself and go after them in Blue Knight. Even though she knew it was a trap, she made the solemn journey to the far side of the moon.

The third stage was that if Elexis failed to defeat Koutarou on the surface, he would have Warlord self-destruct to keep Koutarou and the others on the planet for a while. By doing that, he could buy some time and launch an attack on Blue Knight, which was currently isolated in space. The first attack had doubled as a decoy by gathering Koutarou and the others in once place and then stalling them.

And Elexis's strategy proved effective. Koutarou and the others were unable to get to Theia and Ruth in space. Blue Knight was mostly completely automated, but even then, it was a bit too much for just Theia and Ruth to

control on their own in combat. And going up against three ships, the more help, the better. But left stranded on Earth, all their friends could do was watch the footage of the battle that Clan was streaming to them from Hazy Moon. Koutarou started feeling rushed and impatient.

“Clan-san, can’t we do something with your power?”

Harumi’s silvery hair swayed in the wind as she posed that question Clan, whose hologram was being displayed by Koutarou’s armor. Harumi’s hair had taken on a silver sheen due to the influence of Signaltin’s mana. It gave her a mysterious air that charmed anyone who saw her.

“Even if I have the Cradle enter the atmosphere and pick you up, we won’t make it in time.”

Entering and exiting the atmosphere followed by a 380,000 kilometer trip to the far side of the moon was a trip that would take time, even with Forthorthe’s advanced technology.

“So we’re at a stalemate...”

Koutarou tightly clenched his fists. With his strength amplified by the armor, if he’d been holding anything in his hand, it easily would have been crushed.

“Blue Knight, I do not understand the detailed circumstances, but in short, you wish to enter the world of the stars?”

Shizuka, who had been watching over the situation until now, opened her mouth. She had her arms crossed and was staring at Koutarou’s face.

“That’s right. My friends are fighting in space, up there in the world of the stars.”

“Hmm... Behind that large satellite, huh? There certainly seems to be a commotion going on up there.”

Shizuka looked up at the moon and squinted her eyes before nodding. She wasn’t using any kind of magic, yet she could sense the distortion of space and energy colliding even from this distance.

“But it would take too much time for us to get there using any method we have.”

“I see. In that case, Blue Knight, I shall take you there right now.”

Shizuka pointed straight at the moon. She then stuck out her chest, put her hands on her hips, and revealed a confident expression. It was neither a joke nor a misunderstanding.

“You can do that?!”

“It won’t be easy, however. There is a limit even to my powers.”

The legendary dragon inside of Shizuka looked like an omnipotent being to Koutarou. But even Alunaya had his limits. In fact, he couldn’t come to Earth as himself. As expected, two thousand years and ten million light years was too great a time and distance to cross.

So instead, he’d sent just his mana and a copy of his soul to Earth. And using the crest on Koutarou’s hand as a beacon, he had been sending bits of his powers to Shizuka who was living at Corona House for over ten years. In other words, he hadn’t just suddenly appeared today. He’d been preparing for this for quite some time.

“Rising up into the world of the stars and flying to the back of that satellite will most likely drain me of all my powers. And until I recover, I won’t be able to do anything. Would you be fine even then?”

Right now, Shizuka—or rather, Alunaya—only had the power to take Koutarou into space. He wouldn’t be able to give Koutarou any support in the battle after that. That’s why Alunaya asked Koutarou if he still wanted to rush to Theia’s side.

“Of course! Please take me, Alunaya-dono!”

Of course he did. He was prepared to handle all of this on his own if he had to. He was Theia’s knight, after all.

The Second Coming of the Legend

Saturday, May 22nd

When Blue Knight informed Theia and Ruth that they'd arrived at the far side of the moon, the three enemy ships were lined up and waiting for them. Normally being on the dark and far side of the moon, the ships wouldn't be visible, but thanks to the CG-processed images on the monitor, they were clear as day.

"As we suspected, it was a trap."

"So it seems, Your Highness. Several fighters have been launched from the enemy carrier."

"So everything is going just as they planned... Activate the automatic interceptor system, and hand the firing control system and the steering over to me. I'll leave the rest to you."

"As you wish, my princess."

In order to keep the three ships from supporting the forces on the ground, Theia would have to attack with Blue Knight and jam their communications. That would raise her allies' chance of victory back on the surface.

Until now, they had only transferred small fighters to support their soldiers and a dozen or so Motor Knights to support Warlord. If they sent anything more than that, the odds would inevitably be tipped in their favor in the ground battle.

"Ruth."

"Yes?"

"Let me apologize beforehand. I'm sorry. I don't think we'll be returning alive."

In order to protect Elfaria and to secure a chance at victory for their friends

on Earth, someone would have to attack the enemy fleet. Though Theia and the others had two ships at their disposal, Clan and her Hazy Moon couldn't openly participate in the battle because of her precarious situation with her family. That meant Blue Knight would have to fight alone, and the situation was grim. It would be nigh impossible for just one ship to come out victorious.

"What are you saying? I made an oath to stay with you through everything."

"So you did..."

"If anyone is to apologize, it should be the both of us to Satomi-sama."

"That's true... Then Ruth, if that time comes, let's fall on the moon. If we do that, then we can always watch over him."

"That is a wonderful idea, Your Highness. By all means, let's do so."

Theia and Ruth were already prepared for their defeat. With their ship alone, they didn't have a prayer of winning. Blue Knight was a royal class battleship, the most powerful class of Forthorthian ships, but it hadn't fully recovered from the damage it had taken in its last fight with the same ships. Moreover, it was a three on one fight. It didn't look good for them.

"However, I don't believe we should just let them win."

"Of course not. Since we're going to fight, we should aim for victory. If we don't, I'd feel bad for those who follow behind us."

But despite all odds, Theia and Ruth were going for the win. Theia wanted to defeat her enemies, reunite with Koutarou, and say something sensible to him. And Ruth wanted to tell Koutarou her wish.

Blue Knight made the first move. Since it was a royal class ship, even for a battleship, it had an exceptionally high-power generator. And making use of that energy allowed them to extend the range of their attacks. Out of the many weapons at her disposal, Theia chose to begin with the laser cannon.

"Blue Knight! The high concentration laser!"

"As you wish, my princess. Opening the gunport to the high concentration laser, Shining Flower. Activation assigned to the commander's seat trigger."

Theia was sitting at the bridge's commander seat. She steered the ship from there, and took control of attacking at the same time. Though she was steering, there wasn't a rudder like on a marine ship. Since a spaceship required navigation in three dimensions, the control style was much more similar to that of a fighter jet. She had a control stick, and she held her finger over the firing trigger.

"Your Highness, the defensive ship has taken the front. I'm confirming the existence of a distortion field."

Ruth was sitting in the operator's seat to the right and slightly below Theia. She was in charge of information processing and managing the ship. Simply put, Theia was in charge of offense and Ruth was in charge of defense.

"The defensive ship is in the front and the fighters are following it. Behind them is the battleship, and the carrier is in the very back. A standard formation."

The enemy fleet consisted of a carrier, a battleship, and a defensive ship.

The carrier's combat capabilities in itself were weak, but it carried several fighters within. It would launch those fighters and have them attack in its stead. A combined attack by a group of highly mobiles fighters was hard to prevent and had a lot of power behind it. However, even then, fighters often lacked the firepower to breach a ship's barrier on their own. And for that reason, a carrier practically never operated alone.

That was where the battleship came in. It excelled in attacking. Using ordnance that made use of its large generator, its primary job was to soften up the enemy's barrier. Once it did, then the carrier's fighters would be more effective. In other words, the battleship would weaken and the carrier would destroy. So the battleship was an indispensable partner of the carrier.

Opposite its partners, the defensive ship was in charge of defense. It was aptly named, and came standard equipped with a robust barrier. It had weaponry as well, but the ship's role was to take the lead in battle and block any incoming attacks. It was common practice for such ships to be unarmed. Since they largely served as a shield, there was no need to station a crew on it unless there was a particular reason for it.

The enemy was making effective use of those three ships in coordination. The defensive ship was put in the front to protect the fighters launched by the carrier. The battleship followed after them. The carrier itself stayed in the back and didn't move aggressively. The battleship would attack and weaken the Blue Knight's barrier at range while the defensive ship covered the fighters' approach so they could move in for the kill. It was a textbook strategy as old as space combat itself.

"The ships and weapons are probably new models from DKI, but their strategy is orthodox..."

Theia was a little curious about the basic strategy the enemy was using. Based on Elexis's wits in their last battle, she felt this was a bit too simple for someone like him.

"What shall we do?"

"There's no time to think about that. Let's get around the defensive ship and attack the battleship."

Theia made defensive maneuvers with Blue Knight while turning the bow towards the enemy battleship. Blue Knight's movements were like that of a fighter's. With Forthorthe's advanced technology, it was possible to control gravity and mass, so even large ships had high mobility. And when the bow came around at the right angle, she squeezed the trigger.

"A direct hit on the enemy ship! The distortion field's strength has decreased by 30 percent!"

"We won't hit that many times from this distance! Ruth, we're going to get a little reckless!"

"Understood, Your Highness! The fighters are leaving the defensive ship's distortion field! It looks like the defensive ship is going to devote itself to protecting the battleship!"

"It looks like they know how to hit us where it hurts. We'll ignore the fighters and focus our attacks on the battleship! Those fighters aren't much of a threat to us right now!"

Theia had scored a bullseye on the battleship, but it wasn't enough to destroy

it. While her laser had a long reach, it had less power compared to the other weapons. That's why Theia wanted to close in and use something more powerful to finish off the battleship, but her opponents knew that's what she'd be after. Since both sides needed to weaken their opponent's barrier, they concentrated their focus on that. And because Elexis's ships knew that Theia and Ruth wouldn't have time to deal with each individual fighter, they had the defensive ship give up on escorting them and focus on covering the battleship instead.

"Blue Knight! The variable property beam cannon!"

"As you wish, my princess. Opening the port to the variable property beam cannon, Powder Snow."

"This time won't go the same as the last!"

Theia changed her weapon from laser to beam. While the beam didn't have the same reach as the laser, it had considerably more firepower. From their current distance, it was the better option.

"Your Highness, energy reaction detected in the bow of the enemy battleship! They're firing!"

"Leave it to me! I won't make an amateur mistake like letting them hit us!"

The enemy battleship commenced its attack by firing their own beam cannon. It seemed they were trying to turn this into a shootout with main weapons.

"Three fighter formations are pursuing us!"

"Are they trying to harass us?!"

Three groups of fighters formed bands of three, for a total of nine crafts chasing after Blue Knight. But they alone didn't have the power to break through Blue Knight's barrier, so Theia ignored them and continued her attack.

"After a volley with the beam cannon, we'll pass by the side of the defensive ship! As we're next to it, throw some missiles at it!"

"As you wish, my princess."

"Your Highness, I'll scatter disturbance particles immediately after the missiles have been fired!"

“I’ll leave that to you! Now here we go!”

Through some skillful piloting, Theia smoothly turned Blue Knight and charged towards the battleship being protected by the defensive ship. With the defensive ship in the way, it wasn’t wise for Theia to engage in a shootout. Instead, her plan was to challenge the battleship in close combat.

“If I do this, you can’t fire either, can you?!”

Since there was still some distance between them, Theia approached in a straight line with the defensive ship between her and the battleship. With that, the battleship would be unable to attack her, meaning she could advance freely. The defensive ship had far less offensive power than the battleship. Its sporadic attacks couldn’t hit Blue Knight. Theia repeatedly fired the beam cannon as she charged the defensive ship. Under fire, it gave up on attacking and focused on defending with its barrier.

“The bombardment has lowered the strength of the enemy ship’s distortion field by 56 percent!”

“All right!”

“Firing missiles.”

“Scattering disturbance particles!”

The beam cannon hit the defensive ship dead on just like Theia had predicted, and greatly weakened its barrier. Theia then passed by the defensive ship’s broad side and fired missiles into it. Ruth then released a large volume of chaff particles to disrupt communications and scatter any incoming lasers from the defensive ship’s counterattack.

And after passing by the defensive ship, the enemy battleship appeared before Blue Knight. Everything had been playing out like Theia had wanted so far. And if they could destroy the battleship, they might actually have a chance at surviving this.

“Your Highness, the enemy fighter group is attacking!”

“Ridiculous! What are they planning to accomplish by attacking now?!”

That was when something unexpected happened. The nine fighters following

Blue Knight suddenly began their assault. With the Blue Knight's barrier intact, however, their attack would be completely pointless. There should be no way they could harm the ship. But nevertheless...

"Your Highness, Blue Knight's distortion field has lost 20 percent of its strength!"

"What?!"

Completely contrary to Theia's expectations, Blue Knight's barrier took considerable damage. It was an absurd feat for mere fighter crafts. If they took repeated attacks of that caliber, their barrier wouldn't last for long. It was practically unthinkable, and defied all common battle sense.

"It seems the beams fired from all nine fighters hit the same spot at the same time, Your Highness!"

"Aha, so that's their new strategy!"

The fighter crafts that DKI had created worked on the same principle as the Motor Knights sent to Earth. They specialized in perfectly synchronized attacks on targets that the carrier designated. The fighters' individual attacks would do nothing against Blue Knight's barrier, but when they concentrated their attacks on the same place at the same time, it was difficult for even a royal class battleship to withstand. Rather than using new weapons that could easily leave behind evidence, Elexis had opted to go for optimizing conventional technology.

"High energy reaction detected from the battleship!"

"Activate the emergency boosters! Dodge it at maximum speed!"

"As you wish, my princess."

Having learned the enemy's plan, Theia didn't force an attack, but rather decided to immediately fall back. She attempted to get away from the battleship at Blue Knight's maximum speed. If she got into a shootout with the battleship while the fighters were on her tail, it was obvious how that would play out.

But in its retreat, Blue Knight shook violently. It had been hit by the battleship's bombardment.

“The third block of the left leg has been hit! Closing the hatches and releasing fire suppressant!”

“We’ve been had! We knew they were tough, and this is what we get!”

The fighters’ attack had weakened their barrier, and with the emergency retreat taxing the generator, the barrier hadn’t had time to recover before the battleship’s attack. Not even Blue Knight could take a hit in that condition and walk away unscathed. Thanks to Theia’s skillful maneuvering, they’d managed to get through it with just some damage to one of the legs. If a different pilot had been at the helm, it likely would have been a much more devastating hit.

When Elexis returned from Earth to the carrier, the fleet began their actual attack on Blue Knight. The princess’s ship took continuous damage, and was gradually losing its ability to return fire.

“Looks like everything is going according to plan.”

“Yes, Elexis-sama. But Princess Theiamillis...”

“Princess Theiamillis is a genius in battle, despite being the daughter of the pacifist empress.”

“It’s surprising that we still haven’t beaten her despite employing RTS.”

The Round Table System—or RTS for short—was named after the Round Table knights of old used to discuss strategy. It was a new type of firing system that DKI had developed for unmanned crafts. With it, unmanned crafts were able to perfectly coordinate with each other. In other words, it was what allowed the fighter crafts and Motor Knights to use synchronized attacks.

“It just means that there are exceptions to everything. Koutarou-kun actually managed to break through it.”

“I heard the report... but is it true? I find it hard to believe.”

“Yes. That boy surpasses logic and probability. It’s like a bad joke put on some clothes and is walking around pretending to be a person.”

“Then I’m impressed you came back safely after going up against something like that...”

“I may have, but I was unable to bring most of my subordinates with me.”

A forbidding expression crept across Elexis’s face. Not being able to do anything for his fallen subordinates was a bitter failure. It made him realize how naive he’d been. For Elexis who had been looking forward for his fight with Koutarou, this was a most unsatisfying ending.

“However, a war is not settled through the victory or defeat of one battle. If we manage to capture Princess Theiamillis, we’ll still be in the black despite our losses on the surface.”

“We won’t waste your preparations, Elexis-sama. We will win. Please observe us at your leisure.”

“Indeed, I think I’ll do just that.”

The captain gave out orders left and right and gradually narrowed the encirclement around Blue Knight. Elexis quietly watched as the battle progressed.

He may have lost on the surface, but he had managed to trap their most dangerous opponent down there. That left Princess Theiamillis isolated on her own in space. So as long as Elexis’s men won here and captured her, not only would they be able to bargain for Empress Elfaria, but maybe even their men that were left behind.

“Koutarou-kun, you were stronger than me... but I will be the one who comes out on top.”

Elexis was convinced of his victory, which was gradually becoming reality in front of his very eyes.

The battle so far was playing out in the coup d’etat army’s favor. More accurately speaking, they’d had the advantage from the start. Things had gone smoothly for them because Theia and Ruth had walked right into their trap.

Blue Knight hadn’t been fully repaired since their last encounter, and now it had suffered additional damage from the fighters and battleship. It was just floating in space, damaged all over. The hull was scorched black and torn up in several places, revealing the ship’s inner workings. It was no longer the

beautiful blue machine it once was.

“I wonder if the battle on Earth is over...” Theia mumbled in a quiet voice as she stared at the monitor.

Floating in the center of it was a processed image of the Earth’s moon, shining brilliantly.

“Most likely. And considering that the coup d’etat army is not demanding a surrender, then Satomi-sama and the others most likely won,” Ruth said as she gazed at the moon with Theia.

Apart from the moon, there were several bits of information floating on the monitor. Damage reports. Enemy intel. The AI’s suggestion to retreat immediately. It was all red lights and warnings. Not a blip of good news for the two girls.

Theia and Ruth already knew that they had no chance of winning. But since they could only guess what had happened on the surface, they couldn’t stop fighting. That’s why they were gazing at the moon and beyond—to Earth, which was just on the other side of it.

“That is our only saving grace.”

“Elfaria-sama is safe. Let’s leave the rest to Satomi-sama. He will surely protect Her Majesty.”

“Yes... He is the knight of a legendary princess like myself, after all. I am sure he will be able to protect my mother.”

Theia smiled at Ruth, tilted her control stick and turned Blue Knight around. As she did, the enemy ships appeared in place of the moon. The fighters protected by the defensive ship, the battleship behind that, and the carrier in the very back. Compared to the heavily damaged Blue Knight, the enemy fleet was practically unharmed.

“Ruth, set up automatic control to take over once manual control of the ship is interrupted.”

“Our destination?”

“The moon.”

“...All right.”

When Ruth replied, a trickle of tears streamed down her cheeks. She knew that Theia was going to make her last stand. She’d fulfilled her duty as a princess to the very end, and wanted to indulge in her own emotions in her final moments. Ruth was painfully aware of how Theia felt, because she felt the same way herself.

“Setup is complete.”

“Then let’s go. We’ll show them how Princess Theiamillis and Guardian Knight Ruthkania fight!”

“Yes, let’s!”

Theia and Ruth bravely charged into battle once more as a princess and her knight. They would fight until there was nothing left.

Seeing Blue Knight approach on his monitor, Elexis realized that Theia was going to make her final attack. Behind the bridge of the Blue Knight, a large light flag formed from lasers and beams was waving proudly. The flower in the center of the flag was Theia’s personal crest. It was a sign that she herself was on board and was taking charge.

“Oooh... Princess Theiamillis’s flag is...”

“So the princess really was on the ship...”

The personnel on the bridge of the carrier was taken aback at the sight of the princess’s flag. While they might be part of the coup d’etat army, many of the soldiers still held the royal families in high esteem. And now faced with the undeniable fact that they were fighting the princess personally, they were all rightfully shaken. The same thing was happening aboard the other ships as well.

“Calm down! It’s not like we’re trying to kill Her Highness! We only wish to stop any useless fighting! Make sure our attacks don’t hit the bridge!”

However, as the captain scolded them for losing their cool, the bridge calmed down once more. The captain and the crew were all members of the Melcenhein band of knights, which had been around for over two thousand

years. Their chain of command ran deep, and the captain's word held great sway over the crew. Under his orders, the unrest was quickly quelled.

"Splendidly done, captain."

"I am sorry you had to see such a shameful display."

The subordinates' failure was the captain's failure. As a knight, the captain didn't want anyone to see his men second guess themselves before battle.

"You have nothing to worry about. That much is to be expected considering our opponent. Due to our old customs, old mores, and old system of rule, it is only natural that they should be anxious. If anything, your ability to snap them out of it is worthy of praise."

"...I am honored, Elexis-sama."

The reason the Melcenhein band of knights was obeying Elexis was because they trusted in his character. Otherwise they would never be following a civilian, even if they were ordered to by the military top brass or a relative of the Melcenhein family. And that was still true here and now. The captain held Elexis in high regard.

"That aside... Now that she has raised her flag, Princess Theiamillis will be making one last attack."

"She will be prepared to die honorably in battle, so if we let our guard down, it will come back to bite us."

"I'd expect nothing less... Captain, I'll leave this to you. Your crew will be in full control of the weapons."

"Yes, sir. We'll make sure you live up to your expectations."

Likewise, Elexis trusted the Melcenhein band of knights. And with his experience as a CEO, he knew that micromanaging things wouldn't help any. So he left the battle ahead to the captain, and sat down in the commander's seat to watch things unfold through the monitor, which was currently displaying Blue Knight.

Certainly, going into this fight must require quite an impressive resolve...

Though the princess's ship was badly damaged, it still gave off a very regal

presence.

Theia deftly moved Blue Knight as she took evasive maneuvers and approached the enemy fleet. As she got closer, the fighters that were being protected by the defensive ship left its range and moved into position to intercept her.

“Your Highness, six formations of fighters are approaching!”

“Intercept them with lasers and missiles! Keep firing at them automatically!”

“As you wish, my princess. Entering automatic interception mode with the laser gatling and high maneuverability missiles.”

The fighters previously moved in three groups of three that unleashed synchronized attacks, and they’d now doubled their numbers. In response, Theia activated Blue Knight’s defensive weapons. She left the defenses to the AI while she herself focused on attacking.

“High energy reaction detected on the battleship! An attack is incoming!”

“Now of all times!”

Theia squeezed the trigger and fired off her beam cannon twice before tilting the control stick to the right. Since she was focused more on avoiding the enemy’s attacks than aiming, the beams fired from Blue Knight only grazed the battleship and flew off into the far reaches of space.

“Focusing the deployment of the distortion field on the side of the hull!”

As the ship moved, Ruth deployed a barrier. An instant later, the beam fired from the enemy battleship assaulted Blue Knight. But thanks to the early evading and defending, there was no damage to the hull.

“Ruth, once more!”

“The fighter groups are still approaching!”

The fighters were coming at Blue Knight from the other side. Blue Knight intercepted them using lasers and missiles, but only managed to shoot a few of them down. The rest were still charging right for the ship.

“Then I’ll just do this!”

Realizing the incoming danger, Theia took drastic action. She removed her right hand from the control stick and grabbed hold of a secondary one.

“Blue Knight! Anti-ship energy sword, shooting mode!”

“As you wish, my princess. Anti-ship energy sword Signaltin set to shooting mode.”

The control stick Theia had grabbed controlled Blue Knight’s right arm. Since controlling the arm and moving the ship at the same time was difficult, she had refrained from doing so until now.

“Taaake thiiis!”

Blue Knight’s arm, several hundred meters in length, began moving. The reaction caused by Theia swinging the giant arm was counteracted by boosters firing at the proper place and time. The sounds of the mechanisms moving the arm and the boosters activating could be heard all the way from the bridge. The noise alone conveyed the power from the swing of a giant’s arm over a kilometer in length. It was incredible. And at the end of that arm was a beam sword just as huge. Theia used it as a beam cannon and swept it over the oncoming fighter group.

“Three fighters destroyed! Energy reaction detected within the fighters! A synchronized attack is coming!”

Thanks to Theia going against common sense and having a spaceship move its arm, her attack managed to destroy three of the fighters in a single strike. But even then, more than ten fighters remained. They attacked at the same time to try and finish off the damaged Blue Knight.

“Generator output to maximum! Focused deployment of the distortion field! Then pour all remaining power into the energy sword!”

Theia moved the Blue Knight’s arms and brought the entire ship to face the fighter crafts. Since their attacks focused on a single point, she placed the beam sword in their path and used it as a shield. Between the barrier and beam sword, Blue Knight somehow managed to survive the attack.

“The generator has overheated and is currently undergoing emergency cooling! The barrier has collapsed due to being overloaded! The anti-ship energy sword’s system is down! The energy pool has been almost fully expended! T-minus 163 seconds until systems can be restored!”

Theia had saved them for the moment, but it came it at a high price. The generator shut down, the barrier collapsed, and the beam sword turned off. All the ship’s conserved energy had been used up. Blue Knight was left simply floating in space.

“So this is it, huh...?”

“Yes... How unfortunate...”

If they were fighting with their bodies, they might have been able to keep moving through sheer force of will. But since Blue Knight was a mere machine, such an extraordinary feat wasn’t possible. It would take another two and a half minutes for it to come back online. And their opponents weren’t foolish enough to stand idly by for that long. This would be the end of Theia and Ruth’s fight.

“Say, Ruth, do you think we fought a fight we can be proud of?”

“Yes, Your Highness. You fought splendidly as a princess. I guarantee it.”

The enemy fighter formation slowly approached Blue Knight. Behind them were all three spaceships. However, neither Theia nor Ruth were looking at them anymore. They were looking the other way at the moon floating in the distance.

“I only fear that I may not have been of much help...”

“That’s not true. It is because of you that we could get this far. You have nothing to be ashamed of. Ruthkania Pardomshiha fought valiantly in a fashion worthy of the title of guardian knight. I guarantee it.”

“Thank you very much, Your Highness. I am honored.”

As Theia and Ruth exchanged smiles, their thoughts turned to what was to come.

If they were taken by the enemy, they would be used as tools to threaten Elfaria. And after that, they would be imprisoned at best, executed at worst.

Either way, they would only be used against their loved ones. That wasn't something that Theia wanted. So she made up her mind.

"...I'm sorry, Ruth."

"No, your judgement is correct, Your Highness. There is no other way."

"Thank you... You've done well serving me until today. I only have words of gratitude for what you've done."

"What are you saying, Your Highness? It was my pleasure to serve you."

The two girls took each other's hand and grasped them tightly. They were both smiling, but large tears were spilling out of their eyes. The time they'd spent together was anything but short. Simply calling them childhood friends would be a disservice. And now that their lives were reaching the end, there were so many things they wanted to say. But time wouldn't allow for that. So they simply held each other's hands and cried together.

Blue Knight was about to fall into the enemy's hands, but before that could happen, Theia gave the ship one final order.

"Blue Knight, we cannot be taken by the enemy. Blow up the bridge and us with it."

Theia's final order to the Blue Knight was one meant to kill them.

Dying would be better than being captured. And it was the only way Theia could think of to get out of it in this situation. Being used against the people she loved was the last thing she wanted.

"In order to execute that order, authentication is required."

"My name is Theiamillis Gre Mastir Sagurada von Forthorthe."

"Authentication completed. Identity of Princess Theiamillis confirmed. Order acknowledged. As you wish, my princess. The bridge will be detonated in one minute."

"Phew... That should do it."

"Thank you for your hard work, Your Highness."

After giving her final command, Theia lightly drooped her shoulders and let

out a lovely sigh. An admiring Ruth smiled with a somewhat liberated expression. Their time as princess and knight was over, and as they stood hand in hand, they were nothing more than sisters.

“You too. Now my only regret is...”

“Your Highness?”

“As expected, I do have regrets... Heh, it seems I wasn’t able to play the role of a saint.”

“Actually, I have a regret too. I wasn’t able to tell Satomi-sama my wish...”

“Oh? Now you’ve got me interested. Tell me.”

“It will be a long story, so I’ll tell you later. I couldn’t speak of it in a place like this. It’s a bit of a girly wish, after all.”

“After saying that much, I don’t think there’s much point in keeping it secret now... But I suppose you’re right. It would be a waste to share it somewhere like this.”

“Let’s peacefully talk about it over tea and snacks sometime.”

A countdown for the impending self-destruct was displayed on the edge of the monitor. The timer had just hit the halfway mark, so there wasn’t much time left. However, neither Theia nor Ruth were looking at it. Instead, they were focused on the big, round moon as they carefreely chatted away. Once the countdown expired, Blue Knight would deliver them there.

“That’s right, Your Highness... When we get to have our talk, I’ll reveal something big as well.”

“Oh? Sounds interesting.”

The countdown timer flashed a ten second warning. Yet the two girls ignored it and continued to talk. It was as if they were saying that it didn’t matter at all.

Nine, eight, seven, six...

They simply squeezed each other’s hands. In order to support one another at their final moments, to show their gratitude towards one another, and to promise to stay the same in the future.

“Yes. It’s an important secret regarding Your Highness’s knight.”

“Heh, then I’m looking forward to it.”

Five, four, three, two...

Time was up. In the last few seconds, the two girls closed their eyes. They didn’t want to see each other torn apart in the explosion. They just held hands and waited for the end to come.

“Now, I can’t have you going around telling secrets about me.”

However, what they heard wasn’t the boom of an explosion, but the jestering voice of a young man.

When it appeared in front of the coup d’etat soldiers, everyone without exception fell into panic. That included their commander, Elexis, who stared at the monitor in astonishment.

“What is that?! Impossible! Something like that shouldn’t exist!”

What Elexis was seeing defied logic. His brain screamed that it couldn’t be real.

It was a single reptile covered in crimson scales. It had large wings on its back and a horn growing out from its forehead. That alone was strange, but what made it all the more surreal was its size. Even with a very conservative guess, it had to be at least twenty five meters long. It dwarfed the nearby fighter crafts. And the strangest of all was that this reptile was flying around freely in space. It flapped its large wings and dashed towards the center of the fleet, gradually approaching the Blue Knight.

“Uwaaaaah, it’s a monster!”

“It’s a hallucination! We’re hallucinating because we’re deprived of oxygen!”

The soldiers had, until now, lived in the world of science and common sense, both of which were taken very seriously in cutting-edge modern Forthorthe. But nothing had prepared them for the sight of a monstrous lizard flying around in space. It was mind-blowing, both in concept and scale. Even in space where everything looked small, there was no denying the beast’s colossal presence.

“ROOOAAAAAAARRR!”

And the lizard dealt the final blow to the soldiers by opening its mouth and letting out a bestial roar. Even though sound shouldn’t have been able to travel through the vacuum of space, and even though there was a great distance between the ships, they all heard the roar loud and clear just the same. Since they didn’t know it was the result of magic, most of them began doubting their own sanity. Those who didn’t were the superstitious types. Yes, even in the space age, sailor’s superstitions ran deep.

But one way or another, the lizard’s bellowing roar struck fear into their hearts. By now, almost all of the soldiers had lost their heads, and the chain of command aboard the coup d’etat vessels had fallen into chaos. They were now in danger of the fighters and ships crashing into one another.

“Calm down! The target may be incredibly bizarre, but it hasn’t even attacked us!”

The only one who managed to retain a modicum of composure was Elexis. Since he’d already seen a bizarre enemy on the surface, he was somewhat prepared for the otherworldly scene he was now witnessing.

What is this?! It’s like something out of a fairy tale!

But not even he could fully hide his surprise. That was just how inconceivable the situation was. That’s why his voice didn’t reach the panicking soldiers. And the time they spent in a tumult proved to be lifesaving for Theia and Ruth.

Clan’s jaw dropped as she watched the giant red lizard, Alunaya, dash towards the enemy fleet.

“Jeez, this really is reckless...”

She was so dumbstruck that she hardly knew what else to say.

“If something like that charged at you out of the blue, you’d forget all about war...”

Clan sympathized with her enemy. She knew how they must have felt. Even though she knew exactly what was going on, it still felt surreal even to her.

Accepting Alunaya's proposal, Koutarou decided to head out into space. He'd asked Harumi to treat the magicians Maki and Yurika, who could then protect Elfaria and heal the remaining injured people. Once Maki and Yurika were back on their feet, Alunaya transformed from his half-human, half-dragon state into his original form as a giant dragon. Letting Koutarou and Harumi up on his back, he then rose up into the sky.

But ascending into space wasn't easy, even for a legendary creature like Fire Dragon Emperor Alunaya. Especially on Earth where he had no real physical form. The power that Alunaya could use while in Shizuka's body was severely limited. Flying up into space and to the far side of the moon would take all of his mana. That's why Alunaya charging towards the fleet was just a bluff. Even if he reached the ships, he couldn't actually do anything to attack. If the enemy had opened fire on him, he would have been in trouble. And though it was a necessary act to buy enough time for Koutarou and Harumi to board Blue Knight, just as Clan had said, it could only be described as reckless.

"But even for a legendary elder dragon, this is as far as he can go. The rest is up to you..."

Clan closed her mouth and adjusted her glasses as her thoughts went out to Koutarou. Images of him flashed through her mind, but strangely enough, they weren't memories of him fighting. Instead, she was recalling his terrible sleeping habits, him forcing her out of her laboratory and cleaning it, his back as he stood in the kitchen and made dinner for her, him smiling at her with a carefree expression, and finally, him grieving over his own powerlessness.

Bring forth a splendid victory, and bring Theiamillis-san and Pardomshiha back home. If you do, you will surely be able to return to that life...



Koutarou wasn’t someone who enjoyed fighting. But he had no other choice right now. With that in mind, Clan decided she would do whatever she could to support him. To that end, she cleared her mind and began artfully tapping away at her terminal. Gathering information, analyzing data... There was plenty she could do to help even from this distance.

“That red guy is definitely Alunaya!”

There was one more person on the bridge as busy as Clan was. It was the young boy who’d stood with the adults to watch the battle unfold.

“Did everyone see it?! The Silver Princess was with him! The sword was shining and stuff too!”

The boy made exaggerated gestures as he eagerly explained his findings. Only figures and graphs were shown on the monitor right now, but until just a moment ago, it had displayed a lone knight.

It was a strange knight wearing blue armor and carrying a silvery white sword. Despite going up against the coup d’etat army that vastly outnumbered him, he didn’t relent a single step. And by the knight’s side was a girl whose hair glowed silver. The girl’s hair was black, but the light that reflected off of it was unmistakably silver. She had used mysterious powers to protect the knight and lead him to victory. The knight and girl then got on the back of the giant red dragon, and headed towards Princess Theiamillis in order to save her.

“It’s the Blue Knight! He really is the Blue Knight! Her Majesty Elfaria and Princess Theiamillis are in danger, so he came to save them! That’s gotta be it!” the boy shouted, his excitement reaching its peak.

The knight that had appeared on the monitor was just like the one from the fairy tale he’d heard from his parents. Since it was his favorite story, he’d read that picture book over and over by himself as well. The knight wore blue armor and carried a silver sword, his left hand controlled fire and lightning, and he could even fly in the sky. With a beautiful silver haired girl at his side, he defeated and befriended a red dragon.

Since the boy was still young, he couldn’t understand the details surrounding the coup d’etat. He could, however, tell from the grim looks on the faces of the

adults around him that Elfaria and Theia were in danger. And when a princess was in danger, a knight would appear to save her. There was no doubt in this boy's mind. He believed that the knight he'd seen was the legendary hero, the Blue Knight Layous.

"Could it... really be...?"

"There's no way. The Blue Knight lived two thousand years ago."

"But isn't the resemblance too strong to be a coincidence?"

"It's just someone pretending to be the Blue Knight, right? He's just an eccentric."

"Can you win if you're just faking it, though? He was up against the elite troops of the Melcenhein knights who had the latest weapons from DKI."

"That's..."

"And what about that sword, the girl, and the giant dragon? How do you explain that?"

"B-Beats me, honestly..."

The boy believed with all his heart, and it seemed the adults were slowly starting to come around little by little. But because the thought was so unrealistic, they remained dubious. It was logically impossible that the Blue Knight himself had come to save them. All they would agree to for sure was that the knight who'd appeared had powers beyond their understanding.

"It's the Blue Knight! Why don't you all get it?! No matter how you look at it, that's the Blue Knight!"

"Well, if that really is the Blue Knight, what a welcome sight it would be..."

"Yeah. If that were the case, we could remain hopeful even in a situation like this..."

They had been chased out of their country and were in an awkward position, so they were all too aware of the grave reality of the situation. It would take a legendary knight to turn things around. But those didn't just conveniently show up when people needed them. There was no way. This was reality, not some fairy tale.

“Jeez, adults really are difficult... I won’t help if the Blue Knight gets angry at you later.”

That’s why, at this point, the young boy was still the only one who truly believed.

“Now, I can’t have you going around telling secrets about me.”

As a young man’s voice echoed through the bridge, the Blue Knight’s AI spoke up as well.

“Top priority code acknowledged. Aborting self-destruct. Your Excellency the Blue Knight, this ship is very pleased to see your return.”

Blue Knight acknowledge a top priority order. But it was strange. The one who held the highest rank on the ship was Princess Theiamillis. Yet Blue Knight had obeyed the orders of the young man over hers. Something was strange.

“Koutarou?!”

“Satomi-sama?!”

However, neither Theia nor Ruth were listening to what the AI was saying. They raised their heads and looked for the young man whose voice they heard. Just as they did, the door to the bridge opened.

“...And Theia, why the hell are you trying to blow yourself up? It’s not like you to admit defeat. It that what a proper princess would do?”

A boy wearing blue armor appeared from behind the sliding door. He was looking at Theia and Ruth with a dissatisfied smirk like he wasn’t aware of the danger they were in.

“But there was no other way!”

“You’ve gotten a bit too sensible lately. Like I told you, you should be a little more selfish. Like you were before,” the boy, Satomi Koutarou, said with a stern look.

He then ran up to the highest point of the bridge where Theia and Ruth were. As he climbed the stairs to get there, he was temporarily hidden from view owing to the difference in elevation. And during that time, Koutarou gave the

ship's AI another order as he glanced at a monitor.

"Blue Knight, prioritize the restoration of functions. There aren't any humans other than on the bridge. Leave life support to other areas until later."

"In that case, time to restoration can be reduced by 14 seconds."

"Good boy. Continue like that and drop anything that isn't necessary. I don't care if you have to push things a little. We're not trying to get the ship into tip-top shape. This is a race against time."

"As you wish, my lord. New estimates: T-minus 42 seconds until functions are restored, 52 seconds until the energy pool is replenished."

Just as he finished giving his orders, Koutarou reached the top of the stairs. Coming back into view of the girls, Theia picked up right where she'd left off.

"If I'm selfish, those important to me will die! Including you! Why did you come, Koutarou?! I was trying to die so this wouldn't happen!"

Theia criticized Koutarou for showing up. He'd managed to board Blue Knight without her finding out, but she wished he hadn't. If she'd known about it beforehand, she would have sent him back.

"Carry out your duty to recapture our motherland... Those were your orders."

"Wha?!"

"Satomi-kun, that's a little cold... I'll feel badly for Theiamillis-san if you don't say it properly."

Theia was at a complete loss for words over what Koutarou had just said, but then Harumi appeared from behind him. After running up the stairs after him, she was slightly out of breath.

"Harumi?! Why are you here too?!"

"Why? Well... You and Ruth-san are my precious friends."

Theia was again stunned, but Harumi gave her a smile full of affection. To Harumi, being here with them was the obvious choice. She had more than enough of a reason to stake her life for Theia and Ruth.

"But—"

“Theia, are those hands of yours only for holding on to Ruth’s?” Koutarou asked as he looked down at Theia’s hands, which were still tightly holding on to her best friend.

“What do you mean?”

“Those hands are connected with so many people. You just can’t see it right now.”

Theia was planning on dying with Ruth. They were always with each other, so going out that way wouldn’t be so bad. Ruth had even promised her they’d always be together.

But Koutarou didn’t see it that way. Ruth shouldn’t be the only one she felt that way about anymore. And whether those other people who were special to her were present or not shouldn’t matter.

Isn’t that right, Yurika...?

In the past, Yurika had said that even though they might not always be together, the feelings of everyone from room 106 would always be connected. So even now, even if she couldn’t see it, Theia was holding hands with everyone. Ruth wasn’t the only one she had anymore.

“...Koutarou, is your hand connected to mine too?”

Finally understanding what he was saying, tears filled Theia’s eyes as she looked up at him. She was so happy she just might break down sobbing where she stood. She had many friends that were willing to risk their lives to protect her. Friends she would risk her life to protect. And her beloved was one of them.

“Of course. If not, I wouldn’t have become your vassal.”

“You mean to say I’m worth that much to you?”

“Worth is unrelated to this. Me and everyone else... We’re staking our lives on this because our hands have been connected for so long.”

“Koutarou...”

What she got back was a clear and powerful answer. When she heard it, a warm feeling spread throughout her chest. It soon turned into an intense,

throbbing joy. Her tears wouldn't stop. Her body was so hot that it felt like she was on fire. But none of it was unpleasant. Theia was convinced that it was for this very moment that she had come to Earth.

"Isn't that great, Your Highness?"

Ruth, who had been watching over all of this, smiled at Theia. Even though she didn't say it, she felt the same way Theia did. A burning hot emotion was pumping through her too, and large tears fell from her eyes as well.

"Ruth..."

The two girls unconsciously squeezed each other's hands. But they now knew that they were holding on to so much more. Supported by that conviction, Theia wiped away her tears and the light came back to her eyes. They were the strong-willed eyes of a princess before a battle. But something was different now. They were tinged with a deep love.

"Koutarou, Harumi."

"Yeah."

"Yes."

"Ruth."

"Your Highness..."

"And everyone who isn't here..."

Theia would no longer hesitate. The path she must take was clear. Now all that was left was take the first step.

"Please live together with me. Whatever path we find ourselves on, walk hand in hand with me."

"Yeah."

"Of course!"

"As you wish, my princess."

Theia had true friends who supported her and each other. Knowing that, she felt stronger. She was about to break free from the frame of a princess and grow into something even greater. That moment was, without a doubt, when

Theia truly cleared her trial and demonstrated her potential to become an empress.

Alunaya hadn't been able to buy all that much time, but even then, it was enough to change the fate of Theia and the others. Blue Knight's generator was now back online, and the ship's functions were reviving one after another. The damaged parts of the ship were passed over, but they would be unnecessary now. Ten seconds after the generator started up, the energy pool filled up, making it possible to use the ship's weapons and barrier again. Thanks to Alunaya, Blue Knight had regained some of its power.

"Koutarou, you control the hull! I'll be in charge of attacking!"

"Got it! How should I do that?"

"Ruth!"

"Right! Satomi-sama, please stand on top of the glowing section of floor over there!"

Koutarou followed Ruth's directions and headed over to the glowing circle on the floor. It was the place where the armor had been stored before Koutarou wore it.

"Maneuver suit, change from attack mode to control mode!"

As Koutarou stood on the glowing circle, Ruth operated the panel by her seat. As she did, several holograms appeared around Koutarou. They all contained various information needed to control the ship.

"Satomi-sama, your body is going to float!"

And the next moment, just as she said, Koutarou floated up off the floor about ten centimeters. The armor then moved on its own and changed position.

"Ruth-san, what is this?"

"The armor has aligned to Blue Knight's posture! Now all you have to do is move, and Blue Knight will copy you!"

"All right!"

Koutarou tried moving his limbs a little as a test. As he did, the hologram of Blue Knight in front of him moved the same way.

“So that’s how it works... But it’s a little slow. Can’t we do something about that, Ruth-san?”

Koutarou, and subsequently the ship, wasn’t moving as fast as he wanted. It felt like he was moving his body underwater. He confirmed the dullness of his movement by turning to face the enemy fleet. They were gradually recovering from the panic of Alunaya’s appearance. The decisive battle would soon begin.

“I’m afraid we can’t do anything about that. You’ve been slowed to move at a speed the ship can handle,” Ruth said with an apologetic expression.

The reason he was moving slower than normal was so that the ship could keep up. As long as they were connected, there was no way to avoid it. But the next moment, Ruth found something abnormal in her computer.

“Wait a moment, some kind of code is being executed in Blue Knight’s main system without permission... This is...?!”

“Damage has exceeded the set threshold. ID confirmed of the maneuver suit pilot, Layous Fatra Veltlion. Combat data collated. Voiceprint confirmed. Welcome back, Your Excellency the Blue Knight.”

Surprisingly, Blue Knight’s system was changing its settings right in front of Ruth.

This is a program that’s been installed on Blue Knight from the very beginning! Having Satomi-sama come into contact with the ship during control mode must have activated it! Then, this is—

Just as Ruth put together what had happened, Elfaria appeared on the front monitor. In comparison to the surprised Ruth, she had a somewhat happy smile on her face.

“Long time no see, Layous-sama. This message has been set to activate if you are in danger even after entering control mode.”

“It really was Her Majesty’s doing!”

“Mother?! And... Layous-sama?!”

Ruth and Theia both let out cries of surprise. They were surprised by different things, but their surprise was equally deep. Koutarou, however, was the only one with the most dumbfounded expression on his face.

“Elle, your methods haven’t changed, even after twenty years. Jeez... So, what did you do?”

“This ship was constructed using the combat data from your armor that I received from Clan-sama twenty years ago. But because your way of fighting is so erratic, no normal person would be able to control it. That’s likely true for you when you first met Theia as well. So I’ve scaled back Blue Knight’s true power by using a number of safety devices.”

The recorded image of Elfaria explained things as if she were answering Koutarou’s question.

This way they’re talking... There’s no mistaking it! Koutarou and my mother must have met in the distant past! It must have been when he and Clan vanished!

Theia had felt that something was out of place, but her common sense had held her back from believing something so incredible. But now the evidence was right in front of her.

Elfaria continued to explain: “But the one standing here right now is you, Layous-sama. The Layous-sama I met twenty years ago. And this is the ship I made for you. So I’ll now unlock its true power.”

The moment Elfaria said that, the monitor she was on was filled with red words of warning.

“Changing preset control mode from Common Mode One to Layous Fatra Veltlion. Warning: Control of the ship now requires a highly skilled pilot. Please refrain from having anyone other than His Excellency the Blue Knight control the ship.”

As soon as the AI said that, Koutarou could feel the extra resistance disappear from his movement. He’d felt like he was in a pool of water before, but now he could move as freely as if he were flying in the air.

“So this is it!”

“Satomi-sama, a bombardment is coming from the enemy battleship!”

Ruth reported that the enemy fleet was about to strike. Seeing Blue Knight move again, the enemy had mustered itself out of the depths of panic. The encirclement of fighters was gradually closing in, and the enemy battleship beyond the fighters had its cannon aimed at Blue Knight.

“Leave it to me!”

Koutarou swung his limbs around and used that momentum to spin Blue Knight’s hull. At the same time, he set the boosters on Blue Knight’s legs to full thrust. Blue Knight demonstrated mobility unthinkable of a spaceship and forcibly changed its flightpath mid-route. As a result, the beam fired from the enemy battleship completely missed.

“We can do this!”

“Be careful, Layous-sama. The ship can now move as you wish, but all safeties have been released, so there’s nothing safeguarding structural integrity of the hull. The ship’s mass exceeds two million tons, so you can easily puncture and damage your own ship. Please be careful while maneuvering it.”

“Don’t make something so hard sound so easy, Elle!”

Koutarou moved Blue Knight in an irregular serpentine pattern as he closed in on the enemy. He felt almost exactly like moving in his armor like he always did, but since he couldn’t let his arms and legs make contact with each other, he had to be more careful than normal. If it weren’t for a pilot like Koutarou, who had his senses heightened from the use of spiritual energy, controlling the ship in such a fashion would have been next to impossible.

And Koutarou’s efforts were rewarded. The enemy was unable to the hit the ship as it made such extraordinary movements. The highly mobile fighters were just barely able to keep up, but they couldn’t lock on with their synchronized attack, and their individual attacks were easily blocked by Blue Knight’s barrier. Thanks to Koutarou, Blue Knight’s defenses were significantly boosted by a serious increase in evasive potential.

“Theia, you focus on attacking. You will open a path, and your knight will walk down it. You are his master, after all.”

“Mother... Koutarou... Just what is going on?”

Theia was still confused.

There were so many things she wanted to know. Koutarou’s secret, his relationship with Elfaria, and most of all, the reason why her mother was calling him “Layous.” She couldn’t suppress the anxiety she was feeling. She was worried that something that might completely alter their relationship was hidden beneath the surface.

Realizing what had overcome Theia, Ruth called out to her.

“Your Highness, I understand how you must feel! However, please focus on the battle for now! That person right there is without a doubt our Satomi-sama! I guarantee it!”

“Ruth... you’re right. I got it!”

Her hesitation and anxiety still lingered, but Theia decided to temporarily cast them aside. Right now, she had a battle to focus on. A battle she had to win. If she didn’t, she would never be able to ask the questions she wanted answers to. Besides, Ruth had offered a guarantee. That meant enough to Theia that she could put her worries aside enough to focus on the task at hand.

“Blue Knight! Give me control of the firing control system!”

“As you wish, my princess.”

Complying with Theia’s order, the devices around her changed positions. Before now, she had been in control of both piloting and firing, which was why her control panel had been arranged similarly to that of a fighter jet. But now that Koutarou was taking care of the ship’s controls, her only role was attacking. The ship adjusted her new control setup to make it as efficient as possible. As a result, Theia had a lot more weapons at her disposal all at once.

“Here we go, Koutarou! I will make you a path! You take the ship straight down it!”

“Don’t mess it up!”

Theia focused on bombardments and Koutarou on steering. Though his movements were irregular and difficult to predict, Theia matched her attacks to

them and skillfully fired off shots when she could. Her targets were the fighter group between Blue Knight and the enemy battleship. She used lasers for distant enemies, beams for nearby enemies, and missiles for retreating enemies as she eliminated the fighters that stood in their way.

“Are you implying I’d do such a thing?! Just who do you think you’re talking to?!”

“My princess who has been quite pessimistic lately.”

“Idiot! I’ll punch you later for that! You’d best prepare yourself!”

“Just make sure it doesn’t hurt too much.”

“Of course it will!”

As the force of their words increased, their movements sped up at the same rate. Seeing them like this reminded Ruth of how they were when playing video games together.

Satomi-sama... Your Highness... This is how the two of you should be...

Ruth felt something warm spreading through her chest again. However, she did her best to endure it. Now wasn’t the time to cry. Instead, she took action to support the two of them.

But it seemed Elfaria had a message for her too.

“Ruth, please cover for Layous-sama and Theia. If those two get serious, this ship will demonstrate its full power. That is how I designed it.”



“Your Majesty...”

“However, the generator’s output is still the same, so the power distribution will be much trickier than before. There may also be times where the gravity and inertia controls can’t keep up with Layous-sama. Your power will be needed in order to keep everything under control.”

“This ship was designed with the three of us in mind from the start...”

Ruth was surprised by Elfaria’s words, but she immediately set to adjusting the ship’s parameters to best accommodate her two friends at the helm. Just as Elfaria had said, there was a lot for her to do.

Ruth needed to manage the barrier and the distribution of energy from the generator and the energy pool, all in addition to assisting the ship in dealing with Koutarou’s movements while delivering information on the enemy to Theia. She would need to read their habits and patterns and make any necessary adjustments before they took action. It was something no one other than Ruth, who had always been watching over them, could possibly pull off.

“I understand, Your Majesty. I will make sure that those two are victorious!”

With Ruth’s assistance, Koutarou and Theia began moving even faster and fiercer. The three were functioning as one. Thanks to the strong bond between them, they were able to take Blue Knight’s powers to new heights. As a result, the struggle from before seemed like a lifetime ago, and they were now pushing back the enemy fleet. It wasn’t because any one of them was special, but because the three of them all shared something special.

“And... is there anyone else there? I leave this message to you in hopes that there is.”

“Your Majesty...”

Finally, Elfaria had one last message for Harumi. Surprised, Harumi looked at Elfaria on the screen.

“Theia is an awkward child. I’m sure she’s had to go through a lot as my daughter. She only fully trusts Ruth. But now... it seems she has real friends. There is nothing that could make me happier.”

Elfaria had learned the fate of her future child when she'd met Koutarou, including that Theia would greatly mature on Earth and find irreplaceable friends there. That's why she'd been able to stay strong and fulfill her own duty. She was supported by that hope for the future.

"I ask this of you, knowing full well that it is a selfish request. But please, help Theia out. That girl is very stubborn, so she likely won't go to others when she's suffering."

A tear streamed down Elfaria's cheek. That was advice Elfaria herself should have taken. But her role as empress made that incredibly difficult, and as a mother it made her sad that she hadn't been able to pass that lesson on to her daughter.

"So please, take care of Theia. Please let her know that she can rely on those important to her. Please show her what ordinary happiness is like..."

Elfaria bowed as she spoke those words, and that was where the video ended. Seeing it through to the end, Harumi felt like she understood Elfaria's wish perfectly.

"Please be at ease, Your Majesty. That was what Theiamillis-san did for me. I had shut myself in, but she showed me the outside world. That's why it's my turn now. As long as I'm playing the role of the Silver Princess on Earth, I will forever be Theiamillis-san's ally!"

Harumi flashed a determined expression and began incanting a spell in Ancient Forthorthian. She was going to add a fourth bond into Blue Knight, which was currently being controlled by a bond of three. Contributing her power too, Blue Knight would become a force that greatly exceeded Elfaria's expectations.

The coup d'etat army had temporarily been thrown into disarray by the appearance of the gigantic reptile. However, they regained their calm after the lizard withdrew without doing anything and Blue Knight, their target, began moving once more. But that calm wouldn't last long. It was as if Blue Knight had undergone some sort of transformation, and was even more powerful now than when they'd first faced it.

“Elexis-sama, Blue Knight is moving too fast for the cannon to lock on to it!”

“Calm down! Have the fighters deal with it!”

“Concerning the fighters, they’re being jerked around by Blue Knight’s movement patterns and are unable to get into a proper attack formation! They’re being shot down one after another! At this rate, we’ll eventually be unable to do anything!”

The bridge of the carrier that Elexis was on had erupted into the noisy din of panic once more. They had never heard of a royal class battleship with mobility comparable to a fighter craft. Worse yet, on top of Blue Knight’s newfound maneuverability, it was accurately shooting down the fighters now. That should be impossible. But there it was, all displayed on the screen. Blue Knight was heading towards the battleship, and at the rate things were going, the battleship would be destroyed as soon as Blue Knight got in range. They had to stop it before then somehow.

“Then use RTS missiles! If you use high maneuverability missiles, they should be able to keep up with its speed!”

“Understood! All ships, launch high maneuverability missiles! Set the tracking to RTS!”

RTS missiles tracked targets the same way robots and fighters using the system would. Several missiles would work together to corner the enemy and detonated as many missiles as possible at the same time. Evading high maneuverability missiles was difficult, and the explosive force behind several of them going off at once was considerable. They were a very effective weapon, but had one serious drawback. Controlling several missiles and fighters at the same time placed a good strain on the computer guiding them. To prevent that, control of the fighters would have to temporarily be put on the backburner, dropping their defensive power considerably. That was why they hadn’t resorted to using the RTS missiles yet.

“Blue Knight has drawn its anti-ship energy sword, Signaltin!”

“What can they do with that?! It’s no use, Princess Theiamillis! The only one who could cut missiles down with a sword would be Koutarou-kun— Wait!”

It was then that everything that had led up to this moment rushed through Elexis's mind. The girl on the ground with the red scales, the giant red dragon that had appeared out of nowhere, Blue Knight's movements that got better immediately afterward, and now Blue Knight drawing a sword against incoming missiles. All of that led Elexis to a single conclusion.

"You're aboard that ship, aren't you, Koutarou-kun?!"

The red dragon had brought Koutarou into space, and it had charged them in order to buy time for Koutarou to get on Blue Knight. The ship's movements had improved because Koutarou was now piloting it. And lastly, Blue Knight had drawn its sword because Koutarou was at the helm.

"Cancel the RTS on the missiles! Restart control of the fighters right away!"

"But if we undo the RTS now, the tracking will—"

"Even if they keep tracking, they won't beat them! Don't you get it?!"

Elexis's decision was swift and precise, but because the captain hesitated, they wouldn't make it in time.

"I've been had... I should have realized it the moment I saw him using Blue Knight's maneuver suit... That ship was designed with Koutarou-kun in mind!"

Frustrated, Elexis slammed his fists into the armrests of his chair.

"Just who is he?! How can he have this much power?! Why is he supporting the royal families?! And how is it that Blue Knight is so catered to his power?!"

Elexis could only watch on as Blue Knight swung its giant sword of light. It was using an Ancient Forthorthian sword style, and its beautiful swordsmanship enchanted all those who saw it cut down the incoming group of missiles.

It wasn't just thanks to Koutarou that Blue Knight had been able to cut down the missiles.

Koutarou had been clued in to their approach and location thanks to Harumi's spell to detect metal. If it weren't for that, Koutarou wouldn't have been able to get a grasp on the number of missiles or a read on their proximity. Theia had shot down most of the missiles that Koutarou had missed with the sword, and

the few missiles that made it past her were completely blocked by Blue Knight's barrier. Ruth's energy management had been perfect, and they hadn't experienced a single shortage from the first sword strike all the way down to the barriers deploying.

In other words, their remarkable success was the direct result of all of their powers, and moreover, their cooperation.

"Satomi-sama, please keep charging forward! Because of those missiles, their system has been overloaded and their ships are barely functioning at all!"

"Let's go, Theia!"

"Leave it to me! But what will you do with the defensive ship in the way?"

"Ruth-san, can't this sword break through?!"

"It's possible. But considering that ship's characteristics, it would be difficult if we don't use full power!"

Koutarou and the others were going to go after the battleship. Currently, it was the only enemy ship with the potential to take down Blue Knight with a single attack. If the battleship got off just one lucky hit and the fighters followed up on the attack, Blue Knight's barrier wouldn't be able to take it.

But there was an obvious kink in their plan. Since the defensive ship was protecting the battleship, it would be difficult to attack directly. They would need to use their mobility to circle around the defensive ship, or use the energy sword to destroy it and plow through. The former might give the fighters the time they needed to restart, while the latter would leave them defenseless as the sword drained the ship's energy. Both options had their own risks.

"Um, Ruth-san. Does that, um... Barrier? Does the thing protecting the spaceship work the same way as Satomi-kun's armor?"

That was when Harumi, who had focused on supporting them with magic, joined the conversation. Her expression was quite different from her usual timid one. Instead, she reminded everyone of how she'd appeared on stage during the plays.

"Yes! Though the output is on a completely different level, they work the

same way!”

“Then I can do something about it. Satomi-kun, please attack with the big Signaltin.”

“Roger that! Let’s go, Theia!”

“Yeah!”

Neither Koutarou nor Theia needed to hear the details of Harumi’s plan before agreeing to attack with the energy sword. They believed in her, and they didn’t have the time to hesitate. Koutarou set the course for the defensive ship and Theia destroyed any fighters in the way.

“Harumi-sama, what are you going to do?”

Ruth, however, was curious what she had in mind. She wanted to know in case she could help as the ship’s operator.

“We will attack with two Signaltins. Using the small Signaltin’s mana, I’ll change the large Signaltin’s power into something else.”

“Is something like that even possible?!”

“If it’s just the tip, it should be.”

“I see, that’s what you mean... What a good idea!”

Having gotten a rough idea of what Harumi was planning, Ruth began making adjustments to Blue Knight. Harumi took a deep breath to prepare herself, holding her hands together in front of her chest.

“Satomi-kun, use Signaltin.”

“Okay.”

Koutarou listened to Harumi and drew Signaltin from its sheath hanging at his waist. As he did, Blue Knight treated the energy sword the same way. The big and small Blue Knights both held their Signaltins and charged towards the defensive ship.

“Here I go!”

Harumi closed her eyes and focused. She was trying to draw out all the power she could from Signaltin. She needed as much as possible if she wanted to

affect something as big as a spaceship's weapon. Adhering to Harumi's will, Signaltin began emitting a massive amount of mana. The light and overflowing mana was enough to make the bridge they were in tremble with power.

Sakuraba-senpai's hair is...

When Harumi had used mana before, her hair had taken on a silver sheen. However, now that she was drawing out the full power of Signaltin, it didn't just stop there. Her hair wasn't just glowing; it had actually turned silver.

Your Majesty...?

Koutarou's eyes were instinctively drawn to her. With her hair that color, Harumi really did look exactly like Alaia, the Silver Princess he'd met two thousand years in the past. He could also feel Alaia's presence from the mana surging forth. If he hadn't known it was all Harumi from the very start, he wouldn't have been able to tell them apart.

"Past, present, and future, oh mother of all things, Goddess of Dawn."

Words of prayer flowed beautifully from Harumi's mouth. Those too were the same as Alaia's. At that point, even Koutarou who knew both Alaia and Harumi well wasn't sure who he was looking at.

"I, a daughter of Forthorthe and thy faithful servant, beseech thee. Now is the time to break the seal and give us power to overcome the crisis that threatens us."

As Harumi continued with her prayer, Blue Knight's energy sword was wrapped in a pure white light, and began glowing just like Signaltin in Koutarou's hands.

"Wind of the heavens. Green of the earth. Water of the sea. Fire of the mountains. Using my life as provision, reveal the power to rule all things!"

The light enveloping the two swords pulsed as one, and in perfect time with the beat of Harumi's heart.

"I am Alaia, the silvery white snow of Mastir! Oh holy sword of the temple, carve my name into your blade and revive!"

Harumi finished her prayer and all of Signaltin's power flowed into the energy

sword. That gigantic sword was now as Signaltin itself. It didn't matter if it didn't have a physical form or not. The ship's energy sword was now glowing as the true Signaltin.

"Now, Satomi-kun!"

With her prayer complete, Harumi looked up at Koutarou. Because she looked so much like Alaia, Koutarou forgot himself for a moment.

Not good. Keep it together! Now isn't the time to space out!

Fortunately, however, it was just for a moment and he quickly remembered his place. They were in battle, and he readied Blue Knight's sword accordingly. They were now right on top of the defensive ship. He didn't have the time to lose focus.

As if scolding himself, he shouted out in a loud voice, "Here we go, everyone!"

"Go all out!"

"The anti-ship energy sword, Signaltin, has been charged to 100 percent!"

"I'll leave it to you, Koutarou!"

Theia's bombardment and Ruth's barrier control protected Blue Knight as it moved in, and Harumi's magic made the energy sword shine brightly. Koutarou firmly held Signaltin in both hands and thrust it forward with all his might.

Matching Koutarou's movements, Blue Knight's frame roared as it thrust its giant sword out. The target was the generator of the defensive ship in front of them. The defensive ship responded by raising its barrier to block the sword. In exchange for minimal weaponry, the defensive ship was equipped with a very potent barrier. Not even an anti-ship energy sword should have been able to pierce it easily.

"Gooooooooo!"

But as Koutarou let out a battle cry, the energy sword broke through the defensive ship's barrier. It let out a scream in the form of violent blinking before shattering like glass and disappearing.

That was the result of the power that Harumi had given to the energy sword. Using Signaltin's mana, she replaced the tip of the energy sword with spiritual

energy. Since Forthorthe's barriers couldn't block spiritual energy, the tip easily broke through, and once the sword was in, the rest was simple. Breaking something with a crack in it was an easy task. The energy blade easily smashed through the compromised barrier.

"Open up all ports! Keep firing until you're out of energy!"

"As you wish, my princess."

And once the barrier fell, Theia unloaded with most of Blue Knight's arsenal. Beams, lasers, missiles, the works. All imaginable types of weapons were used to attack the defenseless ship. Its hull was punched through like paper, proving that the firepower of a royal class battleship was not to be underestimated. The defenseless ship was instantly destroyed, and the escape pod containing the bridge alone was left floating in space.

The reason Koutarou and the others were able to destroy the defensive ship the way they had was partly because the fighter crafts had been unable to move. Knowing that, they didn't let their guard down even after destroying the defensive ship and moving on to their next goal: the battleship. The enemy's main defenses were down now, but their attack power remained unchanged.

"Koutarou! We're focusing on their main turret!"

"Got it!"

Theia and Koutarou's target was the main armament of the battleship—a turret sticking out from the upper part of the ship's hull. Because the main turret was capable of rotating, it could fire in every direction regardless of which way the battleship was facing. But because it stuck out from the ship, it was structurally weaker and made for an easy target. It was a powerful weapon with adequate defense.

But now that the defensive ship in charge of protecting the battleship was gone, going after the battleship's main weapon would be the most effective strategy. Once that turret was taken out, the battleship wouldn't be as much of a threat.

"Your Highness, the fighter group has reactivated! They're chasing after us!"

“Koutarou, I’ll leave the battleship to you! Do something about it!”

“‘Something’?!”

Theia began her bombardment to keep the reactivated fighters from closing in, leaving the attack on the battleship to Koutarou. Since he had planned on letting Theia do the attacking, he didn’t have anything planned.

“Damn it, in that case! Ruth-san, change the sword to shooting mode!”

“As you wish, my lord!”

Koutarou readied the energy sword, but this time a beam was fired from the tip of it. Since beam swords and beam cannons functioned very similarly, the anti-ship energy sword could be used both ways.

“Haaaaaaaah!”

Koutarou shot off multiple beams as he closed in on the coup d’etat army’s battleship. Of course, the enemy didn’t just sit still and take it. Their turret took aim and repeatedly fired back at Blue Knight.

“As if I’d let you hit me!”

Koutarou turned and spun Blue Knight around in an attempt to dodge. But realizing that the maneuver alone wouldn’t be enough, Ruth gave him a helping hand.

“Releasing a section of the gravity and inertia control!”

“Oooooh?! Wh-What’s this?!”

The moment Ruth input a command into the panel, Blue Knight’s rotational speed drastically increased. The ship was able to avoid the incoming attack thanks to it, but the sudden increase in speed startled Koutarou.

“Please get used to it, Master! I’m sure you can do it!”

“You’re kidding!”

Even though Koutarou was panicking, Ruth showed no mercy. Even now, she was still speeding up the ship to match Koutarou’s movements. Koutarou pointed the front of the ship towards the coup d’etat army while desperately struggling to maintain control.

“Even after two thousand years, you’re still an amusing lot...”

Having used up most of his mana, Alunaya was just watching Blue Knight move at lightning fast speeds in his half-dragon, half-human form. Since this way of fighting was novel to an ancient dragon like him, he observed it all with an amused expression.

“If you’re going to play like that...! Focus the barrier around the right leg in five seconds, Ruth-san!”

“Kyaaaaah! Wait, waiiit!”

“I’m not waiting!”

Koutarou repeatedly fired beams from his sword while closing in on the battleship. Having taken several hits, the battleship’s barrier was just about to give out, so Koutarou spun around and kicked his right leg towards it.

“Too fast! You’re too fast, Master!”

“I’m sure you can do it, Ruth-san!”

“You’re kidding!”

Now it was Ruth’s turn to panic, and she hurriedly made adjustments to the barrier. Without even waiting for her to finish, Koutarou let loose his roundhouse kick. The power of a kick like that from a two million ton machine was terrifying. Combined with the barrier raised moments before impact, the kick easily tore through the battleship’s barrier and sent the turret, and the main guns on it, flying off into space.

As Koutarou let his kick fly, Theia bombarded the battleship and robbed it of all remaining combat potential. Leaving the disabled battleship be, Koutarou and the others then headed for the last remaining ship, the carrier. The only things left that could pose a threat were the fighters it was controlling.

“There are nine fighters left, in a total of three formations! Twenty-seven crafts have been destroyed so far!”

“They may be unmanned, but they sure are using them like they’re disposable.”

“They probably won’t be using them anymore after this... Ruth-san, please open a channel to the remaining ship.”

“They’re an unmarked fleet of ships operating illegally. I can’t imagine that they would answer...”

“He’ll answer. That’s just the kind of guy he is. Please, Ruth-san.”

“Okay.”

Koutarou wanted the enemy to surrender before he started his attack. Realizing his intentions, Ruth sent a hail to the carrier. It didn’t take long before Elexis appeared on Blue Knight’s main monitor.

“I was astonished by your way of fighting, Koutarou-kun.”

“I just took a bunch of risks, and somehow managed to make it through. But now I’m trying to avoid taking any more risks.”

“Is that a request for me to surrender?”

“I don’t care if you surrender or retreat. Neither of us have anything more to gain from this fight. Am I wrong?”

“No. My subordinates thought the same thing. That’s why I had them leave the ship. You can see them, right?”

Elexis had evacuated all of his subordinates using escape pods. They were headed for the disabled battleship, leaving only Elexis behind aboard the carrier.

“You know there’s no need to buy time.”

Koutarou figured that Elexis was trying to buy time for his subordinates to escape. He’d done something similar in the past.

“I’m not trying to buy time. This is me being stubborn. I want to fight until the end.”

“Stubborn, huh...? Then I won’t bother asking again.”

Seeing Elexis’s smile come across the monitor, Koutarou realized he was serious. Koutarou was standing where he was because he’d remained stubborn too, and he knew there was no convincing Elexis to back down.

“Thank you, Koutarou-kun. I like that side of you. It might also be why I feel like this.”

Elexis wanted to give it his all. He had found real competition for the first time in his life in the form of a rival. That’s why he didn’t want to end their fight just yet. He still hadn’t gone all out, and he wanted to see this through to the end. He was like a child that refused to go home. It was like he just wanted to keep playing with Koutarou.

“I’ll play along. But in exchange, can I ask you something?”

“What would that be?”

“Once this fight is over, what will the coup d’etat army do?”

“Well... They’ll probably withdraw for a while. They will officially announce that Her Majesty Elfaria’s condition has taken a turn for the worse, and they’ll use that time to fabricate some false charges against her. Once they generate some fake evidence to go along with it, they’ll announce that they had only said Elfaria was ill because they couldn’t openly treat her like a criminal until they had gathered all the evidence they needed... or something along those lines.”

“And then they’ll launch a grand attack, huh?”

“I would imagine so. Well, until then, they might try an assassin here and there.”

“I see. Thank you, Elexis.”

“In exchange, can I expect that you’ll take this seriously?”

“Yeah, I will.”

“I’m looking forward to it.”

With those words as his last, Elexis cut off communications. He disappeared from Blue Knight’s monitor, which instead began tracking the carrier that was now on the move.

You’ve started to care for your allies... but you still live life from moment to moment, don’t you, Dextro?

Koutarou reminisced about his past enemy, and then took a fighting stance

with Blue Knight. There might only be one ship left, but he couldn't let his guard down around that enemy.

"Theia, he's going to go all out from the start."

"I know. I do have some experience in battle, you know."

"The carrier's missile ports are opening. I believe it's those guided missiles. The battleship is still unmoving, so it seems it won't be joining this fight."

"He might not be suited for fighting either, just like me..."

The battleship still had undamaged missile ports on it, but Elexis was ignoring them. He wouldn't get the results he wanted if he resorted to that.

"What was that?"

"No, it was nothing... Theia, I'll leave the missiles to you! Let's finish this as quickly as possible!"

"Yeah!"

"As you wish, my lord."

Elexis was challenging them to a fight, well aware how much of a disadvantage he was at. But Koutarou knew that he still had to take this battle seriously in more ways than one, so he activated Blue Knight's boosters and dashed towards the carrier Elexis was on. The nine remaining fighter crafts moved to get in his way. Just past them, the carrier was firing its missiles. With the number of fighters reduced, it was possible to use both the fighters and missiles at the same time now without excessive strain on the computer.

"I see! That's an attack that's hard to block!"

Seeing those missiles launching, Koutarou used Blue Knight's posture control thrusters to make a sweeping evasive maneuver. While the missiles and fighters were low in number, they both utilized the advantages they had, making the interlaced attack from both difficult to block.

"He's probably trying to slow us down with the fighters and defeat us with the missiles! Leave the missiles to me! You shake off the fighters! You can disregard the carrier's bombardment as well!"

“As you wish, my princess!”

Koutarou and Theia stepped up to the plate after dividing their roles. Koutarou would make use of their mobility to keep the fighters from closing in, while Theia would deal with the missiles approaching from a different trajectory. With fewer enemies to handle now, they should be able to deal with this without a problem.

“Your Highness, the carrier is still launching missiles! Strangely enough, there are more than before!”

“It’s camouflage! You’ve thought this through, Elexis!”

Elexis launched a second wave of missiles and peppered in some that used standard guidance systems. Since Koutarou and the others couldn’t tell the missiles apart by looking at them, they’d have to be equally cautious of them all. Theia immediately began shooting to try and take down as many as she could.

“Gather, spirits of earth. Kneel before me and reveal your name. Speak, Lineage of Earth!”

That was when Harumi cast her metal detection spell on Theia. With that, Theia could sense the missiles and fighters flying around in space nearby.

“Thanks, Harumi!”

“Good luck!”

Even powerful combat magic was helpless against objects flying around at extremely high speeds. That’s why that was the best Harumi could do for now. Basically sidelined at this point, Harumi felt a growing frustration building up inside of her.

“The number of fighters is decreasing! Deal with the carrier!”

With so many missiles flying around and no way to tell them apart, Koutarou and the others were pressed to defeat the carrier. Koutarou evaded the fighters’ attacks and turned Blue Knight towards the carrier. Meanwhile, Theia prioritized shooting down missiles coming at them head-on in their path. Thanks to that, Koutarou could focus on just the fighters and the carrier.

“Go! I will make a path!”

“Raaaaah!”

As Theia cut down a path in the missiles for Koutarou, he flew Blue Knight down it with the agility of an acrobat. Several explosions occurred around them, making it look like they were dancing through fireworks. It wasn’t nearly anything so elegant, however. This was a test of grit, and a fight for their lives.

“The carrier has set its generator output to maximum!”

“Don’t let him get away, Koutarou! Finish this battle right now! I can’t hold them back for long!”

“Leave it to me!”

As Koutarou approached, Elexis drained as much power as he could from the carrier’s generator. Theia wouldn’t be able to keep up her sharpshooting for long, so she figured that Elexis was going to strengthen his barrier and distance himself from Blue Knight.

“Oh no! That’s...?!”

However, the situation developed in an unexpected direction.

“The carrier is charging right for us! He’s not trying to buy time!”

“He’s trying to ram us?!”

“So that’s what you’re up to, Elexis!”

The distance between Blue Knight, which had accelerated to keep Elexis from fleeing, and the carrier, which had now decided to charge forward instead of retreating, was shrinking rapidly. Even if they tried to evade, their escape routes were all cut off by missiles and fighters. It seemed Elexis had set this all up on purpose, and his intent had been to ram them from the very beginning “So that’s why he had all the soldiers evacuate! He used the missiles and fighters to conceal his true goal and to cut off any escape! Just how far have you planned ahead, Elexis?!”

Koutarou flashed a bitter expression as he held his arms up. Theia’s attacks had broken through the carrier’s barrier, but the ship was still charging right for them.

“Ruth-san, focus the—”

“Focusing the distortion field on both forearms! Setting generator output to maximum and making barrier maintenance the top priority!”

Ruth realized Koutarou’s intentions and focused the barrier around Blue Knight’s arms before he even had a chance to explain. The carrier was heavy, and whether Blue Knight could properly catch it or not was difficult to say.

Blue Knight’s held its hands out to meet the carrier, and the impact rattled the entire ship, causing the bridge to shake violently. It even overcame the gravity and inertia controls protecting the bridge.

“Kyaaah!”

The girls all cried out when the tremors erupted. Warning after warning rang out on the bridge. The monitor was full of damage reports, and red and yellow lights were rapidly flashing everywhere.

“Nuuuuuooooooo!”

Maintaining his focus, Koutarou used his full strength in an attempt to push the carrier back. If he made even the slightest mistake, it would slip his grasp and crash right into Blue Knight. But catching the carrier from the front and letting its momentum carry them backward to lessen the impact was the only conceivable way to survive this.

Pieces of the carrier that had been broken off in Theia’s bombardment crashed into Blue Knight, and while that wouldn’t destroy the ship, it certainly didn’t feel good. Koutarou shut his ears to those crashing sounds and concentrated solely on controlling the ship. That was more important than anything else right now.

That was when the monitor in the front of the bridge shattered into several pieces. Where it had been, a hole several meters across opened up, revealing the pitch black darkness of outer space behind it.

While the crew protection systems prevented Koutarou and the others from being sucked out and supplied them with emergency lines of oxygen, the air in the bridge was gone almost immediately. Once it was all sucked out into the vacuum of space, a giant silhouette appeared on the other side of the hole.

“Surely you can’t move in a situation like this! I win, Koutarou-kun!”

It was Elexis in his giant mobile weapon, Warlord. He was going to make one final attack using a spare model he had stored on the carrier.

Elexis had planned everything out for this moment. He evacuated his troops and rammed the Blue Knight with the carrier. He knew Koutarou might try and catch it, but knew he’d be unable to move if he did. That, in turn, would mean that Koutarou who was controlling Blue Knight couldn’t move either. All he had to do then was to conceal himself in the debris of the carrier and assault the bridge with Warlord. That was the only path he’d seen to victory, and he’d bet everything on it.

“Farewell, Koutarou-kun! You really were something!”

Thrilled that his big gamble had paid off, Elexis leveled his beam shotgun at Koutarou.

“Damn...”

And Elexis was right. Koutarou couldn’t move. If he stopped controlling Blue Knight right now, the ships would collide and suffer serious damage. And he didn’t want to imagine what would happen to his crew in the process. That said, if he didn’t move, he’d be shot on the spot. He was caught between a rock and a hard place.

“I won’t let you!”

That was when a small silhouette stood before Koutarou. It was a petite girl with golden hair and blue eyes.

“I won’t let you kill my knight!”

“What?!”

Theia stood in front of Koutarou with her arms spread open, intentionally placing herself between him and the beam shotgun. She had no plan. She was simply using her small body to try and protect Koutarou.

“You idiot! Do you have any idea what you’re doing?!”

Koutarou hurled sharp criticism her way. A princess was putting herself in harm’s way for the sake of a knight. It was an unthinkable act for a royal who

had a higher duty to her country and citizens.

“No! But it’s something I must do! Even if it makes me a failure as a princess, you alone are special! I will protect you, even if I have to put myself in danger!”

Theia was in tears. She logically knew that she shouldn’t be doing this. But despite that, she hadn’t been able to just stand by and watch. Her body moved on its own. Deep down, she instinctively knew that she needed Koutarou as much as she needed to breathe.

“So Koutarou-kun is beloved by Her Highness...”

Theia’s actions came as a surprise to Elexis as well. He hesitated for a moment, pondering what to do. Should he shoot the both of them, or capture Theia? He spent a few seconds considering his options, yet those few seconds changed the outcome.

“Gather, spirits of water! Dance, spirits of wind! Combine these two powers and appear, spirits of ice! Oh soaring iceberg, seal him with your ever-expanding glacier! Ice Coffin!”

All of a sudden, Warlord’s left arm was covered in a block of ice and lost all functionality. That included the built-in beam shotgun. Harumi hadn’t missed her chance to get off a spell.

“What?!”

“Blue Knight! Anti-material machine cannon!”

While Elexis was surprised by the sudden frosty development, Ruth in the operator’s seat input a command into Blue Knight’s system and summoned a weapon directly to the bridge. Since an energy weapon would require time to charge up, she chose a high-caliber weapon capable of rapid fire.

“Fire right away using automatic aim!”

Since they were in a vacuum, the sound of the machine canon firing didn’t reach anyone. Only the faint vibrations of the cartridges dropping to the floor could be felt by the people around it. The power of the cannon, however, was anything but faint.

“Aaaaaah!”

With its barrier shattered and pummeled with shells, Warlord was unable to hang on to the hole it had created and was pushed back out into space.

“You... You tried to kill our precious Koutarou...”

Last up was Theia. She muttered to herself in a trembling voice as she glared at Warlord flying backwards through the hole on the bridge. Her eyes were burning with rage.

“I won’t forgive you... Even if god does, I won’t! Elexis, you tried to do something you never should have, and I’ll see to it that you regret it for the rest of your life!”

As Warlord was using various boosters and thrusters to straighten itself up, a long line of light chased after it. The light pierced through Warlord and ended the long drawn out battle.

As the carrier was destroyed, the battleship that had been largely disarmed warped away. After seeing the enemies retreat, Clan let out a heavy sigh and leaned back in her chair. Silence had returned to the bridge of the Hazy Moon, so her sigh nearly echoed through the room.

“Jeez, that was an awful tightrope to walk...”

While the battle had ended in their victory, it had been nothing but a series of crises from start to finish. Clan had felt compelled to go help several times, but fortunately nothing had ever gotten too out of hand, so she hadn’t had to interfere. Still, watching it all unfold from the sidelines was a harrowing experience. She would have felt infinitely better to be out there fighting with them.

“Since you’ll eventually become my vassal, you have to win more elegantly and definitively...”

Clan had a few harsh words for Koutarou for making her worry like that, so she contacted him using a direct line.

“Hmm? Clan? What’s wrong?”

Koutarou appeared on the monitor up front.

“As if you don’t know!”

Seeing Koutarou safe and sound, Clan was overcome with an even more intense sense of relief. He looked tired and had dirt all over his face, but he didn’t appear to be seriously injured. Moreover, he sounded okay. The sense of relief she felt being able to see him like that was anything but small. At this point, not even Clan herself knew if she wanted to thank him or berate him.

“Please win in a more elegant manner, would you? I felt like I was the one who was going to die watching you.”

“Sorry. I’ll try harder next time.”

“As long as you understand. Heh, good work, Veltlion.”

“What, you’re awfully kind tod—”

The moment Clan spoke that name, loud roars of joy erupted on the bridge that had fallen silent.

“Wh-What?!”

Surprised by the sudden shouting, Clan almost fell out of her chair. She frantically grabbed hold of the armrest and turned towards the direction of the voices. There she saw men and women of all ages gathered. Clan then remembered she wasn’t alone. The civilians who were so worried for Theia and Elfaria were on the bridge with her.

“See?! Even Princess Clan called him Veltlion! It really is him!”

“Yeah! Seeing how he fought, there’s no doubt about it!”

“No other knight could do that!”

“To think he could turn the tables in such a situation!”

“Then is that sword really Signaltin?!”

“Alaia’s crest was engraved in it! It has to be!”

“It seems like even Alaia-sama is with him!”

The civilians on the Hazy Moon had begun to see Koutarou as the Blue Knight. Considering the situation, it was only obvious they’d want to think that he was. Their empress and princess were chased out of their country by an unjust coup

d’etat, and a knight in blue armor had saved them. Not only that, but he had fought against overwhelming odds and achieved a brilliant victory. On top of that, key items of legend seemed to appear one after another. There was of course the blue armor, and then there was a sword imbued with mysterious powers, and a girl with silver hair who controlled them. Then there was the red dragon. Seeing all of it come together for Koutarou’s victory, the civilians began wondering if maybe he *was* the Blue Knight. And then as the cherry on top, their highly esteemed Princess Clan had addressed the knight in question as Veltlion.

If Princess Clan was calling him that, then there was no doubt about it. They were now convinced that the legendary Blue Knight, Layous Fatra Veltlion, had appeared in history once more. The bridge was filled with cheers for him. Their voices were so loud that even Koutarou on the other end of the comms line jumped back a little.

“Wh-What? What happened?”

Clan couldn’t understand why the civilians had all suddenly burst into cheers. They were shouting so loud and so much that it was no longer possible to make out any of what they were saying.

“Clan! What is with this ruckus?!”

“I don’t really know either! They seem to be rejoicing over something!”

Koutarou and Clan were both forced to raise their voices as well in order to hear each other.

“We can’t really talk when it’s this noisy! Let’s take a raincheck!”

Realizing that it would be a pain to talk about anything like this, Koutarou decided to put their conversation on hold for later. Since they had made it out of the battle in one piece, all seemed well for now, and there was no need to rush things.

“You’re right! Let’s talk later!”

Of course, Clan had no objections to this. That is, she wouldn’t until a few seconds after she ended the call. When she did, the civilians only grew louder.

“Wh-What? Just what is going on?!”

The people swarmed her, full of questions.

A few hours after the battle had ended, Elexis was staring up at Earth’s sky, all alone, from the coast near Kisshouharukaze City. The night sky was getting brighter as the sun’s light began peeking out from over the horizon.

“Phew, I’ve completely lost... To think I couldn’t win even after going so far. It’s actually rather refreshing...”

While the second Warlord had been lost to Theia’s attack, Elexis had somehow managed to escape using the built-in ejector seat and made it back to Earth. He had suffered a disastrous defeat, lost contact with his allies, and was now stranded on Earth. Anyone else would consider this a serious situation, but Elexis was content. That was because he realized that he hadn’t stood a chance, even though he’d given his all.

“I didn’t lose because Koutarou-kun was strong. It was because I was alone. In that last battle, I let go of my allies. That was probably why.”

There was no going back now, but Elexis couldn’t help thinking he might have come out on top if he’d stuck with his allies. But he’d specifically chosen not to do that. Perhaps he’d been too quick to discount their power because of his desire to protect them. Arrogance or distrust was always the reason for his defeat.

Despite having fought to achieve his ideal form of society, he had fallen after giving it his all. And the reason was clear. But he wasn’t complaining. Not in the slightest. He’d given his all, and there was nothing else he could have done. He was satisfied with this result.

“Then how about you come with me?”

That was when someone called out to Elexis from behind. It was the voice of a young woman. She looked perhaps young enough to call a girl, but her voice and composure gave her the air of a mature woman.

“And who might you be?”

Elexis continued staring out into the ocean while asking for the name of the woman behind him. First light over the water was breathtaking.

“I am Maya. Just like you, I fought against that boy alone and lost.”

And that’s the story of how Maya and Elexis met.

As You Wish

Saturday, May 22nd

Several days had passed since the battle, and Koutarou and the girls had returned to their everyday lives. Theia and Elfaria, who had escaped from their homeland, were now staying on Earth. The situation in Forthorthe had progressed exactly as Elexis had predicted, and there was now a temporary lull in the coup d'etat. Theia and Elfaria remained in contact with the Elfaria's supporters left behind in the country, and they were now in the process of gathering information and making preparations to retake the country. As a result, they couldn't make any moves at the moment either.

As the commotion began settling down, Koutarou called Theia up to Harukaze High's rooftop. He was going to reveal what he had been hiding from Theia all this time.

Even after the battle had ended, Theia hadn't asked Koutarou anything. She was patiently waiting for him to tell her. He couldn't find it in him to betray that trust. On top of that, Theia had risked her life to protect him. He felt the least he owed her now was the truth. And he'd decided to make good on that today.

"The weather's great today..."

With the summer season drawing ever nearer, the May sky was a vivid blue. There were thick, fluffy clouds here and there in distinct shapes. Koutarou leaned against the handrail on the roof and blankly stared up at the sky. He could hear the sounds of birds and cars off in the distance. It was a calm pre-summer afternoon, and he quickly lost track of time taking it all in.

"Hahh, hahh, hahh..."

The next thing he knew, he heard the sound of labored breathing. It sounded like someone had run all the way up to the roof. They sounded exhausted. But nevertheless, Koutarou could tell who it was just from the sound of their

breathing. After all, it was someone he had a very deep relationship with.

“Phew...”

Once they caught their breath, they stood next to Koutarou and, just like him, leaned on the handrail and looked up into the sky. They were short and barely reached Koutarou’s shoulder, but their long hair fluttered behind them in the breeze. It shone like golden flax, or woven rays of sunlight.

“...”

“...”

And the two of them just stood there in the warm breeze for a while. Since it was nearly summer, it was exceptionally pleasant outside. A near perfect day. The girl’s fluttering golden hair fell into disorder from the wind, but it continued to shine radiantly as it reflected the sun. She ran her fingers through it, making her look like an actress in some movie. Koutarou stared at her until the wind slowly died down.

“Say, Theia...”

The girl with the gorgeous golden hair was none other than Theiamillis Gre Forthorthe, the very one Koutarou had invited up to the roof. She’d come at his request, and looked up at him when he said her name. With her facial features, clear blue eyes, and golden hair, she looked just like an angel that had descended from the heavens.

“Can you believe everything I’m about to tell you?”

“Why would you ask something like that?”

“Because I’m about to tell you something nobody would normally believe.”

“Is our relationship normal?”

“I’d say it’s not.”

“Then you can tell me without worrying. If you seriously told me that the sun would rise from the west tomorrow, I would believe you.”

“Thanks, Theia...”

With that, Koutarou stood up from leaning on the railing and turned towards

Theia. She responded in kind. They stood facing each other, so close they could reach out to one another.

“Now then, where should I start...?”

“Start from the beginning. There’s no need to rush.”

“Yeah, you’re right.”

There was so much Koutarou had to talk about, and she was right. The best way to tell her everything without causing confusion was to start from the beginning. He thought back to what had caused the complex situation he was in now. It had started with a very specific event about half a year ago.

“Theia, do you remember when Clan and I went missing?”

“Yes. There’s no way I’d forget. That was the day I realized that I love you.”

Theia blushed slightly and smiled. Looking at her cute expression, Koutarou almost forgot what he was talking about. But it was important for him to explain now, so he quieted his racing heart and continued.

“The problem was where we ended up.”

“You said you went to a different world.”

“Yeah. It was complicated, so I left it at that.”

“Then where did you really go?”

That was when Theia’s expression clouded over. Koutarou’s sword, his strange back and forth with Elfaria, the various programs installed aboard Blue Knight. With all of those things in her mind, Theia felt the vague anxiety she had the day of the battle.

“To Forthorthe, specifically two thousand years in the past. And there... I met the Silver Princess.”

“H-How could...”

Theia’s eyes opened as wide as they possibly could.

What Koutarou had just said far exceeded anything she could have imagined. She had suspected that Koutarou might have travelled to the past, but not two thousand years to the time of the Silver Princess.

Hearing that, Theia's mind wandered in a very specific direction. There was something she had wished for in the past, but she would be troubled if Koutarou spoke of it now.

"There, I got in the way of the Silver Princess and the Blue Knight meeting. That's why I had to take the place of the Blue Knight."

He said exactly what Theia thought he might.

"Koutarou, wait!"

She interrupted Koutarou with a pale face. She spoke so quickly to stop him that she was at risk of biting her own tongue. To Theia, something that must never happen was about to occur.

"If what you're saying is true then, the legend of the Blue Knight in Forthorthe is all about you?!"

"That's right. We never did find the real Blue Knight, so I had to see things through to the end. If I didn't, history would have changed and we wouldn't have been able to come back here."

"Do you understand what that means?!"

With her eyes full of tears, Theia grabbed at Koutarou's chest. She clenched his white shirt tightly between her small fingers. She was distraught.

"That means that you are the real Blue Knight!"

"I'm just a substitute."

"No! You don't understand a thing!"

Theia shook her head violently. Both her scattering tears and her disheveled hair sparkled in the sun.

"How could just a substitute attract that Silver Princess's heart?! How could she entrust just a substitute with Signaltin, the sword that controls the fate of the country?! There was never any other Blue Knight from the very beginning!"

Koutarou had called himself a substitute, but Theia who was more knowledgeable of the legend knew that there never could have been two Blue Knights. He'd appeared mysteriously to begin with, and disappeared the same

way. He had magical armor and weapons. And that was just the tip of the iceberg. But it all made sense if she assumed that the Blue Knight had come from a different age.

“Think back to it! Did you save the Silver Princess because you were just a substitute?! You didn’t, did you?! Since she understood that! She loved you! She wasn’t naive enough to be fooled by your acting!”

The most convincing evidence of all was the way the Silver Princes—Alaia herself—felt for him. There was no way the legendary princess would fall in love with an act. And Alaia had certainly fallen in love with the Blue Knight, with Koutarou, because he had desperately protected her and the others until the end.

“She’s the same as me! She fell in love with you because of who you are! That was why she entrusted you with Signaltin! You are without a doubt the Blue Knight!”

Theia loved Koutarou as well. She had also entrusted him with a sword. She was painfully aware of how Alaia must have felt. There was no substitute for Koutarou anywhere in the universe.

“I’m... the real...?”

“That’s right! You are! You are the Blue... the Blue Knight...”

Theia’s words deteriorated into sobbing. Unable to properly answer him, she sunk down on the spot, placed her hands on the ground, and let her emotions out.

“Uuaaaaah, waaah, aaaaahhh!”

She was overflowing with tears and deep sadness.

“Theia... Why are you crying?”

Theia’s reaction came as a surprise to Koutarou. He thought that she would be disappointed or angry. He hadn’t expected her to cry like that.

“Because... Because you’re the Blue Knight!”

Theia slowly clenched her fists, scratching her fingers along the concrete floor. Tears dripped from her cheeks like tiny waterfalls, and her voice trembled

with sorrow.

“The Blue Knight is the Silver Princess’s knight! Someone like me doesn’t stand a chance against her! You wouldn’t love me! You only became my vassal because of your loyalty to the Silver Princess, right?!”

To Theia, Koutarou was no longer just your average knight. She wanted her bond with Koutarou to be simple. Something that had come from a simple meeting, and slowly grown into something more.

But now she’d come to find out Koutarou was the Blue Knight. The Blue Knight had absolute loyalty for the Silver Princess, and he was still protecting the royal families even now. That meant that the bond Theia and Koutarou shared was really just an offshoot of the Blue Knight’s bond with the Silver Princess.

Theia didn’t have the confidence that she was a splendid enough princess to win his loyalty on her own. That’s why she believed that Koutarou was protecting her because of his loyalty to the Silver Princess. So to Theia, Koutarou admitting that he was the Blue Knight was the same as saying he was out of her reach.

“Theia...”

“Why... Why did you have to be the Blue Knight?! I could never be a match for the Silver Princess! Not a selfish and immature woman like me... Uaaaaaaaahh!”

Theia broke down crying again, and her already small body shrunk further. Her sorrowful cries rang out, her tears rained on the concrete roof, and she trembled under the weight of it all.

“Theia.”

Koutarou squatted down next to Theia and gently touched her shoulder.

“I don’t need any sympathy! I... I loved you! Not the Blue Knight, but you! Yet... Yet...”

Theia shook Koutarou’s hand off and continued to cry. In the past, she had desired to obtain the Blue Knight for herself, but now he had appeared when she least wanted him to. What she wanted now wasn’t the Blue Knight, but the

Koutarou she'd always been with. To Theia, this was a horrible twist of fate.

"Theia, listen. You misunderstand."

Now that he understood why Theia was upset, Koutarou called out to her in an attempt to clear up the misunderstanding. That had to be resolved no matter what.

"I don't want to listen! I don't need you to comfort me! No matter how much you try to gloss it over, you are *the* Blue Knight!"

But Theia didn't want to hear him. Her rival was the Silver Princess. Once she learned that, she was beset with inconceivable shock, and her heart closed itself off. And that troubled Koutarou, which was why he desperately spoke of how he really felt.

"Think about it, Theia. I came back. To this age. Where you guys are. Why would I be here if what you're saying is true? Wouldn't I have stayed by Her Majesty Alaia's side?"

The moment she heard those words, Theia and her tears froze completely. It was just as Koutarou said. If he truly loved Alaia, there would have been no reason for him to come back to Earth. If his position as the Blue Knight was a problem, he could have just hid it and stayed in the past. Yet here he was, proof he'd returned to Earth.

"Her Majesty did ask me to stay in Forthorthe and serve the royal family, but I declined."

Theia pressed her hands against the floor and pushed herself up. She then slowly looked up and stared at Koutarou. Because of all her tears, her face was mess.

"...Why? Why did you come back?"

Looking so unlike a princess, Theia asked Koutarou pointblank why he was here. Faint hope and the shadow of anxiety were visible her eyes. He reached out with his hand, wiped the tears from her cheeks, and smiled.

"Because I made a promise with you guys."

"Promise...? What are you talking about?"

Theia tried to recall what promise Koutarou was talking about and blinked repeatedly in blank confusion. As she did, the few remaining tears in her eyes streamed down her cheeks.

“At the Christmas party. We all made a promise back then, remember?”

Koutarou gave Theia an embarrassed smile for a moment, and then explained.

“We all promised to make the play a success.”

“That promise... You so earnestly protected a promise like that...”

The promise they exchanged at the Christmas party, and the bonds they’d cultivated that led up to that were what had brought Koutarou back to Earth. The Silver Princess had indeed been a wonderful person. She was someone Koutarou wanted to help, someone he wouldn’t mind serving. However, even then, Koutarou hadn’t forgotten about the promise and the people waiting for him back on Earth. That’s why he’d declined the Silver Princess’s offer and returned home.

That might have been the first case of Koutarou, who normally kept people at a distance, actually desiring others.

“Oh, and also, you said that I was Her Majesty Alaia’s knight, but you’re wrong.”

“How could that be?! You’re the Blue Knight, aren’t you?!”

“I was acting like a knight despite not having a title. That’s why I was never formally her knight.”

“Then...”

“That’s right. There is only one person in this world who I’ve asked to make me her knight.”

Koutarou stared directly at Theia, and spoke the name of his one and only lord.

“Theia, you are my only princess.”

“K-Koutarou...”

The tears that should have stopped began flowing all over again. Yet this time, they were tears of joy.

“Don’t cry.”

“I’m not crying! I’m laughing! At how stupid you are!”

“Stupid?”

“That’s right, stupid! She was the Silver Princess, you know?! The strongest princess and empress in Forthorthe’s history! And you declined her offer to come back here! You’re not just stupid, but an idiot, too!”

Still crying, Theia began pounding on Koutarou’s chest. The force behind her fists was weak, but the emotions in them were powerful. Koutarou felt Theia’s earnest and warm feeling pouring into him each time she hit him.

“Don’t call me stupid all the time. I might start believing I really am.”

“You really are! You chose us over the legendary princess! And on top of everything, you chose to swear loyalty to a flat-chested, selfish woman!”

Koutarou had chosen his own life over the life of the Blue Knight. That’s why he returned and sworn loyalty to her. Theia was unbelievably happy. It was like this validated her entire existence.

“A traditional knight of Forthorthe upholds his oaths and is a man of his word. Isn’t that a perfect match for an old-fashioned princess like you?”

“Stupid! Idiot! You big idiot!”

Unable to contain herself, Theia embraced Koutarou and began crying even harder. She threw her arms around his neck and pressed her cheek against his chest.

Theia needs me this much...

Koutarou gently hugged Theia back. He wanted to let her know that he needed her too.

“You might call me stupid, but I’m glad I came back.”

Theia’s small body fit perfectly in Koutarou’s arms. It made him smile.

“Because I can protect you with my own hands like this... It’s best to keep

people precious to you close by so you can protect them yourself.”

As he hugged her, Koutarou felt like was protecting Theia. Like he was protecting someone who had put her life on the line to protect him. That sensation gave him joy.

“Then protect me... Take responsibility and do so until the very end...”

Theia muttered and closed her eyes. She had found someone she could entrust not just her body, but her heart to as well. She was truly blissful at being able to connect with him like this.

“And... only once you have seen us all live happy lives to our fullest may you die...”

Being hugged by Koutarou, Theia also clearly felt like this was the place she belonged. Just like she and the others needed Koutarou, he needed them. Those feelings and bonds were surely stronger than fate itself.

“...As you wish, my princess.”

“Mm... Very good...”

That’s why Theia could believe that even if further hardships awaited her in the future, Koutarou and the girls of room 106 would live happily ever after.

For a teenager like Shizuka, it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that maintaining her looks was one of her top priorities. Thanks to her doing martial arts training, her figure was not a problem. But she was aware that she had let her guard down and eaten a little too much since the battle a few days ago. She was sure of it because the floorboards in her apartment were starting to creak more. That’s why she began worrying that she might be putting on weight even if she didn’t look like it.

So immediately after getting out of the shower, Shizuka pulled out a scale from her wardrobe. Her only chance she had to weigh herself was when her roommate, Maki, was taking her shower.

“All right...”

After bracing herself, Shizuka timidly put a foot on the scale.

The scale that she had been using for over ten years was an analogue one, a rare sight these days. Shizuka's ideal weight was 46 kilograms. Compared to her classmates around her height, it was a little on the heavy side, but she knew that was because of her muscular build thanks to her martial arts training. But after eating so much, Shizuka was prepared to see a figure of around 48 kilograms.

"Huh?"

But when Shizuka put both of her feet on the scale, the needle took off and hit the far end of the scale with a dull thud. The scale went up to 200 kilograms, and the needle was pointing past that.

"Oh, it's broken... I'll have to get a new one... Hahh, another extra expense..."

Shizuka figured that the scale must be broken and slumped her shoulders. There was no way that she could weigh over 200 kilograms, after all.

But Shizuka had no idea that there was a dragon living inside her that stood over twenty-five meters tall. She'd be lucky if she only weighed 200 kilograms.



Article 17
In the event that Kasagi Shizuka (resident of room 206) detects a serious problem concerning the health of the residents of room 106, she has the arbitrary right to declare a health care week.

Article 17 Postscript
Going on a diet on my own is tough! Everyone, think of it as helping me! Please!

Corona Convention

New! June 7th, 2010

Afterword

Long time no see everybody. It's the author, Takehaya.

This time I have delivered volume 13. It's the story of something happening in Theia's faraway homeland. On top of that, the secret of why a certain person is so strong is revealed.

Thanks to everyone's support, this series has reached a total of fifteen volumes. Could this be HJ Bunko's longest series? When I imagine fifteen volumes lined up on everyone's bookshelf, I'm deeply touched. It also makes me want to live up to all your expectations. I hope to continue writing volumes that won't let down the fans.

As of late, I've been getting more fan mail. There was even someone who sent me some snacks! Thank you very much, everyone. Some of the letters have had questions for me, so I would like to take some of this space to answer a few of them.

First off is: "Is there something you do when you're thinking about the composition of the story?" While I write down things I come up with, I think the most important thing before writing a volume is to think about how I want the series as a whole to end. Starting writing before everything is set can cause problems later on. For example, I can't have the main character say that he treasures life if I have him killing a bunch of enemies just before that. In order to do that, I'd need to make the main character avoid taking anyone's life, or at least make it clear it was a difficult decision. Inconsistencies like that can crop everywhere, so I think it's important to always have the bigger picture in mind.

Next is: "Do you have any tricks for naming characters?" When naming a character, I first try to make sure I haven't used anything like it before. When publishing multiple works, it's important that names don't clash there either. In fact, I had trouble making sure that the names of a work that was published the other day, *Kaze to Lute no Shirabe ni Nosete*, weren't too similar to this series. The other thing is to make sure that the names are easy to read. A complex

name would distract the reader. A simple example is my pen name, Takehaya. The kanji I use for it is more often read as “Kensoku.” This is a trick I use to make those I do business with to remember my name. It’s fine for a pen name, but it can derail a story if readers can’t figure out a character’s name. That’s why I believe it’s best to use simple names that are easy to read.

Lastly is: “Can you be an author while doing something else?” Apart from the rare occasion that a debut work is a breakout hit, most authors start writing while working a different job. A newly debuted author can’t live on their writing alone. It’s not until they become popular that they can gradually shift to writing more and more. So the answer to the question is that the people who can manage two jobs are the ones who make it in this industry.

That is all the space I have for this afterword. I would like to give my thanks to Poco-san for drawing cute illustrations; to everyone in the editorial department for their hard work; and to everyone who bought this book.

Let us meet again in the afterword for volume 14.

March, 2013

Takehaya

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Invaders of the Rokujouma!? Volume 13

by Takehaya

Translated by Warnis Edited by Morgan Dreher

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