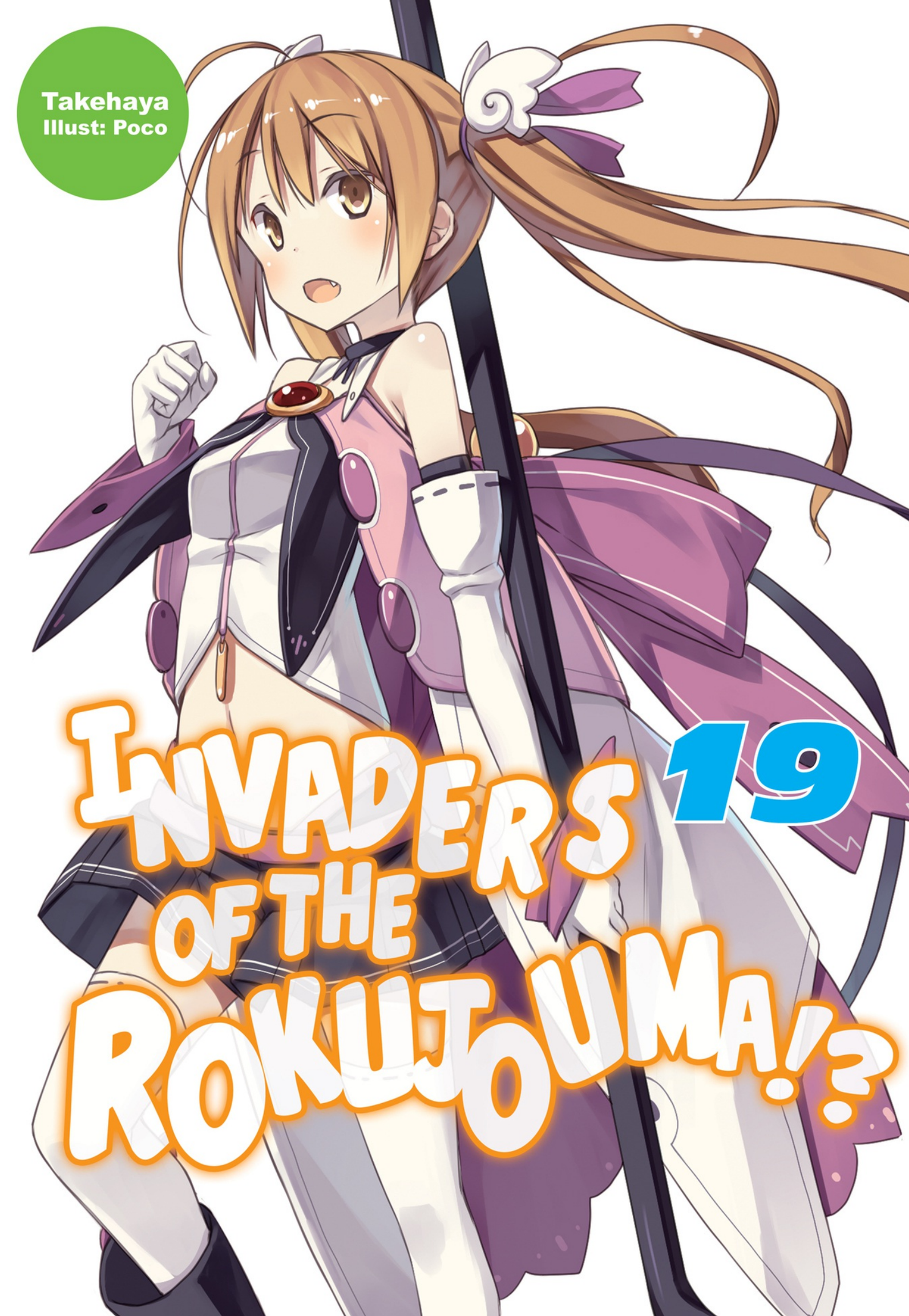
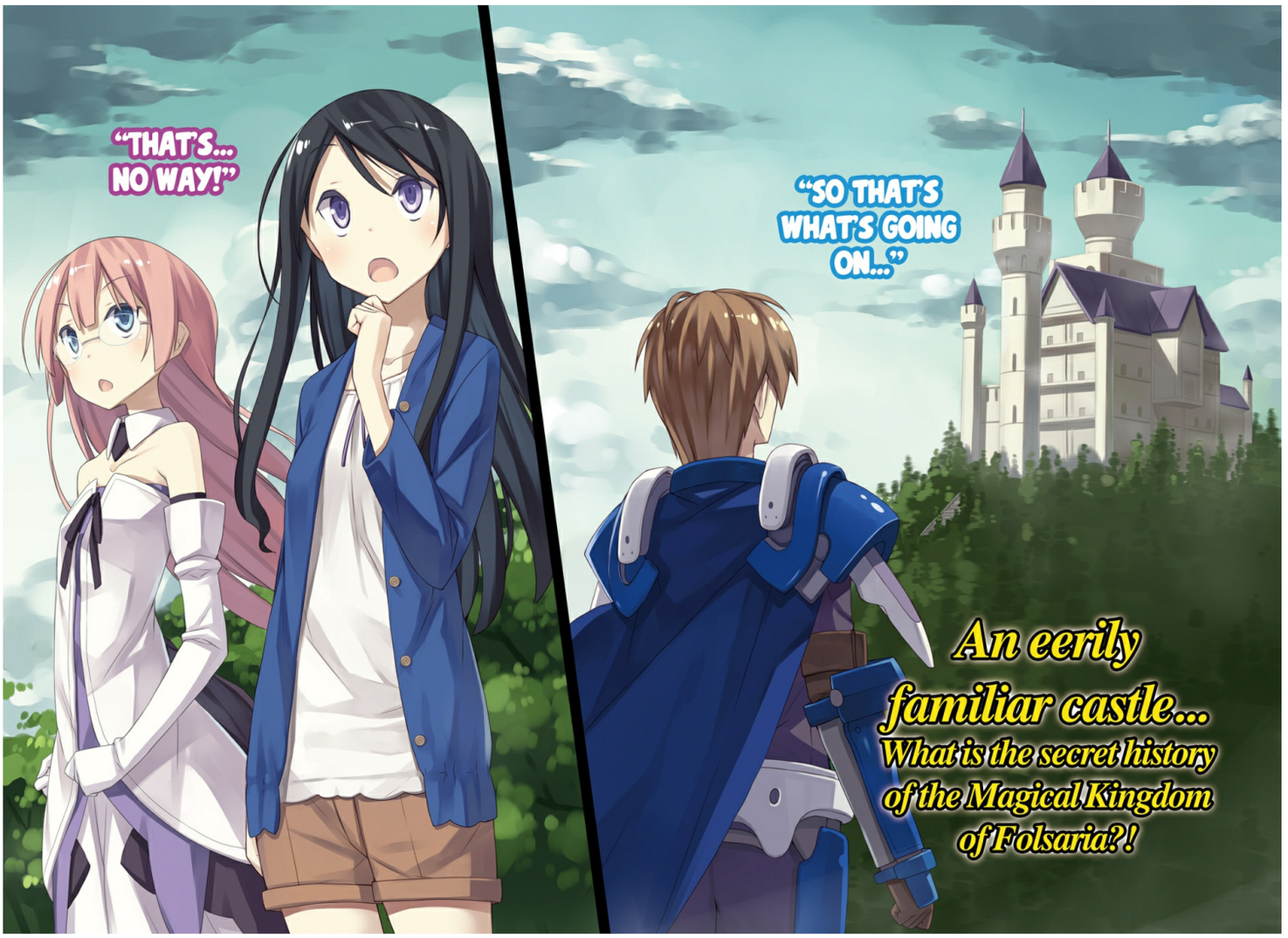

Takehaya
Illust: Poco
INVADERS OF THE ROKUJOUMA!?
19


INVADERS OF THE ROKUJOUMA!? 19
"NOW, LET'S BEGIN THE MISSION!"
JUST BEYOND THE PORTAL IS...
THE MAGICAL KINGDOM?!


"THAT'S... NO WAY!"
"SO THAT'S WHAT'S GOING ON..."
An eerily familiar castle...
What is the secret history of the Magical Kingdom of Folsaria?!


"JUST WAIT A LITTLE LONGER, MY BELOVED... I'LL TAKE CARE OF RAINBOW HEART AND BRING YOU BACK SOON..."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Wednesday, September 15th

Faraway Days

Wednesday, September 15th

Prisoner Life

Saturday, September 18th

The Magical Kingdom of Folsaria

Sunday, September 19th

Raid

Sunday, September 19th

The Land of Beginning

Sunday, September 19th

The Return of the Magical Girl

Sunday, September 19th

The One Without a Future

Sunday, September 19th

Advent

Wednesday, September 22nd

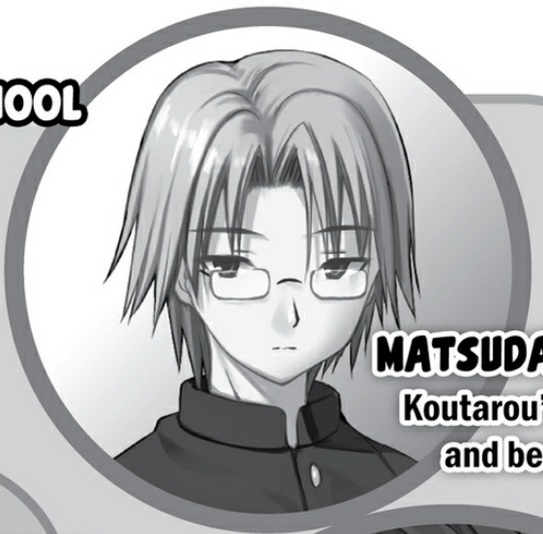
Over the Rainbow

Afterword

STUDENTS OF KISSHOUHARUKAZE HIGH SCHOOL



KASAGI SHIZUKA
Unquestionably strong.
Koutarou's classmate and the landlord of Corona House.



MATSUDAIRA KENJI
Koutarou's childhood and best friend.



SAKURABA HARUMI
The president of the knitting society that Koutarou joins. She's one year his senior, and a little sickly.



SATOMI KOUTAROU
Our protagonist, and the formal tenant of room 106. Also the Blue Knight.

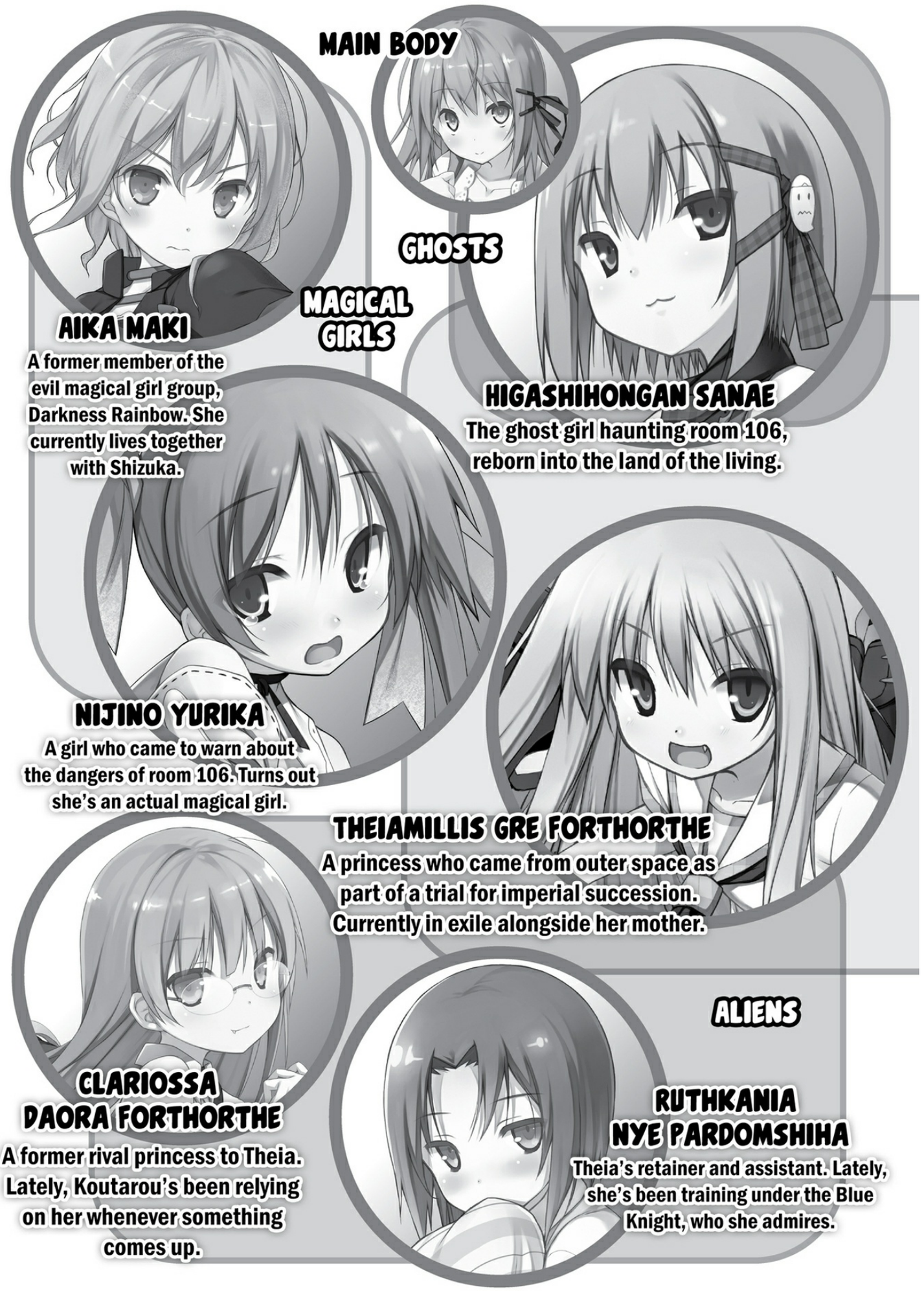
RESIDENTS OF CORONA HOUSE



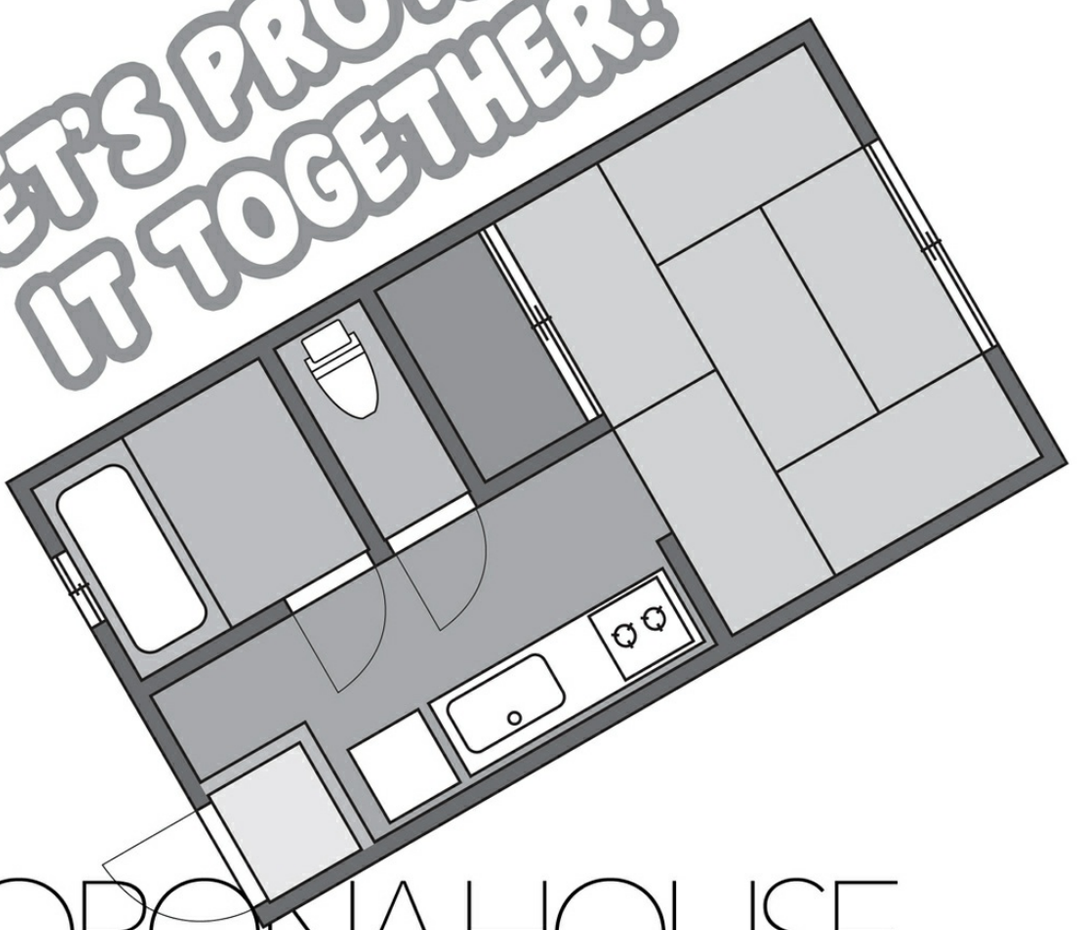
UNDERGROUND DWELLERS

KURANO KIRIHA
A crafty woman who pretended to be plotting to invade the surface while searching for the person she loved.

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 came from outer space as part of a trial for imperial succession. Currently in exile alongside her mother.
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. Lately, she's been training under the Blue Knight, who she admires.

LET'S PROTECT IT TOGETHER!



CORONA HOUSE
ROOM 106

Faraway Days

Wednesday, September 15th

Marina and Kai first met on the job in the Magical Kingdom of Folsaria's army, Rainbow Heart. Marina was a new magical girl, and Kai was the soldier assigned to guard her. While magicians were strong, they required time to cast spells. So when used in squads, it was common for guards to protect them and buy them that time.

Marina and Kai were both young and often butted heads after becoming partners. After completing several missions together, however, the sense of antagonism between them gradually died down and was replaced with something else. Indeed, slowly but surely, the young couple fell in love and became partners in a different sense. Not long after that, Marina decided that she would retire as a magical girl and marry Kai... after one final mission.

And that was the mission she was out on now. Marina was ecstatic thinking about her future, but she didn't let it affect her work. She kept a cool and level head on the job, as expected of a veteran magical girl.

Marina and Kai's final job together was a somewhat dangerous one. They were tasked with infiltrating the mansion of a suspected necromancer and obtaining evidence of his crimes. In the Magical Kingdom of Folsaria, the personal use of magic was strictly prohibited. Necromancy in particular was considered to be a nefarious art, often being used for evil and other ill gain, so even when civilians went through the proper channels to apply to use it, they were often denied. The target in question was suspected of using necromancy illicitly, but without any evidence, Rainbow Heart had been unable to bring any charges against him. And that was exactly why Marina and Kai were being sent in—to find said evidence.

"To think we'd have to infiltrate the place even though we already know he's guilty..."

Kai looked up at the dark mansion and let out an exaggerated sigh. The mansion stood alone on a hill a good ways from the city and gave off an austere

and lonely impression. Kai was a large man, so Marina had to look up when she talked to him. But even when she spoke up, his eyes stayed fixed on the dark house on the hill.

“Don’t complain. We can only prove that he’s bought prohibited goods as it is. That’s nowhere near as serious as what we’re potentially looking at, and we can prove he’s dabbling in necromancy with just his account books.”

As agents of the government, Marina and Kai couldn’t enter someone’s home without good reason. Which was precisely why they’d done a preliminary investigation beforehand. In doing so, they uncovered that the owner of the mansion had recently purchased spell components and other goods used in necromancy. Whether he’d simply purchased them or whether he’d actually used them would significantly change the weight of his crimes, but Rainbow Heart had no way of knowing which it was without digging deeper. And that was why Marina and Kai were now approaching the mansion.

“I know, I know,” said Kai with a wave of his hand

“Heehee, if I remember correctly... You’re not so good with ghosts and zombies, are you?” prodded Marina.

“Hush, you. It’s way weirder that you’re actually okay with them.”

“Heh, then doesn’t that make you the biggest weirdo of all for marrying a weirdo like me?”

“Yes. Yes, it does.”

“How rude.”

“You said it yourself!”

The two lovers continued to tease each other as they worked together to scale the wall surrounding the property. The much larger Kai served as a foothold for Marina to get to the top, where she turned around and loaned him a hand to get up too. Their teamwork was perfect, showcasing both the time they’d spent together as partners and the deep trust they’d developed during that time.

“You’re a bit heavy. Maybe you should go on a diet for the sake of your new

partner.”

While Marina was retiring as a magical girl, Kai would continue serving under Rainbow Heart. As a specialized guard, he would eventually be assigned a new magician to protect. And it was this future partner Marina was worried about.

“I’ll think about it if it’s a cute girl.”

“Hey!”

“Haha, don’t worry. Nobody is cuter than you.”

“Lies and flattery!”

Yet in the end, there was absolutely nothing for Marina to be worried about. Kai’s smile instilled a sense of confidence and comfort in her. But all of a sudden, there was a drastic change in mood between the two of them. Without another word, they nodded at each other and jumped down from the wall, landing without a sound on the mansion lawn.

“Here’s where things get tricky...”

“Let’s just go at it like normal.”

“Yeah.”

This was where the fun and games between the two lovers ended. For once they were on the mansion property, they were no longer a young couple... but seasoned partners who worked for Rainbow Heart. And it was time to get down to business.

When using large-scale magic, an appropriately large magic circle and a ritual were required. Magic circles were like storehouses for mana, and they doubled as something similar to a magical circuit capable of channeling that mana and producing unique effects. They could be quite delicate and took a great deal of work to create, so choosing a safe and secure location to make one was an important step of the process. Basements with stone floors were a popular choice, which also had the additional benefit of being far out of the public eye. And that was exactly what Marina and Kai found in the mansion.

“It looks like this big one isn’t complete yet... And what’s that small one over there? Was that just practice?”

“Just what is he planning on doing with a magic circle this size...?”

Marina and Kai found multiple magic circles in the basement. Studying them confirmed their suspicions of necromancy, but the size of one of the circles in particular was strange. Rather, it was dangerous. It was large enough that it could be used to summon hundreds of departed souls, certainly more than enough to destroy a city.

“I wish to revive my granddaughter, young agent of Rainbow Heart.”

Suddenly, Marina and Kai heard a voice coming from behind them. When they whipped around to see who it was, they saw an elderly man standing there.

“Who are you?!”

“That’s my line, young one.”

“You’re...”

Marina and Kai had seen him before. They’d spent time observing the mansion, including its residents. And this was the owner, Gazan.

“I am Gazan Saiga, the master of this mansion.”

“Gazan-san, stop this at once!”

That was why the elderly man had turned to necromancy: he wanted to bring back his late granddaughter. While his desire was understandable, the cost was simply too high. Magic could achieve all kinds of miracles, but bringing the dead back to life was beyond all reason. It required an incredible amount of mana, which meant one of two things: either a significant investment in a mana generation device, or a significant sacrifice. And based on the magic circle scrawled on the basement floor, the elderly man had chosen the latter. He intended for a great many people to die in this basement. Marina couldn’t accept that, and so did her best to convince him to stop.

“You’re still too young, young lady... You haven’t experienced what its like to lose something truly precious, have you?”

“What?”

The elderly man’s unexpected question made Marina falter. He looked at her with pity in his eyes... No, perhaps he was looking past her at a younger version

of himself.

“After losing my granddaughter, I learned... When you lose something truly important to you, what does that leave you with? What remains after loss?”

“That’s...”

Marina had no answer for the elderly man’s question. Like he said, she’d never experienced any such bereavement.

“Desire. The kind of desire you would feel like dying of thirst in a scorching desert. It leaves you wondering why there isn’t any water nearby... It becomes all you can think about. It consumes you. And that’s the question that has driven me. Why... Why isn’t my granddaughter here?”

In that moment, Marina saw madness in the elderly man’s eyes. He so grieved the absence of his beloved granddaughter that it had driven him to the ultimate taboo. He wanted her back no matter what. Even if it meant going against the very laws of nature. His thirst had become so strong that he was willing to kill others to get the water he needed. The water he desired.

“Marina, it’s no use talking to him.”

Kai drew his weapon after hearing the elderly man’s crazed babbling. Seeing that, Marina’s eyes shot open wide.

“Kai, no! Gazan-san will understand if we talk to him!”

“We don’t have enough water to satisfy his thirst. It’s a shame, but...”

Marina didn’t understand, but Kai did. He had experienced what the elderly man was talking about for himself. When he was younger, he’d lost his little sister. And thanks to that, he understood what the elderly man was really after. He knew that Marina’s kindness would only get her killed here, and as her future husband, Kai wasn’t about to let that happen.

“You’re right, young man. Your lives aren’t enough to revive my granddaughter! Not even close!”

That was when four suits of armor, one in each corner of the room, began moving. They smoothly unsheathed their swords, almost as if there were people inside. And once their weapons were drawn, they attacked Marina and

Kai from all sides.

“There are only two options for you! Quietly become sacrifices, or die right here and now!”

The elderly man was controlling the four living armors. He was going to capture Marina and Kai and use them as sacrifices for his resurrection spell; as a magician, Marina would make a particularly useful sacrifice. But if he couldn’t successfully capture them, they would need to be disposed to keep them from getting in the way. The elderly man hadn’t allowed them to freely walk into the basement just for that.

“Gazan-san, please listen!”

“It’s not gonna happen, Marina! Nobody can reach him now!”

Being surrounded was bad news. Kai pulled on Marina’s hand while she was still trying to reason with the elderly man and headed for one of the living armors. Whether they could take out one of the armors and break the encirclement before it closed completely around them would determine the outcome of this fight.

“But Kai, doing something this sad for a loved one—”

“You can talk to him all you want after the armors are destroyed!”

“O-Okay!”

Marina was reluctant, but she knew Kai was right. Talking could come later when things had calmed down. But in order for them to ever get there, the living armors needed to be destroyed. Resolving herself, Marina began an incantation with her staff in hand.

“Enhance Weapon!”

Marina cast a spell to augment Kai’s sword. When the two of them fought together, they combined their strengths and achieved the highest possible attack power by having Marina use her magic on Kai. It should be a swift, surefire way to take out the armors.

“Marina, slow down the other suits!”

With that, Kai charged at the armor in front of him. His enhanced sword easily

cut through the living armor's sword and right arm.

"Leave it to me! Magnetic Field!"

Marina created a powerful magnetic field aimed between the other armors, and it immediately netted all three of them. But the binding wasn't perfect. Though greatly inhibited by the magnetic field, they were still slowly inching forward. It seemed they were powered by more mana than she'd expected.

"Kai, they're stronger than I thought! Hurry!"

There was a limit to how long Marina could maintain the magnetic field and keep the armors in place. It was critical that Kai defeat them as quickly as possible. Time was against them.

"Leave it to me!"

Kai swung his sword again with both hands and cleaved the armor he was up against in two. Marina's skill with magic was impressive, but so was his with a blade. Not satisfied with only taking out a single armor, however, he headed immediately for a second. Seeing this, Marina changed the shape of the magnetic field. She didn't want him to get caught up in it too.

"I won't let you interfere! She will soon be revived!"

The elderly man, meanwhile, wasn't about to sit back and watch as they ruined his plans. Brandishing his staff, he began incanting a spell of his own. As the one responsible for creating both the magic circles and the living armors in the basement, he was quite a powerful magician in his own right.

"Deadly Cloud!"

The elderly man unleashed an accursed miasma that drained life force from its victims. It was a notorious necromancy spell that only had one purpose—to kill. The pitch black cloud began to fill the center of the room, surrounding Kai alongside the three living armors. Since the armors had no life force to speak of, however, it had no effect on them whatsoever. It was really just a clever way of targeting Kai.

"Kai!"

"Don't worry!"

Kai took a deep breath and held it just before the cloud could reach him. The miasma would only take effect when inhaled, and Kai knew enough about magic to keep himself safe—or at least alive—in a situation like this.

“I’ll dispel it right away! Just hang in there for a moment!”

“...”

Rather than replying to Marina, Kai instead took down a second suit of armor. He was clearly all right, and seeing that, Marina felt a wave of relief wash over her. She then calmly incanted a spell to counter the black cloud.

“Greater Dispelling!”

“...”

In the time it took Marina to do that, Kai defeated yet another armor, leaving only one of them standing. Anxious to finish things before Marina’s spell took effect and cleared the air, Kai turned and swung his sword at his last remaining target.

The felled suit of armor clattered to the floor in pieces. The next moment, Marina’s spell activated, clearing away the horrid black cloud. Everything was going perfectly.

“I’ve got you now!”

Perfectly, that is, according to the elderly man’s plan. In creating the black cloud, he’d been able to conceal what he was really doing. Not only did the cloud obstruct his opponents’ view, it kept them distracted. Kai was completely focused on the living armors, and Marina was too busy casting a spell to deal with the lethal miasma. And the elderly man used that opportunity to prepare another spell. Just as Marina dispelled the deadly cloud...

“Die, damned interlopers from Rainbow Heart!”

While he was engaging the last armor, Kai had his back turned to the elderly man. He was wide open. And since she was still recovering from the spell she’d just cast, there was nothing Marina could do to help him. The elderly man fired an arrow made of negative energy directly at Kai’s defenseless back. Unlike Marina, Kai was a normal human. There were plenty of other sacrifices that

would be just as good as him. So as far as the elderly man was concerned, he could just finish off Kai here and now.

“Oh no!”

The magical dark purple arrow struck Kai squarely in the back. He’d never stood a chance of dodging it, and Marina was powerless to do anything to save him.

“KAIIIII!”

And so Marina came to experience what it was like to lose something truly important. It was only then that she understood what the elderly man had meant by desire.

Dark Purple woke up to the sound of her own screaming. Seeing her hands reached out towards nothingness, she realized that she had been dreaming.

Ever since losing her fiancé, Kai, Dark Purple had been having the same dream. It was like losing him all over again every time. And each time she was forced to experience it, the desire that elderly man had spoken of grew stronger. As she was now, she completely understood how he’d felt. She also realized how foolish her past self had been for trying to dissuade him.

“Just a while longer, just a little while longer... Once Rainbow Heart is defeated, I can revive Kai... We’ll be together again...”

Marina was a whirlwind of emotion that fateful night, and after losing Kai, she completely gave herself over to rage. She cut the elderly man who’d taken him from her down without hesitation or mercy. She then stole his research with the intention of reviving her fallen fiancé. Just like the elderly man before her, she was driven by desire.

However, her experience as a member of Rainbow Heart warned her that the path ahead would not be an easy one. She knew Rainbow Heart would eventually get in her way and try to stop her. That’s why she turned to Darkness Rainbow. Between her talents and her desire, it didn’t take her long to make it to the top.

And so Marina became Dark Purple, whose goal was the downfall of Rainbow Heart. For in order to achieve her heart’s true desire, Rainbow Heart needed to

be out of the picture. She didn’t even care if that meant going up against her former allies—for she was no longer Marina, but Dark Purple, the cold leader of Darkness Rainbow.

“Just wait a little longer, my beloved... I’ll take care of Rainbow Heart and bring you back soon...”

Purple looked over at a tall, cylindrical glass tank. Inside it was a body suspended in preservation fluid. It was the corpse of Kai, Purple’s fiancé who she wanted to resurrect more than anything else in the world. She stared at him for some time, her eyes colored by deep love, insanity, and desire, all while repeating the same words to herself... that the decisive battle was near, and so was their reunion.

Prisoner Life

Wednesday, September 15th

The children who had been kidnapped by Darkness Rainbow to be used as sacrifices in their summoning ritual were fortunately able to walk away from the encounter unharmed. The ritual had been activated at only 20 percent completion, meaning the children had only been drained of about 20 percent of their spiritual energy to power it. And that was collective. Some of them had only lost as little as 10 percent. Moreover, since Darkness Rainbow had only collected children with exceptional amounts of spiritual energy in the first place, losing just 10 to 20 percent of their spiritual energy only reduced them to the level of normal humans. It might keep them from becoming magicians in the future, but it wouldn't have much of an effect on them other than that.

Knowing the children were well physically was a relief to Koutarou and the others, but their mental states were still a point of concern. That was why, with the children's best interests in mind, a certain precaution was taken before they were returned home to their parents. It wasn't hard to imagine that the trauma of being kidnapped to be used as sacrifices would scar any child that age, so wiping their memories of the event would be essential in helping them return to their normal lives. However, simply erasing their memories would confuse the children, so they were overwritten instead. They were essentially fed the plot of a hero show—they were kidnapped by relatively innocuous "bad guys" and swiftly rescued. In fact, the children were probably at home telling their parents about how they were rescued by Harukazeman right about now.

But even with the children safely returned, Darkness Rainbow's attempted attack on the city was a serious ordeal. In order to cover it up completely, the Sun Rangers had to pull some strings. Neither they nor the government they worked for wanted any friction with the Magical Kingdom of Folsaria, so they were willing to do what they could to smooth things over and leave the rest to Rainbow Heart.

And so, after a couple of harrowing days, the serial kidnapping incident was ultimately resolved. The last remaining loose thread was Dark Crimson, who

had been captured at the very end of the fighting.

One of the first steps for a member of Rainbow Heart working in Japan was securing a place to stay. Most of the time, this was facilitated with help from local cooperators. The lodgings obtained in such a fashion often ended up becoming safehouses. Rainbow Heart safehouses were stocked with a supply of various magical items for communication and transportation for any agents that might need them. They were also warded with a number of spells to keep them off of Darkness Rainbow's radar, which made them the perfect place to keep the captive Crimson.

Crimson was presently confined in the storehouse of one such safehouse. The storehouse was outfitted to be used as a prison in the event it was absolutely necessary, and had various defensive and suppressive spells cast on it. Between those, once her staff had been confiscated, it would be next to impossible even for a leader of Darkness Rainbow to escape. Knowing that, Crimson obediently sat in her chair, facing the people that had come to interrogate her—Koutarou, Yurika, and Kiriha.

"Crimson-san, please tell us... Where is Darkness Rainbow's base?" Yurika asked with a solemn expression.

In order to put a stop to everything, Yurika had decided that she needed to attack Darkness Rainbow's base directly. But the only one who knew where it was... was Dark Crimson. That was why Yurika was pleading with her with uncharacteristic seriousness.

"Gee, where was it again...? Who knows?"

However, Crimson had no intention of simply telling her the location. She had been offered immunity if she gave up magic and the information Rainbow Heart needed, but Crimson was unmoved on the matter. The only thing that mattered to her was getting stronger, and she wasn't about to give that up. She wasn't about to willingly walk away from the life that let her fight freely as she pleased, even against her own friends.

"Then when is Darkness Rainbow going to attack Rainbow Heart?"

"Gee, when was that again...? Who knows?"

“Crimson-san, at this rate, all of Folsaria will become a battlefield! No good will come of it, no matter who wins!”

Both Rainbow Heart and Darkness Rainbow were small military forces by Japan’s standards, but Folsaria wasn’t a big country. If the two factions fought in an all-out war there, innocent civilians would be embroiled in the conflict. With the new technology and magics Darkness Rainbow had access to, the entire country might even go up in flames. Yurika wanted to avoid that no matter what, which was why she’d made the bold and desperate choice to go on the offensive.

“I don’t care.”

Yet even so, Crimson remained unmoved. Life, love, innocence, safety... Those things weren’t even on her radar. All she cared about was fighting and getting stronger. She couldn’t care less about what happened to her country.

“Crimson-san!”

“I can’t tell you what I don’t know.”

“But you do know!”

“Even if I do, there’s no way I’m just gonna tell you. That’s all top secret, you know.”

“Th-That’s...”

“If it’s really that important to you, why don’t you try torturing me? That might make me talk.”

“Ugh...”

Yurika was at a loss for words. Even though she’d steeled herself for it, she simply wasn’t cut out for this kind of hardline negotiating. Seeing her struggle, Koutarou lent her a helping hand.

“Once Rainbow Heart and Darkness Rainbow’s battle comes to an end, there won’t be anyone left for you to fight. Wouldn’t that be the worst kind of torture of all for you?” he said, putting a hand on Yurika’s shoulder.

She looked up at him in slight relief. Crimson, on the other hand, flashed a defiant smile.

“That’s an interesting thought. I hadn’t considered that, but... Who knows? Maybe I’ll strike out on my own and create another anti-government organization. Fighting against Darkness Rainbow to see who’s stronger sounds like fun too.”

Crimson was unfazed by Koutarou’s threat. She didn’t really care who she fought, even if that meant making an enemy out of Darkness Rainbow. She simply wanted to fight—that was her sole purpose in life.

“What do you think, Kiriha-san?”

“At this rate, we aren’t going to learn anything without resorting to torture. That said, I’m not sure she’d talk even then.”

Kiriha could tell Crimson was made of stubborn stuff. Torture wasn’t exactly something Koutarou and the girls wanted to use in the first place. Moreover, they didn’t have time for it—and Crimson knew that. She was quite sure she could endure whatever Koutarou and his comrades threw at her because it wouldn’t last for long. Darkness Rainbow’s battle with Rainbow Heart was on the horizon and drawing nearer with every passing minute. Once they made their move, it wouldn’t even matter if the location of their base was revealed.

“Yurika, can’t you use magic to read her mind?”

Even if violence wasn’t a viable option, they might be able to force the truth out of Crimson magically. Or so Koutarou was hoping as he looked to Yurika, their last hope.

“It would be easy enough if she were willing, but it will take a great deal of preparation to ready a spell strong enough to work against someone as hostile and resistant as she is.”

Alas, Yurika shook her head. Forcibly reading the mind of a magician would be no simple task.

“So we’re stuck...” Koutarou said with a sigh, his shoulders drooping.

Crimson wasn’t willing to cooperate with them, and they didn’t have time to try and force anything out of her, magically or otherwise. In short, this had turned into a dead end.

“Koutarou, there’s something I would personally like to ask her. Do you mind?”

After waiting for the ongoing conversation to reach a lull, Kiriha interjected. There was actually something that she’d been wanting to ask Darkness Rainbow for quite some time.

“Hmm? Oh, yeah. Go right ahead.”

Koutarou agreed to her request without hesitation. He didn’t think for a minute that Kiriha would ask anything frivolous at a time like this, so he knew she must have something important in mind. He stepped to the side, and Kiriha approached Crimson.

“Crimson, there’s something I want you to tell me.”

Kiriha looked straight at Crimson, who looked right back at her dauntlessly.

“That depends on what it is.”

“This isn’t related to the upcoming battle.”

“...Then spit it out. If it’s something I can answer, I will.”

Crimson had no intention of giving away anything about Darkness Rainbow’s fight with Rainbow Heart, but she wasn’t necessarily opposed to talking about something else. Kiriha was a powerful enemy, but Crimson didn’t dislike her. She was actually quite interested in hearing whatever Kiriha had to ask her, and judged it would be as good an opportunity as any to gather information on Koutarou and the others.

“As I’m sure you know, Darkness Rainbow has been working with the People of the Earth’s radical faction.”

“Yeah, for a while now.”

Crimson had heard about it in brief from Maya, and knew that the relationship between Darkness Rainbow and the radical faction went back eleven years. But she couldn’t just blurt that out. She had to choose her words carefully since she didn’t want to inadvertently give Kiriha any unnecessary information.

“I find that rather strange.”

Indeed, the very fact that Darkness Rainbow and the radical faction had worked together at all was what puzzled Kiriha.

“Strange? How so?”

Crimson wasn’t following, and furrowed her brow accordingly.

“The radical faction was primarily composed of some rather prideful individuals. I find it strange that they would consent to working with outsiders, magicians or otherwise. I was hoping you could tell me the reason for that, should you happen to know.”

The radical faction believed that the People of the Earth were supreme beings meant to rule the earth. As such, they believed in dominion rather than cooperation, especially when it came to normal humans. They were particularly hateful of the surface dwellers, but Kiriha had no reason to think that they would treat people from other worlds any differently. They were so stubborn and set in their ways that Kiriha found it hard to believe they’d make an alliance with anyone at all, even if magic was involved.

“Ah, so that’s what you’re talking about... Yeah, I remember Maya saying they were kinda slimy.”

Crimson laughed to herself a little when she recalled the face Maya had made when she said it. It was extremely rare for the cool and composed Maya to look so bitter, so it had left a rather profound impression on Crimson.

“So, do you know? Can you explain it to me?”

“Yeah, sure. It’s no skin off my nose.”

Crimson nodded and agreed. After thinking back on it for a moment, she began explaining things in a somewhat jocular tone. It seemed recalling Maya’s sour face was just that amusing.

“It’s simple, really. According to Maya, we Folsarians and you underground people were all from the same place long ago.”

“Is that true?!”

Upon hearing those words, Kiriha’s ordinarily calm face went totally blank. She put all decorum aside and vehemently pressed Crimson for more

information. That seemed to surprise the somewhat smug Crimson, who stared at her wide-eyed.

“Y-Yeah... Maya showed me some old slab or something. It had some kind of crest carved into it, and she said that was the proof. We’re... What did she call it? The seventh lost race or something?”

“The lost seventh tribe?”

“Yeah, that.”

“So that’s what it was... That’s why the radical faction...”

Kiriha was aghast and convinced at the same time. She believed that Crimson was telling the truth. She had no reason to lie, after all, and what she was saying made perfect sense. If the People of the Earth and the Folsarians were really indeed long-lost kinsman, the radical faction wouldn’t have considered them outsiders. That would explain why they were willing to work together.

If the Folsarians are the lost seventh tribe, I’ll have to talk with my father about this...

Kiriha had heard tale of the lost seventh tribe many times. They were said to be a remarkable bunch known for their strange and mystical powers, but heir story was passed down through the People of the Earth now as nothing more than a legend, so Kiriha didn’t know all the details. What Crimson had just told her would need to be confirmed later, but that would have to wait until the current commotion had settled down.

“The Folsarians and the People of the Earth are related?! Yurika, did you know that?!”

“No! This is the first I’ve heard of it! I would have told you sooner if I knew!”

Koutarou and Yurika, who had heard every word of Kiriha and Crimson’s exchange, were unable to hide their surprise. After seeing the elitists Tayuma and Maguz working with Maya, it sounded all too plausible.

“To think the underground and the world of magic had a real connection on top of their mutual interests...” Koutarou muttered.

And there, a hush fell over the room. Koutarou, Yurika, and Kiriha were all lost

in thought over this most unexpected development. Crimson was the one to break the silence.

“You... Koutarou, was it?”

“Hmm? Yeah...”

Crimson’s voice brought Koutarou back to his senses. Putting on a serious expression again, he turned to face her.

“Can I ask you something now?”

“That depends on what it is.”

“It’s a personal question.”

“Still depends on what it is. Let’s hear it.”

“Heh, okay.”

When Koutarou agreed to hear her out, Crimson smiled.

“I want to ask about Maki.”

“What about Aika-san— I mean, what about Dark Navy?”

Koutarou felt a chill run down his spine to hear this topic come up. Darkness Rainbow should still be under the impression that Maki was being held captive and controlled against her will. If he let the wrong thing slip, it would put Maki at risk, so he needed to tread carefully here.

“Please call her Aika-san now. You see, Maki... She’s chosen to live as Aika Maki rather than Dark Navy.”

“You...”

If Crimson knew that much, then she must know that Maki had betrayed Darkness Rainbow. Koutarou realized that, but he couldn’t accept it. If Maki’s betrayal was exposed, her life would be in danger. That was the last thing he wanted.

“I have no intention of getting along with an enemy.”

“Heh, don’t worry. I’m not gonna report Maki to Darkness Rainbow.”

“What...?”

Koutarou's eyes shot wide open. He was surprised enough as it was to learn that Crimson had found Maki out, but genuinely shocked to hear her say she wasn't going to tell Darkness Rainbow about it. Crimson smirked, seemingly enjoying his reaction.

"We were pals before," she explained. "Besides... we're gonna end up fighting to the death eventually anyway, so what do I care whose side she's on?"

"...So you're Aika-san's friend?"

Koutarou gave up on trying to hide it. It seemed Crimson knew everything, so there was no point in lying to her.

"I don't know if you can call us friends anymore... But yeah, we definitely used to be," Crimson said, her shoulders slumping dejectedly.

The time Crimson and Maki had spent as friends in the truest sense of the word was short and sweet. But Crimson would never forget it. That's why she wouldn't turn Maki over to Darkness Rainbow, and why she wanted to ask Koutarou more about her now.

"So here's what I want to ask you, Koutarou. Why did Maki choose you?"

Based on what Maki had said and the way she'd acted, Crimson already had a rough idea. They were close enough that she could connect most of the dots on her own. However, she wanted to hear it directly from Koutarou.

"Aika-san didn't choose me."

"Huh?"

"Aika-san chose us and her classmates. And we chose Aika-san. It's not something so one-sided. We're in this together."

Maki couldn't bear the solitude and distrust; she sought love and the bonds of friendship. And Koutarou, the invaders, and her friends at school had given her that. They had all welcomed Maki and given her lonely, weary soul a comfortable place to belong.

"Hmm..."

"Though I don't really expect you to understand that."

“Oh, come on. Our priorities are different, but it’s not like I don’t get it.”

Crimson slowly shook her head and flashed a faint smile that was equal parts happy and sad. Koutarou’s answer... He had given Maki something she couldn’t.

“I’m glad.”

“Thank you, Koutarou.”

With their discussion over, Crimson thanked Koutarou. The sadness had now faded from her smile.

“You don’t have to thank me for that.”

“I know. But it’s not for me; it’s for Maki.”

Crimson, who lived to fight, couldn’t save Maki. But that didn’t mean she didn’t care about her. Crimson was happy Maki had found her own path.

“Say, Crimson...”

“What?”

There was something about Crimson’s smile that gave Koutarou a glimmer of hope. He already knew what the answer was, but he decided to try asking her anyway.

“Is there... really no way that you’d stop fighting?”

“Could you throw away Maki?”

It was an apt analogy. Crimson treasured battle the same way Koutarou did Maki. He would never give her up no matter what. She’d become a part of his daily life. She felt like an intrinsic part of his existence.

“...I’m sorry to hear that, Crimson.”

He’d known what he was walking into, but he was still sorry for it. They were so close, yet their wishes kept them worlds apart. In his eyes, it was truly regrettable.

“Koutarou, you really are a lot like Maki. I think that’s why she chose you.”

“But I think that Aika-san wanted to choose you.”

That was the conclusion Koutarou had reached after talking to Crimson. Her

first love was battle, but she had a lot of heart. Koutarou could easily see why Maki wanted to be her friend.

“I can’t accept that. This was fate.”

Crimson had chosen battle over friendship, meaning the road had forked for her and Maki.

“This might be strange for me to say, but... please don’t let go of Maki, Koutarou.”

“You don’t have to tell me twice.”

“Then I won’t have to worry about Maki anymore.”

“So all that’s left is fighting?”

“Yeah, you nailed it. Man, you really are just like Maki.”

Crimson was entrusting Koutarou with her feelings for Maki. She felt like she was passing a torch, and that Koutarou would take care of her now. Maybe even better than Crimson could herself.

“Well, this might be strange for me to say, but... don’t die, Crimson.”

“I can’t promise anything. Especially when I’m going up against you.”

“...I’m glad we could talk, Crimson.”

“Me too.”

And there, their discussion came to an end. From here on out, Crimson would be solely and exclusively focused on battle. She was like a demon born for war. There would be no dissuading her.

Not long after Koutarou and the others left the room, Maki entered. She’d come to bring Crimson some food. While Crimson had been a little uncomfortable dealing with Koutarou and the others, she felt right at home when it was just Maki. Seeing her, she lazily leaned back in her chair and yawned.

“Haaahhhhh...”

Maki smiled wryly as she placed Crimson’s dinner on the table in front of her.

“You seem bored, Crimson.”

She would no longer call Crimson by her real name. They both knew that they were walking different paths in life now. And they both knew that Maki was only here now because things were likely to go over more smoothly if a former friend of Crimson’s was the one taking care of her.

“Who wouldn’t be, forced to sit in a chair and talk all day?”

“I suppose that is new and unusual for you.”

“Say, Maki, mind removing handcuffs? I won’t start any trouble.”

It would be difficult to eat this way, so Crimson held her shackled hands up in a pleading gesture.

“You might not, but if Darkness Rainbow shows up, then there will definitely be trouble.”

Maki knew that Crimson wouldn’t do anything even if she uncuffed her. Crimson was a simple and earnest girl. She knew that Maki despised deception, so she’d never bothered lying to her before. It seemed highly unlikely she’d start now. Maki knew that, but she also knew that there was still the potential risk of Darkness Rainbow showing up.

“Man, organizations sure are a pain.”

“Says you who’s part of one.”

“Hmph... Whatever. At least help me eat.”

“Okay, grandma.”

“Who are you calling grandma?!”

Maki pulled up a nearby chair and sat down next to Crimson to help her eat.

“Hom...!”

“Don’t just scarf it down. Here, have some water.”

“Gulp, gulp... Thanks, Maki.”

“You’re welcome.”

Maki had a cheerful expression on her face as fed Crimson dinner. It was likely

because she knew good and well she wasn't in danger right now, but Crimson thought there was more to it than that.

"Maki, you really are a bit strange."

Crimson stopped eating and took a good look Maki's face.

"You think so?"

Maki quizzically tilted her head. She didn't know what Crimson was talking about.

"You never used to joke around before."

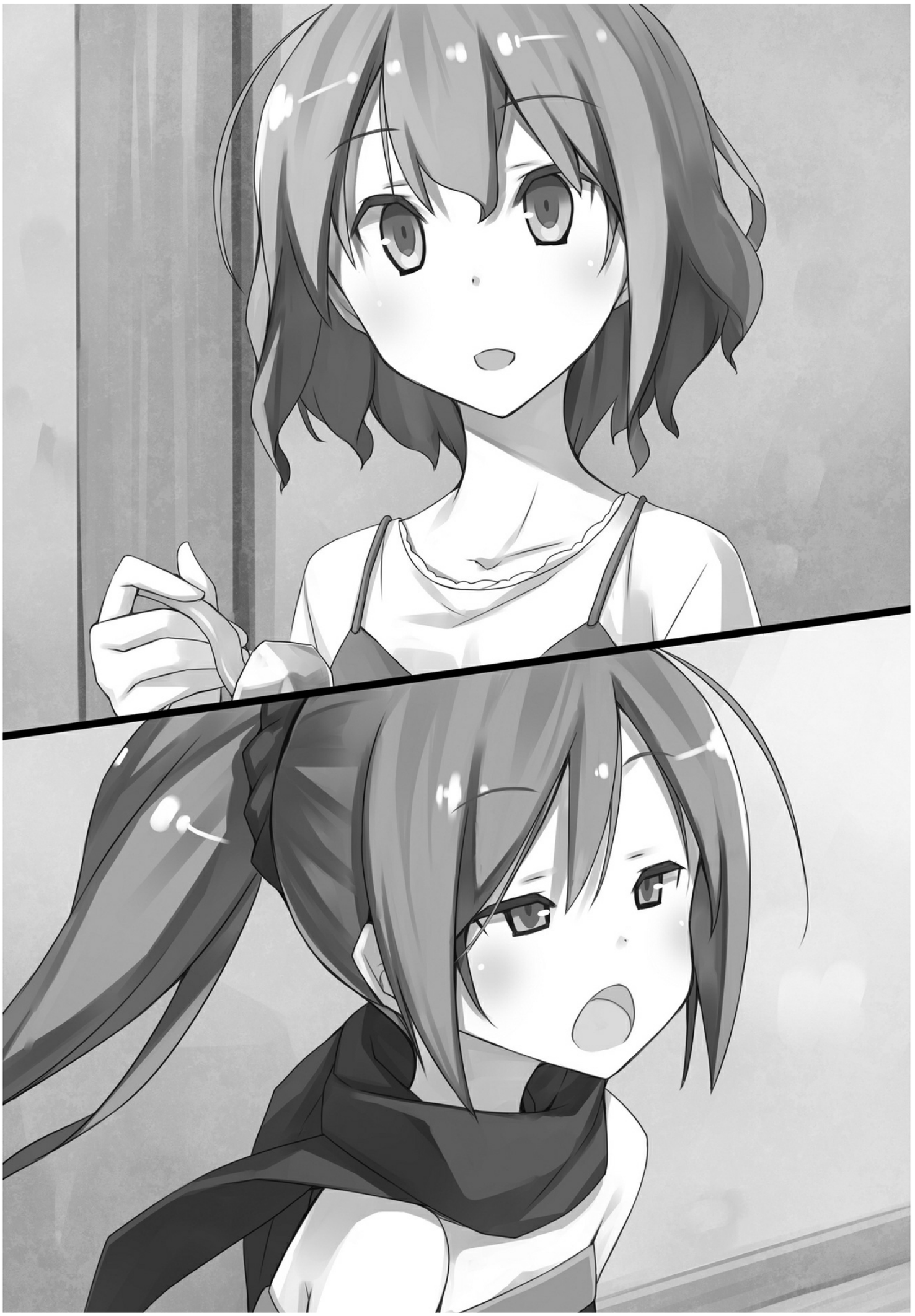
"Mm, you're right. I think that's thanks to Satomi-kun and the others."

She'd just joked about Crimson being a grandma because she needed help eating. When she stopped to think about it, she realized Crimson was right. It was something she never would have done in the past, but things like that were a daily occurrence in room 106. It was unquestionably the influence of Koutarou and the other girls.

"Then, really, you've finally gotten what you were looking for, huh?"

"I have. That's why I'm going to protect it until the end."

"Good. Make sure you keep it safe."



Crimson and Maki had gone their separate ways in life, but they still understood each other. It wasn't like they would suddenly turn hostile for no reason. Crimson was honestly happy for Maki, and vice versa.

"So, Crimson, how about you?"

"What, another interrogation?"

"No, not that. I'm asking if you got what you were looking for too. Did you have a satisfying fight?"

"Ah, well, I'd love to throw down now... But I did get to fight you, and the decisive battle with Rainbow Heart is near. I'll have nothing to complain about if I get to go up against Satomi Koutarou or Kasagi Shizuka."

"That would be troublesome for us, although I do personally hope you get what you want..."

"Tough spot to be in, isn't it?"

"It most certainly is. Having such a troublesome friend sure is a lot of work."

Just as Crimson wished for Maki's happiness, Maki wished for Crimson's. If fighting and getting stronger was her true desire, Maki wanted her to achieve it. It was simply unfortunate that, at the moment, that would mean Crimson and Maki butting heads.

"Actually, Crimson, on a related note... You're going to be moved soon."

"Moved? To where?"

"Folsaria. Keeping you here is just asking for Darkness Rainbow to attack. Besides, we'd be in a bit of trouble if you actually decided to put up a fight. That said, we can't ask for extra support here when Folsaria needs it more."

Even a fully prepared safehouse would be in trouble if Darkness Rainbow made a serious move on it. It would be much safer to move her to an actual Rainbow Heart base.

"That's fair," Crimson admitted with a wry smile and a shrug.

Moving, huh? Heh...

Despite the casual and joking gesture, there wasn't the slightest hint of a

smile in her eyes.

“Just take it easy until then. You’ve been quite busy lately, haven’t you, Crimson?”

“Yeah, that sounds good. I think I’ll do just that. Once I’m done eating, anyway.”

“Okay, okay. Now, say, ‘aah!’”

“Aah!”

However, Crimson’s eyes only remained sharp for a moment. She was quickly back to her usual self and started eating again. With Maki’s help, of course. Fighting wouldn’t come up again over dinner. The two girls spent the rest of the meal carefreely chatting away. It would have been impossible to tell they were actually enemies preparing for battle.

The Magical Kingdom of Folsaria

Saturday, September 18th

A few days after Crimson was captured, a careful plan was hatched to move her to Folsaria. The majority of the preparations actually fell on Folsaria—or Rainbow Heart, more specifically—concerning her imprisonment. There were all sorts of safeguards that had to be put in place to receive a leader of Darkness Rainbow.

As for the move, Yurika was put in charge of the operation. As a local operative of Rainbow Heart, it only made sense that they would assign her the responsibility of handling things since she was already involved. And as such, she was currently in the middle of a meeting with the transportation team from Folsaria at the safehouse.

“Koutarou, do you really think we’ll be okay with Yurika in charge?”

Sanae-chan stopped packing her backpack and cast an anxious look over at the busy Yurika. While Rainbow Heart saw her as an archwizard, Sanae-chan only saw her as Yurika... which was precisely why she was worried about her being put in a leadership role.

“D-Don’t say that, Sanae-chan! That’s rude!”

Sanae-san, however, reprimanded her for that. Sanae-san was Sanae’s more mature personality that had developed when her soul and body were split, but both she and Sanae-chan were still Sanae in the end... meaning Sanae-san was actually also concerned about Yurika being in charge.

“Don’t worry. At times like this, Yurika will be fine.”

However, Koutarou didn’t seem the slightest bit apprehensive about it. He knew they could count on Yurika because she always came through when it mattered. He’d seen it firsthand plenty of times already.

“That’s not the face you should be making when you say things are gonna be fine.”

Though Koutarou wasn’t worried about Yurika, something seemed to be

bothering him. Sanae-chan, who was sticking out of her body, could sense it clearly.

“Um, Sanae-chan... I don’t think Koutarou-san likes this kind of situations where Yurika has to get serious.”

“Huh... That’s heavy stuff, Koutarou.”

“...It’s not like it’s just Yurika.”

It was true; Koutarou was unhappy that any of the girls had to be doing this. Since moving Crimson would be dangerous, he as well as the nine invaders and a team from Rainbow Heart would be escorting her. Everyone knew what they were getting into was serious business, and no one was their usual cheerful self because of it.

“So Koutarou’s just worried about us...”

Having realized why Koutarou was acting this way, Sanae-chan smiled and happily flew over to him. Sanae-san was happy too of course, but her emotions showed differently—she was blushing slightly.

“It’s not that I’m worried. I know how strong you all are.”

“So you just don’t like us fighting?”

“No, I really don’t.”

Koutarou no longer had any intention of hiding that. He loved seeing the girls smiling and enjoying their everyday lives, and he hated anything that tore them away from that.

“So you’d rather go alone, huh?”

“Well, yeah... But I know that’s not possible.”

“Is it because you think you’re weak, Koutarou-san?”

“Yeah. In the end, it all comes down to that.”

Koutarou nodded and looked to Sanae-san with a bitter smile. She’d hit the nail on the head. If Koutarou were strong enough, the girls wouldn’t have to fight. That said, all the strength he did have came from them. He knew he couldn’t protect anyone by his own power alone, and that bothered him.

“Then let me tell you something wonderful,” Sanae-chan interjected, circling around Koutarou.

“Hmm?”

When Koutarou looked up, he saw a huge smile on Sanae-chan’s face.

“Playing pretend heroes is fun because it’s pretend.”

This was Sanae’s way of cheering him up. Sanae-chan and Sanae-san might express themselves differently, but they were ultimately of the same mind.

“Real heroes have it rough,” Sanae-san echoed.

“Playing pretend heroes is great because you can always stop. You can always just go home... Kabutonga couldn’t do that, could he?”

If there were real heroes in the world, their families would be under constant attack by the bad guys. That’s why heroes always had to hide their identities or leave their loved ones. Kabutonga, who Sanae-chan had brought up as an example, had no family because it was safer that way. Since he was completely alone, he didn’t have to worry about losing anyone. In that sense, he wasn’t all that much different from modern-day special agents.

But Koutarou was different. He had a home and a family. His loved ones—and their countless smiles—would always be awaiting his return. But they too had already been dragged into this conflict. He couldn’t just leave them behind. And Koutarou wasn’t some masked superhero; the enemy already knew his face. It would be pointless to try and hide his identity now. So with no other recourse, he and his loved ones only had one option. There was safety in numbers. They needed to rely on each other. They could work together, and with their combined strength, they would overcome.

In other words, Koutarou wasn’t a hero.

He could only dream of playing pretend. Dream of a world where heroes could safely clock out and go home to their families without worry. Of course, real villains would never let that happen.

“So you’re saying I’m just trying to play pretend hero? You two are pretty harsh...”

Koutarou smiled wryly. He thought they were right on the money. He'd only wanted the fanciful, convenient parts of being a hero without all the baggage and worry.

"Besides, didn't I tell you before? If you leave me behind again, I'll put you in a scorpion deathlock. So take me with you everywhere. Out of love, of course," Sanae-chan said with a boastful smile.

"The same as we share our happiness, we should share our pain. We're not playing pretend friendship..." Sanae-san said, folding her hands over her heart.

Seeing the both of them this way, Koutarou felt the tension leave his shoulders. Changing gears cold was difficult, but he knew they were right.

"Thanks, you two."

Thanks to them, the grim seriousness on Koutarou's face faded. Seeing that, the two Sanaes merged into one and leaned in towards him.

"You can thank me with lots of head pats."

When it came to head pats, Sanae thought it was more convenient to be one person.

"Okay, okay."

"Spoil me more."

The same was true for hugs. Not satisfied with just being pat on the head, Sanae wrapped her arms around Koutarou and embraced him.

"I'm always in your debt, Lady Sanae."

"I know, heeehee. Now do it again, even more intense and passionate for Sanae-san!"

"Okay, okay."

"U-Um, I'm sorry, Koutarou-san..."

"It's fine."

Koutarou hugged Sanae with one arm and patted her head with the other. He realized that she'd probably been feeling anxious too.

That anxiety was perfectly natural considering the situation. It really had nothing to do with Yurika being in charge; it was because moving Crimson would be dangerous. Making it from the safehouse in Kisshouharukaze City to the passage leading to Folsaria would be no problem with Blue Knight, but after that... They were headed into unfamiliar territory and there was a good chance they'd be attacked by the enemy. They'd been briefed on everything they needed to know about the Magical Kingdom of Folsaria, but there were still uneasy. So much so that it trumped any apprehensions they had about Yurika's leadership.

"Veltlion, there doesn't seem to be any disconnect here."

"Which means it really does lead to a different world, huh?"

"So it would seem. Really, anything goes with magic, doesn't it...?"

The passage leading to the Magical Kingdom of Folsaria lay in the less populated suburbs of Kisshouharukaze City. It was a permanent portal made from powerful magic, and as long as permission was granted, anyone could use it to travel back and forth between Folsaria and Kisshouharukaze City. Since permanent passages like these were often targeted for their strategic value, both Rainbow Heart and Darkness Rainbow preferred setting them up in out-of-the-way locations.

The portal led directly to Folsaria much the same way Theia's gate in room 106 led directly to Blue Knight. There was one major difference, however. The target destination could be seen through the portal. Using Blue Knight's transfer gate was like walking through a glowing green wall, but there was nothing like that with a portal. It was sort of like a magical door that was always open, meaning you could easily see what was on the other side. It also meant you could have something running through it—like cables, for example. It was quite unlike Forthorthian gates in that regard, leaving Clan particularly enthralled with it.

"By the way, Clan-san, why are you putting a cable through the portal?"

Shizuka watched Clan working with her head cocked to the side. She couldn't understand why Clan, who was always wireless, now suddenly needed a cable for something.

“Radio waves and gravitational waves won’t reach a mystical world that might as well be another dimension, so I’m pulling a cable through so we can have a relay station on the Folsarian side.”

As she explained, Clan held up a metallic box. It was a homemade relay device with all manner of cables and circuits visible, and it was what she would be using in Folsaria to keep them connected to their technology in Kisshouharukaze City.

“Oh, I get it. It’s like one of those thingies you can buy that helps you get a better signal for your cellphone when you’re underground or out in the country or whatever.”

“Yes, that’s right.”

Technologically, it was out of Shizuka’s league, but she got the idea. She then began helping Clan with her work.

“So we only need to connect this box and this cable, right?”

“Go ahead and plug it in if you would, Shizuka.”

“Okay.”

Clan was setting up a relay station because she was quite certain they would eventually be attacked. In other words, because she was feeling uneasy. It wasn’t just her and Sanae, either. All the other girls felt the same way. Kiriha, for example...

“If this place is attacked, Theia-dono and the others will be at a severe disadvantage, so make sure you work together with the Rainbow Heart operatives to keep it safe. If something goes wrong, contact me.”

“Understood, Kiriha-sama! We will protect this place with our lives.”

“I’m counting on you.”

Kiriha had brought a group of her subordinates with her. Their mission was to protect the portal and relay station. If they failed, they would lose their connection to Theia and Clan’s ships, and a good deal of their firepower along with it. They were bringing equipment and weapons with them to Folsaria in the event of an emergency, but they wouldn’t be able to use their usual flashy

attacks. So in order to stay in top shape, protecting the portal and relay station was a vital mission.

Kiriha had also left additional troops stationed at the apartment. Rainbow Heart was lending aid as well, and several magical girls from other regions would be rendezvousing there. With their combined forces, room 106 should be well protected while Koutarou and company were gone.

Harumi, meanwhile, was worried about something else altogether.

“By the way, Maki-san, will you really be all right going to Rainbow Heart’s base?”

She was worried about Maki’s wellbeing because of her status as a former member of Darkness Rainbow. She had no idea what things would be like in Folsaria for her. Concerned for her friend, Harumi leaned over and whispered to Maki so that the Rainbow Heart agents around couldn’t hear.

“I’ll be okay. It seems like the negotiations went well. Besides, this collar is working out in my favor. But thank you for worrying about me, Sakuraba-san,” Maki whispered back to her with a smile.

“I’m glad...”

Hearing that, Harumi looked relieved.

In reality, they had already come to an agreement with the higher-ups of Rainbow Heart. While it was true that Maki had been part of Darkness Rainbow, she would be receiving immunity in exchange for her cooperation with Rainbow Heart. Mostly, they wanted Maki’s talent and information. Moreover, the collar she wore made them feel better about trusting her. Koutarou and the others knew that there was no way Maki would betray them, but they needed a guarantee for other people to believe it. That guarantee was the collar, which was supposed to keep her in line.

Officially, Maki was a captive in Yurika’s care, and as long as she continued to cooperate, she would be allowed to go free when this was all over. In order to keep her status as the former Dark Navy from affecting Folsarian morale, however, that was being mostly kept under wraps for now. As a result, none of the Rainbow Heart team felt any hostility towards Maki. If anything, they were

more suspicious of Theia and Kiriha.

“Your Highness, it’s about time.”

“Very well... Men, are you prepared?”

Hearing Ruth’s report, Theia stood up and looked around. She was already wearing her Combat Dress. This time, however, she didn’t have the heavy-duty firepower accessory Assault Red equipped. Since there was a chance they might end up losing the relay station, she’d chosen Command Green instead.

As its name suggested, Command Green was a commander’s best friend. It would improve her ability to lead by assisting with things like intelligence gathering. In exchange, it was outfitted with weapons that consumed less energy and ammunition. It would be the optimal equipment in the event her connection to Blue Knight was severed. Theia was thinking ahead. She wasn’t about to underestimate her enemy.

“It seems everyone is ready, then.”

Ruth confirmed that all preparations had been complete, and switched her own armor over from standby to cruise mode. She was wearing a powered suit much like Koutarou’s, but hers had a focus on defense rather than offense and made it easier for her to control her automatic weaponry. In other words, it was the perfect match for her. It would keep her safe whether she entered the fray with her beam swords or hung back to operate automated weaponry.

“Good. Now, Yurika, brief us before we leave.”

“Okay.”

Yurika stepped to the front of the group at Theia’s request. In addition to Koutarou and the other invaders, there were also Rainbow Heart agents and Kiriha’s subordinates present. All told, it was a couple dozen people. And Yurika boldly stood before them without even flinching.

“Our mission today is to transfer the captive leader of Darkness Rainbow, Dark Crimson, to Rainbow Heart’s base in Folsaria,” she said in an unfaltering voice.

She wasn’t showing any sign at all of her usual meekness or nervousness. As a

result, even though she looked the same as always, she gave off a completely different impression. This was Yurika, archwizard of Rainbow Heart.

“However, don’t think of this as a normal transport mission. The success or failure of this operation will affect the outcome of the battle ahead. Don’t take it lightly.”

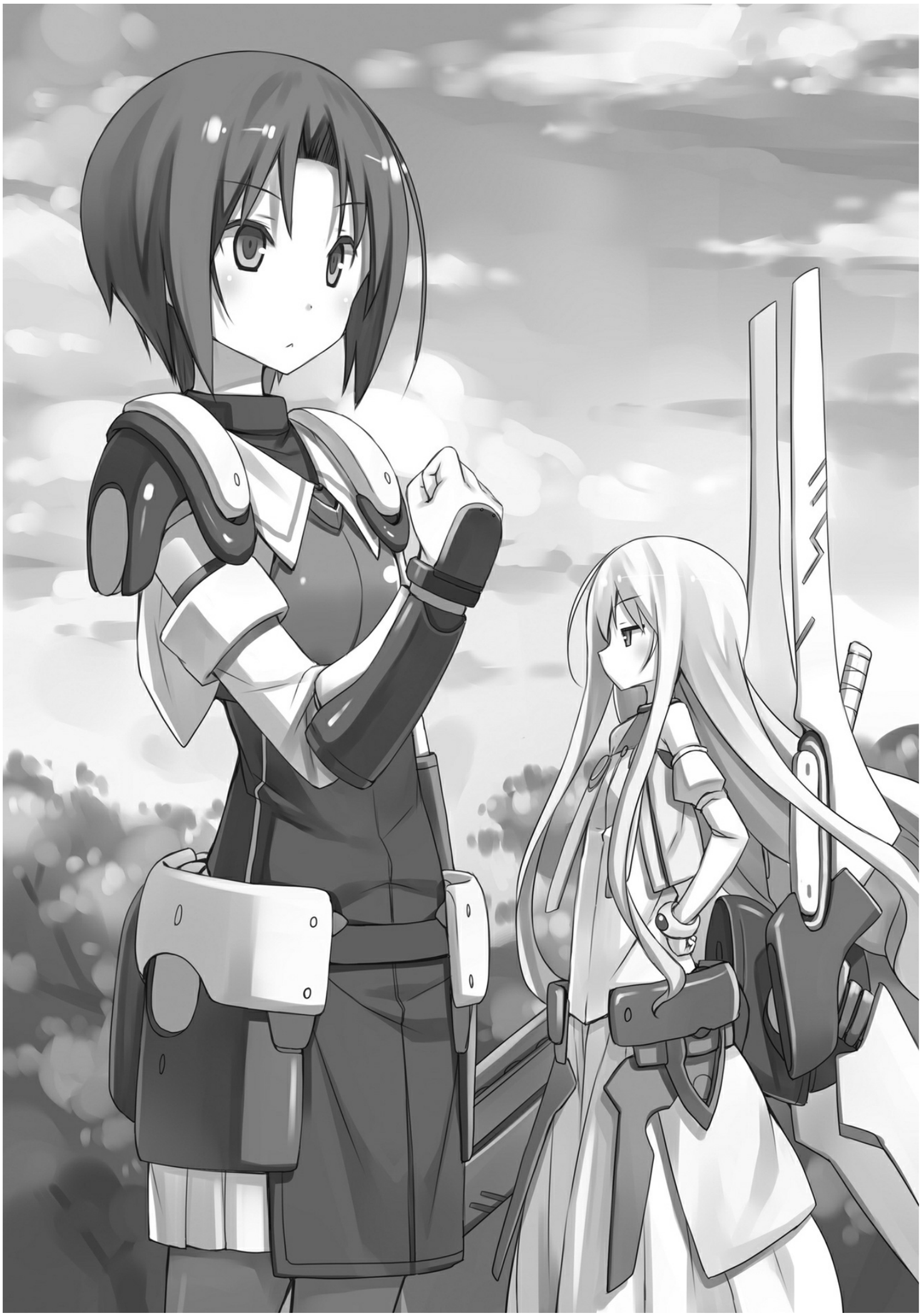
Yurika continued with her briefing. And at least for now, she really and truly looked like a leader. Seeing it, however, Koutarou couldn’t help feeling uneasy.

I know people’s lives are on the line, so this is how it has to be, but... it really doesn’t suit Yurika...

Considering the importance of the mission, Yurika taking charge and keeping it together was a good thing. But Yurika simply wasn’t cut out for this line of work. She was playing her part right now because she had to. Really, she was forcing herself. That’s why Koutarou wanted to help her and end this as quickly as possible. He wanted Rainbow Yurika to be able to go back to being regular old Nijino Yurika. So one way or another, Yurika’s briefing did a good job of motivating everyone.

“...Prepare for difficulty at every turn. Don’t let your guard down, even when you near the finish line. Don’t give up when faced with hardship. Work together with your allies to overcome and complete the mission, please... and thank you all. Now, let’s begin the mission! I wish everyone the best of luck!”

Once Yurika’s briefing came to an end, everyone moved simultaneously. They all understood their roles and knew what they had to do. In order to protect the lives of many, now was the time to act.



Folsaria's sky was a little greener than Earth's. The atmosphere was different, and there were all kinds of plants Koutarou and the others had never seen before. They truly felt like they'd walked into a different world the moment they stepped through the portal.

"So this is the Magical Kingdom of Folsaria..."

Koutarou surveyed the area. They were surrounded by dense forest, and were standing in front of a stone building erected in a glade. This was where the portal was kept on the Folsarian side.

What is this? I feel like I've seen something like this building before...

To most of the group, the building was just as unfamiliar as their surroundings. But Koutarou felt a sense of deja vu when he saw it and cocked his head quizzically. He'd never been to Folsaria before, but this was strangely familiar to him.

"This is interesting, Blue Knight."

"What is?"

But before Koutarou could put his finger on it, Alunaya called out to him and he quickly put it out of his mind. Surely it just reminded him of something he'd seen in a movie.

"The density of mana here is far more concentrated than in your world."

"Then does that mean my weight—?!" exclaimed Shizuka.

"It's currently dropping rapidly."

"All right!"

It seemed the differences in Folsaria weren't just aesthetic. The natural mana here was thicker, and its abundance meant that magicians could recover their magic faster than in Kisshouharukaze City. Alunaya was feeling its effects already, and was quickly recovering the mana he'd spent in the battle with Darkness Rainbow the other day. At this rate, Shizuka would be back down to her ideal weight by the end of the day.

"Then will you be able to use some amazing spells?"

Koutarou was imagining a supercharged version of Alunaya's plasma breath capable of incinerating just about anything.

"No, the potency of my magic won't change. It's similar to how you wouldn't be able to drink more water just because you were sitting next to a lake."

"I see..."

"Of course, since I don't need to hold back, I might be able to use something a little stronger than normal."

Alas, Koutarou's imagination had gotten the better of him. Alunaya couldn't cast or use anything more extraordinary than usual. The amount of mana one could manipulate depended on their skill as a magician, and that didn't change between Folsaria and Earth. That said, the dense natural mana here would allow him to recover faster than normal, meaning that even though he couldn't cast better spells, he could cast them more frequently.

"Who cares?! The important part is that my weight is returning to normal! Aah, if only we'd come here sooner!"

Shizuka's current weight was roughly 98 kilograms and dropping. She wanted it back down into the forties, so this was a most celebratory development as far she was concerned.

"But... the denseness of the mana here is directly connected with people wanting to freely use magic."

In contrast to the rejoicing Shizuka, Maki looked a little sad. The natural mana in Folsaria meant that a single magician could cast exponentially more spells here than they could on Earth. And that had been the cause of their misfortune.

Crimson laughed when she heard Maki's lament. But that was about all she could do; she was currently bound physically by handcuffs and rope, and magically by several spells.

"Say what you want. This little country would have fallen into ruin even without magic. We needed it just to get by."

The soil in Folsaria wasn't very fertile, so the people were dependent on magic to survive. Because of that, status and income were directly affected by

the strength of one's magic. That inevitably created a disparity between those that could use magic and those that couldn't. It also paved the way for the rise of people who were willing to abuse magic. In other words, the abundant mana and severe environment here in Folsaria had given rise to Darkness Rainbow.

"It doesn't have to be like that anymore. The time to return power to the weak is coming."

"I'm surprised you can say something like that when you can control so much mana yourself, Rainbow."

Crimson objected to what Yurika said, but she obediently got into the vehicle that was waiting for them in front of the building. She knew that it was pointless to oppose with more than just words for now.

Cars were widespread even in the Magical Kingdom of Folsaria, although they were somewhat unique in design. Folsarian cars were modeled after Earth ones, but because Folsaria was rather behind in terms of technology, they largely relied on magic to work. Their engines were magical and they used mana as fuel.

In short, they used magic to make up for what they lacked in technology and other resources. As a result, Folsarian cars were about on par with Earth cars made several decades ago. But operating magically had its merits, too. Folsarian cars were quiet and pollution free. So while they didn't work quite as well, they were much better for the environment.

Koutarou and company got in to some of these mysterious cars and headed for the capital of the Magical Kingdom of Folsaria, Thorthe. In all, they were divided between three vehicles. The lead car was carrying the strong and tough Shizuka, as well as Sanae and Clan who had the ability to detect danger. The middle car was carrying Crimson, as well as Maki to keep her in line and Theia to keep her restrained if need be. They also had the quick-witted Kiriha with them in case anything went wrong. The caboose was carrying the rest of the group—Koutarou and Harumi who worked as a team with Signaltin; Ruth who was in charge of information gathering; and their commander for this operation, Yurika. It was a rather balanced arrangement that would allow them to efficiently respond to all kinds of situations.

“It looks like we’ll reach the city safely at this rate.”

Harumi smiled in relief when she could see the capital on the horizon through the windshield. Their trip had passed uneventfully so far, and they were most of the way to Rainbow Heart’s base. It seemed highly unlikely that Darkness Rainbow would risk attacking now.

“It’s probably thanks to Kiriha-san’s plan,” Koutarou replied with a smile.

Kiriha had come up with a clever countermeasure to safeguard them from Green’s divination abilities. She sketched out several routes they might take to reach Rainbow Heart’s base, but didn’t decide on one. Instead, just as they were about to leave, Kiriha rolled a die to determine the route they’d take. As a result, the way they moved was essentially chosen at random, meaning all possible options would appear to Green with equal probability. That would make it impossible for her to know where they’d be ahead of time since the decision wasn’t made until the last minute.

That being the case, the most logical thing for Darkness Rainbow to do was find an ideal spot to lie in wait. With all else equal, an ambush would be their best shot at recapturing Crimson. Of course, that was *if* recapturing Crimson was their goal.

“We can’t let our guard down yet. The real danger is potentially up ahead.”

Unlike Koutarou and Harumi, Yurika wore a stiff expression. As they approached the city, the routes would slowly begin merging since there were only two ways to enter the city: the north and south gates. It would be an incredibly dangerous move when they were this close to Rainbow Heart’s base, but it wasn’t out of the question that Darkness Rainbow might still attack.

“You’re right. Sorry, Yurika.”

“I’m sorry, Yurika-san.”

“No, don’t be.”

Yurika didn’t blame Koutarou and Harumi for being hopeful. She shook her head and then turned to the window. The real question right now was if Darkness Rainbow was hiding somewhere out there.

If Yurika is being this cautious, Dark Green might avoid attacking... But if I tell Yurika that, that might inadvertently increase the odds of them attacking... This future forecast business really is a pain...

Koutarou turned to look out the window as well. They were getting closer and closer to the city by the minute. And once they finally pulled in, he overheard Theia radio Clan via her bracelet.

"...Clan, can you hear me?"

"What is it, Theiamillis-san?"

Neither one of them sounded like anything was wrong, so Koutarou listened in casually without worry.

"Could you take a look outside the car?"

"Outside...? Why?"

"Well... I was just thinking this cityscape looks a lot like Forthorthe's."

"What?"

Theia's words got Clan's attention. She'd been fixated on operating her scouting drones flying overhead, but suddenly looked up with great interest. Outside was the Folsarian capital of Thorthe.

"You're right... But it's more like the millennia-old ruins than anything modern."

"So you think so too?"

"Yes. What an interesting coincidence."

There, the conversation caught Koutarou's attention as well.

Millennia-old ruins?

Since they'd only just entered the city, Koutarou hadn't realized it yet, but he saw it as soon as Theia pointed it out. Looking at the buildings, they did indeed feel similar to the ones he'd seen in Forthorthe. But that wasn't modern Forthorthe at all; it was Forthorthe two thousand years in the past.

Ah, so that's why I felt like I'd seen it before...

He now realized why he'd gotten a sense of deja vu upon seeing that building when they'd exited the portal. Folsarian architecture was similar to what had been used in old Forthorthe, so he was reminded of the time he'd spent there.

"There are actually cities similar to this on Earth too," remarked Kiriha.

"It's possible similar styles arise under similar environmental conditions, Kii," replied Clan.

"I'd like more originality in alien civilizations... How disappointing."

However, Koutarou regarded the similarity as nothing more than a coincidence. It wasn't like the buildings were identical, and they had far more pressing things on their minds for now. The transport mission to move Crimson still wasn't over yet.

In the end, the attack Yurika had been on the lookout for never happened. They all reached their destination without incident.

Rainbow Heart had a total of eight facilities within the capital of Thorthe, all spread out to protect the city. They had seven bases, one for each color of magic, in a wide circle around their headquarters, which was next to the castle. At the center of the rainbow, it was quite true to Rainbow Heart's name.

For now, Koutarou and company were headed to the Blue Tower. That was where they were taking Crimson. They couldn't keep a dangerous terrorist like her right next to the palace, so she would be held in one of the outer bases.

The Blue Tower was the base for the Blue Magic Division, of which Yurika was the archwizard. That made her the highest-ranking magician there, so apart from the base commander, she was at the top of the totem pole. And it showed, for when she entered the base, people began saluting her one after another. It had embarrassed her in the past, but she walked with her head held high now. Her strong sense of purpose drove her forward, and her everyday concerns seemed very far away right now. Upon entering the tower's audience hall, Yurika approached an old woman with a salute.

"Kaera-sama! Nijino Yurika reporting on the success of the Dark Crimson transport operation," she declared.

"Good work, Rainbow," the old woman replied as she returned her salute.

This was Kaera, the base commander. She was also a civil officer who held a position similar to that of an elder. There was an elder for each base, and the seven of them often held meetings. They were the supreme decision-making body in Folsaria, making Kaera a rare figure of authority.

“Well done on completing your mission.”

“It wasn’t me. It was all thanks to my friends and comrades.”

Yurika adored Kaera. She was always kind and had helped guide Yurika down the right path. Yurika loved her like her own grandmother.

“You have some wonderful friends, then.”

“Yes! But Kaera-sama... we’ll have to talk later. I still haven’t completely fulfilled my duties.”

“Ah, yes, of course. My apologies for sidetracking you.”

“Once I’m done, I will return to make my report.”

“I’ll be waiting.”

Yurika loved Kaera, but she was unfortunately in no position to sit down and catch up with her. There was still work to be done—taking Crimson to her cell. So after one more salute, Yurika turned around and exited the hall.

“My, my. It seems Nana made the right decision after all...” Kaera muttered to herself as she watched Yurika go.

When Nana had first nominated Yurika to be her successor, Kaera had objected. No matter how much she liked Yurika, she wasn’t cut out for fighting. But nevertheless, it seemed things had worked out. Yurika was now boldly standing at the forefront of an important mission, leading a powerful group of allies she’d collected on her own. Seeing this rather unexpected result, Kaera felt like it was the coming of a new age.

“And that’s the Blue Knight, hmm?”

Next, Kaera’s eyes fell on Koutarou, who was walking next to Yurika. She’d already received a report on Yurika’s allies, and Koutarou had piqued her interest most of all. His appearance and fighting style were very similar to the Arbiter that appeared in the legends passed down amongst the elders.

“He’s certainly not the Arbiter himself, but a very similar knight has appeared to us just before the decisive battle against Darkness Rainbow... Surely this was meant to be...”

Kaera felt the gears of fate turning when she saw Koutarou and Yurika together. After all, a powerful magician stood at the Arbiter’s side in the legends as well. It gave her hope. Hope she desperately needed, because more than just Folsaria was at stake.

Raid

Sunday, September 19th

Darkness Rainbow leaving Crimson behind as a decoy in the battle for room 106 the other day was a last resort. Since each member prioritized their own safety, nobody would willingly sacrifice themselves for one another. In other words, despite how much Crimson loved fighting and despite the fact that she would make the best decoy since she was already injured, it was a role she'd never play without some kind of insurance. That insurance was knowing that the rest of Darkness Rainbow would rescue her. So while it meant taking a certain amount of risks, Darkness Rainbow had no choice but to agree to said terms and rescue Crimson, and it had been decided that Dark Green would be heading the operation.

Just hang in there a little longer, Crimson...

Dark Green, however, probably would have undertaken the mission even if she weren't told to do so. Though she wouldn't admit it, Green thought of Crimson as more than just an ally in Darkness Rainbow. Perhaps it was simply because they'd spent so much time together, but she'd started to feel something of the bonds of friendship with Crimson. And thanks to that, Green was in high spirits. This wasn't just any ordinary mission, after all—she was going to rescue a friend. And Green wanted her back no matter what. In the future she wanted to see, Crimson was indispensable.

"As expected, our chances of being able to rescue her are higher now that she's been moved."

Green was watching the Blue Tower where Crimson was being held from an elevated position in the suburbs. From there, she used several spells to gather information that would help her come up with the most reliable plan.

At first, Darkness Rainbow had three options in rescuing Crimson. They could make their move either before, during, or after Crimson's relocation. Trusting in her abilities, Green had chosen the latter: rescuing Crimson after she was transferred to Folsaria. Before the transfer, Rainbow Heart was on the move

too much; it made the future difficult to read. Green would personally be involved in an ambush if they attacked during the transfer, which skewed her predictions courtesy of a feedback loop. And with those options out of the question, the most reliable plan of action was waiting until the transfer had been completed.

“Crimson’s definitely being held in there...”

Green’s spells were steadily gathering information for her, and confirmed most of her suspicions. Crimson was being held in a room that blocked magic. Normal scrying magic wouldn’t be able to see into it, but Green had a special workaround with her future forecast. There were several cells in the tower outfitted to contain magicians, and Green’s forecasts were split between the top of the tower and its basement. Considering the traffic in the building, however, the odds were slightly higher Crimson was being kept at the top. Moreover, the spiritual energy sensor that she’d brought with her from the underground was picking up a weak reaction to Crimson’s aura on the top floor. It had an estimated accuracy of about 60 percent at this range, which was just about what her future forecast estimated the odds of Crimson being at the top of the tower were. The chances of them both being wrong, however, were only about 15 percent. Judging by that, Green determined that Crimson was indeed being held at the top of the tower.

“We would’ve had a hard time with this rescue in the past, but... we’re different now.”

Green used the portable computer on her arm to give orders to the automated weapons she had stationed nearby. They were a combination of spiritual energy and Forthorthian technology, so they didn’t emit any mana whatsoever. She also had cloaked drones that flew through the air without making a sound. Between those and her own magic, it wouldn’t be hard to fly under Rainbow Heart’s radar.

“Just hang in there, Crimson. I’m coming to save you right now!”

Dark Green had a tragic past. She’d once lost something very important to her because of a lack of foresight. And it was her goal as a member of Darkness Rainbow to make sure that never happened again. That’s why she was

determined to save Crimson no matter what.

Yurika never started fights. No, they were more so something she got dragged into. And when it happened, she would do her desperate best to defend herself so she could return to her everyday life in peace. That was always how things had been up until now. This would be the first time ever she was initiating the offensive, and that was just a sign of how serious the situation was. How cornered she felt. It wasn't something she wanted to be doing, and so despite her determination, there were still moments her confidence wavered. This was one of them.

"..."

Yurika was eating dinner at the Blue Tower, but neither her mouth nor her hands were moving. She was simply staring into her bowl while holding her spoon. She wasn't really looking at the soup, however. Her mind was elsewhere.

"Yurika, aren't you going to eat?"

"Satomi-san...?"

Yurika was so spaced out that she didn't realize Koutarou had come in until he said something to her. When she looked up, she saw him sitting across from her, eating his own dinner.

"Are you nervous?" he asked.

"Y-Yes... I'm so worried about what's going to happen next..." she admitted.

Between the nerves and her fretting over the future, Yurika was nearly paralyzed. While she'd grown and matured a great deal over the past year, this would still be the first fight she'd ever taken charge in. For the first time in her life, each and every one of her decisions would affect the lives of real people—and a lot of them. Before now, the enemy had always come after her and not the other way around. Her hand was always forced in some way, which made what she needed to do quite clear. She only had to focus on what was right in front of her, the immediate problem. But this was different. She had to think bigger and long-term. The looming consequences were far greater, and that pressure weighed heavily on her. It had completely seized her.

“I thought so.”

“You noticed?”

“Yeah. It’s only normal for a commander on their first campaign.”

Koutarou shrugged and cracked a smile at Yurika’s question. He’d felt something very similar when he first took to the battlefield in past Forthorthe.

“If you make the wrong decision, people will pay the price with their lives. Who wouldn’t freeze up in that position? Everyone feels the same way before a big battle. Except for those who don’t put any value on human life, that is.”

Maxfern, Dextro, and Tayuma probably hadn’t given it a second thought, but any commander with half a heart would. The thought that you might be sending your own allies to their deaths was terrifying. And that terror was all consuming for first-time commanders.

“You too, Satomi-san?”

“Yeah, I was scared my first time too. They were all such good people, earnest about protecting their country... and a single word from me could’ve gotten them all killed. So, yeah, I know exactly how you feel.”

Koutarou had had the legends of Forthorthe to go off of as a reference, but he’d only had himself to rely on in the heat of the moment. The decisions he made in combat were his, and he’d had his successes and failures. There were plenty of battles he would gladly redo if he had the chance.

“So what should I do, Satomi-san?”

“Don’t try to do anything special.”

“What do you mean?”

“Like... don’t try and do everything yourself. That’s a common mistake.”

When your allies are in danger, it’s human nature to want to leap headlong into the fray and rescue them yourself. It seems like the right choice in the moment—it *feels* like the right thing to do—but it isn’t. A commander needs to remain a constant figure, and battle is an ever-evolving playing field. You can’t just change the plan at every turn, and rushing into danger yourself might compromise everything—a cost that would be paid in blood.

“Just trust in your allies and do what you always do. That’s for the best.”

Trying to carry too great a burden alone makes your allies hesitate as well. That’s why acting like normal was the safest way to ensure things went smoothly. And while that may sound obvious, it was all too simple to forget when the lives of so many were at stake. It was one of the many reasons Koutarou thought war was so horrible.

“If I was the strongest magical girl in history, nobody would have to fight...”

Listening to Koutarou, Yurika stared down at the palms of her hands. If she possessed earthshattering power, she could fight this battle entirely on her own. But because she didn’t, her friends would all put themselves in danger to help her. It made her feel helpless and bitter.

“Yeah, I think the same thing every day. If I was an invincible hero, you and the other girls would never have to fight again.”

“Satomi-san...”

Koutarou flashed a dry grin. Again, he knew exactly how Yurika felt. And that surprised her. She’d convinced herself that someone like Koutarou would have no idea what she was going through.

“But you know... When I told her that, Sanae said something interesting to me.”

As he spoke, Koutarou’s dry grin began to soften into a genuine, kind smile.

“Sanae-chan did?”

“Playing hero is fun because it’s all pretend, but being a real hero is hard.”

“It’s fun... because it’s pretend...?”

“Just think about it a little. If you were really the strongest magical girl in history, what would’ve happened when we met?”

“If I were really the strongest magical girl in history...”

Yurika reimagined what her life with Koutarou and the others would have been like if she were that strong. For starters, she probably wouldn’t have flown in through the window that night. She also would’ve been able to stop the

Corona House brawl without anyone realizing it. She would've won the obstacle marathon on her own, prevented Sanae from getting kidnapped by the ghost hunters, and even put a stop to Clan's sabotage before it posed any real danger. On the surface, those all sounded like wonderful things, but...

"I would have been able to handle everything on my own, but... I would probably still be alone..."

A Yurika that strong never would have needed help. She would have resolved all of the strange incidents surrounding room 106 alone, meaning Koutarou and the others never would have had the chance to come to terms with each other and learn to cooperate. They never would've had to. Yurika might have even kicked them all out of room 106 from the start to keep them out of danger, and that would have been the end of that.

"That's right. It's because you're imperfect that we all had the opportunity to come to know each other and treasure each other. I don't think super strong Yurika would have felt so strongly about us."

"So I came to treasure everyone because I was weak..."

"It wasn't just you. It was like that for everyone."

"Everyone else too? You might be right..."

Convinced, Yurika nodded her head.

"And if you suddenly became the strongest magical girl in history now, the enemy wouldn't be fighting you. They're smart enough to pick their battles. They'd be coming after us or attacking the city."

"That's why we play pretend. I... I really only wanted the convenient parts of being a super magical girl..."

It was precisely because Yurika wasn't the strongest magical girl in history that she'd been able to bond with Koutarou and the others. It wouldn't have happened any other way. And even if she became the strongest magical girl in history now, she still wouldn't be able to fight alone. The enemy would come for the precious friends she'd made. It turned out that reality wasn't anything like playing pretend.

“So, Yurika, what do you think we should do?”

“Um... grow strong together and work together to defeat the bad guys?”

In the end, Yurika reached the same conclusion Koutarou had. Anyone could do heroic things from time to time, but truly being a hero was a sad, lonely life. Yurika didn’t want that, so she knew that she alone couldn’t be strong. She needed to get stronger with her friends, and it would be through friendship that they could overcome anything. Yurika believed that that would ultimately be the safest thing for everyone.

“I think so too.”

“Ah...”

When Koutarou agreed with her, Yurika was relieved. She’d come to the right answer. Her expression relaxed a little, and Koutarou continued...

“That’s why you should believe in us. Nobody expects perfection from you. We accept that we’re all imperfect. That’s why we work so hard together.”

Sanae threatened to put him in a scorpion deathlock if he left her again. Harumi vowed to stand by his side. Kiriha embraced his weakness. Theia and Ruth swore to make him happy, even if they had to use force. Maki prayed for him. Shizuka was there for him whenever he grieved his lack of power. And Clan had worried about her own imperfections right alongside him in the past.

They were all in this together, embracing each other in spite of their imperfections—no, because of their imperfections. And in that sense, they shunned perfection. Someone who was perfect didn’t need anyone else. Like all-powerful gods, they towered over other people. They were larger than life, meaning there was no room—certainly no need—for anyone else in their lives. And that wasn’t what Koutarou and the girls wanted. They would gladly choose friendship over perfection.

“Satomi-san...”

Coming together and doing their best in spite of their flaws felt right to Yurika. It was what she wanted from Koutarou and the other girls, and it was what they wanted for her.

“You’re right. It’s hard... but I’ll try to think that way.”

Even though she knew it was only normal to be imperfect, it was hard to shake her desire to be a hero. But Yurika began wishing that she would eventually feel that way. An easy way out was different from a true solution.

“That’s fine. I’m still trying to convince myself, too.”

“Ahaha.”

A smile finally bloomed on Yurika’s lips, and she wiped away the tears that had started forming in the corners of her eyes.

“Thank you very much, Satomi-san. I feel a little better.”

She was allowed to rely on her allies. She could rely on Koutarou and the others, and the soldiers too. None of them were perfect, but they would be giving it their all. They didn’t need heroes; they had each other. Or... maybe that *was* what made them real heroes in the end. But it didn’t really matter so long as they were together. Having finally reached her answer, Yurika felt a great weight slip from her shoulders.

“So eat up. You’re not gonna accomplish anything on an empty stomach.”

Seeing Yurika’s smile, Koutarou also felt relieved and cracked a smile

“Right!”

And there, Yurika chowed down. It was strange. She’d hardly been able to get a bite down before, but the food tasted great now. She figured that was the difference that not being alone made, and happily shoveled spoonful after spoonful of soup into her mouth.

“Hey, Satomi-san.”

“Hmm?”

“Want my green peppers?”

“Eat them yourself.”

“But one of my flaws is that I don’t like green peppers! You have to help me!”

A loud thud reverberated through the dining hall.

“Just shut up and eat ’em!”

“Okaaay... Hngh, I’m sorry for saying something stupid.”

Getting hit by Koutarou hurt, but it was something a perfect Yurika never would’ve gotten to experience. So imperfect Yurika decided to count her blessings.

As dinner continued, things Yurika disliked began piling up on the plate. She was happily pushing them aside to make room for the things she did like. In other words, she was saving the worst for last. Maybe through some stroke of luck she wouldn’t end up having to eat them after all. Typical Yurika.

Ugh, this is what I get for cheering her up!

Koutarou began thinking of ways to get Yurika to eat her vegetables, but before he could put any of his plans into action...

BOOM!

“Kyaaah!”

“Wh-What was that?!”

There was a loud, roaring boom and the entire Blue Tower shook violently. It felt like a lightning bolt and an earthquake had struck the tower at the same time. Tables and chairs were upturned, sending plates, silverware, and food flying everywhere. There was only the one rumble, however, so Koutarou braced himself against the sturdy wall and quickly got back on his feet.

“Yurika, are you okay?!”

“Y-Yes, somehow!”

Koutarou ran over to Yurika and helped her up too. She was covered in green peppers, carrots, and celery, but she didn’t seem to be badly hurt.

“But just what is— Ah!”

Yurika had landed hard on her butt and was a little bruised up, but her expression only turned sharp when she stood up. It suddenly dawned on her what all the commotion might be.

“Let’s go, Yurika!”

“Right!”

The dynamic between Koutarou and Yurika was suddenly different. They were no longer roommates goofing around over dinner. No, as they sprinted away to face the danger ahead, they were a legendary knight and an archwizard.

The explosion had taken place just outside the Blue Tower, and the culprit was a guided missile that Dark Green had gotten from Elexis. The warhead, which had been designed to concentrate the explosion forward, easily punched through the magic barrier and the outer stone wall of the tower. And it just so happened that Crimson was directly on the other side of it.

“Hack, ack... G-Green!”

“Crimson! I’m glad you’re okay!”

Crimson was in the midst of a coughing fit thanks to all the dust kicked up by the explosion, but appeared to be fine otherwise. Seeing that she was unharmed, Green unwittingly teared up. She was the only one who’d deeply regretted not being able to bring Crimson home during the last battle.

“Don’t— Ack! Don’t give me that! Hack, ack... Who would do that? Firing a missile—hack—straight at where your ally’s being held... Wh-What would you have done if it’d killed me?!”

Crimson was tearing up as well, but it was mostly from the smoke in her eyes. It was bad enough that she was having a hard time breathing, too. But that’s not to say she wasn’t happy to see Green.

“It’s fine. I verified the outcome with my future forecast.”

“Oh yeah? And what were the odds of success?”

“Ninety-five percent.”

“Wait, so what about there 5 percent chance something bad would happen?!”

“Well, those odds were closer to 20 percent in total.”

“Oh, okay. So there was only a 5 percent chance I’d *die*.”

Green had used her future forecast to narrow down Crimson’s position and

then fired the missile from as far away as possible. Of course, a forecast was a still only forecast; there was always the undeniable chance that Crimson might be held somewhere else. But in all possible futures where she attacked the top of the tower, Green's forecast broke down thusly: there was an 80 percent chance of Crimson being rescued unharmed, and a 15 percent chance that she would be injured in the rescue. That meant, all told, Green had a 95 percent chance of succeeding the rescue. In the other 5 percent of futures, Crimson was badly injured enough that she wouldn't make it out alive. In other words, there was a 5 percent chance of total failure, and Green had fired the missile knowing that risk. It was perfectly understandable that Crimson was a little irritated.

"Wasn't there any other way?!"

"There was... but this had the highest chance of success."

"I'm a little curious, but you don't have to say anything more."

"I'd rather not think about it, so thank you."

"Were they that bad?!"

Green had come up with several other ways to rescue Crimson, but firing a missile from range was the plan that had yielded the best odds. So while Crimson was irked about the 5 percent, Green had chosen the safest possible option.

"Wait, Crimson. The enemy is coming."

Green's future forecast, which she'd kept active as she infiltrated the tower, revealed that the enemy was on the way. The most imminent future had Yurika and Koutarou breaking through the door in thirty seconds.

"...I expect to hear the details when we get back, then."

"Of course. But that means we'll have to make it out of here first."

"And my staff?"

"I brought you a spare."

There, Green produced an extra staff and tossed it to Crimson. It was something Dark Yellow had made in preparation for their battle with Rainbow Heart. Dark Yellow was in charge of creating magical weapons, and this backup

staff was one of them. Since it wasn't personalized, it was fairly rough in design and there was a limit to how much mana could be channeled into it, but it was much better than nothing. In an intense battle, it would be an easy but fatal mistake to lose your staff. That's why Yellow had thought to make spares ahead of time, and it was already paying off.

"Crimson, make yourself lighter and get on."

"Got it... Feather Weight."

Green had made her way up to the top of the tower on an automated weapon capable of flight. Using it instead of her own magic would reduce the magic they needed to use in their escape, and thusly making it harder to follow their mana trail.

After making sure that Crimson and Green were gone, Koutarou and Yurika entered the now empty cell.

"It looks like it went well."

"No, we can't be sure just yet."

The truth was that they could have burst in while Crimson and Green were still on the premises, but had chosen not to. This was part of their plan.

Yurika had decided to attack Darkness Rainbow's base, but there was still one major problem with that. She didn't know where it was. So in order to find out, Kiriha had suggested that they use Crimson.

Kiriha's intuition told her that Darkness Rainbow wouldn't just abandon one of its most powerful leaders right before such an important battle. That said, they also wouldn't risk a potentially costly rescue operation unless they could guarantee a certain degree of success. Koutarou and the others weren't aware that Darkness Rainbow had promised Crimson they would rescue her in return for acting as a decoy, so in order to encourage an extraction, they'd intentionally set up a golden opportunity for one.

When Crimson was first captured, she was taken to and held at a Rainbow Heart safehouse in Kisshouharukaze City. It would have been easy to attack with a sufficiently sized force, but it was cloaked well enough that Darkness Rainbow didn't know its exact location. Koutarou and company didn't have the

time to sit around and wait for Darkness Rainbow to find it, either. Leaking its location would have been too obvious of a ploy, so Kiriha had come up with the idea of moving Crimson.

The first and most obvious opportunity for Darkness Rainbow to attack would be during the move. But whether or not they chose to act on that, the move would still give away that Crimson was being transferred to the Blue Tower. That way, they could come and rescue her after the fact instead if they wanted.

And everything had gone just according to Kiriha's plan. Green waited until Crimson was moved, and then swooped in to take her away. All that was left was to follow them back to Darkness Rainbow's base.

"Heehee, it's finally time for Sanae-chan to shine!"

"Us too, ho!"

"We'll show them the power of friendship, ho!"

It was up to Sanae and the haniwas to tail Green and Crimson. Sanae's ordinarily powerful spirit sight was enhanced even further with the help of the haniwas' spiritual energy technology, which would allow them to stay on the magical girls' trail even though they were trying to cover their tracks.

"Take care of her while I'm gone, Koutarou! Now let's hit it, Karama-chan, Korama-chan!"

"Leave it to us, ho!"

"Ane-san, we're off, ho!"

The excited Sanae-chan left Sanae-san behind as she flew off through the hole in the wall. The haniwas were hot on her heels, eager to embrace their time to shine. The three of them were long gone before Koutarou and the others could even say goodbye.

"I'm... kinda sorry."

The abandoned Sanae-san blushed and apologized. Sanae-chan had most of Sanae's energy and childishness, while Sanae-san embodied Sanae's more mature points. She was always the one left feeling awkward.

"Don't worry. She's just fine the way she is. Anyway, how's it looking, Sanae-

san?”

“Um... It seems like the enemy’s concealment magic is rather ingenious. Following them on her own would have been hard. But thanks to the haniwas, she’s managing somehow.”

“That’s great news. Let’s go after them ourselves.”

Koutarou and the others then rushed out as well, but they took the door rather than the hole in the wall. Unlike the ghostly Sanae-chan and the haniwas that could conceal themselves, Koutarou and the others would stand out too much if they chased after Crimson and Green in the air. Following along on the ground would be much safer.

The climate and seasons of the Magical Kingdom of Folsaria were similar to those found at higher latitudes on Earth. It was notably more frigid than most of Japan, and dotted with tall conifer forests. All in all, it gave off a rather wintry impression.

“The question is if these are really conifers or not...”

Koutarou looked at the trees skeptically. They certainly looked like conifers at first glance, but it was possible they only looked similar. They were in a different world, after all.

“I don’t believe they’re strictly conifers, but something quite similar,” replied Clan.

“Why?”

“The climate and environment here are very similar to that of Earth, so it wouldn’t be strange for similar organisms to have evolved.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Not unlike we Forthorthians and you Earthlings.”

“Huh, now that you mention it...”

It made perfect sense that similar circumstances gave rise to similar results. Such phenomena had been observed even in the relatively limited confines of Earth, where mammals and marsupials separated by vast oceans had evolved into similar creatures. Clan’s conclusion was that the same thing was capable of

happening across worlds.

“The real problem is that we lost sight of Darkness Rainbow in this forest,” said Kiriha, joining the conversation with a shrug.

Crimson and Green had ducked into the forest during their escape, where Sanae had lost their trail. Crimson and Green were concealing their auras, and their spiritual energy blended in with the natural energy of the forest, making it impossible to sense them from afar now.

“It’ll be just fine! This forest can’t deceive us!”

“You can’t deceive perfect teamwork between friends, ho!”

“We only need to carefully examine things, ho!”

Sanae had lost the two magical girls from the air, but that didn’t stop her from continuing to search from the ground. She’d merged back with her body to heighten her psychic abilities, and was still working with the haniwas on top of that. She had one on either side of her head, and they were lending her all the power they could spare. Together like this, she could still sense Green and Crimson.

“How are we doing, Sanae?” asked Theia.

“Um, I think we’ll catch up to them soon. Their auras are getting denser, little by little.”

“Your Highness, Dark Crimson was injured, which might be slowing them down.”



“This is our chance. Let’s close the distance and get a visual.”

Theia believed that Crimson and Green had entered the forest for more than just cover. She suspected that Green had planted gear here ahead of time to aid them in their escape. The fact that it had suddenly gotten harder to follow them indicated they were up to something.

And if that were the case, Theia wanted to get them in her sights before they pulled anything else. She was confident that as long as she could see them, Green and Crimson would never be able to shake her. And more than anything, she wanted to hurry. She was anxious to get to Darkness Rainbow’s base.

Koutarou and the others moved through the forest at a good clip. A few minutes in, Shizuka suddenly came to a stop. She then raised her right hand and pointed straight forward.

“I’ve spotted them... They’re over there.”

“Are you sure?”

Koutarou looked in the direction Shizuka was pointing, but couldn’t see anything. Whatever she was looking at was too far away for normal human eyes to see.

“Yeah, I can totally see that poor excuse for a mantle.”

Shizuka had good sight to begin with, which was enhanced even further by the power of the Fire Dragon Emperor inside of her. Her keen eyes were as sharp as a hawk’s, so she was able to spot her quarry before even Ruth and Clan’s drones did.

“I’m seeing it too now. Here’s the image.”

Ruth tapped away on her bracelet terminal and conjured a hologram in the air. A hologram of something red.

“It’s hard to tell by that alone... Here, let’s try this.”

Clan fiddled with her bracelet and replaced the fuzzy image with a precise CG model—of Crimson in her dark red mantle.

“Good work. Don’t lose sight of them, Ruth.”

“I’ll try.”

“Pardomshiha, I just noticed it while analyzing the footage, but there seems to be a specific pattern in the thermal radiation ahead. It might be something going wrong with one of their spells.”

“Thank you, Clan-sama! I’m on it!”

Ruth looked into it after Clan pointed it out, and confirmed the pattern. It seemed to be a side effect of either their camouflage or concealment magic. Ruth locked on to that pattern and used it to track the magical girls.

Green overlooked a mistake like that...?

However, Maki had her doubts. Dark Green was a specialist in green magic, which encompassed divination and perception. In other words, illusions, concealment, and things like future forecast were her forte. As such, Maki would have expected her camouflage spells to be flawless. But if they could sense something as obvious as an identifiable signature, then... As soon as the gears clicked into place, Maki hurried to warn her friends.

“They’re attacking! Crimson revealed herself on purpose!”

Maki figured one of two things was happening. Either Green had purposefully cast an imperfect spell to lure them out, or Crimson—who was bad at green magic—was acting on her own. Either way, it seemed Darkness Rainbow had set up an ambush here assuming they’d be pursued.

Maki’s warning rang through the forest just as Green was about to make her move.

She saw through it?! As expected of Navy! Even though she’s brainwashed, she’s as sharp as ever!

Green clicked her tongue mentally and proceeded with her attack. Even if Maki had seen through her, she couldn’t back down now that Crimson had been spotted.

“Go forth!”

Green’s attack was a surprise assault using the automated weapons under her control. She’d hidden most of them in the woods beforehand and lured

Koutarou and the others to the perfect place for an ambush. Green had gone to cast concealment spells on her weapons, leaving Crimson out in the open as a decoy. The plan was to attack while Koutarou and the others were occupied with her, meaning Maki had been spot on.

“D-Detecting several energy reactions! The enemies are all around us!”

Green dismissed her concealment spells on the automated weapons as they began their attack. Koutarou and the others then realized that they were surrounded. There were more than thirty automated weapons in total, a sum that staggered Ruth. Her voice unwittingly trembled as she reported the situation.

“Mass Protection!”

The first one to react was, surprisingly, Yurika. She’d started to cast her spell the moment Maki said something, so it activated just after the automated weapons appeared.

The weapons fired off their machine guns with a loud rat-a-tat, but the bullets bounced right off of Yurika’s defensive spell. There were enough of them, however, that the barrier didn’t hold up for long. Fortunately, those precious few seconds were all Koutarou and the others needed to rally.

“Everyone, focus on protecting yourselves! Whatever you do, don’t force yourselves!” Koutarou instructed as he began attacking the automated weapons.

The automated weapons were machines running off of a combination of Forthorthian and underground technology. On top of that, they’d been enhanced with magic. Koutarou and the others were up against over thirty of them, which meant they each needed to take out three or four apiece. The weapons weren’t all that dangerous on their own, but they had the overwhelming advantage in numbers. So while it would be ideal for Koutarou and the others to split them up and each handle a few of them at a time, there was no way the machines were about to cooperate.

“Such lavish hospitality! A full greeting with automated weaponry and everything!”

Theia took to complaining as she opened fire on the machines with the assault rifle equipped on her right arm. Command Green was outfitted with an assault rifle, a grenade launcher, and standard throwing grenades, plus a heat knife for close combat. It was an arsenal designed to give her maximum versatility in combat. She had less overall firepower than she did with Assault Red, however, meaning she'd have to be more conservative and aim her shots carefully. Her accuracy was more precise with her current setup, but Theia couldn't help wanting to charge in, guns blazing. This was frustrating for her.

"You're wrong, Theiamillis-san! Take a closer look at the enemies!" called Kiriha.

"What do you mean?!"

"These are all prototypes and test models! Some are even refurbished! They've only deployed weapons they don't mind losing as sacrificial pawns!"

As it turned out, Green had sent a hodgepodge of automated weapons after them. Some were experimental prototypes, some were simply older models, and some had even clearly been damaged before. They certainly weren't the standard issue for sending into battle. It looked like Darkness Rainbow was saying these were trash, that they didn't care if they lost them. If anything, sacrificing them as cannon fodder might be the best use for them.

"In other words, the enemy is planning to use this opportunity to escape! Hurry up, Ruth!"

"Yes, Kiriha-sama!"

Despite the ambush, neither Green nor Crimson were attacking. No, they were planning on doing something else while they sent their pawns out to fight for them. Kiriha could read their intentions just from their actions. But by the time she put it together, Crimson had met back up with Green.

"Bingo! But you're too late!" she declared with a bold laugh.

Finally getting her chance to outsmart the quick-witted Kiriha, Crimson was in high spirits.

"Crimson, quit playing around! Let's go!"

But the prudent Green scolded her, and quickly made her exit with a couple of automated weapons serving as guards. Staying to gloat would only put them in danger. Green was also delighted to have pulled one over on Kiriha, but she knew all too well that she couldn't let her guard down.

"I know, I know. Jeez, you're so strict..."

Crimson hurriedly chased after Green, carrying on a conversation with her much like she used to with Maki. Secretly, she was a little disappointed she wasn't getting any more respect now that Darkness Rainbow was down a leader.

"Koutarou, should I chase after them?!"

Sanae was alarmed to see their two opponents fleeing, and offered to chase after them with her astral projection.

"No, protecting yourself takes priority right now! Don't overdo it!"

Worried for her safety, however, Koutarou stopped her. When Sanae-chan projected herself, she left behind a vulnerable Sanae-san with greatly diminished spiritual energy. And that was far too risky considering the situation they were in.

"But..."

"Don't be a hero, Sanae! We've still got options!"

"...Okay."

Sanae just wanted to be helpful, but in the end, she agreed to stay put. Recalling her previous conversation with Koutarou, she knew that he'd said what he did out of love. She didn't need to be a hero because they were all in this together.

"All right! Love-Love Heart, Eternal Beat!"

If she couldn't chase after Crimson and Green, she would just have to settle for taking out the enemies near Koutarou. Burning with passion, Sanae unleashed an explosive amount of spiritual energy. It warped the very laws of physics and shone so brightly that it became visible to the human eye. As it radiated from her, she looked like was wearing a golden, glowing robe of

feathers.

“Eternal Angelic Shot!”

Sanae fired off arrows of light made out of pure spiritual power. They flew straight forward and impaled the weapons in front of her. They then released their spiritual energy and rent the machines from the inside. Attacking like that in her wasteful but enchanting robe of light, Sanae looked just like one of the heroines from the anime series she so loved.

“That Sanae girl... Just who is she?”

“Have you forgotten already, Uncle? She’s the former ghost who used to live at Corona House.”

“I know that, but I can’t imagine that’s all...”

“She really is amazing, isn’t she? To think a normal human could do that much...”

Shizuka smiled wryly as she crushed another automated weapon. In terms of sheer combat prowess, Shizuka had it hand and fist over Sanae thanks to the power of the Fire Dragon Emperor within her. She was a talented martial artist, but she couldn’t surpass human limits without Alunaya’s help. In contrast, Sanae was performing superhuman feats like it was nothing. It was no wonder that Alunaya was surprised. He was so surprised, in fact, that he began to suspect Sanae wasn’t actually human at all.

“I’m jealous, Uncle. She weighs the same no matter how much she fights.”

“All right, all right. Let’s finish this up quickly.”

“You don’t have to tell me twice! Let’s go, Uncle!”

“Understood!”

Shizuka began swinging her fists again. Wreathed in flame, she looked every bit as powerful and magical as Sanae.

“Satomi-kun, I’m casting a spell on the sword!”

“Please do, Sakuraba-senpai!”

Koutarou and Harumi were also working together, though in a different way

from Shizuka and Alunaya. While they were pursuing Crimson and Green in stealth, Koutarou had chosen to carry Saguratin instead of Signaltin, which would generate too much mana and give away their location. In the midst of the ambush, he hadn't had time to call for it, either, so he was stuck fighting with what he had on hand. Nevertheless, Harumi devoted herself to supporting him. While the sword was different, her role was the same.

"Gather, spirits of water! Dance, spirits of wind! Combine these two powers and appear, spirits of lightning! With the wrath of the god of thunder, condemn my enemies!"

No matter how far away they were, Harumi was connected to Signaltin through the crest on her forehead. That was how she'd been able to traverse endless time and immeasurable distance to reunite with Koutarou. It didn't matter if she was in a different world. With her hair shining silver, she poured pure white mana into Saguratin.

"Appear! Thunder God's Brilliant Blade!"

The mana overflowing the sword turned into electricity powerful enough to shock whatever the sword might come into contact with. Without hampering Koutarou's fighting style, she'd chosen a spell that would enhance both his offense and defense.

"Ha!"

Koutarou sharply exhaled as he swung the sword he was so familiar with. It caught the claws of a beast-type automated weapon, and at the moment they crossed, the weapon completely seized—but only for a moment. The metal machines were particularly weak to being overloaded with electricity, so Darkness Rainbow had given them magical resistance to it. But that moment was all Koutarou needed to get back into an attacking position and strike again. When the beast-type automated weapon started to move again, the tip of Koutarou's sword was already impaling its metal body. Taking both the sword attack and the electric charge that came with it internally this time, the machine seized up for good.

While Koutarou and Harumi were showing off their splendid teamwork, so was the resident pair of magical girls.

“Greater Acid Splash!”

Yurika shot a strong stream of acid from the tip of her staff, spraying it over the weapons coming after her and Maki.

“Keep it up, Yurika!”

Maki then closed in with her staff—converted into a greatsword—to finish off the melting automated weapons. The weapon she closed in on tried to defend itself with a knife, but it was no match for Maki’s greatsword. Its whole arm gave way under the heavy impact of the blow, Yurika’s acid having seeped into its joints and weakened them.

But while Maki had defeated the enemy in a single strike, she used a large enough weapon that even a single strike could leave her wide open. Protecting her in that moment was Yurika’s job.

“Poison Cloud!”

Yurika cast a miasmic cloud over the automated weapons now aiming guns at Maki. It only took a matter of seconds for them to stop moving and collapse on the spot. They never even had a chance to fire.

“To think that poison would work on machines... Yurika is just full of surprises...”

Maki was both grateful and impressed. Common sense, even for a magician, would suggest that poison would have no effect on the automated weapons. It should only work on living, breathing creatures. But the truth was that Yurika’s poison not only deteriorated electronical components, it was also highly conductive. Thanks to those two properties, the gaseous poison began eating away at their circuity. And once that started to spark, it was all over. So while common sense may have said that it was pointless to try, uncommon wisdom said that poison was actually quite useful against machines.

“Impressive... Hey, what’s wrong, Yurika?”

“Nothing... I just got something in my eye...”

Yurika had brilliantly used her magic to great effect, but she still wasn’t sure it was a good thing.

The automated weapons had Koutarou and the others vastly outnumbered, but that didn't stop them from dominating the fight from start to finish. The results spoke for themselves, really. In a matter of minutes, the automated weapons were no more than scrap metal. Moreover, since Koutarou and company all been fighting prudently, hardly anyone was hurt at all. The worst injury they'd sustained was a scraped knee on Maki's part.

But not everything had gone their way. Sometimes there's a price to pay for holding back and fighting at your own pace.

"Not good. We must have entered holy ground. I can't sense their spiritual energy through the forest at all anymore."

"The spiritual energy of the land is too high, ho!"

"Performing a circumferential search to pick up their trail will take too much time, ho!"

The price they paid this time was losing track of Green and Crimson. They'd fled in a direction that was particularly dense with spiritual energy, which covered their tracks for them. The natural spiritual energy of the forest essentially overpowered what faint traces their auras left behind, so the trail effectively went cold here for Sanae and the haniwas.

It would be possible to follow them again once they left holy ground, but they had no way of knowing where they might come out. They'd have no choice but to circle the whole thing in hopes of picking up the trail again, but the trail would be growing weaker—and harder to find—with every passing second.

"This is a strategic victory in Green's book. I hate to think of the planning it took to come up with this..." muttered Maki, who knew the inner workings of Darkness Rainbow all too well.

Especially since she was rescuing Crimson on her own, Green wouldn't have engaged in this plan unless she was assured of her odds at success. She'd prepared herself thoroughly and come up with all manner of safeguards to make sure she and Crimson could get away. Being able to do all of that on the spot, although frustrating, was truly commendable.

"I should've chased them after all..."

Sanae's shoulders drooped. Koutarou had told her not to go, but she was kicking herself for listening to him right now. Unexpectedly, however, the one in charge didn't seem disappointed in the slightest.

"It's okay, Sanae-chan," Yurika said with a smile.

"What makes you say that?"

"Because we have a plan too."

"We do? What plan?"

Sanae's eyes shot wide open. She was surprised to find out they had some kind of secret plan, and even more surprised to hear this coming from a cool and confident Yurika.

"Well, that's—"

However, just as Yurika was about to explain the details to Sanae...

"Your Highness, Yurika-sama, I've confirmed the beacon. The detachment is successfully continuing their pursuit of Crimson and Green," Ruth reported as she tapped away on her bracelet terminal.

Hearing this, Sanae's already wide eyes nearly bulged out of her head.

"A detachment?! We have something cool like that?!"

"That was all explained in the strategy meeting, wasn't it?"

"O-Oh yeah. Eeheehee..."

The meeting had been so long and boring that it was the most Sanae could do to stay awake. She was tuned out for any given part of it, which was why she had no idea that they had a detachment. Her embarrassed smile couldn't hide that.

"S-So, what's this about a detachment?"

"Well..."

Yurika explained things all over again for Sanae, who gladly listened this time.

Darkness Rainbow had expected Yurika and the others to pursue them, but they in turn had foreseen that that would be the case. It was easy enough to

guess that Darkness Rainbow would have some kind of plan in place.

That said, they had no way of knowing how, exactly, Darkness Rainbow would try and throw them off. There were far too many possibilities, so trying to come up with a countermeasure for each was unrealistic. Instead, Kiriha had come up with the idea of going after Darkness Rainbow's blind spot.

In a resourceful move, she'd collected the automated weapons destroyed in their previous fight—specifically the ones operating off of spiritual energy technology. She then repaired them and overrode them so they were under her control. Since it was all familiar spiritual technology and she even had access to the radical faction scientists who'd created the weapons, it was a relatively simple feat.

Then, when Green rescued Crimson, Kiriha had two of her modified automated weapons infiltrate Green's ranks. They used faked identification numbers and their IFF signals identified them as friendlies, so the other automated weapons had no response to them. And with so many automated weapons around her, it would be difficult for Green to notice two more sneaking in. It was such a subtle move that her future forecast might fail to portray the difference a slight increase in the number of automated weapons could make. Even if she did notice—whether with the help of her divination or otherwise—it would likely be too late.

In essence, Green commanding a large force of automated weapons and only using her future forecast to predict the near future created a blind spot. It put but a small hole in an otherwise good plan, yet Kiriha used her wits to thread the needle with aplomb.

The Land of Beginning

Sunday, September 19th

Koutarou and the others headed through the forest, now tracking the automated weapons that were with Green. They were moving with a decided vanguard and rearguard now: Koutarou and Theia in the front, and Shizuka and Ruth in the back. The idea was that this would keep them fully prepared in the event of any more surprise attacks. The other girls were walking between them, and Yurika couldn't help but stare ahead at Kiriha every now and then.

She really is amazing... What would we have done without her?

Yurika smiled to herself, glad to have Kiriha on her side. Kiriha's quick and clever thinking had turned the tables for them more than once already. Really, she was the biggest threat to Darkness Rainbow. Yurika, Koutarou, and the others... They possessed all kinds of skills from magic to fighting, but no one had a mind like Kiriha's. Clan was a close second in terms of intelligence, but she applied herself strictly to science. And when it came to tactical thinking and problem-solving, a balanced intellect was necessary. In that sense, Kiriha was by far the smartest member of the group.

"What is it, Yurika?"

When Kiriha noticed Yurika looking at her, she looked over her shoulder and met her gaze. She was wearing her usual calm and composed smile. Just looking at her face, it was hard to believe she had the mental might to overcome a magician without even being able to use magic.

"Well, um... Kiriha-san, if the time comes, I'll protect you."

"Oh? What's this all of a sudden?"

Kiriha was unsure of what was going through Yurika's mind, and tilted her head in puzzlement.

"I was just thinking that I might be the commander, but you're the one who's really moving us. Unlike me, you're irreplaceable."

"If Koutarou heard you say that, he'd scold you and tell you that no one's

replaceable.”

Kiriha giggled a little and nodded towards Koutarou at the front of the group. Yurika knew he probably would get angry if he heard what she’d said.

“I know that that’s true on an individual level... But looking at the bigger picture, we need you to stay safe until the end.”

Yurika didn’t want anyone to die, certainly. But she also knew that when it came to a matter of life and death, Kiriha needed to be protected. As long as they had her, the odds of everyone else surviving were that much higher. That was what Yurika had really meant when she said Kiriha was irreplaceable.

“Don’t worry. It’s my job to keep anything like that from happening. But I’m happy you feel that way. Thank you, Yurika.”

Kiriha understood how Yurika felt, but there was more to it than that. By the time her allies were in a life or death situation, Kiriha had already failed as their strategist. So really and truly, it was Kiriha’s job to make sure that Yurika never needed to protect her. Nevertheless, she was comforted to know that Yurika had her back no matter what, and so she continued to smile at her.

“No... it’s nothing to thank me for...”

“That’s not true.”

“Um, Kiriha-san...”

There was something Yurika wanted to ask the gently smiling Kiriha. She wanted to ask because she was sure Kiriha would have an answer.

“What is it?”

“...Can we win?”

The future was uncertain, and that made Yurika anxious. That was why she was so worried about Kiriha’s safety. But in spite of all that, she had her fingers crossed. She was hoping the wise and insightful Kiriha would tell her everything was going to be fine.

“I wonder...”

But alas, Kiriha was no fortune teller. She couldn’t see into the future any

more than Yurika could, but she knew one thing was for certain.

“However, it’s not a matter of can and cannot. We simply *must* win. For everyone’s sake.”

“You’re right.”

If they fretted too much over losing, they might let their chances of victory go. And they couldn’t afford that. That’s why, no matter the odds, they simply needed to focus on winning. It was what they had to do to forge a better future.

“Just stay strong and focused. Victory will follow.”

“...Okay, I’ll try.”

Darkness Rainbow’s stronghold was on the horizon, and the decisive battle that would determine Yurika’s fate was looming ever nearer.

Darkness Rainbow’s base was deep in the heart of the forest. Reaching it required following a winding path through a land of dense spiritual energy, making it nearly impossible to track anyone there.

A large castle rose up in the center of everything, surrounded by a spread of houses in all directions. They were all old, however, and had been abandoned for quite some time. Rather than a town, it seemed almost like a monument. An ode to an age long past.

“To think their base was in the Land of Beginning...”

Koutarou overheard Maki muttering to herself as she looked around the ruins, but he was unfamiliar with the phrase she’d used.

“Aika-san, what’s ‘the Land of Beginning’?”

“It’s just what it sounds like. This is where Folsaria began.”

“Right here?”

“Satomi-kun, you’ve heard that Folsaria was founded by a group of people who’d been exiled from their homeland, right?”

“Yeah, something like that.”

“This was where they ended up. This is where they built their first town, which eventually became the Magical Kingdom of Folsaria. That’s why it’s called

the Land of Beginning.”

According to legend, the people of Folsaria were banished from their homeland for the grave sin of turning against their benevolent king. After a long journey, the descendants of those criminals eventually reached this place. And as penance for their past sin, they created a kingdom without a king. The agreed that their true king still resided in their homeland, and they would honor his rule even as exiles. To govern themselves in the meanwhile, it was decided that a council of elders would be established.

And so the Magical Kingdom of Folsaria took its first steps here, but being shrouded in the heart of a deep forest was inconvenient for a developing civilization. As such, as their population increased, the capital was moved to a wide open plain, where Thorthe was then founded. The people began a slow migration there, eventually abandoning the first city altogether. In other words, where Koutarou and the others were standing now was a historic location. It was what remained of the Folsarians’ first struggles to survive in this land.

“So that’s why Darkness Rainbow chose this as their new base...” Yurika mumbled after hearing Maki’s explanation.

“I think so. I believe they fully intend to start anew again from here,” Maki agreed with a nod.

When she fell into league with Koutarou and the others, Darkness Rainbow was forced to change bases out of necessity. But with their battle against Rainbow Heart swiftly approaching and the fate of Folsaria on the line, they wanted to choose a symbolic location. That was what had brought them here, to the Land of Beginning.

The town showed its ancient age. The buildings were made of just wood and stone, but most of the wood had long rotted away, leaving only the stonework behind. A good deal of the stonework had collapsed as well. Only the sturdiest structures were still standing.

“A town sure does deteriorate quickly with nobody living in it...”

Harumi looked around at the ruined cityscape with a forlorn smile. The main street that was once bustling with people was now only populated by plants and trees. Apart from what remained of the buildings, there was no real sign

anyone had ever lived here.

“It’s hard to see a place abandoned like this.”

“Heehee. That must be your inner landlord talking, Kasagi-san.”

Seeing Shizuka furrow her brow so, Harumi couldn’t help giggling. The town may have fallen into ruin, but that wasn’t the case for its people. They’d simply moved on. It wasn’t a sad story at all, but the empty town did have something of a desolate atmosphere.

“Your Highness, Master, it looks like Darkness Rainbow’s base is the castle on the top of that hill,” said Ruth, pointing towards the castle in the center of town.

She’d been receiving data from the automated weapons that had infiltrated Darkness Rainbow’s ranks, and had just pinpointed their signals.

“Hmm, yes. A castle like that is a good place for a base,” said Theia with an approving nod.

Designed for maximum defense and durability, the castle still stood tall. Ivy and various other plants had climbed its walls and scaled its towers, making it look like something straight out of a fairy tale. In Theia’s book, it looked like the perfect place for a group of magicians to make their base.

“Theia, we can leave the sightseeing for later. We have—”

Koutarou was about to say they had things to do, but the words caught in his throat and never left his lips. Instead, he broke into a dead run towards the castle.

“What is it, Koutarou?!”

“I don’t believe it! Is that even possible?!”

He sprinted ahead, completely ignoring Theia when she called after him. He swiftly climbed an outer stairway on a nearby building to reach the roof.

“Whatever is the matter with Master?”

“I... don’t know either. He just suddenly took off.”

“We should follow him.”

“Agreed.”

Theia and Ruth went after him, and the other seven girls quickly followed suit. They all gathered on the roof with Koutarou, and with a bit of elevation, they had a much better view of the castle.

“There’s no doubt about it. That’s... Hey, Clan! Come over here! You too, Sakuraba-senpai!”

“What is it?”

“Satomi-kun?”

When Koutarou called to them, Clan and Harumi approached. He then pointed out the castle and turned to them in something of a fluster.

“Take a good look at that castle, you two! Don’t you recognize it?!”

“Recognize? I’ve never seen anything— Wait...”

“That’s... No way!”

The two of them suddenly realized what had taken Koutarou by surprise, and they were just as shocked themselves. They could hardly believe what they were seeing with their own eyes.

The other girls, however, were quite confused. Seeing Koutarou, Clan, and Harumi simply standing there in awe didn’t explain anything, but it was clear that something big had happened. And so, speaking up on everyone else’s behalf, Yurika decided to ask about it.

“Satomi-san, what is it? What’s gotten into the three of you?”

“...That’s Sariachal Castle. The same Sariachal Castle that Clan and I blew away with the Super Space-time Repulsion Shell!”

Koutarou’s answer, however, completely blew her away too.

When he realized that what he was looking at was unmistakably Sariachal Castle, Koutarou was shaken to the core. It felt like his whole world had been turned upside down.

“Now I get it... That’s why they came to room 106...”

But when he slowly began to accept and process what he was seeing, the

pieces started falling into place. And not just here in Folsaria. This revelation began to shed light on all manner of things for Koutarou, including why the invaders had converged at his apartment. It was no coincidence after all.

Dark Crimson had said that the Folsarians were once People of the Earth, a tribe that had been lost ages ago. And if those same people had ended up here with Sariachal Castle, that meant that they were actually from past Forthorthe. In other words, both the Folsarians and the People of the Earth were actually descendants of Forthorthe.

In Koutarou's final battle in past Forthorthe, he'd blown away Maxfern and his alchemists, plus Grevanas and his magicians with Clan's Super Space-time Repulsion Shell. It had shunted them out of the universe, sending them drifting through space-time until they, apparently, ended up at Earth and Folsaria respectively.

Maxfern and his alchemists settled on Earth, developing their own culture with their own technology. The ruins Koutarou was helping excavate at his part-time job were likely remnants of that society. However, it seemed they'd all been wiped out at some point. Perhaps it was the deadly virus that had been sent with them. Koutarou knew that humans from Earth were genetically resistant to it, so only those of mixed blood would have lived through an epidemic like that. But regardless of the reason, Maxfern and his people largely vanished at some point in history. Those that did survive inherited the technology and culture and continued to develop it further, eventually becoming the People of the Earth.

Meanwhile, Grevanas and his magicians ended up in this world. They regretted turning their fangs on the royal family with Maxfern, and so they created a kingdom with no king—the Magical Kingdom of Folsaria. They got the name by combining "Forthorthe" and "Sariachal." Their capital, Thorthe, was also named after Forthorthe. Everything made sense.

The People of the Earth had entered a state of decline and there was strife in Folsaria. As a result, people from both nations had set their sights on invading Earth. One thing led to another, and somewhere down the line, Sanae's spirit was torn from her body and Yurika became a magical girl. Theia and Ruth eventually arrived in ceremonial fashion from Forthorthe, and Kiriha had

appeared as an emissary of the People of the Earth. None of it seemed to be related a year ago, but it turned out they all had some connection to ancient Forthorthe.

“In other words, this is all because of me. This was my battle from the very beginning...”

Realizing all this, Koutarou felt like he had a new perspective on everything. The girls appearing in room 106 had all ultimately been because of his actions in the past. In other words, this was his fault. Up until now, he’d thought he was helping the girls with their own problems, but this was truly eye-opening. Things would be different from now on. Koutarou would take charge, and he would take responsibility for what he’d caused.

Learning that they had all met in a confluence of fate came as quite a shock to the girls as well. And not just the original invaders, either. All nine of them were shaken.

By the time Shizuka’s parents were lost in the hotel fire, Alunaya’s soul was most likely already residing within her. That was why she alone had survived. Without the powers of Alaia and Signaltin, Harumi might have died the day of the obstacle marathon. The cases were obvious for Maki and Clan as well.

In fact, it was all obvious now. The reason they’d all met and bonded was ultimately because of Koutarou’s timeslip. However, Koutarou hadn’t been sent back in time until well after the invaders had arrived. The complex intertwining of the threads of space-time and cause and effect had created what seemed like a bizarre and impossible situation. It was perfectly natural that the girls were all bewildered by this.

“It had crossed my mind... but to learn that’s really the truth is a big surprise.”

“You mean you’d figured it out, Kiriha?”

“Hypothetically. Space and time are vast, yet we were all came together in such a specific coincidence. That said, it wasn’t like I had any proof. I’m just as surprised as you are.”

During their battle underground, Kiriha had realized her connection with Maya from her childhood. And her connection with Maya also indirectly

connected her with Sanae, Yurika, and Maki. She had assumed it was ultimately a coincidence, but it turned out the truth was rather the opposite.

“I can’t say I’m all that fazed,” interjected Theia.

“Oh?” replied Kiriha.

“This feels like nothing compared to finding out Koutarou is the Blue Knight.”

“Ah, yes, of course. I’m sure this pales in comparison.”

There, Theia and Kiriha exchanged knowing smiles. It seemed that this uncanny development had only brought them closer together in solidarity.

“The short of it is that this was fate. We were destined to be with Koutarou,” announced Sanae.

The girls had appeared in front of Koutarou because he’d fought so desperately to save the past. And it was because of the girls that Koutarou had fought so desperately to save the past and return to them. Sanae was unsure which had really triggered which. It was like the age-old question of the chicken and the egg. The only thing that was really clear was that the two were inseparable now.

“I think so too. I think that we’re all here for Satomi-kun,” agreed Harumi.

She thought Sanae was exactly right. Koutarou’s straightforward and earnest heart had brought the girls to his side. And in return, the girls wished to heal the deep, internal wounds he still suffered. She believed that might even be the very reason they’d been born. No, she hoped it was. She hoped nothing other than fate and true love were behind all this.

“I just hope Satomi-kun feels the same way... A one-sided destiny would be really lonely.”

Shizuka felt the same way, but was a little worried their feelings weren’t reciprocated. If Koutarou didn’t think of the girls as his fate too, it would be all too sad. It was an important question for her and the other girls.

“But Master returned to our side, didn’t he? He even declined the legendary Silver Princess for us...”

Ruth believed in Koutarou. She knew that neither she nor any one of the

other girls could ever compare to Alaia, but surely all nine of them together could. Koutarou needed them. He knew that he belonged with them, and that was why he'd fought through the past to get back to them. And hearing Ruth's words, the other girls' hearts began to settle.

"Of course my knight would return to my side," declared Theia.

"He may be your knight, but he's also my first love," said Kiriha.

"I guess it's a good thing Koutarou loves all of us! Too bad he gets mad when I try and get in the bath with him..." lamented Sanae.

"S-Sanae! You tried *what* with Veltlion?!" exclaimed Clan.

Koutarou's timeslip being the crux of everything came as a surprise to everyone at first. But as they all began to think about it, it made more and more sense. The girls had always felt fate pulling them closer to him. It didn't, in the end, really surprise any of them to find out that their destinies were complexly intertwined. No, it only strengthened the feeling that they were meant to be together.

"We were meant to be..." Yurika muttered as she stared at Koutarou.

He and the girls were still looking at old Sariachal Castle in the distance. There was something about him, the way he carried himself and the look on his face, that made him seem more stern than usual. Seeing it made her feel a little sad.

"Is something the matter, Yurika?" asked Maki.

She couldn't help noticing Yurika's forlorn expression as she stared at Koutarou, and was wondering what might be wrong.

"I think I now understand why Satomi-san said he didn't want anyone to fight."

"What do you mean?"

"Maki-chan, look at Satomi-san... That's kind of a scary face, isn't it?"

"You're right... It certainly doesn't suit him."

Maki knew exactly what Yurika was talking about. Koutarou normally wore an innocent, joking smile, and there was no sign of that on his face now.

“I’d prefer to see him... Ah, that must be what you mean.”

“Yeah. I really don’t want to see Satomi-san looking like that. I just want him to be his normal self.”

“Me too, Yurika. Me too...”

Koutarou had said before that he didn’t like Yurika having to be a magical girl, and Yurika now felt the same way about him. She didn’t like it when he had to be the Blue Knight. She would much rather him just be Koutarou, and she wanted him back to normal as soon as possible. Maki agreed, and so did all of the other girls. Not one of them enjoyed seeing him so serious and prepared for a fight.

“I bet he’s feeling responsible,” said Yurika. “I’m sure Satomi-san thinks that what happened underground and what happened in Folsaria are his fault...”

“I can only imagine,” replied Maki. “But what ended up happening underground was the fault of the people who sprung the coup d’etat. If Satomi-kun hadn’t done anything, things only would have gotten worse.”

Koutarou’s actions had indeed led to the birth of the People of the Earth and the foundation of the Magical Kingdom of Folsaria. But he’d done what he’d had to in order to save lives. Maxfern and Grevanas were in the midst of enacting a plan that would wipe out all of Forthorthe, including themselves. Ultimately, Koutarou had saved them. They should have been grateful to walk away with their lives, and couldn’t really complain about where they’d ended up after what they’d done.

The problems that the People of the Earth and Folsaria had experienced after the fact... Those were Maxfern’s and Grevanas’s responsibility. Koutarou had nothing to do with it beyond that point, but it didn’t feel that way. He couldn’t shake the weight on his heart, and he steeled himself against it by taking on the aura of the battle-hardened Blue Knight. And that was exactly what made Yurika feel so restless.

“Satomi-san’s not the Blue Knight, and we’re not superheroes.”

Yurika now understood why it was that Koutarou both simultaneously accepted and rejected the fact that she was a magical girl. She felt the same

way about him being the Blue Knight. She knew that he was, but she didn't like it when he had to be.

"We were meant to be together, but our place isn't on the battlefield. It's home at room 106!"

Koutarou and all nine girls wanted to get back home and back to their normal lives together as quickly as possible.

Choosing the Land of Beginning for their new base was a statement on Darkness Rainbow's part. It was a sign of their resolve. The Land of Beginning was a place of great historical significance for Folsaria. It was where everything had started for the nation, and it would be where everything started again for Darkness Rainbow—or came to an end. There would be no retreating from here, because retreating from the Land of Beginning would be the same as defeat. In other words, they were prepared to make this their last stand.

"Once Crimson gets back, at long last... the battle will finally begin."

It was Dark Purple who had chosen this location for their new base after Maki was captured. Their next battle with Rainbow Heart would be their last, and the Magical Kingdom of Folsaria would be reborn with Darkness Rainbow at its heart. And there could be no more fitting a setting for such a fight than old Sariachal Castle.

"Kai... Once this battle is over, the two of us will be..."

Purple looked over to the cylindrical glass tank in her personal laboratory. There was affection and kindness in her eyes that made her normally cold personality seem like a lie. That affection and kindness, however, were solely reserved for her late fiancé.

If she didn't defeat Rainbow Heart, she would never be able to obtain the sacrifices she needed. That's right, Purple's resolve to battle Rainbow Heart was driven entirely by her desire to revive her love as soon as possible.

"You've waited so long for this... Just be patient a little while longer..."

As strong as Purple's desire was, however, her mind remained unclouded. There was no option for failure here. And to that end, she'd made careful preparation after careful preparation. She'd spent all this time patiently waiting,

enduring the desire eating at her heart. It would have driven any normal person mad. But Purple was steadfast and focused, and at long last, the big day had come. She would finally have her chance to eliminate Rainbow Heart. She would be able to fulfill her desires soon enough, and she stared nostalgically at Kai's corpse as she began reminiscing about everything that had led up to this.

She stayed like that for a while, but there was eventually a knock at her laboratory door.

"Purple! GreeGree brought Crim-chan back!"

It was Dark Orange. Her bright, cute voice gave her away the moment she opened her mouth.

"Okay, I'll be right there. You go on ahead."

"Okaaay!"

Normally, Purple would be irritated at having her time with her fiancé interrupted, but today was special. She'd been waiting for this moment for a long, long time.

"I'll be off now, Kai... I'll come back like always, so just wait for me right here like always, dreaming of how you're going to slap me when I wake you from your slumber..."

Purple was usually reluctant to leave Kai, but not today. If Crimson was back, then that meant the decisive battle was upon them. Rather than hesitation, there was fire in her eyes.

Darkness Rainbow had invested a good deal of time and resources into rescuing Crimson, but even then, there was still a chance the mission might be a failure. That's why they'd agreed to initiate their attack on Rainbow Heart whether or not Green returned with Crimson in tow.

"Purple, you're awful. There's a limit to how much you can use people."

"I'm no such thing. I'll at least wait until you finish your dinner."

"You mean you'll *only* wait until I finish my dinner."

The remaining four leaders of Darkness Rainbow welcomed Crimson and Green when they returned to the Land of Beginning. They had already finished

their preparations and were ready to go. Once Crimson and Green did the same, they would begin the attack. Hearing this from Purple, Crimson reflexively looked up to the sky.

And while they were talking, Orange turned to Green.

“You pulled it off, GreeGree!” she said, giving her a hearty slap on the back.

In truth, Orange had been rather skeptical about the rescue operation. She was worried that they might end up losing Green too, and thought that they should refrain rather than taking the risk. That being the case, she was especially impressed when Green returned victorious.

“Ouch... J-Just let this be a reminder that there are flaws in every plan.”

Green frowned, but she didn’t raise her voice. She was also happy about her success, and she understood that Orange was praising her.

“There’s no need to be humble, Green,” said Yellow. “With you and Crimson, we have the upper hand.”

“Yellow is right,” agreed Blue. “Things will be a lot easier now.”

They both thought Orange was right. Everyone in Darkness Rainbow was pleased with Green’s hard work and Crimson’s return.

But not a single one of them is actually happy that Crimson’s back...

Rather than from the pain of getting slapped on the back, Green was frowning because she was displeased that no one seemed at all concerned about Crimson. The other four leaders were solely focused on the battle ahead. Not one of them even looked happy to see Crimson.

Navy-san would have...

There, Green’s thoughts turned to Maki. She’d realized that Maki and Crimson’s relationship was different from that of the other leaders, and she was quite sure that Maki would have at least been glad to see her returned. But Green’s frown became more severe as she chased those thoughts of Maki from her mind. As attached to Crimson as she was, Green didn’t want to admit that Maki had a special bond with her.

“Green, do you have a moment?”

“Yes.”

When Purple called out to her, Green collected herself and got back down to business. She was well aware that there was no time to spare.

“What do you want to know?”

“I want you to tell me how the enemy will move. The status of Rainbow Heart’s main force, the location of the seven Rainbows if possible... Things like that.”

They’d already dispatched a scouting team, but Purple wanted to check what they reported against Green’s forecast. Green respected Purple’s cool and collected judgements, and readily agreed. She grabbed her staff before beginning an oh-so familiar incantation.

“Precognition.”

When Green cast her spell, a vast amount of information entered her head. She was reading the future. No, she was reading all possible futures. They overlapped to create an image in her mind. Likely futures were brighter and sharper than the rest, while less likely futures were dim and murky. If she were to forecast the future of Earth’s position, for example, the image would be as crystal clear as a high definition photograph. If she tried to forecast the position of a particular person, however, the image would be as blurry as a photograph taken of a moving object.

“Let’s see... Their main force will move to match us.”

“Are you sure?”

“The future is imminent enough that there’s only a 5 percent margin of error.”

“So that’s all they can manage even with reserve forces... Well, they can’t leave the capital undefended, so I guess they can’t do anything too drastic.”

Green divined that Darkness Rainbow would be facing Rainbow Heart in a frontal clash. She could see it clearly enough that there was very little chance of the future deviating from what she’d seen. Her experience told her those odds were no more than 5 percent. In other words, there was a 5 percent chance of

Rainbow Heart doing something like trying to flank or ambush them. Yet if all went according to Green's forecast, they would easily be able to overpower any ambush with their newly acquired spiritual energy and Forthorthian technology. However, that didn't mean they didn't have anything to worry about.

"Then what about the Rainbows?"

If they didn't confirm the whereabouts of the seven strongest members of Rainbow Heart, they still might be in for a nasty surprise. Purple knew what that 5 percent might lead to.

"It looks like two of them are protecting room 106 in Kisshouharukaze City."

"Heh, it seems like our last attack really got to them. They're dividing their forces."

Rainbow Heart couldn't leave room 106 unguarded, even with the decisive battle against Darkness Rainbow so close. Especially not after what Darkness Rainbow had pulled last time.

"Four of them are working together with the main forces. It looks like it might only be three, actually... But I think it's four."

"In a head-on confrontation, we still have the upper hand if it's six against four. We could handle that without having to bring in Maya."

The leaders of Darkness Rainbow and the archwizards of Rainbow Heart were well matched in terms of power. There were prodigies every now and then, but the current members of each side were all roughly on the same level. So with the numerical advantage, Darkness Rainbow was almost assured victory.

"But that's only six of them accounted for... What about the last one?"

"Hold on a moment. Just where is she...?"

It was easy to read the future of willing petitioners right in front of her, but peering into the future of someone who wasn't present was rather difficult by comparison.

"Who is the last one?"

"Nana's apprentice."

“Nana’s...?”

Hearing that name, Purple’s expression changed. Rainbow Nana had once taken on and incapacitated all seven leaders of Darkness Rainbow in the past. Hearing that her apprentice was now on the scene and acting alone was somewhat uncanny. Purple got a sinking feeling...

“Wha—?! This is bad, Purple! Nana’s apprentice is headed here!”

And it was right on the money. Green confirmed that Nana’s apprentice, Yurika, was en route.

“Are you sure?!”

“The margin of error is less than 10 percent! That means that, at very least, they’ve already found this place!”

“How?!”

“I don’t know! I can’t see any signs leading up to it! But they’re definitely on the way now!”

Green couldn’t just see the present and future with her magic. To a limited extent, she could also look backward into the past. She took a moment to scrutinize the events leading up to her rescuing Crimson, but she couldn’t see anything that indicated this would happen. Nevertheless, the future was right in front of them now. Rainbow Yurika was in the Land of Beginning. It didn’t make sense. No, it shouldn’t even be possible. Green didn’t understand, and fell into something of a dumbstruck stupor.

“Calm down, Green.”

That was when Crimson scolded her. Green twitched a little in response, then turned to look at her comrade. Having finished her dinner, Crimson rose from her seat and walked over to join in on the conversation.

“That woman, Kurano Kiriha... She’s probably behind this. I wouldn’t doubt for a minute that she knows weaknesses of future forecast that not even we do.”

Crimson was simply going off of intuition, but she was spot on.

Knowing that Green’s divinations were less reliable the further in the future

she looked, Kiriha had finished modifying the automated weapons and had them put into place several days ago. After that, she'd left them completely untouched. If Green had bothered to check last week, she would have seen what Kiriha was up to, but it was far too late for that now. The weapons—and Kiriha's plan—had flown right under her radar.

"We should have killed her last time when we had the chance."

"What do we do, Purple?"

"Isn't that obvious? We'll send our entire army to attack! And after we've defeated Rainbow Yurika and her friends here, we'll regroup and annihilate Rainbow Heart!"

Green's forecast was a surprise, but in Purple's eyes, it didn't change what they needed to do. Whether or not Rainbow Yurika had discovered their base, they would end her and the rest of Rainbow Heart.

"Just bring it on, Rainbow! I will reclaim the past!"

Heeding Purple's orders, Darkness Rainbow sortied. The leaders moved to intercept Yurika and her allies, while their main force marched on Thorthe. The curtain was now rising on the battle for Folsaria between Darkness Rainbow and Rainbow Heart.

The Return of the Magical Girl

Sunday, September 19th

Koutarou and company were able to confirm that Sariachal Castle was Darkness Rainbow's base, but they weren't yet sure how to attack it. They'd likely end up caught in a long, drawn-out fight if they went in the front door. And if all six leaders came at them at once, they'd be in serious danger. Koutarou and the girls didn't know that Darkness Rainbow's army had already sortied, so they were still weighing their options.

"We have to stop their tinplate soldiers or we won't win, right?"

The "tinplate soldiers" Sanae was referring to were the automated weapons Darkness Rainbow had gotten from the radical faction and Elexis. Darkness Rainbow had never been able to make a decisive move on Rainbow Heart because they lacked the numbers to stand up to a larger organization. But now that they had machines to pad their ranks, they didn't have to worry about that anymore. One of the reasons Koutarou and the others had come straight to Darkness Rainbow's base was to try and take their weapons out ahead of time.

"But going in the front is so dangerous..." Yurika sighed, her shoulders drooping.

They couldn't just storm the place. They needed some kind of plan. And that was where an unlikely candidate—Harumi—raised her hand.

"Satomi-kun, can I say something?"

"Go right ahead, Sakuraba-senpai."

"Isn't sneaking in the only thing we can do in this sort of situation?"

If they couldn't walk in the front, they should just sneak in. It was a simple, effective solution to a rather sticky problem.

"Veltlion, I agree with Harumi," Clan said with a nod.

Regardless of whether it was necessary or not, Clan would prefer sneaking in. Avoiding a direct confrontation was more her style.

“Yurika, what do you think?”

If Harumi and Clan were in agreement, they already had Koutarou’s ear. However, Yurika was the one in charge, so he turned to her for her opinion. After gathering her thoughts and staring at the castle for a long moment, she gave her reply.

“...Satomi-san, do you think we can do it? Do you think we can sneak into that castle?”

Yurika was worried about the castle defenses. There was a chance sneaking in might be the more dangerous option.

“It won’t be easy. Old castles like this were designed to resist infiltration.”

The same thought had crossed Koutarou’s mind. He actually had some experience attacking Forthorthian castles and fortresses, and knew that they were built with war in mind. There were likely already safeguards in place to defend it against any unwanted intrusion.

“But it’s still probably better than going in the front.”

“Okay. We want to avoid fighting—for everyone’s sake—and we don’t have much time. Let’s sneak in.”

Yurika trusted Koutarou’s judgement, but people’s lives were the deciding factor in her call. They would be walking right into a confrontation with Darkness Rainbow’s army if they went in the front, and the resulting chaos may very well spell casualties. If they could sneak in and accomplish their objective with a minimal amount of force, however, that would be ideal. Moreover, the clock was ticking. They needed to handle things here as quickly as possible, and that meant skipping fighting where possible.

Now that they’d decided they were going to sneak in, they needed to decide on a route. There, Koutarou’s knowledge of the past came in rather handy. Old castles were connected to the outside world in several ways. Like aqueducts, for example.

Older castles also doubled as fortifications. They needed reliable, defensible access to water, or else they would never withstand a siege. And in the case of the Sariachal Castle, that water came from an underground aqueduct.

“How does it look, Clan?”

“We’re in luck! The facilities from two thousand years ago are still here!”

“All right, luck really is on our side!”

Koutarou and Clan were familiar with Sariachal Castle from their time in past Forthorthe. They’d studied it rather closely while they were trying to figure out how to go about attacking Maxfern, and one of the suggestions on the table had been to infiltrate via the aqueduct. Koutarou and Clan were hoping that might still be a viable option, and as luck would have it, Clan’s scouting drone confirmed that the structure was still standing. This could be their big break.

“Kiriha-san, what do you think?”

“Our enemy doesn’t know that we have this information. So even if they use their future forecast, the chances of them predicting us infiltrating this way are low. However... we should still add an element of randomness.”

There, Kiriha pulled a small stack of cards from the front of her jacket and fanned them out in front of her. She then presented them to Koutarou and bid him draw one. Since Green’s future forecast relied on probability, selecting a plan at random—like by drawing a card—was the easiest way to thwart it.

“...Then it’s decided. Let’s go with the underground aqueduct.”

Koutarou had drawn an old card that had lost most of its foil sheen with age. It was a Kabutonga card scribbled with a young Kiriha’s handwriting. It held special meaning that only Koutarou and Kiriha understood, and when drawn in this context, it was like a green light.



Koutarou and company made their way to the aqueduct by going through a waterway accessible by a well in town. That meant travelling a ways underwater, but they all had barriers, spells to breathe underwater, and various other abilities on their side. Between them, everyone made it to their destination with little trouble.

“Here we are, Sanae.”

“Aye aye, captain! Thanks for the ride!”

“Don’t be so loud. We’re in enemy territory now.”

“Oh, right.”

Koutarou dismissed his armor’s barrier and put down Sanae, who he had been carrying on his back. Sanae hopped off of him onto the stone-paved floor like she was hopping off a bus. Right now, they were currently in a maintenance passage running alongside the underground aqueduct. If they continued this way, they’d eventually be inside the castle.

“Still, we were lucky the aqueduct and waterway were connected,” Harumi said, looking back at the waterway they’d just exited.

If it hadn’t met up with the aqueduct, infiltrating the castle would have been much harder. And without access to a water supply like this, the early Folsarians would’ve had it much harder as well. She couldn’t help thinking it was a lucky break for both of them that the waterway was there.

“Harumi, I think it’s less about luck and more about hard work. I think they purposefully dug the aqueduct all the way out here to reach the waterway. Well, I guess even then, it’s fortunate that there was water here.”

Since the castle itself had come from Forthorthe, the aqueduct was rendered useless when it was placed in a random spot. It wasn’t like the waterway it was originally connected to was sent with it, after all. So in order to get it working again, the Folsarians had extended it until it reached water. And it was indeed a lucky break that they’d found it, for there were no rivers or lakes in the area.

“So Maxfern’s castle is up ahead... It feels kind of strange.”

“To think where the final battle took place in the legend of the Blue Knight

still exists... I can't believe it."

Theia and Ruth had a somewhat different reaction than Harumi. Sariachal Castle was a thing of legend to them. They'd only ever seen it in movies and books. And being there in person was strange. It was like they'd walked right into the legends themselves.

"At least this looks like it's being maintained. Very good," Shizuka said, looking around with a satisfied smile.

The town above ground had been left to ruin, which bothered her greatly as a landlord. However, since the aqueducts were still providing fresh water to the castle, they were still being taken care of. It put a smile on Shizuka's face to see some love put into the place.

"That isn't a good thing, Kasagi-san."

"Why not?"

"If it's being maintained, that means that someone here is maintaining it."

Maki was right, of course. The aqueduct was in good enough repair that it looked like someone was cleaning it regularly, and it would be unfortunate if they happened to run into someone at this stage in the plan.

"It's okay. Facilities like this are always serviced on a regular schedule. No one would show up to clean it at a time anyone would actually be using the water."

"I see... That's a landlord for you."

Surprisingly, Shizuka's landlord knowhow was actually coming in handy. No one would service the water line while people were using it. The risk of contaminating the water was too high, which was why maintenance was usually scheduled for very early in the morning or very late at night. And since it was the middle of the day now, Shizuka was quite sure there was no risk of running into any maintenance workers.

"Well then, we made it... But here's where things really get interesting. What's the plan, Yurika?" asked Kiriha.

"The controls for the weapons are probably in a command room or laboratory. If possible, I'd like to make it all the way there without being

noticed. If that's not possible, we'll just have to break through."

"Understood. Wait a moment... Ruth, come here for a second."

"Yes, Kiriha-sama?"

"Use your scouts to gather information alongside the haniwas."

"Understood."

"Ho! You can count on us, ho!"

"It's our time to shine, ho!"

Kiriha and Ruth then got straight to work gathering information. They wanted to reach the controller for the automated weapons without being found by the enemy, so trying to rush through the castle was a bad idea. Instead, they would take their time to scout the place and plan accordingly.

Koutarou and the others followed the aqueduct all the way to the end, and entered the castle from there. They were currently hiding in a nearby stairwell that connected the second and third floors. So far, they hadn't run into anyone. There was hardly a sign there was anyone there at all. It was possible the place was just minimally guarded, but the castle seemed to be deserted.

"This is bad... They've already left."

Koutarou could feel it. There was a particular energy, an atmosphere that built up in bases preparing to go to war. He remembered it well from past Forthorthe, and there was none of that here in the castle. All was quiet, meaning the soldiers were likely already on the move.

"They're probably advancing on the capital as we speak. We must have missed each other on the way."

While Koutarou and the others were chasing after Crimson and Green, Darkness Rainbow's army was headed towards the capital via a different route. By now, Thorthe might already be under attack. But since Koutarou and the others needed to keep a low profile, they couldn't contact anyone to confirm that things were all right. It was a tough spot to be in.

"But since Crimson-san and Green-san returned here, surely the attack hasn't really started yet. We can still make it if we hurry!"

Yurika hadn’t given up hope. There was still a chance to prevent the fighting. It was hard to imagine that Darkness Rainbow would challenge Rainbow Heart to a decisive battle without Crimson and Green. And since they’d retreated here to Sariachal Castle, surely Darkness Rainbow hadn’t actually made their move yet. They would at least need to recover and regroup with their troops before getting serious.

“Koutarou, Yurika is right! We still have a chance if we can seize control of the automated weapons!”

“Yeah, you’re right. Let’s just continue as planned!”

From there, Koutarou and the girls carefully ascended to the third floor. The stairs they were on only connected floors one through three. That was to keep a single stairwell from being able to compromise all of the castle in the event of an attack. If they wanted to reach the next floor, they’d have to find another set of stairs to take them higher. And in order to make it all the way to the top floor —the seventh floor—they’d probably have to find another set or two after that.

“I wonder if things are going to go so easily for you...”

However, just as Koutarou and the girls exited the stairwell and started to make their way down the hall, they heard an unfamiliar voice.

“Who’s there?!”

Koutarou instinctively raised his voice and unsheathed his sword. The voice in question laughed in response.

“Now, now. That’s my question, Mr. Intruder.”

A shadowy figure stepped out from behind a pillar—it was Dark Purple. She stood defiantly across from Koutarou, a cheerful smile on her face. The other leaders then stepped out behind her. Now that Maki was gone, the six of them composed the upper echelon of Darkness Rainbow. Once they’d realized Koutarou and the others were approaching, they’d decided to lie in wait for them.

“To think top brass would come greet us personally...”

“The soldiers are all out right now, so we’re a little shorthanded. Once we

defeat you, we'll be headed off to join them as well. Being low on manpower really is unpleasant."

"Then let me throw this right back at you: I wonder if things are going to go so easily for you..."

"Oh, did I say something like that?"

Purple remained confident, even faced with ten powerful enemies. She wasn't the slightest bit phased by Koutarou's remark. She didn't appear to be all that much older than Koutarou and the girls, but her poise came from her unmistakable maturity.

She's not as bad as Maya, but... she'll still be a troublesome opponent...

Koutarou forced a confident expression in return as he faced Purple, all while thinking that a fight against her would be a real struggle. Koutarou knew all too well that the fighter that kept their cool the longest would come out on top.

After Koutarou and Purple's short exchange, Yurika stepped up next to Koutarou. Negotiating with Purple was supposed to be her job.

"Purple-san, won't you stand down?"

That was something Yurika asked her every time they faced each other. And it was a question that irritated the otherwise calm Purple to no end.

"How many times must you people repeat the same discussion before you're satisfied?! We made up our minds to fight a long time ago! Why do you insist on asking the same thing over and over?!" she hissed.

It was quite clear this wasn't the first time they'd had this conversation, and it was quite clear she was sick of it.

Purple is... What on earth?

Maki was stunned by Purple's behavior. She was Darkness Rainbow's de facto leader, and it was her unshakable calm that had earned her that role. To see her so worked up now... She almost looked like a different person to Maki.

Purple had gotten emotional because she saw a glimpse of her younger self in Yurika. She too had once fought against Darkness Rainbow the same way. Oblivious to this, however, Maki had no idea what had gotten into her.

“I know that there will be a fight whether or not I ask... But Rainbow Heart exists to protect the lives of the people. It’s my duty to ask anyway.”

Strangely enough, Yurika was the calm one. She knew she was in a situation that she couldn’t talk her way out of. Of course, so did Darkness Rainbow. But even so, she still had to walk the virtuous path. That was her job as Rainbow Yurika.

“Then it’s time for a rude awakening! Allow me to show you the lie you’ve been living!”

Seeing that glimpse of herself in Yurika, Purple felt like she was reliving her past. Except she was the necromancer this time. In other words, she needed to reject Yurika and what she stood for to keep walking down the new path she’d chosen for herself. She had to defeat Yurika and revive her lost love. She had to... because it was all she had.

“All right! Now you’re speaking my language, Purple!”

“Don’t get too excited, Crimson, or you’ll get the rug pulled out from under you again.”

Crimson and Green stood behind Purple on either side. The remaining three leaders, Orange, Blue, and Yellow, then fanned out behind them. And behind them all, a crowd of automated weapons appeared. Koutarou and company had come to settle things once and for all, and it seemed Darkness Rainbow was ready to do the same thing.

“Purple-san!” Yurika called out.

“It’s not going to happen, Yurika,” said Koutarou, putting his hand on her shoulder.

“But...”

“You’re right. But if you die here, what will happen to Folsaria?”

“I-I understand...”

With their enemies ready to attack at any time, any further talk could get dangerous. Yurika might simply get shot down while trying to negotiate. And since they couldn’t risk losing her here, they’d have to abandon trying to

prevent the war with diplomacy.

“If it’s to protect the people of Folsaria, I will fight!”

It might not have been the correct decision, but it was the best option she had right now. Believing that, Yurika readied her staff.

“That’s right, Yurika! Now is the time to fight and protect the people you love!”

“Being a hero is hard! But it’s time to kick butt, Yurika! Sanae-chan says so!”

“The ideal would be not to fight at all, but we work with that we have. Don’t grieve your ideals being out of reach for now. Fight the good fight and continue to pursue them! Do your best! You’re only human, not some god!”

“Yes, of course! I’ll do my best!”

Above all, Yurika had friends who understood her. They knew she was really just a normal girl who hated fighting. And she was only able to fight because they were with her now. They would work together to overcome this trial, and all return to their normal, everyday life together.

“Ha, you don’t understand anything at all, Rainbow!”

Witnessing this scene, Purple’s irritation hit its limits. Yurika had no idea what it was like to lose something precious to her. She was only able to continue as a magical girl of love and justice because she had no idea what desire was like. She had no idea what ate away at Purple every day. And Purple thought it was high time she learn.

“Your fate was sealed the moment you walked in here!”

The instant Purple said that, the anomalies began.

“Network connection lost. Blue Knight can no longer be reached.”

“The comms are down?! Why?!”

“Same here! We’ve been completely cut off from the ships!”

The first anomaly was reported by Ruth’s bracelet. All forms of communication were being disrupted, severing their connection to Blue Knight. Clan couldn’t get through to her ships either.

“Satomi-san, I suddenly can’t gather any mana! This isn’t good for my magic!”

“Blue Knight! The supply of mana suddenly stopped—”

“Wh-What’s going on?! Signaltin’s powers were cut off!”

The magicians felt it next. Yurika and Maki could no longer use magic, and Harumi could no longer feel power from the sword. Effectively, they were rendered perfectly normal girls. The same was true for Shizuka, who was suddenly cut off from Alunaya.

“I’m starting to feel sick... What is this?”

“Spiritual energy field output is decreasing, ho! This is bad, ho!”

“Only 30 percent of the generator output is reaching the field, ho!”

The last to feel it were Sanae and the haniwas. The amount of spiritual energy under their control suddenly and steeply dropped off. That mostly affected the spiritual energy they could project, meaning their barriers would be significantly weaker.

“Just what is going on?!”

In Koutarou’s case, he was cut off from everything but the armor he was wearing. He couldn’t reach Blue Knight to call for Signaltin, so he would be stuck fighting with Saguratin—with less than half of the normal spiritual energy pumping through it. Koutarou’s spiritual circuity and spirit sight weren’t working like normal, either. Only his purely mechanical armor was still functioning properly.

“Let me explain it to you, boy.”

Koutarou and the others were baffled by this sudden turn of events, and even more baffled still to hear a familiar voice echo down the hall. Koutarou recognized it belonged to someone who’d been a thorn in his side multiple times now. It was Maki’s master and the former Dark Navy before her, Maya.

“Maya?! Are you doing this?!”

“Not so fast, now. It’s not just Maya. It’s me, too.”

“Elexis!”

Maya and Elexis now emerged before the group, but in a very different fashion from Darkness Rainbow. Neither of them looked ready to fight. It was like they were simply spectating.

“It’s simple. We’ve analyzed your powers and now we’re jamming them.”

“It took a lot of hard work to make this thing, you know.”

Elexis help up a metal cylinder about thirty centimeters long. It was a device specifically designed to jam gravitational waves, spiritual energy, and mana. In other words, it was the reason everyone’s powers had suddenly gone dark.

“We had to gather and analyze a lot of data to figure out how to get it to work just right. And by that, I mean only jamming your powers and not ours too. It took quite some time.”

“I see... So that’s why you left without a fight in the underground, and why you never even showed up the other day. It was all to make that!”

Koutarou finally understood what was going on. Maya and Elexis were so assured of their victory with this device that they hadn’t bothered attacking before. Darkness Rainbow had also assisted in gathering the data needed to build the device so they could use it against Rainbow Heart.

“The only element of uncertainty in this fight will be you kids.”

“If we don’t take care of you, this will probably just go the way it did underground.”

“But if we can contain that variable—you—victory will come to us on its own.”

“In other words, we have to eliminate you here.”

Ever since Koutarou and the girls had started working together, they’d become too powerful. Their whims could turn even the tides of war. They’d demonstrated as much underground. Darkness Rainbow had every confidence they could eliminate Rainbow Heart, but Koutarou and his friends were a different story. That’s why they had to take them out here. They were just too much of a liability.

“But there’s something I don’t understand.”

“And what’s that, Koutarou-kun? It’s all very logical, really.”

Elexis spread his arms out wide in a grand gesture as if to welcome Koutarou’s question. Surely it wouldn’t be anything too important.

“That’s not what I’m talking about! Elexis, you know that they’re the descendants of Grevanas and his magicians too, don’t you?!”

“Oh... I’m impressed you figured that out, Koutarou-kun.”

Elexis narrowed his eyes slightly. He’d heard the story of how Folsaria came to be from Maya, and he’d put two and two together when she told him the name of their first leader was Grevanas. Any Forthorthian would have made the connection, but Elexis was surprised Koutarou had.

Why does he know something that only the elders of Rainbow Heart should know? Did he discover it infiltrating the castle somehow? Or did the elders reveal it to him? Either way, something’s fishy. Koutarou-kun must be hiding some kind of secret...

Elexis’s suspicions about Koutarou increased. Regardless of whether he’d figured it out seeing the castle or whether the elders had shared the secret with him, there was something special going on with Koutarou. He was clearly no normal boy.

“Elexis, if you know, then why would you have them fight?! The place they want to return to is Forthorthe! You could just take them back yourself, couldn’t you?!”

What didn’t make sense to Koutarou was why Elexis hadn’t taken Darkness Rainbow to Forthorthe like they wanted. If Darkness Rainbow’s objective was to return to their true home and Elexis could get them there, then there wouldn’t be a need for this fight in the first place.

“Just taking them there isn’t enough. That won’t change Forthorthe!”

“What?!”

“If the Magical Kingdom of Folsaria remains as it is now, I can’t take them back to Forthorthe! The elders would never allow an army of magicians to intervene in another country! But if Darkness Rainbow wins, things will be

different! And that's what we need! That's what we need to change Forthorthe!"

"Ridiculous! You'd start a war here for something that petty and pointless?!"

Koutarou was aghast at what Elexis revealed. He was trying to revolutionize Forthorthe's current political system, and he was planning on using the Magical Kingdom of Folsaria to do it. That was why he'd struck a deal with Darkness Rainbow and supplied them with all kinds of technology. In return, they would cooperate with him once they'd finished their fight in Folsaria. And once everything was all said and done—once Darkness Rainbow and Elexis had both gotten their ways—Elexis would take anyone who wanted to go back to Forthorthe. After his revolution, Forthorthe should have no problem accepting a few immigrants from Folsaria.

Koutarou had said it was all petty and pointless, and Maya took issue with that.

"I hear you dismissing us, boy... but just how much of our circumstances do you really understand?"

Maya had a very irritated look in her eyes as she stared down Koutarou, who didn't really know the half of things.

"What do you mean?"

"It's true Darkness Rainbow was created with the intention of returning to our true home. But after hundreds of years of fighting, we've discovered more purpose than that alone! We're not in a situation where we can just reconcile because we can suddenly return home!"

That was because of everything else Darkness Rainbow fought for. The organization was formed under the banner of returning home, but in their fight against Rainbow Heart over the centuries, things had changed. Darkness Rainbow had become a faction of like-minded people who each had individual goals they sought to accomplish with magic. Crimson wanted to get stronger, Purple wanted to revive her lost love. And right now, those people were the heart of the organization.

If Elexis had shown up hundreds of years ago when Darkness Rainbow's main

goal was still to return home, everything could have been solved by him taking them to Forthorthe. And that would make some of Darkness Rainbow's members happy even now, but it would do nothing for Crimson and Purple. The private use of magic would still be forbidden, leaving anyone with a goal they wanted to accomplish with magic high and dry. That was why, even if they could go home now, they still had to defeat Rainbow Heart.

But the sheer amount of time the two sides had been fighting presented another problem. Hundreds of years' worth of resentment and hatred was impossible to quash. There would be no reconciliation between the factions.

In short, Darkness Rainbow's struggle was more fraught than it had ever been. The circumstances were delicate, and the issues complexly intertwined. Maya couldn't forgive Koutarou for writing it all off as "petty and pointless."

"We will defeat Rainbow Heart and return to our home in a dignified manner as partners of the new system that Elexis is creating! We have no intention of crawling back as refugees! We are the proud magicians of Darkness Rainbow!"

"If you want to stop them, then just try it, Koutarou-kun! You'll learn the hard way what kind of power they've sought to this end!"

With those final lines from Maya and Elexis, the six leaders of Darkness Rainbow began closing in on Koutarou and the others. With things as they were, only Theia and Koutarou would be able to put up a fight, but even Koutarou was significantly powered down. He might just end up getting in Theia's way. It seemed disaster and defeat were upon them.

Faced with certain death, Koutarou made the call to retreat. They would only be annihilated if they tried to fight like this. Breaking through the six leaders and destroying the jamming device Elexis was holding would be next to impossible like this, too. The only remaining choice was to run.

"Everyone, let's fall back for now! There's no chance of a fair fight here!"

"We're not just going to let you escape! We knew you'd try that!"

When Purple raised her voice, automated weapons began pouring out of the stairwell that Koutarou and the others had just come from. It didn't take a divination expert like Green to see that they were now trapped. With their

objective being to eliminate Koutarou and his allies, Darkness Rainbow had deployed their forces so that there would be no escape.

“Tch! At this rate, we’ll...!”

Koutarou cut down the automated weapons in front of him with a bitter expression on his face. Thanks to his armor, he could deal with the automated weapons with ease when fighting them one at a time. But since he was swinging around a normal sword, one at a time was the best he could do. He couldn’t take them out fast enough to clear a path to the door. And with the leaders of Darkness Rainbow attacking them now too, they had to stay on the defensive.

“What’s wrong?! Is that all you’ve got when you can’t use magic, dragon girl?!”

“Oh, that’s not all! Not even close!”

Crimson had specifically targeted Shizuka, but she wasn’t using her lasers or her cannon. Instead, she’d strengthened herself with magic and was swinging her staff, now transformed into an enchanted battleaxe. In contrast, Shizuka was fighting Crimson barehanded and without the help of Alunaya’s strength or toughness. As a result, she had her hands full just avoiding incoming attacks.

“Go, Maki-chan!”

“I’m counting on you, Yurika!”

Maki and Yurika were working together to fight Green. The effectiveness of their spells was greatly reduced thanks to Elexis’s jamming device, so they chose to work together and pool their powers. Even then, however, they were only operating at about half capacity. To make the most of it, they decided to focus their mana on Maki, who could handle herself in a fight, and send her in against Green. Green clearly had the advantage in terms of magic power, but she wasn’t good in close combat. Maki and Yurika were hoping they could catch her off guard that way and force a win.

“Navy-san, if you weren’t around, then Crimson would...!”

However, Green knew exactly what they were up to. To defend herself, she trained a few automated weapons on Maki while she prepared a spell.

“Ugh!”

“Maki-chan!”

“Mirage Blast!”

“Kyaaah!”

“Stand back, Yurika!”

Yurika had cast all her magic on Maki, leaving herself defenseless on her own. Maki had to cover for both of them, which was hard while she was trying to close the distance on Green. It left them at a disadvantage, and they were both injured by Green’s spell.

“Oh? Even though your familiars have powered down, you’re still putting up a good fight.”

“They’re not familiars; they’re servants.”

“Ho! We’ve got guts, ho!”

“Let’s show them the power of haniwas, ho!”

Kiriha, meanwhile, never had any special powers to begin with. Her greatest weapon of all was her sharp mind, so she tried to fight smart, compensating for her naginata’s reduced cutting power and her weakened haniwas. It was fortunate for her that she was up against Yellow. As a specialist in defensive magic, her attack spells weren’t anything special. Even Kiriha could dodge them.

“We’re going in again, Karama, Korama!”

“No use in complaining, ho!”

“We’ll make up for what we lack with courage, ho!”

Kiriha and the haniwas’ strategy was to have Kiriha step in and attack from the front while the haniwas came at Yellow from her blind spots. In their weakened state, the haniwas didn’t have enough spiritual energy to make an effective barrier, so they’d been given a new offensive role.

“But there’s more than one way to defend yourself... Hedgehog Guard!”

However, Yellow was no ordinary magician. As a leader of Darkness Rainbow, she had more than one trick up her sleeve.

“Owowow! W-We’re hit, ho!”

“It’s spiky, ho!”

The haniwas attempted to tackle Yellow while she was preoccupied with Kiriha, but were repelled by Yellow’s barrier. That in and of itself wasn’t really a problem, but Yellow had summoned a particularly dangerous barrier. It was made of spikes, which had damaged the haniwas when they collided with it. At this rate, Yellow might be able to wear Kiriha down with her defenses alone.

“Harumi, don’t get too far away from me!”

“I’m sorry for making you fight on your own, Sanae-chan!”

“No problem! This is my time to shine!”

Sanae was desperately fighting to protect Harumi. Since Harumi couldn’t actually use magic on her own, she was defenseless once she was cut off from Signaltin. Sanae still had control of some of her psychic powers, however, which she was using to keep Harumi safe from Purple.

“Not so fast, little girl! This is just the tip of the iceberg!”

“Ugh, what a terrible personality.”

Playing along with the weakened Sanae, Purple summoned an assembly of departed souls. Sanae would easily be able to handle them under ordinary circumstances, but she was weakened and had her hands full protecting Harumi. They would eventually get the better of her at this rate.

“Sanae!”

“Gaaaaah!”

Luckily, Theia realized the danger Sanae was in and had turned her rifle on the crowd of spirits. Physical attacks had little effect on spirits, but Theia’s rifle was exceptionally high caliber and was able to deal some real damage. If Purple had chosen to summon fewer and increase their power instead, it never would have worked.

“Thanks, Theia!”

“Be careful!”

“Yeah!”

Seeing her chance, Sanae took out a few of the damaged spirits and regained some ground. It was a relief for Theia, but her opponent—Dark Orange—took her moment of distraction as an opportunity.

“Do you really think you have the time to worry about anyone else?!”

“Yikes!”

Theia swiftly jumped backward. Moments later, an orange, yellow, and red cloud appeared where she’d just been standing. It was so bright and colorful that it hurt Theia’s eyes just to look at it. Orange’s specialty was alteration magic, or the ability to change the properties of magical and nonmagical things alike. There was no way of telling what would happen to anyone who came into contact with that cloud.

“Your spells are just too slow, you see.”

“You aren’t cute at all!”

Theia had the upper hand in the fight between her and Orange. Her equipment was purely technological, so she was unaffected by the jamming device. Orange was opportunistic and had a tricky fighting style, so in a battle of firepower, Theia clearly had the advantage. Yet she just couldn’t seem to get a finishing blow on Orange.

“Ruth!”

“I’m sorry, Your Highness! Thank you!”

The reason for that was because she had to cover for her allies and was unable to focus on Orange alone. If she had been equipped with Assault Red instead of Command Green, she probably would have defeated Orange by now, but she’d also probably be out of ammo.

Meanwhile, Ruth—who Theia had just saved—was currently fighting Dark Blue.

“Why don’t you just give up? Even with all those skills you’re so proud of sealed, you have no chance of winning.”

Blue was indifferent in her attacks and spoke in a dull tone. Her specialty was

summoning magic. She could call demons to attack for her, or conjure lava to pour over her opponents. She had a wide variety of options and attack modes, much like Ruth did when she had all her drones at her disposal.

“It doesn’t matter! A knight fights to protect their allies! Giving up is never an option!”

With her link to Blue Knight cut, Ruth was reduced to fighting with her beam sabers. While her skill with a blade had improved significantly, she was still more powerful with her drones and her information network. And without those trump cards, she was struggling.

“We did it, Elexis. We’ve won.”

“I’d certainly hope so after all the time and energy we put into this. I’d be massively disappointed otherwise.”

Seeing how the fight was going, Maya and Elexis were convinced of their victory. With Koutarou and the others’ abilities so compromised, they were at a distinct disadvantage and were easily being cornered by the dark magical girls and automated weapons. The battle was so one-sided that the remaining Darkness Rainbow soldiers—who’d been ordered to stand down to prevent any unnecessary casualties—were even allowed to join the fray. It seemed the outcome of this battle had already been decided.

“Damn it, I have to find a way to get everyone out of here! We’re getting destroyed!”

Koutarou frantically looked around as he fought back the enemy. He was trying to find a way to get the girls to safety. It didn’t look like anything good would happen if they stayed here. All he could see was the girls struggling and their enemies increasing. His experience told him they needed to get out.

“It can’t end here! I still haven’t—”

Koutarou took his eyes off of the mechanical soldier he was fighting for the briefest instant to scan the rest of the battlefield. When he did, it thrust its bladed right hand at his side.

“Guaaah!”

Koutarou had been attacked by so many enemies that his defenses were already compromised. The machine's blade had no trouble piercing the weakened barrier and Koutarou's flank underneath it. He immediately dropped to one knee from the intense shock and pain. If he'd had full control of his spiritual energy, he would have been able to use it to help dull the pain. But not now. He couldn't even move.

"Koutarou!"

Seeing him go down, Theia let out a scream. The other girls all reflexively turned to him when they heard her shout his name, creating one giant opportunity for their enemies.

"Don't look away in the middle of a battle! Are you girls insane?!"

"Kyah!"

"Ugh!"

"Oh no!"

The dark magical girls' attacks rained down on the Corona House girls. They all swiftly moved to defend themselves and were able to avoid any critical damage, but they were all knocked to the ground. Now that they were prone, the next series of attacks would likely be their last. Koutarou and the girls would be defeated, and Darkness Rainbow would win. There was no longer anything they could do.

"Koutarou-kun, it's been months since our first battle... but it seems like I'm finally about to get my first win."

"It's been more than ten years for me, you know? I'm just glad I got to see you get your comeuppance before I turned into an old lady."

Elexis and Maya approached. They both thought of Koutarou and the others as opponents they had a deep connection with. They wanted to be there for their final moments.

"Elexis, Maya... You guys really got us this time. There's nothing more we can do... You win."

Koutarou conceded his face with a bitter smile. He truly looked like someone

who'd completely given up. But seeing that, Elexis stopped dead in his tracks.

"What is it, El?"

"That doesn't sound like something the Koutarou-kun I know would say. I think he just might be planning something. Purple-kun, kill them immediately."

Elexis had an inkling Koutarou was trying to trick them. He'd seen Koutarou fight in the past, and he knew he was the type to defend his comrades to the bitter end. Surely he'd only give up so easily if he were trying to get his enemy to lower their guard.

Damn, he caught on...

Koutarou mentally clicked his tongue. Elexis had seen right through him. Koutarou was currently trying to overload his armor's generator and cause it to explode. By doing that, he thought he could at least create an opportunity for the girls to get away.

"Understood. This is goodbye, intruders."

The six dark magical girls pointed their staffs at Koutarou and the others. In a few short moments, they would all activate their specialty spells and annihilate the group.

"I won't let you!"

Koutarou forced himself up and willed his numb legs to run right at Darkness Rainbow.

Please get away, everyone!

He would use his body as a shield and blow up his generator to give the girls a chance to escape. All he cared about was them getting to safety. He knew his plan was crazy, that it might not even work. But he still had to try.

"What a foolish man... What do you think will come from that?"

Purple sneered at Koutarou. She already knew what he intended to do, and that Yellow's barrier would be able to block it. He would die for nothing. He would just be hurling himself into his grave a little sooner than the girls. Purple found that unbearably amusing.

Be grateful, Blue Knight, that you get to pass on with those you love. You'll never know this desire...

Mana gathered at the tips of Purple's staff. She and the other leaders of Darkness Rainbow would be ready to unleash their spells any second now. They, as well as Maya and Elexis, were thoroughly convinced of their victory. Victory over Rainbow Heart was sure to follow suit. It was a delightful prospect, and they all rejoiced in the imminent defeat of Koutarou and the girls from Corona House.

But unfortunately for them, the future they were so confident in was washed away by a rain of bullets. Before anyone knew it, the fight began anew.

"Guah!"

The bullets were first focused on the object in Elexis was holding, piercing it several times. He almost dropped it in surprise, but quickly secured it with both hands. He knew very well what would happen if they lost the jamming device.

"Kyaaah!"

"Wh-What's going on?!"

Next, the storm of bullets began raining down on the six magical girls. For some reason, they pierced right through Yellow's barrier. That should have been impossible, so it caught Darkness Rainbow quite off guard. They quickly scattered to get out of the way.

"Who's there?! Show yourself!"

Since Elexis had been attacked, Maya was enraged. She scanned the hall for the attacker, her eyes full of fury and hatred. If looks could kill, everyone in the room might have dropped dead on the spot.

"...I see you haven't changed, Maya. You always act so confident... but the moment someone messes with something you care about, you erupt in anger."

"That voice... No!"

"Mm, I'm afraid so."

The mysterious attacker then revealed herself. She was petite, and had her hair bound up in her signature twintails. She had a youthful face, but keen eyes.

“Rainbow Nana! My eternal nemesis!”

Rainbow Nana had once been the strongest magical girl in Rainbow Heart. Even though she was retired, people still talked about her to this day. She was a living legend in Folsaria. The story went that she’d been seriously injured in battle and would never fight again, but here she was.



The moment Nana appeared, all of Darkness Rainbow froze. That was just how intimidating of an opponent she was. If they let their guard down for even a moment, the fight would be over instantly. Nana had claimed victory after victory over Darkness Rainbow, and was rightly feared among them.

“I’ve handed the title of Rainbow over to Yurika. I’m just Nana now.”

“So what? What kind of idiot would let their guard down because of that?”

“Honestly, I can barely use magic anymore.”

“I still won’t rest easy until I see you dead.”

Seizing the opportunity Darkness Rainbow gave her when they all froze, Nana opened fire with the gun in her right hand again. The bullets it shot were made of a combination of magical and spiritual energy. It was designed to gather and fire mana, but with Nana’s reduced mana capacity, the spiritual energy generator powering her artificial limbs supplied the gun with spiritual energy to compensate. The hybrid bullets came with a special advantage—defending against them would require two kinds of protection.

“Protection From Soul Energy!”

“Anti-Magic Shield!”

Realizing why the barrier hadn’t held up before, Purple and Yellow each cast a defensive spell. Purple’s would keep them safe from spiritual energy, and Yellow’s from magical attacks. This time, their two-fold ward successfully blocked Nana’s attack. The bullets themselves didn’t have an impressive amount of energy behind them.

“Don’t think we’re the same as before, Rainbow Nana!”

Shielded by Purple and Yellow’s spells, Maya charged at Nana. She fired her own gun, which was built into her left arm as she ran, intending to close the distance and settle things with her blade arm.

“Then let’s try this.”

However, Nana flashed a playful smile and rolled something across the floor towards her.

“Oh no!”

By the time Maya realized what it was, it exploded in a brilliant light.

Nana had tossed a flashbang. And since everyone had focused on her, it proved exceptionally effective. All of Darkness Rainbow was blinded by the flash. Everyone apart from Maya, whose mechanical body was assisting her, and Green, who didn’t rely on her eyesight to fight, was unable to move.

“Everyone, use this chance to regroup!” Nana called to Koutarou and the others.

She then ran towards Maya, who was rapidly approaching. Nana knew better than to underestimate her.

“Green, you kill the boy and the others!”

“Okay!”

The highly capable Maya engaged Nana, while Green commanded the automated weapons to deal with Koutarou and the other girls. In the present situation, it was the optimal way for them to fight.

“El, what about the jamming device?!”

“It’s all shot up! It’s only operating at partial capacity! If I bypass a circuit or two, I can keep jamming at least one of them!”

Elexis was doing his best to repair the damaged jamming device, but it was seriously compromised. He didn’t have the time or tools to bring it fully back online.

“Then make it that dragon!”

“I’m already working on it!”

Elexis concentrated the machine’s reduced jamming power on Shizuka. If Alunaya appeared now, it would all be over.

“Chatting it up with a man, huh? I guess you *have* changed!” Nana called out.

“And so have you!” Maya shouted back as they clashed.

Koutarou wanted to back Nana up, but most of their group was still unable to move. With the jamming down, they could use their powers again for the most

part, but they weren't able to start fighting right away. They had to recuperate and treat the most immediate injuries first.

"Men, leave Green to me! The rest of you get ready!"

Naturally, the first to take action was Theia. She was wounded and wanted to change her gear, but she knew they would be defeated if she didn't take this opportunity to stop Green. She opened fire like she was trying to empty her clips as quickly as possible.

"You'll never be able to handle this many weapons on your own."

"I'll show you exactly what I can do! It's not like I have to win on my own, anyway!"

Green began casting spells forward while the automated weapons attacked from all sides. Theia was trying to stop them on her own, but she was horribly outnumbered. At this rate, she would be unable to suppress the enemy for much longer. It was a battle against time now.

"Yurika, Aika-san! Leave me and Ruth-san for later! Heal Sanae and Landlord-san first!"

"O-Okay!"

"Kasagi-san, I'll heal you right away!"

Koutarou had the magicians prioritize those who would be able to get back into combat sooner. Koutarou and Ruth would both have to recalibrate their systems and summon their weapons, so healing Sanae and Shizuka, who had their own powers ready to go, would be more effective.

"Then I'm off to help Theia!"

"And I'm off to get some payback!"

"Shizuka, there's still some interference, so I can't use all of my strength. Don't go overboard."

"And to think my weight is still increasing... Unforgivable!"

With their injuries healed, Sanae and Shizuka entered the fray. That made Koutarou feel better about Theia's position, but he still had plenty to be worried

about.

“Yurika, will Nana-san be okay? She only just got better, and she can’t use magic like she could before, right?”

Koutarou was watching the fight unfold between Maya and Nana while Yurika was healing him. He was concerned about Nana, who had only just gotten her new body. Moreover, she had less mana than before and had been out of active duty for quite some time. Under the circumstances, it was especially dangerous for her to go up against Maya alone.

“She’ll be fine.”

However, Yurika, who knew Nana better than anyone, wasn’t worried in the slightest. She glanced quickly over at her best friend, and then smiled at Koutarou.

“Nana-san’s a genius magical girl, after all.”

“But she can’t use that much magic now.”

Even though she used to be a genius magical girl, she’d lost most of her body and her mana along with it. Even if she used a device to heighten what power she had left, she would never achieve the same results she used to. That’s why Koutarou was worried about her engaging Maya. It just seemed too risky.

“They called Nana-san a genius magical girl, but that doesn’t mean she was a genius at magic.”

“What?”

“She’s a genius that can use magic.”

Strictly speaking, Nana was one of the weaker archwizards when it came to magic. However, she was incredibly skilled at controlling what magic she did have and could reap great effect from even small amounts of mana. Moreover, her flashes of brilliance made her a force to be reckoned with in battle, with or without magic. Just as Yurika had said, people called Nana a genius magical girl, but the genius part came first.

“So please don’t worry. That is without a doubt the genius magical girl... Rainbow Nana.”

If Nana had been anything else, she never would have been able to fight against Darkness Rainbow on her own, and she certainly wouldn't have been able to bring an all-out fight between them to a draw. The leaders of Darkness Rainbow weren't so weak that they'd lose to someone just because they had an overwhelming amount of mana. That's why, even though she now had artificial limbs and had switched from using magic to weapons, Nana was still a powerhouse. Yurika was convinced that while Nana might be weaker than she was before, she was still stronger than anyone else present. People didn't call her a genius magical girl for nothing.

Nana had practically lost all ability to use magic. Since she couldn't accumulate any mana in her artificial body, she could only use what little mana her organic parts still generated. Because of that, she was limited to the most basic of spells at best.

She also couldn't store up any mana on her own without her mana core, but that didn't mean she couldn't use an item to do it for her. She could also generate a bit of excess mana with the spiritual energy converter she had installed. And with those two things in mind, a special set of guns had been made just for Nana, Over the Rainbow.

The grip of these guns continuously absorbed Nana's mana and spiritual energy. When fully charged, they had about fifteen shots each. When emptied, however, they would simply begin charging again. It would only be a matter of time before she had more ammo. And during that downtime, she could load them with strictly spiritual energy. The spiritual energy bullets were less powerful without any mana, but she could continuously fire them without fear of running out thanks to her spiritual energy generator. Strategically, Nana would only fire the mana bullets when she needed to break through defenses, and would rely on the spirit bullets otherwise.

"Nanaaa!"

"You've gotten ridiculously fast since the last time we met, Maya!"

Nana rapidly fired spirit bullets—bullets made purely of spiritual energy—at Maya. That was because she needed a lot of them to hit Maya when she was moving so fast. She couldn't fire her magic bullets—the hybrid bullets with

mana mixed in—as rapidly since there was a limit to how many she could use at a time.

“It’s just perfect to defeat you and that boy, don’t you think?!”

“It’s certainly troublesome!”

Nana tilted her head to the side. The next instant, Maya’s blade passed through the air where her face had just been.

I fired that many bullets and not a single one hit!

Nana had splendidly dodged Maya’s attack, but she was marveled by Maya’s strength. Nana’s artificial parts came with a built-in combat system, but it was only a secondary mode. Her new body had been constructed with a comfortable everyday life in mind. Maya, on the other hand, had a body built almost entirely for combat. And in that sense, she had an edge.

“But I have some other tricks up my sleeve!”

Nana spun around and lifted her arm in Maya’s direction. As she did, a glowing ball of red fire appeared in front of her hand. While small, it was still clearly a fireba spell.

“Magic?!”

“Amplifier!”

Next, the gun in Nana’s right hand began shining and a glowing magic circle appeared in front of the fireball. When she released the fireball, it shot out of her hand like one of her bullets. And when it passed through the magic circle in front of it, it grew one size larger, swelling up to the diameter of a normal fireball. When it hit its target, it would explode in a wide burst of flame, which should make it an effective attack against the swift-moving Maya.

“Quick Cast Anti-Magic Shield!”

Sensing danger, Maya quickly incanted a defensive spell with the small staff build into her left arm. Since Maya hadn’t lost her ability to accumulate mana like Nana had, she could still use spells, though not in rapid succession.

What’s going on?! Nana shouldn’t be able to properly use magic!

Thanks to Maya's defensive spell, Nana's attack was negated before it could do any damage. But instead of moving in for an attack, Maya then took some distance. She'd been fighting all this time under the assumption that Nana couldn't use magic, so she needed to rethink her strategy.

"I'm surprised... I heard you were magicless now," Maya scoffed, shooting Nana a glance that was both impressed and resentful.

Darkness Rainbow had left Nana be after determining that she could no longer use magic and was forced to retire. What Maya had just witnessed, however, turned that on its head. She genuinely couldn't hide her surprise.

"I am."

"Then just what was that fireball? And don't try and feed me some lame excuse like that it was only a trick."

"Thanks to all kinds of tools working together, I can use magic like any normal person might be able to. But it's not my doing. And, in that sense, it is a trick."

Nana showed off her left arm and the gun she held in her left hand. Between the two of them, she was still able to use some magic. Maya narrowed her eyes and scrutinized Nana.

"I see... I did hear a report about your apprentice having a staff that allowed anyone to use magic."

"Correct. I'm using that in combination with the mana gathered in the guns. The only thing I'm really doing is the amplification. I still can't use magic on my own."

The frame of Nana's left arm had been made by transforming the staff that Koutarou had brought back with him from past Forthorthe. It was capable of casting a wide variety of spells, but consequently at reduced power. Anything it could produce would need to be amplified to be combat worthy. However, Nana still couldn't gather the mana to cast an amplification spell on her own. That was where her guns, Over the Rainbow, came in. They could focus her mana for her, allowing her to cast an amplification spell. So between the staff and her guns, she effectively had the magical abilities of a normal magician.

"I guess that makes us about even, huh?"

In terms of physical strength and performance, Maya was on top, while Nana won out when it came to magical ability. In Maya's eyes, they were evenly matched overall.

"It looks like it."

Nana agreed. It looked like their fight would drag on.

"In that case, I'll be the one to win, seeing as I have allies on my side!"

However, Maya was still convinced of her victory. The reason for that was because she had the automated weapons at her disposal. Maya used her comms function to request reinforcements, and shortly thereafter, four automated weapons flew over to protect her.

"What a coincidence. I have allies too."

"Sorry for keeping you waiting, Nana-san!"

Fortunately, Nana wasn't alone either. She had Yurika, who had just finished healing the others. Though their roles were somewhat reversed, this was the first time in over a year they'd gotten a chance to work together.

Thanks to the time that Nana had managed to buy everyone, Koutarou and the girls were all recovered. However, the same was true for Elexis. After finishing his adjustments on the jamming device, he boarded his personal mobile weapon to face off against Koutarou.

"It looks like you got yet another new toy, Elexis."

"If I used the same old ones, our playtime would end the same old way."

"That makes sense."

"I guess I'd call this one Warlord II."

Elexis's mobile weapon was a five meter tall steel giant. It was an improved version of the one he'd fought Koutarou with before, and it featured a slightly different design.

"However... I can't boast too much about the improvements this time around. It's all from equipment Maya brought with her, so she gets all the credit."

It seemed the modified design was the result of different magical and spiritual

energy based elements being incorporated into it. It was now an amalgamation of cutting-edge Forthorthian science, Darkness Rainbow's strongest magical powers, and the best spiritual energy technology available. So while the difference in design was slight, the overall change was significant.

"Yeah, that's even scarier. You having friends, I mean. Your mobile weapon alone isn't all that much of a problem."

"I've learned a thing or two after losing to you a time or two."

"There's a limit to what a man can do alone."

"Indeed, I feel the exact same way now."

Koutarou's biggest worry was Elexis's new ally, Maya. In the past it had looked like Elexis had allies, though he was really just fighting on his own with subordinates to support him. But Maya was different. It was like the two of them were partners. And Koutarou knew better than anyone what kind of boon a genuine ally could be. It seemed Maya was already working wonders for Elexis, too. He was far more stable now than he'd been the last time he and Koutarou fought.

"It seems like you've changed a little bit as well, Koutarou-kun."

"I haven't changed. This is all borrowed too."

"Which means it's extremely dangerous."

"There's a limit to what one man can do, after all."

"Hahaha, we're both in quite a bind, aren't we?"

"Yeah, it's a sad story."

Koutarou and Elexis drew their swords at practically the same time. They intended to treat this like a duel. They both knew that petty tricks wouldn't work on the other.

"Sakuraba-senpai."

"Right."

Koutarou called out to Harumi in his mind. She responded in no time, and Signaltin began glowing in his hands.

“Please focus on controlling Signaltin. You can’t let your guard down around this guy.”

“I understand. Good luck, Koutarou-sama.”

Harumi’s hair began glowing silver as she bolstered Signaltin’s mana. Normally she’d be using any excess mana to cast spells, but her control of Signaltin wavered when she did that. Koutarou had warned her that any carelessness would prove fatal against Elexis, so she focused all of her concentration on the sword this time around.

“Then let’s go, Koutarou-kun!”

“It’s on, Elexis!”

With those words as their signal, they both advanced. Koutarou had moved first in their last match, but they were on the same page this time. That alone was proof of the improvements Elexis had made to his machine.

“Confirming hostile activity from enemy mobile weapon. GoL will now begin its offensive.”

Right on cue, Koutarou’s ancillary gear, the Garb of the Lord, made the first attack.

“Activating right shoulder laser cannon. Beginning attack on enemy mobile weapon.”

After activating the laser cannon, GoL fired on its own. Its firing control system was modelled after Theia, so it made rapid decisions and acted quickly. To anthropomorphize it a bit, it was impatient.

“Don’t fire too much. This is no ordinary opponent.”

Going up Elexis, Koutarou needed to manage not only his sword, but also his armor’s energy reserves. Koutarou warned the AI accordingly.

“...As you wish, my lord.”

There was a brief pause before it confirmed the order. Koutarou charged towards the metal giant, thinking this probably would have been where Theia started pouting.

While Koutarou and Elexis were clashing swords, battle was breaking out all over in the hallway again. The most eager and hasty of the dark magical girls was none other than Crimson. Once she set her sights on a worthy opponent, she would attack without hesitation.

“I’ve been waiting for this moment!”

“You again?!”

Crimson’s target was Shizuka. However, unlike before, Shizuka easily warded off her attack. She was currently in her half-dragon form, so she wouldn’t be done in that easily. However, despite having her attack deflected, Crimson was in high spirits.

“That’s more like it! There’s nothing fun about fighting weak opponents!”

Crimson didn’t actually care for Elexis’s jamming device. She didn’t like the idea of winning after hamstringing an opponent. She would much prefer to conquer a full-scale mountain than blow off its peak to lower the summit.

Shizuka had unbelievable power when she transformed into a dragon. And while Crimson had no interest in tangling with an actual dragon, she was quite happy fighting Shizuka in her half-dragon form. And now that she finally had the chance to do that, she was pleased as punch.

“If you’re a martial artist, you should understand what I’m after!”

“I like fighting against strong opponents just as much as the next gal, but I’m not interested in a fight to the death!”

Shizuka unleashed a roundhouse kick while denying she wanted anything to do with Crimson’s all-or-nothing mentality. She’d been practicing karate all her life and enjoyed the challenge of facing a strong opponent, but that was because they could learn from each other and grow stronger. There was nothing to be had by eliminating opponents. In short, Shizuka believed in martial arts but not violence.

“I see! That’s too bad, though! I won’t hold back!”

Crimson caught Shizuka’s kick with the haft of her axe—in other words, her staff—and quickly incanted a spell.

“Quick Cast Heat Metal!”

“Uwah! Hot!”

Only the metallically reinforced guard of Crimson’s staff, which happened to be what she’d used to defend against Shizuka’s kick, heated up quickly. She’d specifically chosen a spell to burn Shizuka, but superheating her staff would wear down its durability. She couldn’t use it too many times, but it was certainly a pain when she suddenly whipped it out in a close-quarters fight.

“Jeez... Magicians really are crazy.”

Shizuka hurriedly jumped back and repeatedly patted the burned part of her leg. It had felt really hot, but she wasn’t seriously hurt. With the power of the Fire Dragon Emperor within her, she was especially resistant to fire and heat.

“Who’s the crazy one here? Whatever. That’s more like it.”

Crimson flashed a fearless smile. The stronger her foe was, the more joy she felt in winning. She couldn’t help getting excited about her fight with Shizuka.

In contrast to Shizuka’s intense battle, Kiriha’s was progressing a little more calmly. Her opponent was Dark Yellow, who specialized in protection and reinforcement, making their fight a bit more tactical.

“Kiriha-san, was it? What trick will you show me next?”

“You’ve taken measures against electricity too... My, what should I do?”

Yellow’s signature magic gave her incredible defenses and a surprising amount of attack power. All of Kiriha’s attacks so far had had pretty much no effect, but Yellow wasn’t having the same problem. A single shot from the bow she fired pierced right through the haniwas’ barrier. Fortunately for Kiriha, however, Yellow wasn’t all that skilled in combat. She normally cast reinforcement magic on someone else and let them handle the fighting.

For now, Kiriha was focusing on finding clever openings to attack. For example, Karama would attack with eye lasers, which Korama would immediately follow up with an electric attack. The laser ionized the air, which created a path for the electricity to follow. That way, they could accurately attack Yellow’s feet, which was a particularly hard area to defend. It was a

smart, unexpected strategy that played on the fact that electricity rarely ever moved in a straight line through the air.

However, being skilled at defense, the same attack would never work twice on Yellow. She quickly cast an elemental protection spell after Kiriha got her the first time, so she'd have to come up with a new strategy if she wanted to attack again.

"If you're not making a move, then I will!"

Determining that Kiriha was probably stumped, Yellow nocked an arrow. The bow she was using was actually her staff transformed. Its attack power wasn't all that high on its own, but she'd enhanced it severalfold with her magic. It now had firepower equivalent to that of a cannon. It was a terrifying attack, but it was just what Kiriha had been waiting for.

"Now! Do it!"

"Ho! Yurika-chan's specialty poison gas attack, ho!"

"Poison gas isn't very heroic, but we can't be picky about that in this situation, ho!"

When Yellow attacked, she had to undo part of her barrier. Kiriha had had the haniwas analyze the timing, and they used that to their advantage now.

"Oh no!"

The moment Yellow fired her arrow, the haniwas each threw a ball in through the temporary hole that formed for her arrow to pass through. The balls quickly began emitting white smoke at a furious pace.

"At this rate, I'll choke!"

Yellow was fully encompassed by her barrier. In other words, there was no way for the gas to escape. And at the rate her barrier was filling up, she was going to suffocate. Having realized that, Yellow quickly dismissed her barrier to solve the problem. She knew that Yurika was skilled with such attacks these days, so she'd thought up countermeasures in advance.

"...This is my next trick."

"Kyah!"

The next moment, however, Kiriha came flying through the smoke and swung at Yellow with her naginata. She responded by quickly raising a ward, but because Kiriha's naginata was infused with spiritual energy, she wasn't able to fully block it. The force of the blow sent her flying backward.

"She fell for it, ho!"

"Ane-san really is a trickster, ho!"

"I-I was fooled... Those were just normal smoke grenades, weren't they?"

Yellow hurriedly got back on her feet and glared at Kiriha with contempt. Completely unfazed by her stare, Kiriha firmly nodded.

"That's correct. I don't have any real poison gas."

Everything had gone according to Kiriha's plan. After forcing Yellow to strengthen her barrier, she filled said barrier with gas. Darkness Rainbow was cautious of Yurika's magic, so it was easy enough to scare Yellow with gas that resembled it. Then all Kiriha had to do was charge through the smokescreen and get in an attack. Yellow was completely at Kiriha's mercy.

"You won't die a pretty death, you know..."

"Well then, allow me to defeat you quickly to forestall such a terrible thing."

Kiriha flashed an elegant smile that she concealed behind her folding fan. She was thinking of how she should use her real poison gas, which numbed its victims.

With her connection to Blue Knight restored, Ruth summoned four small unmanned fighters. She fell back to the rear and gave them thorough orders, getting them to cooperate and attack the enemy simultaneously.

"It seems they have someone like me on their side too..."

Facing her was the summoning specialist Blue, whose fighting style was similar to Ruth's. She called forth four demons and had them go after Ruth's machines in a clash of fighters and familiars.

Why are the demons all shaken up? Just what are they so scared of?

But what perplexed Blue was that the demons she'd summoned were afraid.

They also kept repeating some nonsense word she couldn't understand. She'd never seen them like this before.

"Is Vadra... Vadra is attakin agen..."

"Kil... Vadra kil our kind..."

"If we don kil fas... we die tu..."

"Scared... Is Vadra..."

Ruth, on the other hand, understood them just fine. She'd heard the word they were repeating before.

"Fatra? Could they be survivors of back then...?"

Forthorthe and Earth had the same flow of time, but Folsaria and the Nether where the demons were from did not. There were also many demons that had been sent directly from past Forthorthe to present-day Earth. Because of that, there were still demons who remembered Koutarou. And Fatra, the Blue Knight, became a word they uttered in great fear.

"Keep it together! If you don't want to die, you have to fight and win!"

Upon being scolded by their master, Blue, the demons began to settle. She was right. They knew that fighting and winning was the only choice they had. After all, even though they'd been thrown to the future and a different world to boot, the Blue Knight had still come after them.

"Go!"

"Grrraaaaah!"

"Here they come! Begin the counteroffensive!"

And so a strange proxy war broke out between Ruth and Blue. Magic and lasers flew every which way, and fangs, claws, and armor clashed. It was a chaotic fight that no one could imagine the end of.

To Green who considered herself Crimson's partner, Maki was an eyesore. Even though they had become enemies, Crimson was still worried about her. That irritated Green to no end. Which was why, unlike the other girls of Darkness Rainbow, she had no intention of freeing Maki from her mind control

and bringing her back. No, she was going to kill her where she stood.

“If only you didn’t exist!”

Green’s hatred was intense. Even Crimson’s fight with Maki had only added more fuel to her envy. Green had seen the lonely look in Crimson’s eyes when she came home that night. She never looked that way after fighting anyone else. Green had spotted it right away because she was always paying such close attention to Crimson.

“What are you talking about, Green?!”

“Shut up! Just shut up! I’ll kill you right now!”

Maki didn’t understand why Green hated her so much. That said, Green had her pride. It wasn’t like she was going to stoop to explaining herself to Maki. In the end, she knew that she was getting herself worked up for no reason.

“Phantom Blade!”

Green created several blades curved like the crescent moon to attack Maki with. They were illusions, but they still cut on contact. Green was a master of illusions, and this one was just convincing enough to trick the body into thinking it had been really been cut.

“False Vision!”

To counter that, Maki used her own illusions. Being skilled at indigo magic, her spell worked directly on her target’s mind and provided fake visual information. It was an effective defense, even against someone like Green who could see the future.

“Hmph, something like this...!”

Green shook her head from side to side to dispel the false vision. But by that time, Maki had escaped the range of the blades that Green had sent flying at her. Brandishing her greatsword, she then closed in on Green.

“Wind Blade!”

Maki infused her sword with magical power as she ran and took a big horizontal swing at Green. The wind magic she’d cast allowed her attack to reach beyond the blade of her sword.

“How about this?!”

“I won’t make— Ugh, Magic Shield!”

Even though Green could predict her opponent’s moves, she wasn’t particularly skilled in combat and had trouble dodging wide-area attacks. And upon realizing that she wouldn’t be able to evade the wind even if she escaped the blade, Green quickly cast a defensive spell to protect herself.

“Kyaaah!”

However, it was an undeniable truth that when an equally strong sword and shield met, the greater force—the attacking sword with momentum behind it—had the advantage. Green was able to block Maki’s attack, but was sent flying backward. Seeing her chance, Maki chose to pursue.

“Hah!”

However, at the last second, she relented and jumped backward instead. Just as she did, illusory blades stabbed into the ground between her and Green. Green had called them back in order to protect herself.

“...You’re pretty good, Green.”

“I’ll do whatever it takes to kill you!”

Green had been sent flying, but she was able to regain her balance midair and landed safely on her feet. Normally she wasn’t this skilled in combat, but her burning rivalry with Maki brought out her latent potential. As a result, they appeared to be roughly on the same level. Their fight could go on for a while.

With her allies back in action, the load on Theia was greatly reduced. Thanks to that, she was able to focus on her own battle, which was progressing in her favor.

“Damn it! You’re really not cute at all, princess!”

“I’m selective about who I show my cute side to, and that list certainly doesn’t include you.”

“See? Not cute at all!”

Orange stamped her feet in frustration, which was perfectly understandable.

She'd been wounded and her outfit was now dirty and torn. Orange liked dressing up and looking nice, so this was a particularly distasteful development to her.

"I'll defeat you right here and now! Then I'll get to listen to your adorable voice as you beg for mercy!"

"Do it if you can!"

Theia flashed a fearless smile and slashed at Orange with the heat knife in her hand. Her current fighting style involved firing her assault rifle while closing in to strike with her knife.

I have the upper hand now, but this is bad...

While her expression was one of confidence, Theia was panicking a little on the inside. The truth was that she was almost out of ammo. With her connection to Blue Knight restored, she could just switch out her Combat Dress accessories when she needed to, but she would be defenseless while she did it. Orange wouldn't be kind enough to wait patiently while she changed, and there were also the automated weapons and soldiers in the area to consider. That being the case, changing now would be suicide. She'd have to make do with her heat knife and the ammo she had left.

"A girl shouldn't be using a violent weapon like a knife! Just imagine being on the receiving end!"

Orange blocked the knife with her staff. Her staff was decorated with expensive jewels and cloth, the complete opposite of Theia's sleek and rugged knife. Moreover, whenever Orange swung her staff, it spread glittering powder like diamond dust.

"Which one of us is the violent one?! You're the one spreading around that suspicious powder!"

The powder in question was a product of Orange's magic. Being skilled at alteration, she'd prepared all kinds of tricky traps for Theia. One of them was the glittering powder, which caused chemical burns just by touching it.

"Whaaat?! You don't think it's cute?!"

Sensing that Theia was growing wise, Orange turned her staff towards her in an exaggerated fashion and tried to spray the powder all over her.

“I’ve got you!”

“Aagh! Wh-What?!”

That was where Theia grabbed both of Orange’s wrists and restrained her. She got some of the glittering powder on her in the process, but there was no time to complain about that. There was something Theia had to, and she was prepared to suffer a few minor burns for it.

“Blue Knight! Change Combat Dress to Assault Red!”

“As you wish, my princess.”

She needed to swap her accessories and replenish her ammunition. Before Orange’s very eyes, Theia’s dress changed from green to red, from command to assault gear. By the time Orange realized what that meant, the damage was already done.

“Oh no! I was tricked!”

“Hahahaha! Look where being cute got you!”

“Grrr!”

With her arms restrained, Orange couldn’t even use magic. Her allies wouldn’t risk hitting her to shoot Theia, either. And so Theia cleverly and safely managed to change her armament.

Sanae was going up against Purple again. Sanae’s spiritual energy far exceeded human limits, and without proper measures, not even a leader of Darkness Rainbow stood a chance against her. That is, except for Purple. She used necromancy and magic that manipulated spiritual energy. With some measures prepared beforehand, she would be able to put up a good fight against Sanae.

“Now it’s my turn, Purple!”

As Sanae ran towards Purple, she emitted a glowing aura. Some of the overwhelming amount of spiritual energy within Sanae’s body was leaking out and transforming into light. It was proof that her spiritual abilities were so

strong that they had the power to warp even the physical world.

“Just how much can you do before the very gates of hell...? Activate Precast Spell: Summon Abyss Gate!”

“What is this?!”

Sensing something abnormal, Sanae instinctively stopped in her tracks. The abnormal presence was coming from behind Purple. At first there was nothing there, but a few seconds after Sanae sensed it, a black dot appeared. The dot gradually grew larger, turning into a murky whirlpool.

“This is bad news...”

The murky whirlpool gradually grew larger and eventually reached several meters in size. The black dot in the center also grew larger. To Sanae, it already looked less like a whirlpool and more like the embodiment of malice.

“Why did you do that? Do you realize what you’ve done?”

What Purple had summoned was an embodiment of greed that prioritized itself and denied others. It was on a smaller scale, but it was the same power that Tayuma had come into contact with.

“Oh, I know. I know exactly. I opened the gates of hell.”

“You don’t understand! This isn’t normal magic!”

“I do understand. At the very least, while I have this, it’ll cancel out your powers!”

Purple was right. The light surrounding Sanae grew weaker as the whirlpool of malice, the gates of hell, opened. Sanae’s power was born from the energy of optimism, hope, and vitality. It was the exact opposite of the power overflowing from the gates of hell. Purple was going to weaken Sanae this way, and then finish her off herself.

Purple doesn’t get it! If she uses this, she’ll be dragged into it too! Just like that creepy old man! I have to hurry and do something!

Sanae recalled Tayuma as she stared into the gates of hell. Tayuma was the kind of man who didn’t hesitate to blame all of his misfortune on others. Even though the malice she’d conjured was smaller, Purple would meet the same

fate if she continued to curse others.

“You will die here! By my hand!”

“If Purple falls unconscious, will that go away...? I don’t know, but I’ll at least give it a try!”

Determination burned in Sanae’s eyes as she ran towards Purple. She wasn’t thinking of defeating her. She only wanted to protect her friends and save Purple from herself. Sanae’s meeting and parting with the ghost woman that had attacked her in the past was what led her to this conclusion. And that kindness would become a great power to combat the gates of hell. Sanae, after all, believed that love was all.

The One Without a Future

Sunday, September 19th

Thanks to Nana destroying Elexis's jamming device, the battle against Darkness Rainbow was practically even. However, because of that, if anyone one person were to fall, it would tip the scale and the entire balance of things would be disrupted. Both sides were now battered and fatigued, so it was only a matter of time before someone actually succumbed.

The first crack in the ice was the battle between Shizuka and Crimson. They were both high-powered attackers, and were using up more stamina and taking more damage than anyone else.

"Shizuka, we're almost out of mana! We have to finish this!"

"I guess we don't have a choice! Uncle, we'll settle this with the next move!"

Normally, Shizuka probably wouldn't lose against Crimson. A large-scale weapon would be required to defeat Shizuka when she was wielding the Fire Dragon Emperor's full power. However, knowing that, Elexis had performed some emergency repairs on the jamming device to try and cripple as much of Alunaya's power as possible. As a result, Shizuka and Crimson had been on relatively equal footing. At least until this point. Shizuka's stamina and Alunaya's mana were running dry; they needed to end things quickly.

"So she's going for the finish... Well, of course she would. Just look at me."

Seeing the fire in Shizuka's eyes and knowing that their next clash would be their last, Crimson grinned. She was in a similar straits, and would be out of mana after a few more spells. Normally it wasn't appropriate to smile in a situation where victory and defeat were uncertain, but this was just the kind of close fight that Crimson lived for. She couldn't help but enjoy every moment of it. And of course, if Shizuka was going to settle things with her next attack, she'd meet her head on.

"It's on, Crimson!"

"Just the way I like it, Shizuka!"

They advanced on each other at the same time. They were both aiming to close in and unleash a powerful attack to defeat their opponent. However, since both of them knew what the other was planning, charging in without a plan was foolish. As such, they both fired off a few attacks to limit their opponent's movements as they approached one another.

"Haaaaah!"

Shizuka swung the dragon claws on her right hand and rent the air, forming vacuum blades that flew straight for Crimson.

"Explosion!"

In response, Crimson used her explosion spell. The explosion and blades of vacuum clashed between the two girls and created an even bigger explosion.

The shockwave from Crimson's spell assaulted Shizuka. However, Shizuka's vacuum blades had cut through the shockwave, greatly weakening it. And with only weak flames lingering from the explosion, both girls dashed right through them without hesitation.

"This is it! Raaaaah!"

Shizuka opened her mouth wide amidst flames. As she did, a surging heat began overflowing from within. This was the strongest attack Shizuka could use in her current state, Alunaya's breath weapon. It generated flames so hot that they condensed into plasma.

"Inferno Fireeeee!"

Crimson's answer was a familiar incantation. Of all the powerful spells that red magic specialist Crimson could use, this was her strongest. It was a simple spell that unleashed vast amounts of mana in an instant and converted it all into heat energy. The name was thusly quite fitting.

When the flames from the explosion finally cleared, the two girls were just a few meters away from one another, each about to unleash their most powerful attacks. It put them both in a situation where they would have to fire or be destroyed by their opponent.

Their final attacks clashed, resulting in a huge, terrific explosion. Though the

attacks had mostly offset each other, the fallout was enough to blow out a portion of Sariachal Castle's solid walls and shake the entire building to its foundation. If they hadn't forcibly negated some of each other's attacks, it likely would have destroyed the whole castle.

At ground zero of the explosion, both girls were swept away by the shockwave. When the smoke and flames cleared, they were both lying on the ground unmoving. It was a fierce double knockout.



Ruth and Blue weren't fighting all that far from Shizuka and Crimson, and were both hit by the shockwave. Ruth was closer, however, and took more damage from it.

"Alert. First hip motor damaged. Left shoulder shock absorber has encountered an operating error—"

"L-Leave the reporting for later! Make sure that I can move right away!"

"As you wish, my lady."

The effect on Ruth herself was negligible. She was shaken and her ears were ringing, but that was the extent of it. However, the damage to her armor was quite considerable. She was wearing a powered suit of armor like Koutarou's. It was made for high defense and mobility, but several internal devices were damaged by the shockwave and stopped working, leaving Ruth frozen. The armor was too heavy for her to move with just her own strength.

"...I've won!"

Compared to Ruth, Blue—who had been a bit further away from the explosion—hadn't taken as much damage. She wasn't completely unharmed, but she and her familiars could all still move. Because of that, the rarely emotive Blue had a very clear smile on her face. In their battle of attrition, the moment of victory was upon her.

"You guys get the fighters!"

Blue had her four familiars stall the small fighters while she targeted Ruth.

"Titan Fist!"

Blue used her specialty summoning magic to attack Ruth as she tried to stand. Summoning magic wasn't only for summoning creatures. This time Blue used it to summon a massive rock... right over top of Ruth. She was going to let gravity do the rest.

"Oh no! I need an emergency deployment of the distortion field!"

"Alert. The generator has not yet recovered. The distortion field's strength will be less than 30 percent of its usual level."

“It’s still better than getting hit directly!”

“As you wish, my lady. Deploying distortion field.”

Moments after Ruth heard Blue’s incantation, the massive rock crashed into her barrier. It was a simple move that was essentially just trying to crush her opponent, but the force behind the falling boulder was tremendous. It wasn’t something a weakened barrier could hope to block. The second the massive rock hit it, it collapsed completely as if under a titan’s fist.

“Did it work?!”

The next moment, Ruth was sent flying. However, that wasn’t because she’d been hit by the rock. She had deployed her barrier diagonally so that the rock would push her to the side rather than crush her. The barrier had only held up for a split second, but that had made all the difference. Ruth’s quick wit had just barely saved her.

“You think you can take it easy?!”

However, Blue wasn’t done attacking.

“Ice Storm!”

“Kuh!”

The next spell was a rain of ice shards. Ruth’s armor had used up all of its energy in handling the previous attack, so all she could do was protect herself with her beam sword.

“Hrgh! Aaah!”

However, blocking all of the shards raining down on her with just a single sword was impossible. She put up a good fight, but after being struck by ice shards from all directions, she lost consciousness.

Seeing Shizuka and Ruth fall shook Koutarou and the others. Especially Theia, Ruth’s childhood friend.

“Ruth?! Curse you, Blue!”

Theia was in the middle of fighting Orange, but when Ruth was defeated, she turned her focus on Blue and let loose with her beam rifle.

“I’ll have you pay for harming my vassal!”

She ignored Orange, who was right next to her, to attack Blue. It was a wild move, but if she did nothing, Blue might finish Ruth off. That’s why she turned to attack Blue knowing it would put her at risk. She and Ruth had decided to spend the rest of their lives together. Moving forward without her wasn’t an option in Theia’s book.

“Kyaaah! Y-You guys, protect me!”

Being attacked from an unexpected angle, Blue’s barrier was no challenge for Theia’s rifle beams. They easily pierced through and assaulted her. In retaliation, she hurriedly recalled her familiars and sent them after Theia. If she was attacked again like that, it would be the end of her.

“Nonsense!”

However, Theia was now wearing her Combat Dress in the Assault Red configuration, the mode with the highest attack power. She took aim at Blue and her familiars in the way with her main cannon and multi-launch missile system.

“Mishil, mishil! Vadras mishil!”

“Nooo! Scare, scareee!”

“Kyaaah!”

While the familiars were distracted by the missiles, they were sniped by the cannon. Their bodies of hardened mana crumbled, and their souls were returned to their world. Blue was then assaulted by the missiles that had gone around the familiars. She was able to avoid most of them through a quick spell, but not the last one. It sent her flying, and when she hit the floor, she was out cold. The only reasons she hadn’t died instantly were because she’d been lucky in where the missile hit her, and she had just enough protection from her magical girl outfit to save her life.

“I’m your opponent, you uncutie poo! I won’t forgive you even if you apologize now!”

After getting ignored by Theia, Orange was rather upset. In her pursuit of

cuteness, there was nothing she hated more. It was just enough to push her over the edge and get her to use spells she ordinarily never would.

“Decrease Oxygen!”

This one in particular was a simple spell that reduced the amount of oxygen within its effective area. However, in contrast to its simplicity, it was extremely dangerous.

Humans inhaled oxygen through their lungs, which then circulated through their bodies in their blood. Just changing the density a little was enough to make them sick or lose consciousness. And there were barely any symptoms until it hit. Thus Theia lost consciousness without even realizing she’d been attacked.

“Seriously, how rude.”

Despite it being a simple and dangerous spell, Orange rarely used it. The reason, plainly put, was because it was uncute. Cuteness was Orange’s true pursuit in life, and she didn’t like using anything that didn’t fit her image. It was a spell she only used when truly angry.

Around the same time that Theia collapsed, another duel was about to reach its conclusion. It was the battle between Maki and Green.

“Crimson?!”

With her future forecast, Green had forseen Crimson falling just before it happened.

“I don’t have the time for this!”

However, Green was in the middle of her fight with Maki and couldn’t go to help her. She grew more irritated by the second while dodging Maki’s greatsword.

“What are you on about, Green?!”

“Shut up! This is all your fault!”

Green hurled her irritation at its source, Maki. She didn’t like Maki. In the last battle, Crimson had gone out to save Maki and come back hurt. And when they were retreating after fighting against Koutarou and the others, Crimson stayed

behind to fight her again. Crimson clearly felt like Maki was more than just an ally in Darkness Rainbow. She clearly felt closer to her than she did Green, which annoyed Green to no end and only made her hate Maki more.

“Crimson, no!”

As Crimson and Shizuka’s last attacks clashed, Green completely lost her composure. She had to rescue the collapsed Crimson. That was all that was going through her mind.

“Kasagi-san?!”

“Out of the way, Navy!”

When Maki heard the explosion, she looked over towards Shizuka. However, with Green charging right at her, she had to refocus on her opponent before she got an accurate grasp of the situation. If she’d fully realized the condition Shizuka and Crimson were in, she undoubtedly would have responded differently.

“Mirage Blast!”

“Green’s been acting strange for a while now. But with this...!”

Thanks to her future forecast, Green was good at defending herself and her fighting style focused on counterattacks. That said, her forecasts were less accurate when she herself initiated the attacks because she was actively interfering with the futures she could see. And that was exactly what was happening right now. There were far more openings in Green’s offense and defense than normal. Maki was ready to take advantage of those, and she dodged the flying ray of magic that came at her as she swung her greatsword.

“Don’t get in my way! Why are you always, always, always in my way?!”

Green did her best to try and protect herself, but she wouldn’t be able to dodge or throw up a defensive spell in time. She wasn’t particularly strong, so it was unlikely she’d be able to hold out on her own, either.

“Don’t take my Crimson all for yourself!”

“Green, why—”

It was then that Maki’s greatsword struck Green. The blade was made from

mana, so the instant it hit, the energy was released and sent Green flying.

“How can you feel so much for Crimson, but nothing for others? Can your eyes not see any other future...?”

Green didn’t get back up after that. Though she had won the battle, Maki looked far from happy. She couldn’t help but lament that Green was unable to break free from her shell of loneliness, just like Maki in the past.

The battle between Sanae and Purple was an intense one. Purple’s magic could manipulate spiritual energy, but in a straight competition of strength, Sanae, who could wield spiritual energy without the use of magic, would most likely win. However, the moment Purple opened the gates of hell, the outcome of the fight became uncertain. Sanae’s bright spiritual energy was being cancelled out by the malice overflowing from the gates, which reduced her overall strength.

“Purple, if you fight using that, something really bad is going to happen to you! Hurry up and get rid of it! Close those gates right now!”

Normally, Sanae used a bow and arrow made of spiritual energy to fight. But right now, she was fighting in close combat with spiritual energy focused into her fists and feet. If she sent an arrow flying, its power would be drastically weakened by the time it reached its target because of the gates of hell. That’s why she decided to rely on close combat instead.

“I don’t mind holding back if you do!”

“Don’t make a fool of me! I only need to kill you right now, and that will be the end of that!”

Purple refused to back down. She then summoned a couple of departed souls and sent them after Sanae. While she was occupied, Purple conjured another spell to attack. But the same way the gates of hell made Sanae weaker, they made Purple stronger. She now matched Sanae for power, or maybe even surpassed her.

“Like I said, you can’t do this! Why don’t you understand?!”

“You’re the one who doesn’t understand! You have no idea how deep and dark this desire burns!”

Moreover, Purple was gradually gaining more strength. The gates of hell absorbed her malice and generated power that it fed back to her in a vicious cycle. It was starting to make Sanae increasingly nervous, too. Not because Purple was getting stronger, but because she was walking closer towards corruption.

“What can I do to make you understand?!”

Sanae lashed out at an incoming departed soul as she tried to think of a way to persuade Purple. Since Purple had summoned two departed souls, Sanae spun around and kicked one soul into the other behind it.

“Urghhh...”

“Gaaah...”

Sanae had put quite a bit of spiritual energy into her attack, but it hadn’t been enough to defeat the souls. Purple’s increase in power made the souls she summoned stronger as well. But they weren’t Sanae’s only problem. While Sanae was occupied with the departed souls, Purple attacked too.

“Soul Energy Strike!”

Her spell generated a purple light. However, within seconds, it had turned from purple to black. It was the influence of the gates of hell at work. And with the color changed the effect of the spell. An offensive spell that slammed spiritual energy into its target turned into a dark spell that devoured the soul of its victim.

“I’m telling you, don’t do this!”

Sanae focused all of her spiritual energy to protect herself as she desperately pleaded with Purple. Purple herself wasn’t aware, but what her soul was experiencing was very similar to what had just happened to her spell. With her spirit sight, Sanae could see it happening in real time, and that’s what made her nervous.

How do I stop Purple?! At this rate, she’ll devour her own soul!

The current Purple now resembled the female ghost that Sanae had once fought. She didn’t want Purple to end up the same she had. It was terrible. She

wanted to save her soul from ruin somehow.

“Young lady, can you hear me?”

“Huh?!”

That was when a man’s voice reached Sanae’s ears. Not in the form of sound waves, but spiritual ones.

“Wh-Who are you?! *Where* are you?!”

Sanae somehow managed to block Purple’s attack with a shield of spiritual energy, and quickly looked around for the owner of the voice she’d heard. She didn’t see anything, but it called out to her again.

“Here. I’m right next to you now.”

The owner of the voice had moved right over to Sanae. He looked human, but his body was translucent. He appeared to be the ghost of a young man. He moved alongside Sanae as she fought against Purple and continued talking to her.

“I want to borrow your power.”

“Mister, it’s dangerous here! Hurry up and run away, or you’ll get sucked in!”

Sanae urged the ghost to run while fighting against Purple and the departed souls. Regardless of who the ghost was, nothing good would come from standing so close to the gates of hell. In Sanae’s eyes, he looked like a normal ghost, so she wanted him to escape while he could.

“I’m afraid I can’t. I have to save Marina, the girl who calls herself Purple now.”

“What do you mean?!”

“She’s my woman, and she’s been consumed with the thought of resurrecting me ever since I died. However, I don’t want to be resurrected if it means sacrificing countless people. We would never be happy that way.”

Even if Purple, Marina, succeeded in reviving Kai, he would feel immense guilt over the lives she’d sacrificed to do it. That’s why he didn’t think they’d be able to live happily like that. It would only be the beginning of another tragedy.

“That’s why you want to stop her, right?”

“That’s right. But my voice can’t reach her the way she is now. That’s why I want to borrow your strength.”

“Stop running around! Just die, little girl!”

The current Purple couldn’t even see her love. She was so obsessed with trying to kill Sanae that she’d never even stopped to consider who that spirit floating beside her might be. If he was caught up in one of Purple’s attacks and disappeared, she probably wouldn’t even notice.

Ever since Kai lost his life, he’d been trying to call out to Purple. But she’d been too dominated and consumed by her sense of loss to hear him. She was so fixated on her wish of living a happy life with a revived Kai that she’d never once sensed the presence of the real thing.

“I want you to carry my voice to her. If it reaches her, I’m sure she’ll understand!”

Kai had but a single wish. He wanted to save Purple, his beloved Marina, from ruin. He had appeared before Sanae with only that in his heart.

“Okay, I’ll give it a try!”

Kai’s wish was something Sanae understood well. She greatly sympathized with the simple desire of wanting to save his beloved, which was why she didn’t hesitate to cooperate.

“If everything goes well, the gates of hell might can be closed with your power.”

“Okay! Let’s give it our best shot, mister!”

“Yeah!”

If Kai’s words reached Purple, her negative feelings would grow weaker, which in effect should weaken the gates of hell as well. If that happened, Sanae could pour her positive spiritual energy into the gates to close them. It was what needed to be done, for everyone’s sake. Especially Purple’s.

After defeating Theia, Orange was able to move freely, so she paused for a moment to consider her next move.

Let's see... Should I finish off the fallen enemies, wake up Crimson-chan and Blue-rin, or go help someone else?

The first options that popped into her head were killing the enemies that were knocked out, waking up her fallen allies, or backing up her allies in need. She surveyed the hall to see who might need her most.

"Yellow-chan should be able to go on for a while even if she can't win. Maya-yan and the young master should be fine on their own, too. That leaves GreeGree and Purple, sooo... maybe GreeGree?"

Out of the ongoing battles, Orange believed Green was in the most danger. She was getting oddly heated up and frantic about killing Maki. It also seemed like Green's greatest weapon, her future forecast, wasn't working properly. And most of all, Green as she was right now was super uncute. So Orange decided to help her out.

"Jeez, you're such a handful, GreeGree... Wait, whaaat?!"

However, that was when she realized something. Something that made her abandon her thoughts of Green and turn to Purple with a pale face.

"Purple, this is weird! That uncute girl with glasses isn't here!"

"What?!"

Orange realized that Clan wasn't present. She had definitely been there when Koutarou and the others had infiltrated the castle. They'd confirmed it with magic. But she hadn't been there at all for the battle in the third floor hallway. So where was she, and what was she doing? Clan had vanished somewhere between the underground aqueduct and the third floor, and there had to be a reason for it.

"Orange, the glasses girl is after the controller!"

"I see! We were tricked! These guys are all just decoys!"

Clan was missing because she was on a mission for the master controller for the automated weapons Darkness Rainbow had. If she could take that out while Koutarou and the others kept Darkness Rainbow busy, it would be their victory.

"They've caught on! Hurry up, Clan!"

“Understood!”

On the other end of Koutarou’s comms line, Clan began working faster. Speed was more important than caution now.

Darkness Rainbow had divination on their side, so Clan had followed Kiriha’s instructions carefully. After finding the controller, she simply waited a while before trying to hack into it. Since Green could only accurately see the near future with her forecasts, as long as Clan was simply biding her time, nothing certain would show up in Green’s predictions. After Koutarou and the others started a fight, Green wouldn’t have the leisure to look into anything other than the battle at hand, leaving Clan free to do as she pleased.

“Orange, hurry to the laboratory! Get her off the controller!”

“Okay, I’m on my way!”

Orange understood the importance of the automated weapons’ controller quite well, and she was the only one who was free right now to go after it. If she didn’t stop Clan, they would lose their machines and likely their battle against Rainbow Heart.

“I won’t let you, Orange!”

“Navy-chan?!”

However, Maki stood in Orange’s way. Since Orange had given up on helping Green, Maki had come out victorious.

“Don’t be such a bully, Navy-chan!”

“I won’t let you go any further!”

Orange reluctantly readied her staff and faced off against Maki. If she didn’t hurry up and defeat her, Darkness Rainbow would lose. Considering how smoothly things had been going earlier, this was a huge upset on the verge of becoming a genuine crisis.

Sanae and Kai’s plan was simple. First, Sanae would pour her spiritual energy into Kai to allow him strength enough to talk. In that state, he would approach Purple while Sanae headed for the gates of hell. Kai would talk to Purple, and Sanae would close the gates.

“Let’s do this, mister!”

“I’m counting on you!”

When Sanae poured her spiritual energy into Kai, his figure grew clearer. Eventually, his soul grew dense enough that he became visible to the naked human eye, and his voice was clearly audible.

“Wha?!”

Anyone would be shocked to suddenly see their dead beloved appear before them in the middle of a battle. It came as a complete surprise even to the calm, composed, and prudent Purple.

“Thank you, young lady! Now stick to the plan!”

“Yeah! Good luck, mister!”

Sanae and Kai split up accordingly. Sanae went after the gates while Kai went after Purple. They both had their own missions to accomplish.

“It’s all this thing’s fault!”

Sanae unleashed her spiritual energy at the gates. If she weakened them even a little, the dark power flowing into Purple would lessen, making it easier for Kai’s voice to reach her. And if Kai’s voice reached her, Purple’s malice would decrease, weakening the gates further.

“Marina, just stop this! Even if you do this, we can’t be happy!”

Kai ran right up to his love and desperately pleaded with her. That was what he’d always wanted to say to her, but never could. And finally, at long last, she could hear him.

“You’re lying! If I revive you, we can be happy! We can get married like we were supposed to and have a family! We’ll be happy that way, won’t we?!”

Purple was stubborn. Even if Kai himself denied it, the thought of reviving him and living happily ever after was what had driven Purple all this time. She couldn’t just let go of what felt like the only thing she had left.

“Just how many lives do you intend to sacrifice for mine?!”

“As many as it takes! I don’t care how many people have to die if it will bring

you back!”

“Don’t be stupid, Marina! Amongst those people, how many do you think will be like us?! How much more misery do you intend to create?!”

That was the core of Kai’s wish. There was no point in bringing him back if it meant taking away someone else’s beloved. The tragedy would only grow. Even if Kai and Marina were to marry, the ever-growing chain of malice would only bring more misfortune upon them. The families of those sacrificed might come for revenge. Or they might come after Marina’s revival spell. Darkness Rainbow wanted to destroy Rainbow Heart and live in a world ruled by the strong, but Kai knew that wouldn’t lead to happiness for him and Marina. They’d be living their lives awash in blood instead.

“I get it!”

“You finally understand, Marina?!”

“Kai, you’re being controlled by that girl, aren’t you?! Right?! Just wait, Kai! I’ll kill her right now and set you free!”

“Marina!”

Purple couldn’t object to what Kai was saying. He was right, and she knew it from the bottom of her heart. But even so, she couldn’t accept it. She wanted to revive him no matter what. She couldn’t let the years of work she’d put into this all be for nothing. She also couldn’t accept that Kai was rejecting the way she’d been living.

That’s why she looked for an escape, and found it in blaming Sanae for controlling Kai with spiritual energy. The Kai that loved her would never reject her. And if this Kai was, it had to be Sanae’s doing. She must have bent and twisted his will, using him like a tool. If she just believed that, Purple would be able to continue on as she had been.

“I love you, Kai! I will destroy our enemies and revive you!”

“Stop it! If you go any further, you’ll—”

Kai abruptly lost his form. Purple’s malice was only growing stronger, and with it, so too were the gates of hell. Purple not wanting to hear Kai say any more

sucked away the spiritual energy forming his body, and his voice along with it.

“Kyaaaaah!”

There, the strengthened gates of hell turned on Sanae, who had been trying to close them. The chaotic malice flowing outward from the gates fed back into Sanae’s soul through her spiritual energy, and robbed her of her consciousness.

“Heh heh heh... I won’t let anyone get in the way... I will destroy everything and revive Kai... heh heh, ahahaha!”

Dashing Sanae and Kai’s hopes, Purple’s malice and the dark power had grown stronger. Purple was planning on destroying anyone who got in her way. And right now, Clan was at the top of that list. For Purple and Kai to live happily, Darkness Rainbow first needed to win the war against Rainbow Heart. She would need sacrifices.

Purple ran out of the hall to go kill Clan. Because she’d been behaving so strangely in her fight with Sanae, Koutarou sensed that Clan was in danger and wanted to chase after her. However, his enemy wasn’t about to let him do that.

“I’m your opponent, Koutarou-kun!”

“Elexis!”

Elexis’s giant stood in Koutarou’s way. He’d been fighting it all this time, but still hadn’t managed a win. This lastest model had been enhanced with magic and spiritual energy technology, and was on a totally different level than the one he’d fought Elexis in before. Moreover, this one had plenty of automated weapons supporting it. So even with the combined powers of Signaltin and GoL, Koutarou just couldn’t get the upper hand.

“You should know that Purple won’t get to just walk away from this!”

Koutarou held Signaltin with both hands and slashed at Elexis’s giant. However, Elexis’s gigantic sword blocked Koutarou’s attack, and the beam shotguns equipped on both his shoulders fired back.

“Of course! We walked into this battle well aware of the risks! We’re trying to change the world, after all! There’s no way we’d back down just because we’re afraid it might be a little dangerous!”

“Take this!”

Koutarou blocked the beam shotguns with GoL’s barrier and fell back for a moment. As he did, a powerful bolt of electricity assaulted the giant. It was an offensive spell cast by Harumi. She’d been assisting Koutarou all this time, too.

“So you don’t care what happens to your allies?!”

“That’s why we’re fighting! That’s our wish!”

However, Harumi’s bolt was diffused by several automated weapons gathering in front of the giant to form a barrier. Not only was the giant upgraded, but RTS, the system that allowed the automated weapons to work together, had been vastly improved as well. As a result, while the giant on its own might not have compared to Koutarou, Elexis was standng his ground with a whole group of automated weapons to defend him. Taking him out quickly so Koutarou could go after Purple would be difficult.

Moreover, the girls were largely in the same stymied position. Crimson, Blue, and Green had fallen, but Orange, Yellow, and Maya were still present. There were also the additional soldiers and automated weapons keeping them pinned down.

“Not good! At this rate, Clan-san will be killed and we won’t be able to stop the war!”

Yurika, who was in charge of things, started to panic. Clan wasn’t all that good in direct combat, and she should be focused on hacking the controller right now. Purple, on the other hand, was now driven by some kind of alien power. She would likely kill Clan outright, and even if Clan managed to scrape by somehow, it would seriously delay taking over the controller. Either outcome was bad, and might spell the end of Rainbow Heart.

“Now that it’s come to this, we can’t get hung up on appearances! Yurika-chan, leave this place to me and go after Purple!”

In response to the imminent crisis, Nana was willing to make a stand and have Yurika chase after Purple.

“But Nana-san, you can’t face Maya-san on your own!”

Yurika and Nana were currently working together against Maya. Like Elexis, Maya had a lot of automated weapons with her and they were only just barely able to fend her off with the two of them cooperating, hence why Yurika was reluctant to leave Nana's side.

"Nana, it looks like your apprentice understands the situation better than you do."

Maya sneered at Nana. Not even a genius like her could take on Maya and a group of automated weapons alone. Maya felt like Nana might have stood a chance in the past, but certainly not now.

"I actually have an ace up my sleeve."

Nana shrugged and smiled wryly. As she did, she called up the artificial limbs' computer.

"An ace up your sleeve, huh?"

Maya's eyes narrowed. Her experience told her to be very cautious when Nana flashed that kind of smile or she would end up facing something horrible.

"It's not something I really want to do, though... Release final limiter."

"A release code is necessary to execute this command."

"Magical Girl Rainbow Nana, Radiant Angel."

"Code confirmed. Releasing final limiter."

Immediately after Nana gave that instruction to her computer, she began glowing seven colors. Light was flowing out from her body and the glow got brighter by the second.

"...That's your ace?"

"Yes."

"That's awfully flashy."

"That's one of the reasons why I didn't want to do it."

Nana's body had three limiters in place. The first was to keep her body's capabilities on par with a normal human's. That limiter was automatically released when she switched over to combat mode. The second limiter was to

keep her from using more power than necessary to avoid damaging her frame. Maya had something similar, and they'd both released them a while ago. But the final limiter was the last safety device Nana had. It was in place to keep her artificial body from killing her. If she moved too fast or used too much spiritual energy, it would damage what Nana had left of an organic body. It might even be extreme enough to kill her, which was why the limiter had been installed. That was just how much power Nana's new body had.

And now, Nana had removed all three limiters. She was throwing her own safety to the wind so Yurika could chase after Purple. The seven colors of light overflowing her body was proof of that. If she kept up the appearance of a perfectly human form, cooling, intake, and exhaust would all be insufficient. That was why she'd opened up several vents on her body, and they were where the light was leaking out from.



“Yurika-chan, go! I’ll do something about this!”

“O-Okay! I’ll leave the rest to you, Nana-san!”

The exhaust she vented made Nana’s hair flutter and the seven colors she was shining illuminated her. The strong determination in Nana’s eyes reminded Yurika of when Nana had fought against Darkness Rainbow in that fated battle a year and a half ago. She’d gone into that battle with the same expression she was wearing now. And she had returned victorious, though seriously hurt. Remembering that pushed Yurika forward. Nana would win. Yurika firmly believed that, and sped off down the hall after Purple.

“I see... Sure seems like it wasn’t your apprentice I needed to be worried about.”

Maya did nothing to stop Yurika from going, despite knowing what she was planning on doing. There was only one reason for that. If she took her eyes off Nana for even a second, she knew she’d be defeated. Maya carefully observed her opponent while increasing the output of her own generator and releasing an indigo light of her own.

The generators built into Maya and Nana’s artificial limbs started to roar like their fighting spirits as they began shining.

“You’re wrong, Maya. You don’t know how amazing Yurika-chan is.”

“Amazing? That coward? She’s certainly amazingly cowardly...”

Maya didn’t think much of Yurika. She had only been a hindrance in her battle with Nana, and she hadn’t stood out all that much when the two of them tangoed previously.

“...Maya, you know that Yurika-chan is my apprentice, right?”

“Of course I do. That’s why I kidnapped her once upon a time. It seems like she was your cooperator at first, though.”

“And how much time do you think has passed since I first met Yurika-chan?”

“To become an archwizard, she must have spent at least five years training. And it’s been over a year since she first succeeded your role, so maybe seven in total?”

It had taken Maya four and a half years to train up Maki as her successor, so that felt about right.

“You’d think so, right? But it hasn’t even been three years since I first met Yurika-chan.”

“Impossible! You’re saying that she became an archwizard that quickly?!”

Maya’s eyes shot open wide in surprise. If they’d only known each other that long, that meant Yurika had spent even less time in training than Nana had. In other words, Yurika had become a magical girl faster than the legendary genius magical girl. Maya knew just what that meant, but her brain denied what she was hearing.

“That’s right... Yurika-chan only spent about a year in training. Moreover, she should have been too old to start training. She was already fourteen. Yet nevertheless, Yurika-chan became an archwizard in no time at all. Even with her cowardly nature, the higher-ups of Rainbow Heart were forced to recognize Yurika-chan’s talent.”

“It can’t be...”

However, that rang surprisingly true for Maya. Up until now, Yurika hadn’t really played a big part overall, but she would sometimes use surprisingly powerful spells or clever strategies like summoning a higher existence or tormenting Maki with clouds of poison and acid. Those weren’t accidents, but rather glimpses of Yurika’s talent that just hadn’t fully come out into the spotlight. Sensing that, Maya felt a chill run down her spine.

“But it is. Yurika-chan is the real genius. She was just missing love and courage, so you couldn’t see how amazing she really was.”

Regardless of how strong a power she held, without something to protect and the desire to continue to protect it, it was simply a waste of talent. Yurika didn’t have the heart to make full use of her wonderful talent when she was younger. The weakness of her heart had kept it in the dark.

“And the past year and a half have nurtured Yurika-chan’s heart. Right now, she has plenty of love and courage. So let me say this loud and clear, Maya. There will come a day Yurika is hailed the strongest archwizard in history.”

The battles she'd been through before today had trained Yurika and given her love and courage. As a result, the true talent that hid within her had begun awakening. Once it all blossomed, Yurika would become a magical girl that surpassed even Nana. Nana was sure of it.

Koutarou and the others' priority in Sariachal Castle wasn't to defeat the leaders of Darkness Rainbow. It was to prevent the clash between Darkness Rainbow and Rainbow Heart. The easiest way to do that was to seize their central command controller for the automated weapons. And to pull it off, Kiriha's plan was to use Koutarou and the others as a decoy while Clan found the controller and hacked it.

Of course, a countermeasure for Green's future forecast was necessary, so Clan had broken away from the group using her stealth technology to stay hidden while Ruth displayed a hologram of her walking with everyone else. And after Clan found the controller, she remained hidden and stalled for a while. Once Koutarou and the others engaged Darkness Rainbow, however, Green would focus her readings on the battle at hand and wouldn't have the time to do other things like survey the castle. And in the opening chaos of the fight, Ruth would casually dismiss the hologram while no one was paying attention. It would be far less suspicious than her just standing around. Out of sight, out of mind, after all.

When her sensors picked up the sounds of a skirmish elsewhere in the castle, Clan finally made her move. She took out a few guards watching the room, and then got to work. From that point on, she would be alone and there would be no one to protect her because everyone else would be battling Darkness Rainbow. Ruth should have cut the hologram at the start of the fight, however, meaning it would only be a matter of time before the enemy realized something was amiss. Would the enemy come for her, or would she be able to hack the controller first? The outcome would depend on her skill.

The controller had been placed in the corner of a large room that was most likely a laboratory. The equipment that filled it was almost all magical, which meant it was all rather unfamiliar to Clan. As a result, she could easily identify the controller at first glance. It was obviously different from the other devices in the room.

“That’s it. Then let’s go to... Wait, huh?”

But on her way over to the controller, something else caught Clan’s eye. It was a three meter high cylinder, and it stood out as the largest thing in the room. Clan slowly, curiously approached it. Since it was right next to the controller, she suspected it might be a weapon.

“This isn’t a magical tool... I just hope it’s not dangerous...”

Clan knocked on the surface of the metallic cylinder, trying to figure out how thick it was. It seemed she’d hit some kind of button in the process, as the surface of the cylinder slid away and revealed what was hidden beneath. The light sound of her knock had told her the metal was just a thin, protective cover.

“Wh-What is this?!”

Under the metal sheeting was an equally large tank that felt like glass to the touch. There was a man inside, suspended in a liquid that clearly wasn’t water.

“Is he sleeping... or is it a corpse? Why would he be here, though? Is it a spell component to make a zombie?”

Clan had heard about zombies appearing in the shopping mall the other day. It wouldn’t be all that strange to keep a corpse for one here. This was a magician’s laboratory, after all.

“But from the look of it, he’s not going to attack, so let’s forget about him for now.”

The control panel on the tank told Clan the preservation levels were good and the conditions were stable. If she took that at face value, it meant that she could leave the man be for the moment. Besides, she was on a mission and didn’t have any time to spare getting sidetracked.

“This is the real problem... Let’s see... It looks like it’s based on Forthorthian computers and communications, but some parts from the underground have been built into it as well.”

Approaching the controller, Clan felt some relief. It was mostly tech she was familiar with. Really, when it came to Forthorthian computers, there was no one more knowledgeable than Clan. She’d also gotten information on spiritual

energy technology from Kiriha, so she should be more than outfitted to handle the controller.

“Now let’s begin!”

Clan got to work straight away. She removed the maintenance cover from the controller and revealed its inner workings before connecting her own computer to the device with some cables. The automated weapons’ controller was protected by several layers of security, and she’d need to undo each of them in order.

“If I fail, he’ll laugh at me for my lack of skill, and if I succeed, he’ll laugh and say that I have a terrible personality... No matter what happens, Veltlion is going to laugh at me...”

Clan sighed as she tapped away at her terminal, working to undo the first layer of security. Hacking was a battle of wits between the hacker and the system’s creator. In a not so nice way of putting it, the one with the more devious mind would win. Clan would come out on top, certainly, but Koutarou would tease her for it. Which irritated her to no end. And the fact that he wouldn’t really mean it made it even more irritating. In short, she was mad because she wanted him to praise her properly.

“In addition to all that... the people of this land are descendants of Forthorthe. But just because their ancestors were criminals doesn’t mean they are. This is for them, too. I’ll just have to keep my head down and bust through this, whether or not Veltlion laughs at me.”

The status of the automated weapons was sent to the controller in real time. Live data and footage was displayed on the screen. From that, Clan could tell that the war between Darkness Rainbow and Rainbow Heart had already started and that thousands were clashing in the suburbs of the capital of Thorthe. Since the fighting had only just begun, the casualties were still on the low size, but were steadily climbing over a dozen. Clan felt strongly about what she was doing because she wanted to put an end to that as soon as possible. She felt that way both as someone responsible for the Folsarians being here in the first place, and as an imperial princess of Forthorthe.

“...But if Veltlion does laugh, I really will kill him!”

Clan continued complaining about something Koutarou hadn't even said yet as she pressed the key to execute a command on her computer. It put the script she'd written into action, and began searching for a hole in the device's security.

And without much difficulty, Clan was already through the first layer. When it came to scientific knowledge, Clan was superior to Elexis. This job would have been a cakewalk if it weren't for the stressful circumstances and time limit. Nevertheless, she swiftly moved on to the second layer of security. Based on the first layer, it seemed like there would probably be three or four more layers to go through. With her skills, that should only take a few minutes.

But before those few minutes were up, a loud boom rang out.

"Wh-What?!"

"...You can't use your powers like that, Purple-san!"

"Don't get in my way, Rainbow!"

That was when Purple and Yurika suddenly burst into the laboratory in a fierce clash of spells.

Purple's magic was especially potent right now. Because the gates of hell were still whirling by her side, Yurika was no match for her in terms of sheer mana. But even though the odds were against her, Yurika remained optimistic.

There were lots of people stronger than Yurika in room 106, like Theia. In terms of actual physical power, Kiriha might actually be the weakest, yet she was always the one leading battles. Who knew what would've befallen them already today if she weren't around? But having seen what she could do—having seen what all her friends could do—Yurika was encouraged.

When she started wondering to herself what Theia or Kiriha would do in this situation, she realized that there were still ways for her to fight Purple. She probably wouldn't stand a chance in a straight-up contest of strength, but Purple was brandishing her incredible power with reckless abandon. It was like suddenly wielding a weapon that was several times larger than what you're used to. While the power behind her spells was terrific, they were harder to control than normal and took more time to cast. If Yurika calmly observed

Purple and used appropriate defensive spells and evasive tactics to her advantage, she could still avoid Purple's overpowered attacks.

“Damn you, Rainbow! Stop running like a little coward! I’ll end it all with this! Negative Energy Burst!”

Purple gathered the dark energy she had drawn out from the gates of hell and detonated it in an attempt to blow up Yurika. Her irritation at not being able to finish her off generated even more dark energy, and Purple’s magic power reached new heights as she fed off of it.

The power of the blast is inversely proportional to the distance from it, and its energy type is negative spiritual energy!

Fortunately, Yurika was able to correctly intuit how to defend herself based on Purple’s behavior. She had learned that the pressure and blast of an explosion were related to distance from Koutarou the other day. She also chose not to use a general-purpose defensive barrier, but one specifically meant to block Purple’s negative spiritual energy.

“Double Cast: Push! Protection From Soul Energy!”

Yurika jumped backward while activating two spells at the same time. Since they could be activated together, neither was a particularly high level spell. However, they were incredibly effective in terms of protecting her from Purple’s attack.

The first spell she used pushed her even further back as she jumped. The second she landed, she got low. The shield she cast next then deployed around her. Purple’s spell came flying at her not a moment later, yet the supposedly powerful blast was negated by Yurika’s low-level magic.

That was the result of the splendid combination of an evasive and defensive maneuver. She distanced herself from the center of the explosion, lowered her posture to reduce her surface area, and activated a focused barrier around her. Distancing herself from the explosion meant that blast was weaker by the time it reached her, and her concentrated barrier meant that it was sturdier than normal. Between the two, she was unaffected by Purple’s attack that probably would have killed her at close range even with the most powerful defensive spell she could cast.

“Curse you! Again with the petty tricks!”

Purple ground her teeth in frustration. Her biggest spell yet hadn’t worked on Yurika at all. She could hardly believe it. She couldn’t accept it. Irritated, she desired more power. The only thing on Purple’s mind was crushing Yurika with an even stronger spell.

Just as I thought, there’s an opening here for an attack...

The bigger the spell Purple used, the more she left herself open while casting it. It was no different than using a large sword or any other weapon. And Yurika didn’t let that chance slip past her. She didn’t hesitate to unleash the most effective spell for the situation.

“Poison Cloud!”

Past the tip of Yurika’s staff, an eerie orange mist began shrouding Purple. It was the poison cloud Yurika had just conjured. The cloud itself obstructed Purple’s vision, making it even harder for her to attack. Meanwhile, the vaporous poison assaulted her. It was one spell with two effects, which undoubtedly maximized Yurika’s mileage right now.

That coward has gotten better!

Purple temporarily halted her attack and rushed to escape from the poisonous cloud. She wasn’t foolish enough to try and continue her chant in the middle of it. However, that was exactly what Yurika had expected her to do.

“Now, Energy Bolt! Targeting Option: Auto Homing!”

“Damn it! One petty trick after another!”

Yurika had unleashed a magic arrow that tracked Purple on its own. It drew a shallow arc as it chased after her as she tried to flee the cloud.

“Don’t take me lightly, Rainbow! I’m not someone who would be defeated by a weak spell like this!”

Purple used the gates of hell to shield herself. The magical arrow that was coming at her flew right into them and vanished. Yurika’s strategy wasn’t bad, but Purple’s years of experience made her wise to such tricks.

“In the end, you’re just a burden for Nana! Just getting a little better isn’t

enough to defeat me!”

Purple jumped out from behind the gates of hell and pointed her staff at Yurika again. She was going to blow her away this time. Her irritation at not being able to put an end to her yet fed the gates, which gave her the dark energy she needed to cast another big spell.

A burden?

There, Purple realized an effective way to defeat Yurika. And she would execute it without mercy.

“It’s over, Rainbow!”

Purple then turned her aim on Clan, who was leaving the fighting to Yurika while she focused on undoing the controller’s security. She thought that would be the quickest way for them and Rainbow Heart to come out victorious.

“I won’t let you!”

Protecting Clan was Yurika’s duty, so she defiantly stepped between her and Purple, her staff at the ready. She would use her own body as a shield if she had to.

“Yurika, are you going to be okay?!”

“I’ll be fine! Please continue, Clan-san!”

“You think so, Rainbow?! You won’t be able to dodge this one!”

Purple and Yurika began casting their spells simultaneously.

“Multiple Soul Energy Bullets! Modifier: Empower!”

“Greater Protection From Soul Energy!”

Bullets of spiritual energy powered by the whirlpool of malice. A shield of spiritual energy born from a strong desire to protect. These two spells that manifested completely different wishes collided.

“Die, Rainbow Yurikaaaa!”

The bullets Purple fired made a deafening noise as they slammed into Yurika’s shield. Purple had conjured a countless number of them, and they needled Yurika’s shield like spray from a machine gun. And for each one that hit, the

glow of Yurika's shield slowly weakened.

"I won't lose!"

Yurika shouted out loud to cheer herself on, pouring as much mana as she could spare into her spell. It was just enough to sustain her failing shield through the rest of Purple's attack.

"You did well to hold that off! But how about the next one?!"

"It will be the same regardless of how many times you try! I'm Rainbow Yurika, Nana-san's apprentice!"

In reality, Purple had a good point. Unlike Purple who could draw out power from the gates of hell, Yurika's remaining mana was limited. If they continued clashing like this, Yurika would be out of magic completely before too long. Nevertheless, her eyes were shining with resolve. She wasn't going to give up. No, not like this. She was still racking her brain for a way to win.

The opening after Purple-san's attack is the same as before... but I've put my all into defending, so I'm not in any position to attack. In that case...!

Yurika held her staff at the ready as she moved forward. If she let Purple take the initiative, she would just be pushed back by her powerful spells. So Yurika would make the first move to force Purple to use spells that focused on speed over power.

"You're coming at me?! Soul Energy Strike!"

"Quick Cast Magic Shield!"

However, for some reason, Yurika used a defensive spell instead of an offensive one. Moreover, it wasn't a specialized one, but a general all-purpose one. Purple knew it wouldn't hold, so she sneered at Yurika and summoned more spiritual energy bullets at the tip of her staff.

"You fool! Even if I'm using spells focused on speed, that pesky shield won't be able to block my attack! In the end, a failure is still a failure!"

Since the spell Yurika had cast was meant to defend against all kinds of attacks, it wasn't all that strong against any particular one. Yurika would never be able to block Purple's superpowered attacks with it. Even if she survived, she

would be in no condition to fight. She had successfully gotten Purple to use a weaker and faster spell in response, but that was the extent of what she'd accomplished. Purple was convinced of her victory.

"Now, please do it!"

However, there was a second part to Yurika's plan. Yurika actually had allies that Purple hadn't noticed yet—the modified automated weapons that had snuck into Sariachal Castle with Green. Clan had summoned them to the laboratory, and she attacked with them on Yurika's command.

"Order accepted. Self-destructing."

"Oh no! Curse you, Yurika! Was this your—"

Yurika's defensive spell was so that she wouldn't get caught up in the blast of the automated weapons self-destructing. Purple, however, was completely defenseless.

When the flames from the explosion cleared, only Yurika was left standing. Purple had been caught in the blast and now lay collapsed on the hard laboratory floor. Seeing her friend safe, Clan let out an uncharacteristic cheer.

"You did it, Yurika!"

"No, this was all thanks to your cooperation, Clan-san."

Yurika had come up with that plan because Clan had let her know she had the automated weapons on the way. Really, it was Clan's idea to use them.

"Now it's all up to you, Clan-san! Please hurry!"

"I know! I'm not going to let your efforts go to— What?!"

Clan suddenly turned as white as a sheet. For behind Yurika, the wounded Purple was standing back up.

"Yurika, behind you!"

"Huh...?"

Hearing Clan's words, Yurika hurriedly turned around. However, by that time, Purple had already launched her attack.

"Ahahahaha, you're too weak on the finish, Rainbow Yurikaaaaa!"

A pitch black mass of spiritual energy flew from the tip of Purple's snapped-in-half staff. She had taken enough damage that the power of her attacks was compromised compared to before, but Yurika had completely let her guard down because she thought the fight was over. Clan was too far away to protect her, and they'd just had their ace in the hole—the automated weapons on their side—self-destruct. There was now no way for Yurika to block Purple's attack.

"Oh no, everyone is always warning me about this—"

All Yurika could do was stare at the approaching spell like a deer in headlights. She had realized her defeat. Just like when she was playing games with everyone, she would let her guard down at the very end and lose in a sudden reversal. Yurika felt like this would be a very fitting way for her to go.

"You're fine just the way you are, Yurika."

However, the moment before the spell hit, a familiar silhouette appeared in front of her. With a single swing of a sword, Purple's energy bullets were no more.

"Nobody wants you to become some kind of invincible heroine. There's no reason for you to win on your own, because we'll always win together!"

"Satomi-san!"

It was Koutarou. After flashing Yurika a brief smile, he turned his sword on Purple again and shot her a sharp glare.

Koutarou had been able to chase after Yurika because Theia had woken up. The Combat Dress she was wearing detected that she had lost consciousness and taken the means necessary to revive her. It was a safety precaution installed for use in space, but it certainly came in handy here. And once she was back on her feet, Theia tagged Koutarou out in his fight with Elexis so he could go after Purple.

Why does that girl have everything I've lost?!

When Koutarou appeared, a fierce rage and resentment started burning within Purple. Seeing Yurika and Koutarou reminded her of old days with Kai. They cared for each other, protected each other, and did their best to live their lives together. That was the exact happiness that had been stolen for her.

So why...? Why did Yurika have what she couldn't? A blinding rage became one with her desire, and envy seized hold of her mind. She was on the verge of a complete meltdown.

"Surrender, Purple. You can't fight like this."

"Stop joking! I'd rather die than surrender!"

In her agitated and compromised mental state, the ordinarily practical Purple adamantly refused Koutarou's demand to surrender. She knew good and well that she couldn't fight anymore, but surrendering would mean giving up on her quest to revive her lost love. It would mean letting go of her future happiness. There was no way she could surrender when Yurika was flaunting her happiness in front of her like this. Consumed by rage over the unfairness of it all, the burning jealousy she felt over Yurika, Purple was hell-bent on pressing forward. She would seize her happy future one way or another, no matter who she had to sacrifice to get it.

"Purple-san, you can't! If you fight anymore, you'll—"

"I don't care! You don't understand what it feels like to lose something truly important to you!"

Purple's gaze wandered to the tall, cylindrical tank in the room for a brief moment.

Purple-san, you...

In that moment, Yurika saw deep love in Purple's eyes. Deep love in the midst of swirling malice and madness.

"I would sacrifice anything to fulfill this desire! Even if my body were to break or my soul to shatter! Because I'm going to reclaim my beloved Kai and my happiness!"

Purple couldn't give up. Her life as Marina had been wonderful beyond belief, and she was robbed of it. Her life now was dull and dry by comparison, and she had no qualms about sacrificing that to get her happiness back.

"Oh gates of hell! I'll pay any sacrifice—just give me the power to kill them! Aaaaah!"

Now Purple was supplying the gates of hell with more than just her negative feelings. She was willing to exchange her very soul for power.

“Negative Energy Lance! Modifier: Maximize!”

She converted that massive energy she received into a powerful attack in an attempt to defeat Koutarou and Yurika in one fell swoop. It was an attack very similar to the dark arrow Maki had created when she tapped into some of room 106’s power. However, the size and scale of this were much, much larger.

“Purple-san!”

“Yurika, don’t! We need to stop that spell first!”

“R-Right! Greater Protection From Soul Energy!”

“Clan, you help out too!”

“I know! Focus deployment of special distortion field forward, maximum power!”

In response, Koutarou, Yurika, and Clan worked together to block the deadly attack. Yurika’s spell and Clan’s barrier covered the three of them.

“Dieee! Return to your true homeeee!”

And Koutarou made a certain bet as Purple unleashed her spell. He was going to destroy the floor below them.

“How about this?!”

Koutarou swung Saguratin at the stone floor, which caved under the blow.

“Kyaaaaah!”

“What are you doing all of a suddeeeen?!”

The trio fell down through the hole that opened up. Not even Purple had expected Koutarou would choose to escape downwards. As a result, the dark lance that should have scored a direct hit flew right over their heads.

“Curse youuu!”

Purple focused and tried to change the trajectory of her lance midflight, but it had far too much momentum. She could only change its course slightly, and it

merely grazed the top of their combined barriers. The lance then continued on, destroying the stone floor ahead of it and eventually exploding.

By the time Koutarou got up, there was rubble everywhere. He was directly below the laboratory in what seemed to be a storeroom. Clan and Yurika were right next to him.

“S-Satomi-san... are you okay?”

“Yeah, somehow.”

“Ouch, owowow... Hack, ack... V-Veltlion, wasn’t there a more elegant way to do that?”

“Sorry, the elegant approach would have gotten us killed. Look at this mess.”

“...You did well, Lord Veltlion.”

“I’m impressed you can say that so shamelessly...”

Fortunately, all three of them were safe. They were a little injured in the fall and the blast, plus a little shaken from the whole experience, but they could all still stand.

“We can’t let our guard down yet. We don’t know where Purple-san is.”

Just as Yurika said that, Purple pushed aside some rubble and climbed up out of it. She had been caught up in the floor collapse and had fallen down into the storeroom as well. In her case, she had only been showered in some rubble, but without any defenses up, she was just as bad off as Koutarou and the girls were. And that was on top of the injuries she’d already sustained.

“Please stop this, Purple-san.”

“Th-There’s no way I could! Why do you think I’ve been committing these crimes? If I stop here, it will all be for nothing! All that would remain would be a litany of terrible crimes with no meaning! My only option is to press on until I can get my beloved Kai back!”

Purple rose to her feet and dragged herself towards Yurika, Koutarou, and Clan. A trail of blood stained the floor behind her.

“So you’ll fight no matter what?”

“If you want to stop me, you’ll have to kill me... I won’t stop any other way!”

She couldn’t give up now. She was well past the point of no return. Her only two options were to revive Kai or die trying.

Or so she thought. But a new path suddenly opened up when something big came crashing down from the laboratory above.

It fell between Yurika and Purple and shattered. Shards of metal and glass flew everywhere, and the object inside was smashed. The moment she saw it, Purple stopped dead in her tracks. Her eyes went wide, and she let out a scream like she’d witnessed the end of the world.

“Aaah... Aaaaah, K-Kai... AaaAAAAAAHHH!”

For what had just shattered right in front of Purple was the tank containing her beloved’s body.

Koutarou had only smashed the floor below him and the girls, but that was just the start of it. Purple’s attack had chewed away at a bigger portion of the floor, causing the whole thing to give in. She was so fixated on destroying Koutarou and the others that she’d destroyed the remains of her late lover with her own hands. It was a horribly cruel twist of fate.

At that, her mind shut off and blinked back on. But it wasn’t the same. The very existence of Kai’s body gave her hope and solace, which had been the strings that kept her bound to sanity all these years. And now that those had suddenly snapped, she freefell into the depths of madness.

Purple’s collapsing mind fed the gates of hell like a fire, sending it out of control. Its power then began expanding exponentially, which Purple used to do two things. The first was to collect the remnants of Kai’s corpse and begin assimilating them with her own body. The second was to attempt to destroy reality itself, which had lost all meaning for her. She wasn’t aiming for anywhere in particular. She was simply casting spells indiscriminately. She wasn’t trying to put an end to Koutarou and the others now—she was trying to end the whole world.

“Purple-san, please keep it together! Stay sane!”

“Let’s go, Yurika! It’s dangerous here!”

“But Purple-san!”

“If we stay here, we’ll die! We’ll need to get outside of here before we can do anything else!”

Yurika wanted to help Purple, but Koutarou stopped her. It wasn’t unlike when Tayuma went on his monstrous rampage. Yurika’s heart was in the right place, but Koutarou knew that not being practical right now would get them killed.

“He’s right, Yurika! Let’s regroup with the others and think of a countermeasure!”

“A-All right... Let’s go!”

Yurika knew that Koutarou and Clan were right. That’s why she agreed to flee with them, despite her desire to stay put.

And so Koutarou and the girls fled Sariachal Castle, which had been the bastion of Folsarians banished from past Forthorthe all those years ago. It was the only thing that they had to remember their faraway true home by. But that precious landmark was now collapsing at the hands of Purple, who’d lost both her past and future. It was an ironic end for the castle that had watched over the development of Folsaria.

Advent

Sunday, September 19th

With Sariachal Castle falling, the battle with Darkness Rainbow was temporarily halted. Neither side wanted to go down with their enemies, and they both needed to rescue their collapsed allies. They thusly wordlessly agreed on a ceasefire so they could all flee with their lives.

Darkness Rainbow used an underground escape tunnel and came out at the foot of a small hill by the castle. Maya, Elexis, Orange, and Yellow were gathered there alongside the incapacitated Crimson, Green, and Blue. There were also plenty of soldiers who had escaped with them. Everyone who was still conscious found themselves staring up at Sariachal Castle where they'd just been fighting.

"El, things have gotten complicated."

"You're right. I had expected some trouble, but... well, this is completely unexpected."

Purple was no longer herself, mentally or physically. She looked like a strange amalgamation of bodies, a man and woman jammed together. There were several arms and legs protruding from her torso and her head was sticking out unnaturally. Her figure was bizarre, but she now stood over twenty meters tall. Looking at her was like beholding some large, uncanny statue.

"Yellow-chan, what happened to Purple?"

"I think she opened the gates of hell too far. She was then probably devoured when the power flowed back into her."

Raging in her bizarre new form, Purple was destroying everything around her with her newfound power. Sariachal had already been damaged beyond repair, and it was only a matter of time before the whole thing collapsed. It was like Purple was acting out the legends of the evil deity of chaos.

"Maya, is this a repeat of the Tayuma incident?"

"Probably. They're drawing powers from different sources, but they both got

too close to the chaos of malice.”

“Which means... the mission failed. Even if we win the war, Folsaria will be ruined.”

If Purple had the same kind of power Tayuma did, even if Darkness Rainbow were to defeat Rainbow Heart, they wouldn’t be able to obtain Folsaria. They had no way of stopping the rampaging Purple.

Tayuma had been able to repel even Blue Knight’s attacks, so even if Elexis called in a battleship to attack with its heaviest artillery, it probably wouldn’t do anything against Purple. Additionally, magical attacks had almost no effect on her now, so most of Darkness Rainbow’s arsenal was automatically rendered useless. It might have been possible to defeat Purple the same way Koutarou and the others had Tayuma, but that would be hard for them to pull off since they mostly only had their magic to rely on. Moreover, they barely had any mana left to fight with.

There was no longer anything Darkness Rainbow or Elexis could do. Continuing to fight any further was meaningless. Whether they lost or won their fight with Rainbow Heart didn’t matter now; Folsaria would be lost. Folsaria was small enough that, at the rate Purple was going, the entire country would likely be destroyed within a few days.

Elexis and the others had been aware that there was a risk in using the gates of hell, but they hadn’t expected it to go this poorly. It was a complete miscalculation on their part.

“Maya, let’s retreat.”

“What about the boy and the others?”

“If anything, I’m placing my bets on them. If they can win against Purple, Darkness Rainbow will eventually get a chance to rule Folsaria.”

“So we don’t stand a chance against Purple, but you think we do against that boy and his friends...? Heh, okay. Yellow, Orange, are you fine with that too?”

“I think it’s the appropriate call.”

“No objections here. I’m already tuckered out.”

In the end, Elexis and the rest of Darkness Rainbow chose to retreat. With things as they were, the ideal outcome for them would be Koutarou and his allies defeating Purple, which meant that Elexis and the others couldn't stick around and continue their fight with them. It would only lessen their chances of defeating Purple. And so Elexis and Darkness Rainbow made the strategic decision to retreat.

"Then you do that."

"Crimson and I will go save Purple."

However, Crimson and Green—who had just been woken up by their subordinates—were against the plan. After being briefed on what was happening, they didn't agree with Elexis's call. Quite the opposite, they were planning on going to save Purple.

"Crimson-kun, what does that mean?"

"Exactly what I said, girly man. Green and I can still fight. If we want Rainbow and the others to win, then it's best to work together for now. If we play our cards right, we might even get Purple back. What do you think? It's a brilliant plan, isn't it?"

After being unconscious for the last half of the battle, Crimson and Green still had some reserves left to fight on. Crimson's idea was that she and Green would work together with Koutarou and his allies, and they would take Purple back once it was all over. It was the optimal outcome in terms of preserving Darkness Rainbow's manpower and war potential.

"I see. I don't think it's a bad idea... but it's dangerous."

Crimson and Green could still fight, but it wasn't like they were unharmed. Going up against Purple in their compromised conditions would indeed be dangerous.

"Oh, I know. But Purple is always taking care of us, and there are still subordinates who haven't escaped yet either."

"At this rate, we're going to suffer heavy losses, so we should make an effort to reduce what we can."

“By all means, do as you please.”

It was a policy within Darkness Rainbow not to get in anyone else’s way. So though this was dangerous, Elexis wouldn’t try to stop them.

Meanwhile, Koutarou and the others were trying to escape through the castle’s main gate. However, Purple was doggedly pursuing them, wreaking havoc as she went. The various walls and structures of the castle were in her way, so she was slowed down by having to destroy them as she went. But once they got outside, there would be fewer obstructions and she would likely pick up the pace. Koutarou was worried she’d catch them at this rate, and so he came to a stop when they reached the castle gate.

“Everyone, go on ahead! I’ll keep her busy here!”

It would be hard for them to defeat Purple the way they were now. In addition to Koutarou, only five of the girls were still in any condition to fight: Yurika, Maki, Clan, Kiriha, and Harumi. The remaining four were either unconscious or had used up all of their strength. If everyone were in top shape, they could probably make a stand, but that would be difficult with only half their usual force. Currently, the best course of action was for Koutarou to keep Purple busy while the others fled.

Besides, this is a mess I helped create... If anyone has to fight, it should be me...

Koutarou had been the one to send Grevanas’s magicians to Folsaria. And if it was the inequity of Folsarian society that had turned Purple into the monster she’d become, then Koutarou felt it was his duty to stand and fight. The girls shouldn’t have to, though. This wasn’t their fault.

Yurika and Maki, however, saw it differently.

“Satomi-san, Maki-chan and I will stay behind too! We want to help Purple-san!”

“Don’t be unreasonable! We can’t even properly fight her! How can you help her?!”

“Please, Satomi-kun! Purple was desperate for the sake of the man she loved! Her methods may have been wrong, but her feelings were real! It’s too cruel for

her to be destroyed because of that!”

Yurika and Maki now understood why Purple had tried to defeat Rainbow Heart after observing her behavior and seeing her laboratory. She had sacrificed many people and committed unforgivable crimes, but they couldn’t just stay quiet and watch as Purple destroyed herself. Yurika and Maki felt for her, and they didn’t want to deny the love Purple still held within her.

“Looks like they win, Koutarou.”

“How gutsy of you to try and leave us behind.”

“Satomi-kun, we’re going too.”

The remaining three girls—Kiriha, Clan, and Harumi—agreed with Yurika and Maki. Anyone who could was still going to fight. They were going to try and save Purple.

“Why are you all coming too?! What about Theia and the others?! If we mess this up, everyone’s gonna die!”

If everyone fought, then there would be no one left to help their unconscious friends escape. That meant if they died, everyone else would too. Naturally, Koutarou objected.

“If that happens—”

“Koutarou, let me make one thing clear.”

Kiriha pressed a slender finger to Koutarou’s lips to silence him as he began to protest. She then smiled and continued.

“You have to accept that this is what we all want. How could we live knowing we left you here alone? Did it not cross your mind that you might make nine more Purples?”

They would live and die together—that was how all nine girls felt. None of them were willing to sacrifice anyone to save themselves. Purple who had lost her lover and Koutarou who had lost his mother both knew all too well how it felt to be left behind.

“What a stupid choice...”

Koutarou could no longer object. He knew what it felt like to lose someone precious, and he didn't wish that on the girls. But still, he agonized over their decision. He was reluctant to bring them with him into a fight they had little chance of winning. As Koutarou was looking troubled, Yurika called out to him.

"Satomi-san, I think that's what it means to love someone."

"Yurika..."

"Or are we precious to you because of some calculated, logical reason?"

"...No, it's probably because of a bunch of stupid choices."

"Then let's go together, Satomi-san. Besides, you're the one who told me that I don't have to be a hero."

Yurika was confident that Koutarou would agree. That was reflected in her smile, shining bright with confidence and love.

Yurika and Maki's plan for taking down Purple was to sever her connection to the gates of hell. Purple wasn't causing all of this destruction on her own. Her negative emotions were being sent to the gates of hell, which converted them into power and sent them back. That inherently meant they were feeding off of each other, so if they could sever that connection, Purple should be cut off from the dark power, ultimately bringing her rampage to an end.

Unlike Tayuma who had obtained vast power in an attempt to transform into a god, Purple's situation was somewhat different. She was still actively feeding off of the gate and hadn't been completely sucked in yet. There was still potentially hope.

"I'm counting on you two!"

"Right! Please be careful too, Satomi-san!"

"Good luck, Satomi-kun! And everyone else, too!"

Leaving Yurika and Maki behind, Koutarou, Kiriha, Clan, and Harumi headed for Purple. In order to sever the connection, Yurika and Maki would need to cast a special spell. In other words, they would need to get much closer. Close enough that they would be in Purple's massive attack range, so Koutarou and the others would be acting as decoys to distract her while Yurika and Maki went

to work.

“Yurika, you’re better at dispelling than I am! I’ll support you!”

“Please and thank you! We’ll settle this with the biggest spell we can, a fourfold incantation!”

“So we only get one shot, huh? I’m on board!”

Purple’s mana was dense, and it was constantly being replenished by the gates of hell. In effect, her supply was inexhaustible. That’s why small-scale spells hardly had any effect on her. If they really wanted to sever the connection, they would need to go all out from the start. Yurika was going to cast the dispel, and Maki would amplify it. It would be the greatest spell they could manage right now.

“Things sure have gotten confusing...”

“You’re right. I never thought things would turn out like this back then.”

“Then let’s settle it this time! You got that, Layous Fatra Veltlion?”

“As you wish, my princess.”

Out of the four acting as decoys, Clan was the first to attack. With her large weapons, she had the longest range. The one she’d chosen to open with was a beam cannon that gave her almost no mobility, but very high attack power in return. It was the same firearm she’d used against Dextro’s giant in past Forthorthe.

“I’m sure everything is the same. I’m seeing this as a continuation of my brethren’s battle.”

“Ane-san, the enemy’s spiritual energy is increasing, ho! It looks like she’s about to attack, ho!”

“Karama, Korama, readjust the spiritual energy field. Optimize it to match Tayuma’s aura.”

“Pattern readjusted, ho! But this is a big gamble, ho! If hers turns out to be different, this won’t be pretty, ho!”

“Either way, it can’t be blocked by normal means. Now all we can do is pray

for the protection of the goddess of creation, or perhaps it's the goddess of dawn!"

With Koutarou and the others approaching, Purple was preparing to attack. Up until now, she'd been doing so indiscriminately, but she now she focused her negative energy bullets on Koutarou and the others. In response, Kiriha readjusted the haniwas' barrier with their previous battle against Tayuma in mind. There was the risk that it would prove useless, but the normal barrier wouldn't work against Purple anyway. It was better than doing nothing.

"Kurano-san is right. Since I have inherited Princess Alaia's will, this is my battle as well. No, it's everyone's battle."

Harumi tried her own approach in defending the group. The sword-shaped crest on her forehead and her long hair began glowing silver, and she recited an incantation in Ancient Forthorthian.

"Come, spirits of the mind! Gather, stack, enhance! Exhibit your great light! May it flutter like a mirage and project our likeness! Appear! Soul Light Mirage!"

Harumi incanted those words boldly, and soon copies of her and her allies appeared. They were illusions she'd conjured in hopes of reducing the risk of any one of them actually being attacked.

"She's firing! Everyone get down!"

"Detecting incoming attack. GoL now focusing deploying the distortion field forward."

The next moment, Purple unleashed her attack. She fired her dark powers like a beam that swept through the area around Koutarou and the others. Fortunately, thanks to Harumi's illusions, no one was attacked directly. But even then, a portion of the dark energy grazed their barriers, which just barely managed to hold up.

"All right!"

Once Purple's beam passed by, Koutarou used the power of his armor to take to the skies. Activating his emergency boosters, he sped towards Purple at a breakneck speed. In his hands were two swords, Signaltin in his right and Saguratin in his left. In order to pierce Purple's defenses, he'd need both their

strengths.

“It’s our turn nooow!”

Koutarou readied both his swords and thrust them straight out, flying at Purple like a meteor. Purple still hadn’t fully finished her beam attack, and even though she saw Koutarou coming, she couldn’t attack him. All she could do was bring up a barrier.

“Let’s go, everyone!”

Koutarou swung at Purple’s barrier. At the same time, Clan’s beam cannon, the haniwas’ lightning and flames, and Harumi’s spell all fired at Purple simultaneously. Like with Tayuma, Purple’s barrier blocked all kinds of energy, so attacking with various types together was the most effective means of overwhelming it.

“Superior Amplifier!”

“Greater Dispelling!”

Immediately after Koutarou and the others’ attacks clashed with Purple’s barrier, Maki and Yurika cast their magic. The magic circle Maki had created amplified Yurika’s spell, and the magical bullet they’d both poured all of their mana into smashed into Purple’s barrier.

Thanks to Koutarou and the others weakening it beforehand, Yurika and Maki’s spell managed to break through.

“It made it through?!”

“Please, keep going!”

Maki and Yurika pinned their hopes on their combined spell as it pierced Purple. Having scored a direct hit, the bullet unleashed its mana and covered the entirety of Purple’s body in an orange light. It was a spell of nullification meant to separate Purple from the gates of hell.

“Grrraaauuugh!”

Purple’s two heads let out horrid screams at the same time. While Yurika and Maki were trying to sever the connection, Purple enhanced her powers in an attempt to prevent just that. It created an intense tug-of-war through mana.

Enveloped in the orange light, Purple's body gradually began shrinking. Yurika and Maki's spell had disrupted Purple's flow of energy, making it impossible for her to maintain her current huge form.

"Gaaaaaaaaah!"

However, by the time she'd shrunk about 30 percent, the orange light faded. The dark powers that rallied to Purple's screams finally consumed the spell. Her body then began quickly growing again and she was back to her original size in no time.

"She resisted it?!"

"Everyone, run away!"

Now back to her original size and power, Purple opened her mouth wide and fired another beam. Koutarou and the others were already retreating, so it would never reach them. But that wasn't the real problem.

"Not good, Yurika! We couldn't cut Purple off from the gates of hell!"

Maki ran up to Yurika with a stiff expression on her face as she plainly spelled out the situation. They hadn't been able to sever the connection like they'd hoped, which was by far their biggest issue right now.

The spell they had just used was among the strongest they could muster, and it had only made it through Purple's barrier because everyone else had attacked first. But in the end, it still wasn't enough. Purple had resisted the dispel and overcome its effects. There wasn't even a lingering sign they'd ever disrupted her at all.

And that was it. Neither Yurika nor Maki had a more powerful spell they could cast. Both technically and physically, Koutarou and the girls had given it their best shot. They'd all attacked at full strength, and it still hadn't made a difference. There was no way they could win now. They didn't have the strength to defeat Purple, let alone save her. They were stuck.

"Clan, can you blow her away with the Super Space-time Repulsion Shell?"

"I believe it's possible... but we'll need to retreat first."

"I'm sure she won't let us."

“This sure is a problem...”

“Karama, Korama, if you change the aura pattern to match Purple, how much will your attack power increase?”

“Her aura is almost the same as Tayuma’s, so it’ll only be a slight change, ho!”

“Your guess was spot on from the beginning, Ane-san, ho! It’ll be about the same as it was before, ho!”

“Maki-san, what if we wake up everyone that’s fainted and have them help?”

“I’m sure we can rouse them, but I still don’t think we have enough mana to sever the connection.”

Koutarou and the others were trying to work out what they still might be able to do, but they were quickly hitting walls in all directions. Their best plan had already failed, leaving them with only inferior options.

“Yurika, what do we do?”

“In that case, let’s use our last resort.”

Yurika, however, still had something up her sleeve. There was only a slight chance of it working, but with little other recourse, she was willing to gamble on those odds.

“What do you mean?!”

“That’s—”

“Gaaaaaaaaah!”

But their enemy wasn’t about to hang back and let them regroup. Before Yurika could explain her last resort plan, Purple attacked. Using her dark power, she created a large amount of negative energy bullets and sent them flying at Koutarou and the others.

Yurika was her primary target. She had been the lynchpin in the previous attack, and most of all, she had everything that Purple had lost. She absolutely hated Yurika. As long as she was in front of her, Purple would want to kill her.

“Mind Connect!”

“All right, I’m counting on you, Crimson!”

“Just let whatever happens happen!”

That was when some unexpected reinforcements arrived. An odd trio jumped between the group and Purple, and combined their strengths to attack. One of them predicted Purple’s attack and warned the others, a second reinforced their weapon with powerful flames, and the third repeatedly fired a special gun to shoot down the incoming energy bullets.

“Nana-san?!”

“Crimson and Green too?! Why?!”

The reinforcements were Nana, Crimson, and Green. Yurika and Maki were unable to hide their surprise upon seeing them, not to mention seeing them work together.

“It just sort of happened! I ran into these two on my way here!”

Nana had followed Purple until Koutarou and the others got out of the castle, and then she’d made her exit via a different route. On her way back to regroup with everyone, she’d come across Crimson and Green.

“That doesn’t matter! If you have some plan, then hurry up and do it! Oh no, she’s coming! Crimson!”

“Inferno Fireeee!”

Purple continued her assault. The three were doing what they could to block the bullets, but they were being pushed back. Seeing that, Koutarou stepped forward to protect them.

“Satomi-san?!”

“Yurika, I’ll leave the rest to you! Just do what you think is best!”

Koutarou used the combined power of Signaltin and his armor to deflect the bullets. Like Green said, there was no time to talk. If there was something that could be done, they needed to do it.

“He’s right, Yurika-san! We’ll hold out here! You do what you need to!”

Harumi stepped forward a little to cover Koutarou and the other three girls. With Koutarou and Harumi joining in, it no longer seemed like they were in

imminent danger. Sensing that, Yurika made up her mind.

“Maki-chan, Clan-san, Kiriha-san, please gather around!”

“What’s the plan?”

“The four of us will merge to recover our mana and sever the connection between Purple-san and the gates of hell.”

“I see. That is an option....”

Being a magician, Maki understood Yurika’s intentions right away. Yurika and Maki had used up the majority of their mana, but Clan and Kiriha who didn’t use magic should still have plenty within them. They didn’t have any talent for magic so it wouldn’t be all that much, but it should be more than enough to cast two or three spells. Yurika’s plan was to merge and make use of that.

There was also another meaning to the merge. By merging several people, their abilities overlapped and increased, making them more powerful together than they would have been alone. In other words, it was a plan that would benefit all of them and allow them to make the most of their powers.

However, there was a large risk involved. There was no guarantee that they would actually be able to use magic after merging. There was also a chance that they had bad compatibility and wouldn’t be able to merge at all, or even that their abilities might functionally cancel each other out. They might even turn into a monster similar to Purple. That was why Yurika hadn’t suggested it until now, but there was no more room for doubt. Yurika was planning on finishing things this way.

“...What do you mean?”

“There’s no time for discussion! If you need our power, then use it!”

“Thank you very much, Kiriha-san!”

“I don’t get it all. Kii, what are you talking about?”

“...You’ll understand soon enough, Onee-chan...”

“Wh-What...?”

Clan still didn’t understand, but every second was precious. Yurika gave up on

explaining and began the incantation.

“Temporary Fusion! Modifier: Stabilize! Overdrive!”

An orange light began pouring out of Yurika’s staff as she held it overhead. The light enveloped Yurika, Maki, Clan, and Kiriha.



Please... Please let this save Purple-san! Let this save everyone! God, if you're there, please lend us your power! We are so powerless on our own!

The orange light was like the embodiment of Yurika's prayer. She wanted the fusion to succeed, she wanted to save Purple, she wanted to protect her friends, and she wanted to end the war. Yurika turned those powerful emotions into mana, which explosively increased the orange light's glow. Soon enough, the figures of the four girls vanished into orange light. Those four orange lights then melded into one brilliantly glowing light.

"Grrraaaaagh!"

Noticing Yurika and the others turning into light, Purple let out a fierce howl like that of a mad dog or wolf. She also stopped her attack on Koutarou and the others. Her instincts told her that light was far more dangerous than anything else. And based on Purple's actions, Koutarou and the others also realized what was going on. The four girls turning into light surprised all of them.

"Just what did she do?!"

"I see... Yurika-chan, you're merging the four of you to enhance your mana!"

Koutarou didn't understand what the light signified, but Nana knew what it meant at a glance. What happened next, however, blew Nana's expectations out of the water.

"That light. I've seen it somewhere before... Where was it?"

"Green, isn't that—?!"

"Yes. My forecasts are becoming a mess. It's coming!"

The orange light grew stronger and brighter. Just as it threatened to outshine the sun, other colors started began mixing into it—blue, indigo, and green. The four colored lights then swirled like a grand quadruple helix and stretched upwards, growing thicker and glowing ever brighter.

Immediately after the four colored lights appeared, the unconscious Theia and Ruth both awoke. When they saw the curious glow filling the area, they stood up and looked around in shock.

"What is this? What is this light?"

“I don’t know... It seems like it’s coming from over by Master and the others.”

As they pondered what was going on, Sanae and Shizuka—who were lying down nearby—woke up too. The four girls then stood there staring at the mysterious light together.

“It’s a warm and kind light. I can’t feel any hostility in it.”

“It doesn’t look like the enemy did it. Bathed in this light, I can kind of feel my powers returning.”

“Now that you mention it, me too...”

Strangely enough, the wounds on their bodies also began healing and the exhaustion that had been weighing them down slowly lifted. Moreover, the spiritual energy and mana that they had used up were regenerating. Surely this wasn’t the enemy’s doing.

“But Your Highness, that makes it even stranger. We don’t have anyone with this kind of ability in our troupe...”

“You’re right. I’ve never seen this power before. Maybe it’s Nana?”

“No, I think it’s Yurika, Maki, Kiriha, and Glasses that are making this light. I can feel their presences in it.”

“So the four of them did something? We should go take a look. There seem to be enemies lurking still.”

“Yes, you’re right. Let’s go, men!”

If they just stayed where they were, they wouldn’t get any answers. And with enemies still in the area, they needed to help their friends. Motivated by those two things, Theia and the other three girls ran to meet up with Koutarou and the others.

When the light turned into four colors, Purple stopped howling began attacking. The mouths on both of her heads opened wide and spewed fire like they were dragons.

“Grrraaaaah, haaaaah!”

The flames weren’t red, but an ominous black. It was like her evil power was

manifesting as fire.

“Gaaaaah?!”

However, after flying forward only a little, the flames vanished. The light flooding the area had erased them. They never even got close to Koutarou and Harumi. In effect, the light Yurika and the other girls were emitting was the opposite of the darkness that Purple was using.

Blue. Green. Orange. Indigo. The four lights became even brighter and began shaking the very earth itself. Immediately after that, the light they shared converged and took shape. It looked like a young girl about Koutarou’s age.

“Is that... Yurika and the others...?”

Seeing this girl, Koutarou was puzzled.

The girl that appeared should have been the merged form of Yurika, Kiriha, Maki, and Clan. Yurika had said so herself, so there was no doubt about that. Yet this girl looked completely different from any of the four girls who composed her. Moreover, the color of her hair was strange. It was a beautiful snowy white. And, maybe because of a trick of the eye, it seemed to be shining the four colors of the lights. The outfit she was wearing was something like a kimono or shrine maiden’s garb dyed the same four colors. It wasn’t all that dissimilar from what Kiriha wore.

But what stood out the most were the four orbs circling her. They were about as big as soccer balls or volleyballs and seemed to be made from a transparent material like glass, but each one was a different color. Just like the lights, there was an orange one, a green one, an indigo one, and a blue one. The moved through the air on their own, as if orbiting the girl.

She looks less like Yurika and the others... and more like that statue in the temple...

The girl looked familiar to Koutarou, but she reminded him of something he’d seen in the past—the statue that had held Signaltin in Forthorthe of old. Her aesthetic was different, but her face looked strikingly similar.

However, if someone were to ask Koutarou who she was, he would have readily said it was Yurika and the other girls. There was just something about

her that made him feel that way, which puzzled him.

“I see... So that’s what this is...”

The girl, on the other hand, seemed to understand a great deal. Half of her questions were still unanswered, but apart from the finer details, she could deduce most of what she needed to know.

Why they ended up in room 106. Why they were united now. It was nothing special. No, it was all meant to be. All to create a single miracle that traversed endless time and immeasurable distance...

“The promised time is near... In order to protect free will, I will not brook interference...”

The girl lightly kicked off the ground and flew towards Purple, leaving a streaking trail of light behind her. Though it only shone four colors, it looked like a rainbow.

“Grrraaaaah, haaaaah!”

Noticing the glowing girl flying towards her, Purple let out a ferocious roar and bared all of her hostility. It was strange to see someone of Purple’s gigantic stature try to intimidate a small girl. But her instincts told her it was the right reaction. She knew this girl would be her ultimate enemy.

“Whirlpool of chaos, you’ve been too greedy.”

“Gaaaaaaaaah!”

Roaring out in irritation, Purple threw seven spears at the approaching girl. They were pillars of dark energy, made from blacking out the seven colors of the rainbow. They carried a darkness with them that would infect anything it hit.

“Just what meaning is there in a result you force?”

However, the girl had a worthy answer. She gracefully stretched her right hand forward and the four globes around her arranged themselves into a square. The rainbow of only four colors turned into a shield and negated the seven spears of darkness.

“Grrrgh... Graaaaah!”

With the spears not working, Purple swung her hands and feet around to try and smack the girl out the air. She'd resorted to physical attacks.

"I guess I have no choice..."

The girl was sad. She didn't like fighting, so she had hoped that Purple would relent. But Purple was showing no sigs of backing down. And because she couldn't just leave Puriple be, she had no choice but to fight here. That fact saddened her.

"Grrgrraaah!"

"...That's one."

The girl shot the green globe towards Purple. The next moment, the green glow disappeared from her hair and clothes. In contrast, the glow of the green globe grew stronger. It was as if she had transferred it to the globe. The green globe then struck a direct hit on the arm that Purple was swinging around. When it did, the green light within was released the arm vanished. But that wasn't all. The other arms and legs started to vanish too.

"Gah... Gryaaah?!"

Having lost several limbs, Purple was assaulted by intense pain and let out a miserable scream. She also lost her balance and toppled over. With her massive size and incredible weight, the ground shook when she hit it. It also caused the green globe, which had fallen to the ground first, to bounce up. When the globe came into contact with the ground again, something surprising happened. The globe began emitting light again and turned into a human.

"Wh-What is—?!"

It had turned into Kiriha. She didn't know what had happened, and simply stood there with a blank look of surprise on her face. She had no way of knowing, but the energy the girl in question had used to attack originated from her. Having used up that energy in the attack, it was no longer possible to maintain Kiriha in the transformation and she returned to her normal self.

We merged with Yurika's spell and I became a part of something bigger... I was supposed to have understood something very important... but I can't remember it. Just what did I learn there?!

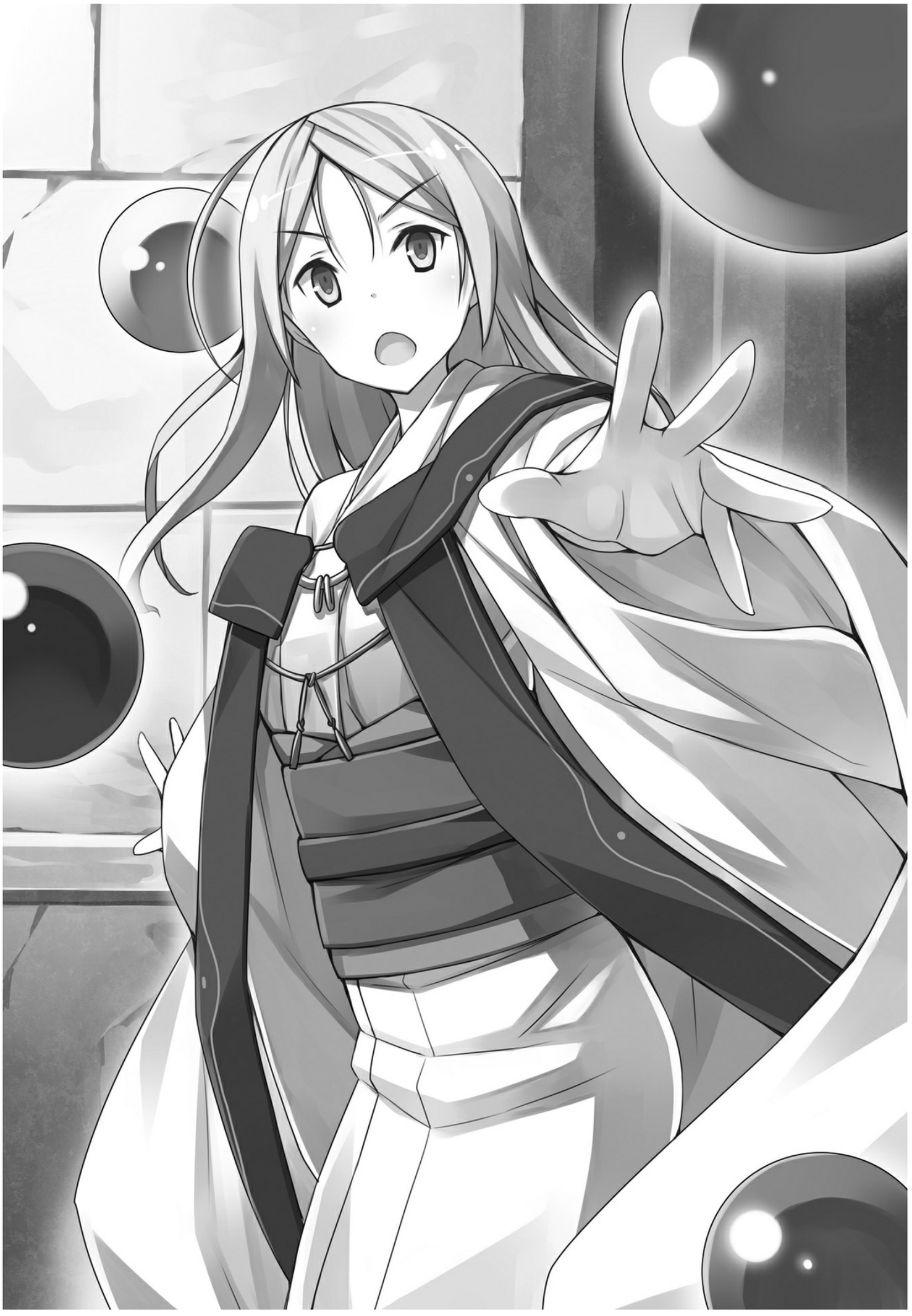
Being separated from the girl left Kiriha puzzled. She was surprised at the suddenness of it, but she was also surprised that she was having trouble remembering anything from the fusion. She couldn't help but feel an anxiousness bubble up within her. She felt like she was supposed to have realized something very important.

"Grryaaah!"

Though Kiriha was left in a stupor, the battle continued. Purple lifted herself up with her remaining limbs and spewed dark energy from her mouth that condensed into black flames to attack the girl.

"That's two..."

In response, the girl launched the orange globe towards the fire. In a similar fashion to before, the orange glow from her hair and clothes vanished and the globe itself grew brighter as it directly clashed with the dark flames. But that didn't stop the globe. Instead, it punched right through, erasing the fire as it flew straight towards Purple.



“Gyaaaaaah!”

Purple roared once more. The orange globe came into contact with the head currently spewing flames and erased it just like the green globe had her limbs earlier. And once it fulfilled its role, the orange globe fell to the ground and turned into a person as well.

“H-Huh?! That’s Purple...? R-Right!”

Clan appeared from the orange light. Just like Kiriha, she was confused. But seeing Purple writhing in pain, she realized what was going on.

“Our attack worked! I don’t know what we did though...”

Purple was in a terrible state. She had lost several limbs and was down a head. She’d taken serious damage, and her entire body was beginning to flicker like it was a mirage. It was becoming unstable.

“There she is!”

That was when the girl spotted a lone woman drifting within the massive body of negativity and dark energy. It was Purple’s real body, which had been absorbed into the gates of hell.

“Let’s go!”

The girl flew towards Purple’s real body. Having exhausted two colors already, the girl’s rainbow was now only blue and indigo. But in spite of that, there was not a hint of hesitation in her expression. The girl—the combined girls of room 106—had been determined to save Purple from the start.

“I will forge a path! The remaining me should follow it and save her!”

There, she fired the indigo orb at the monster. It turned into a human, into Maki, midair. She flew forward with her greatsword extended.

“I’ll leave the rest to you! Show them what you’ve got, Rainbow Yurikaaa!”

Maki was herself again, but she hadn’t lost the energy she’d gotten in the merged state. She focused all of that energy into her sword and drove it into the monster’s body.

Indigo light was released from the sword and reacted with the mana and

spiritual energy making up the monster's body, annihilating it. The heat energy created from the annihilation burned away the monster's flesh, cutting a path to Purple.

"Thank you, Maki-chan! I'll save her for sure!"

The girl left with only a blue light sounded like Yurika, and flew right for Purple without any hesitation. As she jumped into the hole Maki had cut open, the girl's body began glowing blue and started transforming. By the time her voice could reach Purple, she was completely Yurika again.

"Purple-san, please open your eyes! Purple-san!"

However, it seemed Yurika's voice was only reaching Purple's ears and not her mind. She had closed herself off, rejecting anything and everything. The gates of hell were lending her their power to that end, shutting her away from Yurika.

"In that case, I'll do it by force! Please, Angel Halo!"

Yurika raised the staff she had been fighting with above her head and shouted her incantation. She was going to sever Purple's connection between the gates of hell and take her back.

"Divine Judgment! Modifier: High Concentration!"

Yurika cast a spell that unleashed holy light. It had no effect on humans, but it was a peerless power against evil. Yurika used that light to attack Purple and the remaining monster. The blue light that was protecting Yurika lent its strength to her attack, making her attack far more powerful than she'd expected. It burned away at the monster's body, leaving only Purple behind.

"Purple-san, we're getting out of here!"

Yurika picked up Purple's body and turned around, intending to leave the same way she'd come. There was some unexpected interference, however. Not wanting to let Purple—its energy source—go, the body of the monster attacked.

"I-I won't lose after getting this far!"

The monster's body transformed and created whips that it aimed at Yurika. Yurika responded by embracing Purple to protect her and running through the

torrent of lashes.

“Th-There’s the exit!”

Since the monster was only about twenty meters in size, Yurika reached the exit in short order.

“Kyaaaaaaaah!”

But the moment she did, she was caught by the monster’s gigantic hand. By sending Yurika running, the monster had put her right where it wanted. It only had to block off her exit, and capturing her was easy.

“O-Oh no, I have to do something!”

Yurika desperately struggled to try and break free from the monster’s hand, but it had closed around her so that she couldn’t move her arms or use magic. Thanks to the blue light protecting her, she wasn’t absorbed or crushed, but that wouldn’t last forever.

“I-I was almost there, too...”

“No, Yurika-chan, you’ve won.”

“Nana, aim for the wrist! That has the highest probability!”

“Got it!”

That was when the trio of unexpected reinforcements arrived to help Yurika: Nana, Crimson, and Green.

“Gaaaaah!”

Nana’s bullets wreathed in Crimson’s flames repeatedly struck the monster’s wrist. It wouldn’t have worked before, but now that Purple was separated from the monster, it was weaker. Nana focused her fire on a single point, and blew the monster’s hand right off its arm. It then unwittingly loosened its grip, letting Yurika and Purple go.

“Purple!”

Purple tumbled down, but Crimson caught her midair.

“I’ll leave the rest to you, Crimson-san!”

“You don’t have to tell me twice!”

Seeing Crimson retreat with Purple, Yurika regained her balance and faced off against the monster once more. It was now much weaker, but was still maintaining its body. Finishing it off would be Yurika’s last job.

“Good job, Yurika!”

“Satomi-san?!”

“We’re here too!”

That was when Koutarou and the others gathered around her. It wasn’t just those who had been fighting before, either. Even the previously unconscious girls had finally made it over. Yurika’s friends were all here.

“What should we do, Yurika?”

“All that’s left is to defeat that thing and close the gates of hell.”

“Okay, everyone! Give it one last push!”

“Yeah!”

Koutarou and the girls wore bright expressions. They still couldn’t let their guard down, but seeing each other all safe and sound made a big difference in morale. It affirmed their desire to win, and their desire to return home together. Contrary to the weakening monster, Koutarou and the girls were only getting stronger.

“Yurika, let’s focus mana into Signaltin.”

“Yes! I’ll put the rest of what I have into it!”

“Then I’ll do that for the glittering sword!”

“We’ll do that too, ho!”

Maki and Yurika poured mana into Signaltin while Sanae and the haniwas poured spiritual energy into Saguratin. They were planning on focusing their power into one point to defeat the monster for good.

“All right, we’re going to back up Koutarou! Make a path for him!”

“Yes, Your Highness!”

“I guess we have to as well... Give it your all, Uncle!”

“Got it.”

“Kii, you shoot! You’re better at it than me, right?”

“Okay, then please support me!”

Theia, Ruth, Shizuka, Clan, and Kiriha all got to work on opening up a path for Koutarou. Their attacks hit the monster’s limbs one after another, preventing it from attacking. It was a job splendidly cut out for the girls with high attack power and ranged weapons.

“Satomi-kun, let’s finish it with this.”

“Yeah, I could use a long nap.”

Harumi unleashed Signaltin’s mana and Koutarou sent his own spiritual energy charging into Saguratin. The two swords filled with the power of many shone brightly in silver and gold.

“...I’ll leave the rest to you, Satomi-san.”

“That’s not right. You’re in charge, aren’t you?”

“Right...”

She had done everything she could. She had no regrets about anything today. That’s why Yurika could speak confidently now with her head held high.

“Defeat that thing, Satomi-san!”

“Leave it to me, Yurika!”

After flashing a small smile at Yurika, Koutarou charged at the monster. Theia and the others were opening the way for him, so approaching it was easy.

“Say, Theia-chan...”

“What is it, Yurika?”

“Satomi-san said that we don’t need heroes, but...”

“Yeah...”

“Satomi-san is really my hero.”

“And what’s wrong with that?”

“Ahaha, you might be right...”

And so Koutarou valiantly swung his swords as the girls watched on and supported him. The attack filled with all of their desires splendidly cut the monster in two, and the dark energy and mana that composed its body dispersed.

Over the Rainbow

Wednesday, September 22nd

Marina knew that it was only a dream. It was a dream too good to be true, but she tried to ignore that. It was a dream of the faraway days she'd shared with her beloved Kai.

"Hey, Kai. Let's go somewhere on our next vacation. Like Japan, maybe."

"Sightseeing in Japan is a pain. There's too much paperwork."

"Jeez, what about making your girl happy and taking her on a nice trip before getting married?"

"...Is that the kind of high-level technique that's going to be expected from me from now on?"

"Just the once."

"Okay, okay, I'll see what I can do."

They didn't have to go in for work until that afternoon, so they were leisurely spending their morning in bed together. The light of the sun was pouring through the curtains and gently lit up the two lovers smiling at each other. It was a pleasant, peaceful morning.

"Ah, you've got some split hair."

"Because you're always stressing me out all the time."

"Jerk."

"Ow."

It wasn't anything special. Just a normal, everyday morning. Just like the day before it and the day before that. That's why she'd always believed the next day and the day after that would be the same. But she was so very wrong. Marina now knew just how precious these normal mornings were.

"...Why are you crying?"

There, Marina's dream started to diverge from the past. Marina had never

cried while she was lying next to Kai. She'd never had anything to cry about in those days.

"I was just thinking that these days were so wonderful... And now I just can't stop the tears."

Overflowing with emotion, Marina admitted she knew she was dreaming. She couldn't play it off anymore.

"I know how you feel. There hasn't been a day since that night that I haven't felt that way. That's why I came to visit you like this."

"K-Kai? Are you...?"

There was a special meaning behind those words. Utterly shaken to hear it, Marina had to ask...

"Hmm?"

"Are you the real Kai...?"

"Who else would I be?"

"That's not what I mean... Are you just a product of my imagination?"

"I wonder. I'm not actually sure myself. All I know is that I believe."

Assuming this was no normal dream, but Kai's soul that had entered her consciousness... That made both of them happy.

"Then... why haven't you visited me before today?"

"I wanted to, but you were so focused on reviving me that you could never hear my voice."

Kai wasn't just teasing her. He'd tried and tried to call out to her, but she'd never listened.

"Then all this time..."

"Yeah, I've been right beside you. It was frustrating not being able to do anything, though."

"Then I guess it was all pointless in the end..."

"I guess so. I've been with you all along."

“No...”

Marina was aghast. She had wanted to revive Kai so that they could spend time like this again. But in the end, her desire had pushed him away.

“But for some reason, I was able to talk to you today. I think you changed after that battle.”

Her complete defeat and the loss of Kai’s remains had most likely wrought a change in Marina’s heart. At least, that’s what Kai believed, though he couldn’t bring himself to say it.

“That might... be true...”

Marina had a hunch as well. The dark feelings in her chest were no longer lingering there. The blackness threatening to consume her had vanished.

“If you get it, then hurry up and wake up.”

“What?”

“There are people worried about you. Don’t you remember? Two of your allies came to save you.”

When Kai said that, the faces of two girls popped into Marina’s head. Her memories after becoming a monster were vague, but she felt like she had seen them during the battle.

“Crimson and Green...? There’s no way they would!”

“Why do you think that?”

“Why wouldn’t I? We’re Darkness Rainbow, you know?! There’s no way anyone there would be worried for someone else!”

Darkness Rainbow sought the free use of magic to fulfill their own desires. They were highly individualistic and weren’t much of a team. They were only together because they had a common enemy. To them, allies were tools to be used.

“Are you going to cover your ears and shut your eyes again? Just like you did with me?”

“...”

“Why don’t you wake up and meet them? Look at them, listen to them, and talk to them. Why don’t you confirm for yourself why they really came.”

“Kai... Okay. I’ll try.”

“Good girl.”

Kai patted Marina on her head. The sensation it produced was just like what she’d felt in the past. Suppressing more tears, she smiled at Kai.

“Kai...”

“Hmm?”

“Will I see you again?”

“I guess that depends on your sex appeal.”

“Then I guess I’ll just have to keep you here with my sex appeal.”

“Don’t use any more strange spells, okay?”

“Yes, I’ve learned my lesson there...”

Marina wiped away her tears. She didn’t break down crying, but she couldn’t help the tears that welled in her eyes. Kai noticed, but pretended not to.

“See you, Marina.”

“Yeah. See you, Kai...”

Their parting was a simple one. While there might have been tears, both of them were smiling. They were sure that they would see each other again someday.

When Purple woke up, she was in an unfamiliar room of a small hut. It had minimal furniture, mostly just a humble bed. It was even more plain than the safehouse she used during her missions.

Purple simply laid in bed, staring up at the ceiling. She had the feeling she’d awoken from an important dream, but she couldn’t clearly remember it. She also felt like there was something she had to do. But because she couldn’t remember that either, she just continued to lie there.

After some time passed, Purple could hear voices from a neighboring room.

There were two of them, both female.

“I wonder if Purple is okay...”

“She *was* absorbed by the gates of hell...”

She knew them both well. It was Crimson and Green, fellow leaders of Darkness Rainbow. Purple listened in on them, still lying in bed.

“She might stay this way...”

“Stop that. Don’t say anything so horrible. Just imagining Purple sleeping forever sends chills down my spine.”

“I wouldn’t want to get into a fight without her, either. It doesn’t suit us, does it?”

“I just can’t get into things if Purple isn’t there to take charge and be all cool and stuff.”

“That’s right, Crimson... Did you know Purple doesn’t like kurka fruit?”

“Really?! There are really people who don’t like kurka fruit?!”

“Just a friendly reminder that she’s not ‘all cool and stuff’ all the time. She lets her guard down every now and then.”

“Heh, now I’m looking forward to getting a glimpse of that too.”

The two girls were just casually chatting. It was ultimately pointless small talk. Purple’s name had come up, but she didn’t learn anything other than that they were worried about her.

“Now that I think about it, it’s almost time for dinner.”

“You’re already hungry? Heh, I’ll go start cooking.”

“Okay, then I’m going out for a bit.”

“Why? It’s already starting to get dark.”

“I was thinking of going to get some kurka fruit. It grows around here, right?”

“I give up... Do you want to make Purple angry on purpose?”

They really were talking about nothing of consequence. It was all silly nothingness, but for some reason... Purple wanted to join in. She wanted to try

spending time talking to someone about nothing. She didn't know why, but she felt like she should.

And so Purple got up, opened the door, and headed to the neighboring room. Crimson and Green were waiting for her there. However, maybe that wasn't all. Maybe, just maybe, what she'd been craving all these years was waiting for her there too.

After the battle at Sariachal, Crimson proposed a deal with Koutarou and the others: they would surrender the code for the weapons controller if Koutarou let them go free. Because Clan hadn't been able to finish her hacking before the floor was blown out, it was a welcome proposal.

And so they got the code and Darkness Rainbow fled the scene. Clan immediately got to work with the code and stopped the automated weapons under Darkness Rainbow's control. With that, Darkness Rainbow's army was forced to surrender at the capital because their force was suddenly reduced, and the fighting was put to an end right before it was about to swing into full-blown war.

Darkness Rainbow's forces agreed to disarm, and they were currently waiting to learn what would become of them. However, the whereabouts of Darkness Rainbow's six leaders, Maya, and Elexis were unknown. Now that Darkness Rainbow's army was being disarmed, it was hard to imagine that its leaders, or Maya and Elexis, would be making any major moves in Folsaria or on Earth. Based on that, Koutarou and the others were worried that they might be headed to Forthorthe.

There were primarily two reasons why Darkness Rainbow might end up in the Forthorthe Galactic Empire.

The first was because they made excellent soldiers. The people of Forthorthe only thought of magicians as fiction. Of course, they wouldn't consider girls carrying around staffs a real threat. They could boldly enter various places and perform various duties. Whether that be sabotage or espionage, they would be a big threat to national defense. There would also be plenty of Forthorthians who would pay a hefty sum for their services, though Elexis would surely be their primary employer.

The second reason was so that they could gather strength again. Rainbow Heart's hand didn't reach as far as Forthorthe, so the could recoup under Elexis's protection and eventually return with an army to seize Folsaria. The original plan was only to go to Forthorthe after taking Folsaria, but they might have to reverse that now. Looking at the bigger picture, the order didn't make all that much of a difference.

Koutarou had banished Maxfern and Grevanas from Forthorthe to different worlds, and as a result, given rise to the People of the Earth and the Magical Kingdom of Folsaria. And now, Elexis was about to return to Forthorthe with Maxfern's inheritance of spiritual energy technology and Grevanas's inheritance of magic. In other words, those banished by Koutarou were about to make a rather unwelcome homecoming. Of course, Koutarou had no intention of overlooking that. He figured that he would probably need to go to Forthorthe himself in the near future.

Ever since the battle in Folsaria, the girls would often catch Koutarou lost in thought with a serious expression on his face. They'd discussed it amongst themselves a few times, but not in regards to what Koutarou was worrying over. They already had a rough understanding of that. What the girls were really worried about was the fact that the expression Koutarou wore when he was deep in thought was clearly quite different from that of a normal boy his age.

"Maki-chan, Satomi-san's got that stern look on his face again."

"That's no good... That's not like Satomi-kun at all."

Once cosclub activities were over for the day, Yurika and Maki returned home to find Koutarou leaning against a wall with that particular look on his face. He hadn't even noticed them coming in. His current expression gave off the impression of someone with an adamant will and excellent judgment. It was the same expression he wore during battle. In other words, it was the expression of the legendary hero the Blue Knight.

There had been a time when the girls thought that expression was wonderful. But now, they couldn't really enjoy it. They'd come to realize that it didn't really suit him at all.

“Let’s rush in, Maki-chan!”

“...Yurika, you’ve changed a little lately.”

“Huh? How?”

“Heh, I was just thinking how you’re starting to look more like your master. Well, more importantly, let’s rush in!”

“Ah, r-right!”

Because of that, whenever the girls found Koutarou making that serious face, they would do whatever it took to interrupt his thoughts. This time that role fell upon Yurika and Maki, and they rushed up to Koutarou and began using various wrestling moves on him.

“Satomi-kun!”

“Satomi-san!”

“Wah! Wh-Whhat now?!”

“Satomi-kun, let me practice my headlock on you, please!”

“All right, then I’ll practice my figure-four leglock. Take that!”

Play wrestling was starting to become a daily occurrence in room 106, and the girls were all starting to get pretty good at it. Even the unathletic Yurika had a few moves under her belt. Because of that, the two girls were able to get Koutarou into submission without much resistance. Their surprise attack had been a big success.

“Ow, ow, ow! I give, I give!”

Koutarou tapped out without a fight. Hearing that, the girls happily let go and smiled at him. Seeing their faces, Koutarou let out a sigh of relief.

“Jeez... Everyone’s gotten really into pro wrestling lately...”

Because Koutarou didn’t understand what the girls were really up to, that’s all he thought it was. He never dreamed it was because of the face he was making, but Yurika and Maki decided to come clean.

“That’s because you’ve been looking so serious lately, Satomi-san.”

“Everyone is trying out their wrestling moves on you because they want you to return to normal, Satomi-kun.”

“I have?”

Koutarou looked at them wide-eyed.

“Yes. Frequently.”

“Well, yeah, I guess...”

Thinking about it, he realized Yurika had a point. Whenever she looked sad, he would hit her or try out various wrestling moves on her too. So if they’d been trying that on him recently, it made sense.

“I’ll be more careful not to worry you guys. At this rate, my body won’t last.”

“I think that’s for the best. Everyone looks like they’re ready to move on to the next stage.”

“Next stage?”

“We agree that we might be being too rough on you with all the wrestling, so we’re thinking of switching to kisses.”

“Kisses?!”

Koutarou let out a hysteric yelp in his surprise. That would certainly reduce his physical burden, but it would greatly increase his mental burden. To him, kisses were even more dangerous.

“You idiot! Save those for more important times! Don’t waste them trying to cheer me up!”

“I think it seems like an effective tactic based on your reaction just now.”

“If you don’t want that, make sure to be careful, okay?”

“Okay, okay... Jeez, when it comes to you guys...”

If he was that surprised just hearing about it, what would he do when they actually kissed him? Koutarou promised himself to be more vigilant. All he had to do was keep the girls from worrying.

“But... thanks, you two. For worrying about me.”

After calming down, he realized that he had plenty to be grateful for. They were only doing this because they were worried about him. Yurika and Maki looked at each other, lightly held hands, and flashed Koutarou two bright smiles. Koutarou was back to his usual self, so this was a victory in their book.

“Don’t forget, Satomi-kun. Just like how you don’t want us to have to be magical girls, we don’t want you to have to be the Blue Knight.”

“I think it’s unfair that you get to remind us and we don’t get to remind you, Satomi-san.”

“...Yeah, you’re right.”

They felt the same way he did every day. The same was probably true for the other girls as well. There was no way that it was okay for him to be the only one who looked so serious. This time, Yurika and Maki were right.

I really am blessed with good friends...

Though he didn’t say it out loud, that was always on Koutarou’s mind. He treasured the girls, and that wasn’t a one-sided thing. He just had to remind himself sometimes.

Seeing Koutarou’s expression now, the girls put a little more strength into their clasped hands. That alone was enough for the two of them to understand each other's feelings.

“Satomi-kun, could you lower your head a little?”

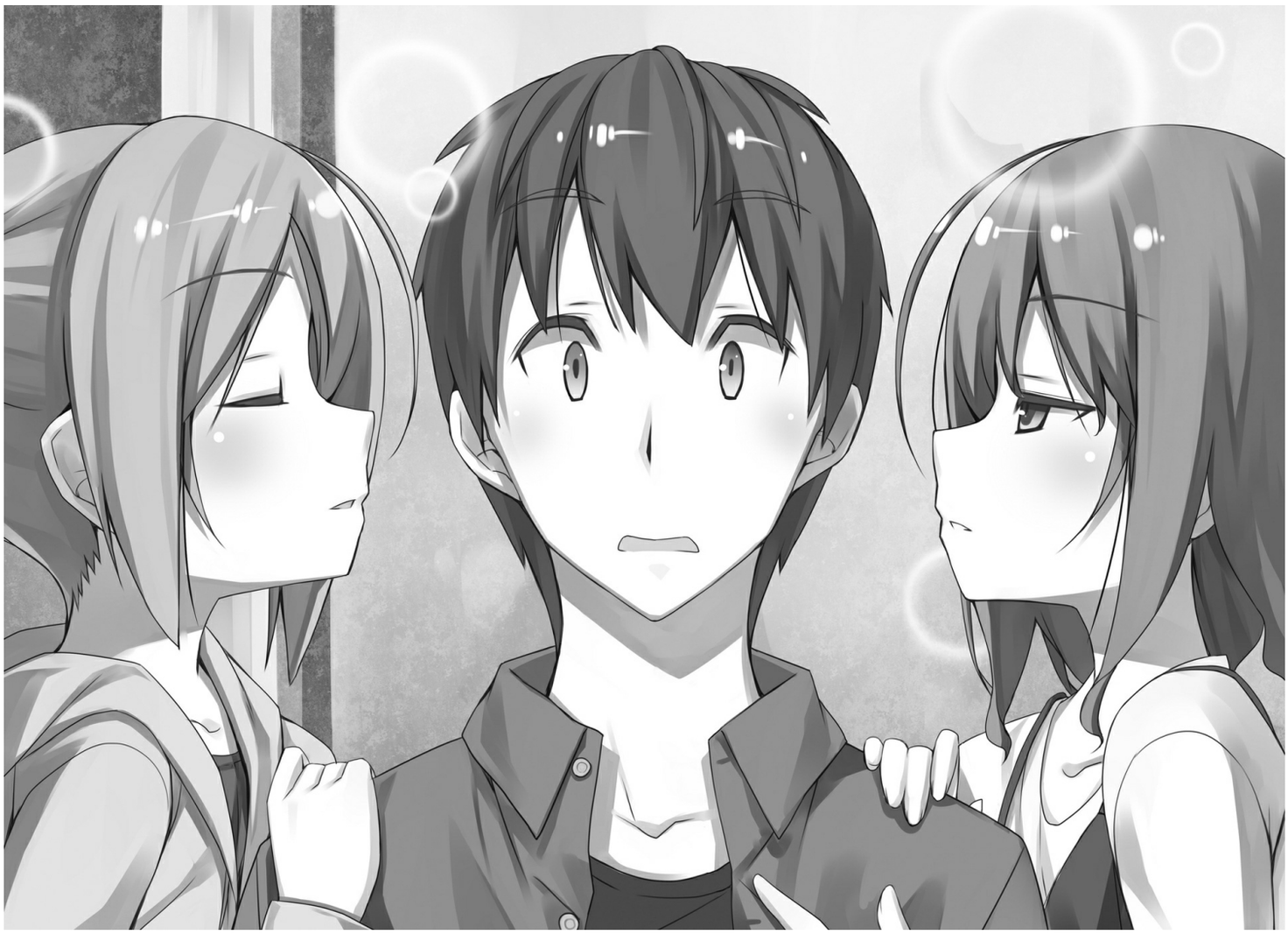
“Why?”

“Just do it, Satomi-san. Please.”

“Okay...”

Koutarou gave in to their demands and lowered his head a little. He figured he might have a case of bedhead, or maybe something was in his hair.

However, it seemed to be neither, as the two girls pressed their lips against his cheeks.



“Y-Y-Y-You idiots! What are you doing?! I just told you to save those for important times!”

Koutarou jumped back from the two girls and began scolding them in a fluster. It wasn’t like he was really mad. If anything, he was incredibly happy, but he didn’t want either of them to do anything they might regret.

“Satomi-san, now is one of those important times.”

“You don’t mind if it’s at an important time, do you?”

They had been involved in a major conflict, but everyone had come home safely. However, Koutarou still looked like he felt he was in battle. His mind still hadn’t come home. A few wrestling techniques had brought him back, however, so all was now well. There was nothing more important than that.

“U-Ugh...”

Koutarou still wasn’t done scolding them, but the words just wouldn’t come out. The reason for that was because Yurika and Maki were right. He knew in his heart that this was indeed an important time.

“Ah, Satomi-san is blushing.”

“That’s a much better expression than before, heehee.”

Despite Koutarou’s suffering, Yurika and Maki were laughing with cheerful expressions, still holding hands. They didn’t mind so much the worries that were going through his head now.



Article 22
Those who have ratified the Corona Convention are granted the right to hold birthday parties for other convention signatories. Should the circumstances necessitate it, said party may be held up to a week earlier or a week later than the actual birthday date.

Article 22 Postscript
Haven't you forgotten my birthday?!
It's September 18th!

Corona Convention

New! September 30, 2010

Afterword Long time no see, everyone. It's the author, Takehaya. This time I'm delivering *Invaders of the Rokujouma!?* volume 19. This volume was close to volume 12, the longest in the series, in terms of page count.

As for its content, this volume continues the magical girl arc from volume 18. The setting moves from Kisshouharukaze City to the Magical Kingdom of Folsaria. There, facing the evil magical girls, Koutarou and the others stumble upon an unexpected truth. While it's unimaginable to them, I suspect some of you readers have caught on already. Were your hunches correct? I think that's one way of enjoying this volume.

I think Yurika is also the biggest attraction this time around. At the start of the series, she had neither pride, courage, nor love. She was always going with the flow and always making excuses. But in this volume, she splendidly fulfills her duties. So splendidly, in fact, that those watching her begin to worry. Koutarou and the others don't want Yurika to really shine in battle because they know what kind of person she really is deep down. Being strong doesn't mean she should have to fight. Yet despite fighting not suiting her, she chooses to fight in a desperate attempt to win back her wonderful everyday life. Koutarou and the others think of that life as priceless, and so does Yurika. If you readers feel the same way, then part of Yurika's story in this work is a success.

Now, as for something I couldn't really talk about before... Yurika played a big part this time around, but I made her so pessimistic in the beginning of the series because magic is too convenient. A magician was needed for the overall structure of the story, but if there had been a fully capable magician (like Yurika in this volume), it would have been too convenient and she might end up resolving all of the incidents on her own. So I made sure to give her a lot of weaknesses, and made her a more dysfunctional magician. As a result, Yurika became the character most affected by the convenience of the story. It wasn't like I tried to do this on purpose. Whether or not you believe me, that's the

truth. But on a similar note, Yurika's not the only one who was given weaknesses in order to balance out her other powers. Arguably, Kiriha—who has no real powers of her own—is the only one without weaknesses. In that sense, Yurika and Kiriha are complete opposites. This is a trick to keep some of the characters from hogging all the spotlight.

Whoops, I almost forgot! There are actually two things I need to report. The first is that HJ Bunko's website, "Read It! HJ Bunko," is regularly publishing short *Rokujouma* stories. There are also other works on there, so if you're interested, check it out sometime.

As for the second thing, there will be a drama CD released with volume 20. The drama CD will continue from where the first left off, and cover the first half of volume 8.5. Like with last time, I believe there will also be an alternative cover.

With that, I've just about run out of space, so I will end things here. Last but not least, I would like to give my usual regards. I would like to thank the editorial department for their help in publishing this work, Poco-san who somehow manages to draw these illustrations despite the many genres involved, and finally, all of the readers who bought this book.

Let us meet again in the afterword for volume 20.

April, 2015

Takehaya

Table of Contents

Cover

Color Illustrations

Faraway Days

Prisoner Life

The Magical Kingdom of Folsaria

Raid

The Land of Beginning

The Return of the Magical Girl

The One Without a Future

Advent

Over the Rainbow

Afterword

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Copyright



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Invaders of the Rokujouma!? Volume 19

by Takehaya

Translated by Warnis

Edited by Morgan Dreher

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Invaders of the Rokujouma!? 19