

The cover art features two anime-style characters. In the upper half, a girl with long, straight purple hair and brown eyes looks directly at the viewer with a calm expression, her hand near her chin. She wears a purple and white outfit. In the lower half, a boy with spiky purple hair and a wide, toothy grin is shown in a dynamic, forward-leaning pose. He wears a dark, flowing cape. The background is a mix of bright orange and yellow flames and vibrant purple energy streaks. The title 'Demon King DAIMAŌ ACT8' is prominently displayed at the bottom in a stylized, colorful font.

Shoutarou Mizuki

Demon King
DAIMAŌ
ACT8



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**“WE’LL HAVE
TO GO BACK
TO THE VERY
BEGINNING,”
KAZUKO
SAID.**



**“THE
DEMON
KING IS
HUMAN
AND YET
NOT
HUMAN.”**



“There are kids starving in other parts of the world...” Fujiko sighed.

“There aren’t. Not anymore. I mean, I know what you’re getting at though... The world’s in a bad place right now, isn’t it?” Akuto said quietly.

But this strange scene quickly came to an end. The door to the room suddenly opened, and someone came inside.

“You don’t need to worry. They’re the real deal,” a sweet voice said. Just listening to it made you sleepy.

“I guess I can drop the act, then.” Issei finished his ramen and put it down. His voice immediately became serious, or at least, more serious than it had been.

“Real...?” Akuto said, confused, and turned around.

Standing there was a girl Akuto immediately recognized. In fact, it was a face everyone in the empire knew. Even Fujiko and Yoshie froze for an instant.

“Empress... Kazuko,” Yoshie whispered.

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It’s not easy spending your life in a daze. After a while, Junko found, it didn’t make you depressed as much as it made you sleepy. Except for school, food, and bathing, she’d stopped going outside, and spent her days lying in bed.

At first, she’d tried to stick to her daily training ritual, but her physical abilities were far worse now that she couldn’t use her mana, and she lost interest almost immediately. Her sword was just a heavy lump of metal now. She couldn’t use even use it as a walking stick. And she wasn’t allowed to take it outside, anyway.

When she slept, she would only ever dream of the past, so even sleep became painful. The only moments of excitement she felt were when a new message arrived. When she heard the sound, she would leap up even if she’d been asleep. She knew exactly what she was hoping to find.

—*Sai...!*

Each time a new message came, she would hope it was from Akuto. But she knew how dangerous that would be. Every bit of information flowing in and out

of her room was monitored. She wouldn't be getting any messages.

She'd woken up that day when another message came in, briefly hoping it was from Akuto only to be disappointed again. This time it was from Yuko. The only messages she ever got were either messages intended for the whole class, or from Yuko.

"Yuko again, huh?" she whispered, still groggy as she opened up the student handbook where the message had come in. But the message there wasn't what she'd expected to see. "What...?"

It was a description of how Yuko had almost been kidnapped by Liradans, along with a message that Hiroshi had saved her.

Junko turned on the monitor in the room to look at the news. There was a report on how the palace had been attacked by "rebels," who were obviously the priests of the various gods.

—*Which means...!*

For the first time in a long while, she opened the window. The town was different than it had been just a while ago. There were Liradans in knight uniforms marching down the streets and ordering everyone to stay indoors.

"Oh no..." Junko felt terror as she looked back at the message. She didn't want to think about it, but if they were monitoring anybody's emails, they were probably monitoring hers.

Yuko must've known this, because there was another part at the bottom of the message.

"If you can get to the place where you took me when I was in 5th grade, I'll be able to help you."

The enemy wouldn't be able to find out where she was going based off of that. But how could she get there in the middle of a curfew? She was just a helpless teenage girl now.

"Think. Think. If you don't act fast, they'll be here soon." Junko said aloud, trying to calm herself down.

Even without Yuko's mail, given her position as Yuko's sister and her

relationship with Akuto, she should've been kidnapped already. The only reason she hadn't been was probably that Korone was telling Zero how she'd lost her spirit. But now that Yuko was fighting back, things had changed. She closed her window, grabbed her sword, and went out into the hallway.

But it was too late.. There was a Liradan walking down the hall, and another on the opposite side.

"..." Junko went back into her room and opened the window.

—Could I jump? This is the 3rd floor. With mana, it would be an easy jump to make, but now it's impossible.

She heard the door open behind her. There were no other options.

—I have to jump!

She leapt over the windowsill. There was no sensation of floating like she was used to, just a cold sense of falling.

"Kyaah!" she screamed. She couldn't control herself as she fell, and realized that she might not even be able to land feet first.

—Am I going... to die?

The words flashed through her mind.

—Akuto...!

She desperately thought his name, hoping to see him again. And then she felt someone grab her.

—Am I imagining things? No, this is real... is it...?!

"Akuto!" she yelled as she opened her eyes.

"Sorry, it's not the boss. It's me," Hiroshi said. He sounded genuinely apologetic, not sarcastic or upset.

"Oh, it's you, Hiroshi," Junko said in realization.

"That's not a very nice greeting, class rep. I did just save your life, you know."

"I'm sorry. Thank you for saving me," she sighed in relief. "Did Yuko send you?"

Hiroshi took her up high enough that the Liradans couldn't follow. "That's right. Let's go see her. She's waiting."

"The Asakusa amusement park, right? That's where she wanted to meet me."

"Yes. There's a good place to hide there, so I sent her there ahead of us."

"Thanks again. But wasn't it too soon for a rebellion? Wasn't there something else you could've done? I've heard that Zero can't kill people. So wasn't there a more peaceful way to handle things?" Junko asked.

Hiroshi shook his head. "I agree that it was too soon. But since Zero can't kill people, he's kidnapping and brainwashing them."

Junko felt something cold run down her back when she heard this. "That's horrible... But then what do we do now? The whole country is under his control."

"People still think of me as the hero who defeated the Demon King," Hiroshi said with a firm resolve in his voice. "So my plan is to defeat as many Liradans as I can to protect everyone, then urge them to start a rebellion and defeat Zero. I'm going to prove that if everyone decides to work together, we can overcome oppression!"

Hiroshi's words were encouraging to Junko. If Zero couldn't kill people, this was the only way. But something seemed wrong to her.

"Are you... sure about this? I feel like something's wrong," Junko whispered, but Hiroshi shook his head.

"If we defeat Zero, this will all end."

"Yeah... I'm sure you're right," Junko said, but something still felt wrong. And she realized what it was.

—This isn't what Akuto would do. No, what would he do then?

○

"Empress Kazuko!"

Yoshie quickly stood up straight. However, she was the only one who did. Fujiko's religious beliefs prevented her showing any courtesy to the Empress,

and Akuto and Keena treated everyone, regardless of rank, the same way.

But all of them noticed that there was something different about Kazuko. She seemed to change the air around her just by standing there. She was beautiful, of course, but there was something unique about her smile. Just looking at it made you want to ensure that it lasted forever.

It was all Fujiko could do to keep from kneeling. Kazuko, however, waved a hand and told her to relax before sitting in front of the table.

“Relax. There are many things we need to discuss. Oh, Issei, may I have some tea? And that other thing, as well.”

Issei stood up and brought a teacup and a small pot from the shelves. “Here you are,” he said, as he poured her tea.

Kazuko took a sip and then smiled. “It’s very good,” she said. It was no exaggeration to say that just seeing her smile was enough to bring happiness.

Nobody could say a word, despite all the questions they had.

“And if we’re having tea, we must have this, as well. Nanko Plums from Kishu.” Kazuko opened the pot and took out a dried plum. She elegantly brought it to her mouth, and then smiled a wonderful smile.

“Oh, these are so delicious,” she said. There was a kind expression on her face, as if the bitterness of the plum meant nothing to her. They could see that she was the other “Food Singularist” that Issei had spoken of. Which meant that she’d been here for a while now.

“...Can you explain this?” Akuto asked.

Kazuko looked towards Issei and nodded. He bowed and began to speak.

“I,” he began, “am the man tasked with protecting the secrets of the black mages. I am the High Elder.”

“...You’re the High Elder?!” Fujiko gasped.

“The High Elder of the black mages?” Akuto asked.

“There’s a legend among black mages,” Fujiko explained, “that there exists a high elder who knows true secrets of black magic known to no one else. But

since nobody's ever seen him, I thought it was just a rumor..."

"Yes. And those 'secrets' refer, of course, to the Demon King." Issei stood up. He opened the door in the back of the room and motioned for them to enter. Everyone followed. Instead of leading to the rest of the warehouse, the door lead to an oddly decorated room.

"...This isn't phase space. We've been teleported, then?" Akuto whispered.

"Correct. This is where you were born," Issei said casually.

But it was anything but casual to Akuto. "...What?!" He looked around. It was the kind of room you might call a lab. The room was the size of a school classroom, and in its center was a clear cylindrical case. There were tubes and cables leading out of it attached to a panel with a console.

"The Demon King is human, and yet not human," Kazuko said. And then she continued.

"We'll have to go back to the very beginning. As you know, the first Demon King was Zero. Many, many years ago, the wisdom of humanity brought him forth. But Zero realized that humanity sought its own destruction, and attempted to brainwash and assimilate humanity to keep that from happening. Humanity's resistance was the first Demon King war. And now the same thing is happening again. There were still few Liradans at the time of the first Demon King War, and humanity was able to emerge victorious. But we failed to develop a new form of artificial intelligence.

"We couldn't get rid of Zero. He was a miracle, you see. We still don't know how he was able to become sentient on his own. That's why we used him as a model to create the gods. The gods were able to store human thought data and use it for their own, giving them thoughts in the same manner as humans. That's why they didn't go insane like Zero did. It's possible that any perfect artificial intelligence like Zero will inevitably go insane. Intelligence can only maintain its sanity if it has contradictory thoughts, like a human. The storage of human thought data is the same as the present lifelogs. Anyone who is baptized has their brain's entire electrical impulse map stored as a log, and the gods have been building up these logs for a long time. But the gods reached the conclusion that humanity must perish for the sake of evolution. Their reason differs from

Zero, but they reached the same conclusion as him. The gods did not suddenly attempt to destroy humanity, so we were able to reach their conclusion in secret.

“The results of our research hinted at the existence of a God — a true god, in the old religious sense. They suggested sufficient reasons for belief that this was the being who created the sentience, the ‘self’ in humanity that makes us human. Humanity called this ‘self’ the Law of Identity, and began to view it as God. You can think of this as identical to ordinary religious belief. They believed that at regular intervals, a human was born within whom the god dwelled. Reincarnation, you could call it. The ones who believed this were the first black mages. And this belief was what drove them to create the first Demon King. They created a being with the power to destroy the human race. The Demon King is human, and yet not human. They are a true artificial human, created by injecting mana into the egg.”

Kazuko’s words shocked Akuto. “And that’s me?” he said, astonished. Keena and Fujiko pressed their bodies close to him wordlessly.

Kazuko’s smile never faded from her face. “Reality is what it is,” she said. “The healthiest thing to do is accept it.”

“...Y-You don’t need to say it like that. Ackie’s really shaken up right now,” Keena replied.

But Kazuko tilted her head slightly as if she was confused. “Oh? But if you don’t know the truth, you’re not going to be able to deal with what comes next.”

“But...!” Keena started to say more, but Akuto stopped her.

“Thank you. But she’s right. I think I need to hear what comes next.”

“Ackie...” Keena trailed off.

Kazuko smiled and nodded. “The Demon King understands, of course. Let me continue... It’s possible that the Law of Identity, that is, the true God, is simply a matter of faith. We don’t know for sure that it exists. It may not. It may be completely meaningless. But what’s important to know is that our gods, the gods of evolved evolution, worship the Law of Identity in a religious sense. It’s

kind of funny, isn't it?"

Nobody but Kazuko laughed. But she continued to speak as if it didn't put her off. "So, here's what this all adds up to. The Demon King is humanity's created weapon. Nothing more, and nothing less. You're capable of using every ounce of magical power inside the Empire's borders. Once you awaken, that is."

"No...!" Akuto couldn't believe what he was hearing. It matched up with what Boichiro had once told him. He knew that the Demon King and the gods were, in a way, working together. But he had no idea that all that power would be his to use, in any way he liked, once he awakened. Wait... awakened? Hadn't he awakened when Peterhausen was with him?

"But didn't the black mages make Peterhausen to bring forth a world where everyone could use magic equally?" Akuto said desperately, as if trying to justify his own existence.

But Kazuko was unmoved. "All that proves is that if Peterhausen is there, he can allow you to use all the magical power in the Empire. The first black mages were all killed because of the danger they represented. No, the Elder was allowed to survive, actually. But the current black mages only possess a fragment of the first ones' knowledge. They're simply a group of hackers with a faith based around 'equality.'"

"The elder was allowed to survive...?" A terrifying thought occurred to Akuto, one he could barely believe himself.

Kazuko smiled as if she guessed what he was thinking. "Correct. It was the Imperial Family who allowed the High Elder to survive, so that the tools for creating the Demon King would not be lost."

"....!" All color had drained from Fujiko's face. "Then everything we've done is..."

"It wasn't meaningless, if that's what you're asking. The High Elder and the Imperial Family simply already had the answers you sought. None of the people in the government who were fighting over you, however, knew. The Imperial Family does not involve itself in politics."

There was no change in Kazuko's smile. It was as if she didn't care about how

they felt about it. But Akuto sensed that there might be more than meets the eye to their meeting here.

“So it wasn’t a coincidence that we met here. You knew that we’d come...”

Kazuko nodded and softly clapped her hands together. “Wonderful. This generation’s Demon King is an especially quick-witted one. I’ve been driven from my palace, and so I’ve come to ask your help.”

“Our help...?”

“The woman in the palace right now is 2V, my twin sister. Her hatred has driven her to use Zero to steal my palace and my empire. Of course, you’ll help restore me to the throne, will you not?” Kazuko said charmingly.

But Akuto said nothing.

“Oh, of course. I’ve failed to explain myself properly. I believe that only the awakened Demon King can defeat Zero and 2V. That’s why I’ve come to you.” Once again, she tilted her head charmingly. This time Akuto replied.

“I... awaken?”

“Correct. Oh, I failed to explain myself again. I told you that the Demon King could use all the power of the gods, right? That power comes from the life logs of the people of the past. The more human thought data you have, the faster you can perform calculations. And ‘awakening’ is when you become able to use all that. Hmm... how do I make this simpler? The more people die, the stronger you get. But it takes a lot of death. That’s why the Demon King can become infinitely more powerful,” Kazuko said, then laughed as if she found it funny.

“Is this power really that... wicked?” Akuto whispered.

“Do you think it’s wicked? It’s all a matter of perspective. The people who die don’t have to be killed horribly for it to work. You’re not doing anything wrong.”

“But once I awaken, my power has no limits, right?”

“Correct. You have the power to either save or destroy the world. You can do either at a whim. But you don’t want that, do you? So I’ll say to you once more: serve the Imperial Family.” Kazuko reached out a hand toward him.

Hiroshi took Junko to the roof of the haunted house in the amusement park. The two of them were sitting behind the sign on top of the building, in a space big enough for several people to fit.

“Yuko, does Hiroshi really intend to fight?” Junko said to Yuko, who was sitting next to her. Once he’d set Junko down, Hiroshi had flown off again.

“I think he does. I guess that’s my fault...” Yuko seemed frustrated with herself.

“Then is it okay for us to just sit here?”

“But all we would do is slow him down. It’s frustrating, but we can’t help. I don’t know if we could even if we did have our power...”

Junko remembered the words she’d heard a moment ago. Hiroshi said he was going to use his fame to make the people rise up and fight.

—But when we defeat Zero, will it really be over? What happens after the people rise up? Won’t a hero just be left behind?

“Yuko, I think you need to do something. When a boy’s trying to do something crazy, his friends can’t let him do it alone,” Junko said, but she felt like she was saying it to herself. “I think even putting your love for him aside, it’s going to be difficult to do something about this. But if he doesn’t have somebody who’ll support him no matter what, he’s not going to make it. Even if it looks like he succeeds, even if he becomes everybody’s hero, he won’t last unless he has somebody there for him. If he fails, everybody else will leave him. So he needs somebody who’ll always be there for him, right?”

Yuko nodded at Junko’s words. “I think I understand what you’re saying. But it feels like you can see into his future, sis...”

“I don’t know why that is, but yeah, I think I do. I just have this terrible feeling. Like everything that’s happening is happening because someone wants it to... And like Hiroshi is one of the people they’re controlling.”

“I know you’re scared... but I’d like to think it’s just because you’re on top of a haunted house,” Yuko said, forcing herself to sound cheerful.

Junko chuckled. “When we went here, you insisted on going inside and then

started crying like a baby when you got in.”

“Did I? I guess I wasn’t just scared of Demon Beasts because of the blood in me, huh?” Yuko sighed. “I wonder what Hiroshi’s doing now...”

Junko looked at the news on her student handbook. Things were starting to happen; the newscaster was repeating that no one was allowed to go outside. That must mean that a lot of people weren’t obeying the curfew. And the reason they weren’t was showing on the monitor behind her.

“The mysterious hero who once defeated the Demon King has returned. But this time he is an enemy of public order. He has brutally murdered several knights, and is now calling for rebellion,” the newscaster said expressionlessly.

“They’re lying on the news...” Yuko said angrily.

“But that newscaster isn’t a Liradan. There might be some kind of change,” Junko said. And she was soon proved right.

“We’re getting video from all over the Empire. The ghosts of the old Empire, the priests of the old gods, are starting rebellions all across the land. Citizens are encouraged to stay away from these dangerous areas,” the newscaster calmly repeated.

But some of the video the local reporters were sending in included Hiroshi’s words, and you could hear them softly from the tiny rows of monitors in the back. The volume was too low for viewers to make it out, but the people in the newsroom could hear it. Suddenly, the newscaster’s voice changed.

“No, I think I’m going to tell you the truth. He’s a hero. Not a rebel. Of course, so are the people who rose up to fight. It wasn’t even the Liradans who took over our country. It was Zero, the one who controls them. Everyone! Rise up and fight! I don’t care if I lose my job! Everyone! Rise up!” she yelled, and started to play video of Hiroshi.

But that only lasted a minute before the screen turned blue, and then the TV began playing a recorded program. It was enough to make Junko and Yuko smile, however.

“Things are starting to change.”

“Yeah. I don’t know what will happen, but now we can move. Let’s join their ranks.”

Both of them stood up.

“Yeah. But can we defeat Zero? Zero’s got control of the gods...”

“Huh? He wasn’t saying that because he’d found a way to defeat Zero?” Junko gasped in surprise.

“Huh? But... if we had a way to beat him, couldn’t we just do it?” Yuko looked just as astonished.

Only then did Junko realize her mistake. “Oh no... does Hiroshi not know about Keisu?”

“Keisu?”

“The Liradan we think once sealed Zero. I was sure he knew about her... Okay, now we’ve got something to do. I know what she looks like.” Junko felt the life returning to her limbs, but at the same time, that awful premonition was getting worse.

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“It’s finally started,” 2V said.

The human staff of the palace had already fled. 2V had ordered them to. But there were still countless figures moving busily about the palace. Of course, they were all Liradans. In the end, 2V was all alone in the huge palace.

“Do the people intend to annihilate you?” one of the nearby Liradans said in Zero’s voice.

2V nodded. “Some of them, yes. I think they’ll find it’s harder than they thought. I’d be willing to bet on it, in fact. Cause I’m not going to make it easy for them.”

There were several screens floating in the air around her, showing the priests charging towards the palace. She could see explosions caused by non-magical weaponry in the surrounding park. She’d ordered Zero to take control of the Liradans, so they couldn’t kill anyone. Armed groups like the priests were able to destroy them and break through.

“But then you should be the one taking control. If you leave your defenses to the Liradans, they’re sure to fail,” Zero said.

The screen changed to show a street near the palace that was flooded with people. The Liradans were trying their hardest to push them back without hurting them, but the humans showed no signs of slowing down. It was practically a riot.

“It doesn’t matter if they fail. Actually, I hope they do.” 2V hopped off her throne and called one of the Liradans over to her. “It’s time for the play to begin.”

“What does the term ‘play’ mean here?” Zero asked. 2V laughed and pointed to the screen.

Brave, the man who’d started the uprising, was now heading for the palace. She doubted he’d come up with a way to recharge his energy inside the palace, but he still probably had some kind of plan.

“I’m going to let them see me die. That’s my goal, is to show them my death. I haven’t accomplished the two things I need to really make this a success, but at this point, it doesn’t matter. How is the search for those two... Kazuko and Keisu... proceeding?”

“Kazuko will be found soon, I’m sure,” Zero answered. “I’ve dispatched one of my most talented units. But are you telling me you intend to lose?”

The second he spoke those words, the whole palace vibrated. It was the rioters. They were almost here. But 2V just smiled.

“Lose? Of course not. Let’s get started. Go ahead and show them your true power. We need to draw that hero out. You have permission to use stun sticks and tear gas,” 2V said.

“They’re not trying to kill them, but...” Hiroshi shook with anger as he watched the scene unfold below.

The people at the front of the mob charging the palace had collapsed to the ground in front of the castle drawbridge. It was like a boundary line had been drawn there, and nobody could go any further. There were Liradans on top of

the bridge with stun sticks, blocking their path.

“I have 10 minutes once I’m inside... No, I need to leave energy for my attacks, so three minutes or so?”

Hiroshi turned his eyes upwards above the palace. There was a huge polygon-like object floating there — the embodiment of Zero. If he could destroy it, he could probably shut Zero down. And if he could do that, 2V would be much easier to defeat.

“What do I do...?” Hiroshi murmured to himself. “Charge in? If I can’t finish this in three minutes, I’m done for...”

○

“Will you take my hand?” Kazuko asked.

Akuto looked at her quietly. “I don’t understand why I should do that,” he said in a calm voice, but Kazuko just laughed.

“Oh my, you’re right, aren’t you? There isn’t a reason. But you don’t know what to do with that power you have, do you? So there’s no reason for you to refuse, either. And right now, the Empire has been stolen from me by my twin. Please, will you defeat her before you make any decisions? Please?”

Akuto understood the logic of what she was saying. But he still didn’t feel like taking her hand. “And that’s why you waited for me here?”

“That’s right. I know how powerful Zero is. You’re the only one who can fight him,” she said, smiling as if she had no doubt that things would go her way. Her attitude suggested that she thought the whole world existed only for her sake. Everyone else in the room understood that this was natural for her.

But still, Akuto looked at her with sharp eyes. “Why don’t you apologize?”

Kazuko didn’t seem to be caught off guard by this. Instead, she simply seemed to not understand what she was being told. “Apologize? For what?”

“Why did you hide my... I mean, the secret of this Empire? Weren’t there lots of wars because of that?”

Kazuko put her hand up to her mouth and laughed elegantly. “Haha, what a silly question. The Demon Kings of the past all knew the secret and started wars

anyway. They tried to destroy the system of the gods itself.”

“But Demon Kings are still born despite being so dangerous... No, someone creates them,” Akuto said.

“Yes. There must be one within the Empire. One must be born every few centuries. Otherwise, the bugs within the system of the gods... the pus, you might say... build up with the system and eventually destroy it.”

“Then I’m...” Akuto fell silent.

If that was true — and it almost certainly was — then all the Demon Kings throughout history were fighting a battle that was never meant to be won, either to destroy the system that controlled the world, or protect the people who obeyed that system.

But it wasn’t fate that made them do it. It wasn’t fate, but a choice they made themselves.

“It’s okay for me to be me, isn’t it?” Akuto whispered to himself.

“I’m sorry? What does that mean? You’re the Demon King. An unstable creature with too much power. That’s why you need to serve me...”

Akuto suddenly cut her off. “No. I’m me. And I decide who I am.” He turned his eyes to look at her.

“But do you have what it takes to make that decision? To carry the weight of an entire country? You don’t, do you?” Kazuko’s smile never wavered.

But Akuto shook his head. “It doesn’t matter. I have them.”

He looked at Keena, then Fujiko, then Yoshie. And even though they weren’t here, in his mind he saw Junko, Korone, and Hiroshi.

“I am the me that loves them. That’s why I’m me.”

None of the girls spoke, but their eyes were all locked on Akuto.

“So you won’t obey your country, then?” Kazuko asked.

“I’ll make you a deal. I’ll defeat 2V and Zero, just like you want me to. But don’t try to control my mind,” Akuto said.

Kazuko smiled and nodded. “You’re a fascinating person,” she laughed. “Very

well. If that's the case, then..."

Kazuko started to take a step forward... and just then, a thin ray of light flashed through the room. It pierced Akuto's chest from behind and passed out through the front.

"Huh...?" Akuto froze. Blood began to seep from his chest.

"A-Ackie!"

"Akuto!"

"Was that... a laser?!"

Keena, Fujiko, and Yoshie all screamed at once.

Akuto put his hand to his chest, and then watched in disbelief as it turned red with blood. He turned in the direction the ray of light had come. "Korone...!"

Korone was there, holding her beam weapon. Akuto's face was twisted with shock and terror, but Korone's expression was completely flat, so empty that there wasn't even a trace of coldness or cruelty in it.

"I had hoped that after it passed through you, it would reach Kazuko as well. But I underestimated your toughness, it appears. However, both Kazuko and the Demon King are my targets. This is my chance to get two birds with one stone. Next time, please do not block my shot. My priority list puts Kazuko above the Demon King," Korone said emotionlessly. Akuto had buckled over from the impact, and now she had a clear line of sight at Kazuko as she aimed.

"No...!" Issei, who had been silent until then, suddenly held out his hand towards the floor. The whole room began to glow in response.

"A teleporter circle!" Fujiko shouted.

The circle's magic seemed to affect everyone in the room. Issei activated the circle, and Akuto and his friends, as well as Kazuko and Issei began to disappear. But Korone quickly skated over to the teleportation circle, putting her own teleporter device on top of it.

"Now the teleportation will be incomplete. Instead, you will appear at a location I designate," Korone stated. Akuto had buckled over from the impact, and now she had a clear line of sight at Kazuko as she aimed.

“No... She’s so fast!” Issei said in a voice like a scream.

But then they disappeared, and so did Korone. A moment later, they appeared in a forest they didn’t recognize. First Akuto, and then the three girls around him. Behind him was Kazuko, and a little further away was Issei. Finally Korone appeared, exactly as she’d been a moment ago.

“I assume that was an attempt to run, but you were far too slow. It will be difficult to flee in this forest with no teleportation to aid you,” Korone said.

“K-Korone...” Akuto slowly rose to his full height.

“Please do not stand between myself and Kazuko.” Korone readied her beam weapon.

“Korone, stop!” Keena yelled, but nothing happened. Korone remained expressionless.

“Stop it, Korone!” Akuto insisted. “Don’t shoot anyone! You can hurt me if you want, but you can’t kill any people...” He slowly staggered towards her.

“The Demon King is not a person. Neither is the Empress. Goodbye,” Korone said.

“Stop!” Akuto summoned his strength and jumped on her. He grabbed her weapon as tightly as he could and pointed it away from Kazuko, and then turned around and shouted, “Run!”

But Kazuko simply looked confused. “Run?”

“That’s right. Run—”

“You’re in the way,” Korone said as she wrestled back control of the weapon. Now it was pointed directly up against his stomach.

“Ackie!” Keena ran towards him. But in the next moment, a beam of light had pierced his body.

“...!” Keena let out a wordless scream.

Akuto’s body began to slump to the ground. Korone carelessly brushed him aside.

“Gaah...” He fell to the ground and moaned. He was still breathing.



“Ackie!”

“Akuto!”

Keena and Fujiko ran towards him but Yoshie was shaking too much to move, and Kazuko was still looking at him in confusion.

“Why did you tell me to run?” the Empress asked, as if she truly didn’t understand.

Akuto answered, the blood dripping from his mouth. “Because you’re like me, you were born with the burden of power... That’s why I decided to protect you... Because I once had someone like that. Someone who knew who I was, but who fought my side anyway, and who died laughing...” he said, moaning.

“Ackie, stop talking...” Keena helped him up.

“Oh... if only Akuto had awakened, these wounds wouldn’t bother him at all...” Fujiko cried in despair. She was using healing magic on him, but it wasn’t working at all. She could see the color draining from his face.

He looked at Keena and smiled as his lips moved, but no words came out. And then his head slumped towards the ground. As Keena held him in her arms, all the strength left his body.

They both screamed his name and clung to his body tightly, as if trying to bring him back to life.

But Korone only glanced once down at his corpse before walking right past them.

“That was far too easy. The Empress’s life wasn’t even worth protecting.” Korone turned to look at Kazuko.

Kazuko smiled at her. She almost seemed to be having fun. “Hahaha, you’re right. He should not have tried to protect me.”

“So you accept that the Empress is worthless? Then there’s no problem if you die, is there?” She raised her beam weapon.

“Not at all,” Kazuko said.

“?”

“There’s no need to protect me,” Kazuko waved her hand, and multiple mana balls appeared around her body.

“Black magic...!” Korone jumped backwards, suddenly cautious.

But amazingly, Kazuko stepped forward after her. “It’s not black magic. It’s the Yasakani Magatama, one of the Imperial family’s secret magics.”

Kazuko waved her hand and the mana balls began to dance and strike at Korone.

“Attack pattern unknown. Initiating close-range reactive dodging...!” Korone tried to twist her body out of the way, but the mana balls moved too fast and too randomly for her to stop them from slamming into her body.

“...! Unable to dodge...?” The mana balls clung tightly to her body. They seemed to be causing continuous damage without ever slowing down.

“They’ll keep dancing until I die, and keep dancing even after you die. That’s how the spell works.” Kazuko began to dance as she laughed.

Korone was a Liradan, but the damage seemed to be too much for her. She quickly opened her purse and jumped inside.

“Oh?” Kazuko’s eyes went wide, as if she’d been caught off guard.

Korone’s body disappeared feet first into the small bag. Her hand was the last thing to vanish, and before it did, it traced out a small teleportation circle to make the bag disappear as well.

“She’s a very talented Liradan, isn’t she?” Kazuko smiled as she looked towards a sobbing Keena. “He’s dead, isn’t he?”

Keena looked at her through teary eyes. “W-What do we do...?”

Fujiko, however, made no effort to conceal her hatred. “Th-This is your fault...”

“Oh? That has nothing to do with me. And like he said, he did what he did because of his deceased friend, right?” Kazuko motioned towards Keena’s chest as she spoke.

“H...Huh?” Keena realized that there was a shining light coming from just

below her neck. “Wh-What is this...? Petey?”

It was the necklace she’d hidden beneath her clothes. She took it out, and saw that it was overflowing with light. At the end of the necklace was a piece of one of Peterhausen’s fangs.

“Petey...”

It was as if the creature Akuto had called a friend was trying to tell them something in answer to their sorrow.

“This is...” She held Peterhausen’s fang gently to her chest and closed her eyes. And then she nodded, as if she was speaking to someone.

“Wh-What’s going on...?” Fujiko asked fearfully.

Keena opened her eyes. “He says there’s a way to bring back Ackie...”

“What...?!” Fujiko was completely confused.

“The Coffin of the Underworld King...” Kazuko said, “That’s the name of the device that can revive the Demon King. And of course, it’s also the device used to awaken him...”

“Why does something like that exist?” Yoshie’s words were tiny and hoarse, like she was overwhelmed with everything that was going on around her.

“There have been many Demon Kings throughout history. Some of them have been psychologically underdeveloped. That is why it is customary for the Demon King to be given several trials. And that’s why the device exists, as a safety measure,” Kazuko said.

“Then in some cases he might not awaken...”

“Most likely, yes. Some have died in the process of awakening. Now, go. I’ll wait here.”

“Wait...?” Fujiko turned her head towards Kazuko.

“Yes.” Kazuko’s smile never left her face. “I’ll be waiting for the Demon King to be born for the sake of the Empire...”

4 - The Last Demon King

“You saw a Liradan in VPS whose job it was to seal Zero?” Yuko asked.

Junko and Yuko had left the abandoned amusement park, and were discussing where to go next. Asakusa was close enough to the palace that they could get there on foot if they wanted. But Junko was insistent that they should find Keisu first.

“That’s right. She was a short girl with a long blade on her back, dressed in a kimono like a believer of Suhara, and with her hair tied back behind her head,” Junko explained.

Yuko looked suspicious. “...Zero knows what she looked like and what her powers were, right? Why hasn’t she been caught yet? The Liradans have eyes everywhere, right?”

“That’s right. And they’ve got the past records to go over too, so they know exactly where she was before,” Junko said. She had no proof of this, but it was a pretty safe bet.

“Then wouldn’t they have captured her already...?”

“Well, we know that she was originally at the Megis temple. But there’s been no reports from there, right?”

“That’s true...”

“Which means Keisu can’t have gone too far. If she can seal Zero, then isn’t it possible that she can hide herself from Zero too?”

“So if that’s true, then what does that mean?” Yuko seemed confused, but Junko’s mind had stumbled across a certain possibility.

“The Megis temple was shut down immediately after Zero took over. No human ever went inside...”

“So she’s still inside!” Yuko yelled.

Magic was off limits, and public services were offline. Junko and Yuko had no choice but to head to the center of the capital on foot. The cars weren't working either, so there were many people walking on the roads. There was no security anywhere because the knights had already gone to the palace, but nobody was rioting or stealing anything.

Strangers were muttering to each other about how they had heard that people were gathering at the palace. There was no news coming from their terminals, so everyone was heading for the city center, just like they were. The roads became more crowded the closer they got to downtown, and when they finally made it to the Megis temple, the area in front of it was as crowded as a flying train platform during rush hour.

But even with all these people around, none of them were going into the temple. The front of the temple was a wide, stone-lined hall, and at its end was a locked glass door.

"What do we do?" Yuko asked. Junko suggested that they go around to the back.

"We should go around the back... Last time I was here, there was a door with a lock that looked easy to bust open," Junko said.

It turned out that she was half right. There was a door around the back, but it didn't look particularly vulnerable.

"It doesn't look that easy to break to me..." Yuko said, just as Junko kicked it hard.

There was a loud bang as the door's support pillar bent, and the whole lock fell off it.

"These temples are built cheaper than they look," Junko said.

"That doesn't mean you need to break it, though..."

Yuko pushed the door open, and it made a loud creaking sound. An empty building has its own unique atmosphere; their footsteps echoed in the cold air. The Megis temple even had its own little shopping mall, so now that it was empty, it felt lonelier than ever.

“It’s going to be hard to find a single person in a building this size.”

“Hm.. you’re right.”

Junko thought for a moment. It would take a lot of time if they just searched every nook and cranny. Which meant they needed to think of a place where their target was likely to be...

“She didn’t seem very smart. Let’s search the upper floors,” Junko said.

“The upper floors?”

“When we were in VPS, she came down from a mountain to see us. I can’t imagine she was always there. Maybe she’s just the type of person who always heads upwards? Like that saying about idiots and smoke.”

“...That’s a mean thing to say about someone you barely know.”

“Hmm... You’re right. She didn’t seem like somebody you should take seriously, I guess.” Junko crossed her arms.

They pushed the top floor button on the elevator. According to the plaque on the elevator wall, there was a cafeteria there.

“If she really is stupid, she’ll definitely be here,” Yuko said as she pointed at the cafeteria’s location on the sign.

“Probably, yeah...” Junko agreed.

They got out on the top floor into a spacious, comfortable lobby, then headed past it into the cafeteria. They could hear the sound of plates clinking together coming from inside.

“Don’t tell me...”

They wouldn’t be able to handle anybody dangerous, so the two of them held their breaths as they approached cautiously. At the end of one of the long rows of tables, they could see someone having a meal. The person was so tiny they weren’t sitting down to eat. Instead, they were standing and bending over the table. On their back was a katana that was far too large for them.

“...Don’t worry. That’s her,” Junko said.

She walked into the cafeteria. Keisu turned towards the sound and looked

suspicious for a moment, but then clapped her hands when she realized who it was.

“Oh! You’re that little girl from before!” Keisu didn’t seem to think she was in any danger at all. There was a pile of fried food on the table; she’d clearly been emptying out the cafeteria’s fridge and reheating it by frying it.

“...Why are you eating at a time like this?”

“I love croquettes... Anyway, the world’s changed a lot since my day. I never expected to find the temple completely empty. It’s kind of depressing.”

“Are you an idiot? Zero came back. He imprisoned some priests and sent the others home. There were Liradans that came here, right?” Junko said.

Keisu’s eyes narrowed aggressively. “I thought I told you I don’t like being called stupid.”

“We don’t have time to talk about this. I apologize for saying that. But Zero’s back. How do we seal him?” Junko said quickly, but Keisu just seemed confused.

“By ‘Zero,’ you mean the Demon King, right? That’s impossible. I may not be very bright, but if the Demon King was back, I wouldn’t be here eating.”

“So you know you’re not very bright... No, forget that. Zero *is* back.”

“I don’t understand. I have a mana-connection to the Demon King, the being you call ‘Zero.’ If he was back, I would know,” Keisu said.

“Then how were all the Liradans put under control? That’s Zero’s power, right?”

“Oh, that’s Zero’s normal power. He hasn’t been revived yet.”

“What?”

“If he’d been revived, he would put all of humanity under his control. Every human is given a ‘baptism’ where mana is implanted into their brain, right? He would try to use that mana to control humans like Liradans.”

“Is that possible...?”

Keisu didn’t seem to think it was a big deal, but Junko was terrified of what she’d just heard. Keisu nodded like she didn’t notice, though.

“Of course, he can’t control their minds themselves, but he can sap their will to do anything, or force them to do things they don’t want. Zero thinks that all of humanity needs its protection. It wants to make a society where humans don’t do anything at all. Zero’s goal is, or should be, the complete cessation of all human activity.” The words came out clearly and quickly, like this information had been implanted in Keisu’s brain.

“Then why is he only controlling the Liradans now?”

“I don’t know. There’s probably someone who’s controlling Zero, who’s stopping him from doing that.”

“Which means if we defeat 2V...” Junko felt a cold sweat run down her back. “Come with me, now! We need to seal Zero again!”

○

“I’ll never forgive you for this,” Fujiko said with rage in her eyes.

For once, Issei didn’t smile. “Humans need to believe something. Even the black mages were never able to escape that need,” he said flatly.

“And black magic isn’t just a tool to create a free society, it’s a faith?”

“The Demon King’s the one who’s supposed to save us and bring freedom. The system that made people believe in the gods was a brilliant one, if you ask me. Humans need a story, even if it’s a bad one. And the truth is always a terrible story. A truly ‘equal’ society is one where everybody has the power of the Demon King. And if that ever happened, the only ending for that story would be a bad one: a mass slaughter.”

Issei looked at everyone who was there. Keena was holding Akuto’s body, and Fujiko and Yoshie were standing there in silence. Kazuko had already teleported away somewhere.

“So Akuto never had any kind of great destiny. He was just a boy unlucky enough to be born with incredible power?”

“He probably just figured that out a few moments ago, which means that what he just did was, in a sense, heroic. Now go, acquire the power. But how much better would it have been if that power could only be used to destroy the

world? Then he'd just have to not do that. But it's actually a safety valve that somebody has to hold, a safety valve that grants someone incredible power."

"Why did you never make this public?" Fujiko asked.

Issei snorted. "Hah! It would just make the war come sooner. A little bit of storytelling kept that away. We just tell people that the Demon King is evil, and everyone believes it."

"But...!" Fujiko almost screamed, but Yoshie put a hand on her shoulder.

"Let's go. We can argue once Akuto wakes up. No, it will be his decision to make then. You know, all I ever did was watch, but I love him. I don't want him to stay dead."

Fujiko took a deep breath, composed herself, and turned towards Keena. "Keena, let's go. Take us there."

"I don't expect this to make up for anything," Issei said, "but I'll teleport you there."

"...We're not going to thank you."

"That's fine. Where do you want to go?" Issei asked Keena.

"All I know is that it's in Roppongi, its latitude and longitude, and how many meters underground it is... There's an underground facility there that was made a long time ago. Is that enough for you to teleport us there?"

"It is." Issei nodded as he began to cast the spell.

"Ooh, send me near the palace instead!" Yoshie cut him off.

"Are we splitting up?" Fujiko asked. Yoshie nodded.

"I need to find Keisu. My guess is that if we haven't found her yet, she might be in the Megis temple. I don't think they'll arrest me if I go now. Oh, and since I don't think anybody will be looking for me now, I'll stream what my goggles see on the internet. Your terminals will be able to watch."

"Alright. Thanks." Fujiko nodded.

Issei summoned the teleportation circle.

Hiroshi was standing by high in the air, but he didn't have any time to rest. A flying combat unit was climbing towards him.

"We're in the middle of a city...!" Hiroshi looked around him. He was above the park surrounding the palace, and there were people all around him on the ground below. He would have to make sure the enemy landed inside the palace.

—*There are 20 of them.*

He checked his energy levels and the number of enemies. He wasn't inside the field, so the energy charge was at 100%. But he'd have to avoid using his high-energy weapons that required a cool down before he could use them again.

"High-frequency blade."

The special alloy claws came out of his hand. They used high-frequency vibrations to enhance their cutting power, and required very little energy to work.

"Hah!" He sliced through the nearest enemy. The suit was faster than his enemy could evade, and he easily sliced them in half.

"It's a pain to figure out where the enemy's going to fall," he muttered to himself as he watched the falling remains of his foe.

But then, the enemy came in formation to try and catch him off guard. Several of them flew at him at once, tracing mysterious orbits in the air.

"But they're probably just programs..." Hiroshi used the eye-tracking on his visor's multi-display to predict the enemy's movements. He spoke to the suit to tell it to hurry up. "Give me a targeting priority list. No laser usage."

"Command received. Enemy flight pattern recognized. If orders are given within .5 seconds, escape is possible. If orders are given with 1 second, destruction of the enemy is possible. Recommended course of action: destruction."

"I'll take the latter. Give me the orders!"

"Attack the target designated by the pointer. Designating first target..."

Hiroshi followed the suit's orders, dancing in between the enemies. His foes were using a pattern that involved three enemies attacking at once, which was effective against a slow enemy, or one that tried to run. But if you could attack them faster than they could hit you, they were helpless.

The combat unit's bullets and laser beams failed to even target Hiroshi, so they didn't fire a single shot. They didn't have time to come up with a new formation to deal with him. It was a battle between computers, and his was better.

"I can win this...! How many flying units are there? Are their reinforcements?"

He looked around after he'd shot down a good number of them. The battle was easy enough that he was able to hear the words coming up from below.

"That's him!"

"That's our Brave!"

"That's our Hero!"

He realized he'd never fought in front of this many people before. Just like Lily had said, he could feel the weight of that responsibility on his shoulders.

—What I do as a Hero...

The responsibility was heavy, but more than that, the fact that so many people were cheering him on gave him courage. It was reassuring to know so many people were on his side, and more than anything, that all these people shared one will. They had to be on the side of justice.

—I'm fighting for the sake of the people... I'm carrying the will of the people, and fighting for it!

Hiroshi felt like he'd just understood something important.

He sliced through the last enemy and checked his energy levels. It would take 20 seconds to recharge to full power, so he'd be fine.

He looked down. The huge polygon, Zero, was below him.

—I don't know how to beat it, but I can buy time...

The inside of the polygon was a virtual phase space, where Zero's program

was being run. In other words, he had no physical body. But if Hiroshi could destroy the majority of the data that kept his program running, it would lose the majority of its functions. That was how Akuto had destroyed the god Suhara.

“Let’s do this fast. I’ll use the plasma ball,” Hiroshi said.

The plasma ball was the most powerful weapon the suit had.

Junko and Yuko were looking up from the ground below, watching Hiroshi. They couldn’t move a muscle. Both they and Keisu were buried in a sea of people.

“Oh no... We can’t move.”

“But what are we going to do at the palace?” Yuko asked.

She was right. All they could do was watch. At least, that was all she and Junko could do.

“Can we send Keisu alone...?”

“No, I can’t move either,” Keisu said. She was stuck in the crowd of people as well. She was so small that she had to keep hanging on to Junko’s sleeve to keep from being knocked away.

“We can’t fly because we can’t use magic... Can you fly?”

“I wouldn’t carry such inelegant equipment.”

“You can’t fly?”

“I don’t like it when people make fun of me.”

“Fine. Let’s get a little bit away, and then come up with a way to get into the palace.”

They started to back towards the Megis temple.

“Hey, how do you seal Zero, anyway?” Yuko asked Keisu.

Keisu seemed to think for a moment before she spoke. “I don’t remember.”

Meanwhile, Fujiko, Keena, and Akuto's body were all inside a vast space somewhere. They weren't sure exactly where "somewhere" was. They knew the latitude, the longitude, and how many meters underground they were. But they weren't sure what this place was supposed to be.

There were countless numbers of huge pillars, several meters in diameter, holding up a ceiling so high above that they couldn't see it. The room was completely empty, except for a single coffin next to the three of them.

"I bet nobody's been in here for hundreds of years..." Fujiko said as she looked around.

The only light in the room was coming from around the coffin. There wasn't even dust on the floor, which was proof that no human had ever been here before. If there were no fibers to fly up into the air, there wouldn't be any dust. It was clear that the only point of this place was to hold this coffin. Without knowing its precise location, there was probably no way to get there.

It felt like the place hadn't been made to hold the coffin originally, but had been abandoned at some point. It was safe to assume that there was no exit and no entrance.

"This is the coffin, isn't it?" Fujiko said.

Keena was the only who had heard Peterhausen's voice. It was probably only the data left behind between the gods, and not some kind of spirit, but it still felt like fate that it had talked to Keena.

"Don't worry. This is it," Keena said.

She tried to lift Akuto's body up to move it into the coffin, but it was too heavy for her.

"Let me take the head," Fujiko sighed, "and you take the legs."

"Thank you. Umphh...."

Keena and Fujiko laid him down in the coffin, and the coffin reacted. A mana screen appeared a little bit away, displaying what work it was doing and why the coffin had activated.

"Do we just have to wait?"

"I guess so." Keena nodded.

Fujiko let her body slump down to the floor.

"Are you okay?" Keena asked. Fujiko answered with a nod and looked up at the ceiling.

"I just started wondering what happens if Akuto never comes back," she said, almost as if speaking to herself, "When he died, I got emotional, but strangely I managed to keep control..."

Keena smiled a little. "I was the same way."

"I want him back. I really do. But..."

"But?"

"Is that really what should happen? When he comes back, will he still be himself? And won't he just suffer if he does...?" Fujiko wasn't sounding like her usual self.

Keena walked over to her, and put both arms on her shoulders from behind. "Ackie is Ackie. He's not anybody else. I'm sure it's the same for everybody else in the world. Maybe Ackie can only be revived because he was created by someone instead of being born, but everybody is who they are. Don't worry."

Fujiko knew Keena didn't have any evidence for what she was saying, and her words only served to remind her that Akuto could be revived because he was closer to a Liradan than human. But she still felt a bit better.

"Yeah. I hope he's okay. And knowing him, no matter how many times he comes back, he'll still make the same choice."

"He'll think way too hard about what's best for society, like he always has." Keena laughed.

The coffin continued its work, but it didn't say when it would finish. Every second seemed to last an eternity.

"Is he okay, you think?" Fujiko asked.

"Don't worry... It'll be fine. Um... If you're really worried, you can pray."

"Pray?" Fujiko asked, surprised at the seemingly idiotic suggestion.

“Yes. Pray. It’s all we can do, right?” Keena said innocently.

But Fujiko shook her head. “Yes, but to God? There’s no such thing...”

“I think there is. If there’s not, Ackie’s just going to have to suffer forever, right?”

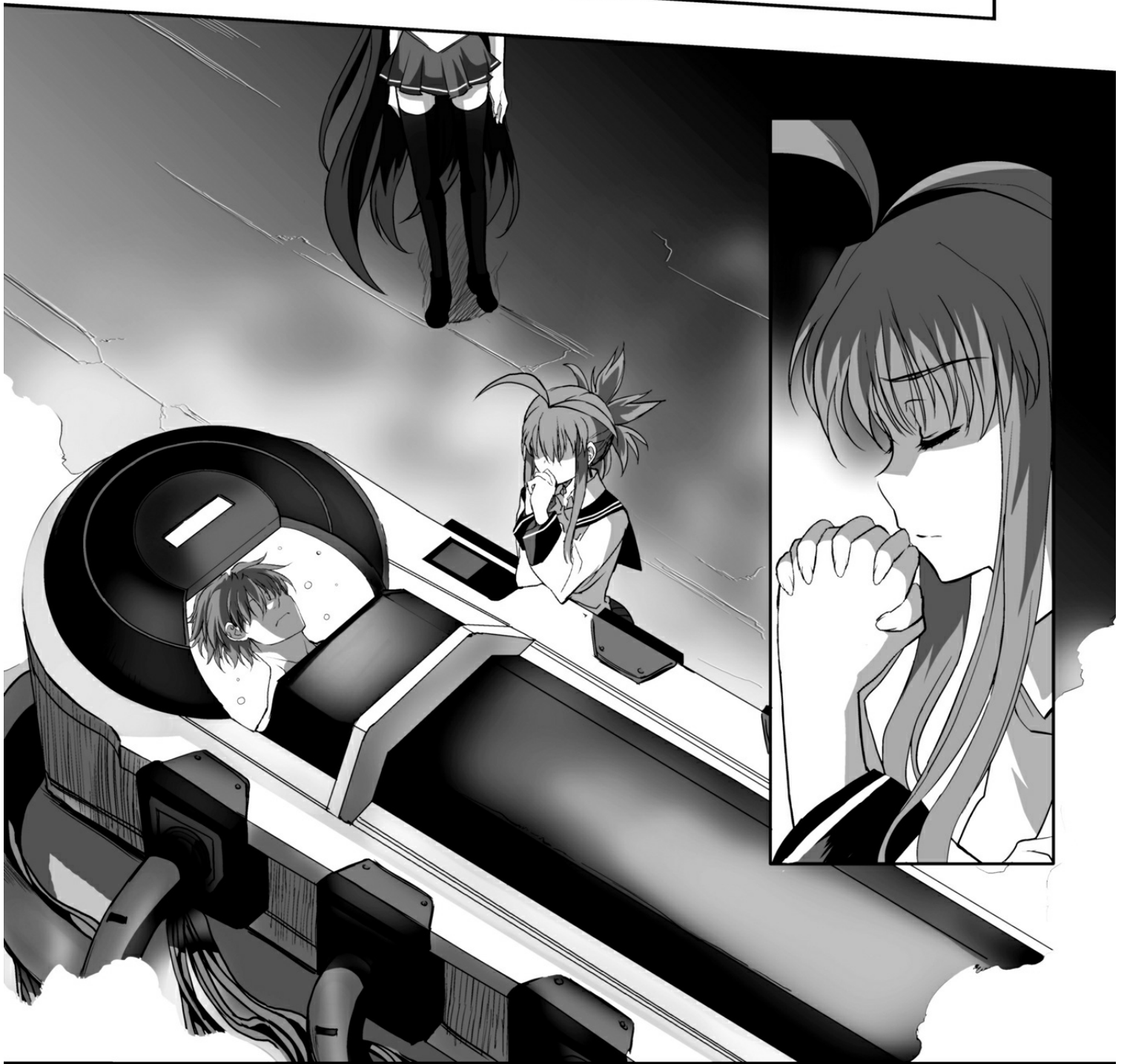
Fujiko gasped. “You’re right,” she said after a moment. “Maybe faith is something that humans need after all.”

The gods were real beings, at the core of the evolution of those humans that believe in them, or perhaps the core of their souls. If you didn’t believe that, then the lives of men called Demon Kings had no point at all.

Keena kneeled before the coffin and folded her hands.

Fujiko closed her eyes and prayed to... “something.”

The coffin silently continued its work. But nobody knew what would happen next.



Yoshie sighed when she realized that she hadn't been teleported inside the palace. "Well, so much for that. I guess the palace is probably guarded. Wait, is this place..."

She looked around and realized she recognized where she was. It was the lobby of the Megis temple. "Well, that's something at least," she said, as she walked over to the window to see what was going on outside. The crowd had swelled to an almost unbelievable size.

"Those people aren't just there to gawk, are they? Man, people are scary when they get mad." Yoshie fiddled with her goggles. The video of what she was seeing began to be broadcast on the net.

"I suppose this is actually the perfect place to look for Keisu though... Oh?" Just before she turned around, she saw a few people moving against the crowd. When someone does that in a group of people, they stand out a lot. "Woah! Lucky me. I guess I've got good karma?"

It was Junko, Yuko, and Keisu; three people that Yoshie knew (she recognized Yuko from watching her on TV). Yoshie went to the entrance to the table and waved to them. "Hey, over here! Wow, I'm so glad I found you!"

But all of them seemed confused.

"Who are you?"

"Are you with the temple?"

"It feels like I know you, but I've never seen you before..."

Suddenly Yoshie realized that she'd only ever met them inside phase space. "Well, it's a long story, so I'll cut it short. I'm Yoshihiko," she said.

None of them seemed to understand what she was saying. Perhaps the idea of using a different identity in VPS than in the real world was something hard to understand for a girl who was used to being honest in everything, because Junko seemed to understand it less than Fujiko.

"I'll explain everything later, but for now, just know that I'm on Akuto's side. And yes, I am with the Megis temple. I helped the priests. Oh right, there's a levitation boat we use for emergencies. It can take us to the palace. I'll explain

on the way.”

The three of them still didn’t seem to understand, but at least they knew she wasn’t an enemy. So Yoshie took them to the lever that released the boat. There was an emergency escape door halfway up the building, and next to it was a levitating boat with room for six. It used mana to keep itself afloat. Releasing the lever would unmoor the boat.

“If you’re doing this for us, you probably really aren’t our enemy, but...” Junko said as she yanked the release lever.

“Believe me. I feel bad for tricking you, but I really am Yoshihiko,” Yoshie said again, but Junko only seemed more suspicious. “L-Let’s just get on the boat...”

Just as Yoshie spoke, there was a flash of light above. The battle between Hiroshi and the Zero polygon had begun.

“It’s dangerous to get too close, but... we have to hurry. Oh, I guess I should take some kind of weapon, too.” Yoshie threw an emergency escape chainsaw into the boat. Then she jumped in herself and grabbed the oars, which were coated with a special film that allowed them to travel through mana. The other three followed, and Yoshie started to row.

“That’s the guy who defeated the Demon King...” Yoshie said as she looked up at Brave.

Yuko nodded, deciding to keep the fact that it was Hiroshi to herself. “That’s right. And he’ll do it again too, I’m sure.”

“Yeah, if he can defeat Zero, that would be great. We’d be just fine then. Yeah, he looks really strong,” Yoshie said hopefully, “so maybe he can.”

“Transferring Anti-Heat Cape. Transferring Plasma Ball.” Hiroshi’s suit covered itself in the cape, and then balls of light appeared around it. Each of them was an incredibly intense sphere of heat that would burn anything it came into contact with.

Hiroshi ordered the suit to make a hard dive. He had to make it through the field that blocked his suit from transferring energy and instantly destroy the polygon behind it. This attack would take all the energy he had, and then he’d need five minutes to get his weapons back. He needed to finish things in a

single strike.

His cape flapped in the wind as the balls began to spin around him. It was like a high speed drill slamming down on his foe from above.

“Plasma field stabilization complete. Setting time from contact to release to one nanosecond. Adjusting visor translucency from 23% to below 18%. Deploying dimensional fault field. Contact with the target in three seconds,” the suit reported calmly.

Ahead of him, Hiroshi could see the shining polygon. It was giving off an eerie red light as it reflected the plasma balls, and it was getting closer and closer.

“Go!” When the whole of his field of vision was almost filled with the reflected light of the polygon, Hiroshi was sure he’d won. But then his body was hit by a powerful impact. He didn’t know what had happened, but the crowds below saw it all.

Just before Hiroshi had hit it, the polygon had moved, almost as if it were a living creature. It had seemed to be fixed in space before, but now its body twisted slightly before bounding at Hiroshi like a bouncing ball.

And above the polygon’s mirrored surfaces, there seemed to be some kind of field. Hiroshi only realized after he’d regained his balance that the field had survived his plasma balls.

“The plasma balls dissipated after release. The field appears to be a dimensional fault.”

“A dimensional fault field...” It was the same futuristic technology that the suit used. It was only that field which enabled him to survive the plasma explosion at close range.

—Why...? No, instead of thinking about the reason, I need to get ready for the next attack... Don’t tell me it’s going to be what I think it is!

Hiroshi tried hard to calm himself down so he could think. He got some distance and climbed into the air, but he didn’t turn his back on his foe.

What Hiroshi was expecting was a dimensional severing; the future technology that Boichiro Yamato had used. It probably worked on the same

principle.

Unfortunately for him, he was right. One of the triangles that formed the polygon opened towards the outside. From within it came a shining rainbow ray of light that shot towards Hiroshi.

“Tch...!” Hiroshi dodged. The space around him seemed to shift slightly, like the sky had been sliced open with a knife.

“How much energy do I have left...?” Hiroshi checked the gauge in the corner of his eye. He couldn’t use his weapons, but if Zero was attacking him, the polygon would be unable to use its defensive field.

“A little over four minutes...” He whispered to himself.

But when Zero saw that he’d dodged the attack, it changed tactics. All the triangles on the polygon opened at once. It began to shift form with shocking speed, like folding origami. The polygon became a pair of plates stuck together, and began to spin like a saucer. It charged at Hiroshi in that new form.

“Analyze pattern.”

“The enemy’s mobility rivals ours. It is recommended to transfer control to the suit. Verbal commands will lack sufficient speed.”

“Give control to the suit,” Hiroshi said, trying hard to keep his wits about him.

The suit took over, forcing him to move in unpredictable patterns. But the Zero saucer was every bit as fast, and firing off dimensional severings too. The two of them flew through the sky at speeds far too fast for the eye to follow, leaving an eerie trail of severed space behind them.

—I can dodge, but without control I can’t attack even after four minutes pass...!

Fear seized Hiroshi. Not only could he not attack, but moving this fast was draining his energy faster than it could recharge.

—Do I run?

A moment of weakness passed through his heart. But then he heard a voice from below. Many voices, in fact. A sound like an earthquake was rising up towards him. It was the voices of the people below, cheering him on.

“Brave! Brave!” They were calling his name.

—*This is...!*

He felt heat well up in his chest.

—*I’m not done yet! I still have more time! I’ll keep fighting until there’s nothing in me left...!*

“Brave! Brave!” There must have been tens of thousands of people around the palace. All of them were looking up and cheering for their hero. Their voices were so loud that they were shaking the boat that carried Junko and the others as it floated above the crowd.

But Junko was ignoring them, and looking at Yoshie with shocked eyes. After hearing her explanation several times, Junko had finally realized the truth.

“You’re... Yoshihiko...”

“I’m sorry. I mean it. That’s why I didn’t worry about taking off your clothes and stuff,” Yoshie said as she looked up at Brave. Yuko was staring intently at the battle too, but Junko alone was looking downwards.

—*Th-Then...*

When Akuto had told her to spend time with Yoshihiko once they got back to reality, he was talking about Yoshie. And thinking back, that was right after they’d talked about how it was possible to look different in virtual reality.

—*I was upset over something so small...?*

Junko suddenly found the whole thing ridiculous, and started to laugh.

“H-Hey, are you okay?” Yoshie asked, but she held up a hand to say she was fine.

“I’m fine... And you know, I think we’ll get along just great. You’re a very different person there than you are in reality, though.”

“Oh, that was my attempt to seem like a man. Girls seem to really like it for some reason. Anyway, forget that. Let’s talk about Akuto.” Then Yoshie told Junko about everything that had happened on their journey.

Junko’s expression took on a serious tone. “Then... can Akuto come back to

life?”

“We don’t know. We’ll just have to wait.” Yoshie shook her head, but Yuko must have been listening, because she pointed upwards to the sky.

“If we just wait, we’ll be just fine. And Brave will put an end to all this anyway before he gets here.”

Maybe she was right. To Junko, Akuto was the one who always saved the day. But for Yuko, that person was Hiroshi. And now, almost everyone in the capital was screaming Hiroshi’s name.

“He’s a hero, huh?” Junko whispered. In this moment, he truly was a hero.

And then, the decisive moment came. A light shot up from below — a mana ball. It flew upwards towards Zero before exploding on the saucer’s side. Someone who could still use magic was helping Brave.

“Someone can still use magic...?”

“Who is it?”

Yoshie and Junko said, but Brave wasn’t going to let his chance go to waste.

—An attack from below?

For a moment there was doubt in Hiroshi’s mind, but it didn’t matter who it was. Zero was distracted.

—How much energy do I have left? ...Enough to use the molecular wire.

“Pass control back to me! Wire!” Hiroshi yelled. And then he raced past Zero’s side as fast as he could. The wire in his hand seemed to simply drift in the air, but a moment after he passed by it, Zero’s saucer was sliced open from the center.

“Did I... win?” Hiroshi turned back. His weapons were totally drained of energy; he couldn’t even dodge at top speed anymore. But it didn’t matter. The saucer was trying to reform and failing, as its triangle parts began to separate and fall to the ground.

“It’s over...! I won...!” He felt an indescribable sense of satisfaction. He heard the sound of Zero’s remains crashing into the palace, but then he heard

something even louder than that. It was the crowd yelling his name.

“He did it!” Yuko cheered and clapped.

“Whew... Is it over, then?” Junko let out a sigh of a relief.

“Well, I guess this works as an ending too,” Yoshie said as she stopped rowing the boat. They’d gotten as far as the outer walls of the palace. The crowd had crossed over the walls and made it into the front courtyard, but only they were high up enough to see what was happening inside.

Then Keisu looked up at the sky, before craning her head around as if watching for something.

“What’s wrong?” Yoshie asked.

Keisu held up a hand to cut her off and spoke sharply. “He’s not dead.”

“Huh?”

“Zero’s not dead,” Keisu said. There was no hesitation in her words. She could probably tell by instinct.

“But we know it’s impossible to totally shut him down. That’s not what you meant, right?” Yoshie asked, but Keisu didn’t seem to understand the question. But before she could even attempt to answer, something made them freeze.



“Zero’s control... his ambitions have reached their end.”

Suddenly, a voice echoed. It was audible even among the cheers of the crowd, so of course, it wasn’t a normal voice. It was magically amplified, and coming from the palace.

Someone who appeared to be Kazuko was standing on the palace terrace. The shouts from the crowd got even louder. She made a larger version of herself appear above, so that even the people in the back could see her.

“I don’t know who you are, brave one... but you have given courage to us all. You moved me to action. That’s why I attacked Zero,” Kazuko, who was actually 2V, said.

“No...” Yoshie gasped.

“Th-That was part of her plan...?!” Junko exclaimed. They both knew that she was the one who was talking. Junko went on, asking “Where’s the real Kazuko?”

Yoshie shook her head. “We don’t know. She’s trying to escape right now. Korone was controlled by Zero and chasing her.”

“If Kazuko dies, 2V is empress...? Is that what her plan was?”

“But Kazuko was really strong. I don’t think Korone can kill her. Is 2V just trying to lie to stay alive...?”

Junko and Yoshie were both doubtful. But nobody in the crowd knew about 2V.

“But the magic that you all use will not come back. The gods probably died with Zero. I swear to you all that I will take power and rule the Empire again. Until magic is restored, and the gods in the temples return, I will rule this country as its empress! Until that day comes, I ask you for your help!” 2V said loudly.

“That’s crazy... The Imperial Constitution forbids it...” Yoshie whispered, but the cheers of the crowd drowned her out.

“Glory to Empress Kazuko! Glory to Empress Kazuko!” The voices overlapped and spread out around the palace. Even if they didn’t know the truth about 2V, the people were still supporting an imperial dictatorship. And they were excited

to do it, too.

“Wh-What are they thinking? I thought the people believed in the gods, and used them to guide their lives...” Junko said in shock.

“No, it’s probably the gods who are at fault here. They probably realize how weak the system that depends on the gods is. If nothing else, they all know that Zero was the first Demon King... So basically, they’re done with the priests,” Yoshie said.

“It was the priests who saved the day though, right? Without their help, Brave never would have fought Zero...”

“That’s probably just how the masses think. We’re no different. We’ve been unable to speak up a lot of times. And we’ve believed in stupid things, too.” Yoshie shook her head.

“But if they know the truth... it’ll be okay, right?” Junko said with a pale face, but nobody answered her.

The only sound was the crowd, cheering for Kazuko. As she stood on the balcony, 2V’s whole body was shaking with joy.

“What do you think, Zero? These are the people of the empire! I’ve proved that they’re insane! They rose up to free themselves from oppression, and now they’re begging me to oppress them again!” she said in a loud whisper to Zero.

“It won’t last, though. They’ll come to kill you. And then, they’ll seek a new ruler. That’s why I decided humanity was mad,” Zero said coldly.

“My opinion is the same. I understand. But I wanted to spend my life proving it for myself. I wanted to laugh at every citizen of the Empire.”

“Because it was the people who ruined your life?”

“You can think of it that way if you want. But no matter what the reason was, nobody does what I just did and survives. I’ve got plans to keep myself alive a while longer, though. I’m going to end this world while I’m still feeling this joy. Now, Zero, I’m going to unleash your power.”

“That’s why I became your servant. I’ve been waiting for this moment...”

“It’s coming...!” Keisu’s hair and ears twitched like an animal’s as she spoke.

“Coming?”

“Zero. I can sense that Zero is about to awaken...” She looked around, but of course, Zero was nowhere close by.

“2V is using magic. She must be helping him wake up,” Yoshie said as she looked at 2V through her goggles. She could see the flow of mana.

“Then if we defeat 2V...!” Junko looked up in the sky. Hiroshi was there.

“Please...!” Yuko put her hands together and prayed as she looked up. But Hiroshi’s body was slowly falling.

—I’m out of energy... And the field blocking the energy transfer is still active... I fell into a trap...

Hiroshi grit his teeth. He knew about 2V, of course. And he knew that he had to defeat her. But...

—Even if I did have the energy left, could I kill 2V...?

It was frustrating, but also fortunate. He probably couldn’t have done a thing. The people were still applauding him, and he’d be forced to kill the Empress in front of their eyes. There was no way he could do that. It would mean killing “Kazuko,” who was beloved by the citizens and had massive support.

It wasn’t that he was scared to do it. It was that he was scared of living the rest of his life as a hated, infamous murderer. Even if he knew he had to do it, he still would’ve hesitated.

—But then, Zero is still alive... What happens now?!

“No... It looks like he’s out of energy,” Yuko said as she looked up at the sky.

“What did you say happens if Zero awakens?” Junko asked again.

“Anyone who was baptized will have their minds taken over by the system,” Keisu answered.

“Then it’s all over!” Junko yelled.

The people were applauding her with no idea what was about to happen. Even after Zero awoke, that probably wouldn’t change. Zero and 2V would probably shut down their minds and force them to worship him.

“Keisu... do something!” Yoshie said, but Keisu still seemed like she couldn’t remember something. She just shook her head.

“Now our empire will be eternal...!” 2V yelled. She must have said it for the people to hear, because the answer came back as a frenzied cheer.

“Glory to our kingdom, which will last for a thousand years!” 2V cried.

And then suddenly, an ominous dark cloud appeared.

“A cloud...?”

A shadow fell on the assembled cloud. They looked up to see that it was gathering over the palace, even as the rest of the sky was clear.

“That’s impossible... Clouds don’t work like that...”

“What’s going on?”

A ripple of fear went through the crowd. And then there was a roll of thunder, loud enough to drown out the voices of the crowd. The people began to scream in fear. There was no rain; there was simply crash after crash of terrible lightning, and thunder following quickly after.

“What...?” 2V looked up.

Kazuko was still out there somewhere, but there were no signs that she’d made it into the palace. The priests were inside, they were struggling against 2V’s killer combat machines without their magic. That left one person.

“The Demon King.”

He was floating in the air. Each strike of light illuminated him briefly. The screams of the crowd fell silent.

In the air, they could see a man in shining black. If the light around him was white, and his face had been filled with kindness, anyone would’ve thought he was a saint.

But the man in the air was the exact opposite of that. Behind him were wings of black light. His body was covered in bulky, twisted muscles. His mouth was formed into a cruel, fanged smile. His eyes were flashing with a red light.



“I have a message for those foolish enough to obey the Empress. If obedience will bring back your lost freedom, then you are free to make that choice. But if you want freedom, if you want power, I will give it to you,” the Demon King said. He spread his arms wide, and the people below him began to murmur to themselves.

“My magic...”

“It’s back...”

“He’s returned!” Junko yelled as she looked up at the sky.

“I can use mana. It’s back.” Yoshie tried covering a fingertip in mana. It began to shine with a faint, but unwavering, light.

“I wasn’t talking about mana,” Junko said as she wiped the tears from her eyes.

“I know. He’s back, isn’t he? But look at your face,” Yoshie chuckled.

Yuko was looking at Akuto in fear, but Junko put a hand on her shoulder. “It’s okay. Who he is inside hasn’t changed. I can tell from the way he talks. He’s decided to accept everything.”

“Accept it...?”

“That’s right. He’s going to put an end to all this.”

It happened just as she spoke. The lightning fell on the terrace where 2V was standing. There was a terrible crackling sound as half of the balcony was blasted away.

As the crowd watched, the lump of hardened ash that used to be 2V’s body fell dozens of feet to the ground below.

After a few moments of silence, the crowd realized what had happened. The whole courtyard filled with screams and angry roars. But the Demon King answered with a laugh.

“Zero was my messenger, and now he is gone. But thanks to him, the gods are dead. Why? To bring magic to all of you equally. Why did I kill the Empress? To destroy the ruling order of this world. Now, who will you obey? Or will you live

for yourself? Choose. The time has come to decide the fate of this world. This is the last war. And I am this world's last Demon King.”

5 - Bloody Emperor

2V was walking down a secret hallway behind the palace. She was in the place where she'd spent most of her life. There was nobody left alive who knew about this place. She hadn't even been here for a very long time. 2V was alive.

"You're a very cautious woman. Even out there you used a doll that looked just like you." It was Zero who spoke. Zero, for his own part, had taken the form of a new Liradan he'd been given. It had a beautiful face, but one with no trace of human warmth within it.

"I told you I'd thought this through. And I wasn't lying when I said I was willing to let my life end. It's time for me to retire. You're free now to do whatever you like. That Demon King interfered with your powers. Are you going to fight him? If so, I'll watch."

It appeared that Akuto had the ability to interfere with Zero's control over the gods. That was probably why both of them were called Demon Kings.

Zero left towards the depths of the palace. But as 2V set off in the opposite direction, someone appeared to stop her.

"You sure you haven't forgotten someone?"

2V looked up in surprise. It was a young girl in a classy hat.

"Lily Shiraishi... right?" 2V said casually.

"Yup. I figured there'd be a path nobody knew about, so I searched the whole palace grounds. That's what I've been doing ever since I got here. I knew nobody else would be able to catch you, so it was up to me." Lily flipped her hat around. "I've got my magic back. And it's time to use it!"

Lily quickly charged forward.

"Tch!" 2V made several mana balls appear around her body, and tried to control them with a wave of her hand. It was the same spell that Kazuko had used.

“Those are mana balls with striking power! I guess I just need to strike them harder, then!” Lily struck the area in front of her with countless fists.

2V tried to get the mana balls into position, but Lily struck at them before she could. Each of the balls carried its own striking force even when standing still, so this was a straight up battle of power.

“Raaahhh!” The balls knocked her fists back, but she kept firing away. Each hit from one of them was met with ten of hers. She was hitting at an incredible rate, and the strikes were beginning to push 2V back.

“Gah...!” And then Lily’s power overwhelmed 2V. Her mana disappeared, as countless fists struck her tiny body.

“Dryaaaah!”

Lily’s punches smashed 2V into a wall. She moaned loudly as it shattered beneath her. “Guh...!”

“Hah. Don’t worry, I can’t just kill you. I need to prove to the public who you really are before we can go back to the old system. I’d like nothing more than to snap your spine, but it’s still better to keep you alive. If I kill you, you’ll have gotten what you wanted.”

Lily stretched out her arm with magic to grab 2V by the collar. 2V looked like she would’ve been happier if she was killed.

“Stop... Please...”

“I’m sure you noticed on some level, but humans aren’t that stupid. Once they know the truth, they’ll make the smart choice. The right choice. And I’m not going to let you die before you see that.” Lily smiled cruelly.

And then... There was a low thud from 2V’s body. The impact traveled all the way through Lily’s hands.

“...What?” Lily’s eyes went wide.

2V’s body had been pierced by a spear of light. “Gwah!” She spat up blood and moaned.

“What just happened...?”

The shining sword had come out of nowhere. And after running her through, it vanished. The sword had been made from mana. Not many magic-users could create a sword that could fly that far, or have such power.

Lily looked in the direction it had came from, and couldn't believe what she saw. It was Kazuko, walking down the hall with elegant footsteps.

"Empress Kazuko..."

"Don't you feel a little bad for her? Couldn't you tell that she wanted to die? She'd been in a dark place for so long, with nobody to talk to in person. At least let her spend her last few moments in a pleasant dream." Kazuko walked over to 2V. She was still breathing.

"Y-You bitch..." 2V moaned, but Kazuko simply kissed her. Blood stained Kazuko's beautiful mouth and cheeks. But her smile remained unwavering as she looked at 2V with an expression of compassion.

"Poor girl. You wanted to be like me, didn't you? Did your dream come true in the end? If it did, then I'll kill you before the dream is over."

Kazuko slammed another mana sword into 2V at close range. 2V's body twitched.

"I-Is that really the best way...?" Lily asked.

Kazuko, now completely covered in blood, smiled as she stuck a hand into the wound in 2V's stomach. She moved it around for a moment before finding the heart and ripping it out of 2V's body.

"E-Empress..." Lily couldn't believe what she saw.

Kazuko didn't seem to think, however, that she was doing anything unusual at all. She took the heart and held it in both hands, and began to eat it elegantly.

"Oh, it's like a big dried plum," she said.

"Wh-Why..." Lily said she stepped away.

"I'm taking her mana into my own body. I have to. She got the power that should've been mine: the Mirror of Yata. The power to move one's mind into a Liradan or doll."

“And that’s why you’re... eating that?” Sweat dripped from Lily’s brow.

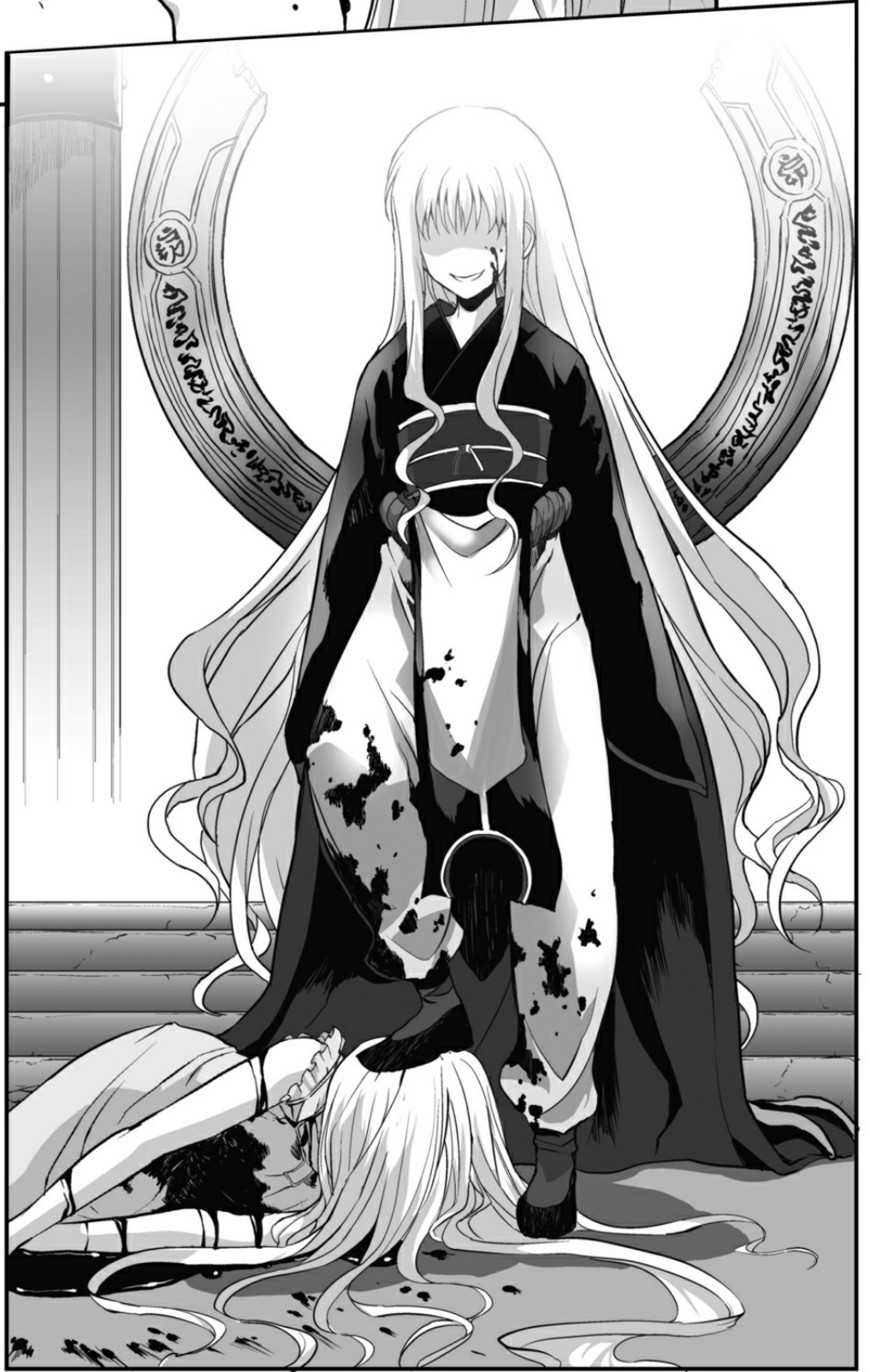
“That’s right. And with that power, I’m going to take responsibility for what she’s done. I’m going to make Zero serve the Empire. For the first time in years, the Imperial Family will rule,” Kazuko declared.

“Wh-What...?” Lily was stunned.

“If both Zero and the Demon King belong to the Empire, then all magic will originate with one source. All will prosper in the name of the empress,” Kazuko said.

Then they both heard a voice.

“No...! I don’t understand what you just did, but I think you’re wrong!” Keena was standing there.



“My master disagrees. He says that the future only comes from continual thought. In other words, you’re wrong.” Fujiko was there too. They’d been teleported to the palace along with Akuto.

But Kazuko kept smiling. Instead, the bloody empress pronounced their deaths. “Then both you and the Demon King will have to die.”

○

Outside the palace, confusion had reached a fever pitch. Akuto had vanished from the sky, but the people’s terror remained. They fled, either on foot, by flying, or using the now-functional flying cars. Yoshie, Junko, and Keisu were the only ones going towards the palace.

Junko’s magically enhanced strength had returned, so now she jumped from wall to wall, carrying Yoshie. Keisu followed her. They left Yuko with Hiroshi, who had safely landed on the ground. The field blocking his energy was gone, so he’d be able to take her out of the area.

“Hey, what’s going on?” Yoshie said. She was talking about Akuto. She still didn’t know him well yet, and she didn’t seem to understand why he’d done what he did.

“He made everyone hate him deliberately. That’s just who he is,” Junko said.

“Why would he want to make them hate him? Does that help him somehow?”

“That’s his way. He carries all the legacies of hatred, and still tries to help everyone. I can tell from the way he was trying to sound like a villain that he wants to make this the last battle of the Demon King,” Junko said. There was passion in her voice, and the life had returned to her eyes.

“So he’s going to defeat Zero and rebel against the Empress? Wooaah! I knew something good was coming, but this is better than I thought!” Yoshie laughed. She looked up at Junko, who was still holding her in her arms.

“...What?” Junko asked. Yoshie grinned.

“You’re in love with him, aren’t you? That’s gonna make for a rough life, you know?”

“Y-You dummy! Now isn’t the time!”

“Right, right. Let’s both throw away our lives for a very interesting man, then.” Yoshie laughed.

○

“So 2V finally kicked the bucket, huh?”

A street far from the center of the capital — The Sage was smoking from a pipe, elbow on the roof of his stopped car, as he felt the disturbance in the mana he was tracing. He sighed.

“The limiter the gods put on the use of magic is gone. People can now use magic without having to be good. Now, which side should I join...?” The sage got in the car while sucking on the pipe in his mouth.

“Bochiro must’ve seen that days like these were coming. I’ll have to see if there’s anything else besides that suit and Zero’s body that he left behind, I guess...”

The Sage — the man once known as the strongest mage, codename USD — whispered.

Afterword

Thanks again for buying this book. It's me, Shoutarou Mizuki.

Now, we've reached Volume 8. This is part 2 of the new storyline, so if you haven't read it yet, please give Volume 7 a try.

And this time I've got news: they're making an anime!

If you bought this volume new you'll already know from the banner on the cover. It starts in April on Chiba TV and other U-stations. As you know, U-stations let you get away with anything, so you can expect quite a lot of craziness.

It's directed by Takashi Watanabe, and the main character designer and art director is Toshimitsu Kobayashi. Series composition and scriptwriting is done by Takao Yoshioka, with additional script writing done by Nao Hoshimasa! I'm so excited to have all these great names working on it. If I had to say what I'm looking forward to most, it's to see how these grown-ups get to mess around and have a good time.

I had a great time talking to everyone, and even though they're all veterans, I could feel a passion in their voices when they spoke to me. I'm sure they'll go way beyond your expectations, so look forward to it! I know I'm looking forward to it more than anybody.

Of course, there's also that drama CD from Beatnix. The voice actors there aren't the same as the ones in the anime, but that's common in theater, so it's like it's a play! At least that's what I want you to tell yourself, and decide who you like better. It's a pretty addicting little game to play.

Then there's Souichi Itou's comic, which is running in Champion Red. I've heard he's planning on keeping it up, and I believe him. It's been really good lately.

Lastly, thanks... oops, out of space. Thanks for everyone who's brought the story this far, and see you in the next volume. There's more fun to come!



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Demon King Daimaou: Volume 8

by Shoutarou Mizuki

Translated by Adam Lensenmayer Edited by Aimee Zink

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