

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

GENESISシリーズ

境界線 上の ホライズン

Ⅲ
申

電撃文庫



GENESIS Series
**Kyokai Senjou no Horizon III **

Complicated relationships abound among the nations and individuals set into motion in the French territory of IZUMO. What choice will Musashi make and what awaits them at their destination?

During the battle with Hexagone Française on IZUMO, Louis Exiv, future ruler of Europe, and Mouri Terumoto, his wife, join in. And finally, Mitotsudaira's mother, the extremely busy werewolf queen, enters the fray to bring in an age of the unrivalled mom!

Where will everyone be headed after the battle?

This is the sixth entry in the academy fantasy story that takes place in the Far East which contains medieval Japan and the other nations of the world.



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イラスト さとやす

か-5-35

GENESISシリーズ
境界線上のホライゾンⅢ(中)

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電撃文庫
 890



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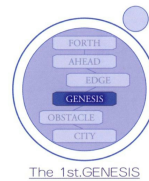


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*Consumption tax will be added to the price separately



Kawakami Minoru

Born January 3, 1975 and from Tokyo. Obstacle Overture, which is serialized in Dengeki Bunko Magazine, finally has a cellphone app! His very first cellphone is being used exclusively for debugging.

(Dengeki Bunko Novels)

City Series

Panzerpolis 1935

Aerial City

Tune Bust City Hong Kong <A>

Noise City Osaka <A>

Closed City Paris <A>

Panzerpolis Berlin 1-5

Virtual City DT <A>

AHEAD Series

Owari no Chronicle 1-7

GENESIS Series

Kyokai Senjou no Horizon I <A>

Kyokai Senjou no Horizon II <A>

Kyokai Senjou no Horizon III <A>

(Dengeki Novels)

Renshaou <A>

Illustrations: Satoyasu

Born in Yamagata and raised in Tochigi. "I'd love to look into the roots of saikyo-zuke." Oh, I typed it into a search engine and immediately found the answer. That's the scary thing about our information society.

horizon
on the Middle
of Nowhere
episode.03



horizon
on the Middle
of Nowhere
episode.03



Installation

installation



installation

■ Anne of Austria ■

Historically, she was Louis XIV's mother and guardian.

Between her husband's death and Louis XIV's rule, she acted as regent and was treated as the French monarch.

Her life was turbulent.

She was a Habsburg married from Spain to France, but at the time, France was in conflict with the two great Habsburg kingdoms of Germany and Spain, so it was not a proud time for Anne who could not speak much French.

As the Thirty Years' War and the Eighty Years' War against Spain continued, her husband Louis XIII and Chief Minister Richelieu had created an anti-Habsburg force and were wary of Anne.

They even left a will saying Anne's authority would be diminished upon Louis XIII's death and until Louis XIV came into power.

Then again, her friend Lady Luynes really hated Richelieu and Louis XIII and started a serious conspiracy that Anne got caught up in.

But after Louis XIII and Richelieu's deaths,

Anne moved the young Louis XIV from place to place to protect him from assassination while educating him as a king all the while. New Chief Minister Mazarin supported her rule and she supported him even as the fighting with her family in Spain intensified, so she really did give her all for France.

And during later internal conflict, she escaped Paris with Louis XIV, but it was their return that settled an uprising of the Paris citizens.

In a lot of ways, Anne is the mother of France, but the foundation of her image is the "wise and lovely woman" that her friends called her after her death.

She did not let her handicaps get the better of her, she went all out every single day, and she always made sure to do what she needed to do.

My Anne of Austria holds that sort of power in her small form and displays a "cuteness" you can't take lightly.

(Kawakami Minoru)

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And during later internal conflict, she escaped Paris with Louis XIV, but it was their return that settled an uprising of the Paris citizens.

She definitely had an overprotective side and she remained involved in politics even after Louis XIV's rule began.

Ultimately, Louis XIV began a new order after Mazarin's death.

She was driven out of politics at that time, but it is said she did not try to cling to power and instead lived out her remaining years in peace.

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(Kawakami Minoru)

Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon - Horizon on the Middle of Nowhere - 3B



—Where did you come from?

III

中

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

—Where did you come from?

Newspaper

Always Smiling
with the
Roi-Soleil



Ecole de Paris
Franceurope News



[Breaking News] Our Vice Chancellor is Here!

"Operation Roi-Soleil's Nude Descent" is underway between our king and Musashi on IZUMO, but this time, we will focus on our new vice chancellor, the Reine des Garous, who has made an appearance.

According to its provider, the above image shows her brimming with excitement while discussing the past. Seeing her wiggling back and forth with her daughter is apparently rare. And yes, she's married!



"Eh!? What is this!? I'm not part of this, so why are my painful memories getting caught in the crossfire!?"



"Oh, my, my. Don't get so embarrassed, Nate. Back then, you didn't hesitate to ask things like "if it feels good, then why would you scream?"."



"Eeeeeee! Y-you are the worst!"

•Roi-Soleil's Selected Links•

Ecole de Paris
My Royal Room
Former Delinquent
Reunion
What Are the Three
Musketters Like...?
Jobs for Mouri
Europa
Royal Doll
Savate
E-Journal
I'm Bored! Hm!?
Lady AM's Words
Hemisphere Printing

Top left: Always Smiling with the Roi-Soleil

Top right:

Ecole de Paris

Française/Europe News

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Nate: “Eh!? What is this!? I’m not part of this, so why are my painful memories getting caught in the crossfire!?”

Reine de Garou: “Oh, my, my. Don’t get so embarrassed, Nate. Back then, you didn’t hesitate to ask things like “if it feels good, then why would you scream?’.”

Nate: “Eeeeeee! Y-you are the worst!”

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[Jobs for Mouri](#)

[Europa](#)

[Royal Doll](#)

Savate

E-Journal

I'm Bored! Hm!?

Lady AM's Words

Hemisphere Printing

Far Eastern History

極東史

Far Eastern History

AIRI.A.D.U.S.T

First of all

There are many types of people: the impatient and the level-headed
The mothers and the daughters, and many, many more
Hopefully, viewing the history they all worked hard for will be of some help



III 〈B〉

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Chapter 28: Hostile Mother and Daughter P31	Chapter 51: Tangled Winged One in the Sky P625
Chapter 29: Mother and Daughter in a Place of Departure P49	Chapter 52: Pursuer in the Rising Wind P643
Chapter 30: Prince of the Cellar P87	Chapter 53: Neighbor at the Breakfast Table P673
Chapter 31: Traveler at a Crossroads P111	Chapter 54: Inexperienced Meeting Participant P691
Chapter 32: Gatherers in a Place of Meeting P127	Chapter 55: Viewer of the Interval P711
Chapter 33: Persuader in the Chaos P151	Chapter 56: Soakers in a Purifying Place P737
Chapter 34: Pursuer in the Forest P173	Chapter 57: Crow Master of the Inland Sea P769
Chapter 35: Traveling Adulteress P187	Chapter 58: Warrior of the Lightning Sky P791
Chapter 36: Agreement at the Table P211	Chapter 59: Victor of the Desperately Fought Sea P809
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Chapter 39: Usurper in a Place of Retrospection P301	Glossary P12
Chapter 40: Visitor in a Hard Place P317	Study: ●The Protestant Reformation● P172
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Chapter 42: Counterattackers in the Dark Forest P357	Study: ●Witch Hunt● P538
Chapter 43: Ruler of the Dark Forest P375	Study: ●Battlefield Diagram 2● P590
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Chapter 49: Bringer of Calamity on the Ship P567	

Illustrations: Satoyasu (TENKY)
Cover Design: Watanabe Kouichi (2725 Inc)
Book Design Concept: TENKY

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Characters



Aoi Kimi

Toori's older sister and worshipper of the god of eroticism and dancing. Fundamentally high-tensioned and selfish in practice.



Aoi Toori

Musashi Ariadust Academy's chancellor and student council president. Mr. Impossible.



Asama Tomo

Daughter of the Asama Shrine, Musashi's main shrine. Childhood friend and overall victim of Toori and Kimi.



Azuma

Child of the emperor and a half-god. All his abilities have been sealed and he lives on the Musashi.



Adele Balfette

From a vassal family that arrived from France. Glasses girl.



Itou Kenji

Cheerful incubus. Nude, bald, and muscular. Known as Itoken.



Ohiroshiki Ginji

Gourmet otaku with a Heart-sama style build.



Kiyonari Urquiaga

2nd special duty officer. Flying half-dragon. Hopes to be an inquisitor. Known as Uqui.



Shirojiro Bertoni

Treasurer. Young leading member of Musashi's commerce and industry guild.



Tenzou Crossunite

1st special duty officer. Ninja and errand-runner who always covers his face with his hat.



Toussaint Neshinbara

Secretary. Loves history, wants to be an author, and writes doujins.



Naomasa

6th special duty officer. Older sister type who works in the engine division. Smokes and laughs loudly.



Nate Mitotsudaira

5th special duty officer. Member of a knight family and inheritor of the Mito Matsudaira name. Half werewolf.



Nenji

Slime with about 3 HP. Manly.



Noriki

Laborer boy who supports his family. Clumsy martial artist. Silent and unsociable.



Heidi Augesvarer

Treasurer's aide. Shirojiro's partner. Has a white fox named Erimaki.



Hassan Furubushi

Calpis logo style Indian. Lives while eating and drinking only curry.



Persona-kun

Super macho man with a bucket helmet. Silent, strong, and kindhearted.



Horizon Ariadust

Toori's childhood friend and current ruler of Mikawa. Currently an automaton. Her emotions were taken as parts for the Logismo Oplo.



Honda Futayo

Former Mikawa student. Honda Tadakatsu's daughter. Uses a strongly old-fashioned speech pattern.



Honda Masazumi

Vice president of the student council. Diligent exchange student who arrived from Mikawa the previous year. Has various issues with her family.



Malga Naruze

4th special duty officer. Black-haired six-winged Weiss Hexen. Member of the manga club.



Margot Naito

3rd special duty officer. Blonde-haired six-winged Schwarz Hexen. Always smiling.



Miriam Poqou

Girl who stays in her room because she requires a wheelchair.



Mukai Suzu

Blind but always gives it her all. Acts as everyone's stopper.



Tachibana Muneshige

Former Tres España 1st special duty officer. Amore. Currently working to regain his inherited name.



Tachibana Gin

Former Tres España 3rd special duty officer. Muneshige's wife and possessor of cannon-style false arms. Fifty times.



Mary Stuart

Half-sister of English Queen Elizabeth. Well-endowed blonde. Living with Tenzou as his future wife. Owner of Ex. Collbrande.

Mishina Hiro

Granddaughter of the engine department's chief. Loves mechanical things. Naomasa's underclassman. Her name is pronounced Hiro, not Dai.

Mitsu

Toori and Kimi's grandmother who lives in IZUMO. An ether engineer.

Izumo Yuu

Executive Chairman of IZUMO. Head of the Izumo clan that manages IZUMO.

character

● Academy Affiliates



Oriotorai Makiko

High-speed battling teacher. Always wears a track suit.



"Musashi"

Automaton that supervises the Musashi and overall commander. Her sharp comments are hard to put up with.

Sanyou Mitsuki

Class 3-Bamboo's homeroom teacher. Looks up to Oriotorai. Somewhat sensitive and unlucky.



Sakai Tadatsugu

Musashi Ariadust Academy's president. Used to be a very able person but was demoted.

Yoshinao

King of Musashi who was sent from Hexagone Française. Has a veto right toward the academy and has the authority to manage Musashi.

● Hexagone Française



Louis Exiv

Hexagone Française's chancellor. Refreshing young man known as the Roi-Soleil. Has divine blood.



Anne of Austria

Hexagone Française's previous chancellor and student council president. Exiv's younger sister.



Henri of the Three Musketeers

Female combat-style automaton. Acts as the leader and as Terumoto's bodyguard. Uses large remote-controlled swords.



Mouri Terumoto

Hexagone Française's student council president. Delinquent type. Destined to be Musashi's enemy as leader of the Western Army.

Lady Luynes

Vice president and Anne's aide. Has Treasurer Mazarin as a double inherited name.



Mouri Sisters

Three automaton sisters who have inherited the names of three of Terumoto's uncles.



Reine des Garous

Turenne. Hexagone Française's vice chancellor. Mitotsudaira's mom.

● M.H.R.R.

Guericke

Provisional mayor of Magdeburg in the Protestant state of Saxony. Performed experiments known as the Magdeburg Hemispheres.

Luther

First name is Martin, leader of the Protestant Reformation, and representative of Protestantism.



Matthias

Representative of M.H.R.R.'s Catholics. Student Council President. Younger brother of Chancellor and Emperor Rudolf II.



Maeda Toshiie

Catholic representative. Has become a ghost and is peacefully between jobs as he spends his days with his wife Matsu.

● P.A. Oda



Sassa Narimasa

One of P.A. Oda's Six Heavenly Demon Army and Five Great Peaks. Delinquent and assault type.



Shibata Katsuie

One of P.A. Oda's Six Heavenly Demon Army and Five Great Peaks. Athletic type. Very troublesome after his recent marriage.



Takigawa Ichimasu

P.A. Oda ninja commander who excels at castle building and ship operation.



Kuki Yoshitaka

Leader of P.A. Oda's iron ship fleet. His job is to oppose the Murakami Navy.



Suzuki Magoichi

Gunner who joined P.A. Oda by betraying the Saika. Uses the rifle Yatagarasu.

● Other



Satomi Yoshiyori

Satomi Academy's chancellor. Gentle. Uses Murasamemaru and the god of war Yatsufusa.



Satomi Yoshiyasu

Satomi Academy's student council president. Small but does not cry. Uses the god of war Righteousness.



Sarutobi Sasuke

Sanada Academy Ten Braves #1. Uses martial arts and ninja techniques.



Kirigakure Saizou

Sanada Academy Ten Braves #2. Uses a wind movement technique.



Murakami Motoyoshi

Fleet commander sent from Hexagone Française to K.P.A. Italia. Opposes P.A. Oda as the leader of the Murakami Navy.

● Musashi

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Glossary

•**Ether Reactor:** A reactor that extracts and purifies ether from the air. Has a lower output than a ley line reactor, but is relatively safe.

•**Europa:** Hexagone Française's primary corporation.

•**Excalibur:** Has a first and second version.

•**External Blessings:** Blessings accumulated outside of oneself. Ether fuel is an example.

F

•**Fan Gang:** Qing brand. Durable but a bit rough.

•**Far East:** Name of the Divine States after the Harmonic Unification War.

•**Fino Alba:** K.P.A. Italian brand. Their use of springs is their selling point.

G

•**God of War:** A giant humanoid machine that people combine with to move.

•**Graduation:** No limit for nations other than the Far East. Far Easterners must graduate at 18.

•**Grande y Felicísima Armada:** Tres España's fleet for the Armada battle. Made up of cutting-edge ships.

H

•**Harmonic Territory:** Locations where the fallen Harmonic World Divine States unified with the real world while breaking apart.

•**Harmonic Unification War:** A war between the harmonic world residents and the real world (Divine States) residents after the destruction of the harmonic world. The harmonic world residents won and began a provisional rule over the Divine States.

•**Harmonic World:** A former alternate space that copied the Divine States. Preserved through ley line control.

•**Hexagone Française:** Mouri clan + France.

•**History Recreation:** Recreating the Testament descriptions to maintain the path the world takes.

•**Holy Spells:** Tsirhc spells. The Catholics are related to the Testament and holy individuals while the Protestants derive power only from the Testament.

•**H.R.R.M.:** Holy Knights Ironworks Guild. Primary corporation of M.H.R.R.'s Catholic principalities.

I

•**Inherited Name:** The name of a historical figure given to an appropriate individual for the history recreation.

•**Internal Blessings:** Blessings stored within oneself.

•**IZUMO:** The Far East's largest corporation. The headquarters for Far Eastern shrines and the corporation that built the Musashi.

A

•**Academy:** An educational facility. Used as the center of political and military power. Tend to have many branch schools.

•**Academy Rules:** The basic laws upheld between academies. Agreed to by the Testament Union.

•**Amako clan:** Former IZUMO land. Destroyed by Mouri and Hexagone Française.

•**Apocalypse:** The end of the world. 1648 when the Testament's history descriptions end.

•**ArchsArt:** England's primary corporation.

•**Armada battle:** A naval battle fought between England and Tres España. Tres España planned to land on England but their fleet was destroyed.

•**Artificial Apocalypse:** A compressed ley line distortion created in England's Avalon to research the Apocalypse.

•**ATELL:** The smallest unit of ether. Used for spells.

•**Avalon:** A space created in England to research the artificial Apocalypse.

B

•**Blessings:** The amount of ether needed for a human to exist for one hour. 3600 ATELL. Conversion unit for a spell's ATELL consumption.

C

•**Catholic:** The old mainstream version of Tsirhc.

•**Chancellor's Officers:** An organization led by the chancellor which leads the academy and performs work such as defense.

•**Contradiction Allowance:** The foundational ability of the world. Allows the simultaneous existence of all sorts of physical laws.

D

•**Divine States:** Former name of the Far East.

•**Divine Weapon:** A weapon that, unlike a normal weapon, has a unique ability.

•**Dunhi:** A religion. Focused on reincarnation.

E

•**Edel Brocken:** Magic brand. Location of headquarters unknown.

•**Eisenritter:** Primary corporation of M.H.R.R.'s Protestant principalities.

•**Emperor:** A divine individual who is said to control the ley lines using the Imperial Regalia in Kyou. Does not interfere with the world.

•**England:** Uses a floating island and does not control any Far Eastern land or Far Eastern daimyo.

•**Ether:** Component that makes up contradiction allowing space.

•**Ether Engine:** An engine that uses ether's space-altering ability. The effect changes based on the internal crest.

•**Ether Fuel:** Ether that has been purified into fuel. Used as External Blessings or for ether engines.

words

R

•**Religion:** Organizations or groups that worship a god or the Testament.

S

- San Mercado:** Tres Español brand.
- Shinto:** Far Eastern religion. Worships the Far Eastern gods and uses divine music spells.
- Shirasago Enterprises:** IZUMO's shrine brand.
- Sign Frame:** Spell device needed to use each religion's basic protection.
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J

•**Judge/Judgment:** Means "understood". Used by criminals.

K

•**K.P.A. Italia:** Association of Aki States + Union of Italian City States.

L

- Ley line:** The thicker of the pathways through which ether flows.
- Ley Line Reactor:** A reactor that extracts and refines ether from ley lines. Can easily cause ley line mutations and destroy everything within several kilometers if they explode. Due to their instability, they are banned by the Tsirhc religion.
- Logismo Oplo:** Weapons of mass destruction created on the motif of the seven deadly sins.

M

- Magic:** Folk spells currently under persecution in Europe.
- M.H.R.R.:** Hashiba clan + Holy Roman Empires.
- Mikawa:** Destroyed by the collapse of Lord Motonobu's ley line reactor.
- Mlasi:** A later non-Tsirhc religion that also worships the Testament.
- Mouse:** A spirit beast device to act as an intermediary between the Shinto religion and its musicians. Other religions use different names.
- Musashi:** Aerial city ship. The sole independent territory allowed for the Far East.



- Musashi Ariadust Academy:** The Far East's representative academy which exists on Okutama of Musashi.
- Musician:** A religion's worshiper.

P

- P.A. Oda:** Oda clan + Ottomans.
- Peace of Westphalia:** The peace treaty that ended the Thirty Years' War.
- Protestant:** A new style of Tsirhc created to escape the corruption of Catholicism and to adjust to the new age.
- Provisional Council:** Group of adults who act as bureaucrats toward Musashi's student council, chancellor's officers, and student committees.

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•**Qing-Takeda:** Combination of China and the Takeda clan.

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- Ether: Component that makes up contradiction-allowing space.
- Ether Engine: An engine that uses ether's space-altering ability. The effect changes based on the internal crest.
- Ether Fuel: Ether that has been purified into fuel. Used as External Blessings or for ether engines.
- Ether Reactor: A reactor that extracts and purifies ether from the air. Has a lower output than a ley line reactor, but is relatively safe.
- Europa: Hexagone Française's primary corporation.
- Excalibur: Has a first and second version.
- External Blessings: Blessings accumulated outside of oneself. Ether fuel is an example.

F

- Fan Gang: Qing brand. Durable but a bit rough.
- Far East: Name of the Divine States after the Harmonic Unification War.
- Fino Alba: K.P.A. Italian brand. Their use of springs is their selling point.

G

- God of War: A giant humanoid machine that people combine with to move.
- Graduation: No limit for nations other than the Far East. Far Easterners must graduate at 18.
- Grande y Felicísima Armada: Tres España's fleet for the Armada battle. Made up of cutting-edge ships.

H

- Harmonic Territory: Locations where the fallen Harmonic World Divine States unified with the real world while breaking apart.
- Harmonic Unification War: A war between the harmonic world residents and the real world (Divine States) residents after the destruction of the harmonic world. The harmonic world residents won and began a provisional rule over the Divine States.
- Harmonic World: A former alternate space that copied the Divine States. Preserved through ley line control.
- Hexagone Française: Mouri clan + France.
- History Recreation: Recreating the Testament descriptions to maintain the path the world takes.
- Holy Spells: Tsihc spells. The Catholics are related to the Testament and holy individuals while the Protestants derive power only from the Testament.
- H.R.R.M.: Holy Knights Ironworks Guild. Primary corporation of M.H.R.R.'s Catholic principalities.

I

- Inherited Name: The name of a historical figure given to an appropriate individual for the history recreation.
- Internal Blessings: blessings stored within oneself.
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- Musashi: Aerial city ship. The sole independent territory allowed for the Far East.

[First Starboard Ship – Shinagawa/Second Starboard Ship – Tama/Third Starboard Ship – Takao/First Central Ship – Musashino/Back Central Ship – Okutama/First Port Ship – Asakusa/Second Port Ship – Murayama/Third Port Ship – Oume]

- Musashi Ariadust Academy: The Far East's representative academy which exists on Okutama of Musashi.
- Musician: A religion's worshiper.

O

- Oat: A religion based on China's sages.
- Offering: Providing a god with something they will enjoy or Internal Blessings.
- Orei Metallo/Water: Ore or water containing ether. Can be used as ether fuel.

P

- P.A. Oda: Oda clan + Ottomans.
- Peace of Westphalia: The peace treaty that ended the Thirty Years' War.
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School Rules

Article 105

- Every academy possesses three protected territories known as territorial land, territorial airspace, and territorial waters.

Article 105 Line 1

- Every academy's protected territories are based on the scope of the Testament descriptions and ley line correspondence.

Chapter 27: Mother and Daughter in the Mist

CHAPTER 27

"Mother and Daughter in the Mist"



Why do you
Become so spellbound?
Point Allocation (Y-Youth...?)

Why do you

Become so spellbound?

Point Allocation (Y-Youth...?)

An island wrapped in mist floated in the sky.

This floating island extended north to south and was located in the air northwest of the island nation known as the Far East.

The north of the floating island contained a giant shrine bearing the company name IZUMO, Hexagone Française warships were docked to the west, and an aerial city ship named the Musashi was docked to the east.

The two fleets to the east and west were using IZUMO's central land to battle.

However, the Musashi had produced thick mist between them which hid the people and gods of war.

On the Musashi end where the mist was thinning out, a certain confrontation was underway.

A woman held a boy wrapped in a chain and a girl faced her.

They were mother and daughter.

The mother went by the title Reine des Garous and the daughter...

"Now, what will you do, Nate? ...Or should I call you Mitotsudaira Nate as you are an official member of Musashi?"

The Reine des Garous held the boy forward by his shoulders.

His pants were lowered down to his knees.

"Yes, this boy is Musashi Chancellor and Student Council President Aoi Toori, isn't he?"

The mother laughed and spoke to her unmoving daughter.

"If you won't do anything, I'll take him for myself."

“Hold on. Now, that’s what you call a genuine monster. What am I supposed to do about this?”

A voice filled the sky above the sea far north of IZUMO. In an aerial ship’s open-air command center, a Hard Wolf crossed his arms and looked at a sign frame.

He was Drake, 5-1 of the Trumps, and he scratched his head in annoyance.

“It was an accepted fact that the Reine des Garous had been hunted down. ...I even believed my grandfather and the others about that.”

He thought while speaking.

...Although they didn’t talk about it much since Loup-Garous aren’t really the same thing as Hard Wolves like us.

“I wasted my time feeling bad for the Loup-Garous.”

“Testament,” said the bitterly smiling mermaid in the sign frame.

Cavendish opened a new sign frame to gather the official statements from Hexagone Française.

“Hexagone Française gave a report saying the Reine des Garous had been hunted down and they enacted a policy to protect the Loup-Garou race in order to secure a fighting force for themselves. The noble family that became the base of the Mitotsudaira family – that is, the minor noble who took a Loup-Garou as his wife – was one of the families given protection at that time. Because the wife later became pregnant with Nate Mitotsudaira, she was called to Paris where she was treated kindly and served Anne of Austria.”

“In that case,” said Drake. “When the Reine des Garous got pregnant, she must have made a deal to become vice chancellor during Louis XIV’s rule in exchange for protection during her pregnancy.”

There was likely more to it than that, but it was not worth worrying about any further.

He guessed he would eventually hear about it in the form of rumors.

“Drake, just how powerful is the Reine des Garous?”

That question came from Hawkins in his swimsuit and scarf on a different sign frame, but Drake shook his head.

“She’s trouble.”

“Even more than you?”

“That’s a good question,” he said with a bitter smile.

He was unsure whether Hawkins was trying to flatter him or analyze the enemy’s data.

“Listen. Both of us may be lupine races, but Loup-Garous have some differences from us, especially the pure-blooded ones. Hard Wolves like me are either humanoid wolves or a fusion between wolf and man, but Loup-Garous are the wolf-possessed.”

"Do you understand?"

“Wolf-possession is a spiritual phenomenon. Instead of a human going mad, it’s a wolf spirit possessing a human. And...”

“And?”

“Just like standalone spirits, spiritual beings can easily surpass the abilities of those who live in the world of men. Do you understand? Don’t let how Loup-Garous look fool you. They’re no different from a spirit with a human form. And the moonlight fully draws out their true nature, turning them into a monster. They were the gods of fear itself in ancient times. After all, the Loup-Garou is the oldest monster in Europe.”

Drake asked “do you understand?” again.

...She really is a lot of trouble.

It was said his race came from the people who were transformed into a wolf by a Loup-Garou but could not return. To put it another way, the Loup-Garous were their origin.

“The Loup-Garou race is pretty amazing.”

He recalled what his grandfather had once told him.

“If they possess a human and devour other humans long enough, they

eventually gain a true spiritual body. Once they can leave their host and still influence the real world, they've reached the knight class. When those intermingle, they give birth to a Loup-Garou with an actual body that can continue to devour humans and become a noble class. Above that are the royals and the highest royal is the queen. After all, it is women who control the moon. That is the peak of the Loup-Garou race. Although, I'd heard they had almost entirely died off due to killing each other after the split between England and Hexagone Française for the Hundred Years' War."

He scratched his throat fur and swore.

"This is just like with Joan of Arc. After all, the previous Reine des Garous controlled the left wing group which was opposed to the ogre named Gilles de Rais."

"What does that mean for this confrontation?" asked Cavendish.

Drake shook a hand as if to say "don't worry about it".

"It's not worth recording. Just eat some meat and sleep. After all, any records are going to be worthless. She has ether defenses that can deflect any and all attacks and godlike strength. And this Reine des Garous took a human husband and hid her identity, so..."

Yeah.

"She's clearly a capricious person. She'll kill if she feels like it or let them live if she feels like it. Rules don't work with her. There's nothing to record except that 'it's over'. That's how I see it, anyway."

On the battlefield, the confrontation between mother and daughter continued without the slightest movement.

However...

"Um, mother?"

Mitotsudaira suddenly spoke up and her mother tilted her head.

"What is it, Nate?"

“Judge.”

Mitotsudaira nodded at her mother’s reaction, but...

...What am I supposed to say?

Her mother was capricious and she had often been manipulated by her even as a child.

Plus, there was one definite fact when it came to her mother.

...If you anger her, it’s all over.

She knew that fact firsthand, so she took a slow breath and tried not to provoke her mother.

“We are a...normal Loup-Garou family, aren’t we? So...why would you suddenly joke about being the Reine des Garous?”

“Oh, my.”

Her mother backed away in surprise.

As always, she went overboard in expressing her emotions. The smile on her face was the same as the one Mitotsudaira remembered.

And with the same expression, same smile, and same tone she remembered, her mother spoke.

“Now, Nate. Think about this carefully. A normal Loup-Garou family would never pass down an item like those silver chains.”

Asama: “Is she implying anyone who didn’t pick up on that is an idiot?”

Mal-Ga: “So accepting what your mother tells you at face value makes you an idiot? That’s a pretty harsh rule.”

...Shut up.

She used shared voice settings when out on a mission like this, so she hoped it would not leave any unwanted records behind.

“Um,” she began. “Well, it is true you told me the details of the silver chains, but...but I always thought that was because an ancestor was part of the main force back then. I never thought...”

“Testament. This new revelation is quite sudden, isn’t it? Try to stay focused, Nate.”

Marube-ya: “That’s quite the amazing mother you have there.”

...I agree with that. In fact, why hasn’t she changed at all after so much time?

However, her mother brought a hand to one cheek and sighed.

“To be honest, I was planning to have some fun on my deathbed by surprising you with this. Yes, just like my mother with me.”

Still restrained by the chains, the chancellor turned toward her mother with a tilt of the head.

“Nate Maman, how surprised were you when you heard?”

“Testament. I said I had never heard anything about that and that she must be joking, but she said that a normal Loup-Garou family would never pass down an item like those silver chains. She even lectured me on the verge of death.”

The entire Musashi side reacted with comments about how similar the entire family was and Mitotsudaira began to sweat uncomfortably. The chancellor nodded a few times, but she had to wonder why he turned toward her with a curious look in his eyes.

At any rate, her mother sighed again.

“But our identity could not be revealed to the public, especially in this generation. Anne of Austria, Hexagone Française’s previous provisional Chancellor, ordered it. According to her, if the other nations learn that the Reine des Garous is on the people’s side in Hexagone Française, it would lead to political maneuvering. After all, it was the non-human unit that overturned the power balance between England and Hexagone Française during the Hundred Years’ War.”

“Then,” asked the chancellor. “Why did you identify yourself as the Reine des Garous now?”

“Testament. Because Hexagone Française has completed its preparations toward becoming the ruling nation.”

The Reine des Garous formed words while convinced she was explaining the obvious.

“Hexagone Française has great national power, a powerful king, and prosperity ensured by the Testament descriptions. With those things, the Reine des Garous is no longer a source of political maneuvering *against us* but a source of political maneuvering *against other nations*. That is simply how powerful a name it is.”

...This is only natural.

The world of men obeyed the Testament Union and the Testament descriptions. Since the Reine des Garous had left the forest and joined the world of men, she had no objections on that front.

...But that means I will use this to its fullest.

Wolves gave their all when having fun and when eating.

“But,” said her chain-wrapped prey with a tilt of his head. “Doesn’t that mean the nation has put a collar on the wolf?”

The meaning affected her more than the words themselves.

“ ... ”

She felt her own blood throb.

Ahead in the mist, she heard her daughter gulp and sensed the girl’s pulse racing.

...You understand, don’t you?

A werewolf was a wolf, they would eat when hungry, and they would otherwise choose to eat or play on a whim.

They were a free beast. The Reine des Garous was their representative and treating her like a pet in a collar was a definite provocation.

Had her daughter realized that?

However...

“ ... ”

That daughter remained motionless.

She held her breath, took a defensive stance, and did not move. She did nothing.

And so the Reine des Garous had the same thought once more.

...You do understand, don't you?

Yes.

...After so long, you have realized anew that you cannot stand up to me.

It was not even a question. The girl had dropped her hips down in a low stance, but that was no different than a beast curling up its tail in preparation to flee.

That meant her daughter was no obstacle.

Therefore, she looked away from the girl and faced her prey. That boy was the one who had defenselessly asked that provoking question.

How interesting, thought the Reine des Garous while asking a question of her own.

“Listen. You just accused me of wearing a collar.”

But...

“But if that is a bad thing, then why did you put a collar on my Nate?”

“Eh?”

Mitotsudaira looked toward the chancellor and heard his questioning tone.

She saw him turn toward her.

The action was so quick that she lowered her head without thinking, but his gaze was on her neck and the black leather choker she wore there.

She had worn it for a long time now and had decided to always wear it from now on, but to her mother...

“When I last saw you eight years ago, you were not wearing that. From the scent, I take it you have been wearing it for five or six years now, Nate.”

“No, um, this wasn’t from the chancellor.”

“Are you saying you turned yourself into a pet?”

Her mother did not even look at her and she could not help but think back over what the choker meant.

It was true someone else might see it that way.

...But this is...

She hesitated and lowered her head, but a sudden voice reached her from directly ahead.

“Wait a sec, Nate Maman. You can’t just berate her like that while treating a choker like a collar. Plus, a collar doesn’t immediately mean a pet either. Surely you know that.”

“M-my king...!”

“Sure,” he said with a nod to her.

H then spoke speaking to her mother while wrapped in chains and with his pants pulled down.

“Some people are just into that kind of thing. Surely you know that.”

Mitotsudaira saw her mother give her a look of disbelief. *Eh?* she thought before grasping what he meant.

“Wh-what are you talking about!? I am not ‘into’ that kind of thing! Don’t give me that look, mother!”

“No, um, Nate? Even if I can’t, well, understand other people’s preferences, I will still respect them. Um, yes, that should cover it.”

“That’s right,” said the chain-roll next to her mother. “Besides, just look at her, Nate Maman. Don’t you think it’s suspicious just how desperate she is to deny it?”

“N-now that you mention it, you’re right. Maybe giving her the silver chains was a mistake. I never thought it would give her a bondage fetish.”

Her mother and the chain-roll both looked back at her and nodded.

“You can wait until you’ve calmed down, but try to explain it to me sometime. Not what exactly your preferences are, but how you turned into such a fetishist. ...The lecture comes after that.”

“N-no! You have it all wrong!”

“Yeah, that’s right, Nate! It isn’t a fetish! You just happen to like it!”

She wanted to hit him with something, but she could not provoke her mother.

...B-but isn't the chancellor turning against me here?

“Well, whatever,” said her mother with a shrug. “My current state is not a collar.”

She formed a small smile as she continued.

“It is repayment for my blessing.”

“Her blessing?”

That question came from the loading entrance on Tama’s starboard side that had become a giant hole now that the bridge was gone. Asama tilted her head among those gathered on the edge to see.

“What blessing did the Reine des Garous receive?”

She was answered by Kimi who stood with Horizon. She crossed her arms and shook her shoulders in a laugh.

“Heh heh. Isn’t it obvious? What is the one true blessing a woman can receive from another?”

“Marriage?”

“Heh heh heh. Silly girl. Something another can take from you is not a true blessing. A true blessing is something only that person can give you and that not even that person can take from you.”

Kimi looked down into the still thick fog.

“That blessing would be a child.”

“Yes,” said the Reine des Garous with a smile. “Previous Chancellor Anne allowed my relationship with my husband. And when I had my child, I was given a blessing.”

She turned to her daughter who was still looking back in a human-style defensive stance.

“So Nate, you have Anne to thank for your birth. When I was pregnant, she placed me by her side as a maid and urged me to speak with her about so many things.”

She heard an impressed “oh?”, but it did not come from her daughter.

It came from the chain-roll next to her. He faced her with a smile and spoke in a tone of understanding.

“So your situation now is in thanks for the fun and happiness from back then.”

“Testament. ...I am the Reine des Garous, so I can live a wild and enjoyable life on my own. However, there are a few people who have made me desire them and enjoy myself with something other than strength. There is my husband, Anne, and...”

There was no need to say any more at the moment, so she nodded toward the chain-roll.

“It was a fun and happy time, and that is why...”

She nodded again, recalled many things about the past, remembered making it through those things, and spoke to her prey.

“Yes, this rebellious non-human will use her strength to pay back for everything she was given.”

So...

“We are enemies here.”

Chapter 28: Hostile Mother and Daughter

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"Hostile Mother and Daughter"



It is something
That is never buried
Point Allocation (Individuality)

It is something

That is never buried

Point Allocation (Individuality)

“Now then,” said the Reine des Garous. She grabbed the Musashi Chancellor’s shoulders and pointed him toward her daughter. “I will be taking him, okay?”

“Eh? W-wait! Wait, mother!”

What was she going to say now? A fight would be meaningless, so there was no reason to respond. And so the Reine des Garous opened her mouth and spoke a single word.

“Nate.”

Her daughter stopped, she heard the girl gasp, and she even detected the silver chains on her arms drop limply to the ground.

...Oh, my.

This was more than she had expected. *How cute*, she thought.

“Listen, Nate. Who said you could come inside Hexagone Française?”

“Well...”

Her daughter froze up even more and the prey in her left hand shook as he turned toward her.

“Wait, wait. ‘Come inside’? You don’t have to use such a lewd-gah!”

She held the boy’s jaw in place, lightly twisted, and used her thumb to push two teeth inward. Her daughter’s face paled just before she gathered her strength.

“W-wait! Please wait, mother!”

Her wording had grown more polite, so...

“Testament. I will wait, Nate. But I would prefer you call me mamma.”

Or...

“Would you prefer we *do things like we did back then?*”

She took a breath, smiled, and gestured to the edge of the land port with her chin.

“Nate, Bizen IZUMO is right over there, isn’t it? And that is where you once left the Musashi and-...”

“Please stop!!”

The girl cried out to reject the past.

The Reine des Garous looked at her daughter.

She was a lovely child. Her two clenched fists trembled and her emotions were running full blast, but the weak outer surface alone was still quite adorable. But did she understand that herself? Her head drooped and she transformed the motion into a bow.

“I’m sorry, mother. ...I disobeyed your instructions and descended to the surface.”

“Since you apologized, I will forgive you. Now, Nate.”

The Reine des Garous gestured toward the Musashi with her chin and encouraged her daughter with a smile.

“Head home. Everyone is worried about you.”

“U-um, mother?”

The Reine des Garous gave her a puzzled look and her daughter pulled back a little and took a deep breath.

“Please return...my king.”

...Oh, dear.

She had to know that was impossible.

“I don’t think so.”

The Reine des Garous embraced the boy from above, smiled again, and faced her daughter.

“I will be taking him for myself.”

“For yourself? Um, uh...mother?”

You don't have to look so scared. And besides...

...You understand, don't you?

“Testament. It's been a while since I *ate* a young boy. I've been holding back since you were born, but...yes, this is war. My position as Reine des Garous has been released, so I can act accordingly.”

“W-wait! Mother! What would father say!?”

“I already have an excuse in mind.”

She was perfectly prepared for that, so it would all be okay. And with that thought, she embraced the boy again.

She pressed her body against his.

“You would prefer it this way, wouldn't you?”

She was plenty confident in herself as a woman. As spiritual beings, Loup-Garou would not age past how they viewed themselves, so they would always remain in their best state.

...It's been a while since I played this game.

Long ago, the royal girls had played a game of tempting young men at night and then eating them.

Due to the Loup-Garou ability to possess, the men would also experience the joy of the Loup-Garou sating her hunger and so would die blissfully even as they were eaten.

However, the expansion of human land had destroyed the forests and the Loup-Garou had lost their homes. Many of them had slipped into human society and many of them had resisted and been hunted down. As a royal, the Reine des Garous had remained in the forest she inherited from her mother, chosen to leave everything up to fate, and ultimately found herself where she was now.

...It might be nice to remember old times again.

“Being eaten by me will feel wonderful. Every last drop of blood will feel joy.”

When she asked “okay?” the boy quickly shook his head.

“D-don’t be ridiculous! Wonderful or not, if I’m eaten, it’s all over!”

“No, it isn’t. You will become a part of my own flesh and blood. Think about it carefully,” she began. “Instead of continuing with your boring life, wouldn’t it be more fun to spend forever and ever as here, or here, or even down here on my body? In other words, you can live inside my underwear until the day I die. You can literally become an erotic sound effect. Wouldn’t that be a better life than having to deal with tests and work?”

Horizon spoke while sipping at a cup of tea she had pulled from somewhere.

“Wouldn’t he first become poop in that life?”

“H-Horizon! Wait! You need to be more careful about what you say, even if you are surrounded by horrible people!”

“Oh? Asama-sama, are you living in a fantasy world where you do not poop? We can’t have that. Mankind must face reality. Isn’t that right, Masazumi-sama?”

“Why would you ask me!?”

“Maybe because of your relationship with the sewage?”

“Sewage? Sewage?”

A brown algae creature poked its head out of the ditch and Horizon gave it a thumbs up before continuing.

“This is what you call an extreme carnivore culture.”

“Things are getting a little noisy in the distance, but whatever.”

The Reine des Garous asked her chain-wrapped prey a question.

“How about it? Will you be eaten and become a part of someone as strong as me?”

“Hold up.”

The boy gave her a serious look and then lowered his gaze to her chest.

“If I do that, could a boob sommelier like me actually become boobs? I could make history’s most awful sound effects like *plupluuump* or *boiiiiing* while announcing that I literally am boobs!?”

“Testament.”

The Reine des Garous replied without even a shred of doubt.

“You can make all the boinging sounds you want. ...Yes, those sound effects are true beauty!”

“I see. ...Hey, Nate! This married woman is damn persuasive!!”

“Ehhh!? That’s enough for you!?”

“Heh hehn,” said the Reine des Garous as she embraced the boy and looked to her protesting daughter.

...I’ve won!

With confidence filling her heart, she placed her chin on her prey’s head.

His hair felt nice as it tickled her throat, so she gave a quiet rumble in her throat and looked down at her daughter.

“He is mine now.”

Her daughter groaned and voices reached them from the Musashi.

“Horizon! Wait! You can’t just rip out the wall for your soap opera expression! L-look! I have an imaginary wall right here.”

“Asama-sama, would you accept an imaginary arrow for your standard shooting routine? And Masazumi-sama, you would not accept an imaginary bad joke, would you?”

“Don’t tap my shoulder and ask me that!!”

I hope that environment wasn’t too stressful on my daughter, thought the Reine des Garous.

Meanwhile, the Schwarz Hexen cautiously floating in the air nearby waved a hand back and forth.

“You don’t have to worry about all that. Listening to it will just rot your brain.”

“Testament.”

She nodded along with her daughter and then faced that daughter once more.

“Now, Nate. I’m sorry, but you cannot stand up to me in any way right now.”

She pulled the boy toward her again and her daughter’s eyebrows rose a little, but the girl still spoke in a desperately persistent tone.

“Th-that isn’t...”

...Why don’t you realize that you don’t stand a chance from the moment you have to say that?

The Reine des Garous sighed as a mother.

“Honestly,” she began. “It is truly unfortunate, but you really do take after your father. ...Like with that flat chest.”

“That has nothing to do with-... My king? Why are you staring at my chest with a look of newfound discovery?”

“W-well, if what she says is true, then it means there aren’t any huge boobs in your future, Nate. And in that case, it’s pretty sad how you sometimes read those odd articles in the women’s magazines or gently massage your underarms and whatnot with such a serious look on your face.”

He gave the girl a pitying look and she panicked. She began waving her hands toward the Musashi.

“I-Is this being broadcast across the nation!? Cut it! Cut it now!!”

“Mito is taking the cruel rules of our national broadcasts too lightly. And Toori-kun really does notice the small things, doesn’t he?”

Toori-kun sits in the back seat by the window, so he has a good view of everyone else, thought Asama.

“Anyway,” she said after a breath. “Mito is sacrificing herself to buy us some time, so what can we do?”

“Judge,” nodded Naruze. She narrowed her eyes to look at Naito through the mist. “Neshinbara is apparently doing something. ...I’d like to fire on her using my Weiss Fräulein, but I would have to use a homing shot and she could probably avoid it from this range. It would be best if Margot could fire directly on her, but she can’t from her position.”

Beyond the fading mist, the Reine des Garous rested her chin on the idiot’s head.

Asama then heard their enemy’s voice through the mist.

“Heh heh.”

Her clear and delighted voice carried nothing but emotion.

“Musashi’s chancellor and student council president is quite cute, too.”

Asama and everyone else began glaring into the mist.

“Now then,” muttered Asama as she turned to the others.

There, she saw Tenzou who had just arrived with Mary.

“You handle this one.”

“Okay,” agreed the ninja. “Am I the only one that sometimes thinks Toori-dono has a very heroine-like side to him?”

“Wow. Tenzou-kun just came out and said what I’ve been wondering if I should say.”

“Eh? What’s that? You want me to draw out a storyboard like that? How about with Kimi?”

Naruze turned to Kimi but stopped. Confused, Asama too looked to Kimi and saw her staring into the mist with her arms crossed.

“...”

“K-Kimi-dono, stop silently glaring into the distance! It’s kind of scary!!”

“Eh? Oh, sorry.” Kimi slapped her cheeks to correct her expression and then faced the others. “Anyway, this is the first time I’ve seen Mitotsudaira’s mother, but what about the rest of you? Do you know her?”

Is that true? wondered Asama just before she remembered.

She had seen Mitotsudaira's mother long ago in Bizen IZUMO, but at the time...

...Kimi and Toori-kun had a certain issue to deal with.

"That's right. You and Toori-kun didn't meet...or rather, didn't see her."

"It's my first time seeing her too," added Masazumi with a tilt of the head. "I'm not sure what's going on, but Mitotsudaira looks pretty scared."

"Yes," agreed Kimi. "Her mother is on an entirely different scale from her. I wonder if she'll end up like that in the future. But if her breasts grew like that, we might have to start calling her Boingdaira."

"That sounds like some kind of giant monster."

"I see," said Horizon with a few nods of her head and a glance into the mist. "Boing + Daira? Such an oxymoron.^[1] I have determined Mitotsudaira-sama is surprisingly skilled."

"I can hear all of you!"

They all responded to the protest from the mist by lowering their voices to a whisper.

Asama then looked into the neighboring long block and sighed.

"I know he's having a meeting to come up with a countermeasure, but can't Neshinbara-kun hurry up?"

Masazumi checked the sign frame Tsukinowa produced.

"He should be ready in two more minutes. I just hope this situation can continue that long."

"Judge," agreed Mary while looking toward the Reine des Garous with slightly raised eyebrows. "My sister was the constant radiation type. ...Oh, and I'm talking about ether. But this woman has condensed her ether to an extraordinary extent. I think only a high-level divine weapon or spell attack would affect her."

"So this would be a lot like trying to defeat Elizabeth-dono?"

Asama and everyone else groaned, but Kimi looked up first.

“That woman is certainly extremely confident. Not only is she taking my foolish brother hostage, she’s wrapped him up for takeout. But if this is a crossroads in the battlefield, it is quite an extravagant one. She is holding Hexagone Française back in order to lecture her daughter right in front of the Musashi and M.H.R.R.”

Kimi laughed.

“How prideful. But she is only the vice chancellor, so she’s lacking the vainglory to go with it.”

“Now then,” said the Reine des Garous again while using just her right arm to lift the chain-roll over her left shoulder. “I need to make some preparations, so you go and make friends with the others, Nate. Make sure you don’t dishonor our family name and make sure you enjoy your youth.”

She took a step to leave, but her daughter suddenly looked up.

“Mother!”

She heard chains moving. It was a slow and heavy sound, but it was a definite sound of resistance.

No beast would overlook that, so the Reine des Garous faced her daughter.

“Oh, dear. What is this? Are you disobeying me?”

She found it so cute how her daughter froze at that question. The girl knew very well she did not have the strength to oppose her mother, but that was why her mother wanted to forever protect her with her own strength.

“Nate, in my current mood, I think I will fulfill my duty.”

“Are you going to eat my king?”

...*Oh, my.*

She found that funny and could not help but laugh a little.

“You can’t do anything one way or the other, so why are you trying to fill yourself with despair?”

“Kh,” groaned her daughter.

It was obvious she was desperately trying to resist and she might as well have been vainly struggling, but that only stimulated the Reine des Garous’s protective instincts as a wolf.

...After all, I would be cooking her up and eating her with sauce if she wasn’t my daughter. She would be in trouble if I didn’t protect her.

Her daughter tried to move her arms, but...

“Silver chains?”

The chains did not move and it was obvious why. It was a truly unfortunate thing.

“Those were originally mine, Nate. Surely you know what that means.”

“...”

The daughter gasped and the mother’s smile only grew.

...She really is so very cute. There’s so much to teach her and so much she doesn’t know.

So...

“Nate, if you are going to oppose me, then come at me seriously. However...”

The Reine des Garous took a breath and faced her.

“It does not look like you have reached that level of conviction yet. So hurry... Yes, at the very least, move beyond where you were eight years ago. When you do that...”

How should she put this? Saying she would “lend you my power” was not quite right. Lending even a small fraction of it would split the earth apart.

She then remembered a Far Eastern phrase that had recently become popular among judo practitioners.

“Yes, I will lend you my chest.”

“You really are her mother, aren’t you!?” shouted everyone on the Musashi.

“Eh?”

Mitotsudaira saw her mother grow a bit flustered.

...*Wow.*

For some reason, wonder filled her mind and then her mother tilted her head toward the others.

“U-um, I simply said I would lend my chest to assist with my daughter’s training.”

A stir ran through the group once again.

“They really are the same,” said someone.

“She said it again! She really said it again!”

“Werewolf families get along really well, don’t they!?”

“That’s what I call ultra easy!”

Mitotsudaira did not entirely understand the last comment, but that seemed to be the case. This was certainly being broadcast across the nation. She felt like she was not the one at fault this time, but she could not stop her awkward sweat. She also had no idea if her family’s honor would survive this encounter.

...*Ah, I really am terrible at ad-libbing!*”

The chancellor then spoke up from her mother’s shoulder.

“Hey, Nate Maman, could you hold me the other way? Have me face Nate.”

Her mother looked confused but complied. His legs had been facing Mitotsudaira before, but her mother quickly adjusted his position so she could see his face. Her mother then pointed that face toward her.

“Do you want to give Nate a final farewell?”

“Eh!?”

The chancellor looked utterly surprised by that and he thought for a moment before continuing.

“Eh? No, um, I just like this way better... Oh, could you point me down a little more. Yeah, and inward.”

“My king, don’t tell me you only wanted to look down on my mother’s chest.”

“What!?”

The idiot looked up with a look of shock that she would even she suggest such a thing.

“Of course that’s what I wanted!”

“Your expression and your words don’t match!”

Mitotsudaira lowered her head and looked away from the idiot who began whistling to avoid the issue.

“Mother, I sometimes want to kill a certain gentleman, but is that due to my human side falling behind?”

“No, it is perfectly fine, Nate. Only the worst guys will compare you to another woman. ...Look, Nate doesn’t have this kind of volume.”

“Y-you are the worst mother!!”

Her mother laughed and suddenly narrowed her eyes.

“Stay perfectly still. This is for your own good,” she said. “You are my daughter, so I will not eat you. But next time, I will do more than crush you like I did last time. After all, it will be the second time.”

Mitotsudaira tried to say something back, but...

...Eh?

She detected a certain scent.

...This is spell gunpowder!

The Reine des Garous heard and smelled gunfire.

She heard thirty-six distinct sounds and smelled spell gunpowder.

It was a nostalgic scent. As the Reine des Garous, she had inherited a vast forest from her mother, but it had been disturbed by the cultivation and wars brought on by the expanding human population.

...And when I came to declare my natural right to the land, I smelled this scent.

She had also smelled it when warriors had tried to travel through the forest in wartime or when they were defeated and scattered across the land.

She had not smelled it in a long while and it was not a bad scent. After all, it always led to flesh and blood.

Her ears captured a sound.

Countless guns were fired from hidden positions. The bullets likely had spells applied to affect a Loup-Garou.

She thought this was an excellent tactic because a hunter had lost the moment he showed himself to the beast.

A human was no match for a beast and this multiple sniper attack obeyed that rule.

However...

“This is a diversion, isn’t it!?”

She realized the enemy’s true purpose. If the enemy was thorough enough to prepare a unit of thirty-six snipers...

...They will naturally send in an additional attack!

That additional attack arrived from almost directly behind her. Sudden speed rushed in from back and to the left. That was her blind spot due to holding the Musashi Chancellor over her left shoulder.

“Bind! Tonbokiri!!”

Chapter 29: Mother and Daughter in a Place of Departure

CHAPTER 29

"Mother and Daughter in a Place of Departure"



What can never catch up to anything
But can constantly grasp it?
Point Allocation (Gaze)

What can never catch up to anything

But can constantly grasp it?

Point Allocation (Gaze)

Futayo saw the enemy's back in the center of her vision.

She did not hesitate to release Tonbokiri's cutting power, but she did not stop her charge.

...This enemy is dangerous!

After all, she had detected Futayo's approach yet had not made any battle preparations. That meant she already had something prepared.

"...!?"

Futayo saw a group of silver panels.

They expanded from the Reine des Garous' hair like unfolding origami.

The panels formed countless boxes which created a structure of their own. The structure seemed to spread its arms and stand tall in an instant.

...A giant cross!?

The silver cross was three meters tall and it stood before Futayo as if supporting the Reine des Garous.

The air burst without warning and Tonbokiri's cutting power was destroyed before reaching its target.

Futayo did not even have time to gulp.

Tonbokiri's cutting power had previously been neutralized when Muneshige had hidden the blade or when Walter had hidden the target with his gravity sword, but this was different. Instead of hiding the target...

"She destroyed the power!?"

"Testament." The Reine des Garous' smiling voice reached her from beyond the cross and shaking hair. "When two divine weapons are used against each other, their effects will collide. Just as your cutting affects an entire area..."

The parts of the cross glowed and a panel of bluish-white light quickly rotated in the central empty space. As the rotation accelerated, the cross's weight clearly increased.

“My silver cross is a striking divine weapon. Destroying everything in an area might take some effort, but it can destroy your cutting power with a diagonal counterattack, much like breaking a blade. ...I have practiced hitting back attacks like yours in the batting center.”

She gave a splendid backhand swing of the cross hammer with her right hand.

It was a swift attack and Futayo could not even hear it slicing through the wind. Its path was so fast and natural that it felt more like it had suddenly been placed in a new position instead of swung there. But...

...Tch.

Futayo could not stop. Due to the speed of her charge, she could not immediately brake.

And so she tried to use Tonbokiri's extension function to jump over the cross being swung in from the right.

“Not there,” said the spear.

The shaft had previously been destroyed by Narimasa of P.A. Oda, so it was gone.

I lost track of that sunglasses guy in the mist, but I really wish he hadn't done that, she thought.

Meanwhile, the silver cross arrived.

The Reine des Garous heard a sound in the instant before the silver hammer struck the samurai girl.

It was the sound of the spear tip being thrown toward the back of her head.

Why would she throw away her weapon to attack?

“Is she prepared to take my attack to hit me!?”

Had she compared the spear tip and blunt strike and decided it was worth it?

...No!

The Reine des Garous realized what the enemy was after.

The samurai girl was not targeting the back of her head. Her attack was directed at...

“Her Chancellor!”

Futayo threw Tonbokiri with enough force to kill the Chancellor.

She knew this enemy would not react otherwise.

The enemy was trying to take away that half-naked chain-roll, so Futayo had concluded he was an important hostage or prey. Whether she was going to eat him or whatever else, someone known as the Reine des Garous would find it humiliating to have someone else kill her prey.

She was sure to avoid the strike to protect that prey.

...And if she does not, too bad. I am not clever enough to cover for that as well. Besides, my ruler is Horizon-sama.

“But...this should work!”

It did.

The Reine des Garous bent forward and stepped away from Futayo to duck below Tonbokiri.

She moved a half step away and that half step kept the cross hammer’s rotation that much further away, so Futayo took a step with her right foot.

“...”

She leaped toward the left of her enemy and ran around the woman.

Tonbokiri stalled in the air, but she grabbed it just as heavy gunfire from the Musashi tore into the enemy.

Also...

“Mitotsudaira-dono!”

Futayo shouted and spun toward the Reine des Garous in midair with

Tonbokiri at the ready.

...I can bind the cutting power here!

Mitotsudaira broke free of her motionlessness when Futayo called her name.

She heard the word that defined only her.

“...!”

Her mind grew clear and the core of her body seemed to return.

...Judge!!

She spoke in her heart and began to move, feeling like she was breaking and remaking her body.

She gathered breath in her gut, gathered strength in her knees, and had only one thing to do: pour strength into her silver chains and strike her enemy from four directions at once.

Her mother was an enemy. Having decided that, she did not hesitate to pour strength into the chains once more and launch them.

But...

“Kh...”

Everything was heavy.

Her own movements felt slow and the chains’ movements appeared delayed.

She had noticed how slow she was quite a bit recently; but at the moment, she was filled with tension, impatience, and...

...The fact that I’m defying her!

That simple act placed even more pressure on her.

Even the flow of time felt heavy. Each instant seemed to stretch on and on without end. It felt like completing an unpleasant assignment, working on homework in one’s worst subject, or being home alone with nothing to pass the time.

She was defying her mother.

She had never once defeated her mother. No, that was long ago. It had been eight years since she had last defied her. She had only been around ten at the time, so she had thought things might be different now.

...That's what I thought...

But she had been wrong.

Something seemed different between them on a fundamental level.

She could not tear off and throw such a gigantic piece of the crust's metal frame and she was not a pure Loup-Garou. She was a half-human who could not even transform.

Long ago, she had tried to bite into a piece of metal like her mother and had cried when she had been unable.

What had her mother said to comfort her back then?

This was surely the same yet also different. She could not do the same things as her mother.

...But she won't try to comfort me now.

They had parted ways eight years before.

The afternoon sky on that day before summer had been a lot like the one here.

She had been taught that she was different from her mother on that day. And now...

"Nate," said her mother with the Chancellor over her left shoulder. "Watch this."

...Eh?

Watch what? she wondered just as Futayo cried out from an upward striking pose to the right.

"Bind, Tonbokiri!"

Mitotsudaira saw it.

To the right, Futayo turned back toward Mitotsudaira's mother and fired Tonbokiri's power.

The Musashi was to the left and smoke rose from the spell gunpowder of the sniper unit.

However...

...What?

Her mother had supposedly been evading in front of her, but the woman was gone.

She was no longer there, but...

"Mito-tsan!! To the left!!"

She turned and saw her mother's hair swaying to her left and a little behind her.

"...Eh?"

She did not understand what had happened.

She could guess that her mother had moved there.

...But when?

She could guess that her mother had moved with tremendous speed.

...But how?

She could not even guess what had just happened.

"Nate."

Her mother spoke to her after avoiding both the gunfire and the cutting power.

"You move so very slowly. ...Perhaps you take after your father."

"...!?"

She shuddered.

Her mother had done more than point out the weakness she had noticed recently.

...She doesn't have this weakness!?

The answer was obvious. After all...

“Evading like this is easy. Yes, any Loup-Garou can do it.”

Impossible, thought Mitotsudaira. *I've never once done that.*

In order to protest, she prepared to turn around, but she suddenly found her mother right in front of her.

She did not know how her mother had moved so quickly, but the woman had definitely avoided the bullets, cutting power, and silver chains with instantaneous movement.

“Now, then.”

She turned the silver cross toward Mitotsudaira.

“Show yourself, Argent Croix.”

A moment later, an impact struck everything.

Ether performed a spatial strike.

The source of the destruction was the cross in the Reine des Garous' right hand.

That cross transformed.



First, the short arms raced down the side of the long axis.

The short arms were cocked much like a crossbow, they shot back at even greater speed, and the glowing panels rotating inside them lost their light.

However, the light inside the long axis grew. But instead of using the ether to rotate the glowing panels, it created a stake of light.

“Stab, Valkyrie Marteau.”

Like a large crossbow, the bottom of the spear fired a stake of light into the air. The power of the impact covered one hundred and twenty degrees in front of the Reine des Garous, an area that included Futayo and Mitotsudaira.

The stake of light was worn away in about two meters as if it had hit something. Instead, it produced a great cutting sound, a vibration, a slight glow, and...

“...”

Everything within a fifteen meter radius was struck.

Futayo, Mitotsudaira, and her silver chains were all affected equally.

“Kwah!”

Futayo was saved for a variety of reasons: she had sent herself into the air, she had faced her opponent, and she had held Tonbokiri vertically in order to use its cutting power.

However, she saw something as she was instantly blown backwards.

“Mitotsudaira-dono!!”

The girl had received a direct hit.

The attack had smashed down the surface enough for it to sink down everywhere within five meters of the Reine des Garous.

Mitotsudaira’s entire body had been knocked to the side and embedded in the ground.

“That cross is not a striking weapon! Is it a short-range cannon that seals a

striking power inside!?”

“Testament,” replied the smiling wolf queen beyond the gale of destruction. “Supposedly, it was originally used as the pedestal used to bind an angel. It suppressed the angel’s power and fired itself down into the crust. Just like the silver chains, my mother’s group stole it from the scene of its use and remade it. The bearer of the cross receives the angel’s divine protection and anyone who tries to crucify that bearer is nailed to the ground in their stead.”

Futayo rotated once in midair and entered her landing pose.

...She’s too far away.

She tore into the ground as she landed, but she had been sent twenty meters away.

Meanwhile, the enemy moved. With the silver cross in one hand, she approached Mitotsudaira who was doubled over on the ground. The impact seemed to have affected her equilibrium because she only trembled and did not try to move even as the woman grabbed at her throat.

“Mito-tsan!!”

Naito took action in midair.

Naito used the silver chain wrapped around her broom to pull Mitotsudaira away.

...This could be bad if her chain supply devices are set to let the chains freely pull out!

But the chain grew taut as she tugged. Realizing it was working, she picked up speed and prepared to drag the girl along.

However...

“This is the problem with leaving the chains connected.”

Naito saw the Reine des Garous swing her silver cross downward. She struck the obelisk on the back of Mitotsudaira’s left shoulder as if swinging a golf club.

“Take that.”

The obelisk and the base of the chain supply device came off and flew toward the Musashi with the chain trailing behind it.

“Eh?” said Naito; because she knew how heavy Mitotsudaira’s obelisks were, because it loudly stabbed into the Musashi’s armor, and because...

“Wah!”

The bending of the chain created sharp acceleration. Its tail end pulled wildly and affected the movements of the broom.

“_____”

Mitotsudaira saw the chain pull Naito’s broom and slam it into the Musashi’s lower armor.

...This isn’t good.

She knew she was tripping up the others.

She tried to get up, but the core of her being trembled and she could not gather her strength.

“...”

She tried to lift herself on her hands and arms, but she could only shake and crawl along the ground.

“It may have been too soon to give you the silver chains.”

Every few words, she heard a metallic sound and felt herself shake.

She felt it again.

“Could you quiet down for a bit?”

As she tried to get up, something pressed down on her. She knew what was happening.

...The silver chains!

Her mother was removing the silver chain obelisks. She felt the shaking of the obelisks being removed and heard the crashing and clanging of the chains. The obelisks were being thrown into the Musashi.

She could not see it herself while being pushed face down into the ground, but the sound told her the obelisks were stabbing into the ship's armor. She knew her mother was strong enough to do that.

She felt it would be better to deflect them using gravitational control than to allow damage to the ship, but "Musashi" must have decided they could not lose the 5th Special Duty Officer's weapons.

Her senses somewhat returned to her and she realized her shaking had reached several centimeters.

"Kah..."

It almost seemed her tears were forced out. The pain, impacts, and a great variety of emotions forced them out; but before they had finished flowing, she heard a voice.

"Nate."

Someone grabbed her leg.

"You are covered in dust from your life with humans."

She realized she had been lifted up, she saw the sky, and she saw her mother's hair below her.

"I need to beat it off of you."

She slammed into the ground.

The Reine des Garous' beating did not end with a single blow. As if striking dust from a piece of furniture, she slammed Mitotsudaira into the ground again and again.

Asama cried out when she heard and saw it beyond the thinning mist.

"We need to stop her!"

However, everyone in the loading entrance shrank down and fell silent. All of them stared into the mist with their eyebrows raised and Asama knew why they were so silent.

...There's nothing we can do?

Futayo could not stand up to her, Toori had been taken hostage, and even Mitotsudaira, their close-quarters attack specialist, had been captured.

There really is nothing we can do, she thought.

“B-but!”

As soon as she said that, Kimi stood in front of her and shook her head.

“Calm down, Asama. I didn’t see it, but this is the same as eight years ago, isn’t it?”

“B-but! This is very bad in a lot of different ways!”

We need to stop her, she thought again and prepared to say something.

“Calm down!”

Kimi jabbed a hand into the center of the shrine maiden suit covering her chest, spreading her breasts apart.

Asama spent several seconds staring down at the opening created by the internal pressure.

“Eh? Ah... Kyaaaaah!!”

But Kimi frowned with her hand stuck between Asama’s breasts and began moving her fingers. Asama cried out at the ticklish feeling and the idiot’s sister tilted her head.

“Huh? What? You don’t keep flint and charms in here?”

“No! !! Don’t! ...Wait! Stop! Take out your hand! Don’t feel around for the reverse taper on the bottom!”

“Wait. What is this? The pressure is so strong I can’t-...”

As soon as the idiot’s sister realized she could not remove her hand, her expression loosened.

“Ha ha ha ha! Wow. I hit the bull’s eye here!”

“Y-you!”

“Can you two stop outdoing my doujinshi?” asked Naruze.

She then helped in Naito who staggered inside after letting go of her broom.

“More importantly, what are we going to do about this?”

That question helped Asama calm down a bit.

...We haven't given up.

Everyone wanted to do something. And...

“I think we can manage this. ...We aren't the same people we were eight years ago.”

Someone walked out from the long block further inside the ship.

It was Neshinbara and he pointed at Masazumi who was sitting by the wall.

“As long as Futayo-kun is investigating the situation down below, I want to make another suggestion.”

...Another suggestion?

Wondering what that was, Asama and everyone else turned to Masazumi.

Masazumi nodded and gave the answer.

“Negotiations and ransom money, right?”

Masazumi had Tsukinowa open a sign frame displaying the appropriate information. It described a long-practiced tradition.

“In Europe, important prisoners of war are bought back with money. After all, a lot of European nations were connected by political marriages or family lines, so a careless execution could make an enemy of every nation involved and could lead to your own important people being killed in revenge if they were taken prisoner.”

“It came from the idea that war was meant to bring down another nation's power, not to kill its people,” said Neshinbara.

“Judge,” agreed Masazumi. “So we should be able to request Aoi's return in exchange for ransom money. As long as it doesn't violate the history recreation and as long as it's based in historical rules, Hexagone Française can't ignore the suggestion. The Provisional Council is already working on it and has made the request. But...”

How would it turn out?

“From what I’ve heard, it’s hard to say whether that Reine des Garous will obey the human rules, so...”

“We need to plan for the worst, Honda-kun.”

“Judge.”

Masazumi nodded and looked to Kimi and Horizon.

“In the worst case, Horizon’s position as Vicereine will make her our temporary Chancellor and Student Council President. I am confirming that now with my authority. That should work until we reach the next port. We just have to say we lost our Chancellor and Student Council President en route.”

An especially loud sound came from outside. Mitotsudaira had gone completely limp after being slammed against the ground countless times and the Reine des Garous had just thrown her down even harder.

“I see your tears have finally stopped.”

She held her daughter up by the neck.

Heat filled Mitotsudaira’s entire body.

The repeated impacts with the ground had completely confused her inner ears and her vision was shaky too. Even sounds seemed to stick and distort deep in her ears.

...U-um...

Her brain shook and she could not form thoughts properly. She did not know why exactly this was happening to her. No, she did know, but...

...There’s nothing I can do even if I do know.

Only helplessness filled her heart.

It did not matter what she did. Even if she struggled, fought, moved, or stayed still, she could not hope to oppose this enemy. Even ignoring it would only lead to being found and beaten.

But...

...Ah.

Something different happened.

A glove-covered hand reached between her choker and neck and it lifted her.

“Now, then.”

Her mother’s voice seemed to stick in her ears.

“You understand, don’t you?”

She was unable to ask what and she felt there would be no point in asking even if she could.

Her mother was cruel. After all, there was no need for her to understand. Whether she did or not, she could not hope to oppose the woman.

And so she did not even try to understand. She simply obeyed and went along with it.

She could only leave all of the decisions to her mother.

...That is safest.

If she assumed she could never oppose her mother and only her mother, she could receive absolute peace of mind. As a child, she had defenselessly followed her mother without knowing where they were going and she could receive that same absolute peace of mind here.

Her mother must have understood that because her sticky voice spoke up once more.

“Nate?”

Just as in the past, she admonished her daughter after calling her name.

“Nate, you understand that you must do as I tell you, don’t you? Then let me repeat something I once said: Nate, do as you are told.”

After all...

“You may think you are acting as a knight when you help this boy in his game of world domination, but I stand in the way of that goal. And I can easily crush

what you and this supposed King you believe in are trying to do.”

...That's right.

I can't stand up to her, she thought.

And as long as an opponent like that stood in their way, they would eventually fail.

“See? You cannot stand up to me no matter what you do, Nate. Isn't that why you spent eight years without setting foot on Hexagone Française territory?”

Her mother laughed, shook her with a comment of “right?”, and held up the prey on her left shoulder.

“But, well...”

She sounded almost impressed as she shook the prey.

He had lost consciousness, so he limply followed her movements.

“Honestly, I can't believe an obedient child like you would come down here to save this boy. ...I'm sure you thought I wouldn't notice or that it didn't count because it was just for a moment.”

She bent her arm to grab his jaw in her hand and she casually pulled his face toward her.

“Nate, you did nothing wrong. It was all this boy's fault. He knew nothing of our difference in strength, so he probably thought he could use you to pick a fight with the world. If only he had known my Nate is a good girl who likes flowers.”

So...

“If it wasn't for him, you wouldn't have to think any of these ridiculous things.”

Mitotsudaira gasped when she heard her mother.

“...!”

Her mind did not clear and her body still refused to move, but...

...No!!

A single thought did fill her mind and tears of denial spilled from her eyes. She tried to voice that denial, but the breath that escaped her lips was not even a voice.

Her attempted cry spilled weakly out just like her tears.

“Ah...hhh...”

However, her mother asked another question without nodding.

“Do you want to save this boy’s life?”

Mitotsudaira’s shaking body managed a trembling nod, but her mother did not nod in return.

“Then,” she said. “Then leave Musashi, Nate. I will have you transferred to the Far Eastern academy in IZUMO. You can bring an end to this all by staying here until graduation. Then you can live in the new Far East as the inheritor of the Mito Matsudaira name.”

Her mother moved her hand from his face to his throat.

“Now, if you understand, then say it. Say you will save his life by withdrawing from all of this.”

“Ah...”

“Now,” she urged again. “This is your last chance to save him.”

Mitotsudaira realized she had no questions inside her.

...She may be right.

She did feel this was her last chance.

She could never stand up to this opponent and neither could anyone else. This boy, who was everyone’s King as well as her own, had been captured and was about to lose his life.

.../...

In the past, she had caused everyone a lot of trouble and worries.

If she had once brought trouble and was only a hindrance now...

“You will do anything for this boy, won’t you?”

Her mother grabbed her choker and shook her.

That was right. She had started wearing the choker after deciding to give all of herself to him. So...

“I...”

Once she finished speaking, she would have to remove it.

Her lips trembled and she did not want to say these words, but...

“I will...”

“I will?”

“I will...save my...”

“Your King’s life.”

“My...King’s...life...”

No, she thought with tears in her eyes, but her mother shook her again.

“Just add ‘by withdrawing’ and you’re done. That’s all. Just say it.”

If she did not say it, he would be lost. If she did, he would not be. And yet...

...*No*...

But when her mother shook him by the collar and showed her his limp form, her heart sunk. Her mother gave a smile with the ends of her eyebrows lowered and spoke the inviting words.

“If you do not say it soon, he will wake up.”

No, she immediately thought. She did not want him to see her like this, she did not want him to realize she had been unable to protect him, and she did not want him to hear what she was about to say.

I have no choice, she told herself and she opened her mouth while making countless silent apologies.

“By...”

Her body shook from her sobs.

“With...draw...”

Suddenly, a sign frame opened next to his face. It came from Asama and displayed Horizon’s face.

“Toori-sama, a married woman’s breasts are right in front of you.”

“Whaaaaat!?”

The idiot woke.

Still dangling from her mother’s hand, Mitotsudaira opened her eyes wide and faced the chain-wrapped boy. Even with the pressure on his neck, he looked around and ultimately down at her mother’s chest.

“Ohhhhh, it’s true! And zoomed in, too! Nice one, Horizon! ...Wait. Why am I wrapped in chains? I’m being tortured and broken first thing in the morning!? That’s a new one! A-and my pants are pulled down! W-was I taken advantage of? ...Wow, this married woman’s boobs really are huge.”

Mitotsudaira could not keep up with what he was saying, but was that because her mind had yet to clear or because she had poor conversational skills?

At any rate, the problem was still in progress. After all, her mother was far too healthy.

And to emphasize that this was her turn, the woman lightly squeezed the idiot on her shoulder.

She nodded and looked between Mitotsudaira and the idiot who was flailing like a fish.

“He has infected you, hasn’t he?”

“N-no, um, mother? My symptoms are still much less severe than everyone else’s.”

Almost Everyone: “Don’t bring us into this!”

Mitotsudaira ignored the complaint from everyone on the Musashi.

...They’re all here.

She knew they would be doing more than just watch and that was enough. Meanwhile, the idiot spoke in front of her.

“So what is this, Nate? A family meeting or something? But, y’know what? Don’t just go along with what your mom says. You can be too nice sometimes. Besides...”

She listened.

“You’re supposed to protect me, not just let me live. ...You need to fight and protect me. I’m weak, after all.”

She felt like she could finally manage to breathe when she heard that, so she cooled her lungs and...

“Judge!”

As soon as that word left her mouth, she was released from her mother’s grasp.

She was thrown through the air to put some distance between them.

Ah, she thought in midair as her mother adjusted the Chancellor’s position.

“That is very interesting, but...you cannot have him back. He is mine.”

“Mother!? What do you mean he’s yours?”

He belonged to the Reine des Garous.

...She isn’t taking him for Hexagone Française!?

That meant they could not pay a ransom for his return. This was the worst possible case in which it was up to her mother’s mood.

Gold Mar: Ohhh! Did she just confess to the Chancellor?”

Asama: “Horizon! Horizon! You really mustn’t use the external walls for that!”

Wise Sister: “...”

Mal-Ga: “Kimi, you’re really scary when you glare silently like that.”

...S-someone really has to do something about this!

However, Mitotsudaira could not move her trembling body; so her butt landed on the ground and she rolled.

She wanted to get up, run, and save her King, but...

...I'm too slow.

She recalled her mother's previous movements.

She could not move that quickly, but her mother could. She wished she could, but...

"—————!"

Her body remained limp as she collapsed onto her side.

"Kh."

She felt pathetic and useless.

...I have to do something.

As soon as she thought that, someone appeared from the mist remaining in the central area to the northwest.

It was a dark man who moved like a blade.

...Sassa Narimasa!?

"That kid's my target, Reine des Garous!"

Narimasa raised his speed with Israfil already expanded on his hands.

He traveled forward and to the left in a gouging arc straight toward the Reine des Garous.

...Now this is interesting!!

He had only meant to introduce himself, so he had never expected to chance across such an interesting opponent.

That opponent did not even turn toward him. She had dropped the daughter dangling from her right hand, but the Musashi Chancellor remained on her left shoulder.

She was trying to show her confidence and it pissed him off.

...But that's perfect after coming across someone like the Reine des Garous!

He had heard the rumors. She was a legendary being, so he wanted to attack her and see how his own strength stacked up against a legend.

“I’ll be your opponent!!” he shouted as he charged toward her.

Meanwhile, she laughed quietly.

“You took your time getting here. Don’t tell me you were waiting for an opening.”

“Don’t be stupid! I wouldn’t do that! I lost sight of that spear girl I was fighting and then ran off in the wrong direction!! I saw a white aerial ship, but it turned out it wasn’t the Musashi!!”

In the central land that was still covered by a thin mist, Exiv brought a hand to his chin with Terumoto by his side. He looked behind him where he could see the white of his flagship, the Pension Versailles.

“Was he the one that stampeded through the mist and back a bit ago?”

“Don’t ask me. I don’t know the guy.”

“Lily Flower!”

Narimasa launched an open-handed jab with his right hand toward the Reine des Garous.

White lily-shaped emblems blossomed and shined on his forward-stepping foot, his supporting foot, his knees, his waist, his sides, his shoulder, his elbow, his wrist, and his fingertips.

“...!!”

The ground here had already been packed down by the silver cross and Musashi’s 5th Special Duty Officer, but his foot packed it down even further. However, that gave him even more solid feedback from the earth below.

A moment later, he felt as if his hand was piercing through the air.

He felt the tip of his jabbing hand sink into cloth and shake wildly from the air resistance, but he forced his wrist forward with his shoulder and elbow.

“Uraahh!!”

His hand slipped through the air. A great sound passed through the bottom of his forward-stepping foot and penetrated the ground where it sounded even louder. His hand was directly targeting the Reine des Garous’ face. It was a surefire attack with no trickery behind it whatsoever.

It happened in an instant.

To Narimasa, it looked like the Reine des Garous had simply taken a step forward.

...Is she shifting the best spot to target!?

Just before he fully extended his arm was the most crucial point for him, so the force of his strike would drop if she shifted that timing.

However...

“No!”

He saw her evade downwards.

She suddenly dropped down as if sinking.

...Did she escape!?

No.

That was not the case. She was making a counterattack against his right-handed jab.

She was trying to attack him, so she had lowered down in order to...

“IZUMO just...”

It broke.

The clincher had been the Reine des Garous’ step forward.

The color of metal could be seen where her silver cross had packed down the earth. That was the frame of IZUMO’s crust and she had stepped there to begin her counterattack against Narimasa.

“—————”

She had immediately sunk down about sixty centimeters.

That attack was the clincher.

As her right foot sank into the giant metal frame, she spoke to Narimasa.

“The frame I threw, the Musashi’s preparations to leave, the Roi-Soleil’s descent, and your stomps had created a number of distortions in the frame, so the crust had already been warped in this area.”

The crust frame was long, but its movements required large-scale management and it did not allow for instantaneous distortion.

“The rest is simple.”

Faster than she could breathe, a vibration raced up from the ground below. Like stones colliding underwater, she heard the muffled but definite sound of something splitting.

A crack was forming and that crack was splitting IZUMO.

It ran south to north.

“...!”

IZUMO snapped apart.

Asama saw it happen from the Musashi’s loading entrance.

Down below, everything blurred like looking at countless overlapping copies.

She knew why: IZUMO was shaking and beginning to split in two.

...It’s going to break!!

This isn’t good, she thought as a great rumbling filled the land below.

An alarm blared and the mist completely vanished from around the Musashi.

At the same time, the crust frame ripped away and the land port area began to tilt. Countless sounds of snapping metal came from IZUMO as that land port area began to crumble away.

“Wah!!”

Down below, Futayo managed to leap onto the bottom of the Musashi while looking worriedly toward Mitotsudaira. The outside world shook. The crust had not merely shifted. The entire frame had been destroyed, so the shaking crust accelerated as if something had thrust it outwards.

“The Musashi land port block has lost 72% of its primary couplings and is tilting! At this rate, the break will reach central IZUMO! Therefore...”

IZUMO gave their conclusion.

“The Musashi land port and the surrounding area will be explosively purged!! Over!”

The shockwave of the explosive blast accentuated the shape of the crack racing south to north along the ground.

The ten kilometers of crust below the Musashi land port were being explosively purged.

The entire area burst.

However, the action did its job. The ten kilometer land port shook and slowly but surely began to fall, but the Musashi remained floating in its place.

An explosion occurred directly below. It was meant to smash most of the falling crust before it reached the ground.

The fragments fell into forests and valleys below. The area was mostly comprised of Hexagone Française’s harmonic territory.

The crust crumbled as it fell there. The land port’s released torii-shaped gantry cranes, as well as the dock’s inner walls and bases, were all detonated and torn to pieces as they fell.

The IZUMO side performed rapid stabilization to make up for the absence of the land port’s weight. The eastern side had lowered, but they assumed it would spring back up once the weight was lost, so the western side began to ascend. This also distanced the floating island from the air currents and explosions caused by the falling fragments, but someone shouted out within the shaking and wind that had already occurred.

“Damn her!”

Narimasa had been hit by a chopping strike that had taken out the right temple of his sunglasses and a chunk of skin. He stood atop the broken frame instead of the crumbling edge of the land.

“Did I hit her!?”

A silver-haired woman stood on a broken piece of earth that was falling and wrapped in wind two hundred meters away. She still held the Musashi Chancellor wrapped in chains on her left shoulder and she raised her right hand.

She smiled as she showed off the torn right sleeve of her uniform.

She herself was unharmed, but Narimasa showed off his teeth.

“I should’ve gone a little to the right, huh!?”

He laughed, stood up, and pulled a comb from his pocket. He pressed the comb against the injury on the right side of his head, getting blood on it.

“I’ll get you next time!”

He forcibly pulled the comb through his hair.

At the same time, wind exploded down below him. The plummeting crust, frame, and other parts had fallen far enough from IZUMO to be detonated.

In the falling explosive blast, the Reine des Garous gently walked along the footing that crumbled as it fell.

She had safely captured the prey on her left shoulder, she had managed to enjoy a battle while she was at it, and...

“Nate.”

She looked over her shoulder where the crust frame was continuing to fall apart far overhead. Her daughter had been on that frame, but what had happened to her?

...No, I should not be asking what “happened to” her.

The Reine des Garous corrected her thoughts. The appropriate question

about her daughter was what the girl was “going to do”.

Would she pursue or not? Meanwhile, the Reine des Garous looked to the unconscious boy on her shoulder.

“What will I do about him? ...I’m looking forward to this.”

To her, a commotion was not a bother. Instead, she was curious what would happen. That was why she had quieted him down for the time being, but...

...I can eat him, let him live, or anything else.

The choice was hers. If she waited too long, the Chancellor’s officers and Student Council would try to have their say, so she wanted to enjoy this as much as she could as soon as she could.

“Now, then.”

From approximately a kilometer in the air, she took a step toward the forest down below. It was a light, playful step like someone hopping over a puddle.

With that, she jumped down with Musashi’s King.

Chapter 30: Prince of the Cellar

CHAPTER 30

"Prince of the Cellar"



Now, let's go
Now, what should we do?
Point Allocation (Go All Out)

Now, let's go

Now, what should we do?

Point Allocation (Go All Out)

A stormy wind blew.

In the sky, the Musashi prioritized preserving itself while floating unsteadily within the whirling air currents and explosive blasts.

The sea along its surface was stripped away by the tearing wind again and again and a tremor ran through it each time.

“All ships: remain alongside IZUMO, shift to concentrated buoyancy, and open gravity barriers to port and starboard. After using the explosive blasts to rise by three hundred meters, shift the ships’ angle of elevation back by five degrees and expand the outer shell for gravitational cruising. Over.”

On “Musashi’s” instructions the Musashi began to rise. Inside Tama’s loading entrance, Neshinbara gave a rapid series of instructions regarding the changing situation.

He was primarily instructing people to intercept or defend against the M.H.R.R. fleet expanded to the east.

“Politician Honda-kun, fifteen minutes have passed. Has Lord Matsunaga contacted us?”

“No.”

Masazumi’s eyebrows rose but she nodded.

“Do what you have to do without worrying about that. And sorry.”

After apologizing, Masazumi sighed.

...It's time, but nothing has happened. This is going to be a lot of trouble.

She did wonder if Matsunaga had set them up, but Neshinbara waved a hand her way while still giving instructions.

“Judge. Don’t worry about it. If we play up the fact that he broke his promise,

we can probably get some sympathy as well as the usual hostility. Also, the Provisional Council has given their interpretation of his lack of response.”

“My father and the others have? What was it?”

“Judge.” Neshinbara nodded and opened a sign frame for her and other others in the area to see. “Look at this: Lord Matsunaga made a promise with Musashi’s chancellor and Student Council president; so now that the target of his promise has been taken away by Hexagone Française, he has reneged on that promise. That’s their interpretation, but Lord Matsunaga might deny it if we asked him.”

“Sorry,” apologized Masazumi again. “Wait. My father and the others should be in a meeting at my place, but it looks like they attached a request for healing spells from the health committee. ...And for blunt trauma and broken bones?”

“Those sound like injuries from a fistfight, but your father and the council wouldn’t do that,” commented Asama. “My guess is someone tripped during all this shaking. I’ll send out someone from my family’s shrine.”

“Judge,” agreed Masazumi while looking outside.

White mist trailed behind the raging wind and IZUMO continued to spill its crust with a great rumbling noise.

Suddenly, someone appeared in front of her.

It was Tenzou.

He looked down into the forest below and spoke.

“I will collect Mitotsudaira-dono and rescue Toori-dono. Masazumi-dono, Neshinbara-dono, please continue negotiating with Hexagone Française for a political resolution.”

Tenzou looked down into the forest approximately one kilometer below. A few pieces of crust and metal frame had already fallen into it.

...I believe the Reine des Garous landed around there.

She had already landed and was apparently traveling south. Birds were flying

away and the beasts were spooked, but...

“The beasts have given up on running. The movements of the trees show their attempts to hide. ...She is moving at approximately eight kilometers an hour. Perhaps that is a leisurely walking pace for her.”

Neshinbara stepped up next to him and also measured the Reine des Garous' movements.

“Can you catch up to her? Once she enters the deeper part of the forest, tracking her from the air will be impossible.”

“I doubt she would bother hiding her tracks on the way to her safe house.”

That was why he would descend to the forest and pursue her there.

She was capricious, so he could not predict what she would do next; but...

“Anyone with Hexagone Française ranger training would be able track her as well.”

“Wait,” said Masazumi while raising a hand toward him. “I would prefer to rescue the idiot with a political resolution. ...But would that be safe? What if the enemy gets to the Reine des Garous' safe house first?”

“Currently she is acting alone. The Hexagone Française fleet isn't moving, but that is most likely on her orders. She doesn't want anyone to interfere with her human meal.”

The atmosphere stiffened at the phrase “human meal”, but there was no point in hiding it.

Tenzou used everyone's silence to continue.

“Thankfully, Hexagone Française's warriors can't guard the area around the safe house. I expect they plan to pursue and capture us before we reach the safe house.”

“I see,” said Neshinbara as he opened a sign frame and began recording. “Judge. Crossunite-kun, I'll let you choose your team.”

“In that case, I choose...Naito-dono and...Mitotsudaira-dono.”

Hearing that, everyone turned to Naruze; but she only shrugged.

“I’d like to tell him to take Urquiaga or Futayo instead; but the half-dragon can’t exactly move around in the forest and Futayo’s weapon was broken. Also, Margot and Mitotsudaira had some survival training in the transport ship back at England, right?”

“Judge. They would more or less know what kind of instructions I would give. At the very least, I would not need to hold back when it comes to our livelihood.”

“But,” said Asama with a tilt of her head. She tilted it even further before continuing. “Why Mito?”

“Well,” he began.

Mitotsudaira lay unconscious on a frame falling far below.

She was terribly exhausted and injured, but he was planning to take her with him instead of returning her to the Musashi.

“For a variety of reasons, she is the one most likely to draw the attention of the Reine des Garous. Both in conversation and combat, the Reine des Garous will be concerned about her. And to be honest, no one from Musashi can actually take the Reine des Garous on in a fight.”

“You mean...”

“Judge,” replied Tenzou as he resolved himself. “The possibility of having her act as a ‘shield’ as she did just now was a part of my reasoning.”

Relieved by everyone’s silence, Tenzou continued speaking.

“In other words, after healing Mitotsudaira-dono’s injuries with spells I intend to rescue Toori-dono even if it means using her as a shield.”

He sighed.

...Could you call this being shorthanded?

He also thought they were short on strength and short on firepower. They had earned some decent results during the battles in London and the armada battle; but the London battles had been centered on their special duty officers

and the armada battle had used a comprehensive view of the “battlefield”.

When they were up against someone who could be called a great hero...

...Is Futayo-dono the only stable combat specialist we can send out?

If Futayo could not stand up to the enemy hero, that enemy would destroy Musashi.

This battle had proven that.

It was fortunate the Reine des Garous was bound by the ways of the human world. No, that may have been where her power came from in the first place; but it made him shudder when he thought about her attempting to destroy the Musashi.

...No.

Tenzou realized other unknown beings like that might still exist in other nations, so...

“Hesitating here will get us nowhere.”

“Judge.”

He heard flapping wings outside and saw Naito attaching a work case to her waist hard point.

“I have the spells we might need and some Orei Metallo to act as focal points. I narrowed down the number of spells since I don’t have much room, but I can put together a means of eliminating pain using a reduction spell. In a short-term battle, it can be better to break through while ignoring the pain. Let’s see... No broom, right?”

“Judge. You wouldn’t be able to use it in the forest anyway and the large spells used for flying could produce enough noise and enough of an ether reading to give away our position. But in the worst case, you can escape with your wings and your Schwarz Techno has excellent offensive capability; so your odds of survival should be quite high.”

“Judge,” nodded Naito.

Suddenly, Horizon stepped up to her and pulled something wrapped in

bamboo grass from somewhere.

“Naito-sama, this is a yakiniku meal. Please take it to Mitotsudaira-sama.”

“I get the feeling a lot has changed since eight years ago.”

Naito took it and Naruze walked up next to her and held out a few small objects wrapped in cloth.

“This is your change of clothes. I thought this might happen, so I always carry it around with me.”

“Why?” muttered everyone with a small step back, but Naito took the pack and realized there was more than one.

“Oh, is this one for Mito-tsan? Not bad.”

“You’ll need it, won’t you? I had to judge her size by eye; but since I know she has no chest, I used an elastic material. It isn’t meant for combat, but it’s better than something that’s too tight.”

“Judge,” nodded Naito before the two exchanged a kiss.

Naito then turned to Tenzou with a smile.

“I’ll be going on ahead since we’ll lose track of Mito-tsan before long. I’ll retrieve her, Tenzou, so you meet up with us later.”

She flew into the air and vanished. She had activated her optical stealth using her reduction spells.

Hexagone Française and M.H.R.R. would still be monitoring them and Musashi did not want them knowing they were heading out to rescue Toori.

“I should probably leave using a hiding technique.”

He could make his way down by jumping from object to object and he would not be noticed if he hid behind falling objects on the way.

But just before he took the first step, someone grabbed his left arm.

It was Mary. He looked to the left and saw her eyebrows slightly raised.

“I will join you.”

Kimi was the first to react to Mary's words. She raised a hand and whispered to Asama.

"Heh heh heh. It's time for some passionate love, Asama. Make sure you don't get burned."

"Wh-what are you talking about, Kimi? Mary-san is just so very worried about Tenzou-kun that she's desperate to find some way she can-waaaaah! That is burning! Even explaining it is too much!"

"You can ignore the peanut gallery and say what you have to say, Mary-dono."

Mary gave a confused bow toward Kimi and Asama who had begun fanning each other. She then wrapped her arms around Tenzou's arm, lowered her eyebrows, and opened her mouth to speak.

That was when Horizon raised a hand toward Hanami who floated next to Asama's head.

"Statistically, this should be a moving scene; so broadcast it to the entire ship."

"Lovey-dovey clap."

Oblivious to what was happening behind her, Mary began speaking.

"Um," she began with her still awkward pronunciation of Far Eastern. "Please, Master Tenzou. Let me go with you!"

"Um, Master Tenzou, I have been thinking a lot lately and I have been holding back because I'm not sure I should do anything myself; but, uh, i-it felt like you had chosen to go on your own here because I'm not skilled enough. B-but if, um, something happened to you down there, I would regret not being with you. So I guess what I'm saying is, I want to be with you."

Everyone listening to the broadcast prepared their weapons.

"I'm going to make that ninja regret this."

"Yeah, for some reason I was thinking the same thing."

“You’re right. We should work together here!”

They heard Mary let out a warm sigh.

“May I go with you?”

The commander at the front of group gestured for the others to come with him and they began moving silently yet swiftly along the wall.

“Oh? For some reason, I hear some people with nothing better to do walking this way.”

Horizon’s comment brought an odd sense of unease to Tenzou’s chest, so he took in a deep breath.

“U-um, please let go of my arm, Mary-dono.”

Tenzou’s plan was as follows:

1: When Mary-dono thinks she has been rejected, start by shaking my head. I of course have no intention of rejecting her.

2: “After all, you can’t exactly embrace my arm while we head to the surface together.” ← I’m so cool!

3: Mary-dono will be incredibly moved!! (Hopefully)

With that plan in mind, he saw Mary let go of his arm in surprise.

“Eh? Oh, Judge. Sorry, Master Tenzou.”

“Nothing to worry about. After all...”

Just as he began step 2, Mary stepped in front of him, stood sideways, and lowered her hips a little.

Eh? he thought.

“Huh? Mary-dono? What is that pose for?”

Mary lightly clasped her hands in front of her chest and gently leaned back.

...Is she asking to be princess carried!?

His disbelief and that fact that his plans had been ruined threw him off.

“U-u-u-u-u-um, M-Mary-dono? Y-y-y-y-y-you, uh...”

He thought Mary was going to say something, but she only nodded.

“Nn.”

And she gave him an urging look with a slight troubled movement of the eyebrows.

Currently, the monsters behind him were whispering.

“Wow, wow. She’s asking to be princess carried! This heat! The passion is like something from a Western romance!”

“Heh heh heh. I never thought I would get to see this in person. ...Record it, four eyes!”

“Oh, yeah. This would make some great material! Who would’ve thought we would see English royalty being princess carried! This is a first!”

Even a brown algae creature poked out from the ditch.

“Princess carry? First? The princess’s first time?”

“Please don’t learn any more strange terms!”

“Maa.”

Tenzou had secretly named his horrible classmates’ rotation of malice “Unavoidable All-Out Dodgeball”, but he soon heard the group stepping away. He considered using a smokescreen charm, but he was afraid of what would happen then and he would probably need the charm later.

“Mary-dono.”

As she nodded back, he snatched her from the ground and leaped into the air.

He jumped.

The action was so sudden that he heard a voice of protest from behind, but it was too late. He leaped into empty air holding Mary and her arms wrapped around his neck.

“U-um, you’re okay with me coming, aren’t you?”

“Judge. Your spirit spells are sure to be useful. And if you speak with the spirits to get their help instead of directly using them, it will cause almost no change to the ether.”

“Then...”

She said a few words as they fell through the sky. A moment later, a pale line of light passed from below their feet and up above their heads.

“I have received some help from the air spirits. They will regulate our descent speed and keep us from being seen. They are not English spirits though, so I can’t ask too much of them. But I, well...”

...She was married into Hexagone Française in the past.

He was not about to complain about that at this point, so he only nodded.

“Thank you very much.”

She looked up in surprise but soon smiled.

“Judge!”

She held him tightly.

“We weren’t able to say goodbye to the others. Should I weaken the spell to show our faces?”

...Do that right now and you would put my life in danger!

“N-no, we need to hurry! W-we are on a mission right now.”

Meanwhile, he received divine messages from Neshinbara and Masazumi that provided support for the mission and predicted how things would play out on the political side. A divine message from Asama explained how to set their personal divine transmissions to covert mode and how to send divine letters using the Hexagone Française spirit known as the Black Swan. It also mentioned something about ethics which reminded him of the frightening fact that Asama was their member of the public morals committee.

At any rate, Mary twisted a little in his arms.

“Oh, sorry, but, uh, can you hold me closer? I can’t ask too much of the air spirits, so they can only really cover a single person. If I move too far out, I’ll be

seen.”

That was why she curled up in the arms wrapped around her and almost seemed to lean against his chest.

“Please hold me tight.”

She’s surprisingly bold! thought Tenzou as he awkwardly did as she said.

He could no longer see Mitotsudaira’s unconscious form on the piece of frame below.

Naito-dono must have retrieved her, he thought before looking up.

He then realized a certain fact.

Mary was looking up in the same direction with her cheek pressed against his neck, so she seemed to have noticed as well. She raised her eyebrows just a bit and gulped.

“M.H.R.R.’s fleet is preparing to fire!”

On Musashino’s bridge, Suzu swiftly and continually reconstructed the models around her.

She went to the most trouble moving her fingers to represent the movement of the wind. The sensation on her hand told her she was creating an image that looked like silk ribbon.

She sometimes magnified the image to handle the wind hitting the Musashi in various places.

“Here...here...oh, it’s shifted...here.”

“Well done, Suzu-sama. Neshinbara-sama requested to continue on while keeping our side toward the eastern warships...yes, these ones. Over.”

“Okay... Judge.”

She wondered if this was okay as she moved the ribbons of wind and the model of the Musashi.

“From...here...”

It moves like this.

“And...like this. That...should do it.”

A ghost of the model remained in the original position and the ribbon lines were pulled by the model she moved in her hand. Next to her, “Musashino” gave the other automatons instructions and the ghost gradually approached the one in her hand. That meant the Musashi was actually moving.

...I need to...be careful.

She felt like she held everyone’s lives in her hands, but...

...I have to do this right.

She had no other thoughts, so...

“Am I...not good enough?”

“Why do you ask that? Over.”

Because...

“Everyone else...jumps around...doing all sorts of things...while shouting ‘ohhhh!’ or ‘ahhhh!’ or ‘toryahhh!’ ...but I don’t have...a sh...shtick?...like that.”

“Suzu-sama.”

“Musashino” quietly called her name.

“ ...”

And she stopped.

“Um...”

She tilted her head.

“You see... No, um, to be honest... I do not like speaking ill of those who give us work; but that strange shouting and excitement is, well...”

“Y-you don’t have to answer...i-if you don’t want to.”

“Thank you for your consideration, but do not worry, Suzu-sama. Out of all of them, you are the normal one. That is all I can say. Over.”

“And...the others are?”

“...”

“Oh. Y-you don’t have to...th-think so hard.”

“Well, anyway, u-um, the others are...super normal. Or should I say they take ‘normal’ too far? Oh, evolved! Saying they have evolved has the right nuance! Over!”

“Should I...evolve too?”

“Please do not. Over.”

“Musashino” replied with a satisfied smile, so Suzu thought to herself.

...Is it complicated?

That was the only way she could describe the feeling. *Hmm*, she groaned in her mind as she expanded the model around the Musashi. That allowed her to check a broader area around them.

“Huh?”

She noticed two movements.

Someone ran north along the eastern cliff of IZUMO where the speed of the collapse was picking up.

It was Narimasa. Instead of simply running across the crumbling earth, he also leaped between pieces of the giant metal frame jutting out. He was currently traveling across the rib-like pieces of frame that had dozen meter gaps between them. Nevertheless, he had his hands in his pockets and jumped between them as if they were a stone path in a garden.

The dozen meter long jumps were quickly taking him north.

A Mlasi-style sign frame was opened in the space to the right of his face and it displayed a man. The man’s red A.H.R.R.S. uniform had a large number four embroidered in white and the background behind him only showed the blue sky.

“Na-chan, I don’t think it’s a good idea to show off.”

“Don’t do it,” added Matsu.

“Shut up, Toshi. And Matsu, don’t say that until you know how much fun this is. Besides, I’m about the only one that can do this. Our upperclassmen’s positions are too important to just have some fun like this. A lot of them wish they could do this, so we can’t be holding back when we can do it.”

“Okay, that explains the upperclassmen; but what about our underclassmen and classmates?”

“Tell them to get on over here. Although I’m sure they’re busy working with Hashiba.”

“That’s right,” affirmed Maeda Toshiie. “There’s also the fact that the Ten Spears adore Hashiba so much. ...Oh, Shibata just sent me a message.”

“What’s he got to say?”

“Testament. ‘If you want me to forgive you for heading out there without permission, you’d better bring back a souvenir.’ And Niwa says, ‘This is your punishment for always misreading my name as Tanba.’ ”

“How is that fair when she’s fine with Takigawa calling her Niu?”

“The problem is how you do it so naturally. You call her Tanba without even questioning it.”

“I’m not good at Far Eastern. When I picture the Far Eastern characters in my head, I end up reading them like that. Also, hasn’t Shibata gotten lax since he got a girlfriend? Used to be, he’d be the first one to something like this.”

“If you want to complain, I can call him in from the next room.”

“Don’t use divine messages when you’re in neighboring rooms!”

“Well, he wants to use divine messages to communicate with Lady Oichi, but he’s never used them much and is using me for practice. He’s gotten to the point of using emoticons now. It’s creeping me out to get these from a guy, so I plan to delete them later.”

“Helping,” added Matsu.

“Y’know,” said Narimasa while leaping. “Is it just me or have we all gotten lax? I bet it’s because Hashiba’s been working way too much.”

“Well, we should be getting busy too before long. ...How’d it go?”

The wind blew by as he leaped to the next frame.

“The Reine des Garous is a monster.”

He landed and jumped to the next.

“That isn’t something a human can take on. With a boss class opponent, a human needs a weapon like in an RPG.”

“You’re the martial arts type, Na-chan, so it was reckless to challenge her without a healer. Did you think you could beat god or slime alike as long as you scored a critical hit?”

“Idiot,” added Matsu.

“Shut up and yes I did, dammit! But it’s no use if I can’t reach her. If only my fingers were three centimeters longer. The Testament descriptions say I was good with a rifle, so maybe I should train in some kind of projectile once I get back.”

He held up his right hand and looked at the Israfil wing tattoo there.

“I’m sure The Lily’d be happy if I used it.”

“You have a bad habit of implicitly criticizing yourself.”

“Shut up. Just say I’m immersed in myself. ...Now, Toshi.”

“Yeah, you can see it, can’t you? I can see it from here.”

“I thought as much.”

Narimasa looked into the eastern sky as he jumped through the air.

“I wondered why you weren’t firing on the Musashi. So that’s why.”

Something had appeared far to the east beyond the surrounding M.H.R.R. fleet.

“What is that?” asked Narimasa when he landed.

“Ships from one of M.H.R.R.’s Protestant principalities,” answered Toshiie.

“We’ve already received a divine transmission.”

Narimasa suddenly slowed his pace and looked to the east.

It was not enough to be called a fleet, but a group of ships approached with an armed aerial warship in the lead and with white cloth over their guns to signify their peaceful intentions. He checked the emblem borne by the lead ship.

“Saxony? That’s the principality where the Reformation began; and you could call that the headquarters of Protestantism, couldn’t you?”

“You’re right about that, but you’re a little off. While they are from Saxony, these are private ships from the city of Magdeburg.”

“What? You mean...”

As he inhaled for his next leap, Narimasa heard Toshiie speak.

“You understand, don’t you? The Protestants are using the course of the Thirty Years’ War as a shield while they rescue Musashi.”

Toshiie took a breath before continuing.

“Magdeburg is the capital of the Protestant principality of Saxony. It was a reliably prosperous city; but during the Thirty Years’ War, it is used as a lesson to show what happens when a principality refuses to cooperate. Thirty thousand Catholic troops led by the Count of Tilly will carry out the Sack of Magdeburg there.”

As for what happened in that sack...

“Nearly 85% of its population is lost, the surviving women and children are assaulted, and the previously moderate Protestant principalities begin to oppose M.H.R.R.’s Catholics.”

“So if a Catholic fleet attacks them now, it will be treated as the Sack of Magdeburg and the Protestants will join together to attack Hashiba and the Catholics? ...If you all can’t act, want me to do it for you?”

“Hashiba has asked that you don’t, so no.”

“Shaja,” replied Narimasa as he landed on the next frame.

In the sky below, he saw one of the M.H.R.R ships approach him.

Toshiie was waving to him from the deck, so he spoke loud enough to be heard directly.

“Did the Magdeburg ship say it has business with Musashi? Is that why you can’t fire?”

“Testament. That’s right. We’re guessing Lord Matsunaga had something to do with it.”

“That old man. I wanted to settle things with him during his previous evaluation, but he ran off saying to come back during his second rebellion. I’d say this is enough of a rebellion, though. Also...”

“Also?”

“Look.”

Narimasa gestured into the sky with his chin.

A silver form stood on the rear loading entrance of Takao, the Musashi’s third starboard ship.

He clicked his tongue and asked a question.

“What is that and why is it there?”

At the same time, he leaped from the frame and into open air. While jumping down, he pointed a finger at the silver form on the rear of Takao.

“What’s going on?”

Why?

“Why is Hexagone Française’s flagcraft, the Palais-Cardinal, on the Musashi!?”

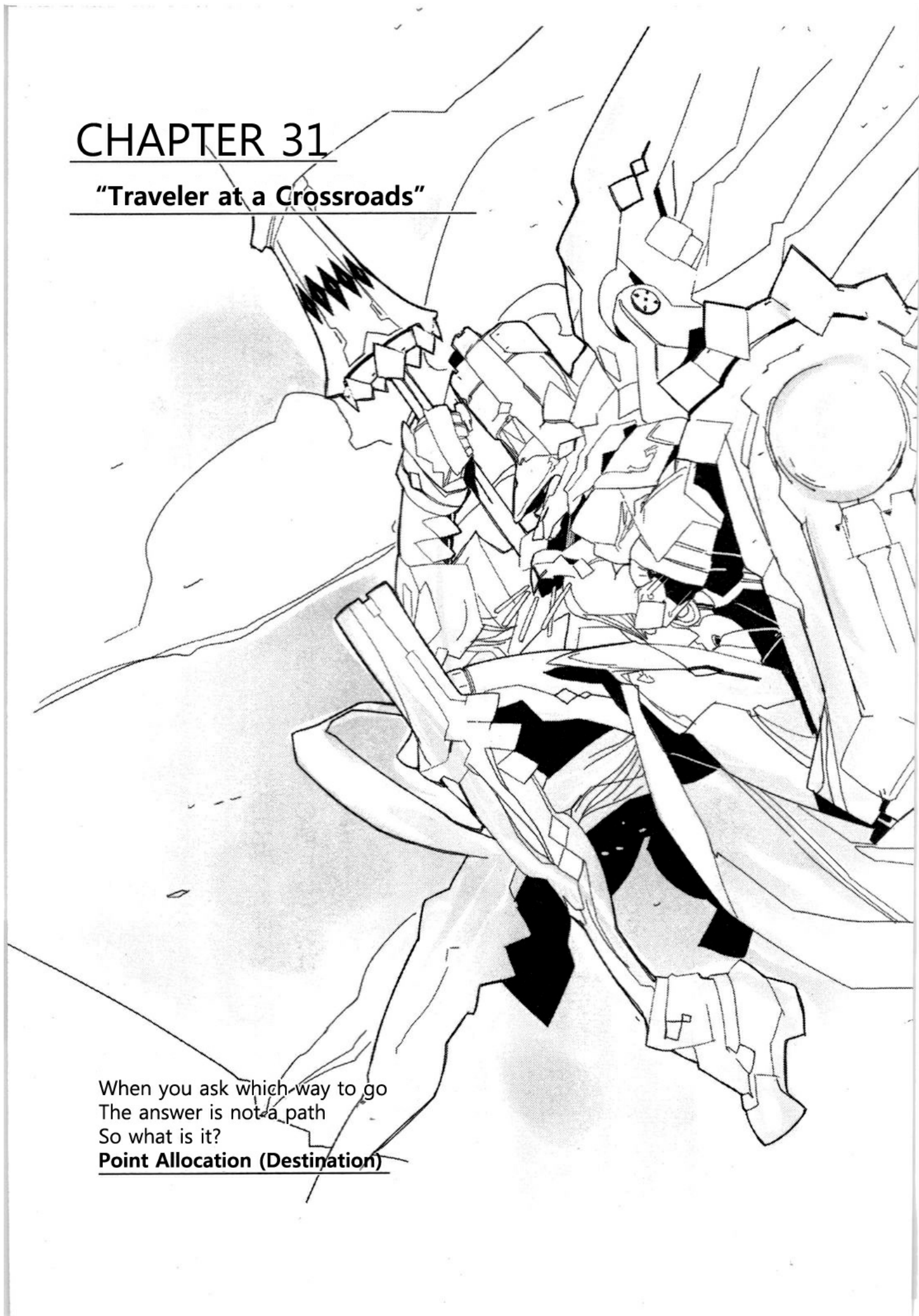
Chapter 31: Traveler at a Crossroads

CHAPTER 31

"Traveler at a Crossroads"

When you ask which way to go
The answer is not a path
So what is it?

Point Allocation (Destination)



When you ask which way to go

The answer is not a path

So what is it?

Point Allocation (Destination)

“Defect!?”

Naomasa’s questioning voice rose from the loading port on the back of Takao, the Musashi’s third starboard ship.

Jizuri Suzaku stood behind her and she rested a large wrench on her shoulder.

...Hexagone Française’s flagcraft, the Palais-Cardinal, wants to defect?

The silver God of War sat with a sheet tied to its spear to act as a white flag.

The six-winged God of War had flown onto the ship just a moment ago.

As IZUMO crumbled and its crust was purged and detonated, the silver God of War had spread its flight wings and flown to the Musashi with the white flag raised.

Because of the white flag and because the Musashi had its gravity barriers open on the bottom of the ship to avoid the explosions and to ascend, “Musashi” had given the following instructions when asked:

“Naomasa-sama, once the Palais-Cardinal has disarmed itself, start by hearing what it has to say. According to our information, the Palais-Cardinal is a God of War and yet it has no combination mechanism for a pilot. Its actions are controlled by Luynes-sama, a Far Eastern maid automaton that was overwritten onto its mechanical components. Over.”

Naomasa had her own thoughts on the issue.

...Is it just me or has the Musashi turned into an exhibition for unusual Gods of War and automatons?

She was ashamed that her mechanic's spirit was a little excited by that fact.

...But anyway, I need to handle this as a special duty officer.

She saw the Palais-Cardinal place the spear behind itself and place its hands on its knees.

Naomasa checked to make sure it had no other weapons and that the tops of its flight wings were touching the ground.

“Judge. ...So you’re what I heard you are, right? A combination between a God of War and an automaton?”

“To be completely accurate, the Palais-Cardinal was originally a God of War created for Lady Anne of Austria, Hexagone Française’s previous provisional chancellor and student council president. It was then combined with me, the automaton named Luynes who was sent from the Far East. My body was dismantled and wonderfully incorporated into the Palais-Cardinal’s control system. Simply put, I am an automaton that controls the Palais-Cardinal from within.”

“The technicalities don’t matter right now. So basically, if you have a combination mechanism installed, Anne of Austria can pilot you if she wants?”

“Lady Anne of Austria.”

“Fine, fine.”

As Naomasa nodded, two sign frames appeared next to her.

“The Palais-Cardinal! The Cardinal! Wait! Really!? Do you think I can touch it or mess around with it, Masa!?”

“The Palais-Cardinal! The Cardinal! Wait! Seriously!? Do you think I can check over it for some material, Naomasa-kun!?”

...Do all nerds like Hiro and Neshinbara act like that?

The sign frames reappeared even after she closed them, so she blocked any new ones and prepared to call for Masazumi. But...

...Come to think of it, wasn’t there some issue related to Anne of Austria?

Naomasa worked to recall the memory that was bothering her.

...Um...

When she had joined the chancellor's officers, she had studied the present situation and histories of the other nations.

...Two years ago, Hexagone Française took in Mouri Terumoto as student council president and Louis Exiv as chancellor.

But the Testament descriptions said Louis' mother, Anne of Austria, had ruled France before him.

Current Chancellor Louis Exiv was from a noble family with divine blood, so he had apparently been trained in politics and war from a young age so he could later become chancellor.

But, thought Naomasa.

“The other nations feared Hexagone Française's growth and made a certain request, didn't they? They said the name of Anne of Austria, Louis' mother and the previous chancellor and president of Hexagone Française, had to be given to one of Louis Exiv's relatives.”

As Exiv's family had divine blood, giving a relative the position of his mother and the previous leader could easily strengthen Hexagone Française even further.

“But the other nations had a reason for making that request, didn't they?”

She was requesting confirmation more than asking a legitimate question and the Palais-Cardinal nodded.

“Testament. Lord Louis Exiv had already lost his parents in the early stages of the Thirty Years' War, which had already begun; and Lady Anne was stricken with an incurable disease.”

Which meant...

“Lady Anne was very sick, so making her provisional chancellor and student council president was meant to restrain Hexagone Française in the period leading up to Lord Louis Exiv's rule.”

...I see.

Naomasa mostly understood the situation, so she lowered the wrench like a cane while facing the Palais-Cardinal.

After demonstrating that she was letting down her guard, she spoke.

“I think I understand why you’re defecting.”

She felt confident enough to urge the Palais-Cardinal to continue.

It wasn’t due to an illness, but she also had a family member that could not move. She had no intention of letting her emotions cloud her judgment, but she was willing to listen to their situation.

The Palais-Cardinal lowered her head slightly.

“Lady Anne ran the academy from her sickbed. Treasurer Richelieu officially opposed her as per the Testament descriptions; but I inherited the name of his successor, Mazarin, and secretly assisted her. ...Oh, what a lovely story!”

The Palais-Cardinal pulled a handkerchief from behind her waist armor and wiped her sight devices. *This automaton is a little too theatrical*, thought Naomasa, but that may have been how she was made.

However, this confirmed the reason for the Palais-Cardinal’s defection.

“I’ve heard the rumors,” said Naomasa. “Just before Louis Exiv took his position as chancellor, Anne of Austria’s illness worsened. In that case, where did she end up?”

“*Lady Anne of Austria.*”

The Palais-Cardinal corrected her again but then struck her own knee and raised her right index finger.

“Our enemy, M.H.R.R., proposed a deal. In exchange for accepting Lord Louis Exiv’s inherited name, they wished for a hostage. ...After all, once Hexagone Française joined the Thirty Years’ War under his command, the road to their loss would begin.”

“But if you’d rejected that ridiculous demand, Hexagone Française would’ve taken over the world.”

“Testament. But the European nations weighed Hexagone Française’s victory

over M.H.R.R. against the danger of Hexagone Française becoming the definitive ruler of Europe and they desired a stalemate. The eastern European nations were already facing the threat of Hashiba and M.H.R.R., so they especially wanted to do Hashiba a favor to help negotiate with P.A. Oda. And so the hostage was sent to M.H.R.R. ...That hostage being Lady Anne.”

Where exactly was she sent? wondered Naomasa.

At that same moment, she heard jogging footsteps and a voice behind her.

“Was she sent to Magdeburg in the Protestant principality of Saxony?”

It was Masazumi.

Masazumi saw Naomasa turn toward her and take a step back.

“You’re late,” said the girl, but there was no displeasure in her voice. She was simply stating a fact.

Masazumi had been listening to Naomasa and the Palais-Cardinal’s conversation via sign frame, but she asked a question just to be sure.

“Would it be correct to view you as Lady Luynes, vice president of Hexagone Française?”

“Testament. It would mean something else entirely for Treasurer Mazarin to defect.”

“I see.”

Masazumi nodded toward Naomasa and then looked back at the silver god of war.

“In other words, you are acting as Miss Anne’s maid and want to defect so you can visit her in Magdeburg where she is hospitalized as a hostage. Correct?”

“Testament.”

The Palais-Cardinal corrected her sitting posture and nodded.

She then brought a hand to her own body.

“I would like to keep this next part private.”

“Judge. Asama, take care of it.”

“Oh, right away. I’ll use a silencing spell by borrowing a divine sound.”

“Maa.”

The sound of strips of paper filled their surroundings. It almost sounded like bamboo grass blowing in a breeze. However, all other sounds vanished from their surroundings.

“Please continue, Lady Luynes.”

“Testament. Please keep this a secret. My body does not contain a combination mechanism. The God of War’s control system was overwritten by my corresponding functions and I move it like an exoskeleton.”

“Then where is the combination mechanism?”

“Testament,” replied the Palais-Cardinal. “The combination mechanism containing Lady Anne was left with the Maurice Cathedral which acts as Magdeburg’s medical facility.”

“You mean...”

Masazumi realized that Anne of Austria’s body no longer existed in a physical form.

She was simply “hospitalized” as data.

“...”

She was at a loss for words, but Naomasa relaxed her body.

“Looks like everyone had the same idea. ...If you use a God of War’s combination mechanism, a human can escape the bonds of the human body and the speed of the God of War’s control devices allow the human’s mind and senses to function. Did you remove the bonds of the body to extend the life of someone on the verge of death?”

“Testament. M.H.R.R.’s Protestant principalities are not bound by the Catholic rules of medicine, so they are researching a number of treatments. Also, Hexagone Française’s Gallicanistic brand of Catholicism does not place the

pope-chancellor as its leader, so that provides a connection to Protestantism. That allows me to have a constant divine transmission connection with Lady Anne. I do not send her my visual data, but we are always exchanging words.”

The Palais-Cardinal suddenly broke down crying.

“But her condition is not progressing as hoped, so I truly wish to become one with...no, it is too presumptuous to say that. But I wish for us to combine and...”

“And directly show her the outside world?”

The Palais-Cardinal nodded.

“Testament. I thought I could use the power output of a Mouse to give her a body and ‘movement’, but...”

Her words grew completely monotone.

“Our nudist rejected the idea and Lady Terumoto said she understands but she doubts it would ever work.”

“Was Terumoto the one to write that script?”

“This is no script.”

The Palais-Cardinal hit her knee and held out her hand as she spoke, but Masazumi narrowed her eyes and turned to Naomasa.

However, Naomasa had already averted her gaze.

“Yeah, I’m...not too good with this kind of thing.”

You’re surprisingly normal, Naomasa, thought Masazumi. And what is wrong with this environment if that’s a surprise?

...Anyway, I get the gist of the situation.

Was loyalty a good description of the Palais-Cardinal’s actions?

Masazumi had a feeling she had some ulterior motive. After all...

...Lord Matsunaga supposedly set this up.

She did not know if that man was an enemy or an ally and she had a feeling he would get involved in all sorts of things and cause even more trouble just for

fun.

Just to be sure, she asked.

“Was this defection planned?”

The Palais-Cardinal was Hexagone Française’s flagcraft as well as Vice President Luynes and Treasurer Mazarin. She had boarded the Musashi to use it as a midpoint in her defection to M.H.R.R. If this was a trap to place the blame on Musashi, it would be a dangerous one.

So in order to receive a promise, Masazumi asked a certain question.

“Was this defection your decision and your decision alone?”

The Palais-Cardinal immediately replied to Masazumi’s question.

“Testament.”

She simply nodded.

She’s clever, thought Masazumi as the silver God of War raised her right hand and spoke.

“After all, this was all the product of chance.”

“Of chance?”

“Testament,” she replied. “I had previously considered making a swift defection if I saw an opening, but today we ended up fighting with Musashi by complete chance.”

“Oh?”

Masazumi glared at her, but the silver God of War did not give in. She continued as if everything were going perfectly.

“And you know what else? By complete chance, I was sent to the front lines. When I checked the progress of the battle by complete chance, everyone was charging in by complete chance, mist filled the area by complete chance, the crust split by complete chance, and everyone had to retreat by complete chance. I tried to fly away by complete chance, but I ended up on the back end of the Musashi by complete chance. I think God was telling me to defect by

complete chance.”

“Tell whoever wrote this script to rethink everything they’ve done.”

The details of the story were filled with contradictions, but...

“Did Lord Matsunaga ask us to stay until 3:15 so you could defect and so the Magdeburg fleet could approach the Musashi?”

If so...

“Is he telling us to carry the Palais-Cardinal to Magdeburg?”

Magdeburg was a city within M.H.R.R.’s Protestant principality of Saxony.

The city would lose its people and be destroyed during the Sack of Magdeburg.

...Why does he want us to go there?

She did not know, but she did know one thing.

“If Magdeburg’s ships are attacked, it will be treated as the Sack of Magdeburg. ...We’re supposed to use that threat to escape the surrounding fleets, are we?”

The eastern sky was clearing out.

The M.H.R.R. fleet was falling back and the Magdeburg fleet was approaching in its place.

“Now, then.”

That fleet in the center of her vision would hold a representative from Magdeburg.

She was worried about Aoi who had been taken away and her classmates who had descended to pursue him, but...

...It looks like we have something to do here as well.

“Naomasa.”

She tapped Naomasa on the shoulder.

“Tell the engine division it’s time to depart.”

At 4:02 PM, the Musashi joined the Magdeburg fleet and successfully left the ring of Hexagone Française and M.H.R.R. fleets surrounding IZUMO.

Traveling to Magdeburg would mean entering M.H.R.R.

“So the Musashi will be towed as a freighter instead of cruising under its own power?”

That was the method the Magdeburg fleet had chosen. Its ships spread out in front of the Musashi and pulled it with towing belts.

As massive and heavy a ship as it was, it could still be moved slowly if enough towing force was built up.

At 5:20 PM, the Musashi’s eight ships were being towed at a very low speed while “Musashi” controlled their horizontal position.

This was a way of circumventing the M.H.R.R. Catholics’ ban on traveling through their nation, but it allowed the Catholics to save a bare minimum of face as the Musashi traveled along the provisional borders of the Protestant principalities.

Meanwhile, the Testament Union and Hexagone Française made no attempt to pursue; but Masazumi had an explanation for that.

“They’re probably telling us to hurry up and get to Magdeburg. I’m guessing Magdeburg wants to hire us to support them in the Sack of Magdeburg. The Musashi can evacuate people and carry in supplies, after all. And if the Testament Union overlooks this as a means of assisting Magdeburg, they can gain the M.H.R.R. Protestants as allies during the Thirty Years’ War.”

And...

“I had Asama send Tenzou and the others down below a divine transmission saying we’ll meet up at Magdeburg. It apparently only just barely got through to them, but they should be able to meet us there once they rescue Aoi or he’s released. With that and the Palais-Cardinal issue, I need to get my father and the rest of the Provisional Council to request negotiations with Hexagone Française.”

However, the Magdeburg fleet's towing speed was slow; so it would take about half a day to reach Magdeburg near the center of M.H.R.R.

And with that much time...

"That is more than enough time to see if the ninja's group can collect my foolish brother or not."

"That is not all," said Treasurer Shirojiro.

He saw a diplomatic ship move from the Magdeburg fleet and land on Tama.

"Why did Magdeburg come to us and how will we get from Magdeburg to Kantou? We have plenty of time to discuss those issues."

At 6:30 PM, the forest visible from the deck had grown dark and its details grew unclear.

As the Musashi traveled to Magdeburg, night fell; and that night was filled with activity.

Chapter 32: Gatherers in a Place of Meeting

CHAPTER 32

"Gatherers in a Place of Meeting"



What do you call
A meeting in the night?
Point Allocation (True Feelings)

What do you call

A meeting in the night?

Point Allocation (True Feelings)

Lights filled the night. Some came from the stars and some were manmade.

To the west of a wide river winding through a forest, the land had been cleared to create vast fields and a city.

It was a large city.

However, the city's lights paled in comparison to all the light in the sky and the fields.

Those were the lights of an aerial fleet.

Countless ships formed several circles around the city. Every so often, a few ships would leave the city and another group would descend in their place.

They were receiving supplies, receiving instructions, and then leaving. The sides of the ships contained the national emblems of M.H.R.R. and P.A. Oda and the emblems of a number of academies.

The area was filled with sounds of blowing wind and the spraying noise of the wind and water formed on the surface of the ships. Even at night, the voices of moving people and noises of transportation were quite loud.

That amalgam of noise contained the sounds of food stands and a night market opened for the people working through the night, and the voices of cows, horses, birds, cats, and dogs interested in or scared by the light and noise.

A certain place was situated near the din yet far enough away to have a decent view of it all.

That place was above the river running alongside the city. A giant aerial ship sat in wait across the river.

The blue ship was six hundred meters long and its upper deck was unlit.

Even so, a few people were gathered on that dark deck to watch the bright city. One of those was wrapped in dim bluish-white light and wore a red

uniform.

“Na-chan, Luxembourg may be having a festival, but stop eating so much meat. You’re human, so eat some bread or rice. Or are you trying to copy the Reine des Garous?”

“Copycat.”

Those comments were directed at the person eating lamb chop after lamb chop on the table by the edge of the deck.

He was Sassa Narimasa. He had a white bandanna around his head, a healing cloth charm on the right side of his head, and a red uniform.

“Y’know, Toshi,” he began while turning around. “You really need to shut up about that. You’re like Fuwa used to be. Do you think you’re my wife, or something?”

“No, I have Ma-chan. And even if you are making enough money to support a family, you’re so reckless it would all fall apart right away. You would visit Ise for your honeymoon and get divorced on the way back. You really need to bring some guidance to your life. It’s causing a lot of trouble for everyone working under you. You don’t want to know how often they come to consult me about it. Things like, ‘It’s time to start the mission, but our commander hasn’t shown up yet. What should we do?’ ”

“What do you tell them?”

“Testament. I tell them you are probably already going on a rampage at the front line, so they should head on out. That usually works, but they were in a lot of trouble the one time you were actually asleep. I felt bad about that, so I told Shibata.”

“That’s when he gave me that really long lecture, isn’t it? So that was your fault.”

“No, I think that was your fault for falling asleep.”

“Idiot,” added Matsu.

“Shut up,” replied Narimasa just as a new figure stepped out from the bridge on the back of the ship.

It was a young man of average height with white hair.

“Hi,” he said with a raised hand.

Toshiie bowed and Narimasa kicked out the opposite chair and gestured toward it.

“Sit. You must be tired, M.H.R.R. Student Council President. Or would you prefer I called you Matthias?”

“I’m not sure if I should reply with ‘testament’ or use P.A. Oda’s ‘shaja’.”

The man in an M.H.R.R. uniform modified to shorten the coat and tighten the cuff of the pants sat in front of Narimasa.

As he, Matthias, lowered his hips to sit, he let out a sigh and gave a bitter smile.

“Ahh, I can finally sit down. I feel like I haven’t bent my legs in forever.”

“Order whatever you want to eat or drink, Matthias. If you want bones, you can take them from my plate.”

“In M.H.R.R., bones are used as a cooking ingredient, Sassa. My brother loves bone marrow.”

He gently touched the small cross-shaped divine monitor placed on the table. A *lernen figur* connected to the ship’s cooking division appeared and displayed a menu.

“What, it’s all carried up from below? Do you not have someone test it for poison?”

“All of the food stands below are run by this ship’s cooking club, Matthias. More importantly...”

Narimasa hesitated to continue, but Matthias answered anyway.

“Yes,” he replied. “With Musashi on their way to Magdeburg, Hashiba asked if she can send Tilly to surround the city.”

In other words...

“It’s quite like Hashiba to not directly ask if she can start the Sack of Magdeburg. Or maybe she can’t bring herself to say it. She would be asking if she could start the crossroads that leads to our...to the M.H.R.R Catholics’ loss.”

Toshiie thought about what Matthias had said.

...As always, he has no power.

Toshiie did not think that was a bad thing.

M.H.R.R. Student Council President Matthias was the younger brother of “Wahnsinniger” Rudolf II, who was M.H.R.R. chancellor and Holy Roman Emperor.

According to the Testament descriptions, M.H.R.R. was a nation of multiple principalities and the position of Holy Roman Emperor was elected from the representatives of the principalities.

The right to vote lay with the prince-electors who were the representatives of the principalities.

...That freed M.H.R.R. from the bonds of K.P.A. Italia’s pope-chancellor’s right to name the emperor and allowed us to freely choose our emperor.

However, the times had moved quickly. By the time they had received that election system, the age of the knights had ended and the emperor was losing his power. So...

“In the end, powerful families would inherit the throne or even have it forced onto them. Currently, my Habsburg family has openly inherited it. At any rate, I’m impressed you would want to come to a false empire with no real power.”



Matsu

Matthias

Maeda Toshiie

Toshiie tried to listen to Matthias, but he was extremely bothered by how Narimasa kept hitting the *lernen figur* to order more food. However, he settled that by swearing to send the bill to Shibata under Narimasa's name.

Narimasa, on the other hand, lightly kicked Matthias's shin under the table.

"Hey, what do you want? Beer? Wine?"

"I also like Far Eastern sake."

"Quit copying us. You'll have some wine. Drink it like a woman."

"Is that any way to treat me after so long?" asked Matthias with a smile on the corner of his mouth.

"Sorry," said Toshiie with a bow. "Someone at the special duty officer level should never treat a student council president like this."

"What does it matter as long as you've got power?" asked Narimasa.

Matsu glared at him from Toshiie's shoulder, but Matthias narrowed his eyes, lowered his hands behind the chair back, and stared up into the sky.

"You've really saved me."

After all...

"It used to be all that was asked of me was keeping my grades in school up and agreeing to whatever I was asked. It was a lot like what people want from Musashi's Mr. Impossible. ...No, I was actually asked to do well in school and carry out the history recreation properly, so you could say I had it worse. Anyway..."

"One of your problems is how you drag out everything you say."

"I was told to do exactly that because it makes me look more important. Anyway," said Matthias. "You all are not mine. There are some exceptions like Maeda since you took Mercenary King Wallenstein as a second inherited name and Hashiba who took my aide Bishop Melchior as an additional inherited name, but people like Sassa here are entirely on the Far Eastern side."

But...

"I'm just a puppet, but I'm still happy. Even as a weak puppet, I can still be

used by powerful people to clash with the Testament Union. ...You all are not my power. You're probably working exclusively for P.A. Oda and only using M.H.R.R. to advance your Genesis Project, but I'm still happy. My actions as a puppet are moving the world in a big way."

He smiled a little.

"And knowing all of you, you could make someone else your puppet if you wanted."

Toshiie had his doubts about that. After all, this emperor's brother was the one who had personally accepted the alliance eight years ago after Hashiba had invaded M.H.R.R. land.

It was true he might have been a powerless ruler who had that action forced on him by the other principalities.

...But since then, he's used our power quite effectively in maintaining the Catholic principalities.

As a helper for P.A. Oda rather than as M.H.R.R.'s student council president, he had informed Hashiba how to maintain the infrastructure for their ease of use.

He had told them how to gain an understanding with the local people, to keep their distance from the local people, and to share technology with the local people for mutual benefit. There was a lot they would not have known and a lot of places where their chain of command would have broken down without Matthias there.

He had clearly researched P.A. Oda in advance.

Hashiba had researched M.H.R.R. in the same way, so they had readily accepted and carried out his instructions. That was why there had been so little chaos during the early stages of the alliance.

Since then, Matthias had been their contact with the Testament Alliance, their spokesman during the history recreation, and their shield against the Testament Alliance when Hashiba took action.

For all those reasons, Toshiie spoke.

“Matthias, you underestimate yourself.”

“That’s right,” added Narimasa with a bone in his mouth. “The most amazing thing about you is how you’ll happily agree to things even if you don’t like them. I decide if I’ll do something by whether I like it or not, but it feels like you’ll do anything that’s in your power.”

“That is how I was raised.”

Matthias pulled a knife from his pocket and began filing down his fingernails.

He sharpened the nails of his thumb and forefinger as he said more.

“It isn’t difficult. I don’t have to put up with anything and I don’t find any of it unpleasant. I simply decided that I have no value if I don’t do what I’m told.”

He took a breath and looked into the eastern sky. Their fleet was receiving supplies and returning to its position, but a giant ship was visible far beyond that.

...Is that the Musashi as it’s towed to Magdeburg?

While watching that shadow over the stars, Matthias put the knife in his pocket.

“That ship is filled with people who wish for things they were *not* told to do and its destination will set into motion what I *was* told to do. This was determined long ago when I decided to show absolute obedience to my destiny. The time for me and my brother to accept that destiny is finally approaching.”

He laughed quietly.

“I wonder if the people inside that Musashi are also filled with hope and fear of what has been set in motion.”

Meetings were being prepared in several places within the Musashi. Most were held by the academy’s different committees as they discussed their future administrative plans and gave reports on the current situation, but at the center of it all...

“I can’t believe I have to work on this bridge. We really should have cleaned

up the student council room. Ookubo, Kanou, and the other first and second years were having trouble finding me.”

“Maa.”

Masazumi was looking through several reports on the bridge in front of Musashi Ariadust Academy. On the stairs end, she had a nice view and let the gentle wind wash over her. The nearby lanterns and sign frames surrounded her in light.

“But it’s all thanks to you that I have a sign frame version of what I used to get as paper documents, Tsukinowa. This is easier to carry around and I can link them with other charts.”

“Maa.”

It was so cute how the Mouse rubbed his cheek against her. She could not help but lean her head toward him.

“Maa,” she said back.

“What are you doing, Masazumi? Neck exercises?”

“Waaaaah!!”

She quickly turned around to see who was climbing the stairs.

“Teacher.”

It was Oriotorai.

Masazumi saw Oriotorai approach while holding a box and a bamboo insulated bottle.

Masazumi watched Oriotorai sit next to her and hold up what she carried.

“Here. Naomasa and Asama will be coming by later, but take this dinner Ohiroshiki made. I already ate at the cafeteria.”

Oriotorai placed the box and bottle next to Masazumi and began removing a wrapped baguette from one of the hard points on her waist.

“Teacher, didn’t you just say you ate in the cafeteria?”

“Oh, this is dessert.”

Oriotorai held her large sword between her knees and pulled the scabbard from a small portion of the blade.

...Wait, wait, wait.

After drawing the sword halfway, she pressed the baguette against it, gave a light tug, and split the bread with only one end of the crust remaining.

“Teacher, you’re a tester for IZUMO, right? So are you testing that sword?”

“No, this is my personal sword. Besides, what would I even test it on?”

Masazumi just about answered “your students”, but stopped herself. *That answer is a little too cruel*, she thought. *She would never actually test a sword on a student. She only hits them with the scabbard. That could still kill them, though.*

As if to say “anyway”, Oriotorai grabbed the collar of her track suit and showed it to Masazumi.

“Right now, I’m testing their shoes and track suits and the like.”

Masazumi wondered if that meant she used to test other things, so she asked.

“What did you used to do?”

“Now that’s a difficult question.”

She made a fake troubled expression and returned the sword to its scabbard.

...Tsukinowa?

Tsukinowa was entirely focused on the blade that was now hidden by the scabbard and Oriotorai noticed.

“That thing has good instincts for a Mouse. Or does he have good instincts *because* he’s a Mouse?”

“Are you saying it’s that good a sword?”

“More or less. I figure it’ll be needed eventually so I’m holding onto it...or you could say I was left with it. But anyway...”

She pulled something from the opposite hard point from the one the bread

had been hanging from.

“What are you going to do with that jar of jam?”

“Dessert,” she insisted. “It’s dessert.”

Masazumi watched her teacher turn the jar upside down and dump its contents across the entire split loaf of bread.

...It was being trained by her that made our class so strange, wasn’t it?

Nevertheless, they had come across someone they could not stand up to.

...No.

That isn’t it, she corrected herself. There was a lot we couldn’t stand up to before this too.

For example, they had not defeated the pope-chancellor at Mikawa. They had only been able to defend.

For another example, she had a feeling Fairy Queen Elizabeth’s massive wings of light were just as powerful as – if not more powerful than – Mitotsudaira’s mother. And their interception of Tres España Vice Chancellor Hironaka Takakane had been more of a technical victory than a true victory.

Hmm, she thought while considering their past results.

Meanwhile, she saw Oriotorai add adzuki from a bamboo tube.

“Teacher, can we discuss something a little more serious?”

“Sure.”

She was unsure how much she could trust an answer from a teacher engrossed in squeezing out every last bit of the adzuki, but she decided to trust their positions as teacher and student.

“Are we weak?”

It took several seconds to receive an answer.

After emptying the tube, Oriotorai let out a breath and made sure the components of her dessert were properly loaded on the bread.

“It doesn’t matter if you can’t win now, as long as you win in the end. Besides, isn’t that Matsudaira’s way of doing this? Oda sows the seeds, Hashiba grows the crop, and Matsudaira harvests it, right?”

That was true, but then the woman held up the bread.

“Want some?”

Masazumi considered it and remembered the dinner sitting next to her, but...

“Just a tiny bit... Wait, not that much! A fifth of that at most!”

“It ended up like this because the edges are so hard. Here. ...Anyway, what’s this about? Isn’t winning and losing for the chancellor’s officers to worry about?”

“But Futayo is more the independent airheaded type.”

“Y’know, Masazumi.” The teacher smiled bitterly. “Airheaded or not, if you don’t leave anything with her, it only places more of the burden on you. And you’re already under a pretty large load after taking on Toori and Horizon’s work.”

Her bitter smile grew.

“Sorry about all the trouble those two bring.”

“Judge. ...No, wait. Forget that. That’s not something worth apologizing for.”

But it did give her something she wanted to ask.

“Have you ever lost?”

She was mostly asking out of curiosity, but it was related to their current issue.

If someone nearby who could guide them had experienced defeat, that could directly assist them here. So she chose her words carefully to show she was asking with the best of intentions.

“If you have experienced defeat, it could help us in the future.”

“Well,” said Oriotorai. “That’s a good question.”

Masazumi watched her think for a moment.

“I did long ago. It was during my training when I was young. ...I couldn’t stand up to someone who...I guess you could describe them as my teacher. ...Yes, I wasn’t the teacher back then; I was a kid. A cute one, too.”

“I can’t even imagine a teacher you couldn’t stand up to.”

“That last part was important, but you completely ignored it, didn’t you? Anyway,” she said. “I think the last time I almost lost was seven years ago. That was when I came to the Musashi. I had only just finished my third year training.”

“You almost lost? To what? A gorilla? A dragon?”

“A person. A person. ...But it ended with me being here. I wanted to go to the Musashi and teach no matter what.”

Is it that attractive a place and profession, wondered Masazumi, but then she thought about why she was here herself.

...Well, I suppose it is worth “being” here.

But...

“Did you want to teach here that badly?”

“There was someone I wanted to see. And I’m glad I managed to. ...That’s why I’m also glad I didn’t lose.”

She then asked something else.

“So, Masazumi, why did you want to hear about losing?”

“Well,” she hesitated to answer and looked around to make sure no one else was around. “As it is now, Musashi doesn’t know what to do if we lose.”

In the light of the sign frames and lanterns, Masazumi saw her teacher next to her and the nighttime city of Musashi down below. When she looked away from the ship and to the surface even further below, she could see the dark forest and the occasional lights of a village.

But even if there was light, most of it was shadow.

It almost felt like that shadow was an umbrella protecting them.

“Can I say something?”

“Go ahead.”

At her teacher’s urging, she wondered if she could finally speak this thought.

“Musashi is a city directly linked to the battlefield.”

“Judge. It is.”

“Yes.” Masazumi nodded, wrapped her arms around one knee, and inhaled. “The results of the battles pass through the students on the battlefield, reach their parents and guardians, and spread to the rest of Musashi from there. That is the foundation of Musashi’s evaluation system for war. The parents determine whether we won or lost by directly observing their children, so it is impossible to manipulate information using the announcements made by the student council and chancellor’s officers. We are a city that makes direct evaluations.”

“True.”

The woman nodded and Masazumi nodded back.

“But...”

Masazumi changed the flow of conversation.

“The operation of the Musashi – especially the workers who keep the city functioning – is handled by far more normal citizens than students. So...”

She decided this was no time to soften her words.

“In order to involve them in war and keep the Musashi running during wartime, quick and definite returns are needed to overcome the risks and growing war weariness. In other words, both the students and the normal citizens need to feel that the war is worth it.”

“For example?”

“A feeling of elation and some kind of compensation when we win. Those would be the most important. Currently, Bertoni and the others are working on a number of plans there. For example, anyone who engaged in battle will have

their level of contribution rewarded with cheap prices on post-war management rights to the surface areas which have grown empty lately.”

“Making it ‘post-war’ isn’t really fair, is it? ...Oh, and is that the thing on the divine network where the candidates are given a score and competing for the top spot? Just make sure you don’t foster too much of a speculative spirit.”

“Judge.”

Masazumi could only nod in agreement, but she soon opened her mouth again.

“Also, wages for ship maintenance are being raised during battles and repair times are being extended to twenty-four hours a day. In other words, if you’re willing to work, you can always make some money during war. In order to strike a balance between acquiring foreign currency and keeping down inflation, we’re taking part in intermediate trade while also encouraging large-scale spending on homes by reconstructing the residential districts.”

“Those little tricks are working well, aren’t they? But...”

“Judge. All of that is because we’re winning.”

Masazumi took in a breath and summed up Musashi’s situation.

“Everything is going well for Musashi because we’re winning.”

This is a pretty harsh reality, thought Masazumi.

She had truly realized that during the afternoon.

“It was Mitotsudaira,” she said before clarifying. “It scared me when Mitotsudaira was defeated so definitively and Futayo couldn’t do anything either. No, I had already been feeling a chill from the moment Hexagone Française approached and proved our strategies and everything else were meaningless when faced with such a powerful nation.”

“You sure are talkative.”

“That’s because it’s nighttime,” she replied while biting into the bread.

What a strong flavor, she thought.

“When I saw the report today – this one, from the PTA – I was reminded how many questions there are from the parents and guardians. It’s still split about 50/50 between the people complaining that they never did anything like this when they were students and the people saying everyone should go along with it because the student body agreed to it, but...”

“But you think it would quickly shift to the negative side if you lost?”

“Judge. So...”

Masazumi lowered her shoulders, but she smiled when Tsukinowa worriedly rubbed his cheek against her.

“I don’t want us to lose. The Battle of Mikatagahara is supposed to include some deaths, so I’m glad Lady Yoshitsune agreed to settle it with a meeting at IZUMO. That is the worst loss that the Matsudaira clan has to go through, so I was worried what would happen if Takeda tried to take advantage of it. And...”

“And?”

“My classmates have been helping out a lot. This time, I’ve especially been relying on Crossunite a lot. I thought my life was over when that idiot was captured on IZUMO, but we managed to turn that into a rescue. Also, including Mitotsudaira in the pursuit team prevents her confrontation with her mother from counting as a mere loss.”

“Tenzou does that kind of thing on instinct. I guess you could say he’s attentive. But...”

Masazumi saw Oriotorai eyeing the dinner box.

“Should I open that up?”

“Sorry.”

It scared Masazumi how the woman did not sound sorry in the slightest. She was too afraid to give her chopsticks, so she gave her a toothpick instead.

After skewering five slices of kamaboko at once, Oriotorai spoke.

“But Masazumi, you have to think about what happens if you lose. It’s the others’ job to win, but Musashi’s vice president also acts as a public relations official.”

“But...”

“Look around you,” said Oriotorai while focusing on the food in her hand. “Even if it’s their job to win, they sometimes fail and sometimes lose. What did they do then? Watch carefully to see how they regained their lost trust. The vice president commands others, so you need to use what others do to strengthen yourself.”

“Is that how it works?”

She did not entirely understand, but it was true she had to command others in her position. In that case, she decided her teacher would know better than someone as inexperienced as her.

“Thank you for letting me speak my frustrations about a number of things.”

“That part of you isn’t very cute, Masazumi.”

Oriotorai smiled bitterly, but then...

“Ah, Masazumi! Please come here a moment!”

A sign frame opened and Asama shouted from it.

“Horizon is causing trouble, so can you help me persuade her!?”

“Huh? What do you mean she’s causing trouble?”

“Well, um...” Asama hesitated, but finally explained the situation. “She’s trying to go down to the surface! She wants to search for Toori-kun!”

Chapter 33: Persuader in the Chaos

CHAPTER 33

"Persuader in the Chaos"



Now then
What is going on here?
Point Allocation (Nothing to Do)

Now then

What is going on here?

Point Allocation (Nothing to Do)

The commotion was located on Tama's second underground floor. A residential wide block on the starboard side contained a scattered circle of people with a certain individual in the center.

"Horizon!?"

Asama, who wore her shrine maiden suit, and Kimi, who carried a wrapped loaf of bread, arrived just as Horizon was attempting to break free of the people.

The two of them ran past the circle of Musashi's public morals committee which was armed with defensive equipment and they stopped five meters from Horizon.

In front of them, Horizon locked her room and reached for the two objects leaning against the wall: Lype Katathlipse and Aspida Phylargia.

"Nh?"

With the two Logismoι Óplo in hand, she noticed the travel backpack at the bottom of the wall.

Her hands were full, so she faced forward.

She stared directly ahead and took a breath.

"How very clumsy. What is the meaning of this, everyone?"

"Sh-she shifted the blame to all of us!!"

Asama stepped forward as she watched the girl try to put the bag on her back without putting down the two weapons.

"Um," she began. "H-Horizon? Where are you going?"

"Isn't that obvious?" she asked. "To save Toori-sama."

Asama thought about what Horizon meant.

What she wanted was clearly impossible.

...But how can I convince her of that?

She had not left with Tenzou and the others, but that was likely because she had not felt ready. Now that she had the equipment she deemed necessary, she would join them.

What should I do? wondered Asama.

“You see, Horizon. We’re not flying over Hexagone Française anymore, so you missed your chance.”

“But I have determined I should rescue him.”

“Tenzou-kun and the others are taking care of that.”

“If I go too, I could help them.”

Asama groaned and was not sure what to say, so Horizon lifted up one of the Logismoi Óplo for the others to see.

“Look. I have Lype Katathlipse. It has not been of any use lately; I am beginning to suspect it will never actually hit anything again, and – to criticize myself – it feels like a bottom tier Logismoi Óplo, but it should be of some slight help.”

Gin’s shouting voice could be heard from beyond the crowd.

“Master Muneshige! Master Muneshige! Why have you fallen to your knees!?”

Being its former bearer can’t be fun, thought Asama as Kimi stepped up next to her.

“Horizon, calm down.”

“Judge. I have determined I am exceedingly calm.”

“Then think about this more carefully.”

“Judge. I have thought about this exceedingly carefully.”

“Then aren’t you hungry? Want some bread?”

“Judge. I ate a proper meal earlier. I am perfectly prepared.”

“I see.”

Kimi nodded and placed a hand on Asama’s shoulder.

“You take care of this.”

“Y-you are completely useless! I can say that now, can’t I!? And why were you trying to tempt her with food at the end!? Did you give this any thought at all!?”

“Oh? Then you must have a great idea. If so, just tell us what it is. ...Heh heh heh.”

“Y-you’re laughing because you don’t think I can, aren’t you!?”

She ignored everyone muttering “you’re letting her mess with you” and she began to think. And after five seconds...

...Okay! I found a great plan!

“Asama, I doubt any idea you came up with that quickly will work.”

...Shut up.

At any rate, she prepared to persuade Horizon by putting on a false smile and raising her right index finger.

“Now, are you listening, Horizon?”

“Oh? What is it?”

“You see,” she began. “This time, Tenzou-kun and the others are in charge of saving Toori-kun. Unfortunately, you are not part of that group.”

“Oh? And why is that?”

“Because Tenzou-kun and the others can handle it just fine, of course!”

Asama gave a huge smile. *This is what you call shrine maiden persuasion!* she told herself while thinking this was sure to make her argument more effective.

In front of her, Horizon responded with an expressionless nod.

“I see. But can they really handle it?”

Asama paused for just an instant when asked that. *Oh, no*, she thought while

maintaining her smile.

“O-o-o-of course! Of course they can! Tenzou-kun and the others can handle it easily!”

“How exactly?”

...Ah! The specifics are hard!!

She paused again. *I've messed up now*, she thought while still maintaining the smile.

“W-well, they have Mary with them and Naito too!!”

Uqui: “May I ask why you shifted away from Tenzou so quickly?”

Still smiling, she karate chopped the sign frame that appeared to her right.

...If the idea that Tenzou-kun and the others can handle it won't work, I have to turn that idea on its head!!

With that conclusion, she spoke to Horizon with a smile.

“You can wait to go until Tenzou-kun and the others have been wiped out!!”

Mal-Ga: “You have guts to include Margot in that. I'm gonna make a doujinshi out of you.”

Wise Sister: “And how will we know they've been wiped out? Are you stupid?”

Marube-ya: “C'mon, everyone, be nice. Asama-chi has gone crazy again, so she can't help it.”

What do you mean “again”!?, she thought, but now was not the time to respond.

“I see, I see,” nodded Horizon. “You have guts, Asama-sama. But how will we know they have been wiped out? Have you perhaps gone crazy? Are you okay in that sense, Asama-sama?”

...She just summarized all three of their complaints!!

Asama very nearly fell to her knees, but the heir to Musashi's representative Shinto family could not back down from persuading someone.

...I have to argue my way out of this one!

“Asama, is it just me or has your goal here shifted a little?”

“Calm down,” she said while patting Kimi on the shoulder and facing Horizon again. “Why do you want to go save Toori-kun?”

I can persuade her after hearing that, she thought.

“Why?”

After hearing Asama’s question, Horizon glanced up at the ceiling in thought.

“Well, to sum it up in a single word...”

“Oh!”

The girls and everyone else leaned forward in expectation. Asama did the same. As she wondered what the answer would be, the mass of worldly thoughts to her side brought her hands to her cheeks and wiggled back and forth.

“Heh heh. It’s ‘love’ or ‘romance’, isn’t it!? But ‘perversion’ or ‘sex’ work just as well! Wonderful!!”

Horizon nodded toward Kimi and gave her answer.

“ ‘Perverted love’?”

“That isn’t a single word, but it’s still lovely, Horizon!”

Kimi placed a hand on Asama’s shoulder with a smile.

“Help me out here.”

“Wh-why!? You set that up, so you deal with it!”

“Ehhh? But isn’t this how we do things?”

“I will admit I feel like I’ve always been cleaning up after your mistakes.”

Asama sighed and took a step toward Horizon. The girl did not seem to grow cautious, so Asama continued forward while dragging Kimi along.

She ignored Kimi’s strange and exaggerated cries of, “Ah, wait! C’mon,

Asama. You're so forceful. Stop trying to take me by force."

"Do you not understand why either, Horizon?"

She stood in front of Horizon even as she thought this was a lot like dealing with a child.

...But that's exactly why she's so serious.

Horizon tilted her head.

"Well, Toori-sama can be a pain, but when he is gone..."

"Oh? How does it make you feel?" asked the girls.

As their representative, Asama leaned eagerly forward at the front of the crowd. She of course ignored Kimi's shouts of, "It makes you feel lonely, doesn't it!? As your sister, I feel I'm a step away from hitting the jackpot!"

Horizon raised the hands holding the Logismoι Óplo and tilted her head.

"When Toori-sama is gone..."

"Y-yes? How does it make you feel when he's gone?"

There was a three second pause.

"I have nothing to do."

"You just use him to pass the time?"

Kimi tapped Asama's shoulder with a dramatic expression, but Asama continued to ignore her.

Horizon however faced Asama and continued to speak.

"Mary-sama, Mitotsudaira-sama, and Naito-sama have gone to rescue him, but given the excitement this afternoon, they are clearly outmatched."

That did seem to be the case, so there was nothing to say.

...That's a hard idea to overturn.

Kimi tapped her shoulder from behind again, so she finally turned around and glared at her.

"What?"

“She didn’t mention Tenzou!”

Without even tilting her head, Horizon glared back.

“Who?”

“S-see! I didn’t say anything because I knew she would react like that, so why did you have to bring it up!? And all while Tenzou-kun is doing his best to camouflage himself in the forest so he’s as plain and invisible as possible!!”

“You’re pretty awful yourself!”

She followed Kimi’s lead and danced out of the way of everyone’s shouts before facing Horizon again.

Horizon held up Lype Katathlipse.

“Listen,” she began. “I am Musashi’s greatest firepower. Opinions of this Logismoι Óplo may be dropping like a rock, but...

“Ah, Master Muneshige! Why did you fall to your knees again!?”

“But even this poor Logismoι Óplo should be useful as a long-range surprise bomber. I have determined it would be best to travel there and destroy the area in question.”

Asama suddenly looked at the other Logismoι Óplo she held.

...*Eh?*

The indicator on Aspida Phylargia showed how much ether fuel it had stored inside and that indicator was about a third of the way full. However, she had supposedly used all of its fuel when firing on Hexagone Française’s nudist and student council president.

Aspida Phylargia transformed any “pain” felt by its bearer into ether fuel, so...

“Horizon, you have been reading criticism directed at you on the divine network, haven’t you?” asked Kimi.

Horizon nodded.

“I still lack 7/9 of my emotions, so I have determined it is not causing all that much damage. As an automaton, I find myself mentally pointing out any theoretical errors in the criticism of the student council and I find myself

agreeing with the logical criticisms. That is why it took so long to accumulate this much. So-..."

"No."

Asama cut off Horizon.

"You must not fill Aspida Phylargia like that."

Asama saw Horizon tilt her head.

"Why not? I only feel 2/9 of the emotional pain and we need the power at the moment."

Asama understood what she was saying.

It was true the pain was lessened by Horizon's lack of emotion and it was true they always needed the Logismoí Óplo to be ready. *But*, thought Asama. *This isn't a humanitarian issue.*

"It is wrong for you to bear it all yourself, Horizon."

"Why? I am the representative of the Far East. Or at least one of them. I am also Vicereine of Musashi. So why should I not take action or prepare to rescue Musashi or its representative?"

She continued speaking.

"In Mikawa, I could have bought the Far East's destiny with my life. In that case, shouldn't I save the Far East even if it means harming that life?"

"Now that you mention it, I do agree that is a possible path for a ruler."

"Wait, Asama."

"It's fine."

She squeezed the hand Kimi placed on her shoulder.

"But, Horizon."

She took a step forward.

"Please remember this. What we did at Mikawa ensured that you did not have to do that."

So...

“This is the same. We will not sacrifice you alone. This is the path we chose at Mikawa and it is the path you chose at England.”

Horizon tilted her head in confusion, so Asama continued.

“You are the one that suggested saving Mary and we all acted on that suggestion. If someone is about to be lost, we will stop it. You are not the only one with that idea. We all want to do that.”

“Then,” said Horizon with a further tilt of her head. “If you want to do that, why are you not heading out to save Toori-sama?”

...She had to go there, didn't she!?

That was a difficult question to answer. She could simply say they were using everyone where they could help the most, but...

“What's this, Asama? Do you not care about my foolish brother?”

“Y-you're working against me, aren't you, Kimi!? You're definitely trying to complicate this!!”

She took in a breath and placed her hands on Horizon's shoulders.

“Um, I would only get in the way of the others who went to save him. ...I'm just not powerful enough.”

“Eh?”

Everyone else seemed to be working against her too because they all pulled back in surprise. Horizon, on the other hand, nodded.

“Oh, of course. Because you are not officially allowed to fire on people.”

“When you say that with your expressionless face, I can feel my own Aspida Phylargia meter rising.”

“You're so silly, Asama. And listen, Horizon.”

“What is it, Kimi-sama?”

Kimi circled behind Asama.

“Listen. Asama has a job to do here. She has to use these breasts to counterbalance the people here who are severely lacking in that department.”

“S-stop that. Don’t try to lift them up from behind. And stop nodding in understanding, Horizon. ...Ah. Sanyou-sensei!? Where are you going!?”

“Anyway,” said Horizon. “To sum up, I am being forbidden from leaving despite my strength because...”

“Yes, because we sent out people more suited for the job.”

She’s finally calmed down, thought Asama with a mental sigh of relief.

“The people most suited for the job have already been sent out.”

At that point, footsteps and a voice reached them from behind.

“That’s right, Horizon. There is a good reason to keep you here on the Musashi. This is the best place for you right now.”

It was Masazumi.

Asama realized persuasion duty had finally been removed from her as Masazumi arrived next to her.

Horizon stared at Masazumi’s chest.

“I see you too are putting a burden on Asama-sama.”

“Eh? W-well, she does help me out a lot.”

“Judge.”

Horizon set down the Logismoí Óplo, placed her hands on Masazumi’s shoulders, and squeezed just once.

“Do not worry. Some people are into crazy things.”

“I’m not sure what you mean... What is this, Asama? Does it have anything to do with the breast enhancing poses the Aoi sister is making behind you?”

“No, no, no.” Sweating uncomfortably, Asama asked a question. “More importantly, why exactly do we need Horizon here?”

“Judge.”

Masazumi looked to Horizon’s tilted head and placed a hand on her shoulder.

“It’s a simple matter. Horizon is the Vicereine. She takes on that responsibility in Aoi’s absence. Having the same authority as him makes her temporary chancellor and student council president.”

“ ... ”

“And,” said Masazumi. “I only received word on the way here, but the Magdeburg representative wishes to hold a meeting. What a pain.”

With that last comment, she patted Asama’s back, Kimi’s back, and then Horizon’s shoulder.

“Things are rough up here and down below. Horizon, if you’re worried about things down there, you should worry about things here as well. We sent the best people we had for what needs to be done down there and you’re the best person we have for what needs to be done up here. ...That’s all there is to it.”

Thank goodness, thought Asama in silent agreement.

...We all have something to do.

Toori had been taken, they did not know how the pursuit was going, and they were on their way to Magdeburg which would be sacked. Everyone was definitely worried and they needed to be distracted from that.

“We all need something to do.”

Asama’s thoughts soon turned to the people who had descended to the Hexagone Française forest. They had to be even more anxious than the people on the Musashi.

“I hope Mito is okay.”

“ ...!?”

Mitotsudaira suddenly came to.

An instant later, she realized she was in a dark and cold place.

She could sense her surroundings by scent more than sight; so she knew that this was a forest at night, that she was lying on a bed made of plants, and that she was naked for some reason.

“Okay, Mito-tsan. How about I get your clothes on?”

Naito’s upper body leaned forward from the right. She held a Far Eastern uniform.

The girl’s proposal to put the uniform on her prevented her from grasping the situation. Instead of feeling the girl was being kind, she was worried what the girl might do to her.

“No, um... Margot? Why are we out here? And I can...”

She stopped before saying “dress myself”. She had tried to sit up but found herself unsteady.

“You’re probably a little loopy from the pain reduction.”

“Um, I...”

“Yes, yes. Right, right.”

Naito nodded and showed no concern for what she was trying to say. She pulled Mitotsudaira the length of a lap closer and gave a pure smile.

“You were pretty beat up, but you heal nice and fast. I saw that side of you in England and this is mostly bruising, so you shouldn’t even need the pain reduction by tomorrow.”

“Really?”

Mitotsudaira leaned forward, found she could not stop herself, and collapsed. *Ah*, she thought as her chest and chin fell into the plant bed. Her legs fell out of place as well.

...Th-this doesn’t mean my chest only sticks out as far as my chin!

Arguing when no one had said anything was a sad trait of someone in her class. She felt a little depressed when she wondered if that would stick with her forever, but she slowly managed to sit up again.

“If I have to get dressed, does that mean...?”

“Judge. We are in a Hexagone Française forest right now. Tenzou’s our leader. He says we have to move at night since they might notice the movement in the trees if we do it before the sun sets. But he says our pursuers will only move at

night for the same reason, so we'll be moving during the same time period and they can't catch up."

"Judge. Then, um, can you cut the pain reduction?"

"Eh? It'll hurt a lot."

"It will help me wake up a bit."

"I see."

Naito nodded and Mitotsudaira saw the Far Eastern uniform and tights in the girl's hands.

"Um... I think I want to get dressed."

"How about I help you?"

"No, I can do that on my-..."

"I really don't think you can with the pain reduction."

She approached while smiling and repeating "don't worry".

"I've practiced on Ga-chan. I like doing motherly things like dressing people up. It's cute when they struggle."

She moved behind Mitotsudaira and wrapped her arms around her.

"Here, let's start with the tights."

"No, um, wait! Don't grab my legs-hyaaah! Wait! Um... Nn!"

Seeing her reaction, Naito's mouth curved up in satisfaction and she nodded several times.

"I'm so glad I didn't reduce your ticklishness. And I'm so glad I came to Hexagone Française."

Tenzou and Mary were inside a pit in the forest. He had chosen this low area to the south because he predicted their pursuers would come from the north. In the center of the five meter space, he used an unlit sign frame to explain to Mary the surrounding terrain and what they would do.

"And that is why Hexagone Française will not be waiting at the Reine des

Garous' safe house. She is acting entirely on her own and has made sure everyone else stays away. That is why we must lose the pursuers before going there, but I will probably need your help when we travel. However, I will take the lead and the rest of you will follow in this order: Naito-dono, Mitotsudaira-dono, and then you. That way..."

Mary was listening intently, but he glanced down at her waist. "Eh?" she said while twisting her thighs together and adjusting the sides of her suit at the stomach.

"Um, did you see something strange?"

"Eh? N-no, not at all! Not in the slightest! I-I, um, was looking at Excalibur."

The two Excaliburs floating at her hips moved. One moved to Mary and the other to him. They rubbed their cheeks against their elbows.

"Um, Master Tenzou? What did you want to say about these little things?"

Little things? he thought. *Oh, she's treating them like pets.*

For the time being, he spoke to the right half that had come to him.

"Can I ask you to protect Mary-dono?"

After floating for a moment as if in thought, it rubbed its cheek against him again.

It did not return to Mary, which meant...

"It's taken a liking to you. It must know that you were the one that drew it."

"I want to avoid leaving you unprotected, though."

"Oh, my."

She narrowed her eyes in the starlit depths of the forest and rubbed the scar running from above her nose and to her cheek.

"I can fight well enough on my own. In fact, I would prefer to leave that one with you. Not to mention that Lady Mitotsudaira is injured. I intend to look after her too."

"I am glad to hear it. Please do so without pushing yourself too much."

“Thank you,” she said while bowing.

He lowered his head even further.

“No, thank you, Mary-dono.”

“No, thank you.”

“No, no. Thank you.”

“No, no, no. Thank you.”

“Why are you two throwing yourselves on the ground toward each other?”

Hearing Naito, Tenzou frantically straightened up. Mary glanced toward him with a bitter smile, but he only shrugged and spoke.

“How is Mitotsudaira-dono doing?”

“Judge. I am right here.”

Mitotsudaira was leaning against a broad-leaved tree to the south.

“You must be exhausted,” he said. “Are you feeling all right?”

“Well, um, that is a different issue...”

She sighed and faced him.

“Do you have anything I could eat?”

Study:

● The Protestant Reformation – Protestantism and Catholicism ●



"Sis! Sis! What is this Protestant Reformation thing!? Did the flat-chested people "protest" and demand their breasts be "re-formed" into something bigger!?"



"Heh heh heh. Chest brother, during the Age of the Gods, the Protestant Reformation was when the unified Christian Church split into the Catholics and Protestants. It was caused by corruption in the church."



"Had they fallen into what people call a decadent lifestyle!?"



"More or less. They were interfering with politics, finding ways of making money, and – even if the lower levels weren't – the upper levels had become a privileged class that ate and drank whatever they wanted and didn't even follow the rules of the religion. They even started making money off of the normal people by selling indulgences, which were supposed to purify your sins after you died if you bought them. The witch hunt was also going on at the time, so there was a fear of being labelled a witch if you didn't buy indulgences or donate to the church. The people were really left with no choice but to pay the church."



"Doesn't sound much different from the Yakuza..."



"Right. Some serious people within the church began speaking out against the hypocrisy of what they were doing. Soon, sects began popping up here and there trying to correct the actions of the upper levels of the church that they claimed were wrong."



"Huh? But I thought Luther started Protestantism."



"You seem mistaken about something. Protestantism simply refers those who were "protesting", so it wasn't just a single group. Luther is the representative of one major group, he was the first to spread the Protestants' shared ideas of restoring the Bible and clearing out the corruption, and he disliked conflict. That is why the churches and the lords that supported them decided to treat him as the representative of Protestantism. And even if we call it all Protestantism, the different sects inside it have different precepts."



"I see. So what did Luther do as their representative?"



"Basically, he acknowledged Protestantism and defined its ideals. In other words, he made it an official sect when the church was going to treat them as heretics and he decided on their "teachings"."

•Catholic:

The pope is the head of the church and has the highest authority. Faith in God is guided by the pope.
Worship of icons (the cross, images of Christ or the Virgin Mary) allowed.
Sins are forgiven when confessed to the church.
Divorce and contraception forbidden.
Must periodically attend mass at a cathedral.
Mary viewed as a saint.
Has official priests for guidance.
Primarily calls its buildings of worship "cathedrals".

•Protestant:

The words of the Bible are the teachings of God and have the highest authority. Faith in God is guided by reading and understanding the Bible.
Worship of icons forbidden.
Confession not practiced.
Divorce and contraception allowed.
Mass not necessary outside of important ceremonies.
Mary not viewed as a saint.
No official priests and little organizational structure. A representative local believer is selected as a pastor.



"That's a lot of differences. Although it looks like they both have their pluses and minuses."



"Well, if you look past the differences, they both have the same objective to their faith: peace and love. So it feels like they could get along as long as they believe in that part. Protestantism is said to excel on the frontier and in business, but that might be because it is more compact since it lacks mass and you could handle confession in your own heart."

The Protestant Reformation – Protestantism and Catholicism

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Chapter 34: Pursuer in the Forest

CHAPTER 34

"Pursuer in the Forest"



You cannot catch up to it
Even if you hurry
Point Allocation (Objective)

You cannot catch up to it

Even if you hurry

Point Allocation (Objective)

Mitotsudaira ate her late dinner while walking.

...I can't seem to calm down.

She walked through the forest where the shadows of the trees increased the darkness of the night. Tenzou was crouched down in the lead, she and Naito were spread out to the left and right about ten meters back from him, and Mary followed another ten meters behind them.

Tenzou kept an eye on the others' pace and tried to stay below the trees as much as possible. He would occasionally gesture with his hand to inform them of a rocky area or an area in which flowing water had worn away the terrain.

10ZO: "We're stopping."

When he sensed a presence, he would inform them with an unlit sign frame.

After the occasional stop, Mary would walk up to him.

"If it's an animal, let me handle it."

They would whisper to each other and a boar or deer would eventually pass them by. Then they would begin walking again.

"Mito-tsan, how are your legs holding up?"

She was still wearing her personal shoes which had picks meant to be driven deep into the ground when using the silver chains. The picks had been removed for the time being, but she was not used to using them like that and would occasionally hit an outcropping of rock.

...I'm used to fighting on a plain or in a city. I'm no good in the forest.

"..."

She looked at the surrounding darkness of the trees and recalled an event from her past.

Long ago when she had been very young, she had entered the forest and gotten lost. She had not known how to return home, so she had cried.

...And then...

When she thought that, she noticed she was trying to see the night sky through the tree branches.

This isn't the time for that, she realized.

She quickly turned toward Naito and remembered what the girl had asked.

"F-fine. I'm doing just fine."

She inhaled and responded more to the long gap she had made than the question Naito had asked.

"Don't worry. I am from a Loup-Garou family."

The rubbing pain on her heel was likely the beginning of a blister, but it was mild enough that resting somewhere would let it heal. However, her entire body felt sluggish and she did not have the willpower to say much, so she took a bite of the portable food Tenzou had given her as an excuse to remain silent. The soft bamboo packaging contained three cokepen-sized sticks. She removed one and put it in her mouth. Before biting into it, she licked it as if sucking on it.

"Nn."

The Far East's culture of preserved food had made great advances using vegetables, but vegetables were not her favorite thing. She would have preferred Western-style portable food, but...

...Cheese!?

The surprise of the Western flavor almost made her stop walking. Next, the strong flavor of salt almost seemed to stab into her tongue.

"Oh, Tenzou made those at home. He says it's a crude Far Eastern type of cheese. Then he broke apart some tuna, boiled it down, and solidified it with egg whites. Apparently, you're supposed to make a soup out of it, mix it with rice, and cook it like that."

She bit into it without really listening to Naito's explanation.

She preferred normal meat to fish, but this cheese-filled tuna had enough resilience to feel like she was actually eating something. She practically whittled down the one stick in her mouth, and...

...I have two more?

"There's even more."

Naito tossed her something.

She caught it and found more than just sticks. There were wafer and pill shaped ones as well.

"The wafers are for main meals. Rice flour was solidified with condensed milk and cooked. The pills are for nutrition. They-..."

"I smell vanilla essence."

"He said they were thickened with caramel."

In that case, they had all been made using some kind of animal fat. She had expected to be given flavorless but edible charms called "food charms" or dried meat, but...

...Food charms are only meant to eliminate hunger and you can't carry all that much dried meat with you.

She was thankful, but at the same time...

"This is a Western variation."

Mitotsudaira focused on Mary who was protecting them from behind.

...This must have been her idea, not Tenzou's.

Mitotsudaira was undoubtedly placing other burdens on her too.

Should I say something?

No, we're on the move and I really don't want to alert our pursuers by saying something.

But if this is just her being considerate, maybe I should tell her not to worry, but since she's English, she might want to keep her distance from someone born

in Hexagone Française, but she also married into Hexagone Française at one point, but she might have a grudge against Hexagone Française because that makes her feel indebted to Tenzou and Tenzou can't follow through on that point, so...

...Wow.

She held her head in her hands and just about summed it all up as “It’s Tenzou’s fault”.

That’s not it. It really isn’t,” she thought while focusing on Mary.

...I really am terrible at communicating.

Mitotsudaira gave a mental nod and realized she tended to keep her distance from others.

She was a knight, she was a Demi Loup-Garou, she was second in line to ruling the Far East, and so much else, so she was used to speaking from those positions.

And she had been around the terrible people of Musashi for a very long time.

However, Mary was a bit different.

She was a royal and the Fairy Queen’s sister.

Mitotsudaira’s positions were of no help with this girl. In fact, those positions only complicated matters.

On top of that, England and Hexagone Française had countless historical connections and she did not know what the girl thought about those.

...And I’m not sure I should ask about it myself.

Well, I don’t need to worry about that now.

Yes, I’m feeling faint from the pain reduction.

...I don’t need to force myself to-...

Her thoughts ground to a halt before she could add “speak”.

...Wow.

Wh-what is wrong with me? Am I so bad at communicating that I'm shutting it down altogether?

"..."

I'm awful, she thought while mentally holding her head in her hands.

Is this shyness of mine an advanced version of rejecting something without ever trying it?

But come to think of it, all of my personal relation skill slots must be filled from trying to deal with those horrible classmates. I can't fit anyone else in there, so there's no point in adding any more acquainten-...

...Wow.

This is really bad.

During business discussions or at work, one could always discuss the product in question or the item being developed. But in personal socialization, the discussion had to be about yourself and the other person.

...What is there to even talk about with me? I'm a Loup-Garou, I have these rare silver chains, I'm flat-... That doesn't matter. Right? Right?

At any rate...

...Every topic is too over-the-top.

But Mary is the same. She is English royalty, she is Scarred, she has Excalibur, and she has huge-... Well, that one might count since it's what attracted Tenzou to her.

What were they supposed to discuss out of that? They could always discuss food or their everyday lives, but a normal chat felt unnatural with all their unique qualities.

This was what it meant to have too much.

"..."

Mitotsudaira sighed quietly so Mary would not notice.

"Mito-tsan, are you getting tired?"

“Eh? Um, no, I was just thinking.”

“Did you really find what happened earlier that humiliating?”

“Did you have to bring that up!? Are you trying to pick a fight!?”

Tenzou turned back toward them.

He pulled a finger horizontally across his mouth, lowered his hand, and pointed forward. Naito nodded twice and turned to Mitotsudaira.

“He says if you have your throat slit and are buried in the ground, you need to stay positive. ...Think you can do it?”

“Are you sure he wasn’t saying to stay quiet, keep low, and continue forward?”

“Ohhh! You’re clever, Mito-tsan.”

Tenzou turned around again, so Mitotsudaira and Naito frantically crouched down. He suddenly looked far behind them and then back forward.

Without saying a word, he resumed moving and Mitotsudaira matched his pace.

...Did he find something?

A moment later, something appeared above the trees.

“...”

A giant object passed by.

It was a small Hexagone Française aerial ship.

Tenzou sent instructions to the others who just about raised their heads.

...It’s only passing by.

If it had found them, it would not be moving so quickly. It had seemed to appear so suddenly because it had released its auditory stealth. He focused and heard the overlapping sounds of several more ships in the distance.

Hexagone Française was trying to put pressure on them.

The sudden sound would fill them with the fear of being found.

They would be spotted if they panicked and began to run and they were rendered motionless while hiding from it.

So...

...They will hold us in place with the ships while the pursuers come for us.

“But now is the time to move.”

“Tenzou, are you sure that’s a good idea? There’s a whole bunch of them flying around up there.”

“I will make sure we take a safe route, so do not worry. Besides, they clearly have no idea where we are. After all...”

He listened.

“Mitotsudaira-dono, how far do these sounds continue?”

“Let’s see... It sounds like ten kilometers north of us is the center and they are spread out over a radius of twelve kilometers.”

“Judge. It would be natural to assume their main force of pursuers is at that center point. And they are searching over such a wide area because they have not caught our trail yet. Not even their force in the north has.”

So...

“Once they realize we are not in the north, east, or west, they will narrow their search to the south. But the distance we travel in that time is essentially a bonus for us.”

“You’re so cool, Tenzou.”

Naito exaggeratedly spread her arms as she praised him, but Mary looked at him with her hands on her cheeks.

...I just scored some more points!

I’m so glad I came to Hexagone Française! Three cheers for Toori-dono’s abduction! he thought before focusing again.

...Anyway, we have some dangerous pursuers after us.

When they had dropped down, he had told Mary to manipulate the wind to send them a little to the east.

They had landed near the border with M.H.R.R.. There, she had asked a deer to carry some dummy gear he had prepared and travel south. Meanwhile, they had travelled west before starting south.

...If we travelled along the border with M.H.R.R., it is possible they would be too afraid of M.H.R.R. to pursue us. But I only made it look like we had decided to do that.

However, the enemy had not fallen for it.

The arrangement of ships above Hexagone Française showed no sign of moving east toward M.H.R.R.

...And as Mitotsudaira-dono pointed out, they are centered on a point directly north of here.

His ears had picked up the same fact.

“That means they did not fall for the decoy and are directly pursuing us here.”

Another ship passed by overhead. Its movements suggested it had not found them, but...

...They have at least speculated that we might have made it this far.

“Um, Tenzou?” asked Mitotsudaira. “If the pursuers do catch up, who would we be dealing with?”

My answer will be nothing but consolation, but we can't have her panicking, he thought as he opened his mouth.

“No one much. Their forces are split dealing with M.H.R.R., so I assume they have only sent some kind of special forces after us. After all, we are pursuing their vice chancellor, so there would be little point in using too many resources on this.”

“We need to stop them before they reach the Reine des Garous's place. She ordered us to stay away and she dislikes having others enter her territory. We

know she is on her way to her safe house with Musashi's chancellor, but provoking her could trigger the worst case scenario here."

The female *Belle de Marionnette* of the Three Musketeers, Henri, spoke on the deck of a light aerial ship floating above a forest.

"Basically, don't interfere with the Reine des Garous's capricious nature. ... Can you handle that?"

She spoke toward the rest of the deck, but that deck remained unlit.

She had her back to the pale moonlight and three female *Belle de Marionnettes* stood in front of her.

They were maids, but their maid uniforms were modified for travelling through the forest.

The tall one with the number 01 stitched on her clothing smiled and spoke.

"Testament. Understood. This will be our first official mission after being placed under the princess's command. Regardless, I will do my best as her helper and as the inheritor of her uncle Mouri Motokiyo's name."

"To be honest, I would prefer not to have the princess's maids engage in combat, but..."

"If the other nations learn that even the princess's maid *Belle de Marionnettes* are trained in combat, they will be forced to take time to deal with us. And we have inherited the names of Mouri commanders, specifically Princess Terumoto's uncles, so this is exactly what we want."

She then tilted her head.

"But should I really be using Mouri-01 as a designator? Motokiyo is the fourth son of Lord Motonari and part of a mistress's family, but this will lead the other nations to simply view me by that number."

"Yes, but the *Belle de Marionnette* unit you lead uses the ranking from the Hexagone Française side, so there's no helping it. It seems they actually wanted to give you the name of Takamoto, father of Lady Terumoto and eldest son of the late Lord Motonari."

"But the Testament descriptions say Takamoto passed away before Lady

Terumoto came of age. ...And the inheritor of Motokiyo's name went missing, so I am the replacement."

Henri saw Mouri-01 lower the ends of her eyebrows in a smile.

"The princess has had a strong influence on you, hasn't she?"

"Not as much as on Lord Exiv."

She then turned to her two sisters. She nodded at the slender, expressionless one with short hair.

"I now officially grant Mouri-02 the name of Motoharu, second son of Lord Motonari."

She then gestured toward the short girl past the other one.

"I also officially grant Mouri-03 the name of Takekage, third son of Lord Motonari. And..."

She indicated the lines of maid *Belle de Marionnettes* behind her.

"These are the chosen 128. As the Mouri forces, I ask that you remove everyone traveling through our territory without permission."

She tilted her head.

"But what is the Reine des Garous hoping to do by abducting Musashi's chancellor and student council president?"

Chapter 35: Traveling Adulteress

CHAPTER 35

"Traveling Adulteress"



Now, it's time for some fun
What would you like to do?
Eat dinner? Take a bath? Or...
Point Allocation (Beast)

Now, it's time for some fun

What would you like to do?

Eat dinner? Take a bath? Or...

Point Allocation (Beast)

The house was made of sweets. The floor panels and walls were thick wafers, the roof was sugar candy and chocolate, the windows were sugar sculptures, and the pillars were thick pretzels.

However, the furnishings in the rooms were not made of sweets. The chairs were nothing more than bent wood with the surface hollowed out and the table was carved from a giant log.

The dishes, the soups inside them, and the other food were not sweets either.

“Heh heh. I take it from the look on your face that you didn’t think the Reine des Garous could cook, Musashi Chancellor.”

The Musashi Chancellor shook his head in his chair while looking at all the meat-focused food in front of him.

“No, I was just surprised by how extravagant it all is. ...In fact, did you make this candy house too? I saw something similar when I came to Hexagone Française a long time ago.”

“No,” said the Reine des Garous who had removed her coat and put on an apron. “My mother had a Technohexen build this place long ago. Only lost children can remove its components and it repairs itself. ...I’ve heard a few others were made for the history recreation of some old story.”

“Hmm. So it’s a place for lost children, is it? ...So was I lost?”

“That’s a good question.” The Reine des Garous gave a bitter smile and looked curiously across the room. “Children like that used to show up from time to time, but I have almost abandoned the place ever since getting married. The cleaning is handled by Technomagie, but stocking up on ingredients isn’t easy. ...The house you found yourself at was probably better maintained than this one.”

“Judge. ...So I take it even Loup-Garous eat more than just people.”

Now, how am I supposed to explain this? thought the Reine des Garous.

...It is true the man-eating side of Loup-Garous gets a lot of focus.

They used that image to get along with others and preserve their position as beasts, but there were certain people a Loup-Garou would always spare.

“We do not eat children. Ogres specifically target children because they like the soft meat, but they eat people solely for the food. We eat people as a part of the ritual battle known as hunting, so we do not attack children who cannot run or fight very well.”

“You don’t like children?”

“I never said that.” She smiled. “Unlike deer, sheep, or goats, human children will cry instead of run. They’re very cute. ...If they would run with all their strength, we would have the right to use all our strength to hunt them down, but when they simply cry, we only have an obligation to rescue them. Of course, if they come to hunt us down or win us over after they grow up, all of that changes.”

“You’re a true knight...no, a true royal, Nate Maman.”

She only allowed herself a small smile at that. She turned her focus back to the food and used her mitten-covered hand to pull a beast’s leg bone out of a pot on the stove.

She placed the hunk of meat attached to the bone on a giant bread plate.

“I can’t say anything about being a knight, but to many tribes in ancient Europe, the wolf was viewed as a god of hunting or war. After all, wolves have a strict pecking order and they value their pack. Also, they avoid unnecessary hunting and protect their territory. ...The Far Eastern wolf is much the same. You know what they say wolves do to people, right?”

“Gulp.”

“No, not like that. When a person enters a wolf’s territory, it will not immediately attack. In order to drive them out, it will watch and see whether

the person will leave or not. Once the wolf knows the person is not travelling deep into its territory, it will leave. If the person does head that way, then it will attack. ...That is why there are so many stories of children lost in the mountains being sent back to their village by a wolf.”

“I see.”

The Musashi Chancellor brought a hand to his neck. There was a collar there.

That was what a wolf attached to its prey.

He grabbed the loop of leather wrapped around his neck.

“Am I your prey? Or am I a child?”

“How would you like your meat cooked? Medium well?”

“Whoa, whoa! We’re getting ahead of ourselves here!! And raw! I think raw is best!”

Toori brought his hand back to the collar.

“Anyway, can you remove this thing? I won’t run away. And I’m sure you’d just catch me again if I tried.”

“No. After all, we don’t trust each other enough yet.”

“Eh? But I trust you.”

“Then...”

She pulled a leg of venison from behind a pile of plates and placed it on a metal plate on the table. It was sprinkled with herbs and ready to be put in the oven.

...Now, then.

She bent her upper body down lower than her butt, rested her chest on the table, and lightly poked at the meat with her claws. From there, she looked up at the Musashi Chancellor and tilted her head.

“How would you like this cooked? That’s what I was asking about before.”

The Reine des Garous saw the Musashi Chancellor look up at the ceiling in

thought.

...How about it?

Loup-Garous were man-eaters, but she was not going to eat him right away. The proper method was to hunt down her prey, feed them to remove any odor from their meat, and then have them obey rather than be forced.

...We only eat them once they actually want to be a part of us.

This was different from all the young men she had lured in and eaten for fun with her fellow Loup-Garous long ago.

This was Musashi's chancellor and student council president.

She felt he was worth eating properly.

After all, her daughter Nate relied on him. If he personally asked to become a part of her, Nate would have no choice but to give up.

"I am not going to eat you that soon. So..."

If the prey feared her, it was easy for them to be pressured into submission.

She wanted to avoid that.

He had to happily desire to be eaten from the bottom of his heart. Loup-Garous were a race associated with the moon who toyed with the instincts of man, so her pride as their queen would allow nothing less. For that reason, she lowered the ends of her eyebrows and spoke.

"It disappoints me that you would think I wanted to eat you right away."

She then repeated her question while poking at the uncooked meat so it swayed toward him.

"How would you like this cooked?"

He bent back even further in thought, but after a while...

"..."

All of a sudden, he faced forward and looked right back at her with his eyebrows slightly raised.

Oh, how cute, she thought as he met her gaze.

“Raw! I said raw is best, didn’t I!? I mean it!! I want it raw!!”

“Y-you sure are stubborn. You thought I was talking about you when you said that!”

“Honestly, did you really think you could talk your way out of it like that!?”

When the Reine des Garous straightened up and raised her eyebrows, Musashi’s chancellor averted his gaze.

He faced the door and pouted his lips.

“Don’t know whaaaat you’re talking about.”

He then began whistling to feign innocence. As soon as he did, a snake appeared in a corner of the room.

“Nwooooh! Is this a house of old sayings or something!? Wh-where’s a worm!? I’m gonna get so swollen!”^[2]

“Oh, the Technohexen that built this place added in a lot of tricks, so it probably really will swell up if you do it. She couldn’t control the weather, so frogs should be fine though.”

She partially hid behind the meat and glared at him.

“But for humans, eating wild animals raw is a good way of getting parasites.”

...Raw meat is a tough thing for humans.

However, she saw the idiot turn toward her and twist his eyebrows.

“What? I’m the kinda guy who keeps his word!!”

“You really are stupid. All you have to do is apologize.”

“What? I haven’t done anything to apologize for.”

He pointed at her with a gently bent hand.

“You asked me how I wanted the meat cooked and I said raw! There’s nothing wrong about that, is there?”

“Then what does that say about me when I pulled the meat out and asked again?”

Well?

“That makes my later question proof of my distrust of you.”

“What? That’s just...um... You were making sure because you want me to grow up big and strong, right? Listen, Nate Maman. Don’t say bad things about yourself.”

She just about complained that he had started it, but she reconsidered.

...This will never end if I do that.

One or the other of them had to back down and she was older.

...I’m an adult, but he dragged me into this childish fight.

A quiet laugh escaped her lips and that laugh calmed her heart.

She leaned forward again while gently shaking her hips left and right. She once more looked up at him from below.

“Do you like women who immerse themselves in insulting themselves?”

“That kind of woman sounds like a lot of trouble.”

“Oh? Then you must be the type who can’t leave that kind of woman alone.”

That was what it meant for him to continue answering her. He must have known what that meant because he let out a small groan that could be taken as understanding or stalling for time to think.

“Ah, well, you see? About that...”

He thought some more and spoke the words as they came to him.

“It’s a waste to destroy yourself like that.”

“True. And you want to tell those women that they could shine if they didn’t do that, right?”

He was saying they were a lot of trouble because he felt he had to say that to them.

“Heh heh.”

She laughed quietly, reached out a hand, and touched his cheek.

“Will you tell me that I would shine even more if I wasn’t so troublesome?”

After all...

“I am a lot of trouble.”

“Yeah, I was really starting to notice that,” he said. “But still, I’ll take it raw.”

“Are you still insisting on that?”

“I’m not backing down on that decision. Slice it thin and serve it with soy sauce and wasabi.”

“It will have to be horseradish instead of wasabi. ...You can really get hooked on that stuff, even if I only use a little bit. I’ll go get some from the spring out back.”

“This house of sweets sure is perfect for a carnivore’s diet.”

It had been used by two generations of Reine des Garous, so it was perfectly set up for them.

Meanwhile, he looked to the meat.

“It’s a real shame, though. Wild game is best when it’s been sitting around for about a week, right? Eat it right away and not all the blood will have drained.”

“Yes. It will smell and taste bitter right now.”

She thought for a while and tried to find a method of preparing it that they would both accept.

“How about I make it into roast beef? The meat will be room temperature, so that is the best way to retain the flavor of eating it raw. While I prepare it, we can talk and deepen our trust over the soup and hors d’oeuvres.”

“That’s fine, but isn’t roast beef an English way of cooking?”

“Oh, my.” She looked up. “You certainly know a lot about cooking.”

She almost asked if he had learned it from Nate, but being compared to another girl was annoying even if it was her daughter.

“That’s because my mom’s a cook.”

Does that not count? she wondered. All of a sudden, she found this thought

process reminding her of the past.

Long ago, she had had a similar thought in this same place.

...That's right. I heard someone talk about another woman and felt a little jealous.

She began to immerse herself in the memory, but she closed that mental lid to the past by straightening up. She had to take good care of that memory, so she instead nodded toward the boy in front of her.

“Now, how about I start cooking. After that, you can go take a bath.”

“I'm feeling more and more like you're preparing me to be eaten.”

“You clearly don't trust me yet, but that isn't surprising since we only just met.”

She smiled and had a sudden thought.

...And yet I know a lot about this boy.

She had done a fair bit of research on him after the incident at Mikawa. After all, the divine *courier* and letters her daughter sent her often mentioned him as a troubling existence.

What kind of letters would her daughter send once she ate the boy?

Mitotsudaira panted in the darkness.

She was currently travelling south through the dark forest in pursuit of her mother. The pain reduction left her head a little hazy, so she tried to focus and clear her mind.

...What is my king doing right now?

That was all that ever came to mind.

It was a negative thought. Worrying was important, but letting it take over only led to depression and panic.

She tried to avoid those thoughts.

...But then I start thinking about how everyone else is worried about him.

It was likely true that they were all worried. Horizon, Kimi, Asama, and all the others had to be worried and she knew what had caused all that worry.

“I...”

...I couldn't protect my king.

She did think she was blaming herself too much here, but a part of her heart whispered that it was at least partially true. There was undoubtedly a part of her asking what had caused this situation and asking if she was looking away from the real reason.

“...”

She shook her head to physically drive away the negative thoughts.

“Are you okay, Mito-tsan? Are you thinking about something?”

Naito pulled on her hand from half a step ahead and turned toward her.

Mitotsudaira was more surprised by the squeezing strength reaching her than having a hand wrap around her own.

Her head had started to droop, so she looked up.

Tenzou was only a few meters up ahead and Mary was only a few meters behind.

She belatedly realized how close Naito was by her side.

...They're helping me because I'm so exhausted.

The occasional sounds of an aerial ship passing by overhead were incredibly irritating. The noise stabbed sharply into her slightly dimmed hearing and it almost felt like a chill.

“1st special duty officer, we need to hurry. That is all we can do right now.”

“You're worried about the chancellor, aren't you?” asked Naito.

...Are you tempting me?

She was probably trying to be considerate, so Mitotsudaira only nodded and focused on walking in silence. Soon, Naito nodded twice.

“Yes, yes. He's probably naked with a chain around his neck while she gives

him food.”

...Uuh...

After picturing the dreadful scene, Mitotsudaira mentally shook her head.

...M-my mother would never do that!!

“And,” added Naito with a perfectly serious expression. “He’s probably barking, eating the food with his bare hands or only his mouth, and crying as he does everything your mom tells him to.”

Mitotsudaira pictured everything she had just heard.

“N-no, um, I don’t think even the chancellor would do that.”

“Ohhhhh! This is so good!! My taste buds are experiencing so many new flavors I think I’m crying! I’m gonna strip down naked! And can I have that meat too!? Can I!?”

“Oh, my. You don’t have to grab at it with your bare hands. And don’t drink the soup from the bowl with only your mouth. There’s a spoon right here. My mother took it from the English army as spoils of war.”

“Wow, this is an awesome spoon! Henry V transforms into his flying form! Amazing! I’m seriously ready to bark like a dog, put a chain around my neck, and become a part of your family!!”

“A-anyway, I think we can trust the chancellor.”

Mitotsudaira was assuring herself more than anyone, but Naito tilted her head.

“But that’s not an easy thing to do. Trusting him is fine and all, but it can be hard with the truly unbelievable things he does.”

She was disappointed how close she came to saying “judge”.

However, she felt that was going too far, so she raised her eyebrows slightly and argued back.

“H-has he done anything like that recently, though?”

“Topknot.”

That counterattack just about did her heart in.

“Uuh,” she groaned.

...Th-that one is so fresh I completely forgot about it. B-but...

“H-he only did that because it was necessary! Right?”

“Please forgive my...topknot.”

...H-huh? Am I turning into that boring sort of girl who lets jokes get to her too much!?

Naito laughed silently and patted her shoulder, but Mitotsudaira felt more relaxed than exhausted.

After deciding to continue viewing this positively, she saw some movement up ahead.

Tenzou crouched down and gestured toward them. Curious, she approached.

“We’re moving ahead at an excellent pace,” he said.

“Eh? R-really?”

“Judge.”

Naito let out an impressed tone, so it must have been fairly unexpected for her as well. Seeing that, Tenzou explained further.

“According to the general map, we should reach a small ridge if we continue up ahead. I was thinking about taking a break once we crossed it.”

“That’s pretty far away,” commented Mitotsudaira. “We’ll be moving pretty late at night.”

“Oh? Are you saying you can’t walk any further?”

Mitotsudaira knew Naito was provoking her, but she was thankful for it while so weak. She brought a hand to her chest as she replied.

“I can walk just fine! Let’s hurry and make our way as close to the chancellor as we can!”

“They have chosen a clever route and done well covering their tracks, but it is not enough to hide so many people.”

Mouri-01 spoke quietly in the darkness as she touched the ground.

She was inside a small pit in the forest. It was shallower on the southern side and grass covered the bottom.

They definitely stayed here.”

Mouri-03 asked a question as she looked to the south from a tree branch.

“How can you tell, big sister?”

“People’s weight and movements will bend the grass. Although it looks like they fixed even that after the fact.”

Mouri-01 touched the grass and the night dew beaded up on the fingertips of her glove.

“The dew has slightly lowered the fixed grass, so I was able to determine it was camouflaged. ...Still, it was not easy tracking them this far.”

“But it looks like they stopped that camouflage from here on, doesn’t it?”

“It would appear they only truly started travelling as a group when leaving here. But...”

Mouri-01 asked a question of the surrounding *Belle de Marionnettes* and Mouri-03.

“Can you pick up their residual heat trail?”

The *Belle de Marionnettes* shook their heads and Mouri-03 sighed up above.

“It’s pretty weak. ...Oh, I get it. They must have calculated out when the dew would fall. If they’d predicted how far we would get by then, they would only have to erase their tracks up to-...”

“This is a Hexagone Française forest and a harmonic territory forest. Even if we’re dealing with a ninja here, they would have been trained with a focus on the Far East, so they would not know how much European grass changes in the dew. They must have read as much they could from the air, predicted how far

we would arrive before the dew fell, and erased their tracks up to that point. I have determined that was an excellent decision.”


“Big sister, this isn’t the time to be impressed. What are we going to do? Pursue them? If you can predict where they are, we could send in the ships flying around up above.”

“Disturbing the Reine des Garous’s territory would displease her, so let us pursue by foot. If they also predicted that the dew and low night temperatures would weaken their trail of residual heat, this is a dangerous enemy indeed. Did they use the Testament Union’s almanac to predict we would be sent out to guard Hexagone Française’s territory? We were able to use the residual heat to see through the camouflage using a deer at their landing point, but...”

Mouri-01 brought a hand to her chin and thought. After a while, she spoke again.

“Mouri-02, can you pick up their residual ether trail?”

Someone silently stood up from the grass. It was Mouri-02.



Mouri-03

Mouri-01

Mouri-02

She had been crouched down with her right hand on the ground, but she did not turn toward her elder sister. She simply held out her left hand and raised three fingers.

“There are three residual ether trails? Which ones were disguised?”

Mouri-02 shook her head.

“Testament,” replied Mouri-01. “If they are all disguised, then this really must be their 1st special duty officer. That ninja.”

“He must have used deer again. By the way, can you not remember that ninja’s name, big sister?”

They all exchanged a glance via their shared memory and spent three seconds thinking, which was a long time for *Belle de Marionnettes*. When they were unable to find the answer, Mouri-01 clapped twice.

“Testament. That is enough wasting our thoughts on that. The middle route is probably the correct one, but we will have to check them all. Split into three teams and report back once you find a heat signature. We will pursue after regrouping.”

She paused.

“Now, then. If you want the center route, please raise your hand.”

Scarred: “Um, Master Tenzou? Excalibur has returned.”

Tenzou nodded at Mary’s divine chat message, opened a small keyboard, and replied.

10ZO: “Thank you. I keep relying on you here, don’t I? It’s fortunate the deer are willing to help us.”

Scarred: “This may be Hexagone Française land, but the animals do not follow human rules. They were willing to help on the condition that we do not disturb their land. And...”

After reading Mary’s message and hearing a ship in the sky, Tenzou asked a question.

10ZO: “What is it?”

Scarred: “The deer are overly conscious of Lady Mitotsudaira’s presence. They seem to know she is the Reine des Garous’s daughter from her scent or her aura. So, um...”

Scarred: “Was I...threatening the deer with Lady Mitotsudaira’s presence?”

He knew what she was trying to say, but he glanced toward Mitotsudaira who walked between him and Mary.

...We cannot let her see this conversation.

He tilted his sign frame horizontally so it could not be seen from behind.

10ZO: “What did you say to the deer about Mitotsudaira-dono?”

Scarred: “Judge. I didn’t want to scare them, so I told them this: ‘Lady Mitotsudaira eats more than just meat, so don’t worry. She also eats lamb as a vegetable.’ Once they heard that, they immediately agreed to help us.”

That’s definitely a threat, he thought, but he decided that was fine since it all worked out.

Scarred: “How is our pace?”

10ZO: “Slower than I would like. ...Oh, but keep that between us.”

Scarred: “Judge. It can be our secret. I promise I won’t tell anyone!”

That made him somewhat happy, but he was not quite sure if that was a good thing or not.

At any rate...

10ZO: “Naito-dono is feeling a little tired too, but I think Mitotsudaira-dono is at her limit. She’s stumbling more and more recently. Once we reach the rest area up ahead, we can do what I mentioned earlier. I will explain it to Naito-dono.”

Scarred: “Judge. ...Um, Master Tenzou?”

10ZO: “What is it?”

Scarred: “Even if we end up fighting up ahead, we’ll always be together once

it's over, right?"

"Judge," he sent back while thinking.

...I hope they won't ask for these logs as part of my report when we get back.

Submitting them would only be a bad thing for me, he thought as he lightly waved a hand toward and nodded at the two behind him.

"We're keeping up a good pace. We're about to reach the ridge, but we don't have far to go now. The rest area is just past there. ...Can you keep going until then?"

Tenzou looked up into the eastern sky. The trees were in the way, but he would have been able to see the Musashi if they were not there.

...That last communication we just barely received said we would meet up in Magdeburg.

"They must be dealing with their own trouble there."

A certain room was filled with furniture and decorations. It had windows on the wall, carpet on the floor, and a table for eight in the center.

"This is our treasurer's diplomacy room, so there is nothing to worry about. It is soundproofed and can survive an explosion. So what brings you here so late, Magdeburg Provisional Mayor Guericke?"

Between the door and table, Masazumi extended a hand toward a bearded young man with his hair cut right along his eyebrow line. He wore an M.H.R.R. uniform and he did not accept Masazumi's handshake.

His arms hung casually by his side and they both had a machine attached as armor. The arm armor was formed from levers and a metal hemisphere.

Everyone gave him odd looks and wondered what they were, but he simply gave a nod in response. He looked across the walls and even the ceiling of the furnished room.

"This is a most convenient room. I'm thankful. There is a lot I would like to discuss privately."

“What would you like to dis-...”

“I would like to hold a negotiation in a hurry, Musashi Vice President.”

Before Masazumi could ask anything, he spoke to her and the people behind her: Horizon, Asama, Shirojiro, and Heidi.

“Please destroy the Musashi.”

And...

“In exchange, we will give you a means of fighting P.A. Oda.”

Masazumi was at a complete loss for words, but someone did move. Horizon gently placed a hand on her shoulder.

“It would seem we have taken aboard a visitor from Neshinbara-sama’s world.”

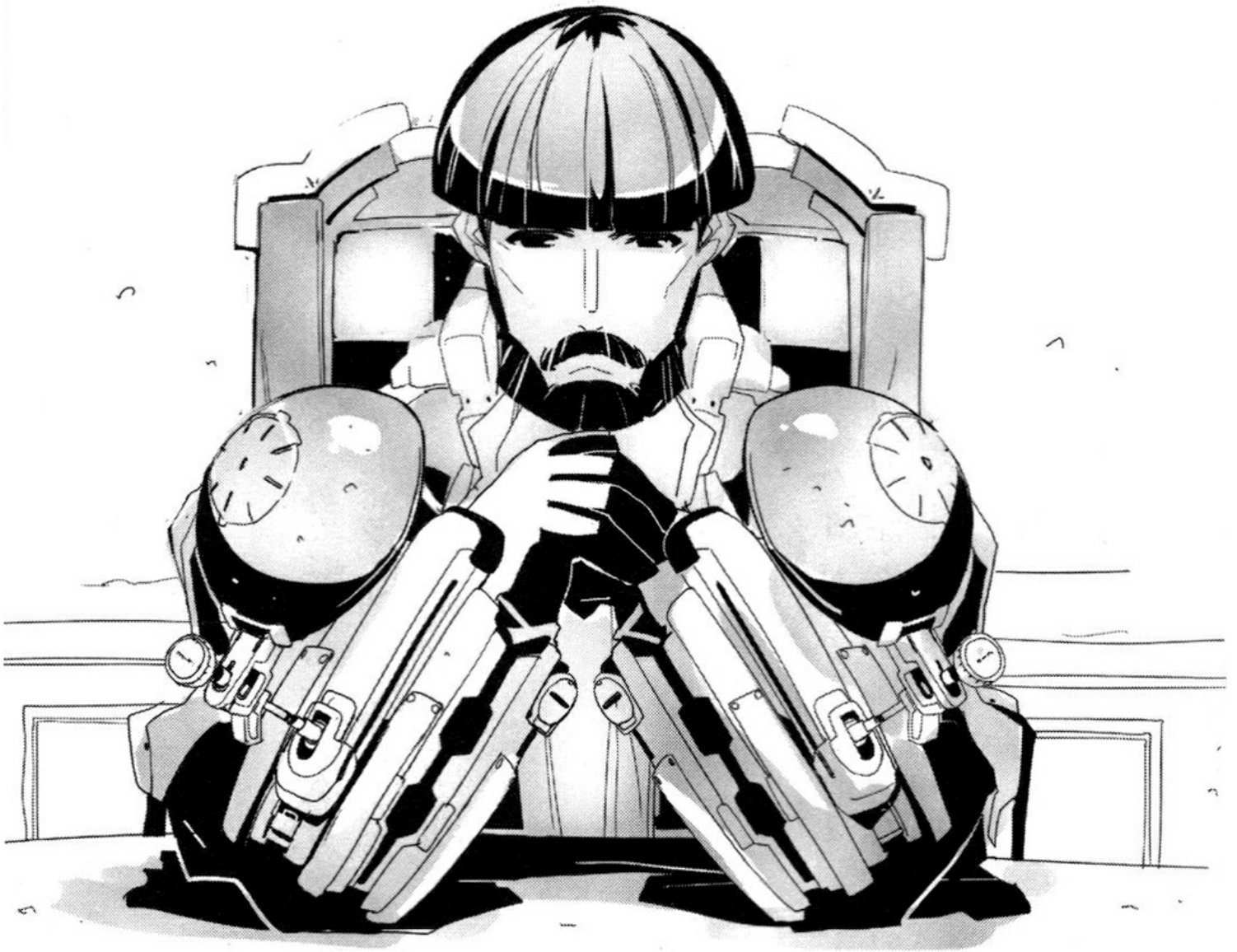
“Wait, wait, wait,” said Masazumi as her expression grew panicked, but Guericke’s eyebrows moved slightly.

“Oh? That is the name of one of our city’s best customers. In that case, I am pleased to meet you. ...The city of Magdeburg is the printing center of M.H.R.R.’s Protestants,” he said. “So I hope we can have a good negotiation. I hope it will be beneficial for both us and Musashi.”

Chapter 36: Agreement at the Table

CHAPTER 36

"Agreement at the Table"



What exactly
Brought everything to this point?
Point Allocation (History)

What exactly

Brought everything to this point?

Point Allocation (History)

The negotiation began with silence.

Asama stood at the door to manage the divine transmissions and Naruze waited in the diplomat's room outside.

Inside, Horizon sat at the negotiation table by the window on the ship's inner side. From her perspective, Magdeburg Provisional Mayor Guericke sat on the right while Masazumi and the treasurer duo sat on the left.

"Now, then."

The first to speak was Masazumi. She was facing Guericke from across the table.

...I know what he's trying to say.

"I think I know what you're saying, provisional mayor. During the Sack of Magdeburg, the city will be destroyed and lose most of its citizens...but you want it to take place on the Musashi instead."

"Testament. I am glad you understand. That will speed this up."

Guericke rested his elbows on the table. The arm armor with hemispheres attached acted like an armrest.

"I currently work under Saxony Sub-Chancellor Johann as treasurer of Saxony Academy. I hope you understand that I am perfectly capable when it comes to negotiating financial matters."

Obscene: "Ha ha ha. What is a sub-chancellor!?"

Mal-Ga: "M.H.R.R. is made up of several principalities, so the emperor holds the position of chancellor and the leader of each principality acts as the sub-chancellor. Also, the new sub-chancellor of the principality that produces the chancellor is customarily given the position of M.H.R.R.'s student council president which puts them in a higher position than the other sub-chancellors."

Rudolf II from Bohemia is the chancellor, so his younger brother Matthias is M.H.R.R.'s president and Bohemia's sub-chancellor."

It helps having someone from M.H.R.R. with us, thought Masazumi.

But...

Mal-Ga: "Those brothers get a lot of gay comics made about them. Make sure you remember that."

...I want to correct her, but I can't in the middle of a meeting!!

"What do you say, Musashi Vice President?"

"Eh?"

...Oh, no!! I wasn't listening!

Marube-ya: "Now, one of the following people will give you the right answer. Try to guess which one."

Mal-Ga: "He said he'd let us off the hook if you let him grope your truly nonexistent breasts."

Marube-ya: "Apparently, he gets really fired up if you say 'Leave, you piece of shit!'."

Asama: "Calm down, Masazumi! Try to start from there!"

83: "Curry is best at times like this!"

...Those are all clearly wrong!!

Asama seems the safest, but she's also made the least progress, she rationally concluded.

"Sorry. Things were a little noisy. Can you repeat that?"

"Eh? I was only asking if you understood my position."

Vice President: "You all can go straight to hell!"

Marube-ya: "Oh? You're showing some nice initiative today, Masazumi."

Asama: "Yes, if only she was calm enough to spell 'hell' correctly."

These people, she thought while watching them calmly typing away.

“Mayor Guericke, asking to use the Musashi in Magdeburg’s place is an absurd demand, so how do you plan to continue these discussions? What kind of bargaining chip have you brought with you?”

She asked another question.

“You mentioned a means of fighting P.A. Oda, but what exactly is that?”

Masazumi saw Guericke reach into his pocket. He briefly glanced down at what he pulled from his pocket and showed them. It was a blueprint.

“Are you familiar with my history recreation? I refer to the aside given about me from ’48 onwards.”

She was not familiar with it. After all, his visit had been unannounced. During the day, the various committees and the provisional council could have worked to compile information, but they could not react as quickly for a night visit like this.

However...

Mal-Ga: “I know what he’s talking about.”

Vice President: “Really, Naruze?”

Mal-Ga: “Judge. I believe he’s the man who caused a huge commotion in the city by pressing two balls together, sucking on them, and then tugging on them again and again.”

...What kind of explanation is that!? Someone please tell me the truth!

Marube-ya: “Judge. That’s exactly right, Naruze!”

Vice President: “W-wait! Isn’t it a little cruel to do this to me during a real negotiation!?”

Asama: “That’s right! I think it’s cruel too! I don’t know much about this either, so someone give us a better explanation!”

Naruze poked her head in through the open door, beckoned Asama over, and sent her pen racing through the air.

“You see, this went like...um...this and then they were pulled like this.”

Asama nodded several times, waved at Naruze as they parted ways, and began typing.

Asama: “I understand now, Masazumi. Guericke-san is the person who caused a huge commotion in the city by pressing two balls together, sucking on them, and then tugging on them again and again.”

Vice President: “Then arrest him! Shouldn’t he be arrested if he did something like that!?”

Marube-ya: “No, Masazumi. He isn’t some indecent person. All he did was cause a huge commotion in the city by pressing two balls together, sucking on them, and then tugging on them again and again.”

Vice President: “D-dammit! If this is how it’s gonna be, I’ll search the ship’s divine network for the truth!”

<Search Results: Otto von Guericke 1602-1686. According to an individual aside in the Testament descriptions, he was mayor of Magdeburg from 1646-1676. He once caused a huge commotion in the city by pressing two balls together, sucking on them, and then tugging on them again and again. (This article was edited by Neshinbara Toussaint two seconds ago.)> **Novice:** “Phew. Barely made it in time.”

Vice President: “Y-you people are doing your best to get in the way of my work, aren’t you!?”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh. Silly girl. This is the truth, so what’s wrong with telling it like it is?”

Really? she thought. *There really is some truth to this, right?* she also thought.

She crossed her arms and decided to go through with this while keeping as much of her dignity intact as possible.

“I assume you refer to the incident where you cause a huge commotion in the city by pressing two balls together, sucking on them, and then tugging on them again and again.”

That statement instantly filled the room with something.

That something was silence.

All expression vanished from Guericke's face.

...Huh?

Almost Everyone: "Wow, she actually said it."

Vice President: "Every last one of you can go straight to hell!!!!!"

Suddenly, Guericke cleared his throat and gave a shallow nod in her direction.

"My Far Eastern is not the best and I am having trouble understanding some of that, but that is...more or less correct."

Wise Sister: "Heh heh heh. What a naïve man! Interpret things that kindly and you'll have worn a hole in your stomach before your third day on the Musashi! A hole! Right through the stomach!"

Asama: "While I definitely agree with you, how about holding back? He is a beginner, after all."

Mal-Ga: "I always have trouble with Germans. They tend to be really straitlaced and like to keep everything so serious."

Almost Everyone: "Did you forget what nation you're from!?"

Naruze is really strict when it comes to herself, thought Masazumi as Guericke placed his hands on the table and held up the objects on his arm armor.

Small movable metal hemispheres were attached near the wrists. They were shaped like thin bowls and almost looked like plates.

"If the Apocalypse does not happen, these will later be known as the Magdeburg Hemispheres."

"What are the Magdeburg Hemispheres? Do you know, Miriam?"

Miriam, the translucent girl, and Azuma all lay alongside each other in the bottom bunk of the two beds installed on the wall of a ten square meter Western-style room. Azuma was watching the sign frame he had opened in the head space.

Miriam brought her hands together before answering.

“It was a vacuum experiment.”

“Is that the name of a special attack or something?”

“Boom,” said the girl.

“No,” replied Miriam while holding out her hands. “You see? Mayor Guericke was also a scientist, so he placed two hemispheres together, sucked all the air out of them, and tested their strength by tugging on them to see if they would come apart.”

“Huh? So that previous explanation about balls was...?”

“Hmm,” he and Miriam groaned together.

He then tilted his head again.

“But why would he bring up that hemisphere experiment?”

“These hemispheres can oppose P.A. Oda,” said Guericke. “As Musashi’s vice president, I believe you will know what I mean by that.”

Eh? thought Masazumi.

...I don’t know anything about those hemispheres.

What does he mean? she thought.

Horizon nodded and turned toward her.

“If we use those to suck at your breasts, they will grow, Masazumi-sama.”

“Waaaaaahhhh!!”

She cut off Horizon with a shout and frantically turned to Guericke.

“Sh-she didn’t say anything! She didn’t say anything at all!”

“...”

Ah. I’m starting make him suspicious, she realized while mentally sweating.

At any rate, she sat back down and observed the hemispheres he had placed on the table with his wrists.

She then began thinking about the Apocalypse and if it had some connection

to the hemispheres.

...Oh.

It suddenly came to her.

...Is that what he means?

She asked a question to confirm the answer in her heart.

“The vacuum experiment known as the Magdeburg Hemispheres causes a lot of excitement, doesn’t it?”

“Testament. However, the actual experiment does not occur in Magdeburg. It occurs in the southern M.H.R.R. city of Regensburg. The hemispheres are named as they are because the mayor of Magdeburg performs the experiment. However, it seems the metal hemispheres held together by a vacuum finally came apart after being pulled by sixteen horses.”

“I see,” replied Masazumi before asking a question. “Are you familiar with Avalon?”

Guericke simply nodded without even smiling, so she did the same.

“That technique for creating an Artificial Apocalypse was researched in England, but it would have reached you through the Protestant nation of Holland. Have you been experimenting with a defense spell using the concept of a vacuum?”

“Testament.” Guericke nodded once more and spread his arms a bit. “You should know this if you recall the Artificial Apocalypse in England, but it was kept from spreading using a spell. That spell can stop the Apocalypse which consumes ether and produces blossoming flowers, so it would make a powerful defense. ...However, that barrier was made by Chancellor Henry VIII and Chancellor Carlos V and it is very complicated. England has little history with Testament Kunst, so the analysis is being done here.”

Guericke slowly closed his spread arms.

“The Magdeburg Hemispheres are a defense spell created by the greatest minds of England, Holland, M.H.R.R., and various other nations. We will provide you with all of the documents and prototype creation devices. That should give

you a significant advantage in your battles with P.A. Oda or any other nation.”

And in exchange...

“We ask that you give us the Musashi. That way we can protect the city of Magdeburg and its people.”

“Wait.”

Guericke heard Musashi’s vice president speak.

...She is less telling me to wait and more giving herself time to gather her thoughts.

She faced him with slightly raised eyebrows. Not hiding her caution was a negotiation technique. It was a gesture meant to show she would not allow any disrespect or one-sided demands.

After displaying that barrier of caution with a single expression, she spoke.

“It is my understanding that this is not an official discussion.”

“Testament,” replied Guericke. “We are simply laying the groundwork for that, so I too view it as a preliminary discussion. However, a decision here will lead to a later decision. That is how this works.”

“So I should view this on the same level as a primary meeting?”

“Testament,” he replied again.

He then had another thought about the Musashi Vice President who lowered her gaze in a nod.

...She has made sure to check on everything. She is a reliable negotiator.

That was not surprising. Musashi had many enemies at present, so they could not function as a nation without a reliable and careful vice president handling their negotiations.

He made a short pause in his thoughts and that vice president spoke.

“First, I would like to know what it is you want from Musashi. Give us specifics.”

“Testament.” He recited the statement he had prepared. “The Musashi is a city of approximately one hundred thousand. Magdeburg has approximately thirty thousand. Thus, if you provide us with roughly a third of the Musashi, that will be equivalent to Magdeburg. ...Please understand that we will not be taking everything.”

This was the decision they had reached after discussing it all with the Magdeburg city council and citizens.

Musashi’s vice president backed away slightly.

“Then let me ask this: what will the actual Magdeburg be?”

“It will be a ‘harbor’. It borders a river and it can all be viewed as ‘warehouses’ if the residents leave.”

“In that case,” she said. “What will you do with the people? Twenty five thousand of those thirty thousand die in the battle. The remaining five thousand women and children receive brutal treatment and many are killed. What about that?”

“We are currently gathering a specialized group of Living Dead, Living Bones, and spectral non-humans. They have all already died, but we are especially focused on the ones who enjoy self-harm or being harmed.”

“That isn’t enough, is it?”

The aide to Musashi’s treasurer spoke while looking at the sign frame produced by a white fox Mouse.

“Many nations use mercenaries like that so as not to lose academy students, so it won’t be that easy to gather twenty five thousand of them.”

“We only need one thousand.”

Guericke used both hands to draw a half circle on the table.

“What matters is leaving behind the fact that there was a battle. Once we send that group to the front lines and have them clash with the enemy, we can have the warriors behind them escape or simply treat them as if they had died.”

“That’s a lenient interpretation. Something like that would not normally be accepted to artificially increase the number killed in battle.”

“Testament,” said Guericke while opening a document in a box-shaped Protestant sign frame. “We have a history recreation guarantee and approval signed by the pope-chancellor and other Testament Union representatives. We have received approval to recreate the Sack of Magdeburg in that way. After all, this battle turns M.H.R.R.’s Protestants against the Catholics and leads to M.H.R.R.’s defeat in the Thirty Years’ War.”

“And they want to use that to stop Hashiba and P.A. Oda?”

“That is the Testament Union’s intent,” he confirmed. “Therefore, we have one other request for Musashi beyond the aforementioned 33% of the Musashi.”

He corrected his posture before saying what that was.

“Evacuate the normal citizens using the Musashi’s remaining ships. I would like for you to seriously and reliably consider this.”

Masazumi first turned to Augesvarer. The girl gave a serious nod and turned her sign frame so Masazumi could see.

It was playing a German show about the Technohexen trials. A uniformed inquisitor made a proclamation with the moon in the background.

“In the name of the moon, I will punish you!!”

Marube-ya: “Are all Germans this serious and reliable?”

Vice President: “Naruze and Naito must be special cases.”

Mal-Ga: “Oh? I’m quite serious. I’ve never once forgotten to add in a black bar before publishing.”

Vice President: “Your problem is more fundamental than that!!”

Anyway, thought Masazumi while turning to Bertoni who sat past Heidi. If Augesvarer was so calm, then Bertoni would have no problems speaking on this subject.

“Bertoni.”

The merchant nodded.

“I think it is an interesting idea. If we were to provide one third of the Musashi, Asakusa and Shinagawa would likely work. The amount of supplies they hold is equivalent to one third of the whole. They contain no residential blocks, but we could create temporary residential facilities by adding a set number of water supplies, bathrooms, and beds in each section. That would be more than enough to meet Magdeburg’s demands.”

And...

“Evacuating the people would be possible using the decks, empty spaces, and transport ships of the remaining six ships. As long as we continued to be towed, there would be no problem there. Afterwards, the reserve storage currently handled by Asakusa and Shinagawa would need to be managed by one of the ports we visit, so we would be forced to remain in a city of a Protestant principality near Magdeburg or a neighboring Far Eastern reservation until the Peace of Westphalia. ...Either one would be inconvenient, but it would be possible.”

“I see,” said Masazumi with a nod.

Marube-ya: “It’s possible, but that doesn’t mean we’re going to do it. All he did there was show off our wares.”

...I know that.

Vice President: “You’re asking me to help you get all the information we need to know if this is worth doing or not, right?”

Marube-ya: “Exactly. Remaining cautious would definitely be a good idea. After all, we’ve said handing over 33% is ‘possible’. In other words, we’re luring him in by pointing out that he isn’t asking the impossible. ...And Germans are quite serious.”

Mal-Ga: “This man probably never misses a black bar either.”

Masazumi looked over at Guericke, imagined him drawing a black bar on a doujinshi, and immediately felt bad for doing so.

Guericke glanced behind him.

He saw the famous sniper shrine maiden standing by the door and past her...

...The great doujin author Naruze must be protecting us!

M.H.R.R. and especially Magdeburg's state of Saxony had a busy printing business. The printers systematically developed and gathered by Gutenberg used metal, so they were very durable.

Not much printed material had been allowed in Catholic regions because writing was thought to belong to god.

...But in Protestant regions, we can print all sorts of things as books!

For that reason, M.H.R.R.'s Protestants had received the benefit of producing printed materials for the other nations. This had provided further expansion in a nation with already great skill in metalworking and it had made Guericke's hemispheres and many other technological developments possible. However, one of those benefits left him curious about something.

"Who is that fallen angel guarding the room out front?"

"Oh, that's our 4th special duty officer. She's from M.H.R.R."

...It really is the great Naruze!

Some of my fellow fans on the Musashi refer to her as "Naruze-tan", but I could never show such disrespect.

After all, the workshop hired to print her popular series "Asama-sama Shoots" gets to check over the contents before printing and that has intensified the rivalry within the guild. But the workshops aren't sure what to do now that the job comes packaged with printing the Musashi King's ridiculously unpopular pure literary work "Our Slope".

I do wish the great Naruze would occasionally hold back on the black bars, but that is simply getting selfish.

...Oh, come to think of it, the model for Asama is there with her!

If I could only see Suzu as well, I could complete eighty percent of my reason for coming here.

...Come to think of it, the girl sitting right in front of me is the Masazumi

mentioned as a possible new character in the next issue!

I was so focused on my work that I overlooked it, but I am speaking with an individual who could soon support one of Magdeburg's industries.

Meanwhile, Musashi's vice president spoke.

"Do you need something?"

I need to memorize her voice and mannerisms so I can tell the local fans back home.

...Ah! I should have recorded what she said about sucking earlier!!

To make sure he did not overlook anything else, Guericke stared intently at the girl.

Masazumi drew back from Guericke's gaze.

Vice President: "Wait! This guy's scaring me!! He just started glaring at me!"

Asama: "He was staring at me earlier. Maybe he's just being cautious...no, maybe he thinks we're going to harm him."

Wise Sister: "I'd be scared too if I was in range of an international-level gunner shrine maiden."

Asama: "I'm *not* going to shoot him! I don't have my bow with me right now!"

Azuma: "Would you shoot him if you did?"

Probably, thought Masazumi. *And Asama and Azuma's names are easy to mistake.*

...But there's a lot I need to find out here.

It mostly came down to two things.

1: Do the Magdeburg Hemispheres really work?

2: Would Musashi really gain more than they lost?

In other words, would this spell be useful in reality and would Musashi gain enough if they accepted these terms. But to know 2 she first had to ask about 1 and determine the value of the Magdeburg Hemispheres.

For that reason, she moved the discussion along.

“To make a number of decisions, I would like to hear more about the Magdeburg Hemispheres.”

“What are the Magdeburg Hemispheres?”

Guericke nodded at the Musashi Vice President’s question.

...A complicated explanation would be very German, but the Far East would likely find it difficult to understand.

He decided to lower his explanation to her level and he began with a solid confirmation.

“Are you referring to the hemispheres used in the history recreation of causing a huge commotion in the city by pressing two balls together, sucking on them, and then tugging on them again and again?”

“No, um...”

A number of sign frames appeared around the Musashi Vice President, but she closed every last one of them. *She must be receiving advice*, he determined. *Such excellent teamwork*, he added.

“I was not talking about the hemispheres that cause a huge commotion in the city by pressing two balls together, sucking on them, and then tugging on them again and again.”

...I really should have been recording what she said here!!

He was filled with an intense feeling of loss and she continued speaking.

“Or do the anti-Apocalypse ones also involve causing a huge commotion in the city by pressing two balls together, sucking on them, and then tugging on them again and again?”

...Wait! That was too quick! I wasn’t ready!!

Oh, no. A German must not lose his cool like that.

He took a deep breath to bring some cooler air inside his body.

“The anti-Apocalypse ones have nothing to do with causing a huge commotion in the city by pressing two balls together, sucking on them, and then tugging on them again and again. Of course, their basic structure is the same as the ones that cause a huge commotion in the city by pressing two balls together, sucking on them, and then tugging on them again and again.”

Mal-Ga: “Are you sure that man isn’t just an idiot? Maybe I should stop asking him to print for me.”

Novice: “Ah, wait, wait. You get so much printed with them that we get better prices by being in the same cultural group. Let’s have a serious discussion before you do anything like that.”

Vice President: “There’s a lot of cultural exchange with other cities I don’t know about, isn’t there?”

Mal-Ga: “If I get my stuff printed in M.H.R.R. and arrange to have them look after it, I can have them bring me my inventory every time the Musashi travels through the center of the Far East. It’s a pretty good location and some people even use the silk road trade to pick up their printed items on the way to events in Edo.”

A lot goes into this, realized Masazumi before returning her focus to Guericke.

“Let’s continue talking about the Magdeburg Hemispheres.”

“Testament. As I stated earlier, you can think of them as a defense spell using the technique that holds the Artificial Apocalypse in that spring. According to our research, that holding technique creates an embankment for the directionless Artificial Apocalypse. The Artificial Apocalypse will consume everything, but this barrier is made so it ‘won’t be consumed for the moment’. As for its strength...well, you can say its strength is purely proportional to the amount of ether.”

What does that mean? wondered Masazumi until Naomasa sent a message.

Smoking Girl: “He’s saying the barrier will deflect enemy attacks for as much ether fuel as you pour into it. In other words, the more fuel you give it, the stronger it gets.”

Worshipper: “Isn’t that the same as our gravity barriers?”

Smoking Girl: “The gravity barriers can ‘deflect’, but the counterforce eats up some of the power. Plus, they’re weak against ether cannons and gravity attacks given the same directionality.”

Musashi: “Judge. When receiving attacks of that nature, we will sometimes destroy the barriers ourselves to spread the force of the impact. Over.”

Smoking Girl: “Well, you heard her. ...But if what he says about these hemispherical barriers is true, they would work just as well against everything since they’re based on the all-consuming Apocalypse. You’d be able to handle any attack just by raising the output and they’d never break unless they were hit by an attack stronger than the amount of ether you’re giving them.”

Mal-Ga: “So as long as you have fuel, you’d have an invincible barrier? That’s a pretty good deal.”

“Now, then,” said Guericke while facing straight forward. “Don’t you need a defense spell that can handle any and all attacks?”

As Masazumi listened to Guericke, she was suddenly reminded of Matsunaga.

After all, she had only met this man thanks to Matsunaga Hisahide’s connections. And yet M.H.R.R.’s Catholics and Protestants were at odds and Matsunaga of P.A. Oda would be on the Catholic side.

...I see. He’s been working with some amazing people.

She had been at least a little suspicious of traveling deep into M.H.R.R. and stopping at Magdeburg on the way to Kantou, but she had discovered the meaning for the trip during this meeting.

This was a path they had to travel before Westphalia.

As everyone held their breath and turned toward her, Guericke added something else.

“How about it? Will you accept this incomparable defensive power in exchange for giving us a portion of the Musashi?”

What should we do? she wondered.

Smoking Girl: “Hold up.”

She did not hesitate when she received a sudden divine transmission from Naomasa.

She faced Guericke and spoke.

“Wait.”

Masazumi held a hand out toward Guericke to say she needed to check on something.

Vice President: “Naomasa, what is it?”

Why had Naomasa suddenly asked for them to pause after hearing their exchange?

Smoking Girl: “Something doesn’t add up. If they have such a powerful defense spell, wouldn’t they be using it in Magdeburg? After all, they have the Sack of Magdeburg coming up.”

That was not the only doubt sent over divine transmission.

Asama: “I have another question. If this was made from the defense spell holding back the Artificial Apocalypse, couldn’t they create a barrier to save the world from the Apocalypse?”

Masazumi looked up in surprise.

Asama: “That seems like a natural idea to have, so why hasn’t Mayor Guericke mentioned it? Do you think they discovered some terrible fact while researching the Artificial Apocalypse in Avalon?”

Masazumi took a deep breath and faced Guericke once more.

“Mayor Guericke, by any chance, is this defense spell of yours still incomplete?”

After a pause, the man finally nodded.

“Testament. The Artificial Apocalypse spring has the same flaw, but we have

been unable to create a large scale version of the defense spell based on our analysis of it. The most we can manage is five meters square, so it is meaningless for us in the coming Sack.”

He relaxed his shoulders.

“Also, some will likely wonder if the Hemispheres can be used as a barrier against the Apocalypse, but there is one fact regarding that which has yet to be announced.”

“Are you saying you discovered something about the Apocalypse?”

“Testament,” he said. “The Apocalypse cannot be stopped with a barrier. The very act of eliminating it with a spell is impossible.”

...You mean there's no way to defend against the Apocalypse?

Masazumi was at a loss for words and Guericke used his hands to draw the shape of a spring in the air.

“Listen. If you have seen the Artificial Apocalypse in Avalon, then you should know that anything thrown into it is slowly annihilated. It is believed *that* is the same as the annihilation of this world. That is, the world will not so much vanish as it will be absorbed and thinned out. And you saw something like flowers bloom, didn't you?”

She had. A group of flowers had blossomed around the vanishing glove.

“It looked like the Apocalypse fed the flowers ether so they would bloom and then it destroyed that seedbed.”

“Testament. But instead of simply disappearing, I believe they are consumed to allow ‘the Apocalypse’ to bloom. Of course, this entire world is filled with ether, so those flowers will not bloom on us, the people living inside it. If they will bloom anywhere, it is on the very concept of ‘this world’. However, we and the entire world contained within that concept are part of the seedbed for the Apocalypse's flowers and we will be absorbed by ‘the Apocalypse’ before we realize it.”

Do you understand?

“All of the ether that makes up this entire world is being evenly absorbed and thinned out by the Apocalypse. Everything is connected through the ley lines, so it does not matter if you are inside a barrier or not. I have concluded that the Apocalypse is an annihilation of absolutely everything and that it invalidates all defensive measures.”

Masazumi and the others silently listened to Guericke.

“It will most likely happen sometime during this year in which the Testament descriptions end, but the world will grow too thin and we will suddenly find that it is vanishing. However, I doubt we will feel any pain as we thin out and disappear. That may be our one piece of hope.”

“That’s probably true,” said Asama via divine transmission.

Asama: “All things naturally consume ether to exist and that is not something that can be switched on and off. And when there is a hole in a ley line, it is filled and the ether attempts to maintain an even density, so if the Apocalypse absorbs ether and blooms as Mayor Guericke says, the amount of ether in the ley lines would gradually grow thinner to maintain that even density.”

Masazumi sent back that she understood and Guericke spoke in front of her.

“I do not think the Apocalypse is something we would notice right away, but once it begins, there is no stopping it and no way of preventing the world from eventually disappearing.”

Suddenly, Bertoni asked him a question from beyond Augesvarer.

“Mayor of Magdeburg, is this information on the slow progress of the Apocalypse and that it is not a sudden occurrence something you are giving us in addition to the Magdeburg Hemispheres?”

“Testament. I think it will help rid the people of their worries, but what do you think?”

“I am not so sure. What would you think if someone gave you that information?”

“Well,” said Guericke with a shallow nod.

After a pause, he replied in a definite tone.

“I would realize the Apocalypse was real and that there was no stopping it and I would despair.”

Masazumi listened as Guericke took a breath and continued speaking.

“This fact is too great a burden for Magdeburg and Saxony, so I wish to hand it over to Musashi. I believe you can put it to good use.”

He pulled back slightly.

Oh, realized Masazumi. Now that he's said that, he's relaxed.

He felt the relief of passing a heavy responsibility onto someone else.

She could tell from this conversation that he had discovered this truth in his research of the Apocalypse and his fellow researchers had been hiding it ever since.

...After all, it would spread despair if it got out.

Part of her wondered why he would have been researching this, but she knew he must have had no other choice.

There had to have been a great pressure placed on him and that thought brought a question to Masazumi's mind. She asked this man who was said to have experimented with hemispheres and proven the existence of a vacuum.

“Why did you research the Apocalypse?”

“Testament. Out of curiosity.”

He directly replied to her.

“I thought I could use my history recreation to find a way to combat the Apocalypse. Then again, I may have been mistaken from the moment I tried to have a dream as a down-to-earth German.”

Asama: “Um... I'm not any kind of officer, so maybe it's not my place to talk, but...”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh. My foolish bother, Mitotsudaira, and...um...the ninja?...are gone, so we have space for at least one person to speak. Why not just say it?”

Asama: “Yes, well, uh...”

Asama typed out what she had to say.

Asama: “Is there any point in giving us this information? Our main objective is to gather Horizon’s Logismoι Óplo and open a path to stopping the Apocalypse. So if we know the Apocalypse will definitely destroy the world if we don’t accomplish that, well...how are we supposed to handle that?”

That last part is her real question, thought Masazumi while half agreeing with the girl.

It really was more than they could manage.

...If we say the Apocalypse will destroy the world if they don’t hand over the Logismoι Óplo, the value of the Logismoι Óplo will skyrocket and the other nations will probably try to take them from us and gather them themselves.

It’s not an easy thing to handle, she complained.

But suddenly, someone to the left answered Asama’s question.

“This is a business opportunity!!”

Bertoni suddenly stood.

“Whatever the Apocalypse may be, we can turn it into a business opportunity! What other option is there!?”

Chapter 37: Traitor in the Ruler's Presence

CHAPTER 37

"Traitor in the Ruler's Presence"



Here we go
It's finally time
Point Allocation (Time to Shine)

Here we go

It's finally time

Point Allocation (Time to Shine)

The meeting with Magdeburg Provisional Mayor Guericke of the M.H.R.R. Protestants ground to a halt.

Both Guericke and Masazumi were not sure how to respond to Bertoni's business opportunity announcement.

Masazumi simply thought about what he had said.

...A business opportunity?

It was so sudden that she did not understand. After all, they were talking about the Apocalypse.

"Um, Bertoni? If the world is going to be destroyed, wouldn't a business opportunity be entirely pointless?"

"You don't get it!? Fine, then! Listen!"

Guericke also stared at the merchant in disbelief, but that was unsurprising for someone unused to this class. At the other end of the man's disturbed gaze, Bertoni opened a sign frame filled with writing and struck it with his palm.

"This is our strategy! First, we tell the entire world that the Apocalypse is coming and stir up their fear more and more and more! Yes, we spread despair! We make sure there is nothing but despair! And once that despair is so rooted in their minds that all mankind is on the verge of suicide..."

He expressionlessly turned to and pointed at Masazumi.

"We sell the defensive barrier that uses the Artificial Apocalypse! If we say it 'might defend against the Apocalypse', it will sell like crazy! We can use the site of the Peace of Westphalia, but we can divide it into two stages by first selling rights to the auction and then actually holding the auction! And if we also charge the general public an admission fee, an unimaginable amount of money will pour into my pocket!!"

The corners of his mouth rose as he continued.

“And after the defense barrier auction is over, we can sell our newly found ‘Truth of the Apocalypse’! People will come to us, hoping the information will save them, but once they learn they won’t be saved after all, they will fall into despair! ...And that is when we hold a second defense barrier auction! And at double the price!”

Asama: “So in other words, you’re a monster.”

Marube-ya: “Oh, Shiro-kun. You’re so cool!”

...Are we sure there really isn’t something legitimately wrong with their brains?

But the merchant had opened a second sign frame that he also struck with his palm.

“Are you listening?”

Without even waiting for a response, he began to speak.

“When we announce the auction, the rich are sure to be desperate. However, those who want to feign calm will ignore it. But that will change once we reveal the truly hopeless truth and hold the second auction. Once they know there is no future for them if they don’t, even those whose pride was restraining them will jump at the opportunity!”

He pulled a folded paper fan from somewhere and pointed at a word on the sign frame.

“Panic☆ Yes, panic is what matters! When people jump at the opportunity out of panic, we can take them for everything they’re worth! ...That is where the real money is made!! Don’t forget it!!”

“Wait.”

Masazumi asked a question.

“But there’s no point in making all that money if the Apocalypse is right around the corner.”

“What kind of nonsense is that?”

Bertoni looked down on her with scorn. “Listen,” he began. “When the world ends, I will be the richest man in the world. No, that is comparing me to others and does not do it justice. At that time, I will be the world’s final and greatest merchant!”

He made his declaration.

“If I hold all of the world’s money, the world can be destroyed for all I care! I will watch the people running from the destruction and laugh as I throw money down to the crumbling world from my transport ship.”

...That does paint a nice picture of the Apocalypse.

She pictured people fleeing below a deep red sky while great cracks in the ground and blazing fires swallowed them up. But up above, the laughing merchant and his aide were riding a ship of money and scattering coins around.

They would all be destroyed just the same, so why did the two above seem like the winners?

...That’s completely unreasonable.

She lowered her head in thought, but the treasurer finished vacantly muttering below his breath, made a “ding” sound effect with a straight face, and then spoke to everyone there.

“Okay, I have put together a plan!”

“What kind of plan?” she asked hesitantly.

Bertoni gave her a smile that did not reach his eyes.

“It is a simple matter, vice president. We will hand over a part of the Musashi for my own self-interest.”

“Wait!!”

She shouted in protest, rose from her seat, and swung her right hand with a quick snap.

“That would be a huge disadvantage for us, wouldn’t it!? What would the people who work in Asakusa and Shinagawa do if we handed it over!? Wouldn’t

that throw Musashi's internal economy into chaos?"

"What's wrong with that? The world's going to be destroyed regardless."

"What happened to having a plan!?"

"What a picky girl," he sighed while glaring at her. "Listen. Asakusa and Shinagawa's personnel can help manage the city the Musashi is moored at. Once the people know the Apocalypse is near, some will disturb the peace and cause a variety of problems. I am sure the city will be shorthanded. As for Musashi's internal economy, those troublesome merchants will use it as a chance to make some reforms and I believe it will turn out well for me and for the Musashi Ariadust Student Council."

He leaned gently toward her.

"How about it? Flying is the Musashi's greatest expense and it brings in no money. If we claim we cannot fly after handing over two of our ships and we moor near Magdeburg or somewhere else, it will naturally create a large area of commerce around us. Afterwards, that area will absorb the rest of the world's fortunes. ...Well? Sounds lovely, doesn't it? The money will come pouring in."

"What if we focus on developing that land instead of just absorbing all the money?"

"Do you really think we can buy Musashi's safety like that?"

Masazumi tilted her head, so Augesvarer opened a sign frame.

"This shows Musashi's budget and how our acquired foreign currency is used. Anyway, just like the past treasurers, we use excess foreign currency as a way to buy Musashi's peace. What we do is..."

"Make international loans for the other nations' debts?"

"Judge," said Augesvarer with a nod. "That's one way we defend ourselves."

Mal-Ga: "International loans? What does she mean?"

Wise Sister: "Think of it like lending a flat chest some pads when she wants to dress up, but only on the condition that she returned the pads if she entered a

boobs competition.”

Mal-Ga: “Oh... It scares me that I kind of get it now.”

Asama: “Um, to put it simply, if a nation needs a lot of money for war, settling new land, or maintaining their current land, they can borrow money from other nations to pay for it. That’s what you call an international loan. And the Far East has been a good place to borrow from. Due to the provisional rule, it would hand over as much as you needed and it’s flexible about repayment since its religion has no rules about money. But...we made a ton of decisions at Mikawa and that led to the Musashi taking over the Far East’s financial activities.”

Marube-ya: “Right, right. Musashi can lend other nations money to buy its own safety and we can press them for repayment if we need a bargaining chip against them. For example, we could give a nation with lots of conflicts between students two choices: borrow money to cover your war expenses in exchange for being Musashi’s ally or keep fighting us but don’t borrow any money. Of course, most nations are refusing to repay their pre-Mikawa debts because they ‘borrowed it from the Far East, not from Musashi’. However, some new loans are beginning and we can get ourselves some allies using the repayment of them.”

Mal-Ga: “What if they try to avoid paying?”

Marube-ya: “Not many nations can put up a fight on the level of the armada battle, right? And if we run into a dangerous nation, we can always use a more receptive neighboring nation as an intermediary. We could ask them to go fight the other nation a little in exchange for forgiving their debt.”

Azuma: “That’s like a rich kid who pays a stronger kid to bully other people for him.”

Marube-ya: “This isn’t bullying; it’s defense. ...Although we do need to give some thought to the power balance if we’re going to do that. We also can’t loan unfairly between nations, so it’s not an easy thing to do.”

“I know we need money,” agreed Masazumi. “But I do not think Musashi’s safety or our influence in the Peace of Westphalia can be bought with money

alone. For one thing, it's all over if every single nation decides not to pay. We need politics, economics, and the laws that support them or we can't allow this as a nation's academy. Gathering money is fine, but please focus on gathering Horizon's Logismoi Óplo as well."

"I can see you are playing this safe," said Bertoni as he turned toward Guericke. "But Musashi has no choice but to transfer those two ships over to Magdeburg. Do you know why, vice president?"

"Tell me."

"We are being towed by Magdeburg, so we must accept their demands. There is nothing we can do if they decide to quit towing and abandon us here."

He's right, she thought. We can't fly through M.H.R.R. territory right now. ...And that makes it dangerous if they stopped towing us.

She wanted to avoid that, but Guericke suddenly raised his right hand.

"Excuse me, but can you wait just a moment?"

He must have realized what they were thinking because he quickly stood up. He shook his head toward Bertoni and turned to Masazumi.

"We in Magdeburg would prefer to build a solid relationship with Musashi. I have no intention of proposing anything unnecessary."

...Of course.

To use the Musashi in place of Magdeburg, the Musashi had to actually reach the city.

In that case, refusing to tow them would only be a last resort.

And at the moment, they had no reason to do that.

...They're not like our treasurer who's ready to hand over part of the Musashi.

Suddenly, Augesvarer looked up in surprise and moved away from Guericke.

"I get it! This man is trying to threaten us by refusing to tow the Musashi, isn't he!?"

"Eh?"

Guericke clearly did not understand what Augesvarer was saying.

However, the cruel merchant saw an opening there, so he grabbed Heidi's shoulder.

"Yes. Yes he is, Heidi. This hemispherical mayor intends to use that refusal as a bargaining chip against us. ...We have no choice but to hand over the two ships! That is what this means!"

"No, um, wait."

"How can you two make jokes at a time like this?"

"What are you talking about, vice president?"

Bertoni turned to her while ignoring Guericke who was still "um"-ing and "uh"-ing.

"Listen. If the Musashi is stopped in Magdeburg, we can be the true winners as the world is destroyed by the Apocalypse! Would you rather run away and die or laugh, throw money around, and die!?"

"I don't want to do either, you idiot."

That was when, Guericke gave the finishing blow.

"Well, there's still a lot about this I don't understand." He nodded. "But if you will sign a contract here, that would be better than I could have hoped."

Guericke desperately tried to restrain his pounding heart.

...Th-the Musashi will be permanently moored near Magdeburg!?

If that happened, all of Musashi's printed materials would naturally end up in Magdeburg.

The Apocalypse was not far off, but the city would have economic stability and mental stability as the printing city with the privilege of seeing Naruze and a number of other authors' works before anyone else.

"I would like that more than anything else!"

He stood and clenched his right fist without thinking. *Oh, no. A German*

should be calmer than this, he realized. But if their treasurer agrees, that doesn't matter.

“In exchange, we will allow the Musashi to plan the resistance against the coming conflict.”

Musashi's treasurer clenched his left fist and held it out.

“Judge! For our ambitions and victory in life!”

“Testament! For our ambitions and victory in life!”

“Hold iiiiiittttt!!”

Oh, the Musashi Vice President's shout is so delightful. I wonder how she will be drawn in the next doujinshi. But due to Asama's gunner character trait, the great Naruze always uses artillery sound effects during the kiss scenes and reliable union scenes. That makes it a little too shocking too self-insert, so I reliably wish she would do something about that. And the sound effects are a bit of a problem when making the German or Latin versions.

However, Musashi's vice president raised her right hand and shouted again.

“Wait just a damn second, you two! I'm using my authority to intervene here!”

Masazumi pointed back and forth between Bertoni and Guericke, who had been staring right at her since a moment ago.

“There's still a lot we don't know and we have to gather Horizon's Logismoι Óplo! We decided on that policy for the Far East as a whole, not just the city of Musashi!”

“We can simply retrieve them from the other nations at the Peace of Westphalia,” said Bertoni almost carelessly. “We can trade them two defense barriers for their Logismoι Óplo. That is sure to get us most of them. ...Of course, those barriers are actually meaningless in the face of the Apocalypse!”

“Y-you just want to cause trouble, don't you!? And besides.”

She pointed between Bertoni and Guericke again.

“Calm down, you two! This isn’t just about handing over part of the Musashi! Don’t go ahead with international deals without asking me first! And if we scam people with those defense barriers while we’re semi-permanently grounded, we’ll be surrounded and attacked! They’ll try to get back at us for tricking them!”

“Ah ha ha. Not to worry. I’ll make sure they never find out.”

“Like I can trust you!”

“Calm down,” said Bertoni while narrowing his eyes. “By that time, the entire world will be on the verge of destruction. Normally, they would be completely helpless as that destruction arrived, so if they want the satisfaction of having tried to fight it, they will have to pay me. That is all this is.”

In other words...

“Just three minutes ago, I seized control of the entire world using money!”

“Are you really Musashi’s treasurer!?”

“It seems you do not understand the truth of this world.” Bertoni sighed. “The disciple of money just so happens to play the role of Musashi’s treasurer.”

“Think before you speak!!”

Asama: “Um, who’s the bad guy here?”

Mal-Ga: “That’s easy. The flustered, weak-looking one is the normal person. The calm one is the crazy person.”

Vice President: “A-all of you are calm too! Aren’t you!?”

Asama averted her gaze and Naruze could be heard turning her back while standing guard outside the door.

These people, thought Masazumi as she glanced around. She noticed Heidi standing next to Bertoni and opening a variety of sign frames. This gaze Masazumi a very bad feeling.

“Um, Augesvarer?”

“Eh? Oh, don’t talk to me anymore! I’m on Shiro-kun’s side! Heh heh heh. That’s right. I’m the Marube-ya’s woman!!”

The enemy is growing, honestly thought Masazumi.

But the biggest problem was Bertoni's authority as Musashi's treasurer.

She could always revoke his position with her authority as vice president, but...

...Restoring it later would be a lot of trouble.

Given Musashi's position, there was a lot to gain from the position of treasurer.

Vice President was a higher position, but it was a "status" position with primarily political work. On the other hand, Treasurer was a "business" position that actively dealt with the economy and commerce.

If she revoked his position, the position's restoration could be slowed by opposition and interference from the commerce and industry guild or the provisional council. On top of that, the student council's approval rating would drop.

Appointing a new treasurer would be better, but no one else was qualified.

While wondering what to do, her gaze happened to land on Horizon.

Horizon expressionlessly scooted forward in her seat. She was just about to slide right off the chair, but her breasts rested on the table and supported her. She went on to speak in an emotionless voice.

"My impression of Asama-sama."

Asama: "Wh-why am I suddenly under attack!?"

Wise Sister: "From the footage we're getting, that is what Asama does. ...But your shoulders get really stiff if you don't, right? I asked Mary once and she agreed."

Mal-Ga: "Yes. I think Margot leans forward more since she has her wings on her back. ...But where's Adele? Is she at the infirmary at Asama's shrine? Mitotsudaira isn't here either, so the only ones without any experience in this busy activity would be Suzu and me."

Laborer: “Do automatons’ shoulders get stiff too?”

Girls: Wow! He’s worried about Ujinao-san!”

Sticky King: “Don’t make fun! Noriki is serious!”

Obscene: “That’s right! Love should not be treated like a joke!”

Girls: “...Sorry.”

In the corner of Masazumi’s vision, Horizon raised her right hand while continuing her impression of Asama. She looked back and forth between Bertoni and Guericke.

“Anyway, I agree it would be best to gather the Logismoι Óplo at the Peace of Westphalia.”

“Wait, wait, wait!” cut in Masazumi. “Horizon, when you say you agree...!?”

Horizon tilted her head.

“I do not entirely understand the details, so I am simply speaking from an efficiency standpoint. And Masazumi-sama, I am the provisional student council president, so please be quiet.”

“That’s right, Honda Masazumi!” Bertoni excitedly pointed at her. “This is the time for money! Money rules the world in this age, so you politicians need to stay quiet!”

“That’s right, Shiro-kun! Long live money!!”

These damn people, thought Masazumi while clenching a fist.

“Now, with my authority as provisional student council president, I would like to make a slight correction to the previous deal.”

“Go ahead, go ahead!! As long as it is slight!”

The two merchants and the mayor eagerly rubbed their hands together as Horizon continued.

“Bertoni-sama, you are slightly fired.”

“Slightly?”

Masazumi thought as the merchant and mayor asked the same question.

...This has gotten pretty amazing.

She felt an odd sense of resignation and understanding that this was the sort of situation that required real resolve. Meanwhile, Horizon spoke softly.

“You are only being fired from your official position. How is that any different from an on/off switch?”

Those calm and for some reason questioning words were followed by Augesvarer’s voice.

“Hey, Masazumi? Horizon is saying something, so...could you look this way?”

“Sorry, but she told me to be quiet.”

“Calm down,” said Horizon. “I have determined gathering the Logismoι Óplo is important. They are my emotions after all. But another of Musashi’s major policies is to ‘not lose anything’ from the Apocalypse. Therefore, the Magdeburg Hemispheres are meaningless if they cannot defend against the Apocalypse.”

So...

“This is not even worth discussing. I understand the idea of defeatism, but not doing anything at all is the exact same thing as losing to the Apocalypse.”

She nodded.

“So Magdeburg Provisional Mayor, let us make a new deal concerning the Magdeburg Hemispheres and this portion of the Musashi. If I were to make a suggestion...”

“Yes?”

“Judge.” She nodded again and spoke with a complete lack of expression. “We will not hand over any part of the Musashi and we will take the Magdeburg Hemispheres. How about that?”

That sure is one-sided, thought Masazumi.

And being too one-sided was dangerous. After all...

...What if they refuse to tow us!?

So she quickly intervened.

“W-wait, wait, wait, wait. Horizon, that doesn’t amount to a proper deal.”

“Oh?” Horizon tilted her head. “What are you talking about, Masazumi-sama. We keep all of the Musashi and we get the Magdeburg Hemispheres. That is clearly an excellent deal for me. And I am the representative of the Far East and Musashi, so an excellent deal for me is an excellent deal for Musashi and the Far East. In other words, it is the best option! Why would we need to give anything in return?”

“Well, because the key to any deal between nations or cities is ‘give and take’. Right? Right?”

Asama: “I think this is a brand new kind of negotiation that goes beyond being forceful or bullish. It’s probably a sort of breakthrough.”

No amount of commentary is going to solve this. And I just found a new enemy, thought Masazumi.

Meanwhile, Guericke brought a hand to his chin and spoke slowly.

“Have you forgotten that the Musashi is currently being towed to Magdeburg?”

He finally said it. But even when faced by that threat, Horizon remained expressionless and tilted her head.

“I have not forgotten about the towing situation. I remembered it using the perfect memory of an automaton. For example...”

She placed a nearby cokepen on top of her breasts and scooted even further forward in her seat.

“I have used my memories to recreate how Asama-sama sleeps during class. What do you think?”

Wise Sister: “It’s perfect. An automaton’s memory really is perfect.”

Mal-Ga: “Yeah, it really has the same feel to it. The size is a little off, though.”

Asama: “Huh!? Huh!? Come to think of it, I have no way of knowing if this is right or not!”

“Anyway,” said Horizon as she turned back to Guericke. “You may continue, Guericke-sama.”

“Testament.” He nodded and pointed at his feet. “Then let me ask this: what if we were to stop towing the Musashi here?”

...This isn't good.

The idea that Germans never got emotional was probably wrong. It was possible they could feign emotion to give themselves an extra bargaining chip to play with.

That line was likely part of his negotiation tactics. The Musashi could not travel through M.H.R.R., so they had no choice but to be towed by the Magdeburg ships.

“The Musashi cannot fly above M.H.R.R., so if we leave you here, you will be unable to move and you will eventually fall to the surface or be retrieved by some other nation.”

Horizon tilted her head as if to say she did not get his point.

“I do not understand.”

“What about it do you not understand?”

“Judge,” she said to him. “Previously, you questioned my memory by asking if I had ‘forgotten that the Musashi is currently being towed to Magdeburg’. I replied that I had not and made a demonstration to prove it. I had not forgotten, so why are you suggesting this penalty?”

“I was saying-...”

“This back and forth is what we call a negotiation. You tested my memory and I complied. In terms of a negotiation, I have determined that was a win for me.”

After all...

“I am currently the provisional student council president and chancellor. I am Musashi’s representative and Musashi itself. I was tested and passed, so

Musashi has earned one win.”

...That's complete nonsense!

How nitpicky can you get? wondered Masazumi.

However...

Wise Sister: “The Mayor of Magdeburg was essentially trying to intimidate us. Horizon may have lured him in by doing things her own way to an excessive extent, but a threat will never work against an automaton like her. Heh heh. You all need to remember this. My future little sister does not back down when faced with trouble.”

“Now, then,” said Horizon.

She was about to begin something or give some kind of instruction.

She had earned a victory and she would use that now.

...Is she going to demand something of the Mayor of Magdeburg?

I need to focus on helping her, decided Masazumi just as Horizon mimed wiping her mouth with a cloth and dusting off the top of her breasts.

“Asama-sama at mealtime.”

Asama: “W-wait. I don't show them off like that! I really don't!”

“Her expression when dropping curry udon sauce on her breasts.”

Wise Sister: “Wonderful! She almost looks dizzy, doesn't she?”

Asama: “Eh!? I look like that!? Ehhhh!?”

83: “Even curry can sometimes bring sadness!”

“Now, then.”

Asama: “Eh!? You're just moving on!? Why am I always the target!?”

Horizon seemed to be ignoring Asama, but she had not actually opened a sign frame.

One would occasionally appear for her, but it seemed she could not control it.

“Tsukinowa, give Horizon a sign frame too.”

“Maa.”

“Oh, thank you.”

Horizon sat up and gave a quick bow.

Suddenly, something heavy fell behind her.

Eh? thought Masazumi as she checked behind Horizon and saw a white and black gunblade on the floor.

“...”

It was Lype Katathlipse.

Seeing that Logismoι Óplo which was capable of destroying an entire city, Guericke took half a step back.

“A-are you threatening me!?”

“No,” declared Horizon. “And this makes two wins for me.”

Mal-Ga: “Um... Is this actually following a really simple set of rules?”

Wise Sister: “Yes, and Horizon doesn’t know how to hold back. To be blunt, the harder she tries to negotiate, the worse this is going to get. Masazumi, make sure you help her out. Heh heh heh.”

Vice President: “If it wasn’t for those last three words, I would have completely agreed with you!!”

Anyway, what am I supposed to do? she wondered while Horizon stared at Guericke. Horizon then spoke to the treasurer duo.

“Do you have anything to say?”

“Judge.” Bertoni turned an expressionless look Guericke’s way. “Is this man an enemy of our great city of Musashi?”

Asama: “Ehh!? What!? Did I just slip into a parallel universe!?”

Marube-ya: “What are you talking about!? We would never betray Musashi! I can’t believe this pair of giant breasts would doubt Shiro-kun and me like that! I hope you sag! Sag-sag-sag (curse incantation).”

Mal-Ga: “That curse would affect the sales of my doujinshi, so I’ll definitely work to break it. And besides, you were clearly doing everything you could to betray us earlier.”

Hori-ko: “At any rate, I will make my request.”

Horizon spoke.

“Rescind your demand for a portion of Musashi.”

“Even though the lives of Magdeburg’s people are on the line!?” asked Guericke. “I had heard the Far East’s princess would not allow anything to be lost, but was that a lie!?”

“Musashi Treasurer and Treasurer’s Aide.”

“Judge.”

“Quiet him down. The negotiation is already complete for me.”

“Judge.”

Bertoni prepared himself at the same moment as Guericke.

Bertoni commented on the distance between them and their different stances.

“A European stance? Do you intend to begin a prostration battle?”

“Testament,” replied Guericke. “I will ensure my appeal gets through no matter what. I challenge you to a quick-prostration.”

“Fine then,” said Bertoni quietly. “The first to get their prostration through to the other wins.”

Asama: “We don’t have to comment on this, right?”

Uqui: “But what are they going to do? They have a table between them and chairs behind them. If they try to prostrate, their butts will end up in their chairs and their faces on the table.”

Asama: “W-we don’t have to comment on this, right? Right!?”

Wise Sister: “You only need to send us the footage. And some live

commentary if you can manage it.”

Asama: “Why did I have to go to a place like this?”

Masazumi thought to herself.

...Should I just leave?

But Augesvarer raised her right hand to the side to tell her to back away.

Marube-ya: “I checked back through the Testament Union’s almanac and the Mayor of Magdeburg uses a vacuum prostration, so it would be dangerous to let your guard down.”

Vice President: “I see...”

Marube-ya: “Look at those hemispheres on his wrists. He can emit a directional vacuum from them to speed up his prostration. Shiro-kun doesn’t use any equipment, so he’s at a decent disadvantage here.”

Vice President: “Why are you even explaining this to me?”

“Maa.”

Tsukinowa’s the only one I can rely on, she thought just as the two treasurers began to move.

They began their match almost simultaneously.

Chapter 38: New Age of Clinging

CHAPTER 38

"New Age of Clinging"



Something here
Is lacking
Point Allocation (Excitement)

Something here

Is lacking

Point Allocation (Excitement)

In the diplomacy room, the two merchants began to move at almost the exact same moment.

But one of them, Guericke, was not confident of his victory.

This was not due to a lack of confidence in himself. Victory was a result and it did not occur in the middle of a process, so he needed to be confident in something else.

...I need to be confident that I am doing my very best!

If he did his very best to follow the process, he could win or he could find himself lacking, but he would not lose.

What mattered was finding where you were lacking and – whether you won or lost – always crushing those areas.

That was how Guericke viewed training.

...But Musashi's princess said our hemispheres were the same as losing to the Apocalypse!!

He could not allow that, but did that point to something lacking inside him?

“...!”

He thought as he sank down to prostrate himself.

He remembered his school days when he had decided to research the Apocalypse.

At the time, he had been convinced he could use his history recreation of the hemispheres to defeat the Apocalypse.

While researching physics at university, he had been given the opportunity to read documents on Avalon sent from England. That had only strengthened his conviction. After all, when the Fairy Queen had taken the throne, she had

inspected Avalon and sent out new data on the Apocalypse.

...So I was certain I could use an interpretation of a vacuum to create an Apocalypse defense spell.

But not long afterwards, he had learned that the Apocalypse thinned the ley lines as a whole so there was no way to fight it when the defense spell itself used ether.

That had given him a new thought.

...Did everything we do only pave the way to defeat!?

No, he thought. Definitely not.

“We did everything we could to fight the Apocalypse! Don’t call that defeat!!”

Guericke moved his body and his techniques.

He had a single body, but the technique took the form of two hemispheres on his arm armor.

He activated the operation levers for the small hemispheres attached to his wrists.

...That creates a “vacuum”!

The vacuum hemispheres scattered the ether light of a Protestant Kunst and began sucking everything in toward their inside edge.

They were currently pointed down toward his feet.

His upper body was still vertical, but the hemispheres on his arms were pulled down. This produced tremendous acceleration.

“...!”

His knees and butt dropped so quickly that his head and shoulders seemed left behind.

With unbelievable speed, his dropping body slipped between the table and chair. His butt moved straight down.

His hips dropped and the “vacuum” pulled his wrists to the floor.

However, he then twisted his right wrist to the right.

...A prostration does not count if the other party cannot see it!

He pointed the “vacuum” right, the soles of his shoes slipped along the floor, and his entire body slid right in a crouching posture.

He glided and his dropping hips were already lower than the chair. Now he only needed to enter the merchant’s field of vision, place his knees down, and move his hands forward.

To ensure his victory, he power slid to the right while nearly down to the floor. He almost seemed to tear into the floor.

But then a shadow appeared overhead.

...A chair!?

To his left, Guericke saw Musashi’s treasurer grab the edge of the table and push it toward him.

The table was in the way, so he had no other choice.

But even as the boy leaned forward, his right leg shot up behind him.

“He kicked up the chair with his heel!?”

He caught the chair on his heel, kicked it into the air, over his own back, and toward his enemy.

The chair flew in a relatively slow parabolic arc. And because it was slow enough to see its trajectory, Guericke was briefly not sure how to avoid it.

...A German does not hesitate!!

He shot forward below the chair and toward Musashi’s treasurer.

He chose to sink down toward his left and challenge the boy to a point blank prostration.

He slid forward while the downwards pull of the vacuum acceleration kept him on the floor.

However...

“...!”

Musashi’s treasurer forcibly twisted his body toward Guericke.

The table’s movement also changed. It had been moving straight forward, but now it moved toward the man.

Was Musashi’s treasurer trying to hit him? No.

...Is he preventing it from hitting Musashi’s princess!?

Pushed straight forward, the table leg would hit the princess who still sat in her chair, so the treasurer had shifted its path away from her and toward Guericke’s half-lowered chest.

...An excellent decision!

The table came from the left.

But even as he felt the wind of its approach on his cheek, Guericke pointed both arms downward.

As the table approached, his body instantly sank to the floor.

It passed by overhead.

“...!!”

He rotated his right arm. He had leaned back to slip below the table, so he used the pull of the “vacuum” to bring himself into a spin.

He used his spread arms for a backhand strike with the arm armor and he made a horizontal kick.

...My target is the Musashi Treasurer’s legs!

Having to move below the table had broken his prostration form. He needed to buy time for his next prostration, so he used his rotating backhand and horizontal kick to interfere with his opponent’s prostration.

However, his opponent was already moving. He grabbed the edge of the table and...

...A handstand!?

Asama had not intended to watch, but it was happening almost right in front of her.

What mattered now was the intersection between the two of them.

...Mayor Guericke is below the table and he tried to sweep Shirojiro's feet out from under him.

But Shirojiro had grabbed the edge of the table and performed a handstand.

What surprised Asama was that Shirojiro had moved toward the sky instead of the ground.

...He must have trained for this.

It seemed strange, but she stopped thinking about it because she was afraid she would understand it if she did.

Then they made their next move.

Shirojiro had dodged, so Guericke's attack had missed.

"Ah," said Asama just as the table shook.

From her viewpoint, the back right table leg on Shirojiro's side broke from Guericke's strike.

After a solid sound, the table tilted from the lost support.

It collapsed back and to the right like a closing maw.

Guericke was directly below it, so Heidi spoke up from where she had retreated to the back wall.

"Crush him!"

Asama thought that was being a little too straightforward, but then she saw Guericke accelerate.

He used the "vacuum" of his hemispheres to escape toward the back wall.

Guericke did everything he could to escape as if moving his back against the wall.

But as he turned around, he saw the enemy moving in front of him.

On top of the collapsing table, Musashi's treasurer twisted from his handstand and took a combat stance in midair. His landing pose would place him on the tilting table and...

...Oh, no!!

The enemy would make a landing prostration, slide down the table, and end up right in front of Guericke.

That would complete the prostration and mean his loss, so he made a decision.

"The wall!"

He fired his "vacuum" toward the wall, stood on it, and moved left.

...I will make a sliding vacuum dash!

The soles of his shoes tore into the wall, but he managed to round the corner of the room while standing on the wall.

If he reached the wall with the window, he would be directly to the right of Musashi's treasurer. That would be outside his enemy's field of vision, so he would be out of range of the prostration.

To turn, the enemy would have to end his prostration, but by then, Guericke would have dropped to the floor and made a prostration of his own.

That would mean his win, so he tore along the wall and jumped at the corner.

"...!"

He jumped above the window frame on the wall to his left. He slid left along the wall from there and he turned to face his opponent.

...He's rotating!?

The enemy used his slide down the table to achieve prostration drifting. He slid his back end outwards and planted his hands so they faced Guericke. He was perfectly following the man.

He had locked onto him.

At this rate, the battle would end once the enemy's prostration reached the floor.

“In that case...!”

As Masazumi glared at the scene before her, she saw something truly unexpected.

Guericke had been quickly circling the walls, but he tore into the wall to make a leap which took him to...

“The ceiling!?”

As Guericke raced up to the ceiling directly above Musashi’s treasurer, he recalled the anti-Far Eastern prostration tactics he had learned at university.

...Research says prostration is a horizontal petition attack!

That was known from Europe’s research into anti-Far Eastern negotiation. Guericke and the treasurers of other nations and cities had put together a number of countermeasures against the rule of “once a prostration is complete, the petition must be accepted” that had to be followed for the Far East’s history recreation.

One of those came from their research into the horizontality and directionality of prostration.

A prostration made a powerful appeal directed straight ahead, but as a technique, it held little meaning to the sides or back. Therefore, the most effective way of avoiding a poorly-executed prostration was to jump over the individual and land behind them.

This also meant prostrations had a blind spot directly above and they were prone to trap attacks.

Thus, taking a vertical position protected one from a prostration.

...But if I make a prostration from my vertical position, I can strike back when he looks up to confirm my position!

However, a prostration on the ceiling was fundamentally meaningless.

A prostration’s effects were entirely horizontal, so as long as the floor and

ceiling were parallel, a prostration from a vertical position was impossible.

Or so it was in the past, thought Guericke as he raised his arms.

“But that age is about to end!”

He used the vacuum of his hemispheres.

“New Age Prostration! Rise, ceiling!!”

With the sounds of tearing wood and scattering wooden fragments, Guericke tore away the ceiling panel at his feet and tilted it up by ninety degrees.

This created a temporary but definite floor for him. He only had to grasp it and complete history’s first Senkrechte Prostration.

...At this moment, Europe’s petition combat has surpassed the Far East’s history recreation!

With that thought, he began his attack. The heavens and the earth had already swapped places for him and he would now tilt that by another ninety degrees.

...Soles of the feet, ankles, knees, and back.

His entire body worked in unison and he braked using the pull of the vacuum on his arms.

...Perfect!

He knew it could not be done better as he placed his knees and hands on the ceiling and leaned his body forward.

“...!?”

But when he looked below, he saw the Musashi merchant’s prostration turning his way.

That meant his enemy was entering the vertical world just as he was.

...But how!?

He knew how. He could see the answer. However, he could not understand it, so he shouted out exactly what it was he saw before his eyes.

“The floor is rotating!?”

The floor rotated like a revolving door.

There was a storeroom below, it contained empty space and a floor, and the falling table and chairs smashed to pieces when they hit that floor.

From the open windowsill they had escaped to, Horizon, Masazumi, Asama, and Heidi watched the room’s floor rotate around the center by ninety degrees.

“Ah.”

Asama had run over from the top of the tipping floor and she stepped up onto the window frame that was only half a safe area due to the vertical floor.

“Ah, oh. Sorry. I can stand.”

Asama turned around and Masazumi half held onto the girl’s leg while focusing on the transformation of the room and the result of the battle.

Machinery had turned the floor into a wall and Bertoni looked like a cicada as he clung to it while prostrating.

“Is he using pure physical strength to hold onto that vertical wall!?”

“Judge,” said Heidi with a nod. “He’s fully using his palms, nails, and such like a free climber. The technique comes from the history recreation of trap floors in Far Eastern ninja mansions and he incorporated it into a way of forcibly prostrating to someone who was trying to run away, but...”

She could not believe it.

“I never thought he would do it completely vertically.”

“He never tested it vertically?”

“He has apparently tried it before because he likes to test his own ability, but this is of course his first time to do it for real.”

At that point, the floor stopped.

The recoil shook the floor a bit and Bertoni’s body shook with it.

“Hang in there!” shouted Heidi. “Winning here leads down the path to true

riches!!”

Guericke saw the other prostration reach completion before his own.

Below him, he saw the wall that had been a floor and the prostration clinging to it with pure physical strength.

However, the prostration did not look even slightly constricted.

...How boldly done.

Musashi’s treasurer swayed and started to fall, but he returned to his original position and continued clinging to the wall.

“...”

After a breath, he seemed to press his forehead even more forcefully into the floor.

Guericke knew the boy would fall if he waited, but...

...I already lost.

Germans did not lie, so he spoke.

“Well done.”

He was certain of the result. He had done his very best, but he was still lacking. After all, he had attempted history’s first Senkrechte Prostration, but...

...He used only his physical strength to perform an official prostration on a vertical floor.

If a first was accomplished using reinforced weaponry, the world’s treasury techniques would lose their reliability and grow soft.

So this was for the best, decided Guericke in his lacking heart.

He spoke the most accurate words to his enemy.

“You are the correct one, Musashi Treasurer.”

“Then let us continue the conversation.”

Guericke looked down at the voice that answered him.

Musashi's princess sat in the center of the girls who had fled to the window.

She sipped at a tea cup before continuing.

"I have already reached my own answer. Is that okay?"

The floor began to return to its original position, but Musashi's treasurer had yet to leave his prostration. He likely intended to remain like that until the floor was a floor again.

...He takes prostration seriously.

That thought was interrupted by the voice of Musashi's princess as she stepped onto the still-tilted floor.

"Now, I would like to sum up the conclusions we have reached here."

...The conclusions, hm?

Masazumi realized Horizon's words were bringing the meeting to an end, so she tried to step down onto the floor after Horizon.

...Nh?

She had been clinging to Asama's leg to make sure she did not fall from the window frame, but her arm was now trapped between the girl's thighs. Asama had likely been using her as a support, but...

...Is she not loosening her grip because she's trained-...

Masazumi shook her head, tried not to get lost in strange worldly thoughts, and quickly worked to get her arm free.

As she did, the warm thickness of Asama's thighs trembled with tension.

"Eh? Wait, Masazumi. Ah! That tickles!"

The problem came when Asama reflexively pulled her hips back. Masazumi still had her arms wrapped around her thigh, so she lost her balance and...

"Ah."

The two of them fell backwards and out the window.

Masazumi and Asama fell onto grass outside. Masazumi had fallen on her back, but the lawn outside the diplomatic building was thick.

“Nn.”

She lay on her back and noticed a warm weight pressing on her.

She looked up and saw the colors red and white.

...What is this?

She found the answer by considering the end result of the physical motion that had taken place.

...Oh, Asama's butt is sitting on me and it's pointed toward me.

They had both fallen, but Asama was sitting with her butt pointed toward Masazumi's face.

There was nothing sexy about it.

Having Asama's spread legs and butt directly in front of her gave Masazumi a bad feeling of what was to come, so she wondered if she was in light shock after hitting her head. Or perhaps there was another reason for this sense of danger.

“Asama! Masazumi! Are you okay!?”

Naruze frantically leaned out the window and looked down at them.

“Don't move! I'll use this for the next cover!!”

“Th-that bad feeling just became real! Asama, get up! Hurry! This is dangerous!”

Masazumi frantically tried to get up, but Asama seemed to be a little dizzy after flipping around upside down. She tried to do as Masazumi said, but she moved slowly and...



“Eh? Ah, wait. What?”

Instead of “getting up”, she “sat up”, so she ended up sitting on top of Masazumi’s neck and face.

Masazumi tried to speak, but something else happened first.

“ ... ”

She began suffocating

Guericke saw Naruze’s wings beyond Musashi’s princess. Naruze was leaning out the window with her spread wings catching the sides of the window frame. This caused her to fill the window, but...

“Okay, Asama. If you’re feeling woozy, that’s perfect. Just stay like that. And it looks like Masazumi can’t breathe with your butt cutting off her oxygen supply, so this is even more perfect.”

“Eh? Ehhh? ...Ah, ehh!? Ah, wait! Masazumi! Ehhhh!?”

...I want to see it!! Asama and Masazumi are posing for the cover!?

He was filled with a reliable desire, but simply acting on it would lead to reliable suspicion. Fortunately, he came up with an accurate way of camouflaging his actions.

“Are you okay!?”

He expressed his worry and approached, but the aide to Musashi’s treasurer spoke.

“Okay, let’s sum things up.”

...You are reliably in the way!!

At any rate, Masazumi faced forward while climbing in the window after Asama.

Horizon had already entered the room, Naruze had come in through the door, and Asama turned back toward Masazumi.

“Um, Masazumi, are you okay? Did you hit your head or something while underneath me? If anything happened, please tell me. I can arrange for treatment at the shrine’s infirmary.”

“No, I’m fine. Just fine. Don’t worry about it.”

After stepping inside, Asama stood next to her to help support her.

...She’s so big.

She meant her height.

She glanced over at Asama as the girl checked her sign frame.

Asama had the curves to match her height. After giving a casual look across those body lines, Masazumi lightly touched her own chest.

...I’m the same as anyone else below here, though.

She had a certain thought while comparing herself to the girl next to her.

...Are those what you call feminine body lines?

The Aoi sister and Mary also had nice figures and she thought Mitotsudaira had nothing to complain about if you focused on the hips. She felt her own body was lacking, but was that simply due to a complex about her body?

...Aoi does sometimes praise my butt...

She stopped thinking there.

...Don’t start acting like his opinion matters. He’s not a butt sommelier. No, that’s not the point. Although from an authority standpoint, his decision would be what-...

“Masazumi-sama, please confirm what I am about to say.”

“Eh? Oh, judge. What!?”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh heh. What has you so flustered? Did being pushed to the ground by Asama mess with your brain?”

Asama: “Wait. Stop that, Kimi. It may not seem like it, but Masazumi is trying to be serious.”

Almost Everyone: “It may not seem like it?”

What am I supposed to do? wondered Masazumi as she pet Tsukinowa.

Meanwhile, Horizon gestured to Guericke with a hand and asked another question.

“Now, may I start, Masazumi-sama?”

“Yes.” Masazumi nodded. “You may. ...So what is it you want me to confirm?”

“Judge.” Horizon nodded as well. “I have reached the following three conclusions based on our negotiations with Magdeburg.”

They were...

“First, we will not hand over any part of the Musashi.”

Guericke closed his eyes at that.

He looked both accepting and regretful and Masazumi knew why.

...This means he can't save the actual city from the Sack of Magdeburg.

She did not think or speak an apology. After all, she had intended to reject that demand from the beginning.

If she apologized for this rejection, he might think she had wanted to cooperate.

And so she said nothing here.

If necessary, they could hold another discussion on some new topic after summing up the conclusions here.

Horizon opened her mouth to give the second conclusion.

“Second, we will take the Magdeburg Hemispheres.”

Masazumi listened.

“But we will not take them aboard the Musashi yet. After all, the Musashi still has a lot to do. We can always retrieve them after that is over and development can continue in the meantime. I have determined taking them now would interfere with future development of the Hemispheres.”

...Then what are you going to do?

Guericke did not get a chance to put his thoughts to words.

Just as he tried, Musashi's princess raised a hand to stop him.

"If you are wondering what we will do, we will have Magdeburg continue development. However, we ask that you do not give up researching an Apocalypse countermeasure whether it be the Hemispheres or something else. Whatever the result, I have determined the best possible option is constantly changing."

She did not stop there.

"And I hope you have not forgotten, but we are currently searching for a way of stopping the Apocalypse. Our goal is to stop the Apocalypse with the Logismoι Óplo, not your sucking hemispheres. Once we complete that, your hemispheres will be usele-..."

She trailed off and bowed toward him after a pause.

"I apologize. You are doing everything you can to develop those hemispheres, aren't you? Calling them useless goes against my policy. After all, your hemisphere obsession has led you to focus so intently on creating them that you have skipped meals, lost the understanding of your family, been betrayed by your friends, and earned the nickname of Hemisphere Kappa Boy among the people of your city."

"Wait. I didn't go that far."

"Why not?"

"Eh?"

He was completely dumbfounded. Why hadn't he? He had never thought about it.

...Wait. Of course I didn't. In fact, is that really something to criticize me for?

Musashi's vice president averted her gaze and looked out the window, so he decided he could ignore this. Musashi's princess moved on regardless.

"Anyway, our goal is to retrieve the Logismoι Óplo and stop the Apocalypse,

but even then, it sounds like those hemispheres would have a number of uses: in battle, during disasters, or when you need a wall to express yourself.”

“A wall to express yourself?”

“Judge.”

Musashi’s princess stood, placed a hand on the wall, and started ripping it away, but the vice president and the others stopped her.

Masazumi heard Guericke laugh quietly, so she turned toward him.

“Oh, excuse me. ...Yes, using it for a wall in a joke is just perfect. It cannot live up to my hopes of saving the world, so it will be used to make jokes. We can think about it like that.”

He nodded and spoke to Horizon.

“Can we both hope that the Apocalypse will be stopped and all things will have no better use than to make jokes?”

“Judge. And I would like to take the very best course of action to ensure that. Please tell the world that you are hoping to find something to save us from the Apocalypse, that you are working to develop it, and that you are continually improving it. As long as you continue developing and improving it, I can statistically predict that the world will remain hopeful.”

Horizon then turned to Asama.

“And for that, I have a request for Musashi’s maintenance division. Have them construct a fixed divine network line to Magdeburg so they can help improve the Magdeburg Hemispheres.”

Smoking Girl: Oh, that’d be my jurisdiction. ...But how are we going to handle encryption of the divine transmissions?”

After Naomasa’s words appeared on the sign frame, Asama raised a hand.

“Wait. I’ll check on that.”

Masazumi understood why she was in such a hurry.

...Horizon isn’t used to political things.

Masazumi was well aware that Horizon had little experience in politics.

That was why Horizon had read books for the basic knowledge and had continued studying after Mikawa. She was only speaking so calmly and promptly because she was an automaton. In reality, she had to be making complex decisions in her head.

That was how the situation had shifted from the ideas Guericke had presented them.

Horizon had done her best to remake his demands. She had used past examples and plenty of statistical information to find what she viewed as the best possible answer.

However, they were in the middle of a meeting. Saying anything uncertain would lead to trust issues.

For that reason, Asama was checking on things before Horizon could say any more.

After a moment, Asama smiled and opened a sign frame.

“Okay. There are a few extra contract shrine devices in a wide block near our shrine. If we use those for a dedicated line and restrict all outside contact, it should be fine. There will be a time lag in the transmissions, but that will not matter if we make regular contact.”

Asama: “From a budget standpoint, I suppose Magdeburg will have to install one of our contract shrine devices. Magdeburg is a city with lots of history and they take the history recreation seriously, so they won’t have any Shinto devices. This is all assuming they’ll accept one, though.”

Marube-ya: “You’re taking this seriously.”

“Anyway,” said Horizon. “If you are working with Musashi, you should be able to find more uses and new sponsors for the hemisphere barrier. I doubt the other nations will be able to ignore a defense barrier that simply grows stronger the more power it is given, but if Magdeburg is ever targeted for the hemispheres...”

She looked straight at Guericke.”

“Destroy the hemispheres and burn all the documents.”

“The same material will be carried on the Musashi, so it will cause a delay in development but not a major problem. I have determined it will gather more attention for us and increase the number of nations who wish to ally with us. ... Yes, we would be very grateful if you did that.”

Masazumi gave a mental nod at Horizon’s words. She had planned to step in as an aide if anything came up, but she had also wanted to hear someone else’s political decision. After all...

...Nothing would be better than Horizon using the experience she gains here to participate in the political side from here on.

Having someone at an even higher position participating in politics was important. It gave her someone to look to for a decision if something came up and it simply gave her more allies.

The naked idiot was there too, but he did not count.

A sudden memory came to Masazumi.

There was something the idiot had said about Horizon back when he had gone to confess to her.

...She’s a hard worker.

She was the kind of person who would work hard toward some kind of goal.

“Hm? Do you need something, Masazumi-sama?”

“Eh? Oh, um, I was just thinking about something.”

“Did I do something wrong?”

“Quite the opposite,” she said to Horizon. “Keep up the hard work, Horizon. I think you’re doing just fine.”

Horizon reacted to that comment.

Her eyes widened a bit at being told she was doing just fine.

The look could be taken as surprise, but...

...Eh?

Even as Masazumi filled with her own surprise at this unexpected reaction, Horizon returned to her normal expression. She simply nodded and responded with “judge”.

“Then let us get on to the third conclusion.”

Masazumi listened as Horizon took a breath and spoke.

“Musashi will handle the evacuation of Magdeburg’s people.”

Guericke looked up at that.

However, Horizon did not react and simply continued with her conclusion.

“We will likely have to be towed, but I promise we will evacuate all of your citizens.”

In other words...

“Musashi wishes to provide definite support to Magdeburg.”

When Guericke asked why, Horizon turned to Masazumi.

Masazumi knew what that look meant. This suggestion included a lot Horizon was unsure about.

...I guess that’s my cue.

However, she had something to say before adding to Horizon’s suggestion.

“Magdeburg Provisional Mayor.”

“What is it?”

“Musashi’s support of Magdeburg is...not the consensus of Musashi as a whole. However, it is the desire of Horizon who is its current leader. I want you to remember that.”

The support of Magdeburg was being offered by Horizon while asking for nothing in return.

After all, the joint development of the Magdeburg Hemispheres was being settled by sharing a lot of Magdeburg’s burdens.

As for supporting the evacuation of the city...

“Musashi’s leader does not wish for any losses from the Sack of Magdeburg. But since we can’t give you any part of the Musashi, she wants to help in some other way.”

“Testament.”

Guericke brought hand to his chest, got down on one knee, and lowered his head toward Horizon.

“Thank you for your compassionate decision.”

But he did not stop there.

“With that settled, the city of Magdeburg will work as a Protestant city to ensure the Musashi’s safety in its travels through M.H.R.R.”

Masazumi noticed the man’s shoulders relax.

...This couldn’t have been easy.

The leader of a large nation or a national academy could use that nation’s power to negotiate in a number of ways, but even if Magdeburg was a major city for historical and other reasons, its power did not exceed that of a city.

But in the Sack of Magdeburg, it would be besieged by the major forces of M.H.R.R.’s Catholic side. There was no way they could oppose that.

However, he now knew he could protect his people.

The city itself might be destroyed, but this was still a significant result. And on top of that...

Vice President: “He’s promised to work toward our safety when we travel through M.H.R.R. after leaving Magdeburg. That’s a significant result for us. This ensures our safety all the way to the Seto Inland Sea.”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh heh. Make sure you tell Horizon that later. She doesn’t have much experience, so she can’t judge her own performance.”

Masazumi sent back a “judge” and had a thought.

...Part of this doesn’t really make sense.

Something in what Guericke had said seemed odd to Masazumi.

And...

Novice: “This is strange.”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh heh. What is it, glasses boy? Are you worried about the lack of communication from your lovey-dovey glasses girl in England? Ahh, not being able to send immature messages back and forth is just about to drive you crazy, isn’t it!? You’ve been writing all about it in your messages, haven’t you!? Things like ‘I-I can’t restrain the throbbing of my heart!’, right!?”

Novice: “Sh-shut up. I have not been exchanging messages like some kind of child! I really haven’t been doing anything that weird, so could you stop being so suspicious?”

Asama: “Oh, sorry. The line to England has been cut off ever since we crossed the provisional border. Let me fix that real quick.”

Hanami: “Half a day’s worth of divine mail is coming in.”

Almost Everyone: “Eh!? Messages!? Really!? What are they like!? Is it half a day’s worth of love!?”

<Unopened Messages: Neshinbara has received a total of 3481 divine mail messages from Shakespeare.> Almost Everyone: “Eek!”

Is it wrong that even I’m starting to think girls are scary, thought Masazumi as she saw another post from Neshinbara.

Novice: “Vice President Honda-kun, I think you have noticed the general idea and I agree. ...So could you ‘confirm’ this?”

She sent back the word “judge” before speaking aloud.

“Mayor Guericke, I would like to confirm one thing. ...Oh, and please raise your head.”

Once he stood, she asked her question.

“Listen,” she began. “The evacuation of the city’s people will begin as soon as the Musashi arrives in Magdeburg. We can’t have the Musashi just sitting

around in M.H.R.R. after all. ...Is that acceptable?”

...How about it?

Masazumi had her doubts about that suggestion.

However, Guericke’s response came with a nod.

“Testament. That is perfectly acceptable. In fact, I must ask that you do so.”

Novice: “That settles it. ...And this has gotten serious.”

Asama saw the words Neshinbara had posted, but...

Asama: “What do you mean? What’s wrong with wanting to evacuate the people as soon as possible?”

Mal-Ga: “Oh, I get it now.”

“Eh?”

Asama turned to Naruze but said nothing as they were still in a meeting.

Asama: “What do you mean, Naruze?”

Mal-Ga: “Judge. It’s simple. ...If they evacuate the people immediately, they can’t print ‘Asama-sama Shoots 7’. ...That’s just wrong!”

Almost Everyone: “Does the world revolve around you or something!?”

Asama: “And what do you mean 7!? Wasn’t it only at 2 recently!?”

Mal-Ga: “There have been a lot of events in Europe lately. ...Anyway, I’m not entirely lying here. Isn’t it strange? If they evacuate everyone right away, the city can’t function. Do you understand what that means? This mayor knows something.”

Naruze gave the answer to Asama’s confusion.

Mal-Ga: “He knows that the Sack of Magdeburg is going to happen soon.”

Novice: “Exactly. That’s why he wants to evacuate the people even if it means halting all of the city’s operations.”

In other words...

Mal-Ga: “The city we’re headed to is on the verge of a battle. It’s probably already surrounded and the Sack will happen in the next few days.”

Masazumi glanced at everyone’s discussion and sighed when she saw they agreed with her.

...What is going on? Why would the Catholics choose to start the event leading to their defeat?

She did not understand, so she spoke in order to find the answer.

“There is one thing I don’t understand. Mayor Guericke, since you pressed us to hand over a portion of the Musashi, you must know that the Sack of Magdeburg is occurring soon. That is an important piece of information, but I had not heard anything about it. Due to the damage caused by the Sack of Magdeburg, the different nations were unsure whether to begin the recreation or not and Hashiba had been trying their best to avoid it.”

So why?

“According to the history recreation, the army that lays siege to the city is thirty thousand strong. Why did they choose to mobilize so many people so quickly?”

And...

“If they are starting the Sack, when are they starting it?”

“Testament.” Guericke looked across their faces and opened his mouth. “A spy in the besieging army has informed us that the Sack begins the day after tomorrow. We do not know the exact time, but it will happen. ..There is a reason why, but it is...not an easy one to speak of.”

“A reason?”

“Testament,” he said again. “That reason is-...”

Just as he began to speak, the door suddenly opened.

Naruze had opened it from the outside and she led someone else inside.

“Neshinbara?”

“We have a guest courtesy of Naomasa-kun.”

Something else followed him inside.

...A Mouse? And a European one at that.

The maid Mouse wore a red musketeer uniform over a female Hexagone Française uniform.

She looked around the room with sharp eyes and bowed when she saw Masazumi.

“I hold the name of Lady Luynes as a double inherited name, I reside within the defected Palais-Cardinal, and I have come here via an external expansion of the Palais-Cardinal’s OS. I am here as Mazarin, treasurer of Hexagone Française’s student council.”

Masazumi and everyone else fell silent at the name she gave and she said one more thing to them all.

“I have come to explain what has triggered the Sack of Magdeburg.”

Chapter 39: Usurper in a Place of Retrospection

CHAPTER 39

"Usurper in a Place of Retrospection"



Why?
Tell me why.
All I know is that I don't know
Point Allocation (Please Tell Me)

Why?

Tell me why.

All I know is that I don't know

Point Allocation (Please Tell Me)

A sound rang out high in the night sky.

As the Musashi was towed through the heavens, loud impacts came from the rear loading port of Ume, the third port ship.

The sound came from the shield installed in one portion of the port. The white and black shield affixed to a metal pillar with wires and bolts was the Logismoι Óplo named Aspida Phylargia.

“ ... ”

A blue dog-faced god of war named Righteousness attacked the shield with a metal rod. Righteousness repeatedly changed its angle of attack, but it accurately targeted the shield each time.

To ensure the force of the blows did not harm the god of war's wrist, it swung its wrist enough to hit the shield but not enough to push in on the shield.

“You've really gotten the hang of this,” commented Mishina Hiro.

She was looking at a sign frame of output data that Righteousness's maintenance team had extracted. After the god of war finished three sets of ten, she watched the heat expelled from the mouth and other parts.

“Aren't you going to read the current results of the meeting in Tama's diplomatic building?”

“Their meeting isn't over yet. I'm not going to show a lack of trust by monitoring them before they reach a conclusion.”

“Oh, so you're the type that tends not to trust people?”

“I'm the type that tends to overthink things. And to be honest, I watched a bit partway through, but I couldn't keep up with some of it. That's another reason I want to put it off until later.”

“I can understand that,” said Hiro as her shoulders drooped.

But then she looked down at the sign frame data.

“But should you really let me see this data, Yoshy? That’s an important weapon for Satomi, right?”

“Yoshy...” muttered Yoshiyasu inside Righteousness with her shoulders drooping as well. “This is on our chancellor’s instructions and I agree that there’s meaning in revealing this information to the Matsudaira clan. That’s a clan that will never be our enemy in the history recreation. But...”

“But?”

“If we’re revealing our information, we have to be getting something in return. Since the information we’re handing over is on the god of war left to me, it would only make sense to tell me what it is we’re getting out of it.”

“Do you two not get along?”

The surrounding students shrank back at Hiro’s casual comment.

“Oh, should I not have said that?” she added while unabashedly peering at the output graphs. “Well, they say getting into arguments with someone proves how close you really are.”

“Don’t act like you understand this.”

“How much do you hate him?”

“Can you measure emotions?”

“You can,” said Hiro.

She then turned to the student in charge of the output graphs and asked if she could “mess with” them.

“You can only say something can’t be measured once you’ve started measuring it.”

“That’s just sophistry.”

“Then that means the topic is up for debate.”

Hiro placed her hand on the display slate she had opened the graphs on. She

placed a control stone, which resembled a *go* stone, on the controller to raise the magnification of the slate's display. She then entered the output peak line from one end of the display to the other.

"Oh, and I'm just asking out of curiosity while I work. I focus on my work better when I can catch glimpses of different kinds of information. If I only focus on what I'm doing, my focus runs out pretty quick."

"If you look into it, you can learn all you want about the relationship between the chancellor and me."

"I'm not interested enough to do that, so just tell me what you can."

Righteousness called her an idiot, but Hiro only nodded and said, "Yes, yes."

The god of war held up the metal rod again.

"How's *Aspida Phylargia*'s charge?"

"Taking it one hit at a time does better than doing thirty hits in a row. I think it grows accustomed to the pain. At around the tenth hit, the amount gained drops off quite a bit and stabilizes there. I guess it's like when people complain about you. At first, it's a real shock, but you eventually give up and start thinking that's the kind of person you are."

"So we have to hit it to charge it, but it gets used to that? What a pain."

"It is an emotion after all."

Righteousness briefly fell silent before speaking.

"That's right. Sorry."

"Apologizing here is meaningless. You're a weird girl, Yoshy. That's just how emotions are, so there's no use apologizing for it. Instead of apologizing, tell yourself to not forget it next time. I will admit there are times for formal apologies, though. Oh, and I'm just saying arbitrary stuff right now, so don't take any of it too seriously. I'm busy working down here."

"You're a weird underclassman."

"You're still a second year yourself, you weird upperclassman. ...Anyway, I'm glad you're willing to go along with this. Our maintenance god of war pilots

can't hit as accurately as you. Even Masa is more the martial arts type. I had one of ours try it and they hit the pillar instead and the rod slipped from their hand. It hit King Yoshinao's leisure boat and we haven't really told anyone yet."

"You need to tell him!!"

"Not to worry, not to worry. We're going to fix it so it's even stronger and put it back where it was. For now, we're attaching a swan figurehead that makes strange noises and giving it super acceleration when pedaled."

Righteousness looked over to one end of the port and spotted a leisure boat with a swan on the front being modified by a special 24-hour crew. It had a pair of long accelerators attached.

"That thing looks fast."

"It'll probably fly perfectly straight too. Anyway..."

Hiro put on soundproofed fur ear covers and placed a small charm pendant around her neck.

"Hi there. I'm using a bone conduction divine transmission charm. Can you hear me?"

"Is this your attempt at being considerate?"

"I have a feeling you'll be giving out some information you don't want heard."

Hiro waved at Righteousness as it raised the metal rod and she held up the data extraction sign frame.

"Okay, you can start."

Yoshiyasu gave a mental sigh within Righteousness. She did not actually sigh, but she felt the inside of a god of war was a comfortable place. No one could see her expression and they could not look down on her short form.

More importantly, she could take on the role of protector and not have to be aware of how small she was.

...Everyone around me is so huge these days!!

She meant their height.

Oh, Lady Yoshitsune was small too, but the issue there is in the personality.

At any rate...

“It happened long ago.”

“How many years ago?”

“Two.”

“Yoshy, are you sure you don’t have a way of exaggerating things in your head?”

To the long-lived even one extra centimeter is a big deal, she thought.

But...

“If I don’t tell myself it was long ago, I won’t be able to handle it.”

Because...

“It’s about that man and my sister. It’s about the current Chancellor Satomi Yoshiyori and my sister, the previous Chancellor Satomi Yoshiyori.”

Righteousness began striking the shield and Hiro compared the data readings to the previous ones.

...The charge rate is a lot better when it involves the princess herself.

The amount of pain from an extracted emotion was a lot different from that of an emotion you carried with you. Hiro wondered if this really was the princess’s emotion while also feeling impressed with Mikawa’s technical prowess in creating it.

Meanwhile, Yoshiyasu’s voice reached her.

“That man originally inherited the name of a Satomi retainer named Masaki Noritoki. My sister had inherited the name of Satomi’s previous leader Satomi Yoshihiro and of his child Yoshiyori. The two of them often protected the clan from Houjou invasions. Houjou is located across Edo Bay, so there has been a long history of harsh conflict over control of the sea.”

But...

“The Testament descriptions said Masaki Noritoki started a rebellion during Yoshiyori’s generation and was killed.”

“What do you mean?”

“In the Testament descriptions, it was part of a conflict over who would inherit the Satomi clan. He conspired against Yoshiyori with Houjou, but...”

But...

“My sister contacted Houjou and tried to overcome Masaki Noritoki’s rebellion. Houjou said they would accept her request, but only on one condition.”

“What condition was that?”

“On the non-Far East side, Houjou is controlled by the Indian Mughal Dynasty. That’s a Mlasi dynasty and therefore connected to P.A. Oda. At the time, Hashiba’s influence had already reached them and they had a fleet of aerial ships stationed there.”

“I see,” muttered Hiro as she felt the god of war’s attacks vibrating in her skin. “Houjou said they would overlook a lot about Masaki Noritoki’s rebellion if you sank Hashiba’s fleet, didn’t they? In other words, they asked you to free Houjou.”

“Yes. When Masaki Noritoki started his rebellion, Houjou made sure they had sent their own fleet to Mikawa. The fleet was used to protect the automatons being delivered there. So to properly recreate the rebellion, they had to send out Hashiba’s fleet. And to intercept that fleet...”

Righteousness’s attacks slowed a bit. The slight gap between strikes meant the next one created a greater charge of pain than before. However, Yoshiyasu’s voice continued just as the change appeared on the sign frame readings.

“My sister had just developed Yatsufusa and Murasamemaru at the time. They were sent out and the Hashiba fleet had no advance information on them, so the fleet was sunk by Yatsufusa with the assumption that ‘Masaki Noritoki was somewhere in that fleet’. ...That was how she tried to hand the name Yoshiyori over to that man.”

But Righteousness was not done speaking.

“Masaki’s ship was stopped above the ocean because it had hidden after making a show of meeting up with Houjou. When my sister flew to the ship and met up with that man who had planned the rebellion, *it* happened.”

“It?”

“That one’s simple,” said Yoshiyori. “That man killed my sister.”

Yoshiyasu did not know much about it.

At the time, her sister had told everyone to give the name Yoshiyori to Noritoki and leave Satomi to him if anything were to happen to her. That was why Satomi had done that despite how she had died.

“More importantly, Yatsufusa requires the eight virtues in its pilot and he’s the only one it will accept.”

“Doesn’t that mean Yoshiyori and Masaki’s actions were justified? It means killing Yoshiyori didn’t violate the eight virtues, right?”

“Probably.”

“Probably?”

Hiro’s question nearly stopped Yoshiyasu from attacking.

“Noritoki claims a meeting held in advance had decided we had to strictly follow the history recreation of Masaki’s death, but supposedly that information never reached us.”

Meaning...

“So on his side, they thought Yoshiyori was coming to kill him for starting the rebellion?”

“Testament. That’s why he claims he played his role as rebel by ‘fighting back’ against my sister when she left Yatsufusa. But due to the communication error, my sister was not trying to attack and ended up being killed. ...He claims it was all an accident.”

Yoshiyasu gave another mental sigh.

“Satomi has brought together its Far Eastern side and the peninsula, but it is still a small nation and long-term chaos would be dangerous. Due to that, my sister’s final instructions, and Yatsufusa, Satomi called it all a ‘tragedy of the history recreation’, gave Masaki Noritoki my sister’s name, and reversed their positions. The Testament Union was generous to Satomi since we destroyed a Hashiba fleet and liberated the Association of Indian States.”

Yoshiyasu began to complain.

“Honestly, I can’t believe they call it an accident due to a communication error and a ‘tragedy of the history recreation’.”

The word “stupid” escaped her lips.

“That’s just too stupid to be true.”

“Eh?”

“I understand.”

That is...

“My sister and that man planned it together and had some reason for it. That’s why Yatsufusa chose him. But...”

On the word “but” she made her next strike and a solid sound shook the air.

“Why didn’t she tell me anything!? And that man still hasn’t!!”

After an especially loud hit, the grip flew from her hand. Before she could think “oops”, the metal rod was flying through the air.

“...!”

She spread the flight devices upwards and accelerated leftward. She moved in, caught the metal rod as it fell, and took a breath.

“I was in my third year of middle school at the time. After the selection test, it was decided I would enter the student council the following year and my first training mission was to welcome my sister back. Now I’m the student council president, but have I inherited anything that my sister had as president?”

She told herself that was all from long ago, but the memories from two years ago were still fresh in her mind.

“Even now, are they not going to let me stand alongside her?”

“If something does happen, please handle it like that, Principal Sakai.”

Someone bowed below the night sky. Musashino’s front deck was nearly empty, but Sakai sat on a bench with an astronomical model sign frame open, “Musashi” stood next to him, and...

“Yoshiyori-kun, I don’t like critiquing the chancellors of other schools.”

Sakai looked away from the northern sky of the astronomical model and to his left where Satomi Yoshiyori wore the coat of a Far Eastern uniform.

Sakai twisted his eyebrows in a smile.

“But I think deciding something like this on your own will lead to some resentment. ...Have you informed your own principal?”

“Testament. I did when I came here. I said it would depend on the situation.”

Yoshiyori suddenly looked away from Sakai.

A few figures arrived from the stern of the ship. They were all automaton maids and they worked together to carry some tatami mats with “Tea Ceremony Club” written on the bottom.

“Oh, excuse us, Sakai-sama, ‘Musashi’-sama, and guest. Over.”

“Tatami mats?” asked Yoshiyori with a tilt of his head.

“The inside of the diplomatic building was flipped around,” answered Sakai with a bitter smile. “You read the report on that when it came in earlier, right? I’d guess they’re redoing the floor. It was Western style before, so now they’re going for a Far Eastern style. And Asama-kun is there, so she can make them some tea.”

“Judge,” confirmed the automatons carrying the mats as they jogged toward the thick rope pathway to Tama. “We are grateful for all this excitement if it gives us tasks to do. Over.”

“I see,” muttered Yoshiyori. “You’re right about that. I’m jealous of how Musashi is brimming with excitement even at night.”

He first turned toward the Sanada Ten Braves laughing and arguing in the beer garden built on a distant part of the deck.

“Nezu, Mochizuki, and Yuri aren’t with them, but it looks like they’ve adapted to Musashi well enough.”

“I’d love to have them fight for us, but once Takeda finishes the Battle of Nagashino, they’ll be our enemies. They’ll move to Hashiba’s side along with Sanada Nobushige.”

“Sakai-sama, they are our guests at the moment. Try not to think anything you should not. Over.”

“Yes, yes.”

Yoshiyori smiled.

“Principal Sakai, I hear you run mental simulations of your academy’s military situation.”

“Don’t you? In fact, doesn’t everyone?”

“No, a lot of academies can’t even if they might want to. And ours is one of those.”

“Really?”

Yoshiyori nodded, lowered the ends of his eyebrows a little, and brushed a hand through his hair.

“Keeping the eight dogs is the most we can manage. Whenever possible, I prefer to keep the members of the student council away from battle.”

“Yoshiyasu-kun *is* pretty cute.”

“Sakai-sama... Over.”

“I appreciate the thought even if it’s only flattery.”

“See, ‘Musashi’-san? Everyone sees it that way. And if we were talking about my personal preferences, I’d choose someone more like you.”

“You mean the aerial city ship? I have determined you are no more than a child. Over.”

“Musashi” turned away and began making tea while the two men resumed their discussion.

First, Satomi Yoshiyori crossed his arms.

“The way I see it, dreaming about future power is a privilege reserved for the academies of large nations or nations with a future.”

“So is joining with Ariadust not a part of the future you see?”

“I wouldn’t dare. ...Satomi is an Awa nation, so it only gets along well with Matsudaira due to its location. That means our relationship is not one we can trust in too much.”

So...

“If we rely solely on the history recreation, I think it’s possible we can make a weak connection through an ‘interpretative alliance’.”

“You sure are diligent and careful.”

“Testament. I think that may be why Satomi has lasted so long.”

“I see,” replied Sakai as he stood from the bench and looked up at Yoshiyori. “But Yoshiyori-kun. You should try becoming more like our Toori.”

That suggestion put a look of light surprise on Yoshiyori’s face, but it soon changed to a bitter smile.

“I think I have enough of that already.”

Yoshiyori looked around again. He heard a god of war striking something in the distance and saw the lights of a diplomatic ship.

Sakai spoke to Yoshiyori who took a deep breath as he observed all the activity in the city despite the late hour.

“Musashi is still plenty busy, so go check out whatever you want to see. You might get some good stories to tell back in Satomi. ...And the meeting on Tama is probably about to begin its second round.”

As the night continued and everyone began moving again, a meeting resumed in a table-less diplomatic room on Tama’s surface.

Tatami mats had been brought in and Asama had set up a tea ceremony, so they were having the meeting on the floor.

Masazumi, Horizon, and the treasurer pair sat on one side while Guericke and the Mouse named Mazarin sat on the other.

Asama sat at the top of the ceremony and she watched steam rise from the iron kettle she had stuck a heating charm into.

“Now, then.”

While sitting in the proper fashion, she scooped up some hot water with a bamboo ladle.

“While I serve the tea, the rest of you can begin your discussion.”

Chapter 40: Visitor in a Hard Place

CHAPTER 40

"Visitor in a Hard Place"



I have always thought
Far Eastern etiquette
Is a strange thing
Point Allocation (Because They're Horrible People)

I have always thought

Far Eastern etiquette

Is a strange thing

Point Allocation (Because They're Horrible People)

Asama prepared tea in the rearranged diplomacy room.

She used the same method she always did for her club activities.

...Boil the water in the iron kettle, put the...um, we're not doing the soup today, so I guess I don't have to grate any vegetables.

She managed the divine transmissions alongside the tea preparation. She had her hands full with all this, but the previous Western meeting had allowed Guericke some freedom. They needed to keep this a little tenser now.

Even so, Asama said what she could.

“Oh, this isn't a formal tea ceremony, so feel free to relax.”

The Europeans exchanged a glance and clearly did not know the Far Eastern etiquette.

“Um, you too.”

They don't know what they're talking about, but at least they're being modest, thought Asama.

At the same time, Horizon slowly stretched her legs to either side and let out an expressionless sigh.

“My impression of Toori-sama.”

She crossed her legs, grabbed her feet in her hands, and began swaying her body forward and backwards.

Wise Sister: “That does look like him. I'm a little surprised.”

Asama: “Th-this is no time to be impressed! Don't do that in front of our guests!”

The two guests assumed that was the Far Eastern way, so they began swaying

their bodies too. A dull sweat covered Asama's body and she saw Masazumi hang her head while Shirojiro and Heidi copied Horizon's action as well.

...Kh! Wh-why do they have to put this kind of pressure on me!?

She knew her smile was stiff, but she went ahead and poured the first cup.

The first person she had to serve was clearly the most dangerous one, but...

"H-Horizon?"

She made it into a question in the hope that Horizon would reject, but the girl looked up at her.

And she held out her right palm.

"I have a child's sense of taste, so something as bitter and powdery as matcha just does not taste good to me."

Thank goodness!! thought Asama while truly feeling saved, but Horizon continued while still expressionless.

"But why does Far Eastern culture insist on drinking matcha? All it is is bitter. ...But at any rate, please serve it to our guests, Asama-sama."

...Really!? You're fine with all of what you just said!?

Sweating, Asama turned to Masazumi, but the vice president was looking in a different direction for some reason.

Horizon held a hand out toward their guests with the palm upwards.

"Now, Asama-sama. Do not worry about me and serve them their tea."

Guericke frantically shook his hands.

"W-well, you see, I... No, Cardinal Mazarin would like-..."

"A Mouse can't drink, so you can give it all to Mayor Guericke."

Guericke's mouth hung open and he gave Mazarin a look of extreme displeasure.

Outside the window, Naruze wrote "Special rule?" on a Magie Figur, but Asama was not about to agree.

At any rate, Asama decided to help out Guericke.

“U-um, I have drinks for Western tastes too. Would you prefer that?”

“Eh? Oh, testament! If you have a European drink, I’ll take that!”

“In that case...”

Asama decided to serve him what she had prepared.

Masazumi watched Asama’s forced smile as the girl filled a teacup halfway with coffee powder, poured hot water in, and mixed it together. But as she mixed it, her movements suddenly slowed and she said, “Huh? I’ve never made this before, but it isn’t dissolving.” Masazumi was a little concerned, but she realized the winner had been decided when Guericke expressionlessly accepted the paste-like substance.

...I’m glad I’m not on a European student council.

Meanwhile, Mazarin looked up at Guericke and gave an expressionless nod.

“Mayor Guericke, I can’t drink, so please drink a second cup for me.”

“Eh?”

Guericke froze in place and prepared to say something, but Mazarin raised a hand toward Asama before he could.

“For his second cup, please make a Hexagone Française drink. Yes, cheese fondue should work.”

Asama: “I didn’t think that was a drink. ...Well, whatever.”

Almost Everyone: “Try stopping before those last two words!!”

Asama looked more like she was cooking than preparing a drink, but Masazumi ignored it and asked a question.

“Now, can we get to the main question? Why will the Sack of Magdeburg begin the day after tomorrow?”

She had a specific question about that.

“Why did the M.H.R.R. Catholics and Hashiba agree to it? That event triggers the Protestant resistance and Catholic decline during the Thirty Years’ War.”

“Testament,” said Mazarin with a nod and a glance to Guericke. “To start with, what was holding back the Sack of Magdeburg will soon be gone. Lady Anne of Austria, Hexagone Française’s previous provisional chancellor and student council president, fell ill and was left with Magdeburg, but...”

She fell silent and hung her head, so Masazumi spoke up.

“If possible, I would like to hear the rest.”

“Testament. ...Lady Anne’s remaining life is running out.”

Words filled the depths of the night. The voice came from the Palais-Cardinal which sat below the temporary roof built on Takao’s rear loading port.

“That would be the first point.”

Naomasa sat in front of her while eating a roast manju.

She opened a sign frame.

Smoking Girl: “You’ve started over there, haven’t you? The OS Mouse and the god of war are synchronized, so I can hear it here too. But if that’s a problem, I can stop it. What should I do?”

Vice President: “It’s fine as long as the voice is being cut off from your surroundings. You’re part of the chancellor’s officers and you’ll probably be involved from here on. I also want you to hear this as a representative of the engine division.”

Asama: “I’ll set things up there just like they are here, so you can talk like normal.”

“Sure, sure,” replied Naomasa as she checked the sign frame.

Hanami’s icon appeared on the upper left.

<Sync complete. Clap.>

Naomasa nodded and looked up at the Palais-Cardinal.

“Okay, this is going to be a double meeting. Got that?”

She crossed her legs, took a bite of the roast manju and asked the god of war

a question.

“It isn’t that I don’t understand your circumstances. My family environment isn’t much different. ...But is Anne really in that bad shape?”

“Lady Anne.”

Behind her, the cockpit block had been opened to check inside. The maintenance division group in charge of that waved to tell Naomasa it was safe.

“Oh, you can close your back. It must have been cold.”

“This was nothing compared to the chill Lady Anne feels.”

“She feels cold? That’s strange. ...Didn’t you say Anne combined with you, was left as data inside the cockpit container, and taken to Magdeburg? Her senses would be completely cut off, so she wouldn’t be able to feel the cold.”

“Lady Anne. ...And the chill she is feeling comes from...I guess you could call it ‘unease’.”

“I see,” said Naomasa.

...I wonder if my sister feels cold inside Jizuri Suzaku.

“Anyway, Anne is in Magdeburg, right? I’m sure they have new medical techniques since they aren’t bound by the Catholic rules there, but why take her to such a troublesome city?”

“Lady Anne. ...And to be honest, she is a hostage.”

After closing her back and letting out a quiet groan, the Palais-Cardinal raised her right index finger.

“As long as Lady Anne is in Magdeburg, Hexagone Française cannot choose to spread the flames of war to the city. In other words, we cannot advance the Thirty Years’ War’s recreation to the point of the Sack of Magdeburg. For the city, this indirectly protects their people from the Sack. For the M.H.R.R. Catholics, it delays the war’s turning point.”

“Who asked to have her made a hostage?”

The Palais-Cardinal stopped moving briefly, but finally corrected her posture and answered.

“The decision was made by Lady Anne herself.”

Masazumi did not find Anne of Austria’s decision to be a bad one.

...Using a former provisional chancellor and student council president as a hostage, hm?

After retiring, she lost a lot of her importance to Hexagone Française, but that was what made her a perfect hostage. She was still undoubtedly a VIP, so sending her out would affect both the M.H.R.R. Protestants and Catholics as well as Magdeburg and the Testament Union.

Novice: “So as long as Anne herself lives, the M.H.R.R. Protestants and the city of Magdeburg can prepare for the Sack and what comes afterwards. In other words, her life determines the fate of the Thirty Years’ War for M.H.R.R.”

Mal-Ga: “Have you finished reading the divine mail from your stalker? You’re clogging up the network.”

Novice: “Shut up. It isn’t easy when more keeps piling up as I try to read the old ones!”

Obscene: “Ha ha ha. Such happiness!”

Relationships are a tough thing, thought Masazumi while staying as detached as possible and turning to Mazarin.

The small Mouse body was hanging her head slightly. It seemed to be a way of expressing a lack of energy.

However, she suddenly nodded and looked up.

“Let us continue speaking.”

“Judge,” replied Masazumi as Mazarin opened a *signe cadre* showing a girl.

The girl had wavy hair and was wrapped in faint light.

“Lady Anne has an incurable illness. The simplest explanation is that she has problems with her ether circulation. Due to her family, she has divine blood, but she suffers from a destructive illness that is similar to the process by which a human transforms into a monster.”

Hearing that, Asama's eyebrows rose and she handed the cheese fondue to Guericke.

"Even though she's a god? No, it's *because* she's a god, isn't it?"

"Testament."

Mazarin closed her eyes and turned toward Guericke.

"Drink it all. You don't get to leave otherwise."

Mal-Ga: "It's the standard school lunch rule! I hated that because I don't like the green onions in sukiyaki."

Vice President: "I always brought my lunch, so it didn't affect me."

Meanwhile, Guericke took in a deep breath.

After a while, he froze in place and Mazarin turned back to Masazumi.

"Let us continue."

Uqui: "Is it just me or is that Mouse bullying him?"

Masazumi thought so too, but there was no way Guericke could oppose someone like her.

...But based on their interactions, can I assume Magdeburg and Hexagone Française have been in contact?

She turned to Guericke.

"I have a question. If Anne of Austria's passing is the trigger for the Sack of Magdeburg, does Cardinal Mazarin's presence here mean the M.H.R.R. Protestants and Hexagone Française have been communicating?"

She received no response. Guericke was hopeless, but Mazarin looked at her without confirming or denying it.

...So they can't officially admit to it.

However, their silence said enough. If they were not going to deny it, she was free to interpret it how she liked. And so she continued speaking.

"Seeing her death coming, the city of Magdeburg is preparing for the battle, but the M.H.R.R. Catholics shouldn't need to attack. If they lay siege and don't

actually continue on to the Sack, the Thirty Years' War can proceed. So if they are going to attack..."

She wanted to confirm her thoughts.

"The M.H.R.R. Catholics and Hashiba intend to 'win' the Thirty Years' War, don't they? Does this mean they're already prepared to do that?"

"Testament."

Masazumi saw Guericke nod after drinking eighty percent of his "drink".

He faced her, wiped his mouth with a handkerchief, and spoke.

"Three years ago when Hashiba had stationed their Ten Spears in M.H.R.R. and solidified a foothold there, we received a notification from them. The Magdeburg Hemispheres were already under development then and Hashiba asked us to hand them over for M.H.R.R.'s victory. And if we did not, they threatened to carry out the Sack of Magdeburg."

"The Hemispheres were more of a pretext to attack than anything, weren't they? That doesn't sound good."

"Testament," agreed Guericke. "That is why we quickly proposed secretly sending them to Holland or Hexagone Française. However, we would need a transport ship to carry the devices. Transporting them to Hexagone Française would have been difficult and Holland would be invaded by M.H.R.R. during the Thirty Years' War. Just as we were at our wit's end, Lady Anne of Austria arrived."

He continued speaking.

"But now Magdeburg is already besieged by M.H.R.R.'s General Tilly."

"Why? Anne of Austria hasn't died yet, has she?"

"I would like to say these are just anticipatory preparations, but the scale of their deployment shows they are serious. And the other day, the M.H.R.R. warriors laying siege contacted us to tell us they would invade two days from now."

He took a breath as if to build his resolve.

“As I previously told you, the Sack of Magdeburg begins that night.”

“Judge. It seems pretty sudden to me.”

The Sack would begin in two days’ time. Masazumi looked to Mazarin concerning that date.

But Mazarin only shook her head.

“As far as I can tell, Lady Anne should live a little longer at least. If she rests, she should be fine for another week.”

“Then why are the M.H.R.R. Catholics rushing the Sack? That’s suicidal. And if she’s still alive, won’t they be criticized for this?”

Guericke shrugged and shook his head.

“There is one more reason for them to begin the Sack right away.”

“What is-...” began Masazumi, but she changed her mind. “No, I shouldn’t be asking. The answer to that is obvious.”

The corners of Guericke’s mouth rose when he heard that. He seemed to be telling her she was right.

So she faced a certain person.

...That’s right.

There was one strange fact about this meeting. Someone was sitting here like it was normal even though it was blatantly unusual.

“Cardinal Mazarin.”

Masazumi looked her in the eye and spoke clearly.

“Why are you here?”

Masazumi called to the Mouse who was looking her way.

“Lady Luynes is Anne of Austria’s maid, so I understand why she would board the Musashi as it travelled to Magdeburg and take part in a meeting concerning Anne. But you introduced yourself as Mazarin, your other inherited name. That

makes you Cardinal Mazarin, treasurer of Hexagone Française. ...Why are you traveling to Magdeburg?”

“Testament. Well done.” Mazarin gave a deep nod. “I am of course traveling to Magdeburg to ‘visit Lady Anne’, but that is not all. My visit is a covert one as it is not part of the history recreation, but I still have a reason for it.”

That being...

“This is just between us, but a representative of the M.H.R.R. Protestants and the leader of an anti-P.A. Oda alliance are visiting Magdeburg. Those two do not fear opposing the Testament Alliance and they will join together against P.A. Oda under Lady Anne’s guidance. This secret meeting was called together in a hurry due to the few days remaining to Lady Anne, but the Catholics are speeding up the Sack to attack that meeting.”

Masazumi gasped at that reason for the battle and Mazarin smiled bitterly.

“Lord Matsunaga Danjou Hisahide helped arrange this and he asked us to work with Musashi if we could.”

I see, thought Naomasa.

She had let the Palais-Cardinal talk on and on, but now...

“I think I get the picture. Since the Catholics are rushing their preparations for the Sack and beginning the day after tomorrow, you planned to meet up with Anne by using the Musashi and skipping all the unnecessary formalities by defecting. And once you get there, the secret meeting can be held tomorrow, before the Sack. But who are these two representatives of the M.H.R.R. Protestants and an anti-P.A. Oda group?”

“I cannot say. Lady Anne has asked me to keep that a secret. And...at present, I see two problems concerning working with Musashi.”

The Palais-Cardinal raised a finger on her right hand.

“First, Lady Anne is not the only hostage sent to Magdeburg. M.H.R.R. has sent one as well.”

That being...

“M.H.R.R. Chancellor and ‘Wahnsinniger’ Rudolf II. He is imprisoned near Magdeburg.”

“I knew this time would come eventually, but I doubt my brother cares at all.”

Matthias muttered to himself on the bridge of an aerial ship positioned across a river.

He drank beer from a small wooden mug and looked at Narimasa who sat across from him.

Narimasa was leaning back in his chair sleeping. His arms were dangling down from the chair and he was completely relaxed. Matthias then turned to Toshiie who sat in another chair to the right.

Matthias reconfirmed that a ghost like Toshiie had no feet.

“Your relationship with Sassa is a lot like mine with my brother.”

“Chancellor Rudolf II doesn’t hurt people that readily, does he?”

Toshiie gave a troubled smile and Matthias began to nod, but...

“That’s why I hesitate so much. We told him to temporarily move to Magdeburg because his castle in Prague is being remodeled. It’s such a blatant lie, but he still trusts us. It’s obviously a trap to attack and kill him during the Sack of Magdeburg. I am telling him to escape, but who knows if he’s listening.”

Matthias sighed and took a deep breath.

“He has no desire for fame and no ambitions. He simply worries about his own power. He’s always kind to me...no, he’s kind to everyone. If it hadn’t been for his position as emperor, he could have been any-....”

Matthias placed his mug on the table, sighed, and placed a hand over his eyes.

“If possible, I hope the Protestants can attack his tower and destroy it before we get there.”

“You won’t be making the attack yourself, so don’t worry,” said Toshiie. “General Tilly will be handling the basics and my Kaga Millionen Geist will be

effective against the chancellor. I'll probably be the one who ends up doing it, so you can resent me for it."

"Say that and I really will. Are you sure you want that?"

"I think it's perfectly normal for a ghost to gather resentment."

"You need to order me to do it, Maeda. Otherwise, I won't resent you."

"Sorry. ...But it would be best for the chancellor to escape and go missing. Wasn't there a time when he wanted to go to England? But..."

Toshiie looked into the eastern sky. He could see a large cloud-like form in the distance. It was the Musashi. The eight ships were moving east as if blowing in the wind.

"What will Musashi do? The chancellor unknowingly has some information that not even we or Hashiba have seen."

"So it seems," muttered Matthias with a sigh. "It doesn't surprise me. He's quite the airhead. He never hides anything. When Hashiba asked him for it as a representative of P.A. Oda, he bluntly refused, claiming it was his. Poor Hashiba didn't know what to do."

"Testament. In the end, our master told her not to worry about it as long as the information wouldn't leave there."

That information being...

"That memo was left by Great Chancellor Carlos I of Tres España and M.H.R.R. who was also close to Henry VIII of England. It was a portion of his investigation of the Princess Disappearances."

"Chancellor Carlos I investigated the Princess Disappearances!?"

Masazumi spoke up without thinking, Horizon frowned, and Mazarin nodded.

"Testament. It seems Lady Anne heard that while speaking with Rudolf II over divine transmission. He does not have a journal or notebook, but he does have a memo on parchment that Carlos I left behind. Because Carlos I is Rudolf II's great-uncle, all of the documents left by him were given to Rudolf II."

Mazarin continued from there.

“And Hexagone Française has actually been investigating the Princess Disappearances as well. After all, disappearing without a trace seems very Apocalyptic.”

At that point, Guericke continued for Mazarin.

He looked across everyone first.

“Rudolf II is completely Catholic and conflicts with us Protestants, but he will likely be intentionally lost once the Sack of Magdeburg occurs. After all, the Catholics want to make Matthias their next emperor to prepare for the Thirty Years’ War.”

Masazumi understood what the man meant. By the start of the Thirty Years’ War, Rudolf II was no longer M.H.R.R.’s emperor. It was already his brother Matthias.

That was why they would eliminate Rudolf II to solidify M.H.R.R.’s structure for the war.

“But,” said Masazumi to stop the conversation. “Why are you telling us about Rudolf II and this document concerning the Princess Disappearances?”

“Why do you think?” asked Guericke.

Masazumi’s eyebrows rose slightly and she thought about the meaning behind this meeting.

...They’re deciding right now whether Musashi will take part in the secret meeting at Magdeburg, aren’t they?

Soon, a representative of the M.H.R.R. Protestants, a representative of the anti-P.A. Oda forces, and Mazarin would gather in Magdeburg for a secret meeting.

But to join them, Musashi had to prove they were on the same level as the others.

In other words, this was a test.

“You don’t mean...”

When she combined the word “test” with the information they had just discussed, she reached a certain idea.

“You want us to go to Rudolf II and obtain that document? And on that condition, we can take part in the meeting?”

“Testament.” Mazarin nodded. “Of course, that is not all. That is a test of your willingness to interfere with the actions of the M.H.R.R. Catholics.”

“Then what other test is there?”

“That is simple. You will retake a test you have already failed once. You will fight a Hexagone Française force and win. ...In other words, the team you have sent below will fight the unit we have sent after them.”

“Listen,” said Mazarin. “Our forest defense unit is pursuing the rescue team sent after the Musashi Chancellor. They may only be a defense unit, but they are *Belle de Marionnette* special forces that have inherited the names of Mouri leaders. We plan to decide everything on the outcome of their battle with your rescue team.”

Outside the window, Naruze held a message saying “make a joke”, but Masazumi ignored it.

“So today’s battle was more than just a way of introducing your vice chancellor and other warriors. It was also a test of our strength.”

If that all-out battle was now being overwritten by a battle between representatives...

...Hexagone Française must have no interest in our national or economic strength. But...

“Hexagone Française is interested in Musashi’s political standpoint and individual strength?”

“Musashi’s specialty is a local battle like the armada battle or one-on-one battles like in London. We confirmed that *fact* earlier today, so I would like to go over the coming battle now.”

Mazarin looked Masazumi in the eye.

“Listen,” she began. “Musashi’s chancellor and student council president is being pursued by Princess Terumoto’s three maids who have inherited the names of her uncles. They all have unofficial experience in battles against P.A. Oda. Depending on the outcome of this battle, we could suggest that Lady Anne instructs the Reine des Garous to not eat your chancellor.”

That meant Aoi could be returned unharmed if they won the coming battle.

That was why Masazumi crossed her arms, opened her mouth, and said what may have been a bluff.

“That settles it. Our comrades are sure to bring us good news.”

I need to get ready, thought Mitotsudaira in her hazy mind.

They had climbed a slope in the mountain forest and reached the planned rest spot. However, it was nothing more than a pit in the opposite slope that they could sit down in and check their progress.

...I need to be ready to move again after a short break.

The others were being considerate and she knew why. She was the only one who could, at the very least, buy some time with her mother. That was why they said nothing even though she was slowing them down.

...I hate this.

She felt like she was separated out from the others.

She knew her thoughts were headed in a negative direction. It was probably because her mother had reminded her of eight years ago. That was when she had felt separate from everyone and had failed in so much.

“Kh...”

She tried to get up and begin walking, but her legs were unsteady.

“Margot? Can you remove the pain reduction?”

“Eh? I already did.”

That response filled Mitotsudaira with confusion and hesitation. Should she try to gloss over the issue? She wondered if she had let the other girl know how

bad her condition was and she was also shocked at learning how bad it was herself.

“I...see.”

She lowered her raised hips onto the grassy slope. The damp stems, leaves, and dirt were not a problem thanks to her waterproofed and insulated suit, but she was feeling tired because...

...My body is not cooling off.

She removed her coat and sleeves.

“Mito-tsan? You’re going to get chilled.”

“No, um, this feels a lot better. ...You should – heh heh – try it too, Margot.”

“Well...”

Naito sounded troubled, but Mitotsudaira did not look her way and removed her own skirt.

...This should help wake me-

At that point, the color gold filled her lowered vision. She initially thought it was Margot, but it was actually Mary’s hair.

The English royal and sister of the Fairy Queen was crouched down and peering worriedly at her.

“Would you like some water?”

That question woke Mitotsudaira a bit.

...Oh, no!

Mary was not like the others. The rest of the class knew her and what had happened eight years ago, but she had barely spoken with Mary.

One was from England and the other from Hexagone Française. One was a royal and the other was in line to rule the Far East. That created a connection between them, but...

...That is why we must be equal.

Mitotsudaira had not been doing a good job of keeping distance between them, but she had assumed it would all work out given enough time. However, Mary had approached her here.

“Are you thirsty?”

Mary was being considerate even though Mitotsudaira had thought they should try to remain equals.

She had lost, had something taken from her, and been unable to do anything about it. But what did it mean to be shown this consideration afterwards?

...Pity?

Realizing the meaning of that word, she mentally shook her head. It was unfair to think that. It harmed herself and looked down on the other person.

She could not keep this up.

...Yes. Wasn't I taught that long ago!?

At that moment, Mary kneeled down next to her and held out a leather bag of water.

“Um, here.”

Mitotsudaira intended to smile and decline, but Mary took her hand.

“...”

When she reflexively struck Mary's hand away, she fully came to her senses.

...Ah.

Now I've done it, thought Mitotsudaira when she saw Mary holding her own hand.

She had hurt the other girl.

She doubted Mary was overreacting by holding her hand like that. She had knocked Mary's hand back while barely controlling her strength as a Demi Loup-Garou.

...What have I done?

Unable to understand her own action, Mitotsudaira tried to calm herself by bringing a hand to her throat. That was when she realized the choker was gone.

“...!?”

There was no point in asking when she had lost it. It would have happened when her mother had grabbed her neck and tossed her aside.

She had simply not noticed anything until now and that said everything there was to say about her current state.

...My king.

She felt like she had ruined everything that she had promised and she felt strength leave the core of her being.

“...”

She toppled onto her side and a drowsy exhaustion filled her entire body.

She then turned her head toward Mary. Her heart told her she needed to apologize, but she closed her eyes.

...No.

She collapsed onto the grassy slope and passed out.

“A-are you okay, Mary-dono?”

Tenzou caught the leather bag as it flew through the air from Mitotsudaira’s strike and he ran over to Mary who was crouched down on the slope.

“Oh, now that’s a true husband,” said Naito, so he glanced over at her.

“I-I would really rather you didn’t tell everyone about this later.”

“Judge, judge. I won’t tell anyone, so you don’t have a thing to worry about. Not a single thing!”

“I-I can’t trust you at all, can I!?”

At any rate, he ran to Mary who held her right hand and gave him a troubled smile.

“It looks like I got a little too close. ...I should have shown more restraint.”

“Mary-dono, how is your hand?”

“Excalibur moves automatically, so I don’t need my hand when using it.”

She smiled, but she had a habit of not wanting to make others worry and she had just said she would not need her hand. *This must be serious*, thought Tenzou as he took her hand.

“Ah.”

Her shoulders tensed as he removed her glove.

“The bone and tendons are fine. I’ll make a compress, so wait just a moment.”

“No, that can wait. Treating Lady Mitotsudaira comes first.”

Mary looked at the wolf with a bitter smile.

“She has an incredibly strong heart, doesn’t she? ...But I think she has finally gone to sleep.”

“I am grateful.”

“I didn’t do anything,” said Mary with a small smile.

Tenzou shuddered when he noticed Naito exaggeratedly fanning herself with her wings and commenting on the passionate heat, but Mary tilted her head.

“Should I call in some spirits to regulate the temperature?”

“You’re great, Ma-yan!! I think you’re just amazing!!”

“Thank you,” replied Mary with a smile and a small bow.

She then turned back to Tenzou.

“Master Tenzou, I wouldn’t be able to do anything if you were taken by my sister and I think I would end up much like Lady Mitotsudaira is now.”

...But if Elizabeth-dono abducted me, I would probably be executed immediately afterwards.

“Anyway,” said Mary as she took a breath. “We just have to hide Lady Mitotsudaira, right?”

“Judge. If she is safe, the rest should work out somehow or other.”

After all...

“Our pursuers have reached the bottom of the hill, so we need to intercept them here.”

“Tenzou, how many of them are there?”

“About forty, I think. They are probably the Three Maids of Mouri, maid automatons that Hexagone Française sent to Princess Terumoto.”

He smiled at Mary.

“Whatever the case, we need to get in the first strike.”

Fifteen minutes later at 12:13 AM, the battle began in the mountain forest of Hexagone Française.

The scouting unit led by the Three Maids of Mouri caught up to and spotted the special rescue team led by Musashi's 1st special duty officer.

When that information reached Mazarin via Divine Transmission, he proposed pausing the meeting and letting the result of that battle decide everything.

On its way to Magdeburg, the Musashi could not interfere in the battle, but Masazumi saw important meaning in that.

“So you're judging our true value.”

Time passed as she and the others waited for further information in the meeting room.

Tenzou's team minus Mitotsudaira silently but surely began their battle.

Chapter 41: Attackers in the Dark Forest

CHAPTER 41

"Attackers in the Dark Forest"



Now, let us begin
Traveling down an untrod path
Is one form of beauty
Point Allocation (Excursion)

Now, let us begin

Traveling down an untrod path

Is one form of beauty

Point Allocation (Excursion)

“Would you like another glass?”

In a candy house, a dining table was covered with piles of used plates and a wine glass was added to it.

However, the person to which the Reine des Garous held out the bottle was leaned back in his chair and did not move.

“Oh? Did you fall asleep, Musashi Chancellor? How defenseless. And in front of the Reine des Garous no less.”

She laughed quietly, brought a hand to her cheek, and smiled deeply.

She circled around to the boy in the chair and brought her face to his throat.

It was a still night and her non-human hearing detected the pulse in his carotid artery.

“Heh heh. You ate well and now you’re sleeping well. ...You must have been exhausted.”

She brought her hands to her hips and stood up.

“Honestly, do Musashi’s students understand how exhausted he gets even if it only looks like he’s doing stupid things?”

She pushed the table out of the way with her butt, moved in front of the boy, opened his clothing from collar to navel, and gave a crescent moon of a smile.

But...

“...”

She focused her ears toward the house’s entrance and looked to the north.

“Heh heh. The forest is noisy tonight. Quite a bit must be headed this way.”

She placed a hand on the boy's shirt and smiled.

"They're still outside my territory, but how about I watch a little bit before taking this boy."

The first thing to fill the forest night was a gunshot.

There was no moonlight and barely any starlight below the broadleaf trees where shadows overlapped. The gunshot raced up from below a rising slope.

Next, a firing line of ten all fired in the same direction.

They aimed at the center of the slope where they had sensed their target.

They continued firing on that location for ten full seconds.

"..." As soon as they finished, a group of shadows moved below the trees.

They were automatons equipped for night missions in mountainous forests. They wore dark green Far Eastern maid uniforms with black aprons.

They split into three teams. One fell back a bit to act as the rear guard and command unit. The other two circled to the left or right of the slope. Their enemy was in the center of the slope, so they intended to flank the enemy on both sides at once.

The ones moving left had rearranged their bodies to be right-handed and the ones moving right had done the same to be left-handed. This allowed them to constantly aim their guns at their target.

They moved forward.

As they rushed through the forest, they searched for their enemy by heat and sound rather than vision. They also avoided speaking. They could use their automaton shared memory to rapidly exchange thoughts.

Even now, they were confirming each other's positions via thoughts instead of words.

"Right team has arrived. Checking for unusual movements."

"Left team has arrived. Checking for unusual movements."

“Center team has received confirmation. Please continue.”

“Testament,” the other teams replied to the center team.

But shortly thereafter, an especially loud report reached them.

“Okay, this is Mouri-01. Everyone, Mouri-02’s unit has reached us, so I will now command both units. Please keep that in mind.”

Mouri-01 double-checked their current formation.

Two teams had split off from her unit for the pincer attack up ahead. To assist, Mouri-02’s unit had also split into three teams with two sent after the other two teams sent ahead. So...

“An additional team will be added to both advance teams. The leading teams will be known as R1 and L1 while the following teams will be known as R2 and L2. Please confirm.”

“R1 here, testament.” “L1 here, testament.” “R2 here, testament.” “L2 here, testament.”

The responses came in almost simultaneously and Mouri-01 gave them silent praise from the central team.

When she had come to the Mouri clan, she had never expected to be given combat work as well, but...

...We can handle this with the proper training and knowledge.

Thanks to the instructions of Henri, Armand, and Isaac of the Three Musketeers and their familiarity with the forest due to their princess’s love of taking walks through the mountains, after only two years in Mouri, all of the maid dolls had been able to traverse the forests covering eastern Hexagone Française alone and with no equipment.

In a group of three, they could accomplish reconnaissance and delaying missions.

“Mouri-97 of R2 here. I have detected a large group of *framboise* in this area. Permission to pick them?”

“Only if you use your spare hand while remaining in motion.”

“Testament,” they all replied.

A few reports of successful harvests came in afterwards.

Mouri-02 was silent even in their shared memory, but she seemed to have found a similar clump of fruit behind the central team. Mouri-01 decided this was a good thing and that the girl had changed since being dragged around by the princess.

“But everyone, show some restraint and do not pick too many. The forests of Hexagone Française belong to the spirits. Disturbing them is strictly forbidden.”

While they all replied with “testament”, the central team prepared their rifles.

The bullets they used were muzzle loaded in accordance with the history recreation’s rules. They could control the loading and firing with their gravitational control as automatons, so they could fire quite rapidly even with a normal gun. As for the materials used for the bullets...

“Mouri-01, this is Mouri-236. I have reconfirmed the makeup of the soil in this area. The rain last month has changed the soil since the last survey. Raising the acidity of the bullet composition by 2% should speed up the compost rate of the used bullets.”

Dirtying the land would turn the spirits against them.

...And then we would lose the cooperation of the Reine des Garous and other local non-humans.

And if the spirits avoided the people, their blessings would naturally no longer reach the people.

This was why it had long been said to be very careful when fighting in a spirit forest.

...And that is why it has become a job for Belle de Marionnettes like us.

When moving through the forest, they could avoid speaking while also confirming each other’s positions and maintaining order. Automatons were likely the only beings that could do that outside of the non-humans who lived in the forests.

However, the combat automatons could not do that. Henri's giant swords and Armand's extreme gravitational control were bad enough, but Isaac's shellfire would destroy the forest down to its roots.

And that is why we do it, thought Mouri-01 as she gave instructions.

"Everyone, compress the bullets within 2% acidic soil. Our previous shots were a response to sudden movement, but this will allow our used bullets to be absorbed into the ground. Also, R1 and L1, have you detected the source of that sudden movement?"

"Testament. R1 is investigating. ...The sound is gone. No heat source."

"Testament L1 is investigating. ...The sound is gone. No heat-..."

L1 was cut off before finishing.

"R1 has a correction! There is a heat source!"

Something quickly rose on the bullet-riddled slope.

It was a shadow and it sank down for an instant.

"...!"

Wind wrapped around it, and it leaped down the slope toward the central team.

The automatons reacted calmly. Just as the enemy shadow leaped down the slope, the central team simply confirmed its presence and left the direct interception to R2 and L2 who were moving to the right and left.

The next to move were R1 and L1 who had moved ahead and reached about the same height as the point the shadow had leaped from. They calmly fired in a fan shape along the slope where it had jumped from as well as above and below that.

Down below, Mouri-01's C1 team finished confirming the shadow in the air ahead of them.

At the same time, that enemy shadow was suddenly stopped.

Mouri-02 stood at the lead of C2 which had caught up from behind.

“...”

She had used accurate gravitational control to fire a wooden skewer as a high-speed counterattack.

Mouri-01 saw Mouri-02's counterattack strike the enemy shadow.

Gravity had compressed the tip of the wooden skewer that stabbed into the shadow as gunfire from either side poured into it.

“...!”

Mouri-02 twisted her right wrist and the skewer was forced into the enemy.

The impact caused the shadow to burst, but the way it scattered and the sound it made told Mouri-01 something.

“That is not human! It is a tree!”

The scattering shadow was indeed a fallen tree, yet it also had definite heat.

...What is this heat source!?

Mouri-01 soon realized what it was. A mass of heat she determined was a hot stone spilled from the scattering splinters.

Just as she determined the enemy had put it there, the other automatons' thoughts shouted to her.

“L1 here! Noise detected to the outer left!” “R1 here! Noise detected to the outer right!”

Suddenly, new shadows appeared beyond them all to the right and left.

Two movements raced through the underbrush and the automatons defended against the shadows moving down the slope.

“Please rise up!”

The automatons on the outer edges of the teams used their gravitational control to lift the ground on either side.

They created barriers of earth between them and the shadows descending on either side.

It was enough to defend, but something suddenly appeared over the heads of R1 and L1.

“Heat source detected.”

But it was not just one. Countless heat sources poured down on their heads.

“Hot water!?”

As soon as the hot water splashed down on the automatons, Tenzou leaped above R1 and Mary leaped above L1. Their actions seemed to be stopped by the steam rising from the hot water dropped below, but...

...We can do this!

They jumped down into the hot air created by the water dumped on the cold air and cold automatons. Tenzou had boiled the water in a ninja tool known as a paper bucket, Mary had asked the water spirits to keep it hot, and Naito had cut off the path of the escaping heat with a reduction spell.

The forest had very few heat sources, so what happened to steam or the people surrounded by it?

“...!?”

The confused automatons turned toward each other.

Of course they would do that, thought Mary.

If they had been searching for heat sources, they would first notice their fellow automatons after being covered in hot water. And when searching for an enemy heat source, they would naturally be confused when so many appeared at once.

And the heat of the scattering steam would form a mist and make their vision uncertain.

Tenzou and Mary had prevented the enemy from using their eyes.

...Now we only need to seal off their auditory senses!

When Mary landed, she waved her skirt to make a loud noise.

The automatons looked over in surprise, so they had likely switched from thermal sensing to auditory sensing.

...Just as Master Tenzou predicted!

That made her happy, but a voice behind her seemed to push her onward.

“Herrlich!”

It was Naito’s voice from far up the slope.

That signaled the completion of her spell.

“...!”

Everything in the forest shook and cried out.

More accurately, Naito’s acceleration spell had created a straight line wind that shot through the forest’s trees and their branches. Instead of moving the air, the spell simply accelerated and released it.

...But if the branches shake enough...

The wind struck all the trees in an area one hundred meters long and thirty meters wide.

The forest shook. Trees tilted, branches collided, and leaves sounded like a heavy hand was striking them.

The blowing roar grew and pressed in on the ears of the automatons using auditory sensing.

“Kh!?”

The heat sources had been disturbed and now the sound was too confusing.

But the automatons knew an enemy was here, so they had to do something.

However, they could not escape and put some distance between them due to the wall they themselves had created.

And then Mary shouted out.

“Ex. Collbrande!!”

The shadow that had raced down the slope on the outside sounded like it kicked off the underbrush.

The shadow that flew into Mary's raised hand was the left half of the original Excalibur.

Mary crouched down but used her full strength to swing her divine weapon.

She charged at the enemy.

Study:

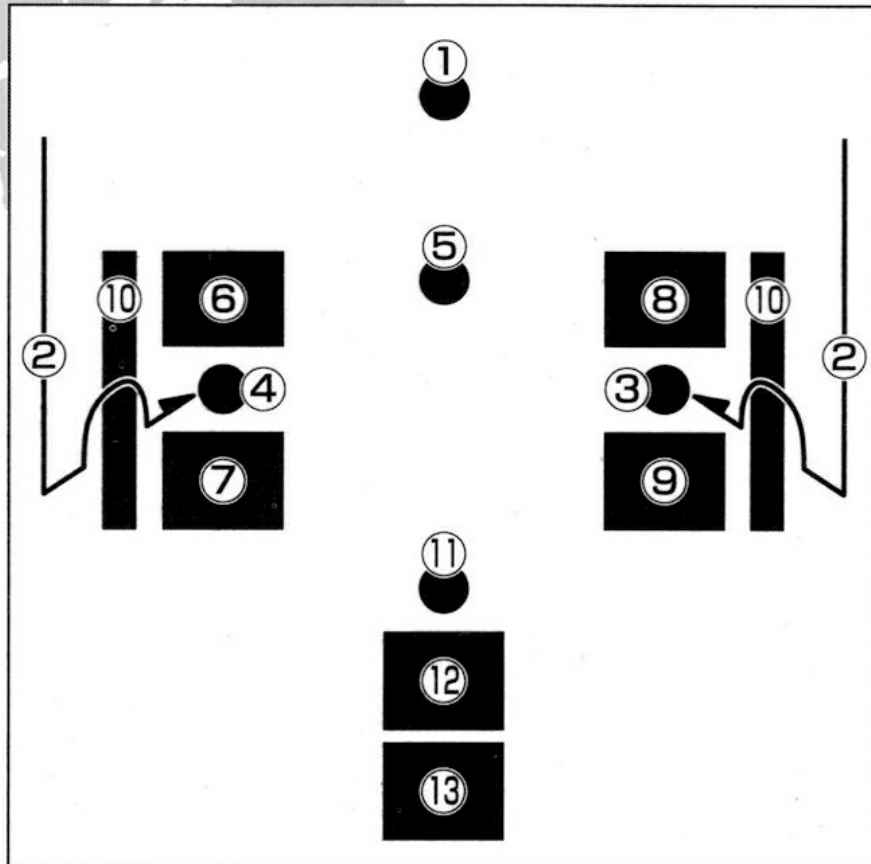
● Battlefield Diagram ① ●



"So, um, Tenzou doesn't matter, but what are the others doin' in the forest!?"



"Heh heh heh. Doin' brother, this is the current situation in the forest."



※The distances are a bit arbitrary. They are actually spread out more from front to back.

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| ① Naito | ⑧ Automaton Team R1 |
| ② Excalibur's Route | ⑨ Automaton Team R2 |
| ③ Tenzou | ⑩ Walls Raised by the Automatons |
| ④ Mary | ⑪ Mouri-02 |
| ⑤ Disguised Tree | ⑫ Automaton Team C1 (Mouri-01) |
| ⑥ Automaton Team L1 | ⑬ Automaton Team C2 |
| ⑦ Automaton Team L2 | |



"...Doesn't this diagram look like a face?"



"Hey, watch what you say. Now I can't help but see it. And try to remember that they're on the way to save you."

Battlefield Diagram 1

Toori: So, um, Tenzou doesn't matter, but what are the others doin' in the forest!?

Kimi: Heh heh heh. Doin' brother, this is the current situation in the forest.

*The distances are a bit arbitrary. They are actually spread out more from front to back.

1. Naito
2. Excalibur's Route
3. Tenzou
4. Mary
5. Disguised Tree
6. Automaton Team L1
7. Automaton Team L2
8. Automaton Team R1
9. Automaton Team R2
10. Walls Raised by the Automatons
11. Mouri-02
12. Automaton Team C1 (Mouri-01)
13. Automaton Team C2

Toori: Doesn't this diagram look like a face?

Kimi: Hey, watch what you say. Now I can't help but see it. And try to remember that they're on the way to save you.

Chapter 42: Counterattackers in the Dark Forest

CHAPTER 42

"Counterattackers in the Dark Forest"



Why do we
Never forget
The trick to fighting?
Point Allocation (Duty)

Why do we

Never forget

The trick to fighting?

Point Allocation (Duty)

The battle in the forest continued as Tenzou and Mary separately charged in at the automatons who had been split between left and right.

Tenzou thought to himself as he heard repeated sword strikes from Mary and Excalibur on the other side.

...Well done!

Ex. Collbrande's path did not waver. Unlike the irregular iai techniques of a ninja, she sent the arc of the sword toward the thickest part of the enemy.

It was a bold sword technique.

...The three hundred she cut down in the past is at least coming in handy now.

Ex. Collbrande was likely helping as well. The other half had come to him. It was light and dull, but it was effective as a blunt weapon. It was far from being a stealthy item and he was unsure a ninja should be wielding it, but he had no choice since it had taken a liking to him. He decided to think of it like a type of ninja dog.

...When I think about it, I'm completely relying on Mary-dono here, but I can't let myself think that way.

But as he cut down the enemy with his attack...

"Oh."

He heard guns being prepared. The sound he heard in the noisy forest was unique to humans, so he held up Ex. Collbrande as a shield and bullets soon collided with it.

He realized the enemy's grasp of the situation was recovering and used the sounds to count the number he and Mary had defeated.

Together, they had reached a total of twelve or thirteen.

The leading teams on the left and right had each had ten members, so the two teams had been reduced by about seventy percent. Two additional teams were arriving from below, but they could not do anything with the automatons of the leading teams in the way.

This was well done, he thought.

10ZO: “Mary-dono.”

He sent a prepared sign frame as a sign and he made a wide swing with Excalibur.

The slash pushed the enemy outward and up the slope.

He had a single reason for distancing them like that. He placed Excalibur on his back to defend from behind and...

“...!”

He ducked low and charged toward the additional team below while Mary did the same on the opposite side.

Mary was relieved to be moving.

She had a variety of thoughts about having to fight, but she was here because of everything that had happened in England.

...Doing what I can here is the least I can do for the others!

The enemy she drove back here was likely the same, so...

“Here I go!”

She held her skirt and seemed to fly as she rode the wind spirits.

...Is this really okay?

According to Tenzou, they were being pursued by Mouri’s three automaton sisters.

They had originally been part of a Hexagone Française academy, but they had apparently transferred to Mouri when Mouri Terumoto married Louis Exiv.

Mary had formally married into Hexagone Française in the past, so she knew these automatons' abilities even if she had never met them.

Using that knowledge, she and Tenzou had exchanged ideas and put together this counterattack plan.

According to Tenzou's knowledge of the Testament Union's almanac, the three sisters held the positions of 4th through 6th special duty officers. On their side, Tenzou and Naito were special duty officers, but...

...What about me?

She moved on. Instead of utterly crushing the enemy, she had left a few behind her. That was to leave the possibility of friendly fire to stop the additional team from attacking.

"...!?"

Mary could see the spirits express their thoughts via movement in the ether and that revealed something to her. In the noisy night, the spirits were expressing their surprise at something that did not belong.

...A wooden skewer!

She realized this was Mouri-02's attack at the same moment as Ex. Collbrande moved from her back, circled around her, and arrived in front of her. An attack tried to gouge into the large sword raised as a shield.

But Mary had a sudden thought.

...Strange.

The attack did not continue. There was nothing more from Mouri-02 or the others up ahead.

...That was a diversion meant to draw my attention forward!

In the past, she had cut down three hundred and later fought a fleet attacking England. Her spirit spells were weaker while away from England, but she had not lost the intuition that had given her.

"Behind me!"

Instead of using her hands, she had Excalibur sweep behind her using its

autonomous movements.

It hit, but it hit more than just one object.

...All of the remaining ones!?

She looked over her shoulder and saw the correct number of enemies, but something was different about them.

“Headless dolls!?”

Their arms were held out toward her as they tried to grab her.

Her strike had smashed them all as they attacked from behind, but beyond them, the previously damaged automatons were holding their comrades' heads.

“I have determined she has noticed.”

As soon as Mary heard those words, the headless automatons she had hit with Ex. Collbrande exploded at close range.

“Mouri-01 to all others. If you determine you cannot continue your mission or that you are obstructing the others, remove your core and memory device and then self-destruct. Your body can be replaced and this is an excellent chance to gain a new body. There is no replacement for victory and your new body can be a reward you have earned instead of a simple replacement. ...Make sure your decisions are sound.”

Mouri-01 heard everyone reply with “testament”.

They were excellent replies. All of those here, herself included, had bodies of hard wood frames, silicon outer shells, and soft resin skin. The wire cylinders of hardened cords that moved their bodies wore out quickly, but they ensured high performance on short missions.

“All but your head is made from natural materials, so it will all return to the earth eventually. If you detonate yourself, make sure to remove your head and core first and continue as we trained. Everyone remaining is to secure the heads and cores.”

“Testament,” the others replied just as another explosion rang out.

...Now, then.

This self-destruction was not a “last resort” for automatons.

When they were acting in groups, even if only one survived, they could secure the cores and memory devices of the others and return with all of them.

And detonating their bodies after giving them instructions for an automatic charge could quickly turn the tide of a battle.

It was powerful enough to destroy an enemy’s front line or put a fleeing foe on guard. This was why they had achieved a 100% survival rate and a 100% success rate in their unofficial skirmishes with M.H.R.R.

“But how will Musashi’s special duty officers handle this?”

...Mary-dono!

Tenzou did not speak a word when he heard the explosion and saw the flash of light. An expression of surprise or panic would only aid the enemy.

His ninja training allowed him to continue as normal no matter what happened in battle.

He still mentally expressed his worry, but was that due to confidence in his abilities or insufficient training?

“...”

However, he soon saw the color of gold push out from the leaves scattered by the blast. It was Mary’s hair.

She had swung Ex. Collbrande back and hid behind it as a shield. She had also used a spirit spell to control the flow of the air.

She was unharmed, but she and Excalibur had been blasted into the air.

The danger was not over yet.

After all, a headless charge was approaching Tenzou as well.

He heard their footsteps behind him. They had not caught up yet because he

had started running faster than Mary had, but if the enemy further up the slope was planning to self-destruct...

...The additional team further down the slope doesn't have to worry about them!

That was exactly what he saw in front of him.

The additional team was readying their guns.

They no longer viewed the explosive headless bodies as comrades.

So Tenzou lowered down a bit.

“Mary-dono!”

And he leaped high into the air toward her.

Mouri-02 calmly observed the ninja's leap.

Her additional central team was in the process of joining with Mouri-01's leading central team, so she left everything in the rear to the others and moved further forward. She rushed in front of her sister to protect her.

“...!”

She accurately threw three wooden skewers toward the airborne ninja. She targeted his knees and ankles to stop his swift movements as soon as he landed.

...!

After throwing the skewers as if pushing them, she prepared more. She would throw these at the ninja's estimated landing spot, but something happened just as she gently spun around in preparation.

“Mouri-02!”

Hearing Mouri-01 call her name, she reversed her movements. Her sister was telling her to be cautious and that meant she must have gotten ahead of herself.

She kicked off the ground to quickly move back to the others. She accurately

traced her previous movements in reverse and finally looked up.

She looked toward the ninja, but he was gone.

...!?

No, he was there, but he was not down below or to the left or right.

He was up above.

The ninja's thermal reading was moving up.

He had jumped again in midair. Mouri-02 wondered how that was possible. She also wondered if it was even true, but another automaton shouted the truth.

"R2's attack was evaded!"

That meant it was true. In that case, she had to determine what had happened.

Tres España's Tachibana Muneshige had recently become famous for a double-jump spell and there were similar Signe Testament and other spells for floating or moving in midair.

But her sister pointed out the ninja way of doing this.

"Ivy!"

More specifically...

"The earlier tree disguised as a human form was thrown at us using ivy. ...I estimate he grabbed that ivy to pull himself up!"

In that case, thought Mouri-02. He must have predicted a situation like this back when he was disguising the tree with the hot stone.

He had left a means of assisting his movements on the battlefield and he had used the previous disguised tree to make it look useless.

Mouri-02 decided this tactic was worth remembering and she also decided their enemy here was on the same level as them.

But...

"..."

The leaves rustled as the tree branches shook and something fell behind Mouri-01. Mouri-02 and the others turned toward it, but it was too late.

After his double-jump, the ninja was attacking their eldest sister who was their central pillar.

The sudden attack from overhead was so unexpected that the automatons were slow to react.

However, Mouri-01 spoke calmly amid their confused pause.

“This is nothing to worry about.”

After all...

“Statistically, I predict Excalibur will be the first to drop down.”

They soon saw the result of that prediction. The object dropping from above had a human form.

However, it was only the upper body.

The coat of the ninja’s modified Far Eastern uniform descended while wrapped around Ex. Collbrande.

Branches and leaves scattered as it dropped straight toward Mouri-01.

But she had already taken a step out of the way.

The dropping sword did not hit its target and Mouri-01 predicted the ninja’s actions as well.

“He will drop down from directly above Excalibur. I predict he wants us to think that Excalibur is a diversion and that he will attack from elsewhere.”

Just as she said, a shadow shot down from above Excalibur.

“No one move.”

As soon as she said that, she used her gravitational control.

“Mine is not as powerful as Master Armand’s.”

She grabbed different spots along the ground, pulled up, and gathered them together as hard spikes.

“But this should make for a decent counterattack.”

Three meter spires of crust stuck straight up from between the automatons and the shadow fell toward that wide-range attack.

“Whoa, watch out.”

The shadow jumped up in midair.

“...!?”

This true midair jump should have been impossible for the ninja, but...

“Musashi’s 3rd special duty officer!?”

Naito did not answer the enemy’s question because she had already answered with an incantation.

She activated an acceleration spell. She wrapped her fingers around a pendant-style Orei Metallo and opened four speedometer-style Magie Figur inside her palm. Two were for acceleration and two for counteracting the recoil.

She often used this for her attacks, but without the broom to determine the angle of fire, she could not make any long-range shots.

...So it has to be close-range!

She had erased her thermal signature with a reduction spell and waited for the right timing.

They had all decided this would begin their path to victory.

After all, automatons were dangerous enemies.

Their life on the Musashi had taught them how immeasurably accurate automatons’ predictions were.

But, thought Naito.

...When you’re too accurate, you only ever think about the best possible option!

That was why the enemy had predicted Tenzou would attack here.

And they had not known how to handle her unexpected appearance in his

place.

Naito's right hand was pulled back by her waist, but after confirming the enemy was caught off guard, she thrust the hand forward. Her palm broke through the speedometer-style Magie Figur and sent light scattering everywhere.

“Herrlich!!”

She fired a ten yen coin toward Mouri-01 as the automaton tried to turn toward her.

The sound of the blast filled the air.

Naito was about five meters from Mouri-01, so the automaton could not avoid the attack.

The mountainous spikes she had created actually left her even less able to move.

But something did move.

It was Mouri-02 who was outside the spikes and quite nearby.

She used what she had prepared when predicting the additional attack above her sister. It was a different defense method from her sister's spikes.

“...!”

She used her gravitational control to lift up four automatons who had met her gaze through the spikes and nodded. After saying “testament” via their shared memory, those four had removed their heads.

Mouri-02 forcibly launched them upwards.

She forced her arms up to instruct her gravitational control. She was generally in charge of more precise control, so she was not suited for this powerful and forceful manipulation. Her arms creaked under the strain.

“Don't hurt my sister!!”

With those words, the four doll bodies flew up as shields.

The four automatons' heads dropped behind or in front of them and their bodies created a definite barrier between the eldest sister and the Technohexen.

"...!"

Two were smashed by the direct hit, one was torn into, and one creaked but endured.

"Mouri-221, detonating." "Mouri-222, detonating." "Mouri-223, continuing as normal." "Mouri-224, continuing as normal."

Two exploded and the other two continued to act as a barrier.

However, the blast did reach the airborne Technohexen. Mouri-02 heard her wings moving and saw the light of a defense spell through the blast.

A special duty officer would have a countermeasure for a counterattack, she thought. She did not shift to defense so quickly by chance. That was the result of constant training.

But Mouri-02 heard another sound.

It came from up the slope behind her. It was directly below the location of the ninja's previous double-jump.

"...!?"

It was the ninja. He had removed his coat and let go of Excalibur, but he was preparing to throw a kunai with only the movement of his forearm. And he was targeting...

"Sister!"

Tenzou threw the kunai as if shoving it forward.

His target was Mouri-01. She was the enemy's leader and she had created that group of spikes.

...So she can't form another barrier!

But, he thought. First Horizon-dono's 'you thief' joke and now this. Do automatons naturally like walls or something?

...At any rate, we need to finish this here!

They had used up all of their tricks and automatons could adapt too well for a trick to work on them a second time.

Not settling this here would be too dangerous.

He was concerned about their numbers as well. Including Mary, they had three fighters at special duty officer level and the enemy had two. That was a large difference, but the enemy had plenty of other automatons fighting with them.

Tenzou's group was at a disadvantage for a long-term battle and they did not want to thoroughly annihilate their enemy to win.

That was why they needed to defeat the enemy leader to stop their advance.

And to do that, he was throwing this kunai.

"...?"

But his hand suddenly stopped moving.

He had not decided to stop his attack. Instead...

...The kunai stopped!?

As if it had hit some invisible barrier, the kunai refused to move even when he pushed it.

It seemed like a gravity barrier, but that technique required the great output of the Musashi. And the idea that this was the automatons' doing conflicted with another fact too.

...Because automatons exist to serve their master, their gravity is only supposed to affect their master, themselves, and their fellow automatons!

He had learned that from studying porn games.

But regardless, his weapon had been stopped.

"Wait just a bit there."

He heard a girl's voice he had not heard before and the kunai began to move.

However, it moved toward his waist and into the stocker on the hard point there.

After the kunai was placed inside like a child putting away a toy, an invisible hand lightly tapped on the stocker.

This was gravitational control.

...What is going on?

Tenzou was confused because this should have been impossible for an automaton.

“Tenzou! Watch out!!”

After Naito’s shout, he was fired on from the left.

“Big sister, are you all okay!?”

He heard the same voice as before as thirty-odd automatons charged forward with guns at the ready.

The group was led by a girl who kicked off tree trunks and branches to secure an elevated position.

“Mouri-03 is here with her unit of thirty-two!!”

They split into groups of eight as they ran. They crouched low, aimed their guns, and accelerated further.

“Crush them!!”

Chapter 43: Ruler of the Dark Forest

CHAPTER 43

"Ruler of the Dark Forest"



What is going on here?
Yes, what is going on here?
Point Allocation (Don't let it surprise you)

What is going on here?

Yes, what is going on here?

Point Allocation (Don't let it surprise you)

Naito was the first to detect the attack by Mouri-03 and her four teams.

Up in the air, she spotted them coming from the west.

...Not good!

Her immediate response was to use a reduction spell to erase the heat radiating from her. She could not escape the automatons' auditory detection, but this was better than letting them see her and her location clearly. And at the same time...

"Master Tenzou!"

While combating the enemy forces on the left, Mary used a spirit spell to erase the heat radiating from her and Tenzou.

That left only one thing to do.

Tenzou would charge in on Mouri-01 or Mouri-02 and take them hostage.

Retreat was not an option for them.

...We can't let the enemy get close to Mito-tsan!

They did not know what the Reine des Garous would do with Toori, but they had to get Mitotsudaira to her to either buy time, fight, or negotiate.

Currently, Mitotsudaira was asleep in the pit on the slope.

Her body's desire to heal itself had brought on this sleep.

Naito had seen how quickly a Loup-Garou could recover in England, so this sleep would likely fully heal the injuries from the beating she had taken.

...So...!

So they could not let these pursuers approach her.

Naito also knew they had reached the final stage of the plan she had put

together with Tenzou and Mary.

It all hinged on whether Tenzou could capture Mouri-01 or 02.

Tenzou's charge was a risk to his life, but they could manage if he succeeded.

So to support him, Naito put some distance between them and then removed the reduction of her radiating heat. She held an Orei Metallo and a ten yen coin in her hand and prepared to fire. It probably would not hit, but it would draw their attention.

"Eh?"

However, the coin in her hand would not move.

She saw the rear half of the enemy's central unit slowly turn toward her and speak in unison.

"Is something the matter?"

...What is this?

It was the gravitational control that had affected Tenzou's kunai.

...But why is it all the way over here!?

Her answer came in the form of a figure on a branch next to her. It was Mouri-03.

Naito realized what the automatons turning toward her and Mouri-03's approach meant.

"They can see me without issue?"

"Could you not run away?" Mouri-03 smiled. "I locked my gravitational control's position on you using my master setting, so even if you completely vanish, I can still track the traces of gravity to see that ninja's approach and everything else. Also..."

Naito understood. Her weapon would not move. It was like pressing down on a child from above.

And just now, the front firing line had turned around.

Tenzou's Excalibur was trapped in the pointed spires and she could not use

her own weapon, so...

...Sorry!

She gave an adlibbed instruction.

“Ma-yan!”

But her instruction proved meaningless because Mary was already on the move.

“Master Tenzou!”

She did one thing to handle this situation.

“The divine protection of my Excalibur can resist the automatons’ gravitational control!”

While Tenzou revealed his form and ran, he reached a hand out toward Mary.

She did the same toward him and threw Excalibur to him.

Once it reached him, he would rush to the enemy and attack. That was his decision.

...Because we can't let the enemy reach Mitotsudaira-dono!

Naito and Mary were here because they understood that, so he no longer worried about the danger this put them in.

He also had a further thought in reference to Mary.

...Mary-dono is more or less family, so worrying about her comes last!

That was an outrageous and somewhat conceited statement he could not say directly to her.

...But before fighting, she said she was prepared to be with me forever once this was over!

On the battlefield, the time to save someone came at the very end. And that was exactly why the battle's end would bring them together forever.

And currently, she had given him her weapon which left her with only her spirit spells.

He looked her in the eye.

She smiled and mouthed the words “do your best”.

He prepared to take the sword and immediately attack.

But in that instant, his hand was knocked upwards.

...!?

It was a wall. A wall of earth had quickly and forcibly risen up between the two of them.

This was Mouri-02. Her sudden gravitational control had raised the wall.

“...!”

Unable to withstand the burden of the gravitational control, Mouri-02’s right arm audibly burst.

The wall stopped, but it was already as tall as Tenzou and cut him off from Mary’s smile and Excalibur.

He heard the sword collide with the earth wall on the other side.

The sword had not reached him, and...

“They’re going to fire!?”

He ran with the wall to his right and a volley of gunfire came from the left.

Mitotsudaira heard a voice that sounded like a scream.

She wondered what it said, but her mind was too light and unclear.

...I need to sleep.

Yes, she needed to keep sleeping.

After all, she was currently half asleep. She was in a state of exhaustion that made it easy to tell herself to go back to sleep.

...That voice...

It was actually the person’s will that reached her. The tone of rejection in the voice reached her more than the voice itself.

And she somehow knew why that was.

She had once cried out in that same tone of rejection before.

...Stop.

That word summed it up best.

Stop.

Please stop. I am telling you to stop.

“...Stop...”

But that word did not get through, so it eventually changed to something else.

...Please.

And...

...I won't do it anymore.

That was it. Yes, that was definitely it.

If they would not stop, she would stop on her end. She would stop doing what she had been doing.

Yes.

Stopping yourself as a sign of rejection only happened when you made someone angry by doing something. And the person scolding you would not stop even when you told them to.

They would only stop once you swore to never again do what had brought on the scolding.

She had once sworn that.

She had been horribly reluctant and had resisted, but the overwhelming difference in strength had prevented her from doing anything more, making any other choice, or even thinking. The difference in strength had ultimately made her make that promise.

That was what had twisted her.

When someone was left in a shameful, worn-down state, others showed no mercy.

Those close to her had been worried, but even that had felt like pity and grown distorted in her mind.

After all, while there were some who would take her side...

...The other people were far more numerous.

So she had ignored those close to her and opposed those more distant. Eventually, that had gone beyond just playing around.

But...

“...”

It doesn't matter, she thought.

Back then, she had promised to redo everything, but here she had not even noticed that she had lost the sign of that promise.

And she had been unable to stand up to the person who had caused it all back then.

She had seen speed as her own weakness, but that had not held true for her opponent. The memory of that opponent demonstrating the speed needed to dodge Futayo's cutting attack was still fresh in her mind.

She could not stand up to her, so there was no way she could rescue the chancellor.

...So it doesn't matter.

She tried to go to sleep because there was no point in fighting anymore.

But...

“...”

That distant voice of rejection would not stop ringing in her ears.

“Kh.”

What am I doing? thought Mitotsudaira.

She was trying to gather strength in her body and recall the shape of that body.

...You idiot.

What am I doing? she thought again. *Why am I trying to move?*

“Nn.”

The painkilling spell was in effect, so her body was heavy and it creaked as if forcing it to move would strip the flesh from the bone. However, she tried to move regardless.

...Wait.

What was she doing? Why was she getting up?

She had a somehow distant sense that her classmates were fighting and she understood why they had left her here to sleep.

The scent reaching her nose told her she was surrounded by plants. Mary had likely used spirit spells to wrap ivy and other plants around her to hide her from the outside.

She might not be found even if Tenzou and the others lost. They were telling her to sleep, recover, and continue on to the chancellor after the enemy passed by.

...So wait.

Why was she trying to get up?

Stubbornness? Regret? Or was it pride or a show of courage?

She had lost the proof of her promise, so she felt she had no right to get up.

And she knew who that voice of rejection had belonged to.

...It was Mary.

Then what did it matter? She had kept her distance from that English royal. Mary would not expect her to come save her, so what reason did she have to go?

She had no reason to help and they did not want her to help. And yet...

“Nn.”

...Wait.

Why? she asked herself. *Why are you trying to move and get up?*

And because she did not know...

...Wait.

No, that was wrong. That was the wrong word.

...Stop.

Stop.

Please stop. She was saying to stop and yet...

"I won't...stop."

She understood. She really did. The part of her heart telling her to stop was saying something.

...Please.

Please what?

...I won't do it again.

Do what? What won't you do?

"I..."

It came back to that cry of rejection.

She felt that her former choice had been wrong. That was why she had corrected her rejection.

But what about this voice that still rang in her ears?

Was there a rejection that could be allowed and that did not need to be stopped?

"I won't lose anyone again."

That was what her king and princess had wished for.

...And I made a promise.

She had once made a promise. She had made up her mind and used that as a basis for her decisions.

So...

“———!”

Mitotsudaira awoke. She tried to gather strength in her body.

...Kh.

But she could not get up. Her mind had cleared, but her body could not keep up.

The cry of rejection still rang in her ears.

...Kh!!

She clearly told herself to get up. She willed it and trembled with effort, but her body was sluggish and refused to move.

...Why?

She wondered if the hang-up was Mary. Did this last bit of hesitation hinge on whether she would rescue the girl or not?

...As for Tenzou...um, what am I supposed to say? But maybe I'm being too harsh. Although this is a completely different issue.

At any rate, she had definitely concluded she had no reason to rescue them.

She truly did have no reason. That was a fact.

...But that cry of rejection is still ringing in my ears!

“...!”

Mary had given the same cry she once had.

...So move!

But despite that, she could not even clench her teeth.

Just as she wondered what to do, a new scent reached her nose.

“Eh?”

It was something that should not have been here.

“...!?”

Her entire body sprang up in surprise.

Tenzou had not given up.

The earth wall to his right had blocked Excalibur's path, but he made a short dash up onto the side of the wall.

He then twisted his body downwards and kicked off the wall.

...Jump!

He would perform a midair side-flip over Mouri-02's head.

He would be upside down once he reached Mouri-02 and he would remove and throw her head with his hands.

He would go for a midair decapitation throw.

He quickly enacted that plan.

He twisted around in midair and threw his body into empty air while stretching his head downwards.

He saw Mary for a brief moment. She was deflecting bullets with a spirit spell air shield, but knowing she was safe was enough. Right now, he had only one thing to focus on.

...My target!

He jumped over Mouri-02's head.

She had no way of attacking after losing her right arm and the gunners to the left would be unable to keep up with his sudden movement.

He used his full mobility as a ninja. He was confident that only someone at the level of an academy's vice-chancellor could keep up with his speed.

But below him, he saw Mouri-02 bring her left hand to her own head.

However, that hand did not stay there.

She pulled back her hand to remove the head.

As her head tilted back and fell behind her, it looked up into the sky and at him.

She was not smiling, angry, or even sad. She was completely expressionless as

she had her headless body jump up at him.

It could not reach him and it was too slow, but...

“...”

It exploded directly below him.

“Master Tenzou!!”

Mary saw the blast envelop him.

Excalibur was returning to her after hitting the earth wall, but an attack was already coming from ahead.

Several headless dolls were rushing in to self-destruct.

She grabbed Excalibur, but it was too late to use it as a shield.

As soon as she realized she could not avoid this attack, the three directly in front of her spread their arms as if welcoming her.

“Thank you very much.”

They produced three explosions in quick succession.

“Please confirm the situation.”

Mouri-01 used her high-speed thoughts to communicate through the scattering heat of the blast.

An automaton’s high-speed thoughts could divide a second into nearly a million parts, so the surrounding motion almost seemed to stop as she made her decisions about the battlefield.

So far, a total of twenty-two automatons had self-destructed and eight were otherwise damaged.

Mouri-02 was one of those who had self-destructed, but all of their cores and memory devices had been recovered.

On the other hand, the enemy’s 1st special duty officer...

...Um, what was his name again?

Whatever. We can worry about that later.

Regardless, the enemy's 1st special duty officer had been caught in a blast, Mary "Double Bloody Mary" Stuart who was on the level of a special duty officer had also been caught in a blast, and 3rd Special Duty Officer Margot Naito was being attacked.

Comparing the losses of special duty officer level warriors, the automatons were winning. They were of course losing if the total numbers were compared, but a special duty officer level warrior was not comparable to a normal warrior in any academy.

...This is a difficult judgment to make.

She decided to leave that judgment to the academy and to simply do her best here.

She slowed her thought speed to match the outside world and her surroundings sped up. After checking the thermal reading of the explosion that had caught the enemy's 1st special duty officer, she realized something.

"Musashi's 1st special duty officer is gone!?"

Mary was the one who realized where Tenzou was.

...Eh?

She had supposedly been caught in an explosion, but she was now seeing the night sky.

From the depths of the forest, she had only been able to see that sky between the branches, but now someone held her in their arms and she looked to the right to see who.

"Master Tenzou!?"

Mouri-01 was baffled.

Why were the 1st special duty officer and Mary unharmed after those

explosions? And how had the 1st special duty officer managed to reach Mary?

A few different phenomena did not fit together. They went beyond her statistical, causal, and predictive reasoning, so she had difficulty understanding what she was seeing.

The battle was still ongoing.

She double-checked the facts. The enemy was unharmed, Mary had been taken away by the 1st special duty officer, and they had both moved to the left end of the battlefield.

That was all. Mouri-03 was attacking the 3rd special duty officer, but...

“Big sister!”

A sound suddenly reached her from directly ahead. It was the sound of an object slicing through the air in a straight line.

“A stone!”

Mouri-01 shifted her thoughts into high speed. She switched back and forth between auditory and thermal detection, added that on top of her visual information, and even amplified the light in that information.

The processing of the visual data was heavy enough for her to drop some frames, but the data she did get informed her of a definite truth.

“We have a new enemy!”

Mouri-01 ignored the earthen spikes surrounding her and raised her right hand. She swung the hand as if rolling her shoulder and a row of new spikes formed in front of her. A total of thirty-two earthen spikes stood in a line stretching out in front of her. The hardened soil rose like a wave, but they were immediately destroyed from the other side.

The flying stone loudly smashed the spikes.

Twenty of them broke in an instant, six more followed, four bent, one broke, and the final one stopped it.

However, the stone simply stopped in midair. It did not fall to the ground.

This was not gravitational control, so Mouri-01 checked visually.

...It's wrapped in ivy!?

Ivy was crudely tied around the stone and it extended back into the darkness.

With a tug on the ivy, it returned. It moved so quickly that it seemed to shoot back.

The stone returned to the newcomer who had likely been the one to retrieve the ninja and Mary with the ivy stone.

“You are Lady Mitotsudaira Nate, 5th special duty officer of Musashi!”

Mary saw the silver wolf from Tenzou's arms.

Mitotsudaira stood halfway up the slope, she was not wearing her coat or skirt, and she still looked very exhausted.

But when she caught the stone in her right hand, her stance showed her intent to move forward.

...She is not going to run.

The ivy on her shoulder was the ivy Mary had gathered to hide her, but...

Gold Mar: “Mito-tsan, how did you get up!?”

Silver Wolf: “Eh? Oh, um, how should I put it? My pride as a knight, I guess.”

Gold Mar: “Wow, knights are awesome! I mean, I went a little crazy on the pain reduction cause I figured you could handle it, but you still managed to get up!”

Silver Wolf: “Y-you had better remember this later! That really wasn't easy! But...”

Mitotsudaira glanced over at Mary and held something up in her left hand.

...Ah.

It was a rice ball.

“I'm surprised you had this with you. Horizon made this, didn't she?”

“Judge. Lady Naito brought it, but it seems they got messed up during the descent. They had lost their shape and, while we rested, Master Tenzou

expressed his concern about their state.”



“Mary.” The silver wolf took a bite of the rice ball and swallowed it. “Mary, you use a lot of herbs, don’t you? They have a bit of a strong scent.”

“Eh? Oh, sorry-...”

“It is not a bad scent. ...I am familiar with it from mixing perfumes.”

As she spoke, she raised the stone and lifted her left leg for a right overhand throw.

“Take this!”

She threw the stone projectile into the enemy group.

Mouri-01 made a split-second decision. She used her gravitational control to break the surrounding spikes at their base and free everyone. At the same time...

“Spread out!!”

She gave her command to the others and swung her own arms forward.

Those two arms directed her gravitational control and pointed the broken spikes forward.

“Please have these!”

The broken spikes were fired toward the silver wolf as if they had been kicked forward.

The spikes were made of earth and packed as hard as stone. Those several dozen spears sliced through the air as their paths crossed.

But Mitotsudaira did not panic in the face of what looked like countless deadly attacks. Her mind was still unsteady and her breathing rough, but...

“Like this, right?”

She twisted the thumb and forefinger holding the forcefully extending ivy.

This swung the stone and changed its path to a quick arc from left to right.

The movement was unthinkable as simple physical motion, but...

...This will work!

This ivy was what Mary had used to weave together and hide her. Mary had applied a spell to them, so now that Mitotsudaira had taken it apart, it was a long piece of ivy that carried ether. It was weak, but...

“It’s no different from the silver chains!”

That was how the ivy allowed the stone to change its path in midair.

It shifted to a gouging arc toward the group of spikes.

And it struck.

It pierced straight through the center of the flying spikes from the side.

The sound of destruction reached Mitotsudaira.

She tugged on the ivy to return the stone and smash the spikes again from behind.

But she was too slow. She had torn several holes in them, but the density of flying spikes was still too high.

“Mary!”

Mitotsudaira forced the stone back to her with pure strength, but she did not catch it. It passed by her and she let it fly behind her.

“Reinforce the ivy!”

“Judge!!”

Bluish-white light filled the ivy along with a flexibility that seemed to push out from within.

...Such great strength!!

Mitotsudaira wrapped the ivy stone around something behind her.

“That big tree!”

She tossed the last of the rice ball into her mouth and moved just as she started chewing.

She tugged on the ivy with both hands.

With the sound of snapping fibers and a great roar, the silver wolf uprooted the large tree behind her.

She went on to carry it forward.

“...!!”

And she chucked the thirty meter or taller tree into the group of spikes.

All of the spikes were smashed, the branches scattered, and the leaves flew about. After confirming the result, Mitotsudaira howled.

As if swinging her hair around, she lowered her arms to her sides and raised her throat to the sky.

“Uu...”

The howl continued with an extended “oh” and a reverberating “nn”.

She then bent her entire body forward and lowered down almost to the ground.

“Here I go!”

She began to dash. In an instant, she shot below the falling tree and grabbed a thick branch.

“Right!!”

She threw the large tree to the left. She had made a verbal feint, but she saw nothing wrong with that small level of cruelty.

The tree stirred up the wind, broke through some automatons, and cleared a path down the center.

She stood the tree in the dirt as thanks, and prepared to face those on the left. She could leave the right to Tenzou and Mary. She could already see Tenzou’s Excalibur returning after being freed from the spikes, so...

“Third throw!”

She threw the stone toward Mouri-01 who stood forty meters ahead.

However, someone got in the way: the automatons making up Mouri-01’s unit. They moved forward and raised earthen walls.

But...

“Go!”

The ivy moved. She was not simply controlling it with the movement of her fingers. It arced up like a snake raising its head and twisted around to tear into the enemies behind the wall.

It moved just like her silver chains.

Mouri-01 realized what the silver wolf's weapon was. It was not ivy or a stone.

...Is it a thought transmission spell!?

The spell sent her intention to an object and had the object move accordingly.

It was the same type of spell as the one used by Musashi's chancellor. While his spell distributed ether to a great number of people, this was a lighter spell that conveyed her thoughts to any ether-protected object she touched with her hands.

Mouri-01 guessed the spell was meant to allow communication with her silver chain divine weapon, but the spirit-reinforced ivy created with Mary's spell was enough to receive her thoughts.

“...!!”

The wall raised by Mouri-01's subordinate automatons was completely ignored. The stone flew past it and swept them away.

But it did not end there.

There was more. The silver wolf prepared her left hand for an underhand throw.

She held a stone tied to the opposite end of the ivy draped over her shoulders.

“Fourth throw!”

It broke straight through the wall.

What a powerful strike, thought Mouri-01. I must stop this stone.

She searched for any way of intercepting it in the current situation, but the answer to her question quickly arrived from outside.

“Big sister!” shouted Mouri-03. “I’ll stop it!”

Mitotsudaira saw a small form jumping above the tree branches.

She swung down her hand which was connected to her fourth throw.

At the same time, Tenzou raised his voice after lowering Mary to the ground and catching his Excalibur.

“Mitotsudaira-dono!”

She already knew from the Magie Figur that Naito had sent her.

...So that’s how Mouri-03’s gravitational control works.

“She can freely set an enemy as her master to stop their weapons!”

By repeatedly switching between people with the high-speed thoughts of an automaton, she could artificially hold multiple “masters” at the same time.

And so Mitotsudaira gave a shout with the same volume as her howl.

“Stand back!!”

Automatons obeyed orders from their masters.

However, that fact held little meaning for Mouri-03. She could freely switch between masters, so she could switch to another master and switch back after ignoring the order.

She did the same here. To stop the enemy 5th special duty officer’s weapon, she had set the wolf as her master. The wolf had told her to stand back, but that only meant she had to set someone else as her master.

...Eh?

But the enemies she had intended to make her master had vanished. Both Mary and the 1st special duty officer were gone.

She had removed the tracking lock using her gravitational control back when she had thought they were defeated in the explosions, so...

...I'm in trouble if they've hidden themselves with a spirit spell and ninja technique!

If she could not see them, she could not set them as her master.

But an automaton needed a master.

If she removed her master setting, she would lose her reason for existence as an automaton, her abilities would be restricted, and she might even cease to function altogether. Also, it was impossible to set another automaton as her master.

...So I need to set another enemy as my master!

“Where’s the enemy’s 3rd special duty officer!?”

She started to turn around, but...

“Right here.”

Someone tapped on her right shoulder from behind and she turned around to find someone whose feathers had scattered from gunfire.

“The 3rd special duty officer...”

“You really shouldn’t hesitate. If you hadn’t, I probably wouldn’t have caught up.”

A speedometer-style Magie Figur now hovered above her right shoulder. There was no escape. The girl grabbed her shoulder to press a ten yen coin against it. Not even gravitational control could stop this.

But...

“Doing it like this will damage your hand too!”

“Oh, don’t worry about that.”

The enemy 3rd special duty officer smiled.

“Your master has guts.”

Mouri-01 heard something fired overhead.

Mouri-03's right arm flew through the air while the rest of her used her left arm to grab at a tree trunk to the upper right.

"Sorry!"

And she fell.

Mouri-01 determined there was nothing to apologize for. In fact, she was the one that needed to apologize. She had been the one to set up the battlefield on the assumption that the enemy's 5th special duty officer and daughter of their vice chancellor would not take part.

That was why Mouri-01 decided that she should take responsibility.

...So I will win this!

She raised both her arms.

The ground below her hands was rapidly torn up and quickly transformed into a projectile.

She had to hurry. Her gravitational control excelled at bursts of strength, but creating and firing this high-density projectile was still a difficult task. She compensated by raising her power output above normal.

"I will hurry!"

This put a great burden on her body, so the ulna of her left forearm and the back of her right hand burst. But she did not care. These were necessary losses to achieve victory.

After all, the enemy's stone was breaking through their walls as it flew toward them.

She had to hurry but remain calm.

"Complete."

She had created a two meter spear. It was made denser than rock and she raised it in her right hand and flung her left hand forward.

She broke her own wall and cleared her vision.

“————”

Mouri-01 resolved herself.

She looked to her enemy, looked to the stone that enemy had thrown, and moved to place her projectile on the same path.

She succeeded.

The two attacks collided in the center of the forest.

The sound of destruction resembled splitting stone and bright sparks lit up the forest.

The scattershot of fragments sounded like a spray of rain as they gouged into the trees and ground.

As for the two who had launched these attacks...

“———!”

They had already begun their next moves.

Mouri-01 raised her arms again to create a second spear while Mitotsudaira began to catch the stone in her hand as it returned to her.

However, Mouri-01 did something else to speed up the creation of her projectile.

“How about an addition?”

She severed her own left arm to use it as extra material.

The spear took form much faster with the extra part.

Meanwhile, the stone returned to Mitotsudaira’s hand and she raised it overhead.

“...!”

But Mouri-01 was ever-so-slightly faster.

“Now, this one is ready.”

She lifted her right hand toward Mitotsudaira with the spear projectile

floating beneath it.

“Here.”

It shot directly toward the silver wolf.

...She's using her own body to win!?

Mitotsudaira's heart filled with admiration of her enemy.

She knew this was dangerous, but she had to admire the action.

This was not self-sacrifice. It was true cooperation to achieve victory.

She knew only an automaton could do that.

However, the level of praise she gave her enemy was also the level of danger she was now in.

She had to intercept this.

She did not have time to avoid it. Not only was it a speedy attack, but she had already raised her arm to throw.

Her only option was to stop the projectile with her stone.

There was a single problem with that, though.

...Hers will be faster!

A projectile thrown by an automaton's gravitational control had a certain unique trait: the gravitational control could continue working on it shortly after it was fired.

Their gravitational control had an effective range, so acceleration of the launched object could continue while it remained in that range.

Mitotsudaira had thrown her previous attack before the enemy had thrown her projectile. They had collided nearby the enemy, but that meant the enemy's projectile had yet to reach its full speed.

They had been of equal power at that point, so...

...I'll lose if hers is at full speed!!

Mitotsudaira was raising her stone, but the enemy had already fired.

She could not avoid having inferior speed.

At this rate, her stone would shatter on impact and the projectile would reach her.

“In that case...!”

She reached a certain answer.

...I will throw it with all my strength!

She could not dodge in time, so she simply made her overhand throw.

But even as she did so, she knew it would be slower than her enemy’s attack.

“Kh.”

I need speed, she begged.

An instant later, speed came to her.

“———!?”

However, it was a crumbling drop in speed.

...What is this!?

It was the pain reduction.

...No!

Her doubt about her counterattack had disturbed her focus.

Her knees gave way and strength left the arm throwing the stone.

“Mitotsudaira-dono!”

She heard Tenzou’s voice and saw him and Mary appear, but they were immediately stopped.

Mouri-03 had fallen to the ground, but she stood with her back leaning against a tree and stopped Tenzou and Mary by viewing them as her masters.

Strength drained from Mitotsudaira’s body and her arm swung forward.

“Kh.”

She felt the stone slip from her fingers.

But in that instant, she saw something unexpected.

After the stone vanished from her hand, it immediately shot toward her enemy.

...Eh!?

She expressed her confusion in her heart.

It had been a weak throw that only slipped from her fingers, so what had happened?

The stone arrived right in front of the enemy's projectile.

“...!”

The instant of collision settled everything.

Her stone attacked the hardened spear projectile just as it was about to break from its initial velocity.

The stone scraped along the side of the spear as it passed by and its great speed caused the spear to burst from that scraped area.

It was utterly destroyed.

The solid sound told Mitotsudaira the truth. The stone she thought she had failed to throw had flown faster than the one she had thrown with her full strength. Not only that, it had reached her enemy.

...What was that!?

A certain memory came back to her.

When she had fought her mother in IZUMO, her mother had instantly avoided Futayo's cutting attack.

She had thought her mother's superhuman speed was something she did not have, but...

...What did I just do!?

She did not understand because she was clearly not at 100% right now. So

why had she been able to give the stone such speed?

She remained confused while the stone destroyed the projectile and flew toward her enemy.

It continued on to gouge into that enemy, but...

“Now, then.”

She heard a sudden voice and a loud noise from behind.

Mitotsudaira saw the source of the noise.

It was a tree. A felled tree dropped from the sky like a stake and stabbed into the ground right in front of Mouri-01.

Mitotsudaira’s stone crashed into the tree. The trunk split open, but the stone shattered.

...Who threw that tree!?

She was a little annoyed at this intervention, but she soon heard another reaction. Mary spoke while looking behind her.

“Oh, good evening.”

Mitotsudaira knew what that confused and smiling voice meant: someone stood behind her who it would be best to greet.

She sensed her mother’s presence.

Mitotsudaira felt the source of her mother’s presence.

There was a scent, faint body heat, and some movement of the air. All those things told her that her mother had appeared about five meters behind her.

No one could move and they all focused on the person behind Mitotsudaira.

Mitotsudaira herself breathed with her gut to prevent her mother from seeing her shoulders rising and falling.

...Calm down.

Her mother had likely heard about the commotion from the forest's animals.

She could do nothing now.

...Nothing except buy time for the others to escape.

So she turned toward Tenzou.

But the ninja in the darkness did not nod. He did not want the enemy to see him react. Taking his motionlessness as an answer, Mitotsudaira prepared herself.

But...

“...”

She realized she could not turn around. She would be defeated in the time it took her to do so. If she did move, anything but a sudden action with all her strength would be too dangerous.

...So I need to move the instant I hear her approach!

It came immediately afterwards.

It came as pressure. The movement of the air, the scent, and the light sound all created a pressure that pressed against her back.

“Kh!!”

I need to escape, she thought just as the presence arrived right behind her ear.

She tried to leap, but...

...Too slow!

Before her legs could sink down, she heard a breath of laughter in her ear. Or she thought she did.

Dammit, she swore.

...But I just threw that stone so quickly!

She was slow and heavy now, so what had that previous speed been? As if to take her past that question, the time for an attack to reach her passed and it was already too late to avoid it.

She realized she had messed up and wondered if she would not even be able to buy any time.

...If only I had speed!

A moment later, an attack arrived behind her.

“...!!”

She was not hit by claws, swung around, or jabbed.

Instead, a giant red sword fell from the sky.

“That’s one of the swords spatially ejected by Henri of the Three Musketeers!?”

The god of war sized blade stabbed into the ground behind her and an attack hit it on the other side.

The heavy, carrying sound was much like a bell and it shook the forest.

“_____”

But Mitotsudaira felt some wind.

Her mother left. She gave a breath of laughter and ran off into the darkness.

Next, some pressure arrived overhead. The heavy noise of wind came from a light aerial ship.

“I am Henri of Hexagone Française’s Three Musketeers! I forbid this battle from continuing!”

Because...

“Hexagone Française and Musashi have unofficially agreed to a ceasefire! Any further conflict would be meaningless for both sides!! Reine des Garous, are you listening!? This is...”

What? wondered Mitotsudaira as she looked up at the aerial ship.

“This is the will of Former Provisional Chancellor and Student Council President Anne of Austria!”

Chapter 44: Those who Wait in a Place of Movement

CHAPTER 44

"Those who Wait in a Place of Movement"



Why do dangerous things
Always have to
Show up?
Point Allocation (Worrier)

Why do dangerous things

Always have to

Show up?

Point Allocation (Worrier)

The battle in the forest ended and the wind blew through.

While kneeling in the underbrush, Mouri-03 looked up at the light aerial ship and at Henri who jumped down from the rear deck. When she lowered her gaze...

“Big sister?”

Her sister had lost her left shoulder and looked at the tree skewered in the ground in front of her.

It was only one meter in front of her and it had split from the impact of landing.

“Now that is an abnormal ability.”

“Yes, the Reine des Garous threw this because she predicted what would happen, didn't she? How much strength and an eye for tactics does she have?”

“Testament,” replied Mouri-01. “The Reine des Garous is of course amazing, but her daughter is impressive too. Take that stone's speed for example. How did she strike with greater speed than an automaton's accelerated throw?”

“That's a good question,” said Mouri-03 who did not know either. The information in her artificial memories told her Musashi's 5th special duty officer used her monstrous strength to control the silver chains, but...

...There are no records of her making an attack with that kind of speed.

She wondered what this meant, but her sister sighed in front of her.

“There is nothing we can do about it here. At any rate, we have lost.”

The eldest sister readily admitted that and lowered her shoulders, but Mouri-

03 had a question about the action and conclusion.

“Big sister!? W-wait!”

Her sister turned toward her, smiled, lowered the ends of her eyebrows, and groaned uncertainly.

“You probably wouldn’t accept it if I said it was because of our orders.”

“Testament. And, um... Why? What do you mean we lost!? Because you would’ve been hit if it hadn’t been for that tree?”

But in that case...

“I could intervene with my gravitational control! I could even act as a shield like our middle sister! So don’t give up on the battle! You’ll make Terumoto sad!”

But her sister raised her partially destroyed right hand with the ends of her eyebrows still lowered and she motioned for Mouri-03 to calm down.

“From a standpoint of whether we could continue to fight, we did not lose. But as far as deciding the outcome is concerned, just look at this.”

Mouri-01 showed Mouri-03 what sat on her hand.

“That’s a fragment of the projectile you made.”

“Testament. That is correct. But...”

She tossed the stone over and Mouri-03 caught the fragment.

...Ah.

She realized what her sister meant.

“The compression is incredibly high.”

“Testament. I increased the power used in forming the projectile to increase its attack power and to increase its stability in acceleration. So even though it was made from the forest’s materials, it can never return to that state,” she explained. “So if we were proud of a victory won with this, the forest’s spirits would have a poor opinion of us.”

“But we had to do it to win!”

“Testament,” agreed her sister. “That is why I created and used it. But now that it did not work and the battle has been stopped, I’ve realized the princess would not want us to win this way.”

After all...

“She is insistent that we do the right thing. ...So now that we have not won and the battle has been stopped, this method is completely worthless. That must be why Lady Henri stopped us.”

“Testament. That is what I was told to do.”

Her sister nodded toward Henri and turned back to Mouri-03.

“Sorry, okay?”

There was nothing she could do when her sister said that. She felt she should be the one to apologize and her sister expressed why she felt that need.

“I suppose this means our combined efforts were not quite enough.”

“Don’t say that,” said Henri as she walked over. “I have determined you did plenty to show how much victory matters to us. And I am sure the higher ups are aware of it. ...I also have a message from the princess.”

“What is it?” asked Mouri-03.

Henri smiled bitterly as she answered.

“ ‘You can push yourselves, but not too much.’ ”

“Anyway, winning is fine, but not at the cost of stirring up trouble with the spirits and non-humans of Hexagone Française’s forests. City non-humans like us see things differently from them.”

Masazumi nodded as she listened to Mazarin in the light of the spell lamp hanging from the eaves in front of the diplomatic building.

She briefly glanced at Guericke who stood next to Mazarin before continuing.

“Has the Reine des Garous freed our idi-...our chancellor and student council president? I would think she would release him as soon as she received the request for a ceasefire.”

Mazarin opened a *signe cadre*, but soon answered.

“To be blunt, she is ignoring it.”

“Wait a second.”

The Reine des Garous was their vice chancellor, so she was required to obey the chancellor’s orders. And Hexagone Française’s student council and chancellor’s officers had unofficially approved of the ceasefire.

“If she is disobeying the request and continuing to hold Musashi’s chancellor and student council president, this is an international incident.”

“That is what makes her the Reine des Garous,” immediately replied Mazarin. “Hexagone Française is home to the greatest of all beasts. ...This is no different from the kings who wished to bear emblems of lions and dragons. Any damage caused by them functions as a demonstration to other nations. Still, it is not impossible to get her to listen to you.”

Mazarin tilted her head and looked to Masazumi.

“But what does Musashi have to give us in exchange for getting her to listen?”
...She really is reliable and straightforward.

The way she goes in for an attack so strongly reminds me of our treasurer duo, thought Masazumi before answering.

“If it isn’t free, I’m not interested.”

“Why not? Your chancellor and student council president’s safety is on the line.”

Uqui: “How about you come out and tell her we don’t care about that?”

The problem is that I have half a mind to do just that, thought Masazumi as Naruze stepped forward from where she had been on guard duty. She sighed and spoke to Mazarin.

“Do you think all lives are equally valuable?”

Worshipper: “Th-that sounds like a decent thing to say, but you really are the worst!!”

“Calm down,” said Neshinbara on the chat.

Novice: “But regardless, it isn’t good that the Reine des Garous is ignoring the ceasefire on a whim. Even if this develops into an international incident, it won’t bring Aoi-kun back to us. But if she is ignoring the student council and chancellor’s officers, it’s a pretty big problem for Hexagone Française too. Vice President Honda-kun, you know what I mean, don’t you?”

“Judge. More or less. They’re the opposite of us, so...”

Masazumi looked over at Mazarin.

“Listen, Cardinal Mazarin. I would like to confirm something.”

Masazumi saw the small Mouse look her straight in the eye.

“What is it?”

Masazumi nodded at that prompting question.

“If the Reine des Garous is ignoring the student council and chancellor’s officers, it creates a certain difficult problem for Hexagone Française.”

Namely...

“Louis Exiv is king of the nation that will rule Europe, but this means there is someone in his own nation he has no control over.”

“As I already explained, the leeway to let beasts run wild is one side of being a king and it also demonstrates his power to the other nations.”

“That’s probably true.” Masazumi crossed her arms. “But this is no mere beast. We’re talking about the Reine des Garous, the queen of werewolves. If that includes all of her subjects, this goes well beyond Hexagone Française. It means the non-humans of all the land she and her ancestors ruled and every member of the Loup-Garou race cannot be controlled by Hexagone Française’s student council or chancellor’s officers. And on top of that...”

“On top of that?”

“Judge.” Masazumi stared straight at Mazarin. “If nothing is done about this, it creates another danger for Hexagone Française.”

“Why?”

Is she luring me in? wondered Masazumi as she spoke.

“For a certain reason, Hexagone Française cannot currently make use of its full power under Louis Exiv’s rule. ...That is why you shouldn’t be able to do anything that would disgrace his authority.”

Masazumi saw two distinct reactions from Mazarin.

She said “testament”, but she also shrugged.

“I have determined you understand that Hexagone Française is in a difficult position.”

Asama: “What do you mean they can’t make use of their full power under Louis Exiv’s rule?”

Wise Sister: “Well, Asama, the way I see it, international opinion of them would drop if that nudist wandered around outside too much, so they are too ashamed to use him.”

Asama: “Wow, but a certain aerial city ship isn’t doing a thing to stop that very same problem!!”

Bell: “B-but...that’s Toori-kun’s...shtick?”

Wise Sister: “Yeeeeeeeah! See, Asama!? What do you have to say now!? Suzu took my side! And it’s dangerous to take her too lightly! She can use Musashi’s sensors to scan all of your sizes and grope your body in empty air! Oh, but will you do me next time? Make a sculpture! A sculpture!”

Asama: “Suzu-san? Don’t listen too much to what these idiots say. It’ll rot your brain. Now, over here, over here.”

Bell: “Eh? Eh?”

...They sure have a lot of energy for this late at night.

But if even Suzu was with them so late, it meant everyone was worried about the others. So to share her information with them all, Masazumi spoke to Mazarin.

“Louis Exiv still can’t use his authority as chancellor too carelessly. Isn’t that

right?”

Mazarin remained expressionless, but her silence was a sort of answer. One could take it as a lack of denial.

So Masazumi continued to convey just how much she understood them.

“It doesn’t take much thought to figure out. Hexagone Française’s full authority has not actually been given to Roi-Soleil Louis Exiv. After all, Mouri Terumoto holds the position of student council president.”

“Can’t you view that as an intention to cooperate with Mouri?”

“No.”

“Why not?” asked Mazarin.

Masazumi turned toward Takao because Mazarin’s actual body, the Palais-Cardinal, was located in its rear loading port.

“Listen. During Provisional Chancellor and Student Council President Anne of Austria’s rule, she worked to cooperate with Mouri and that is what led to the marriage with Mouri Terumoto during Louis Exiv’s rule. But...”

But...

“You can view that in a different way. By cooperating with the Mouri clan, Louis Exiv’s presence is being set up as a foreign aspect and not a domestic one.”

“If I may ask again, why? Why would we do that?”

The answer was simple

“Because it is still not officially time for Louis Exiv to directly rule your nation.”

Masazumi spoke of the Testament descriptions.

“According to the Testament descriptions, Louis Exiv was born in 1638 and took the throne in 1643. But as a young king, his mother Anne of Austria remained as a guardian.”

And...

“In the final year of the Testament descriptions, 1648, Anne of Austria is still alive. If all authority were shifted to him in that state, the other nations would claim you are neglecting the history recreation and would attack. Thus, he has only been given the position of chancellor for the time being. Eventually, his wife Terumoto will hand over the position of student council president or they will cooperate as family.”

She added “however”, but Mazarin remained expressionless.

“Okay,” she said. “Let’s stop this.”

“Eh!? Why!? I must ask why!”

“Because you aren’t reacting.”

Smoking Girl: “Is she some kind of performer?”

Wise Sister: “No. A performer has to continue on even if the audience isn’t reacting. That makes her a terrible performer! And with a washboard chest to boot!”

Shut up, she thought while karate chopping the sign frame apart.

She then turned to Mazarin.

“Anyway, Mouri Terumoto was present during the attack this afternoon, so I assume you had the Mouri clan’s cooperation. But using the chancellor’s authority to stop the vice chancellor would be Louis Exiv’s personal decision, so the other nations will be careful to see whether he is beginning his ‘direct rule’ early or not. While fighting M.H.R.R., it is too dangerous to use his authority as chancellor simply to pursue a rescue team for Musashi’s chancellor. Not to mention...”

Not to mention...

“Our chancellor was taken by the capricious Reine des Garous. She ignored the ceasefire and may eat our idi-...our chancellor. But if that happens, not only will Louis Exiv be unable to begin his direct rule, but his international influence will be completely ruined. Both as a result and a process.”

Mazarin remained expressionless, but she tilted her head a bit and asked a question.

“Are you assuming the Reine des Garous will eat your chancellor?”

That was not an easy question, so she held out a hand for time to think.

Vice President: “What do you think? If I just say ‘yes’, she’ll think I’m a cold-hearted vice president.”

Asama: “As long as you don’t say you’d be perfectly fine with that outcome, I think you should be fine. So just give a brief ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer. Three, two, one, yes!”

Uqui: “Are you trying to get her to answer ‘yes’?”

Tonbokiri: “Wait, wait, all of you. Masazumi, you must not be so negative. Just say this: ‘Musashi’s nudist has it in him to spend the night having sex with the Reine des Garous, so there is nothing to worry about.’ ”

Azuma: “Um...”

Wise Sister: “...”

Mal-Ga: “Wait, Kimi. You’re scary when you’re quiet.”

Wise Sister: “Ha ha. Sorry, sorry. Well, I have my own thoughts about the Reine des Garous, but I do think there is nothing to worry about...”

Mal-Ga: “Again, don’t fall silent at the end like that.”

I get the feeling I’m not going to get any worthwhile opinions out of them. No, I’m certain of it, thought Masazumi as Mazarin shrugged in front of her and spoke

“Anyway, I can see that you have a general understanding of the various problems facing Hexagone Française. We will do what we can to restrain the Reine des Garous’s hunger.”

She paused.

“But Lady Anne is in charge of this and she can be fairly capricious too. Yes, I just hope she makes it in time.”

“D-don’t make me worry like that.”

“Calm down.” Mazarin expressionlessly opened a *signe cadre*. “The Reine des Garous does not eat children and she has not eaten humans since entering

human civilization. I have determined we can only hope she takes a liking to your chancellor. ...As something other than food.”

Chapter 45: Classmate in the Depths of the Darkness

CHAPTER 45

"Classmate in the Depths of the Darkness"



The depths of the night
Tend to flatten people out
Point Allocation (Not referring to their breasts)

The depths of the night

Tend to flatten people out

Point Allocation (Not referring to their breasts)

Someone sat in the dark night.

It was Mitotsudaira who wore a Far Eastern girl's coat over her shoulders and had a skirt placed below her butt and thighs. She took a slow breath, sat up a bit, and looked around.

They were currently resting in preparation for their early morning departure, but she could not sleep.

...It's so hot.

Her body was filled with heat, but it was more of a swollen heat than a flushed one. She felt pain and itching across her body and it all throbbed too much to sleep.

She could always have Naito cast another pain reduction spell, but...

...Margot is tired, too.

The battle was over and the Hexagone Française forces had withdrawn.

"But this is still a complicated situation."

She thought about the result of that battle and the present situation.

...Musashi and Hexagone Française agreed to a ceasefire and the chancellor should have been released.

"But I never thought my mother would ignore the ceasefire order."

Was it wrong to think that was very like her mother?

Hexagone Française's vice chancellor had ignored their orders and was imprisoning another nation's chancellor, so it had to be an awkward situation for them. Before withdrawing, Henri of the Three Musketeers had said Hexagone Française would continue trying to convince her mother before they reached her.

According to Henri, Hexagone Française's internal situation meant they could not afford a conflict with their vice chancellor. Mitotsudaira sympathized with them, but at the same time...

...There isn't a doubt in my mind that my mother isn't thinking about that. This is all about having fun and sating her hunger!!

But others could easily view it differently, so Henri had suggested another method of restraining her.

...We have to continue our mission.

No, that was not quite accurate.

...We have a new mission with my mother.

Henri had given them the mission that Masazumi and Mazarin had settled on aboard the Musashi. It was a mission for Hexagone Française that took place inside M.H.R.R.

<Work with Hexagone Française's vice chancellor, travel with Musashi's chancellor to the tower outside of the M.H.R.R. city of Magdeburg, and meet with Rudolf II who is confined there. Acquire the memo he has from Great Chancellor Carlos I concerning the Princess Disappearances.> The details would be sent in a letter carried by a black bird spirit.

"Even my mother won't be able to touch the chancellor if the mission specifies to travel with him."

But would she really? A capricious beast was a frightening thing.

And that mission also required them to meet with Mitotsudaira's mother and travel with her.

"..."

Her thoughtful mind and body were filled with heat and refused to work properly.

The others were the same. Naito and Mary were both injured and exhausted.

...Especially Margot.

After the battle had ended and Henri's group had left, she had been the first

to sit down. Her wings were stained with blood in a few places and the fingers of her right hand were dislocated.

According to her, the dislocation had allowed the damage to escape and kept them from bursting, but she had soon pretended to cry and said, “Ma-yan, it hurts.”

Mary had expressed legitimate concern and started to heal her, but her uniform was cut in places or otherwise disturbed. She was likely injured, but she had a way of prioritizing others.

...And after the reduction spell and my previous healing, I can't let myself be too much trouble.

Mitotsudaira had declined to be healed. She had asked Mary to heal Naito, herself, and Tenzou first.

Building a fire was bad for the forest, so they had used a spell to cook some light food in a kettle and make some plans. Tenzou had taken the first watch and that led to the present.

“...”

But Mitotsudaira was wide awake and unable to sleep.

Mitotsudaira took in a breath to cool her body.

The air filling her lungs was chilly and contained a hint of dampness and flavor.

As her body cooled, she could tell it was loose, dull, and swollen.

...Maybe that's why I can't gather my thoughts and calm down enough to sleep.

What had happened to the chancellor? What was her mother doing with him?

What had happened to the Musashi? What did the other nations want to do with Musashi?

And what should she do about all of this? What did she *want* to do about it? She acted like she understood it all, but there was a great barrier standing in

her way.

...My mother.

If they did not do something about the Reine des Garous, Musashi had little chance of victory when they faced Mouri in the history recreation. But the fact remained that not even Futayo could touch the woman.

“And no matter how much thought I give this, if the chancellor is eaten...”

It will all be over, she thought while sticking her hands into her hair to hold her head. But then she heard a sudden sound from below.

She heard the moving of underbrush and rustling of clothes as someone got up. Based on the direction it came from, she knew who it was. It was Mary.

Mary must have realized she had noticed because Mitotsudaira heard a voice before she could wonder what the girl was doing.

“Can you not sleep?”

She could hardly say she *could* sleep, so...

“Judge. That’s right.”

She naturally gave that answer and the small fact that she had exchanged honest words with the girl seemed to calm her heart a little.

...I really am obedient, aren’t I?

It was too dark to see her face clearly, but the weariness was beginning to leave it. The superiority of her Loup-Garou blood may have been helping her or it might have been the effect of the exchange during the previous battle and of the rice ball.

Regardless, she could now clearly acknowledge that she had shared the battlefield with the other girl.

And so she spoke first this time.

“This is a difficult night to sleep on.”

“Judge. You’re right. ...I can’t sleep either.”

Mary walked over while still crouched down, but she did not approach any

further than Mitotsudaira's feet.

"Lady Mitotsudaira, may I see your heels? You were dragging them a little as we walked earlier. Your shoe was rubbing you, wasn't it?"

"I don't need-..."

She trailed off and was not sure what to say, but Mary smiled and spoke in her stead.

"I can't seem to calm down, so can you help me out a little?"

Toori woke in the darkness.

"Hwah?"

He was leaning back in a chair with his arms dangling over the back.

He was also completely nude.

He tilted his head when he noticed this.

"Did I strip when I was drinking? Well, the God Mosaic is set to activate automatically, so that's not a problem."

But where am I? he wondered as he looked around the dark room again.

...*Nn.*

He had a number of thoughts, but none of them were going to help. It was dark, so...

"I guess I'll go to sleep. ...Oh, I'm wearing shoes! I'm a maniac!"

At any rate, he was in the dining room and he guessed the neighboring room was the guest room.

"I doubt Nate's mom wouldn't prepare a bed for her guest."

But, thought the naked boy in front of the door's entrance. He put his hands on his hips and puffed out his chest.

"If Nate charged in shouting 'Chancellor!' right about now, she'd probably kill me."

But I'll go to sleep and wait for her, thought the idiot while scratching his head and continuing into the back room.

...Hm?

Something isn't right, he realized. *Why am I going back here to sleep?*

"I can always spend the night sleeping in that weird position on the chair."

No, more importantly...

...What's this smell?

It was not quite a good smell. Nor was it a strong one. Whatever it was, it lingered, refused to go away, and wafted in from that back room.

...This isn't a smell.

It was an aura, a presence, and a sensation that all mixed together into a vague feeling of anticipation.

The anticipation told him he would find something back there, so his body reacted on its own.

"..."

His legs had taken him three steps forward by the time he noticed their movement.

...Oh? Why am I headed that way?

But his legs refused to stop and they slowly walked onward.

...Wait. Wait, wait, wait.

A part of his mind was telling him this was a bad idea, but the usual side of him had a different thought.

...I really want to see what's in that room!

What could it be? It isn't everyday I feel this much anticipation. The most recent time was three days ago when Horizon crouched over to pick up a spoon at mom's shop. I'm not sure if that's really what you call anticipation, but it made even me gasp in surprise. You're a frightening girl, Horizon. Oh, but my gasp sensor also reacted when Asama's fastener came a little undone on her

way up the stairs yesterday.

“What is it this time?”

His feet had grown unsteady at some point, but the idiot entered the next room regardless.

“If you’re asking for help, I don’t have much choice.”

Mitotsudaira noticed a hint of a smile in her voice as she removed her shoes. She undid the ankle fastener for her tights and revealed her feet. Mary gasped slightly.

“You’re bleeding.”

“Heh heh. It’s slow, but Loup-Garou skin absorbs blood to heal. It’s much like how spirits and other ether life forms absorb ether to form their bodies.”

“I see,” said Mary. “Then I need to heal you before you absorb that blood or my efforts will be meaningless.”

Her tone made it clear she could do it.

...Tenzou has gained quite a capable wife.

As she gave that impressed thought, a soft green light appeared at her feet and first touched her calf.

“Ah.”

“Sorry. Did that hurt? I was loosening your body’s ether pathways with a massage.”

In England, she had learned the bottoms of her feet were sensitive, but...

...My lower legs are too!? I was careless!

At any rate, she felt her back and shoulders suddenly go limp.

“That’s due to the circulation in your foot, Lady Mitotsudaira. As a Loup-Garou, the flow of ether is especially important. England’s Celtic healing spells pass the ley line ether through your body to remove any toxins and normalize your body, so it might help you relax and get to sleep.”

Even as she listened to Mary, she could feel the swelling in her back and the other heat across her body vanishing.

...The Celts have frighteningly good healing techniques!

At the same time, something else bothered her.

“But isn’t this an Hexagone Française forest? Don’t your spirit spells use-...”

“Judge. The spirits are impartial as long as you do not pollute the forest. Just like your mother had no connection to the nation, spirits are generally independent beings. It is all reliant on whether I can communicate with them effectively or not.”

The girl laughed bitterly.

“I had difficulties at first, but there is really nothing to it. England’s control of the ley lines ensures there are always spirits nearby, but...”

Mary struck empty air.

“Come,” she called and something appeared there.

“Light,” said Mitotsudaira.

“Judge. It is important to call for them. The spirits are always out in the open in England, but they are still hidden and watching us here. It’s easy to think they are already showing themselves in a forest this large, but they are cautious and want to relax at home.”

Mary’s cheeks were illuminated by the light and there was a fresh injury there. It would eventually disappear, but it bent as she smiled and she pulled an ointment from the small bag hanging from her waist hard point part. The scent was enough to know it was made by crushed plants.

“I will use a Far Eastern divine charm to make a compress. If you keep your tights off, the charm will remove the impurities from your body, so can you do that?”

“Judge. By the way, where did you learn to mix Celtic healing spells and Shinto spells?”

“Judge. While working at Lady Asama’s shrine. They use medicinal plants with

Shinto healing spells and this is the same. My way uses a lot of plants you can only find in Europe, so I need to learn about the Far Eastern plants eventually.”

What a capable girl, thought Mitotsudaira as her hostility continued to vanish.

Suddenly, Mary said something else.

“I think Musashi’s chancellor is still safe.”

“Eh?”

That was what was bothering her. Suddenly hearing the forefront of her worries confused Mitotsudaira.

“Wh-why would you say tha-hyan!”

“Eh? Oh, s-sorry. Did I start too strong?”

Control yourself, control yourself, she thought while biting her lower lips.

Meanwhile, Mary massaged her foot and spoke.

“To be honest, the spirits and wild animals are still cautious.”

“Cautious?”

She then realized what that meant. This was the Reine des Garous’s territory and she was a forest predator.

“You mean my mother still hasn’t filled her stomach?”

“Judge. If the predator had calmed down, the spirits and animals would have relaxed. Since they haven’t, it means Musashi’s chancellor is safe for now. And if that is still true in the morning, I think it will be safe to assume the Reine des Garous has decided not to eat him. A wolf eats at night, after all. But...”

Mary tilted her head.

“That is all I can say. ...I don’t actually know when or how she eats. Do you know, Lady Mitotsudaira?”

It was hard to say that she did. Her mother had not eaten anyone since Mitotsudaira had been born. But she had heard some things from her mother

or from other people.

“She has young men surrender to her and then eats them. And she does it at night. At times much like this.”

“Surrender to her?”

Mitotsudaira more or less knew how.

“Um, well, it’s nothing too strange. She...uses a woman’s weapon.”

Toori passed through the door-less entrance and found a bedroom. The dark room contained cabinets and shelves, but the light from the small window shined on the bed.

The bed was already occupied.

It contained the Reine des Garous.

She had the blanket pushed against the wall, she leaned diagonally against it, and she looked at him with her knees pulled back just a bit.

She was completely naked.

“So, well, uh... She uses a woman’s weapon to get the man to surrender.”

How did the Reine des Garous lure in the men?

After giving a brief explanation, Mitotsudaira looked back to Mary. She was afraid the girl would think she was being inappropriate or vulgar, but Mary nodded with a perfectly serious expression.

“That is...a serious problem for Musashi’s chancellor.”

“Y-yes, i-it is.”

She understood me! thought Mitotsudaira in surprise.

“I hope my mother does not try anything so unbecoming of her age.”

“Judge. But your mother *is* currently a student.”

“Um, well, it’s enough of a crime to wear a school uniform when you have a

daughter in high school, but I think it's even more criminal to use that along with a woman's weapon."

She was unsure she should be discussing a family member's shame like that, but Mary tilted her head.

"I don't see the problem. Isn't her woman's weapon that silver cross? Won't she just be beating Musashi's chancellor with it until he surrenders?"

...She didn't understand me at all!!

She suddenly noticed Naito getting up from beyond Mary. Naito waved a hand in front of her face to say it was useless and lay back down.

...H-huh? Aren't you going to help me!? Or at least say something!? You're just leaving it be?

From his scent, she could tell Tenzou was crawling away from them. She wanted to throw a rock at him, but she could not when Mary was watching.

Meanwhile, Mary tilted her head.

"Was I...wrong? But don't you need strength to make a guy surrender?"

"Um, well..."

What am I supposed to do? she wondered just as Mary smiled.

"But your mother might be able to manage without strength. She is very beautiful, so Musashi's chancellor might let his guard down enough for her to sneak up on him."

This was a new kind of comment that left her unsure whether Mary was complimenting her mother or saying the chancellor was going to die.

...But it seems Mary has little understanding of that kind of thing.

She decided that was up to Tenzou. She also had a feeling Naito or Kimi would interfere, but there was no stopping that if it was destined to happen. But for the time being, the "beauty" that Mary had mentioned was somewhat similar to the "truth" that Mitotsudaira had tried to explain, so she began to speak based on that slight misunderstanding.

"I'm not so sure. My mother is pretty old."

“But she has an excellent figure and she stands straight and tall.”

Mary answered with a smile, but Mitotsudaira sensed something off about it.

Huh? she thought.

She soon realized what it was, but decided to ask to be sure.

“Um, Mary? How would you describe me in that regard?”

“Eh? Oh, you have an excellent figure, too.”

...I knew it!!

For the first time, she realized that someone satisfied with their own size would place anyone above or below them in the general category of a “decent figure”.

From the point of view of England’s representative, both Mitotsudaira and her mother were nothing more than different types of “well-formed figures”.

...She’s on my side!!

But another thought occurred to her.

...But wait. That doesn’t solve anything concerning my mother’s seduction of the chancellor.

She held her head in her hands and Mary spoke to her.

“Um, Lady Mitotsudaira? Is something the matter?”

“No, um,” she hesitated. “I have a feeling the chancellor is going to surrender to her.”

What were the chancellor and her mother doing?

With the moonlight on her exposed skin, the Reine des Garous looked to the boy.

“Come join me.”

She raised and bent the fingers of her left hand to beckon him over.

...It has been a while since I played this game.

Quite a few divine *courrier* had been coming in from the chancellor's officers, but she had ignored them all. A Loup-Garou royal was having some fun tonight for the first time in decades, so it was crass to interrupt her.

...I haven't done this for over twenty years.



This was a “game” Loup-Garous played.

Starting with the War Cry, there were several techniques lupine races had as predators. That included their fangs and claws, but Loup-Garou royals and nobles had nearly spiritual bodies and could alter the surrounding ether to lure people in.

Their mind would be taken from them, they would subconsciously realize they did not stand a chance, and they would stop moving and offer up their own heads.

The fear of a predator was transformed into the pride of being eaten.

Long ago, she and the others had made a game out of seeing how quickly and deeply they could achieve that state. At first, all of the men would show hostility and harbor doubts about the temptation, but they would eventually be unable to resist any longer and would try to take sexual advantage of the situation.

But as they drew closer, the temptation would grow stronger. Their “desire to become one with her” would begin as a sexual desire, but ultimately...

...We exist on entirely different levels and that difference creates to the relationship between predator and prey.

Once they approached, they would realize they could no longer escape. So instead of resisting and being crushed, they would choose obedience. They would choose to sleep with her and be painlessly eaten.

“Is something the matter?”

She narrowed her eyes and lowered the ends of her eyebrows as she lured him in.

The timing of her question and the tone of her voice were perfect. It had been a long time, but her instincts had not dulled.

...Even as a mother, I still have what it takes!

She had her husband’s permission. While eating breakfast, she had said she was going to “deal with a boy who is after our daughter”.

Her husband was quite tolerant, but he had told her not to push herself too

much while she licked butter from his lips.

...I don't know what he meant by "pushing myself too much", but th-that isn't a problem here! I've still got it! I really do!!

When I get home, I need to "devour" my husband in a way that doesn't involve eating him!!

She somewhat missed the others who would be watching from the shadows back in the day, but she gave the same soft breath she would back then. She gently twisted her hips to point her navel toward the boy.

"Will you join me?"

He did not respond, but he had to be reacting. No one had ever resisted the Reine des Garous's seduction and no one ever would.

...This really takes me back.

In this opening stage of the game, some lower level Loup-Garous would fill the room with erotic scents or slip something into their food.

That was one way of enjoying yourself, but the higher level Loup-Garous viewed the seduction like a kind of sport. They would try to get their prey to surrender without relying on anything but their own ability.

This boy was Musashi's chancellor and student council president as well as the one her daughter referred to as "my king", so he was well worth being her prey.

And if her daughter's king surrendered to the Reine des Garous's seduction and was eaten, she would stop pretending to be a knight and return to being the obedient child she had once been.

...She will probably hold a grudge, though.

This might break the bond between mother and daughter, but that was fine. Musashi's plans sounded like a game and she could only imagine they had been made up on the spot, so the second in line to ruling the Far East should not be going along with that.

...So I will make this boy mine.

Once he is part of my flesh and blood, will my daughter start referring to me as her king?

“Come.”

She called out to him again and gently crossed her arms below her breasts to show them off.

“...”

The naked boy took a definite step toward her.

The motion and footstep toward her confirmed that she was still attractive, so she pictured her husband’s face.

...Honey! I’m still in top form! I hope you’re ready for when I get back!

She mentally struck a triumphant pose.

Two girls hung their heads while exchanging words in the dark forest.

“D-don’t worry, Lady Mitotsudaira. I don’t think Musashi’s chancellor will give in to strength.”

“Yes, he definitely isn’t the type to give in to strength, but I’m worried about something else.”

“Eh? What would that be?”

After a brief pause, Mitotsudaira whispered her answer.

“Her excellent figure.”

Thoughts moved rapidly through Toori’s mind.

...Um, is it just me or has this gotten kind of amazing?

What even is this? All of a sudden, there’s this wife. A Loup-Garou, but a wife. Is this what you call a Wife-Garou? That’s gotta be it. And she’s the Reine des Garous, so is she also the Reine des Femmes? Or maybe not. Anyway, this is Nate’s mom in front of me. Oh, man. My first time’s gonna be with someone’s wife? Isn’t that pretty sinful? And it’s a classmate’s mom, too. Isn’t that pretty

amazing? Or will this make me less hesitant from here on out? Oh, but come to think of it, if all my time studying porn games pays off here, will Nate and I be brother and sister? Um...huh? If anything, wouldn't I be her step-dad? Which is it? I don't know Oh, but what's with this wife in front of me? Her boobs are huge and her waist is all like...like...

"Wh-why are you twisting around like that?"

It's supposed to be you, okay!? And her butt is more like th-th-this...um...

"Uh, what is that gesture? A trapezoid? Mt. Fuji?"

Sorry, but it's your butt! Except I'm not sorry at all!! Anyway, what's with this wife? If you like things big, she's pretty much perfect. Her husband's got a hell of a wife. I give her a perfect score!

But looking at her like that and comparing her with Nate... Nate, you're way too different. And given your age, is your boob destiny already set in stone? Nate... Nate, you can cry if you want.

"Wh-why are you crying all of a sudden? Are you okay?"

Shut up. I'm crying for your daughter! Dammit, dammit! Give back Nate's boobs! Give them back!! Give back the boobs! And make it a double! In French, that would be deux! Okay, I'm even starting to confuse myself now. But something tells me this is dangerous. After all, this is a wife and a classmate's mom and a wife. I feel like I'm overlooking something important, but she's a wife. That part's for sure. ...Now that I think about it, this could be a hidden camera show or something. Once I take three more steps, Tenzou's gonna barge in holding a big sign saying "Surprise! You're on Ninja Camera!" Damn you, Tenzou! I'll never forgive you! I bet you can't even tell me how much trouble I went through in England to get you a girlfriend! Well? Can't do it, can you? Then you lose! Not that I actually did anything back then. Ah, this wife needs to stop wiggling like that. I'm gonna start moving! I'm gonna walk right up to her!! And I'm really afraid this is a hidden camera show. I mean, it'd take a third generation blacksmith to match the hardness I've got going on here. If this is a hidden camera show, Horizon'll kill me once they measure that physical evidence.

Oh, crap! Horizon!!

This ain't good. What do I do if she finds out? And if Nate or someone shows up to rescue me right now, they'll definitely find out! And with the parent connection, Nate's gonna find out no matter what! I'm screwed! Or am I? Can Nate and the others wait a while to show up? Well!? No, calm down. The trick to calming yourself down at times like this is to do math in your head. Um. 2378905 x...There's no way I can multiply that!! Are you stupid!? Know your limits here!! So how about addition!? 65333 + 95829 =...No, when I see more than two numbers in a row, my brain refuses to think! I lose my focus and try to escape by looking at the wife right in front of me. Ha ha ha ...No, don't look! Don't loooooook! O-oh, I know. I need to think about some other girl! I feel bad, but that'll definitely distract me! Yeah, another girl's the way to go! Like when Horizon gets the bread from the other side of the register and bends down like this. Then her butt goes like this and...um...

My hardness is only growing from that.

Crap. This is hopeless. Completely hopeless. I'm doomed to an erotic death. I'm definitely going to die. Is this fate? No, there has to be some other option! I'll ask the angel and devil inside me. They'll give me opposite answers, so I just have to trust in the one that sounds like it'll work!!

Okay, my angel and devil. What should I do about this fate?

Devil: "Fighting fate is hard, so don't do that."

Angel: "Going along with fate is easy, so keep doing that!!"

Those may be opposite answers, but they mean the same thing!!

Oh, dammit. Her husband gets to indulge in this every night without having to worry. Damn, that must be nice.

"U-um, wh-why are you crying again? Excuse me?"

Don't give me that worried look while wiggling around like that!

...I-is this boy okay!?

The Reine des Garous saw him react differently from all of her previous targets.

He was only three steps away. Normally, they would choose to kneel before her at that distance.

But this boy was not normal.

A normal person would not be muttering under his breath, would not suddenly start wiggling around, would not hold himself in his arms and shout “Ahh!”, and would not slowly begin to cry.

Earlier, he had turned toward the door and started saying, “D-don’t watch! There’s no thief here! There really isn’t!!” She had initially thought he had gone insane, but it seemed to be some kind of act.

He was approaching and he had a sleepy expression, but she could not let her guard down. If he did return to his senses, she would be forced to make him surrender by force.

...But the Reine des Garous has never before experienced the disgrace of having to make a man surrender by force!

Everything had been set up perfectly, but would she have to handle this like a common beast?

However, a sudden thought occurred to her.

...D-don’t tell me my charm has faded as I’ve aged.

Feeling uneasy, she decided to strengthen her seduction. She exposed her body to the moonlight once more and faced him. She gently spread her knees, reached her hand toward him, and undid her hair.

“Feel free to join me.”

She lowered the ends of her eyebrows.

“Do you not want to?”

As soon as she said that, the boy took another step.

She had drawn him closer and she rejoiced that she still had it.

...Now, kneel before me! Yes!

He bent over right in front of her.

She knew she had won.

...I did it! Honey, I really do still have it! I do!!

She thought about her daughter and how this would solve everything. She only had to finish things here.

“Now.”

She relaxed her body, faced him, and called out to him.

“Get down on your knees and crawl into bed. I’ll give you all the attention you want.”

She called out to the boy who was bending forward in front of her.

But...

“Oh.”

Beams of blood shot from both his nostrils and the force sent him flying backwards.

“Kyaaaaah!?”

Rather than a fountain of blood, it shot from his nose in a straight line. The Reine des Garous took evasive action on reflex, but she suddenly came back to her senses.

“W-wait. You’re draining the blood yourself!? Just how helpful are you trying to be!?”

The force of the bloody stream sent the idiot slamming into the wall behind him. He then bounced off it and collapsed forward.

“Nh!?”

He collided into the floor starting with his naked crotch.

A dull sound and a prying sound came from the floor.

Musashi’s chancellor did not scream, but his expression did immediately grow serious.

“Hh!”

He let out a grunt of air and collapsed limply into a manji shape.

The Reine des Garous watched the series of events in a daze, but...

“U-um.”

A puddle of blood formed around his face on the floor.

She was taken aback when she confirmed the scent of the spreading blood.

“Wait. Um, uh?”

Flustered, she directly shouted her thoughts.

“What is going on!?”

“Huh? A-a disturbance is running through the forest’s spirits and animals.”

“What do you mean by a disturbance? Did my mother cause it? Or the chancellor?”

“Hm.” Mary brought a hand to her forehead. “It seems more like the Reine des Garous is confused.”

...The chancellor must have done something.

She was certain of it and there was nothing she could do about that.

But what had he done to disturb her mother so much? She did not want to think about it, but Naito suddenly sat up and gave her a thumbs up. She did not know what exactly that meant, but she got the general idea. She looked the girl in the eye and Naito lay back down.

“But,” muttered Mary while glancing around their surroundings. “The spirits are wondering what they should do and if they should help. It seems there is quite a commotion at the Reine des Garous’ place.”

“I have a feeling everything is going about as well as normal.”

“But... Yes, I think everything will be fine.”

“Why?”

Mary smiled and held up Mitotsudaira’s foot.

“Because the Reine des Garous has given her heart to a human once before.”

...You mean...

Mitotsudaira had an idea what she meant and Mary confirmed it.

“That is why you are here in the first place.”

Mitotsudaira listened to what Mary said about her.

“I have studied Far Eastern history and master Tenzou has taught me a lot, including your inherited name. ...You have inherited the name of Lord Mito Mitsukuni, haven't you? According to an aside in the Testament descriptions, he performed a pilgrimage of the Far East and researched a variety of things.”

“Y-yes. Judge. That's right.” She shrugged. “I had been thinking of taking someone with me and making my own pilgrimage of the Far East after I graduate. Tomo has mentioned wanting to visit the different nations to investigate the mysterious phenomena there, so I had thought she might want to join me. But...”

“That would be difficult in Musashi's current situation, wouldn't it?”

Mary gave a troubled smile, but she made sure to say what she had to say.

“According to the Testament descriptions, Lord Mitsukuni was an unwanted child, wasn't he? He was apparently the child of a master and his maid.”

Mitotsudaira knew about that. She had looked into it herself and others had made sure to inform her. But Mary continued.

“That is why his mother was ordered to kill the child; but the family that looked after her disobeyed their master's orders, allowed the birth, and raised Lord Mitsukuni in secret. And...”

“And?”

“I think that is similar to the reason your mother hid her position as the Reine des Garous until yesterday.”

Because...

“It was to hide that such a powerful being had entered human society and to

hide herself when her body was under the strain of childbirth. Also, if people knew you were the Reine des Garous' daughter, they might try to take you hostage. But she could prevent that by hiding her identity."

"Then why did she send me to Musashi?"

"Probably to make people think you were not such an important individual. You may be second in line to ruling the Far East, but you were also a knight sent from Hexagone Française and therefore a puppet working for Hexagone Française."

That was true. People had once pointed that out to her. They had told her, hurt her, and twisted her. She sighed while remembering all that. She hung her head and rested her forehead on her hands.

"You're right. ...I was sent there so the other nations would think I was unimportant. And I really was just a child when I was sent away."

"But..."

"?"

"There are some things I do not understand, but one thing feels certain to me now."

Wondering what it was, Mitotsudaira raised her head and saw Mary tilting her head.

"You were not an unwanted child, were you?"

Mitotsudaira felt a chill at Mary's words.

But not because she was angry or upset at the girl.

This was different. The chill felt like it was stroking her spine.

...Mary doesn't know if she was wanted or not.

She had not been born to the correct mother and she had led to the death of the mother she had been born to. That second point applied to her twin sister Elizabeth as well, but...

"Mary, have you...ever resented your birth?"

“No, because I have no one to resent. But...I do wonder why.”

“You ask something you can never know the answer to?”

How long had she been wondering that? Mitotsudaira had no way of knowing; but Mary’s smile deepened.

“It’s fine. Master Tenzou gave me the answer.”

Mitotsudaira wondered if she should record this conversation and share it with the others later. But she noticed Naito open a Magie Figur as she lay on her side, so she left it to her. At any rate, she asked a question like an interviewer.

“U-um... The 1st special duty officer did? How?”

“Judge. ...You see, I’ve been thinking recently. A lot may have happened between my parents and I may be looking at this in a convenient way, but...”

She held a hand to her cheek.

“I feel so happy when I’m with the person I care for, so I hope my parents had times like that too.”

Naito gave a thumbs up and Mitotsudaira replied via eye contact. She heard Tenzou collapse in the underbrush in the distance, so he had likely given up. At any rate, Mary continued while blushing.

“So can I assume the Reine des Garous had times like that too?”

“It isn’t my place to say.”

“Then!” said Naito while suddenly standing up.

Her bandaged wings shook, she held up her recording Magie Figur, and she gave a crescent moon smile.

“Mito-tsan, I want to hear about how your parents fell in love!”

“What? Wh-why do you want to know that all of a sudden?”

“Because.” She wrapped her arms around Mary’s shoulders from behind and the two of them looked up at Mitotsudaira. “I want to know how your mom ended up accepting your human dad. ...It could even help us find a way to keep the chancellor safe.”

Mitotsudaira felt it was rare for Germans to be this motivated by pure curiosity, but she decided it was fine. It was late at night, this was a gathering of girls, and she had heard the general story before.

“Fine then. ...It’s a pretty ridiculous story, though.”

As she began to speak, she wondered what her mother and the chancellor were doing.

Mitotsudaira’s mother and Musashi’s chancellor were intertwined on the bed.

“C-come on. Settle...settle down. Stop moving.”

“Nwah! O-ow, ow, ow. Wait. Seriously, stop rubbing me like thaaaaaat!”

“You’re a boy, so put up with it for now. I can’t believe you’re making this much of a fuss over some disinfectant.”

The mother was straddling the chancellor and pinning him below her butt. She looked down at him where he lay sprawled out with tissues in his nostrils. The idiot had gone limp from the healing charms placed across his body.

“D-dammit. I tried to resist, but now you’ve rubbed that disinfectant towel all over me and placed charms over my hair. My pride is in tatters.”

“And my pride as the Reine des Garous insists that I heal you after you were injured in my house.”

But, she sighed while wearing a shirt. I’ve finished treating his injuries.

“Anyway, I have to apologize. The floor in here is made of hardened wafers, so of course falling down that hard was going to leave you covered in scrapes. The floor used to be chocolate bars.”

“I was wearing my shoes, so I thought it was a wooden floor. I thought the contents of my God Mosaic would slide, but it caught on the wafer pattern. I haven’t felt a scrape that bad in a long time.”

“Anyway,” said the Reine des Garous as she looked down at the boy.

She had put his underwear and waist hard point parts on him. The ether gathered in the hard points regulated his body temperature and gave a barrier

of air to support him while living on the Musashi, but it also regulated his blood pressure and heart rate when injured. So...

“Have you stopped bleeding?”

“Hmm. I still feel something stinging in my throat.”

“What a waste.”

She said that partially as a complaint and started to sigh, but she stopped herself.

This had been brought on by her failure to predict what would happen. This boy was a guest, so if she had failed to make him bow to her, it was due to her own lack of skill.

...My old friends would have laughed at me if they had seen that.

But she had another thought as well.

...At this point, it's probably impossible to make him bow.

The room smelled of blood and disinfectant, so the mood was all wrong.

She had brought several dark green moss creatures in from outside and they were cleaning the floor “Cleaning.” “Thick.” “Bleeding.”

...The mood could hardly be worse.

With that serious thought, she tossed the towel to the moss creatures. They called it a reward, but she wondered if it was really that great.

“Anyway, you bled an awful lot.”

“To be fair, I did eat a lot of meat for dinner.”

Musashi's chancellor had a wet towel on his forehead to cool the heat in his face. The towel covered his eyes, so she could not see his expression.

“I'd really been holding back, so it had all kind of built up inside me.”

“Holding back?”

He nodded.

“After all, I'd had a lot on my mind. But as I thought about all that, I suddenly decided ‘to hell with it!’ and relaxed myself. That's when it all came at once.”

Oh? thought the Reine des Garous.

“So you gave in?”

“Yeah. I mean you’re super sexy. And it all looked like it would feel really great. I started thinking no one would blame me if I explained the situation.”

But...

“I think it was too much for me.”

“My.”

She felt heat when she brought a hand to her cheek, but there was no point in denying it.

...So he did surrender to me?

He had simply been too honest in his acceptance and she had gone in too strong. He had forcibly tried to oppose her, so she had gone in even stronger and ended up with a forced result.

And the boy said something else.

“Sorry.”

“For what?” she asked.

“I brought shame to you.”

The Reine des Garous stared at Musashi’s chancellor.

He groaned in thought and placed his right hand on top of the towel covering his forehead and eyes.

“You see,” he said. “Horizon’s definitely part of the equation, but I also don’t like blaming others for something I did. And Nate said it’s rude to compare a woman with another one. So if you were doing your best to show off your beauty, I need to give a proper answer without thinking about anyone else. And if I was better with words, I’m sure I could convince Horizon of that.”

He sighed.

“But I can’t. I don’t have confidence in my skill with words, I have no idea

what I should do, and I'm afraid of making some people angry or making them dislike me. But in the end, you're the one that ended up losing out from all that."

...This boy really does take things seriously.

So she opened her mouth and spoke while leaning down on him.

"Um, to be honest...I really was going to devour you. Oh, and when I say 'devour', I don't mean it sexually. I mean I was going to literally eat you."

So...

"You have nothing to apologize for. This was a battle between predator and prey...and, well..."

This was only her second time to ever say this.

"Even if it was a situational fluke, you defeated me."

"Don't say that."

...Eh?

The boy sounded certain of himself here.

"Don't say that. I was the one that messed up. That's what happened."

"But..."

She was left speechless and she stared at the boy as he gave a weak smile.

"Whether we're talking about sex or dinner, Hexagone Française's vice chancellor and the Reine des Garous isn't allowed to make mistakes, right?"

"But the Reine des Garous can't have a victory just given to her either."

Then...

"Then one day, once I'm the king of the world, let's have a rematch."

"..."

The Reine des Garous was dumbfounded.

She had someone she could call her king. She had promised to serve them,

her allegiance to them was certain, and that person's brother would one day rule Europe.

...But a king of the world?

Would the boy pinned below her only call himself a "king" once he had become something even greater than that?

She suddenly wondered if she ought to kill him now.

After all, his face was hidden and he was defenseless below her.

Now is my chance, she thought while reflexively raising a hand.

But then he spoke.

"Sorry I'm not up to the task yet. I'm an idiot and I can't seem to do anything right."

She heard him sigh.

"You may have been planning to eat me if I was more skilled, but not even that happened. If you think you would've eaten me if I hadn't started bleeding, then you're basically saying I'm still too inexperienced."

...Ah.

She realized that her conceited words and actions had hurt him.

So she lowered her head.

"Sorry."

She relaxed her shoulders.

I see, she thought. *That's right.*

...The Reine des Garous cannot lay her hand on an inexperienced child.

She would wait until this boy had grown into a man who could actually oppose her. That was how the Reine des Garous did things. And this boy faced her while viewing her as the Reine des Garous.

They had both understood that previously, so suddenly laying a hand on him here would be lying to herself and betraying this boy.

Also, her king and the others who had desired her position as Reine des

Garous would be disappointed in her.

So she faced the boy. She looked directly into his unseen eyes.

“I have no intention of looking down on you. ...You were trying to stand on equal footing with me, weren't you? But you do not yet have the skill needed to do that. And yet... I'm sorry for pitying you for that.”

“Eh? Oh... It's fine. That was just a little complaint. I can't say things like this in front of the others. Also, I definitely lost to one person.”

“Eh? Who?”

“Your husband. ...Nate was born because he defeated you, right?”

She felt her pulse quicken and her body stiffen.

“Ow, ow, ow, ow. You're squeezing my hips between your legs! Tap, tap, tap! Ohhh! What's this!? Boobs! These are nothing like Nate's!”

“You've felt my daughter's?”

She glared at him, squeezed until he screamed, and then sighed.

The boy also relaxed his body and his mouth bent upwards below the towel that hid his eyes.

“I'm jealous of your husband. He gets this all to himself every day, doesn't he?”

“My.”

“But,” he said. “Why did you leave here? From what I saw outside earlier, there's a fruit tree...well, forget that one. But there's a spring and it's a nice environment, don't you think?”

“Well...”

She trailed off as she began to think and then smiled a little.

They were alone together in this hidden house at night, and...

...I am his guardian right now, aren't I?

It was a little much for a child's bedtime story, but she wondered if it would work nonetheless.

“A lot happened a long time ago.”

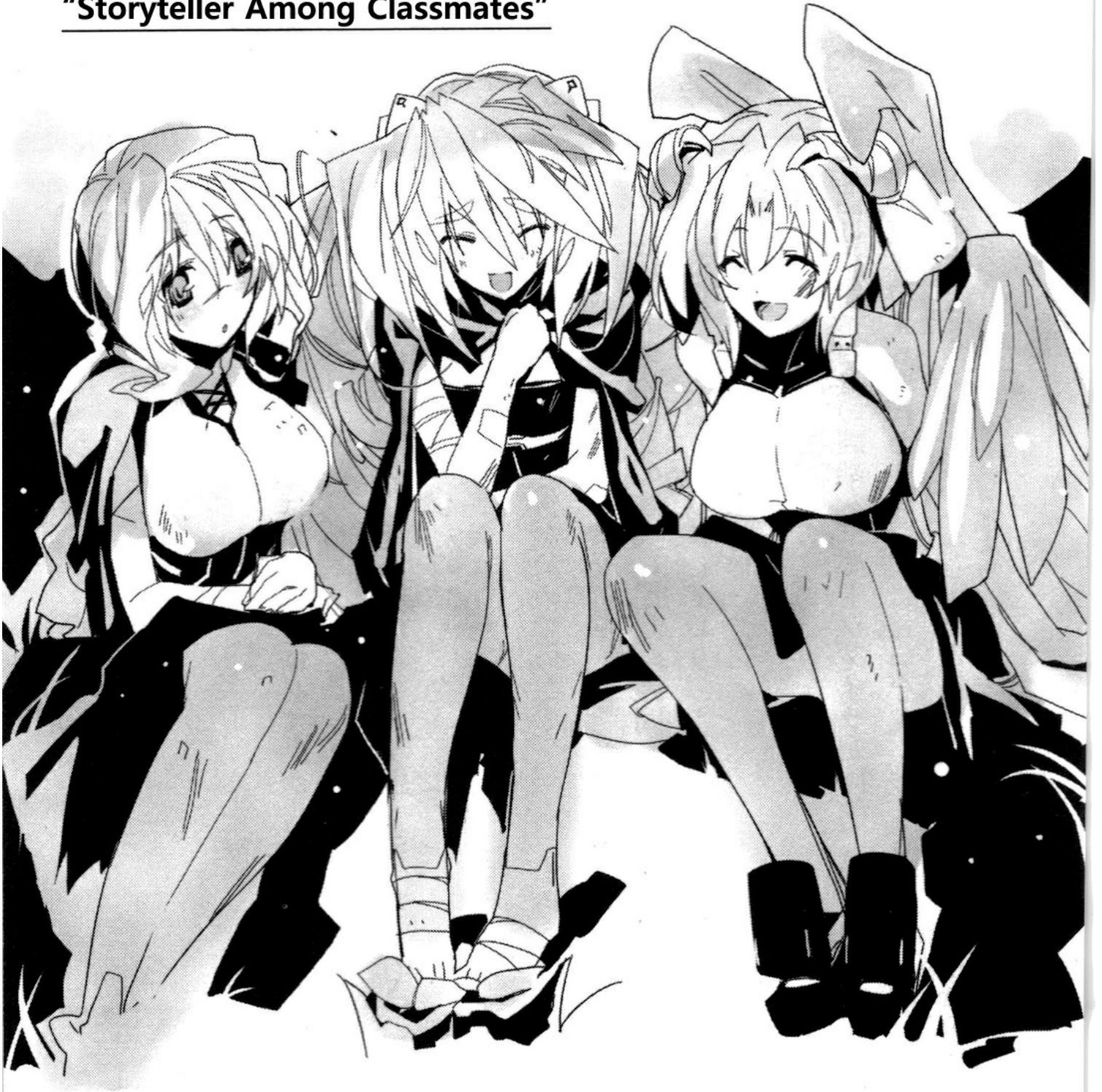
I can tell him about that, she decided while lying down next to him.

“Long ago...well, not that long ago. Yes, it was when I was a bit – just a bit – younger than I am now.”

Chapter 46: Storyteller Among Classmates

CHAPTER 46

"Storyteller Among Classmates"



The depths of the night
Tend to help people grow
Point Allocation (Not referring to their breasts)

The depths of the night

Tend to help people grow

Point Allocation (Not referring to their breasts)

The darkness of the night was amplified in the depths of the forest.

When three girls gathered in the faint light of spirits, stories were bound to follow.

...This feels somewhat nostalgic.

Mary had that thought as she had the light spirits float around them. In England, the children and women would sometimes gather together for a lively night.

“Well, you see,” said Mitotsudaira as she looked at the other two girls. “My mother’s family originally ruled this area. ...Or so it seems. But when I say ‘ruled’, I mean as the beast at the top of the food chain. But...”

“But?” asked Mary to urge Mitotsudaira on.

Mary and Naito had already moved up so all three were on the same level with Mitotsudaira in the center.

“Oh, the water has boiled. Have some herb tea.”

“Yay! Made by a real Englishwoman!”

“Thanks,” said Mitotsudaira as she grabbed both ends of the container made from bent leaves.

She blew on the tea to cool it and the aroma filled her surroundings.

“What a calming smell. ...Anyway, my mother was from the Reine des Garous' family, but the number of humans outside the forest grew and the forest was divided up by roads and wars. Also, the people began working together to hunt down the Loup-Garous. My mother’s family... Yes, I laughed when she once said she came from an unrivaled family, but I never thought she meant the Reine des Garous' family... Yes...”

“Don’t let it get you down, Mito-tsan! Pretend you’re eating some meat!”

You can cheer her up like that? thought Mary in amazement.

Meanwhile, Mitotsudaira smiled bitterly.

“Um, sorry if I’m not entirely consistent in how I say things. Anyway... Partially due to pressure from the lower Loup-Garous and other races, my...yes, the Reine des Garous' family promised to support the humans in the Hundred Years' War to ensure the rights and safety of non-humans. But after that, the lifestyle of the non-humans became a lot more like that of humans. It might have been an intentional strategy on the humans' part. It was a way of acclimating and taming the non-humans.”

What she said sounded harsh to Mary, but that may have been because England was so centered on non-humans. But even if she understood that, stating an objection would not help the situation.

Instead, she urged Mitotsudaira to continue.

“What did your mother do during all that?”

“Eh? Oh. From what I’ve heard, when her mother died, the noble who ruled the area tried to make a name for himself by taking advantage of the situation and hunting her down. My mother apparently purged all of his hunters. From then on, it seems people stopped coming here. But...”

But...

“The humans were pretty clever. They knew they could not stand up to her, so they put a weak noble family in charge of this forest and then sealed it off by dividing it up with roads.”

“They divided up this forest?”

That question filled a room now lit only by a single flickering candle.

A boy asked the question to the Reine des Garous.

His nosebleed had finally stopped, but he had been told not to move from his back and the Reine des Garous lay on her side next to him.

“That’s right.” She nodded. “My family had originally allowed a few roads so

that the humans could pass through because some generations preferred to avoid any complications. But they used that permission to expand all of the roads, even the ones that had fallen into disuse, and they started dividing up the forest.”

She thought back to an old memory that was also a regret.

“And, well, the circulation of the ecosystem doesn’t work well when the forest is too small. Once we could no longer secure enough animals for food, we began to weaken as well.”

“Yeah, Nate does eat a lot of meat.”

...If she has been keeping that up away from me, I must have taught her well when she was younger.

She felt satisfied in her education but brought her thoughts back to the past.

“My fellow Loup-Garous were hunted down or left for human society. Eventually, I was the only Loup-Garou in this area.”

She naturally let out a bitter smile.

“Honestly,” she sighed. “The humans did an excellent job. They knew they couldn’t hope to defeat me directly, so they isolated me and my forest so I might as well not be there at all. And the next noble family to rule the land was too weak to ever defeat me, so they were just telling me to die here all alone.”

“How did that lead to meeting your husband?”

“Well,” she said while looking to the boy.

He lay on his back and turned a look of expectation toward her. *Not that this is all that interesting a story*, she thought to herself.

“The head of that noble family died during Hexagone Française’s Reformation and his son became the next ruler of the land. He was small and weak and disliked athletics, but he was a serious boy who loved books.”

She took a breath.

“And he would eventually become my husband.”

“When my father inherited the land, yes, he was a very diligent person. He saw the rulers of other areas hunting down the werewolves for their people, so he decided to do the same. But my mother had already been isolated and what she had done in the past was well-known, so no one would help him.”

Mitotsudaira saw the other two girls nodding eagerly and she took a sip of tea. She quite enjoyed the way they leaned forward and the way their gazes told her to hurry up and continue the story.

“But my father knew fighting was not his thing, so he asked a friend for some advice. That friend... Well, according to my mother, she was a sickly girl and my father’s childhood friend, but in the academy...um, uh, to be blunt, she saved him from being bullied a lot.”

“What kind of advice did that girl give him?”

“Judge.”

Mitotsudaira leaned back and waved a hand to copy the act her father would sometimes make to match her mother’s story.

“ ‘You really are stupid. There’s no way you can win in a fight, so that means you need to lay a trap. Yes, a trap.’ ”

Mary applauded after realizing she was acting out the part. Mitotsudaira was not sure if that was a good or bad thing, but she smiled regardless.

...I don’t have many opportunities to act like this on the Musashi.

“Anyway, he decided to lay a trap. And then...”

“But when I realized the humans had isolated me, I felt I had finally been freed from all the annoyances of life and decided I could live the rest of my life in quiet solitude.”

The Reine des Garous lay on her side with her back to the wall and Musashi’s chancellor to her left. She gave him a bitter smile.

The werewolf queen placed her cheek on his left shoulder and wrapped her left arm around his head.

She stroked his opposite cheek with her hand and he narrowed his eyes. That reaction removed the bitterness from her smile.

“But my fellow Loup-Garous were gone and my mother had died, so...”

“You weren’t lonely, were you? You are the Reine des Garous, after all.”

Whether he was being considerate or not, she swallowed the weak words she had almost said.

“Testament. That’s right. Royals are always isolated from everyone else. But...”

“But?”

“Testament. When you are alone, you begin to think about the meaning of your own existence. I had books, cooking implements, clothes, and even food in this candy house that any child would be delighted to visit. ...But I no longer had anyone to talk to, so there was no meaning in entertaining, protecting, or dressing up. That was when I realized the lifestyle my mother had taught me was a human lifestyle.”

She had realized something then.

...I put distance between myself and the neighbors who lived the same way as me.

Whenever one of the others had approached the humans, she had laughed and called them dogs, but she had only been able to do that because she had those others there in the first place.

Once she was all alone, even being queen had no meaning.

But at the time, she had thought she was unclean for being so immersed in a human lifestyle.

She had even hated her mother for immersing her in it. She had even wandered naked through the forest to return to being a beast.

But she had been shocked to realize even her appreciation of the beautiful scenery came from a human mindset.

...And that tree grew in front of the house.

It was a fruit tree. Not only that, it bore a strong-smelling citrus fruit.

When her mother had still been alive, a lost child had apparently reached the house and planted the fruit seeds he had with him. A fruit tree looked perfect with a candy house and her mother had said it would be something for her generation to look after, but she had seen it more as a threat.

The smell reached its peak when spring shifted to summer and the tree began to bear fruit.

The smell seemed to have been telling her to leave the house, so she had stayed out in the forest a lot more.

“Well, a lot happened, but I thought it was all the result of the current age, of destiny, and of what I wanted. ...So I decided to throw away everything I had.”

“Throw it away?”

“My first thought was to wander through the forest every day and, if someone had the guts to face me, I would obediently let them kill me. ...But I couldn't find anyone like that. That was when I decided to give in to my lifespan and just let myself rot.”

And then...

“I found a poorly hidden trap set up on the road back to this house. It was a spring-loaded kind that would capture my leg.”

“Did your husband do that?”

“Testament,” she confirmed.

She thought back to that time and did not bother stopping the smile that ran from the corners of her mouth to her cheeks.

“When I saw it, I realized someone would definitely come for me if I was caught in that trap. Yes, and it would be a knight in shining armor who was willing to face the Reine des Garous.”

“Maman, you're pretty amazing, aren't you?”

“Any girl would think the same thing.”

She had nothing to be ashamed of as she clenched her right fist and said that.

At any rate, she went on to say what she had done back then.

“So I returned to the house, did the best I could to dress up for my knight, searched through my books to find the perfect way of expressing my thanks... and I intentionally let the trap catch me.”

“Intentionally? I don’t think I would go that far,” said Naito.

“Well, to be blunt, a trap like that can’t even scratch my mother.”

We really are a strange family, realized Mitotsudaira.

...Yes. Now that I think about it, we weren’t even a normal Loup-Garou family, but she kept it such a secret that I just thought we were an amazing family!

That overly honest and diligent side must have come from my father, she decided with a sigh.

“But anyway,” she said. “After my mother waited for about two days, my father showed up. He was in his first year of high school at the time and he ran over to her when he saw her.”

“Was he excited that he had caught her?” asked Mary.

Mitotsudaira hesitated but finally answered.

“Well, no.”

She hesitated again but made up her mind.

“When he saw her leg in the trap, he started crying and saying ‘I’ve done something awful’, ‘I didn’t think it would do this’, and ‘I’m so sorry’.”

“I wasn’t hurt at all, but he had a weak body, he was bullied at the academy, and he had experienced a lot of... How should I put it? Not so much painful things, but restrictive and hurtful things.”

When setting up the trap, he had likely aspired to be a hero, but then he had seen her caught in the trap.

“He suddenly realized what exactly it was he had done.”

“That’s a lot like Nate.”

She stroked him from the cheek to neck and he acted ticklish.

But anyway, that had surprised her too. She had expected some great hero to appear, but it had been a skinny boy who was short enough to mistake for a girl. And far from wearing shining armor, he had worn an old worn-out school uniform.

“He cried and apologized while trying to remove the trap, but that kind of trap takes a lot of strength to remove. He had a lot of trouble and hurt his hand. As he tried, it even started to rain.”

She had not helped him, but she chose to believe it was out of respect for him.

“After he removed the trap, he put his coat over me so I wouldn’t get wet. At the time, he was a full head shorter than me, but he still tried to carry me.”

“Did you let him?”

“Testament. How could I not after all the effort he put into it?”

But...

“He collapsed once we reached here. ...It was because of the rain soaking him without his coat.”

“And because he had to carry such a heavy-ow, ow, ow, ow, ow!!”

“Then I placed him in this very bed and had the spirits heal him. Once he woke, I tried to look frightening and told him I was the Reine des Garous. That name has a lot of power, after all. And then he said, ‘Sorry, but thank you for saving me, Miss Loup-Garou.’ ”

She had spent a busy week after that until he had recovered. She had been so busy because it was filled with things she had not had to do before.

“He was still weak, so I made food for him, did his laundry, and...”

She had felt shy. After all, she had been alone in the house with a boy. That tension and damage to her honor had never before been present in her life.

And with all that...

“We talked about so many things. Including why I was here and why I was alone.”

The most interesting part was that he could remove the parts of the candy house.

...The condition the Technohexen set for removing the candy was to be a child.

The Reine des Garous would not attack children. She had told him that and seen him off after he recovered.

“When we parted, I made sure to tell him never to return.”

“Why?”

She answered the boy’s surprised question.

“That is simple. Because he smelled amazingly good.”

She thought back to that time.

His scent had not changed, but she had never smelled it before back then. It was not the smell of an herbivore or a carnivore. She had assumed it was the human smell of an omnivore, but...

...I had never smelled it before.

She had only realized the source of the smell later.

At the time, she had simply thought it was a good smell and sent him safely back to his village without eating him.

“Then what happened to him?”

“Apparently, he consulted with a local friend. That person did not believe he had actually met me and assumed he was making an excuse for getting lost, but he asked that friend a certain question. He said he wanted to properly thank and apologize to ‘Miss Loup-Garou’, but he did not know what to do since I had told him to never return.”

“And what did his friend say?”

“Testament.”

The Reine des Garous waved a hand and did an impression of that friend's voice.

“ ‘You do not need to worry about her telling you not to come back. If she really didn't want you to come back, she wouldn't say that the first time around. If she really wanted to keep you away, she would act nice the first time but in a way that made you want to stay away if you wanted to be a good person. She would only reject someone who missed the clues and came back the second time. She kindly nursed you back to health, didn't she? Then you'll be fine.’ But...”

“But?”

“Apparently, that friend asked what was so great about me.”

“The boobs, right?”

“No.”

He had apparently answered differently.

“He said he had never seen someone so beautiful, he said I was cool, and he said he wanted to talk with me more.”

“I see,” said the boy. “That must've been a shock to the friend. Your husband doesn't have much tact, does he?”

“No, he doesn't.” She could not help but smile bitterly. “I think we both realized what we lacked and from there it was an issue of compatibility.”

And then he had arrived.

“Anyway, a few days later, I caught him entering the forest and demanded to know why he had come.”

Looking back, she could tell she had been happy. She had known the only reason he would be there was to see her. She had been proud that he wanted her, but she had tried to reject that feeling back then.

“I came at him a little too harshly.”

“But wasn't that the perfect attitude for a guy who liked the cool Reine des Garous? Wasn't it a real thrill for him?”

“Yes... It has always been a mystery just how well we communicated with each other. It feels like we focus so much on the convenient parts of the other.”

But that was likely what compatibility was.

“When I approached him, he got down on one knee and held out a wooden box. He said my clothes had to have been torn by the trap, so he brought me some new clothes. My heart was racing as I opened it on the spot and I found a Hexagone Française uniform of all things.”

“Your husband is into some crazy things.”

She hit him once and then thought back on the past.

...So much happened back then.

She had refused the uniform and brought him to the house. She chose to believe she had done so out of respect for him.

“By the time I tried on the uniform and showed it off to him to see if he liked it, it was already night.”

Since it was late, she had made him spend the night. She had stood guard over him, he had gone to sleep first, and she had slept in the following morning.

...But I found something amazing when I woke up.

He had gotten up early and cooked breakfast. And he had made jam using the fruit on the tree outside.

“When staying with my mother before, my father had realized from her cooking that she had trouble with citrus fruits. But the Reine des Garous had to take care of the forest, so she could not let the tree die. So my father decided to use the candy house’s sugar candy to make jam.”

Naito tilted her head.

“That’s citrus marmalade, right? But did your mom really like that? If she was living in the forest cut off from human civilization, she wouldn’t have access to flour and wouldn’t have any bread, right? Even a single fruit tree would make a lot, so how would they use it all?”

“Um, Lady Naito? There are more ways to use jam than putting it on bread.”

After speaking to Naito, Mary turned to Mitotsudaira and said exactly what she expected her to.

“He used it as a sauce for cooking meat, didn’t he?”

“Judge. By mixing it with mustard and other sauces, he could make a salty-sweet sauce a lot like sweet vinegar. And doing that uses quite a lot of the jam. My father belonged to a poor noble family and there were a lot of fruit trees around their house, so he cooked like that a lot for himself too. That was why he thought to do the same for my mother.”

She took a breath.

“When he saw how much she liked it, he taught her how to make the jam and tried to leave. He assumed he would never meet her again. But then...”

“Yes?”

Mitotsudaira smiled as the other two girls asked her to continue.

“My mother said the uniform would no longer fit her after eating so much, so she asked him to bring another one for her.”

That was when she had realized the identity of that unfamiliar scent she had detected on him.

...Yes, it was citrus.

When a poor noble family was surrounded by a variety of fruit orchards, what would happen as they tried to keep food on the table?

Most of their food would come from those fruits and it would become a part of their scent. The smell of citrus was an irritant to Loup-Garous, but after passing through a human body, it became the smell of meat.

...The sharp, harsh aroma is sweetened and dissolved inside the meat.

The jam sauce was an artificial reproduction of that.

...That first jam sauce he made was so very sweet.

She had felt like she was eating his scent.

It had dumbfounded her to the point that she had to look over at him to make sure his body was still intact.

She remembered everything from the days following that. He had visited to teach her how to cook and she had taught him what edible plants he could find in the forest. Their repertoire of jam had increased, they had been able to eat all sorts of things together, and the forest environment may have been good for him because his health had not declined quite as often.

She remembered it all.

Their eating habits had grown more similar, so the citrus smell she had supposedly hated had started coming from her own body and the meat smell she loved so much had started coming from him. This had delighted her and they never had the exact same smell because one of them was a carnivore and the other was an omnivore.

She had wanted to smell like him, so while helping him with his studies or something else, she would pretend to peer down at the textbook while really leaning in from behind and pressing her throat against him. That may have been the reason for something else.

“Helping him study was especially fun. I taught him history, old languages, and war while he taught me about new sciences, politics, and economics. But on occasion, he would mention his friend from back home. To be honest, I did not like that very much.”

“You said she was a sickly girl, right? That’s definitely the heroine type. ...And the Reine des Garous is the jealous type, is she? Oh, and does Nate say not to compare girls with other girls because of that?”

“That is simply the nature of women. ...But anyway, I didn’t really understand what I was feeling back then. I simply wondered why he was talking about someone else when I was with him. Thinking back, I can tell he saw no problem with bringing her up because he thought nothing of her. But...”

“But?”

“He seemed to have talent at managing his land and did well with that, but he

seemed to have trouble getting along with people. Word spread that he was meeting with me or with a Technohexen. Once people realized it was partially true, rumors spread that he was working with me to expand his territory.”

“What did he say about that?”

“Oh, I heard about it from the birds because he never said anything. But when I indirectly turned the conversation in that direction, he said not to worry and that he would solve everything once he became a man.”

But would he really?

“I didn’t really understand what he meant by becoming a man. He was short, weak, and looked just like a child, but...”

One day, an incident had occurred.

“Suddenly, my father was no longer able to remove the sugar candy from the candy house.”

“You mean he became an adult?” asked Margot.

Mitotsudaira nodded.

“My mother tried to comfort him, but he only apologized and said it was because he had thought things about her he shouldn’t have.”

“Such as?”

“He had been thinking of confessing to her that he would come for her once he had grown to be her equal and could truly say he loved her. But it seemed the house had seen through it, so he assumed it was rejecting him so he couldn’t take her from it.”

“That wasn’t it, was it?” said Margot. “The candy house was telling your mom to go with him, wasn’t it?”

“I may not be one to talk, but I don’t think either of my parents really understood the other’s feelings or their own feelings. My father thought my mother was someone who protected the forest and my mother thought she would lose her excuse for not eating him once he grew up and was no longer a

child.”

The two other girls stiffened at that last part.

...That's right.

“My mother hadn't realized what it meant to have someone she didn't want to eat. But since my mother didn't want to eat him and my father was ashamed of what he had thought about her...”

She took a breath and shrugged.

“They stopped seeing each other.”

“I see,” said the boy in the flickering candlelight. “This is starting to get exciting.”

“Y-you sure are taking this lightly! But anyway...”

The Reine des Garous nodded and found the boy had turned to face her at some point. Fortunately, he seemed to have stopped bleeding, so she grabbed the shirt next to the bed and placed it over him.

“Nn. Thanks.”

“You're welcome. Well, I was an idiot too. Once I stopped seeing him, I thought I had done a decent job of withdrawing from it all, but it was really just him feeling ashamed. But I was convinced I would have to eat him the next time I saw him because I was the Reine des Garous.”

“Well, there's no helping that. You lived in two different worlds.”

“Testament. That's true. He had a good friend back home. ...And from what I hear, that friend had feelings for him. I had convinced myself it would be better for him to say he loved her instead of me. I thought that would end that relationship between Loup-Garou and human.”

She smiled bitterly.

“After he left, I even said it. When he was still there, I was too afraid to do so, but I used the words to convince myself.”

“Maman, you shouldn't bring yourself down like that.”

“I know that,” she said as she stroked his head and gave a genuine smile.

She then continued with the story.

“But I began to hear unpleasant rumors from the birds and some of the spirits. When he entered the third year, classmates from a neighboring area approached him and accused him of taming the Reine des Garous. And if he wanted to prove them wrong, he had to go defeat me. And...”

And...

“They said they would accept him as a man and obey him if he did. It was actually a trick to take control of the land that had developed so well under his management. They wanted him to challenge me and be killed by me. And the council of feudal lords told him he could always run away but gave him these instructions: drive a stake into the Reine des Garous’ body to take her soul. But if you are going to run, we will decide you lack the ability needed to protect your land. ...They were worried about the rumors of him conspiring with me. When I heard about it all, I decided I would die for his sake.”

“Wasn’t that a bad idea?”

“It was.”

She smiled and realized it had been a long time since she talked about this. She had not had anyone to tell it to since her daughter had left, so she hid nothing and did not try to make it sound better than it was.

“At the time, I was stupid, inexperienced, and desperate, so I wrote a letter and had the birds take it to him. It said, ‘On the night of the next full moon, come prepared to take my life. I will give you my entire being.’ ”

“The chancellor would definitely lecture her about that.”

“He probably would,” agreed Mitotsudaira.

...Horizon would too, but hers would be expressionless.

“Judge, but my father was also stupid, inexperienced, and desperate. He thought as much as he could until the day of the full moon, but he apparently decided he wanted to see her and so he went. He also asked his friend for help.

He said he had these two letters from the council of feudal lords and from 'Miss Loup-Garou' and asked what he should do."

Mitotsudaira smiled.

"And she said, 'You really are dumb. If you do what I tell you, the Reine des Garous will be a piece of cake. Did you know you have to use a special weapon for a Loup-Garou?' "

Was that night even quieter than tonight? wondered the Reine des Garous.

"I set up the silver chain obelisks in front of the house and wrapped the chains around my arms and legs to...well, to make sure I couldn't resist. Yes, and I opened the uniform he had given me from the chest to below the navel to make sure he could pierce my heart with a stake or a cross."

"You're into some crazy stuff, too."

She hit him twice and then smiled.



“C’mon. It set the mood and was perfect for being so full of myself. And halfway through the night when the moon was almost directly overhead, he showed up in front of the house. I was so excited!”

“Ah, wait! If you hold my head like that and rub it with your chin, my face goes right between your breasts and it’s really amazing!”

She laughed and released him.

Noticing heat in her cheeks, she continued to speak.

“I hadn’t seen him in a while, but he had grown a bit and he had brought a large basket with him. Also...he looked extremely uncertain of himself, so I told him to calm down and assured him I would obey him. ...I said I would offer everything up to him.”

“And what did he do?”

“Testament. He moved so close I could feel his breath on me, he opened the chest of my uniform even more, and he said he had come here after being told to kill me.”

But he had said more with a serious look on his face.

“He said a friend had told him of a way he could avoid killing me.”

“A way to avoid killing her? Was there a way to do that, Lady Mitotsudaira?”

“Judge,” replied Mitotsudaira with a nod to Mary who was looking sleepy.

...I can’t believe my parents.

With that thought, she continued the story.

“My father didn’t really know how to kill a Loup-Garou, so his friend had given him instructions. ‘Listen. First, remove her clothes and look closely. Like at her breasts. And then say this.’ ”

“This” being...

“ ‘I heard from a friend that the stake and taking of your soul are metaphorical. So I was told to ask you what to do. I was told you would guide me through it all.’ ”

Her mother had apparently not known what he meant. She had supposedly even asked if there really was a way to do that, but her father had nodded and said what his friend had told him to say.

“ ‘As a man, I apparently already have the stake needed to take everything that you have but also still be with you. ...But what is that stake? If I do have it, what am I supposed to do to you? Please tell me.’ ”

Because...

“ ‘I don’t want to kill you and I want to be with you. So teach me what I’m supposed to do.’ ”

I didn’t know what to do either when he said that, thought the Reine des Garous.

She had thought he was there to take her life, but he had no intention of doing that and on his friend’s instructions...

...He wanted to give me his stake.

That meant for the Reine des Garous to be with a human and a weak one at that.

It was unthinkable. To ensure their lineage remained, each generation of Reine des Garous would devour a powerful male and bear a mixture of their soul and her own soul as her child.

“But being queen had already lost all meaning for me.”

For that reason and because the chains prevented her from moving, she had asked him something.

“I said the clothes he had given me had gotten tight again. So I asked him to remove them since I couldn’t use my hands at the moment.”

When he had moved in close to remove her clothes, she had brought her lips to the corner of his eye.

The first time she had tasted him, it was through his tears.

The Reine des Garous recalled what had happened after that.

She had thought she might resist that first time and she had been afraid of any slight discrepancies in their understanding, so she had remained chained up in the moonlight.

She had then taught him what to do.

“The etiquette of wolves is to start by moving in close and sniffing each other’s scent.”

They had rubbed their cheeks together, brushed their hands through their hair, touched their necks together, and felt each other’s breathing and warmth.

That was the first time she had allowed herself to tell herself she loved that smell.

He smelled nice, he was attached to her, he wanted her, he fed her delicious food, and he thought of her first in everything. She had tried to sacrifice herself, but he had never considered the possibility and insisted on them being together.

If she thought or said she loved him, no one would blame her at that point.

So as they rubbed their bodies together, disturbed their clothing, and became enveloped in each other’s warmth, she gave another instruction.

“Now, please hold me tight.”

...Thinking back, we had gone a little overboard during our normal study sessions. Bad queen.

But he had awkwardly and hesitantly embraced her.

“Now the lips.”

Their lips had met.

“Um, is your...tongue ready?”

He had answered yes by sticking out his tongue. While they wrapped their tongues around each other, tugged, and licked each other’s tongues, she had realized something.

She was tasting him.

But had he understood that as well? Urgency filled his movements as he embraced her and hers as she pressed against him. Their movements filled the gaps in each other's skin and pressed them against each other.

"Um, more..."

She had not been drinking his blood, devouring his flesh, or chewing on his bones. They had been smelling him and pressing their skin together, rubbing their tongues across each other's mucous membranes and soft flesh, tightly embracing as they brought their bodies and minds together, and wiping away or licking up or even rubbing in their saliva and tears.

...And it was intoxicating.

Loup-Garous were nearly spirits, so they could control others through ether. It was a type of assimilation, so they would even obtain their prey's thoughts when eating them.

Those thoughts would be submission, fear, and futile resistance. Feeling those ensured their status and the joy of being devoured that some felt was the power and pride of being a predator.

But what if they did not eat the other person and instead wanted to be with them?

...Our thoughts, movements, and feelings all passed back and forth between us.

As she accepted his feelings, her own feelings reached him via the ether. Not only was it impossible to hide anything, but what he thought about her thoughts and her own thoughts inside him would return to her through the assimilation.

"..."

Simply remembering it was enough to make her shudder. The more they had thought, the more their thoughts had combined. She had lost track of who she was and simply felt good and happy as they intertwined.

"Now, please..."

He had done exactly what she wanted. The feeling would reach her and

circulated between them, so...

...I accepted him as if offering myself up to him.

He had been a different being from herself. She had wanted to be closer to him and his scent resembled hers, but he was definitely a different creature.

But as he had kissed her and attacked where she could not resist, she had spoken up.

“O-okay. Let’s try to go deep in there.”

She could now say they had done a little too much studying then, but that was because she was calmer now. At the time, they had both been very serious. She even had a faint memory of saying “three, two, one, go”, but she hoped she was imagining that one.

But that gathering of his flesh and scent had reached a place she was unable to see.

The empty part of her she could do nothing about was expanded and filled by that flesh and scent of his that she wanted more than anything else. As she had wetly wrapped around it, she had felt a strong pain.

“Ee!”

She had wondered if this was really okay, but had that been due to surprise, fear, or joy? Without finding the answer, his embrace had grown even stronger. Instead of simply bringing their lips together, they had started seeking each other to the point of exchanging breaths or kneading each other.

“ ... ”

The two of them had continued pushing or groping each other’s bodies yet never moving away from each other. As time went on, they fulfilled each other or were fulfilled countless times.

...But...

After remembering that much, the Reine des Garous sighed.

...My inexperience took that in an interesting direction.

After desiring each other for a while, the two of them had realized something about their condition.

First of all, they never grew tired.

She was a non-human royal, so she had predicted her own endurance, but he could also continue without end due to receiving her feelings and regenerative ability through the ether.

One could say he had received the protection of the Reine des Garous.

And on top of that...

...The regenerative ability of the Loup-Garou race kept trying to heal my "wound" right away.

To teach her body it was not a wound, they had needed to keep at it for a very, very long time to make a "mold" of his shape.

...We really did just keep doing that.

But he had been incredibly worried about her "wound".

"Um, are you okay? Should we stop?"

"No, no, no, no, no, no! I'm fine! Perfectly fine! I really am, so just a little longer!"

...Thinking back, if I was, then I could have stopped. Well, I can chalk that up to a discrepancy in our understanding of each other. Yes, that was it.

But as they brought their bodies together, those kinds of words had melted into warm thoughts and circulated between their hearts.

It had all been perfect for desiring each other without end.

For the first three days and three nights, they had continually desired each other and answered that desire while still standing.

She had started off offering herself to him, but because she was sharing her pain with him and receiving his feelings, she soon began to prioritize what she wanted. Worst of all, she was able to request whatever she wanted in the name of "teaching him".

"N-now, there. Work hard there and keep at it. Don't give in until I say it's

okay.”

“C-can you be more specific, Miss Loup-Garou? Make your instructions more specific.”

...How could he ask a girl to say something so embarrassing? ...I did tell him, though.

But to be absolutely sure she would not resist, they had only loosened the chains a little and they had remained standing while desiring each other, answering each other’s desires, begging for what they wanted, and responding to those requests.

On the fourth day, she had been relieved to find she still had no desire to resist. They had loosened the chains further so she could get down on her knees and elbows in front of the house. In that position, she could reach any part of his body with her lips and she could finally hold him in her arms.

That was when their mutual desire had truly begun.

Instead of only being on the receiving end, she could directly desire things, wrap around him, and bend her back to offer herself to him since the chains weighed down her arms and legs. She had also answered his desires when he cried out like a child or like he was crying.

She had wanted to pay him back for everything he had done over the past three days, so she had continued doing all sorts of things for him.

...It was wonderful that my mouth could reach.

She had sent out her tongue and licked over every single part of him. She had trembled as she felt his scent reach her nose from inside her mouth, on her tongue, and in the back of her throat. When she had made him stand with his back pressed up against the pillar and kneeled in front of him, her lips were at the perfect height to reach him.

She had done anything for him in the name of “teaching him”.

“To tame a Loup-Garou, you must stick your spear everywhere you can. And to keep a beast from biting, you can stick something in the back of their throat. That prevents them from closing the base of their jaw and... Well, just stay still.”

“H-huh? I feel like you gave up explaining partway through!”

...Again, why are you trying to make a girl explain all the details? ...I did explain them, though.

She had kissed him, used her tongue to guide him deep into her throat, and slowly moved her head forward and back while sucking and moving him back outside of her lips. She had also used the pressure of her lips to pull his scent from him and savor it. When he could no longer contain himself, she had taken her reward onto her tongue, the backs of her teeth, and the back of her throat before carefully swallowing it. She would also sometimes gently bite him with her back teeth. After repeating this again and again, a new thought had come to her.

...I'm glad I didn't eat him.

The flavor that soaked into her mouth, the back of her throat, her skin, and inside her body was the human flavor she had wanted so much.

If she ate him, it was over after the one time.

But by not eating him, she could continue to enjoy this flesh and this scent as she felt it thick on her tongue, sticky in her throat, and resilient against her teeth.

And it went beyond her mouth. She felt it in her skin, in her flesh, in the sensation of being touched, in the sensation of him pressing up against her, in being groped, in being pinched, and in being embraced.

She could stay with him forever because she had not eaten him.

And the grooming and regeneration of a bestial spirit was perfect for refreshing and preparing their bodies. Even after experiencing it countless times, it would quickly fade and leave them wanting more.

So they had both decided to keep going until the other was exhausted and they had continued for another three days and three nights. Only then did they finally remove the chains and fully remove their clothes.

“Now, can you take off my clothes? ...Oh, but you can do that without me telling you how, right?”

“Well, um... I’ve imagined doing it for so long.”

He had apologized, so she had no choice but to embrace him and whisper that she had too.



Newly exposing their naked bodies to each other had been embarrassing, but it was no longer a one-way situation of doing something or having something done. Once they had begun intertwining their bodies, there had been no stopping them. When she had taken his hand, he had pulled her hand to him. When she had moved her body in close, he had moved back toward her and deep inside her. When she had turned her back, he had embraced her and filled her up. Without saying a word, they had known exactly what the other wanted done and they had fulfilled those desires and had their own desires fulfilled.

The biggest change was that she could have him lick her now that she had removed her clothes. His wetness reached the places filled with her scent and he had licked all over every part of her, front and back. She had moved around at the ticklish feeling and done the same to him, but she had grown nearly intoxicated from having his scent washed all over her by his tongue and she had asked one thing. She had gotten on hands and knees in front of him, traced her tongue along him, and spoke.

“Now, will you cover me with your scent?”

She had wanted him to mark her, but he had hesitated. Once she had urged him on with her tongue and gaze, he had granted her desire. That was when she had nearly passed out. While she lay face down and trembling in the puddle of his scent, he had moved up behind her.

“U-um, to tame you, I have to drive my stake everywhere, right?”

“Eh?”

They could not allow a discrepancy in their understanding. She had raised her hips toward him, he had grabbed them, and to tame her, he had “driven his stake” into a place he had not yet done so. But...

“U-um, Miss Loup-Garou, this doesn’t seem to have tamed you at all!”

“W-work harder! Yes, work harder! The Far Eastern character for hard work is a combination of the characters for ‘woman’, ‘crotch’, and ‘strength’, so keeping this up will give you strength!”

...I really am stupid, aren't I?

But she had offered him every place she could accept him, received what he

gave her when he could not hold it in any longer, was covered by it, licked it up, and swallowed it. They had continued embracing and desiring each other without interruption for another three days and three nights.

...Yes, we really did. I even used my high-speed techniques to...um...be tamed. Yes, that's right. I was tamed at high speed.

But eventually, their bodies had begun to lose their strength. Thinking it was finally over, they had moved into the house while still embracing each other.

During this break, she had thought back on the past days and begun to realize just how horribly embarrassing everything they had done was.

But then...

“Ah.”

Right inside the front door, her weak feet had stumbled and she had fallen so her knees and breasts reached the floor. She had tried to get back up and managed to raise her knees, but her arms had been too weak. The next thing she knew...

“Eh?”

She was on the floor with her knees spread wide and her hips sticking up toward him behind her.

It was an embarrassing position and the way she had asked him to hold her up had been a mistake.

“Please.”

Their mutual understanding had failed, so he had come at her with even more desire than before. In truth, she really had cried several times. Because it was so good.

Her carelessness had led to an even more embarrassing time over the next three days and three nights. After the battle, the two of them had ended up collapsed on the floor in each other's arms. This time, she truly, truly had thought it was time for a ceasefire. Any more education would have definitely been wrong. Not that everything up until then had not been wrong. At any rate, she had not seen how it could get any worse.

But after she got up first, she had seen him next to her covered in sweat, gasping for breath, and red in the cheeks. She had found him incredibly cute and he was amazing no matter what he did.

He had looked up at her with teary eyes and reached out a hand as if asking for help.

“Please...”

A failure in their mutual understanding had suddenly filled her with even more desire than before. In truth, she really had almost cried several times. Because his reactions were so good.

She had been fairly certain that the “teaching him” excuse was still valid. Probably.

“Heh heh. How is it? C’mon, don’t hide your face. I’ll hold both your hands down if I have to. And – heh heh – tell me exactly how good it feels. ...Now, begin.”

She had made him say all sorts of things, but she had later “taught him” all sorts of things to balance it out.

...But even if our understanding could be a little off, our amazing compatibility was the real problem. Yes, that was the problem. A huge problem. And he didn’t help with what he said.

“Wh-what if a lost child shows up?”

...Of course that was going to fire me up even more.

They had continued for another three days and three nights on the floor, below the table, or next to the chairs. Their movements of desire had formed a slow crawl toward the neighboring room. She had decided that they would surely get some sleep once they were in the bedroom.

But she had been too naïve.

Another problem had arisen because the bedroom had a bookcase and it of course contained a health textbook.

“Y-you need to study before going to bed, don’t you!?”

“Eh? What is this acrobatic position? Can humans really do that? Wow!”

She had been unsure why he was so impressed.

Regardless, they had studied the book on the floor, had a hands-on lesson, and then went over it again just to be sure. They had confirmed their own techniques, blushed as they taught each other just what they should do when they were alone and thinking about the other, and then finally made it onto the bed.

She had exposed her defenseless stomach on the soft sheets, spread her thighs to receive him, had her knees lifted up from below, raised her own hips, looked down on him from above, and embraced him again.

She was no longer “teaching him”. They simply obeyed their circulating thoughts, spent a final three days and three nights as she accepted him in from above countless times, and finally fell gently to sleep while still embracing each other.

Although he had woken up five minutes later as he suffocated in her breasts.

Afterwards, they had slept like a log for three days straight, pecked at each other as they dozed, and repeatedly desired each other and answered the other’s desire to confirm they were there when they woke up.

Their connected and overlapping minds had shared a single thought from the moment they had begun until the very end: I never want to leave this person.

...Come to think of it, I’ve done just that here.

Remembering it all filled her heart with love instead of embarrassment.

She also remembered what had happened after they had woken from their excessive time together.

They had both gotten up, exchanged a glance, smiled, shared a meal, and played in the water together.

“Let’s go.”

He had then tugged on her hand.

He had been ready then. When seeing his thoughts, she had learned that he knew human society would never allow him to marry the Reine des Garous.

But he had made up his mind, so she had done the same.

“Yes, let’s go.”

She had taken his hand and she had wanted to go with him.

“And when my parents left the forest together...”

Mitotsudaira stopped at that point. Mary was slowly nodding off to her right.

...Was the story too boring?

But she also remembered the exhaustion from the day.

“Ma-yan must be tired after all the healing and other stuff she did. From what I saw, she fell asleep around the time your mom tied herself up with the chains.”

That would explain why she had never been asked for details about her parents joining together. Tenzou would probably have some difficulties concerning that at some point, but it was not her problem. For now, she supported Mary’s head with her shoulder, but...

...H-her breasts are pressing against my right elbow!!

She felt some fresh surprise at realizing what it felt like with someone who actually had something there, but she managed to support the girl. Naito opened a new Magie Figur and moved the meter down to zero before speaking.

“Now, get on with the story.”

“Margot, you really like this kind of story, don’t you?”

“It’s called having taste,” she said with a smile and a wave of her bandaged right hand.

But Mitotsudaira raised one corner of her mouth in a smile of her own.

“I say that, but I don’t really know much more. No one would approach my parents after they left the forest and his friend went to Paris where her brother

lived. But my parents lived a fulfilling life and they eventually realized my mother was pregnant with me. And..."

"And?"

"Paris...that is, Hexagone Française's central academy, École de Paris, summoned my parents. They thought the time had finally come to be punished for what they had done, but when they got there..."

She had a feeling they had always be vague about this part of the story.

"According to them, they were given a plea to spare some people's lives. It had been sent by the classmates and feudal lords who had plotted against my father. They traveled to Paris and they gave their swords to my parents."

"They...kept their promise?"

"A lot must have happened, but they had the blood of knights in their veins and they had promised to serve my father if he defeated my mother. He had made her his wife, so they kept their promise and my parents have been protected by them ever since."

Mitotsudaira smiled bitterly.

"And my parents were forgiven. Based on what my mother said, it must have been in exchange for becoming vice chancellor as the Reine des Garous once Louis Exiv took his inherited name. That allowed her to give birth to me in Paris, hide her identity, claim to have ruled a different land, and yet continue to protect this forest. But..."

At that point, she realized something.

"That sickly girl who was my father's local friend was probably the same one who judged them in Paris."

She was...

"Anne of Austria. ...Louis Exiv's younger sister by birth and his mother by inherited name."

"She's rumored to be in Magdeburg now, right?"

“Judge.” Mitotsudaira nodded and stared into the darkness ahead of her. “She was probably sent to this spirit-filled forest for a restful lifestyle to help with her incurable illness. Her brother Exiv’s abilities were recognized, but the Testament Union’s interference forced her to take the position of provisional chancellor and Student Council president. To her, the Reine des Garous that her local friend had taken as a wife had to have been a reliable existence.”

“Mito-tsan, I’ll erase that last part from the recording.”

Only then did she notice the sharpness of her words.

“Sorry,” she said with a light bow. “From my parents’ perspective, she’s the one that brought them together and then allowed them to remain together.”

“Without her, you never would’ve been born.”

The thought of her own birth got her thinking, but as she thought, she began to wonder what was wrong with her mother for telling her that sexual story when she was so young. She had a feeling she had seen her mother telling it while wiggling back and forth with her hands on her cheeks about once every three days.

She also remembered her mother rejoicing when she copied that action, but she stopped herself because she had a feeling that remembering any more would lead to a fatal dose of painful memories.

...But I really do owe my life to a lot of different people.

“Then again, I guess the reason my mother is my enemy now is so she can pay back the debt made before I was born and right after I was born.”

“Oh, Mito-tsan, you’re so cool.”

She had recovered enough to reply with “I am a knight, after all.”

...But that’s thanks to the others.

She had still not fully recovered, but she was not wrong to think that.

“How about we get some sleep? I’m sure we’ll be moving before the sun is up tomorrow morning.”

“What about Ma-yan?”

“You can just leave her next to me.”

I sure have gotten lenient, she thought while supporting the girl’s back and lying down.

She managed to get both her and Mary lying on the slope.

“Nn.”

But Mary fell toward her and gently clung to her.

Eh? she thought, but Mary’s arms were already wrapped around her back and chest and were even approaching her waist. The girl’s head and floral-smelling hair rested on her chest and held her in place.

“Nnn...”

...Ehh!? Does she like to hold something when she sleeps!?

“Wait, um... Margot! Why are you recording this!?”

“Tenzou! Tenzou! Is she like this with you too!?”

“W-well, I’m always on the top bunk, so...”

Mitotsudaira and Margot exchanged a serious glance.

“Mito-tsan, why don’t we take a major step in your father’s footsteps and teach her some things here?”

“No matter how I look at this, I have to agree with you.”

“Y-you two don’t understand the beauty of conflicting feelings, do you!?”

As they argued back and forth, Mitotsudaira placed her chin on Mary’s head.

Since Mary had not said anything more, she could assume the chancellor was still safe.

...But what are he and my mother doing right now?

After telling her long story and taking a break, the Reine des Garous looked to the boy who was embracing her left arm.

He was asleep. He was curled up next to her and gently breathing.

...Honestly, how defenseless can you be?

This was not a kind place where she would not eat him simply because he did not oppose her, but...

...He really is entrusting everything to me.

This was just like a child feeling safe in his parent's arms and falling asleep. He was lost in the relief of leaving his safety up to someone else. And if he was doing that, she could do whatever she wanted. Thinking this would be her last chance, she opened her mouth and brought her lips to his forehead.

"...?"

She smelled something there. She smelled the nostalgic scent of her daughter, the scent of bread, the scent of the incense used at Shinto shrines, a dog-like scent, and...

...Oh?

Curious, she licked him and detected a flavor rising from her tongue to her nose.

...This is...?

She knew it but at the same time did not. Frustrated, she licked him a second and third time to check.

But she really could not place the flavor.

Whatever it was, it was saying "I'm here". She did not know what was saying "I'm here", but she had a feeling the words "I'm here" could describe this boy. Wanting to know what it was, she prepared to move from licking to just about sucking on him, but...

"..."

She suddenly remembered something she had forgotten for a long, long time.

"It can't be."

At the same time, a *Signe Cadre* appeared next to her face. It was a Catholic type, but...

"Hm? Didn't I temporarily block any from the Student Council or chancellor's

officers?”

She checked and saw this one was not from either group. It had arrived via her home, so her husband had forwarded it to her and it was originally from...

“Anne, of course.”

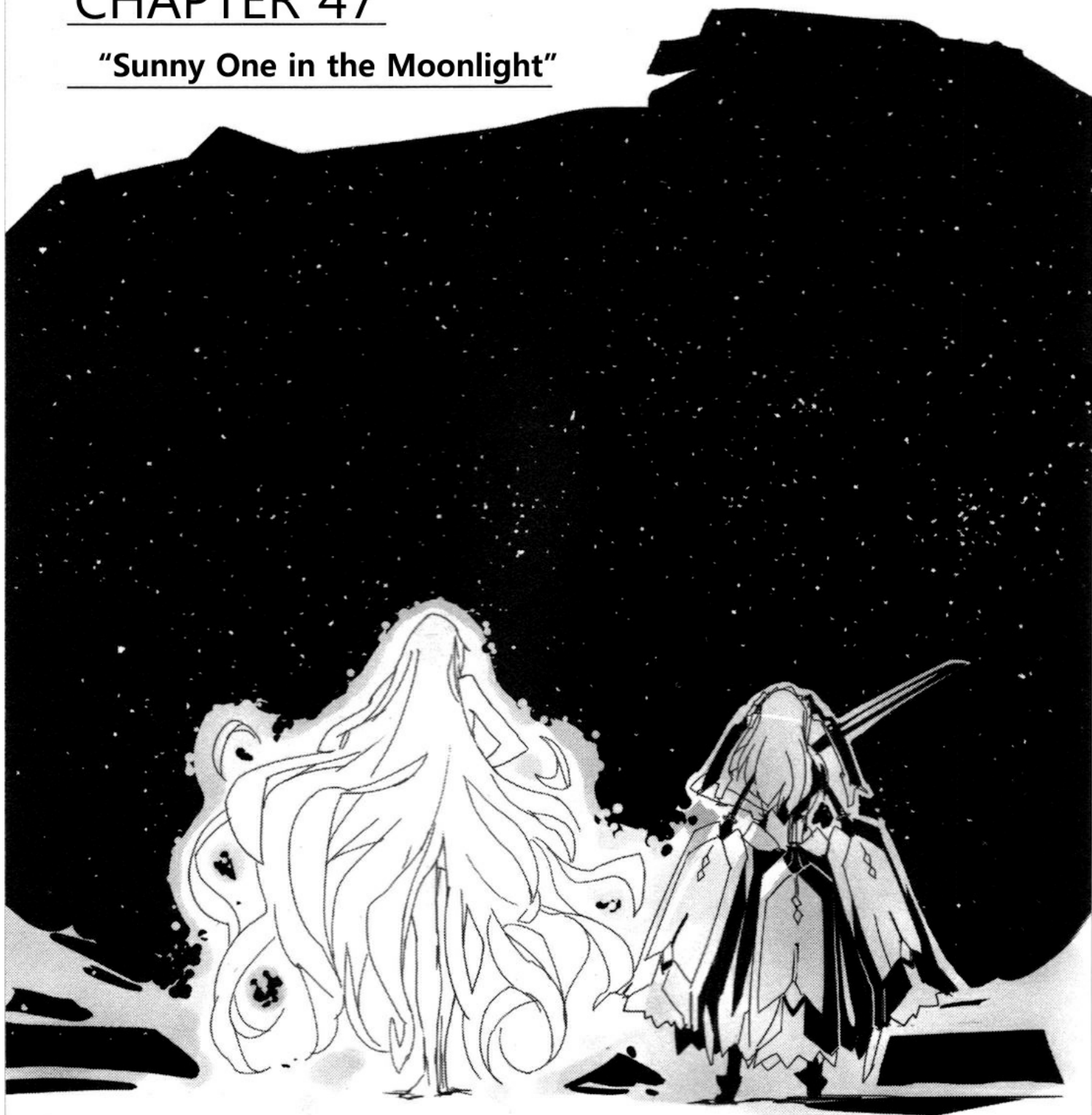
She looked to the boy next to her.

“My. Does everyone find this boy to be that important?”

Chapter 47: Sunny One in the Moonlight

CHAPTER 47

"Sunny One in the Moonlight"



When do you hope it goes well
But would honestly be annoyed if it did?
Point Allocation (Surprise Attack)

When do you hope it goes well

But would honestly be annoyed if it did?

Point Allocation (Surprise Attack)

The starlight shined on the clouds in the night sky and several shadows floated between those clouds.

They were ships bearing the national emblem of Hexagone Française and the academy emblem of Ecole de Paris. They sat motionlessly in the air with the floating city of IZUMO below and an especially large white ship in the center.

That was Hexagone Française's flagship Pension Versailles.

The *Belle de Marionnettes* and people on its front deck were silently watching the surrounding sky.

A single light in the center of the deck supported them all.

That light was Louis Exiv.

Powerful light and flares wrapped around his body as he crossed his arms and faced east. His eyes were turned toward the Musashi visible in the distance. In the starlight, the Musashi looked like a floating mountain range and Exiv's eyebrows were slightly raised.

"Do you think Luynes is handling this in her usual way, Terumoto?"

"What? You noticed me? And here I thought I could sneak up behind you and put some clothes over your back."

"Heh. Of course I noticed, Terumoto. There is nothing about your presence I won't notice."

"Oh, an opening."

Exiv collapsed to the deck from a sudden wooden sword to the butt.

"What? You didn't notice that? You're hopeless."

Terumoto kicked Exiv's collapsed form while holding a non-tobacco herb

kiseru in the corner of her mouth.

Her foot audibly struck his flesh and he let out a shriek, but she paid it no heed, crossed her arms, and puffed out her chest. Before long, he slowly stood up in front of her and turned to face her.

“Heh. T-Terumoto... I would like to have a calm chat with you.”

“Not now, dick boy. I’m busy, so it’ll have to wait. For now, you can randomly reply to or give your thoughts on what I’m going to say. I’m only out here for a change of pace and some fresh air.”

“Oh? Has the Artemis of Ecole de Paris been so busy studying that her frustration has been building up?”

“I can’t help it. I made a promise to Anne.”

“Oh, you mean finding people to inherit the names of all my mistresses?”

“Don’t say it.”

She swung her wooden sword and Exiv got up on his tip-toes in a shallow V-shape to dodge it. He gave another “heh” and brushed up his hair, but he suddenly stopped and took a defensive stance.

“Oh? Terumoto? What has you so fired up? Why are you wielding that with both hands?”

“All you have to do is stay still.”

She slowly moved in closer and he slowly backed away.

“Did Mouri-01 and the others fail down below?” she asked.

“Testament. They showed a willingness to destroy the spirits’ forest to complete their mission. I believe that was more than enough to provide a warning to M.H.R.R. After all, they had likely thought my warriors would be too afraid of the spirits to fight in the forest. ...Mouri-01’s group did well.”

“If it will force M.H.R.R. to rethink their front line, then it was worth it. But what about the Reine des Garous and Musashi’s chancellor and student council president?”

“That’s the question.” Exiv crossed his arms and brought a hand to his chin.

“She has yet to do anything. She seems to have taken a liking to the boy. ...We need to thank Luynes and Anne.”

“The only ones she’ll listen to are her husband and Anne. Her husband isn’t interfering, so that leaves Anne. ...It’s a good thing Musashi went to M.H.R.R. They were able to relay our communications to Anne in Magdeburg. Will the Reine des Garous be starting her new mission with the Musashi Chancellor rescue team tomorrow?”

“Heh. We’ll be in trouble if she doesn’t. After all... Now, listen.”

“Stop acting so self-important.”

With a snap of the wrist, the back of her wooden sword shot up into Exiv’s crotch like a scythe. All of the surrounding men shrieked and drew back while Exiv swayed but kept his feet.

“A-a king never falls! I will bend my knee to no one, Terumoto!”

“You’re no fun. Now, get to the point.”

“Heh. Y-yes. First, um...”

His legs were turned somewhat inward as he pointed east with his thumb.

“Magdeburg will be a battlefield by the day after tomorrow. And...”

His thumb turned to point south.

“Word just came in from the southern division. M.H.R.R.’s Catholics and Hashiba’s southern warriors are preparing for battle on the eastern border of K.P.A. Italia.”

“You mean...?”

“Testament. M.H.R.R...no, Hashiba is finally beginning their battle to settle things with K.P.A. Italia. It will be a short battle based on the history recreation of a Far Eastern naval battle. Our main force is deployed here at IZUMO in the north, so it’s the perfect opportunity for the M.H.R.R. Catholics and Hashiba. The M.H.R.R. Catholics probably want to win this battle and then move on to Magdeburg the day after tomorrow,” he explained. “But it can’t be easy. With Magdeburg and K.P.A. Italia, M.H.R.R. has two upcoming battles. That means all of M.H.R.R. will be fighting. Meanwhile, Musashi’s chancellor has to reach

Magdeburg through it all.”

“Well, he’ll be fine if the Reine des Garous’s with him. Do you think Musashi will send an ‘additional rescue team’?”

“Heh. I doubt it.”

She struck him and clicked her tongue as he began to collapse.

“Don’t act so full of yourself when it involves us. ...C’mon, give me your reasoning.”

“Heh...heh heh... W-well, you see, the Reine des Garous will be the one to choose their route and there is no chance of anything standing in their way when they have her with them. In fact, I doubt the Reine des Garous herself will feel any need for us to send assistance either.”

“You sure are useless compared to some beast.”

“A king needs enough leeway to let a beast do as she pleases. But anyway...”

He crossed his arms and looked across the sky from east to south.

“After the Sack of Magdeburg, the battle over K.P.A. Italia finally begins.”

Terumoto sensed some discouragement in Exiv’s voice.

...He’s worried about Anne’s lifespan.

Both Exiv and Anne had divine blood, so they had long lives, although not as long as the long-lived race.

From what she had heard, Exiv had grown slowly when he was young and had only grown to what he was now in the last few years. If his family was anything to go by, his lifespan would be no different from a normal person’s from here on.

Anne on the other hand had grown quickly when young, but her growth had stopped at the age of fourteen or fifteen. The divine blood had shown itself in her more.

...But that didn’t mix well with her human side.

As a god, she did not belong in this world and her body had started to disappear.

Based on what Terumoto had heard, Anne was something halfway between ghost and human. She would trip getting out of bed because her feet would disappear, but when she looked, her feet would be there. But...

“She’s family, so you want to see her, don’t you?”

“Heh. I have you, Terumoto. And I have plenty of retainers. My sister only left because she knew that.”

“Is acting tough, a king’s primary job?”

Exiv gave her a look with the corner of his mouth slightly lifted, but that was all. His expression quickly returned to normal and he looked to the east.

“Terumoto, you are looking for someone too, aren’t you? The previous bearer of Mouri-01’s inherited name. That Mouri Motokiyo left Mouri when he was unable to bear the weight of that name.”

Masazumi asked a question as she took Mazarin to the diplomat lodgings on Tama’s surface.

“She’s looking for someone?”

Past ten at night, the surface’s wide blocks and long blocks had closed their movable barriers and shut their doors. Masazumi and Mazarin were speaking while Naruze went to the police box in charge of those barriers and doors.

Asama accompanied them and she tilted her head.

“The previous Mouri Motokiyo?”

Guericke had returned to his own ship, so Mazarin was alone and she nodded expressionlessly.

“Testament. He was one year older than Lady Terumoto and it was apparently after seeing him inherit the name of Mouri Motokiyo that she decided to inherit the name of Terumoto. I hear he really was her uncle or something.”

“But didn’t one of your automatons inherit the Motokiyo name?”

That information was in the almanac, but Mazarin shook her head with a troubled look.

“Not originally. You see, he ran away.”

“Yeah, an inherited name is a source of pressure.”

...Come to think of it, I don't have that stress since I never inherited my name.

She knew being an Hexagone Française leader like Mazarin had to be really stressful and it had to have been for Motokiyo as well.

“According to the Mouri clan, he ran away shortly before entering elementary school.”

“That was fast.”

“Testament. But he had his reasons. At the time, the Mouri clan and Hexagone Française were exchanging inherited names and VIP hostages, but a certain individual's inherited name became a problem.”

“May I ask who that was?”

“Testament,” replied Mazarin. She looked around and made sure no one else was around. “It was Louis XIV's half-brother, Eustache Dager. According to the history from the Age of the Gods, he was not a child of the king's wife, Lady Anne of Austria, so Louis XIV was above him in the line of succession. However, he was still a man who could easily shake Louis XIV's reign.”

“Lord Motokiyo was to become your aide, so the Mouri clan tried to give him the name of my half-brother Eustache Dager as a double inherited name.”

Exiv crossed his arms even more as he spoke quickly.

“They were trying to assist Hexagone Française by keeping that threat to my rule away from anyone with connections inside Hexagone Française itself.”

“Judge.” Terumoto nodded and shrugged. “That's right. Even if he tried to rebel against Hexagone Française, the people of Mouri wouldn't go along with it. It was a strategic inherited name.”

She paused.

“But my uncle ran away. ...Although back then I thought of him more like a brother.”

“Heh. It wouldn’t bother me even if you said he was like a lover.”

“I feel like pointing out that makes it sounds as if you think my past is meaningless.”

She smiled bitterly, placed the tip of her wooden sword on the deck, and wrapped her hands around the bottom of the hilt.

“Well, I doubt we’ll ever find him. If he’s still alive, he’d be eighteen now.”

“Eighteen?”

That question came from Asama who was managing Mazarin’s divine transmission settings next to Masazumi.

Masazumi turned around and found Asama frowning.

“Um... But didn’t you say Lady Terumoto was a year younger than him?”

“Testament. She is in her second year of high school.”

Masazumi and Asama exchanged a glance.

Asama: “To choose my words carefully...Lady Terumoto is very mature for her age.”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh. Well, she probably is already trying to create some descendants.”

Mal-Ga: “Could you not make those jokes while I’m working?”

I can agree with that, thought Masazumi before asking a question.

“Cardinal Mazarin, we will help in any way we can. ...Can you give us anything more-ri about Mouri Motokiyo we could use to identify him?”

Mal-Ga: “Oh, sorry, Masazumi. I actually laughed at that one a little. Sorry, sorry.”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh. Why are you laughing at Masazumi’s jokes? You need to apologize a lot more than that.”

Vice President: “I didn’t mean that one! It just slipped out, okay!? Dammit, this pisses me off!”

She felt like this day had helped her get used to expressionlessly typing in protests. And with that thought, she spoke to Mazarin.

“If Musashi ever comes across someone like that, we’d like to report it.”

Naruze ran back with her hand in the air to say the police box had okayed their passage. Seeing that, Masazumi asked Mazarin’s Mouse form a question.

“What are his identifying features?”

“Testament. Very well. According to what Lady Terumoto has said...”

Mazarin described Motokiyo for them.

“Even as a child, he was very tall and had a macho build. And since he’s on the run, he would probably be wearing a mask or something to hide his face.”

All of them froze in place.

Masazumi maintained her expressionless look.

She looked to the side and Asama nodded expressionlessly back at her.

Asama: “Our class really is nothing but influential people and idiots, isn’t it?”

Vice President: “I-it’s too soon! It’s too soon to say that! We still don’t know it’s really him!”

Mal-Ga: “Isn’t it more than halfway confirmed?”

Anyway, thought Masazumi as she forced a smile and asked Mazarin something else.

“What if someone like that was already on the Musashi?”

“Oh? Is there someone?”

You have to know who I mean, she thought. After all, video footage of Musashi’s battles had been transmitted over the divine network several times.

But they would not want to forcibly interfere here, so Masazumi slowly shook her head.

“No, I just meant in the off chance. Yes, if – hypothetically – that were the case, what would happen?”

“Well,” Mazarin brought a hand to her mouth in thought. “I believe we have spoken with Musashi’s previous student councils about this on a few occasions in the past. I have determined we could claim you were hiding him from us and use it against you in negotiations.”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh. That settles it! It does! I bet this was all a setup!”

...Stop pouring on the pressure.

Masazumi said nothing, so Mazarin shrugged.

“Of course, that is just my personal idea. Yes, I was only joking. Ha ha ha ha.”

That final laugh was made completely expressionlessly.

...She isn’t joking. She’s completely serious.

Masazumi nodded and laughed too. She saw Naruze gesturing instructions to the person in charge of opening and closing the barrier.

“Ha ha. A joke. Of course, of course. A joke. Ha ha ha ha ha ha.”

“Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha.”

“Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha.”

As the movable barrier opened, a group including Persona-kun and Ohiroshiki appeared on the other side.

“...!?”

Asama had moved to Masazumi’s side, so she had an excellent view of the girl’s surprised look.

...Masazumi really has gotten good at her visual reactions lately.

Mazarin was looking at Masazumi, so she had yet to notice Persona-kun’s group. However, she had noticed the wind produced by the opening barrier.

“Oh? Is the barrier opening?”

Naruze threw as many acceleration spells onto the barrier as she could

manage and it slammed closed.

With a great roar, the hatch sealed shut in front of Mazarin. As the metallic sound reverberated through the air, Masazumi tapped the Mouse's shoulder to turn her around and pointed to the neighboring wide block.

"C'mon. This door is acting up, so...um...let's go this way."

"Eh? R-really?"

Just as Mazarin looked back at the barrier hatch, the impact of slamming shut caused it to bounce back open. Naruze, the one who had added on so many acceleration spells, scratched at her head.

"Oh, crap. I didn't think this through at all."

Mal-Ga: "Don't be too hard on me☆."

Wise Sister: "So you're saying you want us to be gentle!? You are, aren't you!? Oh, what a dirty girl!!"

Asama: "P-please don't sully my divine network! And the door!"

As Asama watched, Jizuri Suzaku suddenly fell from the sky and forced the door shut. The landing and closing caused two additional loud noises and shook the floor.

Naomasa sighed from the god of war's shoulder and Asama glared up at her.

...Can we really say that settles it?

Next, Ohiroshiki's voice came from the other side of the door.

"Wh-what are you people doing!? We were out working on Tama's repairs, so we're on our way to a late-night bathhouse!"

"Yeah?" said Naomasa. "Well, this road's closed. Find another way."

"Ah, y-you tyrant! You large-breasted women are all such tyrants! You take up too much space! And when people try to move you out of the way, you say they're molesting you! And in accordance with my faith, I don't even want to touch you in the first place!"

"Shut up! Go eat some rotten fried rice, get diarrhea, and get too sick to leave bed!!"

“What, what!? Th-that was oddly specific!”

...Why do we attack each other like this?

As Asama wondered that, Masazumi crouched down and tapped Mazarin’s shoulder.

“U-um, it seems this road is closed. So, uh, let’s go over there and, uh, talk more about Lord Motokiyo.”

“Eh? Oh, Testament. The thing about him is...”

Masazumi nodded repeatedly to urge her on and the Mouse pointed at her own back.

“Lady Terumoto thinks he has a tattoo on his back. When she and her group were in a confrontation against a group of local children, Lord Motokiyo saved her.”

Mazarin shrugged.

“He was apparently badly injured in the process and he got a dragon emblem on the back that protected her. She suspects the tattoo provided some kind of divine protection. I have determined that would be the best way to identify him.”

Mal-Ga: “Huh? So it isn’t him? Persona-kun’s skin doesn’t have a mark on it.”

Asama: “It isn’t a manga-style tattoo that only appears during battle, is it?”

Uqui: “I have never seen anything like that during our past battles.”

“In that case...”

Asama snapped her fingers and Jizuri Suzaku opened the door.

“Oh?”

Mazarin tilted her head and looked to the group walking through with bathhouse bucket sets. The boys all looked to the girls and Jizuri Suzaku.

“Did you see that!? Did you!? There was no good reason to keep me from going to the bathhouse to enjoy having only a single wall between me and the little girls! You and your stupid breasts!”

“Shut up! Do you want me to have you arrested!? I will!!” shouted back Naomasa.

“We all understand that, but you can say it anyway.”

“Anyway, Nenji-kun! A bath after a day of hard work truly is the best! It always makes me feel like I’m melting away!”

“Indeed it does. I always nearly end up sucked down the drain.”

“Tonight will be a curry bath!”

...What an overwhelming bother.

Regardless, Asama, Masazumi, and Mazarin nodded toward that group as they passed. But after a while, a boy with a macho build and a bucket helmet walked past. It was Persona-kun.

“...”

When he noticed them, he placed his hands on his thighs, gave a shallow bow, and continued after the others.

There was no longer anything to worry about, so Asama waved.

“May I...suspect you a little over that one?” asked Mazarin.

“No, no, no.” Asama frantically shook her hand and head. “I-it isn’t him. It really isn’t. For one, his name isn’t Lord Motokiyo. It’s Persona-kun. Yes, and I think the ‘-kun’ is part of his name. And look. There’s nothing on his back.”

“True,” said Mazarin.

Asama also turned around to check and saw nothing on Persona-kun’s back. As they watched him walk away at a natural pace, Mazarin tilted her head.

“It is strange how some people can look so alike, but it does happen.”

Asama had a feeling that was the wrong way of looking at this in a number of ways, but she decided not to worry about it.

...He does wear the helmet, though.

The sky was dyed deeply in the colors of night and the stars were growing bright. Dawn was approaching.

Terumoto laughed bitterly into the night air as she read the *signe cadre* from Mazarin.

“So it really wasn’t him. It seems a bit hard to say it isn’t, though. Will I eventually find him? ...Or would it better if I didn’t?”

“Why would that be?” asked Exiv.

She closed the *signe cadre*, closed her eyes, and nodded.

“If I never find him, I can continue thinking he’s living his life somewhere else.”

“Heh. I adore how reserved you are about what truly matters to you.”

“Oh? Is that so?”

She took a breath and rested her wooden sword on her shoulder.

“Is our tryst over already?” he asked.

“I’ve seen enough of your face for now.”

“Heh. Then you should be fine.”

What does that mean and why is he so confident? she wondered with a bitter smile. *But I am thankful for him.*

At that point, a single *Belle de Marionnette* ran up to them.

Terumoto and Exiv both stiffened.

...Nothing good is ever reported directly instead of by signe cadre.

“I have a report!”

The *Belle de Marionnette* maid covered the long deck in three steps, stopped without sliding, and gently kneeled before them. She then spoke with a directional voice that only Terumoto and Exiv could hear.

“A report just came in from our southern warriors.”

“And?” asked Exiv.

The *Belle de Marionnette* nodded.

“M.H.R.R. and Hashiba’s southern warriors have begun their attack on K.P.A. Italia west of Bizen.”

After a pause, she continued.

“M.H.R.R. and Hashiba’s forces have begun an inter-academy dispute with Aki and K.P.A. Italia’s forces!”

Study:

● Witch Hunt ●



"Sis! Sis! Wait! Wait, wait! We're talking about a p-p-p-p-p-p-porn game plot this time!! I'm so excited!"



"Heh heh heh. Excited brother, this topic has come up a bit already, but let's dive right in for a closer look.

...Originally, there were a lot of witches in Europe. They used folk remedies, made weather predictions, and had other techniques that differed from those of the church or the specialists, so their special abilities were labelled as "magic".

In a broad sense, everything from music, art, and architecture were originally treated like "magic". They were just eventually absorbed by the church and viewed as god's presence in the world.

During the middle ages, their presence was accepted. But some of them did bad things with their techniques in certain regions, so laws were made to judge them. However, those were official witch trials that were no different from normal ones."



"Witches sure are plain... But how did those trials end up as those exciting ones that pretty much hunted them down?"



"As I said, that kind of "magic" had always existed in Europe, but after the middle ages, repeated wars left the world in chaos.

It wasn't uncommon for former mercenaries to become bandits and attack villages. There was also the fear of wolves and wild dogs, famine and starvation, and even disease once the black plague started up. But the people didn't know how to deal with all this and they couldn't exchange information easily.

After wolves, disease, and famine brought despair and unease, the people began to think it was all caused by someone who rejoiced in their unhappiness. They thought god wasn't answering their prayers because someone was interfering."



"Sounds like the group psychology of people with nowhere left to turn..."



"At that stage of civilization, no real communication methods had been developed, so the villages and towns were generally isolated from the rest of the world.

...But as this went on, they decided a "suspicious witch" would be their scapegoat and made use of the inquisition that the church had long used to deal with heretics."



"In other words, they got the help of the inquisition to judge people who seemed "witch-like" with no evidence whatsoever?"



"Exactly. The rest is simple. The different inquisitions heard the appeals of the other inquisitions and – while they still kept the form of the witch trial – they used the rules of the inquisition to execute the witches who had "turned their backs on the teachings of god"."



"Weren't the Protestants also called heretics? So were the witches a victim of their own "reformation"?"



"The Protestants weren't the only kind of heretic. But unlike the relatively peaceful regional witch trials, the inquisition rules introduced executions. That shift began in the fifteenth century when Protestantism began to grow. And about forty thousand "witches" were executed across Europe due to it.

It's easy to think the witch hunts were a Catholic thing since it came from the inquisition rules, but influential people held the same kind of trials in Protestant areas."



"Huh? Could they do that without the church?"



"They were executing "witches", not heretics. Influential people were free to judge them to gain popularity among the people. But that's why the witch trials actually happened everywhere, regardless of nation or religion.

In unstable areas, zealous feudal lords or judges would decide to have them executed, but it would cool off quickly after the judge or feudal lord died. In other words, it comes down to people getting desperate in difficult situations with a society that didn't allow them a lot of information."



"Hmm... I can't exactly make a joke about this. What am I supposed to do now?"



"It would be best if you just stayed quiet."

Witch Hunt

Toori: Sis! Sis! Wait! Wait, wait! We're talking about a p-p-p-p-p-p-p-porn game plot this time!! I'm so excited!

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In a broad sense, everything from music, art, and architecture were originally treated like "magic". They were just eventually absorbed by the church and viewed as god's presence in the world.

During the middle ages, their presence was accepted. But some of them did bad things with their techniques in certain regions, so laws were made to judge them. However, those were official witch trials that were no different from normal ones.

Toori: Witches sure are plain. But how did those trials end up as those exciting ones that pretty much hunted them down?

Kimi: As I said, that kind of "magic" had always existed in Europe, but after the middle ages, repeated wars left the world in chaos.

It wasn't uncommon for former mercenaries to become bandits and attack villages. There was also the fear of wolves and wild dogs, famine and starvation, and even disease once the black plague started up. But the people didn't know how to deal with all this and they couldn't exchange information easily.

After wolves, disease, and famine brought despair and unease, the people began to think it was all caused by someone who rejoiced in their unhappiness. They thought god wasn't answering their prayers because someone was interfering.

Toori: Sounds like the group psychology of people with nowhere left to turn.

Kimi: At that stage of civilization, no real communication methods had been developed, so the villages and towns were generally isolated from the rest of the world.

But as this went on, they decided a “suspicious witch” would be their scapegoat and made use of the inquisition that the church had long used to deal with heretics.

Toori: In other words, they got the help of the inquisition to judge people who seemed “witch-like” with no evidence whatsoever?

Kimi: Exactly. The rest is simple. The different inquisitions heard the appeals of the other inquisitions and – while they still kept the form of the witch trial – they used the rules of the inquisition to execute the witches who had “turned their backs on the teachings of god”.

Toori: Weren't the Protestants also called heretics? So were the witches a victim of their own “reformation”?

Kimi: The Protestants weren't the only kind of heretic. But unlike the relatively peaceful regional witch trials, the inquisition rules introduced executions. That shift began in the fifteenth century when Protestantism began to grow. And about forty thousand “witches” were executed across Europe due to it.

It's easy to think the witch hunts were a Catholic thing since it came from the inquisition rules, but influential people held the same kind of trials in Protestant areas.

Toori: Huh? Could they do that without the church?

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In unstable areas, zealous feudal lords or judges would decide to have them executed, but it would cool off quickly after the judge or feudal lord died. In other words, it comes down to people getting desperate in difficult situations with a society that didn’t allow them a lot of information.

Toori: Hmm. I can’t exactly make a joke about this. What am I supposed to do now?

Kimi: It would be best if you just stayed quiet.

Chapter 48: Sponsor of the Battlefield

CHAPTER 48

"Sponsor of the Battlefield"



What shows up
Without an invitation?
Point Allocation (Damage)

What shows up

Without an invitation?

Point Allocation (Damage)

“Well, then. I didn’t expect to be on the front line the second I showed up.”

A man in an M.H.R.R. uniform brought a hand to his forehead and sighed on a vast area of land covered in the darkness of the night. He faced west and had a row of several thousand mobile shells behind him. They were all armed with guns and swords and the accelerators on their shoulders and backs were already open.

A *lernen figur* appeared near his face. It displayed a young ghost in a red M.H.R.R. uniform. He had a small feminine ghost on his shoulder.

“Matthias, sorry about all this. After you give the command to begin, you can return to the ship and get some sleep.”

“Sleep,” added the small ghost.

“And yet I would go die if I was told to, just like you were.”

“Matthias, we have applied for you to be given the inherited name of Ukita Hideie. He takes part in the Battle of Sekigahara and lives the longest of all of us. Keep that in mind.”

“Thank you for your consideration, Maeda. How is Sassa?”

“He’s gone on to his next destination. Oh, and he took the edamame you left for him and asked me to pass on his thanks.”

“He can be so wonderfully dashing. ...But anyway, I guess I should do my job as M.H.R.R. student council president.”

Matthias smiled bitterly and faced forward.

He stood in a one kilometer square area with a stepped hill to the south and a forest to the north.

To the west, an old-style aerial ship was placed as a barricade and students were lined in the same equipment as the ones behind him. He glanced at them

in their K.P.A. Italia uniforms and mobile shells.

“Maeda, are they part of your army?”

“No, they are primarily composed of the Kriegs Georgern and the Murakami clan’s warriors. The Murakami clan contains a lot of the remnants of the Kitabatake clan we crushed before, so they have a lot of swordfighters. Be careful.”

“If you tell me to be careful, I guess I’ll have to.”

Matthias sighed.

He pulled a knife from his pocket and began casually filing down his nails, but a stir ran through the enemy in front of him.

...It’s not like I’m going to attack you with this.

I am thankful you fear me though, he added while bringing up a map of the area on the *lernen figur* next to him.

...Looking at this, the Seto Inland Corridor is going to be difficult to attack.

He acted like it was someone else’s problem, but he was indeed leaving the entire strategy to someone else.

He was aware none of this belonged to him.

He always left everything to someone else.

I belong to someone else, thought Matthias.

But he also felt that leaving everything to others made his own life easier.

Even if a strategy failed or he made some political mistake, he was only a puppet and did not need to worry about it. People might attack him, but it did not hurt him any as long as he knew he was a puppet. On the other hand, when things went well, people would praise him, even if only for show. The trick was to pray that everything would go well but not to expect it to.

...That’s right.

He finished filing down his nails and returned the knife to his pocket. The

enemy put their guard up again, but he did not care. What came next was none of his concern.

The others would be travelling down a K.P.A. Italia path named the Seto Inland Corridor. It was a long coastal path that followed the Seto Inland Sea from eastern Bizen to K.P.A. Italia's Aki in the west.

...It's about two hundred kilometers long. It's almost entirely straight and most of it is flat as it's on the coast.

As long as their supply line was not cut off, the mobile shell warriors could cover it in half a day.

However, the corridor was a flat area only about three to five kilometers wide and...

...Hexagone Française is directly to the north.

The flat, clear area would leave them defenseless to their enemy's attacks. With Hexagone Française to the north, any careless evasion into that territory could set some political conflict in motion.

"And..."

Countless shadows were visible in the western sky of K.P.A. Italia.

That was K.P.A. Italia's aerial fleet.

It was led by the Murakami clan which had started out as pirates on the Seto Inland Sea and it had received support from Tres España. They were familiar with the sky along the coast of the inland sea and they would mercilessly attack any ground forces attempting to travel along the corridor.

"They're only at most light Dragon class, but there are six hundred of them. They use conflagration spells to quickly burn and sink any ships that attack. And for ground forces, they carpet bomb them with their cannons."

Meanwhile, M.H.R.R.'s principalities were highly independent, so they had little naval or god of war power because those required large-scale factories. Gods of war also required regular supplies and maintenance, so they would have trouble invading a corridor that left one exposed to constant attack. P.A. Oda was equally weak as far as gods of war were concerned, but...

“P.A. Oda and the Oda clan have lots of cool aerial ships. Most notably, they have the true enemy of the Murakami Navy.”

Matthias snapped his fingers.

“The iron-clad ships have been further improved after their use in the Battle of Lepanto. Even in the original history, Murakami had a lot of trouble with those.”

As if to answer him, the night sky tore open and something revealed itself. Black ships measuring eight hundred meters noisily exited stealth mode. They all had cannons on both sides and the front.

“These six galley types are specialized for the inland sea. The Lepanto may have officially been a loss, but these gave the Ottomans the chance to be reborn as P.A. Oda. They are covered in the Black Metal made by BIZEN of the IZUMO brand. Your special conflagration tactics won’t work anymore.”

Matthias saw the six black ships spread out in the night sky.

The ships’ decks carried smaller boxy ships with mechanized dolls onboard. These metal ships were over twenty meters long and the automatons continually sang the word “Shaja” and played kanuns to control the ships.

A new *lernen figur* appeared next to Matthias. It displayed the night sky. A fish demon with one of his ten bent horns broken stood on the deck of the first iron-clad ship. He had brown skin and he faced his enemy far in the west.

“President Matthias, I am Kuki Yoshitaka, the naval representative of P.A. Oda’s defense committee. I have brought six iron-clad ships for this battle.”

“Testament. That is wonderful. Try to show off even more. I can’t help but feel delighted that I’m a puppet for people this cool.”

“In that case...”

A new *lernen figur* opened. It showed a humanoid demon girl. Her left eye was hidden by a cloth wrapped around her head and she bowed along with the three rifles attached to the hard point on the left side of her back.

“I am Suzuki Magoichi, the special forces representative of the defense

committee. I was ordered to participate in this battle as a test after transferring to P.A. Oda.”

“Are you not using the Saika name because our enemy hired a lot of warriors who were originally from the Saika Ikki?”

“I would like to live a normal life. To ensure that, I must survive the Warring States period and I want to avoid a family name that stands out too much.”

“I see,” replied Matthias as he faced forward.

...Ohh.

The enemy warriors were solidifying their ranks after seeing the iron-clad ships.

...How wonderful.

Matthias thought that way because he had done nothing and yet the enemy feared him.

...Such a wonderful example of relying on others. Merely being a puppet lets me see this panic on the enemies' faces. I'm so glad I came to the front lines!! Being a puppet is so much fun!!

But, he thought as he looked to his own fleet floating in the sky.

“Everything is perfect, but this can't be easy, Kuki. In the history recreation, the Mlasi never invade K.P.A. Italia during this period. And if we try to attack using the Far Eastern history recreation, the aerial bombardment as we advance along the Seto Inland Corridor will make K.P.A. Italia impregnable. The only way to defeat their geographic advantage is to...”

“Testament. There is a single battle that allows P.A. Oda to send its forces to the inland sea. And it only lasts half a day.”

“Yes.” Matthias looked up at the countless small ships of the Murakami Navy in the western sky. “The decisive battle with the Murakami Navy. The Second Battle of Kizugawaguchi.”

“Testament.” Kuki's voice was quiet. “My iron-clad ships will destroy the Murakami Navy in only half a day. The oceans around Osaka Bay will fall under Oda's control. This battle was meant to lead into the battle with the Hongan-ji

forces, but that was fought long ago. K.P.A. Italia has put off this recreation for fear of losing the Murakami Navy's protection."

So...

"We will complete the recreation and eliminate the Murakami Navy's aerial bombardment. This will ensure the safety of the Seto Inland Corridor and allow us to reach K.P.A. Italia's headquarters of Itsukushima in only half a day."

"And if you do not succeed? What if you lose, but 'an interpretation' – such as the Murakami Navy retreating – is used to represent their 'loss'? After all, the history recreation says this is your first and last time to use those iron-clad ships."

"Testament. That is correct. To better recreate this battle, Hashiba and the others took care of the previous preliminary battles while prepared for some losses. We will make sure to complete this somehow or another."

"Not that," muttered Matthias. "I'm asking what happens if you don't complete it."

"Testament." Kuki seemed to have made up his mind. "Hashiba and P.A. Oda will no longer be able to send this powerful a force to the Seto Inland Sea area, so the only possible way to fight the Murakami Navy defending the Seto Inland Corridor will be a political one. We will be unable to rely on the ground forces and a long, drawn-out war with K.P.A. Italia will be unavoidable."

The demon commander took a breath before continuing.

"For K.P.A. Italia, this is the battle to ensure their future safety."

"I see. ...This must be tough. Sorry for asking about something so harsh." Matthias sighed. "Please win."

Kuki seemed confused by that request, but he finally gave a powerful nod.

"Sha-... Testament!"

Oh, how cool, thought Matthias.

"Now, then."

He raised his right arm and faced forward.

...This is great.

Even as a puppet, this announcement was his as student council president. While reveling in the fact that this was his alone, he gave the sign to begin the conflict. He swung his right arm forward.

“Let the battle begin!!”

As soon as the fighting began, the two fleets spread out as if trying to take up the best positions.

They exchanged shellfire, but the Murakami Navy created a thick wall with their small ships. By focusing their fire on a single enemy ship, they prevented the iron-clad ships from advancing either as single protrusion or a large surface.

As the iron-clad ships began moving forward, the Murakami Navy created a curving formation and showed their intention to pull back toward Itsukushima and stop the enemy fleet. They would use the distance from M.H.R.R. to Itsukushima to slowly fall back and continue firing.

This allowed the iron-clad ships to make some forward progress, but their speed was controlled by the Murakami Navy. However, it was difficult for the Murakami Navy to break through their armor, so time passed as the slow invasion continued on.

Kuki commented on the situation.

“They are trying to drag out the battle. This is meant to end in half a day, so they want us to run out of time.”

After fierce political conflict over the exact limit of that half day, K.P.A. Italia and M.H.R.R. had settled on sunset that evening at four.

M.H.R.R. had to destroy the Murakami Navy before then.

By the time the sun had risen, Kuki had made a few new calculations related to that problem. Based on the damage to their armor and the speed of their westward invasion, he made a decision.

“Let us change our formation. If we establish a rotation, we can push the Murakami Navy back by four PM and arrive within range of Itsukushima. Once

that happens, we can reach Itsukushima quickly. Of course, the Murakami Navy will be forced to begin a real battle before that happens. The critical point for stopping us will be thirty kilometers east of Itsukushima and we will arrive there at...”

He predicted the time of the decisive battle.

“Three PM. That leaves us one hour to the limit.”

He gave orders to all six ships with that time as his goal.

“It can be slow, but move forward! The sooner we reach the critical point, the more time we will have to spare!”

Both fleets had decided what they needed to do and their movements were complex but orderly. Their actions were being broadcast to the academies of the different nations by the PR committees of K.P.A. Italia and Hexagone Française.

This also reached the Musashi as it approached Magdeburg and the M.H.R.R. Catholic warriors laying seige to that same city.

The sun had already risen.

That bright light only dimly lit a certain room.

Other than the narrow beam of light, the tatami mat room was completely dark.

It was a still place, but sudden motion came from within.

The movement was caused by the girl springing up from the white futon.

The girl was Adele.

“...!?”

She sat up quickly enough to send the blanket flying upwards and she sucked in a breath.

“Huh?”

She stretched her back straight up and eventually tilted her head.

“Um,” she began while looking around the room with her tilted head. “Why am I here? In fact, where is this?”

A certain word appeared in Adele’s mind.

...Did I warp!?

A warp was a powerful teleportation technique used by some of the gods during the Age of the Gods. There were several different versions including the short warp, the long warp, the folding warp, the male warp, the midair warp, the meditation warp, and the yoga warp. It was full of variations.

...With all those variations, it isn’t much different from prostrations, is it?

At any rate...

“Umm...”

She did not understand her current situation. She seemed to be wearing a Far Eastern robe, but...

“Isn’t this a kid’s size?”

She understood this was a disgraceful situation.

But she could not connect the last scene in her memories to the scene before her eyes now.

She was pretty sure she had been wearing an inner suit before, but now she was wearing a robe.

...Wait... H-huh? I don’t remember being anywhere like this! And I don’t remember being dressed like this!

She looked around, but she only saw a dimly-lit room. She had apparently been sleeping in a futon laid out on the floor.

“A Far Eastern-style room?”

The door was a sliding screen and the sun came in through a paper sliding window. After seeing the brightness through that window, she brought a hand to her forehead.

...It's morning?

She had a feeling it had been the afternoon before.

She tried to recall why she was here.

“Um, I was running along that IZUMO field with the chancellor and...”

No. That isn't all. There was something before that too.

She worked her mind even more to recall the past.

...If I'm not mistaken...uh...Sassa Narimasa showed up.

As she tried to remember, she held her right hand forward and placed her left hand alongside it.

“Um, this one is me and this one is the chancellor. So, um...”

She needed a third hand for Narimasa. She could always have her left hand be the chancellor and herself, but she had a feeling that was a very bad idea. From an intelligence perspective.

At any rate, she could use her gaze to represent Narimasa, so she and the chancellor had...

“Um...”

The gaze representing Narimasa came in toward the left hand representing herself and hit it. And then she...

“ ... ”

Suddenly, she swung her left hand outwards.

“Eh?”

She could not quite remember what had become of that. She only remembered a brief view of the sky before everything went black.

...Wow.

Her mind shook a bit.

Her body shook as well and she began to fall backwards. *Eh?* she thought as she frantically swung her hand and tore through the sliding door behind her. She could feel the clearly expensive paper between her fingers.

“Ahhhh!! And I have no moneyyyyy!!

I need to hide this, she seriously thought. Is there anything to cover it with? No, it's paper, so if it has paste on it, I just need water. And even without that, I can use my spit. I still feel like my life is over, though.

Just as she licked her fingers, she heard footsteps walking down what seemed to be a corridor. A voice soon followed. It was Asama's calm voice.

“Adele? Are you awake? We'll be arriving in Magdeburg soon, so we need to examine your brain while we have the chance.”

...Oh, I get it. This is Asama-san's shrine.

“W-wah! But now I don't have time to hide the evidence!!”

She opened the window, thinking she could escape through it, but then she saw what sat outside.

Next to the window and below the eaves of the building was her mobile shell.

However, the head armor was missing.

Everything clicked into place when she saw that headless mobile shell.

.../...

She had been sent flying and passed out from the attack Sassa Narimasa had used to destroy her mobile shell.

...And no one was left to protect the chancellor.

An even greater pang of regret stabbed from the depths of her gut and into her chest.

Her eyes settled on the headless mobile shell. As she looked at her incomplete armor, a cry of anger rose meaninglessly from her throat. It was in reference to both the mobile shell and her own skill.

“It just isn't enough!!”

Asama stopped walking down the shrine's corridor and broke into a run.

She needed to hurry to Adele.

The girl had been sleeping in the shrine's medical room.

She had simply wanted to check on Adele's condition before heading to the spring for some early morning purification.

However...

...What was that hopeless lament!? Is she having a nightmare!?

She didn't used to be this kind of character, thought Asama. She would sometimes stare into the wall at the insufficient state of her body and finances, but she used to keep a generally positive outlook along with Mitotsudaira and the others.

But something in her brain must have been knocked loose in Narimasa's attack.

...I have to do something!

Her shout had been all too meaningful. Who would have ever thought her flat chest would drive her insane? Before they arrived in Magdeburg, Asama needed to hit the girl's brain with spells until the usual Adele was back.

With that shout of inadequacy ringing in her heart, Asama ran down the corridor with a robe worn over her inner suit.

"Adele! Was I right about the brain damage!? There were signs of it in the past, though!"

Asama arrived alongside the room. Adele's room was right in front of her, so she used the corridor's raised floor as a step and leaped.

"Asama-san!"

At the same moment, the sliding screen opened in front of her and Adele ran out. As Asama fell, Adele's head performed a counterattack by stabbing straight up and into Asama's chest fastener.

Both of them stopped moving.

Asama had caught Adele who was standing straight upright. Asama remained in her landing pose as several long seconds passed. A single thought dominated

her mind.

...H-how am I supposed to get her out?

Adele's head was stuck inside her inner suit's chest fastener from below.

Adele's head was pushing her breasts out and forward from within, but that tensed the cloth. Also, the pressure sent back in on Adele's head kept it from pulling back out.

What were they to do?

This was of course a first in Asama's life, so she had no past experience to rely on.

The other girl's head was completely caught to the front and back, so...

"I guess it has to be up or down."

Adele raised her right hand and gave a thumbs up. She seemed to understand, so Asama stood on her tiptoes and lifted her breasts as if embracing them.

"Nh..."

This unexpectedly lifted Adele's head with them.

"Nwaaaah! Wait! A-Asama-san! M-my neck's gonna break!"

Adele tapped out as she stood on her tiptoes and tried to endure the stretching of her neck. And she tapped on Asama's breasts.

Not only did the girl suddenly touch her, but her breath tickled.

"Eh? Ah, wait! Phah. Wait. No. I'm gonna laugh."

Just as laughter was about to burst from Asama, Kimi arrived from the right end of the corridor.

"Asamaaa, I want to use your bath, so-What are you two doing!? Can you not get out!? Are you stuck? Oh, this is too much. And after the pressure jokes from before too. Ha ha. Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!"

The dancer started rolling around on the floor in laughter as soon as she arrived. Seeing that useless girl was enough to calm Asama down.

Asama made sure no one was around, opened the fastener, removed the other connector below her breasts, and exposed her skin. Adele was finally able to remove her head as if lifting it from the surface of the water.

Asama tried not to let it bother her as she closed the front of the robe instead of replacing the fastener.

“Are you okay, Adele?”

“Well, um, uh, sound effects like ‘squish’ or ‘squash’ won’t leave my head.”

“The pressure must have damaged her brain,” said Kimi, but Asama ignored her.

To help Adele calm down, she began telling the girl what had happened while she had slept.

“Listen,” she began. She also placed her hands on the girl’s shoulders. “Right now, the Musashi is being towed to Magdeburg because Shirojiro-kun flipped the floor around with a prostration. Toori-kun fell and was abducted by the Reine des Garous, but Mito, Mary-san, and Naito will do something about that...Tenzou-kun is there too. You mustn’t forget him, okay? Anyway, it seems he’s alive.”

“Wow... I actually understood most of that. I think there’s something wrong with me.”

That comment surprised Asama, which made her wonder if there was something wrong with her as well. At any rate, Adele looked up at her, frowned, and tilted her head.

“Um... Is the chancellor alive?”

That was a difficult question to answer, but Kimi spoke up from where she sat on the floor.

“My foolish brother is fine. At the very least, Sassa wasn’t able to touch him since you shielded him. And it seems the Reine des Garous has taken a liking to him, so...”

“The real question is what M.H.R.R. will do now that they have begun a battle with K.P.A. Italia.”

“Eh?” said Adele. “Isn’t that bad? You said the Musashi is inside M.H.R.R. and P.A. Oda has the strength to easily fight a three-front war.”

That was true. P.A. Oda was attacking K.P.A. Italia while Hashiba faced Mouri, but P.A. Oda itself was also splitting its strength to deal with Sviet Rus and Takeda. And P.A. Oda had the national strength needed to pull that off.

...M.H.R.R. won't be too busy to deal with us.

But despite that thought...

“It will be okay.”

She prepared to say that to put Adele at ease and that may have been a privilege of hers as someone without an official position. But just as she prepared to wipe away the girl’s concern...

“It’ll be okay!!”

Adele said it first.

After moving from the floor to the corridor’s low railing, Kimi narrowed her eyes at Adele’s words.

...Oh?

Wise Sister: “She doesn’t get all depressed when she loses. Quite a difference from a certain cowardly fallen angel I know.”

Mal-Ga: “What? I’m in the middle of an all-nighter inking this doujinshi, so provoke me and I’ll put you in as a guest character!”

Worshipper: “Huh? I only just woke up, but these horrible people are already filling this refreshing morning with chatter.”

But Kimi saw Adele grab Asama’s hand and shake it up and down.

“Contact 6th Special Duty Officer Nao-san or someone to get my mobile shell repaired! Now I know I can withstand a single attack from P.A. Oda’s Six Heavenly Demon Armies! So...”

“U-um, Adele?”

“Judge! What is it!?”

Asama responded to Adele’s energetic question.

“Do you have the money for those repairs?”

Kimi saw Adele’s expression vanish altogether. The girl fell limply to her knees and then onto her side.

“That was a critical hit,” said Kimi. “Her mind is in the wall now.”

“I-I don’t need your commentary! And, um, Adele?”

Asama spoke to Adele who was trembling on her side.

“I-I’m done for. M-money... Why did it have to be money? That’s the ultimate monster. Except it isn’t money that’s truly frightening. It’s the lack of money.”

“D-don’t worry, Adele! Money isn’t everything!”

“That’s right, Asama,” cut in Kimi. “You’ll always have your body.”

Adele had started looking up, but she curled up on her side again.

Adele held her knees in her arms and began singing a strange song that repeated “loo” over and over again.

“This isn’t so bad,” said Kimi. “You’ll find the money somehow and it’s always good to be motivated. After all, we’re about to be busy again.”

“With what?”

“You haven’t noticed the aroma hanging in the air? This is the scent of the food being cooked in the M.H.R.R. camps around Magdeburg.”

She smiled.

“Plus the scent of spell gunpowder.”

“Master Muneshige, is this...?”

Gin had been making a circuit of Okutama for her morning training with Muneshige, but she stopped on the front deck and pointed to the scenery visible over the barrier surrounding the deck. Muneshige stepped between her and the barrier as if to hide her from the scenery below.

“I see. So this is why the automatons stopped cleaning and went back inside.”

He viewed the ground where the dim light of dawn showed a fortress city far ahead.

The city was on the western bank of a winding river. From their perspective, it looked like a star-shape split down the center.

However, the shallow angle of the sun covered the distant city in a stark contrast of light and shadow. The river looked dark and the forest surrounding the city also looked dark.

The forest was covered in fog. Or so it seemed. However...

“We will be able to see it once the sun rises.”

As if to agree with Muneshige, the morning sun slowly changed its angle. Its gentle movement turned the dark purple sky to dark blue, blue, and then yellow.

Something was visible on the surface that seemed scorched by that color.

“That’s M.H.R.R.’s thirty thousand man siege formation around Magdeburg!!”

Camping tents, maintenance areas, food distribution centers, and tents or turf for emergency supplies filled the vast forest. The apparent fog was actually smoke from them cooking.

...And they’re almost done!

One thing was certain: the enemy could begin at any time.

From the look of their camps, their main division was about five thousand strong. They were likely the ones who would charge Magdeburg. The remaining ten thousand were meant to continue the siege and stay behind as a rear guard.

This was the perfect formation for an attack on a fortress.

Only a moment later, they took sudden action. Before Gin could see what had happened, Muneshige swung his arm back while still looking down. He was trying to have her step back.

“Gin!”

His hand latched onto her breast over her track suit.

...Eh?

Without thinking, she reacted to this unexpected accident.

At the same time, Muneshige turned around with a sharp look in his eyes.

“Please stand back!”

“Eh? Oh, r-right. Testament.”

Even as she gave the wrong response, she took a large step back. Meanwhile, something shot up from below.

It was a barrage of anti-air shellfire.

“...!?”

She saw and heard a stream of light, sound, and wind.

The light was exploding sparks and the shards of broken gravity barriers. The sound was the harmony of impacts and destruction. The sound of the shellfire itself arrived after the wind, but it was still powerful.

And it did not end.

“Master Muneshige!”

He held his right hand below his eyes without moving.

She called his name again, but he still did not move. She wondered if he could not hear her, but...

...That isn't it!

She focused on the reverberation of shellfire and detected what he was watching.

She heard a roar of moving air from below. That trembling noise seemed to ripple through the air again and again, but the air was also powerfully pushed up to the Musashi's altitude.

This ascent of the air could only be caused by one thing.

“An aerial ship!?”

Gin saw it in the center of her vision.

She saw a white high-speed galley bearing the emblems of P.A. Oda and P.A.M. as well as the logos of M.H.R.R. and A.H.R.R.S. It pierced through the trembling air to rise up in front of Musashino and between Takao and Asakusa.

The galley fired cannons from its port and starboard sides to attack the inner sides of Asakusa and Takao.

Gin noticed its cannons used Mlasi-style homing spells. The turret-less cannons fired four divine tones in preparation and Mlasi divine messenger birds had been built into the top of the cannons.

“The Djinn Garudas have appeared! Cannon fire incoming!”

The super deformed Garudas cried as one atop the cannons.

“All ships defend!! Over!”

After that shipwide broadcast of “Musashi’s” voice, the torii-style emblems of gravity barriers appeared over the entirety of the different ships. However, the galley had already twisted itself toward the Musashi’s bow and forced itself into a roll. Wind wrapped around it as it rotated, but it still fired.

...Such accuracy!

They targeted the important points and seams of the ships with amazing precision even for homing shots.

The gravity barriers shook and fixed in place. Meanwhile, the galley’s roll took it too far, so it corrected and rapidly turned around toward the sky in front of the Musashi.

The belly of the white galley had already passed by above Gin and shown its stern.

The barrage of cannon fire from the galley at such close range held the Musashi’s gravity barriers in place and prevented new ones from being raised to block the galley’s path.

Gin then saw movement. As the galley calmly flew past the Musashi, two people jumped down to Musashino’s bow.

“Those are...?”

She recognized the two-hot blooded individuals who had come from the siege army down below. The first was...

“#4 of the Six Heavenly Demon Armies, Sassa Narimasa!”

The other had demonic horns visible even as he fell.

Gin recognized him from his introduction in the Testament Union’s almanac.

“#1 of the Six Heavenly Demon Armies and vice chancellor of M.H.R.R. That demonic long lived has General Tilly of the Catholic army as a double inherited name.”

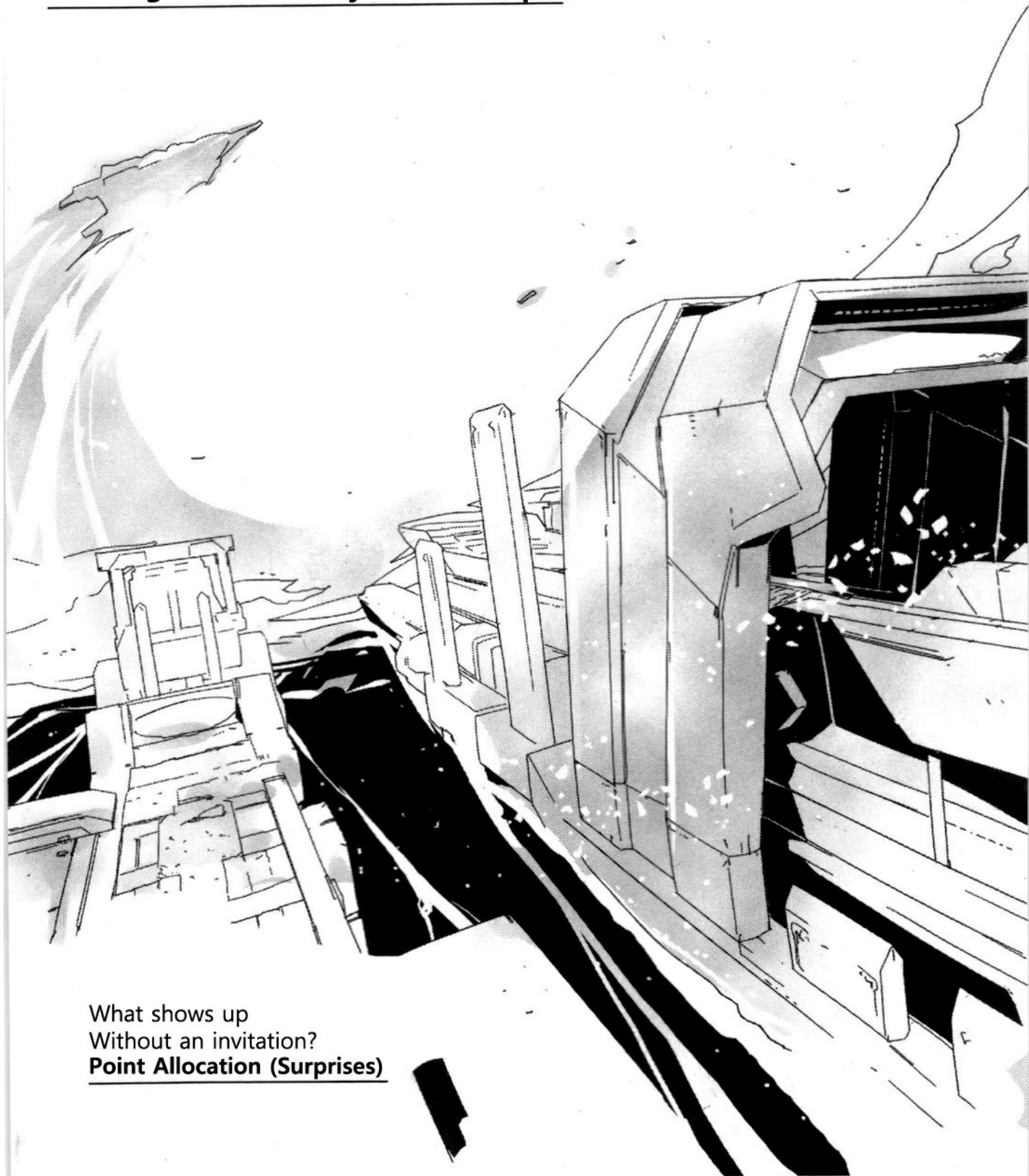
He was...

“ ‘Demon Shibata’ Shibata Katsuie!”

Chapter 49: Bringer of Calamity on the Ship

CHAPTER 49

"Bringer of Calamity on the Ship"



What shows up
Without an invitation?
Point Allocation (Surprises)

What shows up

Without an invitation?

Point Allocation (Surprises)

After jumping down from the galley, Narimasa landed in the streets toward the bow of Musashino.

Far behind him in the sky, the white galley moved away from the Musashi to turn around.

“Once that comes back, it’ll pick us up. ...That’s going to take some acrobatic flying, but it should be easy for Takigawa.”

He ran along a long Western-style business building. His destination was past Musashino’s arch-like bridge at the back of the ship.

He picked up running speed and opened a book-style *insha kotob* that displayed a map of Musashi’s surface.

“Oh, dammit Matsu. You only marked the tailors, hairdressers, and graveyards!”

He continued running while muttering, “What should I do about breakfast?”

He maintained his speed as he jumped over the first road.

He took a great leap.

“There.”

After lightly landing on the opposite roof, Narimasa began running again.

From what he had seen of the street below, they were on full alert. The doors and windows were all closed and ether light was coming from the gaps. Those were defense barriers. As for below the deck and inside the ship...

...Is that an atmospheric barrier!?

That was a spell which weighed down on all of the air inside the ship to slow down anything moving inside. It was less of a burden than the defense barriers

and it had likely been developed from the spell used for elevated work inside and outside the Musashi. It was a trap that would slow him down and slam him into the wall if he carelessly broke through the floor.

What a pain, he thought while picking up speed. A giant form was moving two buildings to his right, but it was more taking long strides than out-and-out running. It was a demon-horned man with a black M.H.R.R. uniform stitched with the numeral “1”.

He carried a long case on his back and turned to Narimasa.

“Hey! What’s the matter, Narimasa!? You going without breakfast!? Well!?”

“Yeah, that’s right, Shibata. The edamame I got from Matthias was too much work to eat, so I left it behind.”

“C’mon, you need to eat what a superior gives you.”

Shibata pulled a large rectangular case off of the hard point on his right waist. It required a full arm to hold and he opened it while running.

“Look! This is Lady Oichi’s love-filled box lunch! Just look at it! Hey! Over here!!”

“God, how annoying.”

“Ahh!? What’d you say!? You got a problem with Lady Oichi’s handiwork!?”

“No, I was calling you annoying. Not Lady Oichi.”

“Oh, me!? That’s okay, then!! I’ll be as annoying as possible! That’ll teach you!!”

“Kh!!”

Narimasa brought a hand to his forehead and pushed up his sunglasses. Meanwhile, Katsuie began digging into the lunch.

With a bamboo bottle of tea hanging from one of his demon horns and shaking as he ran, Katsuie asked a question.

“Who do you think is gonna show up? And do you want any of this lunch? You won’t be able to fight well on an empty stomach. Well?”

“Hm, I’d guess the most likely one to show up is Honda-... Huh? Or maybe not.

I broke her spear yesterday.”

“On Musashi, do vice chancellor level fighters let enemies run freely through their streets?”

“Well, they’ve apparently got a pretty good strategist here. Something a little different from Hashiba’s Takenaka. It’s possible they might just let us run on through.”


A book-style *insha kotob* appeared next to both of them. It was a divine transmission from the bridge of the galley turning around in the sky behind them. It displayed a woman. She had armor wrapped around her forehead and wore a P.A. Oda girl’s uniform modified into a ninja outfit.

She used a hand to brush aside the Garudas and wind spirit Djinnns flying around the bridge.

“If you two take your time, I’ll fly right by and leave you there.”

She crossed her arms which lifted up the cloth around her chest and she let a Garuda land on her shoulder.

“I have to get to my next mission after checking out the Musashi.”



Takigawa Ichimasu

Shibata Katsuie

“You mean bowing down to old man Akechi? Having the main dock in Kyoto sure isn’t easy.”

“Show some respect. He’s the vice president which is higher than you.”

“Don’t say that, Ichimasu. Narimasa falls under me, the vice chancellor. We have so many arguments with the student council over our budget that it isn’t surprising he would have some hard feelings. ...He just isn’t as tolerant as the rest of us.”

“Takigawa, this annoying upperclassman has gotten even more annoying after his marriage. What am I supposed to do about that?”

“Why not try getting married? I kind of want to see what you’re like when you’re annoying, Nari. I feel like it would drive the world insane.”

“Now things are doubly annoying.”

Narimasa sighed as he jumped over a street and Katsuie followed. Katsuie spoke while he was airborne.

“Ichimasu. Give this starving delinquent a map.”

“Eh? Sure, if you want. The one Matsu made, right?”

“I already have that one! That’s the exact one I’ve got right here!!”

“Fine then.”

After landing on the opposite roof, Katsuie resumed the long strides of his running. He grabbed a Western-style fried shrimp with his chopsticks and faced Narimasa.

“Hey, you want a fried shrimp?”

“What’s this sudden change of heart? But I need to eat what a superior gives me, right? I can’t exactly say no, so shaja.”

“Shaja,” replied Katsuie before raising the shrimp over his head. “Cooooome and get it!”

“ ... ”

“Toooooo slow!”

“You... Ah! You really ate it!?”

“Damn, that’s good! Lady Oichi’s a genius! Hey! Narimasa! Why are you running up ahead and ignoring me!?”

“The enemy’s here!!”

He pointed forward where someone was charging toward him along the rooftop ahead. And they were not alone. Ichimasu sighed when she noticed the enemies.

“I’ll be recording this while I approach from behind. Make sure to do this right.”

“Shaaajaaa. This leaves us with only one choice. ...Narimasa, you take care of things up there. I’ll be back here eating this work of art Lady Oichi made. Yes, you have a noble duty to protect her artwork.”

“God, you’re annoying...”

“You’ve gotten really impertinent for someone who isn’t even a real man! Well!?”

“If I’m not a real man, what does it matter if I’m impertinent?”

With that, Narimasa ran on ahead.

...If I hang around with these adults, I end up feeling like the normal one.

The enemy arrived from the front and one took the lead.

“Musashi’s 2nd special duty officer!!”

Urquiaga charged in on a path between Narimasa and Katsuie.

He travelled through the air. He was a half-dragon with armor, wings, and powerful acceleration, so he had the highest odds of surviving a one-man attack on Narimasa and Vice Chancellor Shibata Katsuie. Neshinbara had been the one to make that decision.

He would not overreach. He was only a special duty officer. A normal commander was one thing, but he was a step behind a combat-oriented vice chancellor.

He understood the gap in power between a vice chancellor and a special duty officer and he understood where that gap came from.

...Combat-oriented vice chancellors are all combat-obsessed idiots who never think about anything other than combat!

They might have an everyday life, but it was a small part of their lives. Whether it was thinking, relationships, eating, sleeping, or bathing, it was nothing more than a means of training themselves.

Even when they slept, they would think about the best position to recover from their weariness and the optimal amount of sleep for their metabolism to strengthen their muscles.

They were like a wild beast that had learned how to train.

Compared to them, Urquiaga felt he was a normal person. He had an everyday life, he trained as an inquisitor, he would finish off his horrible classmates if they showed an opening, he played elder sister porn games, and he researched the divine network to find out how to register and post on walkthrough sites without triggering a Catholic moral violation.

The divine firmware had gotten quite harsh lately, but that was just a part of god's trials and tribulations. It gave him a reason to research even more.

But at the vice chancellor level, they did nothing but combat training all day without any of those other things. There had to be something wrong with their brains. It saddened him.

"You poor thing!" he shouted as he attacked.

His weapon was the chain dangling down from his hands. Both ends contained counterweights modelled after the Virgin Mary giving a drill kick. As he flew in, he rotated it around in both hands.

"You may be M.H.R.R. Catholics, but that is not a problem if you are here under your Far Eastern names! Inquisition Set No. 637! Binding Chain 11: Taladro Maria!"

The Virgin Mary threw a kick toward the chests of both enemies.

As he ran, Narimasa did not dodge the chain's counterweight. He simply gave a powerful swing of his right arm.

"Lily Flower!!"

The roof was not the most solid footing, but he did not choose to break his running form to dodge.

He counterattacked.

He used the strength of his right arm. The glowing lily emblems on his shoulder, elbow, and wrist carried that strength and one last emblem appeared at the end of his opened hand.

The power gathered on the tip of his middle finger. When concentrated on one tiny spot, even the strength of a single arm was plenty powerful.

"..."

So he deflected the flying counterweight. A solid sound filled the air and the Lily Flower scattered.

...That worked perfectly!

He then looked to Katsuie.

"What'll you do, Shibata!?"

He saw the counterweight strike Katsuie.

Naruze heard the solid sound as the attack hit Katsuie.

She was at the entrance to the arch forming Musashino's bridge.

In the distance, the galley had finished turning around and was flying back in. Much closer, Narimasa and Katsuie were running her way.

...But the counterweight hit the big one!?

The counterweight was just a hunk of metal and she had assumed he would dodge it. She had certainly never expected him to be so busy shoveling food into his mouth that the lunchbox created a blind spot. The counterweight flew right between the diagonally-held lunchbox and his lowered head and it hit him

square in the face.

So Naruze fulfilled her duty. She was already equipped with Weiss Fräulein. The pen was covered in its ship's hull and she held it under her arm as she aimed from a rooftop.

She drew a new guiding line toward her enemy's position.

That left firing Weiss Fräulein's guided coin bullets.

"Herrlich!!"

The shot produced recoil and scattering ether light. She had fired four coins. Two ten-yen coins drew arcs of light toward Narimasa and two toward Katsuie.

But that was when she saw sudden movement.

...Eh?

Katsuie looked up from his food and turned to the left and right. He almost seemed to be asking if something had happened. But first and foremost...

...What happened to the direct hit of the counterweight!?

The counterweights and chain had moved behind them as Urquiaga flew past them.

The half-dragon's high speed attack had had a lot of force behind it, but...

"It didn't damage Katsuie at all!?"

Even as she shouted that question, two of her coins flew toward Narimasa and two toward Katsuie. Narimasa would dodge his two, but Katsuie had his head down in his lunchbox again.

Suddenly, he turned toward Narimasa with an expression that seemed to be showing off how good the food was.

"—————"

The two coins scored direct hits on the side of his face.

Narimasa chose to leap out of the way of the white Technohexen's two shots. He gathered Lily Flower on the tips of his toes and kicked off the roof.

He used his jump to dodge.

But he had to do more than just jump. After all, this Technohexen had used her guided shots against aerial ships during the armada battle.

...They track your movement and shape more than your ether reading, right?

So when he reached the end of the roof, he kicked down on the very edge.

Pushing down there caused the roof to rise like a seesaw.

The straw of the thatched roof scattered everywhere as it sprang up like a wall. And it swallowed up his presence as both motion and shape.

“That should do it.”

The tilting of the roof took a lot of the force out of his leap, but he turned sideways and flipped to the side in order to hang in the air longer and to make his shape harder to grasp.

The enemy’s bullets flew right past his spinning back and stomach.

They did not hit.

He heard the two overlapping sounds of them striking the risen thatched roof behind him and he smelled burning straw.

He landed on the next roof. His feet made contact just as the roof behind him exploded, but he did not feel like turning around.

“Shaja!”

Just as he began to run forward again, he looked to the right.

Katsuie ran along while covered in ether light smoke from the two shots that had hit him.

...He doesn’t even try to dodge!

But he decided to say what he could.

“Shibata, you should probably look where you’re going.”

“Shaaaajaaa. But what’s going on here? Is it some kind of festival?”

Katsuie came into view as he broke through the glowing smoke. He continued his long strides and his uniform was torn to pieces, but there was not a scratch

on his black skin or face.

He was unscathed.

Narimasa had a thought as he saw Katsuie unharmed and nearing the end of his lunchbox.

...This is why he's so damn annoying.

Katsuie was from the combat tribe of the demonic long-lived. He was large compared to a human, but he was one of the smaller members of his tribe.

However, being small meant something different with him.

He had trained and fought on the battlefield from a young age, so the bodily ether defenses that normally appeared as an adult had manifested when he was still young.

That had stunted his body's growth and development, but it had also given him something else.

The flesh and bone that was meant to swell out as he grew had been trapped densely inside him.

His entire body was compressed, so there were no gaps in his defenses and he could pour overwhelming bursts of power into his attacks. However, that made it difficult for him to hold back and people had a tendency to keep their distance if not avoid him entirely.

...All of that used to be kind of cool, but...

"Hey, look! Lady Oichi put tangerine slices in here! They got warm in with the other food, but I think those little bits of carelessness are great! What do you think!? I'm gonna eat them!"

He's beyond saving, thought Narimasa.

At the Oda clan's council meeting at the beginning of each year, it was customary to unreservedly give advice to superiors and inferiors alike to help correct each other. That turned into a hellish scene every year, but this year, the lower levels had chosen Katsuie as the #1 most liked superior.

...Old man Akechi kicked a locker since he'd always won that title in the past. I never knew he cared that much about what people thought of him.

“Anyway,” said Narimasa as he landed and started to run. “Shibata, the next enemy is coming.”

Wind blew in to catch them as they landed and that wind named itself.

“Sanada Academy! Unneeded #1: Sarutobi Sasuke!”

“Unneeded #2: Kirigakure Saizou!”

A ninja in a vest rode in on the back of a female wind spirit.

Katsuie glanced over at the battle between Narimasa and the two leading members of the Sanada Ten Braves. Fighting while running along the rooftops took quite a bit of skill.

...Narimasa's gotten pretty good lately.

The Sanadas' movements were good too.

...They named themselves to show what they can do before eventually joining us, didn't they? But...

“Unneeded, hm? There's no need to put yourselves down like that.”

Katsuie called out to them.

“Hey! Is Seikai with you, too? I never returned the manga ‘Flushed Cheeks’^[3] I borrowed from him ages ago, so I should probably speak with him.”

A demonic monk quickly stood up and raised his arms atop Musashino's bridge.

“Th-that was a rare revolutionary romance story and you just took it!”

“Oh, there you are. From the title, I thought it was porn, but it was nothing but a guy and girl talking on and on about boring crap! If you keep reading things like that, you'll lose sight of reality.”

“I can't believe you! I just can't! And after you stole it from me!”

“Shut up,” said Katsuie as he ate more of his lunch. “Ahh, that's so good.”

...I'm so glad I got married.

“Bind, Tonbokiri!”

...Oh, c'mon. Don't get in the way of my Lady Oichi festival.

Futayo jumped up from between two roofs for a surprise attack and she used Tonbokiri from a distance of thirty meters. That was right at the edge of the range the spear allowed her.

...And with the greatest range of effect!

While using it to cut scrap wood to help with Musashi's repairs, she had realized it cut wider the farther away she was.

Of course, stepping back and trying to cut numerous targets would reduce its effectiveness, but she did not always need to fully cut through everything and the reduction was slight when she only had a single target.

And at farther range, the enemy could not cover the blade to stop the cut.

...So I realized long-range attacks are easier!

Father! I will become a long-range samurai who wins with projectile attacks! she thought as she used the cutting power on Katsuie.

She aimed for his legs. An attack on his torso would have reduced effectiveness due to his lunchbox shield, so she chose his legs. The distance would weaken it somewhat, but she would win if she could get a cut in on his knees.

“———”

But Tonbokiri did not respond.

“Are long-range attacks not allowed, Tonbokiri?”

“Attack currently impossible.”

That answer confused Futayo.

...Attacking is currently impossible?

She had been able to cut the scrap wood at a distance without issue, so why

was it suddenly impossible?

“...?”

Without an answer, she moved in closer. Thinking something might change if the distance was shorter, she held Tonbokiri up toward Katsuie at a range of fifteen meters.

That was when three things happened.

The first came from the two Sanadas clashing with Narimasa to her right.

“What is this!? I’m being stopped!?”

Saizou cried out and moved away from Narimasa.

The second came from Narimasa as he watched the Sanada forces move away. He turned toward Katsuie.

“Shibata! Does that count as ‘running’!?”

There was a hint of anger in his voice.

The third came from a boy in glasses who appeared in a sign frame next to Futayo’s face.

“Spear Honda-kun! This is most likely a Testament Arma! A passively-activated Testamenta Arma is in effect!”

When she had approached, the Testamenta Arma’s field of effect had opened up. Even if Tonbokiri could destroy a Logismoι Óplo’s field of effect, it could not do so from inside that field.

She did not think she had made a mistake. Something unexpected could not be called a mistake.

And so she thought about what the enemy’s Testamenta Arma did.

...What is this!?

She first noticed that Tonbokiri had stopped.

...And everything around us has gone quiet.

All noise and motion had vanished from her surroundings. For fifty meters around Katsuie...

“The gravity barriers have stopped!?”

On Musashino’s bridge, Suzu sensed “Musashino” had stopped moving her arms.

“What...is it?” she asked.

“Judge,” replied “Musashino”. “My gravity barriers are being stopped in the instant of defense. Normally, I would carry out minute adjustments, but they collapse at that very instant...and then again when it is time to open the next one. Over.”

“What does...that mean?”

They were stopped for an instant. She had no combat experience, so she could not say what that meant in this situation. However, she could sum up what was happening below.

“All attack...and defense...is being stopped...for an instant?”

“Judge. That is correct. The only information we had on M.H.R.R.’s Testament Arma was that they are both defense related, but it seems we are seeing one of their abilities. In other words...”

“Musashino” faced forward and opened a sign frame to contact the entire ship.

“I have determined the enemy’s ability is to stop all of their enemies’ offensive and defensive actions for an instant! And be wary of the gap in the gravity barriers created around the enemy vice chancellor! The galley might try to fire into the area of ‘stopped’ gravity barriers! Over!”

Futayo saw the distant galley perform a rapid roll as it approached.

In accordance with the history recreation, its cannons were located on the sides instead of the top or bottom, so it twisted for a revolution and a half to point its starboard side down.

Still at a distance, it fired its starboard cannons down toward the Musashi.

...Well done!

Futayo was impressed by the group of physical shells that cut through the air.

The galley was apparently captained by Takigawa Ichimasu, a P.A. Oda commander. She was a military commander, but she acted mostly as a ninja and she excelled at commanding fleets and constructing fortresses. With her, Katsuie, and Narimasa, three P.A. Oda leaders had gathered here.

“I see!”

The world is such an interesting place, thought Futayo.

“Anti-shell defenses! Over!”

As if in response to “Musashino’s” words, the shells wrapped in trembling air soared toward Musashino. They slipped through the gap of gravity barriers that seemed to hesitate and vanish.

“...!”

Buildings were smashed and roads split. Wood flew, wind blew, and...

“Ahh, now that was a meal.”

Katsuie ran through the gaps in the explosions and looked up from his lunchbox. He closed the case and attached it to the hard point on his waist. The action was one seen anywhere in everyday life, but he accomplished it instantaneously.

...That was fast!

Sensing danger, Futayo tried to put some distance between them by jumping to the side.

“Hey, stupid. You probably shouldn’t run. That counts as a defensive action.”

Her movements stopped just as she rose up to jump.

She concluded this was a lot like the pope-chancellor’s Stithos Porneia, but that was limited to attack because it only destroyed weapons. This only stopped things for an instant, but it worked on both attack and defense.

...Did Tonbokiri say attack was impossible as an automatic safety to prevent an explosion caused by a forced shutdown!?

Tonbokiri had decided it was too dangerous to activate without understanding the enemy's ability. And...

“...”

She could move again. Her jump had only been stopped for an instant and she had not lost her momentum, but...

“See? You won't make it now.”

Katsue opened the case mounted on his back hard point. He pulled out a silver tower shield resembling a wing and he attached it to his left arm.

“Testamenta Arma: Animus Caritas – Novum. This thing took a liking to me, so I had no choice but to inherit the name of General Tilly. It's a pain in the butt, but it's a cute little thing. Not that I really need it.”

After all...

“I have this!”

He drew a large sword from his waist. It was a thick blade encased in a cowling.

“I don't know how it stands up to the cutting power of your Tonbokiri, but my divine weapon isn't half bad. This is Kamewari^[4].”

Not good, thought Futayo.

She did not know what this divine weapon's ability was, but there was still a distance of five meters between them. However, he still swung the weapon.

It was a swift attack. He had only just drawn the blade, but he was already close to completing his swing. She barely noticed he had even done it.

The blade had not reached her, but...

...Does it have a long-range attack like Tonbokiri!?

He had a defensive Testamenta Arma and an offensive divine weapon. And as for the power of that weapon...

“Get her, Kamewari.”

He swung the attack down toward her and it split Musashino.

● Battlefield Diagram ② ●

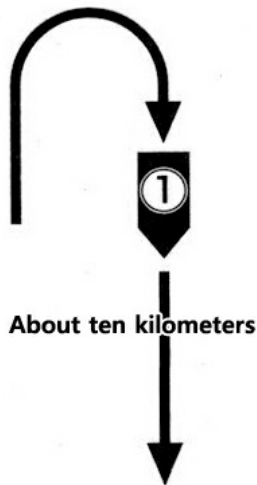
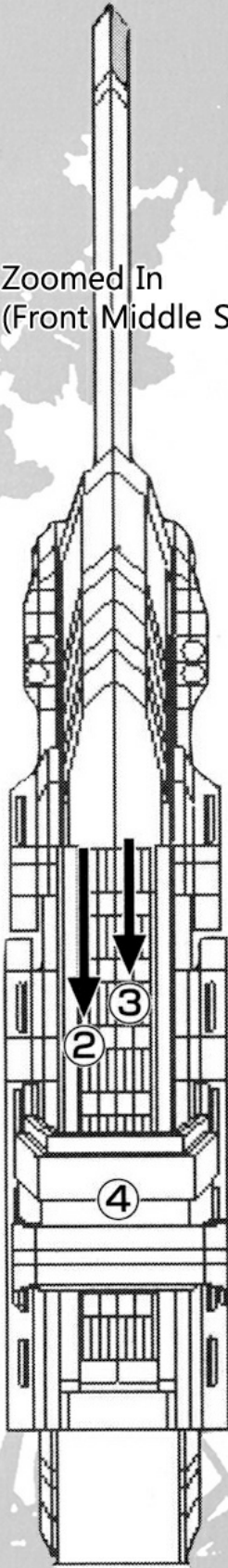


"Sis! Sis! What's going on up on the Musashi!? Everyone's running and jumping around, so I'm confused as hell!"



"Heh heh heh. Hell brother, this is more or less the situation. Take a good look."

● Zoomed In
(Front Middle Ship – Musashino)



About ten kilometers

● Zoomed Out

- ① Ichimasu's Galley
- ② Katsuie
- ③ Narimasa
- ④ Musashino's Bridge



"Wait, are you guys okay? You get into so much trouble without me around, don't you?"



"While we are in trouble, having you around is another kind of trouble entirely."

Study:

Battlefield Diagram 2

Toori: Sis! Sis! What's going on up on the Musashi!? Everyone's running and jumping around, so I'm confused as hell!

Kimi: Heh heh heh. Hell brother, this is more or less the situation. Take a good look.

Upper Left: Zoomed In (Front Middle Ship – Musashino)

Below 1: About ten kilometers

Lower center: Zoomed Out

1. Ichimasu's Galley

2. Katsuie

3. Narimasa

4. Musashino's Bridge

Toori: Wait, are you guys okay? You get into so much trouble without me around, don't you?

Kimi: While we are in trouble, having you around is another kind of trouble entirely.

Chapter 50: Greeter in the Shade

CHAPTER 50

"Greeter in the Shade"



Even though it has been a while
Why do you do things
That are inexcusable?
Point Allocation (Choice)

Even though it has been a while

Why do you do things

That are inexcusable?

Point Allocation (Choice)

Shibata Katsue's slash instantly smashed Musashino's surface city.

"Musashino" used her sight devices to view the result of the attack from Musashino's bridge.

The attack had not been a cut.

...It was smashed!?

Musashino's surface resembled a vegetable roughly cut by a knife. Cabbage especially tended to end up like this.

The destruction continued for about thirty meters and was about five meters deep. It looked like someone had pressed a knife down from above and it shot out ahead of the running enemy vice chancellor.

"Kh!"

The damage that reached "Musashino" through the ship was too much to finish with "over".

The pain was noise. A portion of the ship's control pathways had been destroyed and static filled her like it was clawing at her mind.

But amid that noise, she confirmed the power of the destruction.

The ship had been broken and smashed. Below the massive slash, a V-shaped split had opened in the buildings and the floor at the bottom had been instantly cut open.

However, it resembled a cut from a dull blade. If one pressed a blade against a cabbage, it would split open, but it would not be fully sliced and the blade would stop. The force of the blade would have nowhere to leave, so it would press in on the cabbage.

“The shock...”

Musashino rumbled, but “Musashino” predicted the spread of the shock and opened her mouth.

“Over!!”

As she shouted, “Musashino” realized this divine weapon did not cut its target.

...It simply slams the blade against the target to break it open and smash it!

This weapon used brute strength to accomplish pure destruction.

A moment later, the shock of the smashing power shot from the opened cut and into the sky.

Pieces of buildings and the deck seemed to undulate as they flew, burst, and scattered through the sky.

Several ether pathways were severed, so “Musashino” felt more noise in her mind.

“ ‘Musashino’-sama! The galley is approaching from the front! It is on a collision course! Over!”

It was still a fair distance away, but the white high-speed galley was charging toward them.

At the same time, the enemy vice chancellor leaped toward them down below.

He cleared the thirty meter scar of destruction he had created and he landed on the opposite roof.

“Yo.”

He ran toward them with his usual long strides.

The bridge was located to the stern of the galley accelerating toward the Musashi. In her ninja garb, Takigawa Ichimasu gave piloting instructions for the rolling ship while monitoring the battle up ahead.

She noticed the thirty meter gash in Musashino's surface and narrowed her eyes at the ether light smoke spewing from it. She grabbed the Garuda standing on her head and she threw it.

"Shiba, aren't you getting too wrapped up in your own tempo? You can't grasp the proper distance to fight Musashi's reckless vice chancellor like that."

Great Upperclassman: "Ahh? Shouldn't she be working to follow my lead? I'm older than her."

The bridge's magnified image showed Katsuie raising Kamewari. Its hilt contained an ether fuel gauge that was split between the left and right. It was currently empty.

Great Upperclassman: "The fuel compressed inside needs about ten seconds to expand into a usable form. It's flashier than Tonbokiri, but that makes it more of a pain to use."

"I think Tonbokiri is too stylish for you, Shiba. As are the other historical divine weapons."

"Maybe so," laughed Katsuie while running.

Great Upperclassman: "Ichimasu, isn't it about time you picked up speed? I'm running too, you know?"

"What's Naru doing so far away from you? Oh, he wanted to put some distance between you two so Animus Caritas wouldn't stop everyone from attacking him. ...Naru, how were the Unneeded?"

Lily Flower: "How should I know? The second they got here, Shibata's cheats kicked in."

The magnifying spell showed Narimasa looking back as he ran two houses over from Shibata. He may have felt checking behind them was his role as underclassman. *He takes things pretty seriously*, thought Ichimasu.

...But based on what people gain, that's probably best left to Toshi since he can take the initiative and enjoy it.

"Such cute underclassmen," she muttered to herself before giving the order to accelerate.

The entire crew of the ship was either trained in ninja techniques, automatons, or members of races with similar abilities. Even as the ship rolled, they could continue to stand on the floor or move to the walls.

As the ship rolled, messengers ran down the rotating corridors and the people working on the deck calmly stood on the upside-down surface. Of the Djinn in charge of the different spells, the wind spirits could naturally float in the air, but the Garudas tumbled around the ship while remotely managing their spells.

The ship had a single destination and Ichimasu smiled as she faced it.

“Ahead! We’ll reach Musashino’s bridge in two minutes! We’ll fly below it and pick up those two!”

While viewing the enemy’s predicted path, “Musashino” realized what they were after.

Why was the galley flying their way? And why had Narimasa and Katsuie jumped down?

Suzu indicated the answer while enlarging the model of the Musashi.

“Here... The legs...on the inside!”

The enemy was after the inside of the two “legs” supporting the bridge.

The Musashi could defend against external attacks using its armor, gravity barriers, or ocean, but the armor on the inside portions was weak and the gravity barriers were harder to open there. The inner walls of the arch-like bridge were no exception.

On top of that, the chain of command and output control were handled through there.

“If even one leg is destroyed, full speed gravitational cruising will be impossible. Over.”

Gravitational cruising put a lot of stress on the ships. If the base of the bridge had been smashed or even cracked, they could not use their full speed. For that reason, “Musashino” opened a sign frame.

Musashino: “Neshinbara-sama, give me your decision. Over.”

Novice: “Judge. I think we all know what this means.”

I just received an abstract response to my request, thought “Musashino” while rapidly transmitting the thought to the others. Their responses were 20% criticism, 60% sympathy, and 20% instructions to handle this herself. She accepted the sympathy and remained silent.

Novice: “I believe this means it’s possible P.A. Oda will invade Musashi. We can no longer hold onto the naïve hope that the Oda clan connection will lead to them to remain uninvolved or even take our side. ...That is why I have made some arrangements. I *would* like to get Lord Shibata’s signature, but don’t worry. I’ve done everything I can here. After all, we’re in M.H.R.R. If the value of Musashi’s military strength drops here, P.A. Oda will look down on us. It would leave a bad impression on the European forces at Westphalia, too.”

That was long, concluded “Musashino’s” honesty function. She and the others had had a high-speed discussion on preparing breakfast while he spoke, but she nodded regardless.

Thanks to some intercepted divine transmissions, they knew the enemy galley was captained by P.A. Oda’s Takigawa Ichimasu.

...She is close to Kuki Yoshitaka, commander of Oda’s iron-clad ships, she is a ninja, and she commands an aerial fleet.

She statistically determined flying below Musashino’s bridge was a shameless act. Even Lord Motonobu had never done that during his customary inspection of the Musashi at Mikawa. She knew it was dangerous, but her greed as an automaton wanted to gather as much data as possible. That was why she raised her voice.

“Everyone, shift to defense! We will allow the enemy galley to pass through! Over!”

Ichimasu’s galley quickly accelerated as if jumping up out the water.

It moved heavily, but picked up speed after a certain point and did not stop.

“Only eight kilometers to the Musashi! Shiba! Naru! Here I come!”

Ichimasu faced forward on the galley’s bridge. As the ship rolled to the right, she saw the Musashi and her two comrades running along the distant floating city.

As she gave instructions for small course corrections, Katsuie spoke to her.

Great Upperclassman: “I just had a thought, Ichimasu. What if you ram right into their bridge? That would win it right there.”

“I’ll do it if you don’t need anyone to pick you up. Also, this isn’t an unmanned fire ship set on a simple path. As a serious answer, by the time we got close enough that they couldn’t evade, about a third of the crew wouldn’t have time left to evacuate and I’m sure they would open up as many gravity barriers as they could.”

Ichimasu faced forward as she spoke.

“Also, Asakusa and Shinagawa are taking a rising trajectory. If we try anything, they’re sure to snag us with a derrick to forcibly change our course like they did to the Regno Unito.”

Great Upperclassman: “You mean they do have some defenses against a head-on collision?”

“Shaja. That’s why we have to put up our fight from here. Shiba, you two do your part!”

“Sure,” replied Katsuie just before his *insha kotob* vanished.

Their vice chancellor was continuing forward. In which case...

“Now, then. We just got a whole lot more busy.”

After expressing her trust in her comrades, Ichimasu placed her hands on the command *insha kotobs*.

Along with the Garuda managing the *insha kotobs*, she checked over the ship’s condition and recalculated their course. While giving further instructions, she checked the changes to the ship’s overall state. The results were good, but...

...Are we too exposed to the Musashi's secondary guns like this?

She closed her eyes and predicted the ship's course. After two seconds, she found the answer.

"Everyone! Roll right 180 and then back 180 three times! Angle down five degrees for thirty seconds, then angle back up five degrees and fly straight! From there, accelerate on in!"

"Shaja!!"

The ninja on the bridge replied while hidden yet fulfilling their duties.

Just as the Garudas began to cry, the ship began rolling to the right. But...

"The Musashi is firing on us! It's their secondary cannons on the port and starboard!!"

"That's fine. They're targeting where we were before rolling, so they won't hit us."

Ichimasu smiled as she replied.

"Continue forward. This is fun when you know the enemy shells won't hit you!"

"Shaja!"

The ship accelerated and the force gave a slight push on her back.

"Oh."

The world outside the window seemed to grow larger.

A moment later, the enemy shells flew past the tilting ship on both sides. A sound resembling tearing paper reached her ears and a tremor ran through the bridge, but...

"They won't hit."

And they did not.

"Now, let's go!"

Ichimasu nodded.

The oar-style accelerators on both sides of the galley were still creaking from

the shellfire and rolling motion, but...

“Records officer! We wouldn’t let a PR committee member onboard, so don’t forget to record what’s happening on the Musashi. And make sure the footage can be rendered in 3D! During the armada, even that skilled mechanical phoenix unit had trouble judging the distance on their first bombing run. This is our chance to get material for virtual training!!”

“Shaja!!”

A report came in from gun control.

“We have an adequate angle of fire to port!”

“Record the locations of the gravity barriers before firing!”

The reply of “shaja” was immediately followed by shaking from port. Ichimasu was knocked up from the floor a bit.

“Wah, that’s too much shaking. Cookie’s a boy, so I bet he designed it to focus on the guns. Personally, I like cleanly slipping past their attacks.”

After she gave stronger orders for the ship’s rolling, a report came in from the sensors.

“An enemy is approaching from the sky straight ahead! It’s Musashi’s white Technohexen!”

“Oh?” She crossed her arms. “So she wants to try her hand against the Black Metal armor Cookie designed? Not bad. ...Rear gunners, bring out the secondary guns too! We’re in M.H.R.R., the home of the witch hunts.”

So...

“Don’t hold back on the ammo!!”

A battle between a Technohexen and an aerial ship began about five kilometers in front of the Musashi.

At the very start, several movements occurred in just an instant.

The galley flew in toward the Musashi, so Naruze first flew in at it from the front.

She prepared some homing bullets for when they passed by, but...

“What’s with all these cannons!? A high-speed ship normally only has eight on the back and sides!”

However, this galley had more than double that.

On the sides, it had four evenly-spaced turret-less eight-gun cannons that fired non-homing shells and sixteen turret-less homing cannons above and below those.

Similarly, the back had an eight-gun cannon at the base of each accelerator forming an H-shape and a homing cannon above each line making up the H.

Including both sides and the back, it had 47 cannons.

The attacks were already on their way.

The galley’s roll brought the portside cannons up and fired on Naruze who was flying above.

A barrage of light flew from the twenty portside cannons like rain or like a wall.

“...!!”

Naruze did not evade. She swung her body once in midair and used the reaction.

“Here I go!”

She charged toward the galley down and to the left.

She wrapped her arms around Weiss Fräulein’s ship’s hull and almost seemed to pull it down with her as she fell to the left.

She was aiming for the gap in the homing shots. She could see the forest on the surface and she flew toward that color.

But there was not much room between the bullets of light, so...

“Herrlich!!”

While firing her own homing bullets, she peeled herself from the ship’s hull.

Despite being in midair, she held it under her right arm like a rifle, pointed it

upwards, and forcibly pulled down with her entire body.

Ultimately...

“Yes!”

The enemy’s homing bullets shot past her on either side and scattered into the heavens. Seeing that, she took a deep breath.

...Homing isn’t very effective at this range!

Their homing ability had a certain limitation. To ensure they did not lock onto the very ship that had fired them, the homing ability was deactivated in the earliest stage.

That was why Naruze had flown forward, dropped down, and gotten as close to the enemy as she could. By approaching the glowing bullets rising from below, she could evade them. Sometimes she used her wings or twisted her body and sometimes she used Weiss Fräulein’s acceleration. As for the attacks flying straight toward her...

“Hit them!!”

She fired repeatedly and smashed the shots that were on a direct course, but...

“A second volley!?”

The enemy filled the sky with new glowing cannon fire.

...I can’t let my guard down, can I!?

She bared her teeth in a smile and pushed in the ship’s hull’s throttle as she held it below her arm. She circled below the enemy before the further attacks arrived and she flew behind the galley, but...

...They don’t give up!!

The rear homing cannons had predicted her movement and had already fired. The homing cannons on the sides were also targeting her and their arcing shots had her completely trapped.

“Now you’ve done it!”

But just as she wondered what to do...

Wise Sister: “Heh heh. If you lose, I’ll tell Naito. Well? Are you going to lose? Are you?”

Something pretending to be an ally decided to provoke her.

...Kh.

I won’t fall for it, thought Naruze. It is true Margot might worry for me if she knew about this and that might open up a number of options like that or even that...I can think of about five different patterns.

But...

...No! You aren’t the kind of cheap person who’s satisfied with imagining about all that! That part of my life ended in England!

She would no longer corner herself with her imagination.

Besides, she was living a life she could truly feel in her grasp. Especially when a certain pair of breasts was in her grasp.

So she did not want to give into this cheap provocation and lead anyone to think she only won with that girl’s help.

...So calm down! Don’t listen to what that horrible person says!

Wise Sister: “Should I tell her while doing an impression of you? ‘Ahhn. Margoooooot, I’m sad, sad, sad after losing. Let me kiss, kiss, kiss you. Smooch.’ ”

The attached image contained a lipstick mark, but Naruze endured. She clenched her fist and her teeth, but...

...Good! I made it!!

A moment later, all the effort she put into enduring it caused her to break down all the harder. She felt like about five blood vessels burst in her brain. *Okay*, she thought with a smile on the corners of her lips. Her lips moved to form the words, “that damn girl”.

“Just shut up and watch!!”

She broke into a swift flight and fully opened up Weiss Fräulein.

She pointed the skirt's rail wings and everything else straight down.

"This is all too annoying!"

She used all of the accelerators to provide massive thrust. Her vision darkened a little, but several bodily correction Magie Figurs appeared around her to heal her.

She instantly launched herself nearly two hundred meters down to evade.

She successfully evaded. Instead of stopping, she stalled and was caught by the air, but she still looked up into the sky.

The third volley was already being fired and the shots were persistently following her, but...

"Constantly being targeted is the same as not being targeted. You just have to go wherever you aren't being targeted."

She looked up at the third volley, fourth volley, and even more homing bullets raining down from above and she knew this was the time to fulfill her duty.

She intended to do so.

Neshinbara had told her what that duty was before she had left.

...Draw the galley's attacks!

The more attacks she drew, the less damage to the Musashi's surface.

So she would circle above to draw the gunners' attention upwards and then circle below to fly alongside them.

It was no easy task. What if they hit her? It would not be so bad if she died, But if she did not die...

...That's right.

Kimi would undoubtedly make the joke she had threatened to make. She would keep her promise. That was the kind of girl she was.

I have to stop that girl's idiocy, thought Naruze as she closed her wings and moved the pen in her right hand.

Light rained down from the sky.

Illuminated by that light, Naruze changed Weiss Fräulein's settings.

She hurriedly rewrote the output spell to focus more on evasion than before. She would not need long-term aerial mobility here, so she shifted its abilities toward quicker movements and...

"I don't have much choice."

There was something she had to do.

"Yes, you want me to do it, don't you? Fine, then! I'll do it! Those are the awful words that will get you stuck in a shotgun wedding!"

Asama: "Stop yelling that into the pure morning air!!"

Why do you know what I meant? wondered Naruze as she finished the adjustments.

She struck Weiss Fräulein and pressed it against her body like she was embracing it. She pressed on the throttle with the back of her thigh and she looked to the heavens.

The barrage was there. It was thick and looked unavoidable, but...

"This is perfect for putting the finishing touches on the settings modifications."

She expanded and synced the waist rail wings. She used those as her thrusters, but she used most of Weiss Fräulein's power for firing.

"It's time I returned fire. And..."

She stuffed a tower of about seven coins into Weiss Fräulein and the auto-loading spell dealt with them.

"This is a Technohexen's multi-coin shot. I won't stop until we close up shop."

With that, Naruze charged into the glowing barrage to take the shortest route to the enemy.

Again and again, rapidly-moving light crossed paths in the sky.

Five kilometers in front of the Musashi, a white galley and a white

Technohexen on a broom flew and exchanged fire.

At their speed, the five kilometers of distance was not far.

But the density of their attacks was enough to literally scorch the air and leave a trail behind them.

As they soared, their firefight drew an arc in the sky.

Naruze slipped through the barrage that pursued her and cut her off. Meanwhile, she moved up above the galley. The galley deflected her four homing bullets with its barrage and armor.

They exchanged fire again and again.

The noise rang out over and over and the sky was filled with even more light than the rising sun.

Amid the exchange of light and destructive force, Naruze moved Weiss Fräulein with her entire body. She tugged it upwards, pushed it down, and spun the rail wings around as if kicking off the air.

“...!”

She seemed to hop around the sky as she carried out her evasions and attacks.

The gaps in the barrage were small. Her shoulders were grazed and her wings were torn at, but...

...Margot is working down below!!

She was certain of that. Even if they could not always see each other, they were always facing some kind of trouble.

That was life as a Technohexen.

...That's right.

During the Age of the Gods, M.H.R.R. had been the home of the witch hunts.

War, plagues, and unrest had created an age of unease, so in some regions, witches had been executed as “suspicious” or the “cause of unfortunate or disturbing things”. Those were the witch hunts.

“There!”

One of the homing cannons had turned toward the Musashi, so Naruze fired two shots into it as if to slap it and draw its attention. She trusted that the two shots would hit.

“Take that!”

She wrapped her arms around Weiss Fräulein and launched herself below the galley.

Honestly, she thought. Life as a Technohexen is tough.

But she had it relatively easy.

...Because I'm a white Technohexen.

Society had a generally positive image of the color white and they used healing spells, so even when the witch hunt was at its peak in M.H.R.R., Weiss Techno was understood as a type of folk remedy.

Even if they were not officially recognized, a Weiss Techno user could earn some money by healing people. *But*, continued Naruze as she repeatedly dodged.

...Black Technohexen families were different.

Her parents had told her about the worst of the witch hunts held in M.H.R.R. for the history recreation.

Most had been “interpretations” that did not actually take any lives, but no one had known how far those “interpretations” were allowed to go. So in the end, they had compromised and decided that exile and alienation were the “right” answer.

She knew what that meant now, but she had not in the past.

She had thought she had gone through the same troubles.

“But it wasn’t the same in Margot’s case.”

She clenched her teeth and smiled as she thought.

“I can’t let Kimi’s silly act worry Margot!!”

She pursued the galley that continued firing on her.

The enemy was moving forward, so she moved forward as well. Not only would she draw its attention as a decoy, she would crack its armor and do actual damage. So...

“...!”

She let her attacks fly as if to push the galley into the sky, but she saw its shadow overhead.

The galley accelerated even further and quickly reduced its distance to the Musashi.

“Full speed ahead!!”

Ichimasu shouted on the galley’s bridge.

“Raise our speed and move forward so they can’t lock onto us! Only correct our angle of flight once! Do so when leaving our rising line. Make sure you only need to hold your hand down on the controls in the end!!”

As she spoke, she looked down at a diagram summarizing the ship’s state.

The galley was about eighty meters wide. Musashi’s surface was 164 meters wide on average, so they could easily pass below the bridge up ahead.

But there were gravity barriers.

...How many of them will reach us!?

If the Musashi’s gravity barriers had as wide a range as their output allowed, they would push back at the galley when it tried to pass below the bridge.

With that in mind, she had made sure they accelerated enough to break through any gravity barriers that might be placed in their way.

“Open our own gravity barriers on the bow’s ram! We’re breaking through in one shot!”

A moment later, the navigator spoke up.

“The Musashi is opening new gravity barriers!”

Specifically...

“Their maximum range is fifty meters! They’ll tear into either side of us for ten meters!”

“Roll an extra forty degrees to the right!!”

Ichimasu made a split-second decision. The ship was now almost on its side.

“Tilt the ship toward Shiba-toward the vice chancellor and fill the width! Focus the starboard cannons on the area around the vice chancellor and concentrate fire to starboard while passing below Musashino’s bridge!”

“What should the gunners on the port side do!? Our boys are selfishly complaining that they want something to do!”

“Tell them to make some kind of pose toward Musashino’s bridge! A provocative one!”

“Shaja!!”

“ ‘Musashino’-sama! The gunners on the enemy galley’s port side are making an ‘ahaaan’ pose! Over.”

“Not to worry. Statistically, they are likely insane. People like that are generally harmless. Over.”

Great Upperclassman: “Who ordered our boys to act gay?”

Taki: “Huh? Provocative... Huh?”

What are they doing? thought Narimasa as he glanced at his *insha kotob* and continued to run.

He turned toward Katsuie who ran two buildings to the right while wielding a large sword and shield.

“Where’s Takigawa?”

He turned toward the galley approaching the Musashi from the sky behind them.

...Damn is she fast!

For a while now, he had been accelerating with Lily Flower constantly opened around his feet.

To be collected by the galley, he had to reach the back end of Musashino before the galley did, but at their current speed, they would arrive there at about the same time.

“Why are we all so hard on our allies!?”

He clicked his tongue and accelerated along the rooftop.

He could see the giant bridge up ahead. It was so large that it threw off his sense of distance and he felt like he was not approaching it at all. But...

...We're going to destroy that thing, huh?

That was the greatest objective of this attack.

They had a plan. The Musashi's powerful gravity barriers could be stopped for an instant with Katsuie's Animus Caritas – Novum.

They would use that opening to attack.

The galley would fire anti-ship homing shells to destroy the base of the bridge.

“I see,” muttered “Musashino” on Musashino's bridge.

Suzu tilted her head in confusion, so “Musashino” created a model of the area around Musashino's bridge so the girl could feel it.

“Um, what is...this?”

“The enemy's objective. I had determined flying below here was a shameless stunt meant to shame us, but it is actually a shameless attempt to attack us after stopping our gravity barriers with the Testamenta Arma. Over.”

The galley, Katsuie, and Narimasa appeared on the model in Suzu's hands. That was the result of the automatons' real time predictive calculations. As Katsuie and the galley moved closer, they predicted the enemy would attack the rear port side of the bridge's leg.

“W-will we be...okay?”

“Musashino” nearly said this would not be easy, but she decided to stop.

To find a better response, she quickly had her thoughts go over the conditions for this battle.

...The problem is defending the inner sides of the bridge.

The Musashi’s armor was focused on the outside, so it was thinner on the inside of the legs of that arch.

Normally, that area could not be targeted, so the gravity barriers and a double hull were used to protect the vital parts such as control lines, fuel lines, and the main frame. It had been made light and flexible.

So if the gravity barriers were stopped, they could only rely on the gaps between the thin armor and double hull.

...And I have determined the enemy will be using homing anti-ship shells.

Even if they were homing, the anti-ship shells used by a Kraken-class galley were powerful. Piercing shells meant to break through armor would pass through the thin armor and reach the vital parts hidden within the double shell.

Luckily, Katsuie’s Kamewari had a short range.

An attack that created a gash thirty meters long and five meters deep was certainly a threat, but Musashino’s bridge was not situated on its deck. Its legs were constructed on the side accelerators and that gap made it impossible for that weapon to attack them.

Of course, the enemy would know that, so Katsuie would not make a vain attempt to reach the bridge. Instead, he would maintain a position from which his Testamenta Arma’s effects would cover the area below the bridge.

So “Musashino” reached her conclusion and spoke to Suzu.

“Judge. Do not worry, Suzu-sama. Neshinbara-sama and the others are already on the move. They will make up for our weaknesses and eliminate the enemy.”

So...

“They will stop Shibata Katsuie. Let us trust in that, Suzu-sama. Over.”

...The enemy's going to target Shibata, aren't they?

I can't imagine anything else, thought Narimasa as he ran. I guess I have to protect him.

After all, their plan was centered on Katsuie and Ichimasu working together.

“A person and a warship working together sounds more like a stunt than a battle plan.”

...But if those pain-in-the-ass upperclassmen say they're going to do it, they'll do it.

With that thought, he accelerated. By rushing forward and eliminating any danger, he would at least not be in the way. He also glanced over at Shibata.

Meanwhile, Katsuie moved alongside him with a leisurely pace.

“Hey,” he said. “I'm hungry.”

“What!? Didn't you just eat that annoying love-filled box lunch!? Does your brain not tell you when you've had enough!?”

“Oh!? I may be satisfied with Lady Oichi's love, but I'll never have had enough, you idiot! I'll leave you behind if you keep being so selfish!”

Narimasa wanted to beat the crap out of him if he could.

Taki: “C'mon, Naru. Put up a good fight. If you beat Shiba, I'll buy you lunch.”

“You're going to make me buy you lunch if I lose, aren't you?”

Taki: “Don't be mean. I would never do that. ...I will make you go without lunch, though.”

Narimasa ignored her.

At any rate, Ichimasu had to be piloting her ship while giving instructions to the crew in the back. She would only be speaking to him if she had the attention to spare, but he wanted her to avoid a mistake if at all possible. However...

“___”

The sound of the galley grew behind him. The time for the charge was coming.

He looked back and saw the white high-speed galley approaching while exchanging countless arcing shots.

He guessed it was around half a minute from reaching the bridge and he rushed forward himself.

He had a number of worries, but...

...Takigawa won't mess up.

Just as he nodded while running, he faced forward again and saw something at the top of his vision.

It was something he recognized.

Something made of glinting metal fell from the sky and right alongside Musashino's bridge.

"Shibata! Up above!"

It was coming and at a decent speed.

"That's Musashi's strange mobile shell!!"

Adele frantically controlled her mobile shell as it dropped down.

She had a single goal: fire herself from the launch catapult on the rear of Tama to turn herself into a piece of artillery.

...But if I don't hit, this will be very, very bad!

She was supposed to hit Shibata Katsuie.

His Testamenta Arma stopped all of his enemy's actions, but...

"That just means you have to attack from outside its range!!"

If it stopped all of his enemy's actions inside its field of effect...

...It won't stop actions taken outside that field!

They had considered using a sniper but had decided a mere sniper shot would

not be very effective.

“So I’m a little doubtful that I’ll work either!”

Novice: “Yeah, but you’re our only option! We don’t have anything else!”

Flat Vassal: “You’re clenching your fist as you say that, aren’t you!? You’re hiding something, aren’t you!?”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh. If not, it must be time for glasses to confess to glasses! Now, you’re below the legendary bridge, so go in for the attack!”

Four Eyes: “Oh?”

Almost Everyone: “Eek!”

At any rate, Adele steadied her mobile shell’s fall.

She was falling legs-first. The escape device in the legs contained plenty of shock absorption, but more importantly...

...The armor is broken.

The broken head armor had been directly bolted to the new body armor, so she could not turn its head and her vision was fixed in place. However, that did not matter when falling like a shell.

She had decided she only needed to protect her head when rolling.

“I understand having to launch me from the back of Tama so they wouldn’t notice, but I never thought I would be launched three times. Once from Okutama where the Asama Shrine is, once from Takao, and finally from Tama.”

She understood it was to accustom her to it and to move her quickly to Tama. The first time had been extremely thrilling and had chilled her insides, but it felt normal by the third time.

...Bit by bit, I’m getting the hang of controlling my fall!

When falling from the Tower of London, she had failed to control the fall and ended up spinning.

That had concerned Suzu a little, but she doubted anything like that would happen again.

...It shouldn't happen, anyway. But sadly, I can see it happening given my luck.

At any rate, she could see the enemy. He was running down below. Beyond him, she saw the galley tilt further and she saw Naruze drawing its fire.

She quickly approached the running enemy while Naruze and the galley moved overhead.

She was dropping quickly and her vision rapidly approached the ground.

She could no longer see the ground between the ships. Instead, she saw the rows of houses, a demonic form, and...

“Eh?”

Someone else was running along the rooftops and he had lily flower emblems glowing on different parts of his body.

“Sassa Narimasa!?”

Meanwhile, she reached the target altitude.

She was going to hit, but just before she did, she heard Narimasa's voice. It was the same shout she had heard before.

“Lily Flower!!”

A moment later, Adele was hit by a high-speed flying kick from the right and her mobile shell was knocked away.

After his flying kick, Narimasa side-flipped through the air. He twisted around while passing by over Katsuie's head.

“Shibata! You weren't hit, were you!?”

He pointed at the round mobile shell that had flown through the air and fallen in the city streets to starboard. Katsuie looked to him while running.

“You didn't destroy it? You have a troublesome personality, you know that?”

“It's just how I am.”

Narimasa smiled bitterly, but gave a silent thought.

...This is the second time with that vassal!

He had gone all out the first time and destroyed a portion of her mobile shell, yet she had come with almost the same equipment this time.

Interesting, he thought.

He was from P.A. Oda, he was one of the Five Great Peaks, and he was Sassa Narimasa. Most people reacted to those three terms by avoiding him, but this vassal was a normal student and yet...

“She tried to take us on again after losing the first time.”

Not bad. That takes guts. I don't think I've met anyone like that in a good long while.

Interesting.

This Musashi place is more interesting than I thought, he decided.

It's a pretty lively place.

But in that instant, he heard a sound from overhead.

“There's more!?”

“Shibata!”

Hearing Narimasa's shout, Katsuie turned toward him. Narimasa was about five buildings away and pointing upwards, so Katsuie tilted his head and leaped over a road.

While in midair between roofs, he made the same pose as the lowly boy.

“Like this!? Like this!? What's with that Saturday Night Fever pose? Are you stupid? Wa ha ha ha ha!!!”

“Look up!!”

He needs to do something about that short temper, thought Katsuie as he looked up. He saw a steel beam falling toward him. It was a slender H-shaped beam and it was about four meters long.

However...

“Looks to be about two hundred of them.”

A massive amount of steel materials were falling toward him after being released from the rope binding them together. They must have been released at the perfect time to hit him as he ran.

I see, he thought while continuing to run. He was on the central ship of Musashino, but these had been transported by air from the port ship of Tama. That was outside the range of his Testamenta Arma and it was a good enough surprise attack to make a decent trap.

They had even kept the lowly boy busy by dropping that vassal as a decoy.

...But this is a real pain.

The steel beams would not do much damage even if they hit him, but they would obstruct his movements as obstacles. In the worst case, he could even be late to catch his ride home on Ichimasu's ship. He could of course jump down to the surface without issue, but the lowly boy would be a problem. After all, Oichi would scold him if he abandoned an underclassman.

"I have no choice."

He raised Kamewari in his right hand as if placing it on his left shoulder. He instantly crouched down as he ran. Immediately afterwards, he sent a twisting attack into the air overhead.

"Get them, Kamewari."

The blade sliced through the air. What travelled about thirty meters from the weapon was not a cut as with Tonbokiri.

"Be smashed!"

Instead of cutting, it broke and smashed. And instead of doing so to an object, it smashed things in order to defeat his enemy.

That power was fired here.

The weapon gave a roar, a spray of ether light, and a scorching sound.

From there, the sound of smashing overwhelmed all else.

The two hundred pieces of metal were broken, smashed, and blown away,

creating a path for Katsue. He then took a step to travel down the gap in the steel.

At the same time, a form appeared in front of him. He briefly wondered who it was, but...

...Oh?

Before his question could form, he felt a smile on his lips.

There was a single reason for his joy.

“So someone has the guts to face me! Name yourself and I will listen!”

“I am the Musashi student...”

The individual jumped from a rooftop up ahead and flew through the steel-filled air.

“Tachibana Muneshige. ...I am a normal student!”

Chapter 51: Tangled Winged One in the Sky

CHAPTER 51

"Tangled Winged One in the Sky"



What do people call it
When one chooses
To step forward?
Point Allocation (Challenge)

What do people call it

When one chooses

To step forward?

Point Allocation (Challenge)

Below Musashino's bridge, a demonic long-lived and a young man both chose to clash.

"Demon Shibata" Katsuie reacted to the name Tachibana Muneshige.

...Tres España's former 1st special duty officer and the inheritor of the Peerless in the West's name!

Katsuie had heard he had transferred to Musashi but had been removed from the battlefield due to a leg injury.

"Were you drawn out by me!?"

With that shouted question, he tried to turn Kamewari around and strike again despite just having swung it.

His enemy was faster.

...Oh!?

Katsuie bragged that no one could compare to the speed of his blade, but this enemy was faster.

He could make any number of excuses, but it came down to letting his guard down.

Meanwhile, his enemy moved in. The young man leaped up on top of the airborne steel bars.

"...!"

He threw the steel toward Katsuie, but this was not an attack.

...Is he correcting the path of the falling steel!?

The enemy was not attacking him. The smashed steel bars had flown off course, so the young man was simply correcting that.

The Testamenta Arma's effects did not come into play.

And the corrected paths took the steel right in front of Katsuie. They fell like rain and interfered with his approach by hitting him or obstructing his path.

Instead of a direct victory, the young man was interfering with Katsuie's plan and seeking a battlefield victory.

"You're thinking about this as someone weak, aren't you!?"

Muneshige continually corrected the paths of the steel bars.

The two hundred bars had been broken into four hundred by Kamewari. They were all about two meters long. If they were seen as short spears, this was the same as producing four hundred spears in midair.

They acted as shields to hide him and he constantly made them into weapons.

His job was simple: place his hand on them and throw them back to their original position. He would use the reactive force of the throw to flip back and he would use that rotation to throw the next one.

By continuing the pattern, he moved through the air while spinning from bar to bar and he started moving upwards.

In no time, he had launched seventy-one of them and he felt heat in his arms.

...It produces this much heat without holy spell cooling!?

He felt that was a problem to solve in the future, but his arms were moving well even after his long break. He guessed that was partially due to focusing on strengthening his upper body when he could not use his legs.

He was satisfied that he could feel his actions in the back of his upper arm more than before.

At the end of his repeated spinning and throwing, he arrived at the top of the falling steel bars.

At the same time, the spears of corrected steel crashed into the straw roof.

The first thirty or so formed a standing barricade and the rest fell on Katsuie.

...Will this stop him!?

Each one weighed just below thirty kilograms and that had been seventy-one of them. It would have been more of a collision than a hit.

But Muneshige heard a voice.

“Thaaat should do it.”

Katsuie did only one thing as the seventy-one steel bars crashed into him.

As he ran, he spread his arms, caught the steel, and held them between his arms.

Katsuie wrapped his arms around the seventy-one steel bars as if pushing them forward as he ran.

He held Kamewari in his right hand and Animus Caritas in his left, so he could not hold them with his full strength. However, he hooked them with the inside of his elbow and moved toward the ones sticking up from the floor up ahead.

“Toh.”

He caught them in his chest.

All the metal clanged together and did not stop. He blew away the straw of the roof while adding a dozen or so steel bars to those in his arms.

“And...”

His legs were spread wide to bear the weight and he passed through it all in two steps.

He held a bundle of steel too large to fully wrap his arms around, but he held it even tighter.

He moved his right arm down and his left up to twist and compress the bundle.

“Toh!”

He had twisted together the steel until it was fused together by the pressure. The two ends were still separated, but it was now three times the length.

He had created a massive metal club.

He then pressed the clump of steel against his chest and threw it forward.

“You can have it back!”

His running feet gave a kick straight up toward Muneshige. The movement was light and casual, but the metal club accelerated so quickly that it seemed to vanish.

“...!”

It flew up toward Muneshige.

Muneshige made a split-second decision.

He would evade.

But any evasive action would be stopped by the Testamenta Arma.

...So I will simply run!

For that, he moved. He stood on the steel bars that remained in midair like a raft and he ran straight forward.

This would be much easier than his past feat of running along a blade. Or so he hoped.

His legs were still not fully healed and he had been out of action for so long. However, he needed to evade and quickly, so...

“— — —!”

He stepped on the first bar.

He felt it below his foot, but he felt more tension than relief. He was painfully aware that he was not fully recovered, but he shifted that from fear to caution.

“Toh!”

He moved.

After his first step, he leaped to the second bar of the airborne steel raft.

He realized that his leg was weak as he pulled it back, but he still stepped onto the third. The massive metal club crashed into the steel bars from below.

It precisely struck the area Muneshige had previously been in. All of the steel rose up like a wave and surged toward him.

The steel flew upwards and jabbed in from below like blades, so...

“Toh!”

Without rushing or evading, he changed positions simply by running.

But he had a thought.

...This is too slow!!

His movements had no speed behind them. He was acting based on his balance and instincts, but he lacked the mobility needed to be called a martial art.

He was simply moving across the midair steel bars.

When he kicked off one of them, an unpleasant sensation reached the bottom of his foot. The feeling underfoot was lacking as if he had broken through the floor.

He had used too much strength, rushed himself, and failed because of it.

“Kh!”

Muneshige realized he had made a mistake on the battlefield. And when facing a powerful enemy.

That would have been unthinkable in the past.

But that fact did not fill him with surprise or fear.

“...!”

He felt something like anger and it was directed at himself.

But emotions would not accomplish anything. He fully lost his balance in midair and heard a voice. It came from almost directly below the steel bars.

“Get him, Kamewari.”

The breaking and smashing was fired in a straight line toward his escape path.

At the same time, Muneshige gave a shout while feeling his own inexperience at being unable to resolve this on his own.

“Gin! Please!”

As soon as he cried out, Muneshige saw an explosion strike Katsuie below.

It was a shell shot.

The bursting sound and blast of water vapor crossed paths with Kamewari’s strike.

“Gin!”

He turned around and saw Gin and her Arcabuz Cruz on the roof of a viewing platform on Okutama’s front deck.

Muneshige had drawn Katsuie’s attention upwards. Once Katsuie had used Kamewari and left himself open, she had fired from outside Animus Caritas – Novum’s range.

“———”

A series of five shots were fired into the area around Katsuie.

After seeing that fact and hearing the series of five solid sounds, Muneshige understood he had done his duty. And as soon as he saw Gin nod toward him, Kamewari’s smashing arrived from below.

The thirty meter slash exploded out toward him when he was unable to evade.

Gin watched with her eyebrows slightly raised. Above the explosive blast she had created on the next ship forward, Kamewari’s attack was going to hit Muneshige.

At the very moment that she judged it had struck, Asama – who was here to assess the situation and heal the injured – let out a shout. She brought her hands to her cheeks and Gin assumed she was going to voice her worry.

“Kyaaaah! He was smashed to pulpy bits!!”

Is she really a shrine maiden? wondered Gin before speaking up.

“Do not worry, Lady Asama.”

The half-dragon was there. Urquiaga had passed by Katsuie once, but he had waited until the timing was right and had flown back in to snatch Muneshige out of the air. He was already flying in a downward arc toward Gin and Asama. Held to the half-dragon’s chest, Muneshige noticed Gin.

“_____”

And he gave a bitter smile.

...Master Muneshige.

He only forced a smile when things were not going well for him or he was feeling down.

...Do not worry, Master Muneshige. We are still thirty-seven away from all fifty times, so let’s keep trying.

Gin faced forward to the enemy who was already halfway through the area below Musashino’s bridge.

“Did that stop him?”

It had not. The smoke of the six shells burst apart and someone ran out. It was...

“Sassa Narimasa!?”

No. Narimasa was indeed out front, but he was floating off the ground.

He was a shield.

Katsuie had grabbed his collar from behind with the hand holding Kamewari and he was holding him out front as a shield.

Katsuie’s voice reached Gin and he breathed out smoke as he left the rest of the smoke.

“That was a close one!”

That one really was close, thought Katsuie as he ran.

...That gunner wife seriously targeted my solar plexus.

She knows the weak point of someone who just ate. If that had hit, I might have been enjoying Lady Oichi's lunch and love in reverse. That would just be too much of a waste.

But, he thought.

"Narimasa, I'm glad you were here!"

He recalled the moment of danger and the valiant deed of his underclassman.

Narimasa had jumped in from the side to intercept the gunner wife's first shot.

He had opened his Lily Flower emblems and splendidly crushed the shell.

I've got a great underclassman. I never thought he would be so worried for me he'd come back. Maybe he's gay.

Regardless, after intercepting the first shot, that idiot posed in front of me and shouted, "Hell yeah!"

I just about ran into him, so I grabbed his collar and picked him up.

He then gave a tremendous effort against the rest of that wife's shells.

Long story short, I'm safe.

"And that's all that matters."

Also, Narimasa was heavy, so he swung him around to throw him away.

The small fry was waving his hands around after using Lily Flower to repeatedly punch the shells.

"Hey, wait! You're an upperclassman, aren't you? At least say thanks. I saved your life, you know?"

"And I just saved your life from my bad mood, so we're even!"

"That's not fair!!"

He was annoying, so Katsuie swung him once and tossed him aside.

Katsuie then spoke to Ichimasu. Behind him, her galley had already arrived above the Musashino.

With its acceleration, it would catch up almost immediately.

They were entering the most important time, so...

“Ichimasu! Align your cannons! I’m almost at the end of Musashino’s bridge!”

“It’s just gotta be your way, doesn’t it?”

On the tilted bridge, Ichimasu smiled bitterly and spoke to Katsuie via divine transmission.

“Shiba! We’re going to align our front starboard cannons with you! Make sure to keep straight!”

And, she thought while swinging her right hand toward the crew on the bridge.

“Prepare to pilot us on an escape path! But don’t rush it until we’ve fired around the vice chancellor all we can!”

The gunners placed their sights on the gaps in the gravity barriers around Katsuie.

...This is our last chance to fire!

Just as she prepared to give the command, a sharp voice reached her from the control officer.

“The Technohexen is forcibly approaching from the rear! She intends to settle this!”

“I’m not about to let you fire!”

Noticing what Katsuie and the galley were up to, Naruze made a final barrage of attacks.

Her tower of coins was nearing its end, but...

...Break!

There was a large dent in the galley's starboard armor. It was toward the front and just above the center. Naruze's efforts to concentrate her fire there had paid off. To motivate herself, she had named that spot Margot and rewarded herself with a pantomimed grope for every hundred hits on that spot. So far, she had earned seven gropes.

But her own upper and lower armor had already been worn down.

One shot from the front had been especially bad. A fragment from a shattered shell had flown right toward her. She had used her wings to raise her hips so it escaped below her crotch, but it made her thankful she was a girl. She wondered if she could use that same situation to naturally make a girl out of a boy, but she concluded it probably would not work.

"Regardless, that was a close one!"

The galley's cannons showed no sign of slowing.

She had destroyed a few of the secondary cannons, but they were replenished from within since the inside was divided into blocks. This was why non-turret cannons were so difficult to deal with.

And she had assumed they were small ether cannons, but they fired a physical shell as a core. Her shots were coin bullets given homing and acceleration, so the physical core was too good at counteracting them.

But even so, she ducked below, had her black wings grazed, performed an ideal evasion, and forced herself to continue forward.

...Kh.

She felt pain in her right arm because it had been grazed on the way here. She had cast a spell to stop the bleeding, but the defense spell covering her body had shattered into scattering light and she felt a chill from within. She wondered if the wound reached the flesh, but she chose to focus on moving.

She continued on to break their armor.

If she did, it would disturb the enemy at least a little and that would surely help the Musashi at least a little, so...

"There!! Eighth grope!"

She predicted the timing of the enemy's shellfire and fired twice as a decoy and twice for real.

"Herrlich!"

With that cry, the side of the galley exploded.

The sound of the hit was the loud tone of breaking metal.

...I finally broke it!

The damaged armor bent and twisted. It seemed to lean back and was finally peeled away when the base exploded.

Naruze had destroyed it, but...

"That's your trick!?"

While slipping below the giant piece of armor that flew off the ship, the Weiss Hexen looked forward.

A large secondary cannon existed below the destroyed armor.

The large secondary cannon was a four-gun turret-less cannon.

On the galley's bridge, Ichimasu crossed her arms with a Garuda on her head.

"It was only just delivered and it came with a cover to avoid any damage. I knew you'd target it if you could see it and I didn't want you to judge its power, so I was planning to keep it hidden until just before we used it. ...Still, I'm impressed you destroyed that cover. It was no different from the standard armor."

She bent her eyes but looked away from the Technohexen.

She gave a bitter smile as she looked past the bow and to the surface of the Musashino.

"Well, whatever. The cannons are set for use against K.P.A. Italia, so I knew they would be a little rough. Cookie said he increased the density to help battle the small ships of the Murakami Navy, but they're still pretty useless against an individual who gets up close. It's pretty lame to talk so big when all you can do is graze them."

She had the Garuda on her head give a squawk.

“Fire the four-gun secondary cannon. Blow away the camouflage along with the Technohexen.”

A moment later, all noise vanished from Naruze’s surroundings. The small cannons had suddenly stopped firing.

...Not good!

The secondary cannon in front of her had a caliber of fifteen centimeters, but the three meter base suggested it was an ether cannon. Instead of firing a shell, it was sure to fire a straight and thick beam of light that would scorch the sky.

It transformed as it prepared to fire.

The entire four-gun secondary cannon slid back and the muzzles grew white with heat.

“———!”

Naruze began to evade downward. She could not use Weiss Fräulein as a shield against an ether cannon blast and she wanted gravity’s assistance, so...

...Down!

She grabbed the acceleration panel and pressed Weiss Fräulein down on top of her.

As soon as she evaded, she would attack. She would fire four homing bullets between the enemy’s beams.

She opened a Magie Figur to setup the homing bullets while preparing to descend, but...

Her right hand suddenly slipped from the control panel.

“...!?”

It was so sudden that her right chest slammed into Weiss Fräulein. It struck the right side of her jaw and her vision briefly wavered.

...What?

She quickly realized what had caused this: her blood. Her right arm was injured and the charm applying the hemostatic spell had peeled off due to the blood and her continuous quick movements. The blood had then wet her hand.

The injury and blood loss had numbed her senses.

The blood had dripped from her sleeve to her glove and made the grip slippery.

It only delayed her for an instant, but it was still a deadly opening.

She gave up on evading, pressed her body against Weiss Fräulein and tried to move herself downwards.

“———”

But as soon as she noticed heat straight ahead, the four beams of light shot out into the air and toward her.

Chapter 52: Pursuer in the Rising Wind

CHAPTER 52

"Pursuer in the Rising Wind"



Is it here?
Finally?
Point Allocation (Next Generation)

Is it here?

Finally?

Point Allocation (Next Generation)

Four beams of light swept through the sky.

They came from the four-gun cannon of the galley charging straight toward the Musashi.

The ether cannon used its power to burn through everything in a straight line and the speed of its deployment allowed it to use its full power.

Two of the beams scorched the sky and turned the thin morning clouds to steam. One of them struck the rear of Shinagawa, but several gravity barriers appeared around Shinagawa to detonate the white cascade.

The final beam pierced directly through the area the Technohexen had occupied.

It eliminated everything there.

At the same time, the galley arrived above Musashino.

A voice filled the galley's bridge.

It belonged to Takigawa Ichimasu. She barked orders while petting or tossing aside the Djinn and Garuda that appeared to control the ship.

She looked ahead to where Katsuie was already about to leave the area below the enemy bridge.

This was their only chance to fire, so...

“Front starboard gunners! I know you've been trained to take aim in an instant! So fire around the vice chancellor!”

As Ichimasu gave her orders, the side of the galley transformed as it flew in toward Musashino's bridge.

The turret-less cannons jutted out and they rotated ninety degrees to the

front.

The cannons released their inner connections and then connected front to back in groups of eight to combine into a single long cannon.

Three such cannons were created. Behind them, the non-homing eight-gun high-speed cannons also rotated their barrels to link together.

The non-homing high-speed cannons formed the base and the homing cannons attached to the front to create three high-speed homing cannons.

Small forms appeared at the front and back locking portions of the individual pieces making up these cannons. They were Mlasi-style Mice. The spell-controlling artificial spirits were known as Djinnns. The super deformed Garuda Djinnns cried out and the cannons produced a harmony of sound as they locked together.

The galley continued on.

It tilted diagonally as it charged into the square area below Musashino's bridge.

At the same time, the three front starboard cannons were fired.

Light was emitted from the back and tracking light trailed behind it as it raced through the sky.

There were three shots in all. The high-speed homing shells had solid cores and flew toward Musashino's bridge.

Katsue saw the accelerating galley fire.

After locking onto its target locations, it fired homing shells from the front starboard side.

A few Garuda Djinnns flew alongside the three lights for a bit.

“———”

And the lights accelerated as the Garudas vanished.

The shells were coming.

They were wrapped in distorted air as they flew in behind Katsuie.

Musashi's gravity barriers opened over his head to protect the bridge, but...

"My Testamenta Arma will stop them for an instant."

As soon as he spoke, the barriers stopped. Static ran through them like a slight hesitation and the homing shells slipped through the gaps this created.

Katsuie decided to continue ahead and finish this, but then he heard three explosions in the air.

"...!?"

He saw three bullets of light pierce through the homing shells from the side.

Katsuie saw the destructive shells break apart.

The final shells in their plan to damage the Musashi's bridge were destroyed.

...They got us!?

The enemy's homing bullets had broken straight through the solid core of their homing shells. Not just anyone could fire something like that. If anyone, it would be...

"The Technohexen!"

He turned around and saw the gunner beyond the galley.

It was indeed the Technohexen.

Musashi's Technohexen was alive. The galley's four-gun secondary cannon had supposedly hit her, but she stood on the steeple of a church in Musashi's city and she held her ship's hull in her arms.

"Ichimasu! What the hell are you doing!?"

Taki: "Eh? Huh!? How!? But we shot her down!"

Ichimasu answered him with a question and her answer was found in the white ship's hull the Technohexen held.

The front end had a large half-circle torn into it.

It had definitely been hit, but not by the galley's cannon. *It can't be*, thought Katsuie. *But*, he added as the corner of his mouth rose.

“Did you fire one of your four homing shots at yourself!?”

“I'm a Technohexen. We excel at harming ourselves.”

Standing on the steeple, Naruze held Weiss Fräulein's hull and sighed.

...Honestly, you made me take some pretty drastic measures there.

As Katsuie had said, she had chosen to attack in order to evade.

Normally, homing shots had a time lag until the homing activated to ensure they did not lock onto their firer.

But she had quickly altered the settings on just one of them to begin homing immediately.

It had locked onto the front of Weiss Fräulein's hull. The bullet had just barely made it in time, but it had supplied a powerful strike to the front of the hull.

“I was shot down, but I managed to avoid your cannon fire so I could interfere here.”

She smiled toward the galley flying below the Musashi's bridge.

“I made high-speed homing bullets using all of the spirit fuel Orei Metallo that Margot didn't take with her yesterday. They can't be fired right away, but you can't ignore the firepower that destroyed an enemy ship during the armada battle.”

She lowered her hips. Blood was still flowing from her right arm, so even standing was difficult. However, she set Weiss Fräulein's hull on the ceiling to sit on.

“I'll have to send it in for repairs again, but I can't complain too much. After all, I traded my speed for the Musashi's safety, so...”

Yes.

“Margot is sure to praise me.”

As soon as she muttered that, she heard a single sound.

It resembled shattering glass and it filled the area below the bridge.

She recognized the sound.

...That's a barrier being destroyed!

“Tonbokiri smashed the enemy Testamenta Arma’s barrier from outside, didn’t it!?”

“Musashi’s vice chancellor is still alive!?”

Katsuie raised his voice as he ran.

Three actions occurred in sequence.

First, Ichimasu fired another heavy barrage.

Three high-speed homing rounds were quickly fired from the front starboard side of the galley and all of the port cannons plus the rear starboard ones completed their preparations and joined the volley.

This sent a massive amount of light racing forward.

The solid reverberation of the long cannons tore into the air as if filling every inch of it.

But before the striking light could reach its targets, the second action arrived.

Musashino’s surface and the inner side of the bridge’s legs suddenly filled with light.

It was the ether light of a shattering barrier.

The Testamenta Arma’s barrier had been destroyed by Tonbokiri, so its ether scattered light and vanished.

That light meant Musashino’s bonds were gone.

And that led into the third action. Musashino’s gravity barriers all reactivated. With nothing obstructing them any longer, countless torii-shaped emblems appeared below Musashino’s bridge.

The galley’s shells exploded against those barriers.

There was a great cacophony of mutual destruction.

Light roared, sound blossomed, shockwaves blew through, and the wind rumbled, but...

“It isn’t getting through!?”

Katsuie’s yell was answered by the destruction of light flying upwards like the splashing created by pouring rain.

The stern of Musashino’s surface was filled with the fragments of gravity barriers and ether cannon blasts and the light was brighter than the morning sun.

The sky turned white and lost its color as if it had been purified.

That light meant the bombardment had not reached Musashino and the bridge had been protected.

...Not bad!

Katsuie continued to run as he looked up at the bottom of the bridge and the galley flying past.

His Testamenta Arma’s barrier had been broken, so the galley’s shellfire was now meaningless.

Just as Ichimasu had let her guard down about that Technohexen, he had let his guard down about Musashi’s vice chancellor.

“I never thought she would survive a direct hit from my smashing.”

But...

...My Animus Caritas – Novum has an effective range of about fifty meters around me.

She would have had to attack from outside that, she had to have been injured by his smashing attack, and it could not have been easy to catch up to him.

With that in mind, he shouted to Ichimasu and Narimasa.

“Ichimasu! We’re going to withdraw now! Come over to the right! ...You can

let Narimasa fall!!”

“I knew you’d say that!” shouted Narimasa.

I know how to meet people’s expectations!! he praised himself while running to the right. He was heading to the closest edge of the ship. Once he passed the bridge’s leg, he would jump from the outer edge of Musashino’s deck.

But he let Narimasa go on ahead and followed at a more casual pace while checking on Kamewari by how it felt in his right hand.

It was almost at a full charge, so...

“I can’t just leave empty handed.”

The surface city came to its end, so there were no more roofs to run along.

Instead of simply jumping down, he used his speed and angle to land and continue running without slowing.

His target was the port bridge leg. He would take a large leap from the edge of the deck and toward the back end of that leg.

...I’ll activate Kamewari in midair to destroy that leg!

Kamewari could cut five meters deep, which was not much use against a ship as large as the Musashi. Not only did it have thick armor, but it had a double hull structure to stop any damage and allow any impacts to safely escape.

But he still ran through the scattering and vanishing light.

For Kamewari’s attack to reach the vital parts inside the Musashi, he had to leap in close and throw his momentum behind the slash. He raised Kamewari in preparation.

He would jump from the edge of the ship at the end of the bridge leg, so he had another seventy meters to run.

Each of his steps took him eight meters, so he adjusted his pace to reach the very edge on his ninth step.

“I need to hurry!”

He accelerated, but...

“!?”

He detected a presence approaching through the light and wind behind him.

A swift enemy approached from behind and to the left as if prepared to collide with him.

As they charged forward with the wind and light wrapping around them, Katsuie saw the shape of their weapon.

It was a spear.

He reacted by strengthening the smile on the corner of his mouth.

“So you’re here, Musashi Vice Chancellor!!”

As he called out to his enemy, Katsuie used Animus Caritas for a shield attack.

But as soon as he did, the enemy coming in from the left suddenly threw the spear into the air.

“...!?”

He saw the discarded spear was not a spear after all.

In fact, it was not even a weapon.

It was one of the steel beams he had smashed apart earlier.

“I’m in the process of ensuring my future employment, so I hope you can be of some help.”

Something stood on the shield Katsuie had swung backwards. It was the individual he had thought was Musashi’s vice chancellor.

“Unneeded #1. Sarutobi Sasuke. ...Should I say ‘long time, no see’, Lord Shibata?”

It was a ninja.

“Curse you!”

Without slowing, Katsuie looked to his enemy.

He was definitely surprised, but he was also aware he had a joyous smile on his face.

“A ninja disguise!?”

The ninja standing on the shield on his left arm had crudely altered his appearance.

He had not actually changed his physical build. All he had done was tie his hair in a high ponytail and wrap a Far Eastern boy’s uniform coat around his waist in place of the skirt. But that was not the only reason Katsuie had mistaken him for Honda Futayo.

“What a pain. The people who can keep up a transformation for very long sure are amazing. ...Of course, my specialty is using martial arts to mimic someone’s movements.”

Sasuke had disguised his form as well as his presence and behavior.

Anyone who took part in combat would react to the surrounding actions, sounds, and movements of the air before a visual form.

Sasuke had taken advantage of that.

Katsuie did not feel he had let his guard down.

As a demonic long-lived, he was blessed with armor and great strength, so an attack on the level of a divine weapon was needed to defeat him. The only weapon capable of that on this battlefield was Tonbokiri.

It was his caution over that weapon that had led him to mistake the enemy.

In that case, he immediately thought.

“I thought you withdrew after charging in with Musashi’s vice chancellor!”

“You have good intuition, Lord Shibata. That’s exactly what you should think a useless Unneeded would do.”

Sasuke crouched down on top of Animus Caritas – Novum and tried to place his hand on the edge.

“How about I swipe this to earn some points!?”

“Those would be negative points, you idiot!!”

Katsuie swung his left arm and Sasuke used the momentum to flip through the air.

But the ninja did not stop there. He kicked off the discarded steel beam he had used as a spear and jumped even higher. He then drew a sword from the back of his waist as if to show it off.

“Negative points, you say?”

He used his other hand to remove the coat from his waist and spread it out in front of Katsuie.

This blocked Katsuie’s view, but he simply looked away from Sasuke.

He was running, so if he sped up, the attack from beyond the fabric would not reach him.

His goal was to attack Musashino’s bridge leg with Kamewari and he was about to reach that leg. He was within twenty meters of the deck’s edge and the small fry turned back toward him.

“Shibata! The enemy’s coming!”

Shut up. I already know about Sasuke, so don’t worry.

“It’s Musashi’s vice chancellor!!

Say that part sooner.

Narimasa looked to the enemy that ran in between him and Katsuie.

It was Musashi’s vice chancellor.

However, she was not alone.

When she rapidly spun around to face Katsuie, Narimasa saw a woman supporting her back.

...Is that...?

Before he could say anything, a composed woman’s voice reached him.

“Unneeded #2. Kirigakure Saizou.”

As Katsuie faced forward, he saw the wind spirit woman seem to spin through the air as she pulled Musashi's vice chancellor along.

She was a spirit who could move with the speed of the wind and she had previously accompanied Sasuke to assist his movements.

...Yes!

That's right, thought Katsuie. Even Sasuke's disguised attack was a diversion.

The attack had turned his focus left and back toward the ship and the attempt to steal Animus Caritas – Novum had made him force the ninja off of it.

What happened when he swung the large shield Testamenta Arma outwards and continued to run forward at full speed?

"My body is left wide open!"

His arms and shield were not protecting him.

He could try to swing Kamewari down to intercept, but he was holding it in preparation to strike the bridge leg to his right. He would need to adjust its position to intercept Musashi's vice chancellor as she blew in from the front and a bit to the left.

...No one would normally be stupid enough to leave an opening this wide!

The enemy only had to strike during this defenseless instant.

To help with that, Saizou released Musashi's vice chancellor.

The girl spun through the air and prepared Tonbokiri in one hand.

Her hair was a mess and her right arm hung limply down, so she was in no state to fight.

But...

"Bind... Tonbokiri!"

She activated the cutting power.

Katsuie made a definite decision in the moment that would decide this confrontation.

Kamewari was charged, but he could not turn it toward the enemy in time. Musashi's vice chancellor was coming from up ahead and Sasuke was coming from overhead behind him.

He made his decision with that in mind.

He held Kamewari out in his right hand and he moved only his wrist to point it further to the right.

Musahino's bridge leg was there.

However, there was too much distance between him and the leg. Even with the weapon's thirty meter range, only the very tip would hit.

However...

"I can still take out the outer hull!"

Damaging the outer hull would not be a fatal blow to the Musashi, but they could not use their gravitational cruising in that state. They would certainly repair it quickly, but they would lose their mobility in the meantime.

Until those repairs were complete, they would be unable to force their way out of M.H.R.R.

He chose damaging the Musashi over defending himself.

...Offense is better than defense!!

One could say that was his style, but...

"Get them, Kamewari!"

Even as he shouted, he asked a silent question to Musashi's vice chancellor.

...What is your style, Musashi Vice Chancellor!?

As soon as Katsuei shouted and asked his question, Kamewari activated.

Power swelled up within the blade. The weapon briefly attempted to contain it, but it grew too great and was released.

In that instant, he realized his prediction had been correct.

Musashi's vice chancellor had been directing her cutting power toward him,

but...

“You’re going to cut my smashing power instead!?”

His enemy’s style was different from his own.

She chose the Musashi’s safety over defeating her opponent.

The smashing power produced by Kamewari was cut down the center.

The power was emitted from the fixed shape of the blade, but it was thrown off balance when it was cut partway through its expansion from that blade.

The cutting power was split between the tip and the hilt and the two pieces lost their appropriate directionality and exploded.

The power torn from the tip bent like a whip and burst. The movements of Katsuie’s hand continued to control the power on the hilt end, so the remaining power expanded and exploded as it traveled straight forward.

Some of the severed power did reach the bridge leg, but it was weak. After sweeping by right above Narimasa’s head, a gravity barrier neutralized it.

The power that exploded right in front of Katsuie was also weakened, but it covered a large area.

The smashing power created an explosion that covered both Katsuie and Musashi’s vice chancellor.

An explosion blew many things away and broke many other things.

However, something moved unconcernedly within it.

It was Katsuie.

He was injured. The right half of his clothing was almost entirely torn to shreds and he had lacerations on his side, but he took a powerful leap forward and raised Kamewari.

The large sword was not charged with its smashing power, but he still decided to make his attack.

“Musashi Vice Chancellor!”

That girl had been blown away by a second hit from his weapon’s power. She had defended with Tonbokiri in her left arm, but that arm had a large gash in it and her body was doubled over.

She was obviously badly injured, but she was alive.

That honestly irritated Katsuie.

He was vice chancellor of both M.H.R.R. and P.A. Oda. If she had survived two hits from his attack...

...She understands how Kamewari works, doesn't she!?

Kamewari was a divine weapon sent to P.A. Oda from Mikawa. It was one of the weapons developed at the same time as Tonbokiri, so they could be called brother weapons.

Its activation system would smash anything reflected in the blade, so it was identical to the activation system for Tonbokiri’s cutting.

That gave it the same weaknesses.

Most likely, began Katsuie. She realized I was pointing the blade at my targets and held Tonbokiri’s blade toward Kamewari’s blade.

If all she had to do was hold up her blade, it did not matter if she could not hit and she could continue after the instant in which her defensive action was stopped.

That had allowed her to survive.

She was an excellent enemy.

You really don't find people like this often, he thought deep in his heart. And you don't often have a chance to take out such a skilled warrior.

So inside the remaining blast from Kamewari, he gave up on destroying the bridge leg.

He did not worry about the smashing power. He would simply slam his weapon and strength into his opponent.

“Here I go!!”

He swung Kamewari toward Musashi's vice chancellor as a simple sword.

As he did, he saw her eyes looking straight at him.

"Now that's the look of a warrior!"

His enemy could no longer move. He could tell her left arm was broken too, so he would cut through her body as she glared at him.

"..."

He made his attack.

Narimasa tried to leap from the outer edge of the ship and into the sky.

Overhead, a giant form descended headfirst.

It was Ichimasa's galley.

The white galley was tilted vertically to plunge between Musashino and Tama like a blade.

Narimasa was supposed to jump aboard in the instant it passed by.

Katsuie would run over after cutting down Musashi's vice chancellor.

Narimasa poured acceleration into his legs, but...

...Ah?

Musashi's vice chancellor flew toward Musashino's stern.

She had been sent flying after blocking Katsuie's attack, but Narimasa questioned that.

"What is going on!?"

This made no sense.

The girl should not have had the strength left to block Katsuie's strike. Both her arms were broken and she was covered in blood.

...So how did she raise Tonbokiri with both arms to defend!?

He then found the source of the oddity.

The girl's injuries had healed.

“Eh? What just happened?”

A girl spoke from atop the steeple of a church on Musashino’s surface.

It was Naruze with her white outfit and black hair and wings.

She held up her right arm after applying a new hemostatic spell.

“Eh?”

She widened a tear in the sleeve along the eye of the protective fabric.

Some slightly sticky blood was stuck to her arm, but as for the skin below...

...There’s no wound?

She tried touching the arm. The wound that had felt so hot before was gone and the bleeding had stopped. The pain had also vanished from the rest of her body.

Her injuries were gone.

And it seemed she was not the only one. The surface had calmed down with the enemy gone, so the warriors defending various locations opened the doors leading underground and emerged. They were all tilting their heads.

“Ohh!? What is going on!? I cut my finger when filing down a divine figurine to give it a flatter chest, but it’s healed!”

“I-I burned my divine area when frying tempura in the nude last night, but that’s healed too!”

“I was smoking in the nude yesterday and burned my divine area when I accidentally dropped it, but it’s better now!”

Just as Naruze hoped all of them would die, a great roar descended from the sky.

Ichimasu’s galley was diving between Tama and Musashino.

As Narimasa ran toward the descending galley, he looked back to Katsuie who was two steps behind him.

“Shibata!”

He called out to his upperclassman, but Katsuie was not looking forward or into the sky.

He was looking at Musashi’s vice chancellor whose injuries were rapidly healing as she flew away.

...It bothers him, doesn't it!?

His attack should have been a sure thing. The girl had been injured and unable to move, so she should have been sliced in two. But for some reason, she had pulled off a defensive stance to catch the strike.

The enemy was alive, which meant she had endured three attacks from Katsuie.

And...

“ ... ”

In the instant before he jumped down from the edge of the ship, Narimasa realized Musashi’s vice chancellor was looking their way.

There was no more hostility in her eyes and that may have been why Katsuie reacted the way he did.

“Ha.”

He gave a quiet laugh.

“Let’s go, Narimasa. I understand the general trick here. Someone dangerous has shown up. They probably came up from Magdeburg to welcome the Musashi. ...But only after making sure Musashi was willing to fight us.”

“You mean...?”

Narimasa made his leap as he spoke.

He took a powerful leap and Katsuie made a light jump. As the wind from Ichimasa’s descending galley reached him, Narimasa looked back to Musashino’s stern.

A woman stood in front of the gate leading to the thick rope passageway connected to Okutama.

She had demonic horns, she wore an M.H.R.R. women's uniform, and she held a large silver shield in her left arm. However, the feet supporting her were not those of a normal person. They were the fading ones of a ghost.

She was a demonic long-lived ghost.

“Narimasa, you've never seen her before, have you? That's M.H.R.R.'s secretary, the only Protestant on M.H.R.R.'s student council, and an enemy of the Catholics. She's the ghost of Martin Luther, who created the foundational ideals of Protestantism about a century ago, and she still protects the Protestants. Her real name is...”

Katsuie gave his explanation while digging into the vertical deck to land.

“Tomoe Gozen. During the Genpei War, she was an eastern warrior on the Minamoto clan's side and yet she became Yoshitsune's enemy. When Yoshitsune travelled to the continent, she pursued her to take revenge.”

Futayo realized she was safe.

Honestly, she thought, but another thought followed.

...I am too inexperienced!

She had been unable to strike back at her enemy and had simply taken damage.

She had quite a few thoughts on her failures, but another question rose to the forefront.

“Why?”

“Are you wondering why all your injuries fully recovered?”

She suddenly realized a demonic long-lived woman was standing next to her and looking down at her.

“Well, you did well to survive two or three clashes with that reckless idiot. The rest of you can be proud enough of your results here and you can rest now. I, Tomoe Gozen, allow it.”

With that, the woman named Tomoe held up the shield modified for use in

the left arm.

“This is the Testamenta Arma: Animus Caritas – Vetus. This defensive Testamenta Arma can fully heal anyone who is injured once per day.”

Futayo realized pale ether light had risen from below.

I can walk, she thought while feeling impressed and relieved. And I will be able to fight again.

In order to thank the woman, she placed Tonbokiri against the deck to prop herself up and tried to walk toward Tomoe.

“...”

But she could not gather any strength and she fell to her knees.

However, even the sensation of her knees hitting the deck was unclear.

...Am I tired?

A weary feeling rapidly filled her and sleepiness seemed to drag her to the deck.

“Do not force yourself to move. You required a lot of tension to remain conscious with your nearly fatal injuries and with the pain, so being released from that will hit you hard. Also, this cannot restore your lost blood. So sleep, Musashi Vice Chancellor. You have already arrived.”

Futayo heard a breath and a laugh before the final words she heard before falling asleep.

“Welcome to Magdeburg, the site of the worst defeat in the Thirty Years’ War.”

Upon arriving at Magdeburg, the Musashi moored itself above the city while distantly surrounded by M.H.R.R.’s warriors and aerial fleet.

Musashi’s crew began repairing the damage to Musashino’s surface early in the morning and they hurried through the planning and details for evacuating the people of Magdeburg.

During this, Guericke spoke.

“It has finally come. The M.H.R.R. Catholics carrying out the siege sent a notification that they will begin the Sack of Magdeburg tomorrow at 8:00 PM. They likely plan to finish their battle with K.P.A. Italia today and then complete their preparations.”

“Has M.H.R.R. decided that the Musashi’s arrival has changed the situation?”

Masazumi and the others were worried about that, but Guericke simply said the following.

“Let us stay positive. The best we can do is reduce the damages as much as possible. It’s the same for you, isn’t it?”

“The same?”

“For us, it is Magdeburg. For you, it is the Apocalypse. ...Isn’t that right?”

He smiled a little as he spoke.

“Our best is on a smaller scale than yours, but it is important to me and it is right in front of us. That is why I want the Musashi to begin evacuating Magdeburg’s citizens as we continue towing it.”

Masazumi nodded and they quickly decided to evacuate twenty five thousand of Magdeburg’s thirty thousand citizens. Before the early morning’s end, they had decided to use Musashi’s deck and transport ships and to take the people to a city on the northern border with Holland.

Musashi would leave at 8:00 AM and it was expected to return by 6:00 AM the following morning.

After a discussion, they made another new decision.

Masazumi would go to the Maurice Cathedral in central Magdeburg for the secret anti-P.A. Oda meeting at 5:00 PM.

“I’ll be speaking with Luther aka Tomoe Gozen, Anne of Austria, and others there. It should be a short meeting out of concern for any movements from the siege, so I need to do things right.”

“Heh heh. Pushing yourself is fine, but don’t force yourself, flat-chested politician. But why are they holding a secret anti-P.A. Oda meeting in enemy territory and when surrounded by a battlefield? Are they stupid? Do these VIPs

like making things unnecessarily exciting?”

“I would assume they were only surrounded after already planning this event,” commented Horizon.

“Probably,” said the others while hanging their heads, but Asama frantically spoke up.

“A-anyway, we have allies here and we might be able to gain more allies from these VIPs. Um, Masazumi? I will remain here with you for divine transmission assistance, so let’s do our best, okay?”

“There it is! This lewd shrine maiden has brought out her motherly services! If you don’t watch out, she’ll make you her child!”

While Asama raised her right arm and Kimi fled, Mazarin brought them a report on the constantly changing state of the battle in K.P.A. Italia. Neshinbara examined that report and made a certain prediction and decision.

“M.H.R.R.’s actions may change quite a bit depending on the outcome in K.P.A. Italia. It would be best to hurry the evacuation. No matter which side wins, it will definitely influence our enemy’s actions.”

With that, they began the evacuation with Guericke’s cooperation.

Some remained behind for the meeting in Magdeburg, the Musashi started toward Holland, and...

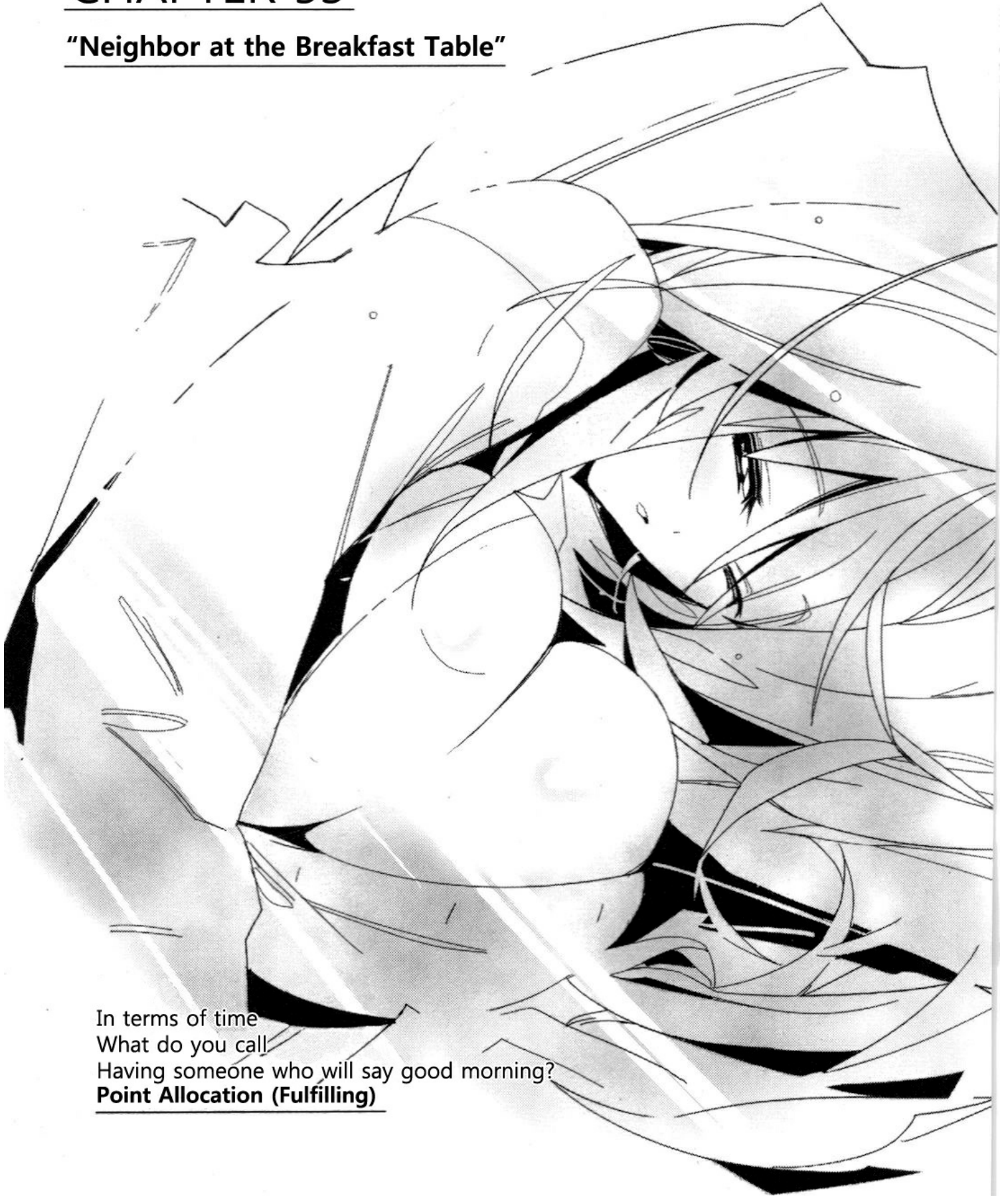
“What will happen to Toori-sama and the others? The plan was for them to obtain Great Chancellor Carlos I’s memo from Rudolf II and then meet up with us in Magdeburg, but that is looking difficult.”

Below the rising sun, Horizon muttered to herself aboard the Musashi as it began to leave Magdeburg for the evacuation. Her eyes were turned toward Hexagone Française in the southwest.

Chapter 53: Neighbor at the Breakfast Table

CHAPTER 53

"Neighbor at the Breakfast Table"



In terms of time
What do you call
Having someone who will say good morning?
Point Allocation (Fulfilling)

In terms of time

What do you call

Having someone who will say good morning?

Point Allocation (Fulfilling)

The Reine des Garous's morning began when her hunger woke her.

The sunlight and the time were of no consequence. It did not matter how bright it got or how much time had passed.

...If I'm not hungry, there is no real reason to get up.

She would hear and smell food being prepared. She would also sense the warmth and scent of someone she wanted to eat. It was only once that filled her with desire that she would wake.

Today, it was the scent that came first.

It was a sweet scent that was a bit stuffy yet also stung her nose a little.

...I know this smell.

With that thought, her mind left its slumber.

She felt the shirt and sheets on her skin and the reliable warmth of the blanket covering her. Her ears moved in the sunlight shining in on her.

"Nn..."

She awoke. She opened her eyes just a bit but then closed them again and slowly crawled along the bed. She drew her knees up below her stomach and stretched her body forward while lifting her butt.

"Yawwwn."

After a yawn, she inhaled to clear her head. She sniffed at the air and got up once she recognized the smell.

...Oh?

She found a Far Eastern uniform's coat draped over the blanket.

“...”

She smelled it.

...Oh, it smells like my daughter.

There are other girls' scents, too. That boy has a lot of them around him. Oh, and boys too. This scent definitely came from someone grabbing him in a chokehold as if dragging him to the police. But who is this one that stinks of dogs?

At any rate, the Reine des Garous savored the brief luxury of draping the coat over her shoulders before walking into the dining room.

She slipped through the door-less entrance and found the scene of their dinner last night. The boy was cooking in the small kitchen. He sensed her approach and turned around to explain what he was making.

“Oh, you’re up? I’m making some jam, but do you want breakfast too?”

“My actual mom’s a samurai who runs a snack shop,” he explained while serving the bread and other foods he had cooked on the stove.

But once he arrived next to the table and looked at her, he froze in place and looked taken aback.

“What’s the matter?”

“Eh!? Oh, um, I just had my breath taken away when I saw a huge-breasted werewolf wife wearing nothing but a shirt this early in the morning!”

“I’m not sure I want you to have your breath taken away by that.”

“Don’t worry about it.” He formed a frame with the thumb and forefinger of both hands and placed it around her. “Zooom iiiin! Okay, got it memorized. You can move now.”

He clapped his hands and resumed cooking. Meanwhile, she sat down and sniffed at the cooked ham.

“Um, about this jam...”

“Oh, you know that summer tangerine tree out front? Werewolves have

trouble with fruits like that, don't they? I went out in the yard after waking up, there were a lot of ripe ones, and..."

And...

"A long time ago, Nate told me, 'I can eat them if the smell is removed by making them into jam.' "

His intonation during the quote was oddly similar to her daughter's, which gave the Reine des Garous an odd feeling. But...

"Then you just now made this?"

He would have only taken the ripe ones, but that still would have been a lot. For citrus jam, the skin had to be washed and finely chopped up, but the smell had not filled the kitchen.

...He must have done all the work outside for my sake.

"You went to a lot of effort, didn't you?"

"Ah? It's fine. I like this kind of thing, and if I don't act like my 'normal self', the others will say I did something wrong."

"Heh heh. Being the leader sure is tough."

"Hmm, is it really?"

He passed her a plate.

"Here. It's thick strips of bacon cooked in the jam sauce."

That was much like what *he* had once made, but she had not told this boy the specifics about that.

She had decided against it because it felt like revealing a weakness of hers, but...

"Nate told me a long time ago. When we all went over to her house once, I was in charge of the food. When I asked what she wanted to eat, she said this."

He had made it for her at first, she had learned it from him, and she had fed it to that girl. She could not quite reproduce the same flavor as when *he* made it, but she remembered that girl rejoicing.

“So you made it for her?”

“No, her instructions were too vague, so it didn’t work well that day. In the end, we got my mom involved and repeatedly tried to reproduce it with feedback from Nate. After about half a month, we got it right. Nate was the most surprised because she hadn’t realized the sauce was from citrus jam. She had always thought it was a type of vegetable teriyaki sauce or something. We started moving in the right direction when I just so happened to use fruit to draw out the sourness and she said it was ‘close’.”

“Is that so?”

She got plenty of the transparent brown sauce on a piece of meat and brought it to her mouth. The jam had not been chilled yet, so it still had some of the sourness of the citrus, but...

“That girl has a sweet tooth, doesn’t she?”

“Oh, you think so too? And sorry about not asking ahead of time, but...”

He took something from the kitchen countertop and held it up for her to see. It was a brick-sized object.

“I pulled on a rock candy brick in the wall out front and it came out, so I used it. That’s fine, right? It’ll fix itself on its own, right?”

“...”

The Reine des Garous was at a loss for words. There was a certain condition for removing the pieces of this candy house.

...The house will not give you permission unless you are a child.

When she considered what that meant, a light emotion welled up inside her until laughter came from her gut and escaped through her throat. She beat on the table as she laughed.

“Ah ha ha!”

“Oh, damn. Why are you hitting the table and laughi-ohhhh! The table’s transforming the huge tits in that shirt! I can sense a divine presence here! You really are amazing, Nate Maman!”

“Ha ha. ...Ahh, I’m crying. At the very least, I really am glad I didn’t eat you here.”

“Here? So it would’ve been fine elsewhere?”

“Well...”

She contemplated how to answer that.

The boy before her eyes would likely become an enemy thanks to the military rule created by her friend, Anne of Austria.

However, that military rule was a public thing and this was a private space. Children lost in the forest could rely on the candy house and it represented the wolf’s one promise that they were not worth hunting.

That meant she would not hunt children here. However...

“It will happen eventually once you leave the forest.”

“When?”

“Well...”

She knew when. She had decided that when she noticed a certain fact about this boy last night.

...If that girl decides to stick with this king in my presence...

She would hunt them both down if that happened. And she had a feeling it was going to happen before long.

But...

“For now, how about we enjoy ourselves?”

“Sure. Then eat up! I’ve still got plenty more to serve you!”

“Oh, my. But the best part about eating, be it breakfast or anything else, is to share it with someone.”

She indicated the chair next to her and the boy held out his hands.

“Not yet. I can eat once I’ve served everything I’m making. And it can be while you eat, but I want to hear a lot from you.”

“Like what?”

“Judge,” he answered before turning around and getting back to cooking.
“What exactly is a king?”

...A king?

The Reine des Garous could not figure out why he was asking that. After all...

“You are already chancellor and student council president, aren’t you?”

“But I’m not always a king. Like when I’m here, for example.”

“Oh,” she realized before he explained.

“In England, Seijun talked about removing the pro...visual rules? Remove the visual rules? Does that mean no more censorship!?”

“Provisional rule.”

The idiot froze in place for a bit, but suddenly pulled a textbook from his pocket and threw it to the floor.

“D-dammit! This...this always happens! Everyone assumes I’m an idiot and shoves all the unreasonable stuff onto me. Now, just how much has Toori-kun gained from this? (Point Allocation: His Life)”

So what were you saying about the removal of the provisional rule?”

“Curse this wife. She isn’t playing along. ...Anyway, um, what was that?”

“I was asking you what you meant. You were talking about England.”

“You sure are nice, Nate Maman!”

She did not hesitate to nod in agreement, but she went on to tilt her head and urge him to speak.

Instead, he served her spinach cooked in egg butter.

“Will this makes the vegetables easier to eat?”

“Did you learn this from my daughter?”

“No?” he replied with a smile.

She was not quite sure what to say, so she took the plate and returned to the

previous topic. She mostly wanted to urge him to speak and tried to say what she thought he wanted to.

“In other words, if you removed the provisional rule, you would become a king like our Louis Exiv?”

“Hm... Yeah, maybe.”

“You sure are noncommittal.”

“No, this is why I want to ask. I’m dumb, so I only understood what Seijun said after having her explain it about five times with a diagram and everything. But it’s not my fault. When she sits in a chair, she holds her legs together and the base of her thighs makes a shallow V-line at her crotch...like this. I can’t help but focus on that. ...Oh, one quick thing. I’m about to drop this spoon, so can I go under the table to get it?”

“How about you wait until you leave the forest?”

“Oh, c’mon, c’mon.”

He carried over a plate of bread and a jar of jam and sat next to her.

“Time to eat.”

“Anyway, um...about what you were say- ...Wait! Don’t eat so fast!”

“Oh, sorry, sorry. I’ve usually got school to get to. So, uh, about what I was saying... What exactly is a king?”

He repeated the question.

“What makes someone a king?”

That is a good question, thought the Reine des Garous.

...What makes one a king?

She thought about it. As a queen, she could turn the focus toward herself, but this boy was asking how to be a “king” himself.

There could only be the one Reine des Garous, so there was no point in telling him about that. She decided to simply give him some tips as a veteran queen.

“Are you listening?”

“Yes.”

“When you look at the person or the job they do, any king is not that much different from what you are now. They have governmental duties, they determine the direction the academy will take, and they make decisions on any issues brought to them. All of that is-... What is that look for? Don't tell me you...no, you really are having someone else do all that, aren't you?”

“But Seijun's so good at it and she likes it. Sometimes she gets a little too into it. ...Ah! But I did make a decision on my own in England! I said we were prepared to go to war if we had to!”

“If you make decisions so rarely, why do they have to be so extreme?”

“Hmm?”

He tilted his head, so she spent a few seconds wondering how to explain this to him.

...I should probably ask him.

“What kind of king do you want to be?”

“I want to create a kingdom that fulfills everyone's dreams. Horizon's and everyone else's.”

His immediate response made her gasp a little. “That...” she began before swallowing the words.

...That is impossible. It is nothing but an ideal.

Politics and everything else could not fulfill an individual's dream. And different individuals' dreams would conflict with each other. It was utterly impossible to fulfill everyone's dreams.

“But,” he asked. “What exactly is a king?”

...What am I supposed to say?

She could only think of “that's not possible”, so she sighed in her heart.

She could tell him the kind of king he wanted to be was an unrealistic ideal, but that would not answer his question.

She had no answer for him, so she would simply be erasing the question inside him. She would be crushing his dream because she did not want to admit her own failure to answer.

She felt it would be best to tell him to ask someone else, but...

...How would Anne answer?

Thinking about that gave her a sudden idea.

“Well...”

I begin like that a lot when speaking with him, she realized.

“First, you need to realize that your own desires are a part of those many dreams.”

The Reine des Garous breathed in and continued speaking.

“You too will be a resident of your dream-fulfilling kingdom. You must not forget that.”

“Sure.”

She thought she saw him stiffen nervously, but that may have been from his anticipation of her answer. Or perhaps he was simply distracted by the open gap in the front of her shirt. Either way...

“As the Reine des Garous, it does not matter if a dream is mine, a king’s, a normal person’s, a wild beast’s, a plant’s, or anyone else’s. It also does not matter what that dream is. They can be important, unnecessary, noble, or normal; it makes no difference. ...No matter the scale or content, everyone can carry a dream.”

I’m lecturing him, she realized with a bitter smile, but the boy only stared at her with something like a smile on his face. What a difficult child. The children who have such high expectations of adults are the hardest to deal with.

But this reminded her of an older time in a number of ways. It reminded her of a time when she was filled with regret.

Thinking she could clear that regret through this boy, she opened her mouth.

“Listen. While everyone can carry a dream, those dreams will all be different. And if my dream, your dream, Nate’s dream, and everyone else’s dreams are all different and all fulfilled in different ways,” she said. “Then you cannot give an all-encompassing answer when you ask what kind of king can fulfill all those dreams. There is no single answer there. ...Every individual person has their individual answer.”

So...

“You need to go to each individual person in your kingdom and ask them what kind of king can fulfill their dream. Then you need to make that a reality. And...”

She could not exactly tell him to “become that kind of person”.

But she reached out, placed her hand on his head, rubbed his head with his hair wrapping around her fingers, and poured in some slight strength to convey her thoughts better.

“First, you need to aim to be the kind of person who can fulfill your own dream.”

The boy thought a bit as the Reine des Garous watched him and rubbed his head.

He was not quite convinced, but after a while, he seemed to accept the words. He looked to her and smiled.

“Judge. Thanks.”

“No, there is a lot more you need to think about. You need to ask other people besides me...while also making sure you do not lose sight of what you must do.”

But it does not seem there’s much to worry about there, she thought. However, she wanted him to remember, so she lightly pulled him toward her and kissed his forehead.

She also licked him a bit to check on his flavor.

“Now you have the Reine des Garous’s protection.”

She hoped she would not have to be his enemy, but...

“Ohhh, that massive cleavage is right in front of me! Right in front of me! Ahhhhhh, it’s gone! Goodbye, it looks like the time to part has come! Then again, if you weren’t parted, there wouldn’t be any giant breasts in the first place!”

“Could you calm down a little?”

“Hmm.”

The boy scratched his head and looked to her.

“Nate Maman, as Reine des Garous, did you think about all this at some point?”

“Testament. ...Of course, I’m a lot more reserved nowadays.”

She had had nothing back then, but she had been given so much, someone had tried to protect her, and she had wanted to do the same in return. When living alone in the forest, she had never even considered having a child, but now...

...That is definitely a dream of mine, even if I only realized it after it was fulfilled.

And she was now acting based on that dream. But...

“It must be nice,” said the boy as he looked at her.

He may not have been able to see the path he was moving along.

...That must be tough.

I have a feeling his classmates are a little too skilled, she thought. And those classmates are also not used to having their dreams fulfilled, so they’re doing everything necessary to set him down his path.

But...

“A king needs a lot of help to fulfill dreams. So if you’re having trouble, try asking the people closer to you instead of me.”

“Really? By they’re horrible people, so when I say ‘Hey! Can I ask something!?’ , they give me this look of scorn, keep their distance, and say ‘Can

you keep it to five words or less?’ or ‘I’m too busy with my manuscript’ or ‘How much will you pay me?’ or ‘What did you do this time? Let’s start with that.’ ”

However, there was one thing she could say.

“Make sure you do not give up on your own dream. There is no need for that and no one can force you to do it.”

“Really? But isn’t it useless to hold onto a hopeless dream?”

“All you are doing is thinking, so how can it be useless?”

He thought for a moment and looked up at her.

“Huh?”

“Do you get it now? Dreaming is not useless. If your dreaming proves fruitless and the dream never comes true, you have to call the dream ‘pointless’ to stop acting on it.”

But...

“Simply holding a dream is not pointless or anything else. If all you are doing is thinking, it never reaches the level of ‘pointless’ or ‘meaningful’.”

“Ohhh.” He gave a slow nod. “Yeah, I think I get it. It’s like in that sex ed program for middle-aged people that insists that ‘You can do it on your own!’ and ‘If it never leaves your imagination, it isn’t a crime! It’s still disgusting, though!’ ”

“I would prefer not to think about that too much, but that’s more or less it.”

“I see.” He chewed on some bread with jam on it and smiled. “Oh, I did a great job on this! Don’t you think!? And I canned the leftovers and put them over there, so eat them whenever you want. Also...”

He turned toward her with a smile.

“Thanks a bunch. Everyone around me is a classmate or someone who’s into the same kind of stuff, so I’m glad I could ask someone like you who’s about ready to eat me.”

“Heh heh. They’re overprotective of you, aren’t they?”

“Hmm,” he thought about that. “I won’t tell them because it would make

their heads swell, but I am thankful... I guess. Anyway, what are we going to do today? Aren't things about to get a lot more fun? I mean, look."

He pointed toward the front door, indicating something she had vaguely noticed as well.

...Here they come.

As if to prove her right, a knock came to the chocolate bar door.

"Excuse me! Is this the Reine des Garous's house?"

They had visitors. And her daughter was with them.

Chapter 54: Inexperienced Meeting Participant

CHAPTER 54

"Inexperienced Meeting Participant"



Why is no one
Leading me by the hand
-Like they used to?
Point Allocation (Subject and Object)

Why is no one

Leading me by the hand

Like they used to?

Point Allocation (Subject and Object)

Satomi Yoshiyasu's morning started early yet again.

She felt she had been careless the day before, but she was careless again today.

Due to the Musashi Chancellor's early morning splatter the previous day...

...Today, I surrounded the bed with spears and such with evil-repelling charms on them, but...

She had thought her defenses were perfect, but she had woken screaming again when the vassal's mobile shell fell and smashed everything. Half embedded in the floor, the vassal moved the round shell to crawl out.

"Wow, I missed my landing a bit! Another seventy centimeters to the right and I'd have crushed your head! Thank goodness I didn't! ...Ah! Sorry! I have to go flying to Musashino now! See you later!!"

The girl had then left, but it had been Yoshiyasu's carelessness to not notice the battle on Musashino.

Yoshiyori had apparently noticed, but he had said P.A. Oda's involvement meant Hashiba might be making a move via Houjou. Yoshiyasu thought that was a little unfair, but...

"Miss Balfette, was it? You don't need to give me a gift of confections or bow down, so just relax."

She and Balfette stood in front of the city hall along Magdeburg's river. M.H.R.R.'s forces looked like a sea of warriors across the river and their aerial ships were waiting overhead.

"The Musashi is evacuating people, so the city's practically empty. It must be tough for M.H.R.R. to keep up their motivation to attack."

Chancellor Yoshiyori had stayed on the Musashi because he claimed to have some paperwork to complete with “Musashi”, but Yoshiyasu had remained in Magdeburg because she wanted to view what could be a major turning point for the Far East.

Righteousness stood next to the city hall and she hoped it would help threaten the M.H.R.R. forces across the river.

“Do you know anywhere to get food around here...should I call you Miss Vassal?”

“Sure, for now.”

The vassal opened a sign frame. Hers was a Catholic sign frame, so the nearby Magdeburg residents shrieked and backed away.

“Oh, whoops. I should put on Musashi’s special Protestant camouflage skin. I don’t want unnecessary fear and suspicion when I’m on their side.”

She scrolled through different designs for her sign frame. There were flower, sumo ring, and keyhole kofun designs that Yoshiyasu could not imagine a use for, but the girl finally found the Protestant one.

“There. Pretty well made, isn’t it? It displays a bible verse every morning and the crossword puzzle includes the Ninety-Five Theses.”

“Why is Musashi making things like that?”

“Don’t worry about it.”

The vassal began searching the map, but Yoshiyasu spoke to her again.

“Miss Vassal, shouldn’t you be fixing that armor of yours? At the meeting last night, you decided the Musashi forces would create an escape route for the people taking part in the Sack of Magdeburg, didn’t you?”

“Judge. The Musashi will take in the participants. Once inside, they’ll be in a ‘city other than Magdeburg’, so M.H.R.R. won’t be able to attack them.”

The vassal lowered the ends of her eyebrows and smiled.

“But the disturbance this morning took out the leg actuators of my mobile shell. It’s being looked at on the Musashi, but I’m afraid it’ll be some unique

issue.”

She then lifted her eyebrows and sighed.

“We’re in charge of evacuating and securing the people, but the Magdeburg warriors have the harder task of defending the city. Their death is pretty much guaranteed here.”

“I heard Mayor Guericke gathered a bunch of Living Dead, but I doubt that’s enough.”

“Historically, the surviving women were raped, weren’t they?”

“Don’t make me shudder,” muttered Yoshiyasu as she looked around the square in front of the city hall. Rows of muscular men who had chosen to remain in Magdeburg were gathered there.

“Listen up! Tomorrow night, we’re gonna show those M.H.R.R. Catholics and Far Eastern apes what we’re made of! They’re all the pathetic type that’s here for a woman!”

“Testament!”

Yoshiyasu spoke quietly as she watched that main force of a thousand men.

“They sure are full of energy for a crossdressing and legitimately gay army.”

“They were recruited from all of the Protestant cities, weren’t they? Those heroes gathered when they heard they would be counted as women in the official records. Almost makes you feel sorry for the M.H.R.R. army that has to rape them to follow the history recreation.”

The men began training by tackling each other and pinning each other in the north-south position. After a glance toward them, the vassal raised her right hand.

“I found a restaurant that’s open! But there’s a problem. Others from my class are bound to be there. Is that okay with you? There’s no other option.”

“There’s also... Oh, the city hall cafeteria is working as a distribution center for the warriors, isn’t it?”

Men dressed as maids stood with their arms crossed below the customer-less

tent of the distribution center at the back of the square.

The vassal looked their way and they walked over when they noticed.

“Oh, dear. Those girls are looking our way.”

“Poor things. Neither of them have anything at all.”

“You’re right... And yet even I have a 121 bust. I wish I could share at least 10 of that with them.”

That’s your chest measurement, not your bust, thought Yoshiyasu, but she managed to endure by reminding herself that she was sure to grow and become more like her sister. *That’s right! I just have to!*

The vassal took a step forward.

“The nearby cathedral is running a food stand, so let’s go check it out.”

Yoshiyasu looked south past the buildings and trees. She saw two steeples there, but she saw something else on one of them.

“That’s Palais-Cardinal, isn’t it?”

Yoshiyasu saw one of the steeples had its roof portion removed and a silver god of war sat on it. The god of war’s upper chest appeared to have slid forward somewhat.

“Anne of Austria is being transferred from the church’s hospital via a wired connection.”

“Judge. She apparently said she wanted to see the outside world and walk around.”

A god of war had a wide range of vision and its accelerated thoughts slowed the passage of time. But was that a good way to view the scenery just before one’s death?

Yoshiyasu briefly thought of her sister and the man who had killed her.

...The last scenery she saw was...

It had apparently been the water of Edo Bay and the dawning sky. Or so *he*

had told her.

She wondered if the sky and the sea had been a good final sight for that girl who so loved the land of Satomi.

But...

...What did she and that man hope for and what did they gain from it?

She clicked her tongue at the annoyance of not having been told anything.

“Want to go? They probably have some snacks there.”

When the vassal turned and smiled at her, Yoshiyasu erased her inner thoughts and closed the lead of a few steps the girl had made.

“You like to keep things positive, don’t you?”

“What makes you say that?”

“This might be rude of me, but that battle this morning more or less ended as Musashi’s loss. If I were in your place, I’d be feeling down.”

“Oh... I’m pretty down, too. It makes me want to curse. I mean, that Sassa guy didn’t see any of my charm as a decoy and I’m too slow to keep up with him.”

“That’s not being down. That’s frustration.”

The vassal laughed behind her glasses and they turned left at a four-way intersection.

“Oh, that was the code calling a meeting of Technohexen. The 3rd special duty officer was right,” said the vassal, but Yoshiyasu had not noticed anything.

But as she walked along the dried dirt...

“I don’t change much when I’m feeling down. I’d only trip up our main fighters if I did. But when you are a main fighter – like a special duty officer or higher – then I think you have a real reason to feel down after your loss. After all, you have to think about how to use your different techniques, weapons, and abilities and how to improve with all of those things. But someone like me only has to give them the time they need to think through all that. I feel like that’s what I can do to have some real impact.”

She gave a bitter smile.

“Oh. Satomi Student Council President, you’re one of those main fighters, aren’t you? Sorry if I insulted you.”

“No, um...”

What was she supposed to think?

Unlike the chancellor’s officers, the student council was usually not expected to fight, but she had been given Righteousness, she had stood alongside her sister and that man, and she had tried to have Yatsufusa accept her after her sister’s death.

...But Yatsufusa wouldn’t even activate for me.

What was different between her and that man? And...

“I’m...not really a ‘main fighter’.”

There was no real point in telling this to someone from another academy. In the past, she had told her sister and that man that they were not treating her like a main fighter. She had been half complaining and half hopeful.

What am I really? she wondered as she lifted her head. Directly ahead, she saw a large cathedral and Palais-Cardinal was connected to one of the steeples.

...Did Anne of Austria think any of these things too?

Even on her sickbed, Anne of Austria had been given the authority of chancellor and student council president for the provisional inherited name that would ensure her brother’s inherited name. However, she had gained the Reine des Garous’s trust, laid the groundwork for her brother’s rule, and...

“She went beyond the history recreation to place herself in Magdeburg and drive a wedge into the world.”

“Eh? Oh, you mean Lady Anne of Austria. ...Hey, there’s the stand.”

The vassal took a few steps forward as if she had completely forgotten about Yoshiyasu, but she suddenly turned around and followed Yoshiyasu’s upturned eyes.

“From what I’ve heard, Lady Anne sent a request to the Reine des Garous.”

“Should you really be telling me that?”

“The secretary said I could share information with you while you’re working with us.”

The vassal continued.

“There’s a steel tower near Magdeburg but outside the siege. M.H.R.R. Chancellor Rudolf II is imprisoned there and the Reine des Garous is supposed to guide Musashi’s representative there. In other words, it was a request to put together an expedition to visit Rudolf II and obtain a document on the Princess Disappearances. ...Apparently, that’s the tower.”

The vassal pointed to the southwest.

Beyond the city walls and past a hill, a black line rose into the sky. Yoshiyasu used the standard abilities of a god of war pilot to judge its distance and size by eye.

“That’s six or seven kilometers away. It’s about thirty meters wide but five hundred meters tall.”

“That’s apparently where the expedition is headed. Yesterday’s enemy can become a reliable ally today, but I hope they can at least wait long enough to give the 5th special duty officer and the Reine des Garous time to talk.”

“Anyway, based on the information I have, the defenses at and around Chancellor Rudolf II’s tower are fairly useless.”

Tenzou spoke from the right side of the table, Mary sat with him, and Mitotsudaira listened from the top end the table.

They were currently holding a meeting, but...

...Honestly, my mother was acting so hostile just half a day ago, so I can’t believe she’s being so cooperative just because someone ordered her to.

At any rate, Mary had agreed to the suggestion that the chancellor make them breakfast, so they were using that time to hold a simple strategy meeting.

“Anyway, that is the order instructing us to go to Rudolf II’s tower near Magdeburg.”

Tenzou was speaking to Mitotsudaira's mother who sat on the left side of the table.

She looked down at the letter Tenzou had given her. The surface of the parchment from Hexagone Française displayed a Gallican *signe cadre* and she read it while listening to Tenzou.

“Testament. I have heard of it. During the Age of the Gods, the historical Catholic Emperor Rudolf II was imprisoned because he neglected his governmental duties and obsessed with researching Technomagie. The same happened during the history recreation, but the Catholics gave his tower in Prague to Hashiba and moved Rudolf II to a newly-constructed tower southwest of Magdeburg.”

She smiled with the ends of her eyebrows lowered.

“Magdeburg is a city of the Protestant principality of Saxony and yet they placed the Catholic emperor there. ...Basically, they were showing off and proving that they did not care what happened to the emperor. That shows that he has no one to rely on even if he wants to stop M.H.R.R. and Hashiba and it proves his brother Matthias and Hashiba have more power than him. ...Not to mention that he was emperor before the Thirty Years' War, so M.H.R.R. likely plans to abandon his tower and declare his history recreation complete during the Sack of Magdeburg.”

“In that case, we need to reach his tower before the Sack begins,” commented Tenzou.

“That's right,” said Naito who sat toward the entrance across from Mitotsudaira. “But even assuming we do get this...document on the Princess Disappearances? Well, whatever this memo from Chancellor Carlos I is, even if we get it and send it to Hexagone Française, how will we get back to the Musashi?”

“Judge. After the Sack of Magdeburg, the Musashi will fall under the authority of the city of Magdeburg. From there, it will be towed along the river as a transport ship. That will apparently take it all the way to the Seto Inland Sea.”

That had apparently been Horizon, Masazumi, and the others' decision.

“So,” continued Tenzou. “Once the Sack begins, the battle will spread to the neighboring areas, so we need to move somewhere safe before then. And once it is over, we can have the Musashi pick us up while it’s being towed. Of course, if something happens, we will need to enter Magdeburg itself.”

“Yeah,” said Naito across the table from Mitotsudaira. “Tenzou, are the divine transmissions from the Musashi being intercepted? If not, we could call some underclassmen and Ga-chan to take us back from Rudolf II’s tower.”

“They probably are being intercepted. The Catholics have a connection to Aki’s Itsukushima Shrine through the Pope-Chancellor and they would probably try to use that when faced with Shinto transmissions.”

After listening to all that, Mitotsudaira had a thought.

...Th-there’s almost nothing for me to say here.

Mitotsudaira suddenly felt left out.

...Well, there’s no helping that.

She knew they were going to complete their preparations and leave for Rudolf II’s tower.

But Tenzou was in charge of their tactics and route, her mother would check on Tenzou’s ideas, Mary would ask about anything she did not understand, and when Tenzou’s ideas were not enough, Naito could jump in with her knowledge of Technomagie or familiarity with the land as a former M.H.R.R. resident.

Mitotsudaira was usually in charge of combat, but with her mother helping, there was nothing for her to do there either. She felt horribly left out as she nodded and peered at the map on Tenzou’s sign frame.

...I’m sure I’m only imagining it, but I feel like the kid no one likes who tries to join other people’s groups!

Her mother smiled and turned toward her.

“Nate? If you have any questions, don’t hold back. Just ask.”

I know that! she thought. *You don’t have to treat me like a child.*

She knew her mother could be mean and that saying this would not help, but...

“I am the 5th special duty officer, you know?”

She only noticed how prickly her voice was after the fact. She had been ignoring that her mother was trying to help them. She was not just being treated like a child; she was acting like one too.

...But, well...

It may have been the location that made her feel left out.

...I can't believe we're holding a strategy meeting in this candy house.

She had never actually been here before. Their home had been far to the west near Paris. Thinking back, she realized her mother had moved to disguise the fact that she was the Reine des Garous.

After hearing her mother's stories, she had often begged to be brought here. Her mother had smiled bitterly and said that was impossible, so she had called her a liar to provoke her.

...I tried searching the nearby forest but naturally couldn't find it.

After getting lost and crying until she fell asleep, her mother had found her and taken her home. She remembered seeing the starry sky from her mother's gently swaying back.

“ ... ”

But now that she was here, she knew why her mother had never brought her.

...It smells very strongly of her and father.

The others did not seem to have noticed, but a Loup-Garou would pick up on certain scents. It resembled blood yet had a sweetness to it, so smelled somehow sticky and addictive.

Mitotsudaira realized that her mother's old stories about what was here and what happened here were all true.

“Ugh...”

The smell and the images it gave her made her feel a little woozy.

I give up, she thought concerning the feeling of being left out.

“Here’s yours, Nate. There’s plenty more, so make sure you eat up, okay?”

Another smell suddenly appeared in front of her.

It was a plate of the chancellor’s cooking.

Mitotsudaira looked at the food on the metal plate in front of her.

“I can really have a ham steak this thick?”

“Well, I don’t get a chance to cut it this thick with anyone but you. I got to have some fun on a bit of a ham adventure or pork adventure.”

He served the vegetables next, but they were stewed in a bowl with butter floating in a cream sauce. The cod mixed in eliminated any complaint about eating only vegetables.

“Oh, I kind of want some of that too,” said Naito.

“Wait just a bit. Nate comes first.”

It concerned her how much that last part improved her mood. He probably just meant she ate the most and he was preparing the most up front, but...

“Nate looks like she’s starving. Her nose has been twitching for a while now.”

...No, um, that’s because...

She could hardly say she was bothered by her parents’ smell, so she gave a harsh denial without thinking.

“I-I was not doing that.”

“Oh, my. What a disgraceful girl. ...You need to take deeper breaths when doing that. That will bring in more of the smell.”

“Is it just me or are you pretty amazing, Nate Mama?” said Naito.

Was that a compliment? wondered Mitotsudaira, but her mother placed her hands on her cheeks and wiggled around. She must have been happy to receive any kind of praise.

The woman could not have missed the smell of her and her husband, but did

she understand how Mitotsudaira felt? If so...

...I can't tell if she's partially ignoring me or trying to help.

Mitotsudaira sighed and the chancellor shook a bowl.

“Tenzou, what are you gonna do for food? Do you not need any? Yeah, a ninja can't eat much. If you get too heavy, you can't move around fast. There's no helping that. If you insist the straw here is enough, I guess I'll leave you with that.”

“W-would you stop giving me that sympathetic look without letting me speak for myself!?”

Mary reacted to Tenzou's protest by standing up. She pushed her chair in and turned toward Mitotsudaira's mother with a serious look. The look was enough to make the woman falter.

“I can borrow your kitchen, I assume.”

After Mary requested confirmation instead of asking, Naito began recording and Mitotsudaira's mother nodded once she realized what was going on.

“Oh, my,” she said with her hands on her cheeks before returning Mary's look.

“Are you that...um...ninja? Anyway, are you his...well...lover?”

“Judge. We have decided we will be together.”

“Then...you live together? And at night, do you...um, sleep together?”

“Judge. When we sleep together, I am on the bottom and Master Tenzou is on top.”

Gold Mar: “Victoryyyyyy!! I don't know what just happened, but I just won!! I hit the jackpot!!”

Silver Wolf: “Well, I suppose that's better than anything abnormal.”

10ZO: “Th-this is a misunderstanding! She's talking about our bunk beds!”

At any rate, they were served a bacon and cabbage soup. Mitotsudaira was served first, followed by Naito. Mitotsudaira felt bad toward Naito, but she also felt a fleeting happiness at being chosen to go first.

She went on to eat some bread with liver paste.

...Ah.

It made her feel nostalgic.

Mitotsudaira continued eating a few more bites without thinking.

...This liver paste tastes so nostalgic.

That may have been because it tasted the same as her mother's homemade paste she had eaten for breakfast back home. She had eaten similar breakfasts on the Musashi, but her mother had not been there.

Why did I think she was an enemy? she started to wonder.

“ ... ”

But she corrected herself: *She is an enemy. She is only helping for the moment.*

She knew her mother would crush someone if that person would eventually oppose her. That was the kind of person she was. So once this cooperative mission was complete, it was possible she would immediately attack once more.

Mitotsudaira wondered if it was wrong of her to be so worried about that future that she could not enjoy herself now.

But...

“Here, Nate. Ham #2.”

“Eh!? Wait! Um, when they're this thick, a second one would bring my calories up to...”

Her mother raised her hand, placed it on her cheek, and spoke in a reserved tone to the chancellor.

“May I have a third one?”

Mitotsudaira could feel her competitive spirit firing up.

...Th-that woman!

She was starting to understand what led Horizon to remove walls. However, her mother turned her way and tilted her head.

“Just so you know, Nate, I slept with him last night.”

“Eh?”

Mitotsudaira looked to the chancellor who was cutting the ham.

“Yeah, that’s right. I ended up bleeding a whole lot.”

Gold Mar: “I’ll delete this part when I hand it over to Ga-chan.”

10ZO: “Huh? Huh? Why are you handling this so differently than with me?”

Silver Wolf: “I have a feeling it’s all over regardless from the moment she’s giving it to Malga.”

Anyway, thought Mitotsudaira as she noticed something heavy in her heart.

...Um, my king was...

“Eaten” by my mother? Does that mean, in a way, I wasn’t able to protect him?

She briefly pictured Horizon’s face and thought of the word “knight”.

“W-wait! Um, uh...!”

She looked at her mother who smiled back with just the corners of her mouth.

“Oh, my. What a frightening look.”

“Mother!”

“C’mon, Nate. Your hair’s bristling up.”

More plates arrived. First for her and then for her mother.

“When we say ‘slept’, we literally just mean ‘slept’,” said the chancellor.

“Unfortunately for me, nothing sexual happened.”

...Eh?

She did not know what exactly happened and she did not know what he had meant by bleeding, but she breathed a sigh of relief.

“Is that so?”

“Oh, dear. She actually bought it.”

Mitotsudaira did not listen to her mother’s cruel joke. She relaxed her shoulders, sighed again, decided to resume eating, and saw what was on her plate.

“Um, can I have a third one too?”

“Can you manage as much as your maman?”

Her mother gave a triumphant laugh, so her response was obvious.

“Easily!”

Chapter 55: Viewer of the Interval

CHAPTER 55

"Viewer of the Interval"



It is vast
And it is cold
But it is filled with something absurd
Even as it sweeps you off your feet, you cannot look away
Point Allocation (First Step)

It is vast

And it is cold

But it is filled with something absurd

Even as it sweeps you off your feet, you cannot look away

Point Allocation (First Step)

A large form moved slowly through the sky.

It was a giant white and black ship made up of eight smaller ships.

It was the Musashi.

As it was towed to the north, it cast a shadow on the forest below and the rivers flowing through the gaps in that forest. Occasionally, it would scare flocks of birds into flight or send beasts running.

However, there was no sound below or around the ship. It was being towed with acoustic primary stealth enabled.

But a great number of sounds could be heard within the stealth barrier.

A festival was underway.

“While also making repairs, we are holding a festival to distract the evacuees and Musashi residents from their worries and complaints. Was this Shirojiro-sama’s idea? I have determined it is proving quite effective, but it also means we could not continue on without doing this. Over.”

“Musashi” spoke quietly on the academy bridge at the back of the rear central ship.

She aligned the pile of documents she held and turned toward someone else.

“Satomi Chancellor Satomi Yoshiyori-sama, thank you for taking care of this. However, Musashi Chancellor and Student Council President Toori-sama is not here and the vice president and vice chancellor are both in Magdeburg, so I called Vicereine Horizon-sama here. Horizon-sama, can you greet home? Over.”

“Judge.”

Horizon was wearing her personal clothes and she raised her right hand vertically toward Yoshiyori.

“Thank you for visiting our shop. Please come again.”

“Um, no, I should be thanking you.”

He bent his narrow eyes but then shrugged.

“It’s looking like I’m not going to meet your chancellor a second time.”

“Toori-sama is currently having fun down below with Mitotsudaira-sama, Mary-sama, and Naito-sama.”

“Horizon-sama, you seem to be forgetting someone. Over.”

“Judge.”

Horizon nodded in understanding.

“There is indeed one more: the Reine des Garous who is currently assisting them. Thank you very much, ‘Musashi’-sama. I can be forgetful.”

“Musashi” stared off into the distance and Horizon looked down below.

“I am impressed we could take this many people onboard,” she said.

Horizon had a thought as she looked across the entirety of the Musashi from the academy bridge.

...Is all of this liveliness a representation of the lives Guericke-sama and I saved with our decision?

No, that is not accurate, she decided.

If she had not made that decision, Guericke would have gotten someone else’s help or done something himself. She had simply gone along with his desire to save them. And...

...I see.

She finally understood what Asama had said the night before.

She was splitting up the different roles between everyone in order to accomplish something.

She was not saying anyone should be sacrificed.

“ ... ”

She had not gone down to save him the night before because she had heard the others were better suited to that role. And now she had managed to save others here.

...Yes.

She was playing her role as vicereine.

She looked down at the festival again.

There were people there.

The schoolyard, the second and third schoolyards that followed the stairs down from the academy, and the streets below were filled with people carrying things or sitting around.

Next to her, “Musashi” calculated the number of people with a sign frame.

“Twenty-five thousand people. It is fortunate we could hold them all with only the deck. They are also permitted to enter the commerce block on the first level down as well as the atrium. Over.”

Satomi Yoshiyori had followed Horizon’s gaze and he crossed his arms and nodded at “Musashi’s” explanation.

“That’s the same as Satomi’s population. Musashi really is a massive presence.”

“Thank you very much,” replied “Musashi” before looking to the white god of war standing in the loading port on the back of Takao. “I have determined Satomi’s technical ability is impressive as well.”

“All we do is gather things from elsewhere. The base of our god of war tech was made by Kantou IZUMO engineers.”

He took a breath and looked at his Yatsufusa.

“We acquired an output device for flight equipment from a certain place, but we only managed to modify it for use with the Eight Dogs and Yatsufusa. And the engines have substitution restrictions applied to increase their power, so

the pilots need to display the appropriate virtue.”

Horizon looked to “Musashi” and asked an expressionless question.

“Why do guys get so excited when talking about mechs and the like?”

“Judge. Sakai-sama has the same symptoms, so I have determined it is some kind of illness. Over.”

“It’s nice how you people can say anything without reservation.”

“?”

Horizon looked at him as he smiled.

“Are you having trouble communicating with Yoshy-sama?”

That’s a good question, thought Yoshiyori.

He was keeping silent about several important things and that had led her to act hostilely toward him. Sometimes she would seem to grow closer, but then she would move away as if embarrassed.

But...

“I’m the type that thinks that makes this easier. But at the same time...”

He let out a bitter laugh.

“I also wish it didn’t have to be that way.”

“I have determined it is difficult to hold parallel views within yourself.”

“Are you letting me join your parallel views club?”

“No.” Musashi’s princess shook her head. “Recently, I have come to think that everyone has something like that. In England, the Fairy Queen wanted to keep Mary-sama from leaving while also not wishing for her execution and Chancellor Felipe chose to destroy himself yet ultimately chose to continue fighting. ...I also saw a battle in which many other people moved forward while also moving back.”

“I see.”

Yoshiyori nodded, but Musashi’s princess unexpectedly said more.

“I have determined it would be nice if you eventually had a chance to speak with Yoshy-sama.”

“...”

He very nearly asked her if she knew what he was hiding from Yoshiyasu, but she gave him a slight nod.

“I apologize. That was only something I learned from Toori-sama...although through his grandmother, Mitsu-sama.”

“And what was that? What did that chancellor’s grandmother say about him?”

“Judge.”

Some urgency had entered his voice, but she answered calmly.

“He went to meet his great-grandmother before he lost her.”

The princess spoke slowly.

“And his great-grandmother was satisfied because she had ‘lived a life that gave her grandchildren who would come see her before the end’.”

“That...”

Yoshiyori paused to choose his words.

“That must have been a wonderful way to live.”

“Judge. And, Yoshiyori-sama, I want to avoid losing anything or being lost. But if the time does come for that, I would want to feel satisfied with myself up to that point.”

So...

“If you are hiding anything or regretting anything, I have determined it would be best to tell Yoshy-sama. If you do, you should be satisfied with everything else.”

“Then are you living a life like that?”

The princess’s answer was not the one he expected.

She shook her head.

“I am still a child who cannot even determine if I am hiding anything or regretting anything.”

“Testament. So do I look like an adult to you?”

“You do,” she replied. “When you use difficult phrases like ‘without reservation’ in reference to our normal conversations, what could you be except an adult? You have an adult flavor to you.”

“Judge. On the vocabulary test I helped with the other day, Toori-sama shamelessly misspelled it as ‘rezervashon’. Over.”

“It’s an issue of spelling?” he asked.

The princess tilted her head as if to say “You mean it isn’t?”, so he gave a slight smile.

“Well, I suppose that means I was saved by children.”

“Saved?”

“Yes,” he said. “At the very least, I was saved by Musashi’s chancellor.”

“That heroine boy is raising flags with both sexes now?”

“What?”

“Nothing. Just talking to myself. I merely felt a need to punish him later.”

I’m not sure what that means, but whatever, thought Yoshiyori. He remembered the past, when he had often gotten lost in thought and tried not to let it show.

“Thanks to him and to you, I was able to avoid abandoning myself. I thought I would tell you that here.”

“Me too?” Musashi’s princess lowered her head and brought a hand to her chin. “I never thought I was a flag-raiser, too. I have been giving Mitotsudaira-sama so many presents, so I may have been raising her affection stat like crazy. ...This is perfect!”

He still did not understand what she was saying, so he simply filed it under “childish talk”.

He then bowed and prepared to leave. He had yet to finish repairs on

Yatsufusa's damaged right arm, so he wanted to do that on the way to the Holland area.

“?”

But he saw a maid climbing the academy stairs. It was an automaton who wore glasses and who he had seen on occasion. “Musashi” addressed the short maid as she moved briskly up the stairs.

“ ‘Okutama’, what is it? Did Sakai-sama do something again? Over.”

“Judge. He is once again forcing me to watch his DVD set of the fashionable drama Topaz Story, but I have put that problem off until later. Currently, I have come with something I wanted to inform you of directly. Over.”

Feeling like he should not be present for this, Yoshiyori began to leave, but Musashi's princess lightly waved a hand back and forth.

“She is merely setting the mood.”

“Okutama” turned around and frantically shook her head, but the princess was not looking. Instead, she sighed and asked “Okutama” a question.

“What is it?”

“Judge. Um... To put it simply, the Palais-Cardinal has created its link with Anne of Austria-sama in Magdeburg. Masazumi-sama and the others are on their way to greet her.”

ANA: “Is the link okay? Can I open my eyes?”

Dragon Dog: “The sight devices are in extremely excellent condition. Try to clench your right hand. That will initialize the reaction setting. ...Excellent, Lady Anne. The sensory assistance for your entire body has been set. After visual confirmation, it will be reset, so please begin viewing.”

ANA: “You're as forceful as ever.”

Dragon Dog: “And I have determined you are ignoring me and doing whatever you want just as always, but you cannot leave like that. And...”

ANA: “And?”

Dragon Dog: “Due to our relative positions, you will have primary control of the Palais-Cardinal once your connection is complete. I will provide assistance, but I will be unable to move this body. Please keep that in mind.”

ANA: “So you can no longer do everything for me while I lie in bed? Well, that’s fine. I’ll do my best.”

Dragon Dog: “That’s the spirit. But do you feel cold even inside the Palais-Cardinal?”

ANA: “Testament. I do. But it looks like it can be reinterpreted as the actual cold felt by Palais-Cardinal. The sun is shining on the right shoulder right now, isn’t it?”

Dragon Dog: “Excellent, Lady Anne. The temperature settings have been reset.”

ANA: “Things are gradually filling in, aren’t they? But Luynes, do I not have to put on any makeup?”

Dragon Dog: “It is splendid how you do not ask to have everyone cleared from the area. And one thing, Lady Anne. Please do not forget that I have confidence in your decisions.”

ANA: “You are perfect. As always.”

The first thing Anne felt was a breath.

Feeling that air suddenly enter and reside within her body allowed her to sense her own body’s presence. The next thing she knew, light entered her vision as the color white. Not long later, she could make out the shadows as well.

She was outside.

And not in a *Lourd de Marionnette* body.

...Mouse technology is being used to create an ether image with artificial senses.

She sat at the feet of *Lourd de Marionnette* Palais-Cardinal.

However, she still could not move. She was afraid that moving would make her body fall to pieces. But with surprise and hope filling her heart, she focused on her lowered hand.

“ ... ”

She grabbed at empty air.

By clenching her hand, she felt the presence of that hand and was aware of her own existence.

That may have been what it felt like to be born.

I will not cry, she told herself as she moved. She knew telling herself to remain calm meant that she was no longer calm, but she still moved her eyes to look around.

Her vision was divided between light and shadow because this was a large place reliant on the sunlight shining in from a tall window.

She was inside the Maurice Cathedral. It was a twin-steeped cathedral along Magdeburg's Elbe River. When she had come to Magdeburg to have her body converted to data, this large space had been the last thing she had seen.

...It's been a while.

She slowly stood up but lost her balance.

“Do not worry, Lady Anne.”

She was supported by a *Lourd de Marionnette* hand that carried the Mouse Luynes.

That was when she realized something.

...I have no weight.

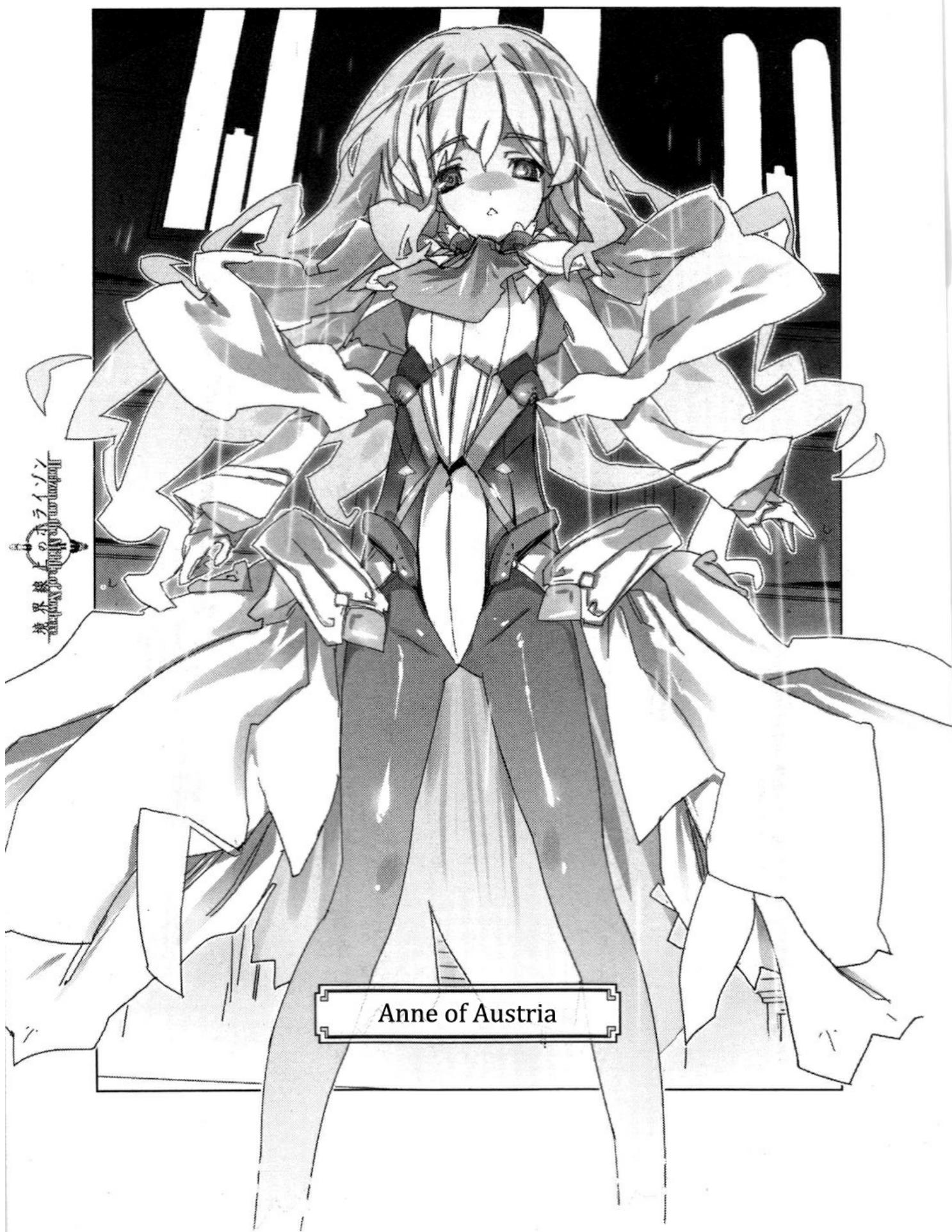
She found she could stand if she kept the “pressure” on the bottom of her feet even.

So she stood. Several Gallican *signe cadre* opened around her to adjust her settings. As she watched them, she looked forward.

She could see it there.

...Yes.

She had entered the outside world.



Anne of Austria

Anne first tried to see who was standing around her.

...I need to greet them and thank them for everything they have done for me.

She thought that to calm herself down as she set foot in the outside world after so long.

However, she first spotted the letters, piles of documents, and some drawings lying on top of the altar before her. The drawings placed atop decorative cloth had been made by a *Belle de Marionnette* copying the scene in its memory and the top contained the signature of the models instead of the artist.

The one of her brother and his wife had both of their signatures. Another with her friend, the Reine des Garous, had her signature.

“ ... ”

She wanted to say something, but found she could not. She simply picked up the two illustrations that were both about thirty centimeters tall.

She held them up before her eyes so the light from the window shined on them.

They were black and white, but she could sense a definite form within them.

“Brother, you’ve grown so much.”

She had met his wife Terumoto just once, but she had lost a lot of her sharpness since then. Terumoto was smiling and driving her right fist into her husband’s side, but she had not put her hips into it quite as much in the past.

Anne decided to assume that meant they were getting along.

The Reine des Garous’s drawing seemed to be from a stop by the academy while out shopping. She was smiling, but...

...The child who was with her before isn’t anymore, is she?

She felt apologetic for what she had forced onto her friend, but she also gave a natural smile of relief.

...I want to see them.

These drawings were not them, but they let her feel how much time had passed for them and for herself as well. But...

...I want to see them.

She understood she was fortunate enough for Luynes to arrive and to receive these drawings, but one's understanding and one's feelings were different. If possible, she wanted to share the same space as them once more and she brushed her ether fingers across the signatures.

The three models of those drawings had made those.

Their given names, their family names, and their handwriting were there. This allowed her to touch them.

"Yes."

And for them to touch her. Once she realized they had touched the drawings, she rubbed them against her cheek. Using those two objects they had touched, she had them touch her cheek.

...I want to see them.

Luynes was too perfect. To make sure I wouldn't cry, she gave me a Mouse body without that ability.

So...

"Luynes, why won't you let me cry?"

"That is simple, Lady Anne. If you cry, the water-cooling effect would give you a chill. Lady Anne of Austria must always be full of passionate heat. After all..."

"Testament. I understand."

She held the two pictures to her chest and looked to the people standing in front of her.

"Magdeburg Provisional Mayor Guericke, thank you for all you have done. And..."

"Long time no see, Anne."

"You are a difficult person to deal with, but it is lovely that you show up at times like this. ...Tomoe."

“I’m glad you see it that way,” said Tomoe with a bitter smile.

Behind her and the others Anne recognized were some people she did not. However, the black-haired girl in a Far Eastern boy’s uniform and the long-haired girl behind her both bowed.

“I am Musashi Vice President Honda Masazumi and this is Asama Tomo who will be providing divine transmission assistance.”

Masazumi had a thought as she bowed.

...This is a unique group.

After all, there was a Mouse and god of war treasurer, a hemisphere prostration mayor, Tomoe Gozen aka Luther, and a sickly ether girl with divine blood.

Masazumi silently sighed at how unique her surroundings were.

Vice President: “England was unique enough and now we have this.”

Mal-Ga: “How about you look in a mirror? Or maybe get your brain looked at?”

Vice President: “But I have a reason for wearing a boy’s uniform. Don’t ask me about everyone else, though.”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh heh. If you have to justify yourself, that means there’s something there needing an excuse.”

Asama: “Oh, but Naruze aside, I’m glad to see Kimi’s here with us in Magdeburg. I don’t think my mind would last without plenty of other people to play the straight man.”

Wise Sister: “Did you hear that? This perverted shrine maiden is saying she can’t survive without being surrounded by plenty of ‘men’. ...And why are you confessing to me? If you want to get married, I have to be the wife. If I was the husband, I wouldn’t be a sister anymore.”

Asama: “Wait, stop that! We’re in a Catholic cathedral, so what if you get caught by the sexual security settings!? I’m blocking it for now, but you never

know when that won't work!"

Mal-Ga: "Try to realize you're over the line from the moment you have to block it, you idiot. Anyway, I brought a few underclassmen with me, so we can escape if anything happens. I left Weiss Fräulein with Edel Brocken for repairs, but they sent me divine mail saying it would be fully repaired by tomorrow morning."

Masazumi sent her thanks and took a breath.

The representatives of Hexagone Française and the M.H.R.R. Protestants stood before her, but...

"Last night, Mazarin said that two other VIPs besides Anne would be here."

One was Tomoe.

"Will someone else be joining us? Who?"

"You can look forward to finding out when they arrive."

Tomoe crossed her arms and turned around with a smile on her cheeks.

"Yoshitsune forced a lot of stupid things onto you, didn't she? How about we discuss that to pass the time until everyone arrives? You also have yet to view Magdeburg's defenses and I'm curious about your team that was sent to meet with Rudolf II."

"Speaking of that team, is M.H.R.R. interested in the Princess Disappearances as well?"

"Testament. We have our own issues. ...And after seeing the situation in other nations, we're all the more curious."

"For example?"

Tomoe raised her eyebrows a little.

"An excellent invitation," she said with a laugh. "Are you familiar with Hexagone Française's previous treasurer, Prime Minister Richelieu who laid the nation's current financial foundation?"

"Judge. His policy of expansion created the foundation for Hexagone Française's development but also created a massive amount of debt. From a

simplistic view, you could call him evil, but to his nation and its people, nothing is more reliable than a prime minister who will work for the good of the nation without fearing evil.”

“An excellent assessment. The thing about Richelieu is...”

She pointed her right thumb toward Mazarin, the Mouse sitting on the Palais-Cardinal’s hand.

“While Mazarin there was taking over after him, he vanished. He fell victim to the Princess Disappearances.”

“In other words, Hexagone Française has also lost a leader to the Princess Disappearances. According to your mother anyway, Lady Mitotsudaira.”

Mitotsudaira listened to Mary’s voice over the sound of water.

They were in a forest spring about a minute’s walk east of the candy house.

The area was around three meters lower than the surrounding land and water filled a ten square meter spring from the northern rock face.

“Do not worry. Everyone is saying things can continue as normal even with us here.”

Mary walked waist deep into the water while wearing nothing, scooped the rippling water up in her hand, and turned around. She smiled and called to the others who waited at a slightly higher spot.

“It’s not quite a bath, but your mother was kind enough to offer. We have sweated quite a lot after all the hiking and fighting yesterday.”

“You’re right,” said Naito who had already started removing her clothes and cracking her neck. “Standard cleaning charms aren’t enough to get the oil out of my wings. Nothing beats water. ...You’ll be joining us right, Mito-tsan? Want me to strip you down?”

Naito’s spread hands approached and Mitotsudaira backed away when she remembered the previous night. But she realized she only had to remove her clothes, so she hurriedly reached for her shirt.

...Ah.

That reminded her that her choker was gone, but before she could feel too down...

“You’re mine!”

Naito was already wearing nothing but her shirt and she grabbed Mitotsudaira to strip off all her clothes.

“Hey, is it just me or are things pretty noisy over there? Don’t you want to check it out, Tenzou?”

Toori was tied to the yard’s fruit tree with rope and Tenzou was sitting in the grass checking on the topography.

...Not even this situation can change that boy.

“Toori-dono, you could have avoided this. When Mary-dono said they were going for a bath and asked what you wanted to do, you could have kept quiet and not announced your plans to peep.”

“Yeah... Unlike you, Mary’s pretty nice, so if I’d said we’d take a bath too, she might’ve let us.”

“M-Mary-dono might very well have said that, but I would have stopped you! And I feel like you slipped an insult in there! But anyway...”

Just as Tenzou said that, the candy house’s door opened and the Reine des Garous stepped out. However, Tenzou immediately looked away.

...G-going outside in nothing but a shirt!? How shameless can you get!?

He repeatedly shouted “inappropriate!” in his heart, but he sensed her approaching and setting something down. Then she suddenly tapped on his shoulder.

“I wouldn’t be dressed like this if I cared if you saw me. Men decide for themselves that they’re looking too much.”

“Uuh...”

The wife genre really isn’t for me, decided Tenzou before looking to what she

had set down next to him.

“These are M.H.R.R. uniforms, aren’t they? And...”

“Hello.”

He saw something a lot like the brown algae creatures except with a little more green. It may have been an indigenous variety and there were five of them.

“Testament. We will be passing through M.H.R.R. territory, so I had a change of clothes brought for my daughter and the others. And if they put their current clothes in this basket, these little guys will clean them. I also had a special program prepared for copying your clothing’s divine protection settings into the M.H.R.R. uniform hard points.”

“I am very grateful, but...”

“?”

He sensed her confusion but still did not turn around.

“Earlier, Mary-dono and the others destroyed the house a little.”

“...Pf. ...Ha ha. Wh-where?”

Surprised that she had laughed and not been angry, he pointed at the wall.

“The chocolate around there, I think. When Mary-dono grabbed it, about half a brick came out. When I touched it, about a tenth came out. When Naito-dono did, she could peel off about a fifth of a wafer brick, but...”

“Yeah, when I pulled out one of the popsicles making up the eaves, it said ‘winner, take another’,” said Toori. “That happened four times in a row, but I put the last winner back because I didn’t want to take them all and I’d give myself a chill if I ate any more. That last one fell back down, so I split it with the others.”

“You really are a child, aren’t you?”

“Yes, he is,” agreed Tenzou. “And wait! You didn’t split it with me!!”

“I think Mary saved half for you with a freezing spirit.”

I see, realized Tenzou. That’s Mary-dono for you.

“Tenzou, you’ve got a great wife, don’t you? Hm?”

“Eh? Well... Ha ha. Mary-dono makes every day wonderful. Living with someone like her makes every hour, every minute, every second, and every split-second worth it.”

“Hey, Nate Maman. We can ignore that idiot while he wiggles around there. And did Naito’s Magie Figur record that? ...All right! Let’s make a new MAD and release it!”

“I can’t believe you! I just can’t believe you!! And what do you mean a *new* one!?”

But after checking the things the Reine des Garous had set next to him, Tenzou had something else to focus on.

“There is a fair distance to Rudolf II’s tower. I would like to reach Magdeburg by midnight tonight to prepare for the Sack of Magdeburg tomorrow, so we do not have all that much time.”

He had allowed the girls to bathe so they could take a breather and maintain their motivation.

His ninja hearing sensed distant voices saying “Wow, yours are huge, Ma-yan! They stick out on either side!” and “Really? I think they’re just perfect for resting on Master Tenzou’s back when I lean up against him.”, so his own motivation was rapidly recovering.

However, the Reine des Garous tapped him on the shoulder and walked toward Toori.

“Don’t worry. I’ve prepared us transportation. ...I am the ruler of the forest, remember?”

Eh? he thought as she used her fingers to easily tear the rope binding Toori and rubbed his head.

“I’m going to take a bath too, but no peeping, okay?”

“Sure! I won’t peep! I won’t peep at all! Super zoom! You’ve got nothing to worry about there!!”

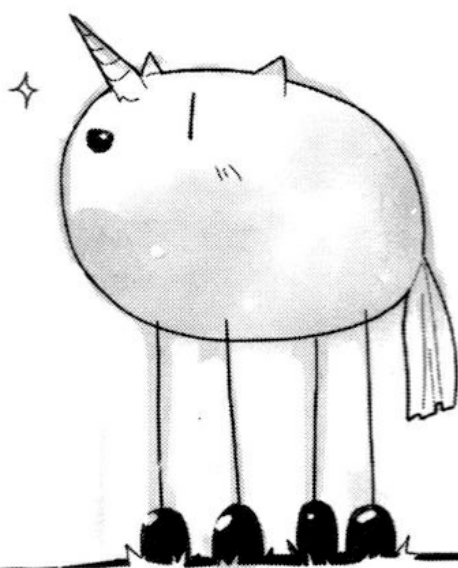
You never betray people’s expectations of you, do you?” thought Tenzou.

“Good, good,” said the Reine des Garous with a smile in her voice. “It’s been so long since things were this lively around here.”

Chapter 56: Soakers in a Purifying Place

CHAPTER 56

"Soakers in a Purifying Place"



What is it-orrrrn?
Point Allocation (Criminal)

What is it-orrrrn?

Point Allocation (Criminal)

Mitotsudaira realized she was at a disadvantage.

Once she entered the spring, her sensitive body was enveloped by the water that seemed to remake her and made her all too aware of her own shape.

...I never thought I would be outnumbered two to one!

She had no one to commiserate with when Adele was gone. Same for Naruze and Suzu.

Nevertheless, the other two ignored how much more water resistance they created. Naito soaked her wings to soothe the heat of her wounds and Mary rubbed the water into her body to receive some Blessings as a portion of the water spirits' ether.

The two Excaliburs were there, too. One acted as a stand for a plate holding leftover breakfast and sweets. The other floated in the water as their bodyguard. Both of them were converting ether to the English format and storing it, so they would make good defenders even if they could not act as a cannon.

Everyone is preparing in their own way, thought Mitotsudaira as she suddenly felt a stone in the sand below her soaking feet. She reached down toward the bottom that the spring water had mostly turned to sand and she picked up a round stone that had been polished by the sand.

She then recalled the night before.

...One of my throws during that battle with the automatons was strange, wasn't it?

One thing still bothered her about that battle. When she had thrown that stone at Mouri-01, she had achieved a much greater speed than expected. It had almost seemed to slip from her fingers and it had seemed like a failure, but it had had even more speed and accuracy than normal.

...What was that?

There was a chance she would have to face her mother again, so she wanted to understand all of her power. The idea of finding “more power than she expected” was quite attractive.

“ ... ”

But when she threw this stone, it flew with standard speed and inertia before falling into the water.

It was exactly what she expected.

It had none of the speed from the night before and she gained nothing from it. So...

“What was that last night?”

“Hm? What is it, Mito-tsan?”

“Ah.”

She turned around and saw the other two girls tilting their heads.

She realized they were worried about her, so she decided not to hide it.

“Um? I threw a stone during the battle last night, remember?”

“Right, right.”

The large two nodded to urge her on, which made them jiggle. *Kh!* she thought as anger filled her heart, but she decided to stay positive, took a breath, and opened her mouth.

“I threw that stone faster than even I expected, so I was trying to figure out the exact timing I used. If I knew, it would help me grow stronger.”

She could not exactly say she was worried about her strength, but the large two exchanged a glance and Mary spoke first.

“You probably won’t know unless you try to throw it with all your might while in a similar state of mind.”

“And wouldn’t it be dangerous if you *did* do it here?”

“You’re right about that.”

Mitotsudaira could only smile bitterly, but Naito continued.

“I do remember one pretty amazing throw, but I didn’t realize you didn’t know the trick to it.”

...That throw looked fast to Margot too?

That meant she was not just imagining things.

Mitotsudaira questioned it while suppressing her impatient desire to learn what that throw had been.

“My pain was cut off, so I should have been weaker than normal. And I’ve never thrown anything like that before.”

“It was a natural stone, so I doubt how you were holding it mattered much. Was there some trick to the swing?”

“Hmm.”

The three of them tilted their heads and Mitotsudaira’s bitter smile grew.

“Well, this isn’t really the time, so I can think about it more later.”

She had definitely pulled off an unusually fast throw.

She only had to investigate it and pursue the answer without rushing things or disturbing her thoughts.

If she could obtain that same kind of speed...

“It would be a powerful weapon for me.”

No one responded to that, but the other two girls did look toward her.

After a while, they smiled and said “judge”.

Mary sat on her sword and Naito spread her wings on the water and lay on them like a bench. Naito looked up at the sky visible between the tree branches and stretched a little.

“I wonder what Ga-chan’s doing right now. We’re having a ton of fun here, but they must be having their own troubles.”

“You and Lady Naruze certainly are close. Did you grow up together?”

“Yeah, but we didn’t use to get along all that well.”

...Eh? Should you really be telling her that?

Mitotsudaira turned toward Naito and the Technohexen waved toward her so Mary wouldn't notice.

She was saying not to worry about it and she smiled while staring into the sky and continuing.

"Telling this kind of story is nice every once in a while."

"It happened during elementary school," explained Naito.

...A lot happened even back then.

Mitotsudaira wondered if Naito was remembering the same kind of thing.

"Ga-chan and I didn't get along too well back then, but we started living in the dorms for middle school. The rooms were chosen by a lottery and we ended up in the same one. Neither of us would talk to the other and we lived completely separately despite being in the same room."

"Oh, my." Mary brought a troubled hand to her cheek. "Then how did you start to get along so well?"

She knows how to listen to a story, thought Mitotsudaira while also wondering if Naito should really tell the rest of the story.

Regardless, Naito kicked at the water to turn her wings boat so she faced Mary.

Naito gave Mitotsudaira a look, so she gently moved through the water to approach the other two. Mary slid her butt along Excalibur and nodded her way, but...

...Tenzou should really make a contract to worship the butt god.

Mitotsudaira smiled bitterly and only rested her elbows on the board.

Was she being a coward to think it was wrong for an English and Hexagone Française girl to sit right next to each other?

Still, she was close enough to sense the girl's body heat. It felt ticklish. It must have been the same for Mary because she let her hair soak in the sun and warm

her up.

Naito pulled the other Excalibur in and grabbed some biscotti from the plate.

“Judge. Anyway, we continued our silence for a while, but it was a stressful enough life that our feathers started coming out. Ga-chan can be stubborn, so she took everything too seriously and we tried to completely ignore each other.”

Mitotsudaira remembered it. It had been during middle school when she had been pretty disobedient herself. Seeing Naito and Malga back then had given her a certain thought.

...We'll eventually break apart.

She had thought she was correct and mature to see it that way.

“But for dinner and other meals, we had to eat out separately, right? So one day I was eating dinner at the chancellor’s place... Oh, we were ignoring each other, but we’d made a tacit agreement to take turns eating dinner at the chancellor’s place. Anyway, it was my turn that day and just when I was going to leave, the chancellor, who was working there that day, said ‘take this’ and gave me a strawberry tart.”

Naito made a large circle with her hands.

“The tart was too much for one person to eat and I was thinking it was about time I tried to grow up, so I prepared a table in our dorm room and waited for Ga-chan to get back. And then when she got there...”

“Yes?” urged Mary.

“Judge.” Naito scratched at her head. “At first, she tried to protest, but when I asked her if she wanted to eat some of it, she suddenly started bawling. When I asked her why, she said it was her birthday. Apparently, her family used to always make a strawberry tart to celebrate her birthday.”

And...

“Each year, she would eat a tart on her own at Blue Thunder, but she hadn’t been able to that year since it was my turn. She could have waited until the next day, but she felt celebrating her own birthday both alone *and* a day late

would just be too sad. But then I asked her if she wanted to eat some of the tart. I apparently reminded her of old times and, yeah. After she told me all that and apologized again and again while crying, I looked at her and, well..."

Yeah.

"It really turned me on."

...Th-that's how you're telling the story!?

Naito waved a hand to say not to worry about it, but it was possible she just had no sense of morals in that regard.

"Anyway," she said with a smile. "I ended up pushing her into the bed and didn't stop until I'd had my fill."

Should you really tell her that? wondered Mitotsudaira as she glanced over at Mary.

Mary however nodded a few times and smiled.

"Eating a tart in bed is bad manners, but it sounds fun. It's like something a delinquent would do."

"Ma-yan, you're just plain amazing!"

A small chill ran down Mitotsudaira's spine, but the source of the chill calmly smiled and spoke.

"There sure are a lot of ways for people to get along. I still have so much to learn about all of you."

Mary turned her usual smile toward Mitotsudaira.

She was really close, neither of them had anything to hide themselves with, and the water had mostly fallen from their skin.

That gave Mitotsudaira a good view of Mary's scars.

"..."

Staring at someone's scars was rude, but it was hard to look at Mary without also looking at her scars and they seemed to shine in the dampness of the

water. Mitotsudaira viewed them as the girl's pride, but that was because she knew what had happened in England and because of her own knightly way of thinking.

...But how does she see them?

Mitotsudaira felt like Mary had grown a lot closer last night. Would they become classmates and friends just like Naito and Naruze had and like everyone else in the class had?

But, she thought. That boy who wanted to pursue himself was almost always involved for the rest of us.

He was nearby now too, but would he help here?

Would she end up using his help to build a bond between herself and Mary?

"Is something the matter, Lady Mitotsudaira?"

"Oh, I think Mito-tsan saw her mother in your breasts. Yeah, that's gotta be it."

"Th-that is not it."

As soon as she said that, her mother appeared on the right-side edge of the spring that led to the candy house.

Mitotsudaira looked up in surprise and saw her mother remove her shirt with a smile.

"Oh, dear. Nate, don't tell me you're jealous of my body."

"Oh!"

Naito looked up and saw Mitotsudaira's mother stroking her body and narrowing her eyes toward her daughter.

"Heh heh. Nate, what do you think? I've still got it, don't I?"

...Sh-she's provoking me again!

Then her mother vanished. *It can't be*, she thought, but the woman's silver hair was indeed already inside the spring.

She had entered the water silently.

...What was that!?

There was no splash, but nothing strange had happened. Her initial velocity had been high, but she had slowed down just before arriving. It was likely a method of shifting her center of gravity.

But once the woman sank into the spring, she lifted the water with her body and stood up as if carrying it. She then looked down at Mitotsudaira's hands and feet.

"Nate, you had both a manicure and a pedicure done? But when I did that for you, you said it felt too hot and refused to ever have it done again."

"I-it helps me fight."

"I see. Then do you want to know how to make a really good one?"

"Oh," said Naito with a nod of understanding. She held Excalibur out toward the mother to offer her some food. "I know that one. You make it from the bodily fluids of someone important to you, right? And it gives you the divine protection you need to protect them and be protected by them."

"Testament. I use my husband's for mine."

She stared at her pearly white nails and lightly licked them.

Mary gave an admiring sigh, nodded, and looked to the mother's nails.

"Loup-Garous have a lot of different spells like that, don't they?"

"If we have time while travelling, I can teach you how to do it."

"Um, but mother?"

"What is it, Nate? Not even the family of the Reine des Garous has a way to make breasts grow. I am sorry your chest took after your father so much, though."

"W-wait. Can you stop making things up!?"

Mitotsudaira put up her guard which caused Excalibur to shake. Mary grabbed the hilt on the other end to keep her balance and her shoulders were shaking. The term "family shame" filled Mitotsudaira's mind and she blushed.

However...

“Oh?”

Her question came from the left, on the opposite end of the spring from the candy house.

“I hear the underbrush parting! Is someone peeping!?”

She held Excalibur to stand up straight while the others gasped. Naito also gave a cheer, wrapped herself in her wings, and sank into the water. Mary said “oh, my” and only hid her chest.

...Wh-why do they seem so calm!?

However, her mother was the last one to react. She placed her hands on her cheeks and wiggled back and forth.

“Oh, noooo! A peeping tom!? How embarrassing!”

...C-curse this mother of mine!!

The fact that her mother had the looks to pull off something like that annoyed her all the more even if she was family.

She considered sending a divine mail to her father, but she remembered how tolerant he could be and that he liked how her mother would get so excited. Simply put, her only choice was to bear with it.

Wait. Am I the only one losing out in this family? she wondered, but she decided not to think about it too much. At any rate, her mother was too busy pretending to be a young girl to be any use, so she would have to deal with this threat herself. She grabbed the empty plate from Excalibur and turned to face the left edge.

“Quit peeping and show yourself, chancellor!!”

She received an immediate response from the forest on the right edge behind her.

“That’s what I’m talking about, Nate! We’ve got permission to look now!!”

She heard the idiot’s voice and the sound of parting underbrush.

...Eh?

Unexpectedly, they both came from behind her and she did indeed see the

two boys when she turned around.

“Oh, Master Tenzou?” said Mary. “Are you here for a bath, too?”

Mitotsudaira screamed.

As the scream stretched into the sky, Tenzou held back the idiot.

“Nwooh, Toori-dono! Mary-dono is in there, so you can’t look! You can’t!”

“Eh? Master Tenzou, I don’t mind.”

Hearing her say that with her hands on her cheeks was enough to send his excitement rocketing upwards, but he also sensed Mitotsudaira’s presence covering her body with her arms and submerging herself up to her chin.

Tenzou soon finished tying the idiot to a nearby tree.

“Now, then.”

“Wait, wait, wait, wait. Hey, you’re in the way! Completely in the way! I can’t see down there! I can’t see!”

I would love to look too, you know? he silently agreed while keeping his back to the spring and blocking Toori’s view. The idiot’s expression was one of pure despair.

“Kh... A-all I want to do is see some naked girls!”

“That’s a hell of an expression for only wanting to see something.”

But...

“?”

He noticed another presence on the opposite edge of the spring.

...A beast?

He looked in the spot Mitotsudaira had noticed earlier and saw the underbrush shaking as something walked out from the trees.

“Oh, the transportation I arranged is here,” commented the Reine des Garous.

Tenzou did his best not to look down while checking the northern edge of the spring.

“An oblong manju with legs?”

“No-orrrrn.”

He saw four oblong white things that were two meters tall with a meter and a half of that coming from their body itself. They looked like short daikon radishes, they were supported by four wiry legs, and what seemed to be their head had a single horn.

There were four in all. As Tenzou wondered what kind of creatures they were, the Reine des Garous explained from the spring.

“These are the famous forest spirits known as unicorns.”

“Unicorns?”

Righteousness, a god of war with blue canine armor on the head, spoke to Palais-Cardinal which walked alongside it. Righteousness was holding the Palais-Cardinal’s hand because the silver god of war was still having trouble walking properly, but Anne stood on the Palais-Cardinal’s shoulder while providing information on the city and on Europe.

Anne shook her legs which faded away toward the feet and had the god of war move its hips forward.

“Yes. When unicorns run, the trees move out of the way and the underbrush and earth make sure not to obstruct their feet. They are the fastest creatures... no, spirits to move through a forest.”

“Hexagone Française sure has a lot of spirits and non-humans.”

“All the developing ones, ones from low-ranking families, and savage ones moved over to England. ...Although I’m sure England would tell you differently. Most of the nobles, royals, beasts, and spirits chose to live in Hexagone Française’s mountains, forests, and headwaters. And of course, that includes the unicorns. The Reine des Garous rules most of the forested areas and even the unicorns are her prey.”

Anne laughed quietly and the Palais-Cardinal moved forward.

“My friend is powerful. ...Now, will you stick with me a little longer for my rehabilitation? If we circle the western fortress, it should raise the morale of the defenders.”

Immediately after that, Yoshiyasu heard a loud sound. The M.H.R.R. warriors on the western bank of the Elbe River had fired a canon.

“It’s only a blank. They fire them every day to scare us. ...They do it on a whim to make sure we can’t relax and they’ll probably continue until tomorrow night.”

“Testament. The Far East uses the same sort of threats and restraints. They must be devoted to the basics.”

...Come to think of it, there are probably Far Eastern warriors in their ranks.

Her god of war’s sight devices detected plenty of Hashiba personnel brought in for support. They were not separated between men and women, but unlike Satomi which did the same due to limited personnel, these warriors simply had no division between the two.

...There are a lot of female Far Eastern name-inheritors because the sex difference allows for easier intervention and thus easier support from the Testament Union.

But P.A. Oda’s case was a little different. They looked at one’s skill and nothing else, so they had a higher percentage of non-humans in their top-ranking positions than most. That was why their main force was known as the Six Heavenly Demon Armies, but...

“What is it?”

“Testament,” she replied while turning to look at the Palais-Cardinal. “It’s nothing.”

...This is an unusual situation for me.

Anne of Austria, the girl on the silver god of war’s shoulder, had divine blood, had briefly ruled the great nation of Hexagone Française, and had handed it off to the next generation.

She had been the one to choose Yoshiyasu for this tour/rehabilitation and she had been the one to grab Yoshiyasu's hand.

Yoshiyasu sensed her own deficiencies, but also found comfort in the fact that there were others above her.

She knew she was still inexperienced as a student council president and she felt she had only been given that position due to her sister's influence.

But...

"Anne."

This may not be something to ask now, she knew.

"How difficult was it to prepare for Louis Exiv's generation?"

"Are you already thinking about passing things off to the next generation, Satomi Student Council President?"

No.

"I can no longer ask my sister that question."

"What about the chancellor? Wouldn't he be the best one to ask? Or is there some reason keeping you from doing that?"

She felt like agreeing or answering at all was the same as losing to that man, so she chose silence and Anne spoke with bitter smile in her voice.

"I simply did what I wanted. I wanted to pass things off to my brother, so that's what I did. And it wasn't difficult at all. After all, I was only doing what I wanted."

"Is that how it works?"

"It is. At least for me. ...I can't speak for anyone else."

With a quiet laugh, the silver god of war took a step down the road. The step was still stronger than necessary, but it no longer wavered when it turned back toward Righteousness.

"Hey, Satomi Student Council President."

"What?"

“Make sure you remember one thing. You can fight against an action, an attitude, or a situation, but never fight against your own heart.”

...My own heart?

She was fairly certain her heart was telling her to avoid that man.

...Is she saying it isn't?

“ ...”

She was still confused when Anne extended the Palais-Cardinal's hand toward her. She reached Righteousness's hand back and felt a stronger grip than she expected. A groan escaped her throat.

“Testament. Make sure you remember, okay? Remember that I was here and remember this strength I am leaving in your hand.”

“You...”

Yoshiyasu had heard this girl knew she was dying soon, but...

“Just call me Anne, Satomi Student Council President. I am nothing but the previous ruler now. This is your generation and I am happy I can be involved in it at all. So don't think of us like we're the same. From now on, I will always be Anne. I will be the Anne of Austria who worries for and roots for my brother, his wife, the Reine des Garous, Luynes, and the rest of Hexagone Française.”

She looked up into the sky as another blast of cannon fire filled it.

“Now, I wonder what the Reine des Garous is doing. She always has things her way, so I'm not worried about her herself. I'm worried that she's causing too much trouble for the others.”

“How would using unicorns for transportation be a problem?”

“Testament.” Anne brought a hand to her mouth and whispered the rest. “Unicorns won't let you ride them unless you're a virgin girl. ...I suppose she'll threaten them.”

As the sun began to set over the forest, people in black uniforms faced some round white lumps.

At the lead of the uniformed people was the silver-haired Reine des Garous who smiled and clapped her hands.

“Okay, everyone. These are the rare spirit beasts known as unicorns and they are going to rush us across the M.H.R.R. border. The unicorns can hide themselves, so M.H.R.R. won’t notice us or even suspect a thing. ...In exchange for carrying us, I will agree not to touch their herd for half a year. Is that okay?”

The Musashi group was disguised in M.H.R.R. uniforms and they exchanged a glance. Naito was already hopping up and down in excitement over getting to ride the unicorns and Tenzou stepped forward to view them.

...But...

The beasts being called unicorns had one fatal flaw.

...They look nothing like horses.

They looked like short daikon radishes or potatoes with a horn attached and wires stuck into them.

“Excuse me, but you look a lot like the eggplant cows made during the Bon festival and nothing like the unicorns from the stories I’ve heard. ...Are you really unicorns?”

“During the destruction of the Harmonic World, we decreased the amount of information making up our spirit forms to survive the ether disturbance-orrrrn.”

“And like this, we don’t need to eat as much and we’re a lot lighter-orrrrn.”

“So this form has been the trendy style ever since-orrrrn.”

“Don’t tell me that ‘orn’ is because you’re unicorns.”

The unicorns exchanged a glance, looked back at Tenzou, and tilted their entire bodies.

“You got a problem with that?”

“That! That was an honest complaint, wasn’t it!?”

“Not at all-orrrrn. All unicorns have pure hearts-orrrrn.”

“Really?” he asked the Reine des Garous who smiled and nodded.

“If they talk back to me, I just hunt them down. I’m a Loup-Garou after all.”

“Is that how it works?” he asked Mitotsudaira who averted her gaze.

Being her daughter can’t be easy, he thought while counting the unicorns.

There were four in all, but...

...Only a virgin girl can ride them, right?

“Um, what are Toori-dono and I supposed to do?”

“Unicorns only allow pure girls to ride them-orrrrn.”

“After all, unicorns love girls-orrrrn.”

“Th-that was blunt! That was amazingly blunt!”

“Calm down,” said a voice behind him.

Next, a gentle shadow and wind moved from behind him.

“Me first!”

Naito sat sidesaddle on one of the unicorns. *That was fast*, thought Tenzou, but a moment later...

“Eh?”

“What is it, Master Tenzou? What’s wrong with Lady Naito?”

“Well, um, didn’t they say only a pure girl could... huh? Ehhhhh!? But, wait. Based on the story I once heard about Naruze-dono’s birthday...ehhh!?”

“Oh? Master Tenzou, are you referring to when Lady Naito and Lady Naruze ate a tart in bed together? What’s wrong with that? Don’t tell me that’s enough to make you impure.”

“Do you have a question-orrrrn? My unicorn senses say she’s pure-orrrrn. There’s no problem here-orrrrn. Pant, pant...”

“I-I’d say that panting at the end there is one hell of a problem!!”

“Calm down,” said Mary as she placed her coat over a unicorn’s back and sat on top of it. “This way, I won’t hurt your back, right? I learned that in England. When riding without a saddle, you can hurt the horse’s back if it isn’t used to carrying people.”

“Wh-what a disappointment-orrrrn.”

Once Mitotsudaira sat on one as well, all of the girls except the Reine des Garous had their steed.

...I can just run alongside them, so...

He turned around to call for Toori and found the idiot was crossdressing.

“Um, Toori-dono?”

The idiot turned around in an M.H.R.R. girl’s uniform and a blonde wig.

“Do I look good in this!?”

...How am I supposed to answer when he asks so forcefully?

At any rate, the Reine des Garous, who was dressed the same, brought a hand to her cheek.

“I had those sent here like you asked, but it looks far better on you than I expected.”

“Um... What craziness is this?”

“You really don’t get it, Tenzou!? This is so they’ll carry me as a pure maiden!”

“Perverts are impure at the most fundamental level, so no thank you-orrrrn.”

“Y-your plan has failed already!”

“Calm down,” cut in the Reine des Garous as she looked back and forth between Tenzou and the unicorn. “As vice chancellor of Hexagone Française, I will courteously carry Musashi’s king. If I’m holding him, the boy will not actually be ‘riding’ you, right?”

She picked up the idiot in a princess carry. “Umm,” said Toori as he scratched at his head, but he did not actually protest. Tenzou decided to leave that to the Reine des Garous, but then...

“Over here, my king.”

Mitotsudaira closed her eyes, raised her nose, and turned away before swiping Toori with a piece of divinely-protected ivy she had secretly kept with

her. “Oh!” cried Toori as he was swung through the air. With his torso wrapped in the ivy, he lightly landed in her lap as she sat on the unicorn.

“Nate, I really feel like a piece of luggage right now.”

“If I left my king with another nation’s vice chancellor, I would never hear the end of it from Horizon and Kimi.”

“Oh, dear. Musashi’s knight wants her king all to herself, doesn’t she?”

Tenzou saw Mitotsudaira briefly bare her teeth at her mother’s provocation.

He truly wanted to avoid another fight between monsters here and he decided to straight-up ignore Naito’s shouts of “Get her! Get her!”

The Reine des Garous shrugged as if to say there was no helping it.

...Is she enjoying this?

I don’t understand women, he thought as the Reine des Garous climbed onto the remaining unicorn. The other unicorns shouted “orrrn!” in surprise and the one finally reacted.

“Uuh...”

It began to cry.

“M-my purity has been stolen... I was only ever ridden by little girls before! But now....!”

“Friend! The orrrrn! Don’t forget the orrrrn!”

“Mother, I think this plan was doomed from the start.”

“I-I’ve still got it! I do!”

“And I think they’re looking at the whole purity issue from the wrong angle,” added Tenzou.

After a quick discussion, they compromised by placing her coat over the unicorn’s back as a dividing line.

“Well, that’s everyone. I can just...”

Tenzou trailed off as he noticed Mary staring intently at Mitotsudaira who carried Toori in her lap.

After a few breaths, she slowly turned toward him with her eyebrows a bit raised and her cheeks flushed. She then brought her legs together and spread her arms.

“Now, p-please.”

...Ehhhhh?

The two Excaliburs floated next to Mary as steps up to her, but he could predict a living hell in the future from how Naito was setting up a recording Magie Figur with a businesslike expression.

“Master Tenzou, this situation demands some sacrifices.”

...Indeed, those huge breasts are definitely worth some sacrifices. And if my future wife says so, it must be true.

Not even Tenzou entirely understood his reasoning there, but he obeyed the guidance of his faith in large breasts.

Once he stepped on the Excaliburs, they floated up.

“Oh.”

They provided footing for him on either side of the unicorn’s back, so he could stand behind Mary without actually riding the unicorn. It required some balancing, but that was a simple task for a ninja. Also...

“Master Tenzou, I think you have this backwards.”

He lifted Mary in his arms. She smiled as her hips rose from the unicorn and Naito whistled behind them, but he had built up his resolve. He started calculating out just how many stealth techniques he would need to use to weather the storm once he returned to the Musashi, but Mary spoke with a smile in her voice.

“I had always dreamed of this situation since reading it in a story. This is the dashing prince carrying you away on his white horse, isn’t it?”

“That burning passion! I’m going to melt!” shouted the two Loup-Garous and Naito, but he ignored that and their suspicious actions. He had clearly already reached overkill levels, so he had nothing left to lose.

“But I imagine things are getting rough in Magdeburg, Musashi, and K.P.A. Italia right about now.”

“What are we gonna do, Shibata? Don’t you think it’s too much work to get this fixated on Magdeburg?”

On the eastern bank of the Elbe River, Narimasa spoke to Katsuie while letting a fishing line fall into the river near their tent. He sat still, waiting for the fishing rod to move, and Katsuie stood about ten meters upstream with a long fishing rod of his own. Katsuie suddenly raised a hand behind him.

A cannon fired, slight ripples covered the river’s surface, and he tugged on his fishing rod.

“Oh! Here we go! That really does get the fish moving! Let’s make this a thing, Narimasa! Cannon fishing! There’s no way this won’t turn into a big business! You handle the advertisement and I’ll manage all the income!!”

“If you want a fishing net, how about you hand over half the rights to that income!?”

“What!?! I was clearly joking, you idiot! There’s no way I’d actually team up with you! If I was starting a business now, it’d be with Lady Oichi!”

“God, you’re annoying.”

A fish struck the side of his face, so Narimasa caught the large salmon before it hit the ground and put it in his basket.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing!?” he shouted back.

“You’re freaking me out by taking this so seriously.”

Katsuie backed away a little and went on to look into the northern sky.

“You can’t see the Musashi anymore.”

“Eh? What? Was it scaring you? ...Ah, don’t throw rocks at me, you idiot! That’s dangerous!!”

“They’re not even hitting you, so quit complaining. ...Anyway, the Musashi may be gone, but some of their people are in Magdeburg, aren’t they?”

Narimasa looked in the direction Katsuie was pointing. Two gods of war were undergoing combat practice toward Magdeburg's western wall. One was Satomi's Righteousness and the other was Hexagone Française's Palais-Cardinal.

"Neither of those are Musashi's."

"Old Tomoe's there, Anne of Whatever's there, and that chestnut-headed vacuum hemisphere guy's there, so someone you hate is probably coming too. And they'll be meeting with Musashi's vice president...what was her name?"

"Honda Masazumi."

"Wow, when it's a girl's name, you answer right away! You pervert. ...Hm, so what's this? Is that the kind of girl you're into? Are you in L-O-V-... Oh? You wanna fight? You wanna fight!?"

"God, could you *be* any more annoying?"

"Shut up," said Katsuie before casting his fishing line back into the river. "Musashi's vice president's definitely there. Probably some others too as bodyguards. I bet we could take her out if we attacked now."

"What would you do about Tomoe Gozen?"

"She can only use that Testamenta Arma once a day, so that doesn't matter now."

"No, I meant her attack power."

"What? I'm vice chancellor of M.H.H.R. and P.A. Oda. ...And she's an old lady. Her stamina's dropped, so I could beat her now."

"Could you not before?"

"I fought her two or three times before, but decided I was having a bad day and ran. I was only five at the time, though."

"Oh, so you were a moron as a little kid, too."

Katsuie began throwing rocks and Narimasa began throwing rocks back, but they finally took a break once Katsuie's fishing rod moved.

"Well, there's Musashi's vice chancellor too, but I've seen most of what she

can do. The gods of war will raise morale, but they'd need thirty of them to hunt down our entire siege force before we destroyed the city. At best, they could manage a defensive fight. They would probably try to defend the city, but Magdeburg doesn't have any walls on the Elbe side to promote trade by river."

"But they dropped the harbor themselves and set up a defense spell device to deflect any attacks. There's no easy way of attacking, but the plan given at that strategy meeting was to charge straight in. Are you sure that'll work?"

"It'll be fine. If things aren't looking good, we can use a cannon to fire you into the city!!"

"Please don't strike a pose when you say that. And you've got all that solid armor, so you do it!!"

This time Narimasa began the exchange of thrown stones, but they agreed to a truce once Katsuie's fishing rod moved again.

"Well, we've gotta do this right. If we don't earn a win for Hashiba here, M.H.R.R. will probably get tougher on her."

"She really pushes herself too hard."

"We've gotta do this." Katsuie smiled bitterly and sat next to his fishing rod. "Once our master dies, she and I aren't going to get along any more. I'll be driven into my own castle where I kill myself. Earlier, Lady Oichi and I were filling up our schedules so we could enjoy every day until then. I don't know when that's going to happen, but I need to make sure Hashiba can continue on in my place."

"There's no real reason for you to die, you know? You can always retire."

"We've gotta play along. And it's not much different for you," said Katsuie. "After my death, you rebel against Hashiba and end up killing yourself. And at the urging of Hashiba and Toshiie's warriors. ...Toshiie has a way of brooding on things, so keep that in mind when you do it. Or as much as a small fry like you can, anyway."

"Sometimes it seems like death wouldn't be so bad."

So...

“I’ve told Toshi to make things as exciting as possible if he’s gonna come for me. I’ve told him to take me on with the kind of excitement he wouldn’t show Hashiba or any of the others.”

“Kah! Would you look at that youth? I can almost smell how inexperienced you are. ...Especially that ‘take me on’ pose!”

“Y-you...!!”

“Hey, you’ve got a bite. ...Yay! Just kiiiidding! You really are stupid, aren’t you? Hm? What are you pointing at?”

“You’ve got a bite.”

“Whaaaat!? Why are you lying again? Humans really are the worst, you liar in sunglasses!”

Katsuie’s fishing rod almost seemed to hop up as it was dragged into the river. He could only say “ah” before Narimasa cut in.

“Hah! You idiot!”

“What!? That was your fault for not being convincing enough! Your words lacked sincerity! ...Honestly, why was I cursed with such an awful underclassman?”

“Oh, god. You really are annoying.”

But Narimasa quickly changed the subject.

“Anyway, I wonder how Kuki and the others are doing. They should be fighting in K.P.A. Italia right about now.”

“Well, Magoichi’s with them, so they’ll be fine.”

But...

“They’re up against K.P.A. Italia, so it isn’t going to be easy.”

As Katsuie looked to the southern sky, M.H.R.R.’s iron-clad ships were finally beginning to corner K.P.A. Italia’s Murakami Navy in the skies south of M.H.R.R. and west of the Seto Inland Sea.

The Murakami Navy had bought some time by pulling back, but they had not destroyed any of the iron-clad ships commanded by Kuki and they were approaching the critical point for stopping them from approaching Itsukushima.

And at 3:17 PM, the Murakami Navy's fleet of small ships finally deepened its deployment and began firing repeatedly.

Both sides of the naval battle between K.P.A. Italia and M.H.R.R. had finally begun to fight in earnest.

Chapter 57: Crow Master of the Inland Sea

CHAPTER 57

"Crow Master of the Inland Sea"



A view from above
Is always
Looking to this
Point Allocation (Big Catch)

A view from above

Is always

Looking to this

Point Allocation (Big Catch)

The finale of the land battle and aerial battle over the Seto Inland Corridor began when K.P.A. Italia's Murakami Navy prepared their formation and fought back against P.A. Oda's onslaught.

"This formation is a lot more dangerous than their last one!"

On the bow of the central P.A. Oda iron-clad ship, a female demon named Magoichi wielded three rifles. She raised her eyebrows as she repeatedly fired all three.

She had a single goal among the flying shells, bullets, and fire arrows.

She stood on the bow of the leading ship and handled the interception and attack from that frontmost point.

Her method of offense and defense was simple. Of her three rifles engraved with a Yatagarasu, one was for attack, one was for interception, and the last one was for whatever the situation demanded.

However...

"There."

She barely touched the three guns. The recoil produced by the Yatagarasu rifles' great firepower sent the shallowly bent guns flying high into the air.

When they finished spinning through the air and fell back down, she would lightly touch them only to operate the firing trigger and adjust the angle at which they would fly back up.

All on their own, the three Yatagarasu would fire in midair, rotate in midair, reload in midair, and accelerate further upwards.

As they flew to about ten meters above her, Magoichi had a thought.

...This battlefield is really noisy, but it's nice having so many targets.

Standing on the very front of the black iron-clad ship felt like standing in midair and she would reach for the three great crows flapping their wings and frolicking around her in order to send them out again. She fired spell-enhanced bullets at the fleet of small ships.

...I love this feeling!

She swung her hands as if scattering birdseed, used her feet too, and spun around.

“Yata! Pick up and devour the shells!”

While occasionally altering their angle, she had the three crows strengthen their flight.

The firing continued.

A trio of rapid cocking and firing filled the air. Added to that was the sound of the Yatagarasu tearing through the wind as their paths were occasionally changed.

Attacks flew and enemy ships burst.

Since the beginning of the full-blown battle, she had sunk around twenty-one enemy ships. Of the two hundred ten kilometers of the Seto Inland Corridor, they had advanced one hundred fifty kilometers west, but as the iron-clad ships broke through...

Nine Horns: “Suzuki, please be cautious. The enemy is throwing away half their fleet as a wall while constructing a defensive formation. ...The real battle begins now.”

Currently, their six iron-clad ships were arranged with three in front and three in back. The front three were pushing the Murakami Navy's net-like formation westward and the rear three acted as replacements for the front three and provided covering fire for the ground troops. Kuki commanded the entire fleet from the central rear ship and he was operating several *insha kotob*.

Magoichi responded while looking ahead at the Murakami Navy.

“The one coordinating these small but not tiny ships is their 1st special duty

officer, Murakami Motoyoshi, isn't it!?"

Ahead of Magoichi, the Murakami Navy's small ships created a formation of overlapping nets. They put together a crude but deep grid pattern. When part of the front layer crumbled, the rear ships would fly through the holes to take its place.

There were six layers to the net and the enemy's main fleet was at the center of the very back layer.

...There he is!

The young man with long black hair was Murakami Motoyoshi. Magoichi had heard he was a mercenary from Hexagone Française. He apparently excelled at remaining aboard one of the small ships and commanding the fleet in a high-speed hit-and-run attack pattern.

Nine Horns: "The Testament descriptions do not specify whether Murakami Motoyoshi, leader of the Murakami Navy, took part in the Second Battle of Kizugawaguchi, but he was the commander that devastated Oda's navy at the First Battle of Kizugawaguchi. Seeing that he is here..."

"They decided they could put him in this battle *since it isn't known if he took part or not*. K.P.A. Italia is making their own interpretation of the Testament descriptions. I have to admit he is good at defense!"

The front line of the enemy's net calmly focused all of their attacks on just one of P.A. Oda's iron-clad ships. Even when Kuki sent the other ships out in front as bait, they refused to bite. Their actions were strongly controlled.

...Even with the iron armor, this concentrated fire is dangerous. ...He isn't bad.

They seemed to have come up with a countermeasure for the iron-clad ships. But...

Nine Horns: "Suzuki, the ground forces have caught up, so we can coordinate an attack. ...Advance and break through their center."

Three Legs: "Are you sure, Kuki? We're taking concentrated fire."

Nine Horns: “This is probably not an enemy we can defeat without taking any damage. And as long as we only take the damage we are expecting, we will be taking the least possible damage. Or so Hashiba said.”

Magoichi smiled bitterly at that and Kuki gave a sighing laugh before continuing.

Nine Horns: “Let’s end this here. You protect our path, Yatagarasu.”

On the K.P.A. Italia side, 1st Special Duty Officer Murakami Motoyoshi commanded the small ships, but not by *cadena firma*. He moved his fleet primarily through glances and hand signals.

The small ships were a lot like fishing boats, so they did not have the power to send their divine transmissions through any possible chaff. For that reason, he gave instructions to each unit’s command ship and they would pass it on to the ships in their unit.

However...

“We certainly were lucky.”

Motoyoshi muttered to himself and pushed his glasses up his nose.

...It’s fortunate this was a daytime battle.

The positioning of each ship was crucial for this net-shaped defensive formation, but these ships needed good visibility because they were too small to be fully equipped with rangefinders. That limited this formation to the day.

“The question is how long we can keep this up.”

The iron-clad ships had solid armor and the Black Metal it was made from supposedly gave it a self-healing divine protection, so the Murakami Navy was forced to wear them down with concentrated fire. But when he gave his instructions...

“But commander! We can keep going!”

He appreciated the thought and it made him reluctant to pull them back, so he smiled bitterly. In land battles, people directly clashed, but on a battlefield

fought between warships, the meaning of morale changed. Morale could be high, but one's momentum was hard to see and it was not easy to keep the pressure on the enemy.

In order to endure the enemy's attacks, high morale was best not wasted. That was Motoyoshi's view.

"Sorry."

He felt he understood their high morale.

The Murakami clan was related to the Kitabatake clan that had existed on the Kii Peninsula. Kitabatake Academy had excelled in the art of war, but it had given in to P.A. Oda's forceful subjugation policy and underwent a political marriage as per the Testament descriptions.

However, the head of the clan had refused to accept that. He had rebelled just as the Testament descriptions said and Kitabatake Academy had been purged.

The remnants of Kitabatake had primarily gone to Murakami and then to this battlefield.

Also, Murakami included the Saika Ikki, a mercenary unit which had joined the Ikkou-Ikki uprising as an anti-Hashiba group. Suzuki Magoichi had been their leader before leaving and joining Hashiba. Hashiba had likely sent out Magoichi to settle things with the Saika Ikki once and for all and perhaps to take them in as allies, but that had instead increased the Murakami side's morale.

However, Motoyoshi had a thought as he listened to the shellfire and shell hits.

...No, I am still being too naïve.

Based on Hashiba's previous accomplishments, he doubted she was the type to use tactics with an ulterior motive like that. Magoichi's inclusion was intentionally meant to raise their morale.

"That way, they can overcome every obstacle to defeat us."

He was being cautious, he had prepared, and he had morale on his side. But the enemy was powerful and he could not let his guard down, so he had fallen

back as far as he could and he made sure they were always firing.

“...?”

He looked to the bow of the enemy's front ship and saw Suzuki Magoichi send her three Yatagarasu high into the sky.

...Is that...?

He knew exactly what it was. He had seen it a few times while viewing the battle between the Ikkou-Ikki and P.A. Oda from a distance. An extremely staticky voice reached him from the Saika Ikki in his fleet.

“Here it comes! This is Yatagarasu's wide-area attack!”

As the three Yatagarasu flew into the air, they came apart and transformed.

The gun barrels expanded into long metal panels that were connected together by enveloping black ether light.

The black light formed a virtual barrel over fifteen meters long.

The three crows each fired a blank. The recoil caused them to rotate and dance high in the sky, but they suddenly arced back down.

They tore through the wind in a descent toward Magoichi who had one eye covered by cloth. However, the Yatagarasu each moved as if their virtual barrels would hit her from behind.

“Hey, now. Don't get so excited that you forget about your owner.”

Magoichi turned toward the Yatagarasu as they descended from the sky behind her. She grabbed the cloth covering her eye and slid it down.

This revealed a pale blue bird's eye with a black pupil.

It was a false eye and the black pupil captured the three flying crows and swiftly locked onto each one.

“Go.”

With that word, she threw three metal pots into the air. They were ether fuel pots the size of a bamboo segment.

The Yatagarasu each attached one of the pots to the gunstock in order to consume the fuel. They quickly passed by her and shook their virtual black wings just once.

The three crows flew to three hundred meters above Magoichi.

They spun around.

The crows rotated vertically through the sky and the path of their ether light drew a circle containing the program spell that would control them.

The three Yatagarasu drew countless circles measuring over one hundred meters and flew around them like the hands of a clock. They then obeyed the program written in the circles.

“Show your talons, messenger of heaven.”

As soon as Magoichi spoke, black beams of light were constantly fired from the three long virtual barrels.

They tore through the air.

The three black lines produced three tearing sounds and they pierced the enemy fleet like talons.

“Guide them.”

The Yatagarasu responded by tearing apart the net of small ships as if brushing it away.

Murakami Motoyoshi

Kuki Yoshitaka

Suzuki Magoichi



The Yatagarasu aimed along a straight line through the center of the Murakami Navy's net and slightly toward the land side.

Of the net's six layers, three were torn apart by the black spray, two had holes punched through them, and the final one was damaged.

This was not absolute destruction, but destroying multiple layers of the net at once threw off the Murakami Navy's actions. The rear ships hurriedly moved forward, but the hole was too deep and they were not fully coordinated.

The iron-clad ships targeted their advance and attack there. The small ships in the rear were forced to move forward to fill the holes in the net, but they received a counterattack of concentrated long-range fire.

This produced more destruction and a few holes formed all the way through the net.

The six iron-clad ships changed formation and advanced through one of those holes. They were packed closely together with three ships in the front and three in the back. The two ships on either side would receive all of the attacks from the right or left and the central ships would break through.

The wind roared and the six black ships advanced like islands or a pod of whales.

The Yatagarasu had lost their light and they returned to the bow of the front central ship where Magoichi held out her left arm. The Yatagarasu let their stocks catch on her arm such that they spun around it several times. They then expelled their scorched physical barrels into the air.

"Good, good."

Magoichi drove new barrels into the three crows from below and reversed their rotation. They were cocked, they gave their cry of firing, and they began rotating and firing around her once more.

They would not be stopped.

"Go, crow that guides the war god. Go wherever Yata's protective bullets fly!"

The three crows cried out and a new uninterrupted stream of fire flew to the west.

The iron-clad ships continued through the torn openings in the enemy's net.

Wrapped in roaring wind and parting the air current, the six black ships advanced.

Meanwhile, the Murakami Navy's commander, Murakami Motoyoshi, raised his right hand and swung it backwards. Doing so thrice was the sign for a full-speed withdrawal and his entire fleet obeyed.

Commander of the iron-clad ships, Kuki Yoshitaka, saw something different enter that movement, so...

Nine Horns: "Central ships, fall one ship's length back from your port and starboard ships!! Lead port and starboard ships, move to the center!"

Three Legs: "Kuki!? Isn't this our chance to break through? Why are you hardening our defenses!?"

Nine Horns: "The Murakami Navy's net had six layers. If they try to withdraw as is, they will only get caught on the layers behind them. The only reason to begin a full-speed withdrawal in this situation is to create a different formation!"

As the Murakami Navy withdrew at full speed, it really did create a new formation.

They created two long net-like walls that formed an upside-down V.

Both nets were three layers thick. It was not as tall as before, but the tilted angle made it twice as long from front to back and it hid the ground.

Nine Horns: "Port and starboard ships, take anti-shell defenses on your outer edges!"

As soon as Kuki gave his instructions, the shellfire began.

As Kuki commanded the iron-clad ships from the deck of the rear central ship, he saw the Murakami Navy fire hundreds of shells to wear down the side hulls of the iron-clad ships. The book-shaped ether light of gravity barriers appeared primarily around the decks and cannons.

“Port and starboard ships, maximum defenses to the sides!”

Countless solid sounds created a single long sound and nothing would stop it.

But...

Nine Horns: “Port and starboard ships, check the damage to the armor! Where damage is lightest, deploy the cannons and return fire!”

“Shaja!” they replied as the counterattack began.

But even as they tore holes into the enemy net, new enemy ships slipped in to fill them.

Even so, the iron-clad ships forcibly accelerated.

They were moving directly ahead.

...I can see Aki there!

That was Itsukushima’s floating island and K.P.A. Italia’s headquarters were located there.

Looking ahead raised their morale. They had made it this far, so...

“Everyone, double-check your objective! Accelerate forward as much as possible!”

But as the iron-clad ships moved forward, the Murakami Navy took new action.

It approached.

The left and right net walls rapidly approached the iron-clad ships.

Three Legs: “Eh? What are they doing!? Are they ramming themselves into our shells!? Are they stupid!?”

Nine Horns: “No! They’re using the angle of fire against us!”

The iron-clad ships’ cannons were massive, so they could not immediately change their direction of fire. Even the homing turret-less cannons could not use their homing properties at close range.

So the Murakami Navy was moving in right up to them.

Nine Horns: “They know how to take advantage of small ships, so is this their

idea of a do-or-die tactic!?”

A small ship was struck and destroyed by a shell at close range, but the crew did everything they could to guide the ship before abandoning it.

“_____”

The small ship collided head-on with the rear starboard iron-clad ship.

A vibration ran through it and an explosion blossomed in the sky. The Black Metal armor was revealed unharmed below the scattering smoke, but...

Three Legs: “Wow, Kuki. I always thought your designs had a lot of waste, but they come in handy at times like this!”

Nine Horns: “Why do women always view precautions for ‘times like this’ as waste!?”

But...

Nine Horns: “If they keep that up in a single spot, they will eventually break through. More importantly, they are reducing our speed. If we let them hold us up here, we cannot take Aki before the battle’s agreed-upon end of 4:00 PM.”

Three Legs: “Um, then what are you going to do?”

Nine Horns: “What do you think these iron-clad ships are for?”

Kuki gave instructions to the leading starboard and port ships.

Nine Horns: “Ram the left and right walls at full power. Sacrificing those two ships is necessary for victory.”

The students fighting a fluctuating battle on the surface saw a cascade of ships pour from the sky.

Colliding metal, breaking wood, shouting voices, and reverberating explosions blurred together.

An eight hundred meter iron-clad ship charged into the net wall formation of the less than twenty meter ships.

The ships that could not react in time and the ones that attempted to evade

or defend were all equally crushed and destroyed by the massive black form.

Ripples ran through the net, they sprayed upwards, and they exploded. When the small ships were struck by that ferocious pressure, they all fell, some spinning, some directly, and some while falling to pieces.

The iron-clad ship did not escape unharmed either. After about fifty ships were taken out in an instant, Murakami Motoyoshi ordered the rear half of the fleet to abandon them and ram the enemy.

The dozen or so ships that rammed them and the concentrated fire of the leading ships was enough to set ablaze the front starboard iron-clad ship that was making its attack on the land side.

With the bow breaking apart and around three small ships embedded within it, the iron-clad ship's bow suddenly dipped. Next, white light burst from between its Black Metal armor and it instantly expanded outward.

“...!?”

Everyone looked up and saw the ship noisily turn into a mass of flames and explode.

The air moved and heat swept down from the sky and across the land.

No one uttered a word on the surface, but the M.H.R.R. students and K.P.A. Italia students on the Seto Inland Corridor all realized one thing: the covering fire from K.P.A. Italia's Murakami Navy had been almost entirely lost.

“Ohhh!”

The high-speed mobile shell assault team making up the front lines raised a cry and accelerated straight forward.

At the same time, the front port iron-clad ship making its attack on the ocean side was also destroyed.

A flaming blossom filled the sky, taking many small ships with it.

Kuki realized he had accomplished his part of the history recreation.

The iron-clad ships were meant to neutralize the Murakami Navy and secure

the safety of the ground troops.

From morning until now, the Murakami Navy had lost almost forty percent of its forces and around twice that were at least damaged. Except for the central fleet, not a single unit appeared to be fully functional.

However...

Three Legs: “They aren’t giving up yet! They’re firing!”

That would be Murakami Motoyoshi’s decision. The hundred or so undamaged ships were deployed toward the land on Kuki’s right. They remained in a net formation but as a wall and they were located at very close range.

Had they decided that no more ramming attacks were coming or did they simply not care if there were more?

Motoyoshi was at the very back and center of this new formation and he looked Kuki’s way despite not actually being able to see him from there.

Their gazes met and they both gave instructions to their fleets.

“Fire!!”

Shellfire intersected, but something happened that Kuki had not expected.

...Light?

Directly ahead of his rear central ship, something resembling lightning raced toward Magoichi’s front central ship.

That light should not have been there. Sensing danger, Kuki cried out.

“Suzuki!”

Before he could warn the demon gunner, flames blossomed up ahead.

The front central ship had exploded.

Magoichi detected everything that happened while in midair.

She was currently flying. She had a Yatagarasu under each arm and their recoil had sent her into the air.

Her decision to take flight had been a split-second one. The instant she had sensed a powerful presence approaching her ship, she had used Yatagarasu to fly into the sky where she could confirm what it was.

That decision had saved her life.

After all, the presence had shown itself the very next moment.

It was lightning.

No, it was technically a bluish-white god of war wielding a large sword enveloped in lightning.

Only half of the god of war was humanoid. The upper half was shaped like a warrior, but the bottom half had four giant legs. The four-legged god of war suddenly appeared on the deck below Magoichi and...

“————”

It drove the lightning sword into the iron-clad ship.

A moment later, the ship swelled out and burst.

“———!”

The bluish-white four-legged god of war left the explosion and roar of noise behind as it leaped toward Magoichi.

It had noticed that she had sensed its presence and jumped away.

A split-second decision would decide her fate as the lightning strike flew up toward her.

And...

...*Kh.*

She did not choose wrong.

She called in the final Yatagarasu that was spinning through the air on standby.

“Bear with it!”

She let it hit her.

It was a solid blow. Her organs twisted in the opposite direction of the hit and

she nearly lost consciousness, but that pain earned her great acceleration. And as the enemy's blade approached...

“Dodge!”

More than just yell the word, she twisted her body and fired the twin guns below her arms. She did not target the enemy; she simply fired into empty air.

She focused on evasion and sent herself flying.

...How about that!?

She felt heat in her right leg. It was the enemy's rising lightning strike, but she shrank down in midair to pull herself away from the hot lightning.

“Kh!”

She rotated through the sky to avoid it.

And she succeeded. The enemy's blade grazed past her foot.

“Well done.”

A deep voice reached her and a large form moved below. The four-legged heavy god of war maintained the trajectory of its leap toward her, which took it to the rear port ship.

Magoichi shouted to Kuki's ship as she watched it leave.

“Kuki! ...K.P.A. Italia's vice chancellor is here! That's the former Peerless in the West and father-in-law of Tachibana Muneshige! He's the head of the Peerless of the West's family...”

The lightning raced toward the rear port ship.

“Tachibana ‘Lightning Cutter’ Dousetsu!!”

As soon as she finished, the heavens were split apart and lightning dropped down.

Even as the M.H.R.R. and P.A. Oda warriors clashed with the K.P.A. Italia warriors on the surface, the team led by the Reine des Garous to meet with Rudolf II rode unicorns to quickly reach the forested border between Hexagone

Française and M.H.R.R.

Meanwhile, Musashi arrived at a city along the border with Holland and let off the evacuees while using the divine network to check the uncertain details of the battle on the Seto Inland Sea.

A lot was on the move, but one thing was true for them all.

“The battle between Hashiba and the Italians is the key here. That will let us predict how the world will progress from here.”

Yoshitsune gave that comment as she moved slowly west along a great plain of Qing-Takeda. She was not alone. She was preparing for battle with cannons and a large mobile city.

“Musashi, can you overcome Magdeburg and arrive here for the Battle of Mikatagahara? You have your meeting with Tomoe and the others as well, though.”

She looked to the west in the early evening sky.

“Now, what will you do, P.A. Oda, Hashiba, and pope of K.P.A. Italia? The result of your battle will influence everything else from here on.”

As she asked that question, the Satou Brothers contacted her from the group following behind her.

They were providing incomplete information about the battle on the Seto Inland Sea, but it was enough to know the situation was progressing.

“K.P.A. Italia Vice Chancellor Tachibana Dousetsu is having some fun, is he?”

He had destroyed a third iron-clad ship and he was continuing to fight.

The battle that would influence the world had intensified.

Study:

Battlefield Diagram 3

Toori: Sis! Sis! It's kind a hard to care since this is a battle between other nations, but that's no excuse for it being so confusing! Help me out here!

Kimi: Heh heh heh. Uncaring brother, I like your honesty, but setting that aside, here's the general situation.

Top: Toward Itsukushima

Left: Ocean Side

Right: Land Side

1: Murakami Navy's Net Walls Composed of Small Ships (Murakami Motoyoshi)

2: Iron-Clad Ships

3: Tachibana Dousetsu

4: Suzuki Magoichi

5: Kuki Yoshitaka

*Gray ships have been destroyed.

Toori: Ohh! So they keep pushing back against each other!? In action games with this kind of battlefield, I always fall off when jumping between ships!

Kimi: That's because you have a habit of tapping the jump button too much. And I feel like that's not the point, but it *is* hard to care when it's someone else.

Chapter 58: Warrior of the Lightning Sky

CHAPTER 58

"Warrior of the Lightning Sky"



None can oppose
This attack
Point Allocation (Victory)

None can oppose

This attack

Point Allocation (Victory)

Light shined diagonally down from the setting sun.

Eight great shapes filled the sky. They said Musashi on the side and many transport ships moved back and forth between them and the city below.

The Musashi was sending the Magdeburg evacuees down to a Protestant city near the border between M.H.R.R. and Holland. As the evacuees on the deck were being ferried down by transport ships, the number of people on its surface shrank.

The festival died down as the number of people dwindled, but new movement was filling the Musashi.

Repairs were beginning on several of the ships.

Repairs had begun en route for the damage done to Musashino by Shibata and the galley that morning, but the damage from the battle in IZUMO and before had yet to be repaired.

The repairs generally began with the main frame and the exterior connected to it and the people began moving and working on the scaffolding set up on the outside of the ships.

However, two people stopped moving on the scaffolding for the Musashi's starboard side.

That was the site of the repairs for the armor damaged in the battle with Hexagone Française the previous day. A blond young man held a large repair charm next to the railing. He and a girl with two large false arms viewed a sign frame.

The sign frame contained divine mail from Tres España labelled "To Tachibana Gin and Muneshige".

Tachibana Muneshige turned to Gin who stared intently at the sign frame.

“Gin, Master Dousetsu has...”

“Judge. My father has entered the battle,” she said. “How troublesome.”

Gin sighed and silently lamented how childish her father could be.

“Once you came here, Master Muneshige, my father visited K.P.A. Italia claiming it was a retirement trip; but I never thought he would fail to act his age and become a student. And their vice chancellor no less. He can be viewed as a guest there because Tres España lent some of its fighting force to K.P.A. Italia during the Age of the Gods, but otherwise he would have been tarnishing the Tachibana name by ignoring the history recreation.”

Based on the message from Fusae, he seemed to be having a lot of fun.

“All he did was bring down one measly warship, but it sounds like he is jumping around like a monkey to celebrate. A gentleman should really restrict himself to simply relaxing one cheek. ...Ah.”

She turned to Muneshige and stared directly at him.

“You are always smiling regardless, so you get a pass.”

The people working around them all froze in place. Naomasa, the site supervisor, looked like she had seen something unbelievable, but Gin ignored it because Muneshige did not seem to mind.

At any rate...

“Do you think my father’s strange behavior is his way of relieving the stress of not getting a TV show made about him? The stupider of the two Honda families really is a thorn in our side.”

“If you say so,” said Muneshige. “But I think Master Dousetsu joined K.P.A. Italia so the Testament Union would accept our inherited names.”

“You are too soft on my father,” she declared expressionlessly.

“Um,” he hesitated as she sighed.

“Honestly, the original individual from the Age of the Gods was said to have cut a bolt of lightning with his sword, so he was known as the ‘Lightning Cutter’.

What kind of overpowered nonsense is that? And after his hemiplegia, he had to be carried onto the battlefield with a palanquin, but everything got even more exciting for him then. Talk about insane. ...Of course, my father managed to recreate all that, so I suppose that means there have been two people that insane throughout history. And that is why he was made the enemy in Cutting World Hondalia. ...Master Muneshige, you should stay on the proper path. Do that and you can be the protagonist.”

“If I’m the protagonist, will you be the heroine? Then I need to work hard.”

Mishina Hiro was passing by just then and she gave Muneshige a frightened look. She grabbed her lab coat’s collar and fanned herself with it, but Muneshige ignored her and smiled.

“If that happens, Master Dousetsu will be jealous, won’t he?”

“That is not...what I was trying to say.”

Gin hung her head a bit and clasped the fingers of her false arms, but she looked up in realization and faced the sign frame again.

“M-Master Muneshige, let’s focus on contacting my father. We can wait until later to discuss everything else in depth!”

Tachibana Dousetsu was surrounded by smoke and the setting sun washed over him.

Intermittent explosions and rumblings filled the rear port iron-clad ship as it slowly began to fall. From that second ship he had brought down, Dousetsu looked around while used his four legs to turn like a horse.

“ ... ”

The boxy ship of the warship-controlling automaton sat on the deck. The automaton inside had lost its synchronization due to the ship’s destruction and it was in an unmoving state of shock.

Dousetsu looked to the automaton and the kanun-style controller it was connected to.

“Now, then.”

With a swing of his large sword, he severed the base of the boxy ship from the deck.

He suddenly turned west and saw something falling from the deck of the front center ship he had destroyed not long before. As the ship tilted and sank toward the ocean, one of the same boxy ships for the automatons that controlled the warships fell from it.

Dousetsu did not watch to see if it would safely land in the ocean. He looked back to the ship he was on now and saw strength filling this automaton's eyes. Once she grasped the situation, she spoke.

“Why?”

Dousetsu nodded.

“I am not showing you pity. I am simply removing you from another's grasp and returning you to a state in which you can rely on god. Will you rely on god, will you share the fate of this ship, or will you fight that fate? The choice is yours.”

With that said, he raced across the deck, his four legs moving just like a horse's.

“Kaminarigiri!”^[5]

He held the large sword Kaminarigiri in his right hand and its blade shined a bluish-white.

The repeated lightning strikes had already ethereally electrified the surrounding air.

...I guess I've used it a little too much.

“I want to avoid dulling the blade, but this battlefield leaves me little choice.”

The enemy commander, Kuki Yoshitaka, would be aboard the enemy command ship at the center of the rear ships.

If he brought down their command ship and defeated Kuki Yoshitaka, they could hold off this invasion by the iron-clad ships.

From there, they could continue as they had. The remaining ships of the

Murakami Navy could support the Seto Inland Corridor and M.H.R.R. could be pushed back. If they then quickly worked out a ceasefire or truce, they could buy some peaceful time.

So...

“—————!”

Dousetsu faced the command ship and took a great leap.

Two iron-clad ships remained: the rear central command ship and the rear starboard ship to its right.

In midair, Dousetsu realized those two remaining ships were picking up speed. He could not tell whether they were trying to move away from him or trying to crush the Murakami Navy as quickly as possible.

...Do they have some sort of plan?

He did not know, but he could still catch up from where he was. Even so, a change came over the battlefield as soon as he began to descend.

“An enemy?”

His enemy took the form of crows. Three long virtual gun barrels wrapped in black light horizontally drew countless circles high above him.

Those were the weapons of the demon girl who had just barely avoided his attack earlier.

He spotted her on the bow of the command ship he was currently jumping toward.

The demon girl was looking his way with both eyes opened.

Her voice reached him from the depths of the intersecting shellfire and explosions.

“Peck and devour him, messenger of heaven!”

A moment later, the attack arrived.

However, this was not the beams of light she had used before.

“Fire a great cannon!”

At Magoichi’s command, a great cannon took shape in the sky.

The black circles revolving at different speeds slid vertically and linked together.

This created a massive cannon barrel created from accumulated black light.

At the base, the three Yatagarasu rotated with their virtual barrels deployed. The great cannon was thirty meters across and at least one hundred twenty meters long.

Three Garuda birds were created atop the cannon and they gave three cries to indicate the completion of the barrel.

“...!!”

Upon hearing their cries, Magoichi’s false bird eye glowed and looked up to its prey.

She stared at the giant four-legged warrior falling toward her.

“Go, Urban Destruction Yatagarasu! Open your three beaks!!”

The three Yatagarasu roared.

Their virtual barrels burst and the black cannons of light literally exploded.

Their cry resounded through the sky.

The three blasts filled the black muzzle in the heavens above and a thirty meter wide pillar of black light dropped straight down.

The crow light crashed into Tachibana Dousetsu’s four-legged god of war.

“Yes!”

Magoichi saw the black light slam into Dousetsu like a hammer and swallow him up.

This attack did more than fry the Yatagarasu’s barrels; most of the frame would need an overhaul. It required a lot of preparation time, so it was only

usable for sniping or lying in wait as she had done here. However, it was an important technique for anti-ship or anti-city battles.

...I never thought I would have to use it against an individual!

But with this, she knew she had lived up to the expectations held by M.H.R.R. Student Council President Matthias. The Yatagarasu were now unusable without an overhaul, so she had to withdraw and leave the rest to the strategy Hashiba had prepared.

However, something happened to the black pillar exploding from the sky.

“Is that...?”

Magoichi saw the color black burst open.

Magoichi watched as the rotating pillar of light was torn to pieces.

She also heard three sharp noises as the three black wings scattered. The Yatagarasu had been deflected.

Before she could wonder why, a black surge filled the sky.

As the pillar of black light dropped from the heavens, a four-legged god of war split it open and burst out.

Its blade was made of lightning itself and the splitting light tore through the black pillar.

Magoichi knew what had happened.

...He let the pillar of light hit him.

“He sent lightning down before the beak could fall and that lightning pierced the pillar of light from above!?”

She saw exactly that overhead.

“———!!”

Dousetsu cried out and sent the black light flying in every direction.

The crow light exploded in the heavens. For a finishing blow, the lightning raced in every possible direction and even swept across the deck on which

Magoichi stood. As the attack reached the bow...

“Kuki! I did what I could! The rest is up to you!!”

She flung herself into the air just as the net of lightning swept through it.

The four-legged god of war dropped to the command ship’s deck.

Rather than land, he slammed his legs onto the deck.

The giant ship shook, but Dousetsu maintained his balance and raised his lowered upper body. He checked on Kaminarigiri and...

...That was an intense discharge.

Kaminarigiri had two stages in its destruction process.

First, the blade emitted a prayer-style ether resonance that replaced the surrounding space with “lightning”.

And second, Kaminarigiri cut through that space because it could cut through “lightning”.

The second stage produced a reverse-resonance in the blade that had called in the lightning. This reversed the “calling” into a “rejection” and allowed it to “cut” the lightning.

However, repeatedly calling in the lightning caused the space composing the blade itself to grow accustomed to “lightning” and it was unable to produce its full power even with its reverse vibration. The ether composing that space would overheat. Once that happened, he could only wait for the ley line to flow in and cool that space.

That was his current situation.

...That gunner isn’t half bad.

When Magoichi had fired the Yatagarasu’s full power at him, she had been doing more than simply attacking him. She had likely been trying to overheat Kaminarigiri to protect the command ship.

Well done, thought Dousetsu, even as he took action toward robbing the command ship of its ability to fight.

He started by rushing across the deck.

“— — —”

He sliced the boxy automaton ship from the deck and let it drop.

It only took one strike and the ship shook. With the control automaton removed, the ship could only drift from inertia and it could not control its cannons.

...That should take care of things for now.

Dousetsu turned toward the bridge deck where Kuki had stood.

...He's gone?

No, he was there. However, he was in midair rather than on the deck.

Kuki had abandoned the command ship by leaping to the other remaining ship.

As soon as Dousetsu noticed Kuki, he heard shouting voices from below.

They came from the crew as they abandoned ship. However, they were doing more than just flee. Some descended to the shore below while equipped with land war equipment while others flew small escape boats to the same remaining ship as Kuki.

None of them were giving up the fight.

They were abandoning the command ship and continuing the fight either on the surface or on the remaining ship.

To accomplish this, that last ship sped up as Kuki jumped to it. They had only done so once seeing that Dousetsu had severed the control automaton. They would leave him behind on the command ship as they went on to crush the Murakami Navy and open a path through the Seto Inland Corridor.

Dousetsu's vision devices showed him Kuki landing on the rear deck of the accelerating iron-clad ship. His demon body endured the hard landing and turned toward Dousetsu.

He had great strength in his eyes. He had not given up the fight and he

demonstrated it with his ship's acceleration. Dousetsu could not yet use Kaminarigiri and he was being left behind, so he gave a yell.

“1st Special Duty Officer, the enemy only has a single ship left! Finish this with your shellfire!”

As soon as he landed, Kuki instructed the ship to direct its defenses forward.

The ship was preparing to plunge into the diagonal wall formed by the Murakami Navy.

The enemy's tilted net was set up to sweep them out toward the sea.

Piercing into that net held a risk of mutual destruction, but...

...The enemy is not as thick as before!

If they directed their defenses forward and pushed onward, they would be able to reach the other side. And if they fired to the sides as they passed through, they could strike the Murakami Navy's diagonal net from the back.

“What's our distance!?”

“Less than eight hundred!”

The collision was near, so he made his decision.

“Watch the enemy's movements carefully! Most likely, they'll change their formation at the last second!”

The enemy's current formation put them at a disadvantage. Everything that had happened told Kuki they were not an opponent that would let that stand. They had gone through detailed training that gave them a wide variety of options to choose from.

...They're luring us in.

Despite that thought, Kuki gave his instructions.

“Continue forward and break through! We can't reach Aki without surpassing them, so do not hesitate here! Focus only on moving forward!”

Kuki could feel the acceleration of the ship as he braced himself for their approach on the enemy.

Not long now, he thought. And not long until I finish Kuki Yoshitaka's role in this battle.

...That's right.

He was close to completing his history recreation.

Once he did that, his deeds would forever remain in history and people would even speak of them if the chance arose.

My desire to complete this is nothing more than a desire for honor, he told himself.

However...

...Pouring all of my being into this opportunity is the true desire of anyone living in this age!

An *insha kotob* appeared next to his face.

Three Legs: "Kuki! You take care of Hashiba's strategy!"

Magoichi must have landed because a divine chat message reached him. However, Kuki had to correct her.

Nine Horns: "No, Suzuki. This was not Hashiba's strategy. This came from the one who is your great master and my master. Hashiba prepared this on Chancellor Oda's instructions."

So...

Nine Horns: "That is another reason why I must fulfill my role here."

With that said, Kuki instructed the ship to accelerate. He wanted to pick up enough speed that breaking through the Murakami Navy's diagonal net would not slow them down.

The wind blew as the ship accelerated. Shellfire flew in from straight ahead, but the iron-clad ship's armor could endure it. Even if the enemy tried to ram the ship, they were now too few in number. If they acted carelessly and created an opening the iron-clad ship could pass through, they would have made a

grave error.

...They can no longer rely on their numbers to attack!

In the port sky, the command ship ascended away from the battlefield.

Kuki had given it a fixed course before abandoning it. It had lost its ability to fight, but it moved away with Dousetsu onboard.

...Just as we had planned!

He watched his previous ship disappear into the sky and instructed his current ship to accelerate even more.

“Go! Our destination is Itsukushima of Aki! K.P.A. Italia’s headquarters!”

As he commanded the Murakami Navy, Murakami Motoyoshi realized the battle would be decided right here.

The enemy had a single iron-clad ship remaining. Another was ascending out of control, but it could no longer fight and Dousetsu had taken it over.

...That leaves this one.

He could not allow the ship carrying Kuki to reach Aki. To the west behind him, the guard unit and anti-air equipment had been deployed around Itsukushima, but a lot of them required his guidance and keeping the enemy away would be ideal.

So, he decided. This battlefield is reliant on my performance here.

“That’s right.”

He reminded himself that he was originally from Hexagone Française but had been sent here because K.P.A. Italia was shorthanded.

At times, he had viewed it as being removed from his clan’s main force and he had heard people calling it a demotion.

“But it’s strange. ...Now, the former pirates of the Murakami Navy are standing at a great watershed for the world.”

One of the nearby people giving instructions to the gunners and pilots spoke

up.

“Don’t call it a watershed, boss. Pirates can’t be climbing mountains. ...Call it an oceanic front instead.”

“Testament,” agreed Motoyoshi with a small smile as he looked to the iron-clad ship charging straight toward them. “Well done. The strong can be cautious of the weak, but they need not fear them. That is a wonderfully bold charge.”

He raised his right hand again.

“Answer the enemy by switching to the final stage of our formation. ...Let’s pull this oceanic front our way.”

The enemy had yet to show a second wave of ships. They may have been showing their faithfulness to the Testament descriptions by not sending in any more until the iron-clad ships had finished fighting.

Whatever the reason, it was convenient for Motoyoshi.

If they could hold their line here, the pope-chancellor and the others would work out a ceasefire or something else before any new ships could reach them.

“Just as in history, the Murakami Navy will be destroyed here. I thank all of you for the work you have done.”

When he raised his right hand, everyone turned his way and nodded back at him. *They gather their resolve quickly*, he thought.

...I suppose I trained them that way.

With a bitter smile, he swung down his hand and spoke.

“No ship is flying back. That is all.”

Chapter 59: Victor of the Desperately Fought Sea

CHAPTER 59

"Victor of the Desperately Fought Sea"



What remains before you
Unwavering? ◊

Point Allocation (Result)

What remains before you

Unwavering?

Point Allocation (Result)

The direct conflict between ships began with a midair clash.

The Murakami Navy was the first to act. Their wall of small ships quickly withdrew toward Aki.

Motoyoshi had given the order after determining their net formation would not survive a collision from the iron-clad ship. They had few ships left, so they would not be able to regroup if anything happened.

Instead, he had them change their formation. They constructed a horizontal net stretching from the iron-clad ship to Aki. It looked a lot like a long board.

That net board was positioned along the iron-clad ship's shortest route to Aki.

If the iron-clad ship collided with the board horizontally, it would be crashing into a wall that continued for the entire length of the board.

If it tried to pass above or below, it would be under attack for the entire length of the board.

And Motoyoshi's next instructions covered an attempt to pass on either side of the board.

"If the iron-clad ship moves to the side, create a stepped height difference along its path! If we do that, we win! Firing horizontally is what naval ships do best!"

They no longer had the durability of a multi-layer net. Their net only had a single layer, but that allowed their cannon battery to stretch on even further.

Meanwhile, Kuki made a single decision aboard the iron-clad ship. He ordered the crew to maintain their speed and decided what route to take in relation to their enemy.

"Below! Pass below the enemy ships!"

Kuki had two reasons to move below the enemy's board.

First, few aerial ships had many cannons that could fire downward, so it was relatively safe to fly below them.

Second, descending to pass below the net formation would give the iron-clad ship a little more speed.

So Kuki's instructions were to pass below the enemy at full speed and to fire upwards.

"You can't miss at this range, so keep firing! We'll pass through while blowing them to bits!"

But just as the iron-clad ship began to descend while firing, Kuki noticed a change in the enemy's movements.

...Is that...?

The board of small ships was breaking apart ahead of them. It seemed to crumble down toward them like a waterfall.

There was only one way to describe it.

"Did they let us accelerate and lure us down to ram us with every last one of their ships!?"

The Murakami Navy chose a more surefire method of bringing down their enemy than shellfire.

They made themselves into fire ships and rammed the enemy.

Motoyoshi, their commander, ordered the line of ships to charge in, starting from the front, and pushed his glasses up his nose.

"I had decided to do this no matter what direction you chose, but it is a shame you did not choose the sides or the top. Our odds of bringing you down would have increased were we able to fire on you at the same time. Ramming you is easier from above, but our shellfire is much weaker. ...So that was an excellent decision, Kuki Yoshitaka. And..."

Murakami Motoyoshi ordered all of his men with a single word.

“Go!”

The Murakami Navy became a waterfall.

The front of the board-like net formation surged down toward the iron-clad ship’s deck.

The shellfire from the small ships was only covering fire for their collision course, but the cannons on the iron-clad ship’s front deck and sides angled shallowly upward.

“We will transform you into a shower of steel!”

They began a close-quarters counterattack.

They brought destruction.

Shellfire overlapped and the sound of splitting and breaking metal joined it. The wreckage sounded a lot like wind instruments, gusts of wind whipped up from the iron-clad ship, and the pieces and wreckage of the small ships looked like they were kicked up by a wave.

Thousands of shells quickly shot past each other. None of them were wasted, but they had no real meaning. They did not reach their target, but they were not fully destroyed.

However...

“Ohhh!”

One small ship used a fellow ship as a shield as it plunged toward the iron-clad ship. The leading ship was smashed by a shell which broke through it and partially split the following ship, but the crew of the leading ship shouted out.

“Go!”

The following ship answered by maintaining its stability and pouring on its last burst of speed. As if delivering a punch, it crashed into the twin main cannons at the top of the iron-clad ship’s deck. The main cannons fired, but the small ship had already wrapped around their barrels and twisted them.

“_____”

The main cannons almost seemed to jump up as they were ripped from the deck and they exploded.

Wind instantly blew through and revealed the iron-clad ship's deck, which had now lost its primary means of attack. So...

“Go!”

The men of the Murakami Navy shouted that word again, but it was filled with hope this time.

“We can win this!”

The iron-clad ship had lost its main cannons and the small ships created an unstoppable stream of collisions into its front deck.

They cascaded down for angled strikes much like from a sharp chisel.

The line of ships wished to collide with their enemy in a straight line.

But Murakami Motoyoshi had a thought as he watched sharp angled charge that would finish off his enemy.

...Is this...?

He realized what Kuki was after and gave an order, despite knowing it was too late.

“Everyone, descend straight down without adding an angle!! You won't hit otherwise!”

Because...

“The iron-clad ship is going to rotate as we try to ram into them!”

A moment later, exactly that happened. As the small ships slammed diagonally down from above, the massive iron-clad ship appeared to raise its head. And then it performed a full loop.

“Take us around!!”

Kuki shouted from the vertical deck that was quickly continuing to rotate.

The Musashi had previously pulled off a midair rotation like this, so...

“We can do this! Let’s show them that a P.A. Oda warship can do anything the Musashi can do!”

The ship’s various accelerators were not quite enough for this feat. They also used the side and bottom cannons on the bow and stern.

By repeatedly firing the front and back cannons down and up respectively, they supplied the ship with the extra acceleration it needed.

Kuki had chosen a descending trajectory both to keep up their speed for the rotation and to use the upward force of the air pushing back at them as they descended.

As its altitude dropped, the ship quickly rotated and creaked.

“How about that!?”

Even as it raised its head, the ship maintained its forward acceleration.

The enemy ships targeting its deck tried to alter their speed and trajectory to match, but the iron-clad ship shot past, leaving them behind.

The ship continued to creak and the side armor bent too much and split. The armor’s Black Metal scattered through the sky, but...

“Shaja!” shouted Kuki.

“Shaja!!” replied the others.

They completed the rotation.

The ocean appeared overhead, heaven and earth had reversed positions, the horizon finally appeared again, and the sky rose from below.

“The enemy ships have passed by overhead!!”

The way forward was clear and Aki and Itsukushima were visible, so Kuki gave a shout.

“Stop the rotation and accelerate forward!”

A moment later, something appeared in the sky ahead. It was the last of the small ships that had supposedly passed them by. It was Murakami Motoyoshi’s

ship.

There was only one reason for this single ship to not have joined the others.

...Did he predict what we were doing!?

And having predicted it, he had chosen to take advantage of it. That was why Motoyoshi's ship was there and why it charged toward them.

This would settle it.

The iron-clad ship had performed a full loop and its bow was flying back upwards, but Motoyoshi's ship descended on a collision course with the front deck. Kuki also heard a voice. He heard the words of the enemy he had been facing the entire time he stood on this battlefield.

"I'm your final enemy!"

While splitting the wind and scattering shells, Motoyoshi's ship dropped straight down like a pile-driver.

Motoyoshi had ordered the rest of the crew to evacuate and he was controlling the ship via *cadre firma*.

He continued onward.

The enemy could not avoid his ship's current path, so he continued straight ahead.

"———!"

Shellfire arrived from directly below. The iron-clad ship's bow cannons had fired upwards to stop its rotation and the shells slammed into the bottom of his ship as if trying to hold it back.

It hit the back of his ship. He felt a tremendous impact and a full third of the ship was torn away.

"Don't underestimate the construction of a smaller ship!"

The ship's course had been thrown off a bit, but he quickly corrected it.

...A normal warship would have been too twisted to move after that.

But the small ships of the Murakami Navy were different. They primarily used fishing boats and other small ships, so they were easily smashed by enemy attacks. But when they were smashed, the destroyed pieces tore away easily enough that it did not bend or twist the rest of the ship too badly.

And that allowed them to continue on.

“Once a pirate latches onto something, he doesn’t let go!!”

He saw Kuki ordering the iron-clad ship to tilt toward the ocean.

Too late, thought Motoyoshi. I’m too close for you to escape the impact by tilting.

“So I will get one last attack in!”

Motoyoshi sent his ship on to stab into the iron-clad ship’s deck.

His attack would reach. Kuki looked his way and shouted, but his roaring voice had no attack power to back it up.

...This will work.

As soon as that thought filled Motoyoshi, an attack slammed into the center of his ship’s deck.

“...!?”

The surprise ruled Motoyoshi’s mind more than the actual shaking. This attack had come from beyond the line of fire for any of the iron-clad ship’s cannons.

It had come from the east, which was directly ahead, and there was only one thing that could have made it.

...The enemy ship that wasn’t fully brought down!?

After an attack from Kaminarigiri, the following ship was falling from the sky as it burned and fell apart. Its back half had exploded earlier, but the front half remained.

It was nothing more than wreckage and it slowly fell from the sky.

However, someone must have remained onboard and they had fired a

definite attack on Motoyoshi.

I see, he realized. Kuki tilted his ship to clear the line of fire for the following ship.

As a result, the main frame to Motoyoshi's ship had shattered and fallen apart.

His ship was destroyed.

Sorry, he thought. Just like his own men, Kuki's men had not given up on the battle. And most likely, Kuki had not even checked to make sure his men had done it.

Just like Motoyoshi, he had trusted in them and made a gamble.

Motoyoshi knew why he had overlooked it.

...I was obsessed with bringing the battle to an end!

He had been trying to end it himself. That was where he had erred. And because of that, he corrected his way of thinking. If Kuki still had people fighting with him, then so did he.

As his destroyed ship was blown from the sky, Motoyoshi cried out.

"Vice Chancellor Dousetsu!!"

Something dropped down from almost directly overhead.

A four-legged god of war jumped down from the command ship that continued to ascend with its control automaton gone.

Kuki's current ship increased its speed and put some distance between them, but...

"A fall from extreme heights can fill that gap!"

Dousetsu felt that Motoyoshi had done well to restrain Kuki's speed long enough for him to reach a position from which to jump down.

"You have my thanks!"

He raised his sword in his right arm and new lightning enveloped it. It had

been sufficiently cooled. As he dropped straight down, he used his god of war body to swing down the blade.

He directed Kaminarigiri's full power towards the deck of the iron-clad ship below.

"Cut it with your roar, Kaminarigiri."

He drove the sword into the ship.

We've won, thought Motoyoshi. He was convinced of their victory even as his he and pieces of his ship fell into the sea. The invasion of the iron-clad ships had been brought to an end.

It had been so long. After moving from Hexagone Française to K.P.A. Italia and learning of Hashiba's movements, he had known he would have to handle the Murakami Navy's destruction.

Ever since then, he had felt a great pressure and a defiant spirit mixed with resignation.

"Please let that all be over."

He squeezed those words out from deep in his throat. He begged for this to be the end.

But at the same time, he saw something move.

It was Kuki. The brown-skinned demon reacted to the lightning arriving from above.

He did not defend, evade, or even give his men orders.

He used the strength of a demon to pick up one of the barrels to the main cannon destroyed in the previous exchange and used it as a counterattack against Dousetsu.

"He can do that!?"

Motoyoshi realized one more reason why Kuki had tilted his ship. The main cannon had been destroyed by the small ship ramming it and it had nearly come free of its base. By tilting the ship, its own weight had pulled it the rest of

the way loose. Kuki had caught it and rested it on his shoulder.

“Gah!”

The demon clenched his teeth so hard that Motoyoshi heard one of his fangs break.

The deck dented inward and the ship was twisted into a greater tilt, but the cannon with a fifteen meter pedestal was securely propped up on the demon’s shoulder.

“Tilt it back!”

The ship straightened out its tilt, which lifted Kuki upwards.

As Motoyoshi fell, he saw Kuki gather all of his strength and brace his legs on the deck.

“Have a taste of my ship’s main cannon!!”

The main cannon’s strike carried the force of the giant ship righting itself and it struck Kaminarigiri from below.

A lightning strike collided with the main cannon.

Dousetsu swung down Kaminarigiri as he fell and the remnants of the main cannon exploded.

In an instant, the metal split and the cannon burst like a paper balloon. However, Kaminarigiri still had power to spare. The great sword continued down in search of something else to cut.

The lightning was not enough to destroy the ship, but enough to provide a fatal blow. It flew in an arc as four legs prepared to land.

Kuki responded by fighting back.

He crouched down and charged into Kaminarigiri’s path shoulder-first.

He let out a roar as he ran.

“I will absorb all of Kaminarigiri’s cutting power with my own body!”

The “Lightning Cutter” effect was created through the rejection process using

the reverse of the process that called in the “lightning”. That was caused by a reverse-resonance and he would have it use up all of that as it cut through his body.

And so he raised his right arm toward the falling blade.

To extend the length of time for which he was in contact with the blade, he gave himself to the blade, starting with his middle finger.

The blade drove into him. It split apart his middle finger, reached his palm, reached his wrist, and split the bone.

“———!!”

He ran to make sure he wore down the entire blade.

He did not hesitate for a moment.

In his mind, it did not matter that he was up against a god of war or the former Peerless in the West.

He thought only of protecting his ship as he charged forward.

He continued on.

Even as his raised right arm was sliced in two, he swung his body downwards to dash further forward.

The blade tore through his right arm.

Kaminarigiri’s strike sent a mist of blood scattering everywhere from fingertip to shoulder.

But despite Kuki’s efforts, Dousetsu’s attack was faster. By the time Kuki had made it halfway down the blade, it cut through his right arm and embedded itself in the deck.

The splitting lightning attack sent a rumbling and shaking racing through the air.

Light burst from the front of the iron-clad ship and a portion of the side before exploding.

But that was all.

Kuki had lost his right arm and he held the bleeding shoulder with his left hand, but he stood up to face Dousetsu.

But the result had ultimately been decided by more than just his arm.

“Even if it means sullyng the name ‘Kuki’, I cannot back down here.”^[6]

Out of his nine horns, he had lost the three closest to his right shoulder. And...

“Now! I’m not done yet!!”

With Kuki’s yell, the ship strengthened its tilt.

Kuki had instructed it to roll so Dousetsu would fall.

As the ship tilted, the deck exceeded thirty degrees. Dousetsu realized he would have difficulty holding his position without stabbing his four legs into the deck.

Kuki stood before him. The demon was gasping for breath, holding his right shoulder as it spewed blood, and staring directly at Dousetsu. The blood fell in sync with his breathing, shimmering heat rose from it, and the hard wood deck scorched and smoked when the blood hit it.

The ship continued to tilt and Dousetsu gathered strength in his left leg which was now pointing almost straight down.

“I would like to hear your name and affiliation,” he said.

Kuki nodded, opened his mouth, and spoke with heated breath.

“I am Kuki Yoshitaka, Naval War Representative of P.A. Oda’s Defense Committee.”

“Then let me ask one more thing: what do you plan to do now?”

“Achieve victory.”

“By what means?”

“Shaja.” Kuki nodded. “If you refuse to fall, I will hit you with pieces of wreckage until you do.”

“Well said.”

An appropriate decision, concluded Dousetsu.

He could not have free use of his sword from this position and his opponent had seen through that fact. This man was sure to use any means necessary to ensure the survival of his fleet. So...

“This is unfortunate.”

“What is?”

“There will be no victory for you.”

As soon as he said that, a great power arrived. It came from Aki’s Itsukushima behind him and it seemed to stroke his back as it passed below him.

He had felt the after-effects of a speedy attack piercing through the iron-clad ship from bow to stern.

Kuki’s eyes widened when he realized what had happened.

“That was...”

“Testament,” replied Dousetsu.

He felt the piercing power throbbing below the deck and he spoke to Kuki.

“That was the new anti-ship bombardment spell created by the Pope-Chancellor.”

A moment later, the power that easily penetrated the iron-clad ship exploded inside it.

The ship measured over eight hundred meters and it was covered in Black Metal, but it still burst from within.

The strength of the armor and frame prevented the internal shockwave from expanding, so it pushed out the inner shell until it split. The compressed air grew hot, scorched the ship’s components, and produced an explosion when it combined with an impact of vacuum.

At first, the ship’s internal components were blasted from the ship’s exits and the attack’s entrance and exit holes.

But the shattered materials soon tore through the ship's inner and outer shell like blades.

A sound much like shattering glass shook the entire ship and the ship slowly entered a descent while still tilted.

The ship had lost all power.

It was still headed toward K.P.A. Italia's headquarters at Aki's Itsukushima, but its altitude was insufficient.

All the black ship could do was gently sink. Meanwhile, Itsukushima was wrapped in light and it maintained its majesty as a floating island.

Rows of glowing emblems surrounded the entire island.

Itsukushima was surrounded by light.

Like a line of dominos, torii cross emblems standing about three meters tall covered the full 219 kilometer circumference of Itsukushima. They were positioned only fifty centimeters apart and they were all acceleration spells.

"This attack spell was originally meant for use against exceedingly large ships such as the Musashi or Himeji Castle, so it isn't easy targeting a ship that size. It probably only worked because Murakami kept it at such a level altitude, don't you think? Hm?"

In the eastern ocean, the Papa-Schola spread his arms on a platform created in front of Itsukushima Shrine's great torii.

He looked up at Galileo and pointed at the command ship flying toward them high in the sky.

"I've sent a guard ship after it, but can you use your Geocentrism to bring it down?"

"Unfortunately, Geocentrism requires a human or equivalent being at its axis."

"Can't you use Dousetsu for that? You sent him out there with Heliocentrism, didn't you?"

“I threw him out there with a three-hundred meter swing, former boy. The force of the swing gave him plenty of momentum when I let go. Of course, anything lighter than the vice chancellor would fly even further.”

“Are you suggesting I should go? Hm?”

“I thought you said you had sent a guard ship, former boy.” Galileo shrugged. “Now, about the acceleration cannon using the acceleration spells surrounding Itsukushima. It would be nice if it could be angled up or down more.”

“Don’t say that,” replied Papa-Schola Innocentius with a bitter smile.

He looked to the eastern sky and sea. Kuki’s iron-clad ship was nothing but wreckage and it was slowly losing altitude.

“It seems the M.H.R.R. ground forces have withdrawn to a safe distance and are watching to see what happens. ...They’re probably thinking about when to ask for a ceasefire. We’ve lost a lot of our forces, but we gained the history recreation of the Murakami Navy’s destruction and continuing peace for Catholicism.”

“Not a bad tradeoff,” commented Galileo.

But then the two of them heard a noise.

“A pulse? No.”

Innocentius frowned and looked to Galileo.

“You recognize this sound, don’t you? Hm!?”

On the iron-clad ship’s bridge, Dousetsu heard Kuki laugh after he fell to his knees. His rapid healing as a demon had already stopped the bleeding from his shoulder, but the blood loss still left him woozy.

“My master has won.”

As Kuki spoke, Dousetsu heard another pulsation.

...Whose pulse is this?

It sounded again and it was somewhat speeding up.

“Is that coming from the command ship up above!?”

“Shaja.”

Kuki smiled, but his eyebrows were slightly raised. He looked to the sky where the command ship was just about to arrive above Itsukushima.

“It’s a good thing Suzuki cancelled out your lightning attack. As long as the command ship survived, I only had to act as a diversion and draw everyone’s attention over here. Getting you down here from the command ship took a lot of doing, though.”

He inhaled and looked up into the sky.

“The Pope-Chancellor and 2nd Special Duty Officer Galileo may understand just what this trembling pulsation is.”

Kuki slowly gave the answer.

“This is a runaway ley line reactor. ...Or rather, a newly developed bomb using one.”

Initially, Dousetsu was completely dumbfounded.

“———”

He knew what a runaway ley line reactor meant. He had heard of the damage done in the past, of the destruction caused at Mikawa, of the secondary and tertiary damages that caused, and of the mysterious phenomena that followed.

“That is a forbidden technique!”

“It is a human technique. It was made by humans, after all. No, my master made it, so you could say it was made by a demon king.”

Kuki laughed with only his mouth.

“It was developed with more focus on range than destructive force, so the blast has a radius of approximately five kilometers. More importantly, it will act as a demonstration to the other nations. We call it a dragon line reactor. ...From that position, it will take out a third of Itsukushima.”

Without showing any concern for Dousetsu’s sense of ethics, Kuki finished

speaking and stood up. He instantly jumped from the back of the deck and off the ship. Dousetsu moved to follow him, but...

...Light?

A ring of ether light appeared around the command ship that had surpassed them high above. This was the same as a runaway ley line reactor. It was filled with more ether than the acceleration reactor could handle and that ether was overflowing.

Kuki vanished from the deck, but he left some words behind.

“I have fulfilled my role. That is all this means.”

The very next moment, a ten kilometer space centered on the Seto Inland Sea's coast crumbled and broke apart.

A flower of shockwaves and dust blossomed in the air and sky.

The runaway dragon line reactor had exploded.

Afterword

All of a sudden, I realized this book was a complete mom festival. Well, she is a “super class” member of this world’s “adults” in more ways than one, but I hope you got a sense for the family bonds between her and Mitotsudaira.

This is touched on in the book, but (while there are differing theories) the “wolf” is one of the oldest standards in Europe. It’s a war god, a guardian god, and a threat of the outside world. These days, it’s often treated as a subordinate of the vampire, but the Loup-Garou is a form of nature worship which makes it much older and more significant than a blood-sucking spirit of the dead taken from the sphere of human life.

Also, Loup-Garou legends are found all across France and France is said to be the home of quite a few European monsters. It was originally an undeveloped region known as Gaul, so I wonder if those stories are a remnant of the threats from forests, dark nights, and other races as Charlemagne reconquered it after the collapse of Rome. At the time in Europe, the people were clearing away nature, so another world must have felt quite close by, just like in ancient Japan.

Now for the chat.

“So what do you have to say today?”

“I really don’t think you should immediately dump all responsibility on me. But anyway, do you want to hear a painful story again?”

“Do you have one?”

“I think it was during high school. After a party to welcome new club members, I fell asleep using the curb of the road as a pillow, my motorcycle fell on me, and I broke five ribs. I was in so much pain when I woke up. The school found out I had a motorcycle license, the underclassmen forever saw me as the

‘upperclassman who only came to the party’, and it was pretty awful all around. Motorcycles are dangerous.”

“Physically, at least. And isn’t your dad a police detective?”

“Yeah. Once when I was riding without a helmet, a car pulled up alongside me. Just as I was wondering why it was getting so close and complaining about how dangerous that was, the power window rolled down to reveal my dad. I had my license confiscated *and* received points against it. ...Japan’s police really are good at their job.”

No, you’re just bad at breaking the law. Anyway...

“Who was the most excited?”

I’ll leave you with that. My background music was Ali Project’s Jinsei Bimi Raison. It seems less about eating and more about the “lively presence” created by a forest or darkness with a monster in it.

Okay, Part C will be out two months from now in September. Wait just a bit.

April 2010. A strangely snowy morning.

-Kawakami Minoru

Notes

1. ↑ Daira means flat.
2. ↑ A Japanese superstition says peeing on a worm will make your penis swell.
3. ↑ Pronounced similarly to the Hojoki, an old work of Japanese literature.
4. ↑ Means “Jar Breaker”.
5. ↑ Means “Lightning Cutter”.
6. ↑ The characters for Kuki mean “Nine Demon”.