

# Dragon Faith

Several Days Later

In order to consult the Queen on the forces that would be assisting in the wave, I headed to the castle.

I also wanted to see if the Old Man had completed the carriage I ordered, so I brought Firo with me.

Raphtalia and Firo, also Fohl, were dragged into my portal. I teleported him away right in front of Atlas's eyes. <sup>[1]</sup>

"We've arrived."

We immediately arrived inside of the castle, and Fohl instantly began displaying hostility towards me.

"You..." (Fohl)

"What? This is also a form of punishment, you know. We need to get her to repent, somewhat." (Naofumi) "Think about my position too!" (Fohl)

Ah, Fohl's begun crying.

He's putting up with quite a bit right now.

I guess being the target of hatred for his beloved sister is too much to bear.

"I'm sorry, Fohl-kun. We're asking for the impossible, aren't we?" (Raphtalia)

"There's no reason for Aneki to worry. The one at fault is that guy!" (Fohl)

"Naofumi-sama is... Well, he's just like that. This is also to help Atlas-chan

develop independence.” (Raphtalia) “I know. I know, but...!” (Fohl)

“Master! Carriage!” (Firo)

She can already fly by herself, so isn't it fine?

Ah, does she still prefer travelling by land?

And, like, couldn't I have just confiscated her carriage as her punishment? I guess it all worked out, though.

It's true that her leg strength is worthy of praise, and if we don't make use of them, Firo's reason for existence will be placed in jeopardy.

“Ah, yes, yes. We'll check in after our business in the castle. Until then, go rest in the castle courtyard, or something.” (Naofumi) “Understood.” (Raphtalia)

“Got it.” (Firo)

“Then will you spar with me, Aneki?” (Fohl)

“I guess I will. With the wave so close, it's not like I can relax.” (Raphtalia) “Is that how it is? Aneki fought that huge mountain over there, right? Tell me how it went. I want to use it as reference.” (Fohl) “That's fine. Firo's here too, so let's make a training regimen based on that.” (Raphtalia)

Raphtalia's party left for the castle yard, and I went to request an audience with the Queen.

When I finally got around to the audience hall, I saw her hard at work.

Hearing the troubles of the people is work too, I guess.

The cabinet minister was conversing with her.

Hmm? Did the minister always look like this?

When I was summoned here, the minister who looked down on me wasn't this one.

“If it isn't Iwatani-sama. How goes your progress?” (Queen) “I believe I already sent word of that.” (Naofumi)

“I heard that your Shield went out of control, and caused a bit of an incident. About that...In a few minutes, an official from Silt Welt will arrive. I would be grateful if you would stay in on our conversation.” (Queen) “... Got it.” (Naofumi)

Regarding that matter, there is nothing I can refute.

I mean, the fault lay with me.

The door clicks open, and the two messengers I saw before step in.

Hmm?

The Shusaku youth's face is bright.

Perhaps he's in a good mood. He smiles as he glances at me.

“Ah, Hero of the Shield-sama. I had the opportunity to partake in watching over your practice war.”

The Genmu messenger begins speaking in a light and refined manner.

Practice war?

Ah, right. My outburst was labeled as such to the public.

“Ah, I see... How did you find it?” (Naofumi)

“After seeing the plans and factors you put into practice to prepare for the wave, our side now feels satisfied.” (Genmu)

I wonder what he truly believes... but the Shusaku messenger seems to be looking upon it favorably, so perhaps it will work out fine.

“I plan to combat Houou, who's set to revive in the west. What will you do?” (Naofumi) “We plan to include our armies in the world's allied forces to combat the wave. Many of our soldiers are full of enthusiasm at the thought of seeing the Hero of the Shield-sama's performance in battle.” (Genmu) “I see... I hope

they don't enter the fray with such light hearts." (Naofumi)

Why didn't such a force come last time? It's probably best not to bring that up now.

Since they had three and a half months, they finished preparations.

I can do nothing but put my expectations on the reliability of the Demi-Human country's forces.

"I've definitely seen some of your resolve. Many of my fears have been alleviated." (Ganmu) "Fears?" (Naofumi)

Upon my enquiry, the Genmu messenger glares at the Shusaku.

The Shusaku holds his mouth open, as if trying to remember something important.

"What?" (Naofumi)

"No, there are no problems." (Genmu)

"... Really? If you've got a beef with me, it would be beneficial for me if you were to clear it up now." (Naofumi) "That's true..." (Genmu)

Honestly, this is the time when we should be putting the upcoming battle over all else.

But if problems crop up immediately afterwards, that will be troublesome.

The Genmu grandpa starts stroking his beard and makes eye contact with the Queen before opening his mouth once more.

"One of the races that lead our country, the Aotatsu race is a little... Our country's higher ups have begun to notice them secretly taking action against the worship of the summoned Heroes." (Genmu) <sup>[2]</sup>

"So will they come and cause a disturbance in my place?" (Naofumi) "No, no, no. Nothing of the sort. It's just that they have begun showing strong support

towards Faubley.” (Genmu) “Fumu...” (Naofumi)

Faubley.

The land governed by a pig.

My image of the country is colored dark with personal prejudice.

However, why would people start raising objections to the Hero faith in the country of Heroes?

“Many of the Aotatsu tribe have migrated to Shield Freiden, and... recently their leader has been working within Faubley. Our side is slightly anxious.” (Genmu)

“Leader?” (Naofumi)

“He works out of Faubley. That country employs a large amount of Dragons, so their relations are favorable.” (Genmu)

Why...?

Ah, Aotatsu can be read ‘Blue Dragon’. [3]

So they’re a dragon race.

When I think of dragons, the wimpy one at my place is the only one that comes to mind.

But Rat told me about it before: The Dragonewt Demi-Human race.

“If you were to categorize the Aotatsu, they would be Dragon people. They have a deep belief in dragons. How foolish...” (Genmu)

Heh... I don’t really get it, but there seems to be various factions over there too.

Even with the religions of I know of, there are moderate and radical factions.

Even though their scriptures are the same, people acting on them differently is common fare. I bet the Shield Faith has many sects too.

“So is there any problem with their current actions?” (Naofumi) “There are fluctuations in the country’s faith. Some say that if the Hero of the Shield

refuses to come to our country, then our country is not one worth protecting... Some strong voices are protesting.” (Genmu) “I see...” (Naofumi)

I think I'll have to go at some point, but I don't have the time, and I don't want to be thrown into the middle of a conspiracy.

However, after we hold back this wave, I'll need to collect as many allies as I can.

I don't want to read a history book saying we lost due to infighting.

But it's unnatural that people of a Dragon Faith are garnishing support in the country of heroes.

I have a bad feeling about this. It sounds like the time with Witch and the Three Hero Church.

With time being of the essence, I need to prioritize Houou, but still I must pay a visit afterwards.

More importantly, I want to meet the one leading those dragons.

I'm not sure if they have any cores, but I want to see if I can get any information like I can from Gaelion.

Though I'm not expecting anything great.

If they had important, world-saving information, they would have sent it to the Heroes by now.

“But upon seeing the Hero of the Shield-sama training for the Wave up close, we have become satisfied with your resolve, and accept the fact that you do not have time to stop by.” (Genmu)

... Recently, I've been the target of quite a bit of good will. I'm really not used to it.

I mean, I almost committed a substantial amount of evil deeds, without even being aware of it. It's scarier than performing evil while keeping my awareness.

“Perhaps they will come to trouble you, but if they do any harm to the Hero of

the Shield-sama, my country will not keep quiet. It concerns the nation's pride.” (Genmu) “That really helps. Regardless of your reasons, right now, fighting the Wave is priority. I'd like it if we could clean up these troublesome matters later.” (Naofumi) “Yes. In order to perform a grand sweep of Melromark's filth, the heroes stayed in this country. I thought their operations were extending to all countries but ours, but upon seeing the mock war, I was relieved.”

The Shusaku youth says as such, as if it were a matter personally concerning him.

Melromark's filth... is it?

I really wish he would stop treating this as an enemy country.

But as long as he's willing to pull back out of good will, I have no problems.

“Rafu~”

“During the previous turmoil, we took one of these specimens under our protection.”

The Shusaku takes out a cage containing a Raph, and presents it to me.

Geh!

“A divine beast created to defend against the wave... 'Tis the legendary second coming. Won't you turn one over for me to take to our country as evidence?”

No... I don't really want to let them off of my territory, but... I mean, it's embarrassing.

I turn my eyes to the Queen, but she tilts her head to the side and rejected me.

I guess refusing here would be bad for negotiations.

Even so, it's finally come to the Second Advent.

“Legendary Second Coming?” (Naofumi)

“Yes. The divine birds were said to be the creations of heroes long past. Or at least, the legends tell it as such.”

“The truth is surrounded in mystery, but that does not change the fact that a new species of monster has come into being here. We would like to be able to take it as evidence.” (Genmu) “Is creating a new monster that difficult?” (Naofumi)

Looking at Rat’s research, it seems relatively doable.

But unlike the Raph race, it’s more like she mixes the properties of different races.

The Raphs were made from Raphtalia’s DNA,so they’re closer to clones.

Though they can already be classified as a separate existence entirely.

“A monster with this degree of completion is nothing to laugh at. I’ll have some authorized personnel look into it, but this is a situation befitting of the name, The Second Coming of the Divine Birds.” (Genmu) “Is... That so...” (Naofumi)

Don’t dig too deep into it... but if this lets peace continue, then I’ll agree to it.

It’s that. Sending over a rare animal to increase diplomatic relations.

This monster’s maintenance costs... won’t be a problem.

The Raphs have better fuel efficiency than expected. They’re light eaters, and omnivorous.

They’re of gentle disposition, and would probably make for nice pets.

“Then I’ll leave that one to you.” (Naofumi)

“RAFU!” (Raph)

As if to say 'Roger!', the Raph specimen faces me and salutes.

It seems to have a good head on its shoulders.

Yep, I'm slightly reluctant to send it off.

"Now that I think about it, I believe I saw a Hakuko in the palace courtyard."

Uu... the conversation took a dangerous turn.

"In accordance with the peril plaguing the world, the Queen has begun a Demi-Human discrimination abolition movement... I have definitely confirmed this fact. This will become good fuel for our own country's Human discrimination abolition." (Genmu) "Thank you." (Queen)

Eh? They're satisfied with ending it there?

It's not that I'm not thankful for it.

"By the way, Hero-sama?" (Genmu)

"What?" (Naofumi)

"Do you have any plans to tie the knot with anyone from my country?" (Genmu)

... My shoulders drop.

After that, I was shown a series of marriage interview requests the messengers brought.

There are plenty of beautiful girls, but I replied I had no interest. I politely returned them.

Is the Hero of the Shield really that sought after?

"Iwatani-sama, then how does my daughter Melty sound?" (Queen)

...From this side too.

Quit it already.

Next, we went into the actual discussions. The negotiations with the country Houou is sealed in were already completed. We'll arrive five days before the scheduled time, have the country and Shadows look for the location, and have the other Heroes confirm it. During those five days, we would pound the ability to coordinate attacks into the newly allied armies.

# A New Sort of Carriage

After my talk with the Queen, I met up with Raphtalia's group. We headed to the Old Man's weapon shop.

I handed him the necessary materials beforehand, so there shouldn't be any problems.

If there is one, it would be...

"Oh? If it isn't you, kid. You never stopped by, so I was wondering what happened." (Old Man) "Well, stuff went down..." (Naofumi)

Ah, my heart aches.

I seriously set out for world domination.

Even if I get beaten half to death, I'll never admit it.

"You see, Master-" (Firo)

"If you say anymore, you get no carriage." (Naofumi) "Uu..." (Firo)

Our little birdie is way too talkative.

And why can Firo figure out and say exactly the things people are trying to hide?

She's been reserved as of late, but from the start, she's been overly intrusive.

I quiet Firo, and ask about the carriage.

"And how goes the carriage I placed an order for?" (Naofumi) "I finished it long

ago. You didn't come by for a while, and I didn't have anywhere to store it, so I left it with an acquaintance." (Old Man)

The Old Man explains where he left the carriage, and I hand over the money.

Since I was gone for a long time, I ended up paying for parking fees as well.

"Okay, I've definitely received the payment. If you take this paper and that Holy Bird girl with you, they should just hand it over." (Old Man) "I see." (Naofumi)

"Then I'll be off to get it now~!" (Firo)

I give Firo the paper the Old Man handed me, and send her to get it.

She runs off energetically, and returns a few minutes later pulling a sparkling carriage.

That was fast.

She appears to be having a lot of fun.

"Um you see... It's really sparkly and well made... It's really cool!" (Firo)

I confirm the carriage she brought over.

It's a little bigger than the previous one.

It's supposed to be a metal carriage, but... The axels and wheels give off a mechanical feeling. It looks somewhat like... the prototype for a car.

"If you get the guy at your place to make some new wheels for it, you can do various things." (Old Man) "Like those ones with spikes?" (Firo)

What do you plan on doing with spiked wheels?

Is this monster planning on running down monsters in our path?

"Next, well, if I put power onto this handle, the carriage becomes really light!" (Firo)

Firo firmly grasps the handle, and the body of the carriage appears to float.

Fumu... does it have functions to control its weight?

“It’s made of Graweik Ore, so it can float, you know.” (Old Man) “You mean something based on a wake board?” (Naofumi)<sup>[4]</sup>

“That’s right. Have you never seen one? The rocks that fly in the sky?” (Old Man)

... I have.

It’s rare, but occasionally, I see some rock-like things flying in the sky.

They helped me reaffirm that this was indeed another world. Is this made with that ore?

I look at the Old Man, and he nods.

“The raw ore can float, but when you use it in manufacturing, it just makes things lighter. In the past, we apparently had the technology to keep them afloat, but it was lost.” (Old Man)

Ah, I think I saw it on the list of ingredients the Old Man had me procure.

I just handed the sheet over to the Queen and left it to her, though.

“Using it in abundance, the carriage can levitate slightly. The stronger you grasp the handle, the more magic it will take from the holder, and the lighter it will get.” (Old Man) “Wah... Then if Firo puts in enough power, can it fly?” (Firo) “I just said it didn’t I, bird princess? Flight is impossible.” (Old Man) “Eh?” (Firo)

“I wonder.” (Naofumi)

The power of flight is lost upon refining the ore, but you can increase its effect by pouring in magic.

I take out an item imbued with magic amplification I created with Item Creation, and mix in Chi. I grasp the carriage’s handles.

... This sucks up quite a bit of magic.

“Wah!”

The carriage suddenly lifts itself slightly off of the ground.

“Firo too~” (Firo)

Firo flaps her wings to build up magic... something the strange me thought up.

The carriage begins floating even higher.

“Oh... Amazing.” (Old Man)

The Old Man shows his interest.

But, with this...

“AUUUU...”

With a bang, the carriage crashes into the ground.

By mixing Magic and Chi, this was my limit.

“I could only get it to lift off for a short time.” (Naofumi) “... Flying carriage...”  
(Firo)

It's an idea overflowing with romance.

I also want one. Because it seems convenient.

“Anyways, you've shown me quite an interesting thing. What will you have me  
make next?” (Old Man) “Let's see...” (Naofumi)

At the moment, I'm not in need of weapons or armor.

And I have no materials.

The strange me generously used all of my rare materials without remorse.

But since the wave is upon us, we're going leveling every day.

I can't compound, so I go out with Raphtalia and Firo to raise my level as well.

I get materials out of that, and have things made.

But I gave the orders to Imya's Uncle, so I don't really have anything to ask of the Old Man...

"I'd like a sword for Raphtalia." (Naofumi)

"Me?" (Raphtalia)

Raphtalia seems confused.

Due to the effects of the Raph Shield, Raphtalia's been strengthened even further.

And that's on top of the three months she spent training with the Granny to power up.

Her level is maxed out at 100, so I want to get her worthy equipment.

According to Ren and the others, Houou is quite strong.

I'd like to fight him with my forces in perfect condition.

"Yeah, could you possibly make something with the Spirit Turtle's materials?"

(Naofumi) "That will be a bit expensive, but are you okay with that?" (Old Man)

"Yes. Can you make something like the Spirit Turtle Sword I told you about before?" (Naofumi)

It's the blade Ren damaged beyond repair.

If we still had it, I think Raphtalia would be stronger.

“Do you need anything, Fohl? Since you fight unarmed, do you want any gauntlets?” (Naofumi) “I... no wait, do you plan on increasing my debt?” (Fohl) “I’m glad you understand.” (Naofumi)

I mean, he’s fighting to pay off his debt. I bet he’ll leave my village once he earns enough.

Though that will be after we take care of Houou.

“I don’t need it!” (Fohl)

“I see. I thought you would want it to have an edge over your sister.” (Naofumi) “Are you trying to get me to kill Atlas!?” (Fohl) “Do you not know the concept of holding back...?” (Naofumi)

If you have a weapon, do you think you can defeat her?

That girl’s great with dodging and rolling. She has a strange sense for it.

She plays with Firo a lot, and she trained with me, so she knows how to defend as well.

Her fighting style is fundamentally defensive. It’s a style where she waits for an opening in the opponent’s stance before attacking.

Ah, does he mean Atlas isn’t on a level where he can hold back?

If that’s the case, then I understand.

“I recommend these nunchucks and tonfas from the far east.” (Old Man) “I refuse!” (Fohl)

Why is he acting up here?

I think having a weapon will help him in battle.

But I guess it’s fine.

Next is Firo, but...

“What’s wrong, master?” (Firo)

... I got her a carriage, so that matter’s okay, I guess.

Imya’s uncle said he could make something with the materials Sadina salvaged.

I’ll have him make some claws.

Yeah. I’ll have the Old Man make just the sword this time.

“Then please make a sword by the next wave. Don’t skimp out on costs. I’ll take the limited resources from my place over, so choose what you need from there.” (Naofumi)

I remember Imya’s uncle looking through them and making a list.

I hand the list to the Old Man.

“Fumu... you have some interesting materials here. I’ll need this and this. I’ll make a better sword than the one you saw before, just wait and see.” (Old Man) “I’ll do just that.” (Naofumi)

“Got it.” (Old Man)

“Then Firo, we can’t take the carriage by Portal, so make sure to take it home.” (Naofumi) “Yay!” (Firo)

I take the list of required materials from the Old Man, and return to the village.

The Filo Rials gaze at Firo’s carriage with envy now, for some reason.

I believe Filo Rials had some form of pride among carriages.

Firo holds her head high among the flock of birds.

The others gaze at me, but... don’t stare at me like that.

# The Raph Species of the Raph

At night, I recovered in the hot springs and then returned via portal while still feeling hot. I wasn't able to work because of the curse, and I even took time off from training to visit Rat in her new laboratory.

“Rafu~”

“Tali~”

“Li-a~”

....The monsters I remodeled when I was crazy come out to greet me.

For now, we're treating them as a subspecies of the Raph species and their feel isn't bad. Or rather, it's good.

The monsters based on the Caterpillands were very delighted about being remodeled into the Raph species and were working hard to raise their levels in the combat party. [\[5\]](#)

Their appearances were of jumbo-sized Raphs, and a few traces remained of their former race.

To explain these traces, there were caterpillar legs still attached to their tails.

Rather than tails.... they seemed to be more like insects' abdomens.

I greet Rat, who was entering something into a slate.

Hm? Sadina is also here.

“How are things going?” (Naofumi)

“Rafu~” (Mii-kun)

“Naofumi-chan. Tonight is a fine night. Won’t you go drinking with Onee-san?” (Sadina) “I won’t.” (Naofumi)

Mii-kun came out to greet me like an assistant, but I ignored him.

It might be prejudice, but this guy makes me sick somehow.

“Ah, Marquis... how can you just come in so calmly.... that audacity is just like the Marquis though.” (Rat)

Rat said bitterly.

Well, I understand her feelings, but I can’t be wallowing in guilt forever.

The battle with Houou draws near.

We have things we must do one by one.

Moreover ....Melromark doesn’t have any direct involvement, but the Castle Town was becoming a little tense.

The waves were also like that, but as one would expect, now is a cautious time.

“The one who modified this guy wasn’t me. It was something that possessed me.” (Naofumi) “I know that.” (Rat)

“Were you in the middle of Sadina’s medical treatment?” (Naofumi) “No. That’s already settled... or rather, don’t go drinking with Mii-kun.” (Rat) “Rafu~” (Mii-kun)

“Ahaha, but this kid has a high tolerance, so Onee-san was enjoying it.” (Sadina)

.....Now that I look closer, what Mii-kun achieved was absurd. <sup>[6]</sup>

He looks like a Raph, but something’s different.

“Mii-kun. Go to sleep soon.” (Rat)

“Rafu~” (Mii-kun)

Somehow his intonation was odd.... he melted!? [7]

Dissolving into a syrup-like form, Mii-kun crawled with a sickening sound, and exited the room.

This might turn into a trauma.

“So? What do you want, Marquis?” (Rat)

“Ah, I was just wondering about the state of things.” (Naofumi)  
I’ve been worried for a while now.

“Let’s see... it’s frustrating to say, but in all honesty, your research when you were possessed deserves to be praised.” (Rat) “.....” (Naofumi)

“I understand if it bothers you, and I don’t want to acknowledge it but, how should I say it....a genius who can do this much isn’t bad.” (Rat) “What’s so ingenious about it?” (Naofumi)

“First is that there are hardly any side effects. And with that, the results are remarkable. For the kids in recovery, and for the monsters.” (Rat) “Side effects, you say...” (Naofumi)

“Before you healed them.... there were kids who were undergoing medical treatments here, right? It used to just result in victims like that.” (Rat) “And you’re saying I managed without guys ending up like that.” (Naofumi) “Yes.” (Rat)

I also examine them, the guys who received treatment and now call me a god.

I’m glad that it’s only to that extent; the previous modifications were too excessive. [8]

As far as it goes, it seems they wished for it themselves, but a line that mustn’t be crossed, shouldn’t be crossed.

“It looks like you embedded your data into the gem inside Mii-kun in case you

were in some accident. A considerable amount of blueprints for the things I've wanted to do was included as well." (Rat)

Rat operated the slate and projected an image... but honestly, I don't understand the contents at all.

In that regards, it's quite high-leveled.

Even though I was told I did it, I can't believe it.

"If I follow this, the majority of the things I've wished to do will be attained, but...well, I've searched through most of it." (Rat) "And? The results?" (Naofumi)

"It was a failure. It was so frustrating I feel like crying." (Rat) "Then did it show how to make a growing weapon?" (Naofumi)

"That was something it didn't have. If I had to say, it looks like it's because you put your efforts into creating the new species." (Rat) "The Raph species, huh." (Naofumi)

"Yes, however that's only an alias. What will you do about the official name?" (Rat)

Their image is already set as the Raph Species though.

No matter what you label them, it's because they were based on Raphtalia.

It's too simple to call them Raph and Tali and Ria and so forth just because Raphtalia was originally used as the base though.

Well, it's also bothersome to think of something this late.

"Isn't Raph Species fine as it is?" (Naofumi)

"There are various ones like the Tari species and Liia species. So they'll be collectively known as the Raph species. I understand. Similar to the Filia species of the Filorials, it'll be the Raph species of the Raphs." (Rat)

Uh.....let's think of a name to call them.

It seems like I'll be scolded if I decide on Raphtalia's Raph species or something.

All the same, I won't give them a name like that.

"I don't know the differences between the Seventh Generation Raphs and the First Generation Raphs though." (Naofumi)

They feel the same when I stroke them, and I don't really understand the difference.

It seems they differ in abilities though.

"There are only a few who look like a deformed Raphtalia, but what are they?" (Naofumi) "They're the seventh... to make it easier for you to understand, I should call them one of the Raphs you made on the seventh day, I think?" (Rat) The day count, huh.

So the hybrid of Tanuki, Raccoon, and Red Panda was the foundation of the Raph Species, and it's probably fine to think of the deformed Raphtalia as one of its subspecies.

"It was Mii-kun, right? What generation Raph species is he?" (Naofumi) "As far as it goes, that body was made on the eighth day, I think? I don't really understand but they differ between days, and you even have upgrades with different abilities. Their structures are very different." (Rat) "Upgrades... it's like they're robots." (Naofumi)

"Robot?" (Rat)

"Like the Golems in this world, that would be the closest term." (Naofumi) "I see..." (Rat)

"So, how does he differ?" (Naofumi)

"Firstly, that body was derived from the concept of Slimes. It uses a component known as 'lump of meat'." (Rat)

Lump of meat....

It catches my interest a little. That expression.

“He has a high resistance against shocks, slash attacks, and even magic.” (Rat)

“There are no gaps....” (Naofumi)

My intuition informs me.

His weakness is probably—.

“However, a flaw with the components is if he gets hit with highly conductive magic while encased in water, he becomes paralyzed and the inner core receives damage.” (Rat) <sup>[9]</sup>

“And if a huge impact splits open the lump of meat, the core will be exposed, right?” (Naofumi) “Indeed, as expected of you, Marquis. The problem is that we can’t expose him to a strong force. It’ll be over if he gets struck by that.” (Rat)

“Doesn’t he have a habit of betrayal?” (Naofumi)

“Ah...Mii-kun? If I had to say, it’s just that he covets power. Thinking ‘I continue to be deprived because I’m weak’ ...but I believe in him.” (Rat) “Right. Isn’t it just you who thinks that?” (Naofumi)

Believing that your own child is cute.

Rat does have the position of a parent in regards to the monsters.

“You’re wrong. Because half of the towers were destroyed by that child’s rampage.” (Rat) “That’s how it was!?” (Naofumi)

“That’s right. After he left the important position of defender, he made a hole and created a shortcut, destroyed the safeguard apparatus, and interfered with the kids who were trying to protect the towers. If he did it badly, he would have been discarded by you.” (Rat) “It’s good that he wasn’t discarded.” (Naofumi)

“That is.... because he was fighting and participating as a Hero’s companion.... I think.” (Rat)

Rampaging while in position...he was that kind of fellow?

Taking my abilities into consideration, even though controlling was possible, it

had been better to leave him alone, huh.

“Marquis, you also went on quite a rampage; we didn’t know what to do with you. It seems you raised the security of anything important. Well, apparently Mii-kun tampered with those logs though.” (Rat)

Rat turned her attention towards the screen of the slate.

“Mii-kun. Somehow, he managed to obtain this alchemic device and operate it to cram it full of abilities.” (Rat) <sup>[10]</sup>

Ugh....it’s just as complicated.

Er, using my common sense to simplify things... to describe the internet world in terms of physical items, modifying the logs is like using an eraser to erase records in a notebook and rewriting them.... I think?

While I was operating the computer, even though he was narrowly able to guess my target in the network, he could destroy my imminent target with a finger... it might be close to that.

Well, even if there’s a computer in this fantasy world, I know the limits of what can be done. It’s not like the whole world is connected through the internet.

In other words, he looked at the logs and tried to fix my rampage, but he just struggled and became a hindrance himself.

Finally, after the modifications were finished, he betrayed the crazy me and followed Rat’s side.

What he did was the same as Sadina, at least.

“For the time being, I have plans to upgrade the homunculus Raph body that was made.” (Rat) “Why?” (Naofumi)

“It seems to still be incomplete. And that’s why it has problems. Be as it may, it’s almost complete.” (Rat) “I see.” (Naofumi)

“I wonder, is your conversation over~?” (Sadina)

“Pretty much. By the way, how are you?” (Naofumi)

I inquire about Sadina’s body.

“Ah, well.. I’ve gotten considerably better. I may lose all the fur tomorrow.”

(Sadina)

Sadina’s fur was slowly falling out in patches, and I could see tinges of black and white.

The walrus tusk was already gone.

Well, she did cheerfully say that what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger. [\[11\]](#)

“However...” (Sadina)

“However?” (Naofumi)

“...Nothing~” (Sadina)

“Is that so?” (Naofumi)

I’ll lose if I worry about it.

Besides, trivial matters are this girl’s forte.

“What kind of Onee-san does Naofumi-chan like? Is being fluffy better perhaps? Like the Raph-chans.” (Sadina) “Well...” (Naofumi)

Your brown coloring pains me when I see it.

“Sadina’s natural form is better. I feel like that streamlined body has more meaning.” (Naofumi) “Oh.... I was praised. Onee-san feels embarrassed.”

(Sadina)

“Yeah, yeah.” (Naofumi)

And so, I returned home after talking with two of the women whose ages were on the higher end even in the village. [\[12\]](#)

# Collect ▪ Wall ▪ Ball

We continued leveling for the Wave. I got the Old Man to make Raphtalia a new sword and placed an order for Firo's claws with Imya's uncle. With that out of the way, we zealously proceed to level grind.

Because of this, my level has already climbed to 105.

Raphtalia's and Firo's were frozen at 100, so they're prepared enough.

The others in the village are also reaching quite high levels.

Especially the Heroes. They're all somewhere around level 115. Their strength is also considerable.

It may have something to do with that peculiar weapon, but Rishia was able to break the level cap and advance to level 105.

Then... the problem lies with Atlas and Fohl.

Let me reaffirm the situation with the siblings.

Every day, Atlas tries to sleep by my side. To get through the strict defenses on my house, she attacks from the front and ends up fighting every night.

And every time, Raphtalia, Fohl, the Raph Race, or the Filo Rials try to halt her advance. But please remember something.

Atlas is a genius.

By experiencing something once, she can adapt 10 or 20 times faster than a normal person.

"Just a little bit more!" (Atlas)

"How unfortunate for you."

“I was told that interrupting Naofumi-san’s sleep was a bad thing, so...”

I deployed a powerful force in front of the buildings. The Heroes, Itsuki, and Ren stand to confront her. They’ve grown to have ample ability to do so.

I discussed it with Ren a couple of days ago...

“Honestly, among the children in the village, the one growing the most is that Atlas girl.” (Ren) “Yes.” (Itsuki)

“I see.” (Naofumi)

Since the Houou battle was approaching, I increased the amount of time I spent training with him.

Of course, Raphtalia, Firo, Fohl, and Atlas also spar. And Atlas’s movements have become unbelievably sharp.

She even studied my style of defense, and even helps me study the application of Chi.

That Hengen Musou Granny said that Atlas’s defensive techniques were lacking, so I worked together with the girl to develop new techniques from the ground up.

The name is just temporary, but we made the skills 『Collect』, 『Wall』, and 『Ball』.

First is 『Collect』.

This is for magic-based attacks. Using Chi, you can move and redirect a magic attack aimed at you.

It’s convenient when facing large scale magic head on.

Its radius of effect is three meters.

Of course, if you infuse more Chi into it, you can increase that.

Next is 『Wall』.

This technique manifests an invisible wall for a few seconds to obstruct enemies.

It mostly works like my Air Strike Shield.

It can stop physical and magical attacks to some extent.

It's much more all-purpose than the skill. Its deployable area is also really large.

Its weak points are its low defense, and its short effective time.

Last is 『Ball』. This one is a counter skill.

Using it, you can gather and condense a magic attack and send it right back at the caster. Of course, there are plenty of magics it cannot send back, so it isn't that effective.

It works on a different principle than hitting attacks back with my shield.

I made it so that Atlas was able to use these skills.

They're skills based on my natural ability of defense, and Atlas was just mimicking that, though.

“It's hard to read her movements, and she's fast. What's more, whenever I think I'm going to hit, she immediately diverts my attacks. I can't get any damage through to her.” (Ren) “And on top of that, her attacks naturally ignore defense, so it's hard to develop countermeasures.” (Itsuki) “But do you think you will be able to do anything about it?” (Naofumi) “Probably. But, if I fought her one on one, I would have to go all out, or it would be difficult.” (Ren) “It would be hard to stop her without giving her serious injury.” (Itsuki)  
For a fully strengthened Hero to have to go all out... Just how fast is she growing?

But since the Heroes try to avoid killing any villagers, they have to hold back. I guess it would be a hard fight.

“Fohl-kun can stop her, so I think we’ll manage one way or another, but as expected of the strongest Demi-Human race, the Hakuko.” (Itsuki)  
Itsuki speaks with an uninterested tone.

By hearing him, I don’t get the impression that they’re strong at all.

Even so, Fohl is quite something to be able to stop her as well.

“Yeah, keeping up with her is the best I can do. She’s way too agile.” (Ren)  
By the way, Fohl is at 110, and Atlas at 103.

Just how strong is my village getting?

Atlas always takes on a large number of opponents, so she gets a lot of battle experience unrelated to her level.

During the day, she trains with other strong geniuses like Firo and Sadina. She’s constantly improving herself.

“Is she seriously that strong?” (Naofumi)

When I train with her, I can take her blows just fine.

Perhaps she holds back against me. I can’t refute the possibility.

Should I ask her to come at me seriously next time?

If she manages to beat the crap out of me, I have no idea what I’ll do.

“Since Naofumi can only be on the defense, it’s hard to find opportunities to attack, I bet. We have to mix in offense as well.” (Ren) “This is the first time I’m hearing of it. Just taking attacks is hard in itself, you know. I mean, aren’t you better off than someone who has virtually no offensive power?” (Naofumi)  
“Well, I can’t argue with that.” (Ren)

Just keeping up defenses is easy... There may be some people who think that, but that’s definitely not the case.

You have to catch and shift the impact of opponents' blows to stop them, and parry them as well. You can't just hold up a shield.

What's more, my self-made defense style also allows me to break opponents' weapons, thus aiding my party.

This does not work on Legendary Weapons, of course.

I can do Shirahatori, and grab weapons and arrows out of midair. [13]

I can interfere with magic as well, and support magic is my duty.

And wait, that's kinda all I can do. I mean, there's no helping it. I just don't have offensive capability.

Back to Atlas.

When sparing with me, she uses her speed to feign and break through my defense.

I'm usually able to deal with it, but I don't think my speed is that high. Is she really going easy on me?

"But you definitely are good at stopping attacks. Perhaps you learned to keep up with Atlas's speed." (Ren) "It's a matter of practice." (Naofumi)

"Well... That's true. Their race really does seem like it was born for battle. (Ren) "Is that so? When she trains with Firo and the Raphs, she doesn't look like anything special." (Naofumi)

Looking at just speed, Firo is peerless.

Her attacks are extremely quick and heavy.

She can also accelerate herself to greater levels with Magic, so she's more troublesome of an opponent than Atlas.

The Raphs aren't as fast as Filo Rials, but they can use illusionary magic like Raphtalia. If you lose sight of reality, then they can easily sneak through your defense.

And also, they have their numbers...

“Firo-chan’s really big, so it’s easier to hit her. But Atlas’s small build and dexterity make it really hard to land any blows on her.” (Ren) “Yes.” (Itsuki)

Her size, is it?

Even though her level’s grown to 103, she hasn’t grown at all.

I don’t know the reason, but perhaps it has something to do with her past illness.

Even so, enemy size...

Now that you mention it, Firo is big.

When trying to dodge, her size is a disadvantage.

And Atlas’s size is troublesome in another way.

The threats are of different categories.

“Fuee... Atlas-chan is getting stronger by the day. It’s really troubling.” (Rishia) “I see... How’s Raphtalia doing, then?” (Naofumi)

“Yes, she’s gradually getting stronger too. Her movements are getting sharper and more intense.” (Itsuki)

Fumu.

“If we have members of that level of strength, won’t the Houou battle be easy?” (Ren) “No, it seems Atlas won’t be participating in the Houou campaign.” (Naofumi) “Why?” (Ren)

Ren asks with a perplexed expression.

“I made a promise to Fohl that I wouldn’t let her participate against Houou. That’s why I’m taking up applicants for that battle, but Atlas won’t be included.” (Naofumi)

I think it’s at the same moment I said those words.

Behind me, I hear the sound of something hitting the ground.

When I turn around, I see a sack on the floor and Atlas staring in our direction.

Her timing is bad.

And wait, isn't my probability of happening upon these cliché situations unreasonably high?

"What's wrong, Atlas?" (Naofumi)

"Naofumi-sama... You're not going to deploy me into battle?" (Atlas) "Yep, most likely. I made a promise with your brother." (Naofumi) "Naofumi-sama! I declared that I would be your shield, did I not? Then I need to be by your side in battle!" (Atlas) "Even if you say that, I already made a promise. I decided I would keep such promises even if it killed me. As long as I properly agreed to the deal, at least." (Naofumi) "Onii-sama..." (Atlas)

Atlas unsteadily walks off. She seems anxious as she increases her pace.

"I'm worried about Fohl-kun, so I'm going to go check on him."

"Me too." (Ren)

"I as well." (Itsuki)

"Fuee... I'm also worried..." (Rishia)

Hmmmmmm... The trust placed in Atlas seems to be low.

For the first thing everyone assumes to be her assaulting Fohl, just how hasty are these people?

No matter how I look at it, it didn't seem that way.

"Fohl's off getting materials to make an accessory for Atlas, isn't he?" (Naofumi)  
Everyone has break time on rotation, and Fohl uses his to go fetch materials.

I won't speak up over what he does on his vacations.

He seems to have placed an order from Imya's uncle, so he left Atlas in Raphtalia's hands and left.

He'll probably be back by tomorrow, so he's safe for today.

"Now that you mention it, that's right."

"Yeah."

"But tomorrow, I feel that something will happen."

It's a road we'll have to cross eventually.

Now then, will Fohl be able to stop Atlas?

I have to start preparing for the campaign.

So far, preparations have been smooth.

The Heroes have sufficiently recovered from their curses.

Besides his personality problems, Itsuki's curse isn't a hindrance anymore. His level even recovered.

From my visits to the Onsen every day, I've fully recovered from my wrath. Even the curses from when I went strange have disappeared.

The only remaining effects are that my experience gets sucked away at regular intervals, and whenever I compound, the product is dropped a few levels in quality.

The levels of those in the village that volunteered to fight in the wave are quite high as well, and the monsters are quite motivated.

I feel like praising myself for raising them 'til now.

By the way, the voice of the slaves, besides Raphtalia, is Kiel.

She doesn't have any delegated position, but she's quite powerful in battle.

Though, she's constantly bound to her Crepe Tree.

When I asked her if she would participate in the wave, she was overflowing

with eagerness.

# Sibling Fight

“Onii-sama! I will be fighting with you!” (Atlas)

“Not happening!” (Fohl)

Ever since Fohl returned, Atlas has been constantly berating him.

Though, she didn't suddenly attack him to silence him or anything.

Well, if she did something like that, I definitely wouldn't let her participate in it.

I would never be able to trust someone like that.

Atlas...

She treats my orders as absolute and agrees with whatever I say.

And whenever my life is concerned, she will stay by me until the end.

I am her absolute doctrine.

There was a time when I wanted a girl to be blindly obedient to me, but when I actually meet someone like that, I can do nothing but worry for her.

I'm a villain; I laugh when misfortune befalls others. I've long forfeited my qualifications to be followed like that.

I've raised an army of slaves who would happily run forwards towards their deaths. For me to make a happy family would be... impossible, right?

That's why I silently watch over Atlas and Fohl's bout.

I have a promise with Fohl, and under its terms, he will fight for me.

That's why the one who needs to persuade Atlas is Fohl himself.

“Even when I’m pleading this much, you won’t move?” (Atlas) “Yes, Atlas. I can’t bring you with me to such a dangerous place!” (Fohl) “Onii-sama, there is no place without danger. You don’t know when something will happen, and I could die. It doesn’t matter where I am.” (Atlas) “Wrong. At least, if you stay here, you’ll be safe.” (Fohl) “... Is that really the case? There’s no saying when someone may poison our water again when Naofumi-sama is out. I may die from a sudden plague. A group jealous of Naofumi-sama’s work may attack the village, and I may have the bad luck of being drawn into their conflict.” (Atlas) She’s bringing out some extreme hypotheticals.

...Though all of them have happened already.

The poison, and Gaelion’s plague, and what happened here before I was summoned...

“Quit it with your sophistry!” (Fohl)

“I’m merely saying the concept of safety is but an illusion, Onii-sama. I merely wish to protect Naofumi-sama from unhappiness! Those countless possibilities may befall Naofumi-sama, you know. When I’m not there, a stray arrow may strike his heart.” (Atlas)

Eh? Now she’s bringing me in?

What logic.

This is a parallel world, you know. Something as simple as a stray arrow won’t kill the Hero of the Shield.

“I don’t want to be someone who’s only protected anymore! Please let me go into battle.” (Atlas) “And I’m telling you that isn’t happening!” (Fohl)

“I’m no longer the weak girl I was before!” (Atlas)

“Your new-found pride will only lead you to misfortune.” (Fohl)

Ah, for the love of... Their dialogue continues.

But if I intrude here, I can’t see a good ending. What should I do?

Even if I tell her she's too young, I have plenty of young children fighting, and if I tell her she just got over her illness, I have other treated slaves fighting as well.

...This may be late, but I'm quite a brute, aren't I?

"... We've each said our part, right, Atlas?" (Fohl)

"Yes." (Atlas)

"Then as one who carries the blood of the Hakuko, you know what we must do, right?" (Fohl)

Fohl and Atlas raise their fists. They begin releasing bloodlust.

What do you guys plan on starting?

"Yes, if my will isn't enough to pierce your resolve... I just have to prove my strength to you firsthand!" (Atlas) "If you lose to me, you have to honor my promise." (Fohl) "I won't go back on my words." (Atlas)

How did it come to this?

And I get the feeling that these two are constantly fighting regardless.

What's more, I get the feeling that Atlas is the one winning those fights.

I reflect on their record.

After I became strange, it seems that Fohl has been on a winning streak.

He stopped acting as a tumor on her side and started fighting her seriously.

The reason he didn't buy any weapons from the weapon store was that he couldn't hold back, and may end up killing her.

But even if you call those wins, he always had comrades. I wonder what will happen if they go one on one.

According to Ren and the others, Atlas's growth is higher, but if you consider willpower and stats, Fohl is at an advantage.

Whenever the genius Atlas feels at a disadvantage, she retreats and adjusts her position.

By that logic, Fohl's advantage lies in the first blow.

Since Fohl's been fighting long before I met him, perhaps he'll display their difference in battle experience.

"Then Onii-sama, I challenge you to a duel." (Atlas)

"Yeah." (Fohl)

Atlas points her hand at Fohl.

Their ways of fighting are quite different.

Fohl uses his fist to break down defenses and damage opponents. Atlas thrusts through them. Instead of hitting them straight on, she goes for the vital points and uses Chi.

From this fight, we'll see if Atlas will challenge Houou.

The wind whistles, and along with it, comes a bioplant leaf.

The moment the leaf hit the ground, it starts.

"DAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!" (Fohl)

Fast!

For a moment, I couldn't follow Fohl's movements as he instantly closes in on Atlas and swings his fist down on her.

"Tei!" (Atlas)

Using her own hands, Atlas redirects his blow and dodges Fohl's hand with a paper-thin margin.

His fist hits the ground and gets embedded in it.

Following a bang, the earth begins rumbling. Cracks begin spreading from the area Fohl hit.

“Now!” (Atlas)

Moving to avoid the cracks, Atlas thrusts her hand towards Fohl’s back.

“Like I’d let you!” (Fohl)

Using the hand embedded into the ground as support, Fohl does a handstand, and he twists his body to meet Atlas’s hand with a kick.

“Damn!” (Atlas)

Atlas stops the blow with one hand, but has to twist her body backwards to absorb the impact of the blow. Regaining her posture, she tries for another attack, but this time, Fohl makes his body vertical and pushes off with his hands to get himself out of the ground. His hand dislodges, and his body flies quite high. He turns his body and aims a dropkick at Atlas.

By the way, this all happened in 5 seconds.

Just how militaristic are these people?

With a fed-up expression, I began calculating ways to deal with these siblings.

How to block Fohl’s fist... how to prepare for Atlas’s fist...

Is this what you call an occupational disease?

Both of them jump back and create distance. They readjust their breathing.

“As I thought, you’re stronger than when I fought you yesterday, Atlas. Nii-chan is always proud of you.” (Fohl) “If you keep looking down on me, you’re going to lose, Onii-sama.” (Atlas) “Three months... In just three months, you managed to reach this point. It’s something worthy of praise. For both me and you.” (Fohl)

“That’s right. Three months may seem like a short time, but it’s enough time for people to change.” (Atlas) “And you’ve changed, Atlas. Looking at you now, I would never have believed that just months ago, you were crying over how your very existence did nothing but cause trouble for people.” (Fohl) “... That still hasn’t changed. Just by living here, I am troubling various people. That’s why, I want to pay off the troubles I caused. One of the people I am in debt to is you, Onii-sama. I want to protect you as well.” (Atlas)

After steadying their breaths, the two continue their conversation while exchanging blows.

Good for them.

“This current me is in a place you call safe, and you won’t let anything happen to me. But that means that I am not truly living. If it’s to protect Naofumi-sama, Onii-sama, or the others in the village, I will happily step on the front lines. If it’s for Naofumi-sama’s goals, then I will gladly do my part in protecting him.”

(Atlas) “Why must you continue to side with that man!?” (Fohl) “You can’t understand, Onii-sama? Don’t you realize what lies in that man’s heart?” (Atlas) “...” (Fohl)

Neither of them can land decisive blows, and the fistfight continues.

Both of them possess considerable speed, and all the people observing the fight can do nothing but watch.

Huh? Why has the peanut gallery increased?

Ah, the people in my place are quite perceptive, so they’ll come as soon as something happens.

How reliable.

More importantly, Fohl and Atlas.

I bet they’re reliable as well.

Ren and Itsuki are probably thinking of how to deal with those two. They’re both clenching their weapons tightly as their eyes follow the battle.

Looking at myself objectively, I'm thinking along a similar vein.

"I understand your determination. But still, I cannot accept it. It's time to finish this!" (Fohl)

Fohl holds his hands out front and concentrates.

"UWOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOH!"

Fohl changes to his beast form.

Doing that increases his abilities considerably in itself.

The only ones who can keep up with Fohl when he becomes like that are the heroes when serious, Raphtalia, Firo, and the Granny.

Is Atlas included as well?

It appears they weren't even fighting seriously yet.

"Yes... I'll do just that. But in order to make you recognize me, I'll fight seriously as well!" (Atlas)

Both sides activate Musou Kassei.

The air feels like it's shaking under the pressure. And at that moment, everyone present realized that different types of bloodlust existed.

The aura Fohl releases is that of a wild beast. It is sweltering and full of primal rage.

In contrast, Atlas's aura is... cold... and ruthless. It is also something that should not have entered the hand of humans.

An aura hot enough to melt an enemy, and an aura cold enough to silence them.

As the two sides clash, the peanut gallery holds their breath and swallows their saliva.

“Hengen Musou Fist Skill! Tiger Break!”

Fohl’s Chi expands. And he points his arms and fists at Atlas, releasing a skill.

# Clash of Tigers

“Kuh!”

Every time Fohl’s fist comes into contact with Atlas, Chi pierces through her body.

The released energy is in the shape of a tiger.

It’s also attacking pressure points. It seems to combine skills to put ignoring defense as its main focus.

It has quite a bit of output, so rather than the pressure points, Atlas is probably more worried about nullifying the impact.

I think I could handle it though. I’ve specialized myself in dealing with defense ignoring attacks. In both the theory and application.

But unlike Atlas’s, while it may ignore defense, it can’t scale off of it.<sup>[14]</sup>

And it looks like his power is flowing all the way through and out of her body, forcing her own chi out.

It’s like an energy attack.

Those things in games that would decrease the opponent’s energy gauge.

“Not yet! Tiger...” (Fohl)

Hmm? The lights leaving Atlas’s body return to Fohl’s hand. Is he recycling the energy?

He can use it like that too?

“Rush!” (Fohl)

Fohl unleashes a barrage of punches.

Each and every hit lands on mark, and every time one hits, a strange sound reverberates through the air.

A cloud of dust rises. Fohl finishes his attack, and jumps backwards out of the cloud.

“How was that!?” (Fohl)

I think that was overkill, dude.

Is what the crowd may be thinking, but I saw it.

“As expected of Onii-sama. I take that attack every night, but it’s getting sharper by the day.” (Atlas)

Atlas looks slightly beaten up, but she’s still standing.

“Gu...” (Fohl)

Fohl is the one who seems to be more affected.

“At the moment of every impact, I used the technique I thought up with Naofumi-sama.” (Atlas)

A 『Wall』 appears on Atlas’s hand.

“To put it simply, you’ve been banging your fists on an extremely sturdy wall this whole time. And while you were doing that, I was attacking your hands.” (Atlas)

I see. So she wasn’t being beaten up at all.

It was meant to be a defensive skill, but against an unarmed opponent like

Fohl, it can be used like that as well.

Even so, just how crazy of a person must she be to sew attacks into the gaps of that relentless barrage?

“As expected of Atlas. To push me back this far.” (Fohl) “Not as far as you’ve pushed me, Onii-sama. Geho!” (Atlas) <sup>[15]</sup>

Atlas vomits a small amount of blood.

Instead of redirecting some of the attacks, she took a few head on.

“Next is my turn, is it? Look, Onii-sama, make sure to watch me.” (Atlas)

On top of Atlas’s hand floats a ball made out of Chi. Its size increased, to show the shape of a tiger inside of it.

“... Is that my chi?” (Fohl)

“Yes, it is the chi you released at me. I was unable to avoid a little, so I’ve sealed it like this. Now you understand what I’m going to do with it, right?” (Atlas)

This isn’t going to be pretty.

『Ball』 is a counter I thought up with Atlas.

It collects power released at it, and returns it.

It’s mainly geared towards anti-personnel battles, but it can equally be used against large monsters like the Spirit Turtle.

And this is the first time she’s using it against a single person.

“Now then, here I come. Onii-sama...” (Atlas)

Atlas immediately appears before Fohl, and presses the ball of energy to his chest.

It doesn't look like she's just returning what was given to her.

It's a skill I see Female Knight, Rishia, and Raphtalia use often.

In the counter ball, she put in much more of her own power.

If I were to think of a name for it...

“This is just a temporary name, but how about calling it『Point Ball』?” (Naofumi)

But... At that moment, Fohl condensed Chi on his fists, and pounded them at Atlas.

“Hengen Musou Fist Skill! Tiger Blow!” (Fohl)

The collision of the two causes the ground to warp, and dust rises once more.

Two shadows leap out of the cloud, and both spin in the air as they fly quite a distance.

“Ah... Gu...”

“Uu...”

Both of them find themselves on the ground.

It was that powerful of an attack. One of them, or perhaps both of them, may already be incapacitated.

I confirm both of their status screens.

No one's dead. But their stamina has decreased greatly.

At the moment, Atlas is at a slight disadvantage.

“Ugu...”

Atlas shakes back and forth as she picks herself off of the ground.

Fohl does the same.

And... Even though Fohl looks like he's going to keel over, he stands his ground.

But Atlas begins falling forward...

"Atlas, it's my win." (Fohl)

"Not... yet." (Atlas)

As she falls forward, Atlas kicks the ground strongly, and lifts herself up.

"This can't be... I thought the best you would be able to do now was to stand."  
(Fohl) "Onii-sama... in a battle you have to win no matter what, will you just let yourself fall on the ground?" (Atlas) "... No." (Fohl)

"Then there's only one thing I have to do. You're the same, aren't you?"  
(Atlas) "... That's right. This is the end." (Fohl)

Fohl directs his shaking fist at Atlas.

His footing is a bit strange.

This is the end. There will be only one survivor... It really does seem like that, but they'll be fine.

If someone were to die before the wave even hit, I would begin doubting the future...

Hmm? Ren's started talking to me.

"Naofumi, look. You're about to see why we think Atlas to be the stronger one."  
(Ren) "What do you mean?" (Naofumi)

I rarely ever see Atlas fighting seriously.

So I don't know what's about to happen. The others seem to be expecting it,

though.

“Suu... Hah...” (Atlas)

Chi begins gathering around the girl.

What?

Atlas’s wounds have healed slightly.

“Right, that girl recovers her stamina in battle. That’s why if you don’t beat her quickly, you become at a disadvantage the longer the battle runs.” (Ren)

Just how high are her combat abilities?

But Fohl’s similar. Just by adjusting his breathing, he seems to be regaining composure as well.

“TEEEEEEEEEEEI!” (Atlas)

Atlas consecutively thrusts at her brother. Fohl also starts striking.

A bang rings out as the attacks hit their marks.

And... both of them stop moving.

I look over the quiet duo.

They both passed out while standing.

How convenient of a skill... just how much muscle do they have in their heads?

『I, the Hero of the Shield, who has understood the origin of power command. Let the truth once more be read forth, mend all that belongs to them. All Zveit Heal!』 (Naofumi)

I chant an AOE recovery spell, and heal their wounds.

The one who regained consciousness first was Fohl.

“Ha!? I was...” (Fohl)

“It was a draw. Both of you fainted.” (Naofumi) “I see...” (Fohl)

Fohl picks up the yet-unconscious Atlas in a princess cradle.

This guy always holds her like that. Is that his fetish?

Not that it matters. I don't think I'll get a straight answer if I ask anyways.

“And? Will you leave her home?” (Naofumi)

“...” (Fohl)

Without giving an answer, Fohl started walking towards his house.

It's not like he was acting out to spite me. For some reason, his face is warping. Is he... laughing?

What's there for him to be happy about?

And he suddenly started spilling out words at me.

“I thank you for raising Atlas to be this strong. Thank you...” (Fohl)

—

The next day, Atlas and Fohl came to my place with bright smiles on their faces. Apparently, Fohl approved of her participation in the Houou campaign.

“Are you sure?” (Naofumi)

“Yeah, even if we leave her in the village, she'll follow of her own accord. It's best to watch her than to let her get hurt all by herself.” (Fohl) “Is that how it works?” (Naofumi)

“Yep, that's how it works. I just have to do my best to protect her. Nothing's changed.” (Fohl) “I see.” (Naofumi)

In the end, this boy's still too soft on Atlas.

But I guess having their final showdown end in a draw makes leaving her home a bit difficult.

And I did use him as a dakimakura last night.

“...”

For some reason, he's staring at me.

Don't look at me like that. I don't have such hobbies.

“Rafu~”

Today, I am once again rubbing a Raph to relieve stress.

Their feel truly is the best.

Recently, I've begun getting hooked on petting things like this.

It's not like I've awakened to a love of animals or anything...

I didn't even keep any animals in my old world.

“Um, Naofumi-sama, are you perhaps patting a Raph?” (Atlas) “Yeah.”  
(Naofumi)

“Where's Aneki?” (Fohl)

“She left for Melty's place.” (Naofumi)

“Wait, you can't go around petting those things when she isn't here...” (Fohl)

“It's better because she's not here.” (Naofumi)

That's why I'm petting it in secret.

“Hah?” (Fohl)

Fohl's face has stiffened.

What's his problem?

"Naofumi-sama." (Atlas)

"What?" (Naofumi)

What is this? I'm getting a really bad premonition.

I immediately turn to the direction Fohl was looking.

What I saw was the village's usual scenery. Nothing was out of place.

... No one was there.

"Don't startle me like that." (Naofumi)

"O-okay..." (Fohl)

Hmm... I looked around again, but Raphtalia wasn't there.

Did these siblings awaken to a sixth sense recently?

What are they staring at...? I continued patting the Raph.

A while later, Raphtalia returned with a strange smile on her face.

# The Land of Houou

Now then, it's about time to finish choosing the members to take to battle.

Tomorrow, we're going to set out for the land where Houou is sealed.

The Heroes and their companions. Raphtalia and Firo are a given. Also Fohl, Atlas, Sadina, Kiel, and the volunteers from the village.

Imya, and the others that specialize in manufacturing, will stay home.

It's not like I'm forcing anyone to come along. I gave them all ample warning.

"Just so you know, the Wave is no game. I don't have the confidence to protect all of you. If you don't have the resolve to fight for your life, then don't come along!" (Naofumi)

I pray that my words actually reached these kids.

Right... I want to get over this with the lowest amount of casualties possible.

The slaves all nod at me, but do they truly understand...?

Ah, right, right.

We did think of sending one hero there beforehand, so he could portal back, take us all there, and let us record it in our portals. But that sounded like too big of a pain, so the proposal was rejected.

If all four of us used our teleporting skills, how many would we be able to take along...?

Including the allied forces, just how many soldiers are there in Melromark alone?

I mean, perhaps the slaves at my place would be fine alone, but if we have the manpower, then it's best to use it.

And so, it turned out that my place's Filo Rials would assist in transporting everyone, slaves and soldiers.

"Then we will be accompanying you." (Queen)

The Queen is coming along as the strategist for the army.

It seems she left the castle to Melty. Melty's guard was left to Female Knight.

We can't use all of the country's forces, and she'll do fine as a guard.

And Melty and Female Knight seem to have compatible personalities, so I don't think there will be any problems.

The person herself was frustrated that she would not be participating, though.

She is quite skilled, but there's no helping it.

She shook hands with Raphtalia, saying she would leave it to her.

For argument's sake, Trash is also in the Queen's carriage.

...He's staring silently from the inside. He seems to have aged even more than before.

His beloved daughter died horribly, so I guess that would cause a man to age.

And his beloved sister's look-alike, Atlas, is serving under his hated enemy. He must be quite miserable.

He was scowling at me with vigor, but when Atlas sat next to me, his expression suddenly turned soft.

Anyways, that's how our journey went.

"Ehehe~ It's fine~" (Firo)

Firo is showing off to the Filo Rials pulling the allied forces' carriages. She's being annoying.

The Filo Rials themselves seem to look a bit jealous, as if... No, that is not my concern.

By competing their Filo Rial-drawn carriages, and their dragon-drawn carriages, the Allied Forces are also proceeding at a reasonable pace.

I guess that's one way to use them.

“KYUA!”

Child Gaelion is pulling a carriage with the same happy expression as Firo. He's competing well with our bird, and... his passengers are making some nice memories, involving much nausea and vomit.

“Rafu~”

I also took the Raphs with me.

Mii-kun wanted to join in the fray too, so Rat came along with her equipment under one arm.

By the way, the former Caterpilland Raphs are also helping draw the carriages.

The gazes from the army are painful.

As expected of the Hero of the Shield! To create a new type of monster to help us is amazing!

...I hear whispers all around. Everyone's bringing up my dark history. This was the result of something that was definitely not me.

Even if you praise me for it, it doesn't make me happy at all.

And, a few days of travel passed... We arrived at the land of the seal.

“So this is where Houou is sealed...”

The land we arrived in was... well, it gave off the feeling of a small, remote country.

There are quite a few people who wear china-ish clothing in Melromark, and it seems they come from here.

But the roofs are really low. It's quite different from the western style Melromark.

I get a different feeling than that of the town on the Spirit Turtle.

It's like it's from a different era...? I'm not too familiar with oriental fantasy settings, so I can't really say.

Anyways, let's just say it's Chinese-ish.

"That would be the equivalent of our country's castle, Iwatani-sama." (Queen)  
The Queen walks in front of us as she shows us around the city.

She doesn't seem too knowledgeable on it, so I don't really think she has to, but...

"For some reason, I don't see many people." (Naofumi)

Right, despite the city's size and wide roads, I barely see anyone walking around.

It's almost a ghost town.

If someone told me this was the country's capital, I would tilt my head in confusion.

"From three months prior, this land was informed that Houou would awaken. After a large uproar, most of the populace evacuated." (Queen) "Well yeah..." (Naofumi)

Thinking about the casualties on the Spirit Turtle's land, the people would try to

get out of here as quickly as possible.

The destruction of the Spirit Turtle became quite famous, and this is the result.

“...”

Ren is silently looking down.

Is he still conscious about that incident? Just don't do it here too.

Motoyasu is restlessly looking around the city.

Is he really repenting?

Itsuki is following Rishia with an apathetic expression as usual.

“... I'll do my best.” (Itsuki)

He muttered to himself.

I really don't understand what's going on with his curse. Is it cured, or not?

I'm pretty sure it should be dispelled by now, but his emotions are still faint.

“And? Are we going to have a talk with this country's head, or something?”

(Naofumi) “That's right. We'll be talking with a representative, though.”

(Queen) “Hmmm...” (Naofumi)

In the room the Queen led us to was a single young boy, sitting on a throne.

Is this the representative?

“Thank you for coming all this way, Four Heroes, and the Queen of Melromark. I am the one acting as this country's king.”

“My, my. The king I knew of was quite a different man. What happened?”

(Queen) “The previous king saw fit to go on a long journey with his men, and all

of the country's priceless treasures.”

I let out a deep sigh.

Again... Why are all of this world's royalty so rotten?

Heading for the hills out of fear of being drawn into the Houou Battle...

“Understood, then are you the representative I heard of?” (Queen) “That seems to be the case. At the moment, my country's soldiers are away, trying to capture the previous king.”

“Hey, Queen.” (Naofumi)

“What could it be?” (Queen)

“Why are all of this world's royalty...” (Naofumi)

“He was supposed to be a skillful leader carrying the blood of Faubley Royalty, but for such a thing to happen in an emergency situation... I can't really say anything about it.” (Queen)

No... isn't he rotten because he has Faublian blood?

Is what I think, but the kid in front of me is acting quite mature for his age.

He may be a person like Melty.

I guess he'll do better than the people that ran.

“We humbly welcome the Heroes, and the allied army. As you proposed earlier, we have compiled all information in our possession pertaining to Houou, so if you would please look through that later, I would be grateful.”

As the boy waved his hand, a scholar-like person stepped out of the shadows. It looks like he will be guiding us.

“Then the armies will be on standby in the city.” (Queen)

“Yes...”

For some reason, the boy's expression is dark.

Ah right, the land around the city seemed to be a barren wasteland.

From what I've seen, the few remaining residents are quite thin.

I heard that a few parts of this world were in famine.

Since I had my Bioplant, I didn't really worry about it, but... We need to secure a source of food for ourselves.

"Shadow." (Naofumi)

"What is it?" (Shadow)

...This isn't the Shadow I know.

Anyways, I called a Shadow out, took some Bioplant Seeds from my pocket, and scattered them on his hand.

"We'll be staying here for a while. Go plant that somewhere to make a source of food. While you're at it, you can go fill this country's storehouse as well."

(Naofumi) "Understood." (Shadow)

On my words, the Queen silently lowers her head.

At the same time, the boy bows as well.

"I'm thankful for the Hero's benevolence."

"If we try to send a starving army into battle, we're the ones that will be troubled in the end." (Naofumi)

Hmm... It's not my problem, but it seems that food problems are prevalent in this area.

I'm worried about how long the supplies we brought with us will last.

The other heroes have also unlocked the necessary weapons to modify

Bioplants.

The problem is... if they keep at modifying, a strange weapon like that shield may pop up, so I cautioned them to do it in moderation.

I'm starting to wonder whether the Legendary Weapons have some sort of Karma system in them.

Ren and the others have done quite a bit. So... if they do anything strange, there's a possibility their weapons will send them berserk.

Even so, mass producing the Bioplant is essential for our profit.

If someone goes out of control here, it will be no joke.

"Will you kindly direct us to the information you compiled?" (Queen) "Yes, this way."

We ended our short audience with the king, and followed the scholar to the place the information was stocked.

But before that.

"Raphtalia, Fohl, and Atlas. Go watch over the Allied armies." (Naofumi) "I believe we've already made announcements to them." (Raphtalia) "More forces will be coming soon, right? Go handle those additions. If something happens, report to me immediately." (Naofumi) "Ah, yes. Understood." (Raphtalia)

Even if we look over the material together, I don't think the current Raphtalia is going to have too much of a role.

I sent Firo to find a place to put the carriage, and to investigate the area.

So she already isn't here.

Perhaps I should get her to sing to raise morale. She's really popular, apparently I believe there was that anime about that. Is it really effective?<sup>[16]</sup>

I think as I proceed forward.

“Naofumi-sama.” (Atlas)

“What?” (Naofumi)

“If anything happens to you, call for me.” (Atlas)

“Yeah, got it.” (Naofumi)

It's not like anything will happen yet.

I think. I give a vague response to Atlas, and went to go read up on our next foe.

# Journal of the Hero

We began browsing through the Houou reports inside of the castle.

There are a couple of books documenting the damage caused by it.

Apparently, the number of casualties was nothing to laugh at.

As a last ditch resort, the Heroes were summoned, and Houou was sealed.

“Ren, Motoyasu, Itsuki, by your knowledge, where was Houou sealed?”

(Naofumi) “That mountain.” (Itsuki)

Itsuki looks out of the window, and indicates a mountain... It looks like a standard oriental mountain.

He points his finger at it.

“Yep, there.” (Ren)

“That’s right, Father-in-Law, there.” (Motoyasu)

“Fumu... in your games, how exactly was the seal broken?” (Naofumi) “It was during a quest, right? It revived from the stone structure acting as its seal.”

“I see.” (Naofumi)

In the Spirit Turtle’s case, the vibrations caused by the monster destroyed much of the murals depicting it.

But now, we can go through the information at our own leisure. How relaxing.

Hmm?

It's a journal left behind by one of the Heroes that sealed it.

From summoning to challenging Houou, it has multiple volumes depicting scenes from the start of his life in this world, to his death... apparently.

It's like that.

Using the wisdom of your ancestors.

Imitating some hero of old to beat or seal a monster.

I mean, school teaches us to act like great people long dead, right?

The journal detailed him being summoned, and chosen as the Seven Star Hero of the Gauntlet. It detailed his daily life of fighting.

I have no idea what his past world was like.

This report says nothing of VRMMOs or Espers. Is he from a world like mine or Motoyasu's?

This kinda reads like a Web Novel, though it's based on his real experience.

Something about beating up a guy who pissed him off. A majority of it was just about the guy bragging.

Quit talking about your Harem. That's just disgusting.

I really don't care about the touching scenes with your heroines.

His wife number 1 seems to be the princess present at his summoning, but mentioning princesses around us is like stepping on a landmine. The girl's real name is included.

Including me, are all otherworlders like this?

Anyways, I tried to skim through it, but worried about missing crucial info, so I started reading it carefully.

When will I find something useful?

And wait, leaving something like this for the future generation, what was this guy thinking...?

Was it simply a diary?

I mean, it's written in Japanese, so this world's people can't read it. That possibility exists.

That means that it might be highly dramatized.

At least, I don't think the individual planned for anyone else to read it.

Otherwise, it would just be embarrassing.

Ren has a doubtful expression.

Motoyasu is... having Midori read it, and is playing with his three's feathers.

Wait, Midori can read Japanese?

Itsuki is indifferently reading through it. But if he finds anything, I think he'll speak up.

Just tell us about Houou already.

And... I read through each and every volume of it.

The only books missing are the ones pertaining to Houou, and the ones pertaining to the wave.

If only he depicted his strengthening methods, of how to class up, or something like that.

“Oi, the most important parts are missing.” (Naofumi)

“This is all the information we have on hand.” (Scholar)

Again.

Oi... why do they only have this set of thin books, with the necessary info omitted?

Did someone intentionally get rid of it?

I really want to complain to someone, but it is as it is. There was no useful information.

“... In the past, a war raged on this land. At that time, much of our information went up in flames.”

“The flame really was accurate in the information it swallowed.” (Naofumi) “I-I’m sorry...”

The scholar apologizes as he reorganizes the reports, and looks over them.

Uwah... this is useless.

But it’s not like complaining will do anything.

“This is the last one. A single manuscript remained.”

I was handed a bundle of paper.

This is more of a stack of scraps than a book. What’s more, it’s full of holes.

Ah, it has a minimal description of Houou.

Houou’s goal is... to win... is prevented.

You cannot seal it during the last set of waves.

And to defeat it, you need to... both... or else...

Here is its attack pattern...

As expected, the writing was unable to withstand the ages. Much of it is impossible to decipher.

I mean, the above was the only thing I could figure out after consulting the rest of the Heroes.

For it to become illegible just before going into attack patterns, are they trying to insult me?

Who was it? Who was so negligent in taking care of this precious manuscript?

“Next is a mural left by the past heroes. Could you please look over that as well?” (Scholar) “Sure.”

Expecting murals like that in the Spirit Turtle’s city, we stepped into a temple that seemed to be a tourist attraction.

“The armies are lined up strangely.”

At the temple’s front gate, a structure slightly separated from the main body, I noticed a queue forming.

Some merchants are walking around and peddling to the line... When Houou is this close... Their commercial spirit is admirable.

“That is also an area we would like to have the Heroes check out later.”

“Hmmm.”

So I won’t have to ask about it now.

What we need right now is information on our foe.

There’s a high probability that we’re the only ones who can understand what’s written on the mural.

It may just look like a strange pattern to those of this world, but to us, they should become letters.

Like with the Spirit Turtle.

And like that, we stepped into the building.

It appears that this truly was a tourist spot dedicated to the heroes. We continue walking through the stone structure.

The atmosphere feels heavy.

As we walk, our steps echo into the darkness.

A Buddhist priest-like person came to greet us... Even so, I see a few catholic priest-like people as well. What's going on with this world's religion?

Flickering candles light the dark temple.

The indie of it was decorated by several statues mimicking the beast.

The gloomy atmosphere only seems to make me more nervous.

“And? Where's the mural the heroes supposedly left?” (Naofumi)

On the wall were several works with old writing, and murals of what looked to be from the Mayan civilization. I can't tell which one it's supposed to be.

I feel like I'm being given a tour of a strange attraction rather than a monument.

“It's this one.”

We were led to the deepest part of the temple, where we found a large... fresco.

But... It's dark. I can't see the whole picture.

“It's dark. 「Faust Glow Fire」.”

The Queen lights the dark room.

What was before us truly was a depiction of Houou.

I don't know if it was done by Heroes, but what's shown are two large birds, surrounded by a sea of fire.

Just from its looks, I guess it attacks by using its wings, dropping fire, and using its claws.

The birds themselves seem to be like peafowls, with scales on their bodies.

Its tail feathers fanned out to form a... fish-like tail?

It wasn't red, but a collage of various colors. It was quite different from what I imagined.

One stayed in the center displaying its vibrant colors, while the other circled around it with opposing colors.

But perhaps due to its age, the damage to the mural is severe.

It seems that it's been preserved well, though.

Its method of attacks were made apparent by the mural.

The first bird would fly to a high altitude, and bombard the ground below with magic and fire. The second would fly low, and attack with claws, and breaths of flame. They coordinated attacks like that.

Of course, this could just be a work of fiction, or an over-dramatization. But that's what was shown.

"It sure has some troublesome attacks."

It clothes everything around it in flames, and turns the scorched corpses into zombies...

The Spirit Turtle had a similar ability.

Also, the feathers that are produced from its wings can give birth to familiars.

Just how versatile is this monster?

But based on its depiction, and comparing it to the buildings in the

background, I don't think it's as big as the Spirit Turtle.

Though it probably is of considerable size.

One was slightly bigger than parent Gaelion pre-mortem.

And we have to fight two.

"Ren, was your Houou similar?" (Naofumi)

"Yeah, mostly... But it didn't have a breath attack." (Ren) "There are a few attacks I don't know of as well. Mine never used its wings to stir up wind. But this one seems to create whirlwinds, and summon tornadoes." (Itsuki) "Father-in-Law, the ability I don't know of is its ability to summon familiars." (Motoyasu) So the games were different from reality.

Even so, I think this every time, but why are all the depictions and the other heroes' information full of holes?

They have half-assed info, but with that, it seems anyone would make the mistake.

If I had information like them, perhaps I would have mistakenly challenged the Spirit Turtle as well.

...? Something's bugging me, but... I can't tell what it is.

It's like something's stuck in my throat.

But it feels like the sort of thing I won't figure out if I keep thinking about it.

# The Last of the Seven Stars

And well, it was preserved decently, but the bottom of the mural was completely weathered away.

They probably thought it was just a pattern in the picture, but it was honest-to-goodness Japanese Just like this... there...

There's barely any that I can read. Again, what's the meaning of this?

But there was something amazing in the list of Houou's attacks...

The picture depicted the first one falling, and the second one swelling up.

After that, the next pictogram depicted the remaining one exploding, leaving nothing but scorched earth.

After taking this attack once, the heroes retreated.

At least, according to this record.

Didn't they beat it?

I thought for a second, but looking closely at the exploding bird, I saw that it was dividing in two.

I guess this attack happens whenever you beat one of them.

And after the remaining one explodes, both of them revive, and the cycle repeats.

... This is like the Spirit Turtle.

Just by stopping the heart, you can't beat it. Just by severing the head, it lives on.

But this time, if you defeat one individually, the other releases a powerful

counterattack.

Someone nicely sketched some stars around Houou.

It looks like these were added in later.

After that, the remaining drawings were too cracked for us to make out anything more. But I did learn that we have to defeat them at the same time.

“With the Spirit Turtle, you had to destroy both the head and heart to defeat it. Most likely, we’ll have to do the same with the two birds. Upon failure, the remaining one uses a powerful self-destructing attack, and both are revived.” (Naofumi) “As I thought... The game was different. In the game, both Houous shared an HP bar, and if you beat one, both of them fell.” (Ren) “Self Destruction... while reviving at the same time. How troublesome.” (Itsuki) Once more, Itsuki reads in a monotone with an expressionless face. I feel no motivation from him.

But by his words, he’s earnestly analyzing the fresco.

“What’s more, as one flies higher, we’d naturally have to concentrate our attacks on the lower one.”

“That means a bomb will explode from above...”

With added revival.

According to Ren and the others, Houou was quite strong, but it looks like someone upped the difficulty.

“Then how ‘bout me and Itsuki-kun attack the higher one, and Father-in-Law and Ren-kun concentrate on the lower one?” (Motoyasu) “Well, I guess that’s how it’ll turn out. From her weapon properties, Rishia should help Itsuki with the higher one.” (Naofumi) “What should I have the army do?” (Queen)

It would be nice if we could defeat it with only the Heroes, but I’m not really

sure.

If the allied armies want to participate, then I should make use of them.

That means...

“Get everyone who can use long range magic. I guess the others will be using bows. The people skilled in magic should target the higher one, and everyone else, the lower. I’ll leave you in charge of the precise organization and strategy.”  
(Naofumi)

Well, we have four heroes strengthened to their fullest here. I want to end this one as painlessly as possible.

I don’t want to run into some unknown factor later.

And this time, we have a slight grasp of their attack pattern, so creating countermeasures shouldn’t be too difficult.

Of course, it’s not certain that the words of the past are completely true, so we should proceed with caution.

“Understood. How should we ask them to train until the day?” (Queen) “Let’s see... If we have a flying target, it should work out if they just practice on it.”  
(Naofumi)

Should we leave that to the Dragon knights?

No, both Firo and Gaelion can fly, so we can get them to imitate the supposed attack pattern, and train on that.

The flames and breaths can probably reproduced with magic, I bet.

“I understand. Then from here on out, the allied army forces will begin training to combat Houou. I hope the Heroes will assist as well.” (Queen) “Yeah.”  
(Naofumi)

“Leave it to me.” (Ren)

“I’ll try my best.” (Itsuki)

I mean, isn't that why we're here?

Our main goal is to get the casualty count as close to zero as possible.

I'd like to avoid battles like what we've had until now. Battles without preparation.

I'll put my all into this.

"Then shall we look over the other temple we passed by once more." (Queen)  
After we finish looking over the Houou Mural, the Queen and the man from this country guide us.

"Is there something over there?" (Naofumi)

"At the moment, that is the only one of the Seven Star Weapons that has yet to select a wielder." (Queen) "Hmm..." (Naofumi)

That piques my interest.

Honestly, we have absolutely no idea what sorts of weapons the seven stars are.

It seems that the strange weapon in Rishia's hands is something else, and I've never seen Trash holding a cane.

"Why is there such a line behind it?" (Naofumi)

"Can't the Heroes understand?"

Well... It's not that hard.

The legendary weapons can be used by those of this world as well.

Of course, from that previous journal, it seems that otherworlders can use them too.

Thinking that they were worthy of it, they lined up to see if they would be chosen by the weapon.

With this many people, I think this would be a good chance for business.

Something like one silver coin to test your worth, or something.

...This world seems to worship Heroes, so I think such practices would breed animosity.

The long line parts for us, and we enter the temple.

In front of the line was... the center of the temple, in which there was a lone wall. No, in this case, it was a block of stone with the weapon embedded into it.

It appears that people are testing whether they can take it out.

“Gununu...”

An army soldier’s face turns red as he desperately pulls at it.

“Yes, next person step up.”

The soldier drops his shoulders, and stumbles down the path he came from.

... Is getting chosen that happy of an event?

Being selected as the Hero of the Shield was nothing but suffering for me.

Aren’t these guys lucky? If I said that, these guys might think me prideful and selfish.

I think, as I gaze at the weapon.

... It’s a gauntlet.

The Hero that sealed Houou apparently had a gauntlet. It’s not strange for the weapon to be here... or is it?

By that logic, one would be in the Spirit Turtle village as well.

“Hey, Queen, why is this gauntlet here? Is there a reason Faubley doesn’t come

to collect it?" (Naofumi) "Long ago, this country experienced great prosperity. By the legend of the Hero of the Gauntlet. It's one of this country's treasures." (Queen) "Then what about the Spirit Turtle?" (Naofumi)

"It seems that it was sealed by a hero of a foreign country." (Queen) "So it's like that." (Naofumi)

Does that make Houou a newer legend?

It's not like I have to investigate it thoroughly. I mean, that sounds like a pain. ... From what I see, it's of quite a simple design. You could also just call it a glove.

It's a basic shape like that of the Small Shield.

In the middle of the gauntlet, there was a single gem embedded.

Is there one of these in all of the Heroes' weapons?

I guess this is the first form of the weapon.

"This is the last Seven Star?" (Naofumi)

"Yes." (Queen)

This is the first time I've seen a real one... but I think I've seen something similar, somewhere. I wonder why.

Rishia's weapon remains semi-transparent, and I get a different feeling from it.

When I look at this one closely, I sense... a greater power.

"So it's waiting for a new wielder here?" (Naofumi)

"That's right. Most of the people visiting this country have come to test their mettle, and obtain this weapon." (Queen) "Hmm..." (Naofumi)

I'll have the slaves from my place try for it as well.

It would be nice if Atlas obtained it.

Her talent is high, so it actually sounds highly likely...

But this line is way too long.

“When do you think this line will clear?” (Naofumi)

“I think it’ll remain throughout the day.” (Queen)

Wow... just how popular is this attraction?

“Well, with times as they are, many adventurers are challenging the weapon as well.” (Queen) “Well then, this may be an unreasonable request, but can you let my place’s fighters try it as well?” (Naofumi) “I’ll try negotiating for it. Until training starts, the Heroes and their party members are free to act as they wish.” (Queen)

Following the scholar of the country, the Queen headed towards the castle.

The result: when night fell, my slaves were given special permission to challenge the Gauntlet.

I’d like to see those results.

# A Seven Star Weapon

After that, we started training based on our assumptions of Houou.

“Why does Firo have to cooperate with Gaelion...?” (Firo)

With a frankly reluctant face, Firo complains. But following my orders, she flaps her wings, and releases fake attacks.

She’s responsible for the lower altitude one.

The real one should be much bigger, but this is just practice, so there’s no helping it.

“Kyua!”

Gaelion is happily flying at a high altitude. He deployed a complicated magic aria to seal the other Gaelion. Of course, he’s emulating the higher one’s magic bombardments from above.

When I asked Adult Gaelion later, the younger was overly happy at being asked a favor by me.

“As I thought, there’s a problem with dealing with the higher one’s attacks.”  
(Itsuki)

After training ended, Itsuki stated as such.

“I see.” (Nafoumi)

When sparring with Firo, and the other Flying Dragons that took on the role of the lower ones, we concentrated too much on avoiding their attacks, and not those of the higher foe.

Of course, since the real one has the resolve to blow itself up, its attacks should be more vicious.

... I ride on Firo's back, to get a sense of Houou's field of vision.

If I deploy my Meteor Shield, I should be able to block out the weaker attack. Deploying Float Shields should create good footholds too.

Ren is the vanguard this time. Since Firo or Gaelion might get injured if he were serious, he's holding back.

Getting back to the previous conversation, regulating the damage on the higher one seems difficult.

Itsuki's arrows are able to hit anything, so he does have an advantage, though.

He's also holding back, so Gaelion can intercept the arrows, but I wonder what would happen if he were serious...

Rishia's also using her throwing weapon.

That's fine, but the problem is everyone else.

Motoyasu is using multiple long-range skills, but his accuracy is nowhere near Itsuki's.

Houou seems large, so perhaps that won't be that large of a problem.

But the Army is the one with the greater problem.

Their bow and magic attacks are weaker than I thought they would be. I'm not sure if I should say it, but I don't think they'll contribute too much.

The slaves I have that are skilled in magic have paid their squads a visit, but I'm not sure we'll be able to use them well.

Sadina and the Queen have ordered them to use long-range support magic. The orca's good at Choral Magic, and group synthesis magic for some reason. The Queen is the same. When someone skilled at it leads it, the output really increases.

Since we're landlocked, Sadina's power output has decreased... but still, I'd like her on the front lines.

But I was worried about the back line's power, so I assigned her there.

We're just practicing based on assumptions, but the damage on the lower one always turns out too high, and I don't have the confidence that we can take them out at the same time.

Of course, if it were an enemy that the Heroes and their companions could beat alone, then we wouldn't have to prepare to this extent.

But caution is important, so we should prepare whatever we can. If it's stronger than our assumptions, I'm not sure if we'll be able to deal with it.

If that were the case, I would have no idea what to do.

I hope we'll be able to beat it alone. However, if that's not the case, we need to prepare for that too.

... I'm not placing many expectations on the allied army.

It's good that they're dabbling in a few things to get stronger. The problem is if they get conceited, and bite back at us.

If we just mildly regulate them, they may become like Itsuki's subordinates.

That's a troublesome problem.

—

The training finished, and night came.

I took the slaves from my village, and brought them to the temple with the Seven Star Gauntlet.

“Hmm... So this is the Seven Star Gauntlet, Nii-chan?” (Kiel)

Kiel seems somewhat excited as she gazes at the glove in the stone.

“Apparently.” (Naofumi)

“There was a long line of people here during the day.” (Raphtalia)  
Raphtalia was watching as well?

People who want to be heroes exist in all worlds, I guess.

I mean, everyone loves them. And right here’s a convenient sword in a stone.

Of course, I won’t say I hate such situations either.

“Will you challenge it too, Raphtalia?” (Naofumi)

“If that reduces the burden on Naofumi-sama from the world, then I’ll happily do it.” (Raphtalia) “Right...” (Naofumi)

I don’t really want to see the sword-wielding Raphtalia beat up monsters with her fists, though. It would make me feel quite uncomfortable.

“Even if you’re chosen, can you fight? Your weapon will deviate from your specialty.” (Naofumi)

But as I said it, I remembered.

Hengen Musou doesn’t have a specified weapon.

“Yes, I think I will be fine.” (Raphtalia)

“I sense a power like the one from Naofumi-sama’s Shield.” (Atlas)  
Both Atlas and Fohl are facing the weapon as well.

These two are my top choices, for obvious reasons.

Out of the slaves, they have the highest probability of being chosen.

“I see. Then I guess it’s real.” (Naofumi)

If it’s just an objet d’art, I pity those who have tried for it.

They depressed themselves over nothing.

But shouting something like, ‘This piece of trash didn’t select me, it must be a fake!’ would be futile regardless.

“Anyways, to let you guys try your hands at it, I got a slot at night, when it’s usually sealed. Everyone should try it.” (Naofumi) “Yes!” (Slaves)

At least their responses are energetic.

I’m not expecting much.

“Then let’s start with Raphtalia.” (Naofumi)

“Me!?” (Raphtalia)

“Yeah.” (Naofumi)

I get the feeling that Grappler Raphtalia would be a sight to see, but I kinda don’t want to see it, but still...

It’s that. She can use her illusion magic to create afterimages.

And maybe she’ll be able to shoot beams out of her fists.

Wait, Atlas and Fohl are already doing similar things.

“What about Firo?” (Firo)

“If you think you can fight with gloves, then try your hand at it.” (Naofumi)  
She basically fights with kicks.

Will she stay in human form, and pummel the crap out of her enemies?

... That actually seems likely. It’s quite scary.

At the moment, Midori is the only Filo Rial that fights in Human form. He swings an axe.

“I’ll try~” (Firo)

The slaves started forming a line.

By the way, Ren, Itsuki, and Rishia are already resting in the Inn.

Motoyasu arbitrarily followed us. No, he arbitrarily followed Firo.

“Now then, everyone form an orderly line~” (Sadina)

... Sadina’s really acting like these slaves’ parent.

If a harpoon user like her got selected, how would she fight?

She does look kinda like a fighter, but something’s off.

I get the feeling she would appear on the fighter training game.

“Gauntlets, is it...” (Raphtalia)

Raphtalia touches the gloves, and try to pull them out of the wall.

But the gauntlets show no change.

If someone gets selected, I expect a flashy light show, or something of the sort.

Do you have to defeat a powerful guardian monster to get accepted by it?

Eventually, Raphtalia gives up, and returns to me.

“It’s not possible for me.” (Raphtalia)

“I see.” (Naofumi)

“Firo’s turn!” (Firo)

Next was Firo, but the gauntlets didn't react to her either.

She tries to pull the gloves out of the stone with all of her might.

Hey, don't transform. Don't use your feet. The stone will be the one breaking.

Luckily, nothing moved at all.

"They won't summon a Hero for it in times like this?" (Naofumi)

I posed this question to the Queen. Why doesn't this weapon have a wielder yet?

I heard before that because the world was experiencing such a calamity, the four heroes were summoned at once.

That means it isn't strange for them to summon another to be the Hero of the Gauntlet either.

It seems that besides the Gauntlet, the other seven are already gathered.

So summoning another otherworlder doesn't sound that bad of an option.

Though I'm worried that a harem bastard like the one who wrote that journal may be summoned.

"It appears that they performed the ritual to summon one again and again, but the results were none too favorable." (Queen) "Fumu..." (Naofumi)

The Last of the Seven Stars. The weapon that won't call anyone from another world.

But its criteria for selection should be looser than that of the four.

The four apparently have to be otherworlders, but the Seven can be selected from this world as well. What's more, they can be otherworlders as well.

"Ah, right. I have absolutely no idea what sort of weapons the Seven Star Weapons are." (Naofumi) "Is that so? I was sure Melty told you already."

(Queen)

Nope, didn't hear anything from her.

She seemed to think that four heroes were enough. I'm not sure she had any interest in the seven.

I've only really talked to her about the village's management, Filo Rials, peddling, and other business matters as of late.

She's a kid. She needs to dream more.

No, have her dreams already been fulfilled?

She's friends with the Filo Rial queens, Fitoria and Firo.

"Gloves are weapons... right? In the beginning, I had to beat up monsters with my fist, so I kinda understand." (Naofumi) "You sure did that..." (Raphtalia)

When Raphtalia became my slave, I mostly did that to relieve stress.

"The Gauntlets are closer to your Shield, Iwatani-sama. If I had to say, they are a Seven Star Weapon that focuses on defense." (Queen) "I see." (Naofumi)

My Shield does have something on its back that covers my hand.

I think the categories are overlapping here. What does this mean?

It's like my Frisbee Shield, and Rishia's strange weapon.

By the way, Rishia can produce a throwing spear like Motoyasu's.

"On the contrary, a Hero of the Claw also exists, you know." (Queen) "... Oy, oy, oy." (Naofumi)

Aren't those pretty much the same?

Please tell me the difference between a Gauntlet and a claw.

I really wanted to shout out, but I endured it.

... For now, let's ask about the Seven Stars as a whole

"What weapons are there among the Seven Star Weapons?" (Naofumi) "That's right. I guess I should start from there." (Queen)

The Queen began speaking in detail about the Seven Stars..

"First is the Cane." (Queen)

The one in Trash's possession.

For the Queen to start with this, I guess she still does care about the man.

Wait, when I first met him, perhaps he was holding something like that.

Trash is... I look around. He's sitting in a corner, silently staring.

Who is he looking at?

I thought it would be Atlas, but his gaze is off.

... Why is he staring at Fohl?

"Iwatani-sama?" (Queen)

"A-ah, please continue." (Naofumi)

"Next are the Hammer, the Projectile, the Gauntlets, the Claws, the Axe, and the Whip." (Queen)

It's a peculiar line up.

But the Four Heroes took the basics, so I guess the rest is a mismatched potpourri.

Especially the last one.

"Whip..." (Naofumi)

That's quite a strange weapon.

Where would you attach the Gem?

The handle?

It may be strange for the Shield to be saying this, but it sounds a little weak.

But in a game I know of, it's the strongest weapon.

# The Eve of Houou

“According to legend, it could turn into chains. It even changed into a flail.”  
(Queen) “That’s really not that different, is it...?” (Naofumi)  
I mean, they’re all blunt weapons.

The boundaries between the Seven Star weapons seem quite vague. I’m jealous.

“The greatest difference would be that the Whip can draw out the power of monsters.” (Queen)

A scene of the Queen whipping a monster and forcing it into submission floats in my mind.

Do you mean like that? The Queen in front of me... does she do that to Trash?  
No, I really, really don’t care.

“The Hammer and Axe are similar as well.”

It’s not like there are... no differences between a set of claws and gauntlets.

“Is that so?” (Queen)

So she wasn’t questioning it at all.

Since she was taught as such from the beginning, she doesn’t find it strange at all.

For now, let’s think of the difference between claws and gauntlets.

I look over at Firo, and noticed.

I see. The gauntlets are exclusive to hands, but claws can go on feet as well.

Having Firo accepted as a Hero would be troublesome, but I get the feeling that it would feel natural.

Thinking along that vein, Hammers and Axes are weapons you lower on enemies, but they have different purposes.

“I don’t think I’ve met any of the Seven Stars besides Trash.” (Naofumi) “I heard that they would be participating in the Houou campaign, but we have been unable to make contact with them. They’re also quite busy, so we hope they’ll be able to arrive on time.” (Queen) “Hmm...” (Naofumi)

Will I finally see them? The Seven Star Heroes?

They were being managed by Faubley, right?

There’s Trash and this Gauntlet here, so there should be five more in this world.

“By the way, how many otherworlders are among them?” (Naofumi) “I believe that three of them were summoned.” (Queen)

That means two of them are of this world.

If I meet them, we should talk.

Like about what weapons they have, and how they strengthen them.

But perhaps only the Four Legendary Weapons adapt to strengthening. Should I ask Trash?

... No, I’ll leave him be.

I haven’t seen him wield his cane.

If he does step forward, perhaps, he will be KIA.

If that happens, I guess a new Cane Hero will be selected.

As I lost myself in thought, the slaves proceeded, and finally, it was Atlas’s turn.

She puts her hands on the gauntlet, and tries to pull it out, but... it doesn't move an inch.

"I was no good." (Atlas)

She easily gives up, and returns to my side.

I think she should try a little harder.

"I used my Chi to analyze it, but it appears that I am insufficient." (Atlas) "You can find out things like that?" (Naofumi)

"Somehow." (Atlas)

"I see..." (Naofumi)

Next is Fohl.

He doesn't seem particularly interested as he approaches it.

"Hmm? ... Go for it, Onii-sama! If it's you, you'll definitely be able to pull it out!" (Atlas) "Yeah! Gunununununu!" (Fohl) <sup>[17]</sup>

Suddenly overflowing with power, Fohl pulls with all his might.

As he puts his hand on the Gauntlet, Atlas starts shouting.

"What was that?" (Naofumi)

It's rare for Atlas to cheer on her brother like that.

There must be a reason.

"I felt something different from when I went up to it... but it may be my imagination. I thought Onii-sama would be able to pull it out, but that was

disappointing.” (Atlas) “Atlas!?” (Fohl)

How cruel. It’s the carrot and the stick.

I think, as I watch over the rest of the procession, but no one could take it out.

“Heave! Ho!”

They’ve started grabbing onto one another, and tried to yank it out as if it were a game of tug of war.

I was supposed to be watching them, but when I wasn’t paying attention, all of the slaves started working together to yank the glove from the stone.

For it to remain firm despite this... I guess it won’t move until it finds someone worthy.

Anyways, a new hero was not born that day.

—

Like that, the day ended.

Reinforcements from other countries poured in by the day, so our numbers are considerable.

Our luck came with the force from Silt Welt.

Their battle abilities seemed naturally high, and their movements were nice.

Tomorrow’s the day when Houou’s seal will break.

That night.

After attending a strategy meeting, I ran into Atlas and Firo.

“What? What’s up?” (Naofumi)

“What’s wrong?” (Raphtalia)

After talking with Raphtalia, something started bothering me about our troop deployment.

“Why are you letting Atlas be on the vanguard as well?” (Fohl) “I must always be with Naofumi-sama.” (Atlas)

“... Fohl, do you want to be deployed with Atlas?” (Naofumi)

It will increase his motivation, and let him get a greater grasp of Atlas’s strength. But I guess he doesn’t want his sisters on the front lines, even if she’s beside him.

Well, I’m also going to be defending on the frontmost line, but also, she won’t have much of a role in the back.

“Atlas, by that logic, you’ll have to be sent to the very front.” (Naofumi) “Yep, that’s what I want.” (Atlas)

“No! Atlas needs to be deployed in a safer station.” (Fohl) “Onii-sama? Then I would just be a tag-along. Would you be satisfied if you were deployed to the rear supports?” (Atlas) “Uu...” (Fohl)

Why is he already making the sound of defeat?

Even so, a problem with deployment, is it?

“Naofumi-sama, I’ve said it before, right? I want to become the Shield that protects you.” (Atlas) “Well, you see...” (Naofumi)

What do you want to do by taking my job?

And just how noisy will Fohl be if you do something like that?

“That’s why I compromised, and stationed you a little behind me, but if you want to be in front of me, then there’s no point in me being there. Raphtalia—,

you understand that, right?” (Naofumi) “Yes.” (Raphtalia)

Raphtalia nods.

There’s a time and place for everything.

And if you try and protect me, the opponent this time is too strong.

I’d like this girl to learn some restraint.

“...Understood.” (Atlas)

Atlas reluctantly nods.

“Even so, I want to protect Naofumi-sama.” (Atlas)

“...I think this every time, but why are you so obstinate on trying to protect Naofumi-sama, Atlas-san? You seem strangely fixated on it.” (Raphtalia) “I think the same. I believe... well, I don’t think I should be saying this, that unreliable guy over there, why must you try and protect him so?” (Fohl) “Raphtalia-san and Onii-sama can’t understand it?” (Atlas)

Atlas furrows her brows in an irritated fashion.

“I can’t be spoiled by Naofumi-sama’s kindness forever. Just by imagining the sight of Naofumi-sama standing in front, and taking damage in place of everyone else... shatters my heart.” (Atlas)

I want to tell her not to deny my raison d’être, but a part of my heart finds affirmation in her words.

At the very least, her words don’t make me feel bad.

Even if she denies the existence of the Hero of the Shield.

“... No, I’m mincing words here. I want to be by his side, not as a party member of a Hero, but as the one next to the Human, Naofumi-sama.” (Atlas)

Not the Hero?

I don't really get it, but it's an Atlas-like explanation.

"What are you saying!?" (Raphtalia)

"Right Atlas!? Why this guy of all people!?" (Fohl)

Hmm? ...Wait, wasn't that a love confession just now?

I didn't notice.

She says something similar every time, so I let it slide.

"Naofumi-sama?" (Atlas)

"What?" (Naofumi)

"I have been drawn to your deep-rooted kind nature. I don't want you risking your life trying to protect everyone." (Atlas)

You'll say something like that to someone who can do nothing but defend?

"Ah, yes, yes. I understand that. I understand what you're trying to say, but I'm a coward, you see. I'm leaving whatever I cannot do to everyone else. So in exchange, I'll do what I can." (Naofumi) "Then, Naofumi-sama, if you were granted the power to slaughter enemies with your own hands, where would you stand on the battlefield?" (Atlas)

Fumu... If I could attack like a normal person, where would I stand?

An interesting question.

... In the end, I think I would still be at the front.

Though I don't know if I would still be relying on slaves.

If, at that time, I had offensive capabilities, I would go level by myself without buying any slaves.

"Naofumi-sama, please remember. Please don't believe that it's... natural for you to get hurt. Your true nature is one where you are always devoting what you have to others... but if you continue like this, who will heal you? Who will devote themselves to you?" (Atlas)

Atlas directs a sad gaze to Raphtalia.

What's she so bitter about?

"Naofumi-sama... if in a future battle, someone were to lose their life, please don't blame yourself for it. Those that live off your protection, those who can only take from you are miserable and rotten. They'll merely decay to nothingness, without even realizing their own corruption. I don't... want to feel like that again." (Atlas) "... That's right." (Naofumi)

What she's saying isn't wrong.

Last time, and the time before that, and even before, there were many that died.

I want to save whoever I can, but I don't deny what I can't do.

But if Atlas continues agreeing with whatever I say, she's sure to rot as well.

If you praise my every action, you'll rot in a different way.

Is what I think, but this isn't an atmosphere where I can voice such opinions, so I stay quiet.

"Onii-sama... I don't want to be someone who does nothing but take from you anymore. Like you and Naofumi-sama, I want to protect everyone." (Atlas)

"Atlas, do you know what you're..." (Fohl)

"Onii-sama, aren't you thinking that as long as I'm safe, it doesn't matter who gets injured?" (Atlas) "\_\_\_!?" (Fohl)

Fohl is at a loss for words.

But there are some times when I think he cares for nothing but Atlas.

"I don't want to see Onii-sama act like that. Oh... this isn't something I should be saying. I'll be on my way." (Atlas)

And Atlas departed with a sorrowful expression.

What's with this?

"I... Think of nothing but Atlas? Then the real reason I got angry whenever I saw Atlas clinging to that guy was..." (Fohl) "What's wrong?" (Naofumi)

I wave my hand at the dumbfound Fohl, when he comes to his senses, he returns a sullen face. Maintaining the same expression the entire time, he leaves the area.

"Should I keep the troop deployment as is?" (Naofumi)

Without answering my questions... those two left.

Really, what's with everyone?

"Naofumi-sama's kindness..." (Raphtalia)

Even Raphtalia's brooding over something. Is there really a problem that needs everyone's concern?

—

The Next Day.

The blue hourglass icon in my field of vision enlarged.

00:12

There's only 12 minutes left.

It's something I've experienced time and time again, but my heart beats erratically.

Just like always... no, I just have to perform better than always. I understand it, but I can't accustom myself to this feeling.

The people have already been evacuated. Left are the Heroes and their subordinates, and the allied armies.

It's not a sudden development like with the Spirit Turtle, so evacuations proceeded without a hitch.

We made sure to give ample warning for people to stay away from this area.

The Queen and the other strategists are in the rear, and they're the ones giving orders.

This is the battlefield of Heroes.

...Though Trash is still in the rear.

Right, right. Perhaps they were running late, but the other Seven Stars never came.

To not make it despite having all that time... how useless.

If I ever have the chance to meet them, I'd like to offer a complaint or two.

"It's been a long time since we had a serious battle. We've done what we could. Everyone, we need to reduce casualties to a minimum, so fight to survive."

(Naofumi)

I stand at the front, and give an ultimatum.

"YEAH!"

With my order, the slaves and armies let out their voices as one.

Along with them are Ren and Motoyasu, Itsuki and Rishia.

... It's been a long time.

Originally, we would constantly have to challenge these waves, but why did it take this long?

I earnestly ponder the thought as I direct my eyes to the location of Houou's seal.

Based on prior investigation, halfway up the mountain was a temple with a stone monument that fit the bill.

A dubious statue of a distorted Houou.

We confirmed that the statue radiated its own heat.

By the way, through careful examination, the researchers were able to confirm that it would awaken by the time on the hourglass.

That's where Houou will appear.

To make it easier to fight, we're challenging it on a barren plain at the base of the mountain.

We've grasped for plenty of means to fight it.

Like using the Gravity Field effects from the Spirit Turtle equipment to drop the higher one.

The problem is the skill's range.... It's relatively small, so we'll need to test it on Houou to see if it'll work or not.

I'll have ride Firo or Gaelion, and board that Houou to see if it does anything.

And if I use a shield with Gravity Field while riding a flying opponent, it's not like I'll fly. I'll fall.

Ren, Motoyasu, and Itsuki have similar weapons, but we have no idea about the extent of their effects.

"Naofumi-sama?" (Raphtalia)

"What?" (Naofumi)

"Let's do our best." (Raphtalia)

"Yep, let's." (Naofumi)

I nod at Raphtalia's words.

And Atlas also called out to me.

"Around us, a blazing chi is... gathering. Naofumi-sama, please proceed with caution." (Atlas) "I understand." (Naofumi)

The hourglass drops to three.

“This time, I’ll...”

“Yes...”

“I’ll definitely do it this time.”

Ren, Itsuki and Motoyasu confirm their determinations, and tighten their grips on their weapons.

Ah... right. Beating Houou is just part of our job. Even if we do beat it, it’s not like our future fights will get any easier.

The four heroes are combining their powers. Why don’t we end this one without any death?

00:01

The last minute.

I concentrate, and chant magic.

「All Revelation Aura」!

I pour in my Magic and Chi, and make my area of effect as large as possible. I cast the super buff I used on Firo on everyone in the front line.

Like with Firo that time, we’re now a squad of super-humans.

00:00

Ping. A sound like breaking glass, one I’ve heard before, enters my ear.

Last I heard it, I received a huge impact.

A pillar of fire rises out of the mountain, and two large birds show themselves.

Their forms were exactly that depicted on the Mural. The two Houou.

“KYU!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

A loud shriek echoes through the air.

It was the sound signaling the start of our battle with the beast.

# Vs. Houou

Just as I thought, like the Spirit Turtle, Houou also headed for the area with the densest population. It headed straight for our vast army.

The number 『8』 floats in my field of vision.

I assume this is meant to be the 8th wave.

“You guys, don’t make a mistake and land the killing blow too early.” (Naofumi)

“We know!” (Ren)

Ren is near the front. He faces the low altitude Houou, and begins releasing various attacks at it.

“KYUIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII!”

The higher Houou starts flapping its wings at us, raining down feathers and fire.

「Meteor Shield」!

I used my chi to raise its defense and scope quite a bit.

With this, I can protect the entire front line, but my powers are insufficient to cover the rest.

This battle is still within expectations.

“You all understand, right?” (Naofumi)

I turn around to find my slaves and the army nodding.

I don't have the confidence to protect this large of a group.

But I need to scheme to protect as many as I can.

With Atlas's help, I use a technique that isn't a skill. I deploy 'Collect' at the raining fire.

As if draining down a large funnel, the rain gathers, and heads towards me.

Based on how strong this attack is, I'll change the battle plans.

In that time, the Heroes began concentrating attacks on the lower altitude bird that rushed at us.

The rain of fire comes into contact with my shield, and stops.

It just feels like a normal rain hitting the top of an umbrella.

What I currently have equipped is the reinforced Spirit Turtle Shell.

—

Spirit Turtle Shell (Awakened) +8 70/70 SR

Ability Bonus:

...

Equipment Bonus:

Skill 「S Float Shield」, 「Reflect Shield」

Special Ability:

Gravity Field

C Soul Recovery

C Magic Snatch

C Gravity Shot

Tenacity Enhancement

Magic Defense (Large)

Lightning Resistance

SP Drain Null

Growing Power

Proficiency Level 100

Item Enchant Level 8 - Defense 10% Up

Dragon Spirit Defense 50 Fire Resistance Up Status Enchant Magic 30+

—

Anticipating Houou's attacks, I enchanted my weapon perfectly.

With this, I can greatly reduce fire-based attacks.

My Barbarian Armor also has Flame Resistance, so normal attacks shouldn't harm me at all.

At the moment, the attacks coming down on me aren't doing anything.

However, the scale of the attack is too big, so I can't guard the entire army for long.

But that was also to be expected.

「All Zveit Resist Fire」!

The rear support forces cast Fire Resistance magic on the army.

With this, we'll be able to ignore the rain, and concentrate on attacking.

Hmm?

When the feathers Houou spread come into contact with the ground, a monster called Houou Familiar (Vassal Type) comes into being.

Just as the mural said.

The vanguard immediately rushes forward to annihilate the familiars.

Good!

“Rafu~!”

Rat’s monster Mii-kun changes shape to something like a carpet. He catches all the feathers I fail to block.

He’s good at changing shape, so he’s useful in times like this.

“Let’s go!” (Taniko)

“KYUA!” (Gaelion)

Firo, Gaelion, and Taniko fly towards the higher level Houou.

“Tei!”

“Kyua!”

“Yesh, let’s go!”

Let me go into an explanation of the weaknesses of Firo’s newfound flight.

By flying, she sacrifices a few of her abilities.

According to the bird herself, I explained it before, but she uses magic to fly. So flying greatly diminishes her magic supply.

What’s more, she can’t put as much power into her feet as when on land, so her kicking power decreases. The power in her beak and claws also decreases.

Also, because she has to concentrate on flight, using magic like Quick and Spiral Strike is difficult.

In that aspect, Gaelion, who could fly from the beginning, doesn’t have too many weaknesses.

Breath is his basic attack, and he can use his claws fine.

Because of his leveling, he even learned how to make and shoot homing arrows of fire.

Houou is more skilled in fire, so if Gaelion doesn't change the attributes of his attacks, he won't do any damage, though.

But I guess a bird of fire has to have good fire resistance.

「Wing Tornado」

Flapping her wings strongly, Firo rotates her body as she rushes at Houou.

It looks like her Spiral Strike, but it isn't nearly as fast.

“Tei!”

And after she lands on the high Houou, she delivers a strong kick to it.

Ah, I guess like that, her kick power doesn't drop.

“Gaelion, let's do this.” (Taniko)

“Kyua!”

『I lead the power of Gaelion, and desire its incarnation. Earth Pulse, grant me power.』

『KYUAKYUAKYUA』!

「High Wing Slash」!

Gaelion's wings begin emitting light, and by flapping them, he creates blades of wind.

Those blades pierce the higher Houou.

“KYUIIIIIII!?”

They're fighting well.

I need to concentrate on the enemy before me as well.

“HAAH!”

I grab Houou's foot, and create an opening for Raphtalia, Atlas, and Fohl's attacks to land.

「Eight Trigrams Karma Blade Second Stroke」!

「Tiger Break」!

“Here I come!” (Atlas)

Raphtalia's blade pierces Houou's shoulder, and Fohl's fist hits its abdomen. Upon Atlas's thrust, part of its body bursts open.

“I can't be losing to them! 「Gravity Blade」!” (Ren) “Yeah! I'll work hard for Niichan! Woof! Woof!”

Ren jumps at the lower Houou's head, and stabs it multiple times, while releasing a skill.

Kiel also turns into Kielberus, and sinks her teeth into the bird.

Oh... like a knife through butter, Ren's blade goes through Houou.

Kiel's attacks aren't to be messed with either.

However...

Houou was a being like the Spirit Turtle. A being similar to a spirit or ghost. Whenever it got injured, flames gushed out of the wounds, and the injuries healed themselves.

“Ku... what vitality!”

Even if you cut it, you can't inflict any deep wounds.

How troublesome...

But by what I've seen, it's not like it isn't taking any damage.

Just like in our simulations, even if it blows itself up, it will be able to revive as if nothing happened. We can't frivolously kill it. We'll have to use tactics here.

But we prepared for these attacks. We don't get any damage from its wings or its breath.

There's no sign that the lower one will perform any SP draining attacks like the Spirit Turtle.

But just in case, I have re-strengthened the Wrath Shield that dropped due to Gaelion's meddling. It doesn't look like I'll have to use it, though.

The Spirit Turtle's Shell has high stats, but Wrath is also catching up.

The Shell doesn't seem to be evolving soon.

But it's impossible to predict everything.

Perhaps an attack like that is coming soon...

As I grasped the lower Houou to prevent it from escaping, I turned my eyes to the higher one.

I see Motoyasu, Itsuki and Rishia, Sadina, and the Queen releasing various long range attacks at the higher Houou.

“Firo-tan, be careful! 「Brionac」!” (Motoyasu) 「Bird Hunting」! (Itsuki)

「Tornado Throw」! (Rishia)

“Choral Magic! 「Water and Lightning Fusion」!” (Sadina) “High Class Covenant

Magic!「Rain Storm」!” (Queen)

Motoyasu throws a spear of light at the beast.

And wait, where are his three followers?

There, I remembered. They’re cooperating with the Filo Rial squad, and fighting on this front.

Itsuki’s arrow divides, and rains down on Houou. Rishia’s tornado of thrown goods spin around it. Finally, Sadina’s pre-prepared Choral Magic lands.

By the look of it, though, it’s not taking as much damage as the lower one.

Firo, Gaelion, the Dragoons, and the other flying monsters... are those Gryphons? Anyways, the soldiers riding them are dealing good damage, but still, we’re dealing too much to the lower Houou.

At this rate, taking them out together will be difficult.

“Hold back a bit more. Or else, we’ll kill it first! We need to match our timings as best as possible!” (Naofumi) “Got it!” (Ren)

“Yes!” (Raphtalia)

I caution the people on the front line as I deploy my First and Second Float Shields to block its attacks, while I continue pinning it down.

We just have to contain our DPS, and accumulate damage on the High Altitude one.

“!? Naofumi-sama, Houou’s stamina is recovering!” (Atlas) “Ku... how troublesome.” (Naofumi)

If it’s Atlas’s perception, then she’s definitely right.

If we hold back, it just recovers.

Even so, we can’t go at it seriously.



My magic is being sucked out.

...I have a bad feeling about this.

“KYUIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII!”

「Meteor Shield」!

The Higher Altitude Houou takes in a deep breath of air, and lets out a breath like a red laser.

Just before it hits, I deploy my Meteor Shield barrier with me at the center.

“Wah!” (Firo)

“Kyua!” (Gaelion)

The people fighting it up close barely manage to avoid it. The breath was directed at us below.

“UWAAAAAAAAAH!”

A whole unit is blown away as if they were merely toys.

Damn... it was hiding an attack like that.

“It sucked my magic! The attack the lower one just used sucked the magic of the ground squadron, and the higher one used it to power its attack!”

But he made a grave mistake.

My Spirit Turtle Shell has C Magic Snatch.

After withstanding the blast, a bullet of magic flies out of my Shield towards the lower Houou.

But... before coming into contact, the bullet vanishes.

Getting back magic from it is impossible?

And I was able to tell when I was holding it, but Gravity Field doesn't work either.

Just how much will you trouble me?

“Uu...”

“To those who took damage, get treated immediately! 「All Zveit Heal」! If you die, you'll get controlled by the enemy! Rear Supports, we need assistance!”

(Naofumi)

On my order, the support squad runs forward and provides relief to those that survived the impact.

# An Unforgivable Flash

As always, the problem is his absorption ability.

The Spirit Turtle Shell cannot stop the drain of MP.

The Barbarian Armor has Absorb Resist (Medium), so luckily, my magic didn't fall to zero.

... I can't deny the possibility that he can absorb SP as well.

I could change to the Soul Eater Shield with Drain Null, but then my defense would drop.

It's not that I wouldn't be able to manage, but I think my Spirit Turtle Shell was just barely able to take that last attack.

I don't have to rely on Wrath yet... but I don't know what option to choose.

Hmm?

The lower level Houou has regenerated itself. Its damage is gone.

Oi... could it be that whenever this attack is released, its recovery hastens?

I turn my eyes to the higher one.

That one seems that it'll take a while longer before it fully recovers, but this is an annoying ability.

"Cut at it before it can heal itself!"

"Yeah!"

"I'll try." (Itsuki)

On my orders, the attacks resume.

Everyone releases their strongest attacks, and the Houou in front of my eyes gets visibly weaker.

There's a large difference between the Spirit Turtle battle, and this one.

That one took forever, but this one doesn't seem that it'll take too long.

That troublesome attack is... dangerous, but I'll try withstanding it with my Soul Eater Shield.

I instruct the supports to cast Fire Resistance periodically.

Good, I hold down Houou as I pop a Lucor Fruit in my mouth to recover my magic.

And I cast All Revelation Aura once more after it wore off.

“Master~” (Firo)

Firo looks upon me from above.

“I need more power~” (Firo)

“Got it, come down!” (NAofumi)

“Yeah!” (Firo)

I control the Filo Rial Familia parasiting off of my body, and toss one at Firo.

The thrown ball of fluff sticks to Firo.

And it transfers its power to Firo.

“Thank you~” (Firo)

Firo spreads out her feathers, and rushes at the higher Houou.

... Right.

Can't I do this to the Filo Rials supporting us in the rear?

By what I've seen, Filo's followers like... Piyo, was it... are in the back casting support, so if I give them these Familia... their output should increase. But that's only if it works.

"Pii!"

As if sensing my intent, the Familia exit my body and run towards Piyo at a high speed.

After a while, an Icon besides Firo's popped up in my vision.

Good, this one's for regulating magic.

Now it should get a little easier.

Next is... Should I use Come on, Raphs?

I slowly look at Raphtalia.

"What is it, Naofumi-sama?" (Raphtalia)

"Come on Raph..." (Naofumi)

"Didn't you already bring them with you!?" (Raphtalia)

Yeah, that's right.

There's no point in increasing their numbers at this point. And My SP will go down.

What's more, I can't have those guys get killed off for no reason.

Do I have anything to deal a finishing blow?

... Yeah.

"Gaelion!" (Naofumi)

"Kyua?"

"Grab Ren, and go attack the higher altitude one." (Naofumi) "Naofumi, are

you sure?" (Ren)

"We have enough firepower here. Go assist in weakening that one. Once you think that one's about done for, release a skill in this direction." (Naofumi) "Got it." (Ren)

In accordance with my words, Gaelion and Taniko descend.

I hope this leads to a quicker resolution.

Its recovery is annoying, but taking care of the higher one is tougher.

The lower one has a higher recovery rate, but it's not that strong, it seems.

Ren hops on Gaelion and flies off.

And wait... The higher one has powerful magic, so perhaps it's weak to physical attacks.

The Queen and Sadina's large scale magics didn't have much of an effect, so that's likely the case.

In this case, there's the chance that the one below is weaker to magic.

Perhaps she sensed that I thought of something. Shadow appears before me.

"By the Queen's analysis, we wish to try hitting this one with covenant magic-gojaru."

Oh? If it isn't the one I know. Where did she go?

But I can figure that out later.

"Got it! Everyone separate from me! A large Scale Magic is headed this way."  
(Naofumi) "What about you!?" (Atlas)

I hear Atlas's voice, and turn to it.

“I can stand it. When the magic is over, we’ll continue attacking again.”

(Naofumi) “But-” (Atlas)

“I’ll be fine. More importantly, hurry and get away.” (Naofumi) “Understood. Atlas-san, let’s go.” (Raphtalia)

“... Why are you always like that?” (Fohl)

Fohl has a fed-up expression as he drags Atlas away with Raphtalia.

After confirming that the forces had retreated, the Queen and Sadina face me and Houou, and activate their magics.

A tornado made of water comes down on me from the sky.

Gu... I can stand it, and it doesn’t hurt or anything. But I can’t breathe.

“KYUIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII!?”

The high-pressurized whirlpool lasted around 30 seconds, but I wonder if Houou took any substantial damage.

It’s sorrowful that the attack wasn’t near Ren’s level of power, but it was around the level of a light barrage from Raphtalia and Fohl.

As I thought, the lower one was weak to magic.

For now, I think I can see the ending.

“KYUIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII!”

The lower one changes its body to fire, and tries rushing again.

I change my shield to the Soul Eater Shield, and stop the attack.

The attack scorches bits and pieces of my body, and I feel that I’m going to lose consciousness.

It’s a hard attack to take from the front.

And even with this, I have fire resistance cast on myself, so I wonder just how hot these flames are.

After the rush ends, I take a deep breath, and wait for the supports to cast recovery magic on me.

And I check whether or not the higher one is going to fire his laser.

...Yeah. It seems that if the lower one doesn't take any magic, he can't use it.

His mouth lets off a few sparks, but nothing happens.

The problem is that the lower altitude one's recovery didn't stop, though. I guess that was unrelated.

We can do this. At this rate, we should be able to kill him.

If we just whittle down the lower one and crush them together, we'll win.

"Okay! It'll be over soon!"

It was at the same moment I declared that.

... I would never forget the events that unfolded.

-From the very back lines, a long stream of light... something pierced the greatly weakened higher Houou.

"Wha-"

We should have waited to inflict a fatal blow, I mean, the lower one had just recovered HP, so why...

I look towards the source of the light.

It was farther back than our armies extended. Way in the distance.

What the hell was that!?

Houou's hidden skill? Or perhaps...

No, now's not the time for that.

“KYUIIIIIIIII!!”

As if it had burned away to nothingness, the higher Houou vanishes, leaving nothing but its feathers.

The remaining feathers flutter in the wind, and scatter over the land.

This is bad...

The rear magicians had just finished chanting a large scale covenant magic.

Even though we know the lower one is weak to magic, we can't take it out immediately.

Having regained our senses, we turn our eyes to the remaining Houou.

“KYU-”

It suddenly stopped moving altogether.

And...

Gobo...

A distorted and peculiar sound reverberated through the air.

Little by little, the Houou's form distorted onto itself, and expanded.

Magic and heat condensed around it.

“Everyone attack it at once! Quickly, we need to kill him as quickly as possible!”

We don't even have the time to retreat. It'll blow up in seconds.

We have to kill it before that, or the area will become a sea of flame.

「Meteor Sword」! 「Gravity Blade」! 「Hundred Sword」!  
「Meteor Spear」! 「Brionac」! 「First Javelin」! 「Second Javelin」!  
「Meteor Bow」! 「Bird Hunting」! 「Spread Arrow」!

Without even taking a breath, the heroes let out consecutive skills.

「Erst Throw」! 「Zweit Throw」! 「Dritte Throw」! 「Tornado Throw」!  
「Eight Trigrams Karma Blade Consecutive Blows」! 「First Stroke」! 「Second Stroke」! 「Third Stroke」!  
「Tiger Break」!  
「High Quick」! 「Spiral Strike」!

“Naofumi-sama! We have to kill it quickly! Tei!”

Atlas quickly starts pricking Houou’s vital points.

We’re truly desperate! I raise Gaelion’s abilities by equipping my Wrath Shield.

Eroding my Heart? Like I care!

Giant Dragon Gaelion seems to understand the situation. He shoots a magic breath at Houou.

「Prominence: Dark Nova」!

With Taniko’s assistance, he immediately releases his strongest breath.

“Pierce through! 「Shield Prison」! 「Change Shield (Attack)」! 「Iron Maiden」!”

Right after Gaelion’s breath hits him, I bind him in my Shield Prison.

Of course, I strengthened it with my SP and EP, but that is only temporary.

And using all of my remaining SP, I summon an Iron Maiden. It shatters the

chains of my Prison, and eats Houou whole.

“Haa... hah... ha...” (Naofumi)

I take out and drink some Spirit Water just in case. I wait for the Iron Maiden to wear off.

“D-did we do it?”

“S-somehow.”

Everyone is out of breath after that extreme barrage.

I even ended up using my Wrath Shield.

With this...

Snap...

Just before the Iron Maiden was about to wear off, the maiden of steel burst.

Inside was a swelling Houou that had gotten too large to contain.

Gu... the cooldown time is...

“Damn! We can’t be killed off here.”

In order to prevent further casualty, I’ll stain my hands with the move that I was still recovering from.

「Blutopfer」!

I immediately chant, and release my Curse Skill.

Gu... blood spouts from all over my body.

“Naofumi-sama!?” (Atlas)

“Naofumi-sama!” (Raphtalia)

Ren, Motoyasu, and Itsuki don't have the confidence to use their curse skills without getting swallowed by their curses.

They're forbidden skills we can never get used to using, and there's no time to think of something new on the fly.

Then I just have to do it myself.

I took heavy damage as I release my Blutopfer at the expanding Houou.

Good!

From the ground, a tiger trap that resembled the mouth of a raging dragon emerged, and closed on...

“Wha!?”

With a bang, Houou burst—

Losing its target, the trap gets enveloped by the flames.

I sway back and forth as I step in front of everyone. In order to contain the explosion, I use the skill I thought up with Atlas, Collect.

At the moment, if we get hit by this, everyone besides me will probably die.

Perhaps the Heroes will be able to stand it, but the Army and the Slaves are here too.

I can't stand down.

Where Houou was standing is now a ball of fire as brilliant as the sun.

And even now, it explodes forth. The ground below it scorches and melts. Nothing is left in its path.

At the same time, far, far away... the flames could be seen, even from Melromark.

# A Price Too Great

I step in front of the bursting Houou. To protect Raphtalia. To protect the Heroes, and the slaves, and the Allied Armies. I stand against the flames scorching the ground before me.

I have no time to worry about the damage from Blutopfer.

I can only count on the Wrath Shield's defense power.

Perhaps the Spirit Turtle Shell would work as well, but this one has higher defense at the moment.

“UWWWOOOOOOOHHH!!”

I let out my voice as I go forward, step by step, to push away the flames coming at us.

Besides the area I defend, everything is charred black.

Gu... It's gotten past my Shield's defenses, and I feel the excruciatingly hot flames eating at my flesh.

The sense of feeling in my arms disappears, along with the pain.

My instincts scream that my body is in danger.

Should I switch to the Spirit Turtle Shell?

It has high fire resistance. I imagine it changing in my mind.

And, from the Shield... I feel something screaming out.

Even if I change to that shield, I still won't be able to stand this.

「Change Shield」!

I change one of my Float Shields to the Spirit Turtle Shell.

... It was burned to a crisp in no time! I deploy the Shield again in front of me to buy some time.

Even with the Wrath Shield, I'm taking this much damage.

If this attack gets past me, those behind me will be reduced to nothing but cinders.

I feel the world around me slowing down.

I guess this is the sensation you get when your life is in peril. I think I read about it in a book somewhere, once. When humans sense their lives are in great danger, their thought process hastens, and time seems to pass slower.

The merciless flames from Houou endlessly surge against me. In order to reduce everything into ash.

Barely... I'm barely containing it, but I get the feeling that only 5 seconds have passed in real time.

How long will I have to do this?

I deployed Meteor Shield long ago, and it was instantly destroyed.

There's no point in using a reflecting Shield, and my Float Shields are already out.

But by deploying my floats one after the other, I'm just barely getting through this.

What do I do?

「Dreifach Resist Fire!」

Something from behind me... is it Ren? A magic that increases my fire resistance

flies at me.

I guess it isn't Revelation level because there wasn't enough time.

A wise decision.

I feel that the damage I'm taking has reduced ever-so-slightly.

But that's merely delaying the inevitable.

!?

Houou's fire's output increased.

As if to tell me there was more to come, the fire power suddenly jumps up. The flames burn through me.

The heat seeps through the cracks forming on my Shield. My shoulder is now a nicely baked entrée.

"Naofumi-sama!" (Raphtalia)

"Naofumi!" (Ren)

"Gu..."

Raphtalia and the others call out to me.

A few of them cast recovery and support magic on me. I'm impressed they were able to muster that up in this short amount of time.

But it's still not enough to handle Houou's inferno.

Gugu...

I frantically put all of my strength to keeping my Shield arm steady.

The force hitting me seems like it'll blow me away at any moment. My limbs are turning into charcoal. The HP bar on my status is unsteadily teetering into the critical zone, and I guess I'll be burned away to nothing at this rate.

I'm impressed that the past Seven Star Hero was able to take on this monster.

Looking back, isn't this explosion more powerful than the one on the mural?

Ku...

In ten seconds or so, I'll be blown away, won't I?

No, there's a single way.

If I use that, I'll save everyone's life.

But if I do, I'll definitely die...

But...

"I just have to do it!"

It happened at the same time as my scream.

Next to me, a single little girl stood.

"It's fine. I'll protect... I'll fulfill Naofumi-sama's wish." (Atlas) "What!?"

Me and... that girl's brother cry out.

The girl firmly nods... she holds out her hands as she jumps forwards.

I can't let her challenge the impossible. I immediately reach out my hand to grab her.

But my outstretched hand never reached Atlas.

Having studied defense under me, that girl... uses one of the attacks we made together. 『Collect』. She directs all of the flames towards her, and collects them. She creates a Wall to redirect them, and sends them in a direction devoid of human life.

"Atlas!"

In response to my voice, the girl's mouth forms a kind smile.

She's letting off an immeasurable amount of sweat... the meat on her arms has been burnt to a crisp, yet still, she uses her chi to redirect the flames... And in response to her great will, the flames obeyed.

What came next was an explosive sound strong enough to destroy my ears, and a flash too loud for me to keep my eyes open.

When I open them, the smoke prevents me from seeing anything.

"Geho, Geho! Atlas!" [18]

I wave my arm as if to brush away the smoke. I shout out.

And I turn and ask a question.

"Are you okay! Is everyone safe!?"

The smoke clears, and behind me, I see everyone standing.

It seems that we managed to change the direction of Houou's flames, but the flames we missed came into contact with the army, and caused large casualties.

There are corpses all around. Many have collapsed on the ground.

More importantly, Atlas.

She ran in front of me, into the flames. I look for the young girl who took drastic measures to save us.

And... I look above.

And I realized the fact that something was falling down from the sky.

I hold out my arms to catch it.

"Ah..."



In response to Ren's stern words, I was brought to the back lines. My mind was still blank.

"Ah... ah..."

I still can't form any words.

Atlas is on the verge of death.

Looking closely, it isn't just her legs that have turned to charcoal. Everything under her stomach has been burned to a crisp.

It's amazing that she's still alive.

"Hah... ha... hah..."

I leave her to rest in a temporary medical tent, and go around treating those on the verge of death with the rest of the medics.

But the most severely wounded is Atlas.

The rest are... only those that survived made it here.

In my blank mind, I look over everything I saw and heard once more.

"Atlas! Get a grip!" (Fohl)

Fohl grips Atlas's remaining arm, and desperately starts talking to her.

Atlas responds in a whisper.

Don't waver...

What I have to do now is treat the wounded.

I need to save as many lives as I can.

I'm a hero. I'm the Hero of the Shield.

Defense, Support, and Recovery. I'm perhaps the best in the world in those aspects.

... I can't concentrate.

Even so... I can't let anybody... I can't let Atlas die.

Calm down. Concentrate, and cast the highest level healing you can.

「Revelation Heal」!

The glow of my recovery magic envelops Atlas.

But... it didn't bring back her missing limbs.

“W-why!?” (Naofumi)

Healing Magic is all-purpose, right!?

Ah, right, when I got back, the magic they cast on me healed my wounds, but it didn't seem to have an effect on Atlas.

No... It's probably healing her, but her wounds are too severe...?

Then... I take out Yggdrasil medicine from my Shield, and apply it to Atlas.

It works as an ointment, and if drunk, it can save patients on the verge of death. If I use it in all ways possible, she should get better.

But...

“WHY!?”

There's no sign of Atlas healing.

I take out my anger on a nearby healer.

“Why won't she heal!?” (Naofumi)

“... She’s crossed the line where healing is possible.”

Rat came forward, and muttered this.

“What... do you mean?” (Naofumi)

“The fact that Atlas-chan is even living is something close to a miracle. Starting with the healers, and the Marquis’s magic and medicines, keeping her alive is the best we can do. Also...” (Rat) “Rafu...”

Under Rat’s arm, Mii-kun’s core cried out.

“This child also had her body destroyed as he protected everyone. He did this much...” (Rat) “Rat-san. Is there any way you can save Atlas?” (Raphtalia) “Can’t you do anything!? Can we give her life like that Mii-kun in your hands?” (Naofumi) “Monsters and Demi-Humans are different. If we used homunculus technology, then perhaps we could get her arms and legs to move, but that girl’s also burnt up most of her organs. Alchemy isn’t omnipotent.” (Rat) “This can’t be...” (Raphtalia)

“Even by replacing parts, it’s not enough. No matter what we do, she won’t be saved.” (Rat) “That’s a lie!” (Naofumi)

I won’t believe it! Never! There has to be a way!

Where!? Where is the Shield that can save Atlas’s life? There has to be one.

What the hell is the Hero of the Shield? What the hell is with this hero that had to sacrifice a little girl to survive...?!

“Naofumi..... sama...” (Atlas)

I turn to Atlas.

“Did we protect everyone?” (Atlas)

“Yeah, but more importantly, you-” (Fohl)

“Onii-sama... please bring Naofumi-sama here...” (Atlas) “... Okay.” (Fohl)

Fohl grabs me, and drags me next to Atlas.

“... I know. I have no time left, right?” (Atlas)

“What are you saying? You have as much time as there’s time in the world.”  
(Naofumi)

On my answer, Atlas, weakly shakes her head.

“Naofumi-sama... It’s fine already. Don’t worry about me.” (Atlas) “Of course I would worry about you!” (Naofumi)

Right. If one Yggdrasil medicine was no good, then if I use more, I should be able to save a single life.

But my supply is limited to two. But if I just get more, then definitely.

I signal the healer to come closer, and order him to bring some Yggdrasil medicine.

“Quit it already, Marquis! I just said it, but she’s past the limit.” (Rat) “We won’t know if it works until we try!” (Naofumi) “And I’m telling you because we do know!” (Rat)

I ignore Rat, and apply the second vial to Atlas.

First, rub it on the wounds...

But as I touched her skin, I noticed.

The parts that had become charcoal wouldn’t come off no matter what.

“Sorry, Atlas!”

I took a knife meant for medical use, and cut off the charcoal portions.

But... still, there's no sign of her healing.

"Hah... hah..."

It seems she can do nothing but breathe. She puts her remaining hand on mine.

"Please... stop already." (Atlas)

"Never!" (Naofumi)

Don't say such things in front of me!

No matter what happened, I never gave up.

Even when I was betrayed by those I trusted, even when I was called a devil, even when I was almost killed, I never gave up.

Even so... I can't give up in the face of this... this unreasonable turn of events!

"Naofumi... sama. Please understand... I can't be saved anymore. I'm the one who understands that best. Every second, part of my chi, my life force leaves my body, so... I understand." (Atlas) "But, even so-"

Water scatters from my eyes, which I thought had withered long ago.

"With Naofumi-sama's miraculous power, I am... here talking to you. Please... calm yourself." (Atlas)

Weakly, as if her body would crumble at any second, Atlas stroked my face.

"Hah... hah..." (Atlas)

"..."

I close my mouth, and Atlas smiles. It's a smile like one a mother would give to comfort a crying child. Using her hand, she wipes away my tears.

"Naofumi-sama, I love you more than anyone else in this world. And I said this before, right? I wanted to become your shield." (Atlas) "...Yeah." (Naofumi)

And that means you'll accept a fate like this!?

If you died because you acted as someone's shield, do you understand just what sort of emotions the person you protected would experience!?

When I was thinking that, I understood what Atlas was trying to tell me.

What she did was exactly what I was trying to do.

Using Collect to gather the flames, and release them somewhere else.

If put into practice, what would happen? I was the one who understood that best.

If Atlas didn't step in front first... I would be where she is now.

"Even so... this..." (Naofumi)

I can't muster up anything but a cracked voice from my throat.

"I am... satisfied. Like this, I was able to use the life you saved to save yours."

(Atlas) "No, you can't die. You can't die from protecting someone like me."

(Naofumi)

That was something that I should have been doing.

It's not like I wanted to die.

If it was me, I may have survived it.

"Naofumi-sama... I don't think I can... answer that request." (Atlas) "Why!?"

(Naofumi)

I know! I already know.

But can't I pray for a miracle too?

Someone. Anyone is fine. God, I pray to you.

I don't believe in anyone, but I'll pray to you!

I'm well aware that this is a selfish request.

Even if the God of this world is the Four Heroes, even if I go against myself, if you can save the girl before my eyes, then... I...

"Naofumi-sama, please... listen to my last bit of selfishness." (Atlas) "What? What is it? I'll definitely grant it. That's why you can't do anything like dying!" (Naofumi) "... I wished to become your Shield. That wish hasn't changed... and... I don't want to return my blood, flesh, or soul to the earth." (Atlas) "Eh?"

(Naofumi)

The hand grasping mine moved to my Shield.

"I knew from the start I could never become Naofumi-sama's number one." (Atlas) "What are you..." (Naofumi)

"But still, I wished for it. If at least this body can be closer to yours than anyone else..." (Atlas)

I remember the Atlas that came to my room every night.

She always wanted to be by my side.

"Even if I lose my form, please let... me be with you." (Atlas)

At this girl's goal... I trembled.

# The Girl Who Became a Shield

“Quit joking around!”

I understand what Atlas is trying to tell me.

And I shake my head at it.

“Do you understand the meaning behind your words!?” (Naofumi) “Yes... I’m well aware. And still, I ask it of you.” (Atlas)

Her face isn’t one of someone telling a joke.

I look towards Fohl.

He’s... standing still, and glaring at me.

Even when I want him to speak up here, he stays silent.

He’s gripping his fists so strongly that they’re starting to bleed, but why...

“And please allow me one more bout of selfishness.” (Atlas) “Wha-” (Naofumi)

I return my gaze to Atlas from Fohl, and see her mustering her power to get up. She gives me... A kiss on my lips.

The first kiss I ever got from a girl... tasted like blood.

As if her power supply had run out, Atlas falls back.

“I always wanted this. My wish has finally been granted.” (Atlas) “Why are you acting love-struck in a time like this...” (Naofumi) “Raphtalia-san.” (Atlas)

“Y-yes?” (Raphtalia)

Atlas calls out to Raphtalia, who had been watching over the exchange silently the whole time.

“The battle that I promised would definitely continue forever... It seems that it’s finally over.” (Atlas) “No, it will still... continue forever!” (Raphtalia) “Ufufu... for Raphtalia-san of all people to say something like that, I’m kind of happy. I think you understand, but I was always envious of you. No matter how hard I tried, I could never become Naofumi-sama’s number one. I knew.” (Atlas) “That isn’t certain yet! Your competition with me will still... go on... and on...” (Raphtalia) Atlas smiles upon seeing Raphtalia shed large drops of tears.

And she made a speech as if she had foreseen this outcome.

“You sure are kind, Raphtalia-san. I understand why he likes you, but please listen to these words.” (Atlas) “Not just these ones, I’ll listen to whatever words you have to offer. I’m fine with yielding Naofumi-sama once or twice, so please continue.” (Raphtalia) “Raphtalia-san, Naofumi-sama... likes girls more than you think. He’s a normal boy. That’s why it’s fine if you... watch over him a little more.” (Atlas) “... I know. But you’re the same, aren’t you? You can’t give up here!” (Raphtalia)

Raphtalia desperately pleads with her, but Atlas is already so weakened that she can’t even tell where she is anymore. She can no longer sense the chi in the air.

That’s just how little time she had left... the cold reality was approaching.

Eventually, as if she just noticed something, Atlas lets out words not directed at anyone in particular.

“Ah... that was right. Perhaps it would have been nice if I could spend my time with Raphtalia-san and Naofumi-sama together. Why didn’t I realize such a simple thing? ... Thinking about it, I guess I’ve gotten another wish that will never be granted.” (Atlas) “You’ll live! If it’s Naofumi-sama, you can definitely be saved!” (Raphtalia) “Thanks.” (Atlas)

Atlas slowly shakes her head, more weakly than before.

“Naofumi-sama... please notice.” (Atlas)

“What?” (Naofumi)

“I was always doing my best to become number one in your heart. But... that wish was never granted.” (Atlas) “What are you...” (Naofumi)

“Naofumi-sama, you yourself... probably didn’t think about it due to the wounds you bore on your heart. But become aware of it. Raphtalia-san... likes you as a member of the opposite sex. Just like me.” (Atlas) “What are you saying at a time like this!” (Raphtalia) “If it... weren’t a time like this, I know that Naofumi-sama would never lend his ears. Please believe... geho.” (Atlas)  
I feel Atlas getting even weaker.

Ku... If I just use more Yggdrasil Medicine, and Revelation magic, then...

“Please... promise. I do nothing but ask things of you, so let this be my last request. Please... Naofumi-sama, please realize that there are people who like you. And please answer them. It’s a... promise.” (Atlas) “Yeah! I understand! I get it, so don’t push yourself any further!” (Naofumi)

God in heaven... please! Please save the people who believed in me.

Even from the moment I was born, I never wished for a miracle.

I never made a wish, even when Witch tricked me, and I wasn’t allowed a voice in this world.

“It’s a... promise. Though I already asked for quite a bit...” (Atlas) “I get it... I’ll think about it, so...” (Naofumi) “Ufufu... for me to be this precious to Naofumi-sama... I... was... hap...” (Atlas)

Atlas goes silent.

“At... las...?”

I frantically shake her, but she doesn't move at all. Her expression is frozen in a kind smile.

"Atlas-san!" (Raphtalia)

"ATLAAAAAAAAAAAAASSSS!!"

My scream... finds no answer...

I have no idea how peaceful her mind was in the end.

Raphtalia is shedding tear after tear. Fohl just continues staring at me silently.

"..."

Atlas's life is no longer here.

What's lying here is...

I mutter at Fohl.

"Hate... me." (Naofumi)

The sister he valued more than his own life died protecting me, and I couldn't even save her... He has enough reason to hate me.

But the second the words exited my mouth, Fohl grabbed my collar, and stopped his clenched fist in front of my face.

"As if I could hate you! As if I could put your mind at ease by hating you!" (Fohl)

"Wha..." (Naofumi)

"Atlas, you see, until the end, she loved you! For your sake, she chose to sacrifice herself! Then I cannot... hate or resent you. I wasn't able to save her either. If at the time, I had just stopped her, it would have never come to this!"

(Fohl) “But...”

Hypothetical possibilities floated in my mind.

At that time, if I stopped her, Atlas wouldn't have died.

At that time, why couldn't I answer to her feelings?

“At that time, if we had never met, Atlas... wouldn't have died.” (Naofumi)

My field of vision took a 90 degree turn, and I was sent flying.

It was only after I hit the ground that I realized Fohl had hit me.

“Don't say such things, even by mistake!” (Fohl) “But that's the truth-”

(Naofumi)

“If she didn't meet you at that time, Atlas would be dead! I was never able to raise the money necessary for the medicine to prolong her life. The next time she had a spasm, she would have died! And still... the one who let us walk freely was you! I won't permit you to say things like that.” (Fohl) “Even so... something like this...” (Naofumi)

“Don't taint Atlas's pride any further!” (Fohl)

Fohl turns his back to me.

Blood drips from his hanging hands.

He hit me, and I'm supposed to be harder than steel. He should be in pain.

The blood slowly drops on the ground.

“Atlas said it. She told me to think of the kids at the village like her, and to protect them. I have to honor her will! You are... the person I would have called my brother in law! I won't let myself hate yoooooooouuuuuuuu!” (Fohl)

Fohl's outburst echoes.

That voice... I'm not sure what power it held, but a bright light flew at him from the direction of the temple, and spun around him.

For a moment, a flash strong enough to make me close my eyes lighted the room, but it went out in an instant... On Fohl's hands were a pair of Gauntlets.

"These are..."

They were familiar pieces of equipment...

What answered Fohl's cry was the legendary weapon.

By scheme, or coincidence? The me of yesterday would have scoffed at this development.

But the current me doesn't have the heart.

It's already too late...

"I'll definitely keep my promises to Atlas! I am... I am going to protect the villagers!" (Fohl)

Fohl ran off with tears flowing from his eyes.

To protect those on the battlefield.

I am... I am...

I soothe the sobbing Raphtalia, and... I think over the will left by the young girl that loved me.

"Please leave me alone for a moment." (Naofumi)

I hold up the empty shell that was Atlas, and I... plead to Raphtalia, Rat, and the healers.

"... Understood. But don't forget that the battle rages on." (Rat) "Yeah, I know."

Raphtalia and Rat nod, and depart.

With a dim mind, I think about my memories with this girl.

That night when she first came to my room.

“Because I am the Hero of the Shield, The only thing this world lets me do is defend.”

I scorned my own role as I spoke to her.

“... I know. When I look at this village, I see that everyone is being protected under Naofumi-sama’s wings.”

“Wings...”

“If all you do is protect, everyone will someday leave your nest.”

“Anyone that wants to leave can leave, and still I will protect this village.”

“But then... Who will protect Naofumi-sama?”

“Wha?”

“This is what I think. If Rafatalia is Naofumi-sama’s sword, then perhaps I could become Naofumi-sama’s shield.”

“Shield... That’s not as easy as it sounds, you know.”<sup>[19]</sup>

That wish was granted at the cost of her life.

That means I have to honor her last will.

If I, who can do nothing but protect, can’t grant a wish as simple as this... I would never be able to forgive myself.

Right... No matter who scorns me, no matter who abuses me, I, who was unable to protect this girl will honor my promise with her...!

“.....!”

Now, I will commit a taboo.

I bought this girl’s life, exploited her, worked her to death, and now I was going to torment her even afterwards. Why must a criminal like me feel this

guilt?

I gaze at Atlas's body.

This is a girl who liked someone like me.

She unconditionally accepted everything in me.

I'm going to absorb that girl into my shield.

Panic. Fear. Despair. Lamentation.

Various emotions swirl around my head.

I can't stop the shaking in my body.

Even so, it's something I must do.

If praying that much won't bring about a miracle, if he is going to see this irrationality, and turn a blind eye... then god must not exist.

No, he's an existence that can't exist.

Like I'd let him exist!

If a god that permits this exists, I'll never forgive him.

No matter what happens, I'll kill him.

I mean, isn't it strange!?

Everything was working smoothly.

I gave ample warning.

We were going to return home without any casualties!

If that light didn't exist, Atlas wouldn't have died.

To hell with Heroes.

To hell with God.

To hell with the Wave.

To hell with...

Why the hell should I... for this unreasonable world...

“Atlas... I think I kinda understand the reason you don’t want to return to the earth of this world.” (Naofumi)

The body of the girl who wouldn’t speak again was way too light.

But I will honor my promises.

I’ll never break them.

I won’t let her go to the heaven or hell of this shitty world.

“Ku...!”

The girl’s body disappears into my Shield.

It was the exact same light as when the Shield absorbed a monster or an object.

—

Curse Series. Wrath Shield, Blessing!

Blessed Series. You have unlocked the Shield of Compassion!

You have fulfilled the conditions to unlock the Soul Shield!

You have unlocked the Demi-Human Series! Series Completed!

You have completed the Slave User Series!

You have unlocked the Comrade Series! Series Completed!

You have dispelled the Curse of Blutopfer!

『Blessed Series』

The Blessed Series is a series granted only to those who have overcome their

curses. A powerful series of weapons.

There is a default form, and it can evolve to other shapes.

The Equipment Bonuses are based on the Shield it changes to.

-----

Blessed Series

Shield of Compassion

Ability Bonus: ...

Equipment Bonus:

Skill 「Change Shield (Attack)」 「Iron Maiden」 「Meteor Wall」

Special Ability:

Benevolent Temptation

Enchant

Blessing

All Resist

Spell Support

-----

Along with the blind girl's disappearance... the Shield of Compassion was born in my heart.

# VS Houou Final

The shield was very simple, but it felt as warm and tender as the sunlight.

Its stats are the highest of any of my unlocked shields.

On top of that, this shield's effect includes the ability to give enchantments.

My defense is rising endlessly.

And... the Slave, Demi-human, and Companion series have all been completely unsealed.

This includes all of their bonuses.

In other words, all of my slaves and companions have had all of their abilities drastically increased.

I change to my usual Spirit Turtle Shell.

Growing Power has been activated by Growth Up!

Spirit Turtle Shell has changed!

Increasing it any further is unnecessary.

Right now, I can't afford to wait and see if it grants any bonuses.

The treatment of everyone here has miraculously finished.

The Healers are all treating it like a miracle.

...But.

As I leave the tent, I look to the sky and see the pests.



Naofumi: "Firo, time this just right."

Firo: "Yes!"

"KYUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUU!!!"

The pests notice us and come to attack us with their claws.

It would be best to remain calm and collected.

Recklessly hating the enemy in front of me would just cloud my judgment.

However, I understand the pain.

I can see how unreasonable this world is.

The wounds that were suffered... and the sorrow for the lives that were lost.

But even though I know this, I mustn't get angry.

Naofumi: "Too noisy."

I catch the pests by their talons and throw them towards the ground.

"KYUUUUUU!!!"

As we gain altitude, the pests swerve back to swarm us.

Naofumi: "Firo, kick them."

Firo: "Y-yes!"

Following my instructions, Firo lands a hit and the pests fall straight down.

It made a great noise.

Shortly after, I jump off Firo towards the pests.

Firo: "Master!?"

Naofumi: "Firo, I'm fine, but get ready to catch me when I fall."

Firo: "Y-yes!"

I give Firo those instructions as I activate Gravity Field.

Before it wasn't that effective, but as it is now, I can use it.

"KYU... KYUIIIII!!"

The pests desperately try to remain airborne, but under the new weight, there was no way they could maintain altitude.

I begin to fall towards the pests that are at a lower altitude.

Naofumi: "Firo!"

I jump before I hit the ground, and was caught by Firo.

I grab both pests as I reach the battlefield and make a declaration.

Naofumi: "Everyone! Let's do this!"

Fohl: "Nao-Naofumi!?"

Naofumi: "What are you doing? Let's hurry up and kill them!"

Fohl: "I understand! Tiger Break!"

It was Fohl who acted first.

I expected as much.

Right now, I can understand his feelings more than anyone else's... as well as his thoughts.

Of course I don't know what it is like to lose a family member.

But, I knew what kind of girl Atlas was.

Naofumi: "Don't worry about me. Let us finish this as soon as possible. Soon, we will kill it!"

Everyone: "OHH!"

The party, who was surprised at my words, stated to unleash their special attacks.

Ren: "Naofumi, how is Atlas...?"

Ren came to ask me in-between attacks.

Naofumi: "..."

I look away in silence.

Right now, I don't want to think about it.

Naofumi: "Kuh..."

Though unintentional, I let out a pained voice.

Along with the power from the Sword, we strengthen the forces.

Kiel: "My body feels... so light!"

Kiel rushes out and bites through the pests.

Kiel: "Yes. It seems like my speed is different than before!"

There is a visible difference in the movement of my slaves and the military forces, as well as their attacks.

It must be due to the bonuses of the completed Slave and Companion series.

I didn't check it, but there must have been a huge boost.

And, it was all thanks to Atlas.

Naofumi: "Hurry. Let's end it quickly. For all of the pain and sorrow it has caused... we need to destroy it, even by a single second faster."

The two pests try to attack me, but it doesn't hurt or bother me.

Their claws and bites are pointless.

If all enemies are gathered in one place, they can all be eliminated easily.

「Gravity Sword」!

「Brionac」!

「Bird Hunting」!

「Tornado Throw」!

「Eight Trigrams Karma Blade」!

「Spiral Strike」!

The swarm of pests are hit by the sheer power of their special attacks.

“KYUIIIIIIIIIII!!”

As one lets out its death cry, the other begins to make a strange noise.

So it is going to self-destruct.

Of course, you won't have the chance to use it.

「Tiger Rampage」!

With Fohl's deadly strike, the enemy was wiped out, leaving nothing but a pile of feathers.

Everyone: "OOOOHHHHHHH!"

The roar of victory echoed throughout the area.

Feathers float down like snow and calmly settle.

Naofumi: "Atlas...we did it."

I raise up my Shield to signal our victory.

The truth is that we should have won without any sacrifices.

I will never... never forgive that guy.

Naofumi: "Ren! You understand what's next, right?"

Ren: "Ah!"

Naofumi: "Inform the Queen. I need to make that bastard pay! I can never forgive him!"

It is very likely that he was a Seven Star Hero.

I have to find out who was responsible!

I called Firo and left to look for the source of that flash of light.

Ren also came along while riding Gaelion.

But even though we searched all day, we could not find the culprit of that attack.

Naofumi: “Damn it! Where did he disappear to!?”

Ren: “Looking for him any more is pointless. Naofumi, please go on ahead and rest.”

Ren came and told me this.

Naofumi: “What are you saying!?”

Ren: “I’ll call you if I find something. So please bear with it for now.”

Naofumi: “But-”

Ren: “Please...”

Before I could argue, Ren pleaded with me.

His expression was mixed with both sadness and anger.

Ren: “Naofumi, you are not the only one who is furious. I am also filled with rage.”

Naofumi: “...I see.”

Ren: “Naofumi, you are the only one I have told this to. Earlier, I unsealed the Sword of Anger. Of course I haven’t used it, since at that time I was surprised at how you were behaving.”

Naofumi: “...”

Ren: “I don’t intend to forgive the culprit either. But, you need some time to calm down.”

It’s true...I need time to calm down.

I was under the illusion that I was calm, but in reality I was filled with anger.

What I am feeling right now...can’t easily be described.

When I was betrayed by Witch, my head was filled with anger.

Right now, I should rest for a bit.

I need to calm down so I can differentiate who my enemies are, and who it is I should protect.

Yes, I need to calm down the feelings in my heart.

Naofumi: "...I understand. I will leave the rest to you."

I sit down at the temple as the day was ending.

The search is still ongoing.

While I was resting, like Ren asked me to, I became aware of how angry I was.

By changing to the Shield of Compassion, my anger begins to fade.

But even so, it was something I could not forgive.

That is because I can understand it... the unreasonable sorrow and suffering.

After the feelings of anger had calmed down, a sense of loss had filled my heart and dominated my mind.

Raphtalia stood by me before I could notice.

Raphtalia: "Atlas-san... that was unfair. I wanted to have Naofumi-sama turn around with my own power..."

Naofumi: "I see...but right now..."

Raphtalia: "I know. I understand completely... so it is okay for you to cry."

But, Raphtalia is probably the one who wants to cry the most.

The pain of losing someone, such a feeling was represented by tears.

Naofumi: "I am not going to cry."

I noticed something along my cheeks when I said that.

Are these... tears?

Since I had left the tent, I was unaware of it, but I was crying.

And... everyone else may have noticed.

I was crying.

Naofumi: "Uuh..."

Once I became aware of it, it was the only thing I could think about.

Raphtalia: "Naofumi-sama..."

I had unconsciously hugged Raphtalia and burst into tears.

After my duel at the castle, I decided to stop crying.

The tears won't stop.

My tears start to overflow when I try to stop.

This was the pain and sorrow of losing someone that I knew.

It wasn't something shameful; I realize this now.

More than anything... for the feelings of the girl who became my shield... I just wanted to silently cry.

# Translator note

1. ↑ TL: Not that it matters. || It does, it refers to Atla's punishment.
2. ↑ TL: If you take separate readings for the kanji of 'Sei Ryuu', it can be read 'Ao Tatsu'.
3. ↑ TL: Naofumi is remarking on the Kanji.
4. ↑ TL: エアウエイク加工の大本か？ I don't get the line.
5. ↑ T/N: There might be more than one, but I can't be sure because Japanese doesn't really have plurals.
6. ↑ T/N: In terms of how much he drunk.
7. ↑ T/N: The last 'rafu' was in hiragana instead of the usual katakana.
8. ↑ T/N: Previous as in Kiel, Sadina, & Raph modifications.
9. ↑ T/N: Lightning magic.
10. ↑ T/N: Not too sure about this. 「ミー君。どうやらこの錬金装置を手にするように操れる様に技能を詰め込まれたみたいなの」
11. ↑ T/N: lit. No matter what breaks, you can grow from it.
12. ↑ T/N: They're two of the oldest ppl in the village.
13. ↑ TL: Shirahadori is that thing where you clap your hands on a sword swinging downwards.
14. ↑ TL: だがあの攻撃は防御無視むしに力ちからを注いでいる所為で防御力比例効果は無い。
15. ↑ TL: Sound of coughing
16. ↑ TL: I'm really not sure about this one, but perhaps it's Macross Frontier. There are plenty of Animes that fit the bill here.
17. ↑ TL: Sound of putting effort.
18. ↑ TL: Sound of coughing.
19. ↑ TL: This is chapter 173