

～組織頂点編～

4

悪の組織の 求人広告



Kiyuna Toto
喜友名トト



MF7777

THE EVIL ORGANIZATION'S RECRUITMENT AD

– Aku no Soshiki no Kyuujinkoukoku –

- Volume 4 -

IN-COMPANY

– Maroon 5 –

AUTHOR:

Kiyuna Toto

ARTIST:

Kotatsu

[Translated by: daikyuntl]

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 because 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 brought down Ramone.

Who ever crosses my path should be fully prepared.

I won't 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.]

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.

Starting out as a doctor, he advanced his research and attained multiple awards recognizing his talent. In other words, he was 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~. HAHHAHAHA!! 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 but 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.]

[Oni- Onion? 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 merrily 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.

(TLN: This concerns on the familiarity and respect of an individual in Japan.)

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 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 [ㄣ], 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 be 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

(TLN: Ikeno's POV... Italicized ones are Ikeno's thoughts.)

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.



(TLN: 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 front-lines 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.

(TLN: Because of the long names, I'll be simply calling this Maroon Five member "Blue" for convenience)

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 the 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 at Koutaro. He knew the hero's 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 its 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.

(TLN: I may say claws just to shorten the 'nail-like claws' on his arms.)

[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.

[Haaaaaaaaaaaaa-!!]

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?

[Hyaaaaaaaaa-!!]

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 them 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 to 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.

(TLN: The following are Neito's narrative of what Professor H's thoughts were)

"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.]

(TLN: Below are Neito's thoughts and not the professor's)

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.

(TLN: Back to the professor's thoughts)

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.



PDF BY: TRAITORAIZEN