



Takehaya
Illust: Poco

13

INVADERS
OF THE
ROKUTOU![?]



INVADERS OF THE ROKUJOUA!?! 13



INVADERS of the ROKUJOU MA?!

THE BIGGEST CRISIS
YET APPROACHES
CORONA HOUSE!



**“CAN YOU
BELIEVE
EVERYTHING
I’M ABOUT
TO TELL
YOU?”**

**“SAY,
THEIA...”**

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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.



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



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

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 ROKUTOUMA!? FACTIONS MAP

MAIN BODY



AIKA MAKI

A former member of the evil magical girl group, Darkness Rainbow. She currently lives together with Shizuka.



GHOSTS



HIGASHIHONGAN SANAE

The ghost girl haunting room 106, reborn into the land of the living.



NIJINO YURIKA

A girl who came to warn about the dangers of room 106. Turns out she's an actual magical girl.



THEIAMILLIS GRE FORTHORTHE

A princess who sought to rule room 106 and its owner for the sake of her trial for imperial succession, but now...



CLARIOSSA

DAORA FORTHORTHE

A former rival princess to Theia. Lately, Koutarou's been relying on her whenever something comes up.



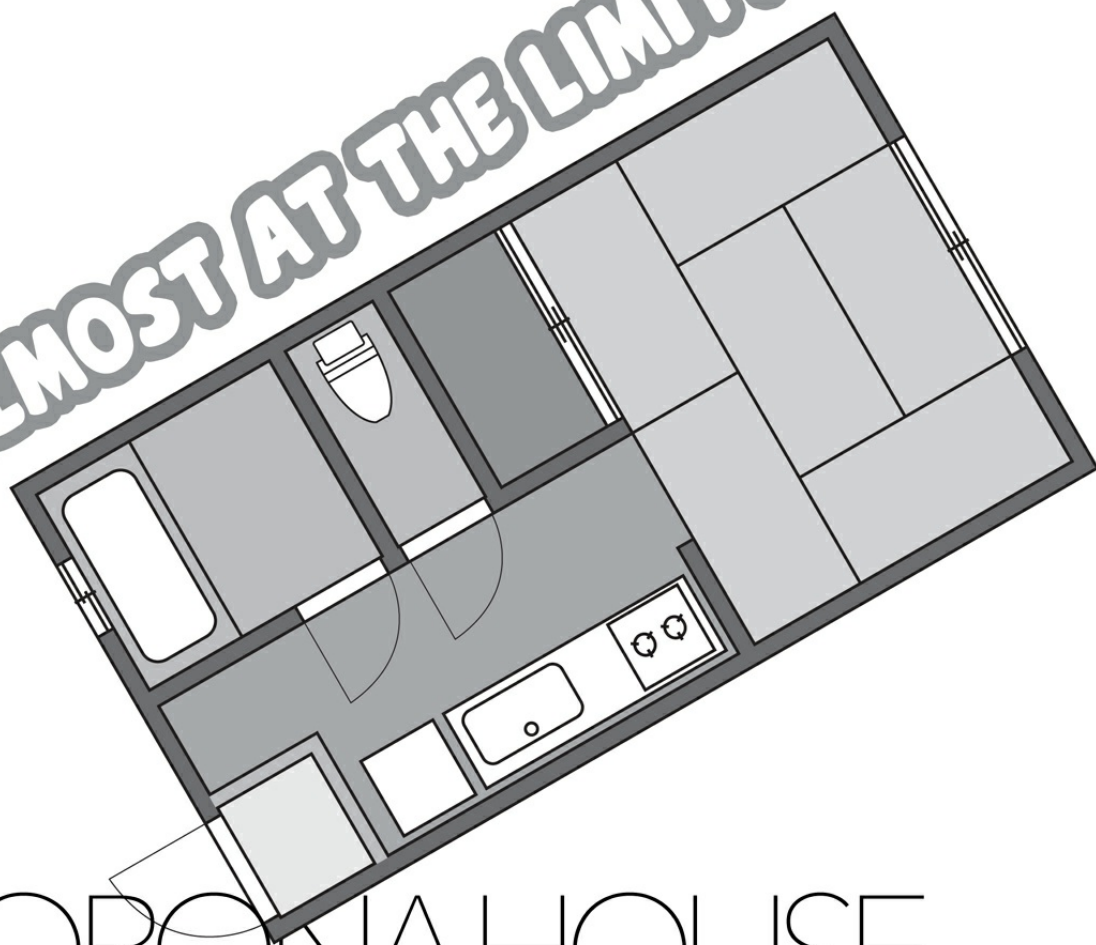
ALIENS

RUTHKANIA

NYE PARDOMSHIHA

Theia's retainer and assistant. One of very few people who knows the identity of the Blue Knight.

ALMOST AT THE LIMIT?!



CORONA HOUSE
ROOM 106

Homecoming

Sunday, April 25th

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"But I want to watch it now!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Heehee, that's just like him."

"I told you it was dangerous."

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

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

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

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

"Ahaha..."

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

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

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

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

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

“Hmm, I’ll keep that in mind.”

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

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

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

“Has everyone gathered?”

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



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

“Hmm...”

“Kiriha, what’s for breakfast today?”

“Salmon, miso soup, and boiled spinach.”

“All right! A jackpot breakfast!”

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

“It’s about time to wake him up.”

“Whaaaaat?! Why?!”

“What’s with that reaction?”

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

“Quit being so picky, Nijino Yurika.”

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

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

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

“Huh? Where are Theia and Ruth-san?”

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

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

deal with that.”

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

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

“What kind of trouble?”

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

“I see...”

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

“Are you worried about Theiamillis-san?”

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

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

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

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

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

“Sakuraba-senpai...”

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

“That’s... true.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yeah!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Thank you, I appreciate it."

"Theia, what happened?"

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

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

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

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

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

“Oh yeah, present Forthorthe is...”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Indeed..."

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes..."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Your Highness..."

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

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

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

"Theia, do you have moment?"

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

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

"Just a moment..."

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

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

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

"...All right."

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

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

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

"Koutarou...?"

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

to enter the room.”

“What are you...”

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

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

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

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

And finally, she invited him in.

“I am honored. Please pardon the intrusion.”

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

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

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

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

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

Your Highness... Master...

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

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

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

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

“And that is...?”

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

Ah...

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

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

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

That’s...?!

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

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

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

“What...?”

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

“Congratulations, Your Highness!”

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

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

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

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

"My right to the throne...?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"My answer?"

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

"Ah..."

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

Koutarou has accepted me as his master...

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

"S-Satomi Koutarou..."

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



“Yes.”

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

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

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

Thus the pledge between master and servant was made.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Koutarou!”

“Whoa!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“What?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You can do it if you try!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Of course not!"

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

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

"Come on..."

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

“Say, Theia...”

“Yes?”

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

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

The hand stroking Koutarou’s hair was unbelievably gentle.

“I’m not going to say goodbye.”

“Yeah. We’ll meet again, right?”

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

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

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

“What is?”

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

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

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

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

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

ease if you remain optimistic.”

“Is that how it works?”

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

“...”

“What?”

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

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

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

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

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

“You’re my knight, after all...”

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

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

“I better thank Her Highness later...”

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

“What do you mean?”

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

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

“Theia...”

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

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

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

“Huh?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Ruth-san..."

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

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

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

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

"I'm sorry..."

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

"Satomi-sama, Satomi-samaaa!"

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

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

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

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

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

“Theia, this isn’t the end, right?”

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

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

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

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

“You promise?”

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

“Yeah!”

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

“Theia-chan, for you...”

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

“Hmm? What’s this?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Yes, please do!”

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

“Theia-dono.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Please do. I’m trusting you.”

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

“Pardomshiha.”

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

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

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

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

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

“Oh?”

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

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

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

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

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

“What are you two talking about?”

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

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

“Th-That's right.”

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

“Yeah... Leave it to me.”

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

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

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

“Thank you. You two take care too.”

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

“Clothes, huh? What a lovely surprise.”

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

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

“...I feel like I’ve lost...”

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

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

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

“Thanks...”

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

“What’s this?”

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

“Oh!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

very sorry to see you go...”

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

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

“Theia, Ruth-san...”

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

“Koutarou...”

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

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

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

“Yes... I’ll do just that...”

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

“Satomi-sama... Yes!”

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

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

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

“Indeed you did...”

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

“I think it’s about time to go.”

“You’re leaving already?”

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

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

“Farewell.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

Wait, don’t go!

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

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

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

Theia, Ruth-san...

The two girls then disappeared in the light.

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

Harumi and Alaia

Saturday, May 1st

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

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

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

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

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

"Yeah."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Even us meeting.”

“Now that you mention it...”

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

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

“Yeah, you’re right.”

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

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

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

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

“I see...”

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

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

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

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

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

“From the sword?”

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

“And that was Sakuraba-senpai?”

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

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

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

Koutarou nodded at Clan's explanation.

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

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

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

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

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

"What do you mean?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Empress Elfaria

Wednesday, May 19th

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Koutarou with a smile.

“...”

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

“...Satomi-san?”

“Hmm? Ah, sorry. Are you done?”

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

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

“Correct.”

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

“Well done, Yurika.”

“Thank you!”

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

“I did my best!”

“Good work, good work.”

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

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

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

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

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

“Okay!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Even me?"

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

"I... I see..."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Hyaaaaah!”

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

“What’s going on?!”

“Take thiiiiss!”

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

“Gyaaaaah!”

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

“Yurika-chan...”

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

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

“Hah!”

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

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

“Um... Hiyah!”

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

“Everyone, come help!”

“Martial arts is my specialty!”

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Waaaaah!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Are you sure?"

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

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

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

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

"I bet."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Thanks, I owe you one.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Koutarou, they’re shooting at Theia! We have to hurry!”

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

“Not good! Clan, can’t you do something?!”

“I’ll try!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Clan!"

"I know!"

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

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

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

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

"Yes, I know..."

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

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

"Go away, just go away..."

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

“God...”

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

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

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

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

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

“Koutarou, what do we do?”

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

“Okay.”

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

“The three unidentified ships are leaving the region.”

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

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

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

Theia, just what happened on Forthorthe?

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

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

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

“I see...”

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

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

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

“Is this really what’s inside?”

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

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

“Is there anything else?”

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

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

“A suit... A suit, huh?”

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

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

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

“Koutarou!”

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

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

“H-Hey, wait, wait!”

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

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

“I told you to waaaiiiit!”

“As if I cooouuuuuld!”

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

“Ouch...”

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

everything?!”

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

“That’s just a metaphor, Theia...”

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

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

“...Welcome back, Theia.”

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

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

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

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

“Ah...”

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

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

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

more complicated.

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

"Theia, you're heavy..."

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

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

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

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

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

"Ow, ouch, owowow!"

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

But...

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

"Koutarou, there's Ruth!"

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

"Really?!"

"Kyah!"

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

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

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

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

“Fine, jeez...”

“Go on, do that thing.”

“What thing?”

“Hold me like a princess.”

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

“Hmmhmm!”

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

“Ruth!”

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

“Your Highness?”

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

“Now it’s your turn.”

“Huh?”

The next moment, Theia pushed Ruth forward.

“Kyaaah!”

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

“Are you okay, Ruth-san?”

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

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

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

“Ah, uh, I... Umm...”

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

“Ruth-san...”

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

“U-Um... I...”

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

“Welcome back, Ruth-san.”

“Ah...”

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

“Yes, I’m back... Satomi-sama...”

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

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

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

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

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

“Lie? You mean you lied?” he asked.

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

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

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

“What?!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“That’s because we realized that it might be a trap just before it was sprung... Ruth.”

“Yes.”

Ruth continued to explain from there.

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

“Now that you mention it, yeah, I did.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

somewhere else?” the cowardly Yurika asked.

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

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

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

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

“Safe territory?”

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

“Theia, by territory, you mean...”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"So, please!"

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

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

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

knew she was asking for something unreasonable.

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

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

“...What?”

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

Koutarou...?

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

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

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

“Koutarou, what are you...”

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

“You’ve fundamentally misunderstood something.”

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

“What is our relationship?”

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

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

That was when Theia realized what Koutarou wanted.

“B-But...”

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

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

“Koutarou...”

“Do it properly.”

“...”

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

She then made her declaration.

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

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

“That’s better.”

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

“As you wish, Princess Theiamillis.”

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

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

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

“Yeah. Everyone loves you two.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Theia and Ruth offered their tearful thanks.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What do you think?"

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

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

"What if they stay in space?"

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

“Is that true, Clan?”

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

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

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

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

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

“What?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"That guy? Who are you talking about?"

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

"Satomi-sama, are you sure?!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Can I trust you with that, Kiriha?"

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

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

"Your Highness, the passage is almost stabilized."

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

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

"Yes."

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

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

"Introduce?"

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

"This is my mother, Elfaria."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It was the only man on the bridge, Koutarou.



“Ah?!”

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

“Long time no see, Layo—”

“Aaaaahhh!”

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

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

“Hmmh, mhhm!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Blue Knight's systems.

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

"'Elle'?"

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

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

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

A thud rang out.

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

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

"Oh yeah?"

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

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

"Could this be..."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

With the Blue Knight, Layous Fatra Veltlion.

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

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

been to protect Theia, and to have Koutarou choose her.

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

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

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

"I'm glad we could meet again."

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

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

"Me?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Clan had assumed that Elfaria was worried about the coup d'état. However, she smiled and shook her head. That wasn't what was on her mind.

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

"Then what are you worried about?"

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

"You're worried about Harumi?"

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

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

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

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

"What?"

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

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

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

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

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

“There’s no need to worry, Your Majesty.”

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

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

“You sound confident, Clan-san.”

“I guess you could call it a woman’s intuition.”

“Well, that’s a problem. It seems I’ve found yet another reason to worry.”

“I won’t back down easily, you know?”

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

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

“Teeheehee... Then allow me to formally apologize, Princess Clariosa.”

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

“Oh?”

“What’s the matter?”

“Um... it’s a message from my family. What could it be?”

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

“This is...”

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

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

The military didn’t know about Clan’s change of heart or how she’d changed over the past months, so they still thought she was after Theia. In other words,

that she was on their side, and they didn't want her involved in the commotion. There was also the chance that Theia might use Clan by sending an emergency rescue signal again. So in order to avoid that, they wanted Clan to fall back.

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

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

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

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

"Clan, fall back to a safe area."

"No!"

Koutarou recommended retreating, but Clan shook her head.

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

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

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

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

"Civilians?"

“That’s right. There are other people aboard Blue Knight who helped me and my mother escape. We can’t fight with them still on board. Please protect them on your Hazy Moon, just in case.”

“That’s...”

Clan started to hesitate.

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

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

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

“I... understand...”

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

Fate might not be on my side either...

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

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

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

“And the results?”

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

“How long of a delay did she request?”

“Three days, sir.”

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

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

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

“That’s just within our time limit.”

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

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

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

empress and her daughter would be untouchable.

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

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

"Him?"

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

"You don't know?"

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

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

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

"Can we win?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

ideals.”

“Even if that’s Princess Theiamillis?”

“That’s what I believe.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ground Battle

Saturday, May 22nd

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"We're fortunate our opponent is Elexis."

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

"What do you mean?" she asked.

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

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

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

"..."

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

"What's wrong, Theia?"

"N-Nothing... It's just, you're so calm... I..."

As far as Theia knew, Koutarou might have some experience fighting, but he shouldn't have any experience with war. This should be his first taste of it. Yet Koutarou was as calm as any veteran.

Oh crap... Well, I guess it's not like I can hide it at times like this...

That was when Koutarou realized that his behavior was indeed very unusual for a high school student. But he couldn't simply go back to being a normal high school boy after what he'd been through, so he decided to try and cover it up instead.

"After fighting so many times, even I've started thinking about that kind of stuff, you know."

"...That's fair. Sorry for suggesting otherwise. Don't pay me any mind."

Fortunately for Koutarou, Theia didn't say anything more. She had too much else to worry about right now other than Koutarou's behavior.

"Your Highness, Satomi-sama, there's movement on the surface!"

And with Ruth's report, Theia put it out of her mind altogether. She grew tense, and so did Koutarou.

“What happened?”

“We’ve lost connection with two of the scouting drones patrolling the outside of the operation area.”

“If it’s two, that means it wasn’t an accident or a wild animal! Theia, they’re here!”

“Yes!”

The next moment, the previously quiet bridge became rather noisy. All kinds of data popped up on the monitors and an alarm rang out as the AI reported additional information.

“Just before the connection with the scouts was lost, they detected a weak spacequake! It seems the forces on the ground are receiving support from the fleet in orbit!”

By “support,” Ruth meant in the same fashion that Theia and Ruth used Blue Knight. Elexis had summoned a weapon to destroy the unmanned scouts.

“So that’s how you’re doing it, Elexis!”

“What do you mean?”

“Elexis is planning on attacking from the surface and from space at the same time!”

“I see... Then if we don’t help, the ground forces will be wiped out!”

Following Koutarou’s lead, Theia picked up on Elexis’s plan.

Blue Knight had currently reduced its power output and was pretending to be an asteroid orbiting the planet. That made finding it difficult. So Elexis had chosen to lure it out. By summoning weapons and destroying the two scouting drones, he was sending them a message. He was saying that his three ships would support the forces on the surface, meaning that if Blue Knight didn’t come out, Koutarou and the others would be in trouble. While they might have a chance against just ground forces alone, they wouldn’t stand a chance against ground forces *and* the aid of three spaceships. So in order to protect Elfaria, Theia and the others would have to reveal themselves.

“Ruth-san, where is the enemy fleet?!”

“It’s currently being calculated!”

Ruth busily moved her hands along the operator’s panel. She was trying to locate the enemy fleet by tracking the signal that was sent as weapons were transferred.

When sending weapons back and forth, a message using gravitational waves was required. Using the data from the two scouting drones before they were destroyed and the data Blue Knight could gather, Ruth was trying to narrow down the signal’s origin. While she didn’t know what weapon had been transferred, she did know the strength and direction of the gravitational waves used. From there, she would be able to calculate the source location.

“I’ve found it! The three ships are all on the far side of the moon!”

Ruth displayed her results in hologram form. As soon as she did, even Koutarou could understand Elexis’s intentions.

“I see. By hiding there, they can fight without holding back!”

The moon rotated around Earth. Because of that, it was impossible to observe what was happening on the far side of the planet’s only natural satellite. And that was where the fleet of three ships had taken up positions. From there, they could fight to their heart’s content without being discovered by the people of Earth. The only potential problem was being detected by satellite, but because Earth had so few satellites capable of observing the far side of the moon, it wasn’t hard to selectively block them out with Forthorthian technology. Ultimately, Elexis was calling Blue Knight to the far side of the moon so that they could fight freely.

“Blue Knight! Release camouflage! Set the generator output to the maximum! Enter a lunar orbit using a short warp!”

“As you wish, my princess.”

Upon hearing Ruth’s report, Theia ordered Blue Knight to relocate. It was obvious that this was a trap, yet they had no choice but to waltz right into it.

“Theia, bring out my armor! I’ll control Blue Knight’s body!”

Koutarou’s armor was originally a device meant to control the ship. The ship

could be set to replicate the wearer's motions, so the ship could be controlled simply by wearing the armor and moving accordingly. While Blue Knight was a warship, it was made in the shape of a person, making it possible to change the direction of its weapons and boosters. That was a characteristic unique to Blue Knight.

"Wait, Koutarou! You should head for the surface!"

However, Theia shook her head at Koutarou's offer. In a three on one fight, it would be hard to win without making use of Blue Knight's directional mobility and flexibility, but despite knowing that, Theia wanted Koutarou to help the people on the ground.

"What do you mean?! You two will—"

"Listen! Even for Blue Knight, it will take some time to reach the far side of the moon! And I don't want our people on the ground annihilated before then! So you head for the surface right away!"

By bending space-time to move, also called warping, it was possible to reach the far side of the moon in an instant. But since they would end up getting shot down immediately if they dropped out of warp in the middle of the three ships, they would need to warp to a nearby location instead. That meant after they reached the vicinity of the area via warp, they would need to use normal means to go the rest of the way, which would take some time. But if their people on the surface were annihilated during that time, there would be no point in even going. That was why Theia wanted Koutarou to head down to Earth immediately.

"...I understand. Be careful, Theia."

Koutarou suppressed his worry and decided to obey her instructions.

"I know. I won't try to push for a win. I'm just going to run around while jamming their communications."

Theia made it sound like she was going to stay on the move, but that would be difficult to pull off in reality. Koutarou knew it was dangerous as well. However, both he and Theia well aware that it was necessary, so they didn't discuss the matter any further.

“Ruth-san, I’ll leave Theia to— Wait, I guess don’t need to tell you that.”

“No, but I shall carve your words into my heart.”

As Ruth said that, the floor of the bridge parted and a blue set of armor standing upright rose up from below. After putting it on, Koutarou would head for the surface.

“Koutarou... Before you go, say something to us.”

“Something? Like what?”

Koutarou replied to Theia while sliding into the armor that had just opened for him. The armor closed automatically and started making adjustments. The armor’s motors started up, and changed the position of the joints to take the load of its weight off of Koutarou. This was the usual startup process.

“Anything that will raise our morale.”

“You make it sound so easy, but that’s the hardest part.”

“Just say something.”

Theia knew that this might be the last time they ever saw each other. That’s why she at least wanted to hear one final sentiment from his lips. She didn’t care if the words themselves were pointless. What she needed to hear was the feeling behind them.

“Theia, once this is over, I’ll play games with you for as long as you like.”

“...Now that you’ve said that, I’ll hold you to your word. Understood?”

Theia got to hear exactly what she wanted. And the feelings behind those words brought tears to her eyes. But Theia held them back and answered with a smile.

“Yeah. And Ruth-san...”

“Yes?”

“Please think of something you’d like. Once this battle is over, I’ll listen to any request you have.”

“Anything?”

“Yes.”

“...I understand. I have a very special request, so I'll pick that one.”

Tears formed in Ruth's eyes as well. But knowing she couldn't show weakness before a battle, she wiped them away and braced herself.

“That's unfair. Why do I get games, while Ruth gets anything she wants? You're too kind to just her. I demand you correct this disparity.”

“Who do you think you are?”

Koutarou smirked as he headed for the bridge's exit in his armor. He would use a small lifeboat to head down to Earth on his own. The readied pod was waiting just outside of the bridge.

“I'm your princess! Treat me with more care!”

“Then you already know why.”

“I don't.”

“Stupid.”

After stepping off the bridge, Koutarou turned around to face Theia and Ruth one last time.

“Theia, you have the right to request anything from me whenever you please.”

“That...”

Theia was struck by Koutarou's words, and her expression went blank. She was so overcome with surprise that she completely forgot what she was about to say. But Theia only remained motionless for an instant. Seeing that the sliding doors leading out of the bridge were about to close, she desperately called out to Koutarou, who was about to disappear behind them.

“Then you better come back to me!”

“As you wish, my princess.”

With those words, the door closed and separated Koutarou from them.

“Isn't that great, Your Highness?”

After the door shut, Ruth smiled at Theia. Theia, however, slumped her slender shoulders.

“...I should have said something more encouraging...”

Theia had seen Koutarou off with a selfish wish. She regretted it.

“Heehee... But Your Highness, you can just tell him that when you meet again.”

“That’s true... If we see each other again, I’ll do just that.”

Theia flashed a small smile and narrowed her determined eyes. Since she was about to jump headlong into a trap of her own volition, chances were high that she would never get that chance.

But thanks to those few words, Theia had found a reason to win no matter what. She would fight her hardest to make sure she could see Koutarou again. To say something more worthy of his princess.

That resolve filled Theia’s small chest and drove her forward.

As Koutarou began re-entry into the atmosphere on the lifeboat, the battle on the ground between Kiriha’s group and the coup d’etat army was about to commence. That information was sent to Harumi, who was with Elfaria.

“Harumi, the battle is about to start. Sadly, this is as much as I can help.”

Clan, who had given Harumi the news, positioned her smaller ship, the Cradle, in the sky above the battlefield to observe it. But regardless of how well the Cradle was able to conceal its appearance, chances were high that once the battle started, the enemies would move in and be able to detect it at such short range. Before that happened, Clan would cut off her communications and move to higher elevation.

“Thank you very much, Clan-san. I’ll see you later.”

“I’ll be praying for your victory.”

“Yes, thank you very much.”

After Harumi thanked her for a second time, Clan ended the call. Once Harumi

did the same from her own bracelet, she turned to Elfaria.

“Your Majesty Elfaria, it seems the battle is about to start.”

“I see...”

Elfaria looked out the window. Harumi and Elfaria were inside a small cottage in the mountains. Because the cottage was in the middle of a thick forest, all that could be seen through the window was a dim forest. But Harumi knew that Elfaria wasn't looking at the trees. She was looking through them towards Kiriha and the others, far, far away on the other side of the woods. She was worried for her distant allies.

“To think I would make people completely unrelated to me fight in my stead...”

Elfaria rued the situation she found herself in. Because she had advocated the disarmament of the army, she'd ended up forcing people she didn't even know to fight for her. Worse yet, that included several young girls. Though she had little other recourse right now, Elfaria wasn't happy about it.

“Your Majesty, please don't say something so sad. We might not be connected to Forthorthe, but we certainly are to Theiamillis-san. She is a very wonderful girl and our precious friend. And Your Majesty is Theiamillis-san's mother. That's why we all decided to stake our lives on this. Your Majesty is important to us too.”

“Harumi... but...”

“Is it that Your Majesty can't accept that we are Theiamillis-san's friends?”

Well aware that she was addressing to the empress of a galactic nation, Harumi spoke her mind without flinching.

If I knew more about modern Forthorthe and its circumstances, I might not have been able to say this...

Everything Harumi knew about Forthorthe was about Forthorthe of the past. She'd learned as much as she could while doing research for the plays. She'd memorized every detail of that setting and any other information she could get her hands on, but she had no knowledge of present-day Forthorthe. Because of

that, she thought of Elfaria as Theia's mother rather than an empress, which made it much easier for her to speak her mind. Harumi knew that what she was saying was quite bold, and couldn't help but be amused at herself.

"Harumi, you..."

Despite the serious discussion, Harumi had a gentle and happy smile. Seeing Harumi like that, Elfaria's impression of her changed.

The conviction in her words... Her dignified behavior and elegant gestures... She is far too well made for a common girl... She really is...

Harumi was a timid girl, but in times of crisis, something deep inside of her would surface. It was noble and beautiful, and, Elfaria thought, very becoming of a princess.

"I'm sorry. That was rude of me... I'm sorry."

Misinterpreting Elfaria's struggle for words as something negative, Harumi apologized and lowered her head. She began to regret overstepping her bounds.

"That's not true, Harumi. I was just moved thinking about what great friends Theia has made here."

Elfaria smiled at Harumi. There were no lies in her words. She really felt like Theia had been blessed with wonderful friends. So great, in fact, that Elfaria started worrying for a different reason. They were complex feelings of a mother who wanted her daughter to be happy.

"Really? Hearing you say that makes me happy."

"That's why I hope everyone will be all right..."

"It will be okay. I'm sure that everyone will return safely."

"...You're strong, Harumi."

"I'm a girl, after all... Weren't you the same in the past, Your Majesty?"

"That's true... Then I too shall believe in those strong feelings of the past and wait patiently."

"Good."

But that was as long as the two could smile. After hearing the boom of an explosion in the distance, they knew the battle had finally begun.

A blinding light appeared in the corner of the monitor Clan was staring at. The image then shifted; the camera positioned the light in the center of the screen and zoomed in. What was being displayed now was the aftermath of an explosion, a cloud of dust kicked up into the air. It was a sign of the first strike, and proof some sort of weapon had been used.

“It’s finally started...”

Clan was sitting on the bridge of the Hazy Moon, hastily operating a panel and giving orders to the Cradle, which was currently positioned above the battlefield. While she couldn’t actively help anymore, she still wanted to observe what was happening in case of the worst possible outcome. Clan activated all of the Cradle’s sensors and attempted to confirm the situation. Data sent from the Cradle was processed and appeared as images on the monitor, one after the other.

“Your Majesty...”

“Princess, be safe...”

Each time an image appeared, the whispering voices on the bridge increased. Clan wasn’t the only one on the Hazy Moon. The civilians that had helped Theia and Elfaria escape were on the ship too. They feared for the safety of their beloved royals, and some pleaded with Clan to be present on the bridge under the condition that they didn’t get in her way. Clan approved, and as a result, a dozen or so men and women were worriedly looking at the monitor with her.

Honestly, I’m envious, Theiamillis-san...

The past Clan most likely would have chased them off the bridge. But now, not only did she let them stay, but she also felt envious of Theia. If she were in the position Theia was now, would the citizens be this worried for her? Clan didn’t have the confidence to say yes, and that proved that she was lacking the qualities of a princess. It made her realize once more how foolish she’d been.

“There’s no need to worry, everyone. Theiamillis-san and the others are

strong. And in the worst case scenario, the Hazy Moon will come to the rescue. So you can continue watching at ease.”

But Clan was now much different than she once had been. How the citizens felt about her would gradually come to change.

“Princess Clariossa... We are grateful for your consideration.”

“B-But of course. You are all citizens of Forthorthe, and I am your princess.”

And a glimpse of that change could already be seen. The people bowing to Clan proved that much. But since Clan was so unused to dealing with others, it slipped by her unnoticed.

The explosion in question had occurred a short distance away from where the scouting drones had been destroyed. The enemy was getting closer to where Elfaria and Harumi were hiding, and the explosion was a trap that had been placed beforehand being triggered.

“As I expected, it seems they can’t detect the traps. But it seems they’re aware that Elfaria-dono is hiding in this region... I can’t make light of my foes.”

Forthorthe used advanced sensors, which Kiriha had suspected would be easy to fool with mundane bombs. After some careful consideration, Kiriha decided to use talismans charged with explosion magic cast on them as a trigger for the main explosive, dynamite. It was a completely nonmetal bomb. As the enemy approached, the explosion magic would activate, which would in turn set off the dynamite. It was a highly efficient and powerful bomb that couldn’t be detected by Forthorthian sensors.

On top of that, the bombs served as indicators of where the enemy was located. And thanks to the explosion they’d heard, Kiriha was able to tell that the enemy was getting closer. Reacting accordingly, she and the others hurried in the direction of the explosion and set up a defensive formation.

“I can’t make anyone out yet...”

Shizuka was staring into the forest, squinting her eyes. She had the best eyesight out of anyone in the group, but in the forest at night, she still couldn’t spot any approaching enemies.

“What about you, Sanae-chan?”

“Hmm, they’re still too far off to see clearly, but I can feel a cloud of hostility.”

Sanae could sense the auras of their enemies on the other side of the forest. Because the forest itself had a thick aura to it, she couldn’t clearly see through it and detect individual people. There was no mistaking, however, the mass of approaching hostility.

“How does it look?”

“There’s one big cloud in the front. And there’s a smaller cloud to its right. There might be more, but I can’t tell from this distance.”

“Which means that, at a minimum, there’s a main force and a detachment... Sanae, keep using your spirit sight and let me know if there are any changes.”

“Okay!”

Based on all the information she had, Kiriha made adjustments to her plan. Since the enemy had split up into at least two groups, she had to account for that now.

“Yurika.”

“What is it?”

“Take three of my subordinates with you and stop the detachment moving to our right. I don’t intend to let them just do as they please.”

“Me?!”

Yurika’s eyes shot wide open. She had just assumed that she would be following someone’s orders, so being given soldiers to command and a mission to carry out was completely unexpected.

“Yes. There’s no one else with as varied a power as yours. You’re the only one I can ask.”

In terms of offensive power or overall fighting capabilities, Theia and Shizuka were in a league of their own. But the only one who had the versatility to adapt to any situation was a magician like Yurika. It made her an excellent candidate for handling operations on her own.”

“I-I don’t have any confidence...”

“Kiriha-san, this is too much for Yurika. Should I go instead?”

“M-Maki-chan’s right! She’s much better at attacking than me!”

Darkness Rainbow specialized in frowned upon uses of magic. In other words, something like a surprise attack would be right up their alley. Maki herself had experience with that kind of thing, which was why she offered to take Yurika’s place.

“No, I’ll need you to confuse the enemy’s main force. Yurika will have to go.”

“No waaay...”

However, Kiriha was set on using Yurika to handle the detachment. Since Maki specialized in mind manipulation magic, she would be vital for dealing with the larger force. Moreover, because of her specialization, she was less adaptable than Yurika. In Kiriha’s mind, Yurika was the only one fit for the job.

“You can do it, Yurika!”

“Sanae-chan, please don’t make it sound so easy...”

“You only need to drive them away, so go give it your all.”

“But they’re coming to kill us, regardless of what *we’re* trying to do!”

“So are you just gonna sit here and do nothing? Once Koutarou shows up, he’ll be really angry...”

“Uh... I-I’ll do my best...”

Since Yurika was a coward, she had been reluctant at first. But once she realized a fate worse than death awaited her if she didn’t comply, she took three underground soldiers with her and vanished into the woods.

“Without Koutarou, Yurika sure is useless, isn’t she?”

“I wonder if Yurika-chan will be okay...”

“Maybe I really should have gone instead...”

“We can’t afford any second-guessing. The enemy coming our way won’t be easy to handle either. Shizuka, Sanae, get up front. Maki, come with me.”

Each of the five girls from Corona House were given three subordinates from the underground to back them up. As a result, five squads were formed. As the commander, Kiriha would make use of them to produce the most favorable results. Currently, Yurika's squad was deployed to handle the enemy's detachment. Next, Shizuka who was skilled in close-quarters combat, and Sanae who was capable of strengthening others and short-range attacks, were sent to the front to attack the enemy's main force. Maki and Kiriha would take up positions in the rear, and were in charge of long-range attacks and distractions using magic.

I just hope Theia-dono's absence won't affect us too much...

Though she had plenty to worry about, Kiriha wasn't in a situation where she could afford to complain. They had to win no matter what. If they didn't, the future they all desired would never come.

A young man wearing a white suit was standing in the middle of the forest at night. That alone was a bizarre sight, but what made it even more bizarre were the men in black combat uniforms surrounding him.

"Elexis-sama, the vanguard has come in contact with the enemy. The battle has begun."

"Despite that, it's been awfully quiet since the first explosion."

"Neither side must want to be found by the people of this planet."

"I guess I'm the only one who wants to stand out, then."

Listening to the report from his subordinate, Elexis smiled wryly as he looked at himself. His pure white suit stood out, especially in the dark of night. He was easy to spot, even from a fair distance away.

"The weapons our enemies are using are even more covert than ours."

"So they're not weapons from Princess Theiamillis... which means there can't be that many of them. Somewhere between twenty and thirty, I would wager."

Being a fair distance away from the city, there was no fear that the relatively silent laser and beam weapons that Elexis's forces used would attract any

attention from unwanted bystanders. So if his enemies were using even more covert weapons than that, it seemed a frank declaration that they didn't have the firepower to match. Elexis thought it was fair to assume he had them outnumbered.

"However, sir, there are several powerful people amongst them. We have already taken some damage."

"Mmm, that's more like it..."

Hearing that there were several powerful people in the enemy force, Elexis flashed a breezy smile.

"Is there a boy using a knight's sword among those powerful enemies?"

"I have received no such reports."

"I see..."

Not getting the answer he'd hoped for, Elexis's shoulders drooped. He looked like a child that had been stood up by a friend for a playdate. It was so drastically different from his normal energetic and spirited behavior that the soldiers around him were a bit confused.

"What should we do, sir?"

"I'll leave it to you. Since we have the numerical advantage, we'll probably be fine if we just hold back and corner them using the you-know-what."

Elexis gave instructions as if he was bored. Since his friend hadn't appeared, he would proceed according to plan. It would all be boring from there, and Elexis saw no need for further instruction in that regard.

"Understood."

"But if a boy with a knight's sword appears, don't carelessly attack. Report to me instead. I'll face him myself."

"Is he that dangerous?"

"That boy is like a living joke."

"I'll take that to heart... Let's go, men! Don't let the vanguard have all the fun!"

With the commander in the lead, the men in black combat uniforms moved out, leaving Elexis and a few soldiers acting as his bodyguards behind.

“Hurry up, Koutarou-kun. I’m getting tired of waiting.”

Elexis looked up into the sky. The stars were twinkling brightly, but the star he was looking for was nowhere to be found. The blue shooting star he wished for was still far away.

Yurika’s ambush had been a success. Since she was a magician, it was easy for her to sneak up on the Forthorthian soldiers without being detected. Her opening attack was equally splendid, and she knocked three soldiers unconscious with one go.

“Kyah! Kyah! Kyah!”

The problem came after that. The three soldiers she’d knocked out had seven companions, who spread out and opened fire after being attacked. Beam upon beam came raining down on Yurika.

“Nooooo! S-Save me, Satomi-san!”

The weapons the coup d’etat army were using were far more powerful than the weaponry available on Earth. And with superior numbers, they unleashed a counteroffensive beyond imagination. With it all directed at her, Yurika quickly retreated. Fortunately, thanks to the covering fire from the three underground dwellers, Yurika was able to dive into a trench before all of her defensive spells were broken through.

“I-I thought I was going to die...”

Still lying in the trench, Yurika let out a sigh of relief. Of the five layers of defensive spells she’d cast beforehand, only one remained. If the trench had been even a little further away, she might not have made it.

“Yurika-sama, the enemy is falling back.”

“R-Really?!”

Hearing the good news from one of the underground dwellers, Yurika poked her head out of the trench. And just like she’d been told, she could see the

enemy falling back, dragging the three unconscious soldiers with them.

“I hope they just leave after that...”

“The chances of that would be quite low.”

“I was afraid of that...”

Tears formed in Yurika’s eyes as she clutched her staff. She was desperately suppressing her urge to run away in fear. Yurika had heard that there would be up to fifty soldiers, so there was no way they would retreat after losing only three.

“And it looks like their teamwork is excellent...”

On top of that, the enemies hadn’t pushed forward. Instead, after driving Yurika away, they fell back with their unconscious companions. That proved how cautious they were and how much they trusted each other. It wouldn’t be hard to imagine that their next attack would be far more dangerous now that they had an inkling of what they were up against.

“Yurika, fight! Yurika, fight! Yurika, fight!”

Yurika encouraged herself and cast a few more spells in preparation for the next attack. The truth was that she was terrified, and she would run away in a heartbeat if her conscience would allow it. But if she escaped, her precious friends would be hurt, or maybe even killed. The thought that she might wake up all alone in room 106 tomorrow morning scared her more than anything. She would rather stand her ground and fight here than let that happen.

“Yurika-sama, the enemy is coming!”

“This time we’ll use everything we’ve got! After that, we’ll fall back to the next trench!”

Mustering her courage, Yurika gave directions to her three subordinates wearing the face of a magical girl. One year ago, Yurika had wished she was the only occupant of room 106, but now that was the last thing she wanted.

“This is Yurika! Kiriha-san, can you hear me?! The surprise attack was a success and three people have been defeated! From here on, we’ll be fighting for real!”

After shouting into her microphone, Yurika pointed the tip of her staff towards the approaching enemy soldiers and started her incantation.

“Poison Cloud! Effective Area: Maximize!”

Yurika cast a spell that created a large poisonous cloud. Though the poison wasn't fatal, it was particularly effective for weakening a group of people all at once. Yurika wasn't a big fan of the spell because she felt that it wasn't very magical girl-like, but she absolutely needed it for this battle. She had to stop the soldiers here no matter what, using any means necessary.

As Yurika's battle on the right flank began, Kiriha and the others back in the center got their first visual on the enemy. Since Kiriha and the others were hiding in trenches like Yurika was, the enemy soldiers didn't advance right away, but began taking cover behind trees and rocks.

“Kiriha, they're about to start shooting.”

With the soldiers closing in, though still a fair distance away, the effect from the forest's aura had lessened enough that Sanae could now clearly sense the enemy's intention to attack.

“...So it begins. Maki, detonate the first through fifth.”

“Roger that. Transmitting the first through fifth detonation codes.”

Maki confirmed her order and concentrated on her staff. Seconds later, several of the bombs connected to Maki's magic detonated.

The single muffled boom Maki heard after told her that the five bombs had exploded at the same time. The explosives weren't designed to be lethal. Kiriha wagered that since her opponents were professionals, they would find any other bombs placed in strategic locations even without a means to detect them. So instead, Kiriha had planted these explosives to destroy the trees and rocks that the soldiers would use for cover. It would make them harder to find, and lower the amount of explosives used overall.

Having their cover literally blown, the soldiers were momentarily stunned. As they stood there, bright lights that had been placed beforehand activated and shone on the surprised men. With the enemy exposed, lit up, and blinded by

the light, Kiriha didn't miss her chance to attack.

"Begin the attack! Fire!"

"Sanae-chan God Arrow!"

"Multiple Mind Blast! Target Option: Sidewinder!"

"Spiritual Energy Armament safety released! Target acquired, ho!"

"Commencing fire, ho!"

At Kiriha's command, everyone in charge of ranged attacks opened fire as one.

Sanae was using a bow and arrow created from her own spiritual energy, Maki used her magic, and the haniwas and underground dwellers used spiritual energy weapons. Each attack was mystical. Since the soldiers had cutting-edge Forthorthian technology protecting them, simple physical attacks wouldn't have much of an effect. But they were wholly unequipped to deal with magic and spiritual energy.

That's why they'd all chosen to use nonlethal attacks. Maki used her mind manipulation magic, and everyone else had spiritual energy weapons, which had almost no effect on the body. Instead, they directly attacked the soul and deprived their opponents of their freedom, which was something both the girls of room 106 and Kiriha's subordinates from the conservative faction were grateful for. Knowing that their opponents wouldn't die when shot, everyone could open fire without any hesitation. And because they attacked full-force, the preemptive strike worked as planned.

"Uwah!"

"Agh!"

The coup d'état soldiers collapsed one after another. Including Kiriha, about a dozen people were attacking from a distance. Under their fire, seven of the coup d'état soldiers collapsed to the ground. Kiriha estimated there to be fourteen soldiers in the front, which meant that the first attack had cut their numbers in half.

"Don't flinch! Fire back! Destroy the lights!"

But the coup d'état soldiers didn't take the attack lying down. As expected from professionals, they quickly dropped to the ground to make themselves harder to hit and returned fire. Their first targets were the searchlights blinding them.

The coup d'état army was equipped with large beam rifles. Their accuracy was spot on, and they had a lot of power to them. The lights didn't stand a chance. They were destroyed in an instant, and the surrounding area went dark once more, making it harder for Kiriha and the others to aim.

"And now it's my turn!"

But the moment the lights went down, Shizuka leaped out at the enemy. While the soldiers were blinded by the light, she'd snuck up on them and had been waiting for her time to strike. She jumped right into the group of soldiers, swinging her arms and legs around in a flurry. She swept away her enemies like a small tornado.

"Uwah!"

"Ugh!"

And with Shizuka's ambush, several more men fell.

"What's going on?!"

"An enemy snuck up on us!"

"Whoops!"

Shizuka looked like she was about to continue her attack, but stopped short and jumped into a nearby bush to escape. She didn't have much time to attack before her enemies would strike back. After the lights were destroyed, the soldiers would be practically blind for a few seconds until their eyes adjusted to the darkness. And Shizuka knew she had to retreat before then.

The soldiers that had come around first fired beams into the bush after her.

"Oh, how scary!"

However, since Shizuka had already escaped further into the woods, the beams only scorched the bush and the ground.

“Now, Kiriha-san!”

Shizuka shouted into the headset microphone hanging by her cheek. Not a moment later, a dazzling light appeared behind her. It was a flash that Maki had created using magic. Almost all of the coup d’etat army’s vanguard were caught up in the flash. As a result, just as they had readjusted to the darkness, they were blinded again. Not even their night vision goggles could help them.

Shizuka hadn’t jumped into the enemy’s midst just to take out a few soldiers. The goal was to gather all eyes on her so that the second flash would be as effective as possible. The flash also lit up the soldiers for Kiriha and the others, allowing them to fire upon them once more.

“Say, Kiriha... Are you always thinking about vicious things like this?” Sanae asked, firing one arrow after another from her bow.

Several enemies easily fell prey to Kiriha’s plan. Though they had special powers like magic and spiritual energy on their side, Sanae was still amazed at what Kiriha could do with all of it.

“No, only when I have to.”

Kiriha answered nonchalantly as she fired her spiritual energy rifle. In total, they’d taken out fifteen soldiers now. It was as good as they could have hoped for with a preemptive strike.

“Good to know. Oh, and Kiriha...”

“Hmm?”

“Could you teach me some mischievous tricks I could pull on Koutarou later?”

“Very well.”

“All right!”

“I’m back!”

Shizuka emerged from the underbrush, slightly out of breath but with no serious injuries. She had a few scratches here and there from her attack and subsequent retreat, but overall, she was practically unharmed.

“Aika-san, how does it look?”

“Um, it looks like everything went according to your plan, Kiriha-san. In total, fifteen people have been knocked out.”

“It’s a great success. This is thanks to Yurika doing her best over there, too. I’ll have to thank her properly later.”

If it weren’t for Yurika’s efforts, they might not have achieved this level of success. If the enemy’s detachment had flanked them as intended, then they wouldn’t be in any position to attack.

Hearing the news that was better than what she expected, Shizuka smiled. Maki and Sanae did the same, and they all let out sighs of relief. Only Kiriha still had a serious expression on her face.

“A message from Yurika.”

Kiriha touched her earphone. When she did, everyone could hear Yurika’s voice through their own headsets. She sounded desperate, and was practically screaming.

“Th-This is bad! A bunch of robots just appeared out of nowhere! Just like when Theia-chan summons her guns! Kyaaaaaaaah!”

As the message deteriorated into actual screaming, communication with Yurika was cut off.

“Yurika-chan?!”

“Yurika! Hey, Yurika!”

Shizuka and Sanae called out to Yurika in panic over their microphones, but no reply came.

“The main show starts here. DKI will show us how serious they are.”

Kiriha continued trying to contact Yurika as she looked in the direction of the enemy with a sharp glance. A strange spectacle was developing far beyond what she could see. Machines in the shape of people were appearing from a black hole in the air. They were as tall and bulky as full-grown men. Since they could use the same weapons and protection that people could, they didn’t require any special equipment, which made it very easy to field them.

They were Dragon Knight Industry’s human shaped, all purpose robots, Motor

Knights. They were mechanical knights sent to Earth from the three ships in space.

As Kiriha and the others were facing off against a new threat, danger loomed for Harumi and Elfaria in their mountain cottage. Moments after the battle had started, the enemy sent out small observation devices to look for Elfaria and Theia.

What is this strange feeling...?

Thanks to her heightened senses after her awakening, Harumi could sense the incoming observation devices. She didn't know what it was, however, and only felt vaguely anxious.

"Is something the matter, Harumi?"

"Your Majesty... All of a sudden, I started feeling restless... I feel like we're in danger somehow... even though I have no reason to say that..."

Harumi tilted her head from side to side as she explained what she was feeling to Elfaria. She was confused as to why anxiety would creep over her in such a strange fashion for no apparent reason. She had only recently awakened as a magician, so she didn't yet know that her magical powers could affect her.

Is she just imagining it? Or is this the Silver Princess's powers?

Since Elfaria had her suspicions about Harumi, she immediately began thinking along those lines. And in order to confirm her suspicions, she came up with a proposal for Harumi.

"Harumi, you can use magic, can't you?"

"Yes, though I only learned to do so just recently..."

"Why not use a spell to search the surrounding area, then? If you're just imagining things, then this should help you feel better, but if danger really is approaching, it would good for us to know."

"You're certainly right there... Okay, I'll give it a try."

Harumi agreed to Elfaria's idea and decided to try using her magic.

What should I use...?

Harumi had a wide repertoire of spells available to her, and she had to find one suitable for scanning the area. While Yurika or Maki would know what they needed to use right away, a beginner like Harumi had a tough time figuring it out.

“What’s the matter?”

Seeing Harumi’s hesitation, Elfaria called out to her. Harumi blushed a little, but answered honestly.

“I... um... was just wondering what spell I should use...”

“That’s a good question... Since the enemy is from Forthorthe, it might be a good idea to look for metal. The gear the soldiers use is largely metallic.”

Weapons, armor, communication devices, cars, planes, and even spaceships. Pretty much all modern technology contains metal in one way or another. As civilizations develop, so does its use of metal. The two are inextricably related. That’s why Elfaria thought scanning the area for metal should reveal any enemies.

“Metal, I see... I’ll give it a try!”

Harumi knew a spell that could detect metal. More precisely, it was a spell to locate rocks, but it could be narrowed down to minerals, and then expanded to include refined metals. Harumi clasped her hands in front of her chest and closed her eyes to focus. She then called for Signaltin’s power and chanted a spell in Ancient Forthorthian.

“Gather, spirits of earth. Kneel before me and reveal your name. Speak, Lineage of Earth!”

Harumi flawlessly recited her incantation as if it were a song. Since it was in an archaic language, not even Elfaria, who was also an archeologist, could pronounce it that well. But Harumi spoke it as if she had been taught the language since birth.

The ritual language of Ancient Forthorthe... Could she have such perfect mastery of it just from having memories of it?

Elfaria had heard from Clan that Harumi had the Silver Princess's memories. However, Elfaria didn't think that was all there was to it. She couldn't shake the suspicion that there was something else, something surpassing human intellect, hidden within Harumi.

"...All right."

As Elfaria was contemplating that, Harumi completed her spell. In her mind, she could sense the presence of all kinds of metal around her. The framework of the cottage, the nails holding down the floorboards, the cables running inside of the walls. The TV, a mass of spun wires on the inside, appeared like metallic cotton candy.

"What is this, I wonder? Something is... flying?"

As Harumi's extraordinary senses expanded beyond the cottage, she detected something strange. A clump of metal the size of a volleyball was moving around a hundred or so meters away. Over the rest of the mountain, a flying piece of metal stood out like a sore thumb.

"It's not just one... There's two... No, three?"

"Did you find something?"

"Yes. I don't know what it is, but there are three lumps of metal about this size flying around."

Knowing that comparing them to volleyballs wouldn't make sense to Elfaria, Harumi held up her hands to indicate their size.

"Those are most likely scouting drones. They must be searching for me and Theia."

"Oh no! They'll find us at this rate!"

Even as they were talking, the three drones were approaching Harumi and Elfaria's cottage. At this rate, they'd soon find the cottage and scan the inside.

"Let's escape right away!"

"That's impossible. The scouting drones use sound, heat, optics, and radar to find their targets. If we exit the building, we'll be found right away."

The only reason they hadn't been found yet was because the cottage was preventing the scouts from seeing and hearing them. But if they went outside, there would be nothing shielding them from detection. Just like Harumi had quickly spotted the scouts, Harumi and Elfaria would stand out in the largely quiet and desolate forest.

"It's safer to stay hidden like this."

"But if those things come inside..."

If Elfaria fell into enemy hands, the efforts of the girls who were fighting even now would go to waste. Harumi racked her brain, trying to think of a way to protect Elfaria.

If we leave this cottage, we'll be found right away... But if we stay here, they'll eventually show up... And if we destroy the machines, the enemy will show up to investigate... That means we'll just have to wait it out inside the cottage, but... would that work against alien technology?

The drones would show up soon. And before they did, Harumi would need to think of a way to keep Elfaria hidden. To Harumi, who had lived a completely normal life up until now, this was an incredibly difficult problem to solve.

One drone detected the cottage as it was surveying its assigned area. Determining that the cottage was a high priority target for investigation, it hailed the other drones in the vicinity. Since it was obvious buildings were prime locations for people to hide, the drones were programmed to prioritize their search around buildings if they came across any. Once the three scouts converged, their roles were split up. One would stay outside to survey the entire building while the other two would head inside.

The two drones used lasers to cut open the wooden wall and entered without a sound. Inside they found signs of people, including a boiler that was still hot. Since it was alien culture to them, it took some time for the scouts to determine what it was and what it signified, but it was clear evidence that people had been here. And based on the circumstances, the chances of it being their target was high. The drones then began to examine the building in more detail.

"Ahahaha!"

Suddenly, a woman's laughter could be heard from a different room. Since the scouts had been given the order to find two women, one of them entered the hallway in response to the voice. Passing through a door and entering the hallway, the drone detected more sound from two rooms over. It was several men and women talking.

Hearing a woman's laughter and voice among them, the drone's AI prioritized investigating the source and moved towards the room in question. Once at the door, the drone confirmed that there were people on the other side through the use of its heat sensors. But it couldn't get any more details than that, so it extended a cable from its body and squeezed it through the gap under the door.

"That looks so great. I'd love to visit a place like that..."

Inside the room were two women with black hair. One was a girl in her teens, and the other was a woman who looked to be in her forties. It was only the two of them in there room. They were sitting on a sofa and looking at an ancient video device, a TV. The other voices had come from the video device, which the girl and woman were watching intently. They were each holding a mug with steam rising from it.

Observing this, the drone put all of the information it had together and came up with a logical explanation.

First it connected the heat from the boiler to the contents of the mugs. They were drinking something that required hot water. Next was the laughter from before. It belonged to the girl and woman who were happily watching the TV. Finally, there was the talking, which had come from the video device.

Discerning a logical explanation for everything, the drone lost interest in the two women. They were local residents, relaxing and watching their video device. That was the AI's conclusion. There was the possibility they were in disguise, but not only did their hair color not match, facial analysis had indicated they were completely different people.

The drone didn't have the time to bother with local residents. After retracting its cable, it began searching other rooms. There were no signs of other people in the cottage, and there were no signs anyone had run away, so the scouts

determined that their targets were not present. Upon reaching that conclusion, the two drones began to retreat back the way they'd come. They'd exit through the hole in the wall, and continue their search elsewhere.

However, as the drones passed by the room with the women, an alarm rang out from the two drones all of a sudden. They had been operating covertly until now, but after the alarm, they gave up all attempts to be stealthy.

Hearing that alarm, the two women inside of the room jumped up in surprise. Startled by the sudden sound, they stared at the door. The next moment, one of the drones crashed through the door and entered the room. Surprised by the strange metal machines, both women looked terrified.



But in the next moment, the drones flew through the room and right out of the glass window, fleeing the cottage. After joining up with the drone on the outside, all three flew off into the distance.

“What just...”

The girl with black hair looked out the window. There she saw the starry sky, and a particularly large blue meteor streaking through it.

“A meteor...?”

It was obviously artificial. The blue light it was emitting was not caused by friction within the atmosphere, but was a sign of the energy protecting it. Its long tail trailing behind it, the meteor was headed straight for the forest. And the scouts followed after it.

“Satomi-kun has descended...”

The girl, Harumi, realized what the meteor was almost right away. And why the drones had left. They had detected Koutarou descending from Blue Knight, and prioritized him over surveying the area. It also meant that Harumi and Elfaria had successfully managed to deceive the drones.

“W-We’re saved... I thought it was all over when they came into the room...”

Harumi felt all the tension drain from her body and sat down on the spot. However, her heart was still beating rapidly, and it would be some time yet before she calmed down.

“Your plan worked, Harumi.”

The older woman approached Harumi.

“Your Majesty...”

As Harumi looked up at the woman with black hair, her outline temporarily blurred as her appearance transformed. The woman standing before her now wore an expensive looking dress and a crown on her head. It was Empress Elfaria, one of the two women the drones were looking for.

“I was surprised when you said I had to hide because the scouts were coming, but your plan was a complete success.”

“I’m glad it went well.”

Seeing Elfaria’s calm smile, Harumi was finally able to smile herself. And remembering what she had done, she was relieved that they had survived the crisis.

Upon realizing that the scouts were approaching, Harumi’s first thought was to hide somewhere in the cottage. But she soon gave up on that idea. The scouts were using advanced Forthorthian science. She didn’t think she could completely fool all of their sensors. For instance, if they had heat sensors, they wouldn’t be able to hide at all. And in order to make the cottage look empty, they wouldn’t just need to hide, they’d need to cover any trace that they’d been there. Doing that in such a short amount of time would be difficult, even with the help of magic. So Harumi had come up with the bold plan of not hiding at all.

Harumi used magic to make Elfaria look like her own mother. She didn’t do anything more than that. She’d just hoped that a simple magical disguise would be enough to fool the drones into thinking it wasn’t Elfaria.

Using that plan, they wouldn’t need to cover their tracks. And it was certainly easier to change Elfaria than it was the whole cottage. But on the other hand, there was the risk that the drones might still discover it was Elfaria somehow. For all Harumi knew, aliens had a different body temperature, so they drones might be able to tell it was her just by their heat signatures. All in all, Harumi’s plan was a big gamble.

But fortunately, the drones didn’t gather data that detailed. They were pressed for time and didn’t want to be discovered by local residents. And then Koutarou showed up, which changed their priorities completely. Thanks to that, the drones had easily given up on Harumi and Elfaria and left the cottage.

So even though Harumi’s plan had been a gamble, it was the reason Elfaria was safe. Like Elfaria had said, it was a big success.

“I still can’t believe it went this well...”

“Lots of things are like that. No matter how hard something might look, when you give it a try, you just might find it to be surprisingly easy.”

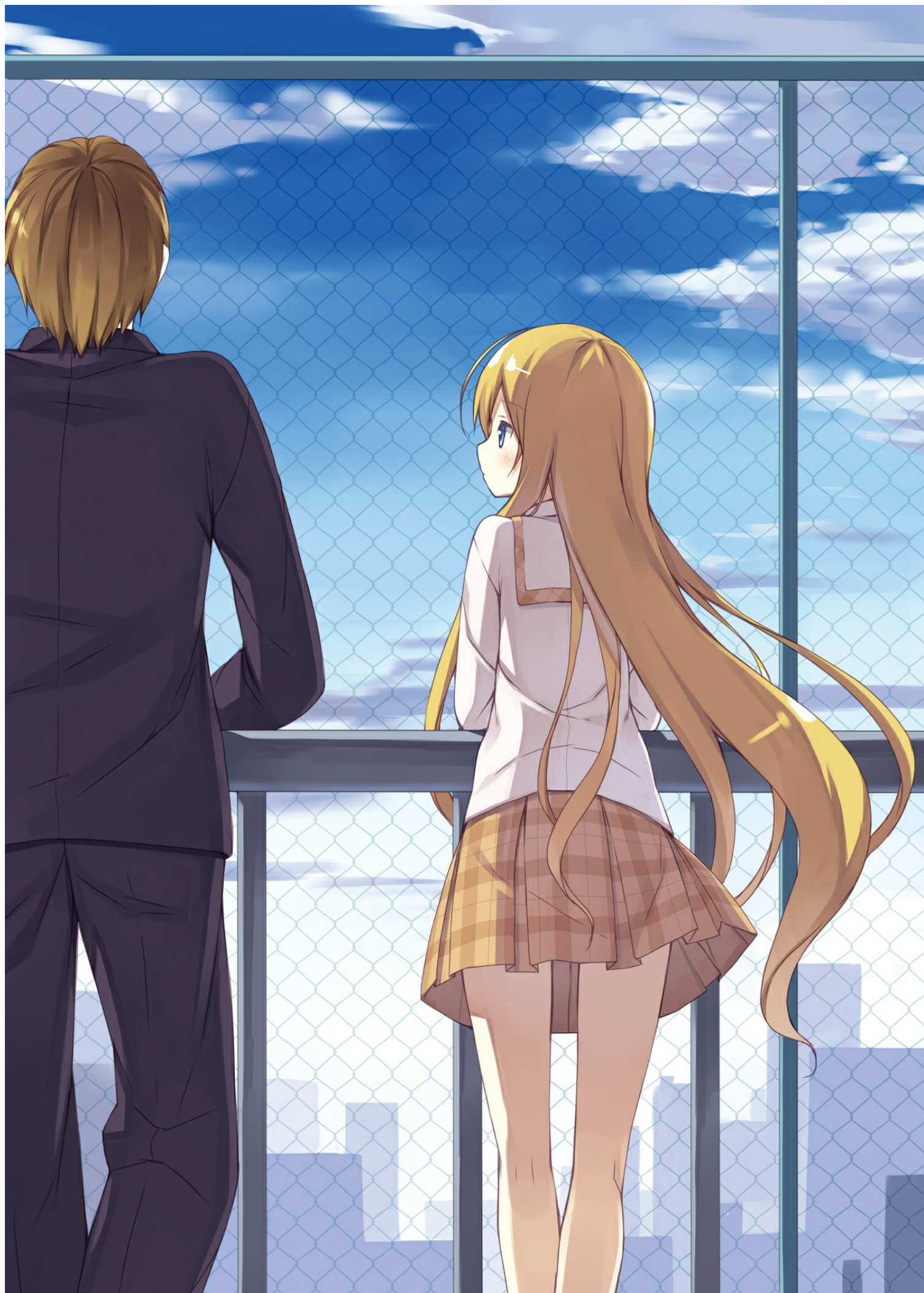






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Invaders of the Rokujouma!? Volume 13

by Takehaya

Translated by Warnis Edited by Morgan Dreher

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