悪の組織の求人広告

～新入社員立志編～

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MFブックス

The Evil Organization's Recruitment Ad

(悪の組織の求人広告)

by

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Synopsis

Komori Neito decides to leave his NEET lifestyle behind and tries applying for jobs.

He finds a recruitment ad for the premier evil organization that is always fighting against super sentai heroes, and decides to go for the job interview.

Having no skills apart from the right attitude of hating the current world, Komori starts off as a low-level minion and works his way up the corporate ladder of Metallica, the world's greatest evil organization.

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Chapter 1: Do You Want To Change The World?

The help wanted ad was quite a strange one.

Company Name: Metallica

Industry: World Domination

Expected Salary: A regular position 700,000¥ per month. A general position 140,000¥ a month. (TL: Around 6250.00 USD and 1250.00 USD)

Qualifications: None (But experience is appreciated)

Numbers recruiting: A few

We are an evil organization with our sights on world domination! Our bright and lively workplace is awaiting your determination!

Employment: A written exam, and an interview. (We have confirmed your completion of the preliminary examination online)

An examination date and meeting place were kindly laid out.

“… The hell’s this?”

Neito unintentionally opened his mouth.

He thought it was about time for him to get a job or something like that.

With a name like Komori Neito, he thought it would be too much for him to remain a hikkikomori NEET.

So from around two hours ago, Neito had been looking through applications on the internet.

He had found himself on quite a strange site. A questionnaire, and several peculiar quiz questions were put out. And strange as it was, he couldn't bring himself to close the tab. It had a certain intrigue to it.

What do you think about a protagonist standing against the forces of evil, who'd sacrifice the life of a single woman to save the world?

Are you happy right now?

What do you think about Oda Nobunaga and Cesare Borgia?

What is your opinion on taking hostages to attain victory?

If you had a goal you had to accomplish, would you be able to die for it?

What would you do if the boss you respected was killed?

Do you think an alien race trying to invade the earth deserves to

be wiped out?

Looking at the battlefield below, please fill in the appropriate choices.

Of the following list of enemies, please select the correct order in which to defeat them.

It must have been made by someone with a lot of time on their hands. That on his mind, Neito continued filling out one answer after the next. And in the end, a question popped up.

Do you want to change the world?

Hmmm. Let's see. It doesn't look too good out there, and there wars and things like that going on in other countries, and I'm a NEET, and unpopular and a virgin, and poor and all. I do get the feeling I've lived being looked down on for a long time. When I see a radiant existence, I am sometimes pained by how far my hand falls from reaching. He thought.

And so...

YES

He answered.

The next question popped up immediately.

Are you sure?

Well it looks like they're intent on it. If you go that far, then let's give it a bit more serious thought.

Is the world really fine as it is? Everything in it remaining the same?

No, right, it isn't, right?

I had my inhibitions. The student life I had lived until last year wasn't anything decent, and it's doubtful anything good will happen from here on either. It was my own fault, I'm sure. But there are plenty of people like me out there. This world is suffocating for them to live in. Yep. As I thought, at the very least, I want to change the world. So I'll answer once more.

YES

He was suddenly redirected to a recruitment site. Metallica's recruitment site. He had too much on his mind for shock. Neito took his eyes off the screen, and tried to calm down.

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I think the first time the evil organization came onto the stage was around twenty years ago.

The organization called Metallica was known to implement modified humans, and commit many a misdeed.

Their modified soldiers held monster-like appearances, and they were extremely strong, it seems. Even the police were unable to cope with them. For a period of time, the world had been thrown into disorder. Just what could Metallica's goal have been. Wasn't it simple world domination? That was the popular theory, and with the impact behind those words, their exploits took up the news every day.

Right after, the existence known as Dylan became the talk of urban legend. Similarly, Dylan couldn't be thought of as human, but unlike the modified beings of Metallica, he was a heroic existence, and quite a strong one at that. He prevented all of their evil doings, and was regarded as a hero.

But the populace had grown accustomed to evil organizations, and to Metallica. By the time the news report had grown tired and given up on them, quite a few different organizations had popped up. They eventually started turning to the power of mysterious beings, but instead of containing humans changed through science, they were usually some revived ancient warrior race, or aliens or beings that underwent sudden mutations, or something like that. Anyways, there were many varieties. Sabbath, Megadeath, Crimson and a number more.

Those evil organizations were in essence some suspicious urban

legends or credible political organizations, or curious scientific minds. Anyways, there were a lot.

But as of yet, the world has not been dominated. The police and armies have been active, for arguments sake, but it was mostly the doing of mysterious heroes like Dylan. Existences much like his own; The Beatle, Rex, Ramone, and many more have been confirmed as individual cases, and they fought off the evil organizations. Eventually from their peculiar appearances, and their common characteristics, they were often referred to as the Rocks.

And with that trend, the people were completely used to evil organizations. The existence of heroes to fight them was now common sense.

Since such events carried out in reality, the superheroes of the studios stopped airing, but even now, children looked up to real heroes. A certain Neito looked up to them as well.

Sacrificing their own wellbeing, the warriors who fought to protect anyone. How cool must they have been? How wondrous? He respected them. The weaker and more helpless he got, the more imprisoned by society, the more he looked up to them. And on that line, he felt the groups calling themselves evil organizations were far and absurd beings.

So while he was surprised, he laughed the recruitment site off as nothing but a joke

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“Or so I thought, but…”

On the interview date, he had ended up coming to the specified location.

Unthinkable for the headquarters of an organization of evil, it was in the middle of an urban business district, in a perfectly normal building. The hell.

If he was to give an excuse, it was half pure curiosity. If someone went through such lengths to give a user a shock, then perhaps some elaborate event was in store, he thought. Yep, that was all.

He hesitated to enter. He ended up loitering in front of the building a while. It was cold. As the site had indicated, he had even worn a black necktie to distinguish himself, yet he couldn’t help wonder why he was even there to begin with.

Am I an idiot? He thought, as he began walking the way home.

As he turned he noticed a girl pass him by. Her silky hair cut neatly at her shoulders swayed. A slightly slim build, and porcelain white skin. Her chest was on the lacking side, but her pink and shapely lips alongside her gentle eyes made her quite a beauty. His sights were caught in the illusion of pure wind blowing past her.

Ah, how cute. Not that she has any relation to my life.

He thought to himself, as he continued walking past; but there Neito noticed a certain characteristic, causing his body to stiffen.

A black... scarf...!?

A black scarf for women, and a black necktie for men. That was what had been written on the site. And that scarf stood out quite a bit from the standard formal wear she clad over her body.

Was this child reeled in by that site? Does that make her an idiot too?

What to do. Should I try calling out? No, that ain't gonna work. Let's just stop there.

Neito's internal conflict ended in futility. Unexpectedly, it was the girl to call out first.

"Ah, good day."

Unthinkable of one who had come to take an evil organization's examination, a polite and sweet voice.

"G-good day."

He replied as such with all his might. But the girl paid no mind to that, and continued.

“… You’ve come to take Metallica’s employment examination, haven’t you?”

Her smaller build leaned in, as if to get closer to the answer. By inevitability, her eyes were upturned.

Dammit that’s cute. Please stop. Ah, she asked something, right? I have to answer.

“… Yes.”

He wrung out that answer.

And receiving those words, her face lit up. A radiant smile. He began to realize why the people of old had decided to describe a smile as such.

“Thank god! Me too!! I didn’t see you at the preliminary examinations in America, so I was a little worried.”

Huh? America? Preliminary exams? What’s this girl saying?

“Yes… well… pleasure to meet you.”

“If it’s okay with you, would you go with me to the meeting room? Being alone is a little… worrisome…”

He had no idea what was going on.

Maybe it was an elaborate fraud. That's why they hired a girl of her appearance.

He felt compelled to think that.

"Ah, I'm Mayuzumi Maki. Pleasure meeting you."

The etiquette in her bow were enough to make him think he heard a dramatic sound effect. Along with that, her cuticles rustled. A peach-like smell entered his nose. He didn't know if it was shampoo, or perfume, or perhaps even her original scent.

Ah, I don't care anymore. It's not like I have anything to lose. Yep, let's try following the cutie. I don't even have enough money for fraud to be effective.

And since he had first seen that recruitment site, the words had remained on his mind.

Do you want to change the world?

He had answered YES.

Perhaps it had been foolish, but in some part of him, he had always felt that way. That's why he had answered.

“Yeah. L-let’s go.”

The girl called Maki received those words, and grinned. And she let some outrageous words from her own mouth.

“Yes! I hope we both get a position! Let’s work together to conquer the world!”

Yep. This might be a little bit bad.

Chapter 2: Ah, Yes

Together with the girl, who had named herself as Mayuzumi Maki, Neito headed for the employment interview meeting hall of the Evil Organization Metallica.

“… Hey, um…”

The situation was just too strange, and he couldn’t help but open his mouth.

“? What is it?”

Maki tilted her head a bit to the side.

Don’t you find it strange Metallica is conducting an interview in such a normal business district?

In the first place, should they really be putting out help-wanted ads like a standard corporation?

I was tested online, but you said something about a preliminary examination in America right? And also… what exactly are you supposed to do after joining an Evil Organization?

He had too many things to ask, that on the contrary, the words wouldn’t come out at all.

“Ah~ no, it’s nothing.”

“? Oh, you’re nervous, aren’t you! That’s alright… I’m the same. Let’s do our best.”

Likely misunderstanding something, Maki made a clenched fist, and held it up in an encouraging pose.

“Ah, yes. You’re right.”

He could only answer as such. And he headed into the building set for the examination. A normal building on a normal street. Metallica LLC wasn’t written anywhere on it.

But he noticed one peculiar thing about it. While it was a weekday in a standard office district, there was no one around but Maki.

Strange.

That was quite clearly strange.

When he entered the building, there was an arrow guiding to ‘M Corp’s’ employment examination. The clean and tidy office was the very definition of a major corporation.

“For real?”

After showing the receptionist-esque person the admission ticket and proper identification papers, they were let through to the waiting room.

By the way, the receptionist was, for argument's sake, a large breasted older woman.

On her chest area was a stylized name tag. It was enclosed by a flower-like design with wings, making it look like quite an official company badge.

The woman smiled, and spoke.

"Welcome to Metallica. Please do your best in today's examination. We're always waiting for comrades to fight alongside us."

The waiting room was already filled with several tens of people.

Neito himself had just become twenty, but the rest were quite varied.

A gangster-ish old man who clearly didn't come from a respectable business.

A punk rocker whose ears were pierced wherever space would permit.

An intelligent-looking young man in glasses.

A skin headed giant noticeably a foreigner.

A young handsome man who could pull off quite a dashing suit.

“Yeah, I’m done.”

He whispered that quietly. Perhaps it was shock, or maybe something else.

He decided not to make remarks on any of the finer details. While he didn’t really get what was going on, at the very least, he knew that some sort of interviewing was going to be going on for some sort of corporation.

He had thought it would be a joke. But a little, in just a very small part of his mind, he did consider that it was the real deal. That’s why he had come all the way here. In that case, shouldn’t the current situation have been just as he had hoped for?

It was his chance to escape NEET life. The income was also quite nice.

Of course it was. Can you not call this a first-rate business known worldwide as best in the field?

It’s a little questionable with it being an Evil Organization and

all, but it's not likely to get any worse than this. Probably.

Hey, I'm home~ Daddy's home.

Oh my, welcome home dear. How was work today?

No~ well, we were doing a little bit of demolition around the prime minister's office, and it was quite a hard job, you see. Well, I can't go against the department chief's orders after all.

Right. That must have been tough. The bath's been drawn already, if you want to use it.

D-dad, welcome home~ um, you see! Next birthday, I want a PS4!

(TL: This was released before PS4 was, as in this being a vision of the future)

Yeah~. How about that. I'll get a bonus if the Oceania oppression plan succeeds, so I'll consider it.

Wow! Yay! It's a home run!

Hahaha, ya' little squirt.

It's not like he wasn't able to fathom such a household situation.

Neito thought about it, and decided to spend his day on the first examination.

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The morning was occupied by a written exam. He was first put to solving mathematical puzzles, of which he couldn't really do. Next he was to read a text, and give his answers to word problems.

Fitting of an evil organization, the contents were all over the place. Something like this even popped up.

Circumstance has led to you fighting with a heavyweight boxing champion in the room pictured below. How would you carry out this battle? Please look closely at the picture. But please understand that if the champion has not been killed, you will die.

The picture contained a man of color absolutely brimming with motivation, and behind him were machine guns and knives, and various other things that could be used as weapons. Yep.

He answered it as follows.

The probability of victory is low, and it doesn't look like I'll be able to run, so I'll give up. Because no matter what I try, one hit, and it'll be down for me, and I won't be able to stand for a while. So for now let's count that bout in the room my loss. Then the next day, use the cover of night, or poison to kill him off.

Now I understand that may not really answer the question. Perhaps the champion has to be beaten in that room for it to count. But look here, if a killing match took place in that specific room, then I'm definitely going to be the one dead. So there's no helping it.

When it all comes down to it, isn't it fine as long as the champion is dead in the end?

The questions were all like that.

He had no idea how he was doing on those ones, but he just wrote down whatever came to mind, and filled them all in.

Next was the interview. It was a group interview, it seems, and he was set to wait in the waiting room a while. There, he managed to get a seat beside Maki.

Yeah~. I have to say something, don't I. The reason such thoughts came to mind was because it had been quite a while since Neito had last conversed with a woman, and it goes without saying he sucked at it.

This is bad. What do I do? She isn't reviewing or anything, and she's just sitting and sipping tea with an uneasy face as she waits her turn. Is it that, you know that, she wants to hear something considerate. I... I have to think of that something first...! I don't think I'm hated yet! If I give her a good impression of myself here, then maybe...!

“M-Mayuzumi-san! I-I don’t think yyyyyou have to be so nervous!”

The voice he finally got out had completely turned coat on him.

Maki opened her eyes wide, and after a while…

“… Pwa, ahahahaha. Aren’t you the nervous one here, Komori-san? That was quite a voice you put out there, you know?”

Bitch, do you know how hard I worked to put out the voice you laughed at…

Wasn’t on Neito’s mind at all. From his point of view, that was a successful conversation in itself. He had gotten her to smile, so he was satisfied for the time being.

“No… well… yes, I’m also nervous, but…”

“Yeah. I am as well… but thank you! Because of that, I think I’ve calmed down a little. Let’s do our best.”

When she said that, his spine suddenly straightened. Small as she was, she gave off quite a dignified air.

“Ah, come to think of it, I’d prefer it you called me Maki. I’m not that used to people calling out my surname.”

Oh, if it's that pattern, then the response is...

"U~m... un derstood. Maki-san. Then I'm fine with Neito as well."

"NEET? ... That's quite a strange name you have."

"It's Neito."

"O-of course. It was a joke. I knew that already, okay?"

Her face was a little pink. Yeah~. How nice. Neito couldn't help but think that. At that moment, the door opened, and a person that looked to be a Metallica staff member called out.

"Komori-san, Mayuzumi-san, Ikeno-san, Suzuki-san, Smith-san, please step in."

It seems the time had come. Come to think of it, he was still in the middle of an evil organization's exam, wasn't he?

"Yes!"

Maki gave a spirit-full reply as she stood from her seat.

"I hope we pass together!"

The girl said that with straight-forward eyes. Now if I just think of this as an airline or media company, and think of this exam as something perfectly normal, then...

“Y-yeah.”

For now, that’s all he could answer.

The interview hall had two middle-aged men, one elderly man, and one woman. They were probably on management.

Of the men, one was wearing a lab coat-ish uniform and an eye patch. Perhaps he was representing the mad scientist side of things.

The other middle-aged one was in good physical shape, with his long hair tied up behind. A trench coat, and even gloves. Was he a fighter?

The old man had white hair, and it was as if he was audibly giving off the aura of a mild mannered grandfather. Is he a bigshot? No, is he purposely misleading?

For some odd reason, the woman looked like a sexualized secretary.

Neito had never undergone an interview, even for part-time work. HE couldn’t help but feel nervous.

By the time it had started, he couldn't tell what was going where. It took all his might for him just to listen to the exchanges of the other interviewees.

"Ikeno-san, would you please state your aspirations in entering our company?"

It seems that handsome one's going first. Do even evil organizations respect them? His head turned around such pointless things, as the man called Ikeno fluidly gave his reply.

"Yes! As long as I can remember, I've held interest in your organization's business policy! While working in an industry with much competition, you have continued to be the top of the market since your founding, and I'd very much like to partake in that vigor! While the goal of world domination may be a grand and distant one, I think the profits that can be reaped from the processes now will prove necessary for your company when it comes time for the twenty second century. I wish to apply to become a part of that driving force for the future!"

Oy, oy, what the hell.

"I see. You have quite some motivation there. Then please state your PR and the department you're hoping to enlist in."

"Yes! In my father's company, I've worked in France from a young... (text omitted) where I went to college overseas, and majored in modern warfare (text omitted), and in my high school

years, I went to the nationals for kendo, and…”

The self-advertisement continued.

Is that guy for real? Neito found himself on the verge of clicking his tongue. So he’s a rich kid from a nice place, handsome, a sportsman, and a scholar? Go die. Why the hell are you applying to Metallica? Go apply to an advertising firm already.

“I plan to contribute no matter what department I’m stationed in, but I want to join the planning department to draft up invasion plans involving mysterious creatures!”

Oh~ I see. Now isn’t that nice. Go die.

Ikeno finished talking, and next up was Maki’s turn.

“I want to triumph over your industry’s rival-like existence, the Rocks. I wanted to aid whatever plans you have against them, and that is why I have applied.”

Rocks… ah, those heroes, right. She sure is a strange one. Aren’t heroes supposed to be everyone’s aspirations? She’s cute, but as I thought, she’s a bit strange. I mean of course she is. She’s applying to an Evil Organization after all.

“I skipped grades, and graduated from America’s MIT, and I hold two PhDs. I think I will be useful to the maintenance and improvement of your company’s resident mysterious creatures.”

But she sure is cute~. And smart too. Amazing. Even so, cute.

In a situation so far-removed from reality, all little Neito could do was send his mind to some far-off land.

“Well then, Komori Neito-san. Please state your reasons for applying.”

He was suddenly snapped back to reality. His first interview. A large company, and evil at that. The expansive personal records of the other candidates. While he was a timid and incompetent NEET. All the conditions were assembled for well-deserved panic.

“I was d-deeply impressed by your company’s ideals…”

“And of what ideals do you speak of?”

“That is, um… well…”

“Do you have a hobby or specialty?”

“… My hobby is the internet, and specialty… well… I’m level three at the abacus.”

“… I see. That’s enough.”

It’s all over. It wasn’t just Neito, the other applicants thought the same.

Maki was taking some fleeting glances at him, and Ikeno was enduring his urge to grin.

Yep. Interview over. Even for evil organizations, finding a job is hard if it’s a major enterprise.

In the first place, me being here was already out of place. Yes, let’s just have some curry on the way home. It was at the moment when Neito had finished changing his train of thought.

The old man who had remained silent up to now opened his mouth.

“I believe you came from the public offering, right?”

The old man’s question seemed to generate quite a stir.

The public offering likely meant that website. Based on his way of speech, that meant the others present were different. And based on this clamor, that must be quite a strange thing.

“I saw it on the net… and…”

“I see, I see. Then I have my own question for you.”

The old man’s words were gentle and kind. As if to put you at ease as you listened to them. But that in itself was scary.

“You want to change the world. You answered that online, did you not?”

The words not coming out, Neito could only nod.

“You want to change the world. Even if that means to destroy the current one?”

? This man sure says some strange things. Now isn’t that obvious. Damn realers, damn conglomerates, damn elites, damn handsome guys. Each and everyone one of them can go get Hyahhah’d and drop dead. After a little while, Neito gave his answer.

(TL: The term go get Hyahhah’d, refers to the standard laughing sound thugs in the wasteland make before they meet, and try to fight a certain master of the Hokuto Shinken. I really don’t know how to translate this one.)

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Maki felt a little relieved as her turn to speak game to an end.

But that feeling was quite a fleeting one indeed.

The boy she had just met today, Neito-kun.

The responses he gave were simply too terrible. To be blunt here, he didn't look like someone who should be there to take the Metallica exam at all. An exam outside the knowledge of the common man, and where only the greatest of elites in every field and other special people were offered listings. It's not like she was looking down on him, she just found it all quite strange.

As his interview continued to go downhill, she struggled to contain her restlessness.

But after that, she found herself a little surprised. Of all things, he had passed the public offering's criteria, and come all the way to the final interview point. She had heard of it in rumor. That unlike those that had to take a number of difficult examinations to reach this stage, there was an unspecified number targeted online that could take a back-door route.

What was needed to find the public offering was a large amount of luck. And to pass the public examination, it seems there was but a single quality that had to be in abundance. There was only ever a single person to be chosen through the public offering. This is only the talk of rumor, but the online examination was said to be one personally written by Metallica's big boss.

Just a single quality. Evil. That was all.

Neito didn't look like a villain. If she had to say, he was reserved, and shy, and a little awkward. That's how she had been looking at

him, and she did have a bit of a favorable impression

So learning he had passed the public offering evaluation, and come all the way here was truly a surprise.

After that, the only elderly person in the room asked Neito his question.

If he wanted to change the world, even if it meant destroying the current one.

Maki felt a shiver run down her spine as she heard the interviewer's question.

Everyone out there had their own dissatisfactions with the world. Doesn't that mean they want to change it to some extent?

But even at the cost of the current world? Was there anyone out there who could give an immediate reply from the bottom of their hearts?

It was something different than just answering everyone should die! With lighthearted feeling. Right?

The old man interviewer's voice had something in it that drew out the true intentions of its listeners. She knew Neito wouldn't tell a lie.

Even if Maki had been given the very same question, she thought that she would have to answer, ‘I don’t know.’

Ikeno san sitting beside her would likely answer, ‘of course,’ with it being an interview and all. Or so he’d try, but with this amount of pressure, she doubted he’d be able to say anything at all.

Neito-kun… Even with it being her interview as well, Maki ended up looking his way.

He raised his face, and answered. Much too plainly, too naturally.

“Ah, yes.”

And at that moment, his expression was simply too natural. But around the boy who looked a little unreliable, for just a brief moment, she thought she saw a jet black flame. It was weak, and faint, but definitely there.

She felt she was being drawn into the depths of his eyes.

Hm… huh…? Why am I… huh?

A moment late, Maki noticed the heightened beating in her chest.

The moment the interview ended, Neito immediately went on his way home. Embarrassed, he didn’t want to remain there any

longer. It's over. I've failed.

At first, I thought it was a joke, or a scam of an employment exam, but for me to fail so miserably at the real thing... Anyone'd get depressed. Let's go get that curry. He thought as he walked down the hallway.

"U-um! Neito-kun!"

If you call out to me, I'll turn around. My social ability isn't that low, though it isn't high enough to pass interviews. He couldn't' help but beat himself up inside, but it's not like Maki had done anything wrong. So while that was going on in his head, he made sure to greet her as calmly as he could.

"Good work back there... Do your best in Metallica. I'll be cheering for you."

When he answered like that, Maki looked down, and fidgeted. She grabbed the hem of her skirt.

? Does she have to use the restroom?

"N-Neito-san, aren't you entering the company too..."

A kind person. Feeling Maki's kindness, his despair and shock only increased.

Perhaps this girl would have been my coworker had I passed... he thought.

“Haha... nope, not happening. There’s no way that one would get me through.”

“Please don’t say something like that.”

Neito thought a bit. About why this person would say such things.

Ah, I see. She feels sorry because she’s the one getting the position.

Oh don’t worry~ you don’t have to pay mind to something like that. I can’t think of you as a person joining an evil organization. Please marry me.

“Then, I’ll be off.”

He felt apologetic for making her so mindful. Neito spoke curtly before walking away.

On that day, in the main underground headquarters of Metallica, a meeting was being held.

“So we can take on Ikeno-kun and Mayuzumi-san, right?”

“Right. Ikeno is qualified enough, and Mayuzumi is... cute, after all.”

“You always bring it to that. Mayuzumi-san is also more than qualified. Just look at her history.”

“Come to think of it, what are we doing about that Komori kid?”

“I mean, it’s just the standard, we deeply apologize, but we are unable to... shtick, right?”

“Wait.”

“Ah! ... Why are you here?”

“Oh, I just thought I’d put my mouth into the employment meeting a bit.”

“Something wrong?”

“That man called Komori. He’s quite an interesting one. You’d be hard pressed to find a loser aura of that extent. The losing team, or something like that? Right now he’s just a brat sulking at the world, but if you polish him up, you might find a gemstone in him. Can’t you put him in with respect to me?”

The meeting lasted two hours.

And another two hours after that, a single letter was delivered to Neito's doorstep.

"How rare. Mail for me... hm... eh? Huh? Fo realz? Let's just look over the contents again and.... Whoooooooooooooooooooooooooh!!!!"

From April onwards, I'll be an Evil Organization's new hire.

It was a phrase that he felt would make him burst into laughter if he said it aloud, so he decided to whisper it in his heart.

Chapter 3: Appointed Position

After the employment notice had arrived, a few months had gone by. Naturally enough, Neito had spent them quite restlessly. He tried loitering around the insides of his house, suddenly took up weight training as he watched anime, and thought to tell one of his few acquaintances about his employment, but the latter was a bit too great a hurdle. It was an evil organization, after all.

Come to think of it, what would I even be doing at work? Probably something like planning out and drafting criminal acts.

Right after I had gotten the acceptance letter, I had sent in a positive reply at the prospects of employment, but looking back, I never really confirmed the specifics of my duties, or my standing or anything like that.

Let's look over the documents again. No, perhaps muscle training first? And so he spent his time, and eventually the day of his formal entry came upon him.

The designated location was a building in the same district as the interview hall. Perhaps this was their public guise. Is it a separate enterprise Metallica made as a dummy?

The receptionist was the same large-breasted woman from the interview. I was too nervous back then to pay much attention, but looking closely, she's quite something. Waved chestnut hair, and kind eyes. An older sister character.

Does it feel good here? Oh, me? I could imagine the words from her mouth.

“Welcome to Metallica. Please make your way to the conference room♪. You will be undergoing guidance there today.”

Her voice was quite comforting on the ears. Maybe it would be best if she wasn’t assigned to receptionist work, and was transferred to honey trap some influential politician. Or so Neito began to boorishly fantasize.

This goes without saying, but there were new hires apart from him. It’s not like he was skilled at dealing with people, and he didn’t have fond memories of his classmates, or peers. So what he was really hoping for at the moment, was that his fellow new recruits were nice people.

Due to the peculiar nature of the company, he knew he was praying for a contradiction. Come to think of it, was Maki there? The though crossed his mind.

“Ah.”

But when he entered the room, the one there wasn’t Maki. A slender and tall figure, of refined features, in an expensive suit.

It’s that guy. The one who was with him in the interview. The high-spec handsome one.

“Um~...”

The handsome man also sent him a glance.

“Huh? So you were accepted?”

It was a tone that spoke lengths in itself of how surprised he was. But Neito himself felt the same, so he could understand the sentiment.

“Eh, ah, yeah.”

The man stared at him intently.

He had mentally told him to die a few times in the interview, but they were going to be working together from here on. If possible, Neito wanted to be able to get along.

“... Hmm~. Well. Good for you, I guess. Regular? General?”

Metallica’s employees were largely divided into regular posts, and general posts.

“Yes, general for me.”

“Ah~ yes, yes. I see. That’s nice.”

The wage prospects of the two were quite a ways apart. They were just about as separated as a pilot and a taxi driver.

The air turned a little uncomfortable.

And with that timing, the door opened.

“Good day… Ah! Neito-kun! You were accepted! That’s great~!”

The one who entered was Maki. Her hair had grown a little since he’d last seen her at the interview, and its flaxen sheen made it look even more appealing. The tension of the room somehow cleared a bit.

“T-thank you, so you also got in Maki-s”

“Oh, so you were hired as well. I was sure you would be.”

The handsome face was the faster of the two to call out to her.

“Thank you, u~m, likewise, Hotokeno-san!”

“I’m Ikeno.”

Halleluiah. She totally remembered me. Neito rejoiced inside, but didn’t show it on the surface.

That aside, it looked to be that the three gathered were the only ones who made it. After a while, the same receptionist from before entered with a man who looked to be an official.

“Everyone’s gathered. Then we will be moving on to announcing assignments, and guidance.”

Neito hadn’t found employment since he graduated. Of course, it was the first time he would have his assignment decided for him.

The fact he was employed to begin with means they had evaluated some ability of his, and they were sure to send him to a job suited for that. He himself hadn’t the slightest idea what he could do, but still, he couldn’t contain his excitement. The official man started listing off in a low voice.

“Ikeno Reiji. You have been assigned to the planning department’s first planning division.”

“Yes.”

Oh~. So he had a name like Reiji? What did the planning department do again? He does look quite smart after all. Amazing~.

Is it that? Does he plan the assassination of VIPs, and the strategic points to blow up?

“Mayuzumi Maki. You have been assigned to the General Affairs

Department's General Affairs Division."

"Yes!"

"By the way, I'm also on general affairs. I'll be sure to guide you kindly."

So Maki-san's in general affairs? She said she wanted to improve the mysterious buildings, so I think she wanted to be in the R&D department. But still, for her to be in the same branch as the receptionist... Isn't that just perfect? General affairs~. Is it a place the pretties are deployed to? Maybe it's the place I'm supposed to drop by to turn in a receipt.

Now then, it was Neito's turn next. From what he could remember, it had been quite a while since his heart had danced so much.

"Komori Neito. You have been assigned to the General Affair's Department's affiliate Misc. Division."

"Y-yes."

?? Miscellaneous? What's that supposed to be again? Neito tried to recall all the company documents he had read through.

He got the feeling they were written of in the smallest corner of a page.

“That is all. Ikeno, Mayuzumi, proceed to the new employee training course at once!”

“Yes!”

?? Training course? It’s been bothering me for a while, but Ikeno and Maki both had trunk cases with them. Large ones at that, as if they were going off on a trip.

“While your destination may be Hawaii, please remember that your purpose is training. Don’t get too lively.”

Hawaii? To Neito, it was a bolt from the blue. He hadn’t prepared for that at all. And wait, he didn’t even have a passport. Was anything like that in the pamphlet? Crap, a huge mistake right off the bat? Before he could fly into a panic, he decided to be upfront about it.

“Um… my preparations… are…”

The official showed off a questioning expression as he continued.

“Its standard for the Misc. Division to proceed straight to the work site.”

“Hah?”

“Do you understand the Miscellaneous Division’s purpose?”

“… No. I’m sorry.”

“Well, to be direct, they’re combatants. Though they’re in charge of handling odd jobs as well. Haven’t you ever seen them on TV?”

Yep. I sure have. Those ones wearing black-ish clothes and peculiar masks, those guys. They appear alongside the mysterious beings, and get beaten black and blue by the Hero, those guys. Those guys that more often than not take on the police.

Those guys that make the children burst into tears. So those were normal people doing that?

Well damn. This is quite bad. Neito’s tension dropped off all at once.

I don’t mean to brag, but I don’t have any fighting experience. Being sent off to the work site without any training at all? For realz?

“Ah, I see. You have it rough. You general workers. Well, have at it. Mayuzumi-san, shall we be off?”

Ikeno no longer seemed to think anything of young Neito.

Maki nervously called out.

“D-don’t worry about it! Neito-kun! Well… um… they say that work is experience over theory, don’t they!”

This girl reminds me a bit of a loyal dog. Or so an irrelevant thought flew across his mind.

“Komori. Your post will be…”

The contents weren’t entering his head.

Komori Neito

Metallica LLC, Miscellaneous Division General Worker (Monthly Salary 135,000¥)

Chapter 4: Hey You Guys, Let Me Hit You

The day after the welcoming ceremony. As instructed, Neito proceeded directly to his station at the Miscellaneous Division.

To be more precise, it was one of the many Miscellaneous Division branches spread out across the country. In an area on the outskirts of town overflowing with arehouses, it was a place that gave off the feeling of a backstreet workshop.

He had slowly started to understand it, but the facilities and people of the Evil Organization Metallica all had separate titles for public eyes.

There were ten people stationed at his worksite. The highest ranked was the supervisor. The members there were all wearing work clothes, and it didn't look to be that they were doing any work.

"I will be in your care from today onwards. My name is Komori. Please treat me well!"

Neito had put quite a bit of effort into his self-introduction on his own part, but the reactions to it were questionable. An atmosphere as if to say, well good for you.

"Komori-kun, it's exceedingly rare for a general worker to be taken on by the main branch. Um, how should we handle this..."

In that atmosphere, the supervisor looked around, and called out to a young and stour man.

“Oy~. Eda-kun. Can you look after young Komori-kun?”

The man called Eda painstakingly clicked his tongue, before standing.

“Eh? Me~... tsk, I understand. Oy, fresh meat. Come o’er here.”

Eda lit a cigarette, and sluggishly called over to Neito.

What’s with this guy? Can he act as a combatant with that weight of his? And wait, is it really fine to smoke normally at work?

A word that had been coming up a lot lately ran across his mind.

Sweatshop.

Come to think of it, everyone in the Misc. Division was a general worker, it seems. A dangerous job with low wages, and in the first place, they were something of sacrificial pawns to the Evil Organization. There’s no way their work environment would be a good one. Is there even a concept of morals?

Will it just be those guys who couldn’t even become thugs or gangsters, so they though, oh well, let’s go off and join Metallica, then?

He didn't have a regular position like Maki or Ikeno. With its vast power, Metallica committed its heinous acts on a global scale. They were the elites to manage the grand task. While a commoner like Neito wasn't aware of it, the organization only hired those sorts from the zenith of every field, and up there, its existence and operation as a company was common sense. They were a major enterprise with world-level influence. While the contents of their business were a bit special, it was understandable why so many elites gathered.

Even so... there was too much a gap, was there not?

"Oy, fresh meat! What're you standin' around there for?"

The jeers of the fatty came my way.

"Y-yes! My apologies!"

"Can ya' use a gun?"

"Eh? No, I cannot."

"Well 'n, you do any martial arts er somethin'?"

"No... not really."

"Can ya' at least make explosives?"

“…”

After the series of questions, Eda loudly scratched his head as he muttered.

“… Useless…”

“Eh?”

What an unbelievable workplace. Neito had yet to do anything, but he already wanted to turn and go home.

“List’n here. Make sure you’re able ta do somethin’ by tomorrow. I’m busy, so go try ‘n pick somethin’ up on yer own. Weapons besides guns are o’er in that there locker. You’ll need ta submit an application if ya wanna handle guns er expolsives.”

Putting out the cigarette that had burned close to the base, Eda spread out a sports newspaper, and the conversation was over. Or at least, that’s what his attitude stated.

Astonished as he was, there’s no way Neito could oppose. For starters, he went and opened up the locker, and tried following orders.

From there, a few hours passed, but in that timeframe, the only words Eda sent over were, ‘can you go buy me a juice?’ alone.

A little later, regardless of work hours, Eda pulled out his phone.

“Oh? Ya’ done now? Eh? For real? For really real!? How many were ya’ up against? Ooh, nice. Reeeaal nice~. OK, the bar ‘n front of the station, right? Well ‘n, seeya there.”

“Um… Eda-san…?”

“Yeah, nice work.”

Eda left quite naturally.

For reals… that fatty… went and left. They what exactly do you expect me to do? There should be some sort of limit to evil, shouldn’t there?

Besides being at a loss, there’s nothing a NEET could do here.

The same situation continued on to the next day as well. On the third day, Eda made a proposal, as if he had just remembered it all at that moment.

“Come ta think of it, did you get to be able ta use ‘t? Have a practice battle with me next week.”

“Hah?”

That was quite a sudden utterance there. What's that supposed to be. A practice battle?

"Practice battle… in what exactly?"

"Huh? I said it, didn't I? It's something the Misc. Division does with its new recruits. If you end up no good, it's the pink slip. I'm going home here, but make sure ya clean up before ya call it a day."

The scene before Neito's eyes went pitch black. Well, he understood the rule. There's no helping it if a rule like that was made. If anything else, this was the lowest tier that actually did the active work. There's no helping it if you turn out to be no use at all. If you went off to battle like that, there'd be no helping death. It would be something like a final examination after a trial period.

Yes, I get that part. But.

Then what exactly am I supposed to do? Since I got assigned here, I haven't been told to do anything but get juice, and clean up.

Even if he looks like that, Eda's worked for Metallica's Miscellaneous Division for two years. And even if that was his first venture into the world of crime, his battle prowess was, at the very least, over mine.

Rather than that, perhaps Eda anticipated all of that, and therefore didn't train me at all.

This is bad. Way too bad. At this rate, I'm going to be beaten left and right, sustain serious injuries, and get cut to top it all off.

"... Maybe it's over for me."

Left behind, Neito couldn't help but mutter.

Fine. I don't care, I'll just quite a company like this. With such thoughts running through his mind, he went and took a mop in hand, and began to clean. The company had shown him a small ray of hope after all. He'd pay it back at the very least.

"Still so young. You can go home for the day."

To Neito, one of the workers. A middle-aged man he hadn't talked with much before. Neito got the feeling his name was something along the lines of Manaka Toshio.

"No, but cleaning's still..."

"You don't have to worry about something like that. It's not too dirty to begin with, right? You just cleaned it up yesterday after all."

How surprising. He was sure no one had paid the slightest mind to how he cleaned the place.

“You haven’t eaten anything today, have you? I’ll treat you, so keep me company for a drink.”

This is that. That workplace bonding thing. Neito hesitated a bit. He had, for argument’s sake, reached the legal drinking age, but he had yet to go out drinking with another human begin, let alone a coworker from the same company.

“Sure…”

He gave a powerless reply. Manaka was different from Eda. He looked like a decent person. Since he was going to quit the place anyways, it would be best to pick up some experience. Or so he determined.

The place he was taken to was a slightly-aged oden stand. It was a little dirty, but its prices were cheap, and the variety of its oden was plentiful.

Manaka sparingly drank a dilute shochu, as he munched on some daikon. It looked quite appetizing. Neito hadn’t the slightest idea on the proper etiquette to drinking with a senior worker, so he just stared at him a while.

(TL: Shochu is an alcohol usually around 50 proof distilled from various Japanese ingredients. I can’t tell you any more, really. I’m a minor after all. Daikon is a variety of radish. Oden is just various ingredients stewed in a soup stock.)

“Oh, go ahead and eat. Not that it’s anything special.”

“… Okay.”

The oden that entered his mouth was warm. He exchanged some unskillful conversation as he filled his stomach.

“You’re sure an unlucky one. Accepted by the main company, then suddenly sent off to Misc.”

Manaka spoke bit by bit.

“Not really…”

“Hey be honest here. Is this really how Metallica is gonna treat me, you must’ve thought.”

Getting a little more comfortable, Neito let out his true feelings.

“… Yes, a little…”

“Haha. A little, is it? I think it year round. Those guys up there don’t even know how it feels to be on the site, and they just keep on setting up their unreasonable goals.

I can’t deal with it. My salary’s less’n half the regular posts. And despite that, it’s always, your deployment was slow, or your costs

are too high... I don't think there's any helping it when people like Eda lose their motivation, you know?

Based on what I'd seen of how Manaka carried himself in the few day's I've been here, it didn't look like he was sulking or anything. So I had to ask.

"Manaka-san... if all that's going on, then why can you work so hard?"

"Well, a man's gotta support his wife and kids after all."

I see. The working adults have it rough. A father's troubles, that sort of thing... The moment before Neito may have been able to feel for him. Manaka looked out far into the distance, and continued.

"And you see. World domination, you see. I want to cling onto it. Even like this, when I was young, I was sure I was going to change the world. I always looked up to an evil organization that may be able to do something like that. And I'm finally in one."

It was the same. That portion was considerably similar to how Neito felt before he got in the company.

"That is..."

"Haha, stupid, right? This from some underling old mook, right?"

His bashful laughing face gave a childish sort of impression opposed to the words coming from his mouth

“No, I didn’t say anything like…”

At that moment. A loud voice came from the park near the oden stand. Sirens began to blare.

“… Guardian, huh.”

Manaka muttered.

Guardian: it was a public order institution established to combat the influx of Evil Organizations not too long ago. It was also a nickname to refer to the members of said organization.

Of course, the police still existed as their own organization, but the Guardian’s power and influence was placed on a higher tier. An existence that had gained quite a bit of authority to oppose Evil Organizations. They were much more proactive than the existing police force, and it wasn’t rare for there to be cases where force was used. Their laws were rigid, and they were truly strong. They were sometimes even called the realizers of order.

They were different from the mysterious heroes that moved individually, the Rocks, but anyways, they were allies of justice.

Naturally, they were an enemy to Metallica.

Could it be they came to suppress us? Neito panicked for a moment, after listening to the shouts, he could tell it was something different. They were yelling high-handedly at someone outside.

What should I do. It doesn't look like that cat's out of the bag, but is it best we run? When neito began to think along those lines, Manaka by his side slowly rose.

"Manaka-san?"

"Hmm? Ah, I'll be off for a bit. Boss, put it on my tab."

"Sure thing, Toshio-san. You haven't changed a bit, have you. You're not young anymore, so pushing yourself too much is poison on your body."

After Manaka paid some money to the stands owner, he walked outside.

? Didn't he just say tab? Then what did he pay for?

Neito hurriedly turned to follow him. In that park nearby, just as Manaka had said, the Guardians were there.

Characteristic white protective equipment, and keiren cyclist-

like helmets. They held batons in their hands. It was the standard dress for Guardians on duty. Those were the guys for C Rank general security or something.

The three guardians were drawing near some homeless man who'd erected a cardboard house to stave off the wind.

"Oy! It's a violation of city code to build up a cardboard house here! Demolish it at once!!"

"Y-you can't... if you drive me out of here now, then what do you expect me to do... I'll die in this cold... I'll leave tomorrow, so... please...!"

It seems an eviction order was given in regards to the man. I see, well what he's doing is quite definitely illegal, I'm sure.

"Not my business!! It's a violation, a violation! You get it? Old man?"

"Yeah~. This really is a pain. Just make it quick already. Go off to the park of the town next door. It's out of our jurisdiction, so we'll let it slide."

Neito felt a sense of discomfort at the Guardians' overbearing tone of speech. They truly weren't evil. But he didn't feel the urge to cheer them on at all.

"..."

Neito shut his mouth, and quietly watched the scene. But Manaka beside him was different.

“This is why Guardians are…”

“!? Manaka-san!?”

Without the chance to be stopped, Manaka went and walked up to the Guardians.

“Hey, yes, you Gars over there. Yeah, you guys. Let me hit you around a bit.”

Chapter 5: Oy, Eda

At the sudden intruder, even the Guardians hesitated a bit.

“Who are you!? What is your intent!?”

But Manaka displayed a fearless smile, and answered in a subdued voice.

“Well you see, I’m... Metallica. Do you think Metallica needs a reason to do bad things?”

What!!?? Neito was much more surprised than the Guardians could ever be. He couldn’t think it sane to name yourself a member of a famous evil organization before the enforcers of justice.

“W-what!? What did you just say!?”

As expected, the Guardians held up their batons, and entered a vigilant formation. They likely weren’t any amateurs. Could a member of that Miscellaneous Division, Manaka, really do anything against them?

He had barely been in contact with the man, but Neito couldn’t help but worry for his safety. He was aware of the shaking of his own legs. That person definitely isn’t a bad person. No, perhaps he is, but I can’t feel that way about him. Even so...!

“Yeah, quite your shouting. If you’re going to do it, then come at me already!”

Quite separated from Neito’s worries, Manaka strongly provoked the armed Guardians.

“Arrest him—!!!”

They came down on him all at once. He’ll be taken in at once, at this rate… or so Neito thought, but the result was different.

“Keh…! Grah!!”

Manaka kicked the park’s sandbox with all his might, pouring its sand down on the men.

And…

“Well then!!”

Perhaps it had entered his eyes. One of the guardians faltered a bit, and Manaka proceeded to deliver a bit boot to his body before pinning his arms to his back.

“Wha…!?”

“Oh, don’t move! Want me to snap his neck?”

The remaining two Guardians halted at his words.

“Bastard... using sand and hostages... how cowardly!! Have you no shame!!?”

“What? I said it the very start, right? I’m a villain.”

He was quite quick to say it. He pushed the pinned man out towards his two friends, and when their stances crumbled to catch him, he got in another blow. A dull sound resounded through the dark park.

“H-he’s strong! ...And wait...”

Horrible. Thought Neito, but he didn’t say it aloud. Yes it was cowardly, and terrible, but so what, he thought.

“The young Guardians they put on night patrol, you think those guys that just flocked in from college can lay a hand on my twenty years of fighting?”

Manaka left it that, left them aside, and proceeded towards the homeless again.

“E-eek!! It’s Metallica!!”

They were scared of him, shrinking away while seated on the

ground.

“Oy, you. Keep your mouth shut, go to that oden shop over there, and eat a meal. Well, the taste isn’t anything special, though. For now, it’ll be something to fill your stomach.”

“…? You…”

The homeless man hesitated on how to reply to the mismatched statements of the villain who had suddenly made his entrance. Looking upon the scene, Neito felt just a little warmth in his chest.

“… Manaka… -san… ah!”

Far away as he was, there was something only Neito could have noticed. One of the guardians that had been beaten down before was unsteadily rising to his feet, taking his gun from its holster.

And its muzzle was fixing on Manaka.

“U… u… uwaaaaaaaaah!!!!!”

His legs moved faster than his head. Raising a strange battle cry, Neito ran.

Defying a Guardian wasn’t something any sane man would do. More so when the opponent had a gun in hand. No decent person would even think to try it. I mean, the enemy was justice, and an

existence that carried it out. Unless you were an outlaw with some built up experience, everyone would do the same. Yes, that's why I'll run. Right. Run, and run...

I was sure my legs were supposed to be pointed to flee, but...

Neito was running straight towards the Guardian holding up the gun.

"Waaaaaaaaah!!!"

It was a pitiful body blow without the least bit of training or theory behind it. But its effects were massive on a Guardian who could barely stand on his feet. The Guardian let off a strange, 'kyuu' sound before falling to the floor.

Because he had sone something so unfamiliar, Neito himself fell as well.

But Manaka soon came to extend his hand, and help him up.

"See, you do have it in you, Neito. You saved me there. Though normally, you should hesitate a bit more. You know, there might be more bad in you than your appearance suggests."

Manaka said that with a grin.

"He... hehehe..."

Two villains had beaten down some allies of justice in the park that night. Neito felt a little strange himself, and he ended up laughing. Just for a little longer, I'll try and stay with this job, with Metallica. That night, Neito thought that as he successfully returned to his house.

From the next day, his training began. His current goal was the practice battle with the one charged with training him, Eda.

The one who had gotten along well with him since that night, Manaka, would offer him advice during lunch and other break times. There wasn't nearly enough time for him to put any real martial arts to heart, so he was only training a usable move or two.

According to Manaka, Eda was apparently a former sumo. He didn't accomplish anything that great in the field, but still, that was some dreadful news to Neito.

There's no way he would win going about it normally.

"Well, just put your all into it. It's not like a loss'll get you instantly fired or anything. It's enough to show off some of your good parts. I'll put in a word too."

Manaka tried calling out during lunch break, but...

"What should I do... conceal a knife, and stab him with the element of surprise...? Or maybe poison... no, that's wrong.

Something… isn't there's something…?"

"O-oy, Neito."

"Ah"

It seems he was lost in thought.

"I'm sorry, Manaka-san. What were you saying?"

"N-no. It's nothing,"

"?"

For some reason, Maka was staring fixatedly into Neito's face. He looked a little surprised.

"What is it?"

"Hey, you. You really have never been in another organization or something before, right? What's your criminal record?"

Just what could Manaka-san be saying? Do I, who's never gotten into a fight, who's never even broken a school regulation, who's– if I really had to say– been on the bullied side of things, really look like such a villain to you? Neito's thoughts turned a little strange as he looked at Manaka's exaggerated expression.

“Surely you jest. There’s no way I have anything like that. More importantly, Manaka-san, can you teach me a little bit more about Eda-sn?”

“Y-yeah. Right… then…”

He altered his training, and carried out all the preparations he could. For now, that’s all he could do.

And the days passed all too fast, the day of their bout at hand. Weapons and poisons banned, knocking down the opponent once is their loss. No killing. With those rules in place, all prior preparations are fare game. Fight like a member of Metallica, was all that was announced.

“Neito… can you do it?”

Manaka was making a worried expression. But if we were talking anxiety, Neito had far surpassed him.

“Oy, oy, fresh meat! I hope you’ve trained at least a bit like I told ya’. If yer too weak, ah may end up beatin’ ya’ too far, okay? Not that there’s any helpin’ how useless you are. We don’t wanna have you drop the evaluation of the one in charge a trainin’ you, me, as well, do we?”

His opponent, Eda, was messily chewing on gum, with a leisurely expression.

Damn, what an irritating fellow. The only thing I've ever learned from you is the variety of juices at the vending machine down the street. Go get diabetes, and die. Neito was half full of such anger.

Crap, I'm screwed. If that fatty hits me for real, I'll die. Our weight classes are too different, if you think about it logically. The other half was such fear.

He had prepared. But would he be able to carry it out?

"Are~ You~ All~ Right~? Did ya' go take care of yer' business? You don' wanna piss yerself when I'm beatin' you."

He raised a vulgar laughing voice.

This bastard... no, I'm still scared after all.

"Then let the match begin!"

With that mixed sentiment, the match's start was announced. The signal came from the supervisor, of whom you could never really tell if he was there or not, or if he even existed, but his voice was surprisingly eminent.

"Orah!"

Eda's jab. I can't dodge. For a fatty, he's fast! What's more, as he

wasn’t ready for it, the impact of a single jab was considerable.

“… Uuh… kuh…!”

“Hey, hey.”

Even now, a stream of jabs. Without being able to raise a limb, Neito was beaten black and blue. He knew he could fall at any moment.

“I won’t… I don’t want to lose…! I… don’t want to… lose!!”

But the difference in ability was ruthless. Even if he wrung out the guts he rarely ever used, that gap wasn’t filled in! Overwhelming offense. He was receiving enough damage that even Neito himself was surprised he could remain standing, but still, he didn’t fall over.

It no longer looked like a match, but simple violence. Only one onlooker, Manaka, seemed to be waiting for something as he looked over Neito.

“I’ve had enough. Yer too weak. Let’s just pin you already.”

Perhaps he wasn’t blessed with much stamina, as before long, Eda came to grasp at Neito. It was a bear hug. But he would squeezing with ample force, in an attempt to drop his opponent. That’s all there was to it, but that move was Eda’s specialty.

The moment before he could be grabbed. In Neito's hazy mind, the words of the recruitment ad abruptly played back.

Do you want to change the world? YES

Continuing on to the interviewer's question at the interview.

Even if that means to destroy the current one? YES

I answered yes to those questions. Did I take them too lightly? I mean, of course I did at first. But I've given it a bit of thought since then. Since the time I answered it online. By the time the interview came around, I could answer it quite normally. But those were my real thoughts. They're what I believe. My life up to now, and the current society. I want to change it, and it will change. That's what I answered. And yet, you think it will end here?

No. It's always been like that. I was weak. The world was harsh. And I didn't change. I kept running. The world didn't change. The world cornered me. That's why I was a NEET. Without any aspirations, just a NEET.

But not this time. I felt there was something special. Here in Metallica. I don't get what that something is yet, but I won't let it all end here.

If I answered I wanted to change the world, then world aside, what do you think it'll mean if I can't even manage the fatty before

my eyes?

I... I... I I...!!!!

Neito fel a black tainted water begin to pour into his heart.

“Oy, Eda.”

He was in his grasp, and it was the moment before any power was put into the hold. Neito addressed Eda in a low voice.

Chapter 6: Well, Of Course

“Oy, Eda.”

What did that guy say just now? Oy, Eda or somehin’? The weaklin’ who hasn’t offered a word of resistance, this guy did? To me? To a former sumo and a senior in Metallica, no honorifics, huh?

“Are you listening, Eda?”

“… You……!?”

Neito’s expression was cold enough to send shivers down his spine. His eyes looked as if darkness itself had resided in them. Black, and deep. There’s something scary in this man. That’s how he felt. From this guy I’ve been overwhelming for a while? Why?

“… Hey, you know your sister? The one that lives in Setagaya? Yeah, the one that finishes badminton practice at 7:00 p.m., and goes straight home? Truly an exemplary high school girl there. But she walks that path home alone, you know. Now doesn’t that sound dangerous?”

What was he saying? Seriously, what is this guy saying? If I don’t down him soon, he’ll be dangerous.

That’s how Eda felt.

“Her house is on the third block, her room on the second floor, facing due west. It seems you’ve cut ties with your parents, but you treat that sisters of your quite dearly. To even give her Christmas and birthday presents every year, you really are a nice guy, aren’t you?”

His junior coworker indifferently continued on. This is strange. This guy is strange.

“You told me on the first day, but our locker here... it sure has a lot of things in it. It sure is amazing that a form’s all you need to bring out a gun or bomb.”

He was scared. He was scared of such a weak man. Eda had forgotten. That strength wasn’t the only thing to make a person hold fear. There was something far more basic: malice. To something like that, strength was irrelevant. It was scary in itself that such a thing was pointed at him.

Eda was a known delinquent from his school days. From that experience, he could plainly tell. This guy is no delinquent. He’s evil.

“You still don’t get it? In this match, killing was banned, right? That’s why you won’t be able to kill me. And you see, I don’t want to lose.”

“W-what are you saying...!?”

“Now if you end up defeating me, then I can’t say for certain what might happen to that sister of yours.”

A shudder. His response to the cold voice Neito let out could only be described as such.

“...! Wa... it...”

“Don’t want to. Now here’s what’s going to happen. I’m going to hit you. You’re going to be hit, and fall.”

“Wha...!?”

“You can dodge it if you want. But if you do, I’m going to peacefully forfeit this match. And after that...”

“Stop!!”

His mind couldn’t keep up. But at the very least, he could tell it didn’t sound like a bluff. It’s quite probable this man would do it all for real. And if he tried to stop him, he’d just take another measure. So to stop him, there was no other option but to kill this man. But in a workplace practice battle? Surely you’re joking.

“...!!”

The pride of the man called Eda wasn’t something stable enough to stand against ill intent of this level being sent his way.

The gentle punch Neito sent made a dull sound as it stuck into his body. Eda fell down quite unnaturally, and the match ended.

“Winner, Komori!”

The supervisor let out the decisive call. Thank god It looks like it went well.

To be honest, I wasn’t really sure it’d work out. Ah~ thank goodness.

“Fu… thank god… he… hehe…”

Neito took a deep breath in relief at his current victory.

Perhaps because he had quite consciously let out an unfamiliar tone of speech, the fatigue set in on him severely. And in the first place, his entire body was in pain.

But he had won. With a gentle punch.

The winner was much more beaten up than the loser. But even so, Neito felt a sense of fulfillment… however…

“That was dirty! Dammit!!”

After the match had ended, Eda declare what was on his mind.

The life of his sister was taken hostage. This match is null and void. He wanted to assert that.

?? I mean… huh? That's no good? Why?

"Eh? Eda-san? Why are you so angry? I mean, you let me win after all, so there's no way I'll do anything to your sister! What do you have to be angry about?"

Yep. It's a good thing he was such an understanding person. Is what Neito had thought.

"That's not what this is about!! You even used such a dirty bluff!! Even I won't be able to concentrate if you say somethin' like that in the middle of a match!"

Eda said that in a rage. This is bad, I think he's coming to hit me. This time, I'm so dead.

What should I do? In the first place, this person is making quite a fundamental misunderstanding.

"Lay off him, Eda!! A bluff that looks cowardly is but a single sort of strategy!! I said to fight like a member of Metallica, didn't I!!? Vicious means are fair game!!"

The supervisor held back a rampaging Eda. Yep, for now, let's run away. I did win, for argument's sake. Yeah, let's leave it at that.

Neito left the area, and Manaka followed behind to talk to him.

"You did it! I never thought you'd be able to say something like that! Hooray! We'll have a celebration tonight!"

A bit roughly, Manaka was praising him. A little into his congratulations, Manaka spoke as if he just remembered something.

"... Hey, Neito. If... Eda had chosen to ignore what you were saying, and defeated you... what did you plan on doing?"

Eh? Even Manaka-san's saying something like that?

"? Then of course I would have inflicted harm unto his dear sister."

I flat out said that at the very start. Why is everyone acting so strange?

Of course, I wouldn't want to do such a thing. So I really was glad when Eda folded like that. I mean, if it didn't go like that, I'd end up doing it for real.

Neito hadn’t noticed. That the special talent he had had begun to sprout. And that normal society would never evaluate a trait as black as his.

Chapter 7: What Exactly Is That Guy Doing?

From the day after Neito's practice battle with Eda, slight as it was, his work environment began to change for the better.

It wasn't a matter of wages, but mainly training. Following the results of that battle, Eda began to hold some animosity towards him, and therefore, Neito training partner was swapped out to Manaka.

It was all Neito could wish for.

"Wrong, wrong. You watching? A stun rod will disperse the same electricity no matter where you hit, so you don't need to swing it around like that. Do it with the intentions of pricking your opponent a bit."

"You'll first need some stamina if you want to fire a gun. For now, it's best you jump rope, and do some muscle training."

"Work to the best of your ability to prevent having to fight empty handed. When you've got nothing on you, it's best you grab whatever's close by. Even pebbles."

And various other bits of advice. Neito was able to learn quite a few techniques that couldn't be considered respectable. Of course, he wasn't able to gain those abilities instantly or anything. It's not like his athleticism was good to start out with, and he retained his lack of stamina. He tried with all his might to gain the basics at the level of an amateur imitating them. Strangely enough, Manaka,

who was so assertive in teaching him all the technical skills, didn't' say a single thing about the thought process he should use to take action, or the right heart or anything like that.

Curious about that, Neito tried asking once.

"You don't need it. For something like that, just move how you see fit. Ah~ but if there's something I have to say, it's got to be that. We're the bottom of the pecking order, but... you should probably start thinking of what Metallica should do with the world, and what you want to do yourself."

Or so he answered, but I didn't really get it. For some reason, Manaka's expression was serious, so I gave an honest nod, and since then, I've begun to think over what an Evil Organization could accomplish, and what I wanted to do.

World domination? That's a process, and a means. Not a goal... apparently.

"Maybe you won't know it for a while. But you should go find it. If you can, then I'm sure you'll..."

He stopped speaking there, but his words had been heavy.

Whatever the case, he was reliable, and a senior at my workplace I got along well with. With such a relation, and a training to keep him occupied, Neito felt a sense of fulfillment.

On top of carrying out odd jobs around the place, he shed sweat as he trained. That was a first for him, and while tiring things were tiresome, he got paid for it, and the feeling of learning something new every day was quite refreshing.

The workplace couldn't be called wholesome, but even so. He felt something like the value of manual labor.

In the mornings, he even began training by himself at the riverbed.

The contents of said training: 'practicing to fly off in a dramatic fashion, when hit, and pretending to stay down,' 'practicing to creep up without making sound, and take them out from behind,' 'practicing to dodge through rolling,' 'practicing to throw your jacket to take away their vision' etcetera, truly underhanded, and all acts that, if looked upon from the side, would make one wonder what the hell the man was doing. But there was no helping it.

He even experienced some practical business dealings.

He made sure not to ask the specifics, but Neito was part of the team that transported a mysterious load to the harbor, he helped offer security for a large-scale gambling facility, and various other things.

Just once, he experienced battle. The information on one of Metallica's research organizations was leaked to the Guardians, and they were about to barge in to investigate. That facility was small in scale, and none too special, but even so, they couldn't just

let the data within it seep to the outside, so Neito's team was dispatched to a point nearby.

Basically, while a different squadron was busy disposing of all the data, they had to buy time form the Guardians. There were five enemies. That was the first time Neito had ever equipped Metallica's Miscellaneous Branch's uniform, their combat clothes.

The combat uniform was a black fiber-textured track-suit like thing with partial red protectors attached around, and on top of that, a black visor-equipped mask came with it as a set.

To be honest, when he first put on the suit, meaning right before battle, Neito's tensions rose quite a bit.

"Whoooh. No matter how you look at me, I look just like a grunt for an evil organization. But it's a little cool, ain't it?"

Those were his impressions. By the way, that suit wasn't something like the reinforced suits a portion of the Rocks wore. It didn't really have anything that strengthened the body's physical ability, and it didn't heighten one's senses. It was just a little sturdy, relatively light for its durability, and that was all. IT did have knuckle guards for argument's sake, but those likely weren't going to be of much use.

But the feeling of playing the part had quite some appeal to it.

Oh, about the battle that followed, but it wasn't really anything

special. Neito was tasked with moving around in the back, and launching nets to bind the enemies trying to damage his comrades.

During break and after work hours, he would eat and go out to drink. He was generally with Manaka.

“Ah~ I’m tired. The beer sure is nice.”

“I’d say so.”

“I really wonder what was in today’s cargo~.”

“Well of course, it’s gots to be weapons or gold or illegally produced stuff, right?”

“Wow. That’s clearly unlawful, isn’t it?”

“Need you even ask? Oh, how about a shochu next?”

“Sure.”

“Today’s Gars sure were weak.”

“Not that I did anything.”

“No, no, for now, you’re faring fine.”

“No~. Ah, is it alright I order the negima?”

“Oh, go ahead, go ahead.”

(TL: Negima is a dish of tuna and onions, usually a skewer, or stew)

“Hey, you have a girlfriend?”

“…”

“H-hey?”

“There are good things and bad things to ask a person, Manaka-san. Let’s turn this around. Do you think I have a girlfriend?”

“… N-no, that’s…”

“I was a NEET until recently, I’m poor, none too handsome, and an otaku, and at present, I’m a low time goon for an evil organization.”

“… Sorry.”

“No, don’t mind it…”

“T-then how about that? A girl you’re interested in, or one you’re getting along well with…?”

“… There’s this girl Mayuzumi-san who’s in the same business, but…”

“O-oh!! What sort of girl!?”

“I really wonder what she’s doing right around now.”

“Oy, oy!”

It’s not like anything happened in particular. Even so, he was tired out by work and training, and continued his hardships in a work environment you couldn’t really call favored. But…

Neito didn’t find it harsh.

Such days continued to fly by.

But change is something that drops by without warning. Two months into that, the Miscellaneous Members of the team Neito, Manaka, and Eda were in, were called out by the supervisor for some business orders.

“Tomorrow, at 17:00, we’re to stay on standby in Area B-37. Based on how things go down, combat is a possibility.”

For a standby mission, the supervisor's face was overly tense.

"The classification given by the main branch is『R』."

Following his words.

"!!..."

The members of Misc. were sent into shock all at once. The air suddenly turned colder.

From the Miscellaneous Handbook, Neito knew what it meant.

Classification R. It meant a mission where you could expect confrontation with the Rocks.

Rocks. They started with『Dylan』, who appeared twenty years prior. Allies of justice of unknown origin.

Some of them possessed special constitutions, others wore armor of super technology, and some even displayed superhuman abilities from the magical mysteries of some ancient ruin or another. Heroes.

Their strength was as steadfast as stone, and from their larger-than-life dispositions, they were generally termed the Rocks.

While they were usually a target of admiration, for the evil organizations that started with Metallica, they were something to fear over anything else.

“Let me explain the details.”

With twice the concentration as usual, they listened to the supervisor’s voice.

Neito felt the pores on everyone’s skin contract.

※※※

What exactly is that guy doing?

It was Mia’s habit to walk her beloved dog before going off to school. Within the pure morning air, she leisurely strolled down the banks of the river.

Pulling on the leash as he wagged his tail, the happy miniature schnauzer was an important part of the day for Mia, who did some activities unusual (?) for a high school student.

On a certain day, Mia was walking her dog as she always did, when she spotted a peculiar person.

A little separated from her walking path, below the embankment closer to the river, was a man repeating quite a strange task.

And from the day she first spotted him, he was there every day without fail.

By himself, he dropped to the ground, and started rolling around. He took of his jersey, and swung it about.

??

A bit of a strange person? She thought, but that didn't seem to be the case. At times, the man would stop as if to confirm something, and scribble some memos in a notebook.

Oh, I see. He must be practicing for something. Or so she decided to take it. I mean, despite all the strange things he's doing, he expression is quite serious. Could he be pantomiming or something?

Watching him flop around the floor with a serious expression, the first thing she did was burst out laughing.

Pfff...! Just a bit of laughter.

But somehow, seeing him there every day had become a bit fun.

Hey, it looks like he's become quite good at that pantomiming(?) of his.

Mia had quite a bit of popularity among male students.

She was confessed to quite a lot.

But from her point of view, the man pantomiming by the riverbank was a type of person she didn't see around her.

He wasn't cool at all, so she didn't feel any romantic attraction, but she became somewhat intrigued.

Will he be there today~? Or so she always thought when she reached the usual spot on her walk.

Just a little, her morning walks had become a little more fun than before.

※※※

Chapter 8: It's Time For The Hero Of Justice

Neito was unaware of it. That Ikeno who joined alongside him had, as a member of the Planning Department, been left with the drafting of the plan. One week before Neito's team was to receive the R Classified order, Ikeno was proposing an important proposition to the faces gathered.

※※

"My planning is perfect. By discarding one team of the Miscellaneous Division, the Rocks' arrival at the scene will be delayed at least an estimated two hours. With that much time, we can..."

What Metallica was planning this time was suppression of a private research institution in the Kantou region.

The institution in question was one that had displayed extraordinary success in the field of genetic engineering, and if they could monopolize on those results, it would be possible to gain a considerable amount of power.

It was one Metallica would want to take over by all means. In order to enhance its military might, and to get control over a technique that may pave the way to world domination.

Ikeno was a new recruit, but his excellent personal record and abilities were recognized, and he was permitted to suggest a plan for the mission.

His plan went as follows.

They knew beforehand that the Rocks' 『Dylan』 knew of their plans to suppress the facility. It was quite likely that some interference would come on the day in question.

So there, they would leak another piece of information. That a large-scale criminal meeting was to take place in a certain area.

Of course, there were no such plan. The important part of it, was that the existence of such a meeting was to become common sense among the populace. And there in truth, there would be a large number of Miscellaneouses stationed there. Meaninglessly.

While they would know of the high likelihood of the research facility being attacked, the allies of justice, the Rocks, wouldn't be able to leave the fake information aside without confirming it.

And for that sake, the facility and meeting site were adjacent to one another.

The hero would definitely come. There's no way they'd let it slide. Ikeno had taken that into consideration. But even if they figured out at once that the information was false, there would be those Miscs there. They should at least be able to stall for time. It was that sort of plan.

The higher-ups were reluctant, but he forcefully pushed it

through. It was fine as long as it succeeded.

Ikeno put together the documents, and headed over to the General Affairs Department. One of their duties was copying and relaying decisions throughout the ompany.

“Maki-chan, please file this one.”

He called out to General Affairs’ Mayuzumi Maki, and handed over the papers. She had joined alongside him, of attractive face and figure, and honestly quite cute. It was a good opportunity for him to appeal to her with the hard work he put up on the forefront of the operation.

“Ah, yes...! This is...”

After accepting it with a smile, she looked over the papers, and for some reason made a dubious expression.

“Hmm? What’s wrong? It’s received the proper approval.”

“... By this plan, the people of the Misc. Division will be...”

“Yeah. There’s a chance they’ll receive a little damage. But that’s the Miscellaneous Division’s job in itself, is it not?”

Even after he had explained it like that, Maki’s expression continued to sink. Ikeno was completely unable to comprehend the

reason behind that.

※※

The point Neito was stationed at for the R Classified mission was on the coast. But it was just a desolate line of warehouses without any tourist popularity.

“Manaka-san, will Dylan really come here…?”

“… Perhaps.”

The Miscellaneous members were dispersed to an extent, and they dotted the coastal area. The division had a basic premise of working in teams of two, so Neito paired with Manaka, as he waited on standby as the sun began its descent. Manaka was equipped with a rifle, while Neito carried a tranquilizer gun. Hidden in the shadows, the two of them checked over the surveillance footage, and time passed.

“… I’m sorry, man. I was opposed to having you participate in this operation, but you know…”

Manaka abruptly muttered that.

“D-don’t mind it. What are you even talking about? It’s not like death is certain or anything…! Right. When we’re done here, let’s go out drinking again.”

Manaka's words rung out as if this was the end, so Neito frantically tried to deny them.

"... Right. Okay. Today, we're not going to the usual oden joint. I'll treat you to somewhere nicer!"

"Yes!..."

It was at that moment. The cameras had caught footage of a certain something. The transformation sequence was already complete.

It was the same as what he'd seen on TV.

With nuances somewhere in between mechanical armor and the exoskeleton of a living being, a pure white body. Something like a horn protruded from its forehead, and a dull luminescence surrounded its body as if you let you discern its overwhelming energy at a glance. It was like a knight of light you'd see in a fairy tale.

So there are other things like that one in this world? That was the first generation Rocks, who protected society from the hands of evil. The incarnation of justice...

『Dylan』!

“Manaka-san! There…!”

He heard the sound of spit gulping down his throat.

“Yeah… looks like it’s time for the Hero of Justice… no helping it. Send out a notification for the other members to gather, and we’ll approach for now.”

Neito nodded, and started moving in response.

This time’s mission was to, ‘take on Dylan– who’s likely to show up– with all your numbers. But don’t just come down at him at once. Challenge him one at a time,’ was all that came. He didn’t ask the reason.

The enemy was a mighty hero, tried and true. Could Neito and the rest of the Misc Members, who were really no more than small fries, really stand a chance of winning if they all went at it alone? Wouldn’t that just result in them being beat down one after another? In the end, it would just be biding time until their annihilation, wouldn’t it? His doubts towards the reason for the orders continued to grow, but… there was no helping it. That was Miscellaneous. The role of the lowest soldiers of an Evil Organization.

“But you won’t enter his field of vision. I’ll be the only one to directly confront him. You just stand and watch from the shadows.”

“!? That can’t…!”

“You got that!?”

Without waiting for a response, Manaka jumped from the shadows, and danced to Dylan’s front. Naito watched on from a place a little ways away.

Chapter 9: Are You An Idiot?

"..."

Dylan seemed to recognize the one who appeared as a villain. His eyes met with Manaka's.

"Yo, Hero. First time I'm seeing you in the flesh, but you sure are cool. What's up with you? You wearing something? Or did your body transform?"

"..."

"Sorry, but I was told not to let you pass."

"..."

On Manaka's conversational tone, Dylan didn't react at all. He merely slowly began walking towards the man.

Dylan's right fist emitted a light.

... I knew that one. I've seen it introduced before on the news programs.

A knuckle charged with energy. One of Dylan's signature moves. Commonly called Justice Hammer. Other Rocks also used similar moves, and that attack that was now known as a sort of trademark

of the group possessed enough destructive power to even demolish boulders.

“Tsk!!”

It would be the end if he drew any closer. Manaka held up the rifle in his hand, and immediately discharged it!

... But.

At the same time, Dylan began accelerating in his direction. It was faster than a leopard, and sharper than an eagle. If Dylan had gone and done an 100 meter dash, it was most definite he would achieve a speed breaking the world record by a large margin.

“... Fu-!”

... He didn’t even dodge the bullet, he deflected it to the side with a single sweep of his arm.

And.

“... Seyah!”

... To Neito, it only looked as if a flash of light was racing about.

A sound of impact reverberated in the area, and in the next

instant, in the outer wall of a storehouse far behind, he confirmed the figure of a beaten Manaka.

"... Manaka... san...?"

Looking closely, the red protectors on his Miscellaneous Battle Uniform were shattered, and after falling from the wall to the floor, Manaka didn't move in the slightest.

That can't be.

That can't be.

That can't be.

In that single instant? Without the slightest portent? So that thing called the fist of justice really was something that strong?

Enough for a man who'd chosen to walk the path of evil to be demolished in the blink of an eye?

Neito couldn't move. It wasn't fear. The truth unfurling before his eyes was going too fast for his mind to catch up.

And Dylan's simple presence was overwhelming.

"..."

Without confirming the result of his actions, Dylan proceeded on. And his form went out of sight.

“...! Hah! Manaka-san!?”

As if he had just been freed from paralysis, Neito ran over to manaka.

“Manaka-san!! Manaka-san!”

He lifted up his collapsed body, and called out.

“... Neito... is it...?”

Manaka’s breath was faint, and his voice sounded as if it would go out at any moment.

“Please get a hold of yourself!! Manaka-san!!”

“... I can’t... be saved...”

He could tell by looking, but still, he didn’t want to admit it.

“You can!! Manaka-san! I’m begging you!! ... You said it, didn’t you!? That... that you’d take me out for a drink...!”

“… Sorry for… that…”

“Please don’t die!! Your wife and your kids are… waiting for you!!… So…!!”

Manaka’s wife had, just the other day, ran off with the kids to some other man. Even Neito knew that much, but even so.

He couldn’t remain without letting any words from his mouth.

“… You there. Good… listen…”

The first person he regarded as a senior at work gripped his hand, as he went on.

“… You have talent…”

He didn’t know what Manaka wanted to say. But if he was going to make these words his last, then they had to be heard. Neito clenched his hand as he inclined his ears to Manaka’s words.

“… Aim for Metallica’s summit. And the world…”

Neito could only listen and nod. Metallica’s summit. Could that mean to become the big boss?

So he was to become a lord of evil. Of the numerous

organizations, the oldest and most powerful one. To stand at the top truly was to stand where one could demand change in the world.

"... It's a promise. Alright...? If you see me in hell, then you've got to tell me... the word 'evil's real..."

"UWAAAAAAAAAH!!! NOOOOOooo!!!"

Manaka couldn't lay out words to the end. Power seeped out of the hand he clenched, and his arm hung limp.

He couldn't talk any longer.

He was dead. He had died. I had practically entered the organization just by going with the floor. The workplace was off from my expectations. And within that, he was the first to properly interact with me, and dim as it may be, the person who to point me onto my path.

I mean, I won't say he was a good person. Of course he was a villain.

But Neito had liked Manaka. It wasn't just battle techniques. He felt the man had taught him something precious.

And he had died.

“…”

His comrade, a grunt of an evil organization, had been vanquished by the hero protecting society.

What Manaka had left him in the end. Its meaning was one that Neito couldn’t really quite grasp. But…

He could no longer stand still. He could no longer leave things like this. Even if the path before him was too dark to see, he could only feel around for it as he preceded on.

He had wished for the world to change. He had walked forth for it. And when he did, so many things had begun to change around him.

Perhaps he it had been a mistake. But even so…

“… I am…”

Manaka left behind a ridiculously grandiose challenge, and left. I’ll have to think over it for as long as I have to press onwards.

But right now, there’s something more important.

“… Like hell I’d let it go down like this…!”

I'll take down that Hero of Justice.

This isn't for vengeance. That's barking up the wrong tree right there. If I let that one go, then Manaka-san, and the rest of us will have been nothing but meaningless existences in the grand scheme of things. I can't forgive that.

Neito didn't actually know the reason for this mission, and he didn't know what meaning it held in the big picture. Perhaps a day would come for him to take action after learning that reason.

But for now, as a single combatant, he didn't want things to end this way.

"... I'll do it. If I'm aiming for the big bad, then this much is..."

I'll even fight your Hero of Justice.

It was the same sensation as back then. No, even stronger than that. Stronger than when he had threatened Eda into victory.

Neito discarded the uniform and protectors over his body. He was wearing a T-Shirt and khakis below. He tossed his uniform into the ocean, and stuffed the tranquilizer gun he had from the start into the space between his pants and him.

"I'll be borrowing this, Manaka-san."

He went on to take the Rifle Manaka had, and...

“Stop!!! Don’t shoot!! Please, spare my life!!”

Neito screamed out in a loud voice, before touching the gunpoint to his own left arm. With an exceedingly calm state of mind, he wrung out resolve from the whole of his body, and quietly pulled the trigger.

A gunshot resounded in the area.

The round gouged out the flesh of his arm.

“UWAAAAAAAAH!!!!”

It hurt just as much as he had expected. The pain caused him to roll across the ground.

“... Aaaah... Gwaaaaaaah!!”

He hadn’t his a vital. But a vehement pain raced across his body.

It’s no good. Rolling around in pain is good an all. But that should be an act, shouldn’t it?

Contain it. The pain, contain the anguish.

“…”

He gritted his teeth hard enough it felt his molars would snap. And he endured.

He’ll come. That guy will come. He’ll surely come. Because that one is a Hero of Justice after all.

The seconds of eternity he spent holding back the pain. Within his fading consciousness, in the corner of his vision, he saw him. Dylan.

A white warrior. He knew he would return. Because the hero would be certain there was no one here but Metallica’s members and himself. And so who was there to scream? Did a civilian wander in by chance? Or so he would think.

“… Hah… hah…”

Conveniently enough, blood had begun to spread out from the spot on his arm, making the wound look more severe than it was.

“!! Why…! Are you alright!? Sir!?”

He came at once. As expected. And Dylan undid his transformation to help Neito up.

Well of course. The transformed state had that much power in its

body. There's no way he'd lift up a heavily injured person with that. If handled poorly, he could fracture bones without the slightest intent. I do believe there was an incident like that quite a while ago.

"Sir!? Get a hold on yourself...! Why did this..."

Hmm. So he's a cool, hard-boiled old man with the transformation off? I was sure he'd be a young handsome schmuck, but when you think about it, he did become active more than twenty years ago.

"... You can't remain here. There are... Metallica soldiers... they suddenly shot at me...! I'm sure they're still around..."

"It's alright now! I'll take you to the hospital at once...!"

The arm that lifted his body. It was strong and warm.

Ah, as expected, this guy really is a nice person. Well of course. By himself, he's been fighting on for the sake of everyone, hasn't he. But you see.

"The hospital can wait. After you've taken a good punch or two."

His expression suddenly changed as he said that.

"Wha...!?"

Without a moment's delay, Neito drew the tranquilizer at his waist, and pushed it against Dylan's chest.

"Bang."

He immediately fired.

A surprise attack at point blank. He had removed his transformation, and he didn't even take a defensive stance. Metallica's signature tranquilizer round that could take down large game in a single shot had hit the Hero straight on.

"...! Y...ou...!! Were... Metal..lica...?"

Dylan unsteadily separated form Neito, and with unsteady footing, he breathed his mind.

"Yeah. That's right. As expected of a hero. You can still move after that?"

"... Damn... you. Underhan... ded..."

"Are you an idiot? I'm a flat out villain here. What's wrong with me doing bad things?"

Neito himself helt he would pass out from the pain, but he frantically withheld it, and showed off a fearless smile.

“…”

“How ‘bout it? Is the medicine working? Now sweet dreams. After you’re down, me and my comrades will leisurely finish you off.”

He always had to show off composure. As an underhanded schemer who’d planned it all out.

“… Kuh.”

Dylan squeezed out his strength, and ran off from the spot. HE had taken something that would knock out an elephant, so I never thought he would be able to run. What’s more, the bugger’s freakin’ fast. His movements, and the speed at which he decided to give up battle and flee.

“… So I couldn’t… bring him down…”

His stamina at its end from his loss of blow, Neito fell onto the ground. The sun had already set.

He instantly relaxed his mind. He was horridly tired.

“… Manaka… san…”

In the desolate quay, Neito whispered, and passed out.

※※

On that day, Metallica's other detachment was able to promptly suppress the research facility as planned. Without any interference from Dylan.

A single Miscellaneous newbie had confronted Dylan, and let alone surviving, he had even managed to repel him. It didn't take long for such news to spread around within the company.

Chapter 10: I'll Walk

When Neito regained consciousness, he was in one of Metallica's affiliate medical facilities. After the battle had ended, his Miscellaneous comrades had carried him there, apparently. His injuries included nothing but the gunshot to his arm. He had passed out from blood loss, and other than that, he hadn't received any major damage.

He could be discharged in a relatively short time, apparently, and he had done quite well this time around. Exceptional results for Misc... Sorry about Manaka. Don't let it get you down. The Misc Supervisor who came to see him explained as such, and had just left the hospital room not too long ago.

"..."

So those events really weren't a dream. The battle at the unpopular quay, the power of a hero you could even call overwhelming, the shot in the dark from my desperate mind. And Manaka's death.

"... Dammit..."

Employment exam, deployment, miscellaneous, company. The organization's structure was just like that of a normal company, but there was no mistake the place Nieto worked was not normal. Perhaps its members had purposely organized it that way to inhibit the enterprise's abnormality. Neito absentmindedly thought over it. If he turned his thoughts towards something else, perhaps he

could drive out the sentiment in his heart, or so he wondered.

After a while of that, an abrupt knock came at the door to the room.

“...? Yes?”

“Good day. May I... enter?”

The one who peeper her head through the doorway was fellow recruit Maki.

“Maki-san...? Why are you here?”

Perhaps today was a day off, as she was wearing a fluttery one piece.

“Yes. I learned about your condition from the workers’ compensation insurance form, so...”

Make was holding some flowers. Does that mean she just came to pay a visit? Why would she do that? Because we were fellow interviewees? Working adults sure have it rough. Or so Neito thought.

“I see.”

Maki was stationed in General Affairs. I'm sure they get information like that going through them as well. She probably knows of how Manaka died in battle as well.

"Ah, here. Some flowers... Is it alright if I arrange them?"

As she said that, she produced a sack containing a vase from her bag, ans started laying the flowers in it.

"... Sorry. For having you go out of your way when you finally got a day off."

The beauty who had joined the company alongside him paid a sick visit. Normally, it would be a happening to make him grin from ear to ear, but he didn't feel such an urge at the moment.

"No. I was free after all! You don't have to worry about it!"

Maki finished up the flowers before shaking her hands in an exaggerated gesture.

"... Thank you."

"You're welcome. Even so, that was amazing! Neito-kun. It's being talked about even at the main branch!"

Perhaps she was trying to cheer him up, as she was speaking in quite an energetic tone.

“A newcomer repelled a Rocks, what’s more, that Dylan of all people! They’re saying! It’s amazing! What’s the matter?”

“…”

“… I’m… sorry.”

In a complete change, Maki made a sullen expression.

No, that’s fine. It’s not like I’m mad at her or anything. I’m quite happy for her consideration. Really happy. So I guess I can at least give off some empty spirit myself.

“R-right! I wonder if they’ll raise my salary or something~?”

“… Ah haha. That’s right. There’s a chance you’ll get a nice bonus!”

“Hooray!”

“Good job!”

And for a while following, he received a report on the present state of things, and chatted about some completely irrelevant television programs.

Just a little, his mood had become lightened. Maki surely came to make sure he didn't become depression, or so he understood it. To a coworker whom she didn't hold particular affection for or anything, for her to be so considerate... On top of being a cutie, she's a nice person to boot? That's amazing.

Or so his thoughts turned.

"Ah... I've kept you a while. I apologize. It's not good if it has an impact on your recovery, so it's about time I went."

"Alright. Thank you for today."

Exchanging those words, Maki stood to leave.

"Hey, you know."

He wanted someone to hear it. So the words came from his mouth.

"Hmm? What is it?"

"... I had this really good superior at the office, you see? A really, really good one."

"... Yes."

Maki looked straight at him, and nodded. Her wide eyes looked as if they clouded over a little.

“That superior told me. ‘Aim for Metallica’s Summit. It’s a promise, alright?’ he said.”

“… Yes.”

The summit of Metallica. Big talk for an underling combatant. Would she laugh at it, he wondered, but Maki answered with a serious face.

“Right now, I still don’t know what that would mean, but I… it may sound stupid…”

To Metallica’s summit. The crown of evil.

The sentiment to change the world. Those weren’t a lie. And at the end of this path may be a power to make such a change possible.

What sort of thing was the world I wanted to make? It was still faint. But I’m sure I’ll catch sight of it if I keep going down the path.

If I continue following evil, there will surely be some things I’ll end up breaking. I’ll surely have to go against ‘justice’. I’ll surely have to shoulder much work. Does a man who just kinda joined at a whim really have the resolve for anything like that?

The answer was a given. It was surely something that Manaka's end was a catalyst for.

So. As sad and regretful I am to Manaka's death, there's no way I could just stop in my tracks.

"I'm thinking of walking up to Metallica's summit."

Neito declared that in a quiet voice.

And to such a man, Maki did not laugh.

Chapter 11: Two Shochus Please

Neito was able to get discharged in four days, and in the following week, he was able to go back to the backstreet factory that was his Miscellaneous Branch.

Should I start training for now? He thought, but two days after his reinstatement, he received a summons from the supervisor. It was the first time such a thing had happened since he was first stationed there.

“Pardon me.”

“Don’t mind it. Take a seat.”

He was prompted to sit on the old chair in the supervisor’ office. The man’s expression looked to be somewhat nervous.

“Did something happen?”

“Yeah. I was just a little surprised! No, I’m sure you… you’ll be too!”

He had been nervous just a moment before, but he suddenly burst into delight. Neito couldn’t understand his actions in the slightest.

“??

“Ah… ehem! Komori Neito-kun!””

“Yes?”

He purposefully cleared his throat, what’s more, it felt quite strange being called with my first hame. I mean, he usually just went oy, Komori!! Or something like that.

“An unofficial announcement for you. From next week onwards, we will be having you transferred to the Second Sales Department of the Main Company.”

“Huh?”

It was a term the recent NEET Neito had little familiarity with, but he knew what it meant. An unofficial announcement was a message from the people in personnel affairs.

“The Second… Sales Department?”

“Right!! For someone to transfer from Miscellaneous to the main company, you’re the first!! It’s an exceptional announcement!! Rejoice!! Your work in repelling Dylan has been recognized!”

An excited supervisor. On the other side, it didn’t really feel real to Neito.

Sales Department. Once again, it sounded like a normal subsection of a normal company, but of course, its contents would be different. As I thought, are the purposely naming them like this?

The Sales Department, as its name suggested, took care of... selling. But it's not like they barged into places to demand the selling of certain items, nor did they prostrate themselves before business clients, or hand up posters to advertise the merchandise of the organization (Though there's a time and place for such duties as well).

What they sold could be summed up as evil deeds. What they sold them to was the world. With the schemes drafted up by the Planning Department as a base, they were the ones who carried out the invasion plans on a large scale.

Unlike his other post in the Misc Division that was pretty much there for odd jobs, it was given an extent of authority, a knowledge of the meaning behind each plan, and based on the situation, it could even give orders to mysterious beings.

Just like the Sales Department of a standard company, it was left to the forefront of the battlefield, and it demanded a level of results. I guess that's the only sense Metallica's Sales Department shares a similarity with them in.

To summarize, they were Metallica's task force.

That was the level of understanding new recruit Neito had on

them, but thinking of the wall he had always felt between himself and the main company, it could be considered a great leap forward none the less.

He had never learned the purpose of his actions, and was arbitrarily ordered around like a sacrificial pawn; an inferior environment of manual labor, authority that could be equated to nothing at all. That was the general position, the Miscellaneous Department

Going over to the main company would mean he would be working in the proximity of members with regular positions. Even if his salary remained as general level, it wouldn't change the fact he would be doing a regular's work. An entirely different position from before should be waiting for him.

"...OH What's up!? Could it be you don't want to transfer!?"

Watching Neito silently thinking to himself, the supervisor hurriedly called out.

So Neito answered with a smile.

"Surely you jest. I'll transfer with pleasure."

"Oooh!! Of course! Great!"

Of course I'll move on. I'll take a step forward.

“Kuh. You sure have it nice. I want to transfer someday too.”

The supervisor complained. Perhaps those were his real feelings. But Neito answered in a joking tone.

“If I get a promotion, I’ll reform the Misc’s reception. I’ll make it a workplace with more motivations.”

“Oy, oy. You sure have some leisure to be joking around like that. Well, I’ll be here waiting with relatively low expectations.”

Joking? Far off. I’m serious here. It’s best the manual labor environment of the Miscellaneous Division be changed.

“Hahaha.”

But that isn’t just for the sake of the people in it. It’s for Metallica as a whole. Because this is an environment that forces its members to believe they don’t need to produce results.

Leaving the supervisor’s room, Neito returned to his business. The expectations for his transfer were gradually building up in his body.

Transfer. Authority. Main company.

Ah, I see, moving over there means I may get to talk to Maki

more frequently. Oh right, Ikeno too.

His heart was restless. He couldn't calm himself down.

After finishing up his work, he cleaned up the workspace. And after confirming that no one else remained, Neito shouted out.

"I did it~!!!!"

He was delighted for the first in a long time. And joy is still joy after all.

And after that was over with, he headed to his usual oden stand. He knew he had to go there.

He didn't have anyone to sit next to him today, but still.

"Excuse me, two shochus over here, please."

"Two? ... Ah, I see..."

The shop owner quietly poured two glasses, passing them off to Neito and the seat beside him.

"...It looks like I'm going to be transferred. So for now, I think I'll see how far I can go."

“… But I won’t forget.”

“I’ll surely never forget.”

“… Thank… you…”

To the airspace void of a conversation partner, Neito raised his glass.

Right, do your best.

He got the feeling such a voice came along with the clinging sound of glass, but still he saw no one there.

Neito cried a little.

Because sorrow was still sorrow after all.

Chapter 12: My Darling Over Papa

Neito was going to transfer to Metallica's Main Office: Second Sale Department. It was located under the building where He first took his recruitment exam.

By the looks of it, the main office was underneath the building and the building above was just a cover to divert suspicion.

[I'll be transferring to the sales department today. My name is Komori Neito and I'll be in your care from now on. A pleasure to meet you all.]

Without delay, He was given a tour of the department's office. Artificial lights made the office bright even though they were underground.

For an evil organization, the office seemed normal, like the ones you would see in any company.

An enormous screen was placed in the middle of the room, feeding in images of the outside world.

"Damn", he thought, "the amount of stress in this office is too damn high".

[Yes, you proved to be proficient in your previous department, did you not Mr. Komori? I know you just transferred here, but I want to you to give your undivided effort in working here. Your

desk is over there. Use it to its full extent and don't hesitate to ask anyone for help.]

The Department Chief seems like a nice guy.

Unlike in the past, He had his own desk with his own workload. The office's spaciousness surprised him but it was the Department Chief that surprised him the most.

He mentioned earlier that his name was Izumi.

If he remembered correctly, he once saw him on T.V. ... He was a well known politician, always wearing an expensive looking suit matching his silver hair. He was often called "The Roman Grey Politician" by the public.

[I see.... Metallica is "that" kind of Organization...] Neito thought.

After Izumi introduced Neito and gave him a tour of the office, some of the staff greeted him, while some went back to their own work.

An elite looking old man, an antisocial looking guy and a tall African-American, No matter where he looked, none of them seemed like a guy you could trust.

Gulp... Neito anxiously swallowed his saliva. It was as if in any moment, he would e pounded into cake in seconds.

I’ll somehow manage this…

It was in that moment…

[Whoa! There you are Nate!]

The voice didn’t come from near him. It sounded off as a light mellifluous voice and It was heard throughout the entire floor.

[??]

He saw an unfamiliar young woman near the entrance.

The young woman had platinum blonde hair and blue eyes…

Now that you mention it, her Japanese intonation was kinda off… She must be a foreigner.

Tying her hair in a ponytail, she wore a short neat miniskirt and she had a smooth fair skin with a baby like face. She looked very tender and gorgeous… though her chest had surprisingly great volume.

In other words, she was a cheerful young woman. What she stuck out to Neito because he a thing for lolis… He got weirded out.

[??]

Huh? Did she just call out to me? Who is this girl anyway?

Neito didn't recognize her one bit. Panicking, He looked at Izumi for answers.

[Oh... I'm sorry Komori-kun. I'll explain it later. For now, take care of her please...?]

Izumi went on to check on other the staff, looking troubled.

[Hmm... You look normal-ish Nate! I thought you were some kind of amazing buff guy, though I wouldn't say that I dislike you. (Smile)]

The young lady steadily approached Neito staring him down with her deep blue eyes.

Whoa, looking at her closely, she's a real beauty. And what is this 'you're that guy' thing?

[Oh—Ummm... Hello there. I'm Komori Neito, Nice to meet you...]

She didn't look like it but maybe she was one of the Sales Department's staff...

Neito thought about it for a while.

[Hmmm? What happened? Are you nervous?]

[Well… No… Hahaha…]

I don’t know who the heck you are, but give me a break! I’m still a virgin…

Up until this point in life, Neito wasn’t really good at dealing with girls. In Mayu’s case, she was just considerate towards a fellow co-worker and was just giving him a hand.

Now this blonde girl appears out of nowhere…

Neito didn’t know what to do anymore.

It’s true that in the past few months, He was only surrounded by men of all age. Now this girl comes in and starts getting close to him.

He was more confused and troubled than ever.

Neito didn’t have a choice but give out a faint laugh.

[Anice is Nate’s assistant. There’s no need for you to be nervous!]

She pronounced the word “assistant” with such native accent.

Oh god, help me

Neito came in the most Neito way possible to the Sales Department with strong resolve. And now this resolve was broken down easily by this young woman.

[Assistant? Huh? What the–?]

Neito looked at Izumi, who was coming back to them.

[… Will you come with me for a second?]

[Sure…]

[What’s happening? Anice also wants to come!]

[No… could you… please wait over there?]

[Whyyy?]

Neito was slightly bothered when he noticed Izumi was talking to Anice in a respectful tone, but he shook it off and went on to the other room as instructed.

[… Who is that woman?]

[Hmm... Well, as she said, she's your assistant from now on... We'll be taking care of her for a while... just think of it as her part time job.]

[Wut?]

His head full of questions; he said it without meaning to.

First of all, why the heck does Metallica allow part timers? Second, who the heck is that blonde girl? Lastly, why the heck would the organization give an assistant to a new guy? There's also the Department Chief's behavior when he's near her...

[...This is just between us okay...? Anice is actually the daughter of Crimson's CEO...]

[Wut?!]

Daughter of the CEO? If I'm right, CEO means something like the owner of the company right?

Neito reacted so loud; other people noticed it outside the room.

Crimson is an Organization that's the same as Metallica, considered as one of the "Evil Organizations". They're based off in California, but recently, they focused their activities in New York.

If Metallica boasts in man-power, Crimson boasts in technology and weaponry. Crimson develops “Jacket Armors” using cutting edge technology and distributed them abroad. They are considered as the “Manufactures for Evil” and were particularly well known in Metallica.

Controlling multiple mafias and gangs abroad, they were considered as an international threat. In other words, it wasn’t an Organization you want to cross with.

… That was common knowledge for Neito. Heck, even an ordinary civilian would know that.

[Listen, it’s unofficial, but Metallica and Crimson have agreed on a joint venture… think of it as sharing our ideas with a fellow company… As for our situation, higher ups agreed that it would be good to build up trust from within…]

[… Is that so?]

Neito didn’t know the dangling wed of affairs Metallica was having.

[And then that Miss Anice? Well, I kind of get the situation, but was it necessary for them to send the CEO’s daughter? Then there’s the case of her being my assistant…]

Neito simply didn’t know what it meant. He was just a new guy in the company. A misfit in the lower department, and now he’s

getting an assistant. Why the heck would the higher ups do that?

[After all we are dealing with the Crimson CEO's daughter. We weren't in a position to decline them and it seems like Crimson's boss gave in to his daughter's selfish request. If you want to know more, ask her yourself]

[Whaa—That might be...]

[Also, think of it for a moment, if anything happens to her, by any chance, it would cause a huge problem for our part.]

Neito immediately knew what he meant. If something were to happen to her, No doubt, it would be Metallica versus Crimson. An all out war would begin.

[Hello!]

The door opened and Anice's head peeked in.

[Oh, Hello]

After Neito answered, Anice came in and immediately sat beside Neito.

[Did you know that I personally requested to be your assistant?]

[It seems…that way…]

[What’s with that tone? C’mon be honest with me.]

Even if you say that, if I even anger Crimson’s boss, my head would be off my head before I even notice

She really did wish to be her assistant. Neito didn’t know what to do. Neito then started to ask her discretely.

[Well… yes… Then, can I ask you something?]

[Sure! What is it?]

Having eye contact would be bad for me. Oh god her fair skin is already bad enough for me

[Why did you want to be my assistant?]

In regard with that question, Anice held her laugh and answered with confidence.

[Because Nate is cool and tough looking. And also, I know you’re a Bad Boy…]

What the heck is she saying?

Neito couldn’t hold on much longer.

[No no no no no! What the heck are you saying? I’m not a tough guy!]

[?... Oh you’re gonna do it that way huh? A samurai always does that... Nate looks helpless and weak, but in reality...]

This is bad. I’m not getting through her. Why the heck is she starting at me with those admiring eyes? In the first place, not all Japanese are samurai!

[No no no no! You got me all wrong here!]

[Hmmm... but I know you fought Dylan and won!]

[I did not win... that was just... well...]

Does she even know the specifics? Just because she’s the daughter of Crimson’s CEO, doesn’t give her the right to know the happenings within Metallica. The story probably changed as it was passed down from one person to another. Gratifying his small feat and turning it into a huge victory. What the heck is the intelligence department doing? Fuck them.

It wasn’t avoidable that he took the interest of Crimson’s boss which he never even met.

[Because my Papa said “Your darling should be stronger and more sinister than Me or I won’t approve of him!” That’s also why I never had a lover in my life… Nate, my Papa seems to approve of you.]

Now that’s just scary. Every guy Anice got close to got annihilated because her Father didn’t approve them. What kind of person is stronger and more sinister than Crimson’s boss?” Neito reflected for a while and thought “In the whole world, I can only think of 3 guys…

Wait a second; did she just call me her Darling??

Neito thought of it for a moment, but as time went on he became more confused.

[And did you know? Ever since I was little, I studied a lot of things. I’m proficient and strong at it! I think I would be of great use to you Nate!]

Well that was very obvious. She’s probably a genius of some sort. I reckon she’s probably stronger than me… Now that you mention it, she’s really proficient in Japanese. Well, she’s a genius after all… what should I expect?

He just couldn’t say it out loud…

[Yeah… well, I understand…]

[Yeah! Nice to meet you Darli—I mean Nate!]

Although Anice halfway through said Darling, Neito decided he shouldn't touch the topic anymore.

Then he reflected for a moment. He can't do much at His situation; at least He should look on the bright side. Which, he had 2 things going for him.

One; he is happy. No matter how complicated his situation was, it was the first time a girl fancied him. Not to mention that she's a beautiful young lady, and He's honestly happy for that part, even though if he screwed up, his head would pop off his neck without notice... But then it's something.

Two; He thought of it for a while, but it would be probably be the first time in his entire life that he would meet a person as sincere as Anice.

At this point, maybe Her as His assistant didn't seem such a bad thing...

[Well then, Nice to meet you too Anice.]

After Neito said that, Anice started giggling as if she was embarrassed, but there was a tone of appreciation behind it.

[Yeah! But first, let's head to the cafeteria for lunch!]

With her bight smile and cheerful attitude, Neito looked at her and thought to himself

Maybe I’m now really a bad guy…

Chapter 13: Perhaps It's Too Great To Bear On My Hands

[Ha-!]

Neito woke up in his hard bed, drenched in cold sweat.

[A dream of that moment again ... I thought those dreams were over.]

This time, He dreamt of the time they were briefed in and started heading out. It really was an excruciating night.

[Oh shit. I'm going to be late]

Neito wasn't going be depressed over that dream. He went on to work at the office as usual.

[Good Morning...]

After a few months in, He was already getting used to having a social life, to the point that he could greet his coworkers with ease.

[Oh, Good Morning...]

[...Yeah]

[Let’s put in our best effort today!]

Each of his coworkers replied to him differently.

[Aa! There you are Nate! Good Morning! Intelligence department is having a briefing today at 11 AM.]

Among all things, He was grateful for his assistant. He was grateful, but the situation he was in was still messed up as hell.

He’s a little happy. No, He is VERY happy for being able to meet such a girl. Her bright cheerful tone always greets him every morning... If only she was a girl he accidentally met in the bustling city, with a normal father, things could’ve been better.

[Good Morning...Thanks as usual.]

[Hehehe—. You’re welcome. Fufufu—.]

For some reason, she was in a good mood today. He wanted to ask her why, but his shift was starting. Neito immediately went on to work.

Work in the Sales Department was mostly paperwork as expected. To sum it all up, it was just reading reports and articles, making and planning appropriate decisions, then sending and informing other departments. They weren’t required to go out and fight on the front lines.

Neito wasn’t used to paperwork, so at first he struggled to get the work done. It’s not like he wasn’t struggling now, but the amount of paperwork to be done was too damn high.

Seeing the work ahead of him, he strengthened his resolve, eager to finish it as fast as possible. No sooner than later, Izumi called him into his office.

He entered the room and immediately sat down on the sofa.

[Did something happen?]

[Yes… I have a few questions for you]

[Yes…?]

[About that plan you drew up the other day… What does this plan mean? The orders were to eliminate the Guardian Squadron situated on the fort at map coordinate C22, but your plan involves attacking an area away from the designated coordinates… Do you mind explaining?]

Izumi pointed at the plans he drew.

What if he won’t forgive me for drawing up such a plan?

[Yes. In regards with that… C22 is a formidable position,

attacking it head on would be futile. But the order still stands...]

[Then why?]

[C22 is as I said, a formidable position. Attacking it would prove to be our disadvantage... unless we draw them out. I propose that we sabotage a nearby area, destroying multiple buildings and causing a panic among the citizens. It might be small scale, but it would draw out the Guardians in C22 hoping to help the people and control the situation. Once they are out, it is when we can attack them.]

[What if... They won't come out to aid the citizens?]

[They WILL come out. I know, that there is no Guardian heartless enough to cast away those who are in need. If we can't draw them out, we might as well broadcast the screams of the people to the Guardians...]

[I understand... But, for this plan to work, it would involve us attacking an unrelated area, does it not?]

Neito understood at that moment, that it was Izumi's way of checking if He was willing to take the responsibility for the plan He drew up.

For a moment, he hesitated.

Metallica would definitely get a bad reputation over this...but

what about it? Metallica is an Evil Organization. What could they expect? Metallica is prepared to do what ever it takes to achieve their goal, even if the actions to be done are inhumane.

[Yes, we need to sabotage a different area.]

Neito answered in a calm and controlled voice.

[That's a cruel way of executing a plan...

Well, and order is an order. I'm sure that such measures taken would be forgiven.

That's all. You can go now.]

[Thank you...]

Izumi is wrong. I know that my plan could not be forgiven by the company. What is bad is bad. And what is destroyed is destroyed. There's now way they could forgive me for drawing up such a messed up plan.

Neito couldn't put it out into words. He went out Izumi's office silently.

****

After Neito went out his office, Izumi thought to himself for a while.

His decision making skills... are different from the others. He doesn't hesitate to make plans that violate basic human morality.

I doubt I could've thought of such plan... Even if I did have the idea, I doubt it would be as cruel and complex as Neito's...

He is fast and efficient in his work, and he is cruel enough to be promoted to the Operations and Planning Department.

Call it what you may, but He has this evil aura surrounding him. Calling it potential would be too much...He really is a person to look out for...

I doubt that this talent would be recognized... We're in Metallica after all.

Perhaps it's too great to bear on my hands... I might lose to Him easily

Izumi gave a sigh and took a sip at his coffee.

Chapter 14: Did The Air Around You Change?

Neito finally got to eat lunch alone. He ate curry in the company's cafeteria alone.

Anice usually calls out "Lets have lunch Nate!" everyday, and accompanies Him during lunch, but she wasn't with Him today.

Despite Her looks, she was a sincere and serious person. Today, She had an errand to run in the Department.

She's way younger than me, but she's got a good grip on life than me. She's always bright and cheerful... if only Her Father wasn't the Boss of Crimson, things could've been better.

Maybe I could try to sweet talk her... No, no, no, no...

Just thinking about made Him all red. He was about to scoop another spoonful from his plate when He saw someone familiar bringing his lunch plate, walking towards Him.

[Komori...?]

[Aa, It's you Ikeno... It's been a while.]

It was his all handsome coworker, Ikeno. They haven't met each other since the recruitment exam. Neito heard that Ikeno was

assigned to the Operations and Planning Department (As expected).

[Hey… Did the Air around You change?]

Ikeno asked Neito, suspiciously looking at Him.

[I don’t know… it still hasn’t been a year. Maybe I’ve changed]

[I heard that you were transferred from the General Affairs Department to the Sales Department]

[…Yeah]

[I never thought I would see you in the main office… but that’s great for you huh?]

[Yeah, Thanks]

Ikeno stood while talking with Neito, but after a while, he noticed he was standing out among the crowd. Nobody sat near Neito so Ikeno sat across him and began eating. I’d like to mention that he was having Carbonara for lunch.(Note: It was said in first person towards the audience)

[By the way, did you hear? There’s a meeting going to be held later in the afternoon.]

Ikeno's words... it may not seem like it, but he's talking to as if he's trying to mock me

[Meeting? Oh yeah, it was on my schedule a while back]

One of Neito's plans was approved a few days ago, and a meeting was to be held on how to defeat the Guardians. The meeting involved capturing one of Metallica's enemy, "Beetle", alive to attain the Rocks Organization's technology. The technology would prove to be useful, if they can analyze and exploit its weakness, aiding Metallica in their conquest.

[Oh yeah, it's a joint meeting between the Operations and Planning Department, and the Sales Department right? I heard that we're going to be tackling on how to deal with Beetle]

Ikeno looked surprised upon hearing those words.

[Wow... you seem to be in touch with the higher-ups in your Department... They even let you in the topic of the meeting.]

Maybe he's also an underling in the Operations and Planning Department... I doubt our experience would differ since I'm from the Sales Department.

In a few words, Neito was always jealous of Ikeno.

[No... it's because I'm attending that meeting]

[What?! You?! You've got to be kidding me]

[Nah, I got invited a while back. Though, It's my first meeting ever since I entered this company.]

In planning against the Guardians, any form of Intel was needed. Neito had experience in fighting one of them, so Izumi invited him into the meeting.

[Is that so… I'll be in that meeting too]

[Then, It'll be our first time working together. Let's do our best.]

[Oh…Yeah…]

For now, Neito wanted to stop talking about work. He saw the opportunity to talk with Ikeno casually but…

[I'm done Nate! Hey, can I come over there?!]

A cheerful voice sounded off away from him. It took no effort at all to recognize his assistant calling out.

She looked like a high school student, but she looked beautiful with the light illuminating her blonde hair. She tied her hair in a ponytail and approached Neito and Ikeno with an air of delight.

[You're having Curry again? That's not healthy Nate... You won't get that proper nutrition from that dish alone. Hmm? Who's this guy?]

[He's my coworker, Ikeno. He's a handsome guy, isn't he?]

Anice stared at Ikeno for a while... Then averted her eyes from him.

[Yeah, you're handsome, but my darl–]

[Oh snap! I ran out of sauce... Would you mind getting some for me Anice?]

He managed to make an excuse, but he said too loud and attracted other people's attention.

It would be bad if Ikeno knew about our situation.

[Hmm? Sure. You're really hopeless Nate...]

Anice went on to get some sauce.

[...]

[...]

There was an awkward silence between them, but Ikeno soon broke the silence.

[Anyway, we have a meeting this afternoon and I'll be in charge of the planning. I doubt we'll need you there but, you should come and listen just in case. I really hope that the Sales Department wouldn't bring the Plan down.]

[Yeah…I'll do that]

Ikeno then stood up and left.

Neito wasn't dumb enough not to notice it. He knew Ikeno was making fun of him, and it was very obvious. He couldn't do anything now…

But,

Neito didn't care. What was important to him, was fulfilling the task given.

He wasn't strong enough as Anice said so, and He may not have the potential as Manaka said… Even so, He'll do it. That's all there is to it.

Then and there, Neito wanted to look cool for once. It wasn't like he was confident that he was going to do it, and he wouldn't say

that he had the confidence to proclaim it out loud. It was just that, for once he wanted to look cool for himself.

He said in a small but firm voice.

[I have no plans to remain the same, and act below you Ikeno]

Hahaha

Maybe I sounded too cool...

At that moment...

[That right Nate! Crush that Ikeno to ashes!]

[Waaa-stop listening to me! Forget what I just said!]

Anice appeared out nowhere, smiling and bringing sauce with her. She sat beside Neito with an air of delight.

Chapter 15: Of Course

The meeting's topic was simple. Capture and take hold of the Rocks Organization's research facility. Securing the facility would provide them some information and data on Beetle's High Tech Armor "Harrison".

Beetle was a member of the Rocks Organization, one of the defenders of Justice. Beetle was different from the others with his High Tech Armor, and is well known among the population.

Beetle's Armor "Harrison, uses plasma energy to enhance his battle capabilities, using thrusters and boosters. This made his movements faster and much more deadly.

Normally, Metallica would have also dispatched some power armor to match Beetle, but this time, it was impossible. Beetle's "Harrison" was too advanced for the Company's standard armor.

A while back, when Beetle's fame began rising, "Harrison" was deemed too dangerous to fall into enemy hands. The Rocks Organization then ordered the research to be classified so the project went underground.

If you think about it, the meeting should be simple. Plan, Assign and Execute.

Neito expected the meeting to progress smoothly, but it dragged on longer than expected.

[With that, we'll be sending C rank employee and 10 combatants from the General Affairs Department. I think that's enough to infiltrate and capture the facility.]

Ikeno, who headed the meeting, was too focused on details. It was just... a waste of time.

[We only need 1 person to secure the files and armor. After the infiltration, he will head to west Japan and deliver the data and armor to our R&D Department. As long as Beetle is not there, there should be no problem.]

Ikeno's nerves were already twitching from the meeting.

It's true... if Beetle won't be there, that force should be enough. But...

Neito disagreed with the idea.

[Lets not waste unnecessary resource on destroying structures, instead, lets keep our attack force small. We will have the element of surprise on our side when we capture the facility.

That concludes my plan. Any objections?]

As Ikeno looked for reaffirmation. People who participated in the meeting were already agreeing among themselves. As long as

there's a unit to capture the facility, then they would just approve since they had no part in it. The plan was simple and was rather "too peaceful".

But Neito was against the plan.

It's true that it was the first time Neito participated in a meeting, and He may be inexperienced at these things. But...

Neito voiced out.

[I'm... against the plan.]

Everybody at once looked at Neito. One of them, Ikeno, replied with a jokingly tone.

[Hahaha...Hey Komori, nobody asked for your opinion.]

Metallica's planning committee, and its participants in the meeting were no amateurs, they were professional in their specialized field, but most of all, they were evil people. The pressure they are facing is huge but, Neito couldn't let them cut corners on this plan.

[Actually, let us hear your opinion Komori]

It was the Sales Department's Chief, Izumi, who came to his aid.

Neito then continued.

[... We should destroy the facility completely. Not only will this create panic within the facility, but we can use this as a diversion to secure the data.]

[What!?]

The room was suddenly baffled by the idea. I mean Neito got it. It was the direct opposite of the plan. The plan was just to stealthily infiltrate the facility and secure the data, avoiding unnecessary fights. Not only did the infiltration unit lack the force to fight, but the enemy might have a hidden weapon they can use against the infiltrators.

[Would you mind... explaining Komori?]

Izumi then spoke out amid chaos.

[I believe that this is the necessary action to take. Maybe, as Ikeno suggested, if Beetle wasn't there, then we could capture the facility. But what about Harrison's researchers?]

Ikeno got triggered by Neito words.

[What heck are you trying to say?! Since we would have captured the facility, they have no other choice but to obey us!]

[I think you're mistaken. They may yield to us physically, but not mentally.]

As Neito continued, He once again felt that feeling. The feeling when he confronted Shigeta, and that time he decided to shoot down Dylan.

A Cold and Dark feeling enveloped him. The following words then came out.

[Won't they be waiting for Beetle to recue them?]

[!]

[A hero of justice always arrives late. We can't let them have their hopes up. Everybody knows that.]

[We must entirely crush those hopes up and break their hearts. 5 will infiltrate the facility. Eliminate anyone who stands in the way, and then destroy the whole facility entirely. We will rob them of everything they have and take them as prisoners.]

[...You...]

Neito became the center of attention in the room.

[You know... not all opinions are appreciated in Metallica...]

Ikeno then started thinking of objections to Neito's Idea.

[In the current public's view, Metallica holds a lot of influence in society, but in the long run, is that influence going to last? You don't have to be on the side of justice in order for you to have control over the world. But, defeating that Justice would hold a lot of meaning in the public view, changing public opinion will ultimately lead to world domination. Metallica holds a lot of power now, but will never get the public's approval.]

[... and then?] /*Note: Not sure who said this, but it is either Neito or Izumi*/

[In other words, an Evil Organization can not be always an Evil Organization. We need to achieve our goals in the following years to gain public approval. Then we would be able convince the public that we are on their side. The case lays the same here. Harrison's research facility is not known in public and I doubt its whereabouts are not well known. If we go in quietly and peacefully, retrieve the data and materials, the matter would just be hushed up in secret. It would be passed down in the shadows and the matter would just slip away quietly. I believe it is important to have a good reputation in the eyes of the public]

/*Note: This was Ikeno's speech*/

Ikeno had the spotlight again in the room, the room became quiet at the persuasiveness of the speech.

[Who said that we need to go in a "quiet and peaceful" manner?

In my experience, there is no policy that we, an Evil Organization, should abide by that... And that “Long run” you said, how many years would that take? 10 years? 100 years?](Note: Neito speaking)

[Why you...!]

Neito had no plans of backing down. He wasn’t planning waiting. Much less go by “quiet and peaceful” methods.

[Instead of going for the uncertain method, I think we should crush every enemy one by one. It is the fastest and most effective way.]

He had no plans of containing the evil within him.

[Aren’t we an Evil Organization?! What is wrong, with us doing evil things?!]

Neito banged his fists on the meeting’s table. He knew he sounded crazy, but his instincts told him he was right.

[Why you little...]

The air around the room once again changed.

Everybody knew it when they entered the company. To have a better position in life... believing they can change the world... or because they had no other path to take. They were a bunch of

people prepared to do evil in order for them to attain what they needed.

Neito's word had an effect on the room to a certain extent. Only Ikeno and Neito's words were heard throughout the room. Everybody else fell silent.

[... The plan you are suggesting has a point, but it is impossible to do in our current situation.]

Ikeno also wouldn't yield. Neito knew he had something up his sleeve.

[Impossible? Why?]

[By company regulations, if you go in with a small force of 5 people, in order for you to control the situation tightly, the main office set a rule that the other 3 must be accompanied be 2 other level 2 employees.]

Ikeno's words sounded firm and absolute. Neito evaluated the need for that regulation.

It is true that if there are people holding tremendous power in the scene, it would be easy to control the team and deal with any emergency situation.

Every Metallica employee has a level designated to them. Ever since Neito entered the company, he was level 1, while Ikeno was

level 2.

[...]

[Do you think that there is a person that would go by your ridiculous plan? Even to let an opportunity where they could avoid danger?]

The room became quiet once again.

It wasn't because they wanted to avoid danger, I doubt. Everybody in the main Office must have seen the battlefield once or twice.

But, it was clear that Neito lost the argument today.

[...]

Should I just give up the idea...?

It was then Izumi spoke with a heavy tone.

[...ikeno-kun, Do you plan on appearing on the actual scene?]

[I am prepared to do so, but in this case, I have deemed it to be unnecessary.]

After receiving that response, Izumi took a deep breath and…

[…Is that so… Then, it cant be helped. Komori, I'm promoting you to level 2]

It all happened shockingly fast.

[Wha–?]

[Chief Izumi, are you serious?!]

[I authorize the promotion by the power vested upon me as a Department Chief.]

[Why would you go that far…?]

Participants of the meeting at once were making noise over the decision. It was an expected reaction I guess.

[Izumi-san….]

Neito was trying to figure out Izumi's real intention. But, if that was possible… if He could be on site then…

[Komori, I may not look like it, but I have high expectations of you. And I have gone through the same thing in the past. That's why, If you're insisting that much, I'm willing to do this for you]

Izumi was smiling. He didn't even look like an evil person. Neito didn't know what Izumi expected of him but, in the situation he was in, it was the greatest life boat he could have.

[Thank You Very Much!]

[But that doesn't leave you from your duties. Don't expect special treatment. But, I have a condition]

Izumi's suddenly became cold and dark. It was like he was a different person. Neito then felt the pressure. Its true that he cant always depend on this kind of kindness within the company.

Izumi's eyes pierced through Neito's mind. Neito was about to tremble in fear, but he held it in. He knew it wasn't going to be an easy condition. Everybody saw what was coming.

The room fell silent.

Izumi spoke care freely.

[I will promote you to level 2 and give you the authority to command the infiltration unit. I will give you 3 people from the General Affairs Department but...]

Neito heard the sound of saliva being swallowed.

[In addition to capturing the armor Harrison, I task you to defeat Beetle himself.]

Beetle, the Hero that wears the armor of science. As a member of the Rocks Organization, He possessed superhuman powers with the help of his suit.

Metallica was tasked to face him. In other words, prepare to die. Risk your life. Everybody knew that in the room.

The air stood still. Neito also stood still.

Challenging Beetle is like going to hell. But if He would accept the condition, it still would be hell for him. He knew Metallica was not some kind of easy Organization to be in.

[... Are you still willing to do it?]

Neito wasn’t let the opportunity pass. He shook his fears, stood up and answered.

[Of course.]

This time, He wasn’t going to let it end like the time he fought Dylan. He was in on his own volition, in order for him to achieve his goals. He was prepared to risk his life to triumph over the Hero of Justice.

Neito made his decision.

Chapter 16: We're Beating Him Down. Let Me Show You The Power Of A Villain

[So that's Harrison's research facility huh…?]

They were in the Kibuki prefecture, up in the isolated mountains. Neito lead the infiltration squad up the mountain at night, using the cover of darkness. They were getting closer to the facility.

The facility was among the mountain ravines, standing quietly. Neito and his squad looked at it on top of a cliff. The moon lighted the path of the soldiers of evil.

[I already explained the plan a while back but… are there any questions?]

Neito asked the guys from the General Affairs.

Neito didn't know any of them. They were all wearing combat suits and showed a sense of nervousness.

There was one among them, for no apparent reason, stopped moving. He was calm and alert, unlike the others who were starting to get tense.

[Um…]

One guy then spoke out with a tense and trembling voice.

[Why is someone from the main office, taking part of this mission?]

It was a question of identity. Neito himself volunteered to do so. Usually, people in the Main Office only make plans for operations like this... They never had to go out in the field. He was, in their eyes, a rare person to go out like this.

[It's because, Nate had this idea!]

Anice, who was at Neito's side, replied happily and energetically.

Truthfully, He didn't want to bring Anice along but, she insisted [No! I want to come! I'm your assistant! I also want to see you fight! If you're going to fight, I have to be there with you!]

/*Anice's dialogue is far by the hardest to translate in this series. Had to cut out the tsundere part*/

And that's how she persuaded Neito with teary eyes. He had no choice but to bring her along.

Her hair today was straight, and in order for her to move more easily, she tied it in a ponytail.

Her white skin, blonde hair and her charming atmosphere were still gorgeous even in this situation. Her eyes were shining with

glee.

[Did you know? Did you know? Nate is...]

[Could you pipe it down a little bit Anice?]

[I'm...I'm sorry]

Neito just wanted to warn her, but she took it as if he was scolding her. She acted like a small cute animal reconsidering her action, which in turn bothered Neito but He focused on the task at hand. He decided to answer the question asked of him.

[It is in order for us to raise the possibility of succeeding the mission, as well as keeping the loss we might have to a minimal. I wouldn't want to lose any of you guys from the General Affairs under my command. Hmm?]

After hearing his words, the guys from the General Affairs started making a commotion among them.

Maybe they think that they're just pawns meant to be used...

In reality, there were a lot of people who think like that when they're sent off to battle.

[I'm usually an on-site person. I somehow know what you are feeling right now.]

Neito wasn't lying. What he said was the truth. He was supposed to exterminate an enemy, but saying that wouldn't help.

Once again, they were a commotion among them.

[Until now, there was no person who would say such things to us...]/*Gen.Affair Guys*/

[Are you serious?]/* Gen.Affair Guys */

[Of course. If this mission goes well, I'll vouch in a special bonus for you guys.]

[Are...Are you serious?! Yahoo!!]

Neito was true to his word. If this battle goes well, that is, if he defeats Beetle, I'm sure his actions would be forgiven. But, if the mission fails, He dies.

[... You're a weird person, Mr. Main Office...]

The guy, who was quiet calm and was just listening to him, spoke out.

Since it was before mission, the guy didn't wear his visors. Neito could clearly see his face. He had a scar and an eye of a hawk which was sharp as a blade. He looked like he was in his 30s. Even as

Neito commanding the squad, he looked stronger than Neito. He named himself as Tsurugi. /*Not sure if I should translate it to: Blade, or just let it be Tsurugi*/

[...Is that so... I'm just...]

[But this and that happens after we complete this mission. If we were decimated after the battle, you could just blow your lie away.]

Neito responded.

[... I plan on winning. There is a point I want to get across...]

[Hmm... I see... Then, let's see if your resolve is real...]

Tsurugi then fitted in his visors.

One minute until the plan commences. They were entering standby phase.

Neito closed his eyes.

[Nate? Are you Okay?]

Anice suddenly asked him so he opened his eyes.

Remember that feeling again. I can't be stopped. I'll keep on

going. It’s a clear straight line towards the top.

[… … Let’s Move Out! Follow Me!]

A Cold and Dark Feeling enveloped him, fueling “that” drive within him.

[Here we Go!]

[U, Uu ooo oo oo!!!] /*IDK how to translate a battle cry…*/

Neito used the rope he prepared beforehand, to slide down directly onto the facility.

The others were late in the descent but they commenced their vertical descent after a while. Looking at it from below, Neito saw that is still had an impact. Unknown infiltrators were descending from the cliff, with their huge bodies and sinister intentions. He knew that the guys in his squad must have worked in Manual Labor.

His squad was composed of low level people from the General Affairs Department. When the mission starts, they wouldn’t be allowed to talk and only follow his orders. In other words, Neito was the head and brain of the whole mission. Everything relied on him.

With a weight of 200 kilos, his squad landed a few meters away from him. One after the other, the sound of them landing echoed

everywhere.

He knew that their bodies were firm, but falling from such height generated enough noise to warn Harrison's researchers of their arrival. A few minutes later, an alarm sounded of the entire facility.

He knew that they were preparing to intercept them. It was all within hypothesis.

If you looked at it, they were far superior to Beetle in terms of number. The plan was to showcase their sinister power to the enemy. Little tricks and resistance were futile meant nothing to them.

Neito equipped and activated his weapon, "Break-Blade". It was a super oscillation type weapon.

Break-Blade could fire of faint light to resonate a low note.

General Affair Combatants wore all black, giving off a sinister aura. In the middle, leading them was Neito, who ordered...

Normally, he wouldn't have said anything like this... it was not in his character. Honestly, he was afraid to say it out loud but...

[We're Beating Him Down. Let me Show you the Power of a Villain.]

/*

End Chapter jokes with Daikyun:

What’s the difference between a knife and my life?

A knife has a point.

*/

Chapter 14: Yo, Hero

The offence on Harrison's research facility dragged on to a melee battle. It was very clear that it was a civilian facility because the resistance was small coming from the research personnel. They were equipped with basic arms and didn't pose much threat.

What bothered them most were the robots made with the power of science. They were humanoid type robots that were equipped with rifles with rubber bullets, and a huge and heavy police baton. They arrived wave after wave, and as the battle raged on, the sounds of motor and gears clashing became more prominent.

Everybody was busy trying to push them off. As more came, the shutters began closing. Neito advanced in hopes of destroying the shutters.

/*protective shutter in order to shelter the personnel*/

[Uu ooo ooo!!!]

[Take this you piece of scrap metal!]

Everybody fought hard and had an individual battle raging on. Among the combatants, a few people stood out.

[Gaaaaaaaa –!!!!]

Their raw power can’t be stopped. It was useless stopping demons from going on a rampage. They sent each robot flying off their heels and advanced boldly.

/* Demons, cuz they’re evil and forceful*/

Blade shouted.

[Do you think such simple machines would stop me?!]

He was equipped with a traditional Japanese Katana. He easily dodged the rubber bullets and split a robot’s head in half as if he was cutting through cloth. Striking once again, he split the robot’s body in half.

[Take this! And this! And this!]

Anice, Neito’s assistant, was unparalleled in terms of firepower. She was equipped with a miniature version of a rail gun, and her rate of fire was decimating the enemies while providing support from the backlines.

She sounded weird while firing the gun, but her movements were so graceful, that Neito couldn’t help but admire her.

Amid all chaos and yellow gunfire in the battle, Neito fought with all his strength.

[Daa aa aaa aaa!]

Neito was proficient in dodging the bullets. Nothing fired from a long distance could match his speed.

Their armor was bullet proof from the rubber bullets. He relied on this advantage to advance close to the enemy and thrust his blade.

Of course it hurt. It may be bullet proof, but the force of impact could still be felt within. Even though it hurt, he wasn't planning on letting go of his blade. Until the Oscillation wave destroys the enemy, he wouldn't let it go. He held on to his weapon tightly. The robot reached for its Police baton and started pounding his left shoulder. He still didn't let go.

[Hurry up and die already! Daaa aa aaa!]

The robot soldier gave out a huge clank, and then stopped moving. Neito confirmed that the system got shut down, then proceeded to remove his blade.

[...Haa...haa... Next!]

They struggled for a while but they managed to end the melee battle. In the first place, they had a huge advantage if "He" wasn't here. They managed to subdue the robot soldiers and got through the shutters where the researchers and personnel were hiding. They took them into their custody and gagged them with cloth in

their mouth. They then went on to destroy the entire facility throughout.

[...Anice, can you give out the command to destroy the facility?]

As his breathing got heavier, Neito left Anice in command.

[Sure... But why? Are you sure you don't want to do it?]

Anice was catching her breath while asking Neito.

I guess it was expected from a tough bred person to have this much stamina...

[I need time to prepare for something...]

He needs to hurry. He needed to finish preparations before Beetle arrives.

Neito entered [Preparation Phase] alone and remained the same for a few minutes. He went to the open square where they secured the researchers, and entered standby phase. He acted like a commander and sat down on a chair.

[...Do you think He is coming?]

Blade asked Neito.

He knew that Beetle was supposed to be in another location. Even if He got the news that this place was attacked, there is still some distance to travel. But,

[He’s coming. I’m sure of it.]

Neito affirmed.

No matter how tiring it is, now matter how far he is, he knew Beetle was coming. Beetle, the Hero was coming.

Even though they were enemies, Neito believed in the Heroes. He believed in their courage. The courage he once adored as a kid, but now, they were enemies.

[!]

A loud sound echoed within the facility. The sound came from near the entrance. They suspected that it was the sound of the barricade they set up being destroyed.

[I told you so.]

Within a few second after the sound, a hero appeared in the square they were in.

The shoulder booster that was equipped was in full power. It was

a terrifying display of speed and power.

Air was gushing out under his feet. It seems that he was hovering.

Hmm... As I thought, He looks so cool. Unlike Dylan, he has this metallic feel with him with a touch of simplicity...

[... What have you done...]

His voice of lamenting... sounds young...

He got angry after seeing that the facility he was associated with, was destroyed.

[... I can't forgive you for this...]

Beetle's suit glowed in golden color and gave off a sound. similar to an aircraft taking off, near his feet. No doubt he was still young. While sitting on the chair, Neito rearranged himself. People were staring at him and at Beetle. He was at the center trying to make a laugh out of the situation.

He looked like a villain while doing it, but it was part of the play in hopes of crushing the researchers' hope of being saved, and to boost the morale of his comrades.

[Yo, Hero. You're late...]

Neito hid his emotion behind a mask. He hid the fact that; he was all beaten up and tired from the fight, he feared fighting a super human enemy enraged by their actions, he needs to fight in order for his squad to be saved, and he was nervous in facing this hero all alone.

He said it in an Evil tone.

Chapter 18: He Really Was Strong

[Wait for me. I’ m going to save everybody.]

As Beetle said it, his thrusters revved up to full power while Beetle himself took up his battle stance. His eye cameras “Twin Eyes” gleamed in light and his horn, (a Beetle’s horn, from which his name originated) attached to his head protector was dyed in gold.

Neito provoked Beetle in a hateful tone.

[Are you going to fight? Do you really think you can win against me?]

Neito knew that it wasn’t part of his character to say something like that, but he made it as realistic as possible. His heart said so otherwise.

It was expected of Beetle, not moving a single flinch and drawing back from a battle, this hero who protects society, He’s truly admirable.

[You’ll fight? Good. I’ll take you on.]

I have no plan on holding back. I’m going to defeat you and move forward.

[Here I come!]

Beetle's thrusters fired up and released a blast of air under his foot and aimed directly at Neito.

[... ... Do it.]

Neito gave the order to fire. 3 demons fired a claw like blow to the path Beetle was heading for. /*As mentioned in the previous chapter, they looked like black demons attacking from the facility since they're evil and all.*/

[Ha—aa — !!]

Beetle took a hit to an arm. The 3 infiltrators used their weight and pulled Beetle in.

In no time, Neito gave an order to his squad.

[Now is the time. To those with a ranged weapon, fire all together at once.]

[Aye Aye Sir!]

The first to respond was Anice. She fired at an unimaginable speed while seemingly looking innocent.

The others followed her lead and started shooting. Bullets were whizzing around Beetle.

[It’s pointless!]

The attack didn’t affect Beetle a single bit. He deployed a barrier from his horn and stopped every bullet that came his way.

As expected of someone who brought down many villains. Numbers don’t mean anything to him.

[Hmm… it is as one would expect.]

Neito looked confident and calm but inside; he was in a state of shock.

Dylan was strong… But this guy is on a whole new level. It would be illogical if a normal person could beat him… But I can’t just surrender.

[You’re kidding me right? After all that attack…]

[He’s a monster… There’s no way we could win…]

[We’re going to get killed… Me.. everybody is!]

General Affair guys started running away. It can’t be helped.

They must have felt what he felt when he first experienced Dylan's strength up front.

But He didn't plan on backing off.

Neito stood up from his chair and raised his blade.

[Don't falter! We are Metallica! A proud Evil Organization!

Beetle just finished a separate mission before coming here. His energy supply must be low. Continue attacking throughout!]

The only chance of winning was exploiting that point.

Beetle must have used up a sufficient amount of energy before coming here. He also needs energy to deploy his barrier.

Different from the other Guardians, Beetle's armor needs energy from an external source. They must have known the risk of running out of energy.

Their attacks weren't effective but, they weren't entirely pointless. They have 3 guys pulling him in the front while the others supported them by cover fire. At least they succeeded in stopping Beetle's advance.

They were busy stopping Beetle in his tracks. And it wasn't like they had limitless bullets. But if this goes on, they'll have the

disadvantage.

[Fire! Fire! Fire! Keep firing! We have sufficient enough bullets!]

Neito got into the mood.

[U oo oo oo!!!]

Somehow he managed to pull his spirits back together and resumed attacking.

[... Curse you!... using such dirty tricks...]

It was then...

[Beetle! The new energy crystal is in the Research Lab B! Hurry and exchange parts and... Defeat Metallica!]

[Wha–!?]

Neito turned around.

One of the researchers managed to free himself and inform Beetle. They didn't tie him securely enough. He held a gun pointing to one from the General Affairs. He risked his life just to inform Beetle.

[Understood! Wait for me! I'm going to save you all!]

Beetle reversed his thrust and headed off to the Lab. After acquiring the info, he darted off as fast his thrusters' could carry him.

[Damn it! I won't let you... we're following him!]

Neito gave out the order and then proceeded to the direction Beetle was headed.

Beetle was too fast. Their bare foot movements were no match for His hovering and thrusters.

Arriving in Research Lab B, they saw Beetle acquiring the Energy Crystal.

[You're too late, Evil Beings.]

Beetle turned the situation upside down.

Anice asked in a weak hearted voice.

[Nate! Beetle has the Crystal!... What should we do?...]

She knew that if they lost the battle, they were done for.

I’m sorry Anice… I’m not as strong as you think I am… Are you disappointed?

[Tschh… Do Heroes of Justice always have good luck?…]

[If there is such a thing as Fate, it will never take on the side of Evil. Here I come, Metallica! This is where the real fight starts!]

Beetle opened a compartment in his abdomen and exchanged the old and inserted the crystal.

Neito shouted.

[Stop!!!]

Beetle shouted in a victorious tone.

[Charge – On!]

The next moment, The armor emitted a strong light and the sound of it activating echoed off the room… But it didn’t happen.

[What! Why…!?]

Beetle’s armor lost its light. He immediately fell into his knees. The sounds of motor, the sound of his thrusters… just disappeared.

[Ha Ha Ha Ha... This is a masterpiece.]

Neito clapped his hands while sneering at Beetle.

[What... does this mean?...]

[Don’t you understand? The Crystal you inserted was a Crystal used to stop functions and movements from the outside.]

Neito produced a sinister laugh.

[Of course, it is standard for any machine to have a device that stops it in case it went haywire.]

During that time, Neito couldn’t see Beetle’s face under his helmet but, he knew Beetle was bewildered by what just happened.

[But my companion said...]

Your companion informed you even if it would cost his life?

Neito couldn’t help but give off a grin. It was just too good for him.

[Ha Ha Ha ha. You still don’t get it, don’t you? You’re so thick, Fine, I’ll tell you what it means.

That was just a lie. I knew where they kept the device that could stop a prototype in case it went out of control. I just passed down that info onto you. I had it intentionally let his mouth gag be loose in order for him to inform you.]

[You fiend...]

[It was really simple... I just threatened him, saying that he'll get a bullet unless he "Risked his life" to give you the information. I knew you would confide in your companions and would rush to get the device. He just sold out a Hero of Justice. I guess that's cruel of him huh? Ha Ha Ha Ha!]

[You piece of... You were the one who threatened him! He has no fault!]

Beetle's armor was just dead weight without energy. Without being able to change and replenish his energy, his boosters and thrusters were useless. With a weight of a few hundred kilos, he wasn't able to stand back up.

Neito smiled and activated his Break-Blade while walking towards Beetle.

[... Wo, Wow....]

His Squad was too impressed, having witness such Evil committed before their eyes.

[... Is that all you have to say Beetle? I am Metallica. There is nothing wrong with me doing wrong things] /*This sounds better in Japanese*/

[! ... ... At least! At least spare the researchers and personnel. They followed you without question right?]

[... ... Including the one who gave you false information?]

[Of course.]

[... ... I understand. I'll at least spare their lives. But, if you put up a fight or try to resist us, there won't be any guarantee that I won't kill them. It is obvious, but we need to destroy the armor you're wearing.]

[... ... You better keep your promise.]

[... ... Nobody knows...]

After the conversation ended, Neito turned to Beetle who was kneeling down. He held up his blade and stroke Beetle's helmet.

There was a cracking sound, followed by a loud vibration. After the two sounds echoed, Beetle's Armor cracked, and started shattering from head to toe.

[Hmm... you're young as I thought.]

Inside the cracked armor showed a young guy, fainted from the strike.

[Huh–... and that is the end of this guy. With us capturing and securing the researchers, they won't be able to create another "Beetle Armor". This guy can't do anything to us now. In addition to that, the researchers' won't be fighting back, seeing their Hero defeated, and knowing that there's a traitor among them. They have no choice but to obey us.]

Neito used all of his power and stamina in the battle. He staggered.

[Are you Okay Mr. Main Office?]

Blade immediately came to his aid and gave him a shoulder.

[... Yeah, I just need a little rest and I'll e fine.]

Neito somehow managed a response.

[We really did win huh? You're one hell of a guy. Was Beetle weaker than you expected?]

[... ...]

It was no such thing... He was strong. He really was a strong guy.

He didn’t have anything towards the guy who betrayed him. Even before he fainted, he secured his companion’s lives above his life. Those words were strong enough on their own. As a defender of society, he really was an admirable guy.

[… … He really was a strong guy. Beetle really was a strong guy.]

He was a fine, noble and admirable person. In opposite to that, I defeated him using dirty tricks. I won’t regret my actions. But I will abide by the promise I made.

[… … You really are a weird one…]

[Never mind that… is everybody okay? Are they safe?]

Although Neito was disoriented, He needed to confirm.

[Yeah, everybody only sustained a minor injury. There were no deaths.]

[Hahaha… That’s good… really good…]

Damn… I’m too tired. Is it okay for me to pass out here?

[Naate! ! You were amazing ! So that’s how you fight ! Anice is so thrilled right now !]

After completing the first phase, Anice rushed to him. Her white cheeks were red from the excitement. Her voice was unnecessarily too excited with a serious air.

[… … Well…umm… that's why I told you that I'm not that stro–…]

[No, that's no such thing. You were really cool back there!]

Hearing it from someone who was raised in California, and a daughter of an Evil Boss with straight way expressing it felt weird to Neito.

[Hey–]

Without warning, Anice hugged Neito. She was more slender and delicate than expected, He felt her Chest push his.

He panicked.

[… … Wait a… …]

[? … … Hmmm? You really can't be helped Nate… Fufufu…]

[… …Sto–… Stop–]

Neito who took more damage than anybody, lost to her tenderness, and fell asleep.

/*

“Neito is the main character of the story and I have written “What is good for Him”. His motivation to conquer the world, to change the world, is coming out in the following chapters. It is quite obvious, but I will just point it out for the readers.”

Chapter 19: Oden, Or Something

A quiet room existed in the Main Office.

People call it “The Boss’ Room”. Within it, a man sat down in a stylish chair.

He may be old, but he was the symbol of the Organization he headed. Behind him were steel wings framed neatly.

He reviewed the documents presented before him.

The documents contained the records of his subordinates. He was scanning through the documents, dividing them left and right.

[Hou…]

The man stopped.

Komori Neito :

April 2213 – Entered the company as a volunteer. Assigned to the General Affairs Department.

August 2213 – Moved to the Second Sales Department.

October 2213 – Promoted to Core level 2

Business Ability: C | Battle Ability: D | Adaptability: Uninspected | Commanding Capability: C+ Special Skill Evaluation: E | Overall Score/Evaluation: D

In charge of Evaluation on Findings Section.

After experiencing a battle with the Hero Dylan, moved to the Second Sales Department. Had a great evaluation result within the Sales Department. Was in charge of planning an offence to capture the Harrison research facility with Ikeno. Took command of a unit and contributed with the destruction of Beetle. May be impulsive in certain times. Received high approval from the squad He led. Proves to have potential. Received high expectations from His superiors.

/*I know, I know… these things should be in bullet form. I'm just following the format of the author… and it's not my job. */

Special Note: Has Anice Jairus as his assistant, as part of the inter-employee exchange program between Metallica and Crimson. Treat with caution.

[Ah… that brat from that time…]

The man put Neito's document on his right, and scanned the next document.

Ikeno Reiji:

April 2113 – Entered the company through the American Selection Test Specialized in Management. Assigned to the Planning Department. Was experienced enough to be promoted to Core level 2.

September 2113 – Promoted to Core level 3.

Business Ability: A | Battle Ability: B | Adaptability: A | Commanding Capability: A | Special Skill Evaluation: A | Overall ScoreEvaluation: A.

/*Sigh… here we go again…*/

In charge of management.

Demonstrated proficiency in management ever since He entered the company. Has high battle management and decisive skill, and was in charge of multiple operations. Has high battle capabilities and can quickly adapt if sent to the front lines with high vitality. The Planning Department's Ace. Gained honors in planning the offensive against Beetle.

Special Note: Had relations with Kagawa from General Affairs, Hirasawa from Accounting. In a relationship with Chelsea from R&D.

[Hmm. He is a well-made man. He's someone who is fits the description of a Hero.]

The man set Ikeno's document to his left.

[Let's see whose next… HouHou-She quite a beauty…]

Mayuzumi Maki:

April 2113 – Entered the company through the American Selection Test Specializing in Development. Assigned to the General Affairs Department.

Business Ability: B| Battle Ability: E |Adaptability: C |Commanding Capability: D | Special Ability Evaluation: A

Assigned to the Management section.

Although assigned to the General Affairs (G.A) Department, She works hard either way. She is calm and gentle, and is popular within the company. She is young compared to her Coworkers, but is very sociable. Her Business Capabilities are on the passing mark. She hopes to be reassigned to the R&D Department, wanting to use her skills acquired in M.I.T as soon as possible.

Special Notes: She is Half Sapas (Mother's Side). She plans to submit an entry on next year's Remodeling Project Competition.

/*not sure what Sapas means when translated … I'll just go with it*/

[Hm Hm… She goes… on my left. She is a beauty after all. It can't be helped if she gets favored.]

After the Harrison Offensive, Neito passed out and was confined to bed for 2 days. He was very nervous on the day he would come back to the office.

/*Assume that the facility is named Harrison, it does manufacture and research Beetle's "Harrison" armor after all*/

He nervously entered the Second Sales Department. Anice jumped at him.

[Nate! ! Are you feeling well now? I've been waiting for You!]

[Oh… yeah…]

Her smile was beautiful as usual.

He had a feeling the she was too inspired by the foul methods He used in defeating Beetle. He already had this feeling when she came to see him the other day.

Neito's usual thoughts:

Oh shit… If the Crimson's Boss hears anything about me…

Didn’t pop up today… He wouldn’t deny that he was happy by his accomplishment. But he wouldn’t express it in public. Because He thought he would look really creepy doing so.

Neito thought of apologizing to people he caused trouble by his absence. He started off to Izumi.

[Good Morning Chief. I-I may have caused you trouble by being absent. I’m sorry.]

[Oh, it’s fine since you’re fully recovered. You really did well. And as promised, You captured the Harrison facility, and brought down Beetle. You really are something. It was worth it promoting you. Thank you.]

Izumi was smiling, unlike the person he saw a while back during the meeting. It was if he was a different person.

[Tha-Thank you very much. It was because you supported me back then, that I was able to do this much.]

It was the truth. If Neito messed up, Izumi wouldn’t have gotten off the hook easily.

But He believed in Me and pushed me to my limits. This usual, humble man risked his career for me.

Neito felt the approval of his superiors for the first time.

[Everybody eyes here. Although the credit goes to the Planning Department, We can't deny Komori-kun's effort in bringing the plan to a success. Let us congratulate him]

[You did well, Komori.]

[That was a miracle.]

[I really thought that you were going to die!]

[You really showed them your willpower to rise up from the G.A. Department.]

[Promoted to Level 2 huh? I guess I'll be lining behind you huh?]

His coworkers gave out a round of applause and their own words towards his success.

[... ... Thank you very much. I was able to do well because of Chief Izumi and your guidance. I'll keep doing my best.]

It was the only thing he could say at that moment. He was about to cry from the joy.

Of course He knew. He knew that if he was defeated, He would be

evicted out of the company. They would've put all the blame on Izumi, putting him into shame. Even though his actions /*of defeating Beetle*/were not accepted by society, He was just about to cry.

After that, he decided to finish some paperwork. The day dragged on to night.

[Good work today... aren't you going to finish up?]

[Ah, well... I still haven't finished my written report so...]

[Do you want help?]

[No... This is the last so...]

One by one, the staff left the office and went home. Neito remained working alone in the office.

After 3 working hours, he almost finished his report. He had no working experience in this field, so it was obvious, that he took 3 times longer to finish his work.

[Ah... I'm so tired. I can't do it anymore....]

Neito was talking to himself, but as he locked the Sales Department's door, He saw a figure outside.

[Woah... ... You-you scared me.... Maki-san?]

Maki, whom he took the entrance exam together, was standing in front of him. It really was a long time since they met again. The only time they got to actually speak with each other was in the hospital room after Neito got hospitalized. Although he moved to the main office, he still caught a glimpse of her, but they never had the chance to talk to each other.

He thought of starting a conversation with her, but he thought that, maybe he would be a bother to her or yet, he might say some weird things. The other reason was, maybe she was too busy for him to enter her life.

[I-I'm sorry... U-Ummm... Good Work Today...] /*She definitely a shy-dere idk the exact word.*/

Maki noticed Neito, and displayed a sense of panic. She wore a white sweater and a skirt today. She was fondling her skirt as if she was bothered by something.

[? Good work too... Is something bothering you? Why are you here at the Sales Department...?]

[No, but... ...]

[Ah, did you want something from me? Were there any defect in our goods?]

[That-That's not it!] /*how do I make this part cute?*/

[?? It's getting late and I really want to go home...]

[Umm...Wait!]

[Wha-What?]

[Neito-kun, it's been a while since you moved to this department... It wouldn't hurt to see me once in a while would it?]

She replied in an upset tone.

[I tried coming here multiple times, but you weren't here.]

Maki showed a face of dissatisfaction.

[I-I'm sorry. A lot has happened ever since...]

Neito was bewildered. He never thought of it that way. As fellow coworkers who entered the company together, they always need to get in touch with each other?... Neito wasn't familiar with such things.

[I really was worried about you...]

Maki stared Neito in the eyes. He was used to Anice doing it, but

he still wasn’t used to speaking with other girls.

[Ah…I’m Sorry. Well, Let’s—Ummm…]

Neito was in a state of confusion. Maki, looking at him, laughed for a while.

Thank god she wasn’t mad at me for real…

[Ha ha ha. That’s enough. It’s just a joke… Anyway, will you join me for dinner?]

That escalated quickly.

[Wait… were you waiting for me the whole time?]

[… … Yes…. I rather not have you ask that question.]

[You could’ve called me out]

[… … but you looked so serious. I couldn’t just interrupt you. I didn’t know you could make that kind of face, Neito-kun]

Neito didn’t understand her one bit.

*stares at Neito

[Aa! I heard about it! You accomplished such a great feat! That's the reason! We'll go celebrate!]

[Aa—I see. Should we also invite Ikeno? Do you know his contact details?]

[Aa—well Ikeno… is with his department celebrating their victory.]

[I see…]

If he remembered, Izumi also told him that the credit for their victory went to the Planning Department. It can't be helped either way. They were the ones who planned the assault anyway. It seems when Neito was resting, Ikeno's achievements got spread throughout the company.

It figures. What did expect from that guy?

[I think you need to be recognized more.]

[Hm? No no no. There's no need for that. Besides, I really don't care about such things…]

[Well… that's that. How about it? Do you want to celebrate with just the two of us?]

[...]

[Is it... not good enough?]

That wasn't the case. He was just glad someone invited him. He was deeply moved by the invitation, that couldn't give out a reply for a moment.

This girl is really kind. And as usual, she's cute as ever. She's so pure and innocent, you wouldn't say that she's from and Evil Organization. Just walking with her makes my nose bleed, Now what if we ate together? Would I be able to hold out? What's so interesting about me anyway? Why does she always come to me?

Neito wasn't stupid enough to refuse her offer.

[No No No. Let's go! Thanks. I really appreciate the offer.]

Maki's face brightened up as soon as Neito answered. She looked like a flower blooming in the spring.

Before He noticed, His heart rate was going up, and he began to sweat nervously.

[Yeah! Thank god. Shall we go? What do you want to eat Neito-kun?]

He thought for a while.

What does a girl even like to eat? Do we need to go to a fancy restaurant? Shit, This month's salary is about to run out. My salary is too low even for a simply office worker…

Neito got lost in his thoughts for a while. His head began blanking out.

[… Oden… Or something…]

[Hmm… Oden?]

[Is it a bad idea?]

[That's no such thing! I really like radishes!]

Wow, I also like radishes…

After hearing her words, Neito felt relieved.

Is this what it feels to be healed emotionally?

Chapter 20: It's Delicious. Really

[One Shochu and a boiled egg please.]

In the end, Neito went on the usual Oden shop he always goes to.

It was a cheap shop, up by a guard railing, but there were no other places he could of. Anyway, Maki was a asking him to

[Bring me to the place where you usually eat!]

And he had no choice but to submit to her request because she was too polite in suggesting her request.

On the other hand, This Oden shop was pretty good. While being an Oden shop, the place also serves ordinary food served in diners, such as Menchikatsu or Potato salad.

Although the owner has a scar on his face and looks like a yakuza, he really was a kind and generous person.

[Here you go, young man. You brought yourself a really cute lady with you today... Is this your...]

[Give me a break Owner... She's just my coworker. If you indicate it that way, wouldn't that be rude?]

Neito replied jokingly to the shop owner while pouring Shochu

into their cups. He took a glance at Maki.

Oh shit, what if she takes this seriously

[No! no no! I'm totally fine with it. Really!]

Maki shook her hands in denial.

She really is a nice person.

[Hahaha. What will you be having Miss?]

[Aa, Umm—I'll have broiled radish first...]

[Coming right up...]

After a while, a hot piping Oden was served to her. They were the only costumers in the shop. Maybe the shop isn't successful because of the Owner's face...

They made a toast and started eating.

[Wow. It really does look delicious. Thanks for the meal! A – ha Fu—fu—]

/*this is supposed to be Maki blowing her Oden...*/

After swallowing, she showed a face of delight while blowing for another. Neito couldn't help but look at her.

[??... What are you looking at...? Aa! Is there something in my face?!]

[No... well... Is it good?]

[It's really good!]

[I agree. It's kind of dirty but this is really a good store.]

[Well, I'm sorry that it's that dirty. Here, it's on the house]

/*The Owner replied in a sarcastic tone*/

[Thank you very much]

Two of them sat in the old shop eating Oden. It wasn't a while when they finally got comfortable enough to talk to each other.

[Did you know that you're the 3rd person to have a meal with me in my entire life?]

[Hmm? I-Is that so?]

[Yeah. The first two were a Senpai from Metallica and a High School friend a while back.]

[Is that so…]

[Neito-kun, what do you usually do on your day off?]

[Hmm. Well, I train by myself. Other than that, I just withdraw from society for a while. What about you?]

[Wow! training by yourself is quite impressive. Me? Well, I'm very free on that day so I usually read a book or take a walk.]

[You're like an intellectual type… Oh yeah, you said you have a college degree right? Was it from Masa-Massachusetts? You're younger than me, but you have a college degree… that's really impressive. What kind of degree did you earn?]

[Umm… Biology… and Umm… Engineering]

[Whoa-that's impressive]

[I-It's no big deal, really. You're more impressive than me, accomplishing so much in your first year in the company. Oh, by the way, once again congratulations on your victory]

It wasn't as grand as a usual celebration party would go, but Neito had fun. Somehow, He felt Maki was also having fun.

She looked a little drunk; her cheeks were pink from the alcohol. Even so, she looked beautiful as usual.

[Hmm—Did you do something good?]

The store owner sometimes joins his costumer's conversations, but he knows his place. He asks them discreetly and knows when to ask.

[That's right! Neito-kun was amazing!]

[Is that so? I hope you continue to be successful in your career.]

The shop owner then brought another serving of Shochu and poured it in for him. It was different kind this time. It was a more expensive kind of Shochu this time.

[Owner… what is–]

[It's to the future of your career! It's on the house]

Neito didn't think of it badly, but having expectations on him was too much, even for him.

[Hahaha… but I'm just a regular office worker so…]

He reached out for tea, but Maki looked at him.

[What are you saying?! That has nothing to do with it. I know you have potential within you]

He purposely asked the owner to serve not too alcoholic drinks to Maki in order for her not to be drunk, but tension began to rise in the shop.

[You're quite famous within a part of the company. "We're an Evil Organization! What's wrong with us doing Evil Deeds?" you sounded really cool back then.]

She sounded off to imitate him; she looked really cute doing so. She didn't even sound like him.

Neito laughed without noticing. It was too embarrassing for him, so he decided to change the topic.

[By the way, why did you join Metallica?]

It bothered him ever since they took the entrance exam together.

He knew Ikeno's motives. He was a kind of person who desired knowledge, he wanted power, which Metallica could supply him easily. Maki on the other hand, didn't look that way.

[...]

Maki fell silent.

Shit, I must have hit on something personal.

Neito was about to apologize, but Maki straightened her face, as if she decided something, and replied Neito's question.

[... I'm half Sapas... My mother was a Sapas...]

The air in the shop suddenly stood still. Silence rang out. He didn't know if the Shop owner heard her, but he was deep in the shop. /*Shop owner was in the shop out of visual range*/

Sapas. They were commonly known throughout the world as "The fallen Evil Organization". In reality, the word was to describe a race. Their race evolved differently from normal human beings, and they were considered aborigines.

Other than possessing high intellectual ability, they were no different from normal beings. They existed even before the current civilization was built, and they entered a Cold Sleep for a long period of time. /*Cold Sleep = Hibernation?*/

They awakened to the present world, amazed at the change that happened. Even so, their intellectual capabilities were unmatched throughout the passage of time. They soon forged an alliance prompting coexistence between normal human beings and their race.

There were extremist within them, called “The Black Sapas”, who believed that they were the superior race, and they should be in charge of the world. So They declared a war against the rest of humanity.

A battle between the “Black Sapas” and Guardians raged on for many years but eventually, the Guardians won and the “Black Sapas” were defeated.

Sapas’ who weren’t “Black” hid in the corner of the world avoiding public eye and humiliation. They weren’t granted any rights.

There’s no imagining what kind of treatment they had been through...

[... My mother wasn’t a Black Sapas. She met my father and lived a normal life, until I was 8. Guardians took her, and that was the last we saw of her...]

[... I see...]

Neito understood her. He once experienced a similar situation.

[... It’s not like I wanted revenge but...]

Neito somehow understood her. He was sure the she really

wanted to change the world. She wanted to create a world where Mothers aren't taken from her child with no reason.

He just couldn't agree with her. Without the Evil Organization, the world would've been at peace. He was sure many people wanted it to remain that way. Many people would like to preserve that peace, that's why Rocks and Guardians exist.

She doesn't care how many years it would take to change the world, but she chose to join Metallica other than go down another path to change the world. Rocks or Metallica? Which side was on the side of justice? The answer was very obvious.

[... ... I'm really a bad person after all... I kept it from you that I'm a Sapas... I'm sorry. You're the first one I've told my secret to...]

Maki was trembling. Her shoulders were shaking a little bit.

That's no such thing... You aren't a bad person

He couldn't say it out loud. It would sound like a white lie.

Neito didn't want to lie to her. So he did something out of the ordinary. He pat her head.

He didn't know if she would be grossed out by him actions, but it was the only thing he could think of to comfort her.

[I don’t care if you’re a Sapas. If we were to compare, I think I would turn out to be more evil than you…]

Maki raised her head, looking surprised.

[Let’s change the world… together…]

Neito couldn’t say it out good, but He managed to get his thoughts across.

Even evil can’t accept who you are, but I’m different. I won’t deny who you are. I’ll always fight. With my friends, you, together.

[… … yeah]

Maki raised her face. Her eyes were wet, but they weren’t from crying.

[Here, it’s on the house.]

The shop owner came back in the perfect timing, bringing in two cups of tea with him.

[M-Malt Tea?]

[It’s today’s special]

The cup gave off a delicious smell.

[Maki-san, you should try their tea. It’s really delicious. Although it’s just service tea]

Neito beamed her in a cheerful tone.

[But That doesn’t mean that you need to go… This isn’t Kyoto after all.]

The shop Owner laughed after remarking so. Despite his evil look, he remarked in a cheerful and playful way. Maki laughed happily.

[Yes… Thank you…] /*This part is supposed to be Ittadakimasu

[Thank you for the offer] but It’s weird in a English translation, so I changed it */

The two of them drank in silence.

Damn, it’s really good.

Looking at his side, Maki was crying while drinking.

[It’s Delicious. Really…]

She’s the cutest thing I ever looked at.

The shop Owner stepped out and lit a smoke.

After eating Maki told him.

[Haa—That was really delicious … Neito-kun…]

[Hmm?]

[I’ll be in your care from now on. Let’s change the world together.]

Her face brightened up. Neito replied

[Of course]

I’ll continue fighting. But you opened my eyes. I’m not alone in this fight.

Chapter 21: I Am Strong

5 months passed since the the battle against Beetle. After the encounter, Neito was involved in planning various offensives against the Guardians, and if it was necessary, Neito went out as a field agent. After the destruction of the Guardian's facilities, Metallica gained control and the the respect of the mafia and various gangster organizations.

In a short period of time, Neito succeeded all the operation he handled. It was easier to accomplish those missions with the full aid and reinforcements of Metallica, rather than the the time he fought solely with Beetle and Dylan. Neito's style was unique among the Department, and this, inspired other staff to follow his example. It became a custom within the the Department that they go into battle and take command of the troops, even if it meant risking their lives.

Neito, who was considered the the weakest among the Department, defeated Beetle, and rose among the ranks within the Department. Before He knew it, the attitude of the staff towards him suddenly changed.

In terms of result, The Sales Department achieved a lot more than they ever did in the past. Dramatic experiences lead to motivation, and motivation leads to success. This was caused by a single new employee.

[... And with that, The Second Sales Department has achieved a lot more this term, rather than the the previous terms. Everyone, we really did well. I hope we will continue to progress like this in

the following terms. I'm counting on all of you.]

The year ended with Izumi's speech, followed by the constant appreciation of the staff members towards Izumi. Neito had no room to speculate, but He knew Izumi's prestige went up within the company as the Sales Department started producing results. That's how much The Second Sales Department's success influenced the company.

[We're finally through!]

[All right!]

[...Huh-]

The staff celebrated with a sense of accomplishment in their voices. Neito also felt the same. He agreed that they did great this year. He was nominated as "The Rookie Of The Year". Although He was close to getting the award, He didn't make the cut. It was unfortunate, but He was satisfied with himself.

Neito knew that his success was influenced by the support given to him by Izumi. He went to thank Izumi, who was sitting in his desk, before he decided to go home.

[Good job today, Chief. I have been in your care this year. I hope I can count on you in the the following years too.]

[Ah... Yeah.... Wait, Komori. I'm sorry, but could you come in

early tomorrow? I'll meet you in my room tomorrow morning. I have something to discuss with you.]

[?? Okay...]

Izumi expressed a sense of disappointment.

The next day, Neito arrived in the office early than usual. He went in the the Department Chief's office.

[Pardon me for the intrusion.]

[Oh, come in. Take a sit.]

[??]

There was someone other than Izumi inside the office. He looked like a top company executive.

Wait... I know him from somewhere...

He had a huge physical build, tied up his hair and wore a long coat. Looking closely, his eyes were green.

He must be a foreigner...

His muscles were clearly visible in his tight clothes. He released

an overwhelming fierce aura, as if he was trying to overwhelm him.

[This person is the head of the personnel affairs section; He's the Director, General Raz.]

/* it could be Director General Raz to make It more cool*/

[Director...?]

Neito suddenly remembered.

I remember now... He was there in the the entrance examination. In that way, he could look like a normal person while being able to scout new recruits... If that's the case, he really has a lot of roles to take in this company. He's head of the personnel affairs, also the managing director and a General? Is the title of General just an honorary title?

[So you're the bastard Komori Neito huh? I should've known you since I was in the interview, but your face don't ring a bell. You're awfully nice, for a person with such a reputation. Tell me, can you really fight?]

[...]

Neito thought to himself.

He’s a managing director. In other words, this person is one of the the people who reside on the top of Metallica, close to achieving world domination. Why is this man in front of me? I heard his name a while back. General Raz: He was with Metallica founding days. He aided Metallica to make it the company it is now. He defeated 200 Guardians by himself, took down the Chinese mafia and He is considered as an equal to Rock’s best Guardians.

[Hey punk, Answer my question. Can you really fight?]

[I…]

He couldn’t go on with a reply. He tried his best not to reply against Raz’s humor. Thinking about the the path He has been threading, He wouldn’t want somebody like Raz take him on lightly.

[I will fight. No matter what method it takes to win.]

Neito replied in a serious tone.

He held back himself from crumbling in nervousness. With his reply, He slowly applied pressure to the villain who looked down on him.

[Hmm… At least you got guts.]

[…Thank you very much]

The air of tension within the the room was at its peak. Izumi cut right in the conversation.

[General Raz, I think that's enough... Shall we get into the main topic?]

[Yeah... Pardon me kid. I just wanted to test you.]

[Yeah...]

What the the hell is this all about?

Neito had no idea at all.

[Komori, There has been an official announcement made by the personnel affairs section...]

[Wha–]

Official Announcement... Am I going to be moved again? I just finished my first year in this Department... Now I'm going to be moved again?

[I know you were doing good ever since you entered the the Sales Department, and I honestly think that it's unfortunate that we're letting you go, but we need you transfer to an another field.]

[But… why so soon?]

Neito replied in bewilderment.

Maybe it’s a demotion. I was finally getting used to the work in this Department, and I’m sure I produced results in my stay here.

[Don’t take it that way. It’s not a demotion. You’ve been specially requested to the personnel affairs section. That’s the the reason why General Raz is here. I couldn’t just just announce it officially.]

[“Special”?]

[General Raz, Will you do the honor?]

Izumi looked at General Raz. General Raz cleared his throat and announced in a low voice.

[Komori Neito, I assign you to be deployed at the special region. With this in effect, I promote you to Core Level 3. You will receive subordinates from Metallica Main Office’s General Affairs Department. You will take your men and head to the the special region. We expect great things from you… Dismissed!]

[… …]

Neito got lost in Raz’s words.

Level 3 would mean Chief Clerk class. He knew that much.

/*Chief Clerk or Squad Leader class – I don't know which is best to use*/

Special Region: The region which holds Metallica's (business) interest. He knew what it meant, but, he was still lost in words.

[Komori! This is clearly a promotion! It's no doubt that it would benefit you greatly if you went to the personnel affairs section. It's unheard of someone from a clerical position to be transferred to be a field official ever since Metallica was founded.]

[Are you listening punk?! Give me a reply!]

[... Ye-Yeah]

[What's the matter? Are you dissatisfied? I can dismiss this promotion if you want to.]

The idea of dismissing the the promotion appealed to him. He was just getting used to the Department. It wasn't like He was dissatisfied with his work. And that way, He would be close to where Maki is. Where the heck is this special region anyway? My life would continue to be peaceful if I remain within the Sales Department.

But,

He couldn't just leave it that way. As Izumi said, it was a special case that he would be transferred to the personnel affairs section. It was exemption, that a normal civilian like him would instantly get promoted to Core Level 3 and become a Squad leader, immediately taking command of a squad. Maybe His efforts against Beetle and Dylan, or the deeds he did within the Department were recognized. Or was there an alternate motive for his promotion.

I took down Dylan and Beetle with unfair tactics... maybe I was just lucky...

That fight wasn't just it. He gained experience while in the Department. Ever since he was transferred, He gained confidence and He acknowledged his capabilities.

Metallica is an Evil Organization, I'll use any unfair method, even it is cowardly to achieve my goals. There is no other way. That's the only way they will acknowledge our power.

The the hesitation to stay within the Department, the the uneasiness of being assigned to the special region and the fear of a conspiracy within the personnel affairs... Neito strengthened his resolve

I am Strong.

[No, I'm not dissatisfied at all. I accept the the promotion. I also

accept the the reassignment to the the special region. You can count on me.]

I will keep on on moving forward.

/*

End chapter Thoughts with Daikyun:

Wrestling is actually really stupid.

Men with No pants fighting for a belt... WTF

*/

Chapter 22: I'll Use This Opportunity To Finish The Introductions

Neito got promoted to Core Level 3, and accepted his assignment to the special region.

Raz took a deep breath and Izumi gave a sense of relief.

[Is that so…? Do your best not to get killed kid. Izumi, I'm done here. I'll be on my way.]

[Yes… sorry for the bother]

In Raz's position, a promotion to be a squad leader wasn't such a big thing. He stood up and quickly left the room.

[Komori, could you wait here a bit? I'll call your subordinates. I'll use this opportunity to finish the introductions.]

Izumi was well prepared for the situation. Neito felt jitter-ish from the announcement. He commanded people from the G.A Department, but it was because he was the on site officer. The situation just demanded him to take command. It was a first of him to have real subordinates under him. Anice was just Anice, He couldn't call her a subordinate. Anice was "special".

Subordinates huh? I wonder who they'll be… It is both something to worry about and to look forward to.

There was a knock the the Department Chief's room.

After waiting for Izumi's response, the first person came in.

[... ...! You're –]

[It has been a long time.]

Neito remembered the one who entered, in other words, the one who would become Neito subordinate.

He had a long glossy black hair, with eyes of an eagle looking its prey. He was tall, and was about 30 years of age. He was with him in the Harrison offensive.

[... ... Tsurugi-san?]

[Tsurugi...? I guess that's good enough.]

He answered in a calm and low voice.

This guy? My subordinate? No, No No. That's clearly off the roof. Having a subordinate that's more powerful than the leader is clearly ridiculous.

[Izumi-san... Umm... What does this mea—]

Neito turned to ask Izumi but it was Tsurugi who gave an answer to his question.

[I volunteered to be in this squad. I decided that you are worthy enough to be my superior.]

What the hell is this guy? He's speaking like a sengoku samurai... If I remember right, He's just a chivalrous guy...

[Komori, I don't know the full details, but why not? He's the man of honor in the Italian mafia, and he came here in order to assist Metallica with his skills, but for some reason, he ended up in the G.A Department]

Izumi explained Tsurugi's situation. Neito consented.

So that's why... And I thought it was weird having such a strong guy in the bottom ranks of the G.A Department. He's part of the Head-Hunting group recruited for Metallica huh? How the hell did this guy end up in the G.A Department? And why the hell is He now under me?

[Umm... Tsurugi-san, Why me?]

Tsurugi gave off a chuckle. He was a well built, rough man.

[I fell in love with you... your "Evil" to be precise... I'll follow you

anywhere… Boss]

[But being assigned to the special region would prove to be troublesome for you…]

[There's nothing to worry about if I stick to you.]

[Yeah… I guess that'll do]

[Understood Boss.]

Neito had nothing else to say on the matter. Thinking about it carefully, there's nothing wrong with Tsurugi accompanying him.

He knew Tsurugi from the Harrison offensive; his battle capabilities, his self control, his decisiveness and his strange loyalty towards him.

There was no disadvantage having him. He pledged his blade to Neito, and if that's the case, He'll use him to his max potential.

After his conversation with Tsurugi, a feint knock came at the door. The door opened and a man came in.

[Come In. Komori, I'll introduce you to the second member of your squad.]

[G’morning]

The guy who entered had a light and bright voice.

It’s not only the voice… His whole vibe is very light and cheerful.

The guy that came in had a light brown hair, wore a slim suit and had a gaudy face. He’s young apparently.

[Oh, This guy will be my superior?]

[He is Niina Kazuma-kun]

[Nice to meet you, I’m assigned to your squad. It I’ll be officially entering this company this April. I don’t have any battle experience, but I graduated college for your information]

Entering the company next year? He must be a new guy.

Neito was just one term ahead of him.

[Y-Yeah…. Nice to meet you too.]

[Eh? That guy is my superior? But this guy looks stronger than him? You serious?]

The man called Niina Kazuma regarded Tsurugi as the squad

leader.

That’s entirely acceptable.

[I’ll just say that I’m the squad leader.]

[Whoa… Is this for real? You’re really my life model. Is it true that you defeated Beetle? How much of the story is true Senpai?]

[Well… All of it is true]

[That’s one awesome feat there…]

The air became quiet and still for a moment, just like the time General Raz spoke to Neito a few moment ago.

For once, Neito wasn’t overcome by his feelings.

That battle really does mean a lot to him.

Izumi whispered to Neito in a low voice.

[… It doesn’t look like it, but Niina-kun aced the quiz on the entrance exam… And well, the result would be… You would have to babysit him I guess…]

Neito had no reason to complain on the task given.

[No problem chief. Niina, it must be hard on you to be assigned to the special region off the bat]

[Well, I really don't want to, but I have no choice.]

Wouldn't Tsurugi be mad about him and his style?

Neito turned to Tsurugi. He didn't give a damn. Looking at it closely, Tsurugi only looked at Niina, as if he was trying to protect Neito from any danger.

[Chief Izumi. Is this all of my squad members?]

[Yeah... I had the intention of leaving it so, but...]

As Izumi finished his words, The door opened the same time as they heard a knock from it.

[Naaate! You got promoted! Congratulations!]

A girl came in with a blonde hair. She was one of the world's elite; with a deadly father who would kill you instantly the moment he finds out you hurt his daughter. She was one of the Untouchables.

[Y-Yeah... Thanks.]

[Good Job! Anice knew that you would become great in the nick of time! It's okay! I'll always be with you, even if you change jobs... You'll never be lonely!]

Anice held Neito's hand tightly and gave of a big smile.

[Hmm? Are you coming too?]

[Yeah! Are you happy?]

Neito looked at Izumi. He signaled that it wasn't his idea, and slid his fingers sideways on his throat.

He couldn't refuse him huh...? The middle management section must be rough for him...

Neito looked at Tsurugi. Tsurugi NE'd and gave a sense of laughter.

/*NE = Nose exhale – The thing you actually do when you find something funny on the internet; blowing out a small amount of air through the nasal passage.*/

Niina was saying something like [Whoa, she's really cute... You're really amazing Senpai]

[C'Est la vie] /*Neito doesn't speak French */

With that, Neito with his 3 subordinates were officially assigned to the special region.

At the end of the day, Neito invited his new subordinates out for a drink. Well, it was something like “deepening our friendship” type of celebration. The 3 of the replied.

[We’ll be in your care from now on]

[Well, I have some private work to do so I’ll be going home first…]

[What? You’re all going? That’s not fair… Who’s paying?]

Chapter 23: Each And Every One Of You

The sound of silence echoed throughout the plane. Anice was energetically talking a while ago, but she soon got tired and went for a nap. Niina was already drinking beer before the plane took off, and passed out mid-flight. Neito decided to review the intelligence gathered before they arrive in the special region.

[Tsurugi-san, could you pass me the files?]

[Boss...]

[Oh, sorry.] Tsurugi, pass me the files.]

[Understood.]

As Tsurugi passed the files, Neito started reading them.

Special Region: Okinawa

There are two reasons why Okinawa was considered as a “Special Region”.

One: There was an existing evil force besides Metallica that existed in the island.

They were Non-human creatures called “The Santana”. Though lacking Intel on them, they were generally living the sea bed and

feed on human souls.

Neito didn't know if humans have souls, but the population in Okinawa was attacked several times throughout the years. Those who were attacked ended up in a state of coma.

The Santana doesn't choose which individual to feast on. In other words, whether you are a normal civilian, a Guardian, or a Metallica member, they'll still come at you. Further Intel has revealed that the stronger the individual is, the more likely they are to come at you. This has been a thorn on Metallica's side since squads sent over are constantly being ambushed by the Santana.

As a result, Metallica cannot fully exercise their power in the island of Okinawa.

Two: A strong Guardian is situated in the island. He is identified by the name "Ramone",

He doesn't leave the island and is said to get his powers from the sun and sea. Intel has confirmed that his capabilities were real. They identified it as an extension on "Shamanism" to a certain degree. With unlimited energy supply, he is able to exercise dominance over the island.

Ramone's objective is to protect the people in the island. This of course, includes protecting them from Metallica.

Metallica's situation is further complicated by the Guardian

situated in the island in addition to dealing with the Santana.

Metallica's usual tactics were to infiltrate, sabotage and overwhelm the enemy in surprise. They were not able to exercise those tactics in the special region.

Because of the reasons mentioned above, Metallica has dubbed Okinawa as a "Special Region".

[Fuu… This is quite troublesome.]

Neito reevaluated the dangers imposed in the special region.

[That's not like you… Our mission in Okinawa is just to secure a foothold in the region. I doubt it would be really difficult.]

[Yeah, If that's the only case.]

[Which means?]

[Tsurugi, I don't plan on just securing a foothold in the region.]

[…. I understand now. As expected of you. I agree with your idea.]

Why end the mission on just securing a foothold in the region? I'll crush both Ramone and the Santana. That should spread

Metallica's influence in the nearby areas too. It may be called a special region, but in the end, it's just an island. If I were to conquer the world, this island should be nothing.

[Tsurugi, do you have battle experience with the Santana?]

[Yes. I fought with them twice.]

[Are they strong?]

[They are certainly strong. I was risking my life when I fought with them.]

[If I were to go on head to head with one of them, do you think I could win?]

[You boss? Please stop joking. You would last for about a minute. Niina would only last ten seconds.]

[That's quite unexpected... You're making me scared now. I'm about to cry.]

Of course, they were aiming to conquer Okinawa. What's scary is scary. He wanted to take a leak.

If that's how strong the Santana are, Ramone who fought with them was much more impressive then. Neito's feet started shaking.

[You really are a mysterious person. When an opportunity presents itself, you become a totally different person. Other than that time, you're the opposite.]

[I can't help it... When we arrive at the island, can you train me up a bit?]

[Understood.]

[I just can't get my finger around it.]

[Metallica's plane regulations are quite normal. How about it? I'm not Niina, but would you care to accompany me for a drink?]

Tsurugi brought out a jar of sake.

[Aa, I'll join you.]

As they started drinking, Tsurugi kept silent all the time. Neito began to feel sorry for not starting a conversation.

[Nate...Mmnnmnn~]

[What is it....? She's sleep talking?]

[Ummm~...Love you... Introduce you...Papa...]

For some reason Anice had a terrifying plan while sleep talking.

[Fu~]

[Now don’t you dare laugh]

[Sorry boss. But this is actually good for you. Someone like Anice-san fell for you. I’m certain why she’s into you]

Neito thought of protesting, it wasn’t like Tsurugi was gay, but he knew there was something people found in him that made them think that way.

[...Each and every one of you...]

Neito didn’t hope too much. The day he would be it would be the day he would die. Until then, he’ll live his life the best he can.

It turns out Maki would be participating in this year’s humanoid construction competition this year and Ikeno was reassigned to the Global Level Management section.

I can’t lose to them...

Neito drank all the sake in his cup all at once, and held out his cup to Tsurugi for another round.

Notes:

Komori Neito

General Affairs Department (Level 1)

Second Sales Department (Level 2)

Okinawa Brach Office Head (Level 3)

Following: Manager Class (Level 4), Section (Department) Chief Class (Level 5), and Managing Director (Level 6)

Chapter 24: I'll Leave It To You Guys Then

Neito immediately noticed something after arriving.

The Okinawa branch office had too many problems.

Firstly, the morale was at an all time low. The guys from general affairs, as well as the branch manager, were not even motivated to conquer the island.

I don't blame them... After all, they're facing two powerful forces...

[Ah, you're the new section chief? How unfortunate that you got sent away to this far away island. But it's going to be okay. If you can hold out for two years, you'll be transferred again. You don't need to do anything here.]

He mentioned that his name was Ooshiro. From the looks of it, he was a native to the region. Smiling without a care in the world, he was always in a good mood.

[Ah, good work today chief. What? Training? Well yeah, we do it, but I doubt we'll be encountering any battles soon, so...ah, no, we'll fight if it comes to it.]

So far, they go out threatening local businesses and gangs for money. If they screw up and reveal themselves carelessly, the Santana would immediately hunt for them. Also, if Ramone found

out about them, there'd be no guarantee of their safety. They were in no position to act against the two strong forces that were situated on the island.

This got Neito thinking.

We're dealing against a strong enemy, but I mostly have weak subordinates. The branch office is not functioning as it should, and we have no reliable support from the main office... I might as well rot on the island like these guys...

What's the purpose of this branch anyway? They're practically useless... Thoughts entered his mind, but seeing as how Metallica considered Santana as a huge threat to their operations in the region, there must be a reason why he was sent here.

Neito understood their situation after being assigned for a few days as the Branch Chief.

However, he didn't plan on rotting on the island for the next few years. He thought of saying [Get your spirits up, men! We're conquering this island!] as a way to boost morale, but he doubted that it would work.

After giving it a thought, he came to a decision.

It's not like you can force someone to be motivated. That was obvious. That's why he needed to find a way – a way to defeat those two powerful forces in the island.

But in reality, Neito didn't have the required fighting power to deal with both threats. He was more suited for office work than for being on the field and fighting.

[...And that's why, I'll be giving you individual tasks from now on.]

He needed all the help he could get from his team. The heads of the branch were him, Tsurugi, Anice and Niina. At once, they held a meeting to discuss their plans.

[Eeh? Senpai, are you really serious on taking down that Ramone? That's normally impossible... Let's just go with whatever happens...]

Niina was quick to adapt to his environment. He already was used to swimming in Okinawa waters.

[Don't say that, Niina. I'm not asking you to go one on one with Ramone. The only thing I want you to do is gather information.]

[And analyze it?]

[Yeah, it has been a few years since Ramone and the Santana appeared in the island. They've fought each other on more than one occasion. After fighting each other for many years, there should be some footage and records about them. I want you to search for those and report to us anything peculiar that we must

know, anything we can use against them or any strategy that would be effective. I know you're smarter than me, so I doubt you'll have a hard time.]

[....Aah, well, I'll do it, but... what about the information not revealed to the public?]

It was clearly a question that someone who wasn't used to the 'evil' ways of the company would ask.

[That's easy. Just find the one in charge, and force it out of them. How do you think someone would react if dangerous looking people from our branch suddenly surrounded them with weapons? They'd immediately spill the beans.]

[...Woah, you're a real vicious one, Senpai. I'm not even sure if I'll be able to do it...]

Niina was expressing himself light-heartedly. Perhaps it's because he adapts so easily.

[And that's where you'll come in Anice. You'll be going with Niina as a team. Lay down the honey trap and wait for your targets. Anice will handle the execution, while Niina is in charge of analyzing the information gathered.]

[Yeah! But, I wont be too reckless. Will you still be fine with that?]

Anice certainly had high fighting capabilities. She was also used to doing evil while looking innocent. On the surface, she was just a cheerful and beautiful young lady (well, that was the impression everybody got) and she can easily move around without raising any suspicion.

[For you, Tsurugi-san… Ah, wait. Tsurugi, for now you'll pair up with me. We're going into town. We're going to investigate the places where the Santana was seen and the places where Ramone fought with them. This may sound dangerous, but are you up for it?]

The intel they had before arriving was becoming more useful. The Santana had mostly been attacking strong people such as sports athletes, Guardians and, in rare cases, professional Knights. Again, these attack were mostly done near the seashore.

In other words, the possibility of them being attack was also quite high.

[Hmph, Boss. I'm entrusting my life to you. I'll go with you. If you say "do it", then I'll do it with no questions.]

Tsurugi's voice was calm and clear. He didn't hesitate at all.

[… Is that so? Then I'll be in your care.]

[Understood.]

With this, their meeting came to an end. In order for them to spread the grasp of evil, they needed information. Information against your enemy was very important.

[Alright, I'll leave to you guys then. This is our first step. If we don't succeed in this, then we can't move our guys in our branch. I'm counting on you guys.]

With betrayal, lies and surprise attacks as the basics, Neito was used to crushing opponents who showed any form of weakness.

Chapter 25: The Sun! The Sea! Come To My Aid!

It took Neito the whole morning to issue orders to his subordinates in the branch. So, it was already in the late afternoon when he went to the beaches with Tsurugi. There were reports of a marathon runner being attacked a few days ago.

[Not a single trace of humans here...]

[That's obvious. It is a restricted area after all, and there's the threat of being attacked by the Santana. It would be illogical for a mere civilian to come to this area.]

The sound of waves was heard throughout the entire beach. He was together with a thirty year old man under the starry night sky. This was too much of a cliché to him, that he decided to ignore the situation.

Anyway, there isn't anyone looking at us.

[There's not much we can get here, And the Santana aren't probably going to appear either. We should start heading home.]

[I agree. Niina has apparently found something interesting. Let's go and hear his report then.]

A moment ago, the beach was calm with the waves beating up the

shore. Suddenly, the sound changed into a constant splashing. Something was approaching them.

[! Boss, look out!]

[...Aa]

Changing stance, they turned towards the sounds. Then...

There they were.

Their distinct figure was clearly visible.

They must have come from underwater.

[....Takko, Takko...](TL Note: They sound like that... I guess that's equal to a Murlock's gurgling sound)

It was a mysterious yet creepy sound.

Their whole body was covered in blue scales, and their feet were those like of a scuba diver's fins. They were moving their mouths quite a lot, but it seemed like they were only giving out nonsensical sounds. Their height was about two meters tall.

Fish-men.

Neito read a detailed report about the Santana, but those reports couldn't fully grasp what he was seeing now.

It creeped him out. The sound of [Takko, Takko] was constantly heard, and one by one, they emerged from underwater. There were a total of six Santana that emerged from underwater. One of them was particularly bigger than the rest and had bluer scales.

He must be their leader huh?

The larger one was wearing something like a wristband.

[...Takko...Takko...Strong...Souls...Must...take]

[!... Did they... just say [Take]? And not [eat]?]

[...Give it... Before Ramone... Comes...]

There were some un-understandable parts, but most of the words spoken had a meaning. This wasn't mentioned in the reports....

[Shall we do it Boss?]

Tsurugi put his hand on the hilt of his katana.

[Wait Tsurugi...A-...Ehem!]

Neito faked a cough.

[Umm… You’re the Santana right?]

[… Takko… Takko…]

[My name is Neito.]

[Boss?!]

Tsurugi unexpectedly raised his voice. But, to Neito, this was the most obvious thing to do. If they are intelligent enough to abduct any person for his soul instead, then their battle capabilities must be high, they can’t possibly get away easily. The situation had changed. The Santana were able to speak human language.

[…Takko…]

[I have a proposal for you]

[Pro…posal?]

It seems that they can hear him clearly. It was pointless to run away, but they were still cautious with him and Tsurugi.

[Tell me your objective. Aren’t you going to devour the souls?]

[...Takko... Gather... Souls... Rebuild... Castle...]

They seem to have a common goal by gathering human souls. Gather the souls and [rebuild] their castle? What the heck is going on?

[Tell us more about your plans. We may be able to assist–]

[Takkkkoooooo!!]

Neito wasn't able to finish his sentence. Their leader ignored Neito's words, and let out a deafening howl. They started approaching Neito and Tsurugi aiming for an attack.

[Dammit!!]

They were fiercely fast. As soon as they stepped onto the beach, sand exploded as they accelerated towards them. Their leader swung his scaly arms, aiming for a decisive hit. They were supposed to go for the strongest first, but for some reason, their leader went for Neito and not Tsurugi. Neito had no plans on getting hit.

[Tsurugi!]

[Understood!]

Tsurugi quickly reacted to Neito's words. Unsheathing his blade,

he swiftly deflected the attack.

Gang-!

The sounds of blade clashing echoed throughout the beach. The sand around them was flying in every direction.

[...You mere Fish-men!... I won't let you touch my Master!]

Tsurugi pushed the Santana back.

[That was close. You have my gratitude Tsurugi.]

[No problem boss... But, at this rate... Boss, I'll hold them here. You go and get away as far as possible...]

Neito knew what Tsurugi meant. There were six of them and two of us. There was no chance of winning. At this point, they were going to be defeated. But, Neito noticed something.

[... That may seem like what a villain would do, but there's no need to do that.]

[Wha-?]

Neito stepped back away from the sand and pointed towards the wave barriers.

There was a figure of a man standing near them. His face wasn't visible, but he looked young. From his silhouette, he was wearing beach pants and a T-shirt. His getup was quite rough, but you can clearly see that it was a person.

[Boss... Who is he? ... Is he ...?]

The man's right hand was burning. Literally. As the words imply, his right fist was on fire. His left fist was also abnormal. Water was swirling around his left fist.

[Takko! Takko!! Ramone! Ramone!! Takkoo!]

The Santana were panicking.

[That's quite a dangerous thing you're having there! Don't worry, leave everything to me!]

The man, maintaining his calm vibe, raised his voice and continued

[The Sun! The Sea! Come to my aid! Haa-!]

The man, along with his words leap towards them. His right fist was burning more fiercely while the water in left fist formed into a blade with a shape of a cross.

Under the dazzling night sky, the man changed his appearance.

Neito was bedazzled by the bright light.

He wasn’t some faker or a bluff.

I don’t know how much significance there is in displaying the supernatural powers, but his power is undeniable.

Beetle was a tough and serious guy but this man’s dignity goes beyond him. He feels manlier. And that was kinda cool.

[Here I come, Santana! I won’t let you do as you please!]

With the protection from the sun and sea spirits, Ramone revealed himself in the southern part of the island.

Chapter 26: That's Amazing. You Really Are Proficient At This

[Uriyaa-!]

After leaping from the wave barriers, Ramone dashed near the Santana, coming in a ten metre range of them.

[Haa-!]

The leader who was facing Tsurugi, immediately rushed towards Ramone, doing an attack like a spinning tornado.

Bang!

The sound-waves echoed throughout the beach, and the Santana were pushed back to the shorelines.

[?]

During that moment, Neito noticed something peculiar.

After the Santana were pushed back, the wristband that their leader wore shone brightly in a deep blue color. Among them, two beads shining more brightly than the rest flew away from the beach.

[Only two? I know you guys have about twenty in reserve. Hurry up and summon all of them!]

Apparently, Ramone knew what was going on.

[Kukko! Kukko! Ramone! Defeat! Defeat!]

[Ha-! This perfect! Come at me all at once! ... Err, can you guys run to a safer place?]

Apparently, Ramone identified Neito and Tsurugi as common civilians. (Even though Tsurugi was wielding a katana and fighting with the Santana.)

Can it be? This guy is too innocent?

Neito hesitated for a moment, but this was perfectly normal (considering the situation they were in).

Maybe it is because he is strong, that he can naturally say those things to the people who are attacked by the Santana...

Of course, everything would change if he knew that we are from Metallica.

[T-Thank you very much! Do your best Ramone!]

It would be too disadvantageous for us to declare him as an enemy here.

Neito honey coated his word to fit what a normal civilian would say.

[But Boss...]

[D-Don’t call me that Mister...! I’m just a kid in the neighborhood... Stop calling me “boss”!]

Neito pretended to scold Tsurugi, and immediately withdrew from the area.

After gaining some distance, they were in between the seashore and the forest. They observed the battle from the safety of the forest.

In terms of battle capabilities, Ramone and the Santana were equal. But apparently, Ramone had the upper hand here. With his burning fists and his karate techniques, he was pushing the six Santanas back.

The Santana projected their scales and fired strong water currents as a projectile from their mouths, but Ramone was superior. Neito wasn’t an expert on martial arts, but he knew Ramone was a master in the art of karate.

But, it couldn’t be said that victory would come easily. Ramone

would sometimes get hit by the attacks of the six Santanas.

[What do you think Tsurugi? Ramone and the Santana's fighting capabilities?]

[Well for one, Ramone will win this fight. If the Santana had more numbers, then it would have been a different story.]

Tsurugi is strong. His evaluation skills are certainly more refined...

[How many Santanas will it take to defeat Ramone?]

[Hmm... nine? No, maybe ten would make their fighting capabilities equal. Anything more than that, Ramone would have a hard time.]

[……]

[Boss?]

[No, this is enough. Let's withdraw.]

Neito thought that conquering Okinawa would be impossible, but know he can see the light at the end of the tunnel.

The day after they encountered Ramone, Niina said something

unusual. There was something peculiar in the analyzed data. He wanted them to hear his report. Neito gathered up his squad members into the conference room.

[You already have collected information? That's was quite fast.]

[Hehehe. Well, ever since we started investigating, things turned out to be more interesting than expected.]

Niina lacked sleep, and his face was fatigued. But there were signs of excitement in him. He was in a drowsy mood, but something kept him up.

[We-ll, it's been a while since I got this serious!]

[Anice did her best too! Niina was too afraid on collecting the information himself, so Anice went with the guys from G.A (General Affairs Dept.).]

[Wha-, give me a break Anice-san!]

Anice was posing with an [Ei!], making herself more appealing.

They most likely acquired the information through illegal methods... well, that's that.

Now thinking about it, Niina should be older than Anice, but he's using keigo. Well I guess that's also fine.

(TL Note: Keigo – the act of speaking politely towards elders/someone superior – Daikyun)

[A-Umm. Anice is a good girl.]

Neito patted Anice's head.

[Ehehehe.]

Since Anice was all in smiles, they continued their meeting.

[Then? What did you find Niina?]

[Ui—s. Well, look at this data.]

Niina did something on the computer and projected the data on the screen.

[This is the data for the past two years for the cases of coma within Okinawa. In other words, the victims of the Santana's attacks. This information was acquired from the police.]

Over two years, four hundred and fifty people were attacked.

Thinking about it, it's an unusually high number. Even with that kind of fighting power, Ramone had a limit to how many he could protect.

[Then, this is the data for those who woke up from the coma.]

It's a weird case, but after being attacked by the Santana, human souls are stolen thus ending up in a state of coma. There were cases of some victims in the state of coma recovering from it. I already know this. In the past two years, twenty-two people woke up. Comparing it with the total attacked victims, that is a small number.

[This point is important, but please look at the day when they woke up in the hospital. I'll display it on the screen.]

On the screen was a calendar. Those days when someone awakened from coma were marked in circle.

[…? I don't get it Niina.]

[Wait a second there, Tsurugi-san. Take a look at this first. The next data are the days when Ramone and the Santana were confirmed fighting. There were a hundred and twenty-two occasions when they fought.]

The screen once again projected a calendar. Circles marked the days someone when woke up, and triangles marked the days when Ramone and the Santana fought. The circles and triangles overlapped with each other.

[….! This is…]

[So you finally noticed Senpai. Yes. The days that someone would wake were the days where Ramone fought with the Santana.]

There were one hundred and twenty-two occasions where Ramone fought with the Santana. The days when the twenty-two patients awakened were perfectly aligned with the days Ramon fought with the Santana. This was certain.

[Also, the twenty-two who woke up from the coma woke up within one month after they fell into the comatose state. Anybody who was in coma for more than one month died due to the body being too weak.]

[I see...]

[At first, I thought this was our greatest discovery, but there were more interesting things that that.]

Niina let out more information.

The Santana started moving on the year 2111, which is exactly four years ago, on November 11. At that same year and same date, something famous happened in Okinawa.

An ancient monolith was discovered in the seabed near Okinawa. For some reason, as soon as the investigation on the ancient monolith started, it suddenly started crumbling apart.

With regards to this event, Niina was suggesting [Maybe it has something to do with it somehow? Because they're sakana-man after all] or something like that.

(TL Note: Sakana : Fish – Daikyun)

The following information was also important.

When people first encountered the Santana, their numbers were confirmed to be ten creatures. But, after the battle with Ramone, they decreased by one and only nine were left.

After that, there were reports of them increasing and decreasing in number. Since there were no sightings of them being more than ten, Niina suggested [Maybe they can only increase themselves up to a number of 10. 10 is probably their max number. Maybe it's something like "law of mother nature" or "genetic restriction".]

[That's about it.]

Niina concluded his report.

[Good job. That's amazing. You really are proficient at this. I was honestly surprised.]

Neito spoke from the bottom of his heart.

As expected of someone who passed the entrance exam with high marks...

Maybe it was attitude, enthusiasm or something in that corner that made him feel less superior. Neito understood himself well.

[Now now, what with the face? Finding more ways to compliment your subordinate maybe?]

[No, you're really amazing... Then, from your point of view, what do you think of the data so far?]

[What about it?]

[No. Well, any strategies? Ways to conquer Okinawa? If you come up with something I'll be here to listen.]

[? I haven't thought that much...]

[Not even once?]

[Not even once.]

[Is that so? Well, good work. You can go and take a rest now. You can take a nap in the break room.]

[Eh? Are you sure?]

[Yeah. Good work. You did well. You were amazing.]

Neito wasn't used to having subordinates. He wasn't great at conveying his ideas, so he just said it as honest as he could.

[……]

Niina hesitated for a moment, then brightening up his mood, replied in a small voice.

[…Thanks]

[A-.Umm. Hey, if you're up for it, will you accompany me as my drinking partner today? Oh, I forgot. You weren't up for those kinds of things.]

Niina said that his work is separated from his private life. Remembering this, Neito withdrew his offer.

[… Is it your treat, Senpai? … if that's the case, then I'll accompany you]

Niina replied rejoicefully.

[Oh, then let's go.]

My salary isn't that high, but I don't mind treating him for free today. It's thanks to him that we are able to gather this much information. The conquest can finally start.

Neito knew information that Niina didn’t possess. Adding up today’s information, Neito started thinking.

In yesterday’s battle, the Santana, after receiving Ramones attack, lost two flying brightly shining beads. Ramone mentioned [Two people huh?]

“

[Gather… Souls… Castle, rebuild….]

[Give it… Before… Ramone comes…]

“

The Santana definitely said those words.

They are collecting souls for a purpose. And it is possible to get the taken souls back in a short period of time. The Santana apparently tries to avoid a battle with Ramone. Then…

[Ku-kuku-…]

He unconsciously let out a laugh.

[Senpai? Are you alright?]

[Aa-, no, it’s nothing.]

[Is that so… For a moment there, your face expressed something like a “demon” or some sort of absolute evil.]

Niina’s words… Well, I can’t deny it. It’s true in a sense.

[Nate? Is it possible that you found another villainous way to solve this?!]

Anice knew Neito for quite some time now. Anice easily saw through Neito’s intentions. Neito displayed a sinister smile.

No doubt she can easily guess what I have in mind if she saw my face.

[Well, just a little something…]

Yes, it’s just as you think. I’ll defeat the Santana and Ramone in one go. In some points of view, it is considered an absolute evil, but I’m from Metallica, and orders are orders. I’m gonna conquer the special region Okinawa.

Even if they’re cold blooded creatures or an island hero, I’ll crush them. I’ll crush anybody that gets in my way. I’ll show no mercy.

But can I really do it?

No, there is no choice. I have to do it.

I’ll become a villain. Become a bastard if it comes to it.

He felt the black flame inside him rapidly igniting, anticipating the incoming battle.

Chapter 27: I'm Just A Plain Old Villain

Niina was assigned to his Senpai, Komori Neito. He considered him to be one of a kind.

He didn't look that strong, and there were some parts he was lacking. In his opinion, he was one of those "weak" individuals. It was quite hard to believe that he passed the entrance exam with his third rate appearance. Although he orders Tsurugi around, it seemed like he was pushing himself to do so.

While being that kind of man, He managed to defeat the Rock's Organization's Elite Dylan, as well as the high tech Beetle, even capturing the Harrison research facility.

At first, he thought that he was just a lucky guy. Niina was sure luck played a huge part in it. He surely possessed high amounts of luck. But he recently noticed that luck was just a small part of it. He noticed that Tsurugi wouldn't just follow someone with only luck on their side. And then there's the face he would make. A face of a true villain.

Maybe he was an incredible person.

On the other hand there was also something mysterious about him. Niina decided never to go out drinking with his fellow co-workers, but for some reason, he ended up accepting the invitation.

[You're a weird person after all...]

He blurted out his thoughts subconsciously, which was weird.

Neito gathered about fifty guys from the branch's G.A. department in the afternoon. The branch was too small to accommodate them, so he rented an auditorium.

What does he plan on doing…?

Niina, along with Anice and Tsurugi, weren't informed of the details.

[I'll tell you guys if everything goes according to plan.]

He smiled with that "weak" face of his and proceeded. He was concerned about the plans, but Tsurugi, with all his battle experience, just replied [Understood]. He didn't bother to ask more questions.

[Anice-san, what do you think Senpai is planning to do?]

Niina tried asking Anice.

[I dunno~. But I'm sure he's planning something sinister ♪]

Thinking about it, Anice-san is also weird.

Apparently, she's the daughter of someone famous. Not to mention her beauty, she was about 5 year younger than me... She's probably a high school student.

With her unrestrained brown eyes, she looks like a fairy. Apparently she's too busy looking at Senpai. I once asked her what she liked about him, and she replied "cuz he's a really evil guy! " in a cheerful tone.

[Mnn... it's taking too long. Half an hour has already passed.]

Niina and the others were waiting outside the auditorium.

[Niina, it's the boss' plan. I'm sure there's an explanation to be given at the appropriate time. As a man, wouldn't this get you more excited?]

[Hee~i]

(TLN: simply means "Okay", but with a carefree touch)

This guy is also weird. It's like he would commit seppuku for his master... What are you? A modern samurai? Aren't you supposed to come from the mafia? It's like I'm the most normal person in this group...

[Uuoooh~!]

Loud voice were heard inside the auditorium. It wasn't the voice

of a single individual.

The guys from the G.A. Department?

Niina clearly heard the cries outside the auditorium. It was a cry that made the air vibrate.

What the heck is going on?!

Those weren't cries of fear. He once went to a movie, the cries heard within the auditorium were more like battle cries from soldiers who were going to battle.

After a while, the guys inside the auditorium started coming out. For some reason, everybody was in high spirits.

A few moments later, his Senpai, Komori Neito came out.

[A, sorry about that. For now, we're done.]

[Good work boss.]

[Thanks. I feel bad for making you guys wait. Now, let's proceed to the next phase of our plan…]

[Hmm? Senpai, what's that? A collar?]

(TLN: more like a neck shackle to be precise.)

Niina noticed Neito wearing a gold-like collar on his neck when he went out of the auditorium.

[Aa, this collar? I'll be wearing this for a month from now on, so don't pay too much attention to it.]

[Haa~....]

(TLN: slang for "yeah...")

Niina was confused as ever.

※※

(TLN: Back to Neito's point of view.)

One week later, the guys from the G.A Department were proceeding to go near the area of the island "Sete" where the Santana were recently sighted. They stopped their vans and then began to wait.

(TLN: pronounced as Seh-Teh Island)

The island was connected by bridge from the main Okinawa Island. After the recent battle on the beaches, the Santana were last spotted on Sete Island. The Santana lost one of their kind during that battle. Since the possibility of being attacked was high near the coastal areas, the Sete Island was deemed a danger zone and all entry was prohibited.

But, if you really want to, it was easy to get to Sete Island.

Other than them, only Neito and his group were on the island.

[Yo~. I was waiting for you.]

Neito, sitting on a bench of an abandoned shop, greeted his visitor.

[...Kukko...Kukk-...You...At that time...Strong one...]

It was one of the Santana, facing Neito with its scaly and muscular body.

[I'm strong? You seem to able to use lip service... Well, I'm just a plain old villain.]

Neito seemed to be at ease during the conversation, but a few moments back, he was scared and was shaking shitless.

But when the time came, the shaking stopped.

It's always the same... Every time I work towards my goal, I eventually get cured of all the nervousness I feel...

[We were rudely interrupted by that hot blooded hero last time...

Woah! Don’t attack me! I’m really scared here. I might die of shock… I know that you guys could kill me anytime, but before that, I have a proposal.]

[…Kukko…Kukko…]

Meeting twice, an individual that wants to talk to them… That’s what the Santana are probably seeing in their point of view. They didn’t attack Neito, but they remained in a battle/attack stance.

[Thought so… I knew you guys won’t easily listen to what I had to say… so I brought you a gift.]

As soon as Neito ended his sentence, the vans opened and from its trunk, five men were tied and were lying inside.

[Kukko!]

The men were breathing. They were alive.

[You guys are collecting human souls right? Here, I’ll give them to you. It may not look like it, but I’m affiliated with one of the evil organizations in the world. It’s no trouble kidnapping a few humans.]

Cold sweat ran through Neito’s back. But there was no way he would let go of his poker face.

[It’s not a bad deal right? I don’t know why, but Ramone is coming. You don’t even have the power to counter his possession of elemental spirits, do you? If that’s the case, no wonder Ramone has been able to fend off your attacks in the past years… He may be heading here now…]

[…Why…do such…thing.]

[It’s simple. I don’t want to be killed by you guys. Don’t attack my friends. In exchange I’ll give living humans to you as gifts.]

[……]

In an uninhabited island… the conversation continues between a vile beast and a merciless villain.

[It’s not such a bad deal right? You’re losing ways to abduct and acquire human souls of Ramone… And your numbers are constantly decreasing…]

[…Kukko…In return…that’s all…you ask? …]

[In return? Well, listen to what I have to say. No, just agree and it would be fine. Don’t get all tense up there… I don’t have to mention that you guys can kill me anytime when you want… Is there any demerit you would have when you listen to what I have to say? I’m sure there are none.]

Neito decided to go with an [investigation] style of cross

reference answer comparing. Hopefully, they should be able to understand what he is saying. Although they spoke in a broken tone, the words are still comprehensible.

"You are collecting souls in order to rebuild your [castle] as your stronghold right?"

(TLN: this is a question Neito asked the Santana, and below is the conclusion of their reply.)

He was right. The monolith was apparently their base. As it was discovered, they had to move out. But in order for them to establish a new base, they need raw energy from humans. Apparently, they already had large quantity of energy stored before their base was discovered. Nonetheless, they still needed one months' worth of energy to fully support their construction of a new base.

"You can only increase your numbers to ten. Am I wrong?"

He was also right. The mysterious reason was that they needed to conserve themselves, so they couldn't increase their numbers to more than ten. They had to breed, protect their race, construct their base then collect souls. If given the time, they could breed and increase their numbers to ten. The only way their numbers get deducted are when they fight Ramone.

[I see... I understand. I got the gist of it. Then there's no need to expose yourselves in obtaining human souls. I'll deliver them to you. If you don't fight Ramone, you can increase your numbers right? Since you won't suffer any casualties.]

[…Who…Are you…?]

[I already told you before. I'm just a plain old villain.]

Neito silently laughed under his breath.

[There's no demerit in accepting human gifts right? Ramone strives to protect the inhabitants of this island. We're just a similar elements of evil that Ramone would want to defeat. I don't want to fight with you guys. As fellow villains, let's be friends.]

This was the plan he formulating for the past week.

The Santana took a while to respond but,

[…Understood…We won't…Attack…You…]

After replying, they took the souls of the abducted humans. The Santana proceeded to leave. Falling to the ground after their souls (their raw energy) were taken, they were in a state of coma.

After the Santana left, Tsurugi and Niina ran to him.

[Boss… why?]

[For now… everything went well. That was scary… I thought I

was going to die... Niina, give me a blanket... I'm gonna cover myself up for a while. Urgh~, It's damn cold...]

[You really have done it now Senpai... You sure have no mercy.]

[Maybe your right...No...Mercy...]

Niina clearly understood what Neito had done. In order to save himself, he sold out other people's lives to the Santana. That's one thing a villain could only possibly do.

[Umm... what should we do to these guys...? Are we going to... even if we are villains... are we still going to...]

Niina was really concerned.

[Ah, we'll bring those guys to the Metallica medical ward. I already made the arrangements.]

[? Oh, is that so... I thought we were just going to dump them in the ocean... Huh? Medical ward?]

[What the heck are you saying? Dump them into the ocean? That's an absurd thing to do there. That's not evil. That action is just too pointless.]

[?? Eh? But... pointless...huh?]

[Ah… it’s too damn cold… that was really scary. I never want to do it again…]

Neito knew what Niina really meant, but he had no time to explain.

For now,

I’ll make Ramone and the Santana kneel before me. Until then, I can’t expose my plans to anybody.

Wrapping himself up more in the blanket, he was still shaking quite a bit.

Neito still hasn’t lost his touch on being a villain.

Chapter 28: I'll Defeat Both Of Them By Today

Three weeks have passed since they started offering human tributes to the Santana. Neito's plans were almost complete. It was either sink or swim. Succeed or die.

After that encounter, Neito along with his subordinates, met with the Santana a few more times. Offering kidnapped humans for their safety, the Santana started to lower their guard towards them. He was now able to set a trap up easily.

The Santana acknowledged that attacking humans would be too risky while Ramone was around. They would avoid any encounters with Ramone as much as possible because there was a possibility that they could get totally wiped out. That's why they accepted Neito's tribute obediently.

On the other hand, the Santana knew perfectly about the evil organization Metallica. They probably interpreted his actions as [a man from Metallica doesn't want us as his enemy. That's why he's offering tributes. Then we'll accept them gratefully. Metallica deals with the surface world, that's why we have no concerns for them.]

That's what they're definitely thinking.

But he wasn't going to leave it to chance. He asked Tsurugi train him for the following days in order to be prepared for the upcoming battle. Training in an abandoned factory, Neito

proceeded with a mock battle.

[Go! Fight! Nate!]

Anice was cheering in the sidelines, sitting on a metal drum.

[...Haa...Haa... One more time Tsurugi.]

[E~h?! Senpai, I can't do it anymore. In the first place, we can't possibly match Tsuruigi-san's abilities~.]

[It's not good to force yourself Boss. Aside from Niina, you've been at it for a fairly long time now. Rest is also important to one's health.]

[...I understand. One last round then. You can take a break Niina.]

['nderstood Senpai~]

Tsurugi might be my subordinate, but he's much older and more experienced.

We both have a police baton as our weapons.

No matter how many times I do it, I can't land a blow. It's not like I have bad athletic abilities... Ever since I entered Metallica, I

always found time to train myself.

Since I was a NEET in the Tokyo area, I also researched about how to defend myself in the internet.

Even so, that didn't help with my current situation.

[You can come at me from any angle boss.]

Tsurugi is calm as always. No matter how much I struggle, he still stops all my blows half-heartedly.

Damn. How did he become my subordinate again? No, no no. I can't entertain such thoughts. If such a man found something in me to make him follow me , then I have to fulfil my role.

[Here I come Tsurugi.]

Concentrate and think.

What are my strengths?

I should know that already. This isn't like the time when I had no self-confidence. I'm a villain. I'll do anything to win. That's my strength.

Then I'll show you. My...

[…The air around you changed quite a bit Boss.]

[…Is that so? Haa!]

Neito proceeded to strike.

But,

Neito's phone suddenly rang. The ringtone set was [no matter what the situation is you need to answer] tone. (TLN: I' reckon that it's a specific ringtone for important matters)

[!…. We'll stop here Tsurugi.]

[…Understood…Huh… It seems like I was saved…]

Picking up the phone, Neito looked sideways and saw Tsurugi sweating heavily.

That's weird… he was calm a while ago.

[……?]

Well, that's that. The call takes the top priority now.

[Hello. Good work. This is Komori speaking.]

The call was from Metallica's medical facility.

[Yes. Yes. I understand. Then, we'll go as planned. Yes. I wagered a few. Yeah, you can leave the ones that don't move as they are. Yes.]

Ending the call, the time had finally come.

[What happened Nate?]

Anice came over to him, wiping his sweat away with a towel. She smelled nice as usual, but he decided to indulge after they finished the day's work.

Neito let out a chuckle.

No matter how hard I pretend to act tough, I still can't get used to this feeling.

[Anice, Niina, I'll give you the coordinates on your terminals. Move towards those coordinates after you readied your equipment. Tsurugi, you're coming with me.]

[Un. Understood Nate!]

[E~h? What's this all of a sudden... A~! You'll explain it later right?]

[I'll give orders via the mobile terminal. I'll brief you while we're moving.]

Niina and Anice immediately headed for the Branch Office for their equipment.

[What about us Boss?]

Tsurugi already prepared himself for the fight ahead and was waiting for orders.

As expected of him...

[Yeah, we don't have much time. We'll head directly to the medical facility. After that we'll proceed to attack.]

Neito didn't fully explain the details to Tsurugi, but Tsurugi's response was swift. Perfectly, he arranged for a car and prepared the equipment.

[We can depart whenever you want Boss. You said we're going on an offensive... Is our target the Santana or...?]

Taking them down individually is too much hassle.

Neito responded.

[It’s obvious isn’t it? I’ll defeat both of them by today.]

Chapter 29: You're Kidding Me

(TLN: Niina's POV)

Niina was certainly confused. The coordinates they were sent to were definitely out of place.

{Coordinate 22-A – 1}

Upon checking, the coordinates pointed underground. Specifically, it was underwater. It was a cave, connecting the surface to an area below the sea. Whether this place had oxygen or not was a mystery. There was also the possibility of dying from a cave-in if there were to be any earthquakes.

And then there were the instructions.

{There will be a long battle occurring when you arrive to the mentioned coordinates. You are not allowed to interfere, but only to observe them from a safe distance. If Kabuto manages to defeat the second party except one, then you are to come in and stop him.}

(TLN: Kabuto – A headpiece worn by samurai's in medieval japan.)

"Kabuto" would be the hero from the south. In other words Ramone. Then "the second party" would be the Santana.

[What the hell is Senpai thinking…]

[N~. We~ll. I think I got the idea.]

[Eh? Are you serious Anice-san? That’s amazing.]

He was walking with Anice inside the dark cave.

Now…

Niina and Anice arrived in the mentioned coordinates. Unexpectedly, the scene they were seeing was just as the prediction had fortold.

[!!! That’s Ramone and the Santana!]

Niina almost screamed, but luckily Anice held him back from doing so.

[Niina, Shhh-!]

Holding her finger at her lips, Anice winked at Niina.

[But… Well… umm…]

The scene unfolded in front of him was a huge battle between the hero and the beast.

It was mysteriously well lit inside the cave. In the wide area where the battle was fought, a stone column and an altar were present. A blue light emitted from it. Simultaneously, Ramone's flaming right hand shone brightly, illuminating its surroundings.

There were a total of seven Santanas. Looking closely, there were three of them defeated nearby. Meanwhile, Ramone was also injured.

It seems like that battle has been going on for quite some time now. The Santana have lost their numbers while Ramone is already out of breath.

[Uuoohh!]

Ramone leaped high and aimed for the Santana's head.

[Kukko—-!!]

The Santana fired off their scales, damaging Ramone who came in range.

Both of them seem to be deteriorating...

Niina never saw such high level fighting. The differences in fighting capabilities were on a whole new level. With their unmatched speed, a single hit towards a normal human would

surely kill them.

[…You're kidding me…]

Niina uttered in amazement.

Does Senpai really plan on taking out these guys?

Chapter 30: Oh, Hero From The South

Behindthe mask of the hero called Ramone, Kinjou Yuuta protected the inhabitants of the island from the Santana.

Attaching a bracelet passed down by his ancestors onto his wrist, he was able to manipulate spirits, thus giving birth to the hero Ramone. He mastered the art of karate at a young age with the help of his grandfather.

The Santana stole the souls of humans. Yuuta learned that they have been attacking people and stealing their souls since the Ryukyu dynasty (EDN: The Ryukyu dynasty is the time when an independent kingdom unified and ruled Okinawa and nearby islands. Or so Wiki says). Yuuta's ancestors also protected the people of the island.

According to the legend, the Santana had stopped appearing after a certain time. Surely though, if they were to reappear, it would be disastrous to the people of Ryukyu.

Supposedly, the Santana's activities ceased due to them having collected enough souls to sustain their base, Niraikanai (EDN: a mythical place in Ryukyun religion...says Wiki).

The legend also predicted, however, that with the advance in human technology and science, Niraikanai would be found and disturbed. That would be the day the Santana would attack humans again.

Although now, it was the fault of the humans, Yuuta didn't hesitate on taking them down. He pitied the Santana, but he lived a normal life – he had family, friends and a lover. His only goal was to protect the society in which his loved ones lived in. For the Santana who threatened this, he had no choice but to stop them.

Yuuta knew that currently, the Santana's base was temporary and that they needed to replenish the souls regularly.

He had noticed that the Santana could only increase until a number of ten from his previous battles with them since they were conserving energy.

Naturally though, the Santana did increase their numbers when they were below ten. He never found a day where their numbers decreased.

With the divine protection and guidance from the spirits of Ryukyu, Yuuta acquired the ability to determine the location if somebody was attacked. The Santana steals human souls. He detects them, protects civilians and defeats the Santana.

There were formally ten Santanas, but with his effort, he managed to reduce their numbers to six. They may try to repopulate, but he just defeated equally the amount of creatures born. This had always been the case.

But for some reason, they didn't show themselves for a while. They also didn't attack humans for their souls.

Why?

Without any signs of movement, Yuuta couldn't detect the Santana. It's good that they stopped attacking people, but without him taking them down, their numbers could significantly increase.

After all the trouble I went through to reduce their numbers? That's not a laughing matter.

Yuuta was lost in his thoughts. He decided to investigate.

He was in the dark for quite a bit, but he managed to stumble upon some information.

He looked for news within the prefecture around the web, and found an article about the Santana being sighted.

{I saw them in the abandoned village near the cliff.}

He thought of ignoring this, but other people also relayed the same information.

{I saw them with my friend.}

{There should be a cave route leading to an underground area beneath the sea.}

{According to rumors, that was apparently the Santana's base.}

Those rumors weren't only spread online. It was also well spread in the real world.

Okinawa isn't a huge island, so rumors spread really fast. The online source also seems suspicious.

There's no way I can trust this.

But, there's no demerit in investigating it... And I can't just leave that as it is.

The entrance beside the cliff was really hard to get into. A normal civilian would have trouble, but Yuuta got in easily.

He transformed and went in the cave.

(TLN: The word "transformed" surprised me quite a bit. I think he's like a power ranger or something. We'll see.)

At that moment he noticed.

The rumors appear to be true...

There was an ancient dark aura emitting from within the cave. The spirits were restless within.

This is the Santana’s base….

Yuuta proceeded further.

In the end, I can only rely on myself. Now that I found their base, there’s no choice but to eliminate them completely. They are beings that shouldn’t exist in modern society. This is all for peace.

My grandmother always said [you’re too short tempered] but that’s what the real Yuuta would do.

Yuuta completely transformed into Ramone and proceeded to attack…

[Haaa-!]

Dealing with the surprised Santana, he dealt a back blow to one of them.

[Ha-i-ya!]

A Santana was blown away spinning.

It was their leader that got blown away. It was still wearing the bracelet where souls were contained.

Due to the attack, the beads glowed brightly blue and got flew

away. He realized that if you dealt enough damage, he was able to free a human's soul. With his attack, he once again saved many souls.

But,

[...Kukko...Kukko...]

They were tougher than usual. They didn't die from the fiery fist strike.

[...Ramone...Kill!Kill!...]

The Santana fired out water from their mouth towards him. They were stronger and more deadly than a normal rifle.

[Ku-!!...]

He managed to dodge it, but he grazed his left arm. He started running while enveloped in pain.

They're one hell of a bunch...

There's no way a Guardian could withstand them. Even the Organization of Metallica stationed in the island can't do anything against them.

[You damn fish-men! Today, I'll rip you to...]

The battle raged on for quite a while.

He kept fighting and struggled against them one after the other.

I'll rip you apart no matter what happens, I'll erase their faces off this planet. They are beings that shouldn't have existed from the start.

Chop, punch, kick, grab, back kick, elbow, low kick, shove, and penetrate.

Yuuta kept repeating his karate techniques with the air of a man serving justice.

[Kukko-!!]

They shot their hard scales towards him.

I can't be defeated here...

My fist are what protects the people of this island. They are the symbol of hope for them...

Ramone proceeded to attack their leader.

[Sei-ya!!]

Mustering all of his power, he hit an underling hardly in the head. The head shot and got buried in the ground. Ramone created a small crater.

[...Haa...Haa...You're all... that's left...]

Only one of them was left, and it was the Santana's leader.

Yuuta was already covered in wounds, but he couldn't afford to miss one of them.

Evil... Beasts that only lead society to the wrong path and end up destroying the world...need to be annihilated.

[I'm coming for you with the last of my strength!]

His fist burned fiercely.

I'll gamble everything unto this strike. If I miss, I won't have any power left. I'll surely lose. But there's no other option.

Borrowing the power of the spirits, mustering the courage to serve justice, his spirit burned with fire.

Focusing all of his power onto his fist, he leapt towards the

leader.

[Kukko!! Ramone!!!]

The leader, in his own way, gathered his strength and attacked Ramone with full force.

[Sei-ya!!!]

One strike.

The fist that burned fiercely, which was Ramone's ultimate move, was similar to the Justice Hammer Beetle had. Their attacks exploded.

[It's finished... I win!]

Before the leader managed to hit Ramone, he side stepped and managed to hit the leader in full force at his chest.

Engulfed in flames, the leader got blown away, unable to get back up. Given a few minutes, he should burn throughout.

[I did it! I...really did it...!]

Yuuta was too tired from the attack. His legs were shaking. He ended up kneeling. He was at his limit. There was no strength left

to even gather the power of the spirits.

But, it really didn't matter. With this he won. The wretched Santana are now annihilated.

Ill rest my body... a bit... I'll go home, and let grandma make goya chanpuru (EDN: Okinawan stir fry of bittermelon, tofu, egg and pork)... A bottle of beer would also be nice...

The hero Ramone was glad that the battle was over.

But,

Clap clap clap clap.

It was then he heard a mysterious sound from afar.

It seemed like an applause.

He was very far within the Santana's base. There was no way other humans could get here. Therefore there was no way he could be hearing applauses.

Clap clap clap clap.

The sound didn't stop.

[What the hell is happening...]

He tried to turn around but he was too weak. He managed to turn while still on his knees. He confirmed where the sound came from.

There.

A slender looking man was sarcastically applauding. Behind him were more men equipped with guns.

They were all wearing black. He recognized those costumes. He fought against them and saw them on T.V for a few times. He knows them.

[That was quite splendid Ramone.]

The slender looking man called out to him.

Who the hell is this guy...?

He was apparently the leader of the group. Ramone saw his expression... He was grinning.

He had a huge grin on his face, but in Ramone's eyes, he was a really cold blooded individual. His piercing eyes were enough to send shivers down his spine.

At the back of his mind, Yuuta already knew. The ones in black were evil beings.

But even without relying on his stock knowledge, he knew the slender looking man was incomparable to the others.

He was the embodiment of [Evil].

[...Who are you guys...?! What do you want?!]

Yuuta tried to get up.

The slender looking man looked at him and called out.

[We are Metallica. A proud evil organization. Oh, hero from the south, this where you'll meet your end.]

The slender looking man proclaimed boldly.

As a master of karate and a spirit wielder, Kinjou Yuuta felt a kind of fear he never experienced before.

Chapter 31: If You're Willing Enough To Gamble Your Life

One month ago, when Neito was forming his plans, he realized that he needed the support of the G.A Department.

Having gathered information, he began explaining the plan to them.

He was going to offer human souls as tribute to the Santana. There are three reasons for doing such.

One: Having gained their trust, they will stop attacking Metallica and its members.

Two: Without the need to go out and gather souls, they won't have to face Ramone. Their numbers will significantly increase.

Three: Having souls offered, they'll begin to trust him more, lowering their guard. For example, he was able to attach a transmitter, revealing the Santana's base.

If all goes to plan, he will leak the information of the Santana's base and Ramone will definitely confirm the information.

They would have to fight each other, ending in an annihilation of one group. Then he would take care of the remaining one.

It sounded off like an easy plan, and the men from the G.A.D (Gen.Affairs Dept.) agreed with him. The hardest part to explain was still yet to come.

[The souls we are going to offer to the Santana... are going to be your souls]

Neito announced to them.

There was a reason for doing so. If they were to kidnap the inhabitants of the island, Ramone would know that Metallica is moving. It would be bad if he began investigating the kidnappings.

Neito took his proposal very seriously. Of course, who would want to offer their souls to some monsters and be in a state of coma? There was also that possibility of dying after one month.

Neito already thought deeply about his plan. He then voiced out.

[I won't force you to do this. I just want you to give it some thought. There won't be any penalties if you don't do this. But if you do consent to this, I'll give back something in return. If you're worried, I will definitely get your souls back in one month. That is automatically provided for.]

With just these words, he couldn't capture the hearts of his men. It was still lacking. He needed to give some assurance that he'll get their souls back.

They’re probably thinking that they’re just pawns meant to be thrown away once their purpose is over. Just like any person from the main branch would do. I can’t blame them.

[Then I will share your fate.]

Neito put on an explosive electric collar around his neck. Without the right password, it would never come off. It was Metallica’s specialty. Everybody knows their purpose. Metallica uses it as an “insurance” in case anybody tried to betray them.

[The explosive is set to explode in one month. Any time more than that then it’ll explode. I will have you secretly set the password. The timer will begin counting when the operation starts. If even one does not come back, I will die.]

The hall was covered in silence. Neito continued.

[Everybody… No, you guys came to Metallica with a purpose. Am I right? Shrouded by society, there was no other place you could turn to. You were unsatisfied by society, so you decided to change it. Am I right?]

[I also feel the same.]

[We are villains. We take whatever methods to achieve our goals. I think that is justifiable. Conquer Okinawa. We will definitely defeat the Santana and Ramone.]

[With that in mind, I gamble my life. I have nothing else to gamble. Before I entered Metallica, I was nothing. How about you guys? When I fought for Metallica, I never once thought of regretting it if I died. That's why I started off in the G.A.D. I kept moving and I arrived at my current position. All for the purpose of attaining the power to change the world.]

[I'll say it again. I won't force you to do it. I won't bear a grudge over you for not participating. Even so, if you're willing to offer your soul, if you're willing to gamble your life, then let's gamble our lives and fight. We will definitely win.]

This isn't a joke. This was not a thing you could boast in public.

Neito announced his message sincerely.

Everybody in the G.A.D. said they will fight. Their war cry echoed throughout the building.

One month later, everything went according to plan. The men from the G.A.D started waking up. This was proof that Ramone and the Santana were fighting each other.

Neito then proceeded to the location of the battle.

[...Metallica...]

[You're right. There was even a time you saved my life... I thank you for that.]

Neito arrived in the last part of the battle. He continued observing them.

Along with his [revived] subordinates, he proceeded down the cave. He knew Ramone might notice them using the spirits, but the hero of justice would have focused all his power towards the foe before him.

[You really are outstanding. I'm sure you're just a really good guy. You fought well.]

[...I can't afford...to lose here!!]

Ramone, along with his beaten up body, fiercely stared at Neito.

He's quite something. He's really amazing. It was also the same with Beetle. No matter what the circumstance, they vowed to protect the world. He is a really strong and enlightening man.

He's different from me. He tries to satisfy the world. Protect the little happiness he has around him.

Using human souls, I baited the Santana and gathered information. I baited them both to fight each other to death.

Even a child can decide who was righteous.

Even so…

[It’s futile. You can’t win.]

[Se-Aaa-!]

Mustering all the strength he had left, his fist started burning greatly.

Raising his hand, Neito commanded his men.

[Fire.]

His subordinates who were behind him, started firing their machine guns. It was a storm of bullets.

Metaphorically speaking, it was like crushing a tomato mercilessly.

Ramone could usually defend himself against their attack, but it was only when he was in a good condition.

[…Haaaaaaaa-!]

Ramone couldn’t avoid the continuous stream of bullets

He probably had no strength left to dodge them. He probably also had no power left to rush at them

[…You're really a great man…]

Neito spoke from his heart in a low voice.

Using his both hands, Ramone tried stopping the bullets and proceeded to go towards Neito.

He was walking towards them in a slow pace. There was probably some defensive energy left.

Step, after step, after step.

[…I can't… afford to lose…! I will…! Protect this island! You pieces of scum… I'll defeat you!]

The air was shaking like a mirage. He was truly a fierce man. Amidst machine gun fire, amidst the injuries had and amidst the damaged he received, he still kept coming.

Step, after step, after step.

He was true embodiment of justice.

[Don't falter. Fire. Keep firing.]

I can’t afford to be scared here.

Neito commanded in a cold blooded voice.

Seeing the face of Ramone getting close, he wanted to run away from him.

But, he can’t do that. He’ll lose control of his troops if he does that. They can’t defeat Ramone if that happens.

There was no better time to defeat him, the hero. In order for me to proceed and change the world, I need to defeat Ramone.

Neito didn’t back down. He had no thoughts on retreating.

His evil ideals were immovable.

Second passed like hours.

Ramone managed to reach one step away from Neito. The bullets weren’t enough to stop him. He managed to get this far.

Pulling away his fist, he proceeded to strike Neito with it. His Justice Hammer was burning fiercely.

But didn’t move an inch. He carefully watched Ramone.

[...I will... protect...]

Ramone wasn't able to throw his punch.

A few moments later, he collapsed in front of Neito and stopped moving. Whether he fainted or he died, Neito didn't know. The bracelet Ramone used for his powers burned away at the same time he collapsed. Ramone could probably never harness his powers again.

Bending down, Neito voiced out to Ramone.

[We won. Your justice was only at this certain level huh...]

Neito grinned.

But within his heart, it was different.

You were amazing.

Neito didn't know the real name of the man before him, and he never would.

But even until the end, he kept moving forward.

He fought and annihilated the Santana Neito greatly feared

singlehandedly. In order to protect somebody...

Who knew how much training he had to go through to perfect his karate techniques...

Who knew how much he had to sacrifice just to fight the Santana...

He didn't run away. He fought till the end. Admirable. He was really a great man.

Neito never spoke it out loud. He had no right to speak of him, as he was the villain that defeated him.

But he was a man worthy to be recognized.

With this, the battle for Okinawa drew to an end.

Chapter 32 : Manaka-san, I've Come So Far Now

Neito decided to send the body of the Santana's leader to Metallica's research center. He knew they conducted all their research without interference. They could research more about the monolith and how it was associated to human souls.

In the Santana's point of view, Neito was their savior. Neito appeared to them as a person offering his services for them to build their base. If ever they would try to oppose him, he would crush them mercilessly. That's why Neito amassed arms in the branch headquarters.

But it didn't come to that. The Santana swore their allegiance to Metallica. No, to be precise, they swore their allegiance to him. Making the sounds [kukko kukko], they even offered their strength to assist him in any sort of task. They must've thought of him greatly. Most of their race are probably living in the ocean depths.

With both Ramone and the Santana are now gone, Metallica's influence over the island rapidly grew.

Since Metallica's activities were originally small scale, the island had no countermeasures against them except their local hero.

Under Metallica's irregular commander, their local hero was brought down easily. All the businesses in the island now belonged

to Metallica in the shadows.

Neito did all of it in less than six months.

Mayuzumi Maki was in distress.

The cyborg project proposal she submitted to the committee for the inter-company competition was about to be approved, and she already petitioned for it to be moved to the research and development department, but it came to a standstill due to a problem.

She had no subject to be the “human” part of the cyborg.

She needed someone she could monitor easily. Her experiment didn’t need to produce great results after the transplant, but it would greatly raise the possibility of winning the competition if her it went well. A creature that improves itself, that was her concept.

In order for her to succeed, she needed to face multiple problems.

First, she needed to find a subject with strong mental fortitude that could withstand the procedure. There weren’t too many in the world.

After the subject became a cyborg, she needed him to be able to

control his powers independently.

He then would be enlisted in Metallica's elite unit to handle special missions in the front lines.

It was a given that Metallica would want a top-notch subject resulting from the transplant. The battle capabilities shown after the transplant would greatly affect Metallica's view on the project and the subject.

Maki still thought the concept of "evolving itself to become stronger" did not appeal to the committee too much. After all, they could interpret it as "it will start off as a weak subject" that will try to improve itself.

Maki knew that eventually they'll come to a decision where there might be complaints.

The project would greatly affect her life and the company. She was hoping the committee would see this.

And, she really worked hard on having the concept of building an improving cyborg. She believed that her project would greatly boost Metallica's fighting capabilities. She tried thinking of a person to be her subject. This was obviously her job as she was the researcher and developer of the project.

[...Hmm....]

Maki was slumped up in her desk thinking. It seemed that she couldn’t come up with somebody.

[Mayuzumi-san? What happened? Are you okay?]

She heard a voice from afar.

[Ah, no, I’m fine. I was just lost in my thoughts…]

She replied hastily.

[Is that so… You seem kinda down lately. Hey, have you heard?]

[? Heard what?]

[I don’t know if this’ll cheer you up, but…your co-worker, Komori-kun, was it? He’s coming to the main office today.]

[Eh?!]

She didn’t know this. She thought he was still in Okinawa.

She had heard all kinds of news.

He defeated Ramone and gained dominance over the Santana.

This news was widespread within the company. No one [believed it] and said amongst themselves that [it was a miracle]. They simply were in utter disbelief.

A normal civilian, admitted into the company through the General Affairs, rises through the ranks and gets sent to the special region, then comes back with all the glory. It was an unlikely situation.

But Maki thought otherwise. She already expected this of him.

If it's that person, maybe, just maybe, he can do something. I wonder what he's doing right now? Is doing well in Okinawa? He could've called me once in a while... Is he doing good there? He's going to do something great again.

Those kind of thoughts came to her.

That's why when she heard news about him, she shouted [Yay!] out loud, causing people around her to look at her, and making her all red.

[W-why is Neito-kun coming here?]

[He's receiving the director's recommendation award. Well, it's obvious that he would receive such a reward since he was up against a Guardian that strong. Ah, about his scheduled time of arrival...]

[.....!]

She let him out of her sight for a bit and he was already reaching new heights.

He was a shy but caring person, calmly proclaiming that he would destroy the world.

He was truly a mysterious person.

Her chest soon grew hotter by the minute.

[A, Ah, I'm...! ....Can you excuse me for a bit?]

[Hehe, sure. Go ahead.]

[Thank you very much!]

Maki briskly walked through the corridors. When she heard that he'll be arriving, she concluded that they'll probably arrive via the lobby.

She had nothing to see him for, but she just wanted to see his face once.

She saw the elevator and decided to use it to go down towards the lobby.

The elevator was crowded with people. She bowed her head to them and entered it.

While she was riding the elevator, she heard all kinds of gossip.

[I still don't believe it... What kind of guy is he? That Komori?]

[It's only been a short time since he was accepted into the company... I really don't know that much about him...]

[I saw him once... But he's not the type that would leave a big impression on you.]

[If that's the case, there's no way he could do something that great.]

[Defeating Dylan, bringing down Beetle and conquering the special region. That's one hell of an achievement. May he's on par with General Raz in terms of strength?]

It seemed that Neito brought about another storm into the company. The guys on the elevator who were headed to the lobby were constantly gossiping about him.

Hearing about him made Maki delighted.

Fufufu. You're all wrong. Komori-kun's kindness is the same as normal people.

She tried to hold back her delightfulness.

She arrived at the lobby.

The lobby was crowded more than ever before.

There some women from the General Affairs waiting in the lobby, and there were some people frantically coming in from outside.

After a few minutes the lobby gate with Metallica's emblem opened.

[……!]

Maki's chest suddenly jumped high. She saw the man whom everyone was talking about in the center of the group.

Wearing a black suit, he was standing leisurely, surrounded by people who looked like his companions.

People around the lobby turned their focus on the group. A cheer erupted from them.

Behind Neito, was a man with a katana, a college student-like brown haired man, a blonde girl and three other men clothed in black. They all walked with an aura booming with tremendous power, not paying much attention to their surroundings.

Neito hadn't noticed Maki yet.

He really has changed.

Maybe it's because it has been a while since he came into the main office...

The air around him changed. He had the most presence among the people the surrounded him. But he didn't have a negative aura. She felt that people were naturally drawn to him.

It wasn't like General Raz whose aura boomed of death and power. Rather, it was like a darkness lurking around, compelling people to follow him.

The entire lobby came to a silence. They were all speechless. They were only able to look at him and his group walking towards them.

Somehow, she understood him. He may look like that on the surface, but in reality he was really a shy person. He seemed weak and nimble; the type people took lightly of.

But today, he was heading into the main office in order to meet the managing director. The director must need to make some important announcement.

I’m sure he really fought hard during battles...

Maki never saw him fight be she knew that the “gap” between them was very wide.

But when he was in Okinawa, he grew quite a lot, stronger, and more atrocious.

The [darkness] he possessed was gleaming darkly during his fights.

I’m sure he’s doing his best. Directing his subordinates, walking forward, atrociously, proudly like a villain.

The lobby was quiet. Only the sounds of footsteps made by Neito’s group were heard.

Among the crowded lobby, a path was opened for him and his men to pass through.

The man named Komori Neito had now become a prominent figure within the company.

Ding.

With that sound, the elevator doors closed.

Neito rechecked everyone's attendance. Tsurugi, Anice, Niina and some men from the General Affairs in the Okinawa branch.

Okay, there's no one amiss.

[... Ah, I'm getting nervous. I guess I really am tired of all this.]

He unintentionally let out his thoughts.

[Good work Boss.]

[Nate was really cool back there!]

[I was honestly taken back, senpai. When you said you were bringing Ramone down, the air around you suddenly changed. You're really scary when you get serious.]

His companions complimented him one after the other.

Even if you guys say that... Tsurugi still had to suggest that

[you'll be part of history from now on. You should act like a real figure in the main branch, Boss].

So Neito really didn't think about it, he just subconsciously did it.

He tried doing it like the time when he was facing Beetle, the time he bought down Ramone.

Who ever crosses my path should be fully prepared.

I wont show any mercy regardless of who you are.

If you don't want to be crushed,

Get out of my way and bow down to me.

He tried bringing out his villainous self.

[Well, I guess that's it. I really don't want to continue doing it since I'm tired and all.]

[Understood Boss. Remember that it's important to make an impression on the director.]

He was now going to face the managing director of the company. The director had apparently news for him.

The next battle was about to begin.

[Thinking about it now…….]

Neito realized something.

He always collapsed unknowingly. After wearing the suit developed for missions, he steadily became resistant to fainting on the field.

He was different now.

When was I able to do something like this?

I can’t consider myself as a weakling now can I?

[Are you okay Nate?]

Anice asked him worriedly.

[Ah, no. There’s nothing wrong here.]

Manaka-san, I’ve come so far.

Will you praise me now?

His thoughts drifted away.

Chapter 33: You Won't Regret It?

Within Metallica's inner walls, there was an area where security levels were unusually high. Those who were allowed to enter were subjected to thorough body checks, and had to surrender all the weapons they possessed. It was where Neito was heading to.

Leaving his subordinates in a different area, he passed through the gate that looked like something from a sci-fi movie. He went into the reception room.

[Pardon my intrusion.]

Calling out, he entered. He wondered what kind of room it would be, but from the looks of it, it was just a regular office that could be found in any company.

It was a spacious reception room, with an antique table and black sofa as the furniture inside the room. The bookshelves were lined with black books, and in the room, there was a huge monitor with its corresponding computer.

He looked around for a bit before spotting someone inside the room.

[Oh, you're here, huh. Come in, punk.]

(TLN: 小僧 (kozou) – it can also be interpreted as brat, but I'll stick to punk)

The first person he saw was General Raz, and with his long hair tied in a topknot, he gave off an aggressive aura. He was the head of personnel, and he was the one who assigned Neito to the Okinawa branch.

[....Hmm... So you're Komori-kun... I see. You're quite interesting.]

The other person was wearing white clothes and an eyepatch. Unlike General Raz, he was much taller and slimmer. Rather than having an aggressive aura, he had eyes that pierced the soul. It was like a lifeless human, which creeped Neito out.

But, Neito knew him. He remembered his face from the time he was interviewed. After joining the company, Neito frequently wondered what had become of him.

[...Professor H...]

Professor H. [H] was just a codename for him that stood for 'Head of Field'. With the aid of his efforts, he practically made Metallica.

Staring out as a doctor, he advanced his research and attained multiple awards recognizing his talent. In other words, he was a considered as a genius scientist. From his research, he engineered [beings that surpassed human limits]. On the surface, he was a real [mad scientist].

For his research, he strayed from good, developing and

researching for Metallica. Ever since he deviated from good, he has been testing and researching on modified humans as well as [over-technology] which Metallica uses. He was a person who had wide influence over the company.

He currently holds the vice president's seat, and together with General Raz, they're called [The Twin Dragons]

[Oh, you know me?]

Professor H's eyes focused on Neito. Neito didn't express any emotion, but it was like the professor scanning his whole body for strengths and weaknesses. It sent shivers down his spine. He tried faking a smile.

This is also a battle. Expressions can reveal a lot about an individual.

Neito strengthened his spirits and continued fighting.

[Of course Professor H. Your abilities are on par with General Raz. You're one of Metallica's legendary figures.]

[……I see. I guess I'm mentally tough, but grouping me together with Raz is a bit… well I desist that you continue doing that.]

Professor H clearly disliked the idea. Maybe there was something going on between him and General Raz. Neito tried to find an excuse for his mistake.

[Head of Field. Leave it at that. The reason he was called today is for an evaluation. This a direct order from the president, or have you forgotten? We aren't allowed to cause a commotion...]

[... I understand. Such an unpleasant situation we got here.]

[... Leave it at that.]

It was like they were each aiming for each other's throat but they were prevented from doing so for some reason.

[Let's make this quick. Hey kid, no, was it Komori?]

[Yes.]

[For capturing the special region, and subjugating the B-class Ramone, you did a good job. For your efforts, you are awarded the Metallica Medal of 1st class.]

From his sturdy figure, Raz procured a silver shining medal and handed it off to him.

[Yes!]

[I never thought that you would be able to conquer the special region.]

Raz was expressionless as ever.

[Yes...]

[If you ever failed, the plan was for me to directly intervene, but hmm, you sure did something unnecessary.]

Bling. Raz's beast like eyes were piercing right through him.

[..Well, I'm sor-...]

In the heat of the moment, Neito almost apologized. In reality, Raz could've defeated Ramone and the Santana. No, surely he would've done it with ease.

This is bad. What do I do? I really don't want to get on his bad side.

What do I do? What do I do?

Neito was in a state of panic for a moment. But,

[...Fuu~. HAHAHAHAHA!! I'm kidding!]

Raz lost his composure and let out a huge laugh.

Thinking about it, this was the first time I saw Raz out of his usual composure.

[Ha, haha…]

[Don’t be afraid! You did well. I may not understand it, but you have your own strength. Your words that day was proved with this result.]

Raz deliberately patted Neito shoulders to the point that it hurt. And it was scary, but he was relieved.

Hearing the words “General Raz”, you would immediately think of an unbeatable villain. He was an individual who stood near the top of Metallica.

Neito had made a declaration and accomplished it (EDN: refer to ch21-22 for the conversation between Raz and Neito) so he brightened up; maybe Raz was actually scouting him.

Raz was surely a straightforward person. There was no ulterior motive in the way he spoke and laughed. What he expressed in public was what he truly felt inside. This made Neito sigh in relief.

He was able to crush opponents in the battlefield like bugs, but he was also able to get along well with his subordinates.

[Th-Thank you very much. With the General’s help we were… — with your encouragement..]

[I never taught you anything. If I were to teach anybody, they would be dead before the second day of their training. HAHAHAHA!]

[Raz, could you suppress that idiotic laughter of yours? I'll handle it from here.]

After Professor H made such remarks to General Raz, he turned to Neito with his cold stare.

[Komori Neito-kun. Aside from the 1st class medal you were given, starting from next year, you will be promoted to core level 4. Again, you are hereby moved to internal FA as a head. This of course, includes your subordinates under you.]

[Eh?!]

This was clearly beyond what he had expected.

Sure, he did head the operation in the special region, but what he only did was take command and make plans.

He was currently level 3. He was assigned as a squad leader. Even with his achievements, he couldn't have easily been promoted to level 4 in the first few years he was hired. Level 4 was a position where no normal commoner could've achieved.

I might get promoted to level 4.

He had this in his mind, but he considered the chances of it happening to be very slim.

Level 4. This was equivalent to a section/department chief position. On top of that, he was assigned for the internal FA. Internal FA had been spread throughout general corporations since the beginning of the 21st century, processing requests for employees who wished to be transferred to another department. They were the ones who approved of this transfer if all the conditions were met.

It was something Neito couldn't even hope for.

They were kidding, right? He was being promoted despite it being the third year since he has joined the company.

[Level 4... is it?]

[Yes. Metallica's personnel system is constantly changing. We can't leave talented personnel in the lower ranks. They should rise slow and steadily...like you...]

Professor H tried to honey coat his words. Frankly it was disgusting. But, Neito had no choice but to accept.

[Thank you very much. I will look into the department I would like to be assigned. With that, I would like to request a day or two

for me to make a decision.]

[Okay, very well. You may take your leave—No, let me escort you outside. With me, you can skip the body check in the entrance of the executive area. Is its fine with you, Raz?]

[Hm, do as you wish.]

In consideration for their words, Neito went with the flow. But in reality, he really didn't want to be accompanied.

[Well then, excuse us, General Raz.]

[Yeah. Keep doing your best, kid.]

Neito finished exchanging words with Raz and headed out of the room with Professor H. The corridor was a long and closed passage, and they walked towards the gate.

It was during this moment that the Professor called out to him.

[Komori-kun, this is a good opportunity to give you advice and a warning.]

[Hmm...? What do you mean?]

The professor's voice sounded prideful, as if he was looking down

on him.

[Your achievement are quite incredible... but remember your place.]

[……]

[No, you yourself are probably an extraordinary person, very, but there are some who disagree with that idea.]

I see. He is concerned about me.

[You are strong, very, but you only have high battle capabilities. You have no special skills or knowledge, but now you're promoted to level 4. I'm on par with Raz in terms of influence. Do you know how many people you're in charge of? How many do you think agree and trust you? How would they react if they were suddenly introduced to someone unfamiliar?]

Professor H was now facing him while walking forward as he continued to kindly remind Neito.

[The GA Department and your subordinates may side with you, but you pose a significant threat to Metallica. I doubt that they would trust you so easily.]

[... Of course, I understand. But, I don't plan on settling at this level.]

I know. I know that in reality, I'm just a coward. I know that much that it's scary. But I decided to keep moving forward. Even though challenges may lie ahead.

[Fufufu... No no. It's not my intention to scare you off. As I have said, those who are talented are destined to rise to the top. It's just I'm warning you to tread carefully from now on. This is my advice.]

[... Thank you very much.]

[Also, I have a suggestion.]

Professor H, the evil scientist, laid his hand on Neito's shoulder.

Slim yet long fingers. It was a creepy feeling.

[You don't plan on becoming an obstacle to me right?]

[Obstacle?]

[Fufufu... you're an indispensable individual. Won't you join my faction? As you know, Metallica is composed of multiple factions, and it isn't considered as one complete organization. I hold quite an influence in Metallica, so how about it? If you join me, I can offer you several conveniences in the organization.]

Those were enticing words.

He knew what Professor H wanted.

Every major organization has its factions. Metallica is no exception.

One of the main figures is Professor H, while the other is likely of be General Raz.

With the power struggle within the company, Neito, who was promoted to section chief, was not exempted from it.

Professor H's offer was certainly very inviting. As he had said earlier, Neito's position in the company was quite unstable. If he was under the Professor, then he would have means of protecting himself. Honestly, he rather scared of being chased because of his promotion. Enough that he might consider running away.

Again, Professor H wanted him on his side. He possibly could've gone through all of Neito's data.

What now? What should I do?

Neito thought a little. If he would theoretically side with Professor H's faction while having his own motives, he wouldn't be let off easily. There was no way the professor could turn a blind eye to what Neito was doing within his faction.

Then, would he agree to the professor? He couldn't decide immediately.

Neito had been in the special region, where people weren't aware about the power struggle within the company. There was a possibility that General Raz might come after him too.

But is it possible? Is it possible for someone like me, to face against such individual?

If Raz was in my position, would he be able to do it?

That's right, if they both are willing to offer protection, then why should I refuse?

Professor H. The man who gave birth to super-humans. I will be this person's...

[... I-I will...]

[Yes?]

The answer is [I can].

[I will be not joining you faction... I'm sorry.]

I’m not obliged to follow this person.

Neito was afraid, but he replied clearly.

[… Is that so…]

That’s right. I don’t plan on joining any factions.

Even if it were Professor H or General Raz, I will never join any of them. I will only join the faction I created with my own hands.

It’s a straight line to the top. Metallica was a huge organization, but Neito was prepared to undertake whatever obstacles he might encounter. Although his decisions now might become a hindrance in the future, and his movements limited from now on, he doesn’t plan on backing down.

It’s scary. His unstable position inside Metallica was scary. Those who are against him were surely powerful individuals.

But, he can’t falter.

Neito had already fought someone stronger than him.

That’s right. I fought those who serve justice with their righteous silver wings and won.

I defeated them and moved forward. In order to achieve my goals. In order to move forward.

Having defeated them, there is no other way.

[Professor H, not just yours, I don't plan on joining any other factions. I'm not an individual that you should be worried about.]

[… You won't regret it?]

[I won't. Never… Well then, I will be taking my leave. I will inform you of my chosen department by tomorrow.]

Bowing to Professor H, Neito exited the executive area through the gate.

He didn't look back.

Chapter 34: I Just Don't Like You

On the night after he was promoted and commended, Neito found himself in a peculiar place with peculiar company.

He was in a bar of a high class hotel, ten minutes away by taxi from Metallica's main office in the downtown area.

Neito had never set foot in such place before – with its high class feel, the leather seat, the extravagant counter and the expensive bottles lined up behind the bartender.

Originally, Anice suggested that they celebrate his promotion and their return to the main office as well as his FA reassignment for the departments.

No, they probably already started celebrating.

Neito was running late for the party.

The reason why he was in such a place was because he was invited while he was on his way to the party.

[I won't take much of your time. I just thought you wanted to hear what I have to say.]

Saying that, Neito had no choice be to accept. But, it was unexpected that they were going to meet in such a high class bar.

One glass is 1000 yen? You've got to be kidding me. I don't have much on me.

This made him think about how to spend his money.

[...Hey Ikeno, do we have to talk here?]

He was invited by no other than his co-worker, Ikeno Reiji. Ikeno was promoted into the "Global Level Management" branch as their chief of the Logistics Department. His ability was recognized for being able to manage multiple countries, and as a result, he was promoted to level 4.

Ikeno was the same as Neito, but they each excelled in their fields.

The plans Ikeno strategized, were at times, approved and it was executed in situations. Neito knew that he was a competent person, both whom he would admire and respect.

But, the last time they spoke was after the Harrison offense.

[This isn't something I want other people to hear. We're safe if we talk here. The bartender is someone I know and have confidence in.]

But if that's the case, we could've just gone to the oden shop...

[What will you be having?]

The bartender whom Ikeno knew asked for their order.

[I'll have a Gibson.]

Apparently there's no menu here. Ikeno ordered some mysterious drink. He's so smooth that he looks cool...

[E-a- I'll have a shochu-... I'll have the same thing with him]

They probably don't have such drinks here...

[Understood, give me a moment.]

Once it was finished, it was served in a small cocktail glass. Inside it was a circular object.

[...Ikeno, what is the circular thing?]

[You ordered something your not familiar? You're so hopeless... That's a pearl onion.]

[OniOnion? Are you serious? We're drinking onions?]

[……]

[Well, that’s that.]

He took a sip of Gibson.

Surprisingly, it was good.

[This is good.]

[Ha… I guess that’s good for you huh?]

Saying that, he wasn’t here to merilly chat with Ikeno. After all he still had a celebration party to attend to.

[So, what did you want to talk about?]

Neito decided to finish things off quickly.

[Aa, you got reassigned to the FA section right?]

Apparently, Ikeno wanted to settle this matter quickly too. Without looking Neito in the eyes, Ikeno started talking.

[…As expected. How do you know that?]

[It’s easy to make women talk. I’m friendly to the women in the General Affairs Department. You should try getting to know them better.]

Apparently, this person is famous. He’s full of confidence, this made Neito loathe him but it wasn’t important now.

[I’ll remember it… then?]

[Sometime within this year, the research lab is getting split into two.]

[Eh?]

The research lab was where research on human experiments, weapons and special equipment were done. They were developed, maintained and modified. It was an important part of Metallica.

He heard that the Sales department was funding a research project for modified human experiments. It was formerly headed by Professor H, but it was different now. Apparently, Professor H had left someone competent enough to act as his replacement.

[The research lab is going to be split? Why?]

[… The research lab was just gathering dust. It may be the former research lab of the famous Professor H, but now he has ascended the ranks and has more things to worry about. With that, all of his researches on human modification and other experiments are just

lying dormant in the research lab. It can't be said that it is actually helping Metallica in the long run.]

Ikeno's explanation was good. After listening for a while, Neito soon begun to understand what had happened.

The current research lab was just an ancient room once used by Professor H. In order for the company to make a breakthrough using the professor's research, they needed to split the research room into two sections to maximize the efficiency. The two sections would then compete to produce the better concepts and designs, which would then be developed.

It sounded a little tough, and Neito didn't understand the reasoning behind it, but sometimes friendly competition did bring better results.

[I'm sure you know of this, but Maki is joining the design competition for modified humans.]

Ikeno somehow managed to get familiar to Maki-san, enough to call her Maki. This bothered Neito, but he decided to put it off for now.

Neito took a sip of Gibson, and gave a nod.

[There are only two slots remaining for submission in that contest. Maki's proposal is included as one of them. With the splitting of the research lab, this chance may make or break the

competition.]

Ikeno gulped down his whole glass of Gibson, and ordered another drink, which was probably whisky.

Neito saw a foreign-like beer behind the bartender, and proceeded to order a glass of it.

[Let her have the advantage of using the split research lab, huh?]

[Yeah, that's about it. The design that wins the competition will be used for Metallica's first prototype for modified humans.]

Neito's order of foreign beer was brought to the counter and served to him. But he didn't drink it.

[You're really amazing.]

The amount of information Ikeno gathered was admirable. But Neito had questions of his own. This time, it was him asking the questions.

[So, what exactly do you want from me?]

[... It has been decided that I will handle the first section of the research lab.]

[...Hmm..]

[But there is still nobody assigned to the second part of the research lab.]

[Wha–!?]

Hearing this much, it was clear what Ikeno wanted of him.

Neito was currently had the FA right. This meant he had the choice of finding a post in any department, and if approved, he would be assigned there. If they were to think that Neito didn't knew about the splitting of the research lab, yet requests to be assigned there, what would happen?

(TLN: Not sure what this F.A. thing means, but it is clearly associated with company affairs.) (EDN: The closest thing I can find is it being a Japanese baseball term, "free agent" meaning that they are able to join any team, or in this case, department. Ch33 states that this concept had begun to spread into companies. Not sure how true this is in reality though.)

Ikeno drank all of his whisky and continued.

[The winner of the competition will hold a significantly huge amount of power inside Metallica. But of course, I plan to win.]

He didn't understand. This made no sense to Neito.

[Ikeno… why are you telling me this?]

They were co-workers, but it wasn't like they got along that well.

Ikeno thought of Neito as an idiot, and Neito thought of him as a below-average strategist.

Ikeno didn't answer Neito's question, and proceeded to down his glass of whisky. He began calculating the expense for them both.

[Hey.]

Ikeno wore his jacket, and prepared to leave. Before going, he said to Neito.

[I just don't like you. And I don't have plans on falling behind you. That's all.]

It was as if he was forcing himself to say that.

The beer Neito ordered was already warm.

He, for some reason, remembered General Raz and Professor H.

Are all the villains in the world the same?

No, they must be somehow different.

Ikeno Reji hated to lose.

Born into a well off family, he was raised well-off. Ever since his childhood, he hated to lose.

In sports, grades and even in popularity.

He didn’t know when he started hating to lose, but he always couldn’t forgive his weak self. If he was weak, he would just be overtaken by someone better than him, and in turn, cast away from the world. If he was strong, then he could shape the world however he likes.

Compliments, but not contempt.

The spotlight, instead of the background.

He loved to win after all.

Being strong was proof of self-achievement. That was what he thought.

But, at the same time, he was a person who exerted much effort. He never neglected his study so he didn’t fail his classes. He was keen to practice and so, mastered swordplay. His parent told him

he had talent. This may be true, but as far as he was concerned, it was his effort that bore fruit.

He was top of studies on a national level, he won the inter-high championships for kendo and was even popular with women.

Deep down, he knew he was a narcissist.

But what of it? He was what he wanted to be. With effort and time, he was able to come this far.

On the other hand, he didn't understand people who chose to make no effort and live in the shadows.

I'm different? You're the weird ones here.

[You're so fortunate. You're an elite. You have good looks and good athletic ability. Your life must be on easy-mode.]

He couldn't count how many time he had been given similar remarks. This made him irritated.

In search of power, Ikeno joined Metallica.

It was the best place for him to build up his strength.

But, he met a man inside the company.

At first, he looked like a man with no potential. With his weak and pathetic self, he looked for redemption inside Metallica. Ikeno really thought of him as no more than a fool.

The next time they met, the man he met changed.

An improbable thought came to Ikeno. If this weak individual claimed to change the world with evil, and claimed to crush anybody that might cross his path, there must be something wrong with his logic.

But the man grew in his way of villainy.

Never once, did Ikeno seriously think of changing the world since he joined Metallica.

In fact, there was no need to. If he was strong enough, then he would be able to easily deal with the problems of the world. It was because he could be himself all the time.

Ikeno was proud of always being proficient. Without even taking drastic measures, he could achieve a lot in Metallica. With the fame he gathered inside Metallica, he gained confidence and good evaluation.

On the contrary, that man was different.

He used evil as his sole weapon to [change the world]. And was successful in doing so.

That man’s existence rivaled his own.

That’s why Ikeno hated the man named Komori Neito.

Chapter 35: Is That Office Love, Senpai?

With the information Ikeno gave, Neito consulted Tsurugi before agreeing to apply for the position on the research lab.

Developing modified humans and weapons, the research lab was an important asset to Metallica. If Neito, who had no faction supporting him, went into a different department, there was a huge chance of his position being unstable.

Since that would be the case, he needed to establish his full authority of the research lab.

Again, if Ikeno's information was right, the head of the section that the competition winner was from would receive a great amount of influence in Metallica.

Neito, who had been constantly fighting in the front lines, needed to make a good impression on the company with the first department he would handle.

That was why he chose the research lab as his first step.

He didn't tell Tsurugi, but he also had an interest on cheering for Maki as a participant of the competition.

Maki's concept was using bio-technology to create [physical enhancements by the transformation of the mental energy and strength increase that came with growth], which was different

from the mainstream cyborgs.

On the other hand, Maki's competitor, a man called Keith, was developing a proposal for the mainstream cyborg concept of [the acquisition of unchangeable superhuman strength by a built-in external super energy supply and drastic modification of the body]. He was under Ikeno as the position of science adviser in the global management department.

As the first section's chief, Ikeno probably thought of taking Keith's idea before Maki's.

Neito didn't know whether he could defeat Ikeno, but there was no other option. He must win.

A month after Neito put through his application for the research lab, it was announced that the research lab was going to be split into two, and Neito would be assigned to the second section of the lab. The same went for his subordinates. It seemed like Metallica commonly reassigned its members as a whole.

Research lab Section 2 Chief: Komori Neito

Research lab Section 2 Assistant Manager: Tsurugi F. Gardner

Research lab Section 2 Research Chief: Mayuzumi Maki

Research lab Section 2 Board Member: Anice Jairus

Research lab Section 2 Board Member: Niina Kazuma

Other than them, there were five technicians, and twenty-one other workers. Neito headed about thirty people in his new workplace. The farewell party at the Okinawa branch ended up being quite exciting, but he was scolded by the GA department for drinking too much and eventually suffered from a hangover.

[But still, the research lab is quite far don't you think? Are we there yet? I'm getting bored with looking the sea.]

Riding Metallica's exclusive cruiser, Neito and his group departed from Tokyo Bay and headed out to the open ocean. The yacht was fully equipped with a kitchen, truly made for long distance luxury travel. They were scheduled to arrive tomorrow morning, which meant that they would be spending the night at sea.

Niina was whined in disappointment.

[It's obvious that the island would be far off into the sea, seeing that they don't want it to be easily discovered. If you're a man, don't grumble about it, Niina.]

['Kay...]

Tsurugi tried cheering Niina up. This was a common occurrence for this team.

[Nate, do you want coffee?]

[Ah-yeah. Thanks.]

Anice was really good at pouring coffee. Neito, who was looking out into the sea, went in and took a seat on the sofa.

The research lab was registered under the main office, but technically they acted independently from the main office. They needed to prepare various equipment for the experiments, and seeing the possibility that they might get attacked, it was obvious that Metallica would keep the location of the research lab secret from its employees. Thinking about this, Neito took a sip of coffee.

The sofa was U-shaped [⊐], and Maki was sitting across him. She was the type of person that put huge amount of sugar in her coffee.

[By the way Chief Komori, we finally can work together! This makes me so happy!]

Maki was clearly excited. For some reason, she seemed nervous when she tried talking to Neito, but her expression was light and cheerful.

[? Yeah. I'll do my best not to bring you down in your competition. And you can call me the usual Neito. We're co-

workers after all.]

[....Yes! Again, I look forward with working with you... Neito-kun.] Maki laughed happily. Her joyous face made her even more attractive.

Ah~ she's very cute.

[Hmm? Is that office love, senpai?]

[T-That's n-not it... umm...!!]

Maki turned red after Niina tried teasing them.

[Are you stupid? How did you come to that conclusion?]

Neito tried to shut him up. Niina was usually a carefree person, and opted to making jokes. Neito finally found a common ground where he could speak to Niina regularly.

[Are you stupid? How could you interpret it like that? You're so sly Nina.]

Anice mimicked what Neito said and added some side remarks.

[...Ah ...um, that's right Niina-san. Please don't make fun of us.]

A bright and happy atmosphere surrounded us.

Aren't we supposed to be a group trying to create weapons of mass destruction to conquer the world? We don't look like that from the outside... Well that's fine.

But they had things they needed to do.

[Well, that's that, I've been thinking. Since we've have all the main members here, why don't we decide our roles as board members and our policies before we arrive?]

[I agree. We are, after all, racing against time here. We'll listen to what you have to say first.]

Tsurugi was the first to agree with Neito's idea. The others also followed.

[...eh, well, I suppose.]

For the past few days, Neito wasn't able to sleep soundly. He had been studying the functions and development of the research lab.

Neito, who only did office work, tried making effort on understanding how he should manage his team efficiently.

[For that competition, there are a lot of things we need to do: we need to manage and remodel the new department, check the battle

capability of the cyborg prototype as well as look at the reports on the performance analysis. After that…]

Niina, who wasn't listening until this point, raised his hand.

[Ah, should I do it? I think I would be the one most suited to do that job, and I really don't want to participate with the daily training and all.]

It was a light-hearted suggestion, but Neito was thankful for it. Actually, he also had thought the same. This would take some of the burden off from Neito. Niina may not look it, but he was more suited for mental tasks rather than ones that were physical. Recently, Niina had started taking interest in their work. Neito didn't know whether it was because of himself, but he was glad he could help Niina develop himself.

[Is that so? I'll leave it to you then.]

['Aye.]

[What's left is the testing of the weapons. We need to run motion-simulation for the weapons that are going to be used by the cyborg… Can I count on you for this, Tsurugi?]

It wouldn't be possible for anyone other than Tsurugi to do it, and he'd be able to do more than what was necessary for the test. Even if he was up against a sword, Tsurugi was strong enough to break its blade with an ordinary sharp knife. Certainly, his keen

eyes and strategical thinking contributed to this.

[Understood, Boss.]

Tsurugi formally thanked him. It felt a bit weird for Neito, but Tsurugi was truly grateful for the task given to him.

[What about me, Nate?]

Anice was frantically moving about, trying to appeal to Neito.

[Anice will be assisting me in my work. You'll be moving around quite a bit, is that okay?]

[Yeah! Okay~ ♪!]

Although Neito knew he was favoring Anice because of her [special situation], and that he shouldn't get too close with her past a certain degree, seeing the always bright and cheerful girl by his side made him reconsider.

[So, we still need to do the revision and the improvements on the cyborg and talk about the competition but... it's already getting late. You can go to your cabins and rest.]

Neito already thought of a plan for the competition. But, he still needed to do something before he could announce it in front of everybody.

Everyone obeyed his words, and proceeded to each of their cabins. Neito, who stayed behind, went up to the deck. He gathered his thoughts and spent his alone time to strengthen his conviction.

[.....]

The night breeze was calming. Neito leaned on the railings and gazed up into the night sky full of stars.

The competition was about constructing a cyborg. To determine the winner, they would let them fight, and the winner would become the concept prototype which Metallica would adopt.

Like what Ikeno said, this was a very crucial project.

He needed to win. The darkness inside him said to do it. Still, Neito was worried.

[..... I'll do it. Just wait and see.]

Neito murmured to himself, absorbed in his thoughts. He didn't know how much time he spent on the deck, but his worries seemed to fade away.

It was then at this moment,

[Hmm? Neito-kun? What happened? You're here and not resting?] It was Maki. She seemed like she had just came out of the cabin and her body was wrapped in a stole.

[Ah, yeah. I was just thinking to myself. What about you Maki-san, why are you here?]

[Ah, is that so… I'm sorry for interrupting. I just couldn't sleep and, well, I ended up here.]

[Eh…? What, no, you weren't interrupting me at all!]

Maki was panicking, and looked distressed.

But Neito didn't mind that. It was about time he said it.

Below the starry night, Neito proceeded to tell her his thoughts.

[I know what Maki-san truly feels.]

[Eh-?! …I-Is that so…?]

For some reason, Maki face turned bright red. Her face was naturally fair, and he could clearly see it from the lights emitted from the cabins.

[? …ah, yeah. I know. That's why I can't say these words with

such ease.]

[... Yes... Yes...]

Maki kept staring at Neito. This time, it was his turn to be nervous.

[I know that Maki-san is a strong person. In order to fulfill your dreams, you entered Metallica and gave it all your effort. It's because you're such a person, that I...]

[...Yes?]

Maki took a step and approached Neito. Her eyes were tearing.

[I want to make your dreams come true. So!]

[Yes...!]

[I know that it is important competition, but I'll do the best I can, so I want you to approve in using me as the person to be remodeled for the project!]

[...Huh...eh?]

Maki froze for a moment, and uttered nothing.

E-Eh? That's weird. Maybe I said it in a strange way. Is it just me or is the flow somewhat different from what she expected? Aah, umm. Explain. I need to explain it to her.

Neito hastily continued.

[I first thought of requesting Tsurugi for this matter. He would be far stronger than me when remodeled, but then I thought, that would be meaningless. I'm not boasting, but my battle capabilities are very low. But if I were to undergo the remodeling process, maybe I can become stronger and create a dramatic appeal to the company by showing the effectiveness of the concept.]

[Ah, umm…wait… please wait a moment!]

Maki is redder than before, and her ears were even red. I wonder what's wrong with her. Maybe something embarrassing happened… Is my fly open? No, it's properly closed.

While Neito was thinking what happened, Maki regained her composure and replied.

[…Fu-, yes. I'm sorry, I'm okay now.]

What was that all about? Neito decided to ignore it, and continue.

[I think this is the best way we can do it. Even if we win the competition and other people come to use it too, I want to be the

one to be first experimented on. You know how people above level 4 have some of their body parts remodeled right? If I were to be a remodeled, I would be in charge of my own remodeling and not have to rely on the main branch.]

[...It, it would be as you said but...]

Formally, Neito could issue his request as an order from a superior officer, but he didn't want to resort to that.

He knew the Maki he entered Metallica with and her desperate feelings about the competition. Back then, Neito told Maki at the Oden shop, [We'll change the world together]. It was an important competition.

To Maki, it was the most important thing to her. That's why Neito needed her approval of using him as the test subject.

Neito held Maki's hand and said his thoughts.

[I will take over this world! Even if I get called a good for nothing, I'll crush whoever is in my path. I don't care if they're on the side of justice. I still plan on moving forward! I won't ever destroy Maki-san's dream..!]

[...Umm.]

Maki gave a soft reply.

It was only then Neito noticed it. They were too close. Well, it was in order for him to hold her hand, but still. Neito immediately let go of Maki's hand.

What was I thinking? Holding a girl's hand? Wow, so gross. I'm sorry. I just got carried away. Well, it was as Izumi-san in the sales department had said, I get carried away too easily. I need to reflect on his words more...

[I-I'm sorry!]

[No... Neito-kun is really savage. You only think about evil things. Jeez~]

Maki jokingly said to him while laughing.

[Eh? But... what other things could I be thinking about...?]

[It's okay if you don't understand it!]

[...Then, how about it?]

Neito was anxious for the reply, but in return, Maki held his hand and answered.

[Of course. If Neito-kun desperately requests of it, then I'll chose to accept it.]

[Really?!]

[Yes, my concept [Spiritual Silhouette] requires mental power rather than physical energy. I'm sure Neito-kun will...ah! We need to do a remodeling suitability exam first! If you aren't fit enough, then you'll have to undergo training.]

[Y-Yeah.]

Maki's eyes which were teary from before, became full of excitement.

[B-ut! My aptitude test is really hard, so please be sure to fully prepare for it!]

Pointing her finger at him, Maki tried to sound tough. That was why Neito replied in a strong manner.

[That's how I wanted it! I'll show you the power of the person who rose out of the GA department!]

[I'll be looking forward to it! ...Fufufu.]

[Hahaha, it's really getting cold. Shall we go in?]

[Ah, no. My face is burning so I'll stay behind for a bit...]

[Is that so? Then I'll go on ahead. Good night.]

[Good night too.]

While Neito was returning to the cabins, he pondered a little.

From reading Maki's concept, it seemed that the [Spiritual Silhouette] remodeling would take the appearance of the person's core spirit. If an innocent girl was to transform, she would take the shape of an angel. If a hot blooded man was transformed, then the form would be like a minotaur.

Well then.

If I, a villain willing to destroy the world just to change it, were to be remodeled, what kind of spirit would I possess?

[...I wonder what kind of monster might come out...?]

Neito was a bit worried, but his soul inside was burning fiercely.

Chapter 36: ...Good Work

The newly established research facility was dubbed [Purgatory Island] within Metallica.

Situated on the Pacific Ocean, the exact location of the island was known to only a few individuals in Metallica. The island was covered in a specially-engineered dome-shaped cloaking device, making it invisible to radars.

Since it wasn't easy to freely travel to and from the island, it was obvious that Neito and his team would have to live on it. Of course, they were provided with the residential, dining and recreational facilities that they needed, and there were also other inhabitants apart from the employees of the research facility.

Other than Niina complaining that there are no women to fool around with, it seems like the facility doesn't lack anything...

On the day of their arrival, they immediately resumed their work.

Although he wasn't directly related to the competition, Niina exceeded Neito's expectations by working energetically in reviewing and researching the materials needed for the cyborg project. At any rate, he was in a hurry to get the job done.

It was sloppy to a certain extent, but when mistakes were made –

[Oh, some errors popped up. I'll fix it.]

– he'd quickly correct it. Well, his attitude was a little bit of a problem, but in the end, he still finished his work.

[You're really good at this.]

[Is that so? Well, then I'm pretty amazing… Hey senpai, want to grab some food?]

[It's still 11AM.]

[Breakfast doesn't exist for me, so it's natural that I'm hungry at this hour. I've been eyeing that katsu since this morning.] (EDN: Katsu-don is pork cutlet with rice.)

[Well I'm going to have curry I guess.]

[Katsu curry would much be better.]

This kind of conversation was very common.

Tsurugi, as he was focused on weapon testing and combat motion for the {Spiritual Silhouette} that was being developed for the competition.

Tsurugi had no background in such things and he didn't have a

country of citizenship, but his skill was definite. Little by little, he showed good results. On the other hand, Maki, the development head, was constantly calling him into meetings.

Since Maki was a scientist, it was obvious that she had no battle experience. For these matters, she asked advice from Tsurugi.

[Regarding this data, Maki-san, the shoulder's power is too much and the balance is off.]

[A-Ah, is that so...? Maybe I was too fixated on only the right-handed finishing blow...]

[Understood, but a punch's power doesn't solely rely on the shoulders. It also depends on the hip movement and footwork of the individual — Like...this...!!]

[Wow! ...That's an amazing speed!. I see! As expected of Tsurugi-san! Then I'll modify the energy usage of the lower half and give it more power.]

The simulation was steadily progressing.

Anice was also displaying her capability in the research lab.

She was a genius in battle and engineering due to the special education she received as the daughter of Crimson's boss.The workers also brightened up due to Anice's cheerfulness, and at times, she guided them in their problems. She also helped Neito

with training and conditioning his body to be able to handle the augmentations that would be made.

The next day after settling into the facility, Neito took the compatibility test. The compatibility test was not solely created for the competition, but had always been used for projects. Tests were performed to measure physical strength, reaction speed, mental resistance, immunity and the like.

Neito's compatibility results were {D}.

The compatibility levels are arranged by:

{A} – Compatibility is extremely high, the rate of success for augmentation is above 100%.

{B} – Compatibility is high, augmentation would result in an above average subject.

{C} – Compatible, augmentation should cause no problem.

{D} – Compatible, but complicated operations during augmentation is not recommended,

{E} – Low compatibility, augmentation is risky.

{F} – No compatibility, augmentation is life-threatening and is not advised.

For Neito, it was lucky that he was at least able to somewhat proceed with the augmentation. He managed a rating of {D} due to his strong mental fortitude.

In order for them to win the competition, Neito needed to improve his rating and gain some physical strength. Although it wouldn't be easy, he decided to do his best until the date of his augmentation.

So, aside from his duties as a lab head, he trained with Anice as his coach.

[There there– Nate, just a little bit more ♪.]

[...O...okay–!]

[Three more left! Fight!]

[... 198 .... 199 ... Haa!! ... 200!!]

[Good job! You did well. Here, have a drink.]

[...th-thank you. Just a moment, please.]

While having training weights on his back, there was a monitor displayed in front of him with a button that Neito had to press continuously. The training was supposed to simultaneously

improve his physical strength and his reaction, but this really took a toll on Neito. It wasn't something he could skip out on, but if it wasn't for Anice's help, Neito really thought he wouldn't be able to do it.

(As the days passed by productively in the research facility, Neito's team members worked through a mountain load of work, each enriching the projects with their experience.)

It really isn't a bad team… Neito thought.

On a certain day, Neito, who just finished his training regiment, went back into the research facility to retrieve certain things he'd forgotten. He spotted Maki who was still working alone.

Ooh, she's doing her best… She's really focused.

Neito thought fleetingly

I really want give her something or just go cheer for her. We are co-workers after and all... And she did a lot of good things for me too... Well in a sense, I want her to like me.

Mulling over his troubles, he bought a canned coffee.

If I say ‘good work’ and then give her this coffee... She wouldn’t think of me as a bother, would she? It would be devastating if I made a bad impression on her...

As Neito was wandering around in the corridor, Niina happened to come by.

[Ni-Niina, why are you here at such a time?]

[Eh? Ah, I occasionally stay in the lounge since it’s bothersome to go home. I also bring in games to play. Why is senpa...ah, ohh, I see.]

Niina peeked into the room from the corridor, and when he saw Maki had stayed behind, he grinned.

[W-what is it?]

[Oh nothing... Senpai, did you know that Maki-san prefers tea than coffee?]

[Really? I-is that so?]

[Yeah, so it would be better to give her tea. There's a vending machine in B-block that sells it. You might want to offer her that since it's the one she likes.]

[... I'll be back after buying it.]

[Hey, senpai.]

[What?]

[You still have that coffee? Can I have it please?]

[... Here.]

[Thanks.]

Neito smiled bitterly at Niina's sharp intuition, but was admittedly impressed by the fact that he was noticed.

[You're really a villainous person, senpai. But who would've thought that you're that kind of person in private. It really confuses me. You're way too depressing.]

Niina commented while opening the can.

[...But well, when you get serious... I guess you look cool, so I think you're okay overall.]

While saying as such, Niina hid his embarrassment by gulping down his whole. After that, he left.

With even such trivial things going on, the days left until the competition continued to swiftly pass by.

Problems also came up.

It was when Neito checked up on the research booth.

[.....Hmmm.]

[What happened, Maki-san?]

[Ah, Neito-kun... Nothing, it's just a little set-back.]

Neito decided to hear more.

The power of the {Spiritual Silhouette} seemed to be still rather weak. There were two particular reasons.

First, the conversion of the subject's spiritual energy to external power was inefficient. Far more spiritual power was needed to

bring it up to expected levels due to this faulty rate. Second, even if the first problem was solved, there would still be a flaw. There was still a need to find an alternative source of the mental energy that would be used.

Those were the two problems that they faced.

Neito was no scientist, but he had an idea to solve the first problem.

[... Hey, for the spiritual energy, are we going to use the soul of an individual?]

[? Well yes. That's an simplistic way to describe it, but you're not wrong.]

Is that so... if that's the case...

[I know a person, well, I can't really consider them to be [people] but they are skilled in soul manipulation. They gather and use souls as a barrier for their fortress and other stuff.]

[!? Really? That a high-level technique called [Spiritual Control]. In theory it is impossible to do that, and it hasn't been actualized...]

[I don't know much, but those guys are sure to be cooperative since they're being held by Metallica... They go [Kukko kukko] and look scary, but do you want to see them? They may able to give us

a hint on this subject. In the end, they're good guys I guess. And they did say that they'll be able to help me in the future.]

[Yes! I'll be looking forward to it!]

Having decided to do so, Neito decided to sneak into the base established by Metallica for [them] and was greeted by.

You... saved...us...

While holding out their scaly hands. Maki who while listening, was at the same moment intrigued and terrified on hearing their theories of spiritual manipulation.

Having just listened to their words, Maki-san is sure amazing to understand such complex theories.

Those type of events frequently happened on the island.

Three months had already passed since Neito and his team arrived on the island.

The second issue that Maki mentioned was still left unsolved. They needed to find a small yet high output storage for spiritual energy. In the end that object might not exist at all.

On the other hand, Ikeno and his team were also present on the island. Although the only time they could test each other's project

was during the competition.

Even so, they were in the same island. They would coincidentally meet each other occasionally. Two days before the finalization of the projects, Neito was in the cafeteria eating Curry Udon when he happened upon Ikeno. The time was nine pm. It seemed like Ikeno was also grabbing his dinner.

[..... good work today.]

[..... A-ah, you too.]

They only took notice of each other's presence for a short period of time.

The cafeteria only had counters with long benches. Since there weren't many people around, Ikeno ended up sitting three seats away from Neito.

[.....]

[.....]

They ate their meal in silence.

They were both aware of each other's progress on the project. They were both lab heads, so it was natural that they would get a lab report every now and then. Since Ikeno was a prideful

individual, Neito had no reason to doubt his report.

[……Ikeno.]

[What?]

[I saw the design for your project. You're really amazing.]

Ikeno's team dubbed their project {Beetle Crystal}. It intends to incorporate external energy to mechanize the subject's body and furthermore, Ikeno entertained the idea of an {external energy source} to be added into the project.

Neito couldn't forget. Using {Over Technology}'s armor, Beetle used crystals as fuel for energy.

The crystal takes energy from a higher dimension and releases it back into this one. It was a terrifying invention made by the Harrison research facility.

After the Harrison offensive, Ikeno swiftly handled the integration of the techniques used to make the crystals into Metallica. Furthermore, the development of such crystals were considered top secret, known to only a few individuals within the company. Currently, one department had monopolized the benefit from it as well as some executives within the company.

[What do you want to say here Komori? 'But it was me who defeated Beetle' or the like?]

[No, although it’s true that I was the one who fought with Beetle, you were the one who arranged the equipment, formation, participants, route and attack timing. I won’t say I won the battle all by myself.]

That was indeed the truth. In the end, that was a joint project between two departments.

Ikeno was also the one who supervised the integration of the crystal technology in Metallica. It was no surprise that he would bring some of it with him.

In hindsight, in order to succeed, Ikeno had already planned out which cards he needed to have. This was something that, Neito didn’t even think of.

He is strong… I’ll admit that.

[… and that is the truth. I’m glad you’re such a competent person.

…. I’ll be going ahead. Go easy on me during the competition.]

Neito finished his meal and determined that there was no other reason to remain.

Neito couldn’t say it out loud, but he admired Ikeno. In the end,

they were like two sides of a magnet, never destined to be friends.

That’s what Neito thought.

In twenty-second century Japan, the Rocks Organization, who were considered defenders of justice, existed with support from the United States. The reasons were unknown as to why the United States supported the Organization. Some say that it was because of the technology that they possessed; handed down to them since ancient times. Due to this they became superhuman with various characteristics pertaining to their powers.

Among them, the Rocks Organization in Japan had some special characteristics.

Most of the members acted on their own.

Dylan, who first appeared 20 years ago; Beetle, who protected the Harrison research facility; Ramone, who protected the island of Okinawa from aquatic threat. There were also others in existence.

Although they could be the backbone of a branch, most of them acted on their own. In the end, the number of people with special powers were limited and with this, it was hard for them to come together. They preferred to spread out and extend their area of protection.But there was an exception. One group of heroes decided to stick together when tackling problems. They were famous within their own territory.

10 years ago, there was a period where research on psychic power was popular in Japan.

The researchers wanted to prove whether or not humans were able to use telekinesis, teleportation and telepathic abilities. They gathered children as research subjects and put them into a school to develop such abilities. This was the birth of the [Maroon] school.

[Maroon] looked like it was making progress with their research, but soon, the personal ambition of their founder began to show. They educated and brainwashed children making them private soldiers in preparation before letting them out into the world.

This made [Maroon] pursue Metallica. They used children with psychic powers as soldiers against Metallica.

Children who possessed psychic powers were like emotionless machines and often self-destructed due to mental breakdown. It was almost like a genocide seeing as how many died.

Now, [Maroon] no longer existed. Why? There was a rebellion within their ranks.

Their brainwashing methods weren't perfect. Among them, five children were particularly friendly with each other. They experienced tough training and developed their abilities together. They were the closest friends. With this friendship, they endured the harsh training and managed to come out on top.

They, who now knew right from wrong, understood how cruelly [Maroon] had treated them.

As a result, they escaped the clutches of [Maroon], and were dedicated to protecting people with their psychic powers.

Psychic powers are the embodiment of a person's heart. They, who shared a strong bond with each other, were significantly stronger than those who were emotionless machines. With that bond, they were able to save many people.

With the rebellion from within and the constant attacks from Metallica from without, [Maroon] was destroyed.

Now, they are working with the Guardians and have fought against evil all around the world.

Years later, they have grown up and further enhanced their friendship through the countless battles they've experienced. They were adored by the common people for their close bond.

Beni Koutarou

Kogure Souichi

Yamabuki Kaoru

Rey – Evergreen

Momoi Sakura

Now in their (Teens? Adulthood? youth is really vague), they were bound by justice and friendship, they were called

{Maroon 5}

Born from [Maroon], the five of them stopped [Maroon].

Currently, as defenders of justice, they were headed to cut down the evil in their path.

They had found a root of the evil organization, a root that spreads evil throughout the world.

The information they got was a special case, but the source was reliable.

There was a mole inside the organization that leaked the information. After all, that's what evil organizations do. There was no need to ask for the reason or why the individual did it. The five of them couldn't even think of betraying their friends.

Evil destroys oneself from within. With no bonds to connect them, evil can be easily dealt with.

The tighter the bond was, the stronger one could become. That's why they were determined that they wouldn't lose to any evil

organization.

{Purgatory Island}: The Island where modified humans were being created.

Maroon 5 was heading to Purgatory Island via a submarine

Chapter 37: Be Thankful, You Bastard

A month later, Ikeno and his section one development team gathered at the auditorium for the joint meeting. It was their first time entering the auditorium. It was decided that a joint presentation would be held between the research lab's section one and section two. For the following three days, they would present their data through various presentations and simulations. Finally, they would test out the prototype for the modified human.

Section one members were already settled down in their seats.

Ikeno looked at Komori Neito.

As always, he's full of spirit...

The last to enter were the two representatives from the main office. They were the ones tasked to oversee and report the results to the main office. The decisions made from the main office were also going to be announced by them. In other words, they were the judges.

We're talking about that Komori... I know he's going to have some sort of trick under his sleeve. Even so, I refuse to lose to him. Wait and see... I'll show you my abilities.

[And now, we will proceed to the modified human presentation.]

[Is it okay if we start first?]

Ikeno quickly snatched the lead.

[Hmm. Is Chief Komori okay with letting section one present first?]

[I don’t mind at all.]

Receiving Komori’s words, their presentation started.

Section one’s idea was to use a [Beetle Crystal] and integrate it to move a mechanized body which boasts incredible strength. They named the project [Chevalier] after the western knights of Europe. It was a method of converting crystal energy into raw power.

Combining massive strength and superior agility, it was possible to use a great sword to cut down its enemies in a single slash.

While the modified human project Chevalier is still in the pre-prototype stage and lacked hard numbers. Ikeno assured that the crystals are easily produced and have great flexibility in application. Furthermore his contacts overseas have overturned the global investment management sector using said crystals. There was no reason for him to lose.

Ikeno took advantage of his communication skills and made a perfect presentation.

[{Chevalier} huh? I didn’t pay much attention to your reports, but it’s really something. Tell me, how long would it take to create one? Seeing as it is a complicated method, I reckon it would take more than two days.]

[Not at all. Please confirm on the 12th page of our report. Construction takes about thirteen hours. While the testing would approximately only cost one day..]

[Oh, to be able to do it that fast...]

[Thank you very much.]

Three years of experience working for Metallica had taught him how to exploit his capabilities and in turn display a perfect product.

[Next will be Section two. Chief Komori, if you please.]

Neito stood up, but retorted.

[Ah, no. For section two, Research head Maki-san will be the one to explain. She’s more informed than me.]

[……hm]

[[T-Thanks for having me.]

It was the first time Maki held a presentation. Ikeno knew much of this in advance. Ikeno didn't know how they did it, but they managed to increase the spiritual energies conversion rate. It certainly was an interesting idea, but it had a huge problem. The fact that it consumes the user's spirit is a huge issue. The idea of a self-improving modified human is interesting, but is it enough to overturn the [Chevalier]? How much the judges would put an emphasis on the methods potential would determine the outcome of the competition.

At least, that's what Ikeno thought. It was at that moment...

Blackout, red lights were flashing and the loudspeakers were wailing. It was an emergency alarm.

[!!!??? What's happening!!??]

[What's going on?!]

The judge's were screaming angrily at the audience. Well it was an expected reaction. Anybody would panic after hearing the emergency alarm.

Normally, this wouldn't even be possible. This was Metallica's top secret island. Only a few people know the exact location and furthermore, the island is heavily shielded.

Since it housed Professor H's research projects, this was done to guarantee that they wouldn't be exposed to any danger.

But for one reason or another, someone had managed to find them despite the odds.

Ikeno, understanding the situation, raised his voice and shouted

[Calm down! This is the emergency alarm. We don't know who, but someone is rapidly approaching the island. They should only have crossed the first detection line. Even if they rode the fastest ship in the world, it would approximately take them three hours to reach the island. Until we can confirm the situation, all level two and below are on standby and should be ready for battle.]

[Evacuate both judges to the underground shelter until we can ensure their safety. For those who are above level two...]

[... Confirm the situation right? Tsurugi, Niina and Anice, let's go! Please stay here Maki-san.]

Reacting a few seconds late, Neito regained his senses and followed up on Ikeno's announcement.

Ikeno escorted the two judges from the main office to the shelters. After escorting them, Ikeno along with his section one subordinates and Neito's section two subordinates, they went to the control room.

It was the brain of Purgatory Island. From the control room it was possible to oversee the security of the whole island; it could detect and monitor the enemy over radar.

Entering the control room, they immediately looked at the surveillance monitor. The intruders clearly broke through the defensive line.]

[..!! Th-This is-!]

It was a submarine, but it wasn't just a regular submarine.

It bore a mark which everyone knew. A five colored symbol etched on the side.

They knew.

The five representatives of justice. Psychic soldiers who fight evil.

[Maroon Five!]

[W-What does this mean?]

Niina spoke in a frightened tone.

[… I don’t know how, but they managed to find this place.]

Nieto was unusually calm. It may be unusual, but maybe it was because of his past experiences.

[Hmm, so is the competition canceled? That’s unfortunate.]

Anice Jairus felt no fear.

[What a disaster! Those guys plan on attacking this island!]

[W-What are we going to do?! The research lab doesn’t even have any weapons stored! We don’t even have a fighting force!]

[How are we going to hold out? What’s more, what if that submarine doesn’t only carry the Maroon Five but also one hundred more guardians…]

[If they attack we’re all doomed. Everybody is going to be killed!]

Most of the members from section one and section two were researchers and scientists. The [battle] they were supposed to be engaged in was supposed to be the competition. Everybody was panicking. It was obvious that Ikeno didn’t bring a fighting force with him.

Komori Neito’s right hand man, Tsurugi was calm, but the rest of

the room was in a state of chaos.

Though Neito looked distressed but he didn't show any sign of fear.

Instead he started thinking.

What should I do? How can we escape from this situation? As my subordinates have told me, we can't fight our way out of this. We relied on the anonymity of this place so we didn't bring any fighting force. The only ones that can probably fight are Ikeno, Tsurugi and Anice.

Seeing that the enemy had superior fighting capability, they were clearly at a disadvantage. They had a fighting force that could only withstand a single blast of psychic energy.

[... Ikeno, what do you think of their fighting force?]

Komori Neito asked him, trying to establish that they were equals at this moment.

[I'd say five from the Rocks Organization and a dozen more Guardians... They clearly outclass us.]

Neito was about to reply "Stating the obvious... You can already tell just by looking at the screen..." but he disregarded the idea.

[……. How did they discover this place?]

While Ikeno was thinking.

This is bad, bringing up the issue now would be a bad thing.

One of their subordinates shouted out.

[We can’t be sure how they did it, but… somebody… somebody must have leaked the information…]

[T-That’s right! Somebody clearly leaked out information!]

[Why would somebody do such a thing…? Isn’t it one of the lower tier guys?]

[That’s right! they must have done some sort of bargain in the dark.]

Tsk, how did it come to this?

As an evil organization, competition is very common among the rank and file. It was natural to feel a sense of doubt towards one’s co-workers.

[W-Wha-?! That’s impossible. It would mean condemning us all! In the first place, we hardly even know where we are!]

Niina's response was good, but futile.

When you think that someone could sacrifice others to save himself, especially when gaining something extra, then it would make sense. Furthermore, the island's location could be easily determined if one had knowledge of astrology.

At this point Ikeno reluctantly confirmed that someone within their ranks must have sold information to the enemy. It was news that inspired chaos, but there was no other reasonable explanation.

They had no choice now but to doubt each other. The mole might even be one of their subordinates. There was even a possibility that the mole could leak their defense plans even as they tried to take down the enemy. Thinking further, even Komori was a suspect. He could leak information of the island, imprison everyone and go on home declaring that he was the sole survivor, therefore winning the competition.

[If that's the case you–!]

[Calm down Niina. It's no use picking a fight now. Wait for the Boss' decision.]

[..... Understood.]

Section one's members were calm, but the air in the room was

full of doubt.

The emergency alarm was still ringing the sound combining with the confused voices and the fear of being attacked by the heroes of justice. It was a helpless situation.

There were few points clear and unclear.

The research lab housed Professor H's various experiments and data. Losing the place could be a massive blow towards Metallica.

Despite the professor's data dumps being vital to Metallica, there was still a mole.

What does this mean?

[Hey Ikeno!]

Neito called out to Ikeno, who was lost deep in thought.

[……Hm? What?]

[Isn't there a chance of us winning? No, if there isn't, is there a way to create one?]

It seems like Komori Neito still has his sense of humor despite the situation... Thinking about the Harrison offensive, he asked the same thing. Something dark within him was awakening.

The same goes for me. I won't lose to him.

[... At a minimum, we need a modified human to equally match the Rocks Organization. If we have that and a talented commander, we can last for more than five minutes during the attack.]

Ikeno had fought with the Rocks organization in the past and of course he'd never lost a battle. With his techniques sharpened by experience, he kept on winning the battles.

But there were no modified humans on the island.

(Back to Neito's POV)

[... A talented commander huh?]

Hearing Ikeno's words, Neito found a way out of their desperate situation.

[... Niina, call Maki.]

[Eh?]

[Hurry up.]

I won't die here. I've used too much villainy to achieve my goals. I can't die midway through my plans.

[U-Understood Boss!]

After Niina ran off, Neito decided to tell Ikeno his plans,.

[Ikeno, I'll undergo the compatibility surgery right now.]

There was no other way. He already finished his training. And his success rate had already been determined.

[What do you mean?]

Ikeno's face expressed sincere doubt towards what Neito was about to do, but he understood what Neito was thinking.

[Maki-san's idea was using [Spiritual Silhouette] to enhance one's capabilities. There is no need to implement it on a machine. The surgery only takes a couple of hours.]

[And then what? Your plan lacks sustainable power. I doubt you'll be a capable fighting force. Seeing all that's happening around us, what assurance do we have that you won't escape alone after the surgery?]

As I had thought…. He and I are the same…

But the way we come up to a decision are different.

[I will fight… That's why Ikeno… I want you to hand me section one's Beetle Crystal.]

[You've got to be kidding me.]

Ikeno glared archly at Neito but he didn't waver.

[Using the spiritual energy stored within the crystal, Maki-san's simulation already calculated that it would be enough to render us capable of fighting.]

Knowing the existence of the crystal, Neito already ordered the simulation on what would happen if they were to have the crystal.

[… That may be the case, but I can't give it to you.]

The air between them grew thick and slowly their surroundings began to quiet down.

[Why? Is it because it would influence the competition? It's necessary for the situation at hand; we can just explain after. Do you think we'll take advantage of you?]

[Did you think that I would just go with your idea? This isn't just about the competition.]

Ikeno, who was unable to suppress his anger approached Neito and grabbed his shirt.

[There's certainly a mole within Metallica. And there's no guarantee that it isn't you. Now how's this for a theory? You implement both research concepts in your body, and escape alone. Everybody on the island gets killed, and you come back to the main office as the sole survivor. Thereby increasing your fame and influence over the company.]

[..... I see. Is that what you think?]

The voices around them were already quiet. Section one's anger seemed to have faded away.

Ikeno was taller than Neito by fifteen centimeters. He kept holding him, but Neito didn't break eye contact.

[Ikeno-san, Neito would never do that-!]

[Wh-, Hey senpai, you better say something back!]

He didn't know when they had arrived, but Neito heard Maki and Niina's voice behind him. He didn't turn around.

[But... There's also the possibility of me accepting the surgery, and defeating Maroon five.]

Neito shook off Ikeno's grip and took some distance from him.

[You don't trust me?]

It was Neito's turn to glare down on Ikeno.

Silence surrounded them. Niina mentioned [The atmosphere created when I'm serious] must be in effect. Everyone from section one was quiet and held their eyes down.

It was almost like they were afraid of Neito.

But it was different for Ikeno.

[Do you think I'll believe you? Cold and barbaric, that's what you are. That must be how you have come up to this point.]

Ikeno glared down at Neito again. There was no other choice; Neito would have to settle it with words.

[Ikeno, never once I have betrayed one of my comrades.]

It was the truth. No matter how sly and barbaric he gets, he never betrayed his comrades.

He paid the reward he promised to the General affairs guys, and he used real explosives on his own neck during his stay at Okinawa.

[And what? ‘I won’t betray you, so please trust in me’… is that what you want to say?]

Well, I can’t help it because I’m a villain…

Neito let a few seconds past before he answered.

[No, I know I’ll eventually betray my comrades.]

After Neito’s response, people start to murmur around them.

Ah well, he still plans on betraying us…

You piece of shit, we’ll never give it to you…

I’ll be the one to kill you before you betray us…

It was truly a sickening sight.

But,

[Shut up.]

Neito shouted calmly.

[Anyone who can’t look me directly in the eye should just shut up. The one I’m talking to is Ikeno alone.]

Neito couldn’t suppress the evil inside him. The darkness inside him started coming out.

Section one fell immediately into silence. Section two on the other hand gulped and paid attention.

[I will betray you once, but not today.]

[… Have you gone mad?]

At Ikeno’s words… ‘Gone mad?’ Neito replied.

[No, I’m perfectly fine. This is for my goals.]

[Betrayal isn’t beneficial for villains. On the other hand, it creates disadvantages for them.]

That’s right, Betrayals are bad. Even common people know that fact.

[If you betray people, your allies decrease, create enemies and create doubt. In the end, you’ll lose power. There are far too many disadvantages to doing it. Thinking about it, only a third rate villain would do it.]

The path you’re going down is going to be a twisted path at most.

I will keep moving on, on to the top.

But I won’t say that I won’t betray. That’s because…

[I’m a villain, in order for me to achieve my goals, I’ll do anything no matter how merciless I get. That’s why I’ll betray when needed. Calculating the disadvantages, I’ll betray when it is most beneficial for me.]

I won’t choose the method. If the time came for me to do it, I’ll do it, no matter how cold and merciless it may seem.

After saying those words, people held their breaths. They were focused on Neito’s speech.

The same goes for Ikeno. Neito walked towards Ikeno and shouted

[I'll stand on top and shatter this world! My path still goes on!]

[Now isn't the time to use betrayal as my trump card, since I still have a long way to go. Until I can justify my sins to those I betray, I won't dare betray my comrades!]

Ikeno kept quiet and wore a serious expression.

Behind him, Neito comrades cheered for him.

[Woah, that was reckless! Nate ! You sounded so cool!]

[Senpai... I'll run when it comes to that, until then I've got your back.]

[Hm.... As expected of the evil being I decided to follow.]

[As you have said Ikeno, I may escape after the operation, but that's if I manage to break through them.]

[...Now you...]

I'm sure a man such as Ikeno can understand.

Indeed, he could run away, but only if he managed to break through the Maroon Five. With their psychic attacks, it was

impossible to escape unscathed, especially if his body was severely damaged.

That's why, he can't run away directly.

If he were to fight, he would fight to win and live.

[You said that we need a talented commander and a modified human to fight them right?]

There was nobody more capable than Ikeno.

[Yeah.]

Neito knew what Ikeno was thinking. Ikeno really hated losing.

They both knew how capable the other was. Therefore, losing wasn't an option.

[I know how capable you are. You're the 'talented 'one here. If you take command, we are sure to win.]

[Yeah, that's if you don't betray us.]

Neito still continued on after receiving Ikeno's comment. It was the first time Neito had ever shouted this loud. He took a deep breath, prepared his soul, and shouted

[Trust in me. This isn't out of my [goodwill] or because of [camaraderie], but trust in my [Evil] that's bound to take over the world!]]

Neito expressed all his thoughts to Ikeno.

The whole room had been shocked and silenced.

Everybody was quiet as they anticipated Ikeno's response.

[……Komori, I hate you. If there were to be a barbaric being mad enough to try conquering the world, then it must be you…]

Neito responded to Ikeno's words

[The same goes for me. I hate you. Always so proud and standing tall, I hate that part of you.]

But that's why

After a long silence, they shouted at the same time

[[—– That's why I'll believe in you —-]]

Their voices were perfectly in sync.

Amidst all the chaos, a small glimmer of hope had emerged. A light that was about to be snuffed was kept alight by the villains.

Ikeno took out a card and held it in between his index and middle finger. In a flash, he threw the card towards Neito.

The card glided across the room, and Neito caught it.

[That's the keycard for Section one's security room. The crystal is stored in there.]

Ikeno wouldn't look at Neito's face; he didn't dare. His pride wouldn't allow it.

Neito smiled a bit and looked like he was about to laugh. It wasn't out of joy, but of something else entirely.

In the end Neito didn't laugh but only smiled. He then commanded his subordinates.

[Along with section one; Tsurugi, Niina, Anice, follow Ikeno's commands. The Maroon Five are coming. Until I can finish the operation, hold them off.]

They all gave out a different response.

[Hm? You're just someone who rose out of the ranks from the general affairs, you sure are haughty giving us orders.]

As expected, Ikeno hated him but that was just that. They both hated each other.

I always hated you for being stronger and better than me.... But that's just because I'm weak. I may not be strong, but I'm certainly more villainous than you. Our eyes are set on different things, that's why...

[Unlike me, my subordinates are more refined than yours. Be thankful you bastard.]

After his response, Neito grabbed Maki's hand.

[So that's what happening Maki-san... Now if you please–]

They kept running.

Neito started to think.

Back when I was a kid, I really adored the Maroon Five.

Warriors that fought for justice.

Now we are about to face off.

Yeah, I’m a villain. I won’t just stop.

That’s right.

Come at me.

If you guys are bounded with love and friendship,

Then we are bounded by the black chains of mistrust and villainy.

These black chains might not be beautiful, but they won’t be easily broken.

Chapter 38: ...Transform

Along with Maki and her staff, they proceeded to the operation table.

[... Are sure about this Neito-kun?]

Listening to the concern coating the project's head researchers words... It was clear that this operation is a serious thing. It's not like I don't understand Maki's worries; but I've already made my decision.

[Yes, I'm sure of it. Though it's a bit scary I must admit. I'm a coward after all.]

[That's not true...]

[It is in fact, true but I'm also excited... What form will my spirit take? And stuff like that]

Neito tried to laugh it off. He couldn't just back down now.

Ikeno, along with his subordinates, set up a defensive line. They mustn't let Maroon pass through.

[Even if we use the crystal, I think we won't get as much power as the [Chevalier]. The simulation went well, but if ever there's too much power released, the spiritual energy will overload... Neito-

kun won't be himself ever again... Thinking about it scares me and...]

Maki was really worried. She always looked out for Neito's well-being. But now isn't the time for that.

[It's okay, please do it. Spiritual energy overloading? It'll be okay. My spirit won't break... I told you we are going to conquer the world together. That's why I'll fight. Ikeno, Tsurugi and the others are also fighting... That's why Maki-san, you must also fight.]

Maki's battle was to make his operation successful. Neito tried to put on a strong face.

[..... I understand. That's right, we'll now begin the operation... Please rest assured. I'll definitely make this operation a success.]

[Alright.]

I never doubted you in the first place...

Neito took a shot of anesthesia and fell asleep.

As Neito entered the operating room, Ikeno finished giving orders to his men.

They’re after the research lab? Let them come if they want. We’ll be ready for them.

They thought about splitting their forces to intercept the oncoming enemy forces, but they decided that it would be better to fight inside the research lab. Maximizing the weapons they had at hand, they could intercept them easily inside.

The research lab had a lot of equipment and the corridors were not too tight. It’s true that they wanted to preserve as much of the equipment as possible, but their main object wasn’t to protect the equipment, but rather delay the enemy. They didn’t have too many options.

The research lab had two wings. One housed the equipment while the other housed the workstations. In the middle of those two are the auditorium and the testing grounds. Its structure was similar to a school but built to provide a defensive position.

Two hours had swiftly past. Following Ikeno’s commands, everyone was set up and ready to intercept. It took more time than expected, but they finally managed to settle into their defensive positions.

According to his calculation, Maroon should arrive here in a few minutes.

Niina, along with a few other subordinates were on the third floor of the first wing, watching the feed from the security cameras

through the glass monitor and informing everyone via radio.

[Niina, relay my orders within three seconds… You're going to be a key person in this plan..]

< Understood >

Ikeno would relay his orders to Niina, and in turn Niina would broadcast it to all the members fighting in the front lines. As a precaution, Ikeno situated all the weak members in the control room, while Ikeno would head off to the frontlines himself if needed.

Ikeno equipped himself with Break-Gun-Blade. A blade that was able to send supersonic waves via its blade, while also being capable of shooting bullets. His weapon was obviously heavy for its size, but Ikeno had the muscle to wield it.

The best plan called him to fight on the frontlines while commanding his troops.

At least that's what he thought.

< Ikeno-san, they're here. >

Even before Tsurugi warned him, they already knew via the surveillance camera. Along with the Maroon five, were one hundred other Guardians. Among the researchers and scientists, their fighting force only consisted of twenty-three members. There

was no one pulling them back, since the others had been safely evacuated to the shelters.

Eighteen seconds left… seventeen, sixteen, fifteen…

[Niina! Activate the Shelter’s Dome]

< Aye sir >

The ground vibrated and a field surrounded the perimeter of the facility. They planned to fully operate it for a whole five minutes.

The dome was an energy field that was designed to protect the facility in case of an attack. Enemies shouldn’t be able to break through easily.

The dome had its limits. Unless they want to use up all the energy inside the facility, the energy field would only last a maximum of ten minutes.

Hey Maroon Five and fellow Guardians, Are you seeing this?

It was hard to initiate an attack if the dome entirely covered the facility. If they waited any longer, reinforcements would come from Metallica. They wouldn’t expect researchers to react so quickly.

Or so they thought.

Their enemies would just have to wait ten minutes for the power to run out. If that happened, there was only a metal wall between the facility and the Maroon Five. There was no doubt that the Maroon Five's telekinetic power could destroy it easily.

Ikeno watched the plan become a success in the monitor.

However, Maroon five using their telekinetic powers were able to teleport inside the dome, appearing in midair. Cameras one, three and six showed the spots they were in. Ikeno desperately tried to get a glimpse of them using the security camera.

On the other hand, the Guardians who were but normal human beings, couldn't follow them inside the dome.

That was their true objective. Now, with the Guardians temporarily out of the picture, only the Maroon Five were a problem. Also, Ikeno didn't plan on facing the five of them head on.

In the first place, each of the Maroon Five had their own distinct powers as well as skills. So if they decide to move fast, they would quickly become separated in the facility.

The first Maroon Five member who arrived wore a blue camo suit.

He specialized in long distance teleportation and movement,

which made him the fastest of the group. He teleported himself on the testing grounds in between the first and second wing.

Ikeno immediately relayed out a new order.

[Alpha team, move two meters east from your current position. Once in position, face the intruder and open fire!]

Their predictions were slightly off in regards to the entry point, but there was no problem since the enemy was still in range.

Alpha team, situated on the second floor of the first wing, stuck out their barrels from the window, and started to engage the blue suited enemy.

They knew of course, that they can't easily defeat the Rocks organization like this. Blue deployed a barrier to shield himself from the bullets.

[Damn... So you were just waiting for me... huh? But...!]

Blue's outline started glowing brightly in the monitor.

But it was all in Ikeno's plan. Five seconds until he teleports.

[Teleportation incoming! Alpha team fall back! Niina, open the roofs of B-block!]

< I’m already on it! >

Ikeno dashed out of the room and ran through the third floor corridor.

He wasn’t some superhuman, but he was still someone who could run one hundred meters in eleven seconds.

Blue’s presence disappeared from the testing grounds. A moment later, he appeared on the second floor of the first wing.

Ikeno confirmed it with his own eyes.

According to Niina’s investigations, there was a hidden spot in the second floor ceiling which could be slid open. It was installed on every floor of the research facility to hide and communicate between floors.

[Ha–!]

Ikeno jumped out from the secret compartment on the third floor and swung his blade at Blue who was currently on the second floor.

[Wha–?!]

Ikeno didn’t dare engage Blue over a long distance. He had psychic powers after all.

This was good in its own way. The more he gets delayed, the better.

[Alpha team, open fire at your ten o'clock!]

As he was shouting, Ikeno jumped sideways.

The Maroon Five were psychic soldiers. They may have psychic abilities, but aside from that, their physical build and reflexes were just that of a regular human being. There was no other option than to deploy a barrier to protect himself.

It had only been twenty seconds or so since Blue appeared on the testing grounds. Ikeno had successfully separated him from his comrades.

Amidst the chaos, Ikeno still received reports from the control room.

[Yellow is coming! Tsurugi, lead the delta team and engage! Lead him into the auditorium!]

[Niina! As soon as Yellow enters the auditorium, bring down the bullet-proof shutters! He can't teleport while he's inside!]

[Keith, take Jairus with you and set up a sniper position on the roof top. Provide cover for every group!]

Ikeno carefully aimed the Gun Blade at Blue and pulled the trigger.

While simultaneously fighting with Blue, Ikeno was giving out orders to every group.

Ikeno thought to himself.

By splitting up and assigning five members to deal with each Maroon Five member, we have successfully increased the efficiency of each member. There's no way that Komori could've thought of a plan like this.

Do you understand now Komori? This is my capability.

The operation should be done by now. Although we are controlling the battle well, we are just barely making it. The enemy force would overwhelm us soon.

Without the modification operation, they would undoubtedly be crushed by their enemies in a second.

I did say it didn't I? If ever we have a talented commander and a modified human, we could make it out alive.

I'll fulfill my end of the bargain, so you must hurry!

For the following minutes, Ikeno continued delaying the enemy.

[Damn! How did this happen?!]

It had taken far more time than Maroon Five's leader, Beni Koutarou, had expected.

Our information was sure that the research facility had no information, much less fighting capability to go against them. Although they didn't know if there was a modified being with them, it was a gamble that they'd taken when they decided to attack.

There was no reason for them to lose…

And yet….

[Haa-!]

[Take this–!]

He was currently fighting a man who jumped down from the ceiling wielding a Japanese sword. Even though he would counter-attack him, he would just fall back and strike again.

He must be just a regular guy. He got injured just like a normal human being, but it seems like he is experienced in battles. In

comparison to my psychic ability, he should pose no threat.

But the man's tactics were beyond average. He comes out to attack, and immediately withdraws even before Koutaro made a move.

Koutaro was a psychic soldier. His specialty was telekinesis. If he focus on an object, he could lift it up even without the use of physical strength. He could knock back his enemy as well as deploy a barrier around him.

But, Koutaro's enemy was agile and quick to escape. He needed to focus on a target for a short time before he could use his powers.

Of course, Koutaro would never lose. No matter how fast and nimble the enemy was, he wouldn't be able to easily bypass the barrier.

[[What's the matter? Aren't you the leader of the Maroon Five? Why don't you come at me? You don't have to get your hands dirty… I'll take care of you real quick.]]

His voice was projected on the building's loud speakers.

Koutaro unleashed his powers on the dark cloud of dust, but he only hit the wall of the corridor.

He was having difficulty using his telepathic powers. For some reasons, the building was full of gimmicks. Shutters suddenly close

and even the sprinklers sprayed some sleeping gas.

Since this was a facility meant for creating modified humans, maybe they built it in case if one of their experiments goes rogue.

Koutaro could never be sure of the reason. He was just waiting for any opening his foe might show.

Given time, he could easily defeat the enemy in front of him. If he feels like it, he even could bring down the whole floor to the ground.

But he didn't have time to spare. It looked like the enemy was just buying time. It was improbable that he was delaying for reinforcement to come from the main island, but there was no other explanation.

Koutaro had been separated from his group. Although it was no reason for him to lose, he had a bad feeling about the situation.

((Can you hear me Koutaro?))

A voice called out to him from the back of his brain. Normally, he would be called Blue during operations. There was no other than Kogure Souichi that would call him by his first name. If they could communicate telepathically, it meant that they were fairly close to each other.

((Sou-chan, where are you? Let's regroup!))

Souichi was his childhood friend and now a comrade on the battlefield.

Koutaro was about to be mentally broken by the inhumane methods of teaching at the school, but thanks to him, he managed to pull through. Though rough, Souichi was a good guy.

Koutaro would never forget the day they met. He was just some wimp in the school who was always crying because of the bullying, but Souichi always asked him [What are you crying for?] and even picking a fight with his bullies to help him. [I didn't even mean to help you.] was his response every fight.

After that, Koutaro began to brighten up and started making friends. He got along with everybody, and together, they became heroes.

Along with Souichi and my comrades, I'll grow stronger.

((Damn, those guys from Metallica are surely up to something. It could turn out for the worse if we don't finish it soon.))

Souichi had the same idea as Koutaro.

((Agreed. That's why...))

((It's no use. You continue going up. Rei's psychometry detected

a control center inside the second wing. Its two rooms deep on the top floor. If you can disable it, you would interrupt their communications as well as all the traps and gimmicks this facility holds. You're the closest, go and disable the control room.))

Unlike Koutaro, Souichi was calm during battles. Although he was the leader of the Maroon Five, it was Souichi they relied on when it came to making snap decisions.

((Understood Sou-chan, I'll head on up. Wait for me, after that we'll regroup.))

Koutaro immediately dashed away from he man with a Japanese sword. There was no worry of him following.

[Koutaro-kun, use the stairs. I'll hold him off]

[Thanks! Wait for me, I'll be back soon.]

His comrade, Yamabuki Kaoru came to reinforce him. Kaoru might look like a simpleton, but she had a good spirit and was a hot-blooded comrade. There was nothing to worry about.

After reaching the top floor, Koutaro saw the control center at the end of the long corridor. He only needed to destroy the doors and disable the control room.

It would all soon be over. It was thanks to everybody that they made it this far. This time, they're going to win.

But then…

An elevator door opened alongside the corridor. The elevator was still in Metallica’s control. Therefore a member of Metallica was on that elevator.

[Who’s there?!]

Koutaro stopped and prepared himself for the oncoming enemy.

At first glance, the man that came out looked like an average human. He was tall and slim, and he wore a suit. Looking at his face, no doubt he was a villain.

[……Please move aside…]

Koutaro issued a warning.

[……….]

The man ignored his words and walked towards him.

In order for him to reach the control center, he needed pass through this man.

He didn’t like fighting, but he would fight if he needed to.

“If you possessed the power, you would crush those who are weak in order to achieve your goals.” He was full of that ideology. That’s why he decided to fight evil. Even if he couldn’t save everybody, he’ll do whatever he can within his power to protect their happiness. That’s why…

[Please stop… If you don’t…]

The man called out in a small voice and gave Koutaro the chills.

What’s this atmosphere that surrounds this man?

[I will defeat you.]

Koutaro didn’t intend to lose. He’ll take away what little happiness Metallica possessed. He couldn’t forgive them, that’s why he’ll stop them at all cost.

[Is that so…? Then let me ask. Why do you fight?]

The man stopped walking and asked him in a calm manner.

[In order to stop people like you who sacrifice others to fulfill your goals.]

Koutaro answered naturally.

[Hmm.. then do you know what my goal is? World domination… Then you are wrong. It's not a goal but a method.]

[……I could care less.]

Koutaro finished charging his psychic powers. He could fire it anytime he wanted to. Normally, all five of them would use this at once, but it was no problem with him using it alone. He could project the charged psychic power from his fist for a great distance. That was Maroon Five's version of a Justice Hammer.

The man before him was enveloped in black. Though his detection skills were below average, he could tell just from the looks of him. His spirit and soul were black. There was no need for him to hold back.

[All allies of justice are the same. You strive to protect every piece of the chessboard without even knowing the master plan of your opponent. We villains don't hesitate on discarding pieces to achieve our goals.]

The man held a straight and serious face. He'd never experienced a conversation that was evil as this. Koutaro was about to be enveloped in the mysterious darkness the man possessed.

[I'll…I'll never accept that! Sacrificing in order to achieve your goals… how is that even right?!]

Behind him, Koutaro's conscience slowly agreed with him.

[How do you know what lies ahead without checking? To most people, you are a symbol of hope, but to some, you are just an obstacle to the world they want to live in.]

[……Even so…!]

Koutaro knew what he was talking about. The current world wasn't perfect. No doubt that there are many of those who want to change the world.

But most people didn't want that. If they needed to break something and hurt someone to change the world, then there was no need for such world to come into existence. That's why Koutaro would fight to protect this current world.

[That figures. I don't think I'm right either… On the contrary, your version seems much more beautiful. But I'll still move on. In the end, we still need to fight. Come at me.]

The man stopped and looked a Koutaro. He knew the heroes ideals couldn't be easily changed.

[…Here I come.]

Koutaro drew back his right fist and covered it with his right hand. His hand shined bright as energy gathered. If he were to score a direct hit, it would be all over.

[JUSTICE HAMMER!!]

A stream of energy shot out. The light soon engulfed the man.

[.....]

Before the impact, the man's lips moved.

He was whispering something, but he couldn't hear him.

The energy hit him and the light soon became an explosion.

As the shockwave travelled, Koutaro took cover from the blast he released.

The man disappeared as the flames of the explosion engulfed the scene.

[.....It's finally over.]

Koutaro, who was sure of his victory looked at the flames once again.

The man wasn't there.

Instead, [Something] stood in his place.

As the light faded and the flames died down, the [Thing]'s outline was more visible.

It had horns like a goat, sharp and long nails, a black body and eyes gleaming red.

It had the wings of a bat at it's back, and its lower half was similar to a boar. There was no doubt that this was a dark being.

Spewing out a dark aura, its intent to kill was reeking all over the place.

Koutaro had no other words to express the [thing] that lied in front of him but one.

Demon.

It was like it had come out of a fantasy book. It was the embodiment of absolute evil and ruthlessness.

It was a demon that had taken a liking to their world.

It was then Koutaro knew and comprehended, what that man said before his Justice Hammer hit him.

The man certainly said,

[..... Transform]

There was demon standing in front of the heroes of justice.

Cold sweat ran down Koutaro’s back.

I’m just a nobody. Spare me.

Chapter 39: I Won't Leave Traitors Alone

A ball of energy rapidly approached Neito.

Unlike Ikeno, he didn't have the ability to react and dodge quickly. If he took it head on, he would surely die.

That's why, now's the time

His operation was a success, but it would be the first time he would transform.

"Due to the effects of the Beetle Crystal, your [Spiritual Silhouette]'s power will have significantly increased" were the words of Maki. "There's a possibility that you will become a mindless beast, rampaging around the battlefield and die".

That would be scary.

But, I'm sure that won't happen. I've already sinned enough while going down this path. You may call it prejudice or self-gratification, but the path I chose is necessary for my goal.

I'm a villain. More evil than anybody.

There's no way my spirit would break me.

[……Transform]

Neito spoke in a soft, yet low tone.

It wasn't something he was proud to say in public. Unlike them, his words bear the great weight of all the sins he committed just to get to this point.

The darkness inside him was stirring. His back started to heat up.

'Annihilate'

He fully understood what that word meant. To wield this much power, it was easy to grasp the definition of the word 'Annihilate'.

His body started to change. Darker, stronger.

His transformation also had an effect on his mentality. He wanted to destroy everything in sight.

But he didn't dare to. He held it in.

I'm the only one that can control my silhouette.

I can't last long in this form, but that's more than enough.

Red's justice hammer rapidly approached.

That must pack some real punch… Isn’t it supposed to be done by five people all at once? That won’t be enough to defeat me.

He held up his right arm, which was turning into something with long nail-like claws, and caught the punch in his palms. A great explosion occurred. It hurt, but he was fine.

As the smoke cleared out, Red noticed his transformation and instantaneously deployed a barrier.

[……What the–…]

Neito confirmed that he was hooved and had wings.

I see… so this is how my spiritual silhouette looks like… It’s not bad. No, it is {bad}. I like it.

[I call it {Evil Silhouette}…… is it too simple?]

[I won’t lose to you.]

[Then, here I come!]

Neito took his stance and dashed towards Red. He was fast, even he was surprised at his speed. The control room seemed far away in an instant.

So this is how they live.

Neito proceeded to strike with his claws.

[Die!]

[That won't happen.]

Clang!

The sound reverberated. Red managed to block Neito's claws with his psychic barrier.

That's some convenient power you got there... But you look like you're suffering. You're sweating a lot and I see that you're clenching your teeth so hard that your gums are bleeding.

[Take this!]

Heroes sure are amazing. He managed to break free and distance himself with his psychic powers.

Neito felt the air around him vibrate and held up his arm to stop the force from the psychic attack. He stopped it with his left arm.

There was a distance of few meters between them as a result of that attack.

[Here I come!]

Not wanting to shorten the distance, Red gathered concrete blocks that were lying around into a pile and threw them towards him.

[Hm-!]

Neito defended himself by constantly crushing the blocks that were coming towards him.

Defense wasn't his sole quality. He gathered up spiritual energy towards his claws, and released a shockwave towards Red.

Red managed to shake it off with his psychic power.

Even if he manage to shake off the attack, there were some parts of his body which he couldn't protect. Yet, he still kept on fighting.

In terms of attack power, the beast and the superhuman were equal.

Damn... so we're about equal to each other huh? The Maroon Five are considered A-class heroes after all... I couldn't expect less. But as he stands alone, he should be around C-class, he should be easier to deal with than Beetle and Dylan.

If I had a choice, I would finish him off as soon as possible, but I wouldn't dare...

Well that's just like me.

Finish him off with my strongest power? Don't make me laugh. That may look cool, but it isn't my style at all.

The windows along the floor where they were fighting were all shattered to pieces, and one section of the wall had a huge hole. Neito surveyed the situation outside.

I can clearly see the testing grounds from here.

Maroon Five's Pink caught his eye. She was fighting a squad led by Ikeno. Although surrounded, she handled herself very well against them.

Among Maroon Five's members, Pink was considered to have the lowest fighting capabilities. She specialized in healing which is useless in this situation.

The person which had the most fighting capabilities was Red. That Red stood equal to Neito.

In terms of control over the battlefield, the Maroon Five had the advantage. Neito and Red were matched in terms of power. Other members of Neito's fighting force barely held on while suppressing the other Maroon Five members. But soon enough, they are bound

to run out of firepower and stamina.

It was thanks to the control room that they managed to hold on with the guidance from Ikeno, but time was not on their side. Soon enough, the Maroon Five would breakthrough Neito and his comrades. Red would soon bring in his reinforcement. Neito couldn't handle fighting two Maroon Five members at the same time. In the end they would lose.

That was the situation he saw.

Then, the most logical thing to do is...

[Hahaha... Hey Red, do you value your fellow comrades?]

Neito asked Red while they were fighting. Neito was laughing because he knew Red did.

[...What are you saying?]

[...Let us see if you can remain on the right path Mr. Hero.]

Neito greatly distanced himself by jumping back, broke the windows and jumped down from the top floor.

Using his wings, he flew towards the floor which he had his eyes on.

He was aiming for Maroon Five's Pink. She was fighting Ikeno and his squad on the testing grounds.

Pink was rated below Red. Since they specialized in psychic powers, her reflexes were slow. If Neito descended with speed towards her from above, he would surely kill her.

In the end this was a gamble.

Neito's objective was to guard the control room from Red. Neito left Red alone and headed out for Pink. Red could go inside the control room, kill Niina and then head out after him.

If that were to happen, Metallica communication lines would be disrupted and the research lab's fighting force would fall into ruin and soon be annihilated. Although Maroon Five would only have 4 members left, they would ultimately win the battle.

To Neito, the worst action Red could take was [ignore Neito, and head to the control room]. At that end Neito would kill Pink.

Niina would die on the other hand, and the control room would be rendered inoperable. Their fighting power would plummet and in the end, they would get overrun by their enemies.

If I were Red, that's what I would do.

Your life and your comrades' lives are important, and you should protect what you can currently protect. But to me, there are far

more things to be prioritized than that. That's why I'll abandon what I'm supposed to protect and attack Pink.

But hey Mr. Hero, do you think you have the resolve to do that?

While flying, Neito looked behind his shoulders for a moment.

[Sakura-chan! I won't let you–!]

Red was following Neito, levitating with the help of his powers, leaping down from the top floor.

So he came after me... No I knew he would come after me.

After all you are warriors bound by love and friendship. In order to protect that little happiness people have you are willing to fight.

You said it yourself didn't you? 'I won't let someone to be sacrificed in order to fulfill the greater cause'.

You should be proud of your belief. That type of justice is what truly makes you a real human.

I believed in you. I believed that you would come after me because of your sense of justice.

But, that would be the reason you will lose.

Those [people we want to protect] are just a form of prejudice. To me, they are no more than [people that need to be destroyed]. A sacrifice is a sacrifice.

[Tsurugi! Ikeno! You know what to do!]

Neito was about to land. He trusted them that they would know it was him after seeing his transformed form. They didn't need any telepathy.

Red came in late behind him.

I've seen this scene so many time in Manga, Anime and RPGs.

"I'll definitely save every person! I won't let you change our world! You are always wrong..."

And the villain gets defeated.

That's one crappy cliché.

I understand. You want to change the world by saving everyone without destroying anything, without hurting anybody.

But I'm not god. I can't do that perfectly. But i will still tread this path.

‘Don’t give up on making everybody happy?’

Don’t make me laugh. What about you? What are you doing to make that true?

You and I are no different. You fight for what you think is right. You are wonderful human beings. Compared to me, you’re far more beautiful beings.

But because you are, there’s no way you can win against me.

[Stop! Hikari (Kou)-kun don’t come!]

Pink was screaming at the top of her lungs. She had higher detection capabilities than her comrades.

I see so you complement each other to cover your weaknesses. That’s very poetic of you.

But,

[You’re too late.]

Neito landed behind Pink while she was distracted protecting herself from oncoming bullets.

Neito gathered energy from his [Evil silhouette] onto his claws.

But it wasn't to take down Pink.

[Haaaaaaaaaaaa-!!]

Neito kicked off the ground and flew once again.

[Wha–!!]

My target has always been you! Beni Koutarou!

His flight must be unstable. His speed is not much and he can't perform any maneuvers while in the air. I'm no different. I just came off the ground and I have wings to worry about.

Will you be able to take my hit?

[Hyaaaaaaaa–!!]

Neito's claws never reached Red. He missed him by a couple inches. Red managed to deploy a barrier in that brief moment.

They clashed mid-air on the testing grounds with the height which was equal to the second floor of the closest building. The shockwave traveled throughout the area.

You’re really something, heroes of justice… but I’m not done yet.

[Tsurugi! Ikeno!]

[Understood!]

[Don’t order me around!]

The two of the reacted to Neito’s voice. Ikeno must have already read the situation. He was already done loading his [Gun – Blade] and aimed for Red’s back.

Tsurugi also jumped down from the third floor swinging his Katana at Red.

They left their post for a moment. That was their gamble. If they can’t defeat Red there and now, then it would be over for them.

[Haaaaaaaaa–!]

Tsurugi firmed his grip and slashed his sword, Ikeno on the other hand shot his [Gun – Blade] while Neito put more force on his claws which was stopped by the barrier.

[……. I–…!!]

With Red suppressing Neito from the front, he wasn’t able to

avoid the attacks coming from the top and behind.

A sword, gun and claw attack.

The three villains penetrated his strong defense.

You may say that it's cowardly, but Ikeno would surely reply "It is in the fundamentals to create opportunities in order win battles"

Neito on the other hand, had different views.

It was simple. Ganging up on a person is cowardly. It wasn't an elaborate strategy but a mere instinctive plan. It is definitely atrocious, but what's wrong with doing something atrocious when you're a villain?

[Hikari-chan!]

Pink's cries echoed but Neito didn't mind.

Losing his telekinetic power, Red plummeted unto the ground. Neito landed on top of Red.

[...Uuuhhh.....]

Red was lying on his face. Neito stepped on his back.

Red had ran out of power, and his psychic suit soon powered down.

[I win, Maroon Five.]

Moments later, every member of Maroon Five gathered on the testing grounds. The remaining Metallica members didn't dare chase after them.

Blue, Yellow, Green and Pink. They all glared at Neito.

[You bastard... I'll crush you...]

[Koutaro-san! How did it come to this?!]

The four of them readied themselves for a battle.

[You should stop. I think I can crush him with my foot even before you could use your powers. Or am I wrong? Wont a superhuman die if I crushed all of his backbones?]

Guriguri.

[... Aah...!... Don't mind me... Fight him...!]

Koutaro tried to convince his comrades.

[Hyahahaha, heroes of justice are sure amazing! Everybody before yourself?! For justice?! I will commend you on that! Hahaha!]

Neito might be mocking them, but in his heart, he was true to his words. They were really admirable.

There was no way it wouldn't hurt. Despite that, Koutaro could bear the pain and didn't scream. He'd never yield. Even if his backbones were to break, his heart wouldn't yield. There was no way to extinguish the flames of justice in his heart.

[...Although if you wouldn't mind seeing a corpse with shattered backbones, then come at me. I'll be your opponent.]

In reality, if they do come at him, he'll be in trouble. If he were to use his [Evil silhouette] once more, it would be dangerous. He could harm himself. His comrades were also out of stamina. They were almost out of ammunition and explosives. IF the remaining members of the Maroon Five were to fight at full strength, they would absolutely lose.

[You coward! You're worse than shit!]

Yellow screamed at him.

[Huh? You're an idiot for not realizing it sooner.]

While answering, Neito thought to himself.

Do I hold Koutaro as a hostage and kill him? No, that would be a bad idea.

Neito knew them well enough because he once admired them.

They were in a pinch. Their comrade was held hostage and is unable to escape. They would find a way to save him, even if it defies all logic. After all, god might side with justice.

That's why Neito couldn't let his guard down. It was impossible to defeat all of them. At any point, if Koutaro were to die, they would come at him relentlessly. Analyzing the situation, it's clear that Neito was still in the disadvantage.

[What do we do now Boss?]

Tsurugi, who was silent the whole time, called out to him.

That's right, we don't have enough time.

[I won't mind releasing your leader, Maroon Five. Hey Blue, or should I say Kogure Souichi, You're the sub-leader right? Let us trade.]

[..... I see you k-know us very well....]

[It's a basic to search and know about your opponent

beforehand.]

Yeah, it's because I adored you guys.

[What about this "trade"?]

[Let's see, the reason why you know about this place, is because someone leaked information from Metallica right? Tell me who leaked it, and I'll release Red. Of course that would mean that you and your troops would pull out from the island.]

[..... Our informant? I don't know what you're talking about...]

There was no way they wouldn't know. They knew too well about the island. Even if they thought that it was a trap, it must have come from someone that assured them of its validity.

[Hey! My patience is wearing thin.]

Neito once again put pressure on his foot, crushing Koutaro's back. Koutaro didn't scream, but it was clear on his face that he was in pain.

[Stop!!]

[Even if there's a possibility that you would lie to me, get Koutaro released, and come at us at full force with your troops. I still trust you heroes of justice... Or are you going to go against your words?]

[……. There is also the possibility that you won't keep your word after we tell you what you needed to know.]

[You're the sharpest inside the Maroon Five right? Think about it. If we were to fight, one of us has to come out a winner. If we win, we will torture until death to get at the needed information. If you win, there would be no point of asking who the traitor is since you would still kill us. It might mean Koutaro dying, but the end justifies the means.]

Honestly, it was sure that Metallica's side would lose. If that's the case, then he must definitely kill Koutaro at least.

[Even if I keep my promise or not, your situation won't change. But if I do, you all get to leave this island alive, with Maroon Five still intact.]

Neito wanted to avoid fighting any longer. The one with the hostage has the advantage in the short run, but not in the long one.

[Sou-kun… We need to treat Hikari-kun as soon as possible…!]

Pink's worried voice was a nice follow up, favoring Neito.

[Decide now.]

Everybody stood silent and was waiting for the decision.

[…… Okay. It'll be over if I tell you right?]

[Yeah, you can trust me to keep my word. I may be a villain, but I still keep my promises.]

Blue told Neito of the information they received. It may be too vague to pinpoint the actual person, but it was enough to give them a clue on who it was. Of course, Neito made sure to have Blue's words recorded.

[I see… I understand. As promised here's your leader.]

Neito grabbed Red by the ankles and flung him over to the other Maroon Five.

[Koutaro!]

[Hikari-kun!]

[…… I'm so sorry… because of me…]

['ts 'kay! 'Don 'mind it! What matter is that you're safe!]

[Don't worry, He's not dead yet. I don't know if he can still fight, but what you should be worrying about here is our situation. You're going to keep your word and pull back right? If not, I'll fight you no matter how tedious it is.]

This was a gamble. It was a gamble against someone who was sure to win. Now that they had Koutaro, their chances of winning was at its highest.

[..... I'll... keep my end of the bargain.]

As soon as Blue said those words, Neito turned his back towards them. It wasn't because he was ashamed of what he did, but rather it was to ease up the tension. If they saw him making any suspicious movements, it would undoubtedly become a battle.

[Thank you. As expected of the highly renowned Maroon Five. Home is that way, take care and have a safe trip.]

Neito tried to fake a laugh.

We can't underestimate them. There's no way to confirm that they know we don't have any fighting capabilities left.

[..... Hey you, tell me your name.]

Kogure Souichi raised his voice at the last moment and ask Neito.

[My name is Nate. You should be honored to hear my name.]

[We'll retreat and we won't come back to this island either... in any case you would've put up countermeasures by then... but one

day, I will defeat you. With Koutaro and the members by my side.]

[I'll be looking forward to it. Do your best then.]

And thus, the defense of Purgatory Island came to a close. There were multiple casualties inside Metallica. Three were killed and many were injured or unconscious.

In the end they were able to hold out. What's important is that they didn't break.

After confirming that they were leaving the island, Neito released his transformation. His spirit couldn't last much longer at this time.

[Yeah! You really did it this time Senpai!]

Niina came over to him.

Yeah, I'm glad you're still alive. Although I knew you would somehow make it out alive.

[Neito-kun! I'm glad you won..!]

Maki also came. Her voice was shaking. As she came closer, she hugged Neito.

Eh? What's with this situation? Somebody came back from the dead?

[Err... Umm... did you see my transformation? I'm glad it turned out better than expected. It was quite strong... Maki-san, thank you. I think it was a success because of you.]

[..... That's not– ... Thank you ...! Neito-kun is such an amazing person. I'm really glad that you're safe...]

She cried while hugging him. Though her face was wet all over, it wasn't such a bad feeling. No, he was really happy, but he was in trouble. He wasn't used it and his situation was very tricky to handle.

[Thanks... but you don't have to cry...]

[I'm sorry... I'll stop crying soon enough...]

He had other things to do but... Neito called out to Ikeno while Maki was still hugging him.

[Hey ikeno, we should treat the injured and...]

[We're already on it.]

As expected of him, Ikeno already issued the orders to do so.

We won because of Ikeno.

Neito wanted to do a fist-bump like in an anime, but he resisted the idea. He hated him, so he'll say what he needed to say.

[Didn't I say it? We can win if it's the two of us.]

[It was mostly because of my efforts.]

Ikeno tried to exaggerate, but it was true.

[No doubt about it.]

Neito laughed while patting Maki head.

[Your transformation as a modified human was amazing Boss.]

[Yeah, you also did well Tsurugi, I'm impressed.]

[Fmm, I knew you would eventually do something like that, so I couldn't get myself beaten up before that.]

Tsurugi was covered in wounds. He most likely sustained more damage than anybody else.

Anice also came down from the rooftop. She merrily approached Neito. Even if it was a battlefield, her care-free atmosphere still

didn’t change.

[You were amazing Nate! You were so cool! It’s still a mystery why you didn’t change after you transformed.]

Hey now, wait a moment. Do you mean to say that the normal me is just the same as the beast you saw when I transformed?

[About that traitor issue we have Boss…]

[We can’t be sure who it is with that information, although it may serve as a clue that will eventually lead us to him.]

Neito suppressed Tsurugi’s question and looked at him in the eye. It was enough to inform Tsurugi his intentions.

[…… If you say so, then we’ll leave it as is…]

Tsurugi also understood the information received. Somebody within the company must’ve betrayed them. Only Neito and Tsurugi knew of this information.

This was the sole advantage they had. If they used the information smartly, they can settle the affair all in one go. A method only a villain can think of. There were only few individuals they could trust.

Charisma always stands out.

[Hey Tsurugi, mind lending me your shoulder? I'm too tired.]

[Understood.]

Neito grabbed Tsurugi's shoulder and whispered on to him,

[I won't leave traitors alone.]

They'll regret having ever used me.

I doubt that you would expect to see me alive. How unfortunate, I'll never forgive you. This isn't revenge, but retribution.

A betrayal that doesn't succeed is the worst kind of betrayal. You're no more than a second-rate villain. If you are going to betray someone, didn't you know that you are supposed to do it right?

I'm sure you didn't think this one through thoroughly enough. And now, you're an enemy blocking my path. I'll crush you and after that, I'll use your downfall to make my way to the top, then throw you away like trash.

Looking at Neito's expression, Tsurugi answered.

[Understood. He must be really stupid to make you into an enemy.]

He somehow was expressing a trembling face.

Chapter 40: Real Villainy

A man exited the room which was located underground. He was in deep thought while walking.

In the end, I failed.

I didn't expect those on the island to successfully ward off the Maroon Five.

The island was designed to be a research center and not a military outpost. There was no way they could have warded them off with the equipment they had for the competition.

My objective was to destroy the research facility and the island.

Having Anice Jairus dying would be a setback, but considering that if my plan succeeded, then she would be a worthwhile sacrifice. Either way, I still plan on crushing Crimson.

(TLN: Crimson – An Evil Organization that has the same nature as Metallica. They also operate globally.)

The two ideas for the competition, [Chevalier] and [Spiritual Silhouette] couldn't have posed a threat. [Chevalier] took too long to produce and [Spiritual Silhouette]'s fighting capabilities were too low.

Or at least that was the plan.

After walking through the long corridor, the man passed through a certain gate and waited for the elevator.

Despite that, they were still able to chase off the Maroon Five. They had the resourcefulness and the manpower to lead their group to victory.

Which meant that this [Ikeno] and this [Komori] weren't against each other.

Furthermore, according to the report, the first section, which was headed by Ikeno, won the competition. Could it be possible that Komori withdrew from the competition? Why? I thought I knew everything about the man.

The elevator arrived at its destination. His destination was the surface.

Well, that's that. Failing doesn't expose me to any danger, it just means that my plan would be delayed, that's all. With my capability, I could find a new opportunity to execute my plan, no, I'll create one.

Thinking so, the man, Professor H, entered the elevator.

[Hello there Professor H.]

He was shaken for a moment, the man; the cause of his plan's failure, Komori Neito was standing beside him.

Professor H was a modern inventor and a scientist. Despite working for an evil organization, he had never heard of a technique which could mask your presence. But somehow he didn't notice Komori Neito's presence in the elevator.

[W-Why are you here?]

[No reason at all, in fact, I just want to talk to you.]

The elevator was a closed room. Neito was standing near the buttons which prevented him from stopping on a floor and getting out.

Komori Neito was the man he failed to kill and now, was a modified human.

You're different from the last time I met you. You're now more cold and merciless looking.

Is this even his real face?

Professor H noticed that he was spacing out,

[T-Talk?... Komori-kun, you do know that I'm an e-executive right? You need to schedule an appointment and...]

There’s no need to be afraid. There’s no proof that I tried to destroy the research facility and the island.

[Don’t worry, this will be over soon. I don’t think it will be a bad thing to hear what I have to say professor.]

Komori pushed the [close] button. Since they didn’t press the button to which floor they were going, the elevator completely stopped.

[Please be brief.]

I can’t show any form of weakness to this brat. I’m Professor H, the one who gave birth to countless beasts.

Professor H glared down Neito.

But Neito continued facing the door, not minding him, and said;

[You were that one that leaked information about the research facility… am I wrong?]

What the hell did this guy say?!

[…… Don’t be stupid… why would I do such a thing? Do you know that I can issue a punishment for these wild accusations?]

Stand firm and don't falter. it doesn't matter how this frail Komori Neito changed to seem like a beast, I can't give myself up.

It must be an illusion. The black embodiment of his ferocity standing out from his back. There's no other explanation than it's an illusion.

Komori continued in a cold tone;

['Why do it" huh? I think you know the answer yourself.]

[..... I don't understand what you might mean by that.]

Komori continued on. He spoke softly yet in a ferocious tone.

"The research facility was a big data bulk of my research. In order for them to produce modified humans, the facility was indispensable.

Since I was the first researcher, there is no other in the world that could match up with my techniques and capability. After I left, Metallica got over their heads and tried to use my data for their own benefit. That's right, everybody's an imbecile leeching off my life's work.

The competition was also designed to work against me and escalate the development and production of armed modified

humans. It was just a pretense so that they could use my data, they seized every bit of data and files from me before sending it off to Purgatory Island to be used by the competitors."

[If that was the case, what would happen if the research facility was destroyed?]

[W-Well...]

"Do you understand?" Neito laughed as he easily saw through him.

"All of Professor H's research would be lost. And those who participated in the competition would also get killed." That was the answer.

[Why would I want to do that? I'm the vice-president of Metallica!]

The professor's voice was swelling.

I can't be taken down here

[You didn't like it right? Always being the [Vice] president. After all, you're equally matched with General Raz. Losing the facility could pose a threat to Metallica. Now who could save them and benefit from that threat?]

Komori faced away from the door and looked at Professor h.

[Only you would benefit from it]

[! ……]

[If it were you, losing the facility would mean nothing. There is somebody else who knew the data needed to create modified humans besides the data bulk in the research facility. You, the genius scientist who came up with the idea still would know.]

He had nothing to respond with. It wasn't because of some rational explanation, but the man in front of him had been emitting a dangerous and dark aura since they started talking. He may be equal to Raz, no, it may be in a different form, but he was far beyond him.

[After repairing the damage, no doubt you would be promoted for doing so. It's because some people would lose power over the company… As for the other reason, perhaps you wanted a raise? Or you wanted to overcome General Raz? I don't know.]

Who is this man? What is he?

He's completely different from the last time I saw him. I heard the rumors and read the reports, but he's different from what they portrayed.

[…… I see. That's a fun theory you've got there. But that's no

more than a figment of your imagination. Do you have any definitive proof?]

There's no way he could have one. No matter how atrocious this man may be, he wouldn't have any evidence.

[Definitive proof? There's no such thing. There's isn't one even if I look. If "I" look, that is.]

Komori answered in a calm manner.

[It's important to have evidence to support your claims. First of all, when the Maroon Five appeared, they said that they heard about the Purgatory Island from their leader. Their leader said that "there was a leak inside Metallica". Of course, I have a recording to prove my claims. If you say so, I could give them to you.]

That's right, there was someone who informed them. He was a well-known scientist but he deviated from the path of justice.

There was actually no evidence linking him and the leak. At the very least, only a section manager could pull this off.

[So what of it? It is no more than a baseless claim that I'm the traitor.]

[It won't be "me" that finds the evidence. What do you think would happen if General Raz happened to hear my theory?]

[... What are you...]

[I believe he would happily drive you into a corner. Even if it's not definitive, there is still some worth in investigating it... after all you are against each other aren't you? You may be an executive of Metallica, but he can suppress your influence, funds and fighting capabilities any way he wants. Or are you confident enough that he'll never catch your trail?]

Professor H wasn't able to respond. There was also the possibility of it occurring. He was supposed to have destroyed the island inside and out... Leaving no one alive, but a survivor returned with some proof.

Would silencing him be enough? No, his subordinates will surely tell General Raz the theory, and I still would end up with Raz cornering me.

[And if they ever found proof that it was your doing, do you know what would happen? Metallica is not kind to its traitors. I don't doubt that dying would be a better option than their methods. Now, do you understand? If I tell General Raz, it would mean your end.]

[Impossible! I am Professor H! There's no way they would do that! I was one of its founders! And I still will...!]

Professor H noticed that he was yelling.

[No, there's no such thing. Your achievements are impressive, but you haven't been producing modified humans for countless years now. You have only been fighting for influence and power within the company. That's why they shut down your research facility. Metallica is catching up to the modern age and tried to revive the project by establishing some competition...]

And the competition succeeded. Even without him, Metallica could still advance their research to the next stage.

He was sure of it.

[Do you understand? Metallica no longer needs you.]

[Y-You-!! You don't have proof, and yet you plan on threatening me!]

It was an outrageous claim, but Komori's analysis was correct. Blinded by the cruel aftermath of failure and the possibility of death, he didn't even consider that there may be another possibility.

[Yes, I'm threatening you.]

Komori didn't show any sign of ill-will.

[Truth be told, I don't care if someone from my side betrayed me

or not. I'll still threaten you. I won't pick and choose which method I use to reach my goals, even if it means framing someone who is innocent. I'll have you serve a use in this path I tread. Well, I already confirmed that you betrayed us beforehand.]

This man is scary. No doubt he'll do it without hesitation. He'll never regret his decision, no, he seems to be enjoying it.

Who is this guy? Was that weak face of his just a show?

What should I do? Should I kill him? Even if he's a modified human, there are many who support me. I could even employ modified humans to take him out.

[I'll say it beforehand, but in case I die, the same information gets passed to General Raz. If I die during an operation, accident or disease, it would all still be the same. It would be in your best interests to pray for my health.]

It was impossible. This guy is evil. He already read my thought patterns.

There's no way to escape his clutches.

Professor H replied after Neito's narrative;

[..... What do you want?]

[It’s really simple. I want you to convince the people above to re-evaluate my salary and performance. It is through that I can measure how allied you are to me. Ah, you can still remain as vice-president if you don’t mind.]

The words he spoke sounded cold and dark to the professor.

[And one other thing… I want you to suppress those who hate me within the company. You can do it? Can you not? After all, you did say something similar before I left for Purgatory Island.]

[…… It is within the realm of possibilities…]

I can do it. I can do it effortlessly. There’s no way I can’t easily suppress those who are below me. So this is how he does things…

Forget seeking protecting from me, He plans to let me carry his weight all along.

[Good, good. Hmm… what else… I’ll have you speak highly of me in the personnel affairs office.]

[Personnel… affairs? It’s unusual for you to boast about your success… If you didn’t withdraw from the competition, you could’ve become section director you know?]

The professor breathe in relief. He can somehow manage if it was just personnel affairs.

[Section Director? You've got to be kidding. I plan on becoming the company director.]

[Wha–!]

[Thinking about it, we're still having a joint personnel cooperation with Crimson right? I'll have them send for me next. Maybe I can be the vice president for Crimson.]

Komori's tone change. Maybe it was a sign that he was serious on what he's talking about. Even so, what he was saying was just insane.

[Why would you want to do such a thing…]

[I have no intention of telling the likes of you… and my conditions are just temporary. I'll leave you as is for now, but you're my pet dog. The world's most influential man is going work under me as a pet.]

Komori thought of him as no more than a bug, that was what he felt after seeing his eyes.

I won't forgive you. You dare order me around with those eyes?

You've got to be kidding me.

[I'll never let it come to that! Don't you dare get ahead of yourself! Komori!]

[Hmm... is that so... I don't mind exposing you now. There's no harm to it. No doubt you'll be killed without mercy.]

The professor was vigorous, but Komori didn't stir.

Looking at the elevator buttons, Komori released the "close" button, and pressed the "first floor – lobby" button.

[Your time limit to decide is until this elevator reaches its designated floor... think wisely... Field-head]

[……!]

The elevator kept ascending. They'll arrive at their destination in a few seconds.

[Wait a moment Komori-kun! Let's calm down and...!]

[I am calm. It is you who should calm down.]

What should I do, what should I do?

If I don't obey this man, I die.

We're already at the twelfth level in the basement.

[Wait! Wait I tell you!]

[No way. Even if you're a first class scientist, you're no more than a second rate villain. Know your place, you puny villain.]

Fifth level. It's no use, there's no time to think. But I don't want to work under him.

He may change his outlook on me, but I won't yield to him. But;

[I'm kidding professor. All you need to do is just the personnel affairs thing and suppressing those who hate me. As long as you acknowledge me then...]

Komori is laughing like it was nothing. It's a kind smile.

This may be my chance. This is a tricky situation I'm in. There's no other choice...

[..... I understand...]

Professor H fell to his knees. He answered crossed legged and his body was relaxed.

Ting.

They were now on the first floor.

[..... Well, then, I'll let you go Field-head]

Without even looking at the professor, Komori exited the elevator.

The professor found himself staring at the back of a person who walked out so casually.

[A-Ahh....]

He approved of him. Attacking him so fiercely, cornering him and then expressing kindness in the last moment. He was defeated spiritually.

Defeated, me, Professor H, who gave birth to countless creatures and beasts. He defeated me.

I never liked Raz in the first place. I wanted to stand on top of him. Wielding the strongest power, I wanted everything according to my plan. But my plan backfired on me. The plan I thought to be "evil" was easily broken through. I was cornered by a stronger "evil force" and fell into despair.

Professor H continued to look at Komori's back. He was scary.

Komori stood still, and without turning, said to him;

[Professor H, I know that you hate General Raz, and I know that feeling… There's someone I hate too… but,]

Komori continued. Simply yet firmly;

[Real villainy, won't go with what you like or dislike.]

The outline when Komori told me that, was much more atrocious than any other beast I have ever created. It is as if I'm staring at the back of the devil.

Chapter 41: He's Really Scared

It was the long awaited weekend. After the ordeal at the research facility, Neito went back to his apartment inside Metallica.

It may be an apartment, but it was just a rented single-room one.

Neito had the money to move out, but since it was too tedious to move, he left his room as it was.

His notice would come soon, but he had time to spare.

Of course, his training went on as usual, but lately he has been rather tired.

Neito didn't schedule anything this afternoon; instead he slept.

[..... I slept well.]

Neito awakened and looked at his watch. It was 10 AM, the second day of his weekend.

He didn't even leave his apartment yesterday. It had been a long time since he experienced such a laid back lifestyle.

That being said, he opened his refrigerator. There must be something in there...

Last night, he dreamt of deceased people visiting him. His trauma from the recent past having appeared.

He remembered his family, who lived in the lowest corner of society. His father died in poverty, and his mother, who after a few years of work, died leaving him with [a few years' worth] of money.

They appeared in his dreams, trying to convey something to him.

Since such dreams appeared after he received his operation, he frequently told Maki about this.

[It embodies one's spirit]... maybe he was seeing those dreams because it was a form of regret in his soul. His silhouette may have affected his memories, triggering those related to his parents.

At least, it seemed that way.

Neito didn't understand the meaning behind it, but he didn't bother finding out. In other words, the dreams were merely data points that were useful in determining his mental status.

[...I only have rice...]

He only had rice wrapped in plastic.

He thought to himself,

I’m not that hungry yet, but going out is such a pain.

Neito turned on the television. It broadcasted news about Okinawa.

< The scars inflicted by Metallica on this island half a year ago are still visible… >

The news caster was talking while past images were compared to the current images of destroyed buildings. They included images of children crying and people who were bleeding.

If I remember right, that was once where a famous politician lived. Where was that again? Ah, it was in the village of Koza.

< But recently, there have been no signs of turmoil in this area. According to analysts, the idea of <<Okinawa has already fallen to Metallica>> is widespread among them. Metallica may be involved in the creation of peace>

That’s right. There are no more annoying politicians on the island. Metallica doesn’t tolerate anyone that would oppose them. The island belongs to Metallica.

In return for acknowledging Metallica, the island received something in return. Thanks to Metallica, they founded a factory famous for producing good beer in the area and a famous

University acknowledged Metallica for their help.

< Again, the argument of <<needing Guardians in Okinawa>> is constantly being argued upon, and some have begun to rally in the streets >

Well, we did do a lot for them…

< And to the special ward, they want human rights too… >

Ah, the branch manager is doing as I instructed… I'm thankful for him…

< Neither Santana or Ramone have been sighted >

And they'll never appear in Okinawa again…

< As the civil unrest calmed down, Okinawa seems peaceful right now… but there is darkness lurking in the corners. Behind every person's smile, there is always a doubt that something is moving in the shadows >

They were now showing images of people living normally. The BGM on the other hand portrayed a mysterious music. When people smiled, the put an edit of a shadow standing behind them.

Neito turned off the television.

… Lost. I'm not lost at all. I am what I am.

[Well then, I guess I'm off to the convenience store.]

He was really starving. Neito left his apartment.

To his right were the slums, and to his left was the regular city.

The convenience stored was on his left towards the city.

As he was walking, 3 youngsters followed him. They were three-four years younger than him, and they were happily chatting. Since they were spread out, Neito leaned close to the corner of the street.

[-And that woman that was with me–]

[What's with that? Hyahahaha]

[By the way, isn't he unbelievable?]

Neito who was on the far corner of the street was hit in the face by the youngster's hand while he was trying to convey something. They most probably didn't notice him there.

[……Ah]

It really hurt. Maybe he wasn't training his reflexes good enough.

The youngster was holding a can of juice while walking, but as it hit Neito, he dropped it.

[..... Hey, what's your deal getting in our way?!]

A single youngster called out to him. They were taller than Neito, and dyed their hair in bright colors.

[I'm sorry]

Neito replied.

[It's your fault I dropped my can of juice, and my shirt is all messed up.]

The youngster's shirt had juice stains all over it.

[... I'm sorry, please let me off this time.]

Neito lowered his head.

[How unbelievable! Who's going to cover the cleaning expenses huh?!]

The three of them surrounded Neito. He backed up.

This is bad, I’m really in bad situation here.

[Hey, this guy is scared shitless. Hahahaha!]

He was already familiar with this situation even before he entered Metallica. He didn’t like it one bit. In fact, it was nostalgic.

For example, if he were to transform into his <Evil Silhouette> here and now, their existence would be instantly erased from earth, but that would just create more problems. Besides, he wasn’t up to it right now.

That’s weird… I have fought with countless enemies, and yet I’m still bothered by these guys. I’m sure a hundred of them couldn’t even amount to the dust below Ramone’s feet.

Why am I this flustered? I’m not scared, but flustered.

[I’m sorry…!]

He hesitated, but Neito slipped through the three of them and ran. He tumbled and mud splashed onto him, but he got up and ran again.

[How embarrassing! Is he really serious? He must be really desperate! Hahaha]

[It’s because you scared him too much… How pitiful, being bullied so easily, Hyahahaha!]

Whether it was funny because he fell down, or because he chose to run, he didn’t know. All he could hear was the energetic laughter behind him.

[… They’re not going to chase after me… are they?]

Well, if it’s not related to work I’m a little bit… It’s no good. I wouldn’t mind leaving them half dead, but there should be a smarter way to deal with this…

What would Ikeno do…? I’m sure he’d break one of their elbows and end it there…

What about Niina? He’s the friendly type so no doubt he would befriend them…

Then what about Tsurugi…? There’s no way someone would pick a fight with someone that scary-looking.

Neito entered the convenience store and bought instant curry.

I’ll eat this after I get back home. Yeah, in preparation for this afternoon.

Neito decided to organize his thoughts for the event to come.

[Okay! Time to go home and prepare myself!]

He blurted out to himself. He thought of bringing up his spirit for once.

He had plan schedule in the afternoon.

For the first time in his life, he had plans.

He came up with his plans on a whim, and it was unexpected. Furthermore, he didn't know how to handle it, so he was a bit worried.

But he was excited. He would be lying to himself if he said that he wasn't. He was so excited that he wasn't able to sleep the day before. It took him some time to roll around his futon before he fell asleep. He was uneasy if it wasn't related to work.

Maybe there were reasons for him to act like that, but honestly, he always had fun when he hanged out with her.

After all, looking outside the box, she was unmistakably a real beauty. Maybe he was mistaken, but he knew she had something for him. After all, they were just co-workers who happened to be on good terms with each other. Looking at her past records, you knew she was a good person.

He also received advice from Niina. Although his subordinate, he was always grinning while he gave some tips. Of course, Neito listened carefully and appreciated the gesture.

A lot happened lately, a lot.

And from now on, a lot more was still to come.

For now he only had one thing to be focused on. Of course he didn’t forget about work afterwards.

Neito returned home and prepared himself for his date.

I wonder what she’s going to wear…

Neito snapped himself from thinking too much about it.

Chapter 42: It Makes Me Really Excited

Their rendezvous was in front of the station. This was because Neito didn't have a car.

Neito arrived earlier than expected. He had fifteen minutes to spare. It wasn't like it was enough to wander around, so Neito sat at a bench near the station's water fountain. It was very sunny despite the season. The sun rays felt warm.

If I were a smoker, I would be smoking at a time like this... Tsurugi does look cool whenever he smokes...

Thoughts like that entered Neito's mind.

Now he had a date. It may be a whimsical one, but the fact they happened to converse with each other during lunch made this possible. He maybe was spacing out at that moment...

[Hey hey, Nate does really likes curry huh?]

[Yeah.]

[Shouchu is just sweet potato right?]

[.....yeah]

[... Hmm... Let's have a date when you're free okay?]

[... Yeah... Eh?]

[Yaay! That's a promise! Amusement park ♪ amusement park ♪]

Looking at her happily jumping around, he couldn't turn her down despite thinking of a way to take back what he said. He was in a bad situation, but. he. had frivolous feelings towards her. He also had something to tell her, so maybe it was a good opportunity.

Neito looked at his watch. He had ten minutes to go.

Maybe I came in too early...

[Wa–!]

[Ooo–!

A huge voice sounded off behind him. He screamed in surprise and looked back. Behind him was a blonde girl.

Today's date? He was with Anice. Their reaction towards each other was funny so they laughed it off.

[Hey there Nate, you sure are early!]

[Don't scare me like that. My heart almost stopped thinking you

were an assassin.]

Really, he was in a position where an assassin could aim for his life.

Well, as long as Head-Field values his life, he should have taken precautions in keeping me alive.

[You surprised me as well. Nate is really interesting.]

Anice circled around the bench and came in front of him. She was wearing a knitted white mini-skirt. For some reason, she looked more feminine than usual.

[……]

[Hm? What's the matter? Hmmm. Don't I look cute?]

He thought of saying something about her atmosphere but he resisted.

[Oh, yeah. You look really cute.]

[Eh? Really? You really think so? Yay!]

[Well then… shall we?]

[Why are you embarrassed? Is it because you're a Samurai?]

Maybe it was because she was Anice, that her pace was faster than Neito's. Neito tried to force a smile, but stopped at that thought. Neito commenced his [Date] with Anice.

While walking, Neito noticed that people were naturally attracted to Anice. Of course, it was no surprise. It was the first time they walked together alone in a normal place.

Her appearance was that of a blonde doll, but her expression looked otherwise. Neito felt somehow embarrassed while walking with her.

[♪～♪～]

She was walking with rhythm while humming an English song. Neito was walking two steps behind her.

He noticed Anice looking at him and brightened up his face.

[Hey Nate, wanna hold hands?]

That won't happen.

[No, umm... that would be too... umm... I'll hold back... We Japanese have a certain rule when it comes to that...]

His palms were too sweaty and it was embarrassing. In any case, that was not going to happen. It took him five minutes to explain why they couldn't hold hands.

After they rode the train, they arrived at a theme park named after some well-known characters.

Neito never visited the place, but according to Niina, the location should pose no problem even though he was in-experienced.

[Let get on that first!]

Her eyes were shining when she insisted on a ride. To tell you the truth, Neito had never been on those type of rides. Even more, he never grasped the concept of going to an amusement park due to "family matters".

[Owaaaa! Let me off–!]

It's scary. It's definitely a paradox. Why would people build rides that would be this scary?

Neito thought to himself and looked sideways.

[Ahahaha ! Kyaa!]

Anice was enjoying herself, screaming at a musically fine tune.

They finished the ride and exited. Neito was feeling sick.

[Ah~ that sure was fun wasn't it?!]

Anice was really satisfied. She was grinning. Her smile truly expressed that she liked it, and somehow, this made Neito feel good too. It didn't change the fact that the ride was scary.

[...it was scary...]

[Really? Even though you jumped from the roof of the research lab, you didn't like it? Why?]

Anice tilted her head and looked at him.

This and that are different. The reason I did that in the research lab was because it needed to be done. It's not like I like high places.

[Hm... Is that so... I'm sorry Nate, you even had to accompanied me...]

In a moment,she became depressed.She was honest to herself when it came to things like these.

[... No, it was really fun. It was my first time riding one, but let let's keep going.]

Neito enjoyed looking at Anice who was having fun. Since it was a good opportunity, he wanted to keep going.

[Really? Don't force yourself too much 'kay?]

[Yeah, I won't...]

[Yay! The next ride is...]

They spent the next few hours on the thrill rides. Neito was sure that it was a form of spiritual training. If he used his "Evil Silhouette" next time, he was sure it would be much stronger.

[Ah, it's about time we went to the theater.]

It was already late in the afternoon.

They watched a pirate themed wacky film and had dinner afterwards. Anice ordered something like a fairy tale dinner. Neito tried refusing when offered a bite, but it really tasted good once he took a bite.

He noticed Anice looking at a stall selling weird accessories, so he bought one for her. She was startled, at the same time pleased.

She laughed satisfied.

[Time sure does fly by fast.]

Anice looked disappointed that the day would end. She was enjoying herself the whole day. Despite having a small body, she was energetically moving around all day.

It was the first time Neito got to experience a day such as this.

[……]

Neito was silent, lost in his thoughts.

Anice, who was walking beside him, looked worried.

[Are you okay Nate? Are you tired….?]

[Not at all… I may look frail, but I started out in the General Affairs Department. Plus I also have my training, so you don't have to worry about me.]

[Is that so… So did you not have fun?]

Ahh, that's why. No wonder I'm not popular.

Neito reflected and answered;

[No, it was really fun. I'm all better now. Thanks.]

Anice was most likely being considerate towards me. She tried cheering me up using the date as an excuse.

A lot of things happened lately, and I may have changed in various ways. I don't regret my decisions, and I plan to move on forward. Though I sometimes feel tired.

[Really? Thank god. I also had fun! Let's come again 'kay?!]

Anice was smiling all day. While riding on the amusement park's rides, she was dazzling in every way. You wouldn't think that she was from an evil organization.

[Yeah, if we can.]

Neito felt embarrassed.

They exited the amusement park and Neito offered to escort her home.

In accordance to Niina-sensei's plan.

Oh yeah, I needed to tell her something.

Neito called out to her while they were walking towards Anice's house.

[Hey, I think I will be sent to New York as part of our inter-company employee exchange with Crimson.]

[Eh? Really? As expected of Neito! If you said so earlier, we could've gone celebrating~]

That was the easy part, the following might be hard to swallow for her.

[And then…]

[Ah! That means Neito will be working with Papa! Wa~ That's amazing! I never thought that it would come to that!]

Exactly. That would eventually happen. Crimson is also an evil organization. He would be fighting with American heroes, whether they are stronger than Japanese ones or not.

[…Yeah. When I first met you at the sales department, I already anticipated that I would be working with your dad someday, but I didn't anticipate it to come so soon…]

That's right. Neito barely finished his first year inside Metallica. He never aspired to himself that he would aim for Crimson's top position. Back then, it would look like a cruel joke.

Since then, Neito actualized that joke. Even if it was a farfetched

dream, Neito decided to thread that path.

I only thought of it on a whim, but it's true that I considered that possibility. Now, I'm in a position to actually aim for it to happen.

[You know, I really love my Papa.]

She happily expressed it as she looked up towards the sky.

That was most likely the case. Looking at Anice, you would see that she was rasied with love and care. They may be villains, but to her, her father is the strongest and kindest figure in her life. She may even have a father-complex.

[But when I'm looking at you, I suddenly feel very excited.]

Anice stopped walking and stared Neito in the eye. Neito got nervous staring into her deep blue eyes.

[At first, when I heard about Dylan, I only took little interest in you. But when I first saw you, I knew you had something in you that others don't possess. I know, because I've seen a lot of bad guys since I was young.]

[Is that... so...?]

Neito wasn't being humble. He really had low fighting capabilities, and he really wasn't that witty. As to how his "Evil"

nature came, he remembered Manaka-san who guided him in the right path.

[Yup, I've never seen a guy that's so upstanding... You're always kind, although you are sometimes clumsy and easily frightened... Fufufu]

Neito recalled how he acted while riding the roller coaster. Anice happily laughed at him.

[That Nate I met is moving forward. It makes me really excited. My heart always pounds hard when I'm with you...]

[...Well...]

Neito stopped in the midst of his sentence. He knew Anice was affectionate towards him, but he already distanced himself from her. There were two reasons for doing so.

First, her father is the one standing on top of Crimson. If Neito unnecessarily provoked Crimson's boss, his head would be done for. That's why there was no reason to get closer to her than necessary.

But this reason was currently invalid. Even if her father is the Crimson's boss, there was no reason for him to turn his fangs on Neito. It wasn't like in the past where Neito was powerless.

This in turn, created another reason.

It was related to what Neito was about to do. As Neito fought on, Anice became a prominent figure in Neito's life.

[You don't need to worry... You don't have to tell me how you feel yet...]

Anice's words were soft and gentle.

[... Really?]

[It's 'cuz Nate is always looking forward... But I hope one day, you'll look sideways and...]

[I'll be sure to remember that.]

Anice looked embarrassed and laughed it off with a "Hehe'.

After that, they stopped talking and kept walking. As the day ended, he couldn't tell Anice what he was supposed to say.

It wasn't necessarily to be said today. After all Anice helped me feel better. It can't be considered as a gift of thanks, but I want her to sleep happily tonight...

One day, I'll definitely tell her.

[I’m fine from here on… Good night Nate!]

[Eh? Aah, Good night too. Thanks again.]

With that Anice walked away. Her face was red when she left.

I guess girls who are Californians and energetic are easily embarrassed…

Neito walked towards the train station and started thinkingt;

Today was really fun and Anice was really cute. I was about to forget it but I can’t stray from my path. It is as she said, I should keep looking and moving forward.

I’m going to depart for Crimson. That is in order for me to settle and have power inside…

In order to conquer the world, I need more power. It is given that I would stand on top of Metallica, but there is no need for another evil organization. I’ll obtain that power to do so.

Crimson is a huge organization. I’ll have them make me their general.

Anice’s father stands on top of Crimson. There will be a time where we will oppose each other. Of course, I don’t plan on loosing. My fighting style will always be the same.

No mercy, no hesitation.

Whether you're the American Rock's organization, or Crimson's king, I'll have you fall. Does Anice understand that much? There's no reason for her to know.

I'll still do it, if I change how I fight just because she's my companion, I can't show my face to those heroes and sacrifices that made me reach this point.

Even if it results to her shedding a tear, I'll still do it.

Neito walked alone, the wind was getting chilly.

Chapter 43: Our Sonic Youth, Our Slipknot

Half a year had passed after the competition ended. Neito, who was on his fourth year inside Metallica, entered the main office with his subordinate Niina. He had to settle his paperwork before departing.

As part of the Inter-employee exchange, He was to be sent to Crimson's American division. Today was the day he would depart.

It was a first for Metallica, having an employee at merely twenty years of age, climb the corporate ladder, and arrive at this position in a mere four years.

He already received his new salary two weeks ago. The inter-employee exchange caused some commotion inside the company.

While they were on their way up after filing their documents in the General Affairs Department, they received a lot of glares and compliments from people.

[Are you ready Senpai?]

Niina who was with Neito called out to him. It was decided that Niina alone, as a subordinate, would accompany Neito to America.

[Yeah, let's get going.]

[Got ya-]

Anice already departed ahead of them as she had things to settle at home.

Tsurugi wouldn’t be accompanying him this time. With regards to that matter, they already spoke with each other last week.

[[I’m going to Crimson with Niina as my escort.]]

[[Only Niina? Would you care to elaborate?]]

[[There’s something I want you to do in Japan while I’m away.]]

Neito explained to Tsurugi. They needed to establish their base of operations. In order for him to conquer the world, there were some things left in the country which prevented him from doing so. Tsurugi was the only one who could handle it.

[[I see…]]

Tsurugi nodded on hearing Neito’s explanation.

[[Aah, I’m a little worried, but it’s decided. I’ll no longer ask “Will you do it?” I’m counting on you Tsurugi.]]

Tsurugi grinned and answered him.

[Fuu, you finally understand… As you wish Boss.]

Even for Neito, not having his trusted right hand man with him would leave him vulnerable. Tsurugi was calm, collected, loyal and experienced in battle. But Neito had no choice. He would have to deal with his problems on his own.

I'll show him that I'm fit to be called his Boss.

The two shook hands and went their separate ways. Tsurugi was already working on his plan. He wasn't even there to see Neito off today.

[What's the matter Senpai? Let's go~]

[Sorry, I'll be there.]

It turns out he was left behind while thinking too much. He walked a bit faster to catch up to Niina.

[Somehow, you managed to move up the corporate ladder so fast Senpai… did you do something bad again?]

Niina was strolling along with both hands braced behind his head.

[It's obvious.]

Since it was obvious he did it, he answered honestly. There was a time when he had enemies within the company, but that period was already over. With Professor H's influence, there were close to none or at least so far none were going after him.

He conquered the Harrison offensive, defeated Beetle, overwhelmed Santana and became a newly bred modified human, defeating many of the Rock's Organization's members.

To those who didn't know Neito personally, they exaggerated and created rumors of their own, glorifying him. They even gave him nicknames like "The Dark Genius", "The Villain Miracle Maker" and "The Dirty" which were really discongruous when they actually saw him.

It wasn't like he was incapable, but he barely considered his victories a victory. Of course, it all wouldn't be possible without the help from his subordinates. Neito knew that full well and didn't claim that he did it all by himself.

Even though people might glorify or tarnish his image, his plans didn't change. One day, he'll be on top of Metallica.

Neito called out to Niina while they were inside the elevator. Niina was soon to be promoted to Level Three.

[Hey Niina, did you know that in terms of your promotion speed, you're ranked fourth inside Metallica's overall history? Well, there's a huge gap between the one ranked fifth and you.]

[Eh? Really? Hell yeah! As expected of me!]

[Hahaha, well it's true that you're amazing.]

The elevator doors opened, leading to the lobby. They were surprised by what they saw.

[Wa-Wow...]

Niina had his mouth wide open. There were a lot of employees lined up in the lobby. They were forming two parallel lines in the lobby bowing their heads as Neito arrived. It was a farewell gesture to those representatives to be sent off to Crimson.

[.....]

Neito wanted to greet them individually, shaking their hands, apologizing and bowing back.

"What the hell is everybody doing?! I know you're busy, so get back to work! There's no need for you to do these things... I may be your representative, but there's no need for you to go this far!"

But, atmosphere here is important... very important.

Neito called out to Niina who was shocked, and moved forward.

[Let’s go Niina.]

He noticed Izumi, the section chief from the sales department, stopped and took a second to bow back at him. He then proceeded to the exit and addressed them;

[Thank you for your time everybody, and now I’m off!]

For a second, some raised their heads in surprise.

[……?]

[……Ha-Have a safe trip!]

[Do you best in Crimson!]

[Komori! You get promoted too fast! Don’t forget us who were your drinking partners back in your sales department days!]

[Do your best! I expect great things from you!]

[Please do something for all of us in General Affairs!]

[Have a safe trip!]

Neito left the main office with words of compliments behind him.

[...Tha—that surprised me...]

Neito returned to his normal self.

[Me too. Oh yeah, Maki-san didn't see you off did she?]

Niina entered the company car. Neito already talked with Maki on the day before.

[Aah, she already sent me off yesterday.]

[Eh? You had no work yesterday right? Does that mean she came to your place?!]

[Hm? Isn't that a given? She really is a caring person~]

[Then? Then? Did she go into your house? Was it at night?]

[You're really curious huh? Of course she went in. I wouldn't leave her waiting outside.]

Neito went in the car and remembered what happened last night.

It was about 9 PM when he heard a knock on his door. He was

filling his cup noodles with hot water when Maki knocked.

[[Maki-san? Is something the matter?]]

[Ah, well tomorrow is your departure date right? I can't send you off tomorrow so… If I'm bothering you then I'll…]

Nights in spring season were cold. While Maki was wearing a white sweater, she seemed cold. He asked her if she would like to come in, even though he thought she might feel disgusted.

[[Really? Then I'll take up on your offer… Pardon me for intruding…]]

They chatted for a while. And for Neito, she compiled all of the American Rock's data sheets as well as his "Evil Silhouette's" performance records.

[[Wow, you did this by yourself? You even had to go through this far for me…]]

[[Y-Yeah. I really thought of it, but maybe it's going to be just an additional luggage for you…]]

[[No such thing… This would really help me. Thanks!]]

[[No, not at all… I'm glad I was able to be a help to you!]

She even gave him a protection charm. Neito really doubted if god would protect a villain such as him, but he was really happy to receive such thing. Other than that, she gave him instant curry which made him happier. It was Metallica's special "Red Root Curry" which when microwaved even in small amounts, would increase twofold. It was really a divine thing.

Neito danced around when he received the packet, Maki seeing this, laughed happily.

After chatting for a while, they were now in a serious conversation.

[[Please do return safely.]]

[[Yeah]]

[[That's a promise okay? I know that you're an amazing and capable person but...]]

She really was worried of him. Somehow, she had a bad feeling about his trip.

If ever they were going out she would console him the same way. Since they weren't, he just thanked her for worrying for him.

She really was a good person within. He was sure a lot of guys would have misunderstand how she felt if they heard that. I'm sure a lot would be able to hold themselves back, but it would be

really hard to do so, seeing a real beauty caring and worrying for you. Neito held himself back from doing something stupid.

They were silent for a few minutes. She was fiddling uneasily. Well she does that sometimes...

As he was about to asked what happened, she got up and proceeded to leave. “Please take care of yourself.”

[Then? Then?]

Niina was really interested in the story. They were already on their way towards the airport.

[Hm? Well, that ended with that. She went home.]

[Haa!! Wh-Senpai! Are you that dense!?]

[I really don’t want to be called that way by you. I served her tea before she left so...]

[That not really the problem here!!]

[Oh stop whining already... Here I’ll share my curry with you. I’ll give you two packets.]

[...Haa~...]

(TCom: Women. You'll never know what they want from you.)

Niina sighed. He was nowhere near Ikeno, but Niina was popular with the girls. He was totally a different species from Neito. Neito didn't bother asking Niina what he was troubled about.

They were silent as the car drove on.

[Oh yeah, hey Senpai, you can speak English right?]

[What's up suddenly?]

[No, you were more den-... no I was just really curious.]

I know you were about to say that I'm dense...

[Well, I'm no different from you. My third grade lessons were half English after all. I'm not good at it, but at least I can speak and understand it.]

Back in his childhood days, in other words, in the year 2090, English was widely taught in Japanese schools. Both social studies and science lectures were half taught in English. He didn't particularly have good grades, but it was enough to pass.

[Ah, is that so...]

If it wasn't me who was in charge of Niina, I'm sure he would get in trouble for his attitude towards his superiors. Not that he wasn't scolded, Tsurugi always gave him an earful when he was with them.

It's amazing how he can put up with that Tsurugi.

Neito got along surprisingly well with Niina. Maybe it was him, or Niina was just really good with human interactions. Niina also opened up to him. Not that he greatly respected him the way Tsurugi did, but it was enough to gain his trust. After all Neito wasn't really 'leadership' material.

After they arrived at the airport, they got off and snagged their luggage. Taking the VIP expressway towards Metallica's private plane. I'm sure we'll arrive by the time I wake up.

[Oh yeah, Niina, you should read the file I received from Maki-san.]

Niina already seated himself and was about to reach for a can of beer.

[Got ya~ Hm, I'll read it now so please take it out.]

It took Neito four hours to go through the entire document but he was sure Niina would go through it in less than thirty minutes.

Neito took out the file and handed it to Niina.

[Well, I'm going to sleep.]

Neito closed his eyes and reviewed what he'd read in the files.

※※

The United States of America, it was where Crimson's main office was. In comparison to Japan, the Rocks Organization had far more members and was stronger as well.

In Metallica, the danger posed by a Rocks member is ranked in five stages. For example, Ramone and Beetle were B-class. Maroon Five's individual members were ranked C, but as a whole, they were A-class.

The highest rank attainable was an S-class. It was given to those exemplary individuals who are the strongest in the Rocks Organization. Dylan, for example, was A-class. There were only four individuals with A-class in Japan.

Then what about America?

Truth be told, thirty two percent of Rocks Organization's members in America were B-class. It was scary for evil organizations, at the same time it was reassuring for civilians.

But the evil organization in America aren't afraid of the thirty two percent B-class. They were afraid of the top two in the Rocks Organization. They both acted as representative of the American Rocks Organization. They were ranked A-class.

One individual was named Sonic Youth.

Everybody knew his real name; Mark Gordon.

He was a famous American Footballer, winning the MVP award last year. He was also once a military pilot, drafted into the space exploration program.

Before he entered the Rocks Organization, he was once a Hollywood star. He had a blonde, muscular body, and a bright smile. He was a perfect human being.

He received his powers due to the effects of warp travel.

It was called Over-Sense.

His senses and reaction time is ten times faster than a normal human being. It seemed like it was possible for him to dodge bullets that were shot at him.

He already tested his ability to it limits when he stood on top of the empire state building, differentiating and listening to each person walking down on the streets.

Even with his superpowers, he had developed weapons and tools, as well as armor to aid him in his battles.

His Sonic Skate was a type of shoe with roller blades on it, and on the surface looked like a regular pair of roller skates.

Its characteristics were different. It was able to accelerate the user to one hundred kilometers an hour by utilizing energy. It was rumored that it could reach five hundred kilometers per hour when stretched to its limits. It was possible to ride up walls, run on top of water as well as jump tens of metres.

It’s obvious that only Mark Gordon could use such thing.

He built a course in front of his huge lawn to enjoy using the Sonic Skates but weather would sometimes disrupt his routine.

At that time, the evil organization “Rooster” created bio-hazard monsters and brought them into the city.

The monsters wreaked havoc in New York City. The Guardians from the Rocks Organization desperately tried to fight off the monster.

In that situation, Mark stood out. Wearing protective equipment and his Sonic Shoes, he headed for New York.

He passed various landscapes in a second, jumping from building to building and crossed the Hudson River.

Defeating monsters consecutively, he would defeat one and then quickly jumped onto the next.

He was able to jump through any obstacle, dodging every blow.

As a result, New York was saved. They celebrated the birth of a new Rocks Hero and thanked him.

Since then, his Sonic Skate was legal for use in New York. He jumps from one building to another, saving citizens from the Evil Organization. He was famous before but now his fame has spread throughout America.

A cool, handsome, rich and tough individual. He was the ideal American Hero. His face was printed on Cereal boxes nationwide.

“The high speed hero. Our Sonic Youth”

That was the title given to Mark.

On the other hand, there was another hero aside from the Sonic Youth. “Him”;

He had doubts about being part of the Rocks Organization but he was registered as such.

He only deals with special types of enemy. His identity is unknown, but he is always there in the darkness.

There was nobody who had seen his face, in fact it was pointless to expose him. He always wore a black attire, covering his face. His weapon was a very unusual one.

Sometimes it was a sniper rifle, changing into a special blade, and sometime a stun gun and a special spray weapon. A regular Rocks Organization would have a signature weapon for use, but it doesn't apply to him.

He chooses his weapon according to what is most effective in that battle.

He doesn't fight with monsters as well as regular old villains.

He only targets Crimson members.

Maybe his interest of stopping Crimson aligned with the Rocks Organizations objective to stop all evil doers. Nobody knows if he was doing it for Justice.

He doesn't associate himself with the police or with his fellow Guardians. He doesn't even follow any of the Rocks Organizations directives. He doesn't speak nor contact anybody. His battle measures sometimes bring harm to the citizens.

There are many who don’t approve of him as part of the Hero lineup in the Rocks Organization. At the same time, some glorified him as a real hero.

He always kills his prey.

Crimson was his top priority.

As a result, he saved many civilians in the process. I’m sure many thought of him as a cool individual.

He sometimes appeared in the newspapers but mostly it was them arguing about his worthiness. In other words, it was a one sided favor.

One of his unique features is “He doesn’t have any abilities”.

He didn’t possess any psychic power, superhuman reflexes nor a sturdy body like many of Rocks Organization’s heroes. You can confirm it with videos.

He only trained his ability to adapt and change according to his environment, as well as practicing the usage of many weapons to suit his needs. In other words, he is just a human being who has specialized in warfare.

Be it as he is, he was paired with the Sonic Youth and was considered an A-class hero throughout America.

He was able to respond to any situation, pick the most effective tactic and conquer his enemy without using any powers. It only meant one thing; He was strong.

Filling a Crimson member with lead, cutting off his head, or rigging him with explosives. They were all methods of assassination.

Every Crimson member killed had marks on their lifeless body.

Crimson Hunter, The Executioner, and No Power Hero were some nicknames given to him. The most famous one of them all was;

Slipknot.

The executioner who put a rope around his victim's neck. It was clearly shown when he continuously murdered individuals from Crimson. The name originated from a punk themed website stating:

"The Fearful Hero, Our Slipknot"

Sonic Youth and Slipknot.

The Fast and the Fearful.

Light and Darkness.

America has two heroes with contradicting characteristics.

Chapter 44: Shoochuu? Sounds Good. I'll Be Looking Forward To It!

Unlike Metallica, those considered as "weak" members of Crimson had their own office, handling various desk jobs and not field work. In short they had unity throughout their ranks.

They identified each of them as members of one family, helping and encouraging one another. They have sworn their loyalty to those who stood on top. Stereotypically, they functioned much like the Italian mafia.

Anice's father, Mr. Big, stood on top of the company. He usually gives orders and advice to his fellow office workers amidst a busy day. He considers each member of Crimson as part of his family, not just some regular employee. If necessary, he would fight alongside them, and considers it as "helping a family member". He would never abandon his family.

In the beginning, Crimson operated a small scale business that focused on underground sales, gambling, and also served as a protection racket. When Mr. Big got inaugurated as their Boss, they escalated from small business to a large scale underground Evil Organization, developing and researching special weapons in secret. They ruled with an iron fist and dominated the underground market.

... At least, that was what Neito heard from various sources. He imagined how Mr. Big would look like if he faced him. Anice's father stood on top of Crimson, thus he was a villain. Neito frequently asked himself what kind of person he is. Would he have

a ruthless stare, thirsting for blood? Would he be a dangerous individual? Or would he have powers that would allow him to live even if his head were to be cut off?

[Hey there, I've been looking forward to meeting you Nate.]

The person who stood in front of Neito was the opposite of what he had given thought to.

Mr. Big's office was on the top most floor of a certain skyscraper. After arriving at the airport, Neito met up with Anice and decided that he would give his greeting to the company he would be assigned to. Mr. Big was far more gentle and welcoming than Neito expected.

[Nice to meet you Mr. Big.]

[I've heard a lot about you from my daughter. You've done well to come. Hm? Go ahead and take a seat.]

Neito sat on a luxurious looking sofa and proceeded;

[Cigar?]

[Ah, no. I'm fine.]

[Really? Then I'll be lighting one.]

Big lit the cigar's tip on fire and exhaled smoke at ease.

He may not be that good looking, but his proper posture, grey hair and nice suit gave him a feel of class.

I see, he doesn't look like the head of a gang at all... If I were to comment, I would say he's like an average CEO I guess... His daughter doesn't look like him at all...

[So Papa, It is as I said he would be right? He's a Nice Guy fufufu.]

Anice was happily laughing beside him. She frequently calls Mr. Big "Papa" or "Daddy".

Neito wanted her to stop, but he can't voice it out. No matter how much a man of character Mr. Big is, he still heads a worldwide Evil Organization. If Mr. Big misinterprets him going after his daughter's hand, there's a huge chance that Mr. Big might hate him for it.

But Big's expression was as bright as before. He seemed to take a liking to Neito.

[I see. As expected of the guy my daughter choose. You have kind eyes.]

[Am I right? – On top of that He's really evil!]

[Really? Hahaha]

[Ehehe – ♪]

Big patted his daughter's head. It was a fun home drama which the father and daughter acted out.

Anice really values her father… Maybe it's because it had been a long time since they saw each other that Big is spoiling her…

[…Haa…]

[Getting back on topic, it is amazing how you rose through Metallica in just a few years after you joined. You even arrived in front of me. You're really something.]

[Thank you very much]

[Oi Oi, there's no need to be that formal boy, you're part of the family now.]

Eh?

Neito panicked a little. He thought he was going to be engaged to Anice and would be his son-in-law.

Maybe that's not what he meant… Maybe "as part" of the

Crimson family…

Neito never had to deal with this type of situation so he panicked a little.

[Well then boy, you are an exceptional villain and can be considered as the company director of Metallica in my opinion. You're going to be treated as a regular employee here in Crimson, to which you won't mind yes?]

Crimson was not centered on the traditional businessmen wearing suits like Metallica. In other words, their company structure was completely different from Metallica.

[Of course. As a representative, I'll also do my best here in Crimson.]

That's my first move. Neito answered as serious as he could.

[OK. You'll be assigned to the Manhattan area. Do you have any questions?]

Manhattan is considered to be the center-piece of New York City. Huge companies and colleges, theaters and facilities, everything was found in the Manhattan area. Neito didn't expect Mr. Big to give him such an important area to a newbie like him. Neito was taken back by his statement.

[Me, handle it?]

There was no change in Big's expression. He puffed out another ball of smoke.

[Yeah, it's the area I've kept my eyes on to for a while now. I'm having trouble controlling that particular area.]

Each member of Crimson has a specific role. Be it assassination or sabotage, as long as there is work to be done, they had to report to the one in charge of the area they are operating on. What Big meant was, they wanted to control as well as unify the whole Manhattan area into one. Big wanted to focus more on unification this time.

[Manhattan is a very dangerous area to operate in.]

Big continued explaining. The term "Hard" can be views from many angles.

The "method" to be used to unify would be complicated. Manhattan was considered as one of the United States center pieces, therefore the strongest Guardians, Slipknot and Sonic Youth, had high possibility of appearing.

[... I see. It's a matter of life and death.]

[Yes, but its returns are great. You'll gain the respect of the entire family, earning the trust as well as access to our information networks.]

If that's the case, Neito would know if there is any bigshot residing in the area, some research document being published from a certain college or those underground deals in the area. All those event happening in the area would be at the mercy of Crimson. That would be a great asset to him in the future.

But Neito didn't easily bite. Why was he selected?

[Why… Why would you assign Manhattan to me?]

Neito asked this bluntly.

Anice already knew the reason, and she was giggling in the sidelines.

[I have two reasons. First, because you are competent. As I said before, the two top ranked heroes from the Rocks Organization are protecting Manhattan. They are a headache for my family. I've already heard of you Mr. "Hero Killer".]

I see… no matter how much he looks like a man of character, he's still a villain. Mr. Big was displaying an atrocious smile.

He may be gentle on the outside, but totally different on the inside.

[…Please tell me the other reason.]

As Neito said those words Mr. Big displayed the over-reaction usually done by westerners. The big “Oh No!” expression.

[I don’t think you should ask further boy.]

Hearing that, Neito didn’t inquire further.

He really didn’t care. Either way, he was going to get swallowed by Crimson, and from there, ride his way to the top. He didn’t care if he needed to fight the Rocks Organization, or commanding subordinates on the field. That’s how he moved forward in the past. He’s going to commit himself to rising to the top.

[I understand. Then I’ll proceed alongside with my subordinate Nina. I’ll accept your assignment.]

[Hahaha! You’re so formal! I’m counting on you!]

Big held out his huge hand. Neito stumbled and they shook hands. He had a strong grip and a wide laugh, deserving of a villain.

[By the way, do you have time after today?]

[Eh? Aa-. Yes. A little.]

[Good to hear! How about it? Won’t you come over to my house

for dinner? My wife is no longer with me, but our chef is good. We can have wine and mutton for dinner.]

He was considerate of Neito, or maybe it was how Americans welcomed their guest... either way Neito was suddenly invited to dinner.

[...Haa...]

[Naate♪ come to our house and I'll cook for you! I'm good in cooking lasagna]

Anice was wrapped around his arm. Anice smelled nice as usual and she was soft. She was smiling at him. Meanwhile Big was urging him to say yes.

Neito held by a beautiful girl at the arm and was deeply encourage to say yes by a big shot evil boss. He couldn't refuse now. He had never heard of this lasagna thing, but he had no doubt that it would be really good.

[T-then I'll accept your offer.]

[Good! I'll arrange a car for you later. Anice, can you go home ahead and prepare for our guest?]

Big winked at her daughter with his deep brown eyes. Anice happily complied and went out Big's office.

It happened in an instant.

[I like to speak my intentions as clearly as possible Nate.]

Big's manner of speaking changed. He was as gentle and welcoming as before, but something changed.

[...Real intentions... I'm not really...]

"I'm not lying" is what he wanted to say, but Big continued. Neito felt that the air in the room was getting cold.

[You're aiming to take over Crimson aren't you?]

It was a direct attack. Big glared Neito like a hawk. His aura was amazing. It was like General Raz's and the old man who acted as his interviewer.

His insides were shaking.

[Not at all. I'm not planning on doing that.]

Neito wasn't his weak self anymore. He replied with a smile.

He understood it himself. Big knew what was going on in his heart. Big already saw through him the moment he entered the

room. But in this situation his “refusal” was important.

[Hahaha. If you say so. Pardon me.]

Neito saw Big as a joyful and patient man in his old age.

[Not at all. It was good that we cleared that up, but why did you think so?]

Big closed his eyes after hearing Neito’s question and thought to himself.

[Hmm… You have your records and the hidden intent to kill now… More importantly, you caught my daughter’s attention. That’s it. My daughter has the tendency to pick the odd ones out… it may be due to how I raised her. You are the first one to really entice her in.]

Those were complicated yet weird reasons. Her daughter was attracted to Neito. Big may be a villain heading an evil organization, but he still cared for the well-being of his daughter.

What does this guy think of me then? A competitor aiming for his organization? A bug that’s trying to get his daughter? Or just an arrogant brat?

Neito couldn’t tell from Big’s expression.

Neito thought, it is as you said. I'm after crimson as a whole. If needed, I'll defeat you. But do you understand? There's only you and me in this room. I'm a modified human.

If I felt like it, I could transform and kill you in an instant. I'll sink my claws on that defenseless back of yours.

[……]

Neito's stomach flipped on this thought.

Big turned around holding a glass in his hand, glaring at Neito.

[I see. I got a glimpse of you true nature. I've done a lot of terrible things to arrive at my current position. I'm well prepared. It's not as if I don't want to get killed by a villain, but I wanted to advise you to not kill me.]

[……I'm not planning on killing you.]

[If you killed me here, or anywhere else, what do you think would happen? Unity among family members is a golden rule. You would no doubt, turn the entire Crimson Family against you. You would be easily cornered like a rat and that would be your demise. No matter how strong or evil you are, you won't live through it. Members of the Family aren't that forgiving.]

Big gulped down a glass of Brandy. There was no sign of precaution or guard. It was an ultimate display of his trust on the

company he built.

[I see. Then if I find those bad guys who are after Crimson, I'll tell them exactly that.]

He replied for now,

It was as Big said, if an outsider thought he could take over the top by killing their boss, it would just kick the hornet's nest.

The battle this time wasn't about solely defeating the opponent with power. It took more than that to win.

Neito's stomach turned as he smiled at Big. Slowly, Big's gentleness steadily came back.

[Ah, then we'll leave that conversation as it is. We should get going. It's my first time having a meal with my daughter's boyfriend. I'm looking forward to it. Is there any food you can't eat?]

Big grabbed his coat and hat. He wasn't lying. He was happily welcoming into his home a competitor for his company and her daughter's friend.

He knew that the person was both a friend and a foe yet he had no problems with it.

[Ah, no. There aren't any particular food that I don't like to eat... But is it really okay?]

[Of course! Tell me more about you. I'm sure my daughter would also be delighted.]

Again, Neito didn't really care how it would go. He was thankful for Big's sincerity and he knew Big didn't hate him. He understood how the members of Crimson could swear loyalty to Big.

He was calm and composed. If there were any threats, he would trust his Family to protect him. He cares for his Family and extends his hand if they need help. He was prepared to give up his life for his Family.

He was the pinnacle of the company.

There was only one word which Neito could describe him.

"Big shot".

No wonder he was named "Mr. Big"

[Then I'll take up on your offer. Ah, have you ever drank Shochu? I've brought some from Japan... If you like...]

Neito asked him while he was putting on his jacket.

[Shouchuu? Sounds good! I'll be looking forward to it!]

Big gave him a big thumbs up.

Even with Anice, Neito thought he wouldn't be welcome when he first arrived. All of his worries were for naught.

Neito left Big's office is light spirits.

Mr. Big was completely different from what Neito imagined. He was glad in one way, at the same time sad about it.

Big was a big shot. An enemy he needed to overcome.

Neito needed to defeat America's pride; Sonic Youth, and the executioner in the shadows; Slipknot. In addition, he needed to find a way to overcome or better yet go around Big to have control of Crimson. Both were difficult tasks.

Thinking how hard his battle is going to be, Neito proceeded to the "fun dinner" with Big.

Chapter 45: I Hope He Lets Us Off

After their dinner with Mr. Big and Anice, Neito headed off to the office the following day.

He had a lot to manage today. Blackmailing, spying, smuggling, illegal trading, assassination, murder and many other underground activities. Crimson did a lot of underground business, but at the center of it was Manhattan.

Neito, who was in charge of the Manhattan area, needed to supervise the operations going on the area.

Crimson may not have modified humans, but they have [Over Technology] equipment available for use. With those equipment as their assets, they are able to carry out large scale crime unopposed.

[Niina, bring me the next one.]

[Gotcha.]

Neito, who was on his first week in the office, was reviewing incoming files sent to him.

Neito wasn't really fond of desk work, but the reports coming in are "Will we be able to get away if we did it like this?" the type of reports which he was extremely experienced with. Of course, Niina helped him get through it.

[Umm… up next is about smuggling. It's about sending gunpowder towards England…]

Niina looked over the document, summarized it and told Neito.

[Give them the forces from Upper East side. That area would be fine even without them for a day. Have it shipped in a passenger flight toward London. Just bribe off the staff and if necessary. Make those people who won't cooperate with us "disappear" for a while. Let them say they were in "vacation" as a cover up.]

[On it. I'll send out an order later. Next one is about those [Slash] members sited in Manhattan…]

Capture and interrogate any suspicious individual you lay your hands upon. Once you get their exact location, infiltrate and exterminate them all.]

[Understood.]

Neito wanted the casualties low, but he's not cutting any edges because of that reason. Strike as fast as lightning and strike them down. That's an unchanging tactic taught and used countless times in history.

Neito realized something as he was working in the office.

The difference between Metallica and Crimson is the way they exercise [Control]. Crimson doesn't aim for world domination.

For example, in Okinawa, when Metallica gained control over the island, its influence could be found lingering around. There was nobody who would oppose Metallica on the island. On the other hand, Crimson didn't leave their permanent presence in the area they control. Of course, they are well known and have influence over the shadows, but in the end they are just some underground organization. There were many other underground companies and individuals who opposed the government.

But, it does not mean that Crimson is inferior to Metallica. It is no more than a difference in policy. Having a great influence, Crimson was able to expand their company to great lengths. They may not aim for world domination, but they want to have the entire US under them. It was difficult since the current Rocks Organization, especially their top two Guardians were keeping watch over them.

[On to the next… The judge we tried to bribe last month was too passionate over his sense of justice. We may lose the case if we have… Senpai, I'm getting hungry. Let's go have lunch.]

Looking at his watch, it was already 1 PM. Neito got too absorbed into his work.

[Aah, sorry about that. Let's go.]

They stopped working and headed off to the cafeteria.

[You know what senpai? You sure have adjusted to the new

environment really quickly…]

[… Well, that's not true…]

He wasn't lying. He may have been greeted by his fellow co-workers warmly, but he had other concerns to tend to.

He already had a plan to win over Mr. Big and attain the company, but there was a prerequisite for that. He needed to be recognized by the company internally.

Neito was doing well and succeeded in his field, but Sonic Youth was in his way.

Neito was handling the case for the [Acceptance of the Alloy to be used by Crimson in creating their Armor]

The shipment would come from Asia, and would be received in the port area. The problem began when Sonic Youth strode over the sea intercepting the boat used for smuggling. Sonic Youth managed to bypass the ship's defenses and got on board. Of course, the crew was already prepared for such events so they jammed the alloy on a gyro plane and launched it off. Sonic Youth on the other hand, gave chase to the plane. He used the skyscrapers to scale up and reach the height of the plane. Using a "half pipe jump" maneuver used in extreme sports, he manage to disable the plane. The plane crashed, but there were no casualties.

Neito heard the report, but it must have taken some superhuman

skill to do such thing.

Crimson wasn't frustrated by this case too much. It was because Crimson was already used to losing to the top two Guardians.

[……]

Neito thought to himself. I can't slack off here. I've come this far to achieve the ideal world I want. In order for that to come true…

[Niina, about what you said earlier…]

[Hm? Is it about time for lunch?]

[No, that case with the judge… I'll head out for it.]

Up until now, Neito never had to face the Rocks' American division. He also hadn't gone as a field operative. He thought that he should change that. Of course, he'll be still be calling the strategy and tactics, but there are some things you just won't know unless you head out to the actual site.

[Eh? Really? What are you planning to do?]

[First, I need to get close and blackmail him… Gather up some men for me. You might wanna borrow some weapons too…]

[You're just gonna head out and blackmail him directly? That's scary...]

**

That night, Neito, along with Niina and others from Crimson, was standing on the rooftop of a five storey building.

The strong cold winds gushed them, but it was the beautiful night scenery that awed them.

[It's so beautiful. It is indeed a great view from here.]

They overlooked the bridge which was in the middle of the metropolis. It was as if the jewels were shining before them. Saying such things Neito looked back.

[Don't you agree? Mr. Judge.]

[... Nnn–!! N—nn!!]

The man who was strapped onto a chair was surrounded by men armed with Railguns and Razor Swords. It was indeed a great scene fitting for a person who was about to meet his end.

[Hm? Aah, I see. Ungag him.]

Neito immediately gave out the order. His subordinates removed the mouth gag from the judge.

[...F-Ha!! You bastard! Who are you! Do you think you'll get away with this?]

The judge was still stubborn despite his situation.

His mistake was in being too confident. In this city, if you're going to be a judge, at least assign some bodyguards to protect yourself. Everybody knows your face since you appear on television frequently, if you're going shopping on Park Avenue, anybody there would recognize you... In other words, you're no more than an idiot.

[Me? I'm a bad guy. I know I'll get away with this quite easily.]

Neito answered diligently and laughed it off. Based on experience, Neito knew this would have more psychological effect on his target. Furthermore, he elaborately chose the top of a high rise building for the blackmailing. Having nowhere to run, his victim must be experiencing real fear from within.

[Well then, you have two choices. Cooperate with me, or meet your end.]

For a moment, the judge was taken back, but he then regained his composure.

[I'm a judge! I'll never yield to outside forces! That's what real justice is about!]

Hmm... Neito was touched for a bit... just a little bit.

It was an instant, but you were afraid right? Yet you still held on to your ideals... You're not my enemy.

It may look like Neito had the upper hand, but in reality, he was at a disadvantage. The judge had his value with Crimson, so Neito couldn't carelessly kill him off. It would create problems if people knew Crimson was behind the death of a judge.

[Really? Are you sure about this? I'll really let you experience a painful fate... You should think this over. I. will. do. It. Make sure you won't regret you decision.]

Neito grabbed the judge's hair and carelessly pat it. He released his killing intent from his body.

Of course, Neito was serious. It would be best for the judge if just cooperated. If not, not only would he suffer physically and mentally, but also his family and friend might also get involved.

Neito didn't want to do it, since it would create a negative an image of him. But if necessary, Neito would do it. There was no point threating a person if you're not serious about it.

If Neito were to get serious, there was a huge possibility that the

judge might end up dead or gravely injured.

[……!!]

The judge reacted to him.

[Well then, this is your last chance. Have you made your decision?]

Neito slyly smiled at the judge.

[W-Wait a second…]

Neito won. At least that's what Neito thought. Surrounded by his subordinates, tied up to a chair, and surrounded by Neito's subordinates, Neito thought he had won.

That's when it happened.

[!!]

Neito's subordinates, who were surrounding the judge, suddenly toppled over to the ground in an instant. There wasn't even time to react. It just happened.

[Wha–?!]

Few seconds after Neito confirmed that his subordinates were on the ground, he heard something.

It was a sound of a gun being fired.

It was a thunderous sound. A dry yet strikingly fast vibration. Similar to fireworks but more thunderous.

[W-What happened?!]

[B-Blood is coming out!]

Neito heard the voices of his subordinates on the ground.

What is happening? The gunshot was heard after they got hit. Is it a sniper? That's impossible. Where did it come from? Wha–...

[Senpai!]

Niina called out to him.

That's right, analyzing can come in later.

[Somebody is sniping at us! Get down!]

Neito crouched and immediately gave out the order to his subordinates.

Niina was the fastest to react among his subordinates. Most probably Niina already knew what was happening even before Neito gave out the warning.

Crouching, Niina pointed to a single point with a finger.

[The gunshot came directly from the direction I'm pointing at!]

Somehow, Niina was able to identify the origin of the sound when he heard it. It was better to rule out that the information was true than being sitting ducks. Neito on the other hand, didn't know where exactly the gunshot came from. All he knew that it came from his right side.

[Different from regular bullets, the bullet came in first before the sound. It must be a weapon that can shoot bullets at the speed of sound. From that analysis, he must be one kilometer away from us.]

Those were Niina's words. Listening to the theory, it made sense. There were times when Niina would excel better than Neito. If Neito called Niina about it, he would just remark "It's just common knowledge" or some sort.

[... You're really something huh?]

Neito decided to leave his compliment at that.

Both of them were conversing while taking cover.

[...Thanks, but this is one hell of a situation we're in...]

Niina was worried. It was as Niina had said. Neito didn't have much experience in dealing with situations such as this. They were ill equipped, making their enemy untouchable. They always made the enemy follow their pace, leading to an advantageous fight, but out on the rooftop, that wasn't the case here.

[...Maybe]

It was undoubtedly "him" that was sniping them.

That individual had the ability and resources to obtain information on Crimson's movements. He had the capacity to surprise and the skill to use any weapon fit for the job. In this case a long range rifle which resulted to his subordinates getting shot in their necks.

There was only one guy who can do it in the entire New York City.

Slipknot.

The dark hero that's after Crimson's head.

They kept their heads down, careful not to get within sight of his

barrel. The atmosphere was full of killing intent.

[W-What are we going to do? I hope he lets us off...]

Niina was as carefree as ever, but there are times when he would coward out. In saying so, that should be a natural reaction.

Neito was the same. To be frank, he was scared. Slipknot was responsible for taking the lives of many villains. His next target maybe Neito himself. Thinking about it gave Neito the chills. He didn't know if the next bullet would find him or not. Since they were on an open rooftop, their escape was blocked.

But;

[...I'll crush you here and now... I'll have you regret ever picking a fight with me. Niina, you said it was over in that direction right?]

There was no way he could pull back. He was defeating Slipknot once and for all. I know the reason why you are targeting Crimson, but I have my own reason why I can't back down either.

I'll reach the top and change the world. I see the vision I want for this world. Until I achieve that goal, I can't afford to lose here.

Slipknot, you're in my way. Move aside.

My body is shaking in excitement.

Neito strengthened himself and turned on the “evil switch” inside him.

[I’ll leave this place to you.]

[Eeh?! You’re really going for it? Well, if it’s you senpai, then there’s a chance that you won’t die…]

Listening to Niina’s words, Neito stood up. He can’t fight unless he stood up.

[…Transform.]

Taking a deep breath, he focused on himself. Transform. Surrounding himself to bring about the darkness within him. His body gradually transformed.

A ruthless body and dark wings stretched out wide.

In the midst of a cold and dark night, a demon had appeared.

[Uuoo!!]

Running on the rooftop, Neito jumped from the building. Neito noticed that the building had collapsed a bit.

The night scenery of the metropolis was beaming below him. Cold winds brushing past the evil entity jumping from building to building.

He didn't need to fully stretch and flap his wings. Gliding would cover the distance between buildings easily.

Neito would glide from one building to another, kicking and launching himself from their walls and rooftops.

No doubt people who saw me are terrified was his opinion, but there was no need to worry. People on Broadway or people who are in Times Square wouldn't dare look into the dark skies.

Gliding above avenues and streets, Neito was on his way to fight a Hero.

Slipknot no doubt already noticed him approaching.

But Neito didn't care.

He steeled himself for the battle ahead.

Chapter 46: Go To Hell Baby!

Neito was on the rooftops above New York City.

From time to time, he could he gunshots passing him. The direction was as Niina had told him.

He knows. He's already shifting his focus on me.

Since Neito already transformed, it was possible for him to block the bullets. It would be dangerous if it came to a certain distance, but at their current distance, he had no trouble defending himself.

Neito advanced while trying to block the bullets.

[There you are!]

Neito, who was hanging from a wall, saw him.

He had a muscular body, covered in black leather tights as his costume, he had a gauntlet that looked like a guillotine. (TLN: Yup, you guessed it right! It's Batman... Even his suit is black)

[Slipknot!]

Slipknot was on the roof of a building. The weapon he had, looked like a large sniper rifle with its long barrel, but it didn't look like anything like it.

[A rocket launcher?!]

On top of that, it was the latest model. The model that could destroy armored targets with ease.

It wasn’t something you would use in a cityscape, but Slipknot was shooting without discretion.

He dodged a bullet while flying, barely missing him in the face. The bullet launched went by Neito and exploded as it contacted the building behind him.

Looking behind him, Neito saw that the firepower had been significantly decreased. That didn’t exempt a certain portion of the building from being destroyed. The ruble from the building also started falling down to the streets.

No matter how you look like it, there would be casualties.

[He’s definitely crazy…]

He can’t say for others, but Neito certainly thought so. He looked at Slipknot once more.

On the other hand, Slipknot also saw Neito. It was as if a demon was closing in on him.

Slipknot looked at Neito and raised his middle finger. Afterwards, he made a thumbs down gesture.

“Come at me you bastard. I’ll send you back to hell”

The gesture must’ve meant something like that.

[All full and confident huh?]

Neito maintained his composure and stretched his wings. He calmly navigated towards Slipknot.

When Neito almost landed on the building Slipknot was in, Slipknot started moving.

Running across the building, he pulled out something like a wire and used it to slide downwards the building. Slipknot broke the windows and entered the building.

Neito followed after him and entered the building.

[... Where did he run off to...?]

The floor they were in resembled an office. There were numerous desks in the area and the city lights lighted the room from outside. It wasn’t crowded, but it was very spacious.

There was no lights turned on in the room, but the city lights illuminated dimly. Neito couldn't see now, but given the time, his eyes would adjust automatically.

Looking around the darkness, there was no sign of Slipknot. He knew Slipknot was hiding nearby.

[Hey you! What are you hiding for? You aren't suited for girl hunting are you?]

It was a sudden, but he heard a voice behind him. It was as if Slipknot was mocking him. It was yet sudden and unexpected.

Neito tried to turn around, but a barrel was already pointed at his back.

Bang Bang bang bang!

A rapid fire of bullets came from behind. On top of it he was aiming his machine gun in one specific spot. Neito could tell he was almost at a point blank range. No matter how much Neito transformed, Slipknot's attack was effective.

This guy...! Where did he come from...! Damn it... if this goes on... I can't hold in forever...

[Kugh...! Haaaa!!]

I’m done for if I fall here. Neito gathered himself and turned around. He used his arm to stop the hail of bullets.

[Take this!!]

The room was dark, but it was only a matter of pinpointing where the muzzle flash came from. Neito continued blocking the bullets while swinging his claws at the light source.

[!?]

Slipknot’s texture was weird. Neito didn’t feel any kind of flesh being clawed apart. Instead he felt something wooden.

Nonetheless Neito didn’t doubt where the muzzle flash came from.

[You’re this old and you’re still playing with dolls? I’m getting jealous that you having so much fun]

Neito again heard a voice behind him. He the noticed that the figure he attacked was a mannequin. The mannequin was locked in place with a machine gun strapped to it. Slipknot somehow managed to strap a mannequin with machine gun and position it behind him in a short period of time.

[I love playing doll with heroes, but I’ll do that after I beat you up!]

It was certainly a weird way to fight. Slipknot must be already used to seeing in the dark. Since Neito was huge in size while transformed, he was clearly at a disadvantage.

Neito picked up the desks and computers around him and started throwing them.

It was effective in blocking bullets as well as extending his attack distance. With “Evil Silhouette’s” power, anybody would be seriously injured if they were hit by the projectiles.

But there was no form of resistance coming from Slipknot. He was using some kind of body techniques to dodge Neito’s attacks.

[Hey there, hold on... Why are you so mad? You’re causing trouble to the employees of this office by doing that.]

Neito periodically saw a shadow that evaded his attacks.

[If you stand still, we could finish this in no time.]

If it was a battle in terms of physical power, there was no way Slipknot would be able to stand up against his Evil Silhouette. Neito’s eyes were slowly adjusting to the dark. If he somehow managed to get a glimpse of Slipknot, then it would be all over.

As long as he kept attacking Slipknot, he would be too busy

dodging his attacks. Neito didn't have to worry about a counter-attack.

Just a bit... a little bit more...

After a few seconds passed, he saw him. There was no need to keep throwing projectiles at him. He just needed to step in and use his claws.

[We're done playing tag.]

Neito could now clearly see Slipknot. Slipknot was standing on top of a desk.

[Ok Ok, then what should we play next? Hmm... Let's play catch.]

Slipknot held something spherical and threw it to Neito. Slipknot made a "here" gesture as he threw the object lightly at Neito.

[You should catch it properly.]

Slipknot was as carefree as he was. He touched his belt, which had various equipment inside it and pulled out an object. (TLN: I'm Batman)

[Cool right?]

Slipknot then put on the object he took out. Neito identified it as something like a goggle.

It was only at this moment that Neito understood what the spherical object was.

It was a flash grenade.

The room was enveloped by a bright light and a loud noise. Slipknot may have no killing intent shown, but the attack he did proved to be a critical one. The goggle he took out must be something like an anti-stun grenade equipment.

[...Tsk..!!]

Neito noticed too late. The grenade went off while he tried closing his eyes.

Neito couldn't see anything. He was blinded for a definite period of time. What's worse was, he couldn't hear anything.

He needed to strengthen his defenses until he could regain his posture.

[Shit!!]

But no attack came. That's weird, Evil Silhouette's defense may be strong, but Slipknot could have easily defeated me at this

current state.

Neito noticed something weird again. He body was wet. It must be raining. But we're inside an office so that shouldn't be possible... This must be the sprinklers. I see, the grenade must've triggered the sprinkler systems.

[Water...? Uaaaaaaa!!??]

A sudden shock suddenly enveloped Neito's defensive stance. It needed no effort to rule out what caused it. It was definitely an electric current. (TLN: And now we have a sadistic Batman)

If Slipknot activated it, he must be in a place the water can't reach to him. He most probably used a stun gun or some sort to electrify the water.

Neito's body was twitching from shock. It was an unpleasant attack coming from his enemy. A normal person would've died from that shock, but Neito held out. He could recover himself after one minute. Thanks to him being a modified human, he was able to stand out and recover faster.

But Slipknot was already moving forward with his plans.

[Heyaa!!]

Neito was stunned. In that period, Slipknot lightly pushed Neito's body. Neito fell, but he didn't hit the floor.

He didn’t know where he got it, but Slipknot pushed Neito unto a push car which every modern office has. Neito was carried around like some package while Slipknot was above him taking something out from his chest. He showed Neito a photograph.

[Hey, do you know any of these three in the picture? If give me any information on them, I’ll stop this little Grand Prix of ours. Oh, you can’t speak right? Close your eyes if it’s Yes, or keep them open if it’s No.]

Grand Prix. Neito didn’t know what Slipknot was talking about, but Neito knew the people in the photograph. One was Mr. Big, and the other two were members of Crimson he recently met.

He didn’t understand the situation, but Slipknot wanted information on Crimson’s top brass. He was now more serious than before.

Well now, what should I do…? Neito thought to himself.

I’ll use any means possible and win. That was how Neito always fought. Then it is viable for him to betray his allies.

If Neito were to give Slipknot the information, and somehow he would be still alive, Hid reputation inside Crimson would plummet. His scenario of taking over Crimson would then be over.

Neito didn’t close his eyes.

[Is that so...? Then there's no choice Baby~, we're going on a Grand Prix!]

With Neito's response, Slipknot sighed deeply and went back to his carefree character.

[Erm, the forty eighth Manhattan Office Building Grand Prix is about to start! Who's going to be the winner this year!? The racer are all lining up now! Start!]

Slipknot along with a beast was cruising around in a push car inside an office. Slipknot pushed the car while he was commentating. They were going fast. Neito still couldn't move after the effects of the electric shock.

[Woah! Cool guy and Monster racers just passed through a hairpin curve!]

Neito saw where they were going. They were headed towards the window. Slipknot didn't show any signs of stopping.

Slipknot planned on dropping him out from the window.

With his unmovable state, if he would crash down the building from this height, even with Evil Silhouette, he couldn't survive.

Neito understood at this point that Slipknot was different.

Slipknot was a heterogeneous person.

He was different from the other heroes he fought before.

The varied equipment he pulled out before were prepared beforehand. This was Slipknot's execution grounds. It was as if they were in a comedy movie with serious stunts already planned beforehand.

And this guy's behavior... There is definitely a crowded street below them. Despite that, Slipknot was willing to drop Neito when there could be civilian casualties.

Throughout preparation, guerilla tactics and his intent to kill without mercy, that was Slipknot's strong point.

[Go Go Go! It's a straight line towards the goal!]

Slipknot didn't stop. Pushing the cart while running inside the office, he was chanting energetically. It was as he was a child having fun. That made him scary.

[Hyiiuu~]

Slipknot was still accelerating, and Neito, with his immovable body, crashed outside the window. Neito felt his weight as the impacted the glass.

Slipknot, who was also falling, looked down on Neito and gave a thumbs down.

He remarked;

[Go to hell, Baby~]

His character changed again. His deep tone was now full of hatred and killing intent.

Neito felt it himself. That was the true nature of Slipknot.

He wasn’t as strong as the previous heroes Neito fought, but he was different.

Can he not be defeated by evil? He doesn’t even have any openings. Even If I inflict my methods on him, will they be effective against him?

The demon fell into darkness

Chapter 47: That's No Laughing Matter

Neito continued falling down. If he were to hit the ground at this speed, he would definitely die.

He'd never liked high places. He was about to feint when he fell from the building, but he managed to stay awake. Maybe Anice's date on a roller-coaster helped him pull through.

I can't go down like this... I still have plans to take over Crimson, stand on top of Metallica, change the world and find the answer for Manaka-san's question in his last moments.

Move! Move! C'mon body, Move!

[Open it!]

His body still hadn't recovered from the shock, but he forced himself to open his wings.

But,

[...It's no use...]

Neito couldn't fully lift his wings. Even if he did, his wings were battered from the machine gun fire. He still couldn't glide properly because of the amount of holes in his wings. In other words, it was only dead weight.

Did he anticipate my moves and weaknesses this far? He's one hell of a guy.

He tried to reach for the building walls, but he couldn't reach for it. Is this part of his calculations too? All for me to go to hell...

He recognized Slipknot's capability.

I'm not done yet... don't you underestimate me Slipknot. If there is a thing called hell, I'll end up there, but not today.

I've always gambled my life when fighting, that's how it's always been. A situation like this...

[Haaaaa!]

If his wings served no purpose, he didn't need them. He deliberately grabbed his wings and tore them off.

[Almost there...!]

Neito ripped out his bloodstained wings and stretched it out towards the walls of the building. Though bloodstained and battered, it was [Evil Silhouette's] wings, it wouldn't easily break when rubbed against concrete.

With the sounds of joints breaking, the wings reached the

building walls. A sharp feeling of pain came upon Neito's shoulder.

The wings collided with the concrete, slowing, and stopping his fall.

[Haa... Haa... That was a close call...]

He fell half of the building's height. It took him approximately twenty five floors to break his fall.

Neito sacrificed much to stop his fall. He lost too much blood after ripping his wing off. His right arm was dislocated and fractured. With his last bit of strength, he grabbed on to his wings with his left arm.

It drained him just holding himself up with his left hand. His transformation wouldn't last long, but he managed to survive.

[.....!]

But he wasn't out of the woods yet. On the top of the building, Slipknot was looking at him from a broken window. He closely observed him since he started his fall. Slipknot was determined to see him splatter like a red tomato.

Once he saw Neito hold on, he immediately withdrew from the window.

Slipknot was coming. He was coming to finish him off.

Even at this moment Slipknot must be humming while coming down the stairs or singing along with the elevator music.

[Well this is getting handy…]

Neito's transformation came off. He was now with his normal body. His right arm was still broken and blood gushed out from his back. All in all, he only had his left arm to do with.

For the first time, Neito was afraid of the "justice" coming at him.

**

(TLN: Niina's POV)

[You're kidding me… right? That Senpai got…]

Few minutes after Neito transformed and went after Slipknot, Niina issued orders to use Crimson's "Flying Board". It was a small tool that allowed its rider to fly. Niina used this and went after Neito.

It was the first time Niina rode it, but he imagined that it would be like riding a snow board or surf board. Both of which, Niina was very familiar with.

It didn't have too much speed, and it can only fly for a maximum

of ten minutes. Moving forward, Niina could see Neito through the LED monitor with had a magnification function.

Once Neito started fighting with Slipknot, Niina landed in a nearby building and continued to observe him through the LED monitor.

Slipknot was a mysterious enemy, but I'm sure he will handle it well… or at least, that was what Niina thought.

A tricky battle commenced, and Neito was thrown off the building. It was truly a desperate situation.

[Are you serious…? That easily…]

His legs started shaking. Niina was an employee of Metallica. He experienced many battles before, but he never stood on the front-lines himself. And again, Niina had never been tasked with the big decisions. That was because it was Neito or Tsurugi making the calls. He thought he could live by his speed and footwork in the battlefield alone.

That was why it was his first time experiencing this kind of situation.

What should I do?

Go and help Neito? You've got to be kidding me. What can I do in that situation? There's no way I can match up with a Guardian

coming from the Rocks Organization. Slipknot is busy with Neito now. If I run, no doubt I could easily get away.

On the other hand, if Neito is defeated by Slipknot, the blame wouldn't heavily fall on me. Slipknot is a known vigilante that had put an end to many villains. It may not be much, but I'll manage to live by. But if I try and rescue Neito, there's a huge possibility that I would die.

[...That's right...]

Niina turned his back on Neito who was desperate.

[There's no choice...]

I should just run now.

[Senpai... Se-senp...]

He threw away his pride to preserve his live... But at that moment, Niina's feet stopped moving. He realized what he was saying was very relevant.

Senpai? That's right, he's my [Senpai].

I've called a lot of people "senpai" during college and during clubs, but that's just formalities. Just meaningless formalities.

Niina was a naïve boy. In his studies and in sports, he manage to get the best results without spending too much effort. In other words, he didn't even bother making an effort. That was because he believed he didn't need it.

Why is everybody trying so hard? Niina just randomly does things well. He didn't possess any special ability, but nonetheless, he wasn't lacking any skill. He just barely manages and arrives where he wants to arrive. He never once was passionate in doing something.

He was able to get along with anybody, talking nonsense and getting close.

For Niina, the term "senpai" was just a word used to get close to a person.

That also applied to Neito. Niina heard that he was a real villain, and so he thought he should call him "senpai".

He didn't notice when he had started calling Neito "senpai" when he wasn't around.

He thought "who is this guy?" when he was first assigned to him in Okinawa. To him, Neito looked weak and cowardly at that time, and didn't fit the title of "villain". Despite that, he made the most bizarre decision and rose to the top.

He had the will to do it when it came to do it, but most of the

time, Neito had a weak heart. That was also the same when it came to women. Sometimes, Neito would be too shy towards people.

When Niina did some “regular” work, Neito complimented him on his performance. Neito looked embarrassed in saying it, so Niina decided to put a more effort into it.

Neito managed to achieve incredible feats. That was the result of him risking his life. He must be doing it with all his best. No matter what method, no matter who it is, Niina saw Neito get over it and move forward.

He was no longer doubting that it was due to pure luck that Neito was able to accomplish those achievements. At one moment, Niina thought of copying Tsurugi’s “Understood” as a form of acknowledgement, but he desisted. Getting passionate over something didn’t suit him after-all.

Maybe that’s what made him acknowledge Neito as his “Senpai”.

He may be different than me, but he is impressive in his own way. Thinking about it, Niina never considered somebody to be “impressive” since he was able to do everything effortlessly.

That person is different. To be frank, Neito is just a normal human. He didn’t have the body nor the wit. He may have trained his body since he entered Metallica, but it didn’t amount to much. In terms of capability, Neito couldn’t be compared to Niina. But wow...

I've never seen a person like that. To me he's the one true "senpai" for me.

[……]

Niina stepped on the Flying Board. He could run right now,

[…But…]

Run? Am I going to run? There's no other choice. There's no way a normal human being can match up to a member of the Rocks Organization. More precisely because it's "him".

[No… There is somebody…]

Even without powers, that man never backed down in fighting. It was just his determination as a villain that made him keep going forward.

[I-I…. I!]

I admired that person. That's why I wanted to see how far he could go. It may not be much, but I'll follow him. And I may have noticed this now, but I know that's what I wanted all along.

Me? Run away? That's no laughing matter.

I’m afraid. I don’t want to go, but don’t want to run away either.

Niina only now noticed that he had a frail heart and spirit. In order for me to proceed down the path of villainy…

I, I will…

[I’m the [kouhai] of the man who’s going to change the world…!]

It may be too late, but it I’m going to get serious!

Niina got embarrassed over getting passionate. But it was not that all bad. He laughed at himself.

He started up his Flying Board. Neito was struggling below him. No doubt Slipknot was already coming down to finish off Neito.

I won’t let him do it. But what should I do? Think. Think! It’s impossible for me to defeat Slipknot. Then what? Senpai not dead yet. That person never gives up. I’m sure he’s thinking of a way to survive right now! But what? How can I help him?

Niina revved up, and rapidly accelerated forward. His never thought this hard before. After ten seconds, he made his decision.

Using his radio, he gave orders to the remaining Crimson members. Of course, he didn’t order them to come and help him. There was no way they could traverse the distance in a short span

of time. That's why he ordered them differently.

<Huh...? But that's...>

His subordinates were worried.

[Shut up and do it! Get it done in less than three minutes! Understood?!]

Niina cut the line. He uploaded the data shown on the monitor onto his tablet. On the other hand, he accelerated his Flying Board.

His head was boiling with excitement. There wasn't a time when he was this serious.

**

(TLN: Back to Neito's POV)

[I've lost touch with my shoulder...]

Neito was at his limit. He couldn't last for a few minutes.

Before his body would give up, there was a far more scary being coming after him.

In his fall, he broke the glass windows up and down the floors he was in. From there, Slipknot took a peak at him.

[Hey you, you're really a tough one huh? From this day on, I give you the [Fell from the top floor but got killed by a bullet through the head] award!]

Slipknot pulled out a handgun from his belt. Neito didn't have a hand to defend himself.

But he didn't give up. He didn't want to die.

[Senpai!]

He heard a familiar voice. He looked up and saw Niina riding on a Flying Board. Neito had trouble riding it, but it was no problem for Niina.

Niina didn't shoot at Slipknot. He thought Slipknot would be able to easily avoid it. Slipknot, who had been fighting people with villains who had special powers, probably regarded Niina as a mere fly. Yet, Slipknot was determined to kill Niina for interrupting him.

[... You...?]

[Hm? Who are ya? You part of Crimson? Then I'll kill ya too.]

Slipknot whistled and pointed his gun at Niina.

Neito thought Niina would never come here to die without a

plan... If he has a plan then I need to get into it...

I don't have much time left

[I've been recording senpai's fight using this glass monitor... that include the floor plan of this building!]

Niina's hints were vague. It was the first time Niina himself went to the front-lines. Slipknot raised his gun and shot at Niina. Niina dodged the bullet. Niina may have high reaction time, but one mistake could've end his life. On that moment, Neito knew Niina was willing to risk his life for him.

That few seconds of contact. It was only or a few seconds, but he understood.

It was a plan Neito would think of, given the circumstances. That's right... I've always fought like a real villain. No matter how underhanded it is. I'll do it.

[That's impressive Niina! You understand me well!]

[Well, I'm a genius after all... And I know you are vile when it comes to it senpai!]

With that, Niina ascended upwards.

[... ? What are you guys doing? Is there something fun planned

out? It's unfortunate, but you won't be able to attend the party you're planning.]

Slipknot once again pointed his gun at Neito.

I'm saved… I now have a chance of surviving.

I won't win, but neither will I lose. In the worst case scenario, we'll be both taken out. Even if don't kill Slipknot, I still could erase his existence from this world. If I manage to survive here, I'll have another day to fight him again. I'll just have to find a more [evil] method to deal with him.

Niina should be done with the preparations by now. I'll just have to rely on him now. When push comes to shove, I'll be the one to pull the trigger.

[Hey Slipknot]

Neito managed to pull himself up with his weak left arm. If I were to pass out from my injuries, I would surely die. Slipknot was looking down on him and pointing his gun. Neito didn't stop. He stared onto the [Dark Hero].

[What? Don't stare at me like that… "If I die I'll haunt you"? You're going to become a "Japanese Ghost"? Woaaah soo~ scary ~….]

Neito interrupted.

[You are certainly strong. You don’t fight like a hero, but you are not [Evil].]

Slipknot still didn’t pull the trigger. He was pondering over what Neito said.

I thought we think the same… but I was mistaken. No matter what the sacrifice is, I’ll keep moving forward. Will you still be able to stand in front of my [Evil]?

[… Did you think of something to get out of this mess? How unfortunate… you don’t have much time left.]

[Well, I’d advise you to hear me out for the sake of both of us.]

[……]

Slipknot still hasn’t fire. Slipknot’s intuition from fighting countless villains must’ve kicked in. He knew something was about to happen.

Then I’ll tell you my plan… go and tremble on hearing it.

I’ll teach what real villainy is and how scary it is. I never coward out on something… but will you?

Your real enemy isn’t me.

But my enemies are the ones who stand in my way.

Will you still be able to stand in my way, Slipknot?

Neito tightened his grip.

Under the dark and starry skies. The eye of the beast once again glowed red.

Chapter 48: Hostage? They're Sacrifices

Holding on with his left hand, Neito saw his executioner. He was in a dire situation, but he didn't show any sign of fear.

[You know what... you fired a Rocket Launcher at me a while ago right?]

[Hm? Oh you mean when you were heading here? Yeah, it was unfortunate how I didn't get you then...]

Those shots were dangerous. If I were hit by any one of those, I wouldn't come out in one piece... But it's Slipknot's mistake of not hitting me.

[But you hit the building behind me]

[Yeah, and I feel sorry for the owner of that building]

Slipknot was as always, speaking lightly. In fact he may never even care of the building he damaged.

[It's a new model for dealing with tanks on the battlefield... If fired consecutively, you could've destroyed that entire building... but you didn't...]

[It's a given. I'm a nice guy after all. I'm nice to people other than Crimson.]

The fire power of that launcher had indeed been significantly reduced. He wanted the damage to be minimal. A part of the building may be destroyed, but it wouldn't cause a collapse.

Why did Slipknot want to minimize the damage?

Neito continued.

[If the building came down, the casualties would've been huge. The entire New York City would be in panic... You wanted to avoid that right?]

[So what? What are you trying to say? Can I just kill you now?]

Slipknot once again raised his gun.

This was the perfect moment.

Neito turned towards Niina and signaled something. "Do it". Niina understood and moved.

In the following seconds, a huge sound echoed.

[? !]

Neito knew that I came from the building few blocks from their

location.

[Hahahaha...! You're so half baked! If you're gonna do it, do it properly!]

Slipknot was upset. Neito was laughing fanatically over the sounds of explosion and the building crashing.

[Did you do that? Does that even hold a significance? Or maybe you're just crazy...?]

[Significance? Hmm... You're surprisingly stupid. Hahahaha, you really don't understand?!]

Neito laughed and ridiculed Slipknot. Slipknot on the other hand gave him a cold stare.

[We got a video of you shooting a rocket launcher earlier. And now, my competent subordinate is uploading it to the internet. The title would be "Slipknot vs. the Monster from Crimson" or something.]

[So what...?]

Slipknot's expression changed.

[The article will go like "This night, Slipknot, in order to defeat the monster, uses a rocket launcher." People in Manhattan will

view it that way. “And tonight, buildings in Manhattan mysteriously collapsed. It is presumed that the rocket launcher did this”]

Neito implied that they had only taken down one building, and they could take down more if necessary. He told Slipknot the plain and harsh truth.

[Now, when tomorrow comes, will the people still see you as part of the Rock’s Organization?]

They had real footage of Slipknot firing a rocket launcher. If Slipknot decided to check, he would soon find it on the front pages of the internet.]

[You’ll become the enemy of the state no doubt. You seem like you fight alone, but what about your supply for weapons? Intelligence? Are you confident that you can still operate the same way as usual? Do you think the Rock’s Organization, or ever Sonic Youth would forgive you? Will you still be able to keep fighting after turning the whole world against you? Your objective is to take out Crimson and its top brass right? Will you be able to do it?]

These were facts. Slipknot was only able to do what he wanted because of the approval of the citizens. He may be extreme in his methods, but he knew where to draw the line. There are a lot of things he can do despite if it’s illegal, just because he was called the “Dark Hero”.

Slipknot is fully aware of it. He fights differently from the other

Rock's members? That's not true. He is just smart. He doesn't create enemies and find a situation where he's always at an advantage.

He's like a villain that doesn't choose his methods as long as it gets the job done. Thinking about it, Slipknot and Neito's core essence were the same. The only difference was the scale. Slipknot belonged to the "other side". He tried to prevent casualties, he stopped himself from becoming a villain.

[……]

Neito saw Slipknot gulping. He was thinking hard.

[Hey you… you're really crazy… If that's the case, you're in no better position either.]

It was also a fact. There were a lot of members of Crimson in Manhattan. If they manage to trace Neito, who was part of Crimson, as the mastermind of the bombing, he would no doubt be disposed immediately. There was no way Neito would be pardoned after causing so much damage.

[And what of it? I'm about to be killed by you. You didn't think that I know what's about to happen? I'll die and fall here… I'm really looking forward to tomorrow's papers… The mysterious bombing, a dead member of Crimson and a viral video of Crimson shooting a rocket launcher. In exchange for taking down a monster, you turned the entire Manhattan population against you. I congratulate you.]

[... Do you think it will go like that easily?]

Slipknot had a point. There was a chance that it won't go as planned, but there was also the possibility of it going as planned.

[I don't know. I don't care what's gonna happen afterwards.]

A loud sound echoed again as Neito finished his sentence. The second building was about to go down no doubt.

Slipknot was now in a serious mood. His lighthearted tone was now gone.

Neito thought;

You're no evil being Slipknot, If I decide to defeat you, then you'll be defeated. I don't care who you are... Dark Hero? That's some fancy words for you. You're just following the will of the people, and when you realize that yourself, you're no longer considered as my enemy.

That's the reason you decrease the firepower of that rocket launcher. You wanted to protect your position. You're no more than a hero of justice. You ultimately try to avoid casualties and avoid injuring people. If he didn't do that he wouldn't be called a member of the Rocks Organization. His essence is still justice.

If that's the case, I'll defeat you. I'll bring you down with the power of evil.

No matter how many building I have to bring down, and no matter how many people get hurt, I'll keep moving forward. Even if it results in the whole world hating me… I'll change the world.

He didn't want to end up doing it, but he didn't show it on his face. He looked up into Slipknot, and gave a hysterical smile.

[Even if I die, the explosions won't stop. It's unfortunate that I would die, but hey, I'll see to it that you're erased from the face of the earth Slipknot. I'll be waiting for you in hell after the other members of the Rocks Organization kill you… See ya.]

Neito was still laughing hysterically when released his grip.

[! ! Damn it!!]

He heard Slipknot's frustrated voice. Then he felt his left hand being grabbed. Neito didn't fall to his death.

[……Hmm… What happened to that attitude of yours?]

[……]

Slipknot extended his arm. He pulled Neito up and passed through the broken glass windows.

[I can’t do anything if you held the entire Manhattan area hostage. Will you call off the bombing now?]

Slipknot had already lost the will to fight. He was just sitting back on the floor.

[Hostage? You misunderstood me, they’re sacrifices in order to defeat you.]

Neito slowly stood up. Having his life spared, he declared himself as the winner.

[What? You still want to go at it? Leave it for today… I’m going home and have a nice cold beer.]

Neito approached Slipknot, who was still sitting back and looked down on him.

[Stay down and don’t move. It’s my win today.]

Neito kicked Slipknot in the face, sending him flying.

With sounds of bones breaking, Slipknot landed across the floor.

[(tsk) That hurt!]

[No matter how you looked like it, I'm more hurt that you, you should be happy that I wasn't transformed... you would've died then.]

[Eh? Are you planning to "continue bombing Manhattan" if I resist? So you're gonna kill me while I'm defenseless? That's not a cool thing to do... And if you're going to do that, I have a better idea.]

Neito already thought of it. If he killed Slipknot mercilessly now, he didn't know what Slipknot would do when driven to a corner.

Slipknot may look relaxed now, but deep inside, Neito sensed a feeling of obsession. No doubt it was related to how he fights. Slipknot must've tried to hide it with his light and easy going attitude.

For example, when Slipknot interrogated him, he was willing to sacrifice everything to get towards Mr. Big and his underlings. He may even sacrificed Manhattan to get the information he needed.

Neito knew, Slipknot had an unyielding spirit. He was certain of it after defeating so many heroes.

There was no purpose if Neito killed Slipknot now. He came up with a more "diabolical" plan to bring him down.

[No, I don't plan on doing that... My whole body just hurts all over. That one kick felt like hitting you eight times.]

[Eight hits? You're kidding.]

[Be thankful that I spared your life. Now, let's talk. Of course, you're in no position to refuse.]

Neito made Slipknot stand and seated him on a chair.

[Right now? Why don't we go off at a bar… I'll treat you to a glass of beer or bourbon.]

[I've got no plans on drinking with an arrogant man in a tight suit.]

They conversed for a while. It went as Neito expected it to go. After the important details were discussed, Slipknot said "he wanted to go home because he was going to be late watching his scheduled T.V program]. Neito released him without a fuss.

(It's the building Slipknot just hit with his rocket launcher a few chapters ago)

Chapter 49: ... This Is Really Bad

Few minutes after the battle with Slipknot, Niina came to pick Neito up with his Flying Board.

In the end, they only brought down two buildings. Niina did well in the short amount of time to pick out the buildings that would yield a minimal amount of casualties while taking into account which of New York buildings had fire alarms installed in them.

But in the end, they couldn't completely avoid making casualties. Some people were injured by the blast and the rubble.

Neito was the instigator, but Crimson didn't blame him. He was the first one to survive an encounter with Slipknot, and thus, could provide them with more information. Instead of dropping, His ratings inside the company rose.

He wasn't in the mood to celebrate after hearing the casualty report in his hospital room. But it gave him an idea for his next enemy.

A combat footage of Sonic Youth fighting was running along the monitor in his room.

[...From what I heard, his speed is inhuman... what should we do...]

Sonic Youth was moving so fast that the camera had a hard time

following him. Sonic Youth dodged a barrage of machine gun fire.

Slowing the tape into super slow motion, he could see that Sonic Youth didn't dodge them as a whole, but rather made small movements to dodge every single bullet. It was truly a remarkable display of inhuman reflexes.

A scene where Crimson's signature battle android appeared. A beam of straight light appeared, blowing away the android into pieces. From there Sonic Youth disappeared from the screen.

[Hmm... You're hospitalized so you should rest Nate. Here, have an apple.]

Anice was peeling apples beside his bed and handed a slice to him.

[No, I already recovered enough... and watching a video wouldn't hurt...]

Neito's recovery was fast due to his regenerative powers. The reason why Anice was with him now was probably because she was concerned for him. To be honest, he panicked when Anice started crying when she came for the first time.

[No, here, say 'Ahhn']

Anice was in a good mood, and her smile was bright as usual... but doing that was a bit too much...

[……Thanks, I can do it by myself.]

[Ah… But-]

He grabbed the fork and ate the apple. Anice was dissatisfied.

A knock came on the door and an out-of-place individual came in.

[Hey there Nate, How are you feeling?]

[A! Papa!]

It was Mister Big. He was wearing his regular Double Suit as usual. Anice was delighted to see him.

[Ah, Hell. I'm already fine. Thank you for your concern.]

Neito thanked himself for not doing the "ahhn" thing with Anice. Mr. Big could've walked in on them. The last time they'd seen each other was during the dinner they had at Anice's house. Even then, Mr. Big was hostile towards Neito but now, there was no presence of hostility.

[Do you have something to discuss with me Mr. Big?]

[Not at all, I just came over to convey my greetings.]

Mr. Big stood on top of Crimson. He would have a lot of enemies, and thus he would carefully hide his personal information to avoid being targeted. There was no way Mr. Big would just come casually visiting him for nothing. For him to visit with such big threats, he must need something of great importance from Neito. Maybe he was just genuinely concerned for his future son-in-law.

[Thank you for coming despite your busy schedule.]

Normally, you would doubt the motive of the visit, but Neito disregarded this thought and decided it was a visit out of goodwill.

[Not at all. You're family after all. Do Japanese people eat melons when they are sick?]

Mr. Big brought in a fruit basket. There huge amounts of fruits inside that made Neito glad. Neito thanked him again.

[But I was really surprised. You fought with Slipknot and manage to live through it...]

[Fufu~n♪ Isn't Nate amazing?]

[...Not at all...]

Anice was praising him, but what he didn't wasn't something worth praising for. Neito understood something after fighting

Slipknot.

First, Slipknot would've immediately killed the person hanging on that ledge if it were the final target. Even if it meant that he would sacrifice all of New York City, he would just brush it off as nothing because he had already achieved his goal. That was the only reason he spared Neito. Slipknot knew he needed to survive by all means until he completed his goal.

Despite surviving, Neito suffered heavy losses. It was his first time getting beaten up this much.

In the final moments, He declared that he "won" against him, but it was no more than surviving to fight another day.

On the other hand, among Crimson, surviving Slipknot's attack was regarded as no more than a miracle.

[Not at all... I did let him get away...]

He kept secret that he deliberately let Slipknot escape. People finding out would cause him too much trouble.

Slipknot was a formidable enemy. He managed to survive the fight against him, but Neito doubted he could defeat him if they were to go at it again.

He was only equipped with his evil spirit and his wits... if he were to use his tactics on Slipknot, he doubted it would work against

him.

[... In honesty, the fight against the Rocks Organization over here is really fierce.]

In addition to Slipknot, “he” also exists. Neito looked into the monitor.

[You’re really modest... Oh, a footage of Sonic Youth eh?]

Mr. Big took a seat beside his bed and shifted his attention to the TV monitor.

[Yes, he is quite formidable. His speed can match up, no, exceed Dylan’s]

[I see. If you say so, then it must be true... How about it? What’s the probability of you winning against him?]

Mr. Big was trying to break it down lightly.

[……I don’t know. I’ll have to try him out myself...]

Neito voiced out his honest opinion. He thought about it a lot, but defeating Sonic Youth was really difficult.

The first idea he thought of was assassination. But then realized

that this was futile.

If they were to shoot a bullet from a distance, Sonic Youth's "Over sense" could easily detect the change of airflow of the bullet, easily moving and avoiding it.

Even so, it was impossible to catch him off guard even if it is a casual day for him.

Even if they were blow up a bomb when he is in the middle of an interview, they would likely fail because he could smell and detect the components of the bomb easily.

If he started wearing his "Sonic Roller Blades" there was no way to catch up to him.

[Is that so... Well, you don't need to force yourself. First you'll need to fully recover. Well, I'm going now. Ah please enjoy the melon.]

Neito called out to Mr. Big as he stood up.

[Ah, excuse me Mr. Big... Can I ask a question?]

[Do you have any idea who this Slipknot is?]

When Slipknot held him at gunpoint, he showed a picture of Crimson's top brass which could eventually lead to Mr. Big. There

must be a link to why he wanted to kill Mr. Big.

[Well, I don't know. I know what you are implying. He's been digging information about me after all. But, there are countless people who bear a grudge on me because of the things my company did.]

He determined that Mr. Big wasn't lying.

He did say "I've done horrible things to people… if anybody were to come after my head, I wouldn't complain if I got killed" he must be sincere.

[Is that so… Pardon me for asking that question. Thank you for the melon, I'll happily have it.]

Neito let Anice go home with her dad. Thanking Mr. Big, he ate the melon and thought to himself. I'm the same as Mr. Big… I don't know how many people bear a grudge on me, but I'm sure one of these days, someone will come after my life… If that someone is on par with Slipknot, I don't know if I could live through…

**

While Neito was recovering, Niina covered for him in the office. He was receiving lots of cases which he had to process.

[Ahh, I'm so tired…]

He took a deep breath and thought to himself.

It's the first time Senpai has been beaten that badly... And we still have to deal with Sonic Youth... This might be tricky...

[Well, Senpai will find a way...]

They managed to get through in the battle with Slipknot. Sonic youth might be strong, but there is always a way to defeat him. Niina might not look like it, but he was an optimist. He didn't mind too much about the minor negative details.

Beetle and Ramone were B class. Neito barely managed to defeat them. Slipknot and the Maroon Five were 'A' class, and he somehow managed to defeat them. Niina knew that Neito just survived to fight another day.

That means Senpai's rank is equivalent to 'A' class in the Rocks Organization... Slipknot and Sonic Youth are also rank 'A's... I think they can they stand equal with each other.

[Aahh, it'll work out somehow.]

He then received a call. It was labeled as "Urgent". He picked up the phone and answered.

[This is deputy in charge of the Manhattan area, Niina speaking.

Is something the matter?]

The topic was a peculiar one.

[...Eh? Really? Are you serious? Eh? It's on national news? Uwah, then I understand... Please submit a report to me then]

Niina hurriedly turned on the television. If the information was correct, it was a bad thing for them.

The television was playing a soap drama. Niina changed the channel and checked the news.

< This is the current situation on ground >

The news just came on and were showing the headlines.

-Slipknot fights together with Sonic Youth –

< Just around noon, the criminal group, "Rooster" robbed a bank bringing with them a genetically created monster. The incident was solved in less than three minutes. The one who responded first were Sonic Youth, and for the first time, Slipknot who thought to only operate at night and target only Crimson members, appeared and brought a resolution to the situation. >

On the screen, it showed Sonic Youth circling around the monster in high speeds, while Slipknot was providing cover fire

with his large rifle. They fight was fast, precise and deadly in the hands of a master marksman and a speed demon. With confronted with two ‘A’ ranked Rocks Guardians, the monster went down in a flash.

Niina knew that Rooster was a huge criminal organization that were nitpicking on minor crimes. The monster they brought with them was equal to the modified humans Metallica had.

They brought down such monster in a few minutes. Their strength was terrifying.

The video only showed Sonic Youth’s after image and a glimpse of Slipknot firing at the back.

[What does this mean…?]

Niina was crushed. There were many times when Rock’s Guardians would help out each other, and Sonic Youth was no exemption. People already know who he was, but Slipknot was different. Nobody knew who he is and he just operated behind the shadow. Then why?

< We have no definite captured image of Slipknot, but it can’t be denied that the top two Guardians’ strength is overwhelming. >

That was definitely true. Maroon Five was composed of C class heroes combined into one, but the one they showed were two individuals with the rank of ‘A’ class. Their individual powers

were just too much.

The current Evil Silhouette was no powerful modified being. The only reason it seemed strong was because Neito knew how to utilize its powers. The Evil Silhouette can no more than be a modified version of the monster shown in the television. There was a huge chance Neito could be brought down that easily.

[... This is really bad.]

Niina hurriedly picked up his phone and contacted Neito.

[Senpai! Did you see the news just now?]

[Yeah... This is one huge setback for us.]

[This is really bad... we were already having trouble dealing with them each... now that they've paired up...]

[Calm down. This may just be a fluke, they may have been simply close to the location when the incident happened.]

Neito was being hopeful. There must be a reason why Slipknot did this.

Niina again, thought to himself. Did Slipknot stop acting independently? Could it be that realized he couldn't defeat Senpai, so he's now pairing up with other Guardians? Will that be common

now?

This was a probable question.

[Slipknot is still suspected on the destruction of the building, he may just want to create a good image of himself. On the other hand, he may have a different objective. He may look like a blockhead, but he's doing it for a purpose. Well, Crimson didn't receive any casualties, and we don't know what he'll do next... All we can do is wait and observe.]

Neito was answering in a worried voice. But it was true that they could only wait for more information.

[... 'derstood Senpai...]

He ended the call.

A few days passed.

Neito hopes were not answered. On the following days, Slipknot started working with Sonic Youth in every incident.

In regards to this change, the citizens were both shocked and divided.

He was no more than a no powered hero, yet he stood equal to Sonic Youth. They already know that he doesn't hesitate as long he

gets what he wants, no matter what the method is, and for that they criticized him. Could they have been both affiliated with one another? Some were saying it was a good thing since they were now working together.

There were times when they would enter the battle simultaneously. And there were rumors about Slipknot sharing his information network with Sonic Youth, and they would both deal with the crime.

In the end, the crime rate in New York City went down, and the number of cases solved by the police skyrocketed.

The Manhattan area now was the very threat to Crimson. They instances of crime lowered, and the top brass, as well as Mr. Big disappeared.

The company was being cornered by Slipknot, and Niina, as well as Neito couldn't do anything about it.

It could be said that Slipknot's change of tactic had bounded Crimson to its knees.

Niina, changed his lifestyle, and lived in fear of the day Slipknot would come for his head.

Chapter 50: It's Going To Be Okay, Anice

The cooperation between the top two Guardians and the sudden disappearance of Mr. Big had a huge effect on the company. Since then there were no activities and operation popping out from within. Though some tried, they would just be ultimately stooped by Sonic Youth and Slipknot.

There was just simply too much difference in strength between the two guardians and the current members of Crimson. The way they deal with incidents was far faster and efficient than before.

Until now, Sonic Youth always responded to incidents after they happen. Now, with Slipknot's intelligence network, he was able to be at that location before any major incident that could happen.

The same goes for Slipknot. For some unknown reason, he was able to intercept and foil the plans of Crimson even before they started.

These incidents kept happening regularly that it was now a huge risk for Crimson to carry out plans.

With such situations occurring, Neito had to be discharged from the hospital earlier than scheduled. With Mr. Big's disappearance, the whole executive staff members decided to hold a meeting. Neito was no exemption from this. The topic would be how to deal with their current situation.

Other than Mr. Big, there were thirteen other executive staff

members. They had no particular ranking in regards to their importance, but they were currently incomplete. Some of the members were taken out. Out of the thirteen, the remaining ten members were gathering on the top of the main office.

The meeting started with concerns and complains, but they soon settled down to discuss the main topic. They were now proposing one after the other on how to deal with the current situation, of which, one idea got shot down after the other. Without Mr. Big they were merely a group that had ideas, but no action.

[Now, why did that bastard in black tights act that way?]

[Could Mr. Big already have fallen into their hands?]

Neito stared into the room with distant eyes.

An idea came forward:

[Why don’t we pullout of New York temporarily?]

But it was rejected. Neito also couldn’t agree. It was simply a notion that they’d surrender. If the general staff found out about it, there was a chance that an internal turmoil could break the company apart. It would be known that Crimson was afraid of the two guardians and they couldn’t keep their territory under control.

Also New York was an area they needed to hold on the most.

Then a proposal came up:

[We should just find a way for them to stop cooperating. Looking at their past, is there any way to break them apart?]

This was the most sensible thing to do, but is it really possible? Most off the general public already had a bad image of Slipknot. Finding out more and releasing to the public would be futile and just a waste of time. Sonic Youth on the other hand was already well known in public. There were no particular resentments towards him, and they could say that the public had huge respect for him.

Furthermore, since both of them were exchanging information, they would have a hard time finding the information that would damage them both.

[Then we should prioritize finding Mr. Big. This is a time when we need a strong leader. And if ever Mr. Big was taken out, it's our duty as part of the family to avenge him!]

It was a probable cause, but it was very insignificant. Every subordinate was already looking for Mr. Big through their own means. Even Neito was asked to search for him in the area he was in charge with (Manhattan).

The same goes for revenge. While the family might want to do it, it lies on the factor of gain and loss. It might be different in Metallica, but there was no point in asking "What if we don't find

Mr. Big?”

Neito crossed his arms, and further observed the meeting.

Everybody already knows what needs to be done... why isn’t anybody bringing it up? Are they afraid of taking responsibility for the idea? Or do they think that they can’t do it?

Before his eyes were the top brass of Crimson engaging in a hot headed discussion. It felt funny to him that they took too much time to reach an agreement.

Although there was the option of waiting a few more hours for a conclusion, Neito did not intend on waiting.

Neito stood up.

All eyes in the room were now looking at him. The discussion stopped, and the room was filled in silence.

Having confirmed that he got everybody’s attention, he continued.

[We have to defeat them. We need to defeat the two of them by our own powers.]

Neito said it frankly. It was their best course of action. If they were to withdraw and show weakness here, Crimson would no

doubt be exterminated. If the two guardians were involved in Mr. Big's disappearance, then everything would be cleared up once they defeat them.

Neito received comments from the executive staff:

[That may be so, but do you know how?]

[It won't be easy… After all, you may have come from Japan and defeated several guardians there, but you proved to be ineffective when you fought with Slipknot…]

[We understand… Why don't we form a plan Nate?]

Every member had different opinions. Some urged that fighting them was not even an option.

It wasn't a case where they just need to hit them both with Crimson's full force. Theoretically, they could gather all the members of Crimson and fight them both, but there were other "missions" to be done other than dealing with the two guardians.

Considering their position, it would be disadvantageous for Crimson to be the one to attack first. They knew nothing of Slipknot, while Sonic Youth, more specifically Mark Gordon, was considered a national asset. There were always measures ensured to protect him.

[I have an idea… If we were to plan and create a huge incident,

they surely would appear.]

Neito further explained his plan. The room was silent.

[That may be so, but how do you plan on dealing with them?]

[It's for the best that I take command for the situation on site. I'm a modified human, and I have the most experience fighting against the Rock's guardians.]

[Do you plan on dying? You're already part of the Family. We can't let a new member of the Family sacrifice himself for us.]

Everybody nodded at that notion.

I see... so this is the secret weapon Mr. Big nurtured... Neito sighed in relief.

The chances of him succeeding were very low, even if he failed, there were no consequence to the other executive members. On the other hand, if he managed to succeed, it could catapult his career forward. Even taking over the company would be possible for him then. In other words, it was a worthwhile gamble.

But the remaining members didn't agree with him plan. It was because he was part of [The Family]. Neito was thankful for the concern, but it was a time when they needed to act.

[I thank you from the bottom of my heart. But it's not all total defeat. Will you let me take responsibility for this mission? Mr. Big called me [Hero Killer]... Furthermore, I come from Metallica, this is my way of repaying the trust the Crimson family has given to me. It's my duty as part of the family.]

The room was silent. They very well couldn't oppose to the hot blooded speech Neito had.

The executive's expression changed. They now saw him as their hope, a person they could truly trust.

Once person spoke out:

[Even if you say that...]

He wanted to continue, but Neito stared at him directly in the eye.

[I will definitely win.]

Neito said those word in a firm voice. This should come natural... Now that Mr. Big is out, it's time to show my initiative...

Those words also came from the bottom of his heart. He wanted them to believe in him. Believe that he could win. It was to a point where an aura of reassurance surrounded him. Neito, with his experience, assured the entire room.

With Neito's notion, nobody further opposed him. With that the meeting ended.

※※

From that day on, Neito was preparing himself for the fateful day. The day they would execute their plans was scheduled tomorrow.

Neito had been given a pent-house, few blocks away from the office. Neito was walking back alone when he looked up and noticed something.

[Snow...huh?]

He was wondering why it had been cold lately. The slow falling snow fell on the busy streets of Manhattan.

It was cold, but Neito was perfectly fine with it. He tightened his black coat and continued walking.

A person was standing at the entrance of his building. Wearing a cotton hat and a bright red coat, it was a girl he knew for more than three years.

[... Anice?]

Noticing him, she came towards him.

[Hey there Nate… Welcome back]

[Were you waiting for me? It must’ve been cold.]

[Yeah… just a bit…]

Anice shyly laughed. Her nose and cheeks were bright red. She probably waited for more than “a bit”.

[You seem down.]

[Ahahaha… You’re right. I’m sorry Nate.]

She was a completely different person today.

It had been a few days since Mr. Big disappeared, but she was still energetic and cheerful. But now, she was all depressed. She was that person that would naturally give off a good vibe to cheer you up anymore.

She still tried to stay positive. No doubt she’s crying at home, all alone. Neito couldn’t do anything to help her.

He thought he had no right to help her, but soon realized that it was because he was weak, he can’t do anything.

[I heard about it… you're going to fight tomorrow…]

[Yeah…]

Neito answered honestly. He didn't want to hide it from her anymore. At least for now.

[You can't! I don't want you to go… Even Nate is leaving me…]

Anice's voice was trembling. It was like a knot tightening in his chest.

[…]

After thinking about it, he hugged Anice. They weren't in the right place to do it, but it was the only thing he could do to comfort her. His shoulders were all shaky since he wasn't used to doing such a thing.

[It's going to be okay Anice.]

He didn't want to be taken out despite working for evil? That's bullshit. He treaded through countless obstacles. Anice was always by his side, brightly and energetically cheering him on. Maybe she was acting that way because of the terrifying situation… but He knew she was purely concerned for his well-being as a person of the opposite sex.

No matter how thoroughbred she was, no matter how educated she is, she had a part of her that liked a villain. She was still a girl, losing someone dear to her would definitely hurt.

While the Rocks Organization is making their move, Mr. Big was missing. She didn't know if her father was safe, this only added to her worries.

That's why… at least I could answer her this…

[I'll never disappear from you.]

I've defeated various enemies thus far… All for the purpose of changing the world. Now, there's one more reason to win this fight.

Neito hugged Anice tightly, warming up her cold skin.

Her voice was trembling while her tears fell.

[… T-… That's a promise? (Sniff)]

[Ah… your face is drenched…]

He thought of giving her the handkerchief in his pocket, but he remembered that it had been in his coat pocket for three days now. Instead, he grabbed a packet of pocket tissue.

[Uu~. Thanks.]

She blew her nose on the tissue.

[... Ehehe... Sorry... I don't look good at all now...]

Looking up, her expression was a little bit brighter than before.

[Aah, no, I don't mind at all.]

[Do you remember what I said when we went to that amusement park back in Japan Nate?]

She had a mellow expression, reminiscing the past.

[... Yeah]

[I really get excited when I look at you. How far will you go? What kind of world will you make? Those are just some of the questions I ask myself when I'm with you... That's why, I want to stay by your side, no matter how evil you might become.]

In the spur of that moment, she held his hand. Neito was becoming nervous and agitated.

[I love my Papa... but I love you in a different way.]

Anice took a step forward, approaching Neito, and kissed him.

Under the falling white snow, Neito was unable to respond to this sudden turn of events.

[A-Anice…?]

Neito stumble on his words since he wasn’t used to dealing with this kind of situation.

[Ehehehe♪ Yay♪ I did it with Nate]

[… Ah….]

[Hmmm♪ Hey look Nate! The snow is falling so thick, we could make snowmen out of it!]

Anice was dancing around while the snow was falling. She was very embarrassed, so she tried to covering it with words and constant movement.

Neito couldn’t move or speak. He was reminiscing the soft after taste on his lips.

Seeing him in that state Anice held out a finger and spoke in her usual heavenly-soft voice.

[I’m feeling much better now! Thanks Nate! I’m going home, so you better go in too… I forbid you from catching a cold! ‘Kay? Good luck tomorrow!]

[Ah… I’ll walk you home…]

[I’m fine. You should go home and rest!]

Without having the chance to spew out another word, Anice turned and ran away from him.

[…….Hm?]

Neito, who was now alone, started thinking to himself again.

What I’m about to do may be considered the most evil thing I may do… And I don’t like it myself. Even if that’s the case, I still need to do it.

I can no longer turn back.

Neito spent a sleepless night only thinking about what he was going to do. For him, it was the first time he experienced such a thing.

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(Author's Notes)

I forgot to mention this, but I decided to write a short spin-off chapter with each hero that came out as the main protagonist. They won't be present here in the web novel, but it's cool to showcase each hero's powers in overcoming various obstacles and enemies.

{The Silver Knight: Dylan}

{The Automated Super-Human: Harrison ▪Beetle}

{The Spirit Manipulator: Ramone}

{The Psychic Group: Maroon Five}

I really like books involving heroes.

After the main story is finish I may submit an entry in regards to what I mentioned above. I hope you readers also look forward to it.

Chapter 51: I'm Going To Erase Both Of You From The Face Of The Earth

< I have something to tell you after today's mission is over >

Finishing up his message, he sent it to Anice via mobile. He reached for the small built-in fridge inside the limo and took out a water bottle. He took a sip and calmed himself down. He was about to commit a crime.

He decided that the plan to draw out the top two members of the Rocks Organization would be a bank robbery.

Normally, Crimson would never commit a petty act of robbery in their own territory. Not only would their business get affected, but the money they stole would have a depreciated value on the international market, making the robbery not worthwhile.

But today, his objective wasn't to steal the money. It's for him to create a situation where he could face off against the two heroes. The only way to draw them both out at the same time was to commit a large scale crime where they were absolutely needed to stop the perpetrators.

The members of his team were Niina, Him and a few other of his subordinates from Crimson in charge of the Manhattan area. The other members under him were tasked off to sealing the island of Manhattan to prevent any further interruption from response teams.

This still worried him. What if he were to be gravely injured in the fight and can't go on? What would happen to Niina and his subordinates? This kept him thinking.

Having a lot of experience in fighting, He knew that things rarely go according to plan.

[Senpai... do you think we'll be okay today...?]

They were now moving towards their designated position when Niina asked him. Of course, He already explained his plan to Niina multiple times.

[... Hm? Are you worried about the robbery? Well, since it's Crimson we're talking about, they should have no problem considering their strength.]

The plan was simple: Survey the area, send in the robbery team, steal the money and then get out. If the cops come, silence them. Considering Crimson has [Over Technology] and Neito at their side, silencing the police should be fairly easy.

[Ah, no, the robbery part is a piece of cake. I'm asking you if you're going to be okay when you fight against those two.]

He barely defeated Slipknot the last time, and now, he also had to face Sonic Youth at the same time. Niina was also worried himself.

[I really don't know... and are you going to be okay with it? Risking your life and all?]

Niina was his subordinate. He didn't include him in his in his plan. He knew both heroes would be dangerous enough to go against.

[Risking my life... huh? Aren't we always doing that? Well, if things go bad, I'll immediately run anyway.]

[That's so like you... then I'll be counting on you to do that]

They both laughed at each other.

This guy grown so much...

[We're about to arrive at our destination. Shall we?]

['Derstood senpai]

A few minutes after the plan started, Neito and his subordinates gained total control over the bank on the southern district of Manhattan. They carried the cash and the gold bars into an armored truck accompanied by a huge trailer truck and a couple of motor bikes and exited away.

He already accounted beforehand that the Guardians would block their way with barricades, but because of his other subordinates,

only a few Guardians stood in their way. They still posed a significant threat

But,

[Do it]

He didn’t care. They didn’t come anything close to what was about to come to them.

With a swift order from him, they blew away the barricade with a bazooka and crashed through it at full speed. The barricade and the Guardian’s transport vehicles were all blown away.

In the middle of the Crimson convoy was the Limousine Neito was on. He didn’t budge from his seat ever since the operation started. Amidst the explosions and destruction, He focused on his task and continued relaying orders to his subordinates.

“Destroy everything in our way. If you don’t want to get hurt, get out of our way.”

Their vehicles never slowed down. They always maintained top speed, crashing everything in their way. They left a wake of destruction and flames in their path to those who dared stop them.

[.. Uwhaa-. Wow. This like that old Hollywood movie I once saw. If I remember right, car chases were still very popular back in the 2050s. This is crazy.]

Niina wasn’t even bothered with the amount of destruction they brought down to the city. He still focused his eyes on the monitor, checking enemy positions and relaying it to Neito.

[Hmm, crazy? We need to do something like this or we won’t draw them both out you know?]

They exited the Manhattan area and headed for the Washington Bridge. The bridge wasn’t left unguarded either. They had established a blockade to stop them.

They still didn’t posed a threat to them.

That’s right, only a hero could stop them.

Suddenly,

The lead trailer truck topple sideways. A loud noise followed a shockwave from the top of the bridge.

[?! W-what happened!?]

His subordinates were panicking.

The trailer truck was toppled sideways on the bridge, blocking the convoy’s path. The armored car carrying the package stopped in its tracks.

Upon inspection, they found out that the front mirror of the trailer truck was shot by a large caliber rifle, hitting the driver in the shoulder. Of course, the glass pane was bullet proof but the glass was shot in the same place multiple times, breaking and piercing through it.

(TLN: Bullet proof glass can stop bullets as long as they don't hit the same place with the same angle more the once.)

Furthermore, something came out of the Hudson River, surfing on top of the water surface, and jumped unto the bridge. It took the driver and threw him out into the river.

Of course, they had the option to blow up the lead trailer truck, but they didn't. The whole purpose of the ploy was to be used as bait to lure the two heroes.

There was nobody else capable of having the accuracy to pierce through the bullet proof glass with such precision and knock the driver out of the fight so easily.

[……They're here huh? Here we go Niina.]

[Aye Sir.]

Neito stood up and exited the limo. It would be suicide to remain within the limo and try to fight both of them off.

He gathered his subordinates and gave them orders.

[Each of you will take up arms and position yourselves on a barricade to slow down the enemy. Don't forget to stay alert.]

Each member of under him left their vehicles and assumed defensive positions.

Neito looked at the toppled truck. A figure was visible standing on top of it. There was only one man capable of jumping that height from the Hudson River to the Bridge.

America's strongest figure and the fastest man alive.

[He looks formidable no matter how you look at it. I see, he's the figurehead of the Rock's Organization huh? No wonder he looks so cool.]

The man looked like he had an aura with him as the sun set behind him.

On the other hand, the other hero was nowhere to be found. No doubt he has taken up position somewhere in the vicinity.

[Well, I can't blame him. It's his specialty after all. Well, I guess I'll deal with this sonic bastard first]

Neito started walking toward the hero his subordinates were

aiming at.

No doubt he noticed him approaching.

He was wearing goggles along with his Speed Skaters. Their eyes met, the hero looking down unto the villain.

[Yo, we just stole a huge amount of cash from the bank... Would you be so kind to move out of our way?].Neito displayed a sense of calmness and a sense humor as he talked to the hero.

The hero now replied to him. [The people of this city have their dreams and freedom. I won't allow you to trample over it. If you won't cooperate with me, I'll have to take you in myself]. It was a clear and strong voice. A voice of a man full of confidence and the justice he represented.

His eye protector was fitted for Motor-Cross bikers and Extreme-sports players. It had a bright blue color. Beneath his helmet was his blonde hair. He had a muscular body and on his feet were Mechanical Roller Shoes.

Everybody in America knew this hero.

The fastest known man named Sonic Youth stood before him.

[Hmph, then I'll be defeating you then "Sonic Youth"!]

The wind was strong. Neito's suit and tie fluttered over the wind.

He took his tie off and folded him into his pocket as he stared down at Sonic Youth.

[... Transform]

His body transformed in an instant. A black substance enveloped his whole body.

Neito sprang forth from his spot and charged at Sonic Youth. At the same time, under Niina's command, Crimson members started shooting at Sonic Youth.

[Here I come!!!]

But,

[!? What!?]

He felt a strong gust of wind and he disappeared. Sonic Youth vanished from the world.

That's not possible. He was there a second ago...

A second later, Neito felt a blow hit his shoulder.

[Catch me if you can]

A roller blade was struck on his shoulder. He didn't see it coming. A moment ago, he was on top the trailer truck and now, it looked like he teleported above his shoulder.

[Impossible!]

He was fast. Faster than expected. Neito felt the cold steel on his shoulder. In a panic, he tried to hit him with his claws but to no avail.

Sonic Youth kicked off from Neito's shoulder and rushed towards Niina.

[Wha–!? Why you...!]

[Sonic Youth!!]

[This is bad! This is really bad!]

His subordinated were panicking. I can't blame them

[Calm down! Everybody, shift to the right and start surrounding him!]

Niina gave a precise order. Now they surrounded Sonic Youth

with him in the center of the circle. There was a chance of friendly fire occurring if they shot now, but it didn't matter to Sonic Youth.

[It's futile...!]

Using his speed, Sonic Youth could have easily dodged every bullet shot at him.

[Bullets are ineffective against me.]

His Roller blades revved up. For him it was but an easy task to dodge bullets.

[Put down your weapons or you'll taste the coldness of the Hudson River.]

[... Damn...]

His subordinates were just staring Sonic Youth down. The next moment, things took for the worst turn.

[Wha-! W-Where is he shooting from!?]

One after the other, his subordinates got taken down. They were getting sniped. It was the other A-class hero, Slipknot's fault.

It was easy for Neito who had transformed to locate him using

the muzzle flash.

[You bastard… Since when have you been there!?]

Looking up, Slipknot was on top of the Washington Bridge with his tight black suit sniping them.

[Hm? I was here since Sonic-kun coolly appeared. Is there a problem?]

Neito wanted to yell at him for making fun of the situation. As they were talking, Slipknot pulled out multiple grenade like objects from his bag.

[This is Slipknot's special throw– here!]

There was quite a distance between him and the convoy, but he made an accurate throw that landed the grenades near the vehicles. The vehicles exploded and some of his subordinates and vehicles got thrown over into the Hudson River.

[Yes! Strike-Out!!]

The dark hero made the situation even worse. He took out their mobility in one go. Many of his subordinates were injured, and some were thrown off into the river.

[… Bring it on… I'll kill you first then.]

Neito spread his wings and made a flight towards the top of the bridge, rapidly approaching Slipknot.

He was a few meters before hitting Slipknot when he raised his claws. No doubt his subordinates thought he was going to hit him but,

[I won’t let you do that!]

[!?]

This voice… How did he get here? Weren’t you down below a few moments ago?

Sonic Youth suddenly appeared by his right side.

Sonic Youth’s blue knuckle guard suddenly appeared and hit him head on. Multiplied by the kinetic energy gained from his speed, Neito got blown away.

Sonic Youth appeared meters in the air and attacked Neito. It was as if he teleported to him.

Neito rapidly shot through the bridge. A loud shockwave followed him as he hit the concrete.

Neito ran out of air as he hit the ground.

[...Gahaa-!!]

[Fuu-That was really scary. It's a godsend that you're here Sonic. Thanks Buddy! Uwa, bad people are really scary! He tried to kill me you know? That would be really bad if it happened hahaha]

[Don't let your guard down Slipknot. And stop attacking senselessly. They may be villains by they are entitled to the same rights as people of this country. They have the right to be equally judged under a court of jurisdiction... wait, maybe that man may cooperate now.]

Sonic Youth surfed the guardrail of the bridge and came after Neito.

Neito sustained internal damage from the blow. He couldn't stand and needed time to recover. He took this moment to analyze their situation.

The situation is at a critical moment. No doubt that's what his subordinates thought. There are two heroes that nobody could lay their hands upon, and the regarded evil modified genius is at this state.

A trailer truck blocks the front, while the burning vehicles are blocking out our escape from behind. We can't expect any help from Crimson at this stage. The only one that stood a chance against them was him. The others may think that the reason they surrounded them was to trap them, but He knew otherwise.

It was something he planned all along. There was no way Crimson would bring out their full power into a plan so screwed up. If they manage to win, then it would be regarded as a miracle. “The probability of winning is so slim… So let us do it”. That was the plan.

But they lost. It was all over.

No doubt that’s what they were thinking.

[Are you okay senpai?]

Niina came and helped him up. As he was being pulled up, he answered back

[Yeah, no problem here.]

It was all according to plan. He surveyed the area around him.

The bridge was already engulfed in flame and smoke. It was a hellish scene. The sun was already setting. No doubt the situation was going to get worse. A helicopter was already circling above them. No doubt it was the mass media. Both ends of the bridge were already blocked by the Guardians as well as the mass media. The reason why the other Guardians didn’t interfere with them was because they feared Crimson, as well as they put their faith into the two heroes sent to stop them.

Manhattan, no, the whole United States must be watching us now. Everybody wants to see the super heroes beat the evil doers. From end to end, every television channel must be focused on us now.

Everything was done to create this situation. The bank robbery as well as the flashy car chase was all for this. The helicopter flew above them and circled in.

How about it? It is as Niina said... It's like we're shooting a movie in the Washington Bridge.

"Crimson lost. The top brass disappeared, and among the remaining members, they tried to do a desperate move only to be stopped by the Rock's Organization."

No doubt that's what the media is going to write against us.

The heroes were standing up top on the bridge, staring down at the villains. That scene caught on the camera must look cool to the viewers.

That's why everything is good.

This is the best setting I could get. This is the best time to unveil the [Evil] I've been plotting. This was way ahead of schedule but I'm almost done with the preparations. I just have to hang on for a little bit more.

[Niina, proceed as planned. Escape alongside everybody that's left. I doubt you'll die if you jump into the river.]

If they manage to get away from the bridge no doubt Crimson people would pick them up and give them medical attention since they're most likely to be disguised as medics.

[U-Understood... will you be okay by yourself Senpai?]

[Yeah. I'll be okay on my own. From this point on, it's better if I'm alone.]

[If... you want me to hold civilians as hostages like last time, I doubt I will succeed this time...]

Niina is smart. Although that option is not totally out of the box, the possibility of success was just slim.

Unlike before, all the attention was drawn unto them. The Guardians were there and easily assured the civilians. And unlike before, there was nothing that could threaten Slipknot now.

And if they manage to succeed, it was a matter of them dealing with the one holding the civilian hostage.

No, it can't end that simply. It can end with them just admitting defeat.

[No, I'll attain everything in this fight. Defeating both heroes and taking over Crimson too.]

And being labeled as the ultimate villain. In return, I have to sacrifice something of equal value.

No doubt I could see that bright face again...

But even that...

[Hurry up and go, Niina.]

I'm moving forward. In order to change the world. To change the scene I saw on [The right side] of my apartment.

I'll go as low as I can, to no man has ever been.

Even though there are few people that wished for this change, I don't care. It's because I choose to change the world that I'm doing this.

Neito grit his teeth and stood up.

[... Understood... Then senpai... if you don't die, I'll treat you to a drink for once...!]

Niina then jumped over the bridge with his remaining

subordinates, after dressing themselves as medics. Small water transports were already prepared beforehand so they should have no trouble getting away.

[Manaka-san... your last words... perhaps you wanted to something like this]

Neito used his shaking knee to get up while mumbling to himself.

[“Show me the real meaning of the word [Evil]” huh? I’ll find out myself soon.]

Neito looked up to the two heroes.

[What will you do? If you’re going to surrender, then I’ll take you in myself and guarantee your safety. Any more fighting is futile.]

Sonic Youth’s words were hard and true. It felt like he was making a sincere offer. If it was the Neito ten years ago, he would’ve asked for a signature, but now it was different.

Neito stared at the figure of justice standing before him.

[Surrender? Don’t kid yourself. I’m going to erase both of you from the face of the earth. Aah, unlike before, I’ll erase you before I surrender. You better be prepared.]

Chapter 52: Its 385,204 Incidents

(TLN: Sonic Youth's POV... Almost all "he" mentioned refers to Sonic Youth)

Sonic Youth was a hero.

Everybody in America knew this. His real name, Mark Gordon took pride in this. His alter self, Sonic Youth was tasked to protect the dreams of the people with his strength. He knew it was his duty to do so.

America is the land of freedom. The spirit to achieve success is called "The American Dream". He took this words into a literal sense, making it into his personal pride.

When he was young, his family was never fortunate, but he didn't give up. He stood up amidst the situation and grabbed his dream. He rose higher and higher, dreaming of it and never giving up.

In following years he was the MVP of American Football, the Top Gun of the Air-Force and he became an Astronaut.

It wasn't for him to be praised, nor did he want to be better than everybody else. He simply liked football, liked to pilot a plane and he wanted to see space with his own eyes.

He showed the world that dreams can come true.

After that, was it by chance or fate, he attained the inhuman ability, Over Sense.

With all of his dreams achieved, and with new powers, He thought to himself “This must be fate”.

He achieved his dreams in the land of freedom and thought highly of it. Now he has powers.

For what purpose?

For sure, it was to protect other people’s dreams. Mark understood it that way. Everybody has the right to pursue their dreams. Nobody has the right to take it away. Whether it was criminals or underground organizations, he vowed to fight them off.

It was for Manhattan, no, New York or yet, for America’s people.

He persuaded himself so. That’s why he can’t lose here.

[... Don’t bother. I fight to protect people’s dreams, I won’t lose]

Mark, no, Sonic Youth was standing on top of the guard-railings amidst fire and smoke, looking down at his enemy.

He heard from his partner lately, that Crimson had someone

from Metallica, a Japanese man who was a modified human, sent to assist them. This must be that man.

[Hey now Sonic, he insists this much... can we just kill him right here and now?]

Slipknot, who came down and was now beside him, mocked and took lightly of the situation.

He didn't like this part of him.

[Slipknot, you and I are different. I fight to protect the people.]

He fought with him on multiple occasions, and he (Slipknot) supplied information on Crimson activities, but he never figured out what drove him (Slipknot) to do such things.

Slipknot fought "to kill" people. Whether it's for revenge, or self-satisfaction, he was obsessed with taking down Crimson's top boss, Mr. Big and the top brass.

Because of his principles, nobody wanted to cooperate with him.

But soon he realized his mistakes. Sonic Youth's condition for them to pair up was to withdraw his rights to decide what should be done to the criminal.

Since he agreed to that condition, they both worked together. He

even agreed to hand over the criminal captured to the Guardians.

Perhaps Slipknot's objective, Mr. Big, was the ultimate objective and each Crimson member killed brings him closer to his goal. That's why he thought Slipknot was competing against himself.

If they paired up, he knew their strength would be absolute, and that was the truth.

Criminals and even Crimson were steadily taken down by both of them.

He knew they would eventually find the missing Mr. Big and his top Brass. Slipknot kept believing that and abandoned his former principles.

[You won't kill him? I'm okay with that decision but... Sonic, it's him you know? The guy that held the whole city hostage, blowing up high-rise buildings and all. If I remember right, he was called Nate]

[What?!]

Sonic Youth again looked at the man from Crimson, Nate.

[... So, what of it Slipknot?] (By Neito)

Nate's face didn't express anything. He didn't feel anything. It

looked like that to Sonic Youth.

Nate continued.

[Sonic Youth, you said you won't lose because you'll protect everybody's dreams? Ha, how noble of you. You can't defeat me. Not because "I won't lose" but because I will win. It's definite. I'll do anything to win. No matter who gets sacrificed or what gets destroyed, I'll attain what I want. That's how I've always been.]

He was showing off an impressive killing intent. Directly and indirectly, Sonic Youth's Over Sense sensed danger from the man before him. He knew he (Neito) wasn't faking it.

But he (Neito) wasn't afraid. On the other hand, it raised his fighting spirits. He knew it was going to be a tough fight.

He couldn't forgive this man. He tried to steal the people's dreams.

Evil. Enemy.

[You-!]

He jumped off from the guard rail and landed in front of Nate.

The wind was blowing and the smoke also got blown away.

[You… Do you know how many crimes you have committed?!]

Sonic Youth declared it in front of him. His heart was burning and yearned for justice. His aura was enough for average villains to contemplate their crimes and cower before him.

[It’s 385,204 incidents.]

Nate didn’t cower before him. His expression was still cold as ice.

[Wha-?]

[Didn’t you hear me? You don’t need to dig it up during trial. The total incidents I committed are 385,204. Both directly and indirectly.]

Sonic Youth didn’t understand him. Nate answer was a huge amount. Did he count each crime he committed? Did he take those crimes to heart? Is there a villain that would do such a thing?

This is no ordinary man. I can’t lower my guard against him.

Sonic Youth took up his battle stance once again.

**

(TLN: Back to Neito’s POV)

Maybe I spoke too much

Speaking to Sonic Youth directly, a little bit of him melted off.

He counted them. He counted the amount of crimes he committed and remembered them.

He wasn’t asking to be forgiven. He counted them to remind himself to carry those sins he committed on his shoulders as he moved on. That’s right, it was for self-assurance. Those who got hurt (killed), and things that got destroyed, they won’t come back. But he’ll never forget them.

Those feelings weren’t supposed to be shown to the enemy. He reflected on his actions.

[But I never thought of it that M-uch!]

In the next moment, he used his claws and slashed upward. His claws were powerful enough to cut through steel.

[Too slow!!]

But it didn’t hit Sonic Youth. Leaving his after image, he disappeared. Looking up, he was doing a summersault flip and landed behind him.

[Che-you're one fast bastard...!]

[Take this-!]

Neito turned around and assumed a defensive stance.

It was close, but he managed to block him off. He blocked his accelerated spin hook with both of his arms. Sonic Youth used the force from the kick to gain distance.

They both stared down each other.

[... I see... I can't do it half-heartedly huh...]

Zing

Fast. What speed is this? I can't hit him at this speed!

Sonic Youth was using his Over-Sense to focus on him. His posture, movements and focus were perfect. His dodge rate was almost at a hundred percent.

[He's close to being invincible]

No matter how he looked at it, it felt so.

Sniping and long range attacks would weaken the bullet's

firepower and because of Over-Sense, he could detect it early on.

But then, close range attacks were also impossible. When Mark Gordon was assigned to a VIP, his security was perfect that nobody could get close to them.

And whenever he fought, he could read the expressions of his enemies and know what they were thinking even before they acted. In that case, he was invincible. His body may be like a normal person's and still vulnerable to mortal wounds, but with his speed, he was untouchable.

It was impossible to kill him from afar. It was impossible to get near him. And with his Over-Sense focused into a single point, he was unbeatable.

He is close. Close to be being invincible.

[...That's right only "Close to", but not Invincible!!]

Neito took a breath and charged at Sonic Youth.

[It's futile. You can never catch up to me!]

Sonic Youth activated his Roller Blades. With a quick jump and a spin, he dodged Neito's attack.

[Take this-!]

He still dodged. Even with consecutive attacks, he dodged every single strike. With perfect technique and his frightening speed, his attacks never touched him. It was like he was only hitting his after image.

But this after-image also struck back.

[Ha-!!]

While dodging Neito's attacks, Sonic Youth immediately did a spin-hook.

It was so sudden that Neito couldn't block it. He took the blow and got blown off.

With his speed as his focal point, Sonic Youth displayed a huge advantage over him.

He couldn't hit him, but Sonic Youth could easily get a blow over him. It was a one sided battle.

At the same time, Slipknot was sniping him from the guard-rails. With his superb accuracy and timing in-between blows, he landed every shot at Neito. Of course, Neito could do nothing but receive the shots.

[... Not... Yet...]

Neito tried to stand and fight, but the blows kept coming at him.

[You should stop. You're all beaten up.]

He was already knocked down multiple times, but he still stood back up. Sonic Youth pointed a finger at him to stay down.

[... I won't stop.]

Neito stood back up. He'll fight to death. His trap will be set off at the most critical moment. There was no other way to win but that.

[You're stubborn... Then I won't hold back!]

Sonic Youth's saw butt hit Neito's head. Paired with the speed and the kinetic energy stored, this brought Neito to his knees. No doubt everybody looking at them via television were cheering at this moment.

(TLN: Saw-Butt – I think that's a part of a roller blade)

But all was good for Neito. The reason he fights is for himself. He was fighting for the world he wanted to create.

That's why he wasn't bothered with other people's opinion of him.

[... Come! You can't stop me unless you kill me-!]

Neito stood back up again. His body was screaming all over, but he ignored it.

[A-ah, you look so pitiful now... Sonic, I'll get serious too.]

Looking down at Neito, Slipknot pulled out a different weapon than his rifle.

He pulled out a rocket launcher.

[Yahooo-!!]

Slipknot fired a rocket.

Neito grit his teeth and tried dodging it.

Explosion and thick smoke eloped the bridge. Slipknot probably reduced the fire power so the bridge won't get destroyed but it still was powerful.

[Hey Hey Hey-!]

Slipknot was now throwing grenades. This also caused explosions and thick smoke.

Paired with the burning vehicles, rocket launcher and grenades, the Washington Bridge was now covered in thick black smoke. No doubt people from afar can no longer see what was going on inside the smoke.

[... Is this it huh...?]

Neito managed to avoid the blasts but still sustained splash damage.

He couldn't stand back up. It was over for him. He can't fight any more.

Looking at the defeated figure, the two heroes approached him.

[It's your lost.]

[You did well, but how unfortunate. You were so close-!]

Both heroes were unhurt. They casually looked down on Neito.

[... Yeah, It's my loss.]

Neito's transformation wore off. Even in his human form, he was all beaten up.

[Sonic Youth, go ahead and capture me. I'll face trial as you suggested.]

Neito didn't have the strength to attack. He couldn't move. That's what Sonic Youth must have thought.

[... Good.]

Sonic Youth slowly walked towards Neito. He was still on his guard. Even if Neito did a surprise attack, he knew it would be useless. But he still was cautious.

[Being defeated by heroes... doesn't sound too bad after-all]

Neito didn't move. Sonic Youth gave his gear to Slipknot and approached Neito.

Amidst the fire and flames, the hero captures the villain.

This was the moment

Bang!

The sound echoed.

It was a gun shot.

[... Wha-? Slipknot, what are you–!]

Thud

The sound echoed again.

It was the sound of Sonic Youth falling.

Slipknot shot Sonic Youth from behind at a close range.

Aiming at the weak spot of his protector (or armor), it was a fatal wound.

Neito laughed at the hero who fell to the ground.

[It’s unfortunate Sonic Youth...]

[...W-w...why...!?]

Crawling on the ground, Sonic Youth still didn’t grasp what had happen to him.

Even with Over-Sense, Sonic Youth was still human. Unlike Ramone or Dylan, he didn’t do any enhancements to his body. A bullet alone was enough to gravely injure him.

[Didn’t I tell you? I’ll use any method just to win.]

Normally, you can't kill him at long distances. Nor get close to him either. And during battle, with his Over-Sense, he can dodge every attack thrown at him.

That's why this was the only way to defeat him.

A strike outside of battle where he isn't fully cautious of. Hiding the killing intent before the strike, and as fast as possible, pull the trigger accurately on the weak spot.

The only person capable of doing that was Slipknot himself.

Ever since they met at the high-rise building, Neito already decided to use Slipknot to defeat Sonic Youth. After the battle with him, he planned this whole thing with Slipknot.

[... My bad Sonic. I'm with this guy. No matter what it takes, I'll achieve my objective.]

Slipknot then continued firing bullet after bullet into Sonic Youth. The man known as Sonic Youth was now dead.

The man who made his dream come true, the man who vowed to protect everybody's dream, was now dead.

[See ya, Sonic Youth. You were really amazing, I hope heaven exists for you. No doubt you'll be sent there.]

Neito whispered to himself.

Sonic Youth was a strong man. He represented America's heroes and was very commendable.

His actions were worthy of an award but,

Neito thought, not everybody can be as strong as you. Chasing after your dream is an amazing thing, but not everybody can do it. The world was built that way. That's why I... I'm going to destroy such world.

[Now then Metallica bastard, spill it out. Where is Mr. Big's safe house? You better not say "Don't kill him" or some kind of joke will you?]

Slipknot pointed the gun at Neito.

[No, go ahead and kill him. This is his location. Well, if I died and you didn't follow as you were instructed, Mr. Big would've been released by now. If he escape, you won't find any other chance to kill Mr. Big will you?]

Neito pulled out a memory stick which had Mr. Big's location and threw it to Slipknot.

He defeated Sonic Youth. But the fight for control over Crimson

was now starting. This would be his greatest betrayal yet.

[Uwa-... You're so merciless. Ok Ok. As long as I get to kill my target then I'm good.]

[Is that so? Then you should change and get it over with before the smoke clears.]

The rocket launcher shot at Neito wasn't a shot to kill him. Slipknot suppressed its power and substituted it with a substance that would cause smoke. The exploded vehicles were also pre-planned by Slipknot. In short, everything was staged and calculated by Slipknot.

With the burning vehicles and the thick smoke, you can't see anything of the bridge from outside.

What they needed to do what interchange Slipknot and Sonic Youth.

The man formerly known as Slipknot will wear the Protector (or armor) and Sonic Rollers.

The dead man formerly known as Sonic Youth will wear the Black Tights.

Desecrating a hero's dead body was no good business. That's why they also needed to do it with the cover of the smoke.

Slipknot was smiling as he wore Sonic Youth's costume.

[Hey you, can you still use the Sonic Rollers?]

[Hmm-. I can't use it freely like Sonic-kun, but it should be fairly possible to skate out and disappear in this.]

They finished interchanging. The smoke was already about to clear, exposing the current scene.

Neito transformed and grabbing Sonic Youth dressed as Slipknot by the face, he raised it up.

He then walked to the edge of the bridge.

Look at me Manhattan! Look at me America! Crimson! Behold this sight!

I defeated Slipknot with my hands. Sonic Youth is about to escape!

Behold the sight of a man who abandoned his ally amidst danger!

Helping the man who tried to kill his woman's father!

I defeated all the heroes in America, taking away hope from

everybody!

All in the name of Evil!

I will obtain Crimson and stand on top of Metallica!

I will rule everything and destroy the world!

No one can stop me!

**

That day, every citizen fixed their eyes on the battle of Washington Bridge, where two heroes collided with the forces of Crimson. They saw the battle live and was shocked by the final scene.

A rough battle occurred amidst fire and smoke. As the smoke cleared, a demon was holding Slipknot's body up high, and the famed Sonic Youth ran for his life.

It was an utterly despairing sight. Any human that looked at that scene could say nothing more.

Chapter 53: Will still go down that path?

Confirming that the TV cameras got a clear picture of Mark Gordon dressed as Slipknot, He threw the body into the Hudson River.

He undid his transformation and opened a communication line.

[Niina, are you in the submarine now? I've thrown Mark Gordon's body in the river. Recover it immediately. Don't forget to put the corpse on a preservation capsule.]

< 'Derstood Senpai. But, as expected of you Senpai. I was shocked when I saw that scene. No matter how you looked at it, you were the bona fide devil. >

Niina quickly responded to his orders. There was still a purpose to be served for Mark's dead body. They needed to freeze it before it starts decomposing. Niina easily solved this problem by reacting quickly and recovering the body.

[I see, so that's what you're planning.]

Slipknot, who was in Sonic Youth's armor talked lightly of their procedure.

[Yeah, that's how it is. If you're done, get moving. Don't you get captured by Crimson now]

[Are you kidding me? You already told me the weak-spots of Crimson's entrapment. There's no way they can catch me.]

Neito already tasked his men to surround the area near the bridge in case something happened. But with his information, Slipknot should be able to pass through easily.

[Well, off I go then. Bye-]

Activating the Sonic Rollers, he began his escape. He can't do fancy maneuvers like the real Sonic Youth, but running in a straight line should pose no problems.

After seeing that Slipknot left, Neito once again opened a line to communicate.

[Sonic Youth escaped... Sorry, but I can't go after him with the injuries I sustained from the battle with Slipknot. We already have him surrounded, capture him at all cost!]

With that order, every subordinate under him started moving.

He already knew what would happen. They can never catch "Sonic Youth". Slipknot was already aware of the route where security was its weakest. And it was Slipknot inside that "Sonic Youth", if anybody got in his way, they'll surely be killed.

[... It's my win...]

He jumped into the river, making a successful escape.

“The foreigner from Metallica, Komori Neito, had prevented Crimson from self-destruction. Waging his life in the battle between the top two heroes of the Rocks Organization, Slipknot and Sonic Youth, he managed to defeat the hero “Slipknot” with the latter escaping for his life. With confusion, the remaining Guardians that surrounded the bridge, let him escape with no effort.”

No doubt that’s what the media (or the people) would write about in the future.

With the help of Niina, he managed to escape safely into allied territory. After that, he was rushed to the hospital to receive treatment and went home. It was a critical moment for Crimson, but since he already did enough, he wasn’t added in the plan to capture “Sonic Youth”.

Returning to his penthouse, he waited for news on the entrapment operation. Soon, everything will be settled.

He sat down on his sofa, folded his arms and stared blankly into space.

The rain was pouring outside, beating against his windows.

An hour passed until he got a report.

There was no need to know the contents of the message. He already predicted “Sonic Youth got away” even beforehand.

No problems occurred. This is good. At this moment, “Sonic Youth”, no Slipknot should be heading towards Mr. Big’s location.

He couldn’t bring himself to sleep. And he wasn’t in the mood to celebrate just yet. He was just sitting on the sofa, staring blankly into space.

Time passed and he still couldn’t sleep. His body was beaten all over, but he wasn’t in the mood to go and sleep on his bed.

That moment,

He received a call. It wasn’t just a regular call. It was connected to his direct line, a line only a single person had access to.

[… It’s here huh?]

There was nobody else who had access to this line except Slipknot.

Neito picked up and answered the call.

[… Yes?]

No doubt he was there to report on the completion of his task. That's what he thought, but the caller wasn't him.

[Hey there Nate! It has been a long time!]

[... ! Mr... Big!?]

His caller was the founder of Crimson and Anice's father. The person he wanted killed. It was really a long time since they spoke. The last time they spoke to each other was when Mr. Big visited him after the battle with Slipknot.

Neito reminisced that past.

**

[I'm sorry Mr. Big, but you're going to have to come with me.]

Neito started his plans when Mr. Big visited him the second time.

He had already prepared beforehand. That night after the battle, He got in contact with Slipknot. Slipknot's objective was the top brass and Mr. Big of Crimson. If that was the case, there was an agreement to be made between them.

{Hey Slipknot, you're having a hard time killing Mr. Big by yourself. Am I right?}

Mr. Big always prepared himself and took precaution to avoid being sniped from a long distance. The reason why Slipknot kept killing Crimson personnel was to get information and set up ahead before Mr. Big sets up his own preventive measures.

{I'll help you assassinate him. I'll kidnap him and tell you his location after everything is done.}

Mr. Big didn't leave anything to chance. He might know that Neito wanted to take over the company but not enough to kill him with his own hands. He might be a modified human, but he risked too much if he killed him himself. In a few hours, Crimson would be chasing after him.

{These are my conditions for our trade. I will kidnap Mr. Big and let him be killed by you. You will start cooperating with Sonic Youth and find the right moment to kill him. Of course you'll act first, after I confirmed it with my own eyes, I'll start moving too.}

Putting it simply, anybody that kills Mr. Big is going to have the whole Crimson Organization after his head. If Neito did it, it would be as Mr. Big predicted. He'll die like a bug being squashed.

Then the solution was simple. Frame it someone other than yourself.

{You won't have any demerits from this, nor do I have any reason to lie to you. You know that yourself.}

Their objectives aligned so they decided to work together.

As He heard on the news that Slipknot started working together with Sonic Youth, He made his move on Mr. Big on his next visit.

He removed the bothersome personnel and “made them disappeared” (referring to the Top Brass always with Mr. Big). It was his own fault for visiting him without any escorts.

“You’re coming with me”, as he said those words, Mr. Big asked him a few questions.

[What if… I said “No”?]

[… Then I’ll be using force, if it comes to it.]

Both of them were talking silently on the hospital’s corridors. It was like they were plotting something mischievous.

{I see. Then you are saying that you have found a way to dispose of me without making an enemy of Crimson, and enable you to take over my company? Is that right?}

{Yes… this isn’t like you to be caught off guard Mr. Big.}

To Mr. Big, he thought Neito was in no condition to fight and bring him down. But with his exceptionally high decision making

skill, he determined otherwise.

{Caught off guard? No, if you were such a capable person, there's nothing I can do about it. That's all there is.}

{... What do you mean? Does that mean you gave up on fighting back?}

Mr. Big moved his head left and right.

{No, I told you before, I've done some horrible things in my life. I was already prepared for something like this to happen. If there was somebody who would bring me down, it's for the best that you are the one to do it.}

Neito didn't understand him.

{Why? Then are you saying that you already anticipated that I would do something like this?]

{If you go down the current path you are on, you'll understand soon enough. No, I hope that day never comes for you.}

And like that, Mr. Big was kidnapped by Neito.

**

That Mr. Big was now about to be executed by Slipknot in his safe house. That someone, had made a call to him.

Neito faltered at this unexpected call.

Mr. Big was talking light-heartedly as he usually does.

[Yes, I've made a requested to Slipknot. I'm currently asking a favor from him. Yes, I found out who he is... It turns out he was someone I knew from a long time ago... There's nothing I can do if he kills me. But he was willing to listen to my last request. Aah, he's here pointing a gun at me.]

Mr. Big was about to die. There was nothing that could prevent this. Neito was mystified because there was no trace of fear in his voice. His voice was philosophical in his last moments.

[Nate, I have to say my thanks to you. The safe house you prepared for me was perfect. The cigars and sake were all good. I'm thankful for your hospitality.]

Giving out his thanks in his current situation, no normal person could do such thing. Neito's hands that held the communication device started sweating.

[... Are you not afraid of dying?]

He unconsciously asked him. He regretted asking. He had no right to listen to his answer.

[Not at all. I am afraid of dying. Of course, I don't bear a grudge against you. But... let me see, I'm just tired of being evil, you see?]

Hearing Mr. Big's shaky voice, he didn't contemplate his decision to kill him. He was just sad for such a thing was needed to happen.

[I don't regret my actions that led me to this situation. I was already prepared beforehand.]

[... I'm also prepared.]

They were the same. Their resolve was absolute.

[Are you familiar with the words "Those who lost are always evil" Nate?]

He knew those words all too well. It was used to describe the nature of evil.

Neito replied,

[Yes... but also in the same way, "The winner is always right"]

If "the winner is always right", then "the loser is always evil" would be an indirect implication...

[Hahaha-Don't kid yourself, you don't believe in those words no more than I do.]

Mr. Big laughed off Neito's notion but it was still as he said, the winner is always "right" and represented justice, while the losing side will be branded as "wrong" and deemed evil. That may have been the truth, but to Neito, justice and evil were two different things. Evil is evil, whether you win or lose. What's deemed as evil, will be branded as evil in its most basic form.

[I'm sorry, let's get back to topic. Evil always falls. I think that is the truth, looking at my situation, don't you agree?]

Mr. Big's words were undeniable. If you lose, you're branded evil, if you win, you are branded right and represent justice. In that higher form of thoughts, Mr. Big implied such things.

[... What do you mean?]

[It's simple, evil, will never be recognized by the world. That's why the path you're going down is treacherous and uncertain. Be it justice or another stronger force of evil, you'll be defeated just like me right now. Those who wish to redeem themselves and go after you will do it in the name of "justice".]

Mr. Big's words were heavy. Neito related with the words so much that it hurt. "A treacherous and uncertain path", he knew it all too well. He felt the weight of those words on his shoulders.

Mr. Big has been a villain for a far longer period of time than Neito, no doubt his words rang true.

Conquerors from the past that are recorded on textbooks are different. On those times, the sense of value was different from the modern age. Their cause was justified because they did it for the people, for their country. They were never branded “Evil” for their hideous actions.

Among the conquerors of the past, even in the name of justice, nobody was able to conquer the whole world even if they branded themselves “right”. How much more if the individual was evil?

[... I understand.]

Neito stood up from the sofa and strengthen his resolve.

[Listen to me Nate, the path you are on, even famous personages from the past, never reached the end of it. No matter how much they tried, they still couldn’t achieve what they wanted.]

Neito finally understood what Mr. Big was trying to tell him. After his many years being a villain, this was what he noticed and learned from his experiences.

He was trying to pass on the lesson he learned to the man who defeated him.

Don’t cry. I can’t cry. I can’t shed a tear for him.

[Will you still go down that path?]

Mr. Big wasn't just implying on how Neito fought his battles. He was talking about his will to change the world and the world he was going to create.

All the things he said was for him to ask this question.

Neito tried to suppress the various feelings coming out from him. Time passed by silently, and Mr. Big was waiting for Neito's reply.

It was as Mr. Big said, he slowly realized what he going up against. The he was on was an impregnable path.

He always ran down this path. Ran since the beginning. Destroying many things and injuring many people, he kept running down that path.

He already knew his answer. There was no way he would falter right now.

[Yes, I won't lose. I'll go down this path until the end.]

Neito answered strongly and as firm as possible.

Mr. Big gave out a small laugh. Somewhere in his voice, there was a sense of satisfaction from hearing his answer.

Without any hesitation, he asked,

[Fu-I see. If I get defeated (killed) here then there's nothing I can do about it. Aah, I have a final request of you...]

Suppressing his emotions, Neito replied,

[Anything that's within my power.]

[Will you keep it a secret from Anice that you defeated (killed) me?]

It was an unusual request.

[But that would...]

After committing such crime against her, there was no way he could accept her feelings from now on. He planned on telling Anice that he killed her father after the battle.

[I'll leave my daughter in your hands. You have your own goals, and maybe you already have someone you like, if that's the case then I'll bear a grudge on you, but I want to save my cute daughter from the pain of knowing her first love was the man that killed her father. That's all there is. You should bear her pain on your shoulders, am I right?]

Mr. Big was still mischievous on his words, but the content of his request was heavy.

He already knew this himself. The reason why he wanted to confess his crime to Anice was because he wanted to redeem and assure himself. Losing her father and having her heart broken by the man she loved, thinking about her feelings, Mr. Big's words were right. He needed to bear his sins on his shoulders rather than confessing and getting over it.

[I understand... until the time comes when she is ready to hear the truth, I will keep it a secret.]

Hearing Neito's words, Mr. Big laughed again.

[Thank you Nate. Then this is it.]

This was their last conversation. Neito replied with a smile and a shaky voice.

[Yes. The melon... was really good. Thank you. Very much.]

Before the call ended, he heard the sound of Sonic Rollers revving up and the sound of a gunshot. After that, the call ended.

It's over.

It was all over.

That man was dead.

Putting down his communication device, Neito went out into the balcony. It was still raining, that's why he went out.

Out in the pouring rain, Neito stood there getting wet. His head, his face and his body were all wet.

If anybody saw him right now they won't notice.

That's why he was there, just standing amidst the rain.

**

The next day, Mr. Big, Crimson's Boss' body was found. There was a wound on his neck, and it was identified that the Sonic Rollers caused it.

There was nobody else they could blame it on.

Sonic Youth was missing ever since the fight on the Washington Bridge ended. It was ruled out that Sonic Youth found Mr. Big and killed him. As a result it was a war between Crimson and Slipknot (dressed as Sonic Youth).

**

In the end, Crimson ruled out that it was the top two heroes from the Rocks Organization that confined Mr. Big.

After Mr. Big's funeral, his executives were in a state of distress. Of course, this was obvious since their charismatic boss passed away. With their failure of capturing Sonic Youth, each executive blamed each other for the situation they were in. The Organization was falling apart.

The underground society also didn't stay quiet. With the top underground organization weakened, each organization stared moving to attack and take away Crimson's territory. The executive staff were at a lost to what to do to save their crumbling organization. There was just nobody from the executives that could lead them.

Amidst that confusion, a man stood out. Bearing the scars of his battle yesterday alongside with his spectacular victory, he scolded the executive staff.

The man proclaimed unto Crimson.

"We must take revenge. That's the rule of the family.

Mr. Big left his will onto me and I will answer to it.

Are you okay with it? Are you going to be an Organization that keeps quiet after your Boss got killed? You'll lose your position in

the underground society.

Stand and fight. Stand up and fight. There is no one else left to protect Mr. Big's legacy but me. We may change, but Mr. Big's legacy will live on. "

There were some skeptical about this foreigner but this man was willing to risk his life to extract revenge on Sonic Youth. If he failed, he promised to commit seppuku.

Taking command of Crimson's forces, and heading out himself, he gathered information to locate the missing Sonic Youth. The following day, he brought with him the dead body of Mark Gordon.

As he had proclaimed, he extracted revenge for Mr. Big. There was no one who doubted him now.

At that moment, the first candidate to succeed Mr. Big was that man.

He managed to defeat the top two heroes of the Rocks Organization, gained favor from the former boss' daughter and had connections with the Evil Organization Metallica.

He was an irreplaceable figure inside Crimson after Mr. Big's death.

Of course, there were some who doubted the flow of this

scenario. If this was already planned beforehand, then that makes the man on top scarier. He would have transcended man, having the power of a demon while having the sly mind of a devil.

There was nobody that could oppose him.

There was nobody else that could lead and rebuild the weakened Crimson.

In order for Mr. Big's legacy, Crimson, to grow stronger, they needed to forge stronger ties with Metallica, and were in a substantial form to merge with them. It was now necessary for the Boss of Crimson to someone from Metallica.

This is how the great worldwide Evil Organization, Crimson and Metallica, with the help of a man taking control, got stronger.

That man's name was Komori Neito.

(Author Notes)

The Advancing into America arc ends with this chapter, but in the next one we'll be able to see how Anice and Slipknot reacts. I'm sorry (Why tho)

The next is "Reaching for the Top of the Organization" arc, "Simple Plan"

This is before something big happened to Japan.

Chapter 54: Brace yourself and Come

In front of Jamie Wilson was the corpse of the man he had been chasing for years.

A clean cut on his was visible, made by the blades of The Sonic Roller.

[This my payback to you Mr. Big.]

After finishing the body, Jamie stood up and ran towards his motor bike.

He fought a very long battle.

Ten years ago, he was part of a small Chinese gang in the state of California that got brutally taken out by Crimson, who were also formerly based in California. What started out as a small territorial dispute escalated into a full annihilation of their gang. In that war, his best friend as well as the woman he loved were killed. Of course, a bit of Jamie died alongside with them.

On that fateful day, they got ambushed by Crimson which led to the vehicle they were riding to plunge into the ocean. It was a miracle how Jamie managed to survive that crash.

In that instant he lost everything dear to him. He cried so much on that day. As his tears dried, something within his triggered.

I’m not going to leave things as it is.

Since that day, swore to take revenge. He trained himself to master weapons and field tactics. He worked as a hired gun to save money and built up his intelligence network.

“Nothing comes out of revenge?”

What of it? I’m not thinking of getting something out from revenge. I just couldn’t forgive him so I’ll kill him. I’m just fighting to satisfy myself.

“The dead don’t rejoice?”

How do you know? I’m sure that my best friend Romeo would rather have Mr. Big dead than me dying alongside with him. “It’s bad to pledge your life in pursuit of revenge” but what of it? As long as the person says he’s okay with it, what rights do you have to stop them?

I already lost everything. My life is already falling apart. There’s nobody worthy to advise me. I’m fighting because I want to fight.

Amidst Crimson’s globalization, Jamie fought alone. People might say “Why don’t you create allies?” I’m not stupid. I won’t let some half-ass person near me, after all, human nature is unpredictable. He might betray me at any moment.

He fought alone. Hunting during at night, using unconventional

methods, he kept coming for Crimson. He started with small fry and made his way up to the commanders, as well as the Top Brass. He hunted like crazy.

No, maybe he was already crazy. Without his constant banter and jokes, he doubted if he could remain sane after many years.

That he, at one occasion got labeled as one of the Rocks Organization.

Don't make me laugh. I don't intend on becoming a hero. I kill because I want to. I'm nothing more than a murderer.

The public commented that his fighting method were "dirty", but he shrugged it off. He did what needed to be done in order to achieve his objective. He can't lose focus by such petty comments.

I'll defeat you. Alongside with your subordinates at that time, and the Crimson you created, I'll bring it down.

Jamie got on his motor bike and headed out into the city. The night lights passed him as he made his way into his hideout.

In his many years of fighting, he met that man. He came to trust that man not because of reasoning, but because of one simple reason. Their interest intersected. That man wanted to kill Mr. Big and make Crimson into his own.

Maybe this was what Jamie wanted all along. Like him and his gang, He wanted Mr. Big to be eliminated by a stronger force of evil and lose everything he held dear.

That was why he decided to cooperate with him.

And now they achieved their objective. He mysteriously didn't feel anything when he confronted Mr. Big in his last moments. He even heard out Mr. Big's final request. He didn't hate him, but as the person he was about to kill, he granted his final wish. Of course it wasn't enough for him to let him go.

He only felt a small sense of achievement. That was it.

Jamie arrived in his hideout.

He sat on his sofa and turned the TV on.

A popular drama series was playing. It was about guys from California enjoying their youth and falling in love.

[Aah, today's the final episode huh... What a convenient timing]

The drama was already running its tenth season. His first love, Jessica used to watch it every weekend. She loved the series and was anticipating the happy ending it would bring out in the end. She even convinced Jamie to watch it with her.

During that time, Jamie held no interest on the show. He always laughed how drama was a cliché and had an uninteresting plot.

But now, he watched it every time.

[... A happy ending huh...? It's as Jessica said...]

The show was over. The protagonist got united with the heroine and they got married.

[.....]

Jamie reached out for a bottle of Wild Turkey (?) and poured some of the liquid into a glass. He took a cigarette out and lit it.

When he defeated Sonic Youth, that man said "I hope heaven exist for you". Jamie thought of something similar. In the past ten years, he was pondering over the same thought. "I hope hell exist"

His best friend Romeo, as well as his first love Jessica and his whole gang, if hell existed, they would be no doubt there.

And no doubt he was also going there.

For ten years, he had been hunting Crimson and watching that drama. He was now getting tired of it.

Jamie puffed out a smoke.

[I defeated the Mr. Big you know? I'm amazing right? That Crimson is already over. With my help, that Japanese guy is going to take over it! Hyuu-! As expected of me!]

Jamie took a sip of Bourbon.

[Is it okay if I go there now?]

Jamie closed his eyes. His cigarette's fire had already gone out. His bottle of bourbon was already empty.

[Is it okay, Jessica? If I ever meet you in hell, I hope you won't get angry at me. I'll even tell you how that drama you like to watch ends...]

Jamie stood up and existed the room and headed out somewhere.

**

The last sighting of Slipknot was over Washington Bridge. All of America witnessed him, but his body was never found.

Thinking of his capability, people began to speculate that he somehow managed to stay alive using some kind of technique. Yet, nobody saw Slipknot after the battle of Washington Bridge.

In the end, who was he? Why did he fight off Crimson? Where has he gone?

Nobody in the world knew the answer. There were a lot of theories, but none of them fit Slipknot.

Then he must've carried something heavy with him, only he could ever know. Let's stop speculating and instead let's thank him. He saved New York multiple times after all.

People of the city thought of him that way no, and the hero called Slipknot, disappeared from existence.

**

Neito was going through data sheets in his office. It was his job as the current Head of Crimson. Crimson's quarterly report, suggestions from Metallica on the Metallica-Crimson merging, reports from Tsurugi back in Japan, as well as his training schedules.

He was handling desk work (which he never was good at), when a knock came into his office door.

[Come in.]

As the door opened, Anice came in.

[Hi Nate! A man called Ikenou sent a report titling “Suggestions on Utilization and Usage of Crimson’s Flying board to Metallica’s Modified Humans”]

[Aah, thanks. Just put the data disk over in that area.]

[You’re welcome! Hey Nate, it’s already dark, aren’t you starving?]

[Eh? Really? Is it already dark? Well I’m starving but…]

As Neito honestly answered, Anice pulled out a paper bag.]

[Fufu-n♪ I thought so! Here, I’ll give you this! It’s Anice special turkey sandvich!]

Looking into the bag, Neito saw a huge sandvich.

Looking up, he saw Anice who was waiting for his comments.

[Aah… Yeah… Thank for the meal… Yeah. It’s really good.]

Anice’s expression brightened up as he said those words.

[Ya-y! Thank god!]

[……]

Looking at Anice, he was endowed on his thoughts.

Six months had already passed since Mr. Big's death and him taking over Crimson's operations. Anice already returned to her former bright and energetic self.

When she heard of her father's death, she was crying on Neito's shoulders all day long. She didn't ask him "Why?" nor bore a grudge against the perpetrator Sonic Youth. In her own way, she understood her father's job and the dangers brought in with it.

His father, who was a villain, had been killed. Maybe she already prepared for such thing to happen.

But in the end, it was impossible not to cry after losing her loved one.

Neito had nothing to say. He only had right to offer up his should for her to cry on. His shoulders were wet as she cried into them.

She just called his name, but then shrugged it off as she wept more.

Neito wanted to confess everything to her and kill himself. But he couldn't do it. It was for his objective as well as the promise he made to her father as her died. He held those feeling in.

On that might, he wanted to leave her and go wandering off into town to buy a drink but he stopped himself. He couldn't bring himself to hurt himself. After all, it was an opportunity created by her father. No way would he throw his life recklessly.

He had to bear and watch the once bright and energetic Anice sink into depression.

But she didn't stay depressed for too long. She was the daughter of the former boss and was the mascot of Crimson.

She smile was what kept Crimson's spirit up. Everybody knew this, as well as she did.

Neito took out "Sonic Youth", and after many weeks, she returned to her former bright and energetic self.

He knew it was though for her and some people also agreed but she insisted "If I keep crying I'm sure my Papa would also be sad" Everybody wanted to protect her.

And despite that, Neito still kept the secret.

Neito was only entitled to stand beside her, not being able to usher the words of comfort.

He hated himself for that, but he couldn't show outside. He was

glad the she was returning to her former self, but yet, he still couldn't forgive himself.

He just had to live with himself.

[……]

[Hm? Are you okay? Am I that cute for you to space out?]

Anice was acting cute and innocent, point her face. She wanted him to laugh.

Noticing her, Neito composed himself in a panicky manner.

[Ah, well, did you already have dinner?]

[Nope. I'm about to have some. Ah! Do you want to eat together here?]

She was like a small dog wagging her tail behind her. There was no way he could refuse her.

[Ah, yeah. I'm okay with it.]

[Yay♪ A dinner date in the office♪ I'm going out to order Chinese.]

[Wha-… don't take it that way…!]

Without saying another word, Anice dashed out of the room.

It may have been tough for her, be she still like Neito. Unlike before, she was now straightforward with her feeling towards him.

Looking at it from her perspective, it would make all sense. The man she formerly liked took it up upon him to take revenge for her father's death and supported her as she mourned.

[What am I going to do about this...?]

Looking at her, Anice was the cute type. And she even was Neito's type. Her smile was nice and he always had fun when she was with him. There was even a time when he got the butterflies with her.

But he never could respond to her feelings. There were three reasons.

One, after doing something that horrible to her, he had no right to enjoy her by his side.

Two, there was a huge chance he might get killed. He didn't want Anice to bear the pain of losing someone she loved again.

The third and final reason is-

Beep Beep

Neito got interrupted in his train of thoughts. That sounds was of his transponder connected to Metallica's main office. In other words, an emergency line.

[Yes, Komori here.]

<Ou! It's you, you little punk! Komori, how have you been?>

A man he was familiar with popped up into the screen. With a huge body and long propped hair, people comment that the man resembled like a boar. He had an astounding aura as well as high charisma, being in charge of Metallica's supreme commander.

[General... Raz? Is something the matter?]

It was General Raz that made the emergency call. Neito composed himself and faced the monitor.

<Wahahahaha!! Don't be so stiff! You're also a Company Director (or High Executive) like me! I heard about your exploits in Crimson, you surprised me for a bit>

[Thank you for those words.]

<Yes, sorry but I don't have much time. I'll get straight to the point. Well, it wasn't my job originally to tell you this, but I just

wanted a glimpse of you. Komori, come back to Japan immediately.>

As usual he was an imposing individual. Neito made a small laugh.

[Return? But Crimson's case hasn't been settled yet...]

<No, but there's a meeting about to be held soon. I'm sure you've heard of it, the M – Meeting>

[Eh...?]

He knew that meeting existed. M-Meeting, it's a meeting where all of Metallica's top brass come together.

Neito was finally recognized as part of the higher echelons of Metallica. He may have done a lot, but there were more people who stood above him.

That's why he wanted to confirm once again.

[Me...?]

<Yes, your achievements can no longer be ignored. You're an essential piece of Metallica now.>

Those words. It seemed like the merging of Crimson and Metallica was really a big deal for them. Of course, with Crimson, Metallica can now have a stronghold in America, and the globalization meant their influence spread further in the world.

This joint-venture was a turning point for the company. With Crimson's Over-technology and Metallica's Modified Humans, Metallica's military might increased. Both directly and indirectly, it was all thank to Neito.

[Thank you very much...]

<Don't mention it. You'll be filled in on the details after you arrive here. But I'll tell you this. The ones participating in the meeting is you, me, Vice president Headfield, our consultant Hamet-dono and our "President">

(Remember that Headfield word I mentioned during the Maroon Five arc? Turns out he was a guy and the company's VP)

[... Our President is...?!]

Neito got riled up by General Raz's words. The president was the one who stood on top of Metallica. And as such, he is the world's greatest villain. It would be easy to say that he had the most influence on the world.

The mysterious thing about Metallica's president, there was no updated information you could find on him. Even Neito didn't see

or know him.

The president was always shrouded in darkness. He is there, but he merely pulls the strings in the company.

The reason for this occurrence is unknown. It would never come out of public.

Neito speculated that the old guy in his interview might have been the president, but that would never happen. If the president went out that public, there was no way he could maintain being mysterious. That must've been another executive.

The president's general identity was already well known. Metallica's president, his name is even written down on modern textbooks.

Toujiro Blackmoa

Half American and Half Japanese, he's far better that Professor H's modified humans, and stronger than General Raz. He built the great evil organization Metallica on his shoulders, and was considered as a genius by the world.

But many years had already passed. People already speculated that he was now an old man. There were even some rumors stating that his position as president was already filled in by a new individual.

In other words, he being the president, is glorified throughout the company. He is also the one Neito was aiming for.

So I'll finally get to see that man huh...?

<That's right... If you got all that, then come back immediately. The contents of the meeting will be sent to you shortly.>

Neito liven upped his expression and answered.

[Understood. I'll be returning tomorrow.]

<Good. Well, how about it, come see me when you arrive. I want to have a conversation with you alone. That will be all>

The transmission from General Raz cut off.

The next moment, Anice came into the room with the Chinese take-outs.

[I'm ba—ck♪ did something happen Nate?]

Anice was now sitting on the sofa, looking at Neito's face.

[Hm? Oh it's nothing. Let's eat.

Brushing it off jokingly, he bit into his sandvich. Anice laughed

in return. She gave him some Chinese spring-roll and poured coffee for him.

Anice talked about the things that happened to her today. It was funny so Neito laughed. Anice mentioned a twenty-first century manga she was reading. Neito listened intently.

That how their meal went throughout the night.

After all of that was over. Headed for Japan. He made it this far. A little more and he can have what he wanted.

He couldn't just jump and plan directly to bring down the president. He needed to know him first. But now...

[Have some of this Nate! It's really good!]

[What... is that? Is that gyoza?! Uwah. Aren't American people ashamed of making this?]

(Implicitly implying that American made gyoza sucks)

I can't tell you everything Anice. I can't even apologize for it. I'll keep the promise I made with your father. I'll keep going forward.

It wasn't atonement for him, neither did he expect to be forgiven. But still,

When all of this is over, if ever you're still by my side I will...

As he was listening to Anice words as he chewed on his sandvich and got lost in his thoughts.

(Author Notes)

The next arc is going to be the second to the last. Did you know all of the names were taken from the band Metallica's members?

Chapter 55: As Expected Of You, Boss

(Author Notes)

A side story not involving our MC

**

The global management department of Metallica was getting busier. There was the issue with integrating Crimson into Metallica and reviewing worldwide reports from their sources, but two cases stood out among them.

One was the integration of Crimson technology to Metallica's modified humans to increase both company's military strength. The second one was finalizing the plan for when Metallica would enter America. Both of which, were no easy task.

What Komori Neito achieved in America was described as a miracle. He was able to take over Crimson, and made it possible to integrate the company into Metallica. The one who placed in charge of such important affairs was Ikeno Reiji, now the new current head of the global management department.

After heading a research team on Purgatory Island, he was promoted to lab head and further accelerated the development of modified humans. His position now was the result of his successes in his field.

If was a regular human, he would tackle his tasks with hard work and dedication, but being him, he approached his tasks in a logical, smart and efficient way.

He still applied those principles of his today.

[Okay, send these samples to the research lab. We need to integrate Crimson's flying technology to our modified humans. I want a report on the prototype of this matter in a month. I already made preparations for mass production so don't worry.]

Sitting in the department head's chair, he kept relaying orders.

[How's L.A.? Good, then I'll send in some men. While Crimson is recovering, smaller organizations are surely going to make a move. We need to take of them before they become an issue.]

His subordinates responded accordingly and moved precisely to his orders. Everybody was a handpicked elite.

[...Good. That's it for today.]

After reviewing, he sent his subordinates home. Ikeno was not stupid enough to overwork his subordinates. As long as they finished their tasks, he allowed them to go home. Ikeno himself also needed to attend a meeting of executives.

His work today was perfect. Born with high intelligence and charisma, he always did his work perfectly. He didn't like to lose to

anybody.

Ikeno stood up and went to the meeting room. The executive meeting was second in importance to the M meeting. The topics they were going to discuss would then be brought up for the M meeting members to decide upon.

Everybody in the executive meeting had their own principle to excel and try to replace the current president, but today Komori was absent.

Ikeno thought to himself.

Komori got promoted into an executive a little bit ahead of me, but the consequence of that is he was being assigned abroad.

I see. It’s a big deal for him to take over Crimson. No doubt he used some kind of brutal method to achieve his goal again. It may be unpleasant, but I’ll have to recognize his achievement. In the end, he helped expand Metallica.

Yet being away from the main office at this moment was fatal for him. Even if he was an executive, if he isn’t here, he had no chance to voice out his opinions.

In the end he’ll remain in America. It wouldn’t come to a surprise if he were to be officially assigned as the head of Crimson in America.

I’m different.

Komori has been rising up via his achievements in battle at the special region and in America. I’ve been rising within the company through perfect execution of my tasks.

Our gap is huge.

Ikeno had no desire to change the world like Komori. He just wanted to excel and be better than anybody else. He just wanted to be himself and remain as he is, no matter how the world changes.

The most powerful person that could do such thing was Metallica’s president.

I’ll stand on that stage. You may be exceptional Komori, but I don’t plan on giving you the seat of the president without a fight.

Ikeno strengthened his resolve and went into his first executive meeting.

The meeting went on smoothly. Ikeno himself voiced out his opinions, and got a chance to speak to the other executives.

Even in front of General Raz and Professor H, Ikeno proposed the plan to for how Metallica will enter America and move and take over the South American region. He made them approve the plan and the budget proposed by the global management department into the M meeting.

It was an obvious result. There were no flaws on his proposed plan, even he volunteered to go to the front lines if they demanded it. He didn't allow anybody to object.

When the meeting was about to end, the consultant Hamet, who was quiet the entire meeting proposed an idea. Professor H, who was nervous the whole time, agreed with the idea. Ikeno was taken back by the proposed idea.

Komori Neito was being promoted to executive director. Being promoted to executive director means he was the fifth most important person within the company. He was now given the right to attend the M meeting.

The decision to approve this idea required half of the executive board to give a "yes", but with General Raz and Professor H, giving their approval the matter was decided. General Raz favored Komori from the start so it was expected that the idea would get approved nonetheless. He was taken back why Professor H agreed. Ikeno wasn't able to overturn their decision.

Komori's achievements were certainly great but…

[…What's going on…?]

Ikeno didn't understand what Komori was setting up. He didn't understand what he was trying to do with Metallica.

**

[Hou, those ladies sure know how to fight.]

Tsurugi F. Gardner muttered as he entered the dark sorcerer Jamie Rockaway's barrier.

The "barrier" covered a section of ruined building in the Akihabara district. There were no people around. In this place, Jamie Rockaway had been operating and brought trouble to the people. There were already a hundred casualties which he had caused.

Tsurugi's comment was about the fight between the Jamie and the heroes from the Rocks Organization. Jamie were equipped with a green robe worn by high ranking magicians.

Using the mysterious art of "Magic", Jamie fought with the two heroes of "Wings". The heroes' identity was well known in public. They were two girls who had a fan base.

In Tsurugi's eyes, the two didn't look like they were equipped for battle. With their bright costume and dyed hair, they were fighting the forces of evil.

(Shall we say they dressed as Magical Girls...? Sailor Moon outfits and stuff)

But their abilities were real. They too used magic. With their

shining bracelets and necklaces, they stood equal with the Jamie's equipment.

[What should we do? Shall we wait until the Wings defeat Jamie?]

A group of people approached Tsurugi from behind.

[Humph, don't be stupid. "We will eliminate all forces of evil in the country" that's the will of our Boss before he left. They're already weakened. I don't need to transform.]

Tsurugi unsheathe his katana.

[Well, if you say so.]

[It would be stupid if we were wiped out here.]

[But will that fellows really prove useful to us?]

The ones standing behind him weren't Tsurugi's subordinates. He may be commanding them, but their real master was in America, Komori Neito.

They were formerly from the Okinawa branch, Sales Department and the Research Department that at one point saw Neito fight and saw the "evil' he had and decided to follow him.

Tsurugi was currently the head of the Sales Department in accordance to his Boss' will.

[Enough talking... let's move out.]

Raising his katana, he slowly made his way to Jamie.

Jamie noticed Tsurugi's approach and called out to him

[W-?! Who are you! Do you want to die?!]

[Run away Old Man! This is a dangerous place! We'll take care of it so run away!!]

The short haired girl called out to him as she would, being a hero. She may look naïve but she had a kind heart.

Tsurugi didn't back down. The group following his followed his lead. He kept walking forward, meeting Jamie in the eye.

Tsurugi declared himself and their intention.

[My name is Tsurugi. Subordinate of the man of evil, Komori Neito. I bear no grudge against you, but for our objective, you're going have to die here.]

Jamie and the Wings took a step back.

[Komori!?... That, Metallica...?!]

The girl with glasses was shocked.

[I have heard of him... No... no way!]

[Prepare yourselves...]

Tsurugi rushed forward. Even without the modification, Tsurugi already had strong muscles to begin with, even without the transformation, he was able to cover a huge distance easily.

His subordinates followed his lead. They raised their guns and shot at Jamie.

[Uwaa!!]

Jamie used his magic to raise an ice dome, blocking out every bullet. But Tsurugi was already I the air. He had won at point.

[Take this!]

Using a strike from above, he sliced the ice dome.

Ping

The sound echoed as his sword hit the ice. A few seconds later, the dome cracked and was cut open.

As Jamie was casting another spell, Tsurugi hit him with a knee and a strike from his katana.

[I'm using the back of my sword... don't worry.]

Tsurugi pierced to Jamie's defenses and defeated him.

His subordinates carried Jamie's body in a stretcher. Having a high level magician by their side, it would boost their military capability greatly.

[No way... in just one strike...]

[Why?! Why did Metallica come and save us?!]

The Wings were taken back and confused by what happened in front of them. They were girls, was one of the reason, but mostly, Tsurugi reasoned out they were no more than C-class heroes.

[... Who knows...? You girls better go home and stop playing hero. There are really bad people in this world you know?]

Saying those words, Tsurugi walked away. He had no business with them.

He didn’t even bother to look back. He knew those girls wouldn’t attack them after what they saw. Furthermore, it was just a case of “evil being defeated by a stronger force of evil”. They didn’t pose any threat to civilians. Jamie Rockaway was already taken care of, so why should they try to attack Metallica which did nothing to them?

Of course, if they decided to fight, Tsurugi was prepared to retaliate. It may be a hard fight, but he didn’t care.

In the end the Wings didn’t come after them.

His job was now done. He was informed that his Boss was coming home the other day.

[This is the seventh one huh…? I want to take care of every villain before the Boss arrives but…]

He didn’t expect his Boss to take over Crimson in less than six months. Tsurugi himself wasn’t able to crush a minor organization and their gangs with the given time. They still held a strong influence over the regions.

“Take out as many as possible” was his orders but he was dissatisfied with his progress.

His return was too sudden. He didn’t know how he did it, but it probably something to do with the “evil” he had in him.

[... Well, as expected of you Boss.]

Tsurugi felt his sense of obligation to his Boss even grew stronger.

(Author Notes)

I thought of writing a side story of how Tsurugi took down those organizations, but it would then be too long. I'll write about one in the next chapter.

Chapter 56: That Much...

Neito arrived at the airport with his luggage. After doing the necessary procedures, he headed off into the airport lobby.

He looked around him. The airport was crowded but he should've no trouble spotting out Tsurugi from the crowd. Tsurugi was around the height of 190 centimeters and had an aura that no other man could have. Sometimes those characteristics of his come handy in these kind of moments.

[....Huh?]

Tsurugi wasn't there. He looked at his watch. He was sure he told him that he would be arriving at this hour. There was no way that man would be late. Tsurugi was the only person he informed about him coming back to Japan. "I heard from the main office, but it is sooner than expected" is what Tsurugi said. The reason why Tsurugi was the only one informed was because he didn't want to create a commotion in public. Tsurugi was the one officially assigned to pick him up at the airport but...

Maybe something happened to him?!

He was worried. As a top-class member of Metallica, there was no doubt people would be after him. Neito took out his phone and dialed up Tsurugi's number. Tsurugi picked up and answered in a causal tone.

[Aah, Good day Boss. Did you arrive safely? Yes, Welcome back.]

Neito sighed in relief.

[Thank you. Where are you now? Are you in the airport lobby?]

Tsurugi's response was unusual.

[About that boss, something happened and I can't come and pick you up.]

[What happened? Are you in trouble?]

If Tsurugi couldn't contact him himself, then he was definitely in trouble. Neito's expression changed.

[No... Well. It's just a hangover. Don't worry about me. I already asked someone to come in my stead. I'll be going now.]

Tsurugi then ended the call.

Hangover? There's no way that Tsurugi would be that drunk. When we drank together, he seemed fine after many bottles of Sake.

[……?]

Neito didn't understand. He was lost in his thoughts, looking at

the screen of his phone, but then

Tap tap.

Somebody tapped his shoulders. Neito turned around.

[...Eh? Maki-san?]

His co-worker and researcher from the R&D Department, Maki was standing behind him.

[I've been standing here for quite a while, and yet you didn't notice me. You're too cruel Neito-kun~!]

As Maki said those words Neito looked at her intently. Today was a Saturday and Maki's day off. She was wearing a Sakura colored One-piece dress paired with short boots. She had a slender build and a mellow face, different from the women he saw at New York. She looked fresh in Neito's eyes.

[Ah-yeah. Sorry about not noticing you. I'm glad weren't an assassin.]

[That not what I meant... umm... Forget it.]

Despite her words, she was smiling brightly at him. Her smile was sudden, yet nostalgic. Neito also smiled in return.

[Oh I almost forgot! Welcome back, Neito-kun]

Maki's words were warm and pure. Just like the time when they first met.

[Yeah... I'm back. Tsurugi was the one who asked for you right? I'm sorry, today is even your day-off. He really didn't need to bother you to do this...]

[No, it's okay! I was free and... no, it's nothing]

Maki waved her hands and tried to dismiss the topic. Her face was unusually red. Despite being called the devil's reincarnate, Neito still couldn't figure out what girls of her age were thinking.

[Hm? Well, if you insist...]

[Ah I'm sorry. You were still carrying your luggage. Let's head off to my car.]

As if she wanted to avoid the topic, she quickly headed off into the crowd and towards the exit. Neito was surprised for a bit.

Her hair was flowing in the air and it was very fragrant.

Five years had already passed since he first entered the company. There was a possibility that their relationship might go further than being just friends, but thinking about it only made him

nervous and embarrassed. He looked like an idiot for thinking that situation could happen.

They arrived in the airport's parking lot. He got on into Maki's car. He wasn't familiar with cars, but her car was small and round, an unusual shape.

(TLN: Probably a Volkswagen Beetle)

[Sorry, you even had to walk to the parking lot...]

[No no. It's no problem. Shall we?]

It was his first time riding a car with a woman driving. Until his twenties, as he was under his (abusive?) father and his late mother. He had no time for leisure until he entered Metallica. No, even if he had the time back then, he couldn't experience such thing.

(TLN: The literal translation says "as he was under his father doing those things". Whether it's abuse of some other thing, I'll leave it to the readers.)

The car departed from the airport and headed into the cities. Neito was scheduled to stay over at a hotel for the day. Normally he would've immediately started his work, but since Tsurugi was absent, he decided to put it off until tomorrow. No, more like he had no other choice.

The radio in the car was playing a song by a foreign artist. He

didn’t know who the artist was, but the song she sang was very heart-warming.

The car drove on.

He looked at Maki. She was focused on the road ahead. He was glad their eyes didn’t meet. She must be now in her mid-twenties and she looked even more beautiful than when they first met.

[Hm? What’s the matter Neito-kun?]

She found out. Neito panicked and averted his eyes from her.

[Ah, No, it’s nothing… Ah, the new Tokyo Tower already completed? It’s definitely taller than the sky tree, it looks beautiful.]

[Why are you speaking in a formal tone-?]

[……]

[Fufufu~. You’re weird. Ah! Yes, that Oden shop started selling Ramen!]

[Really? Is it good?]

[Very!]

That's how their conversation went on for the rest of the ride. They weren't discussing worthwhile things, but he still enjoyed the conversation.

Enjoyed? Me? For a moment, I'm living like a normal person…

He tried changing the topic,

[How was your six months Maki-san?]

Maki was still Maki, she went on discussing the various new models for modified humans and modifications on the prototypes for the Silhouette series. It seemed like she was very busy for the last six months.

[That must have been hard. You're amazing.]

[Not at all, after all, it's something I chose for myself.]

Maki's expression was sad yet mellow. She was a kind individual, but at times she showed those kind of emotions.

[… Is that so?]

He knew why Maki entered Metallica. He vowed to fight alongside of her but,

[Ah, that's your hotel right? I'm sorry, it's gotten this late.]

The car entered into the hotel's premises. Neito thought for a little bit.

He wanted to thank Maki for picking him up at the airport. It was already scheduled that he would ride a train from the airport and have a meeting with Tsurugi regarding Crimson in America and discuss about the M-meeting he was invited to. For a little bit, he was relieved of those worries.

Of course, he wasn't planning on neglecting them. He would never deviate from the path he decided onto himself. He knows, but just for a bit, he wanted to thank her. Thinking about the past and the oncoming future, he knew he was going to be relying on her from now on. Their relationship might change in the future, but that's a different matter.

Yes. It wouldn't be too strange right? No, on the other hand, it would be completely rude if he didn't thank her this situation. It isn't because he was hitting on her or whether they were dating, they were just co-workers. He just wanted to express his gratitude. She won't be disgusted right?

Pondering on his thoughts, he called out to her.

[... Thanks for picking me up. As a thanks, won't you join me for dinner? I-I'm about to get one, and... Niina said that their food tastes great...]

[...Eeeh?!]

Maki's soprano pitched voice echoed in the car. Neito was prepared for the worse answer, but this took him back a bit.

[Is it really okay...?! Then I'll take up on your offer!]

With Maki's embarrassed tone, Neito sighed in relief.

※※

The restaurant they both entered into was with a glance, a high class restaurant. The halls were beautiful, the table cloth was white and fancy, even the silverware and menu showed a touch of class. Maki was taken back.

[..... Neito-kun, this is really amazing...]

[Y-yeah... it's more than I was expecting.]

Both of them weren't used to this kind of dining. It was their first in dining in such fancy restaurant.

[What will you have as your aperitif?]

A male waiter came to their table and asked for their order. Maki

was panicking on what to do and order, but Neito was the one who answered the waiter first.

[I'll be having a Gibson please.]

Neito didn't even plan on drinking alcohol. Those words just came out naturally off his mouth. Maybe it was the western influence on him?

(TLN: This where it unexpectedly shifts to Maki's POV)

"W-wait, that's weird. It's my first time seeing Neito-kun ordering alcohol other than Japanese sake or beer."

[Understood. And what will the lady have?]

[Y-Yes. Umm... Well... Do you have any recommendations?]

[Yes, for that I would recommend wine from...]

The explanation continued.

The waiter's name was actually Smulie-san.

"Huh? I'm driving back home!" Maki was so engrossed on having dinner with Neito, and the unfamiliar atmosphere of the restaurant that she almost forgot.

[Are you drinking Maki-san?]

Neito noticed and reminded her that she was driving. He had a worried expression on his face.

“Aah, I’m an idiot.” For a moment those words popped into her head.

[Ah, no, but I’m…]

“At this point should, I ask Smulie-san for Oolong tea? I only kept studying when I was a student so I don’t know anything about this… Aah, I’m hopeless.”

As she was thinking of such thoughts, Neito said something unexpected.

[Do you have anything planned tomorrow morning?]

“Hm? What does he mean?” Maki didn’t understand, but she answered either way.

[No, nothing in particular.]

[Do you want to stay for the night? It would be a waste not being able to drink wine.]

[Eeeh?!]

Time stopped.

“Stay for the night? A-At this Hotel?! T-T-Th that would mean… Eeeh?!”

“What are you thinking Neito-kun?!” Of course, she couldn’t say it out loud.

[Umm… That’s… Is it really okay?]

[Hm? I’m fine with it. Ah that’s if you’re also okay with it Maki-san.]

Neito shrugged it off as if it was nothing. She never expected someone as shy as him to make the first move.

Maki’s heart rate rose. She hasn’t drank any alcohol but her face was already bright red. If he wanted her to stay then it only means one thing.

“What should I do?” Maki was panicking inside her head. Scenarios just keep popping up constantly.

She already knew how she felt towards him, and when he departed for America, she was constantly thinking about him

while drinking shochuu. She was even excited to be the one to pick him up at the airport and she was glad he invited her to dinner.

But this was too sudden. She was unfamiliar with the restaurant's atmosphere and she never had someone to do it with back when she was a student at MIT.

[... Ma'am?]

The waiter who was just listening to their conversation and looking at her expression, gave out a glee and asked her. He was probably at his limit.

[Ah, yes, then I'll be having that wine.]

[Understood. Then you'll be having Pinot Noir...]

[Yes I'll have that-!]

[... (Giggles), Pardon me... then I'll be back.]

"Smulie-san definitely laughed right...?" She noticed that much.

She didn't exclude that idea that they would be doing it but...

[Maki-san?]

[Y-Yesh!]

Neito looked at her mysteriously. She was thinking too much that she started showing it off her face. She needed to change the topic.

[A, W-What's that Gibson you o-ordered? It looks fancy...]

[Ah-yeah, there this "onion" thing in it. It's quite delicious.]

[O-Oh, r-really?]

[A detestable yet handsome guy recommended it to me one night.]

While they were talking, Smulie-san came and brought with him a decanter and started preparations for taste-tasting. She took a sip.

The wine was definitely delicious. She didn't know much about wines, but from the taste and fragrance alone, she could tell that it was a high quality wine. This helped her calm down a bit.

The more Neito was away from her, the more he changed. Maybe his idea earlier was the result from that. For him to be the one to invite her...

He traveled to America. Speaking of America, America was the

land of freedom. Maybe something happened there that he was now familiar with women. Anice-chan was also with him there.

There was no way he would do it, but after giving some thought, she was now curious. As they ate, she was asking him some non-worthwhile questions, but that question never disappeared from her head.

It came to a point where they were almost done with their dinner. They were enjoying coffee when she decided to ask him.

[B-By the way, how was America? Is Niina and Anice-chan doing well?]

[……]

Maki nervously waited for an answer but, it took him time to respond to her question. She looked at his expression.

[……Ah]

It was an expression she never saw in him before. No, it was more like he was good at hiding those kind of expressions. She understood what he was feeling inside.

He was sad yet, relieved. She understood that from him.

[…Neito…kun…]

It was a sad expression, but he tried smiling it off. She was only thinking about herself at that point, but when she saw his expression, she forgot everything. She didn't want to neglect him.

She extended her hand and without much thought, tried to grab his. That moment, Neito recovered and pulled himself away from the table while giving off a small laugh.

[Yeah, a lot of things happened. Anice is doing alright.]

It was only for a moment, but Neito returned to his usual self.

[Is that so…]

At that point, Maki couldn't ask him any more questions. She really wanted him to open up to her. Yet she was sure he wouldn't talk about it with her.

It was obvious. He had to go through a lot for him to be in his position right now. Taking over Crimson had a deep meaning to him. Maki couldn't fully comprehend, but if that were the case, something big must've happened behind the scenes.

How could she be so careless to ask him? Maki regretted her question.

[Ah, it's getting late. Sorry, could you wait here for a bit?]

Neito called the waiter and got hold of a key card.

[Here, Maki-san's room is on the fiftieth floor. I already made preparations, so you can just check out anytime in the morning. By the way, I'm going to be at the forty-fifth floor. If you need anything ring me up anytime.]

[Yes..... Thank you very much.]

"Yes, I thought so..." Maki was embarrassed a bit. He never thought of doing it in the first place. Thinking about it, it was very like him.

They finished drinking their coffee and headed off into the elevator.

Maki was looking at the city view from her window. At first, she thought of him just a nice guy, but then she noticed 'something' in him not commonly found in normal people.

Upon discovering 'that', she thought it was something she would. She was beginning to take interest in the two sides of him. At one point she decided to tell him her past, but instead of rejecting her, he accepted her past and they fought alongside each other.

He began to improve and make use of 'it', constantly rising to the top. Every time they met, he would change. He always unyielding,

constant and dynamic. She admired that part of him.

Again he made her noticed something new again. No matter how much he changed, there was still a wall between them. The wall dividing them was so thick that she had a hard time reaching out to him.

Yet she still understood him. He kept rising to the top, and it was slowly becoming harder for her to get close to him. On the other side of that wall, he was hurt and got shaken constantly. Despite that he didn't want her to comfort him.

As she was gazing into the night view of the city, she saw her own reflection, crying in tears.

It was then she noticed.

"Aaah, I'm... with that person... that person who's always rising to the top with a strong heart... who was now on the verge of his breaking point... to understand him that much and shed tears for him..."

"I love him that much"

※※

"Despite being called the devil's reincarnate, Neito still couldn't figure out what girls of her age were thinking."

Chapter 57: Simple Plan

After spending the night in the hotel, Neito got up headed towards the main desk and payed for the two rooms he and Maki stayed in. He then rode a taxi to the place where he was to meet up with Tsurugi.

He had an important meeting today. He was about to attend a meeting where only the top five executives of the company were invited. Their topic of discussion would be their new management strategy as well as the policies and plans involved in it.

In all honesty, he wanted to greet Maki before he left. The time he set to meet Tsurugi was so strict that he had to leave without saying a word to her.

Their meetup location was on the beachfront park. They could've settled it in the main office but he wasn't taken any chances in case someone might overhear their discussion. He decided to discussed it with his most trusted subordinate Tsurugi, and chose a place where there weren't many people passing early in the morning.

He arrived ten minutes earlier than the set time, but he found someone familiar sitting on a bench. The man was smoking a cigarette as he gazed out into the morning scene of the sea, the sea breeze blew by him, matching his character.

[You're earlier than expected Boss. You could have taken your time coming here. I was expecting a change in meeting time but...]

He noticed that Tsurugi was about to put off his cigar as he approached but he stopped him from doing so.

[Go ahead, I don't mind you smoking. It's been a while.]

[Yes, it's been a while Boss. Your fight in America was superb. As expected of the man I decided to follow.]

[It seems like you were busy too. You're reliable as usual. By the way, have you recovered from your hangover?]

He threw a can of coffee to Tsurugi. Tsuurugi caught the can without even looking at it.

[Hangover...? Aah, I'm okay now. How was Maki-san?]

[Yeah, we drank for a bit yesterday. I invited her to stay over at the hotel... she's probably still sleeping now.]

Tsurugi sighed as he answered.

[...I see.]

[W-What? Is something wrong?]

[No, nothing in particular.]

Their little reunion was over. After being separated for almost half a year, their reunion conversation was simple. They decided to go into the details when they would go out drinking together.

They both were running down the same path. They may have fought on different stages, but their goal was the same.

[Shall we finalize the idea we are about to propose to the M meeting?]

They already discussed a few things beforehand. The purpose of today's meeting was just to clarify and reinforce their ideas. Niina was also present when they came up with the proposal, and truthfully, he wanted him here to discuss with them. Unfortunately, he was still in America managing the Crimson case.

Their meeting was concluded after thirty minutes of discussion. They didn't deviate from the allotted time. Of course, this was expected because everything was already prepared beforehand. There were no changes. The next step they were about to take today, proceeded according to plan.

※※

Neito and Tsurugi arrived in the main office. A few more minutes and the meeting was about to start. They headed off the area where only executives were allowed, and proceeded far deeper into the block where only the top five executives were allowed to enter. Tsurugi managed to get clearance to accompany Neito into the restricted area. Although they were prepared if someone objected

his entry, Neito was glad he got off without any hitch.

After getting the clearance, they met General Raz on their way to the meeting room. As per se, General Raz eyed Tsurugi and complimented him on his battle history and his ability. At one point he asked Tsurugi ‘to work under me because the treatment is far better’ but in turn, Tsurugi replied with ‘I have only one master. I have no intention of changing sides’. This frustrated General Raz, but in the end, he gave out a big laugh to shrug his response off.

Despite the situation, Tsurugi’s conversation with General Raz calmed Neito down. He arrived in the meeting room and took his seat.

As the most important meeting was about to begin, the atmosphere of the room had a profound meaning.

The room had a highly furnished floor and above them was the symbol of Metallica, with its wings spread over the ceiling. The dark table reflected the light and there was a huge monitor hanged up on the wall.

There were five seats prepared beforehand. The top five executives were called to gather into this specific room. Among the five, four had already arrived.

Managing Director: Komori Neito

Corporate Strategic Operations Director: Raz

Corporate Company Vice President: Headfield

Corporate Company Consultant: Hamet

The god of destruction, a mad scientist and an old man who embodies darkness himself. Each one of them had a title of their own.

If it were him a long time ago, he would've gotten chills just by being in the same room with the three of them. Now, he felt natural as he was sitting with them. Maybe it was because he now carried with him "an evil charisma" as he made his way to the top.

Neito knew he was coming. He was about to arrive. The man he was after. The man who had the position he was after. The man who was considered as the ultimate villain.

"He's about to appear in front of me. Come."

He was prepared, but things made an unexpected turn.

[It's about time... Shall we start the meeting?]

Hamet, the consultant made a suggestion.

“There’s still a vacant seat. He isn’t here yet. The president, Toujiro Blackmoa isn’t here. Why? Isn’t the purpose of this meeting is to decided new policies and plans? There’s no way they would continue the meeting without the president.”

Raz and Headfield didn’t give off any reactions.

Neito panicked and voiced his concern.

[W-Wait. What about the president? Wasn’t he supposed to be coming?]

Each member reacted differently to Neito’s words. Hamet was dilibrating with himself, Headfield looked afraid, and Raz looked irritated.

[Toujiro won’t come.]

Raz closed his eyes and made a sound as if he was biting his teeth.

[Can I ask why?]

He got the attention of the room again. This time, it was Hamet that responded to his question.

[(Fumu). Then I will tell you. We already decided to tell you since you were invited to this meeting afterall… After you hear this, you can’t go back. Are you prepared for it?]

Ever since his interview, Neito always felt a twist inside him as he spoke with the old man. It was like he was looking into his very soul. Now, he was asking him a foolish question. Prepared? Is that something you would ask someone who arrived at this point? He was already prepared a long time ago. If he didn't prepared himself, he wouldn't be there sitting with him. That's why

[Of course, please tell me the reason.]

Neito stared directly into Hamets dark eyes.

[Good. Then I'll get directly to the point... Metallica's president... Toujiro-sama... already died eight years ago.]

[...Ha?]

For a moment he was confused. He got back to himself and started thinking. Dead? Metallica's president? Dead?

Various question kept popping up in his head.

Who was leading Metallica now? Why did he die? If he died, why did they keep it from Metallica's employees? The man was discussed on every textbook, if he died, wouldn't it be common sense to let the world know? Even now, Metallica's president, Toujiro was declared as the ultimate villain.

In the first place, who was this Toujiro Blackmoa? Hamet attached “sama” into his name, and Raz calls him casually.

On the other hand, there was one part he understood. As he rose up the corporate ladder, he never saw the president even once. For some time, he thought the old man Hamet was the president. He didn’t know that the president was already gone from this world. But

Why?

There was no other question more relevant. Why was Metallica even created? How did it come into power? Toujiro only took a generation to raise it from the ground and make it into the greatest evil organization in the world. He had that much influence in the world for him to be able to do that.

Toujiro was considered as the greatest enemy by the Rocks Organization and its heroes. Toujiro, the man who the hot blooded Raz and the genius Headfield, decided to follow. The man who made world domination a reality. The man various evil organization pinned as their greatest rival. From his actions, many villains rose up to take the world into their hands as well as heroes who tried stopping them.

In the twenty second century, heroes and villains were no longer considered fiction. He changed the world dramatically. Who was this Toujiro Blackmoa?

It a question that bugged Neito the most even before he knew the

truth. He thought that he would get the answer through this meeting but he was wrong. He only knew Toujiro Blackmoa as the world depicted him. From his achievements to his actions, he already knew beforehand.

Yet he still died.

[What do you mean? The president is dead? Why?]

Neito kept asking his questions. There was nothing else he could do.

He waited for a response. If he were to trust Hamet's words, they should be explaining it to him

[... Komori, this is going to be a long one]

Raz folded his arms and nodded while breathing out a deep sigh. Headfield on the other hand just nodded back. No doubt Raz already anticipated that it would come to this point.

Headfield was clearly opposed to this. Headfield help a lot of influence within the company, but Raz and Hamet must've convinced him that Neito was worthy enough to be told the truth.

Neito neither wasn't at lost. He wanted to stand on top of Metallica and rule the world. That was a given fact. He never falters and he never will.

[I do not mind. I want to know everything.]

Neito answered in a determined voice.

[Very well... Then I'll tell you myself... Where should I start...? Komori, do you know of the saying "Evil is always conquered"? Toujiro-sama was the one who took it up and challenged the world.]

Hamet, Metallica's consultant began his story.

※※

Forty-five years ago, a boy was born. He was the child of an American father and a Japanese mother. The boy's life was an unfortunate one. The boy's father caught an illness after the boy was brought into this world. Without the means or money to pay, he died. The boy's mother re-married, then divorced.

From a social point of view the boy's mother "wasn't a good one". She had relationships with multiple men, and left the boy to his own devices. She sold herself in the city as a way to earn money.

The mother, who was born a commoner, deemed it the only way for her to make a living.

The life of the Mother and her son was a harsh one. The boy looked pitiful and whenever the mother would bring with her a man, the boy, or yet, both of them were abused.

By the age of thirteen, the boy's mother died of illness. The boy who now had nothing, came to live in the slums.

One day, the boy met a man who once had a relationship with his mother. The man was part of a gang who ran protection rackets in the neighborhood.

That gang wasn't an "Evil Organization" but merely a "Crime Organization". The man wanted subordinates to work under him.

The boy in turn, wanted a mean of living. The boy worked under that man, and in other words, as an errand boy in a gang.

Despite the dreadful workplace and its conditions. The boy kept succeeding and kept distinguishing himself.

The boy was proficient. He had wits and the fighting capabilities he trained into himself after living in the slums. Most importantly, the boy was unpredictable, relying on ruthless methods to accomplish his goal. In no time, the boy raised his fame within the organization.

The death of the Organization's vice leader, the destruction of command within the faction and the downfall of the main head organization. The boy, no, the youth stood on top of all crime

organizations. His subordinate Hamet was always with him during this time.

Despite having control over all of the underground organizations, he wasn't satisfied.

He wanted to become stronger and stronger. Until a point where nobody could touch him. He wanted the whole world under him and gravel at his feet. He'll eliminate anybody that gets in his way. He wasn't picky with the method he used to deal with them. He wanted everybody under his feet.

The boy who now became a youth, didn't stop. By this time, the youth was beginning to think of a plan to actualize "world domination".

The youth then met three people.

The first one was a scientist named Headfield.

His research was based on "human modifications" and thus was not accepted by the scientific community. The youth took interest in this and decided to fund Headfield's research. Headfield's research was a success, but the scientific community still didn't acknowledge it.

Headfield was not fuming with rage. Why won't you acknowledge my research? Everybody is an idiot. Why don't they see the beauty of my research? This research will lead to

mankind’s evolution. This is humanity’s destination.

Headfield was a man of society, but he wanted more from it. He wanted to find out where his research would lead society.

The one who acknowledge his ideal was the youth. The youth promised full funding on his research in exchange that he will use it. As a result, the youth now had the means to create an army of modified humans

The second man the youth met was called Raz.

Raz was strong. He was a fighter in an underground fighting arena and was undefeated. He also participated in a war in past and came out victorious. He didn’t lose to anybody. Everybody was weaker than him.

But that was only on a personal scale. Raz may be equivalent to a hundred men, or yet a battalion in the battlefield, but that can only be tested in a battlefield.

That’s how Raz was always looking for a battlefield to fight in. Yet, there were no such battlefields. The world was now at peace.

“I am strong. Definitely strong. I am the strongest in the world. But there’s no place I can declare those words in. I have reached the height of a military man, no, a soldier. There’s no place for me to show my strength.”

That was when Raz met the youth. The youth suggested a place for Raz to display his power and the enemy he was going to be up against.

The youth was referring to the world. Raz agreed to the youth. There was no other place to wield his powered than the world.

Raz went through Headfield's modifications and became even stronger. He was now an invincible General that led the youth's troops into battle.

The youth now had the ultimate soldier and weapon in his hand. The youth used this power to annihilate, absorb, govern and recruit other crime organizations. He now had the power and used that power in the purpose of evil. Nobody could stop him.

This is how the youth, Toujiro Blackmoa, expanded his organization. I few years ago, the notion of "Evil Organizations" was deemed no more than fiction or a joke. Now, "Evil Organizations" were now a thing of reality. Then he named his Organization,

Metallica.

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Neito listened intently to Metallica's history. It was certainly a very interesting story and he knew there was more to come.

[... I see... Everything started from a small time crime organization. General Raz, Professor H and you were already comrades since that time.]

The other nodded at Neito's words. He was now twenty-five years old. The story started a few decades before he was born. After that, he already knew what happened from reading some textbooks. Dylan appeared and was deemed the greatest enemy of Metallica at that time. Guardians rose up as a response to the rise of evil organizations in the world. From Guardian formed the Rocks Organization,

Neito took a deep breath and ask a question.

[...then how did Master Toujiro die?]

Neito remembered Mr. Big's words "Evil always gets conquered".

[Yes... that happened eight years ago... when Toujiro was in South America attacking a small nation...]

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[Toujiro, those are some persistent bastards. They don't even know when to give up. Dylan is also with them, it would be bad if this dragged on.]

Raz and Toujiro was holding a strategic meeting.

[Yep.]

Toujiro accepted Raz's advice and thought to himself. His face wasn't of a forty year old man. He went under several modifications to keep himself young in hopes of seeing the day where he would eventually control the world. He still looked someone in his twenties.

[That's okay. We don't need to wait for them to give up. I'm also getting tired of them.]

Raz was surprised by Toujiro's tone. He was taking their situation lightly

The country needs to fall. Toujiro must've also understood that. The reason why they needed this victory was because it was to display Metallica's power as well as for them to secure a foothold in the region. Yet, the small county they were attacking still didn't give up. Despite being heavily outnumbered, they still give in into evil. Raz was now growing suspicious.

[...Then what are we going to do Toujiro? Should we call a temporary retreat?]

Raz was looking for Toujiro's answer. Toujiro's idea and actions always surprised him. Raz, who should have higher fighting capabilities, was easily outwitted by Toujiro. Other than his gratitude towards him, he acknowledge Toujiro's skill.

Will Toujiro pull off some ruthless plan again?

Raz awaited Toujiro's answer. Toujiro gave a small laugh, and brushed it away. It was as if he was enjoying a sandvich for lunch. He then replied in a light tone.

[We don't need them to give up.]

[...Then...]

[Just kill them. Kill each and every one of them, no survivors.]

Toujiro smiled brightly to his comrade.

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Toujiro Blackmoa – An upgraded Neito with a pinch of being a psychopath. See you next chapter :)