

Curiosities of Lotus Asia



Aphorism

The value of paper decreased, and so paper abounded in Gensokyo.
When I started to write this book, it was the birth of history in Gensokyo.
-Rinnosuke Morichika

-Table of Contents-

[Transcriber's Foreword](#)

[Transcriber's Character Introduction & Synopsis](#)

[Chapter 1 - Gensokyo's Shrine Maiden and the Allure of the 15 Volumes](#)

[Chapter 2 - Illusionary Bird](#)

[Chapter 3 - Complete and Elegant Tea Time](#)

[Chapter 4 - Rain Furnace](#)

[Chapter 5 - Summer Drizzle Hall](#)

[Chapter 6 - The Flowers of Muenzuka Higan](#)
[Chapter 7 - Ultraviolet Light](#)
[Chapter 8 - The Deities' Tool](#)
[Chapter 9 - Phantasmal Light & Snow on the Window](#)
[Chapter 10 - Colorless Sakura](#)
[Chapter 11 - A Nameless Stone](#)
[Chapter 12 - The Non-Functional Shikigami](#)
[Chapter 13 - The Price of Paper in Luoyang](#)
[Chapter 14 - Moon and Kappa](#)
[Chapter 15 - Dragon's Camera](#)
[Chapter 16 - Miraculous Cicada](#)
[Chapter 17 - The God of Sake](#)
[Chapter 18 - The Universe the Youkai Saw](#)
[Chapter 19 - The Contagious God](#)
[Chapter 20 - The Charming Moon](#)
[Chapter 21 - The Blessings of the Shrine](#)
[Chapter 22 - The Night the Storm Clouds Rolled In](#)
[Chapter 23 - Mechanism of Fortune](#)
[Zun's Afterword](#)
[Transcriber's Afterword](#)

Curiosities of Lotus Asia originally written by Zun.
Originally serialized in magazines in Japanese, 2004-2007.
Original Japanese hardcover compilation book released in 2008.
This English transcription created by Ace Of Hearts, 2010-2011.

Transcriber's Foreword

Things to Know Before You Begin

What you're looking at here is indeed a full transcription of the written work "Curiosities of Lotus Asia." The work was originally written by Zun, then translated by TouhouWiki, and transcribed from there by yours truly; all 23 chapters plus the original full-size Japanese-version scans for your perusal (in the Original Full-Size Scans folder).

Speaking from a 2011 viewpoint, though it's still a rather good read (or I wouldn't've bothered transcribing it), CoLA is one of Zun's older works, its events transpiring around the time of the earlier Windows games; as a result, you won't be seeing any of the modern cast members who would be the type to show up at Kourindou (such as Sanae, Nitori, or possibly Byakuren); if you wanna see more newly-added characters, read something more recent (like "Wild and Horned Hermit").

If you compare my transcription to the original TouhouWiki translation, you can tell I took a fair, though clearly not overdone, number of liberties with the text, including some formatting restructuring and correcting the occasional grammatical or spelling error, basically doing what I could to make it easier to read and understand. As with any translation or transcription project, it's obviously impossible to catch every tiny little thing, but I think you can tell that TouhouWiki (in their translation) and myself (in my transcription) have put as much love and care into this as we possibly could; I know that I, for one, love the Touhou universe very much myself, and, having played all of the games and read many doujins, know the characters very well, so I believe you can see that where I did make dialog corrections, they remain in-character.

There are four fonts used in this transcribed presentation, included in the Fonts folder, which you've hopefully installed at my multiple suggestions:

- * The main font used for Rinnosuke's writings (and as the header font) is Uzura_Font, as it looks somewhat like a guy's printing. (Looks like *mine*, anyway.)
- * The font used for the first section of Chapter 4, where the speaker is Marisa, is

Segoe Print, since that looks a bit more like a girl's writing.

* The font used for Zun's Afterword is Cirno, which font was used in "Phantasmagoria of Flower View," making it an official Touhou font, suitable for having Zun as the speaker.

* The font used for my own Transcriber's words pages (this Foreword and my Afterword) is Calibri, because I like it.

So you know, the text is *never* supposed to overlap any of the pictures; if for some strange reason a page loads weird such that the text overlaps a picture, do a refresh (hit F5); that should clear it right up.

It's important to note that the original work was technically 27 chapters (you can tell this if you look at TouhouWiki or in the Images folder); the reason why I present it here as 23 chapters is because four of the chapters were originally written as shorter two-parters due to size restrictions in their original serial publications (what you see here as chapters 1, 3, 4 and 5); thus, they are presented here combined into single chapters as I believe was originally intended. Besides, even as TouhouWiki notes, Zun never really seemed to keep track of the proper numbering either, screwing up or starting the numbering over almost every time it changed to a different magazine, so I don't really think my presentation as 23 chapters really makes any arguable difference aside from the fact that I had to pick which cover to use for each of the chapters that were originally two-parters (I chose the one that portrayed the proper mood for the chapter in these cases).

You will also note that Chapters 13 and 14 have a different cover art style than the other chapters, because those were originally released on the web; you'll also see that Chapter 8 has absolutely no pictures whatsoever, because that is the chapter Zun contributed to a doujinshi, and scans for that chapter are unavailable as a result - not even TouhouWiki has any.

I also did not include any of Zun's chapter-based afterwords; though they're cute, I felt they cluttered things up too much, taking away from the flow and liminality of the volume.

These things said, I hope that for all the effort I put into its presentation, you are able to enjoy this English iteration of "Curiosities of Lotus Asia."

[Character Introductions & Synopsis](#) |

[Go directly to the Table of Contents](#)

Transcriber's Character Introduction & Synopsis

Know Your Main Characters

"Curiosities of Lotus Asia" is a compilation of the stories of what happens at the Kourindou shop, told mostly from the perspective of the shop's more-or-less reasonable keeper, Rinnosuke Morichika. Though there are some cameo appearances here and there, these are the three main characters who appear in the most chapters:



Rinnosuke Morichika

Proprietor of the Kourindou shop, Rinnosuke runs his independent shop dealing with curiosities because he has a natural ability to know the name and general purpose - though, as he states several times, not the exact method of usage - of any item. He is a pretty reasonable guy who just wants to sell his wares, though hardly any of the girls who come to his shop are actually there to do business with them (and half the time they *do*, they just take his stuff without paying). He is half-human half-youkai, and, like most youkai, is in the middle of a rather long lifespan, so he is clearly smarter than the girls, who take a more carefree approach to life, but you can tell that he sometimes overanalyzes things, and occasionally comes to some pretty strange conclusions as a result. As Zun says, Rinnosuke *is* smart, but doesn't know nearly as much as he *thinks* he does.

Reimu Hakurei

The only shrine maiden in all of Gensokyo (throughout this book, anyway), and definitely a lazy one. She appreciates her *status* as shrine maiden, but often neglects her *duties* as one, oftentimes only performing out of necessity as the situation calls for it, and doesn't know nearly as much about shrine-related things as she should. Reimu is also Gensokyo's #1 incident resolution specialist (as Rinnosuke notes), making her the main character of the Touhou games (but not this book), and maintains the Hakurei Border that separates Gensokyo from the



outside world. Despite her obvious importance to Gensokyo, the donation box for the shrine is frequently empty - something many of the other characters like to poke fun at.



Marisa Kirisame

As magic-users go, Marisa is among the most adventurous and mischievous you'll ever meet; she does whatever she wants, and is always looking for fun and adventure: if something exciting happens, you can bet she'll be in attendance (if she wasn't the cause in the first place). She doesn't speak properly either, with her own somewhat southern speech mannerisms (and she nicknames

Rinnosuke "Kourin" after the name of his shop). While she appears (and for the most part *is*) a bit dense, she hides a more insightful, intelligent side that she brings out when she writes (evidenced in chapter 4 of this book, and in her own, the "Grimoire of Marisa") and when she can tell someone is making an entirely serious inquiry or is honestly trying to learn something (such as in chapter 15). If you're looking for fun times, Marisa is definitely a winner.

Cameo Appearances

Though those are the main three characters, there are a few others you'll see from time to time, such as Remilia Scarlet and her servant Sakuya, and if you're Touhou-savvy, you'll catch unnamed references to certain other characters, like Alice and Eirin.



(No previous chapter.) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 2 ->](#)

Chapter 1

Gensokyo's Shrine Maiden and the Allure of the 15 Volumes



A silver Gensokyo in the early afternoon. Pristine snow gently falls and swallows the earth, and transforms Gensokyo into a magnificent spectacle. The only thing that could be heard were the cries of youkai far off in the distance. The road was enveloped in fresh snow, without a single footprint imprinted anywhere. Humans seldom travel down this path.

Beyond this roadless path, a mysterious building stands. While the owner absorbs heat from a nearby stove originating from the outside world, there is no doubt he is reading an incomprehensible book. Because of such hobbies, it always seems as if he has time to spare.

There is an abundance of goods and items from the outside world in this shop.

Gensokyo is in what the outside world would call the Meiji Era (1868-1912), but there are many items here that belong in subsequent eras. The purpose of most of these items are unknown.

The shop's sign announces its name, "Kourindou," as that is where the antique store, Kourindou, stands.

"Mr. Rinnosuke?"

It appears that someone has arrived for the first time in a while. I wanted to continue reading, but customers are gods; I couldn't just pretend to be out.

"You're there, aren't you?"

The goddess dressed in red had no need to bother preventing my potential ruse, as she was already behind me.

"Oh, it's just you, Reimu. Don't I always tell you not to just walk into my living room uninvited?"

"Forget that, just listen to me. I ran into some bad luck, so..."

This is her. The girl in red before my eyes who doesn't listen to a word anyone says. Her name is Reimu Hakurei. She's the only shrine maiden in Gensokyo, but from her actions one would doubt whether she's truly a shrine maiden or not.

Pardon the late introduction, but I'm Rinnosuke Morichika. I run an antique store.

As Reimu brushed the snow off her shoulders, she started chattering away: "I went out to the village to shop today. For what? I was running out of tea, so I figured I should buy some before the lack of tea gets bad enough to kill me. Well, I won't actually *die*, but - hey, are you *listening* to me?!"

You don't listen to me, so I'm not listening to you, is what I wanted to say, but "Yeah, I'm listening," is what came out.

"But, you know, there wasn't any good tea...oh, this doesn't have anything to do with this but the village's travelers' guardian deity was completely covered in snow; I mean, who the heck was in charge of the umbrella - oh yeah, what exactly was

that god again...?"

Now then. If I don't give her a little push in the right direction, the conversation looks like it'll diverge into talking about Shinto rites of the Emperor.

"The God of Harm, who prevents catastrophe from occurring in the village...You said you ran into bad luck, so what happened?"

"Well, the shopping ended without anything really happening."

Without anything happening.

"On the way back, a youkai was just sitting there minding its own business. And it was enjoying a book, too!"

I tried to say "Isn't that fine? It's not a big deal," but I was ignored:

"I tried to exterminate it with a surprise attack, but it retaliated! It was pretty cocky, and strong. I let my guard down, so I didn't expect shots to come from behind..."

One can only think that the youkai was the unfortunate one, but I wonder what happened, if she was the one who executed a surprise attack, yet let her guard down.

"Mr. Rinnosuke, are you listening?"

"Yeah, I'm not."

"Well, anyway, I beat the crap out of it, and then came here."

It seemed that no matter how I replied, I'd get the same response. Reimu turned her back to me and said "See?" and puffed her cheeks. "And I just got this skirt mended, too..."

"A magnificent tear. I see very well why you want me to fix that."

"Right now."

Yes, ma'am. Reimu seemed cold, so I made space for one more beside the stove.

"I can't possibly mend it *that* fast...just sit here for..."

Footsteps.

"I'm gonna borrow these clothes and change, so hold on a bit."

Gone. She walked right into the back of the store again. She really does do whatever she wants. Sheesh. I headed back to my seat, and decided to continue reading my book - but my stretched out hand grasped nothing but air. The book was floating above.

"Whatcha readin', Kourin?"

A black shadow spoke. I *knew* there was a reason that ever since I missed my morning tea I'd had a bad feeling.

"Hey, I always say this, but--"

"Don't just waltz in here. Right?"

Every single one of them. The girl in black before my eyes is Marisa Kirisame, a magician whose speech is a little unique. She gets along well with Reimu. She often comes to the store, but I can never tell if she has any business or not.

"What're you here for today, Marisa?"



"...I don't really get this book. Hup! Nothin' much, but I ain't headin' home." Nothin' much, huh? She brushed off some dust on a pot for sale as she said that, and sat down on it.

"That's the 12th volume of a series, the continuation of the books piled up here. You wouldn't know just by reading that much."

"Oh. 'The Future of the Non-Neumann-Type Computer'? No way I can tell what that's about just from the title."

"A magic spell book from the outside world. You probably wouldn't be interested in it at all, but I am."

"Hmm...magic from the outside world...what kinda magic is that, Kourin?"

"I'm still in the middle of reading it, but...they use calculation familiars called 'computers', and those do exactly as they're ordered. Of course, these are clearly shikigami. Well, I'm still not quite sure what their power is used for."

"Shikigami, huh...hey, isn't this Reimu's stuff...? Reimu's here...?"

Either Marisa isn't interested in shikigami, or just wanted to change the topic. I told her the details of Reimu's arrival. I said, "You're kind of like Reimu," or some other conversation filler, while she poked around Reimu's belongings, and pulled out three books in them. I felt a light shock. Those books are part of the same series as the 12 volumes I have here. Why would Reimu have them...?

"Hm? Interested in these books? Knowin' Reimu, I bet she thought, 'They look pretty important to the youkai, so I'll take them,' or somethin'."

With the 12 volumes I have on hand, and the three volumes there, that's a total of 15 volumes combined. I have no doubt that this is a set of 15 volumes. The shikigami of the outside world are the same as the ones in Gensokyo after all. With computers, F represents 15, and F is the state wherein everything is compounded. It was written that when everything becomes F, the highest value is held. I think that it's natural for 15 to have power; even in ancient times, 15 meant perfection in this country. The same reason the full moon is also known as the fifteenth night. Computers must be familiars that have resulted from the ideas of the East and the beauty of the moon.



Marisa asked me what I was thinking about as she lined up the three books. Through Marisa's nonchalant actions, I realized something else. The numbers on the books, 13, 14, and 15, when lined up, makes 131415. If the 1 in front is removed, it then depicts the number that represents a perfect circle, 3.1415. This also means a full moon. And thus my theory that the familiars of the outside world use the power of the moon becomes truth. I wanted to research more in regards to the

shikigami of the outside world, but to do that, I required these books.

"Kourin. You plan on makin' a deal with Reimu? Forget it. What she thinks is valuable is completely different from everyone else."

Indeed, Reimu is too detached from this world. Normal exchange conditions wouldn't suffice. However, I can still make a deal with Reimu. Reimu's values are different, after all.

It was then that I heard the returning footsteps of the owner of those books.

"Thanks for waiting. Geez, these clothes are way too big! It's hard to walk in these." Reimu expressed her dissatisfaction as she returned. Well, those are my clothes, after all, so it can't be helped. There's a significant size difference between us, but she's the one who took the clothes in the first place.



"Oh? If it isn't Marisa. Why're you in such a place?"

"That's my line. I just came to check if there was anythin' new in stock, just like a good customer."

"Reimu, will you not call my store 'such a place'?"

"Whenever I come, I never see any customers around; the location isn't so great, either."

I began reading the book I was previously reading as Marisa retorted, "I thought I said I'm a customer." Reimu walked up to one of the cupboards, took out a teapot, and began preparing tea as if she owned the place. They do whatever they want as usual. They're not even customers.

While I was glancing at Reimu's books, I thought to myself that I must pretend to not have noticed them at all in order to make them mine. "Anyway, I'll take up your request to mend your clothes; but you know I won't just do it for free, right?"

With her back still facing me, Reimu asked, "Why?"

"*Why?* Are you kidding? A business, you see, requires customers to pay a suitable *price* for their services."

"I know that much; I pay the normal shopkeepers when I go shopping. The same goes for my shrine; wishes are granted for donations."

"Are you saying I'm not one of your 'normal shopkeepers'?"

"Mr. Rinnosuke, you're not interested in money, right?"

"When did I ever say *that*? Don't go around deciding things yourself."

"Well, you never take any cash."

"What're you saying? The fees for all your requests and everything you've taken from here is all on your tab."

As she poured tea into her teacup, she replied, "That's because I never walk around with money. And even if I went home, there wouldn't be any there, either."

"Nobody donates, huh? Praying at your shrine won't get any wishes granted."

"Oh, I see. Since you suddenly brought this up, you're after these books, aren't you?" Reimu placed her teacup down, sat beside me, and began reeling in the

books that are soon to be mine.

"...Reimu, those books aren't enough to cover your tab."

"These books, you know, looked pretty important to the youkai I exterminated. They're definitely worth *something*."

Marisa looked at me with a face that said "told ya so," and because of that, I was about to let out a laugh, but I held it in.

"Well, let me have a look then...Hm, I see. They're well-made, but they look new. When it comes to these kinds of things, older ones are more valuable...they're nothing special after all. They were probably just something that youkai doesn't see often, so it took them."

"Then, those books for everything on my tab sounds like a fair deal," she said with a smirk. She doesn't listen to others and has no understanding of the concept that things have a value, a price. To her, money is worth no more than the physical value of the metal or paper it's printed on. However, she must've faintly realized that I wanted them. After all...

"All right then; I'll buy those three books from you."

"Huh? all three?"

"One for mending your clothes. One for the rental fee for the clothes you're wearing now. And the last one--"

"Ah, wait a second, what about the tab?"

"Hey, exactly how much do you think is on your tab? It's not too much, but you can't cover it with just those three books." That was the truth. Reimu takes things from the shop, and requests tools and clothes; I'd even prepared her purification wand.

"No way around it, huh...? Alright then, what's leftover on the tab will stay there." I looked out through the window. That's right, I've had a bad feeling since this morning. "By the way, the last one is the fee for the door repairs!"

Loud knocking. The sounds of the shop's door being banged on heavily was getting louder. One book might not be worth the trouble...

"I know the red one is in there! She's the one who took my books!"

By the door was a furious little girl, or what seemed to be. Her clothes were a mess; she must be the one Reimu claimed to have "exterminated" earlier.

"Geez, you're persistent. I beat you, so just go back into the forest like a good youkai!"

"Huh? You're not red."

"I'm blue today."

"Just give me my books back!"

"Even if you tell me to, I can't do anything about it. I don't have them anymore, so give up."

"How cruel - wait, where are they?!"

The books are mine now, and of course, I have no intention of returning them. However, I'm unable to do anything rough. The girls told me how it was "amazing you managed to live so long like that," but I think it's normal, and I've lived many times longer than they have. I glared sharply at Reimu.

"...Hey, Marisa! You look pretty sleepy."

"Huh, what? Ya reap what ya sow, do it yourself."

"I can't move well in these clothes. She isn't much of a fight, so you can take her, Marisa. Just watch out for attacks from behind."

"Are you saying she should get her revenge on you with me? Geez, Reimu..."

Marisa hopped off the pot, and headed toward the girl, in a seemingly good mood.

"Put it on my tab."

Of course, I've never seen Reimu hand over any money to Marisa.

"Here I am. The one in red gave up. Her parent will be taking her place."

"Whaddaya mean, parent? There's no way you're her mother!"

"She's adopted."

Reimu returned to her seat and began drinking her tea.



"If you're going to fight, do it outside the shop. If you destroy anything else, you're going to be paying for everything."

Marisa said "Yeah, I know," and forced the youkai out. "Anyway, Kourin, good for you for gettin' all fifteen volumes."

Surprised, I looked at Marisa. I couldn't remember having said anything about it being a fifteen volume set. "Why did you think it was fifteen?"

Marisa threw the book she was holding toward me. "I looked at the back of the book."

I turned the book over, and flipped open the back cover; written in small print was "15 Volumes Total."

...It's snowing outside. If I don't get the door repaired soon, it's going to be unpleasant in here.

"Seriously, Reimu. Whenever you come here, nothing good ever happens."

"The shop itself has nothing good. Here, tea."

I sat down beside her, and took the tea. It had an extremely pleasing scent. "Ah, this tea...you used the tea leaves at the back of the shelf, didn't you?"

And here I thought it was tea Reimu had brought herself.

"They are the ones with the best smell to them."

"It's the best kind of tea. I was saving it for a special occasion, too..."

"Oh. Will there ever be such an occasion?" Reimu was completely relaxed and in a good mood. The sounds of Marisa's enjoyment and laughter and the cries of her youkai opponent can be heard.

This is relatively usual; I don't think of these days as special.

"Mr. Rinnosuke. You're not going to sell those books, right? All the goods here haven't changed at all."

The majority of the wares here are my collection; indeed, I don't want to let go of anything so easily. "No, they're all merchandise."

...Maybe I'm not suited to be a businessman.

(No previous chapter.) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 2 ->](#)

[<- Back to Chapter 1](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 3 ->](#)

Chapter 2

Illusionary Bird



"Hey Kourin! What's up? Today's our customary hot pot day!" Along with that noise, the door was thrown open; as far as I'm concerned, today's animal protection day.

"Oh, it's you, Marisa? What's the meaning of coming here and claiming this to be a hot pot day?"

Marisa showed me what she had in her right hand, and there it was: an exhausted-looking, red-and-white lump.

Some way from the Human Village in Gensokyo is the Forest of Magic, and close by this forest is my shop, Kourindou. In other words, it's halfway between where the

humans live and where the youkai are. I'd thought I could do business with both humans and youkai with this location, but the truth is that I almost never have clients from either of them. Well, it gets lively at times, but...



"Isn't that a crested ibis? What happened?"

"Ahh, I caught it by the shrine. Reimu's preparin' stuff for the hot pot, so she'll be late."

"And why did you decide to meet at my place, without asking me?"

"What're you talkin' about? This guy's delicious! It doesn't look so good, though..."

The crested ibis. More and more of these birds have been appearing in Gensokyo every year. Wherever they are coming from, every so often the sky would become dyed in their colors. Even so, their meat tastes good, despite their poor appearance. The hot pot, too, would end up dyed in that ibis' color, almost a scarlet red. Not a nice way to put it, but it'll look like a human hot pot made by a vampire.

"Well...I guess it's fine, but why a hot pot, all of a sudden?"

"Isn't it obvious? Cold days are all about hot pots."

Marisa continued to talk about it while going ahead into the kitchen. "Well, I just got this ibis by chance, but it was very lively until a while ago."

Gensokyo is, quite literally, a place where illusionary creatures dwell. At the same time, the people in the outside world would write off "illusionary" creatures as nothing more than "fantasy" creatures. But, of course, illusionary creatures and fantasy creatures are very different kinds of creatures. "Fantasy creatures" are just another name for delusions, misinterpretations, or misunderstandings. On the other hand, an "illusionary creature" is one that can only be found in Gensokyo. It goes without saying, then, that both Marisa and I are technically also illusionary creatures.

However, the reason behind the sudden proliferation of crested ibises is something

I don't understand. Could it be that they have become "illusionary" birds? That would be unthinkable in the outside world I knew, but then again, too much time has elapsed since then. As much as I try to imagine the outside world from limited literature and old memories, it would amount to nothing more than fantasies. A guess plagued by imagination is no more than fantasy. As for guesses, I rank them among "fantasy," "delusion," "forecast," "supposition," and "illusion."

"Sorry for the wait! Marisa is here too, right?"

"I wasn't waiting; it's not like I would even have time to do so, since you girls came so suddenly."

"Well, of course we came suddenly. But you should be waiting at all times; isn't this a shop, after all?"

Reimu came just as Marisa said. She was carrying several bags with her; ingredients for the hot pot, I guess.

"Ah, Reimu! Took a long enough! Let's get started with the hot pot." Marisa was stretching out her hand, with a feeling of "c'mon, hand it over!" to it.

"I bought everything, yes."

"...Huh? This is *red* miso. Who told you to bring red miso?"

"I didn't need to be told. The fact is that for ibis broth, it has to be red miso!"

"Hey, hey! The hot pot is already red enough, so we should make it with white miso. Putting red miso in red broth? Are ya some kinda Communist?"

"It's not like you aren't going to eat it just because it's a different color. Since ibis meat is red to begin with, it shouldn't bother you, right? And white miso - this is not the Genpei War."

The two of them were going on about food coloring - but I wasn't listening. On top of that, Marisa was holding the ibis, and every time she gave it a squeeze, the ibis would squawk; it was kind of weird, like the ibis was her yes-man. I'm sure she was doing it on purpose.



"...And don't you put red pickles on top of tonkatsu? And what about miso ramen?"

"And don't you put fukujinzuke in curry? I wonder if you even put it in cream stew?"

"Havin' somethin' red in the middle of white is the sign of a Japanese soul!"

"As for red-and-white things, just me is enough. And what part of you has a Japanese soul, Marisa? Do you even know what wabi-sabi is?"

"I don't think ya know that yourself, Reimu."

"Of course I don't."

"Anyway, we're not makin' the hot pot that way."

"Wasn't it you who came up with the hot pot idea? We can't eat this ibis raw."

"*That's* the problem? Alright then, if that's all it is, I can handle it."

"...Judge it?"

"Ahh, that might work too. Wanna go for it?"

In the end, it seems like they decided to settle the matter in a danmaku match, without so much as asking for my advice (even though they came to my shop on their own whim). The rules are 1-on-1, using Spell Card Rules; if Reimu wins, the hot pot gets done her way; if Marisa wins, she'll apparently make her go buy the white miso. Nevermind the fact that I've got some white miso in my place; they seem to be enjoying it, so I'll just let them be. Speaking of which, I actually know

the tastiest way to cook a crested ibis. "Marisa, I'm always telling you-"

"If you're gonna fight, then go outside, right?"

"More importantly, could you handle that for Marisa, Mr. Rinnosuke?"

Their objectives seem to have changed already. Whatever the result is, I guess they'll happily eat it however I cook it. I could go as far as to think they arranged this scenario from the beginning, since it always follows the same pattern. Those two are frequently dueling to decide the most insignificant things. On top of that, they lately fight a lot with flying attacks. It's extremely bright, and hard on the eyes.

Their duels are always a study in contrast; against the gung-ho Marisa, Reimu - either on purpose or naturally - fights in a more laid-back style. The duels mostly go Reimu's way, but Marisa doesn't always lose. It's just that Marisa, attacking with all her skill and might, against Reimu, who looks just like she was made of air...it's like trying to pound a nail into dust. In any event, when looking at Reimu, she gives off a feeling that she is not quite from our own world. Anything more than that is something one cannot quite grasp.

"Hey, that's dangerous! What if it had *hit* me, Marisa?! Geez..."

"Aw, damn! Why *didn't* it hit?"

"Your bullets avoid me on their own. How nice of them!"

"They're flyin' straight..."

Since I could hear their voices, I went to see how things were going. Reimu looked like she would plainly teleport at times. And her bullets would fly guided, or in impossible directions. ...It was kind of unfair.

Well then, this nice, round ibis looks really tasty; I've never seen one like it before. Speaking of which, Marisa said something that bothered me:

"Sorry for the wait; we've just made a decision."

"Ahh, you always make me wait like this. I already made the hot pot. With red miso, as planned."

"Gee...you already prepared the hot pot? What would you do if I had won, Kourin?"

"I would have had you eat an ibis cooked in the tastiest way."

The Hakurei Shrine is located on the edge of Gensokyo. And by edge, that doesn't mean only in the physical sense; there is the border between the outside world and Gensokyo. Because of that, the Hakurei Shrine is not an entirely "illusionary" place. And Marisa said she caught the ibis by the Shrine. It may be that this ibis is indeed from the outside world. So it would seem that crested ibises are not illusionary birds yet.

I feel somewhat relieved.

[<- Back to Chapter 1](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 3 ->](#)

[<- Back to Chapter 2](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 4 ->](#)

Chapter 3

Complete and Elegant Tea Time



My heater from the outside world has been repeatedly making noises. It has some switches I don't quite understand, but since I press them and nothing happens, I'm using it in my own original way. Lately, the fire has been too strong at times, so it's a little dangerous.

Speaking of fire, there has been an increase of cremations in Gensokyo lately. Until now, cremations were almost never performed to dispose of a dead human's remains - well, those probably ended up as youkai food. Maybe it's because the youkai are attempting to act more civilized so that, as of late, the ones that would eat corpse meat seem to be decreasing. If you see it from the side of the humans in Gensokyo, those remains simply can't be left neglected - for both sanitary and spiritual reasons - so apparently, there's little choice but to cremate them.

On the other hand, doesn't that reduce the opportunities for new youkai to be born? Humans have little chance for being anything but humans. And if they do, they mostly happen after they die. If they are cremated, it would be difficult for them to become Jiang Shi, Vampires, or other such beings.

Well, maybe that's a good thing. And besides, there are times when youkai can be born from ashes. Ghosts, especially, might be easily formed this way. Speaking of which, it feels like there has been an increase of ghosts in Gensokyo lately. Maybe this is an effect of the cremations, and maybe not...however, these more recent ghosts sure are cheerful and high-spirited. But, after all, ghosts, as far as Gensokyo is concerned...

Knock-knock.

Someone had arrived, but I hesitated in saying "welcome." Usually, the visitors are the ones to start with the boisterous talk, because usually, they are not actually customers.

"...Is someone there?"

"Eh? Ah, welcome. How may I help you?"

"I'm looking for just the right kind of teacups. Would you happen to have some here?"

There was a girl with the appearance of a maid standing there. (Although the frequency is low, I do get real customers!) My expectations were unusually off, but that's because if I always have only one kind of expectation, if a customer shows up, they will always be wrong.

"Yes, I surely do. What kind of cup would you like?"

"A small, pretty, white one...you see, the kind of white cup that would look nice with dark liquids, and it can't be too heavy. But the real issue is the shape, which is a little complex; well, I'll decide about that when I see them. Oh, and I need a pair of them."

"Err, I see..."

A complicated request. It almost seems like an exam for a Cup Expert certification. This is a rather difficult problem. Solving it while I try to remember just where the cups are in the piles of merchandise might be a little too difficult.

"Well, I have all kinds of cups. It's for drinking black tea, right?"

"Well, it's in the same style as cups for black tea."

"The cups for black tea were around here..."

Black tea and coffee are major luxury items in Gensokyo. It's been established that the youkai that drifted here naturally brought with them foreign countries' cultures, and things like tools and books. Even if Gensokyo is closed as an area, it's very international in spirit.

Well then, I just found an antique case. I'm sure that in this case were two cups that I liked.

"Here it is! I think these will be to your liking!"

When I opened the case, I was astonished. Those weren't the shapes I was expecting to see inside. There was a teacup, and something that once *was* a cup was lying there in several broken pieces. Yes, one of my favorites was cruelly broken.

"Which ones?"

"Er, no, just a moment."



Even in my disappointment, I noticed that there was a single sheet of paper inside the case. What could that be? I reached for the paper, but...

"Hmm, this looks like Marisa's writing, doesn't it? 'Sorry?' What does that mean?"

?!

What just happened? Why wasn't I holding the paper? And I really mean "why?"
Once I realized that, this girl was holding it.

"Please, have it back."

I looked at the paper she handed me. The only thing written there was a 'sorry.'
...That Marisa, what should I do to her the next time she comes here?

I quickly recovered from my confusion. I shouldn't bother too much with things I don't understand. if you don't do that, you can't live in Gensokyo.

"Yes, just like you said. I really like these. Can I take them?"

I take that back. I'm still confused. She *liked* the broken cup?

"Eh? I-is that so? Well, I do like them...but they are not exactly *normal*."

"As for small, they are as small as they get," because they are in pieces, "and they aren't heavy. Just as requested."

"They are so pretty, and they will look glorious with black tea. They are exactly what the Mistress wished for."

Yeah, but you may bleed if you touch them...

Knock-knock-knock.

"Hey! Sakuya, are you in there?"

This time I wasn't wrong. It's usual for the noise to begin less than 3 seconds after the door opens. And, of course, this red one is not a customer.

"My, isn't it Reimu? When did you return from the shrine? And the Mistress, too..."



"Return? That's not the point! What's with going inside the shrine when there's nobody there?! And on top of that, you leave this one there to go doing I don't know what."

"I'm not doing anything. It's just there weren't any good cups at the shrine, so we couldn't have a proper tea time."

"I won't treat people who come in on their own to tea!"

Most likely, entering in other people's homes on your own whim seems to be a tradition among the girls of Gensokyo.

By the way, the name of my client is Sakuya. And the mistress that Reimu brought along is called Remilia. Sakuya is a maid in Remilia's service. But, as you can see, this mistress is a vampire. It seems like they were taking a walk and decided to stop by the shrine.

"Even during a walk, tea time is indispensable. And with beautiful cups, of course."

"Remilia, in the first place, why are you walking about in the middle of the day, even though you're a vampire? Shouldn't you be inside a coffin?"

"Even I can have a sunbathing viewing. And by the way, coffins are for putting dead people into. You seem to have a misunderstanding."

A sunbathing viewing apparently consists of appreciating other people sunbathing.

"Anyway, what am I going to do if rumors of demons at the shrine start to spread?!"

"You don't have to do anything. Besides, the donation box was empty."

"But that may be because it's a godless shrine. Right, Mistress?"

"Don't call it godless!"

I'm probably the only one who knows about the origins of the Hakurei Shrine. I thought about telling them now to restore Reimu's honor, but...it's not really important, so it was rejected. How sad.

"Oh, right, Sakuya. Did you find the beautiful teacups?"

"Yes, I believe I did. They are quite splendid."

And then I was immersed in confusion again. What am I going to do about that cup? Its pair is in pieces.

"Here, Mistress. Can you see them?"

Sakuya opened the lid of the case, and lowered it so that her Mistress could see.

Why is a broken cup acceptable? Maybe this is some kind of riddle. That's it; there must be a meaning behind the broken pair. For example, the black tea and the cup pieces would represent a pond of blood and a mountain of splinters, like it was a choice between two kinds of Hell...for a devil and a maid, that must certainly be it!

However, when Remilia saw the cups, she showed a doubtful and disturbed expression on her face. That was a more human reaction than I expected.

"Ah...? What in the world is this?" Remilia pointed inside the box with a tired air.

Well, that's an understandable reaction; Sakuya came to buy teacups, and chose a broken one. I thought Remilia had some strange reasons behind her orders, but it seems I was wrong. Surprisingly, I can relate to Remilia's feelings.

"Eh? 'What,' you say? Why, they are teacups. Are they not to your liking?"

"It's a remarkably avant-garde design; for example, even if you take it by the handle, one third won't come with it, so you almost wouldn't think it's a cup at all...but I think it would be better if more of it could hold liquid."

"But isn't it a nice style? I really like this relaxing and refined antique feel it has. And the shopkeeper also said he liked it, right?"

"This design...so even the shopkeeper likes this odd design."

Remilia was giving me a suspicious and pitiful look. Well, I *used* to like them. If she starts thinking that I'm trying to push a broken cup onto them, I'll be in trouble.

"Oh? And what is this paper?" The paper with Marisa's apology was inside the case too.

"I think maybe it is an expert's appraisal, or something like that."

"Are there such things as expert appraisals with only 'sorry' written on them?"

"It's an 'I couldn't appraise it' appraisal."

"That's like a magician's introduction saying 'there isn't any kind of trick,' isn't it?"

That would be highly improbable.

Maybe Reimu got tired of their wordplay, because she went to have teatime by herself. Speaking of which, I wonder why there's a chawan just for Reimu at my place anyway.

"I will ask again, Sakuya. Just what in the world is that?"

"As I said milady, it's an avant-garde teacup."

"Did I ask for such a thing?"

"Indeed, you asked for it to be small, light, unusual, pretty..."

"Well...this one *is* pretty, though."

It is...?

"And besides, it has a more refined air than the ones at the shrine, does it not?"

"Their shapes are indeed similar, but..."

Their shapes are similar? Are there such avant-garde (meaning not limited to the original form) cups at the shrine? I asked Reimu about that.

"I don't know about any cups like that."

"Ahh, Reimu doesn't know? They were there just before I sent Sakuya out."

"I don't know about that, Mistress. It was after we arrived that the cups became avant-garde."

"Wha...? So you broke my cups?!"

For a while, the shop resounded with a barrage of Reimu's angry words.

...Right, so that's what happened. They broke Reimu's teacup, so they came to buy another one to replace it. But then, why would they buy a broken cup?



"Sakuya, I did indeed ask for a cup that looked like Reimu's. But I didn't mean how it looked *afterward*, but how it looked *before* it changed. Didn't you understand that?"

"Hmm, is that so? I was sure you wished for a cup that made a set with Reimu's."

"This is not a set, it's a mix."

"But if I bought a *normal* cup, you were planning on saying something like 'What are you doing?! Their shapes are completely different!', correct?"

"I...I wouldn't say that."

Maybe you would. Even for a maid, it must be hard to accompany this childish (even though she's apparently over 500 years old) and malicious mistress. But even if you *wanted* a broken cup, isn't it just a matter of buying a normal one, then breaking it? That's what I thought, but that might as well be one of the Gensokyo girls' idea of a joke. If I think about it too much, I'll get tired. That's why I take that stance of not worrying too much about things I can't understand.

"I understand. You want a normal cup, then?"

"If that is what you think, then do as you please, Sakuya."

"Of course. That's just what I'm thinking."

Good grief. Those girls are a completely different type of bother than Reimu and the others. Anyway, the moment I was thinking that I had to go searching for another cup, I heard Sakuya's voice.

"Well, these teacups are trash, then."

What?! Wait a moment! When I turned around in confusion to face Sakuya, it was already too late; she had thrown the case and the cup high up in the air!

...The fragments were dancing in midair! Time seemed to run slowly due to the tension, like an illusion! One of the cups was still in one piece, but even if they were both broken, what kind of person would just throw them?! Even the carefree one drinking her tea seemed surprised! And I would've been even more worried if Reimu wasn't going to drop her chawan from surprise. As for Remilia, her bat-style wings were completely outstretched. I'm not sure if that was because of the tension or the surprise, though...

...But, the cups are sure taking some time to fall...hasn't the case already hit the ground? Well, that's obvious, considering the time...the piece of paper with Marisa's 'sorry' written on it was fluttering in midair.

"So how was it? Real sleight of hand, without any setup."

I couldn't see even one piece of the cup on the floor! Surprised, I turned to Sakuya, and, mysteriously, she was holding the cup. However, more mysteriously than that, in the end, the teacups were sold without a problem, and the two of them left the shop. Remilia seemed greatly pleased with Sakuya's performance. Reimu was in mute amazement for a while, but then she must have remembered that those two were going to the shrine, so she left behind the half-drunken tea and went chasing after them.

As for me, I didn't understand how Sakuya could gather up all the pieces of the cup she threw up, much less how she could perfectly restore the broken cup to its former shape. I just stood there dumbfounded for a while...



Several days had passed. By following my "don't worry too much" theory, I was able to safely recover from my confusion. Just then, Marisa came to visit, and after I scolded her about the cup, I made her listen to what happened. She started explaining with her usual way of speaking, "nothin' weird about that." Apparently Sakuya has this ability, an ability to stop time, it seems. Of course, this way, even if thrown, she could catch the cup before it broke. You could indeed say that there was, in fact, no setup.

But, wait a moment...this ability couldn't restore a broken cup, could it? Something's not right. Even though I should have given up, I started to think about it again. Yes, there's a way to restore a cup only by stopping time. The more I thought about it, the more my brain focused on a single concern.

"That's it! The cup that I 'used to like' wasn't like that!"

With a bad feeling, I looked through my piles of merchandise. That customer is the type to knowingly do something so unbelievable! Well, I *did* sell it, so there's no real loss, but...I checked most of the merchandise, so the only one left...is it the pile Marisa is sitting on top of? I moved Marisa, and under her I found a refined-looking case. That's the one, no doubt about it. With Marisa peeking along, I fearfully opened the lid.

Both Marisa and I recognized the Japanese paper sheet and the cup fragments. On top of the Japanese paper there was a new slip of western paper, bearing the words "I'm sorry."

Truly a magician's "appraisal."

[<- Back to Chapter 2](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 4 ->](#)

[<- Back to Chapter 3](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 5 ->](#)

Chapter 4

Rain Furnace



I travel down a gloomy, unmarked path. My clothes feel twice as heavy as usual. A natural result of this drizzle, of course.

Be it sunlight or pouring rain, this forest's leaves will dissipate it completely. Whether it's sunny or rainy doesn't make much of a difference in this forest. Not knowing if it's day or night...I really like this feeling of borderlessness a lot.

But even so, it's hard to walk when your skirt is so heavy. I put my hands inside my skirt's pocket, feeling the rough object I was carrying, and I look up. Thinking of which, wasn't that a day with this same rain and mist...? The day I got this...?

He's run a shop in this place for as long as I can remember. I don't really think about the past often, but, well, I remember lots of stuff, like the pleasant dimness inside the shop. Yes, there was no such thing as day or night, human or youkai there. It's that kind of place. It certainly feels nice there, but there's just one thing I can't stand.

It probably has to do with my family, but he's so stiff toward me. Well, of course, he was an apprentice to the Kirisame family since before I was born. In the end, it seems he said that by dealing with our everyday merchandise and human customers, he couldn't make the most of his ability, and so went independent. This ability of his, though...just a half-baked "ability" that can neither kill nor revive. Just a while ago he was saying stuff like "this is a heater," and showing me how he uses it in a really weird way. In any case, since long ago, he's been reserved when it comes to me, even though I did

already tell him I've got no intention of moving back in with my family.

At that time I saw a fairy sitting on some huge mushrooms. This type of mushroom makes people feel more cheerful, so I'll take some to recover fatigue. He's always being anti-social and listless, so maybe I should give some to him as a gift.

The forest's mushrooms grow in a blink, and they always grow in different places. They practically pop out of nowhere, and vanish just as fast. The forest is growing, and it's always changing. But there are things that change even faster than the forest. Like humans. It's really humans that pop out of nowhere and vanish just as fast.

But even if I say that, this guy hasn't changed in any way at all since long ago - neither on the outside, nor on the inside. For as long as I can remember, he was already running this shop, so I don't really know when this apprenticeship story of his happened. Just how long is he planning to live, anyway?

There are humans who defy gravity, and there are humans who can stop time, too. But humans who don't change both on the outside and the inside...that may very well be the one thing no human can imitate. I'm so jealous.

That's when I realized I'd picked too many mushrooms; the fairy looked unhappy. It didn't look like I could carry that many, but it seemed like it'd be a waste to leave them behind, so I just stuffed them inside my hat. They were wet, so they felt a little gross. Man, I just can't seem to bring myself to throw stuff away. I'm amazed at this myself.

I'm just like I was when I was living with my parents. During one of his rare visits to my house, he was carrying some scrap of metal, and got in an argument with my father for some reason. I was very young, and even though I tried desperately to eavesdrop, stuff like "hihi'irokane" and "rare metal" was all I could hear. And after that, I got curious and started to gather everything from iron tools to old iron rods and iron scraps, anything that was metal. In the end, it was pointless, but even now that I've left my parents' home, all the iron scraps I gathered at that time - well, trash, really - I still have them at my new house. Even if I would throw away my home, I still wouldn't be able to throw away those scraps of metal. I sure amaze myself.

While I was remembering these unnecessary things, I saw my destination. Close by the Forest of Magic, with this rainy spell joining the drizzly rain

and the forest. Yes, this is a shop with an owner who would name it in such an obvious manner. The incense relates to "gods," basically meaning "shrine." Geez, this guy really likes this stuff.

The Forest of Magic (where my house is)...the human village...and then the shrine; Kourindou is at the center of their borders. In other words, is this place supposed to be the heart of Gensokyo?

There's a drizzle falling today, and on these rainy days, the only thing to do is light a lamp and read a book.

Knock-knock-BAM!

"Hey, Heart of Gensokyo! I know it's kinda sudden, but give me something to dry myself."

What I saw was a black and wet lump. Sure enough, the one destroying my enjoyable reading time was the same troublesome person as always.

"What do you mean by 'heart,' Marisa? Oh...you *are* pretty wet, aren't you? Take this towel and dry yourself."

"Oh, thanks for that. And by the way, why are you readin' a book, Kourin? It's rainin' today, huh? Didn't ya always say that 'the only days for reading books are sunny days'?"

"I *said* that sunny days are the only ones in which you can read a book *with the lights out*."

"Ah, that's right, I brought you this; eat as much as you like and cheer up some."

Marisa handed out her hat to me, while wiping down her body. It was full of mushrooms inside.

"Are you telling me to eat these suspicious-looking things? Well...if they are yours, then I think it's fine..."

"Just make mushroom soup with them. Here's the towel back."

"Hey, dry yourself properly! It'll be bad for my merchandise if you sit around it in

those wet clothes."

"This is the part where you're *supposed* ta be worryin' about me gettin' a cold. Anyway, today I have a job for ya. Betcha weren't expectin' *that*, huh?"

When you yourself say that your being a customer is unusual, I have nothing cynical left to say.

Marisa said "I came to ask ya to fix this," and pulled something resembling an octagon-shaped incense burner from inside her skirt pocket. Though it was generally worn out, the rust stood out the most.



"Ahh, this sure is nostalgic. Are you still using this mini-hakkerō?"

"I abuse it every day. Full-on use. It's just that...it got rusty." This mini-hakkerō is a magical item I made for Marisa when she left her parents' home. Even though it's small, it has extraordinary heating power: it could reduce a mountain to ashes. It can be used for heating, experiments, combat, and more. "Gee, I can't even think of makin' a livin' without it."

"I see. Hearing such things is one of the benefits of being an item-maker."

"That's why I want you to repair it so it never rusts again. Yep, I want you to make the whole reactor out of hihi'irokane."

Even though it was a strange word to come up all of a sudden, as if an illusion that my interlocutor wasn't Marisa anymore, my conditioned response was to use a business tone.

"Unfortunately, I don't deal in such material."

"What ya lack, Kourin, is the ability to lie. Ya lack a lotta other things too."

"Hmph. Since it's such a bother, I have quit lying. But I wouldn't think you would know about hihi'irokane."

"I sure do. It's good stuff, right?"

"Hmm...hihi'irokane is an incredibly rare metal. However, I do have a little of it; I guess I could use it."

"If ya please."

Hihi'irokane is, indeed, a rust-proof metal. Since its properties basically won't change under any environment, I guess you could make the strongest magical items with it. But even if I say that, if I do so, I would run out of this precious metal...what should I do?

While I was hesitating, I noticed that there was a strange point to what Marisa had said. This would be my first chance to do business in a while.

"Alright. Since this item is a proud work of mine, I might as well do it."

"Really? That would help me out a lot!"

"However, I do have something to ask in return."

As I said, when you accept a job, it's only natural to ask for something in return. But for Marisa, the terms I proposed to her could be considered easier than paying in money or mushrooms.

"If I remember correctly, you were gathering some iron scraps a while ago. I have no idea what for, though."

"That's my iron scrap treasure."

"Anyway, you were - as always - gathering them just because, right? So, my terms this time are for doing this job in exchange for that pile of scraps. How's that? Getting rid of bothersome stuff as payment is really good, isn't it?"

"Didn't I say that was treasure? But I guess hihi'irokane is pretty valuable..."

"Well, for starters, those iron scraps don't really have much value to them, so this job is almost a free bonus. As you know, this mini-hakker--"

"Whoa, I don't need an in-depth explanation right now."

I know all about Marisa's character. That's because I've been watching her since she was little. She's the type that can't throw things away. And the things she gathers would just stay unnarranged and piled up...that would only serve to reduce their value. Although she seems terribly hesitant about my terms, deep inside she must want to make a decision quickly. But there's a chance that she would agree, since it seems she can't live without the mini-hakker.

"Do you have any idea how much trouble I went through to gather all those iron scraps?"

"So if you're just going to keep them, then all these troubles were for nothing."

"Just gatherin' stuff was my goal. Never thought about *usin'* 'em."

"Then haven't you already achieved your goal? Just let these iron scraps rest in peace with me."

"Somethin's fishy here. Wasn't hihi'irokane a very rare metal?"

"There's also a good reason for you to agree. If you let such an opportunity pass, aren't you afraid of what's going to happen later?"

"Y'know, you don't have to hold back."

When I said "the repairs will take four days," Marisa in turn said "I'll be readin' this book until then," and grabbed one of my books for sale on her way out. This isn't a library, you know...

Well then, this is the first big job I've had in a long time. Lately, I haven't had almost any work or customers. If it keeps up like this, my "ability" will end up rusting. Yes, the ability to know the name and purpose of any unknown item. Since I thought that I couldn't make the most of this ability at a normal shop, I opened up a shop dealing with curiosities and rare articles, but...curiosities only attract

eccentrics. And this ability, too, has a small problem: the truth is that, even though I can know the name and purpose of something, that doesn't necessarily mean I'll know exactly how to *use* it. ...Well, if I can at least know an item's utility, I can find some way to use it.

The mushroom soup's suspiciously good smell was drifting about the room. While preparing dinner, I thought about the mini-hakkerō. This mini-hakkerō wasn't just a normal hakkerō; it was made with a lot of improvements and special qualities. Wind blows from one of the reactor's corners, so you can also use it to cool yourself during the summer. And just by having it, it works as an amulet for protection and good fortune (...I think). Anyway, it combines many of the "utilities" of outside world items. That is my hobby. Alright, I'll start on it as soon as I finish dinner.

Three days later is a sunny day. One for reading a book with the lights out; that kind of day.

Knock-knock.

"Done, Kourin?"

"Marisa? Yes, it's done."

Marisa was carrying the metal scraps in her arms. And even though I said it would take 4 days, she came back in 3. Oh well, she's always like that. That's why I always say it will take a day longer.

"Ahh, OK then. I'm putting these here. If you weren't done, I would've had to take all this back."



"You shouldn't make such unreasonable complaints when you come a day early. Besides, I don't see why you would have to take them back."

"Because the promise was to give 'em to ya for the finished product."

"Well, whatever. This is the hihi'irokane mini-hakkerō. Probably the only one in the world."

Marisa became so excited and was all "this is hihi'irokane, then?" She was so pleased that she wouldn't calm down, and unusually went back home soon after.

Several days later, Marisa's happy mood continued.

"I feel so good when I wake up! The air feels so great!" she said happily.

Oh my. I thought then, that if using my precious hihi'irokane made her *this* happy, then it would've been alright even if I hadn't asked for *anything* in exchange.

As a matter of fact, this time I secretly mixed in the power of an "item that makes the air cleaner." This mysterious charm had "minus ion" or something like that written on it, and I couldn't quite fathom its manner of use. At least it seemed to be functioning. Knowing the name and purpose of an item, I can manage the rest later some way or another.

"Hey, Kourin. Is it really okay? For it to work so well, this metal must be really precious..."

"Hihi'irokane is indeed rare, but it's not as efficient as you say. Metal is something that, if you just pile it up without ever using it to make a tool, is nothing but a bunch of scraps. This is something you don't seem to understand."

"But my goal is just gatherin' stuff. Usin' it or whatever is secondary."

"Being useful or whatever is not the point. It's important to put it to some kind of use."

"So, are you goin' to use the iron scraps I brought ya? Even though they're in that junky condition?"

I have a reason to be indebted to Marisa. It's nothing more than the fact that I always end up obtaining garbage that she obsessively collects. Anyway, it's not like Marisa would understand things like the small differences in the properties of materials. These iron scraps, the exchange wasn't a made-up-at-the-last-minute condition.

It's just that as Marisa grew up, I was afraid that she would end up finding out...Marisa hasn't changed even a bit; she's still collecting stuff even today. A human that doesn't change even this much is a rare sight.

"Don't just stare at my face like that. Are ya gonna use it, or aren't'cha?"

"That's it. I'll take them and keep them untouched as a memento."

"That's not what ya said before..."

From the middle of the iron scraps, I pulled out an old sword. There's no way Marisa could actually know about hihi'irokane, because this sword is made of hihi'irokane. Marisa always had a sword made of hihi'irokane in her possession since a long time ago. This sword's name is "The Sword of Kusanagi," and it's a very precious item. One that could change the outside world, at least. Marisa had had a very precious thing on her hands without even realizing it. Since I have no idea what would happen if I let Marisa hold on to it, I wanted to keep it in my custody. Even if I say so myself, I believe this is the right decision.



"Whattza matter? You're just holdin' that dirty sword and smirkin'. ...It's kinda creepy."

"Ah...hmm. I just think it's a nice sword."

"A junk sword like that? I bet it can't cut *anything*."

"We can't keep this sword nameless, can we? It was one of your garbage treasures, so what if I name it 'The Sword of Kirisame'?"

"What? You bein' sarcastic?"

"I'm telling you it's a nice sword."

"I think your ability to know names might be gettin' dull, too, Kourin. Oh well, whatever. But you don't have to be so stiff with me. Can't you just call it 'The Sword of Kourin' or somethin'? I'm not goin' back to live with my parents, y'know."

"I'n not...being stiff."

It's just that since I just fooled Marisa and am afraid of what may happen later, I'm putting my guard up. So that even if she finds out she has been fooled when she grows up, she doesn't come asking for it back. And besides, if I don't give it a short-lived name, then there's no point to it.

But then...Kourindou's collection of items that are not for sale has just increased by one. If the shop becomes full of these, I won't be able to speak up against Marisa's collecting obsession. It appears that collecting for the sake of collecting is becoming my objective too.

...That worries me.

[<- Back to Chapter 3](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 5 ->](#)

[<- Back to Chapter 4](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 6 ->](#)

Chapter 5

Summer Drizzle Hall



Once a year, the temperature rises, the truly Japanese rainy season ends, and Kourindou is bathed in intense sunlight, just as always.

The growth of mold in times of heavy rain inflicts damage on trees and tools, and this causes no end of troubles to the antique shop. That melancholic season has finally announced its end.

...However, my worries have not yet cleared up.

It's not that I especially dislike the sunlight; the strong sunbeams make the shops interior darker, perhaps because of the angle. The contrast of the darkness of the shop and the brightness outside the window really makes it feel like summer. I like

both the darkness and the brightness.

However, *this* summer is different. The sunbeams are indeed strong - and they are, without a doubt, the sunbeams of midsummer - but what about *inside* the shop? More light than necessary is shining in through the window...it's as if the shop were standing in a high tide zone; the reflected light seems to be illuminating the shop mercilessly: *This* brightness doesn't feel like summer. For some reason, this weather is only occurring around my shop; what's more, it's been like this for *three days straight* now.



Unfortunately, this kind of "incident" investigation is not my specialty. Usually, even in the slightest occurrence of an incident, there would be people around to solve it for me immediately. Except...somehow, it seems that only the area around my shop is affected, and it looks like she hasn't noticed yet. But going out of my way to request an investigation in the middle of this kind of weather is troublesome...

...Well, if it's *that* human, she's bound to come here even if I leave her alone. Whether it's convenient or not, she still turns up. Like help, or hindrance...

Knock-knock.

"Hey! Why's the rain only falling around your shop?!"

Ah, there she is. The Incident Specialist I mentioned:

"Well, if it isn't Reimu." I was just about to add "You came at just the right time," but for now, I decided to see how things would turn out with Incident Specialist Reimu. She might know something about this incident.

"Of course it's me. Jeez, do you even know what kind of state your own shop is in right now?"

Although the rainy season is over, why has the seasonal rain continued to fall with no sign of stopping? It is indeed a strange occurrence: Even though the blue sky hasn't a cloud in sight, this phenomenon is solely located in the vicinity of my

shop. However, for the time being, I've decided to see what happens if I play dumb:

"What kind of state would you be talking about?"

"I'm amazed. Don't you go outside at all? It's raining *so hard* around your shop you can't even see outside. And there aren't even any clouds. From far away, it's as if there's a white blanket covering just this area. Do you think another strange experiment has started?"

"...Ah, so it really *was* just around the shop." Well...I knew *that* much.

"What are you scheming?"

"I don't do those kinds of things, Reimu."

"Even so, this is an amazing fox's wedding you have here. It doesn't look like this is your average fox."

Though Reimu says that, it probably doesn't mean she has any information; perhaps I should devise a way to get her interested, and request an investigation. I handed a towel over to Reimu and told her to dry her dripping form with it.

"Anyhow, it sounds like you had it rough back then."

"What do you mean, 'back then'...? I *always* have it rough, so I don't really remember in particular."

"Snow fell until the rainy season started. Weren't you the one who solved that, Reimu?"

"Oh, that? That wasn't such a big deal; I've had far worse run-ins than that...actually, they weren't even that big either, I guess."

"I never have any clue whether it's tough for you or not."

"That's just how it is; if you ask me, it'll get worse if you leave it alone. If spring hadn't arrived, it would be troublesome, so it had to be fixed. If the mist didn't clear up, that would be troublesome too, so that also had to be fixed...Just as I thought, you're in trouble now yourself, right?"

"It seems like you understand perfectly. Yes, I'm in trouble."

"You should have said so in the first place! I guess I have no choice: I'll investigate this fox's wedding for you."

Reimu seems to be having fun. However anyone looks at it, she doesn't look bothered. Rather than looking like she's solving it because I'll be in trouble if she doesn't, she looks nothing else but thrilled at the thought of flying headlong into strange happenings.

"Sorry, but I have a few things I need to do; I'm worried as to what I should do about them." Actually, I *don't* really have anything particular to do right now - you could clearly see that I'm unoccupied. However, this kind of incident is outside my field of knowledge.

"Well...whatever. My clothes are soaking wet anyway, so it won't make a big difference if I go out into the rain again. You should do your 'things I need to do' and stay here, though I think this kind of minor problem can be tidied up in an instant." Upon saying that, Reimu left the shop in decidedly high spirits.

As I had predicted, Reimu had taken up the job for me. But, if you think about it very carefully, you'd follow that Reimu came to the shop even though she had no special appointment. Actually, maybe this time, she had come with the intention of solving this incident all along. As for why I think so, the towel I had handed to Reimu seemed not to be wet; Reimu hadn't dried herself. It looked like she had intended to go back out again right from the start. Or maybe she just didn't care whether she was soaking wet or not...?

If I leave things up to Reimu, after a few hours, the crisp summer sunlight will beat down upon the shop, and the shop's interior will once more regain its summer darkness. Once Reimu starts working, the usual incident will be resolved if I give it from two to three hours, up to half a day, and at the very most, a full day. That's usual.

I wondered if I should make some fresh green tea and read a book; I can leave the rest until later. The pleasant smell of tea makes you forget the passing of time. Though, if Reimu, working hard, were to see me like this, she might become angry...



...Even so, Reimu didn't seem to know the reason behind this fox's wedding, but actually, I think I have an idea of what it is. I never thought it would be possible, but...if it is what I think it is, it's an omen. If I wait a short while, things will return to normal, so perhaps this is something that can only be handled by Reimu's emergency treatment; besides, it would've been dangerous to tell anyone else; I especially couldn't tell Marisa.

BOOM!

Rumblllle...

It happened in an instant: the shop's interior lit up with a blue-white light so bright that I couldn't even read my book, and then, along with the exterior, darkened in the next instant. Following that, the rain became even heavier than it already was, the sky that should have been clear darkened, and the distant scenery became obscured.

The sudden heavy rain made me worry a little about Reimu...but it was her idle complaints after she solved the matter that really worried me. I don't doubt that she'll solve this matter, but clearly I had not predicted the pouring rain...I should probably prepare a change of clothes for Reimu. As for which was the real problem, it had to be the issue of Reimu's mood.

Thinking to see how it was outside, I approached the window and took a look outside, but I couldn't see Reimu's figure at all. The rain just kept getting stronger, like it was trying to drain the color from the world. The outlines of the forest and the mountains gradually began to fade, finally becoming a world of dark grey. The only thing I could hear was the sound of the rain striking the roof.

At that point, I saw a human run past the shop - a figure that, like the current surroundings, possessed no color: it was a black and white monotone shadow.



BAM! Clatter-clatter...BANG!

"Hey! What happened here?! This is no normal thunderstorm!"

What wasn't normal was Marisa barging in. And her dripping wet isn't exactly normal either.

"You say 'what happened?' like it's not normal. These summer evening showers happen often,

you know?"

"Ya liar. The rain's only fallin' around this shop. There aren't any evenin' showers like *this!*"

And so we exchanged our casual greetings. It was no use lying to Marisa, so I told her what had happened up until now.

"...Alright. I can prob'ly make this sudden shower clear up in a flash, but I guess Reimu'll get mad at me if I get in her way, so I'll leave it to her."

"For now, why don't you dry yourself off? I mean--"

"If I sit down on items for sale wearing wet clothes, it'll be a problem, right? I know, I know. But since I flew here, I'm not all *that* wet."

Still, even with a "Besides, the rain's only around your shop anyway," Marisa snatched a towel and started drying herself anyway. She looked considerably drenched to me. Had the rain extended over a wider area than I thought? Or was it that she stopped by here before actually coming into the shop? I can't believe Marisa would act so obediently given such an incident before her.

When Marisa had decided she'd dried off enough, she planted herself on a pot that was for sale.

"So yeah. You've gotta be the reason behind this weird thing happenin' around the shop."

"I really have no idea what you're talking about." Actually, I did have an idea. But I couldn't tell Marisa.

It was the rain falling around the shop right now. "Rain" can also be read as "heaven." That the rain is falling solely on the shop, all is under heaven. In other words, this means that a ruling power is present. A little while back, I had tricked...well, negotiated a sword out of Marisa: that was no average sword. That sword was the Sword of Kusanagi, by another name, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi ("Heavenly Gathering of Clouds Sword"). It holds the power to unite the land - no, even greater than that.

As for this rain, I firmly believe it is a good omen that the heavens had approved of me. I think manipulating the weather is a feat that normal youkai can rarely achieve.

"Whatcha grinnin' about? I've been thinkin' 'bout this rain. Maybe it's the work of the mischievous fairies around here."

"Ah? Y-you think so? Can they make rain fall that easily?"

"It's not too hard to make rain fall. There are always a few youkai who can manipulate the weather, though they have a small range of effect. Maybe someone prayed for the rain...?"

"The rain is only falling here...hmm...hmhmhm..."

"Huh? Don't you ignore me."

I feel that I've already unified all under heaven, but I have to make sure Marisa doesn't suspect me of anything; it would be a bad idea if I were to give away the secret of the sword I received from Marisa.

Marisa kept worriedly looking out the window. Perhaps because the downpour was on her mind, she couldn't calm down at all.

"...Maybe Reimu will fail, give up and come back...?"

"Wow. It's not like you to wish failure upon others."

"What're you talkin' about? I came here just 'cuz I had some free time. There's somethin' I can do to kill time right in frontta me, and you want me to just wait around?"

"In that case, shall I ask you to investigate this matter too? I suppose I don't mind if you both do it."

"...Meh. I don't wanna get soakin' wet again."

"Really, you're so selfish, Marisa!"

I'm the one in a pinch, so I'd be grateful if someone would help me investigate, but I couldn't very well shout at her. It looks like these girls spend their time how they want to, so to each their own, I suppose.

Flash!

Rumblllllle...

"Whoa! What's with the lightnin'? That sounded way too close!"

Since the rain is falling only around the shop, then it's a given the lightning is also nearby. However, after that great thuderclap, the rain suddenly ceased. The sound of the waterfall-like downpour faded and became silent in an instant. I thought at first the loudness of the thunder had damaged my ears, but due to Marisa's constant rambling, the shop immediately became noisy again.

"Ooh, it stopped rainin'. Looks like she did it, huh?"

"Of course. I was wondering what might have happened to her since this maelstrom started."

"If it were me, I would've solved this more smartly."

Marisa had calmed down again. Outside, summer had returned with intense sunlight, and the inside of the shop returned to its summer darkness. Not a cloud in the sky could be seen from the window. Looking at it, you could never have guessed that it was raining just a moment ago; I couldn't believe it either.

Knock-knock.

"Ahh, it's over. Honestly, making me do this kind of job. I hope you'll at least make me some tea, and- oh, Marisa's here."

"Kourin made you do all this, but he hasn't made any tea at all. Only some for himself."

I started preparing the tea in a hurry, and Marisa said "It's been a while, so let's have lunch."

"What, you're trying to say I took too long? Well, I don't mind if you're offering to make the food yourself, Marisa."

"Ya *did* take too long, but whatever, I'll cook today. What ingredients did we have again?"

This is *my* house you know. Oh well. I guess I'll let it slide this time.

Marisa volunteered on her own, but really, what ingredients *were* there? Because of the rain, I'd been secluded for a while, so I doubt there would be anything fresh. Well, I'm sure Marisa will manage to make something. She's always bringing ingredients here, so I don't keep much anyway. For now, I gave my thanks to Reimu, and handed her a new towel. Reimu immediately started drying her hair, hurrying me by asking "...and the tea?"

"Alright, be patient, I'm making it now. So, what was it? Our strange fox's wedding."

"Hmm? Oh, well, it was only a rain fairy that started living in your attic. I threatened it a little, and it ran off. I don't really know why the rain got heavier midway though. Maybe someone interfered with it?"

...A rain fairy?

"A fairy that mischievously lengthens the duration of rain. Just like you."

"What are you talking about? I can't make it rain."



"I'm talking about your name. It's the long spelling of 'rain', right?"

"I wasn't given my name for that particular meaning. So, then what? What about the fairy?"

"Since mold has been growing in your shop for such a long time, it happened to settle down because it felt like a nice place to live. It liked the mold! It'd help if you cleaned out the shop thoroughly once in a while; you never know when something like that might settle in again. Ah, thanks for the tea...ahh, fresh green tea."

The outside was awash with beyond-brilliant greenery and dazzling light, not subtle in the least. The rain was now like a magnificent sprinkling, and carried a cool, welcoming wind into the dark interior.

From the back of the shop, I could hear Marisa's voice; it seemed that she had managed to prepare something.

"It's hopeless, Kourin. There's mold on a whole lot of the ingredients. The rain lasted for a while, so you're gonna have to sort this out. I didn't have much of a choice, so today it's miso soup with pickled veggies for the main dish. No complaints outta you now."

Even so, mold...I guess my sovereignty is still far away, I thought while gazing at the sword that decorated the inside of my store.

[<- Back to Chapter 4](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 6 ->](#)

[<- Back to Chapter 5](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 7 ->](#)

Chapter 6

The Flowers of Muenzuka Higan



The deep red poison of the Higan flowers blocked the way. These grounds were protected by these strange-looking Higan flowers, beautiful and fleeting, as if they were not of this world. I thought that certainly, in this place, the inside and outside of the Border, and even yet another world, are mingled like an "impossible intersection of borders." Items that I've never seen might fall in a mysterious place like this.

"This is certainly a mountain of treasure."

When the autumnal equinox comes, I always go out for grave visiting. But even so, the place I go to is not a normal cemetery; it is a place where the humans with no relatives in Gensokyo - the nameless dead - go to rest. Yes, I go to the Mound of

the Nameless in Muenzuka.

And as for why there is such a place as Muenzuka in Gensokyo, where the number of humans is small: it is an effect of the present balance between youkai and humans. There are no longer any humans who exterminate youkai completely, and there are hardly any youkai who attack humans anymore, either. It would be a problem if the number of either youkai or humans were to increase, and it would be a problem as well if it decreases.

If a corpse is neglected, it will usually end up being eaten by some youkai. And having corpse-eating youkai going around is not sanitary. Disease would spread, which is not good for humans. Plus, humans could become youkai after death. If the number of humans decreases, and the number of youkai increases, the current state of equilibrium would be ruined. Because of that, as of late, not even the remains of the nameless go neglected in Gensokyo. The remains of those are cremated, and put to rest here. Thanks to that, you can say that the dead humans of Gensokyo really leave their bodies behind to become ghosts. Even those dead without relatives are cremated, and their ashes buried here.

As for why I am in this place, obviously, it's for mourning those nameless dead. I most certainly am *not* here to pick up the "unworldly rare" outside items that came in with those nameless dead.

Yes, most of the nameless dead without relatives in Gensokyo are people from the outside. This wall between this place and the Netherworld is thin, and, as a consequence of that, this place is also close to the outside world. People, ghosts, and even mysterious items fall in here.

"Thanks to the red poison of the Higanbana, this place is unharmed. It is just like a treasure mountain."

Right from the start, I find nothing but interesting items, such as a bottomless ladle and a soul lantern that glows with the light of ghosts. Are those outside world goods, or maybe they are from the Netherworld? I'll say it as much as necessary, I didn't come here to pick up rare items, I came to pray for the nameless deceased. The outside items I am frantically picking up are just a reward for praying for those nameless dead; that's the only reason that I'm collecting them without hesitation.

However, this merry feeling was crushed by an incomprehensible incident.

When counting the number of bones after cremation, somehow the number of bones and the number of bodies before cremation didn't match; and it wasn't like there was merely one corpse too many. For some reason, only part of a body was in excess. Well, since there weren't any family members to retrieve the bones in the first place, the fact that there were too many wasn't exactly a problem, but still...

"Were there that many nameless dead, Mr. Rinnosuke?"

Without solving this inexplicable puzzle, I went back to my store, Kourindou. However, while its owner - myself - was away, the always selfish shrine maiden and the usually selfish magician had selfishly made themselves at home in my shop. That almost always happens.

"Ahh, the nameless deceased were mostly all humans from outside. As you know, Reimu, there are very few unrelated people in Gensokyo. But as there are some people from outside that escape from being youkai food, yet lose their way here, there are always some dead in Muenzuka."

"And what's that junk you're carryin'? Ya always got a lot of weird stuff."

Marisa was the one who said that. If anything, she seemed interested in what I had collected.

"These? These are what had fallen in Muenzuka, Marisa."

"Graverobbin', huh?"

"Graverobbing *indeed*. How awful."

"Graverobbing? These were not offerings. Who in Gensokyo would leave offerings at Muenzuka anyway? Those items were most likely thrown away by some rude folk, and ended up drifting there."

"So, what, it's just trash? Nobody'd buy that."

"I'm not selling it; not right now, anyway."

It's just a matter of time before trash becomes tools; it's the same as the cycle of death and rebirth.

To end any further discussion, I changed the subject, trying to relate it to that mysterious extra bone from before I was now carrying.

"By the way, Reimu, has there been any major incident in Gensokyo lately?"

"Well, yes. There was this big incident - but it wasn't anything important."

"As always, you don't seem to know if it was actually big or not. Well, whatever, it's just that something strange happened..."

I tried explaining to the two of them about the bone that was bothering me.

"Huh...what? You wanna eat sushi or somethin'?" Marisa was saying nonsensical things, so I just let her be.

"Is that true...? One bone too many..."

"Indeed. Look, here it is."

"Ack! How come you brought back something like *that?!*"

"It's a right arm bone, isn't it? ...At the spring equinox, there was an extra right leg bone..."

"Don't tell me you're trying to assemble the right half of a body piece by piece?" asked Reimu.

"Not at all, but if that was the case, shouldn't I go for an entire body? Why would I stop at half of one?"

"In any case, I don't have the least idea. Aren't those dead people mostly from the outside? If something weird is happening, wouldn't it be happening in the outside world?"



"Funny to hear a shrine maiden callin' corpses 'those dead people'." Marisa was making fun of her.

"That may be, but to think of a corpse entering Gensokyo piece by piece...I'd hope that no one in the outside world is up to no good."

"But this bone...I'm pretty sure it's not human."

Reimu started saying mysterious things again.

"No matter how you look at it, isn't this a human bone? What kind of bone do you think it is?"

"It's just that...there isn't any sign of its soul from when it was alive."

"Huh? I never knew ya could see those kinda things, Reimu," said Marisa, appearing surprised.

"Why, I *am* a shrine maiden, am I not?"

The next day, I went to Muenzuka once again. For more prayer, of course.

In the end, I couldn't solve the mystery of the extra bone yesterday. Conversely, the mystery only got deeper by the end of the conversation. I don't bother myself with things I don't understand, I forget them - a special ability that makes life easier....or so I wanted to.

"Hmm...just as expected, but also surprising." Whoops. Seems that Reimu's way of talking is starting to rub off on me. What was just as expected is that today there's an extra bone here again. And what is so surprising is that the bone was identical to yesterday's - a right arm bone. I looked around to see if there was yet another right arm bone. "Today is the right arm equinox, I guess."

Weird.

If this bone is from a human from outside, then there must be a lot of people in the outside world losing only their right arms. But no, there's no way humans could do that. Even if one were to lose an arm in an accident, the connection between the body and the arm wouldn't be severed; even when separated, the arm would call for the former body, and the body would be under the impression that it has an arm. The human soul is lodged in the whole body, regardless of its physical condition.

At this point, I started thinking about how the Border that surrounding Gensokyo affected things. About how it affected people's "thoughts." If a physical wall would be a wall that keeps the *body* from passing through, then the Border would be a wall that keeps people's *thoughts* from passing through. Going through the Border - in other words, to be "spirited away" - is something that happens when one is in a particular state of mind, where consciousness is hazy, and then your whole self would jump through. For only an arm to jump through the Border, it would mean the arm and the body have different thoughts. A human whose arm and body move with different wills? I don't think there is such a human, much less a lot of them. So maybe what Reimu said was right: this is not a human arm.

...But anyway, it's a beautiful bone; you can't see any signs of the daily hardships in it. The size is as big as an adult's, but it looks as if it's a baby's. Could a human have grown up so perfectly? Would one raised in a family apart from any discomfort become like this?

While I was thinking of this, I stared at the Higanbana blooming by my feet. The stems don't have any leaves. This strange flower doesn't have any leaves on its stem; it grows straight from the ground as a big red flower. Without any leaves, and carrying a lot of poison, this was an appropriate flower for the grounds where the nameless dead rest. The impression I had was that its beauty was one unrelated to anything else.

...And then there was the body that severed its relation with this clean arm. I imagined a scenery of right arms growing in a row like the Higan flowers, and got an unsettling feeling from it.

"...So, what's going on with the production-model right arms?"

When I returned to my shop, the selfish-as-always Reimu and the selfish-as-always

Marisa were waiting for me.

"Ah, here's one."

"Just because there's extra doesn't mean you have to bring them here," Reimu said, while holding her tea in one hand and biting into a rice cracker.

"Hmm...there was something worrying me..."

I went deeper inside the store and compared the bone I had found yesterday with the one I just picked up.



"What's worrying you? Ahh, I didn't get this rice cracker from that shelf. I got it from the ones left on this one."

That's not what I was worried about. The rice crackers I left on the shelf close to Reimu weren't the expensive ones. Reimu had the habit of not choosing and going straight for the best stuff I had in the store. So, the rice cracker Reimu was eating...

"...No, wait. That's not what I'm worried about. It's about the bones."

When I said that, Marisa put her book aside, looking a little upset.

"Alright, enough of that. If ya wanna eat it that bad, I'll cook today," Marisa surprisingly declared, and went into the kitchen.

Well, I don't know what she's so unhappy about, but knowing Marisa, it must be something simple. She did say she was going to prepare the food, so she shouldn't be that upset. Besides, we were talking about the bones.

"So, what's worrying you about the bones, Mr. Rinnosuke?"

"Ah, it's just that the right arm that I picked up yesterday, and the one I picked up today...if you look closely, they are the same in every detail! Even bones from twins

wouldn't be this similar. It looks like they were duplicated."

"So what's bothering you?"

"Don't you get it? Simply put, this right arm and that right arm are from the same individual...I think."

"Really? How mysterious. But it might be normal."

"How's that senseless answer going to help?"

Reimu looked like she was giving up as she put her tea down.

"Didn't you say these were from the outside world? Whatever happens in the outside world is out of my control. Besides, I have no idea about what happens out there. These arms might as well come from a human with six arms."

"Even if it was from a human with six arms, it's unnatural for only the arm to cross the Border. The Border is your area of expertise, isn't it? I thought you would understand that for only part of a body to cross over the Border - it's a sign of a youkai. The Border isn't just a wall, you know."

"Really? That's very interesting."

"Yes, really - wait. Are you sure you are a shrine maiden...?"

"Someone I know said that there are those who can go through the Border with just part of their bodies with no problems...but, of course, she wasn't human herself."

"That's what I'm telling you. This human arm couldn't possibly do that. What did they call this again? An 'Out of Place Artifact'?"

"That's wrong!" I heard as a rebuttal from Marisa. No, she was in the kitchen, preparing the meal, so maybe that was just my impression.

"This arm even looks artificial. And it doesn't show any sign of a soul living in it...I don't think this arm has experienced a normal life."

Reimu put down her rice cracker, and took the bone for the first time. She was again with the tea in one hand, so she just exchanged the cracker for the bone. She looked so absent-minded that it seemed like she could bite the bone by mistake.

"So this arm doesn't have any human feeling to it? So if it came through the Border, I could treat it the same as the other items that occasionally drift in here. But even so, it is clearly from a living thing. Even if it is from a human with only right arms. And by looking at it with my 'eye', this certainly seems like it's from a human. If I were to take a guess..."

I was going to say "you could imagine someplace like a factory or a laboratory, where arms equal to human ones were produced like they were tools," but I stopped myself. These accursed creations would be such an insult to life that I reconsidered it; I'd rather not think that humans would do something so foolish.

"I just hope that the humans in the outside world are not doing foolish things" was what I said.

"But don't you make a living out of tools that come drifting in here once in a while? And aren't you always mumbling about the progress of the outside world?"

"The body of a living thing...it's not a tool. This store doesn't deal in that."

For a while, nobody spoke a word, so it was pretty quiet.

Reimu was making munching sounds like she was biting into something; I was pretty sure she still had the bone in her hand, so I looked at her with a shock, but it was the rice cracker. Well...that was obvious. Speaking of which, it's almost dinner time already, so is it alright for her to be eating?

"It's done. Today's chirashi sushi, just as you wanted."

Marisa cheerfully emerged from the kitchen.

"Chirashi sushi? Awfully extravagant, isn't it? So that's why it took so much time...what? 'Just as I wanted'?"

Marisa had a look on her face like she was making fun of someone. "What, haven't ya been babblin' 'bout it since yesterday? 'Bout how much ya wanted to eat sushi?"

So she said.

"You really did say that," Reimu said while biting her cracker.

"Even you, Reimu...did I say that...?"

"It took s'long 'cuz I couldn't find a fan to cool down the shari [sushi rice]. I was using this hat to fan it till I 'bout almost dropped dead 'cuz it made no wind."

Ahh, I see. So that's why Marisa was saying "Sushi, sushi!" a while ago...that's just like her.

"What is it? If ya don't eat it soon, my chirashi sushi'll go cold."

"Weren't you working hard to cool it down?"

Reimu quietly put the half-eaten cracker back on its shelf while she spoke:

"Sushi, huh? That joke was in bad taste, Marisa."

"Hmph. Bein' told 'I don't want that' by a guy by who shows up in front of someone with shari [bone relics] in his hands. Get it? After people die, they become ghosts. Bones are empty shells. If ya got a problem, go ask it, and that'll be that about the ghosts. If ya want shari, the sushi rice is enough."

"...I see. But, because I brought these bones, I got an unexpected banquet today. I wonder if this is for my good deed of going to mourn at Muenzuka as well."

"Pretty bold for a graverobber, ain't ya."

"My, this is delicious. But you should go wash your hands before you eat, Mr. Rinnosuke; you might have some Higanbana poison on them."

"You're right. But you touched the bone too, didn't you, Reimu? Did you wash your hands?"

"Of course I did."

"But weren't you in here the whole time?"

"Marisa, could you get me some more tea?"

"What, again? Didn't you drink it?"

Thanks to the sushi Marisa made, the shop regained its usual lively atmosphere - well, more like a noisy one. And, just as always, I could use my special skill to "completely" stop thinking about that bone.

Maybe from tomorrow on, the Higanbana wouldn't look like a strange flower, but a beautiful one. That was what I was thinking as I washed the poison off my hands in the kitchen.

[<- Back to Chapter 5](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 7 ->](#)

[<- Back to Chapter 6](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 8 ->](#)

Chapter 7

Ultraviolet Light



There was an ear-shattering clamor like nothing I've ever heard before.

Even though it was almost winter, the air was unpleasantly warm. Even with my eyes closed, a flood of light pushed through. Horrified, I couldn't open my eyes.

The rich, colorful outdoor scenery was being blown away along with the falling red leaves, and the winter colors were gradually setting in. The tree leaves, now red, that symbolize life, are little by little becoming warped, but as far as human comprehension goes, it only means they are turning red in color. For most of these leaves, they won't be able to endure their own transformation, and will fall to the ground, but there are some that will become completely warped. Those leaves will transcend red, into a color the human eyes can't see. The inhabitants of Gensokyo

call this color after the leaves have fallen "the winter color." Humans then say that the scenery has "lost its colors," but it's possible that, amongst the youkai, there are some who can see these winter colors.

The interior of the shop is also painted the colors of winter, but it's not so bad compared to the outside. And that is thanks to human ingenuity.

I had readied one such product of human ingenuity; namely, a "heater." However...

Knock-knock.

"*Damn* it's freezin' outside! It's so cold ya can't even *hibernate!* ...Hey, s'cold in here, too...what happened to that heater ya always have?"

"Ah, Marisa? Well, I ran out of fuel for the heater."

"Huh? Fuel?"

The heater I use was a discovery from the outside world, and its fuel is also of the outside world; that means that once I run out of fuel, it's rather difficult to obtain more. I've always used the fuel that was in it when I found it, the fuel from other items I've gathered, or other liquids with similar properties.

"Well, don't matter how cold it is; what happened to properly greetin' visitors?"

"I *do* always greet customers, no matter how cold it is."

"Ahh, if I'dda known your shop'd be like this, I woulda brought the mini-hakkerō. Anyway, whatcha gonna do about the fuel?"

Marisa is weak against cold; the intense winter cold reduces her sharpness to one third its usual level.

"For some reason, almost no heaters appeared this year; that's why I couldn't get any fuel."

"Maybe the outside world's winters ain't cold anymore. Lucky devils."

"I doubt there is any way their winters would be warm."

"So, what, then? Do ya plan to just freeze to death like this?"

"I think hibernation would be more appropriate, but I don't plan on doing either. However, it seems I've no other choice. Will I find some way to obtain more fuel before I actually *do* become frozen?"

It's not like there aren't other ways to get fuel - like going to the outside world, or getting it from some youkai. Realistically, it would be the second choice, but...that involves dealing with youkai...

"Want me to clue ya in on somethin', Kourin? There's someone besides you with a whole buncha stuff from the outside world. And I just so happen to be an acquaintance o' hers. Just the other day, she was sayin' 'one can speak with someone from far away if they are using this item.' I'm guessin' I could talk to her now if I had one...I was kinda suspicious whether it was actually some kinda shikigami though. Either way, I bet someone like that would have your fuel."

"Is she a youkai?"

"Course she's a youkai."

Knock-knock-knock.

"Aaah, so cold, so cold! It seems it got cold all of a sudden."

"Ah, Reimu. Welcome."

About now, people everywhere are making preparations for the winter season; Reimu too has certainly come to pick up some winter clothes. That's why I'm treating her as a customer today.

"Hey, it's cold in here, too! What happened to that overheating heater you always had?"

"Looks like it went for a long summer vacation to me."

"Huh? You're here too, Marisa?"

"Yeah. Right in frontta ya." Marisa explained to Reimu for me about my running out of fuel, and the various ways I might obtain some more. Looks like Marisa really is weak against cold.

"This youkai you're talking about - it's Yukari, isn't it?"

"Yup; she's closest to the outside world. I bet you'd know where to find her."

"No, I don't; I don't even know where she lives. She just comes to the shrine when I don't want her to, and, of course, sometimes she doesn't come when I don't want her to."

"So you...never want her to come...?"

"Anyway, Yukari won't be showing up for a while."

"Taking a wild guess?"

"It's not like drawing 'Great Fortune' from the omikujji; Yukari just never shows up during wintertime."

The verbal duel between Reimu and Marisa - which I could never know if it was for real or not - continued. Of course, I never actually said I was going to ask anything of this youkai; it's just that, if I were to remain without fuel like this, I'd really be in trouble.

"Come to think of it, if you prepare some fried tofu, she will certainly come visit. Well, her servant, anyway."

The next day, I tried putting some fried tofu on the storefront. I didn't exactly expect anything; I just did it as a sort of charm.

The temperature has naturally dropped some more today; seems it really is becoming winter. It's very inconvenient not being able to use my heater as I always have, but it cannot be helped; maybe I'll have to think of another way of warming

myself up.

I got this heater a few years ago. At first, I was considering putting it up for sale, but I changed my mind after I had used it the first time; I couldn't possibly sell a tool so convenient - I mean, hard to use. It could warm up every nook and cranny of the room, and it wouldn't even feel like it was winter. And I didn't have to bother with firewood or dirty chimneys, nor did I need a big installation like a fireplace. I wasn't getting much exercise because I didn't even have to move around as much. It wasn't long before I had begun thinking it would be a shame to sell this item - or rather, more like I couldn't sell it.

However, it has been a long time since I really felt the winter; it's cold. Have Gensokyo's winters really been so cold? Should I try digging up the magical heating furnace I made long ago? Wait...that was the mini-hakkeru I made for Marisa.

A knocking sound came from the shop's entrance. Did it trap someone already? It hadn't been more than an hour or two since I had set out the fried tofu; it must be someone who really likes fried tofu, if they were to be caught this quickly.

...But, there was no one inside.

"Ah, do you have a moment? I have some business for your master--" I opened the door, but no one was there. And my fried tofu was gone without a trace, too. Someone had certainly been there, but I didn't think it would be someone so quick to disappear like that. Could it have been the work of a fox...?

It seems I was wrong to think I could get what I wanted without making an effort myself. Just preparing some fried tofu and putting it out is about the same amount of effort as doing nothing.

"Well, this way is a little cold...but if I do it like this, there's no way my prey can escape the trap."

"...So, how long have ya been standin' in front of your shop holdin' fried tofu? That's not the kinda effort ya hafta make."

"Ah, Marisa. You were there?"

"Yup. Right in frontta ya."

"Oh - would you help me by luring in the youkai to my place?"

"And why'd anyone have to do something so stupid?"

"I'm not an expert in luring youkai, you see. I just don't know how to do it."

Marisa said "Fine, fine...let's just go inside for now," and entered the shop. Since I had the fried tofu in hand anyway, I left it by the entrance, and went in after Marisa.

"Not even a dumb fox youkai would fall for that kinda trap."

"Even so, a while ago it looked like it had caught something."

"Whatever. If ya can't use your heater, how can I come hang out at your place? I'll go and search for Yukari."

"Do you really think you can find her?"

"Even though Reimu said what she did yesterday, I've seen Yukari at the shrine sometimes. She's gotta live around there, I'm sure."

And so, Marisa went out to search for Yukari in my stead.

Do I...really want to meet this youkai? Even without the heater, I could find another way to warm up. After all, everyone else in Gensokyo is able to survive the weather without this useful device, and besides, even if I meet this youkai, there's



no guarantee that she can supply me with the fuel.

Didn't I just want to know more about the outside world? By using an item connected to the outside world, and by being interested in a youkai connected to it, couldn't it be that I just want to get some more information? I do deal with a lot of mysterious merchandise and, being surrounded by all these items, I am always wondering about the outside world; for instance, there's this box, much smaller than a music box, and made of a white, inorganic material. My ability tells me that this box is an item that can store and play a lot of music. However, until now, it has never played any music for me. Just how do they use it in the outside world, and what kind of sounds does it play...? I took the small, white metallic box, put it to my ear, and closed my eyes; maybe I could hear some sounds from the outside.

I got the impression that there was a conversation coming from outside. Maybe Marisa had already come back, or else a youkai had come by, lured in by the fried tofu...? No, I don't think that's it.

There was an ear-shattering clamor like nothing I'd ever heard before. I couldn't believe such a painful sound could be made by any living creature. I also felt an unpleasant warmth all over my skin; it was as if the ambient temperature had changed all of a sudden. In a winter like this, I don't think I would need heating...even with my eyes closed, a flood of light pushed through. What could be shining so brightly to do that? It's a cold brightness, unlike sunlight or magic light.

Then I had a flash of intuition.

Right now, I must be in the outside world; riding on the outside items surrounding me, my thoughts had flown across the barrier.

But, I didn't open my eyes; what if, after seeing the outside world, I couldn't return to Gensokyo anymore? Humans who are spirited away almost never have a chance to come back again. On the other hand, if I open my eyes believing this to be only a visual and auditory illusion, my thoughts wouldn't cross the Border, and would be back in Gensokyo - but I could miss my chance to see the outside world...which choice would I prefer...?

That's right, wasn't my goal to obtain fuel? I did have a clear objective: I didn't want to get lost in the outside world; only to visit it long enough to complete my task. I had to leave my thoughts at Kourindou - no, in Gensokyo - and let only my

body cross over there. Yes, that's a feat humans could not pull off - but I'm sure I could.

For the sake of getting fuel for making my shop warm again, I slowly opened my eyes...

Hakurei Shrine. The shrine at the very edge of Gensokyo. Marisa went there to look for Yukari. When leaving Kourindou, she noticed the fried tofu still in front of the shop, and decided to take it with her so it could be put to a more effective use.

"Heeey! Are ya here?"

"Hm? Of course I am, right in front of you."

"Not you, Reimu; I mean Yukari."

"What happened? And why are you holding that fried tofu...?"

"You were the one who said she'd show up for fried tofu."

"Not her, her fox shikigami."

"Exactly, and since Kourin obviously has no idea how to catch a youkai, I had no choice but to come here so you could catch one for me."

"Oh, I see. Rather selfish of you, isn't it? Anyway, how about we have tea while we talk?"

Marisa and Reimu drank tea while they argued about how to catch Yukari.

"Hm, Yukari...maybe she's already hibernating?"

"When ya say 'hibernate,' that just means she never shows up anywhere, right? And we don't have a clue where she lives. What if she's actually gone vacationin' in the southern islands?"

"That may be. ...By the way, where *are* those southern islands?",

"We don't hafta go that far. But there really isn't any way to call her?"

"I guess there's only one other way...but if I do that, she'll get angry..."

"So there is a way?"

"Well, there is...but if I do it, she'll show up only to tell me that it's dangerous and I should stop."

"The point is that she'll show up - that's what matters, right?"

To these girls, words like "dangerous" are hardly a deterrent.

"But it means purposely attempting to weaken the Hakurei Border; what if the ones who are close to the outside world get sucked into it...?"

There was a flood of light. It was a very bright, cold light. It was so bright that I could hardly see. And there were some voices speaking in what didn't seem to be Japanese. The hot, foul air was making my head hurt. So this is the outside world...I had seen it in things like books that drifted in, but I never imagined it would be so noisy and unpleasant. I had to calm down and look for some fuel, and then I should calmly look for a way to go back to Gensokyo.

My eyes were becoming accustomed to the light. This archway here was something I recognized...is this a shrine? And there are a great number of people here, too...

"Oh, this will not do! You ended up all the way here! You shouldn't come here, because you are not human, you see?"

"?"

The cacophany suddenly stopped. The light also went away, and I had the white

box in my hand again. The surroundings were gloomy, but somehow I could see...it was the usual interior of Kourindou.

It looked like I had just fallen asleep for a little while. Since it was so dim, I lit a small lamp, and put the white box back on the shelf.

If I just keep falling asleep like this, there was no way I could achieve my goal. I was curious if the fried tofu in front of the store had lured any youkai, so I opened the front door. Unfortunately, all that had happened was that the fried tofu had been taken.

"Then it was a fox's doing after all...?"

I could see the shapes of Marisa and Reimu in the distance - and of yet another girl, who seemed to be lecturing them as they walked; quite an unusual scene.

"Why, nice to meet you. Please call me Yukari Yakumo. Are you the person who wanted to meet me?"

The youkai in front of me, wearing gaudy clothes and carrying a gaudy parasol, had the sharp eyes characteristic of someone who isn't human. And she had an ominous smile.

"Ah, greetings. I wanted to meet you for a bit of a business proposal..."

I guided Yukari inside the shop, and explained the circumstances that had led to my calling her, like the fuel for the heater.

"Is it electric? Or kerosene? Or maybe even nitroglycerin? Well, whatever the case, it's a simple request. I have an undending supply of any of those...and we should help each other in times of need, after all."

She wore a wide smile. I knew it was definitely ominous.

"As expected from a youkai."

"As expected from *me*."

Having said that, Yukari started to walk around the store, her long skirt fluttering

silently.

"This shop of yours...it only has articles that are quite out of fashion. The latest trend, you see, is in portable objects: portable things to speak with people from far away, or portable devices that display the records of other people on a small screen..."

"We don't particularly care about fashion here; I just deal with items that I like."



"Ah, this white box...this is a fashionable item."

"Oh, that. That is supposed to carry a lot of music, but I have yet to understand how to use it."

I have the ability to know the name and the use of an unknown item just by looking at it; however, this ability does not tell me how to use it.

"If you put this to your ear, you will have odd visions like the ones you had earlier; that's because you are not human."

Again with the wide, ominous smile.

"Hey, turn that heater on already! It's freezing!"

"Aren't you a little impatient, Marisa? I have barely begun to speak to the lady--"

"Oh, I already turned it on. See? It's full of fuel, is it not?"

Indeed, it was now completely full. "When did you...but I was here the whole time...how in the world did you do that?"

"We should help each other in times of need."

With that, Yukari stuffed the white box she was holding into her clothes.

I was quickly regretting having met this youkai girl.

[<- Back to Chapter 6](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 8 ->](#)

[<- Back to Chapter 7](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 9 ->](#)

Chapter 8

The Deities' Tool

"This thing...what were the people in the outside world thinking when they made it?"

I still remember feeling chills when I put it away on a shelf deep inside the store.

Let's put it this way: I am Rinnosuke Morichika, a merchant through-and-through. And this is my antique store, Kourindou, where I keep all sorts of items, most of them curiosities. I gather these items from the outside world to sell them, and I always keep my door open to customers.

But then, there are those who are not customers, but still come here and treat me like I am a fake merchant. "It's not like you're really interested in selling any of these things, right?," they say. And I am indeed not interested in selling anything to *non*-customers.

There are, in fact, a few items kept deep inside the store that I am not interested in selling. Some items are not for sale because I am personally interested in them. It's true that some of these are bothersome things that would only take up space in the shop. However, I consider all of them to have value, but more so than my common wares. It just so happens that no one willing to pay a price corresponding to their worth has appeared.

But, among them, there is an item which lately has been bothering me terribly. And it's worse than usual, because I can't really ask anyone's advice regarding this item. It's a grey box, small enough to be held in the hands, made of..."plastic," I believe it was called? As I was saying, it's a box made from a material that is neither metal nor stone. Items made of this material have been extremely

numerous lately. On top of that, this one has several differently-shaped buttons and switches on it. However, even if I push them, nothing happens.

Insofar, there's nothing particularly ominous about it. However, this item's utility is very unsettling. Yes, my ability permits me to determine an item's utility. That's why I am the only one that gets this uneasy feeling. And it's this feeling that prevents me from selling this item.

Knock-knock.

"It's freezin' out there Kourin! And it's even worse in the forest."

"Is that you, Marisa? If you are coming in, wipe the snow off yourself before you do."

"Yeah, I'm doin' that now."

I put the ominous little box deep inside a shelf to hide it, and went over to the entrance.

"It's too late to start now...aren't you already inside the store?"

"I'm not even a customer, so it's not that bad, right?"

"No, it's *doubly* bad. I'd like to know what you are going to do if you get my merchandise wet."

"But ya aren't gonna sell any of it, are ya? The whole shop is full of nothing but stuff that isn't for sale; it doesn't look like ya wanna part with any of it."

"Even if it's not for sale, it'll still be bad if it gets wet. Anyway, hurry up and go wipe yourself off outside."

Marisa reluctantly went outside. There was a lot of snow piled up on her hat. Was it really snowing that much? Since I haven't been outside at all, I didn't even notice that it was snowing. That's fine, though; during the harsh winter, I can wait for it to end, staying close to my heater - a result of human ingenuity.

"I'm back. It's cold outside, but the sun came out, so it's real pretty."

"It stopped snowing, then?"

"Huh? Wasn't even snowin' to begin with."

"What about the snow piled up on your hat?"

"Ah, it landed on me when I went under some tree in the forest. I wonder if it was some fairy's idea of a prank; makin' the tree shake when someone walks under it so the snow falls on 'em. My head did feel a little heavier 'cuz of that, but whatever."

I was curious as to why she didn't wipe it off at that time. But since she would surely say something like "I was exercisin' my neck," I didn't bother asking.

"Get anything interestin' lately?"

I started saying "Oh, that's right, just a little while ago...", but then I held my tongue. That item I got a while ago would be that creepy box. As to why I had a bad feeling about it, it was because of what it is used for.

What that item does is that it can apparently control just about anything. For example, manipulating people, making them fight, starting wars, and, depending on the circumstances, even destroying the world. It's just as if it were a god's tool. But by looking at it, it doesn't seem like anything that powerful, or at least, that was what my eyes told me.

While it only took me a short while to ascertain that, since I don't know how to use it, I wasn't even able to get it to make an insect move. So I gave up and let it rest deep inside the store, as one of my not-for-sale items.

"A while ago...what?"

"A while ago...I had this strage dream. I could feel an unpleasant air. And there was this ear-splitting noise and an incredibly dazzling light. I had never seen anything like it before, but for some reason, my memories are..." Better to talk nothing more of that small box.

"What does that got to do with anything? Like I care what you dream about."

Knock-knock.

"Aah, Rinnosuke! This shop of yours...it's dangerous."

"What do you mean by 'dangerous,' Reimu? You won't find a shop more modest than this one."

It turned out Marisa only came here yesterday because she was free and wanted to kill some time. But maybe she couldn't stand doing nothing for long, because soon she went somewhere else; just like a dog frolicking around in the snow.

Today's visiting customer - wait, she's not actually a customer - is Reimu. Maybe it's because only non-customers ever come here that this shop is so modest.

"It's not a modest shop, it's simply one where there's no intention of selling any of its items, isn't it? But anyway, don't you ever go outside, Rinnosuke? Since you are always using heating, the snow on the roof melts and forms a lot of icicles, you know that? If one of those were to fall on someone, it would hurt a lot."

"It'll be fine. Maybe a prankster fairy will use them to drive away weird people coming to the store."

"A fairy that drops icicles? I don't think that's a fairy from the forest."

"Well, whatever; if they bother you that much, just take them down on your way out. You can do that much, right?"

"Fine by me, but that's not why I came here today. I was asked to give you a message."

"A message?"

"In a short while, I'll be coming to take the usual.' ...Just what is 'the usual'?"

"...What do you mean by 'the usual'? And just whose message is that?"

"It's from Yukari, of course."

When I imagined Yukari saying this, an unpleasant look appeared on my face. It's

true that I am in her debt, but that youkai girl's smile is terribly ominous.

"Wasn't she still hibernating?"

"That's exactly why she sent a message."

That's right, that youkai girl would certainly know something about that small box. However, she is the last person I would want to hand it over to. To date, she has never returned any of the items she has arbitrarily taken from me. And for some reason, she gives me the chills.

"I have no idea what 'the usual' is."

"Anyway, I've delivered the message; now, I have to go out and do some shopping." Having said this, Reimu promptly left.

When you come to my shop, and then leave saying that you "have to do some shopping," what am I supposed to think? It looks like she is suggesting that I have nothing worth buying here. No...it's more like she is saying it out loud.

I once again took out that small grey box; I imagine this is likely the thing Yukari mentioned. I picked it up by coincidence, so maybe it really is Yukari's?

The outside items that fall into Gensokyo include items that came through the Border by accident, items that became "illusionary" because no one used them anymore, items whose users had suddenly disappeared, and so on. So, if this box really is a god's tool, then that means that the gods have, very likely, disappeared from the outside world.

If this item really can control anything, then Gensokyo can easily be put in a dangerous situation. Especially if I had it over to that youkai girl, I can't even imagine what might happen.

No normal person would seriously believe that such a mysterious item like this exists. But in my case, I can't not believe it, given what I know.

Of all the items from the outside world I have gathered until now, there are some that no one in Gensokyo would believe it is possible to create, so it may very well be an item capable of destroying the world; I don't want to loose into Gensokyo

such a powerful tool from the outside capable of wreaking such havoc if I can avoid it. For now, the small grey box shows no signs of working, but who knows when it may release its god-like power? If this ability is set into motion, people might start being controlled, be made to fight, might start wars, and the world might very well be destroyed.

I love Gensokyo as it is; that's why I can't possibly give this box away to *anyone*.

I should *break* an item as dangerous as this. I should break it with a mallet.

...With slight reluctance towards destroying this little grey box, I hit it with all my might.

The next day, I was preparing to go out for the first time in quite a while; I had business that required me to do so.

I had, in fact, swung a big mallet on that small box yesterday. But it, how can I say it...had a strange outcome. It felt like striking a soft pillow. Surprised, I looked at the end of the mallet; that was a scene I would rather not recall. There, between the mallet and the small box I was supposed to break, was a white hand that had snuck in between them! Yes, a creature made of only one hand had stopped the mallet. I had struck down as hard as I could, but this (slender, female) hand was calmly interposing; the hand brushed the mallet aside, raised its index finger, and, in front of my eyes, waved it left and right. And then, just as if ridiculing me standing there dumbfounded, the hand grabbed the small box and disappeared along with it.

At first, I had no idea of what had just happened, and just stood in blank amazement for a while. But once I could think calmly about it, I realized there wasn't anything mysterious about it. Of everyone that I knew, there was only one who could do this; that's right, it was the girl who took it - the last one I wanted to give it to.

I still don't know where she lives. But for now, I'm just getting some fried tofu ready.

"...Preparin' fried tofu...gonna stand in front of the shop holdin' it again?"

"Marisa? When did you come inside?" Marisa had suddenly appeared behind me.

"Ya seemed to be in a hurry, runnin' all over the place, so I just entered and kept quiet; no particular reason."

That's right - if I can get Marisa to go searching for me instead of going after her myself, it would be many times more effective.

"Marisa, I have a favor to ask..."

"Go look for Yukari, right? Yeah, sure; why not?"

"...How did you know that I wanted you to look for Yukari?"

"The fried tofu."

Marisa gladly accepted, and went out again almost as soon as she had arrived. In this case, since it's so cold, I'd rather not go out myself.

I tried to calm down and think. Just what was that small box? My ability showed me its frightening use, but you wouldn't think an item that small could have that power. But if Yukari took it when I was about to break it, then it couldn't have been just another trinket...

It had black, cheap-looking buttons, and some small openings on its back and sides, but its most characteristic feature was the small window just above some buttons, that would neither open nor shut. If you stared for too long at that window, you would almost feel like you could get sucked into it. It was made of a strange artificial material. However, from its weight, it didn't seem like there was a lot packed inside it.

Rather than danger, what I felt from it was more like an eerie and somewhat lonely feeling. If I had a better sense of intuition like Reimu, maybe I could've sensed something more. Maybe even something like the feelings of the one who used this.

...Why is it, that now that I don't have it anymore, I can remember its details much

more clearly? Did my eyes get clouded by all the illusionary visions that my ability showed them? From now on, perhaps I should start looking at things without relying only on my ability....

Knock-knock.<

I noticed the sound of the front door opening; I must have fallen asleep while I was thinking.

"Whattaya doin'? Ya send me out lookin' for someone, then go take a trip to dreamland?"

"Ah, Marisa. ...Was I sleeping?"

"She was at the shrine, that Yukari. Drinkin' tea and relaxin'. Guess she forgot about hibernation."

"So...what did she do?"

"Asked me to deliver a message."

"Another message? And what is it?"

"Ah. She said 'Yes, I have received this month's fee.'"

What? So that was for payment? And a monthly one at that? Does she intend to come collecting things every month now? Looks like I walked into a deal with a very troublesome youkai.

"And then she said 'Didn't I inform you before that portable things are popular in the outside world right now? That's why this kind of item is appearing a lot: this one is a handheld game machine; you can use it to fight and destroy imaginary enemies, wherever and whenever you are. But unfortunately, this grey one is a rather old variety. It's only monochromatic...and since it's so old, almost nobody in the outside world has one anymore. You know, the popular one right now is one that has two screens.' ...What's she talkin' about?"

"I see now. That's a relief to hear."

What kind of "handheld game machine" is it that's popular in the outside world right now? When that small box with the two screens that Yukari mentioned goes out of fashion, maybe it'll start appearing in Gensokyo as well.

...And so the icicles hanging from the roof actually fell. Did a strange person come by, such that the prankster fairy drove them away...?

[<- Back to Chapter 7](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 9 ->](#)

[<- Back to Chapter 8](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 10 ->](#)

Chapter 9

Phantasmal Light & Snow on the Window



...It's cold. No one would think the chill within the shop would be of this world.

I have a heater placed at the center of the store; it's an essential item for getting through Gensokyo's severe winter. It was dangerously close to becoming no more than a mere decoration this year, but I got it working again somehow.

But it's still cold. And when I say "cold," I mean the entire shop is freezing.

This heater is from the outside world; it usually gives off an unbelievable heat. And right now, I could almost say the same thing of the flame that's burning bright within it; there's no way it should be this cold...normally.

But, it's cold. And that is naturally because the shop has been full of ghosts since

this morning; that's because the temperature of ghosts is extremely low. The shop was engulfed in that otherworldly and ghostly light. This light would reflect back in the snow on the window and give a phantasmal mood to the whole shop, as if in contrast to the very real light from the heater.

Unfortunately, I don't have any abilities that would allow me to hear the voices of the ghosts; as much as I would like to, I can't find out what these countless ghosts' purpose is; that's just not my specialty.

But if it stays this cold, I don't think I'll be able to get through this winter. So, even though it might be somewhat of an extreme measure, maybe I should ask a specialist to perform a ghost extermination. As for why I think it's an extreme measure, I don't sense any ill will from these ghosts.

Since going all the way to the shrine was such a bother, I tried to communicate with a bored-looking ghost in the shop with the message, "I want you to go to the shrine and call the shrine maiden." Well, I guess it is a silly idea, considering that I want it to call Reimu here so she can exterminate them. However, the bored ghost happily replied (and by that, I mean it moved its head-part up and down in a nodding motion) and flew off; it seems they can hear and understand my voice, at least. And really, these ghosts are very nice and cheerful types. If they weren't so cold, that would be even better.

A ghost's chill can actually be helpful, especially in summer; on hot summer nights, humans would gladly look for ghosts in order to cool themselves; though this is actually a test of will, that's the reason why it is more commonly done in summer.

All living things have their living temperatures; human and youkai are the same in this aspect. On the other hand, objects always assume the temperature of their surroundings. But ghosts are cold, unlike both living things and objects. Maybe that is how ghosts assert themselves.

Knock-knock.

"What happened that would make you call for help in that manner, Rinnosuke?"

Reimu had come; it seems the ghost had accomplished its task.

"What do you mean? I thought you would be able to tell just by looking at the

situation. I wanted you to exterminate - or rather, drive away - all these ghosts."

"Ghosts? Well, there's been a lot of them lately; the shrine is full of ghosts too. It's such a bother..."

Was she trying to imply something like "I can't exterminate ghosts myself"?

"It gets cold here with all of them around."

"Well, that's because they're ghosts, after all. But before driving them away, maybe you should figure out why they gathered here in the first place?"

"But it's so cold. I'd rather investigate after the room gets a little warmer."

"Is that how it is? I doubt you'll find a way to get rid of them if you don't get to the root of the problem." As Reimu spoke, she prepared some amulets; ghost-warding talismans, perhaps? "I will put up some amulets, just for peace of mind though."

"Thank you...but taking such an indirect approach isn't like you, Reimu. Do you dislike dealing with ghosts?"

"What I do is *youkai* extermination - ghosts are not *youkai*."

Reimu just stuck some amulets around the shop and went back. And, in fact, it did seem like the ghosts couldn't get close to them; the thing is, the range of the amulets was far too small; the shop's interior was just as full of ghosts as before. They were almost useless spread out like that, so I rearranged some of the amulets closer to me, my bed, and the more valuable merchandise.

Looking closely, some of the ghosts were crowded around the heater, looking as if they were cold. I wanted to say "whose fault do you think this cold is?", but then again, it seems that even ghosts who are cold don't necessarily like being cold.

Well...that makes sense; most ghosts were originally human, and so, a ghost's tastes and character shouldn't really change much from when it was alive. Upon closer observation, I could see some curiously looking around the store, some that wouldn't move from close to the heater, and some that were chatting with their fellows (or so they seemed). There appeared to be quite a few types.

They certainly have different ways of thinking. But then again, why are all these different ghosts gathering at my place all of a sudden? Did they all decide to do so as a group? If I could only hear their voices, it would be a lot easier.

When you think of hearing the voices of the deceased, an itako medium is the profession that comes to mind. The thing is, most people misunderstand a medium's ability; they don't actually listen to the voices of the deceased; they let their unconscious be possessed by the person they were asked to summon, and then transmit it in the form of words. That's why mediums can't hear the voice of anyone who is not closely related to the client. And if said client is not in front of the medium, they also won't be able to perform a possession. If a medium were to "successfully" contact a deceased soul that is neither family nor lover to the client, then it's most certainly a trick. On the other hand, if it is family or lover, then she could perform it even if the person was not dead.

You may think that shrine maidens have the same ability as itako mediums, but they differ a little. A shrine maiden can speak out a god's words. And, as there is a god to every thing, you could even hear an object's voice through that. But then again, this communication only goes one way; it would be - so to speak - a god's monologue put into words.

...It's quiet outside. Snowing, probably. It might just be that those ghosts were in the middle of a journey, and stopped here because it was snowing outside.

Reimu only stuck her amulets around the shop, without doing any active extermination. Ghost must really be different from youkai. There's not really a reason to exterminate ghosts, unlike youkai.

As for me, I just went to sleep, leaving the heater on. Even the ghosts would be cold. Well, at least I would be.

Bam-bam-bam!

Daybreak. The sun had barely risen, but someone is already banging on my door.

The snowing has stopped. The light from the snow and the freezing air enveloped all of Gensokyo in white.

Bam-bam-bam!

"Excuse me! There's something I want to look for at your shop for a moment!"

Bam-bam-bam!

Flomp.

Ahh, the knocks on the door were making the whole shop vibrate...and it was snowing all last night, and since I left the heater on overnight, the snow on the roof must have loosened.

"You're a bit early; there's still some time before I open up shop for the day...just what is your business here?"

However, when I opened the door, there wasn't anyone there; there was just a pile of snow right in front of the door - and protruding from this snow pile were two swords and a leg.

Customers won't be able to enter like this. Seems like I'll have to shovel away all this snow later...but wait! It seems like this snow pile in front of me is one such visitor! Just where did I put my snow shovel...no, wait...there seems to be something soft inside the pile, so it might be dangerous to push a shovel into it...

"Ughhh..." I could hear a voice coming from inside the snow pile.

"You can get out by yourself, I guess...but just what is it that you want? It's still too early in the morning; I haven't opened the store yet."

"No, I...I can't move. Can't you at least help remove a little of this snow?"

"If you can hear my voice, then you can state your business, for starters; I can help you after that, alright?"

"Oooooohh...ughhhhh..."

I removed some of the snow from around where I heard the voice, and there appeared the head of a silly-looking girl, the first one to ever receive a counterattack from the rooftop snow.



"Brr, it's cold! I can't move my arms and legs like this! Please move away the rest of the snow."

"If you move your body too much, it will compress the snow and it'll harden; that's why--"

"It doesn't matter *why!*"

"So what is your business here?"

She whimpered a bit, then answered, "There's something I want to investigate in your shop, and it's urgent; that's why I came all this way--"

"Something you want to investigate? Could it have something to do with the ghosts?"

"Yes, it does."

"Why didn't you say so before? I'll take this snow off you."

"So if it were another matter, you would've *left* me like this...? *Honestly!*"

"From now on, please visit the store in a more proper manner."

A little while after I began removing the snow, she was able to move again, and freed herself from the pile. Maybe it was because of the ordeal she just went through, but when I opened the door, she entered after me with an embarrassed look on her face.

The girl, who goes by the strange name of Youmu Konpaku, started to shiver from the cold as soon as she entered the shop. She was wearing green from head to toe, with a broad and short skirt that seemed very cold. Her bobbed haircut looked excessively childish - and the way she showed up was also quite childish. But her most characteristic trait was the long sword - about as long as she was tall - that

she carried on her back, and the small sword by her hip. To walk into my store carrying such dangerous things...how can I say it? It wouldn't be strange to assume she was a thief; maybe that's why the shop itself turned against her. By dropping snow on her and all.

"If you are feeling cold, you should sit near the heater; it's been on since yesterday, so it must be rather warm."

"Ah, thank you very much. I will do that now, then."

After she entered the shop, her behavior became very polite; she's probably "that kind" of girl.

"It might be too hot, so take care not to get burned..."

When I glanced in the direction of the heater, she was there with a relaxed expression on her face, looking almost lazy. I guess she's the same as Reimu and the others then.

As the water in the teapot on top of the heater was almost boiling, I put in some snow and ice I brought from outside.

"Can we get started? First, what is your business? You said you came to investigate something about these ghosts...?"

"That's right. Do you know why these ghosts are gathering here?"

"If I knew, I would be doing something more interesting."

...Like thinking what I could do after gathering them. But more importantly, something caught my attention just a while ago: a conspicuously large ghost came in at some point, and is now monopolizing the heater like it was enshrined there.

"Before the ghosts started to gather, didn't anything strange happen?"

"Before I answer that, just who are you? Do you exterminate ghosts with that sword? Or maybe you are just curious about them?"

"Ah, forgive me for not saying before; I happen to know something about the cause

of these ghosts gathering here. As you can see, I'm also a ghost - well, half-ghost..."

What? So she isn't entirely human? Well, it doesn't look like I'll be able to ask her to do either youkai or ghost extermin-- wait, a ghost?!

"Ghost, you say? But since when do ghosts have a physical body like yours? You can't possibly be dead."

"Ah, of course this part of me here is the human one; my ghost part is the one there." She pointed to the big ghost monopolizing the heater.

It seems like she's able to command ghosts; in this case, she may be used to dealing with ghosts. There exist such strange occupations in Gensokyo.

"So, I'll ask you again. Did anything strange happen lately? Like picking up something, for example...?"

"They just suddenly started to gather one day."

I was beginning to figure out this girl's intention from the way she phrased her questions.

"Yes, I know that already."

"You just said you had some knowledge about this; however, you are trying to get information out of me. In other words, you want me to say something you don't want to admit aloud yourself?"

"Uh, i-it's nothing like that!"

"In that case, can't you tell me what you already know?"

"Y-yes, very well; I'll just ask you directly: Did you happen to pick up the Soul Torch?"

Soul Torch? Had I picked up something like that? I pick up a *lot* of stuff, so I don't always remember the more commonplace objects.

"What exactly is this Soul Torch?"

"The Soul Torch is an item used for guiding a countless number of souls; it is something that originally only existed in the Netherworld; the light from it can be seen by ghosts no matter how far away they are, nor how many obstacles there are in the way. And when they see it, they flock to it."

"Ah, I see. So that's the Soul Torch...Now that I think about it, I think I picked up something that looked like it in Muenzuka, just before winter started...just where did I put it...?"

"So it's here?!"

For some reason, she seemed really happy.

"Yes, I'm quite sure I picked it up. That was some time ago, though...but I don't remember bringing in a torch or a lantern; wait a moment." I looked into the pile of lanterns that I picked up over the last year, and found something like it; it looked like a paper lantern the size of one's palm, and it was indeed glowing somehow. "This is the Soul Torch, right?"

I had the ability to know the name and utility of any item, after all.

"That's it, that's it! Ahh, what a relief..."

"It seems like it started glowing by itself...is this cold flame the light of a disembodied soul?"

"Yes, but you don't need to concern yourself about that. As long as you possess the Soul Torch, the ghosts will continue to gather here."

I see. So that's what it amounts to.

"I think I'm just now realizing the reason why you came to my shop. You see, I told you that the ghosts were gathering, but I didn't say that they were being a bother. It was you who carelessly dropped it, wasn't it? Maybe you could manipulate ghosts before, but once you lost this, you couldn't control them anymore?"

"No, you're correct...I'm not able to manipulate ghosts by myself..."

"All this time, you really just wanted to get it back, right? If you don't tell me the real reason why, I don't think I will be able to give it to you."

"Oooooohh..." She whimpered a bit more.

So, finally, she began to divulge her reason for coming. The girl apparently lived and worked at a large mansion in the Netherworld. And there she was entrusted by the mistress of the place with the custody of this important item, the Soul Torch. However, it seems that she carelessly dropped it while travelling. That does seem likely for this girl.

When she realized she had lost it, she couldn't remember where she may have dropped it, and without being able to bring the matter to her mistress, she was at a loss on what to do. She would search for it during breaks in her job for a while, but since she couldn't make any progress, she gradually forgot about it altogether. Likely of her, I suppose?

"In the end, Lady Yuyuko found out about it...and she was awfully mad at me."

"Well, that's obvious."

But was the reason she got angry because she lost it, or because she didn't tell her about it? I wonder if she knows herself.

"Lady Yuyuko said that she could make the Soul Torch shine no matter where it is, and that I should go look for where the ghosts were gathering."

If she can make it shine wherever it is, then I'm sure she would be able to know where it is, too. It seems awfully convenient that she could only make it shine - she had to have wanted to make this girl go look for it. So what she was angry about was definitely not having been told about it.

What all this means is it's because I picked up this item that I'm now surrounded by ghosts and frozen to the bone. And on top of that, I'm being used to teach a lesson to this girl.

"I can see that you are extremely relieved that you found what you were looking for. But this Soul Torch has already become merchandise, you see; I can't give it away for free. I haven't opened the shop yet, but maybe I can make a special sale

for you."

"Whaaat?! No way~! Just give it back, please..."

"Hold on. I got a good sense of this lantern's value as soon as I saw it. Being an item from the Netherworld, it is not something that's easy to come by, right? So the price should fit the value..."

Knock-knock.

"Yo. Wow, did it snow a lot yesterday or what?"

The door opened, and the cold-sensitive Marisa entered.

"Ah, Marisa? It's dangerous, so open the door more quietly. The snow on the roof might fall, you know."

"What? But there's no snow on the roof. Which is kinda weird, actually."

"And why is that?"

"'Cuz I really don't think ya took it off yourself; ya never were one for manual labor, right?"

A good amount of time had already elapsed since that girl came to visit this morning; if it were still snowing, there would be time enough for a lot more to pile up. On the other hand, there would still be quite a bit of snow shoveling to be done.

"Ahh, there was this kind person here, and she removed the snow from the roof and from around the store for me."



"Hmm...hey...? Izzat Youmu...? How weird for her to come here. And the rest of the store is warm enough, so do ya really hafta be so close to the heater?"

The girl spent the whole morning removing the snow from the roof for me, so obviously she was freezing.

"Ohhh, my whole body's frozen stiff...are you really friends with this cruel shopkeeper, Marisa?"

"Yup, you bet! He sure is cruel, ain't he?"

"That is something I cannot ignore. How was I cruel? You came to my store to buy something, and then you said you were empty-handed, right? You can't live like that in Gensokyo."

"Gensokyo is such a strict place compared to the Netherworld..."

"Ahaha, no way! There ain't anywhere more relaxed than right here. I bet ya got tricked by Kourin into shoveling away the snow, right?"

Somehow, I got the impression that Reimu and Marisa must always be making fun of this girl, probably because of her immaturity and earnestness.

But, shoveling snow is a small price to pay for a life lesson, if you ask me.

[<- Back to Chapter 8](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 10 ->](#)

[<- Back to Chapter 9](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 11 ->](#)

Chapter 10

Colorless Sakura



As spring came closer, the snow-covered Gensokyo gradually regained its colors; winter's whiteness was fading from the lowest reaches of the mountains and, as if to replace it, those low reaches were once again being colored white: spring's whiteness, the cherry blossoms.

Those cherry blossoms could also be seen from Kourindou's window, but if you think I would purposely go out for a flower viewing, then you are mistaken. Isn't it good enough to enjoy a flower viewing from inside my own store? I don't like noisy places, and even going to a flower-viewing with people I often see is not that pleasing. I will quietly watch the cherry blossoms alone, from inside my store. I don't think there is a more elegant - or refined - way of viewing flowers; the humans who go out for flower-viewing are those poor people who live in the forest or somewhere where they don't already have a great view of the scenery; they

seem more like the half-witted kind of humans, enticed by the magic of the sakura.

Knock-knock.

"Hey, Kourin, it's flower-viewing season!
There's one every day at the shrine."

"Oh, Marisa? Your hat is full of flower petals; shake them off before coming in."

"But I left 'em there on purpose..." Marisa commented as she went outside and shook her hat off.

Marisa's house, in the Forest of Magic, didn't have any tasteful vegetation like cherry trees, and in fact, the forest repelled honest people, so it was extremely obvious that Marisa was elated to see cherry blossoms.



"So, ain'tcha goin'? To the flower-viewing, I mean."

"Flower-viewing, huh...I have other things to do today, so I will pass."

A flower-viewing with Marisa would be a fairly loud one - and I don't like loudness.

"And you are always pretty vacant...what's that ya gotta do? Does it take long?"

"Ah, I have another flower-viewing - a quiet one."

"Alright, go to your wake-like flower-viewing," said Marisa as she left.

I resumed my quiet flower-viewing. Watching the cherry blossoms alone from the inside of my store was the biggest luxury I could ask for.

And just like that, it became night.

The next day, the cherry blossoms were even more splendid. Since the previous day I had a flower-viewing consisting only of looking absent-mindedly at flowers, today I thought of having a more refined flower-viewing - and by refined, I mean while reading a book.

My archive didn't have only books from Gensokyo, but also many from the outside, though books regarding sakura were extremely common by any standards. There was not, however, a single book about the skunk cabbage, even though it's also a type of vegetation. Anyhow, just from that, you could see that sakura were a special flower for the Japanese. Since a long time ago, both humans and youkai have been driven insane by the color of the cherry blossoms. One person would become exhilarated under them; another would think of death, becoming all emotional. All of it was the doing of the reminiscent sakura.

Knock-knock.

"Is anyone here?"

"Welcome." It was the half-human girl from that other time...Youmu, was it?

"Ah, thank you very much for before; thanks to that, Lady Yuyuko was only a little angry with me."

"That's good to hear."

I don't know to what extent, but from what I heard from Marisa later, this girl was tasked with gathering all the stray ghosts in Gensokyo, and was still looking for unfound bodies. If so, was the other day when she was in the middle of this punishment...?

"Even if you say that, all I did was sell you an item. Are you looking for something to buy today as well?"

"No, I was passing in front of your shop, and I thought of both giving you my thanks and inviting you to a flower-viewing."

I think that if she hadn't said that she was just passing by, the thanks would have

had a higher value...but anyway, seems it's another flower-viewing invitation.

"The cherry blossoms at my Lady's garden are several times more worth seeing than the ones around here. But, even so, today's flower-viewing is actually at the shrine..."

"Hm...unfortunately, I have other things to do today."

"Oh, is that so? Well, the cherry trees will not run away, but the blossoms will, so please come see them while they are still blossoming."

I saw Youmu out, and turned to watch the cherry blossoms several times less worth seeing than the ones in her mansion, while reading a book.

And just like that, it had once again become night.

The following day, the cherry blossoms were once again even more splendid.

By the way, the book I was reading yesterday obviously did mention cherry blossoms. That was also a roundabout flower-viewing. As to why I would read a book about cherry blossoms while under them, this is just a way of enjoying life. People who don't know how to enjoy life are the simplistic and emotional kind; when they see cherry blossoms, they say things like "how pretty!" or "aren't they beautiful?," or perhaps "there are many ways to enjoy the cherry blossoms" like they know what they are saying, but are actually only exposing their foolishness. Being satisfied with merely speaking whatever is on your mind is such a simplistic and childish attitude, you see. Humans that only say those kinds of things are not much different from shikigami or tools.

When you just let yourself feel the sakura in front of you - without comparing them to sakura you saw somewhere else, or ones you saw in the past - you will gradually arrive at a true flower-viewing. To attain a certain level of sophistication, one must be able to appreciate subtleties like these.

Today I stored the heater I had left out all this time. Naturally, you couldn't get a

real spring feeling with it around. But, I still felt a little uncertain about it, as perhaps the mornings and evenings would still feel a little chilly.

Speaking of the heater reminds me of Youmu coming here yesterday. The truth is that what she said about those magnificent cherry blossoms bothered me a little; for starters, the connection between cherry blossoms and ghosts is a deep one, so when you talk about the cherry blossoms in that lady's garden full of ghosts, you can feel some cause and effect there.

There are not just a few plants that turn into youkai in Gensokyo; especially the cherry trees that lure people to their deaths - those have a great magical power. And not only cherry trees, but all kinds of dangerous plants exist in the Forest of Magic. Trees live longer than humans - and occasionally, even longer than youkai; the only ones who have seen all of Gensokyo's history...are none other than the Gensokyo trees.

Knock-knock.

"Is anybody there?"

"Welcome."

"The store was open, so I imagined you would be here, but..."

The ones who came were the ones from some time ago: the vampire lady, Remilia Scarlet, and her maid, Sakuya.

"...there wasn't anybody at the shrine, so I thought Reimu might have come here."

If you look at it closely, the mistress' dress is also cherry-colored. Vampires live long by sucking human blood; they might be fundamentally the same as cherry trees.

"No...I haven't seen Reimu here for a while."

"Today I arbitrarily decided to have a flower-viewing at the shrine, but then she arbitrarily decided not to be there!" The cherry-colored vampire had some unreasonable complaints. "That's right, won't you come to the flower-viewing as well? At the shrine."

"Is that alright, with Reimu not being there?"

"The cherry blossoms are flowering whether she's there or not."

"And besides, since the shrine is wide open, there are food and drinks available," said Sakuya, smiling. With a maid like this around, I can't carelessly leave the shop unattended.

"I am glad for the invitation, but it's still opening hours for the shop, so I guess I will have to decline."

"If you see Reimu, please tell her to head back to the shrine, alright?" Having said this, both of them left.

I kept looking at the cherry blossoms as I tidied up the heater.

As such, the day ended.

Again the next day, the cherry blossoms were endlessly splendid.

I wonder, did they end up finding Reimu yesterday after all? But then, even if Reimu wasn't home, it's easy to imagine them in a loud merriness under the cherry trees - and the image of Reimu's indignation upon coming back in the evening and finding everyone helping themselves to her stuff was also on my mind.

The cherry-colored vampire and the red-white shrine maiden...if you mixed the red and the white, maybe you would get that cherry-pink color. But this definitely wouldn't be correct; the red and the white are not there to be mixed. In other words, there should be a boundary between them.

Since ancient times in Japan, red and white have been used for joyous occasions, and reversely, for inauspicious ones, black and white are used. It should be noted that, for both of these opposite customs, the color white is used. To put it more simply, you might say that the color red indicates a good omen, while black means a bad omen. So it looks, but it's actually not like that. The white is indeed indispensable.

So, in this case, what does white indicate, you might wonder? Firstly, it is not recognized as a proper color. As for why? It's because it can turn into any other color, which makes it a unique type of color. If you would give it a number, it would be zero.

On the other hand, red is the color of human blood, so it also symbolizes life. It's the color of a human's first perception of life - a color of genesis. You could think of it as existence itself.

So basically, red and white symbolize the distinction between existence and nothingness. That's why the red-white boundary means "joyous." By using red and white together, this border is emphasized, and the borderline represents the beginning of all things. That's why the ancient people thought of it as a good omen.

So what about *black* and white? Just as white is not recognized as a proper color, black is not either; black is simply darkness - and in the darkness, *all* colors turn black. If white is zero, then black is a void (imaginary) number. Besides them being zero and void, nothing concrete can come from the border between black and white. Basically, life can't be born from it. The difference between red/white and black/white is analogous to the difference between this world and the next. So there's nothing mysterious about the fact that red/white symbolizes life, while black/white means death.

So why, then, of all things, does the color of *cherry blossoms* puzzle humans, and charm a great many people...?

Knock-knock.

"The cherry blossoms are sure white."

"Welco--"

There was the sound of the door opening, but why wasn't anyone standing in the entrance...?

"...When did you get inside?!"

Right inside the store was Yukari Yakumo. I am not really comfortable around this girl. Not only can't I understand how she thinks, but I feel as though I'm being watched from somewhere. Whenever she is close by, I feel terribly uncomfortable.

"And besides, everyone around here seems to be doing flower-viewings every day. Shouldn't you take a rest?"

"Oh no, tomorrow will be the first. Flower-viewing, I mean."

"I see...so you haven't been at the shrine?" I had this image of everyone around Reimu being loud fools, so I was a little surprised.

"Why, no; I have been at the shrine every day. But tomorrow will be the first flower-viewing. It's tomorrow that the true cherry blossoms will flower."

I didn't really understand what she was saying, but it seemed today was not going to be a flower-viewing day. I was thinking that if I got invited for a flower-viewing again today, I might as well go, but I suppose I escaped from that; I guess today, I'll have another flower-viewing by myself while drinking tea.

"Today I just came to confirm the cherry blossoms' whiteness. Well then, now I'll be going back to the shrine again. The shrine's crimson cherry blossoms...Ah, that's right; it's unrelated, but did you know that the origin of red-white banners as an auspicious symbol is from Hachiman? Most people have forgotten about it, such an old thing."

Yukari said that, then left through the front door without waiting for an answer. I can't follow her line of talk; I can never fully understand it. I believe that in a conversation, you are supposed to be able to expect what your partner is going to say, so that - no matter how fast it goes - it can follow a logical course. Unexpected words sound the same as Buddhist prayers.

I had some tea and watched the cherry blossoms. If I were to make a comparison, I'd say that these cherry blossoms are whiter than those from other places - and that maybe this wasn't only due to their variety of cherry tree. I don't know why, but up until last year, they weren't so white in the first place. But by any means, I will participate in the flower-viewing tomorrow. If I get invited, that is.



The next day, the cherry blossoms were in such full bloom that it made the previous days' seem like fakes. There were such swelling white waves that it looked as though they were going to drown the shop. It already seemed as if nothing but cherry blossoms existed outside the shop's windows.

That's right - could it be that the sakura originally couldn't blossom that much? Nature is always surpassing expectations.

After all, weren't things like expectations unnecessary for fantasy? But anyway, if you think about it calmly, aren't they blossoming a little too much? Cherry flowers shouldn't last that long even when there's no wind blowing...for something that is supposed to be fleeting to be showing for so long, it actually makes me feel anxious; are these cherry blossoms really going to scatter...?

Knock-knock.

"Are you there?"

"Welco-ah, Reimu?"

Reimu, who should have been at her shrine's every day flower-viewing, had come here. Reimu seemed busy around the clock with preparations and clean-ups, so I was rather expecting Marisa to show up again.

"Lately, it seems there's always a flower-viewing; almost every day someone comes to my house."

"Isn't that because the cherry blossoms at the shrine are splendid ones?"

"I guess..." Strangely, I felt a certain awkwardness. Obviously, even Reimu might be feeling tired from day after day of flower-viewing.

"Today I'm borrowing the back of your shop."

"The back of the shop? And what do you mean by 'borrowing'?"

"For a flower-viewing, of course: today I'm having a flower-viewing at the back of your shop."

Ah, of course. So she wasn't tired from the continuous flower-viewings after all.

"Everybody told me about it...that the cherry blossoms at Kourindou were about to fully bloom. So I came to see them, and it seems they are in the perfect state already."

So as far as these girls were concerned, the cherry blossoms up until yesterday still hadn't blossomed? Does that mean that I was the only one who thought they were in full bloom the entire time and kept doing one-person flower-viewings? So maybe all the recent visitors were here to check on the state of the cherry blossoms at the back of the store?

"I don't really like noisiness, but...did you call everyone else already?"

"No, I haven't called anyone yet, since I was only coming to give the cherry blossoms a look, but I think that they would naturally gather here in a little while anyway."

"And why is that?"

"Because I happen to be here."

Was that natural for Reimu? As far as she was concerned, it was obvious for people to come to where she was, and since it was obvious, she didn't concern herself too much about it.

"If you say that, then I suppose this shop will soon get really noisy. Maybe I should close the shop early today; I don't think I'm going to do any business anyway."

"Really? I thought you *never* really did any business."

"That's because a lot of people who are *not* customers keep coming."

"No, it's because there's nothing in this store that anyone would *want*."

The white sakura at the back of the shop. White is the lack of color, and at the same time, the basis for all colors. Even the seven colors of the rainbow are based in the color white. If you join it with red, the color of genesis, to form the red-white, all kinds of different colors might be called forth. The fact that the flowers became white and blossomed fully at the same time that the red-white Reimu came is not a coincidence; this is all the doing of those ghastly sakura. And then when Reimu comes, people start to gather. And so, while no one notices, they are being manipulated by these sakura.

The cherry flowers bloom thinking only of luring people to come gather under them. If you think just of all the gatherings, across dozens and hundreds of years, then it seems they have a mysterious magical power, despite appearing to be mere plants. The sakura at the back of the store made themselves white to better attract people's eyes. And so they called Reimu's redness, and thought of obtaining all seven colors of the rainbow through that red-white-ness.

I am probably the only one who noticed the sakura's scheme. This way, by manipulating humans, they may be gradually turning into youkai. If they end up acquiring power enough to hurt humans, they will become more than what humans could handle. Just when had the sakura at the back of my store become so devious?

...Oh well, whatever. Wanting to noisily watch the cherry blossoms, wanting to die, wanting to gather...it's all quite natural. At any rate, the sakura having both red and white means the birth of colors, and that's a good kind of birth. It's just as the birth of a new season, so the flowering of the cherry blossoms should really be at New Year. Obviously, this is impossible, but at least I can feel a New Year mood. Being manipulated by the sakura's magic is not so bad.

"What happened? Why that happy face?" Reimu asked.

"Well, if it's New Year, you've got to be happy."

"It's kind of late for New Year."

"By the way, do you know the reason why red-white means happy situations?"

"Oh, that? It's obvious that it's because they are shrine maiden colors, isn't it?"

Outside the window, I could see some black mixed with the cherry blossoms' white coming this way. But for some reason, I couldn't see *this* black as a bad omen.

[<- Back to Chapter 9](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 11 ->](#)

[<- Back to Chapter 10](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 12 ->](#)

Chapter 11

A Nameless Stone



In the beginning, nothing in this world had a name; it was a world in which all things were mixed together in chaos.

However, the gods from those ancient times gave a name to each thing there was in it, and so the orderly world we see today was born.

When naming a thing, a new border is created that gives that one thing its own individual recognition; you could say that the power of naming is the power to bring forth something from nothingness - surely the same power as a god's. And, given the strength of this power, the things themselves remember those names - and *that* is why I can see those names in them.

I left the window open, so as to allow the summer breeze into the store. Outside, there was a summer shine too strong for people to go walking. It wasn't so bad inside the shop, but just so as to enjoy the breeze a little more, I hung a wind chime near the window.

Knock-knock.

"You're there, right?"

"I am, but...why are you so happy? Not that that's rare for you, Marisa."

"I dunno if it's rare or not," she said as she took off her hat and sat atop a pile of merchandise.

Even if she wants to play cool, it's way too hot today; it's full-blown summer outside, and she has that big skirt and frilly dress. I kind of worried if that big black hat and heavy clothing of Marisa's wasn't too hot for her. But the big hat should block most of the sunrays, so maybe she was unexpectedly comfortable?

"Ahh, it's so hot my head could cook! Oh, and I picked up this thing; could it be from the outside world?"

"Hm?"

Marisa took out a small, square stone. Surprisingly, it had some metal legs growing from it. Quite a mysterious stone.

"This...yes, definitely an outside world stone."

"Makes sense, makes sense...a weird stone like this couldn't possibly be from Gensokyo. So, is there something interesting about it?" Marisa seemed very happy.

"This is called a 'semiconductor chip;' it's a manmade stone used in the outside world. Basically, it's something they use when controlling shikigami. But, unfortunately, it doesn't have any use by itself."

"Oh, is that so? What's it lacking?"

"That much I don't know; only that it is a part from a bigger tool. Stones like this are originally used by putting a number of them together. By doing that, you can apparently give all kinds of commands to a shikigami."

"I see - so it really is of no use all by itself. Oh well, I'll just use it as an amulet." Saying that, Marisa stuck the chip to the ribbon in her hat.

Now understanding what exactly the stone was that she had brought, Marisa now looked satisfied enough, and was now reading a book. When used by people who know how to use them, semiconductor chips are said to be capable of almost anything. So even if she doesn't know a concrete way of using it, maybe a thing capable of doing all kinds of things would be well-suited to be an amulet; in terms of size, it's no bigger than a thumb, and so it doesn't really get in the way, so it might as well be good for that.

I didn't make up that name, however; it had already been named. The difference between Marisa and myself is just one of being able or unable to sense this name. Perceiving an object's feelings and perceiving its memories are things that come together. It's a matter of having love for them; just by having this love, something like knowing a name becomes trivial.

Knock-knock.

"Are you there?"

"Yup, I am!" Marisa answered.

"Ah, there you are, Marisa-wait, not *you!* I was asking if *Rinnosuke* was here!"

"Ah, Reimu? I am. What is it today?"

"I have something I want you to take a look at," she was saying as she entered the store on her own.

"What is it? If it's tea you want, there is some over here."

"Oh, really? You're awfully well-prepared." She came back with a rice cracker in her hand. She was too damn shrewd.

"So what's the thing ya wanna show?" For some reason, Marisa was asking instead of me.

"Yes, yes...I wanted you to take a look at this stone."

Another stone. So Reimu brought some stone from the outside world or something? Not that I think that finding a stone is such great joy though. To make a tool out of a stone, it would have to be something like a paperweight or a flint stone.

"It's really big, but isn't it just a normal stone?" Marisa asked.

"Look closely."

"Let me see it. Oh, but this is..."

The stone she handed me had the shape of part of an animal's backbone. So basically, this wasn't a *stone*, but a *bone*. That in itself wasn't strange, but its huge size was; it was a piece of backbone as big as one's hand: quite big indeed.

"This is some kind of bone, isn't it? The kind of stone they call a 'fossil,' right? I came because I thought you would know what kind of fossil it is, Rinnosuke."



Hm. This stone does indeed looks like a fossil.

Marisa once again saw fit to answer for me: "A fossil bone, huh? But if there was an animal big enough for this bone, it woulda been pretty damn big, right? Like, bigger than Kourindou! But there *were* some animals as big as this long ago. What animal is the bone from?"

So Marisa also thought this fossil was from a dead animal. But originally, fossils were not things that were buried in the ground; "fossil" is what the people who

dug them up called them afterward. So to think that there were animals this big long ago is a huge misunderstanding. I can't just let that pass without teaching them why fossilized bones look like they belong to animals impossibly big for today's standards.

"Ahh, Reimu, Marisa...it seems like you both have a great misconception."

No matter how strong the summer sun is, the store's interior is dark. And even though the store is crammed full of merchandise, the ventilation isn't bad. Gensokyo is a mountainous region, so the wind basically never stops. That way, even in summertime, it feels comfortable inside the shop.

The wind blowing through the window made the chime sound. But it was also making some of Kourindou's mysterious merchandise rattle, so the wind chime's sound was half-drowned. I thought that if they keep getting hit by the wind like this, some of the items might soon end up broken. But since they weren't likely to be sold, and since I get a steady arrival of new goods, I didn't mind it too much. Of course, the *really* valuable items are all kept safe elsewhere.

"What kind of misconception? Anyone would think this is a bone no matter how they looked at it."

"Oh, this is indeed a bone - but it is not a fossil, you see."

"It does seem to have turned to stone..."

"A fossil is 'a stone of petrified bone named after the animal it originally belonged to.' It only becomes a fossil after the name of its animal becomes known; until then, it has no name, and is not particularly distinct from any other stone."

"In this case, if I ask you the name of the animal it belonged to, it will become a fossil?"

"That would indeed be the case, but...that would be impossible; this animal was from before the time the gods gave names to everything: it's a nameless animal. This is the only kind of thing that even my ability can *not* identify."

"Well...in that case, since I discovered it, I can name it, right?"

At the same time that the power to name is a god's power, the gods themselves didn't have names in the beginning. Like with Takemikazuchi no Mikoto or Hachiman, the gods' names we are familiar with nowadays only represent but one aspect of these gods; Takemikazuchi no Mikoto was originally Mikatsuchi ("pot spirit"), and, just as the name implies, he was a god lodged in a jar. When his name changed to Takemikazuchi, he changed from a god of sorcery (as implied by the "pot" character) to a god of swordsmanship (as implied by the "thunder" character). By changing its name, a god changes its nature, which is evidence that a god's name is only one aspect of their selves. In the beginning, the gods had a much more ambiguous shape; they were nameless entities with no particular distinctions. Conversely, the gods who still retain their original form can only lodge in things from before the naming, because if a god were lodged in something that *had* a name, then it could only express one of its aspects.

"Are you saying that you want to make this be a fossil instead of a bone?"

"That's not what I meant...it's just that not knowing its name gives me a bad feeling, you see. And I'm curious as to what kind of creature could be an animal this big."

"You say that the owner of this bone was big? That's your biggest misconception."

"But--"

"Try to imagine an animal large enough for this bone: its height would by far surpass this shop, and its length would be as big as the shrine grounds. There's no way an animal this big could have lived. First, think of how much food it would have to gather, and there is no way it could move its body around quickly. And how would it be able to take care of its children and bring them enough food? There couldn't possibly have been an animal that needed a body so big."

"Eh? But here is its bone, isn't it? And where I found this fossil - or fossil-like thing - it was full of them, so what are all *those*, then?"

Strangely, Marisa seemed to have become disinterested, and was reading a book. I guess she didn't care about things like ancient animals. Except that this isn't a story about an ancient animal - it's about how things come to be like they are today.

"This bone's proprietor was originally normal-sized, and this bone used to be just

large enough, as those we know nowadays. But after it died and its flesh went back to earth, its bones continued to grow. Proof of that was discovered only recently since those huge fossils started to attract attention and were made a fuss of. Some time ago, they were still too small, and nobody would find or make a fuss about them."

"Are you telling me that after it died, the bone went on growing by itself? There's no way that could happen."

"Of course, *normally*, something like this *wouldn't* happen. But then, why did the bone get so big? Ah yes. The reason is that this isn't actually a fossil. Because it's actually from an animal from before the naming of things, you see."

I picked up my cup of tea. The tea had already warmed a bit, but, of course, I let that happen on purpose; only people like Reimu can drink hot tea with a straight face on such a summer day.

"Not having a name means that this animal didn't have any particular individuality; it just blended with the world. You couldn't say it was 'stone,' 'bone,' 'soil,' or 'animal' - it just *was*. It was something close to a god's original form. Therefore, it was the only kind of thing a god could take lodge in. And so that in the distant future it could regain flesh and reign above ground, these god-bearing bones are enlarging to a size fit for itself."

"Wait, wait...wait a moment! Your talk is going all over and I'm not following."

"Really? But it's easy. The bone you have is part of an individual that will turn into the incarnation of a god."

"I somehow doubt that."

"The fact that it continues to grow is one evidence, but there's an even more definite proof. The fact that even with my ability, I can't know its name just by looking - which is to say that it doesn't have a name."

"Well...I can't really judge that myself...and then, what kind of god will this bone become?"

"Can't you just imagine at once? An incarnation of a god with such a huge

backbone. Even in Gensokyo, you rarely see one...but I'm sure you know about them."

"Ahh, of course. So that was it...now I get it."

The day was starting to end; the sky was slightly tinged in red. The midday heat had pretty much subsided; only the sound of the wind chime was left there to remind of the day's heat. The two of them seemed satisfied enough, and went back.

Of course, not even I can see the names of things that come from before the age when the gods gave names to things. But when the humans find a bone from this age, they just go and give those names as they please. And when they do that, a nameless piece of a god becomes established as just another stone; this is what they call a fossil. When a piece of a god turns into a fossil, it then stops growing. And when a human sees this bone stopped halfway through its huge transformation and says something like "long ago, there were animals this big," you can only feel a little pity for their lack of imagination.

Knock-knock.

"Uh...there was one more thing I forgot to ask."

Reimu had come back, just as I was taking off the wind chime and closing the window.

"What is it? Still something about the bone?"

"From your story, I understood that this bone was 'a part of a dragon.' But, in the place where I found it, I also found a lot of old shellfish fossils. And those are sea animals, right? Do you know why they were there? Could it be that Gensokyo was underwater long ago? Even though it's so deep in the mountains..."

Humans with such a scarce imagination are indeed pitiful. To think that "because there are sea creatures buried in the soil, this place too was underwater long ago" is simply too pitiful.

"Really? So there were shells buried along with the dragon bone...and why does that make you think Gensokyo was underwater long ago?"

"What? Well, isn't it true, then? If a place that was sea becomes dry land, the shellfish *would* get left behind."

"Not at all. If the change to land is *slow*, all the sea creatures would have fled to the open sea. On the other hand, if there were a disaster big enough to turn sea into land *instantly*, the shells most likely wouldn't have remained in their original shape. In any case, there's no way they would keep still in one place and turn to stone."

"If you say so...but what are those shells, then?"

"Because dragons, you see, have to be born in the sea. And for them to be reborn, the resting place of their bones must be like the sea. So, the shellfish are there for this image."

"I've never heard of such a story. About dragons not being able to revive away from the sea, that is."

I really wished that Reimu, who is a shrine maiden, would have more knowledge about gods than myself. But the again, she's just a child, so I guess I'll have to teach her again.

"Dragons are reborn during a thunderstorm in the sea, rise to the skies, and soar through the heavens. Proof of that is given by the fact that the sea, the rain, and the heaven were all named by the dragons."

"You seem to know a lot, though I can't be sure if this is all true."



"The reason is that sea, rain and heaven are all essentially the same word, because the characters for each of the three of them can all be read as 'ama': The word for 'fishermen' is often read as 'ama,' which proves it actually means 'amabito,' which means 'people of the sea.' 'Rain umbrella' is read as 'amagasa,' and the 'Heaven River' (the Milky Way) is read as 'ama no gawa.' Dragons call up thunderstorms while soaring through the heavens, and the Dragon Palace is said to be at the middle of

the sea. So even you can see that they have a profound connection with water, can't you, Reimu?"

I saw that Reimu was still a little doubtful, but I wanted to improve her imaginative capacities, so I continued.

"One more thing as proof that dragons run through the three 'ama,' there are the rainbows that cross the sky. The ones that appear after a storm are the traces of a dragon's appearance."

"Ah, of course. I guess I understand now."

"That's right; for a dragon to be born, the three 'ama' must be present. The rain and the heaven are, but Gensokyo doesn't have a sea - that's why the dragon creates an illusionary sea. And, as an image of this illusionary sea, there are the clam stones that sleep alongside him."

Reimu seemed convinced, and went back to the shrine just before it became dark.

Of the story about the dragon's stone that I taught Reimu and Marisa today, none of it was made up by me. Only I know about that, but the truth is that fossil stones are also called a dragon's in the outside world. Dire Dragon, Winged Dragon, Sea Dragon...they have lots of names for referring to them. I believe that story I told just now is considered to be common knowledge outside of Gensokyo.

By the way, in Gensokyo, when a dragon (the animal) turns into a dragon god, those bones are not fossils, but living bones. The reason why that happens is

because the ancient animals in Gensokyo are not named. And not being named, it means that their bones refuse to turn into fossils, and keep growing.

There is no way I would give a name to something from before the age of naming. As for the things that even my ability can't sense the names of, I don't delve too deep in my memory about them; this would be the same as borrowing the power of the gods without permission - and I can't see that as anything other than egotistic haughtiness.

[<- Back to Chapter 10](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 12 ->](#)

[<- Back to Chapter 11](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 13 ->](#)

Chapter 12

The Non-Functional Shikigami



Not that I was expecting any kind of response from it, but I was dusting the keyboard I had for sale. The keyboard was part of an item called a "computer," and the most I could say about it was that it was a tool with almost too many buttons. I always like to keep my merchandise clean, but these keyboards were particularly difficult to maintain, as they would soon become covered in dust. They definitely weren't made in a shape that is convenient for people.

Amongst my merchandise, the rate of arrival of computers - which is to say, the number of them that were recovered in Gensokyo - was quite high. And as there were few who wanted one, they are quite problematic. On top of that, they are big, so they take up a great deal of space. As of late, I'm not even picking up the ones I find unless their shape attracts my eye.

Computers are tools that behave according to orders from their masters; you could say they are the outside world's shikigami. But their strange and complicated construction, as well as their uninteresting appearance speak volumes about the culture of the outside world.

In Gensokyo, a shikigami's appearance is an important matter. They could be a fox, or a cat, or many other kinds of interesting forms. Which is only to be expected, since the shikigami already had their original forms before becoming shikigami, and became one after being given the necessary abilities. Of course, the tool facet of a shikigami is its most important part, but for a shikigami to look like a mere tool would simply be missing the point. I guess that in the outside world, they only care about the contents, and not the appearance. But isn't that a little too impersonal?

Knock-knock.

"Hey, it's gettin' pretty chilly, huh? Looks like the season of short sleeves is almost over."

"Ah, are you still wearing short sleeves? How long did you think summer was going to last? Soon it'll get cold enough for me to have to bring out the heater."

"Nah. Even though I'm weak to cold, I don't think ya need that yet. But hey, isn't it strange to put coffee in a bottle with a small mouth like that?"

I told Marisa that the drink she had just identified as coffee, while having a somewhat similar name, wasn't actually coffee, but a drink called "cola," a drink from the outside world. At least for drinks, you don't have to be told how to use it, just what its use is, in order to know you drink it.

"What? Cola, ya say? But hey, ya shouldn't just drink things ya find lyin' around, yeah?"

"Don't worry, this is for sale. Because here at Kourindou, we sell the items we pick up."

While she didn't entirely understand my logic herself, Marisa seemed to agree as she sat atop a desk.

The days were starting to get shorter. The sky was already turning red, the kind of color that prompts one to head back home. It's often said that in autumn, the days fall "as fast as a bucket," but since that means the speed in which the bucket falls, it doesn't quite match the idea of the sun setting earlier. Maybe this explanation is wrong, and there's a more profound meaning to it? I'll think about it next time I have some time.

"Oh yeah! Can ya give me one of those computers over there?"

"Oh really? You saying you want to buy one? I'll give you a bargain."

"Nope, don't got any money. I just thought havin' a shikigami would be fun."

"No money, you say...well, I guess I can just put it on your tab..."

If people who come to look at stuff they don't intend to buy are called "window shoppers," then what do you call people who come to get things they don't intend to pay for? Maybe "Marisa shoppers" would be suitable?

"Yeah, sure. That works."

"Alright, I don't even know what other choice I would have anyway, but make sure you pay it off later. Now then, I have many different kinds of computers; big ones, small ones...what kind do you want?"

"Gimme a big'un. Bigger's stronger, right?"

Marisa had already hefted a big computer in her arms and walked out into the evening with it. It was an unsuitably large item for such a small girl, but while watching her emboldened figure carrying it, it felt extremely Marisa-like. It was kind of mysterious. Tools were usually simpler the bigger they were, and Marisa's big computer looked quite simple at first glance. However, its insides were surprisingly bizarre and complex, more so than anything else in Gensokyo.



Shikigami as complex as computers could only be created by the skills of the outside world. And not only computers, but from tableware to the sheets of paper

used for newspaper, most of my items are the results of the technology of the outside world. And the humans that the youkai usually prey upon are humans from the outside world. As a closed space, Gensokyo seems to have warded itself against the benefits from the outside. They say "if you can't beat them, join them," but you shouldn't join something stronger just because it's easier or safer. It is a moral to train those who have become weakened by cowardice, scurrying into tiny spaces like mice. When you put yourself with something bigger than you are, your outlook widens and you have many more opportunities for learning.

By shutting itself into a closed space, Gensokyo gradually forgets about the benefits it gets from the outside world. And this is not limited to Gensokyo - the smaller the place you put yourself in, the more you don't notice the benefits from the bigger things. In this kind of situation, thinking that Gensokyo is somehow better than the outside world is but arrogance. When living in a small place, people become arrogant and lose the drive to improve themselves. By looking at Gensokyo as it is today, one can understand how both humans and youkai are just carrying on with their degenerate lifestyles.

As for myself, I believe that, for the sake of my search for knowledge, I would like to live in the outside world someday. In other words, I want to join those I cannot beat. I dream of improving myself and putting my knowledge to good use there.

The computers I've been collecting lately...among their various functions, it seems they specialize in transmission of information - or so my ability tells. You wouldn't think that this square box is a shikigami capable of moving on its own, but once it moves, it is said to be able to gather information at an incredible speed. However, this is something I find difficult to imagine.

If one were to make a shikigami that collected information, it should be in the shape of a tengu, even if it were just a fake. That way, it would not only be a fascinating computer, but one that would certainly possess the ability to gather information. That was the universal way of thinking in Gensokyo.

Before going to sleep, I took a look at the empty cola bottle. This "cola" leaves a bit of an acrid taste in your mouth, but its bottle's shape is certainly pleasant to look at. Maybe it's a drink very suited to Gensokyo. If the outside world shikigami had interesting appearances like this, they would sell a lot more at my shop. And so I spent the evening, thinking of these things.

Knock-knock.

"Rinnosuke, are you there?"

"Yes, I am."

"I just heard from Marisa. So you've been reduced to surviving by eating what you pick up now?"

Even without computers, news travels surprisingly fast in Gensokyo. It was just yesterday, but it had already reached Reimu. However, this information had already changed into something different. I wonder if information gathered by computers also gets changed like this?

"Eating what I pick up? All I did was drink some cola."

"Cola? I don't really know what that is, but it's something you picked up, right? You shouldn't just drink things you're not familiar with..."

Reimu was holding the empty cola bottle with a suspicious look on her face. On the inside, it was just a dark liquid, but on the outside, its bottle was made in such an interesting shape that you couldn't ignore it. I could sense a great wisdom in this. I wonder if the people who created computers and the people who created cola were the same.

"So yesterday, Marisa was really happy about getting a computer. She got it from this store, right? If she just took one, you should have at least told me too."

"Actually, I sold her that. She didn't just take it away. But I don't think anything will happen just because she has one. I just recently realized, but these shikigami are a little different from the kind of shikigami we know."

"Can't you tell just by looking?"

"Well...I suppose you certainly could. But rather than just that, they are different in

concept; what we usually call a shikigami is a 'spirit made into a tool by creating a pattern.' In other words, they are created by turning fantasy into reality."

"That's why you see so many with one-pattern minds."

"However, I can't really see these computers as having a spirit of their own; they were tools from the beginning. I imagine them more as a 'tool made into a spirit by creating a pattern.' In other words, they are created by turning *reality* into *fantasy*."

"I don't get it. Like dolls that move on their own, you mean?"

"In the outside world, things of fantasy don't exist - or rather, things that don't exist are *called* fantasy. That's why humans invented tools that can *create* fantasies."

"Hmm. And what do you think Marisa is going to do now that she has one of these shikigami?"

"She will likely just neglect it, like her metal scraps."

Knock-knock.

"I heard that - I didn't scrap it just yet."

"Ah, so you were here, Marisa?"

"I wasn't gettin' anywhere with the computer, so I took a break and came on over. Ya got any more cola?"

"Cola tastes like medicine; it's really not all that good."

"I thought it'd at least be as useful as a doll or somethin'..."

Marisa was standing in front of the door, looking just like she had let a prankster fairy escape. She had a clearly disappointed look on her face.

"A doll? And since when are dolls *useful* tools?"

"Hey, there are people who use dolls to help around the house, yeah? Isn't that

kinda like using a shikigami?"

"What are you saying? You couldn't possibly make a doll realize what they're doing."

Seems like Marisa once again has a misconception. She made a dubious face as she sat on some of my merchandise. Reimu was being very Reimu-like, fiddling with one of the small computers without asking. She seemed a little afraid that it would start moving when she touched it.

"So you say that moving dolls are similar to shikigami, right? That might be possible, but the dolls in Gensokyo right now are not shikigami-worthy."

"I don't even know what shikigami're s'posed ta be in the first place. Ain't they like familiars or somethin'?"

"Familiars and dolls do have their similarities, and familiars and shikigami also have their similarities, but dolls and shikigami are very different from one another."

"Okay, so...what? I've seen 'em move and work just like they've been told, y'know?"

"But dolls, you see, are only being manipulated."

Marisa's face was tinted red. The evening sun was already setting. From now on the days would get shorter, and the power of the youkai would only continue to become stronger.

Yesterday, I spent some time thinking about the autumn days "falling like a bucket." What if the "falling like a bucket" is not referring to a literal bucket down a well, but rather to the youkai's name - the tsurube-otoshi, who attack people from the treetops during dark nights? In other words, maybe it means that as autumn advances, the tsurube-otoshi become more active. In this case, there's no problem regarding speed or time.

"So if dolls are bein' manipulated, what's so different about shikigami? Looks like they're always bein' manipulated too..."

"To make a doll move its hands, you have to pull a string attached to them. To

make it look like it's walking, you have to pull the strings on its arms and legs. To make it appear alive, you pull all of them as appropriate."

"But did those dolls have strings...?"

"They don't have to be *physical* strings; it could be magic or something else, but it's certainly some kind of manipulating power. For a doll to move its right hand, someone must manipulate it into moving it. For a doll to help with housework, you have to manipulate it into doing housework."

"That sounds pretty handy. That should make doin' chores by yourself a snap, yeah?"

"I suppose it would. If you can manipulate many at the same time, then not only would it be easier, but it would also let you do things you couldn't normally do by yourself."

"I get it. So that means if a doll is talkin', then it's just bein' manipulated to look like it's talkin'? Just a lame one-person act."

"And as for the shikigami, they are like servants who move according to orders."

"Hey, isn't that the same as the dolls?"

Reimu was in front of a computer, no longer trying to make it move, and now drinking tea. She no longer seemed interested in it.

"They're completely different. Shikigami move according to orders, and they can have other abilities as well. If we were to compare it to the doll example from earlier, you could say that if you want the shikigami to move their hand, you don't have to pull it; just saying 'raise your hand' would be enough."

"Because shikigami are alive, after all."

"Just because they are alive doesn't mean they have to follow orders. For example, if I told *you* to raise your hand, would you do it?"

"Yeah, sure! Look!"

"You really are a hopeless case..."

"So then what? What do I have to do if I want to use the computer?"

While we were talking, it had become just a little bit darker. Soon enough it would be the time for the tsurube-otoshi to go on a rampage. But in these girls' case, it's more like they would gladly go searching for the tsurube-otoshi even if they had no business doing so.

"Well, in that case...you'd have to at least possess enough power to make the computer listen to what you say. In other words, 'if you can't beat them, join them'."



Will there come a time when these computers could be used in Gensokyo? As far as I can see, it's not likely that the ones in Gensokyo could become used to daily life without the benefits from the outside world. In that case, the only way to employ computers would be to actually go to the outside world.

Transmission of information in Gensokyo is already fast. That's because there are a lot of curious people. If the people here are able to gather information themselves instead of using these outside world shikigami, then computers might not be needed in Gensokyo at all.

While looking at all the non-functional computers, I thought that for the sake of learning, I too would have to someday "join them." "Them" being the outside world. Gensokyo takes the benefits of the outside world for granted, and that's why everyone leads a freewheeling life here. I understand this only too well, since I deal in items from the outside world.

Even though we shut ourselves inside Gensokyo, we take from the outside world only the things we deem convenient, and pretend to be independent. But the truth is that if the outside world were to crumble, Gensokyo would soon follow. And on top of that, while being in Gensokyo, you can't affect the outside world in any way. The people living in Gensokyo are leading a life in a small place from which they can't get out, and I understand that to be simply the easiest choice.

Marisa was probably thinking of having the computer do her housework for her, but a tool from the outside world wouldn't show its true nature to the indolent mindset typical of a small place.

If I were to use a shikigami, I wouldn't think of any other than a computer, but until the time I can give orders to computers and attain greater strength than what I have now, I'll just continue studying about the outside world.

"What happened? It's already dark, so I guess we better get goin', right? Too bad I couldn't figure out how to get my computer to work..."

"Oh yes, and remember not to put things you find lying around in your mouth."

"Yes, it is quite late. Oh, yes...wait a moment, you two. Before you go back, I have a gift for you. Think of it as a sample."

I said that with my gift already in mind. Yes, something I could give to these people of Gensokyo who are lacking whatever makes these shikigami move, myself included. Something that would convince them to proactively join something bigger.

I gave both Marisa and Reimu a cola.

[<- Back to Chapter 11](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

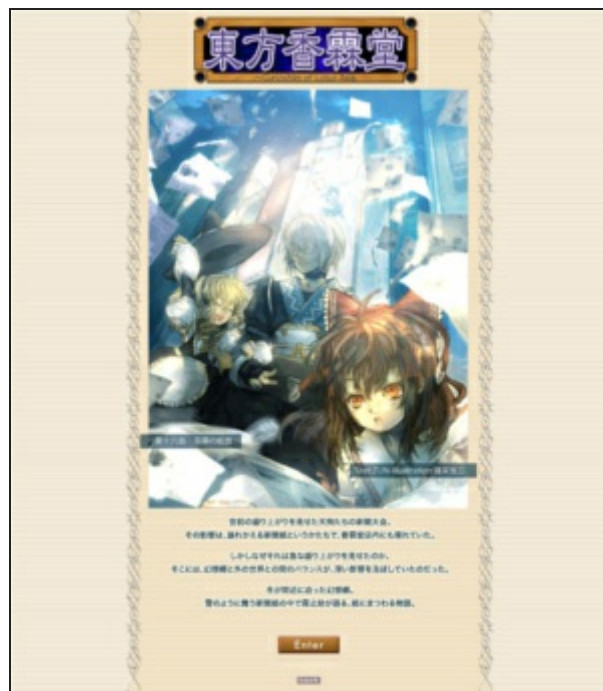
[Forward to Chapter 13 ->](#)

[<- Back to Chapter 12](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 14 ->](#)

Chapter 13

The Price of Paper in Luoyang



Truth is built upon information just as a castle built upon sand. For some reason, extra editions were being constantly released and fluttered around in Gensokyo's wind, and irresponsible news articles permeated everyone's talk. The articles were of all kinds, from old news to recent news, and from facts that everyone knew about to ones of quite questionable truth.

Most of the truths we know are built upon information. When an event takes place, we usually don't have the chance to witness it with our own eyes. With luck, we can at most conjecture about it through the information that the event creates. And what we call "truth" is built upon this uncertain base of information. Most truths are not only built upon uncertain bases, they are also fleeting, fragile. Truth is, in fact, easily changed by new information. If one is to create new information, then one must keep in mind that this information will change reality. There's no such thing as information that conveys only the actual truth: truth itself is the

ultimate illusion, an illusion that doesn't even exist in Gensokyo.

And there were a lot of newspapers scattered all around that didn't seem to understand that. That's because until recently, there was a tengu news tournament going on. This tournament is not a new thing, but this year it showed an unprecedented uprush, and at the same time, the tengu newspapers seemed to permeate every academic aspect of Gensokyo.

But the question remains of why this news competition - which has happened every year - took this sudden rush this year. I can think of two reasons for this. One is that the recent incident's aftermath provides a plethora of article material, and the other one - which I believe has a more direct relation - is that the supply of paper has seen a sudden increase, and its price has dropped accordingly. If the availability of paper increases, it's a matter of course that the number of newspapers will increase too - and similarly, the fact that paper has become more easily accessible is something I'm very grateful for.

Knock-knock.

"Gee...extras and more extras! When you release extras every day, there's nothing 'extra' about them!"

"Yes, but they'll be a bother even if you bring them inside my shop." Reimu had a sheaf of newspaper prints (all of them extras) in her hands. We are not a garbage collection establishment, and there is no way those newspapers could be considered articles to be sold. "Hm? What are you doing? You don't seem to be reading a book."

I waved across the table with my hand, holding a writing brush. Yes, I had started to write a book. I had always wanted to write one, but couldn't easily get hold of enough paper. But now that enough paper is easy to come by, that's at least one thing I can do.

"I was thinking of writing about the everyday happenings."

"Like a journal? But what would it be useful for?"

"Because the authenticity of these newspapers is somewhat questionable. So I was thinking of writing the facts as close as possible to the truth."

"That's still not truth."

"When you write down a truth, it is not truth anymore. That's why it's impossible to write down the truth. Don't you know why there isn't any historical-like history in Gensokyo?"

"Because every day is very peaceful? The things that remain as history are things that were good for a few people and bad for a lot. And even when we have an incident, it's quickly solved."

"That's not all there is to it. There is a simpler reason for lack of history--"

Our conversation was interrupted by the sound of the window glass breaking.

"Extra! Extra! Read it like there's no tomorrow!" You could hear a distant tengu voice through the broken window.

I quickly went and looked through the broken window, but the figure of the deliverer was already far away, and didn't seem to worry at all about the glass she had broken.

"Geez, they call it an extra or whatever, but can't those tengu deliver things in a more calm manner?"

"The fact that they are distributing extras around is already weird in itself."

As an emergency repair, I stuck the old newspapers Reimu had brought to the broken window. Using newspaper pages gives it an appearance of poverty, but it would work fine as a paper frame. It was the season of cold winds out there, and it was better to stick newspaper there than to do nothing.

"Won't a paper frame of newspaper get torn easily? Like when another extra gets thrown through the same window?"

"No, that won't happen. Even if it's newspaper, paper is stronger than glass. Most definitely."

"I wonder about that..."

"Didn't you ever think about that, Reimu? Why such a thin and weak-looking paper is used for door and window frames, I mean."

"Isn't it because it lets light through?"

"If that was all it was, it wouldn't be strange if they had all been replaced by glass by now, would it? and lately, the need for gathering light from outside is decreasing."

I told Reimu about the mysterious nature of paper frames as borders. Even a child could tear that paper if she wanted to. If they were touched by a dirty hand, they couldn't be restored. Unlike glass, paper frames couldn't be washed. And because they were like that, if they were torn or dirtied, someone would definitely be to blame. Kids that acted rowdy around them would get scolded, and the ones who would touch them with dirty hands would be stopped. For these kinds of individuals, the paper frames served their first purpose as paper frames. In most cases, those individuals would be from the same house in which the frames were posted, so the sturdiness of the paper frames would ultimately be based on the power of the household to keep them that way. In a way, their strength is immeasurable. Thanks to the paper frames, people didn't act rowdy around buildings, and nobody handled doors roughly. If they were replaced with a sturdier material, such as iron or stone, then the behavior of people would turn rougher; they would even start acting violently inside buildings. And before long, even the sturdiness of *those* materials would break.

Paper frames have the power of preventing dangerous behavior from people. The strength of a paper frame is not definite; it is proportional to the strength of the ones living inside it. The paper frames of an abandoned house can be torn apart even by a baby, but the frames of a shrine housing a god wouldn't ever get torn even by an adult's strength.

"Hey, Rinnosuke, do those unbreakable paper frames have eyes?"

Looking at the window, I saw an eye peeping through a hole in the newspaper frame.



"Well then, what does today's extra say...?"

As a punishment for making a hole in the newspaper window, I made Marisa fix it.

"Ahh, it was really unimportant: they decided the winner of the tengu newspaper competition. It says the winner was the paper 'Kuruma News,' that I've never heard about."

"That's really unimportant, isn't it?"

"That's really unimportant."

I have read this great tengu winner's "Kuruma News" already, but this extra that was just thrown through my window - the "Bunbunmaru News" - was so exaggerated it was somehow cute. Its contents were a great way off reality; all of its articles were written so as to make everything seem amusing and peculiar. And especially, its information was so crammed in, like it was only trying to create volume. It was truly awful.

Maybe by having a lot of stuff crammed together, people who just couldn't think deeply about anything got a sense of having acquired more knowledge. If knowledge was just the enumerated information, then wouldn't human wisdom be the same as books and newspapers enumerating events? The reason we can get knowledge from books and newspapers is most definitely not because the knowledge is written on them. The things written in books and newspapers are but an uncertain basis on which to construct the truth; they are basically just information, and that's not enough to gain knowledge from. When you think about this information is when it starts to become knowledge. Compared to the "Kuruma News" - regarding its subjects, anyway - this "Bunbunmaru News" has a lot more considerations and inquiries, and its knowledge goes deeper, or so I think. Well, regarding its subjects, anyway.

"By the way, why has the number of newspapers increased so suddenly? I had no idea, but this newspaper competition is held every year, I gather? If that's true, then the competition can't be the only cause, right?"

"The main cause would be paper becoming much more accessible. The price of paper in Gensokyo has just dropped sharply. Seems a great quantity of paper is dropping in from the outside world."

"Hmm...first ghosts, and now paper. An all-you-can-drop-in event?"

"Computers are shikigami capable of gathering information without using paper. When you consider that together with the increase in paper, then you could say that paper has already reached the realms of fantasy as a form of transmitting information. It may even be that the act of writing books itself has already become fantasy in the outside world. But well, it's thanks to that that I'm now thinking about writing one."

"Have you become forgetful, then?"

"You mean to say that all writers are forgetful?"

"Yes, they're all like Indian strawberries."

"You mean like that, and Nichiren Oshou?"

"I believe what you two want to say is '3-day monk.'"

Gensokyo doesn't have any historical-like history. And that is not because every day is peaceful and any incidents are quickly resolved: there is an even more simple reason: It is because the youkai's life span is too long.

Even if an event became history, as long as the involved party is still alive and can go changing the information at their discretion, the real truth cannot be determined - not upon this uncertain foundation. Truth is a castle built upon the sands of information; if a truth of uncertain authenticity is built, it will crumble in the wind. No matter how many "castles of truth" are erected, they can all melt under the rain. Objectiveness is the most important thing in history, but if an involved party is still around, it cannot quite separate from its interests, and that is why there is no history in Gensokyo.



I intend to use this paper that fell in from the outside world to write about the Gensokyo I see, in the most objective fashion I can. If that can become history, then the beginning of my writing of this book will become our very first history. And this first history would exactly be the birth of Gensokyo's history; in fact, at the beginning of my book, I even wrote "the history of Gensokyo is born."

"Anyway, this is just too much paper...from where are the tengu gathering so much of it?"

"The only reason for paper to be increasing here is because it is decreasing in the outside world. Like I said before, the very use of paper as a way of transmitting information might already be fantasy."

"So it's all oral tradition now...? Well, there are a lot of people in the outside world, so they must have a lot of mouths, at least."

"So that means that, in contrast, communication through paper might become popular in Gensokyo."

"Like the tengu's newspapers, y'mean? That'd be annoyin'."

"Yeah, it would be annoying."

"Well...I supposed it would be annoying."

Gensokyo's history would soon be born through my hands. I wonder if there will eventually come a time when my book will become a textbook of Gensokyo's history. At that time, academism will start to take place in Gensokyo, and Gensokyo will become closer to the outside world. Incidentally, if my book does sell like crazy, it would help a lot with the shop. If I don't sell only picked-up goods anymore, Kourindou's level could possibly rise above that of a mere second-hand store.

Due to the large amount of paper raining down on Gensokyo, its price had dropped. And at the same time, newspapers and books can now be written, increasing the demand for this paper.

If the price of paper goes down in Gensokyo, it goes up in Luoyang. When paper disappears in the outside world, it proliferates in Gensokyo. When large flocks of crested ibises fly through Gensokyo's skies, they must have disappeared from the skies of the outside world. There's a balance to everything. People who only focus on the small things could never see the balance of the world.

"But really, all these newspapers have is unimportant subjects. Like finding out the width of the Sanzu River. What's so good about figuring that out?"

Marisa was flipping through the sheafs of old newspaper Reimu had brought, reading some of the unimportant contents in them.

"Because the width of the Sanzu River is related to how much time you take to be ferried across it. Even a human like you would be more relieved in dying knowing it, isn't that so?"

"Must be boring if it takes too much time. Maybe I can bring something along to keep myself occupied during the trip?"

"Seems like you yourself realize that the Sanzu River will be wide when you cross it, Marisa."

"Better wide than narrow."

"No, it's not...the width of the river is the same as your relation to people. If the number of good friends - say, good enough to lend you money - you have is small, it'll be wide. If you go taking things away from my store on your own, it will be so wide you won't be able to be ferried across, you know?"

"That's why it's good for it to be wide. If it's so wide, can I take some stuff from the store with me?"

Even though it was a newspaper of unimportant content, the girls could get their heads working about it to acquire some knowledge. Knowledge is something you think about yourself, argue it against your existing ideas, and apply to your own station. It's not something that's written somewhere: you have to pick up what's written and think about it for knowledge to first appear. While it's a thankful thing that there are newspapers and books that gather lots of information and

happenings, they don't really gather knowledge; your knowledge won't rise just by looking, reading, memorizing, writing, or speaking.

I think it's a mistake to make a winner of a newspaper like the great tengu's that promotes these things. Judging the merits of a newspaper only by the number of subscribed readers is dangerous. Couldn't they see that this would just increase the number of humans and youkai who misunderstand knowledge? Next time I meet a tengu, I'll be sure to mention it.

"But anyway, this tengu newspaper competition is over now, right? That means the number of unimportant extras will finally go down."

"That's right. And they were delivering extras with such regularity that it was the same as having a subscription. Well, I do have subscriptions, but even so, I still got extras delivered to me. I'd be glad if they only did that when there's an extra with big news that relates to me."

"But there'll be another newspaper competition next year, right? And with their being so early to think and act, the tengu might soon be starting their preparations for next year--"

Marisa's line was interrupted by yet another extra tearing through the paper frame. The two of them looked with surprised expressions at the extra thrown in through the window.

When I thought of having to change paper frames the whole year round, I started to feel a little dizzy.

[<- Back to Chapter 12](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 14 ->](#)

[<- Back to Chapter 13](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 15 ->](#)

Chapter 14

Moon and Kappa



Knock, knock, knock.

There was a sound at the store's entrance. "This late at night? Who could it be?"

Relying on the light gathered by the snow on the window, I went to the front door. It had been a while since I'd closed up shop for the day, and the interior was now freezing cold.

"Are you open?" Standing there was the maid who worked for the vampire. For someone who came calling in the middle of the night, she didn't seem to be in a particular hurry; but then, I suppose that most of her hours of activity were nocturnal. By the look on her face, she considered it to be normal to go out in the middle of the night. Her mistress being a vampire, I suppose that can't be helped.

"What are you saying? All the lights are off; it can only possibly mean that we are supposed to be closed."

"It could be that you were saving up, or absent; I was wondering which one it would be." I wonder if, in the case of my being absent, she was planning on coming inside by herself in order to get what she wanted. This is why I don't carelessly leave my place. "I am looking for a lucky item...do you have any?"

I lit the store's lights. At the same time that this vanquished the madness of moonlight, it brought the gloominess of night back into the store. I believe it is a very uncouth thing to come calling at a shop after it's closed, but as long as it's a customer, I don't really mind it; I'm also used to having customers come terribly *early* in the morning as well.

"Lucky, you say...that's a really vague request. I have a 'meteorite with an engraved shinto gate' that I just got--"

"No, not something with so little authenticity. Don't you have something that you can tell it's a good omen just by looking at it?"

I couldn't possibly imagine what she would use an object of good omen for in the middle of the night, but if it was something that I had for sale, then I wanted to sell it. Lucky items are usually articles with little utility, so I don't have much interest in them. I told her, "In this case, I have a great lucky item somewhere," and went to fetch an article of really good omen that was laying deep in storage.

"Oh my, isn't it such a colorful tortoise shell? That certainly seems to be of good omen."

"Red and blue, black and white, and yellow at the center; all in all, a five-colored shell. I don't think I've seen anything with a better omen to it."

"But...a shell like this seems strange for a tortoise; it's too big, and a little featureless."

"Right, this isn't actually a tortoise shell. It's a 'Kappa's Five-Colored Shell'."

It takes a while for my outside world heater to warm the cold interior of the shop. When the room finally started to warm up, my head also started to work better.

"A kappa. I see. ...Where do the kappa live again...?"

"There are kappa living in the mountain. You people might never have gone into the mountain, but there are a lot of youkai living there. But, this shell is not recent; it's from more than a thousand...probably from 1300 years ago, I suppose. Anyway, it's really old."

"That is pretty old."

"But since I won't accept later complaints, I had better advise you beforehand that I was told it was a kappa's shell, but I can't ascertain that that is absolutely so. Still, a five-colored shell is the best lucky item one could have."

I stated truthfully about the credibility of it being from a kappa. And so, the maid's face expressed little doubt. Seeing her expression, I changed the subject.

"By the way, why is it that you want a lucky item? And this late at night, on top of that?"

"That's because...it would seem we need a lot of luck for a certain spell to be successful."

It was a very strange story that she spoke of. A few days ago, the Scarlet Devil Mansion - where Sakuya Izayoi works - was celebrating Setsubun. A vampire chasing demons away would be a strange event, but these kinds of mysterious events were frequent at the Scarlet Devil Mansion, so this wasn't all that weird in comparison.

"Just when the celebrations were ending, there was an incident with the moon. Though I suppose you don't know about it."

Later, I read about it in the Bunbunmaru News; it seems that on the night of the Setsubun, a terrible disaster made the moon crack. The moon cracked without a sound, and it was restored without a sound. And, considering the time it took place, only a few had actually witnessed it.

"But what is the relation between the moon incident and the item of good omen?"

"My mistress was surprised to see the smashed moon and said once again, 'this time, we will go to the moon'."

By "this time," it means that she has had the sudden decision of going to the moon before. She wanted to perform a spell for going to the moon (a spell apparently named "Project Apollo"), but apparently, she didn't have the necessary ingredients, and the spell failed.

Project Apollo is an extremely difficult and complicated outside world magic. I've browsed several grimoires detailing the spell's procedure, and both the procedure and the ingredients seem to be those of the highest level of magic. Especially because many of the ingredients and tools are of no understandable use. And even going after each one of them would be extremely hard. That's why I believe there's not a single magician in Gensokyo capable of performing it.

"The mistress' magician friend said 'I have enough of the ingredients, but for a magic of the highest level to succeed, a good fate of the highest order is needed,' and so she ordered me to 'bring the luckiest item in all Gensokyo'..."

"...How unfortunate."

The performance of a spell consists of six elements: These are the performer's Ability, the Disposition of the soul, the Substance of the ingredients and tools, the Space in which it takes place, the Time during which it is performed, and for last the Fate. Of these, Fate carries the most strength: as long as you have enough Fate on your side, it can cover for the other elements; similarly, if the Fate element is entirely absent, even the simplest magic will fail.

"The other elements seem to be almost complete, with only Fate left for last. Since I couldn't find such lucky items as a four-leaf clover or a bamboo flower, I wondered if something more unusual would work..."

I don't think unusual things and lucky things are the same, but maybe that's the accepted idea at the Scarlet Devil Mansion. If unusual means lucky, then rather than a kappa's five-colored shell, a tsuchinoko sake might be better. However, I had the feeling that this would be my best chance to sell this kappa shell; I couldn't possibly let this chance get away.

"This five-colored shell is not only unusual - in fact, it is just the thing you are looking for."

Lucky items must be told of as being lucky, so I spoke at length of why this item was not only lucky, but why it was ideal for her.

I stopped talking while standing and went to sit on a chair by the heater. I offered her a chair to sit on, but she said "I'm used to standing" without moving off her upright posture. Being seated by myself, I pointed to the shell she was holding and began to explain:

"The colors of red, blue, white, black and yellow can express everything in nature. The directions of East, West, South, North, and Center; the seasons of Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter, and the Setsubun; the five elements of Fire, Water, Wood, Earth, and Metal. In short, those five colors can represent everything in our world. Those can even cover the Space, Time and Substance necessary for performing magic. Besides, the tortoise was considered of good omen since long ago for being the animal that carries the world along. So, all the colors of nature represented on a tortoise is the biggest sign of good omen an item could be. Much has been said about tortoises capable of living ten thousand years. Of course, those wouldn't be normal tortoises, but the ones that have such shells."

"But didn't you say that this shell was from a kappa rather than a tortoise? Do kappa live ten thousand years as well?"

"And that's why this item is perfect for you. Kappa are often related with the Chinese river youkai called kahaku...but this is not correct."

"That's the first time I've heard about this, though..."

"Kahaku are gods who live in big rivers. I can't help but think that putting kahaku and kappa together is flattering the kappa a little too much."

"That's right, kappa are even worse than tengu."

"Just because there's a youkai with a similar name in an outside world country, to think that they are the same creature is unreasonable. And, as far as wording goes, it's only natural to use the same character for 'big river' - ka - as for creatures who



live in rivers."

"I think that kappa are creatures who became a lot more like us."

The water kettle atop the heater started to whistle. As I brewed some tea, the chilled shop finally started regaining some appearance of vitality. I wondered if the maid wouldn't take it upon herself to brew the tea, since it should be her habit, but apparently she wouldn't do that at other people's houses. This was proof that she was a proper maid. If you think about it, there might be some people who prepare tea and clean things up at other people's houses, but that's rather insensible. When you come to other peoples houses, even if you are a maid, you are still a visitor. That is why, even if you offer to help, you are just giving trouble to the host; you would just be insensible to his good intentions. A maid should be sensible wherever she is, and should always avoid any discourtesy.

Very differently from a certain someone who comes to my shop, makes tea, and drinks it on her own whim.

So I served tea for her as well.

"So, where did the kappa come from?"

"If you think about the image of a kappa, you'll soon be able to answer that."

"A kappa's image...by the way, is a kappa's shell smooth?"

Yes, the kappas shell is different from a turtle's: "I think the origin of the kappa is related to the kahakame." But, by any means, for someone who comes calling in the middle of the night, this maid doesn't seem in that much of a rush. Maybe she thought since the beginning that going to the moon would be impossible. She looked like she was just playing along with her mistress. "Kahakame, the river turtle. Their name in kanji is written with the characters of 'great turtle'. What these characters express is the idea of a huge turtle. It would not be unusual for a fully-grown one to reach the size of a human. When these turtles live for many years, they become able to understand human speech, and gain the ability to take on human form, becoming kappa."

"Kahakame...never heard of them. And are there really such big turtles on rivers? They couldn't be sea turtles..."

She talked like she had seen a sea turtle swim before, which made me a little curious, but I went on.

"Why don't you try remembering? There certainly are. Really big ones, who live in rivers and ponds instead of the sea. Try thinking about a kappa's image again, looking at this shell. Doesn't it remind you of a round and smooth tortoise shell?"



"I see. Now I understand what you meant. This item is indeed just what I was looking for. But even so...my mistress is definitely going to say something like 'I have nothing to do with water creatures'."

The maid seemed to reach a conclusion, and went back with the five-colored shell under her arm - after paying, of course, and without helping to tidy up anything. She was a really good maid. I cleaned for both of us, and once again closed the store.

But thinking about her last words...I noticed that she not only had all the knowledge of a maid, but was also a really fast thinker. As soon as she perceived the true nature of kappa, she must have simulated in her head how it would be to explain it while showing it to her lady. To explain why it is a lucky item, she would have to mention what was said of the shell; she was already planning on not explaining the kappa's true nature.

The real nature of the kappa are the great turtles. Tortoises that don't live on the sea, but in rivers and ponds, and can get incredibly big. In other words, snapping turtles. If these turtles live for too long, they gain supernatural abilities and become kappa.

Her mistress wanting to go to the moon carrying a turtle seems, by itself, a little contradictory, and I can't help thinking it defeats the entire purpose. And so, her mistress not having anything to do with water creatures, she won't tell her the shell is related to turtles.

The moon and the turtle. Two things that look similar but are indeed very different. However, the turtle is the one we can touch, and that brings good luck. The moon is ominous and untouchable. That being the case, if I were to choose

which one is the better...I wouldn't even have to say that it would be the turtle. Rather than looking at something distant and ominous, it's better to look at something close and lucky.

She should have realized that much - that using a turtle to get to the moon was ridiculous at first glance - and did it on purpose. Her mistress probably won't notice, but maybe it will be good enough for her if someone knowledgeable enough in the Scarlet Devil Mansion realizes it.

As for me, more than an unexpected extra income, I got a small feeling of exhilaration. That five-colored shell was too big, and no one would be interested in it; it was pretty much defective stock. And even though it was supposed to be a kappa shell, it was suspicious. When that maid came here, I thought that was my last chance to sell it, and used my uttermost sensibility on that shell and that girl.

When looking at the outrageous goal of going to the moon, and that very maid-like way of acting, it was suddenly like the relation between the kappa and the turtles and between the moon and the turtle was flashing. Because it's a lucky item, it doesn't matter that it's completely unrelated. That's why I talked about it in such a roundabout way. Of course, I'm sure she soon understood that, and decided to take the article, as it was all calculated.

I put the brush down and looked through the window. At that moment, I had the impression that the moon had shone red, just for an instant.

[<- Back to Chapter 13](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 15 ->](#)

[<- Back to Chapter 14](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 16 ->](#)

Chapter 15

Dragon's Camera



The spring-heralding bird's call reaches all the way into the shop.

Winter had ended at last, and color had returned to Gensokyo. At the same time that Gensokyo - formerly dyed white by the deep snow - sprang into a vivid scenario with spring's arrival, the cheerful fairies and humans started their uproaring. It felt like a sudden rush of pure air had come to a stagnated world, expanding and clarifying the field of vision. It's like fresh and clear days like this had always only existed for this purpose. How long has it been since such a clear day this year?

I was writing in my journal when I suddenly thought of imparting onto paper the beauty of this day. A drawing would be fine, but in Gensokyo there is an item even more suited for it: a photograph.

"...Whatcha doin'? Movin' stuff around with such nice weather outside..."

I heard a voice coming from around the entrance. I took another look around the interior of the shop. The articles were scattered all around as if a thief had previously entered. I was looking for a particular item, even though I didn't know how to use it.

"Ah, Marisa. How long have you been here? I know the place's a bit disheveled right now, but don't touch anything; those are articles for sale."

"Even if ya tell me not to touch 'em, I can't move if I don't."

"...Ah, I finally found it! This is what I've been looking for."

"Hm? Isn't that the thing the tengu are always carrying?"

The thing I was looking for is a "photo camera;" just as its name indicates, it's a tool for taking photographs.

I have the ability of knowing the name and the use of an item just by looking at it. The reason I set up Kourindou was so that I could make the most of this ability. Unfortunately, this ability does not tell me the precise means of usage.

"I was thinking of affixing some pictures to my journal. However, even though I've had the camera itself since long before, I put it aside because I didn't have the slightest idea of how to use it to take a photograph."

"Ain't the tengu always takin' 'em like it was nothing? They do it kinda like...you look into it, and press a button. But I've never actually seen a photo come outta the thing, so I don't know what kinda trick they use."

"I'm sure it must be this button here, but I can't get any reaction no matter how much I press it."

I pressed it even as I said this, but indeed, it didn't even make a sound. Even though my ability definitely says that this is a photographic camera, used for taking photographs.

"I always took it that taking pictures was a special ability that the tengu had. Never thought there could be a tool that did that."

The tengu are a mysterious species, full of secrets. Because they live on a mountain where humans and other youkai cannot set foot, their peculiar society and amazing techniques are mostly hidden. All one can do is read their newspapers. Even though their techniques for developing photographs are a mystery, their printing techniques are especially amazing; no one but the tengu possess the technology to roll off a mass of newspapers like those of the outer world.

Incidentally, the kappa also live on the mountain, and you could say they have the same degree of advancedness to their techniques. The kappa's techniques consist of impressively precise tools. It may even be that the kappa are the ones who make the tengu's cameras. The items crafted by the kappa are truly curious ones, and as an item storekeeper, I am greatly interested in them.

But let's leave the thoughts about kappa items for the future, and concern ourselves with the photo camera right now.

"Hm, it's really of no use. I can't even tell where the photos are supposed to come out."

"By the way, why is it ya wanna take pictures? Ya wanna imitate the tengu by starting a newspaper?"

"A newspaper..."

I do have interest in writing a newspaper. If I can write articles that will be read by other people, I could correct society's misinformation about many items. But there's an even bigger problem to that; even if I could figure out how to take pictures with a camera, I still wouldn't know how to handle typesetting and printing.

"...No, I couldn't possibly start a newspaper so easily. The reason I wanted to take photos is that, since the spring days outside are so beautiful, I wanted to have a piece of them here inside."

"We can see that stuff again next year."

"Don't misunderstand; I don't want photos of things I can't look at, or of things I want to see all the time. What I want is to see ordinary scenery from a different viewpoint."

If I could take pictures, then I would be able to regularly use them as a basis to look at things. That way, I could see the everyday scenery in a very different way. Looking at things from different angles is an essential part of a shopkeeper's life.

"Then just drink some booze. You'll see even the same scenery in a different way. Even so, I'm still curious about the trick for taking pictures."

"There's nothing mysterious about that. The basic concepts of creating a picture out of something you see are easy to grasp."

"Oh, really? But if ya capture the real scenery in a photo, it's like makin' that scenery into two. If ya take a really *large* photo, then ya can't distinguish it from a faraway view, right? But, there can only *be* one view of a faraway mountain. So just what is decreasing when the photos increase?"

"The scenery isn't decreasing, but something else is...For example, if you put up a mirror facing a mountain and stand in between the two, what do you see when you look at the mirror?"

"I see myself."

"No, forget about yourself for a moment; look at the reflection of the mountain behind you - the scenery there will be projected just as if in a photograph. In other words, an image is reflected off a mirror even if there isn't any living eye to see it, and it's possible to preserve that reflected instant. And a photographic camera has the ability to preserve it. The actual image is not diminished or duplicated; you could say it's that reflected instant that gets cut out."

"Hm...that's a little hard to understand...but anyway, it must be real since there are photographs. In that case, since a mirror has a flat surface, we can only take flat pictures."

"No, I think that with a little devising, it is possible to create even solid photographs."

I surveyed the store's interior once again; it was really disheveled indeed. But I wanted to get an item to show Marisa the possibility of solid photographs, so I shuffled through it again.

"Ah, here it is. That's it, this one."

What I pulled out was a small box with dragon-themed embroidery. Opening it, there was a thumb-thick triangular piece of glass inside. I took that glass out and showed it to Marisa.

"Take a look."

"What's the deal with this glass?"

"This glass piece is an item called a 'prism'. It's a tool for coloring the air."

"A tool for coloring the air, you say? There ya go sayin' weird stuff again."

I brought the prism closer to the window, and held it under a sunbeam. The prism absorbed the light, and colored its rays in seven colors.

"Ohh, it looks like a tiny rainbow."

"With just this small prism, it's possible to color the air. And why do the seven colors of the rainbow come out of the prism, you ask? Because all the three perfect colors and the seven imperfect ones are related to the gods."

"Whatever, that doesn't matter. So, how were ya sayin' it's possible to make solid photographs with that?"

"If you set three prisms so that they are sending their colors from three different positions at the same time, you can draw a solid picture. Afterward, it's just a matter of making a tool for preserving the air as it was at that instant - a tool that immobilizes air."

"Wait a moment, your story is jumping around like always. How come you can draw a solid picture by sending colors from three directions?"

Marisa took the prism from me and looked at it curiously from various angles.

"If you mix red and green, it becomes yellow. If you mix red and blue, you have violet. With other combinations, you can obtain just about any color. That way, if you cross the rainbows skillfully, you can paint any color. In order to make a solid picture, you'll only need to have the width, depth, and height, so with a minimum of three rainbows from different directions, you can account for all the points in the air."



"I'm not sure I understand...but drawing pictures in the air? That sure looks like an amusing tool. But that seems like a far-fetched dream compared to the ones that can only take flat pictures."

Yes, that is more or less right. Even if you understand the theory, it won't come true if the technology is lagging behind. No one has made any tools for either drawing pictures on the air, or for immobilizing it. But if we don't think about new things, all of Gensokyo's leading technology will end up belonging to the tengu or the kappa. That's why I'll keep thinking of new things. This is not only my belief as a shopkeeper, but as a person.

Knock-knock.

"Ah, there you are. It's almost time for the flower-viewing, you know."

"Ah, Reimu? Ya sure guessed right that I was here."

"There are not many places where you would be, Marisa. But anyway, it's really disheveled here. Looks like a thief entered...or maybe there's a thief inside already?"

By "thief," she was referring to Marisa. She didn't even bother to deny it; she just snickered like a cat. Was she thinking of stealing the prism?

"Oh my, there's a tiny rainbow coming out of it. What is this?"

Reimu was looking around the disheveled shop as she entered, and fixed her gaze

on the prism Marisa was holding.

"This is a prism; seems it's a tool for coloring the air. You can't eat it."

"It does look hard," said Reimu. Marisa inclined it and projected the rainbow over the floor, then over my face.

"What's the trick behind it, Rinnosuke? It doesn't look like there's anything inside it..."

Reimu and Marisa just asked whatever questions they thought of without thinking about them first. The best thing to do would be to carefully think it over on your own, then consult about your conclusions with others, but they are still kids, so I let it be. Besides, it was still better than not even thinking of the questions at all.

"Indeed, there is nothing inside a prism. What is important is its triangular shape."

The number three represents perfection and harmony. With three legs, you can have stability even on an irregular surface, but that still holds true for four or more legs. However, just like in the case of the snake, frog, and slug, in a three-way deadlock, everyone is kept in check, and fighting cannot break out. But if it's exactly two - or four or more - people, they'll soon start quarreling.

"Three heads think better than one. The three beats of musical rhythm. The Three Imperial Regalia. The Three Days Emperor. No other number suggests stability as much as the number three."

"That last one didn't suggest stability at all."

To understand the significance of the number three in the prism, one needs only to look at its transparency. Transparency represents an entity which cannot be seen; in other words, a god. Just like the presence beyond the bamboo screens in a shrine. The presence of a god is felt in that transparent space and the shrine is but a place to worship it. And talking about the shrine's sacred chamber brings us to the ama.

"Skipping to the conclusion, the number three in the prism is the same as the three in a sacred chamber: the sky, the sea, and the rain. And by mentioning these three ama, you should be able to tell what god they point to, Reimu."

"Hm. Er...the rainbow?"

"No, it's still too early to arrive at the rainbow yet...are you really following the conversation?"

"Just as always, your story is jumping all around. Can't you explain it a little more slowly?"

Reimu was the one who asked about it out of curiosity; she should have pondered about it herself. I have no obligation to slow down my explanation to her pace. Whether she understood or not, I continued explaining.

"Alright, didn't you bring that big animal bone that other time? Didn't I say at the time that it was a dragon bone?"

Just by being transparent and triangular, a prism represents a dragon's living place.

"I don't think I need to explain that rainbows are traces of a dragon's passage. So, something passes through the prism: in this case, light; a rainbow is created."

"W-wait a moment! I took it at face value last time, but how come dragons leave rainbows in their trail?"

Oh geez. If I keep being questioned nonstop, my own work cannot go forward. All I wanted today was to investigate a little about the photo camera's manner of usage...Hey, didn't Reimu come over to look for Marisa? She's really being carefree about it. Just by looking at them, waiting for the answers for their questions, you can see that they completely forgot about their original objective.

"I see. Why do dragons leave rainbows on their trails, you ask? That might be a little complicated to explain. I'll just let you know that you could not understand it now."

"Don't say it like I'm some kind of idiot, Rinnosuke. If you explain it carefully, I'm sure I can understand."

"Well, starting from the conclusion, since dragons are made from the three perfect elements of the world, they leave in their wake the seven colors of the rainbow,

which can create everything in existence."

"That's pretty grandiose."

"But you see, dragons are the highest gods of Gensokyo; they can bring creation or destruction. They are apart from the youkai around here by one or two orders of magnitude."

I explained that in a world in perfect harmony, there are no gaps where new things can be born. The rain falls from the sky and imbues the seas with the strength of the heavens, then the water evaporates from the sea and becomes clouds. From the three ama elements by themselves, you can only obtain their own cycle.

The dragons brought dissonance into this world, and from that dissonance everything was created, and the world was changed. To the perfect 3 they added the rainbow's 7, and the world was organized into the "10 Powers."

"Because of it, all substances in Gensokyo are created and destroyed by the interaction of these ten."

"Oh! When you put it like that I kinda understand! It's my specialty, y'see."

"Your specialty...what was it again, Marisa?" I couldn't tell if Reimu's question was serious or a joke.

"Well, it's plain to see I'm a magician. No surprise there, right? You're the one who doesn't seem miko-like."

"Yes, knowledge of substances and their interactions is indispensable for magicians. I know that you *are* actually quite studious in *that* respect."

"That's not 'studying' for me. Reading books, perfecting spells, that's all daily routine, so increasing my knowledge is not really 'studying'."

"Hmm, you really seem quite diligent, Marisa...are the results showing, I wonder?"

The substances are composed of wood, fire, water, earth, and metal. These elements interact with each other through the force of the ten, and instead of stability, they are in constant transformation. By "the force of the ten" it is meant

that wood fuels fire, fire originates earth, earth brings up metal, metal purifies water, water raises wood, wood impoverishes earth, earth sucks in water, water quenches fire, fire melts metal, and metal chops wood. These forces are complexly interrelated, not being limited to only interactions between two substances. If the strength of metal weakens, wood gets stronger; but if wood gets stronger, then fire gets stronger as well, and earth gets stronger, which leads to metal getting stronger again. And if metal gets stronger, wood gets weaker. As these forces are never stable and always work, several new substances are created and destroyed.

"In brief, it's because of these forces that I usually lose to Reimu."

"Not like I care about poor loser excuses, but why do you say so?"

"It's because Marisa is water, and you are wood. Since water raises wood, it means water will usually lose in a fight between the two. But, fighting apart, it doesn't mean you are incompatible. It actually means good affinity."

"I am wood, and Marisa is water...so what are you, Rinnosuke-san?"

Just by looking at Reimu you could see she was a spring person, and she lives in a shrine at the very east. This symbolized wood. As for Marisa, she likes to dress in black and lives in a dark forest, away from the sun; that means water. As for me...just as implied by my name, I am also water.

"...We really got far from the camera talk. It's because you girls just keep asking questions."

"Well, yes. There's still a lot I don't understand about the dragon gods."

"Dragons hardly ever show themselves. And even if you don't understand everything we discussed right now, as long as you think about it later, it will be alright. This way, all the world's underpinnings will slowly become clear to you. And by the way, what about your flower-viewing? It's been some time already since you arrived."

"Ahh, I forgot about it! Even though today we have some unusual guests..."

"Unusual guests?"

"Since the weather is so clear today, we're having some tengu over for flower-viewing. And today we're...wait, we are always doing it, but didn't you say you would join us sometimes? What do you say, Rinnosuke, you want to come?"

"Maybe ya can even have the tengu explain ya the trick behind the camera."

That's right, if I wanted to know the workings of a photo camera, the best thing to do would be to ask the tengu about it directly. Why didn't I realize such a simple thing before...wait, tengu?!

"Tengu, you say?! No way! Sorry, but I'm not taking part in this flower-viewing."

"Oh well, I thought you'd say that. But, since there'll be tengu there, we can even take some commemorative pictures."

"I'm taking this prism with me. I'll suggest the solid photo. The tengu might make it or something." Saying that, the two of them left.

So she did indeed take the prism away. She kept fiddling with it all the time; I guess she liked it. It wasn't that valuable, but merchandise is merchandise, and I like getting paid for it.



But even so, going to a party with tengu...that worries me a little. Tengu are unparalleled drinkers; the amounts of liquor they can take can't be compared even to the heaviest human drinkers. You can even say they are in the same league as the oni on that. To go partying with even one tengu...or worse, with more than one...

The reason I didn't want to take part in today's flower-viewing is not because I don't like noisiness; if I'd asked the tengu about that, they would, just for fun, say something like "if you want to know, drink; if you don't, we won't tell," and then they would make me drink so much I wouldn't remember a thing later anyway. That's the kind of creatures tengu are. And anyway, I have to tidy up my disheveled store. And after that, I'll try fiddling with the photographic camera again. I guess I'll just have to find out by myself.

I'm looking forward to the reports from those two tomorrow.

...If they can remember anything, that is.

[<- Back to Chapter 14](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 16 ->](#)

[<- Back to Chapter 15](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 17 ->](#)

Chapter 16

Miraculous Cicada



The winds of the morning and evening mix in coolness. The Obon sightseeing tours of the ancestors from the netherworld have come to the land of the living, enjoyed themselves, and returned home contentedly. From here on, the heat of the afternoon will lessen gradually as time passes.

"Haven't the cicadas been really loud lately? I've never heard of a cicada with such a weird call."

Marisa, who was reading a book, closed it violently when she heard this, and fastened the brim of her hat around her ears. Indeed, the cicadas were abnormally loud, and indeed it was not a call she had heard much before. However, I was not flustered, and repeated it again, this time in a slightly louder voice.

"Yeah, this year is the year of the miraculous cicada, you know."

"Oh? What is the meaning of that phrase?"

I know the cry of these cicadas: I heard their shrieking 11 years ago. Back then, that summer, as I was adjusting my warehouse stock, I heard a sound like a low cry from the direction of the forest. 11 years ago, Kourindou had been facing the entrance to the Forest of Magic for only a few years, so at the time, I was not as knowledgeable about the magical forest, and did not know that the weird sound was the call of the cicadas.

I had only learned the real truth behind the sounds from 11 years ago a mere two days ago. It was two days ago that I had been awakened by the cicadas' piercing calls. Cicadas are mysterious creatures, suddenly starting their calls and just as suddenly going away. They also dive into the earth, and as if suddenly remembering that, they come from the earth. Because of that personality, I treated the cicadas magnanimously.

However, this year's cicadas were not normal. These cicadas' calls were much lower than the calls of the normal cicadas I was used to, and there were much more of them.

Because of the cacophany, I shut my window, even with the heat. However, with the window shut, it was very hot inside, and this had an adverse effect on my storage. I also could not sleep well at night, and it was uncomfortable for my customers as well.

I contemplated how to get rid of the cicadas, but, unable to take the heat, I left my store for the first time in a while, and left for the village. Of course, during that time, I did nothing but consider how to exterminate the cicadas.

As I got further away from my store, I found that the cicadas' calls decreased in volume. It appears that these cicadas only resided in the Forest of Magic. I was slightly relieved. For, if worse came to worse, if it was so loud I couldn't be in my store, I could go to the place of a human whom I had received hospitality from a long time ago, and live there. Cicadas' lives are short, so after a few days I was sure it would quiet down.

As I was thinking this, I arrived at the Kirisame residence. It had been about 10 years since I'd last seen the father of the Kirisame residence, and I was not good with meeting with people from the village other than as customers, so I was very nervous. I wondered if the father of the household would recognize me, or if age had possibly made him senile. The humans of the village mature, then age as the years pass. These normal processes don't happen to me, so I can never stay long at the village. I only bring unease and fear to the humans there.

However, such nervousness quickly vanished after some small talk. I spoke to the father of the Kirisame house of mercantile dealings, and the current merchandise of Kourindou, as well as the tools of the outside world, etcetera. And with that, my nervousness melted away, and I was able to get to the matter at hand: the obnoxious cicadas.

"...And then I realized that the sounds that I heard at the Kirisame residence that came from the forest were exactly the same as the low cries I had heard 11 years ago."

"Took you awhile to realize that, eh?"

"I had this memory in the back of my mind when I arrived at the village, but I didn't think at the time that it was the same cicadas' calls as I had heard 11 years ago. If I were to give an excuse, the further you go from a loud sound, the more it goes away, and all you can hear is a muffled, low sound. This year it appears that the cicadas are very close to my store, but 11 years ago they were far away, and all I could hear were the normal calls. It's a very different feeling now than it was then. That's why I only realized this after I left my store."

It had become hot, so I decided to open the window to ventilate the place. After I had opened it, the cicadas' calls came like a flood, so after opening it up just a finger's breadth, I stopped.

"After I'd figured out that the mysterious sounds of 11 years ago turned out to be the cicadas' calls, I asked your father if he knew anything about the cicadas. By the way, he seems to be doing well."

"The cicadas are too loud; I can't hear you well."

"In the end, he knew nothing about the sound of the cicadas' calls. Of course, he

also said he knew nothing of the true meaning of the cicadas. I began to become interested in what the cicadas' true meaning was, so I left the Kirisame household and went to a certain human's place."

That human is, among the humans in the village, the one with the most resources and knowledge, and resides in the Hieda household. The Hieda residence is a proper, traditional house that has stood for over a thousand years. In the enormous library that the Hieda household has, everything about Gensokyo is stored. There is no small amount of knowledge about the outside world, either.

To the house of Hieda there is one born every hundred or so years known as the Child of Miare. The Child of Miare is said to have the ability to memorize everything in the Hieda libraries, and currently, the 9th generation child appears to have that power.

The tomes of the Hieda family are, with some exception, kept hidden from outsiders, but recently, those restrictions have been relaxed; if you have good reason, they will be released for general public use. Thankfully, this applies to non-humans as well.

"Hmm. Reimu told me once that such a person existed, but...I am surprised to hear they have such interesting resources."

The slightly-cracked window of the store was not doing its job in bringing in the wind, and the room was still hot. Leaving a hat on made it even more hot. After saying that she'd like to go there one of these days, she took her hat off, and began fanning herself with it.

When Marisa says "go there," I'm sure she means "to steal things." When I restrained her by telling her that relations between the head of the Kirisame and Hieda households were good, Marisa looked frustrated and said "just get back to the story about the cicadas!"

"The house of Hieda's resources were indeed vast. It was so huge, I didn't even know where to start, but the 9th generation Child of Miare, Akyu, told me that she had memorized the entire library in order to tell people its contents. Disbelievingly, I asked, 'Are there any records about these loud cicadas?' and she told me immediately. It appears the rumors about her memory are true."



"Hm. Well, if you understand the deal with these loud cicadas, you should also know how to get rid of 'em, yeah? So do somethin' about it then! No matter where I go in the Forest of Magic, those annoying cicadas are there. I'll become deaf soon!"

"So plug your ears, then. At that time, my interest had already begun to change. More than how to get rid of them, I wanted to know why they appeared in such numbers 11 years ago."

The cicadas continued their calls as if they were mad. Eventually, my ears got a bit used to the sound and it wasn't as annoying, but speaking in a voice louder than normal makes one's throat dry. I began to pour two cups of tea.

At any rate, these cicadas were shrouded in riddles. Cicadas mature after about 7 years, then all of a sudden go up to the surface, call out for about 7 days, and then leave their bodies to reincarnate. It is said that cicadas are the vehicle by which sinners who have cleansed their sins in hell reincarnate into the cycle, their souls being temporarily housed in this form.

In addition, there are even more special types of cicadas in the outside world, according to the sources. There are 13-year cicadas and 17-year cicadas; as the names suggest, it appears that they come up once in 13 years or once in 17 years.

The cicadas that appeared in Gensokyo were mysterious cicadas that appear once in 11 years, and are referred to by some people as "The Miraculous Cicada." When one asks why they are called by that name, one reason is the mystery behind them living 11 long years under the earth, but in addition, whenever these cicadas came out, it's also always happened to be a bountiful year. The book stopped there.



"Hmm...why 11 years? The outside world has 13-year and 17-year ones, so it is odd to me that 7-year cicadas are considered normal in the first place."

The resources of the house of Hieda had no answer to Marisa's obvious question, but only gave a spectator's view on events. This is proper for a reference material, but is lacking in something for those who read it.

Of course, I had the same question as Marisa. However, the main difference between her and I was that all I could do was think about it on my own, but Marisa has people around her who might know the answer. Of course, that person is often me.

"Why don't you ever even think about figuring it out yourself?"

Marisa didn't even seem to notice that I was scolding her. She continued fanning herself with her hat, waiting for the continuation of the story. Perhaps the calls of the cicadas increased my annoyance, or perhaps I've just become easier to annoy lately.

"Oh well, this particular story is complex anyway. First, it has been said the first confirmed appearance of the 11-year cycle cicada came around 100 years ago. In other words, there is a chance that 100 years ago, they were made extinct in the outside world, and thus came to Gensokyo."

"So you're saying that the 11-year cicadas existed in the outside world?"

"If you think about it, it is only natural to presume this, since there are 7-, 13- and 17-year cicadas in the outside world as well."

"Hmm...that doesn't seem right. If there're 7-, 13-, and 17-year cicadas, wouldn't you think it would be 10- and 15-year cicadas left? 11 years seems so half-assed."

I see. It appears that Marisa thinks that by putting in the intervals between the years, it would be more natural. 10 is between 7 and 13, and 15 is between 13 and 17. It is probably more her instincts than anything theoretical. It probably feels good when holes between intervals are filled in their natural place. Marisa's

personality seems to be the type that if everything but the books in this room were scattered all over the place, the books themselves would be gathered by type and put in chronological order. I thought this too, and it was kind of funny.

However, I wonder how the instinctually sharp Reimu would have answered?

"No, 11 years is correct. On the contrary, the cicadas of the outside world must realize that the 11 years are gone."

"7, 11, 13, 17...that set of numbers of years just doesn't feel right."

"Do you understand? Those numbers can't be divided by anything but themselves and 1: they're prime numbers."

Whether it be 7, 11, 13, or 17, they are all prime numbers. They prime numbers greater than 7 proceed as 11, 13, 17, 19, 23, etcetera.

I realized that the outside world had 7-, 13-and 17-year cicadas, but was missing the 11-year cicadas - and that Gensokyo had cicadas that came once every 11 years.

"Therefore, I prognosed that the 11-year cicadas were of the outside world, and that for some reason they had become extinct there."

"Hmm...I might be chastised again, but I'll ask anyway: why're cicadas limited to appearing in cycles of prime number years?"

"That's a normal question to have, but unfortunately, I can't answer it."

"Eh? But Kourin wouldn't go without his questions being answered!"

"Right you are! You understand me well."

"Then ya can keep explainin'."

It feels like I'm being used, but whatever.

"It's very unlikely that cicadas which all come out in different prime numbers of years would all happen to come out at once; the cycle for 13-year and 17-year cicadas both coming out at once is...only once every 221 years. Thus, it's probably

to minimize the undesirable years when multiple kinds of cicadas are all out at once. If it was 10 and 15 years as you suggested, they'd run into each other every 30 years."

"Huh, I think I get it. Cicadas are smart, huh."

"This doesn't mean that cicadas are smart. As I said before, it's said that cicadas are vessels for souls as they depart from hell. In other words, it's a system invented by the Enma, so it's only natural that it would be clever."

"But why is it only the 11-year cicadas that are going extinct and showing up in Gensokyo?"

"I can only venture a guess, but I'd imagine that between the 11-year, 13-year, and 17-year cicadas, the younger 11-year group became the victims. Those three would only ever all come out at the same time once every 2,431 years. After centuries and centuries, that year finally came, and the 11-year cicadas were driven off to Gensokyo."

"Hrm, maybe...when I hear you talk about this stuff, it makes these noisy cicadas actually seem valuable. The miraculous once-in-11-years cicadas."

"Exactly, that's why I don't want to exterminate them."

I bravely opened the window. The 11-year cicadas cried piercingly with the joy of being released from their long-standing sins. As expected, Marisa clutched her ears, making a sour face. Nevertheless, it was still probably louder at her own home than at my shop.

Because a shop full of people who weren't customers was a pain, I drove Marisa out. She reluctantly left, but no doubt didn't return home, instead taking advantage of the hospitality of the shrine or somewhere similar. Although, since her parents live in the human village, she should just go back there instead...

How long had these cicadas been chirping? When I thought about it, I noticed a strange coincidence linking the Enma to the cicadas. The Enma is famous for the seven trials following the memorial service held seven days after a person's death. This seven is a prime number, the number of days matching the number of years between times when the cicadas come to the surface. Furthermore, after

judgement is passed, if you think about remaining underground to await reincarnation, the number of days a 7-year cicada would have to wait is roughly the same as the number of years that would pass before 11-, 13-and 17-year cicades all came out at once.

Cicadas are mysterious creatures. While they were created in accordance with the Enma's system, they seem to have a more subtle nature, and the possibility exists that their nature gradually gains more magical significance.

Why do they stay underground for the same amount of time as the souls damned to hell? Why do they disappear after only a short time on the surface? Do humans have the shortest period in the cycle of reincarnation?

If you say so, I wonder what happens to youkai when they die? What will happen to me as a half-youkai?

I closed the window once more, lost in thought.

[<- Back to Chapter 15](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 17 ->](#)

[<- Back to Chapter 16](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 18 ->](#)

Chapter 17

The God of Sake



Youkai Mountain was aflame with reds and yellows. The temperature sharply declined, and the red leaves on the trees, their lives succumbing to insanity, fell to the ground, unable to withstand the autumn wind. As the sun sank behind Youkai Mountain, the tengu could be seen flitting about the scarlet sky. This is the time of year when it was at its most beautiful.

October is called "the Godless Month" because it is said that generally, most gods are absent during it, but this cannot be the proper name of a month filled with such godly beauty. It is actually called "the Fermenting Month," meaning this is when all the grains gathered during the harvest are brewed to make sake.

"You seem to be in a good mood."

"I'm preparing to brew the new sake for this year; how could I *not* be?"

Reimu, looking at me skeptically, asked "...you make sake?"

To which I simply replied "Yes, because this is Kourindou."

Today, the three of us - Marisa, Reimu, and I - were to sample the fall mushrooms, accompanied with sake. Reimu and I were currently waiting at the store, as a critical ingredient - the mushrooms - had yet to arrive.

"Wow, I didn't know you made sake too, Rinnosuke. We should try it next time."

Sake seems to taste much better in colder weather. And being that this will be brand-new homemade sake, that should make it even more delicious. October is the month for new rice - and it is only natural to brew new sake from new rice.

"Well...I guess it would be ok, but..."

"But?"

"Only if you don't drink too much of it."

Reimu and Marisa drink without bothering to taste the sake. After I put so much effort into brewing it, that's just a waste.

"We don't drink that much if it doesn't taste good."

"Oh, but it does."

"Then maybe we will drink a lot."

Actually, the reason why I am brewing sake is not merely to drink it. Sake starts out as rice, and then at some point becomes sake. With my ability to know the names of objects, I should be able to clearly distinguish this point, no question about it.

The Japanese have a long history of drinking sake. Thousands of years ago, there are records of "human-friendly alcohol" in the history books of the mainland. By this time, Japan had already developed its own methods of brewing alcohol, and

this produced rice alcohol - or "sake" - with a faint, mellow scent, no aftertaste, and a refined flavor. There are many different varieties of sake, among them some of the finest of spirits. Just like rice, it had a flavor that suited practically every dish, and was essential to any meal.

"So, a distillery here? It doesn't seem like many kinds of gods live here. I wonder if it would really come out all right..." Reimu's mannerisms exhibited her deep connection to the craft of brewing sake.

It's no mystery that sake and shrines have a very intimate relationship. Originally, the job of a shrine maiden was to drink sake. Drinking sake would alter their mental state and allow them to communicate with the gods of this world. As proof of this, the god of sake, called Kushi no Kami, comes from the word "kushi," or "mysterious," meaning that drinking sake makes one do mysterious things. Sake is a necessity during shrine rituals. As they need sake more than most occupations, a long time ago, nearly the entire available supply of sake was brewed at shrines, while nowadays, you don't hear of shrines brewing sake too often. It isn't out of place for Reimu to talk as if she is learned in it; that's because shrines always have a supply of special, sacred sake.

"So when did you start brewing sake?"

"I just started this year."

A dubious expression formed on Reimu's face. "Uh, you know the gods won't ferment it that easily. To begin with, you need a lot of it for it to work. Enough that if you don't drink a lot, you won't finish it."

I had expected her to make that kind of face. "Ok then. I'm sure if I keep trying every year, it'll turn out better. I know I might fail, but I won't get better at it if I never start."

Ring-a-ling.

"Fragrant matsutakes and kakishimejis, I got the very spirit of fall in these mushrooms right here!"

"Kakishimejis are poisonous."

"Don't sweat the small stuff. Reimu's already here, so put these on the grill and let's start drinkin'!"

Tonight's main course had arrived. Holding a hat stuffed to the brim with mushrooms, an excited Marisa seemed ready to drink.

"Yes, I know. I'm almost done with the preparations, so wash off those mushrooms for me while you're waiting."

"Preparations? Whatcha preparin'?"

As she was asking questions for the sake of asking questions, I told her not to worry about it and sort the mushrooms.

"Rinnosuke started to brew sake."

Marisa said, "Ya don't say?" in an uninterested fashion, adding "...if ya start now, you're not gonna make it in time for tonight's meal," which was completely obvious.

"Naturally. All I have here are things that will become sake. If you wanted to drink, you should've brought your own. I'm pretty sure there's plenty at the shrine, right?"

"Oh yeah, no problem there. I kinda thought somethin' like this'd happen, so I brought this."

She's well-prepared, but only for herself. Under the heap of mushrooms, she produced a bottle of sake. Reimu, looking surprised, started to say "Um, that sake--"

"Yep! Found it sittin' around at the shrine."

"But it's much too soon to drink that."



While she appeared shocked when she said that, the very next moment, her expression changed to one of aloofness. "Ah, so you're brewin' sake, huh? That reminds me of when I tried it myself a while back."

"Wow, that's the first I've heard of that. It didn't go so well, I imagine."

"Wow, that's the first I've heard of it as well. It didn't go so well, did it?"

"It was an absolute failure," Marisa said, making a goofy expression, tittering and lightly rapping her head. Hearing her speak of her failures was a sign she was in a good mood. She truly is one who doesn't care about her past. "Since ya can make alcohol from rice and fruits, I thought I'd try givin' mushroom shochu a crack. That's when things got bad."

I didn't understand her reasoning, but Marisa excels in that kind of thinking. Even in magic, she attacks common knowledge with her own unique theories. Such as the theory that magic only has five basic elements; she's the only one who's put effort into trying to prove it wrong. Sometimes the new spells she makes even surprise the youkai.

But...I'm still not so sure about the mushroom shochu. "That's a rather avant-garde variety."

"How did it turn bad?"

"I created some weird new mushroom."



Reimu laughed at the ridiculous outcome to Marisa's tale. "Sake isn't something you can make with whatever you like, wherever you like. It's something that must be made as an offering to the gods, so it must be pleasing to them. The number one rule is that if there are no gods enshrined at wherever the distillery is, then the sake won't turn out well, and the rules only get more technical from there..." Reimu was slowly changing the subject from theology to biology.

The gods prefer to ferment food with sugar; things like fruits which are naturally full of sugar are easy to turn into alcohol. With luck, all that's necessary is to crush it and let it sit. In the case of fruits that grow on trees, like pears and grapes, you can tell that it has fermented when the smell changes. You may have seen animals or bees gather around overripe fruit that has fallen on the ground. That is because the smell of fermentation attracts them. However, in the case of rice and other grains where the sugar content is low, it's necessary to change the starch into sugar through fermentation. Even though it's not the same fermentation that turns it into alcohol, it is a necessary step. As the starch dissolves, it creates a sugar-rich substance called mold. Once the mold has been prepared, the process is then the same as with fruit and is left to the gods.

The main difference between rice alcohol and fruit alcohol is that it is nearly impossible to make rice alcohol naturally ferment on its own. The more time and effort put into it, the better the end result will be. There is also another kind of alcohol made in a way similar to rice alcohol but with wheat, called "beer," but that is yet another case.

When I started making sake, I had studied the process on my own, but most of what I found out I had already heard from Reimu. She knows all about it because she has been distilling it at her shrine to this very day.

Reimu concluded her lecture with "...so in short, to make alcohol, you need sugar. I doubt this weird mushroom of yours contains any, so even making a little might be difficult."

"Well, aren't we Ms. Know-It-All? Maybe ya shoulda used your brain power to learn how to be a better shrine maiden instead," Marisa retorted.

But I couldn't let that go, because I knew that making sake was truly part of her job: "No, having thorough knowledge about how to make sake is very important for a shrine maiden. That's because they need sake to be able to communicate with the gods. A long time ago, brewing sake was one of their jobs, although I'm not so sure about now..."

I took an indirect glance at Reimu. If she really was making sake at her shrine now, I expected her to show some kind of reaction, but my plan did not work; she continued to speak. "Well, since your house is in the Forest of Magic, Marisa, something else just might be fermenting there. I'm not so sure about Kourindou

though..." Reimu's eyes passed around the room. I realize it's a little cluttered, but far from unsanitary.

"So you're saying that there aren't any gods here that could brew sake?"

Reimu looked around the inside of the store; the shikigami from the outside world, the tengu's camera, the ghost lamp...after a single course, Reimu said this: "The gods are *already* brewing too many things in here."

The mushrooms were cooking, their fragrance permeating the air.

As some time had passed since Reimu began her lecture on alcohol, it was already dark outside, and the reddened mountain could only be seen as a black shadow. It was now time for Kushi no Kami, the alcohol-loving youkai, and ourselves to drink the night away.

The air was filled with spores from the lightly-salted mushrooms due to the fire. We began to drink accompanied by just this scent. Reimu and Marisa began to squabble over the mushrooms, but it was a lighthearted act. As for myself, I drank while eating, filling my mouth with mushrooms while imagining the day when my own sake would be ready.

As the fermentation process continues, at what point does it become sake? I had actually already ventured a guess.

"Oh, Reimu. I wouldn't eat those kakishimejis; they're slightly poisonous, and you'll end up in bed for a while."

"Don't worry, they're clean." As Reimu pondered that herself, Marisa added, "if ya do end up in bed, it'll be fine. I'll take care o'the shrine for ya."

Upon hearing that, she tossed the mushroom still in her chopsticks out the window.

The fact is that there isn't anyone who knows more about the mushrooms that grow in the Forest of Magic than Marisa. There are other, edible mushrooms that look very similar to kakishimejis. Due to the low reach of the sunlight and high temperatures in the forest, mushrooms thrive where few other things can.

I took a mushroom that looked like a jounenbo, put it in my mouth, and began to chew. The sensation of the mushroom flooded my throat and nose through the power of the sake, filling me with an indescribably pleasant experience.

When does sake become sake? I believe it is the very moment when it is joined with delicious food in the mouth. Until then, it might not be too much to say that sake is just another liquid. The sake made by the gods is something no human could ever do. Is it sake, or vinegar, or something else entirely? Literally only the gods know.

And the sake from the god of sake naturally chooses who drinks it. And to pay respect to Kushi no Kami, one must become drunk. Drinking a lot and becoming very drunk is important.

How much a human or youkai enjoys luxuries such as alcohol, tobacco, coffee and tea is a good indicator of their character. It is easy to tell their sensitivity and how broad-minded they are through these luxuries. Tengu, oni, kappa, and other strong youkai are also strong to alcohol; vampires don't drink tea merely because it resembles the color of blood. It is all simply because a youkai who enjoys luxuries becomes strong.

"Whatzza matter? You're not movin' your chopsticks at all. Is the poison from the younenbo gettin' to ya?" asked Marisa.

"What was that? What's a younenbo?"

"That's whatcha ate just now, Kourin. Looked like a jounenbo, didn't it? Though it's obviously a different size, it's called a younenbo because it's like a youkai jounenbo."

I started to feel uneasy.

"They only grow in the Forest of Magic, but they got a nice smell and a good, rich flavor. And of course..."

Of course, it's fine to eat them. If it weren't meant to be eaten, it wouldn't have been on the grill. I was praying not to the gods, but to Marisa.

"...Of course, they're hallucinogenic. But the effects aren't too bad, so you'll be fine."

That's when I decided to cancel the evening feast and chase the two out. They said they had already eaten their fill, so they left without a fuss.

Even if it tastes fine to her, the problem is that she fed a poisonous mushroom to someone else. While Marisa might be used to living there, a normal human can't withstand the forest miasma for long periods of time. Yet, mushrooms still grow there. I wish she would just gather safer mushrooms...

But, there was still one more question remaining; that being, does Reimu actually make sake at her shrine? Whether because of my bragging about brewing my own sake, or being too nervous about Marisa's mushrooms, I was hesitant to ask directly, so the answer to that question will remain unknown.

[<- Back to Chapter 16](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 18 ->](#)

[<- Back to Chapter 17](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 19 ->](#)

Chapter 18

The Universe the Youkai Saw



"Ah! There go two in a row!"

"Yeah, just one more to make it ten."

The excited voices of the two rang out inside the darkened shop. Soon it'll be midnight, a time when crying children had long quieted down, but neither Reimu nor Marisa had done so. The two of them had taken up occupancy in my store and turned off all the lights, so I, unable to read a book or write in my journal, moved over to where they were, relying on the little bit of moonlight coming in through the window.

"Really, I don't know what to do with you two. Haven't you had enough? These so-

called 'meteor showers' aren't exactly rare, you know..."

"What are you talking about? You said it yourself, didn't you? 'Tonight the shooting stars will be amazing, I'm sure more than a hundred will fall.'"

"I really do think about a hundred will fall, but you don't intend to watch all of them, do you?"

"You bet. I even got over a hundred wishes ready to go."

-Noon inside Kourindou the day Reimu and Marisa came to see the meteor shower.-

I had placed a mysterious, newly-acquired item on top of my desk, gazing at it. I say it was a newly-acquired item, but the item itself was old and a bit dirty. The parts made of metal had spots of rust here and there as well. The item was made up of a ball the size of a large, round watermelon and four legs supporting it. The ball was made of metal, but it had a very odd form. There were a number of thin rings fashioned from metal connected together that looked like they were used for measurement; they formed a sphere that air could easily pass through, like a throwing ball made out of bamboo. Furthermore, each of the metal rings could rotate freely while the legs kept everything else in place. Unfortunately, a few of the metal rings had rusted, so they didn't turn very smoothly. It wouldn't make for suitable merchandise in this condition, so I had thought I'd somehow try to fix it myself.

"What's with this weird hollow globe?"

"This isn't a globe, Marisa - and when did you come in?"

"I thought maybe a hole had opened up in the Earth."

Marisa had asked if it was a globe, and it wasn't, so just what was it? A globe is a model of the Earth.

The humans living in Gensokyo don't know much about the planet they live on;



that is because Gensokyo is in a small area of the mountains in a small part of Japan, which is itself a small part of the world, and it's not a place one can easily leave.

That said, it's not like outside information or tools aren't able to find their way in. A globe is one of the various tools that have washed in from the outside world, and so we've been able to learn about the planet we live on. Strictly speaking, while they understand "knowledge" down to the smallest places here, the human residents of Gensokyo and the land they live in isn't quite connected with the knowledge of the Earth. For example, if you were to say *here* that a hole had opened up in the Earth, they would easily believe you.

Still, though this tool looks like a globe, it is certainly not. It is a tool used to measure objects that, though they are always close to Gensokyo, we still don't know much about - the same as the Earth.

"This is a tool called an 'armillary sphere.' If a globe is a tool used to provide information about the Earth, then an armillary sphere is used to provide information about space."

While an armillary sphere is an unusually complicated tool, all it is used for is to measure the position of the stars. However, there's a reason for its complexity. Though it appears that the stars are just floating in the sky, correctly measuring their position is difficult. It's not something you can measure absolutely, like how the ground you see from far away has mountains and forests giving varying degrees of height. While lines can be drawn between stars, and there are many fundamental stars that don't move and are simpler to calculate, that is still mere speculation. Their positions are unreachable, and observing stars that exist apart from fundamental ones has long troubled many astronomers. In order to resolve that problem, the armillary sphere couldn't have been made without being complicated.

"So...how d'ya use the thing...?"

"Well...that's what I'm investigating now."

"Ah. So you don't know either. Well yeah, that's how it always is."

I felt she was making a fool of me, but it was true, so I couldn't deny it. "Well, I

imagine this is how you'd use it: While looking at a star through this tube in the middle, you match up the rotating sphere with the star, and take a reading from the scale or something written here...hmm?" I'd just realized that there were strange characters written on this object. What I thought was 'a scale or something' wasn't a simple numbered system. There's a possibility that these strange characters broaden the usefulness of the armillary sphere.

"What? Is somethin' on that ring?"

"Indeed, there certainly is. I'd thought for sure that this was a tool from the outside world, but the characters written here could overturn that theory."

"Where, where? Can I see? ...Hmm...can't read it."

"Well, that was fast."

The strange characters written on the armillary sphere were the names of the constellations.

"Written here is...Yuki-Nyuudou constellation, Kaenba constellation, Bashou-no-Sei constellation...they appear to be the names of constellations to me."

"What's with that? They must be some crazy constellations, yeah?"

"There's more to the problem than that; I haven't heard of these constellations either. Well, it might just be nothing more than a list of ridiculous constellation names. That would be strange in and of itself, but even if that were the case, these constellation names..."

Te-no-Me constellation, Tsurube-Otoshi constellation, Great Tengu constellation...

"...But aren't these all the names of youkai?"



The constellations we know - and this probably applies not only to the humans of Gensokyo, but the humans from the outside world, too - mostly came from the continent. They have a long history, being made before Gensokyo became separated from the outside world. Furthermore, there are still some constellations originally from ancient Japan, but few remain now. The Japanese ones were simply stars themselves rather than the interconnecting lines between them, and were

given names and worshipped.

Well, at least, that's what I've always thought, but after looking at this armillary sphere, I'll probably have to rethink my assessment. It's hard to think that constellations with the names of youkai would have come over from the continent. If Japan named this many constellations, it wouldn't be strange to think that Japanese astronomy has advanced considerably...

"...However, all of them are indeed youkai names. If this was the work of Japanese astronomy, they should have used more names from gods or heroes. If you think of it that way, rather than Japanese astronomy, it is possible that this armillary sphere is not a tool of the outside world, but instead..."

This is probably a youkai armillary sphere. Youkai have been living for thousands of years, so it wouldn't be strange if they had their own astronomical knowledge. The youkai have many things that can put human technology to shame. They must have created their own system of astronomy as well instead of using the humans'. It's possible to think that the astronomy used by humans is in fact a field of study thought up by youkai.

Additionally, it is said that over a thousand years in the past, youkai had travelled to the moon. At that time, humans wouldn't have yet known the meaning of the moon or the stars. For that reason alone, youkai astronomy must be excellent.

The moon is an important heavenly body for youkai, holding festivals on days when the moon is full and calming down during the new moon. It's easy to imagine that youkai study of the moon has greatly advanced.

However, the youkai names of constellations on this armillary sphere suggest that

not only is their study of the moon very extensive, but of the stars as well. For example, the Milky Way is called the Sake Way, and there the sake of oni flows to earth. Close to that, the extremely bright Orion's Belt the youkai call the Ibuki-Douji constellation and indicates the Ibuki-Douji's three powers of harmony, finite, and infinite.

Because of the planets' brightness and inconsistent movement, they are called "tengu stars." They move here and there, and can be read as an existence that disrupts the orbits of other youkai.

Comments are also recorded within the youkai constellations. Even the comets' cycles have been researched. Since youkai can live for a long time, you can say it's easier for them to observe than humans. Comets are called "detested" or "condemned stars" because they are apparently bad omens that threaten youkai society.

The one written with the largest characters is the Celestial Dragon constellation; this is the so-called Big Dipper. The celestial dragon always stares at one point, and looks as if it might take flight at any time. The star at the point is Polaris, the north star.

Even in youkai constellations, Polaris is the unmoving star. Basically, it is the face of the unmoving lord of night, Acala, an embodiment of Mahavairocana. Though it goes without saying, Mahavairocana is an avatar of the sun that renders youkai powers ineffective. In the night world, he is said to become Polaris and consume youkai power in order to prevent their festivals from getting out of hand. It is said that the celestial dragon is plotting to eat Acala in order to control the sky both day and night. According to the records, it is prophesized that after a few thousand years the celestial dragon will move, and then youkai society will also undergo a great metamorphosis. Though it's said not to happen for thousands of years, youkai foresight is incomparable to humans', so this may be troubling.

"...Anyway, givin' me a complete rundown of how it works is just gonna be a waste of time, but I got somethin' I wanna ask ya. I know ya can find the position of the stars and the youkai constellations with this thing, but what's that? Says 'Master of the Night Sky'?"

"The Master of the Night Sky? Isn't that the moon? I guess it lets you measure the position of the moon, too."

The moon is a very important heavenly body to the youkai, so the Master of the Night Sky would have to be the moon.

"Nah, it's not the moon..."

"Is there some other heavenly body worthy of being called 'Master'?"

"Those, the stars that stand out the most, the ones that fall down and disappear in a flash."

"In a flash...do you mean shooting stars?"

"Yeah, that's it. They're my favorite out of all the stars. They grant your wishes, too."

Ah, I see. Shooting stars...liking flashy things is very Marisa-like. But that is different; those aren't celestial bodies.

"Shooting stars aren't *actually* stars, you know."

"It's a *shooting* star, right? So ain't it a star?"

"Shooting stars are...scales from the celestial dragon who flies through the heavens, that sparkle when they fall off. So this tool can't find their position."

"Hm...well, I guess it's 'cause they move, huh? I didn't think it'd be able to measure that, but it's still a shame."

"Why is it a shame?"

"If ya knew what time they fell, ya could have as many wishes granted as ya wanted. If ya got enough free time to study *other* kinds of stars, you should study *shootin'* stars instead."

"It's not like they were studying them because they had free time...but it's true you can't tell when shooting stars will fall. However, I know a way to see them for sure."

"What was that? Really?! If ya know, tell me!"

"A few times a year on certain days, a large amount of shooting stars pour from the sky. If you look then, during a single night you can probably see ten...no, a hundred shooting stars."

So, I had told Marisa of one of the days that one could see a meteor shower, and on that day, Marisa had shown up early, brought along Reimu, and we had a sort of meteor shower viewing party.

I wonder how much time had passed. They counted the fifteenth shooting star.

"This is amazin'! I think we really *will* see a hundred of 'em tonight!"

"I'm starting to feel a bit tired."

After saying Reimu shouldn't be, Marisa leaned further outside the window to take in the astronomical show.

"Ah, the sixteenth one. Um...can-can-can," Reimu whispered.

"What's with that?"

"Saying a wish three times while a shooting star is visible is almost impossible, isn't it? So I tried shortening my wish as much as possible."

"Ya cut off too much. What kinda wish was that, anyway?"

"A wish about my incantation skill. What are you wishing for?"

"Ah. I wanna use stronger magic."

Both of them were excited about seeing a hundred shooting stars, but as the time between them continued to increase, they ended up losing count, becoming tired, and falling asleep, and thus the curtain had closed on the first shooting star wishing party.

-Present day, four or five years later.-

I stared at the memorable armillary sphere. From then on, the shooting star wishing party became a yearly tradition, and we've already had quite a few of them.

When I think about it, I get the feeling that it was since the first shooting star wishing party that Marisa started to use star-related magic. Now when it comes to magic shooting stars, it's Marisa's number-one specialty. Plus, every year, she comes asking for the dates of the meteor showers, and I hear she'll watch them by herself.

I wonder if Marisa was enchanted by the celestial dragon, and I wonder if her wishes were granted.

The polar opposite of the static movements of the stars, shining brightly and immediately disappearing. Every now and then they'll become meteorites that reach the earth, and hold a power capable of dealing incredible damage. I wonder what people see in those kind of shooting stars.

"Oh, the youkai armillary sphere? That sure brings back memories. You're still holdin' on to it?"

"Yeah, I took it out for the first time in a while and was looking at it. But when did you come in?"

"You were just daydreamin', and didn't notice me."

"I was just reminiscing a bit about the past for...huh?!"

"Whazzup?"

I was reading the names of the youkai constellations written on the armillary sphere. There are various youkai written down, but I'd found one that particularly caught my attention. It wasn't the name of a constellation, but it stood out the most.

"...Nevermind, it's nothing."

"Sure looked like it was something."

And it was. The legend about youkai going to the moon over a thousand years ago isn't really a legend; I'd heard about it from the mouth of one of the youkai herself. In other words, that youkai is still living in Gensokyo. Still in Gensokyo, and still controlling things from behind the scenes.

On this armillary sphere that youkai's name was written. Furthermore, it was written as the creator's name.

"Let me see, let me see. Oh, I think I should be able to read this. 'Author, Yukari Yakumo'? ...Ugh, really? *She* made this...?"

Marisa was clearly annoyed, and strangely I agreed with her. The reason is that the place where those characters were written was in a place where a constellation name should be. Furthermore, it was labelled not as "maker," but as "author."

"So that's it. This was made by that annoyin' youkai. Lame."

"At any rate, she's smart and has a wealth of knowledge. If you were honest about it, you probably would do well to learn from her."

"I don't wanna. Anyway, just because she made this doesn't really mean she's smart."

"You don't have nearly enough humility nor the ability to conjecture."

This doesn't mean that Yukari Yakumo is the youkai that made this armillary sphere; more likely, she's the one who came up with the names of the constellations written on the armillary sphere. In other words, I think she's the one who made the constellations.

Gensokyo, a place where these sorts of characters are still active. Until now, I've underestimated the power youkai have to live very long lives, but thinking about how that relates to the sphere, I feel a slight chill.

[<- Back to Chapter 17](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 19 ->](#)



[<- Back to Chapter 18](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 20 ->](#)

Chapter 19

The Contagious God



Around the middle of winter, the sliding door to the storage room rattles and opens with some difficulty. As very few things back there generate heat, snow often piles up on that area of the roof. The weight of the snow pushes down on the roof, and thus the door. That may be one factor. Why I say "one" is because there is yet another important reason, that being the spirit of the god of grains, having worked outside until the autumn harvest, rests in my storage room in preparation for planting in the coming spring. What was once a humble storage area becomes sacred ground, and one can feel the weight of its divinity holding back the door.

It's just as Lord Daikoku resides in the kitchen, not being confined to a single place, but anywhere food is prepared.

This means that gods aren't just found in objects, but in all sorts of places. However, they do not put any emotion or thought into this notion. There will always be somewhere or someplace for them to live. That is the main difference between gods and youkai, fairies, and ghosts.

"Oh, what's the matter? For someone who always makes a racket misbehaving in my store, you're awfully quiet."

Marisa, clothed in black from head to toe, staggered into the store, making her look even smaller and blacker.

"*cough* Whaddaya mean? I'm always quiet. ...Whew, finally made it."

"Did you catch a cold? You don't look so well. Would you like something warm to drink?"

There was just some hot water boiling in the kettle on the stove, but I poured her a cup.

"Ah, thanks," said Marisa as she sat on a chair.

"If you have a cold, maybe you should've stayed at home instead?"

"Maybe if this *was* a normal cold, sleepin' would help. *cough cough*"

"So this is an *abnormal* cold?"

I myself do not catch colds very often. For one thing, it's that my body is resistant to illness, but there is another reason: There are very few diseases that can afflict both youkai and humans. Only humans can suffer from human illnesses, and only youkai can suffer from youkai illnesses. As an aside, most human illnesses are sicknesses of the body, while most youkai illnesses are those of the mind.

In the case of half-human-half-youkai such as myself, they are resistant to both varieties; that's why I can allow Marisa into the store without worrying about contracting her illness.



"I don't even know if this is a cold or what...my whole body just feels heavy."

"I see. Unfortunately, while I'm not especially strong, I don't get sick easily. Even if you tell me what your symptoms are, I won't really know what your problem is."

"Yeah, I know. It's not like I came to ya for a checkup or anythin'...Man. I just got somethin' I wanted ta show ya."

Knock-knock.

"Are you here, Rinnosuke? *Cough*"

"Oh, do you have a cold too?"

"I don't know if it's a cold, but it feels like my body doesn't want to move." Upon saying this, she immediately headed straight for the interior of the shop, where there was already another patient asleep.

"Marisa is already sleeping."

"Yes, I imagined she would be feeling ill."

"You're my second patient today. I don't mind though because I don't catch colds easily. Maybe I should become a doctor, too."

"You won't make a profit off it even if you do."

I couldn't tell if she meant that there wouldn't be enough people who trusted me enough for that, or that the residents of Gensokyo rarely need doctors, but I heard that about two years ago a rather skilled physician appeared and her practice is thriving, so I doubt Reimu was referring to the latter.

This skilled physician suddenly appeared in the bamboo forest and is said to treat both humans and youkai alike. If Reimu and Marisa's symptoms get out of hand, maybe it would be best to call her.

But at any rate, why did Reimu come here in such poor condition? I never told them I stocked medicine here, because I rarely ever do.

"*Cough cough* I came to look for something. I want an antique, so I thought Kourindou would be the best place to find one."

"You're just looking for an antique? Maybe you should have come when you were feeling better."

"That's not going to happen...If I don't find what I'm looking for, this is only going to get worse."

"You seem to know the reason behind this strange cold."

Reimu explained how the majority of the people living in the human village had already come down with the same symptoms. While they call it a "cold," the coughing isn't as bad, but the body feels lifeless and even walking is a chore. And, this cold is highly contagious.

"*Cough* I'm looking for...something like a small pot...or similar antique - the older, the better."

"A pot? Are you giving up on being a shrine maiden and starting a new religion?"

"But the most important thing is that it must be something without a name. *Cough cough*"

I had only a vague grasp on whatever Reimu was planning. For her to come all the way to my store while ill, and specifically ask for a nameless item...but that reminded me Marisa said she'd wanted to show me something, though since she's sleeping; I suppose it can wait.

"So an antique, and one without a name...it's going to be rather poor quality. Let's see..."

"I thought something at the shrine might work too, but I can't tell what has or hasn't been named yet...*cough cough*" She then added, "because the only one who can truly determine that is you, right?" That made me feel better, and with a slight air of pride, I came back with Reimu's request.

"How about something like this? It's a plate that goes back 300 years from the current age. It was meant to be used, but the quality was so poor that it doesn't

seem like it was ever used at all, and because of that, it was never given a particular name."

"Hmm...do you have anything a little older? Like, say, around 1200 years ago...?" Reimu said that having merely glanced at the plate. I got the feeling that the age was the more important factor in her request.

"1200 years? I don't usually have something like that on hand."

"Kourindou is supposed to have everything, isn't it? I want something nameless that's as old as possible." She started to lie down as she complained. I would consider my shop to stock curios and antiques, but I don't think I ever said I have "everything."

But, with my air of pride unable to accept turning down her request, I went to go put away the dish with the other stock I did not want to sell and began looking for something 1200 years old. When I opened the cold, heavy door to the storage room, I began to think of why Reimu needed such a thing.

"Reimu, I couldn't find anything that fit your demands exactly, but would something like this be acceptable?" As I said that, I showed her a flat, triangular, shaped lump about as large as my hand. "This is a fragment of a jar older than 1,000 years, and it has no name." Naturally, a mere fragment has no value as an antique, but as far as objects older than 1,000 years, this is her only option.

"However, this is no ordinary fragment; this was originally part of a pot with an interesting purpose, for sealing something within it. I'm sorry I couldn't find anything older, but it's all I could find."

"*Cough cough* That should do just fine. I knew you'd have *something*, Rinnosuke."



She asked to borrow it for a moment, held it in one hand and a sacred tree branch in the other, and began to murmur. It looked as if she were performing a ritual. I was not expecting this to be her purpose in the least.

"...I hear the voice of the god Tomo-no-Yoshio..."

It appeared that she was actually doing something

a shrine maiden would do for once. Perhaps it has something to do with the unusual colds. She finished her simple ritual by placing seals on the fragment, and sighed.

"Whew, now I feel much more relieved. If I take this around the village, that should cure everyone's illnesses."

"Oh. Well, isn't that nice? But I still have absolutely no idea what's been going on. Can you give me some details?"

I wondered if Reimu was already feeling better, as after she finished her mysterious rite and seemed more like her normal self, she began explaining the situation.

"First of all, this is a contagious disease," she began. Similar to a vicious cold, it easily passes between people, and simply being close to someone infected with it will lead to catching it. Endemics of these unexplained illnesses seem to happen once every several years.

It is impossible to limit the spread of contagious diseases by oneself. To completely suppress it, it is necessary to seal the curse god that caused it into something. According to Reimu, the cause of this disease's prevalence is the curse god associated with it running rampant. By finding out which god is doing it, sealing it, and then showing it to those who have been afflicted with the disease, this will give them the belief that they have been cured.

"Gods that need to gather faith choosing to do so in this temporary manner are called 'contagious gods.' In this case, to suppress the illness, we need to fool the god of this illness that into thinking that it has collected faith, and in that way, it will become a real curse god."

"Fool, you say? Fooling a god that has control over disease sounds disastrous."

"This time, I bestowed the role of curse god onto the god Tomo-no-Yoshio. He is a curse god who occasionally deals with plagues."

"That sounds pretty bad, but wasn't he an actual person? If I remember, about twelve hundred years ago--"

"It'll be fine. While there was fear of plagues at first, and the grudge he bears does

not seem to have lessened by much, this time he seemed grateful to do any kind of dirty deed, and was quick to say 'if you want me to cure this disease, make me into a curse god or something.' I guess he's been bored lately, so I let him handle it."

I wonder if gods and shrine maidens always have such friendly conversations, but it's a world that only shrine maidens know, being mouthpieces for the gods.

"I wanted something without a name because objects with names already have another god residing in them. Nameless items that are extremely old are the ideal vessels."

"I see now. So you should be able to cure everyone's illness with that? You said they were gathering faith temporarily, so how does curing the illness turn them into a god?"

"Divine spirits of illnesses of the past that no one fears anymore lack the power to do anything. You haven't heard of anyone worshipping Lord Tomo-no-Yoshio as a normal god, right? He didn't even have a shrine built for him. Now that he's sealed in this fragment, I'll ultimately throw him away at Muenzuka."

"The way you're saying that, like gods are disposable, is rather cruel."

"That's the fate of these contagious gods. Just forgetting about them is the best thing for us humans. But still, Lord Tomo-no-Yoshio was supposed to have already been sealed, so why did he seem bored?"

"Hey, I'm feelin' pretty good now." Sitting up in bed, Marisa wedged herself into our conversation. "I mighta looked like I was sleepin', but I heard what Reimu was talkin' about. Somethin' about the disease comin' from a spirit?"

"I didn't say that, I said it came from a god."

Saying "Well, that's what it sounded like ta me," she reached into her hat, and took out a small old plate. "I thought I'd come by and give ya a look at this today, Kourin. But the thing is, ever since I picked it up, I've been feelin' pretty bad."

"That's another old plate. It seems to have quite a history..."

"I took it 'cause I thought it'd be worth somethin', but all of a sudden I felt horrible

for some reason. I wanted ta see ya so ya could give me a second opinion."

"Hmm, it doesn't look like it was given a name. Unfortunately, I doubt it's worth a great deal, but what I can say for sure is that it's rare to see something so old."

Reimu inspected the plate and a curious expression appeared on her face.

"Um...where exactly did you *find* this plate?"

"Funny thing is, when I first found it, it had these dirty seals all over it, so I thought I'd clean it up; that's when I started feelin' sick."

I heard the sound of snow falling off the roof. How long had passed since Reimu began lecturing Marisa? I get the feeling she had already repeated herself three times by now.

"I'd think you'd know that if you found something that's been sealed, that you don't take them off! You found that plate at Muenzuka, didn't you?! You had no idea what might have been sealed inside!"

"How's yer average human s'ppose'ta know a contagious god was sealed inside? Why'd ya throw somethin' like that out, anyway?"

"It's important to put it somewhere away from the village until the contagious god has lost all its faith! The reason why everyone is sick is because *YOU* went to Muenzuka, found that plate, and removed its seals! You realize that, right? Now I know why Lord Tomo-no-Yoshio seemed so bored - it was because of you breaking the seal!"

"Keep your voice down, will ya? I'm still tryin' ta get over a cold."

"Thanks to your foolish actions, now I'm going to have to go around to every house in the village, one by one."

The image of Reimu visiting each house trying to gather faith for the curse god to cure the epidemic was rather amusing, but I was still skeptical of whether that would truly work. If sealing a curse god is how illnesses are cured, I have the feeling that doesn't explain the reason why I don't fall ill easily, nor why youkai and humans are susceptible to different sicknesses.

The physician who appeared in the bamboo forest doesn't need to commune with the gods to heal disease, but rather uses more advanced procedures. Using implements no one has seen before, taking pictures of the inside of the body, even exchanging useless parts of the body for working replacements.

However, I still hold some doubt, as I have not seen these for myself, but if it is true, then the bamboo forest physician is likely an intellectual who started her practice here after lamenting over the condition of medical care in Gensokyo.

She may even be from the outside world.

[<- Back to Chapter 18](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 20 ->](#)

[<- Back to Chapter 19](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 21 ->](#)

Chapter 20

The Charming Moon



The rapidly-falling cherry blossom petals covered the land in white, replacing the snow that had just melted. Though I had not checked the calendar in a while, I could surmise a guess just by looking outside that either April was about to end, or that May had already started. I thought the cherry blossoms bloomed a little late this year, but a few days' difference is no cause for alarm. It just seemed to me that there were fewer warmer days this winter. Cherry blossom buds only appear on warmer days, for on colder days the temperature makes them close up tight. If there are fewer warmer days, then that will delay when the blossoms bloom.

Incidentally, in the few records left behind after Gensokyo's formation, it is written that in Gensokyo over one hundred years ago, the beginning of March would be determined by the blooming of the cherry blossoms. As it presently indicates a

more suitable time frame, around the end of April or the beginning of May, when you consider that, March comes much earlier. So when compared to winter temperatures back then, and the cherry blossoms blooming almost two full months later, it was likely much warmer then than it is now.

But, of course, that's not the case at all. Winter always has been - and always will be - cold. There is another reason for the cherry blossoms signaling the beginning of March.

"Now if it were me, I'd shoot down every last petal."

"What? If it were *me*, I'd dodge them all."

"But they fall so slow, so that's nothin' special."

"What are you talking about? Slower bullets are harder to avoid than fast ones."

For some reason, Reimu and Marisa were having a bitter, pointless argument, but I couldn't hold it against them. They had planned on having a flower-viewing party today, but it was cancelled. And to make matters worse, the blossoms had almost completely fallen off, and already bits of green could be seen on the trees. Today might have been their last chance.

With their wish of this send-off party to their precious petals dashed by the heartless rain, they now wait bored inside the shop. They were so excited for their party, but now they were likely worried if the rain would strip the remaining petals from the trees.

"And besides, the petals are already so limp. What's so special about shooting them?"

"It's special ta me. I'm proud-a my shootin' skills."

"Alright you two, I think that's enough of this petty argument. After the cherry blossoms fall, you know that means summer is right around the corner. It's simply that this year, it won't be the spring *wind* that takes them, but the spring *rain*. You shouldn't be spending endless hours bickering because of your current situation. Why don't you try thinking ahead a little more?"

"'Petty'? How rude. What we're doing is discussing new ways of interacting with the cherry blossoms. Isn't that thinking ahead?"

"We're so far ahead, we're practically in the future."

Although they say "far ahead," their "future" is a lot more recent. Like about what they should do today.

"We're so forward-thinking that we never reflect on the past, but a little while earlier, Yukari had said something like, 'It's a good thing the cherry blossoms in Gensokyo bloomed late this year,'" Reimu said.

"Hm? So what does that mean?"

"'Winter in the outside world suddenly became much shorter, so the cherry blossoms bloomed in the middle of March,' she said," Reimu told me in an unusually lazy tone of voice, which I took for her mimicking Yukari - although it was a poor imitation. If you take too many liberties in your exaggeration, no one will know who it's supposed to be.

"I...see. So she mentioned something about the short winter in the outside world?"

"'Since I got to see both the outside world's blossoms and Gensokyo's evening blossoms,'" she continued in her Yukari tone, "'I get to enjoy seeing the cherry blossoms twice this year.'"

I don't know why she only saw Gensokyo's cherry blossoms in the evening, but even if the timing is different in the blooming of the trees between the outside world and Gensokyo, it should be no inconvenience to the youkai here.

"Ah, so that means the cherry blossoms in the outside world were at full bloom in March. It seems they had an exceptionally warm winter. But no matter. Since you two seem bored, let me tell you about something strange."

I took a glance out the window as I said this. The rain had lessened to a light drizzle, but the outside of the window was clearly wet. I wondered if the rain might wash away the petals stuck to the window until I finished my story.

"What's this 'something strange'?"

"Just a small detail. While the cherry blossoms blooming in March in the outside world is indeed early, a long time ago, the cherry trees blossomed in March as well - both in the outside world and in Gensokyo."

"Blossomed in March? Isn't that more than a month early?"

"Who'd wanna have a party when it's still so cold out?"

"No, I didn't mean that it actually *was* March - simply that they blossomed in March."

"What's that...? A Zen riddle...?"

"It's the old calendar. There are almost no traces of it nowadays, but over 100 years ago, they used the lunar calendar. March in the lunar calendar would be around the end of April in the modern one. I was just saying that if you used the old calendar, the cherry blossoms would bloom in March."

"The old calendar? Ah, that."

"Hey, I sometimes wonder about this myself, but what *is* the old calendar? And why'd they change it, anyway?"



I prepared some salted tea with floating cherry blossom petals for them. I poured the hot water slowly, and even the floating blooms in the cup were imbibed. While we can't enjoy relaxing under the trees today, there are still ways to enjoy the view of the blossoms.

"I never thought you would prepare such beautiful tea for us, Rinnosuke."

"So what's this old calendar business about?"

"And why was it necessary to change to the new one?"

"The old calendar - or, to be specific, the lunar calendar - is based upon the waxing

and waning of the moon. One cycle, the time between new moons, which takes between 29 and 30 days, is counted as a month. And then twelve of these months make a year."

"Ah, so maybe that's why the word 'month' comes from the word 'moon'."

"Precisely. When the change was made to the new calendar, that word remained unchanged. However, the amount of time is different; as a month now is around 30 or 31 days, it's about one day more than the old month. So that means a year in the old calendar is roughly 10 days shorter than a year in the new calendar."

"Missin' ten days out of a year? That doesn't sound too bad to me."

"No, no, no; it *is* bad. Being short by even 10 days is very troublesome. After ten years, it will start snowing in spring; after another 10 years, winter and summer will have completely changed places."

"So it'll be a warm winter, huh?"

"Wouldn't it be more *hot* than warm?"

"And just like that, the seasons and the months would continually shift. So they added a thirteenth month every three years."

"So that's why I see that word come up every now and then in the older books."

Marisa seemed to be waiting for the perfect time to drink her tea. I'm not sure what her idea of perfect timing is, though. As for Reimu, she had already started on hers.

"Unfortunately, that is not the case. In years when they had a thirteenth month, it was never called 'the thirteenth month'. The reason is because when the seasons would become too out of place, they would simply add that extra month to the end of the current month, like when March would start to feel too much like February; the real March and the extra month would both be called 'March'."

"...How does that make any sense? What a ridiculous system."

"Of course, they had some manner to clearly calculate when to add this extra

month, but after a while, they were able to rely on their senses. Sense is the underlying aspect in all calculations."

"But doesn't havin' two of the same month make things complicated? Givin' it some kinda name'd make more sense."

"The extra month was properly distinguished by the name 'uruo month,' meaning 'intercalary month'. For example, the second March would be called 'Uruo March'. The reason why they changed to the new calendar was that even with the Uruo months, the seasons would rarely match up, and so it became too inconvenient. So the old lunar calendar was abandoned, and the new solar calendar spread in its place."

"Wow, the old calendar was so complicated, I wonder if it wasn't humans who came up with it, but youkai? Why didn't they use the calendar we have now from the very start?"

"Well, a lunar calendar would be better-suited for youkai. You'd immediately know on what dates the new and full moons occur. But as human technology advanced, they pushed more and more for a solar calendar."

"But aren't there quite a few youkai here in Gensokyo? Do we really need to use the new calendar here?"

"The reason why we use the new one here too is because it is the one they use in the outside world; that's all. We're already isolated enough, but using a different calendar would make matters worse. It's not as if the solar calendar were created in Gensokyo."

"I guess you're right. Now that I think about it, it would be strange if the youkai suddenly decided to stop going by the moon and start using the sun instead."

"Indeed: They never wanted to have the change forced upon them, and I've heard that there are still some here who have not yet adapted. In fact, there is a unique lunar calendar made by the youkai of Gensokyo."

The two of them, their mood improved after having forgotten their quarrel, listened intently to my story.

"The youkai lunar calendar. It doesn't just go by the waxing and waning of the moon, but also incorporates the color of the moonlight to determine monthly cycles. It is said that it is much easier to tell when natural phenomena will occur than the calendars the humans devised. Not only seasons, but disasters like earthquakes and volcanic eruptions and when the bamboo flowers will bloom. Many kinds of cycles are included in this calendar. Just by knowing the date, you can also know how much longer it will be until the bamboo flowers bloom."

"That's pretty cool! If their calendar's got all that stuff, maybe we humans should use it too. Sounds a lot more useful, that's for sure."

"However, there's a big problem with humans using the calendar - the length of their day is not as long as our days. In fact the concept of 'day' doesn't even exist - their smallest unit of measurement is a full month. If you were to compare it to the current 'day,' the new moon would be like midnight and the full moon would be like noon. And it's considerably long, taking 60 of our years for one of their calendar cycles. This might be fine for beings with such long lifespans as youkai, but for much more shorter-lived humans, that seems extremely inconvenient to me."

"Hmm...so since they hate the sun, they picked the moon. Guess they really do depend on it that much, but I ain't never heard-a any youkai usin' that calendar."

"Although they did *make* it, very few actually *used* it; I heard that the youkai living on the mountain use it though. By the way, there's a month with the same purpose as the Uruo month in the youkai lunar calendar as well. However, they don't call it the 'Uruo month,' but the more obvious 'thirteenth month'. And in years with this month, the power of youkai becomes exceptionally stronger. Because of these years where youkai become stronger, it seems that the number 13 is considered unlucky by humans in certain areas."

"Never heard-a that before. I know about 13-year cicadas, though..."

"Yes, because I *told* you about that, but you're still right; I myself haven't heard much about 13 being an unlucky number around here."

That was all the information I had regarding the youkai lunar calendar. Even if they asked me for more, it would be mere speculation, so I stood up to pour more tea. Thinking that serving them more cherry blossom tea would remind them of the cherry blossoms outside and put them in a disagreeable mood yet again, I poured

the usual green tea.

Since I had shared the extent of my knowledge on the matter, the conversation came to a standstill. But then, Reimu's voice broke the silence with a rather simple question:

"By the way, Rinnosuke, what does 'Uruo' mean, exactly? I don't think that word comes up normally in most conversations..."

It's important not to take things for granted, but to question even the smallest details. Growth as a human is directly related to how much knowledge one has accumulated. The better you know the past, the better you know the present, and the better you know the future.

"'Uruo,' huh? Hmm, let me think a bit...The meaning from the continent is 'not the genuine article.' Since the second march after the first one wasn't the real March, that's why it was called 'Uruo March.' Since it's a word from the continent, they don't use it in the youkai lunar calendar. That's why it isn't used outside of the context of the lunar calendar, but how did it become associated with it in the first place? Originally, this country had no word that expressed the meaning of the word 'uruo.'"

"Now I see."

"However, that character isn't pronounced 'uruo' in the continent; the reason why it's pronounced 'uruo' here is because of...a rather slipshod reason. When it came over from the continent, there were no words in the Japanese language that could properly express it, so no one knew how to read it. Then someone noticed it looked like the character in 'uruou,' meaning a number of things ranging from 'moist' to 'charming,' so they called it 'uruou' as well. So 'Uruou March' would sound like



'Charming March.' They put no other thought into it. And then, since they felt that 'uruou' was too difficult to say, they shortened it to just 'uruo.' So as far as why it is pronounced like that, there was never any meaning in it from the start. And since this word rarely came up in conversations, that's the whole origin story."

"So it looked like the character for 'uruou' and then they shortened it to 'uruo' because it was too hard to say? That really is lazy. Are you okay with that, Rinnosuke? I thought you were a lot more picky about names."

"Words are things that stand on their own; they are not something in which I have any right to meddle. And besides, I rather like the sound of it. Doesn't saying 'charming year' or 'charming month' sound a great deal more pleasant than 'not-the-actual month'?"

"Well, 'charming month' or 'moist month', while the cherry blossoms are blooming, I don't think that means it needs to rain...Oh, look! The rain stopped!"

The light from the sun, which had come out at some point, could be seen outside the window, seeping in through gaps in the clouds. Having given up their flower-viewing party for lost, the two were now in high spirits. I was unsure how many flowers remained to be viewed, but I had the feeling they would take any opportunity to have a party merely for the sake of it.

"Won't you join us tonight too, Rinnosuke? This might be the last time we have a flower-viewing party this year, and the cherry blossoms are so pretty when they're shining with water."

"I say this every time, but I don't like outdoor parties."

"C'mon, what're ya talkin' about? We listened to your borin' stories, so the least ya can do ta make it up is join us."

Despite their irrational request, I just happened to be in the mood to see the cherry blossoms that evening anyway. I said it would be worth seeing the flowers that had not been washed away by the rain once. Imagining a beautiful world of flowers moist with rain, gracefully falling under the charming moon, made me want to drink sake.

[<- Back to Chapter 19](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 21 ->](#)



[<- Back to Chapter 20](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 22 ->](#)

Chapter 21

The Blessings of the Shrine



Mountains will have mountain gods, and rivers will have river gods. Gods reside in everything on the Earth. This book that you have in your hand, or a semiconductor that you may have picked up, is no exception.

But certain special gods have shrines dedicated to their worship. What's the difference between these gods and the other gods? There's nothing in particular; it's just a matter of a god being sufficiently popular or not.



Gods who provide blessings to humans are popular. There are also gods who will spread curses if they're not worshipped, and so by worshipping them one can escape misfortune, so they have popularity in a different sense.

Shrines exist for such gods. A shrine's existence is thus decided by popularity, which is entirely up to humans, but for gods, it doesn't matter to them in the least.

The reason for this is that a god's power is determined by the amount of faith humans have in them. For example, Inari Okami and Tenjin, who are very popular amongst people, have succeeded in gaining far greater power than they used to have when they were referred to as Ukanomitama-no-Kami or Sugawara-no-Michizane due to the great number of shrines built in their honor.

Conversely, as for what happens when people *lose* faith in gods, they will lose their powers, and once there is *nobody* who remembers them, they disappear from existence altogether: A god must work hard in gathering faith since their very existence is at stake.

"...Why does our shrine have so many youkai?"

"You probably need more visitors. Otherwise the gods won't have enough power to ward them off."

"But if there are youkai in the first place, no one will come. There's nothing that can be done about it."

"True. It appears to be a vicious cycle."

I think the shrine maiden Reimu - who doesn't do her job and comes to relax here all the time - is one of the problems. In the past, the shrine didn't have so few visitors, and youkai never approached it. It must say that the main cause is the current shrine maiden, Reimu.

I suppose it's beginning to bother her, as she said she's here to discuss ways to recollect faith.

"Well, even if we lose too much faith, it won't change my job of exterminating youkai, so it might not be a bad thing after all."

"You are mistaken, Reimu: A shrine losing faith can be fatal."

"I guess you're right, since I wouldn't get any offerings."

"No, no, it's not as simple as just that; saying that a god loses faith is like saying a god loses power, so if your shrine gets taken over by an evil spirit, it'll be harder to drive it out."

"Well, if you say so...but what should I do?"

"You can expel the youkai from the shrine as a last resort."

"Why would you start your suggestions with the last resort...? Oh, whatever. What other options are there?"

"One option is to choose a new god for your shrine to worship - give up on your current god and get a more popular god to come to your shrine, bringing its faith with it. When few are aware of your god's name, much less its blessings, it's no wonder you're losing faith like this."

"Enshrine a different god? ...Am I *allowed* to do that...?"

"There shouldn't be a problem. A Japanese god is known as a 'bunrei,' meaning 'divisible spirit'. Even if you split one into an endless number of parts, its power won't be affected. You can use that to bring another god's power directly to your shrine. The process of gaining a divisible spirit is called 'kanjou,' and it's something that happens frequently in the outside world."

"Hmm, a new god. That should be a nice change of pace, and it might even be fun. Maybe if I can get a god of sake to come, it might be easier to get faith since its blessings are so obvious."

"If that's what you want, it might be good to get gods like Asama-sama, otherwise called Konohana-no-Sakuyabime; she is usually a goddess of mountains, but she is one of sake as well. She's said to be a very beautiful goddess, and is very popular right now. To make it easier to notice, you might want to change the name of your shrine to Hakurei Asama Shrine."

"Hmm...I'm not really interested in changing the name..."

"Even if the god you worship changes, it'll have no meaning if people don't notice it, so normally names change with such events."

Ring-a-ling.

"Hey. It's the rainy season, but it's not rainin' today. Since it's so sunny, maybe we should start prayin' for rain."

"I have no idea what you're talking about, Marisa - as usual."

"Whatcha talkin' about when it ain't even rainin'?"

"We were having a very important discussion about the shrine."

"'Bout the shrine? Did somethin' happen to that youkai shrine o'yours, Reimu?"

The shrine being called "that youkai shrine" itself is the problem.

"Well, there are too few visitors. And the only offerings I get are the leaves that the tanuki put in the box..."

"Oh, izzat it? Don't worry 'bout it. Most of those leaves are from me anyway."

"That's not what she's worried about. Reimu's problem isn't foolish pranks, but the fact that her shrine is losing faith because there are no visitors."

"Ya don't need the help of gods ta kill youkai. So wait, what good is the shrine then?"

Although I find repeating myself to be tiring, I reiterated the connection between the lack of faith and how it affects gods and shrines to Marisa.

"Gotcha. Yeah, that'd definitely be a pain if your shrine got taken over by some youkai. But there's a real easy way to get more people ta come if ya wanna know."

"What's that?"

"Have a huge festival and call it, like, the Hakurei Shrine Retaisai. If ya do somethin'

like that, I'm sure you'd get everyone who loves festivals, right? And if ya *still* need more people, just have 'em every week. What the shrine is missin' is something that'll pull more people to it; if ya keep havin' dinky little parties all the time, no one's gonna bother comin' at all that way."

What Marisa says is true. Humans won't worship gods that won't benefit them; if the lives of the people become wealthier, then a shrine will not be needed. In that case, events like that might be necessary to draw interest.

"Even if I do arrange a festival, I just know the only ones who will show up will be the youkai, and if there are youkai around, humans won't come."

"That's true, yeah...youkai love pretty much anythin' where they can cause a racket."

"That's why we were talking about having a kanjou."

"Huh? Kanjou? Whazzat?"

We explained to Marisa that a kanjou is the process of changing the god of worship at a shrine.

"Okay, but if ya do that, what'll happen to the god ya got now?"

"At first, I was going to worship them at the same time."

"Whaddaya mean by 'at first'?"

"I mean it'll vanish naturally if it's forgotten."

"What? It'll vanish?!" The summer scenery as seen from the window began to darken. There was still plenty of time until evening, so I guess rain is underway. A unique ability of the rainy season, it seems. "The god in your shrine will vanish? B-but...Reimu, are ya okay with that?"

"If the shrine itself will vanish if I do nothing, then I guess I have no other choice."

"By the way, who was the god of the Hakurei Shrine? An evil spirit? Or maybe not?"

"They say there aren't many records regarding the god of the Hakurei Shrine, and according to those same records, we *did* get taken over by an evil spirit in the past..."

If even the god's own shrine maiden can't remember its name, it's not surprising that it's losing faith. But I guess there's no helping it; in Gensokyo, gods exist everywhere in nature. A place like a shrine isn't necessary, since one can ask for a god's favor anywhere.

In Gensokyo, it is said that the only shrine is the Hakurei Shrine. Thus, it is a unique place, and many simply refer to it as "the shrine." Since there are no other shrines with which to compare it, it can easily be forgotten that a god is being enshrined there. So, as expected, the people of Gensokyo no longer see the value of a shrine.

"Well, the future of the shrine is something for you to decide, but there is one thing I can say. The Hakurei Shrine plays an important role in supporting the Border. Regardless of who the god is, that won't change."

"Well, the worst part is not knowing the blessings of the shrine."

"Is there even a blessing at all? I didn't feel any different after those offerings."

"That's because you won't be blessed for offering *leaves*. I guess we should worship a god who has a blessing. In that case, it might be Konohana-no-Sakuabime then."

Even if there are blessings of sake, I think the only people who'll be happy about it will be the people making the sake, and there are only a handful of those people.

"By the way, why do you get blessings from gods you worship? Doesn't that make gods no different from the youkai who loiter at the shrine?"

The store had become dark. It seemed to be raining outside. Marisa was uneasy, worried about the weather, but Reimu was thinking of nothing else but her question.

"You're a shrine maiden, but lack far too much knowledge; you don't even train because you dislike it. If you won't stop drinking sake all the time and don't train more often, you won't be able to save your shrine."

"Well I'm studying *now*, aren't I?"

"I suppose, but I'll tell you why you get blessings when you worship divine spirits."

"Sure, sure, go on."



"They say everything has a divine spirit within it, but strictly speaking, things without names are divine spirits themselves. These objects are then named based on one of the powers of the spirit."

"Now that you mention it, I think I've heard about that before."

"Maybe I have told you before myself; I think it was about the petrified bone? Anyway, a divine spirit is different from a youkai in that it has two personalities."

"Since youkai are simple and only have one personality, that makes them twice as different."

"The two personalities are the 'nigi' and the 'ara'. The 'nigi' is the side that shows its kindness to humans, and is the one called the blessing."

"What? Its personality is the blessing?"

"I told you that divine spirits are the origin of all, right? The divine spirit is the personality of an object. Thus, the emotions of an object are directly related to its owner, and becomes visible in matter. If a god of sake gained power, the sake would naturally become better. Also, the 'nigi' is further divided into two parts of its own called the 'saki' and the 'kushi'. The 'saki' provides fulfillment to the soul, and the 'kushi' provides knowledge. If I were to use the god of sake as an example again, the 'saki' improves the fragrance and taste of the sake, while the 'kushi' would improve the skills used to *make* sake."

"'Nigi,' 'saki,' 'kushi'...they're all good, aren't they? Maybe I should seriously have a kanjou for Konohana-no-Sakuyabime."

"Well, gods other than Konohana-no-Sakuyabime have personalities that are

blessings too, but you mustn't forget their other personality, the 'ara'."

"Oh dear."

"The 'ara' is the wrath of the divine spirit, and is the part that manifests itself as disaster and misfortune. Using the god of sake as an example, the sake would not only taste bad, but could even turn into poison. Worse yet, you may never be able to make sake in the same place ever again."

"I don't like the sound of that. A lesson not to anger the gods, I guess. Do gods always have those two personalities?"

"There may be some differences, but they will always be there."

"Isn't there a god with only the gentle side?"

"Divine spirits - that is to say, all things in Gensokyo - have both a good side and a bad side. But the 'ara' personality isn't always bad."

"But it turns sake bad, right?"

"Well, the 'ara' is the true power of the divine spirits. By worshipping the 'ara' aspect, the worshipers will be given protection. For example, it can ward off enemies that try to interrupt the sake-making process. To put it simply, blessings are a combination of what comes from calming the 'ara', and from thanking the 'nigi' to increase a god's power."

"Hmm. People say that a dependable deity is one that goes around granting everyone's personal requests, but I guess that's not it at all. What you're saying is that the truth is that a god's increase in power is connected to its blessings."

"Well, yes, if you make the gods happy, people will receive blessings. It's different from making people happy by defeating youkai."

"Well, then, the shrine doesn't have to worry about that, then."

The window showed that it was completely dark and raining outside, as it should be in this season. Reimu and Marisa decided to stay for dinner.

Although it was not my intention, since we talked about sake so much, we decided to drink many different types of sake today.

"Hmm, maybe this sake is a blessing from Lady Asama, too."

"Then *this* sake must be one too!"

"The two of you have *both* had too much to drink."

"To Lady Asama! Cheers!"

The purpose of a shrine isn't necessarily for the humans who built it to hear requests; all the gods need to do is listen, and they gather faith - a very convenient situation. That's why people can give their puny offerings and ask anything they like of them. These divine spirits are just another kind of youkai who enjoy the relaxing life of Gensokyo.

[<- Back to Chapter 20](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 22 ->](#)

I'd been planning on eating alone tonight, so the menu was meager. I don't eat meals often in the first place; "dinner" for me is really just sake with a side of pickled vegetables. A half-youkai like myself doesn't really need to eat much in order to live; it's more for pleasure. If the sake is delicious, that's enough to last me through the night.

But that won't do for Reimu and Marisa; if they don't eat regularly, they'll get weak and eventually collapse due to lack of stamina. A lot of foods high in salt content go well with sake and make good snacks; some rice and something salty would probably perk them right back up for a while.

"Yukari has been acting odd? Do you mean *that* youkai, Yukari Yakumo?"

I really don't like her. I make my living by collecting things from the outside world, so I really do owe her a lot, since she keeps Gensokyo and the outside world separate, but whenever she's around, it feels like something's looking right through me, and I can't think straight.

"Yukari's actually been helping me train lately; it's really weird."

"Helping you train...? A youkai? That's unusual for a youkai to train a youkai hunter...it seems like she's plotting something. What are you going to do about it, Reimu?"

"It doesn't matter even if she *is* up to something, since I've been training."

"Well, if you say so..."

No matter how you look at it, that just means you're doing exactly what Yukari wants you to do.

Gensokyo is the place it is because of Yukari's ability to control borders; her power is what separates Gensokyo from the outside world. There really aren't any youkai in Gensokyo who could stand against her. Needless to say, a human probably wouldn't stand a chance either.

"Yukari...Yakumo, huh? Since she probably chose the



name 'Yakumo' herself, I guess you have no choice but to bend to her will. 'Shrine maidens must do as she says.'"

Dinner was finished, so we sat outside and gazed at the moon while sipping sake. The rain had wiped away all traces of the day's heat, so it was a crisp summer evening. It was the best kind of night for watching the moon, but Reimu and Marisa had already taken up all the sitting space in front of the entrance, so I stood behind them and enjoyed my sake.

"Oh, I was drying some clothes at the shrine before I left. I wonder if they'll be all right, since we had that storm."

"Of course they aren't: It was rainin' so hard we couldn't leave, remember?"

"I guess so; I'll probably have to wash them again...By the way, Rinnosuke, about what we were talking about earlier...what do you mean by 'I have to do as she says'?"

"Well, the name 'Yukari Yakumo' says it all, doesn't it?"

I have the ability to tell what something's name is just by looking at it, so maybe I go on a little too much about names, thanks to that.

You can generally divide names into two categories. There are names that *describe* an object's characteristics, and names that *determine* its characteristics. The former are generally names that describe something's shape, color, other external attributes, or in the case of things like tools, their utility. Most animal, plant, and natural objects are named in this fashion.

The latter type of names are usually given to those things whose nature hasn't yet been determined, or to those that the namer wishes to use merely to distinguish it from other things; the names of people and the personal names youkai take on fall into this category, as well as the names of most commodities. These are the names that have the most power over a thing. Since a person's name has a great effect on the sort of personality they develop, parents normally give their children names that hold various meanings; they don't just pick names that sound pleasing to the ear.

"The name 'Yukari' means 'violet,' and violet is the outermost color in the rainbow.

In fact, when a dragon flies through the sky, the pair of rainbows it leaves behind appear to be an identical set, but in fact, the outermost color of both is violet."

"That's true. I've seen two rainbows when I look closely, but I can never quite make out how the colors are arranged."

When rainbows appear, they often form in pairs: an inner rainbow that you can see easily at a glance, and an outer rainbow that's considerably fainter. Quite a few people don't seem to know the order of the colors in each rainbow.

From bottom to top, the colors of the inner rainbow are violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange and red, but the outer rainbow goes from red to violet in the same fashion; in other words, it's reversed. So, if you put the two rainbows together, from bottom to top the colors progress from violet to red and back again. The border between the rainbow and the sky is certainly colored violet.

"Just going by that, her name is obviously a reference to borders, right? But that's just her first name. Her other name, 'Yakumo,' if you take it literally, it refers to the kind of clouds that pile up on themselves in many layers."

"What do you mean, if you take it literally?"

"Well, the word 'yakumo' isn't used by itself very much. However, it's used quite extensively in the divine land of Izumo. In her case, it's quite likely she's taken it from the verse 'Yakumo tatsu Izumo yaegaki tsumagomi ni yaegaki tsukuru sono yaegaki wo'."

"What's that, an incantation?"

"It's a poem that was composed by his divinity Susano-o. They say it's the first Japanese poem ever written. Quite surprising, isn't it?"

"Huh. I've always pictured Susano-o as more violent. I had no idea he wrote poetry. But what does it mean?"

"The contents are very simple: 'In the land of Izumo, covered by beautiful, heavenly clouds, I've built a great fenced mansion to let my wife, Princess Kushinada, live a peaceful life in seclusion.'"

"So...it just means he built a house? Why bother with a poem about something like that?"

"Well, it's because it's the first Japanese poem. The way he repeats the word 'yaegaki' over and over really brings out his merry spirit at having finished that house, don't you think?"

"It seems more foolish to me."

Well, what about a shrine maiden calling what the gods do foolish...?

"Getting to the point, aside from the primary meaning of borders, Yukari Yakumo's name also has the hidden meaning of 'a strong fortress to keep the gods trapped inside'. Now, if you substitute shrine maidens for the gods, it obviously refers to Gensokyo. Yukari will never let the shrine maidens escape from Gensokyo."

Reimu became quiet. She probably had a lot to think about.

It's nice enough to sit in silence and drink sake, but you only get so much out of it, so I decided to renew the conversation on a different topic.

"Oh, and speaking of that particular verse, you can see yet another side to it if you say it out loud."

"Yakumo tatsu...uh, how'd it go again? I forgot." When Marisa said this, I recited it once more.

"Isn't the sense of rhythm from the repetition of the word 'yaegari' pleasant? And it goes well with the 'ya' from the very first word, 'yakumo'."

"Ya, ya, ya...it's almost too much 'ya'. I wonder why he wrote it that way?"

"Of course, there's a meaning behind it. But the true meaning is hidden in another word pronounced 'ya'."

"Really? What would that be?"

"Why, the splendid 'night' that always hides itself from the great Amaterasu."

The wind had gotten rather cold. As the ground that had dampened earlier that evening dried, it probably caused the wind to pick up. I sipped on my "fuel." It didn't cool me down too much, but it did speedily give rise to a new line of thought. After all, if you look at the world the same way all the time, you won't get any ideas more profound than those that lie in the realm of common sense.

"The number 'eight' is actually very closely related to 'night'. Can't you read both characters as 'ya'?"

"Well yeah, but you can do the same thing with 'yakniku', since you eat it at night. But usually, that's pronounced 'yoru'. Isn't that all just coincidence though?"



"You might think so, if it were just the kanji for 'night' and 'eight', but what's interesting is that those two words are almost the same in other languages, too."

"Really? I don't know much about other languages."

"In English, it's 'eight' and 'night'; in Latin, it's 'oct' and 'noct'; in German, it's 'acht' and 'nacht', and in a lot of other languages 'eight' and 'night' sound very similar as well. Are those all coincidences?"

"Hmm...I don't know much about the countries in the outside world. So why are the words for 'night' and 'eight' so similar?"

"There are a few explanations, but unfortunately no one has a definitive answer."

"What? Why ya bringin' up somethin' *you* don't even get?"

"It's not that simple. To begin with, etymology is probably different for each language." Marisa didn't seem satisfied with that answer, so I promised I'd look into it some more. "Anyway, we can speculate about why that is in Japanese, at least. The 'ya', or eight, in words like 'yakumo', 'yaegari' and 'yaorozu no kami' doesn't literally mean the number eight, but a very large number of something...now, I hope you'll notice that whenever it's used that way, it's always pronounced 'ya'."

"Let's see - a great number of hills is 'yasaka'; when cherry blossoms pile up it's

'yaezakura', the great many-headed demon Yamata no Orochi...hm, it really *is* pronounced 'ya' whenever it means 'many'."

"All of these words are very old words that existed before we started to use kanji for writing. You don't say that you have 'eight' of something in modern Japanese if you want to say that you have a lot."

"Yeah, it'd be a huge pain to have to make enough food for 'eight' people."

"Anyway, my point is that the only reason this word for many, 'ya', was written with the character for 'eight' is because eight was a big number."

"Eight is a big number? Aren't there lots of bigger numbers?"

"Well, it's true that nine is a larger digit, but eight and nine are both big numbers. However, nine, read as 'kyuu', is linked to the 'kyuu' in 'eikyuu', or 'eternity', so it's been linked to the infinite for a long time. After all, if there are a lot of something, it's still a finite amount, so it's obviously less than infinity. That's why eight - the number one less than nine - was given the pronunciation 'ya', I believe."

"Hmm. So you mean the character for eight wasn't always read 'ya'? What's its connection to the night, then?"

"Well, it's the word for 'night' that was originally pronounced 'ya', not 'eight'. Anything that was incredibly high in number was linked to the night."

And that's not all; the Japanese names for numbers hide many more secrets like this.

"I wonder why the word for a great number of things was the same as the word for night?"

"To answer that, all you need to do is gaze up at the sky on a moonlit night like this. Isn't it obvious why the word for night came to mean 'a great many'?"

The clouds that had given us a sudden squall earlier that evening had completely vanished; in their place, the skies of Gensokyo were filled with a countless number of stars. Forgetting my sake, I gazed up at the starry sky. The silvery river that flowed through the sky was more than enough to crush any reckless challengers

who thought they could count every star within it.

In comparison, the sun floated high in the daytime sky without peer. It's only natural then that the great Amaterasu - that is, the sun - would be worshipped as the highest god.

A countless number of stars twinkled in the sky. Their faint light made them seem like they had to hide themselves from the sun. All across the world, the night sky expressed how tiny humans must have felt in comparison to the sun, as well as the pain the youkai felt from it.

"Anyway, I think it'll be okay even if Yukari's planning something, so I guess I just have to train."

"Hm...maybe so. It will be good for you to get more powerful through training, and besides..."

There was no way to stand up to Yukari, nor was there any reason to do so.

"Yep. Anyway, I'd probably better get back to the shrine and figure out a new training schedule."

"But I'd wash that laundry again before that if I were you. That storm probably did a number on it."

"Ohhh..."

"Evenin' storms happen all the time durin' the summer. Even if it's sunny all day, hangin' your laundry out to dry and leavin' your house like that is just careless, y'know."

"Well, the laundry was already wet, so what's the harm in a little rain?"

"Mm, maybe you're right."

"No, that's not it. If you don't take better care of them, your clothes will fall to pieces someday. I suppose with all your danmaku battles they're not fated to live long to begin with, but that means you should at least take proper care of them when doing laundry. It's important to value your possessions."

"All right. I won't leave the shrine until they're dry tomorrow. I bet they'll dry up in a flash under the summer sun."

"But if ya fall asleep, it'll be just as bad as leavin'."

The number for "one" can be pronounced "hito," or "hitotsu." When you count 1, 2, 3 as "hi, fu, mi," one is "hi." Needless to say, that's the same "hi" as the word for "day." In other words, the sun. The Japanese counting system starts with the sun, goes on to the wind (fuu), the water (mizu), the sky, the earth, and connecting everything to the night. By counting to nine, the Japanese number system includes everything in nature.

Even a single number has so many deep meanings to it. So needless to say, a name that incorporates numbers can easily hide very deep meanings, so it's not surprising that someone like a strong youkai would do so. It's a huge mistake to think numbers are merely words to measure quantity - if that's what you think, you'd better look at the world around you a little harder: you might start seeing a great number of carefully hidden secrets.

[<- Back to Chapter 21](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Forward to Chapter 23 ->](#)

[<- Back to Chapter 22](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Read Zun's Afterword ->](#)

Chapter 23

Mechanism of Fortune



Assume you have a pair of dice. If you were to roll them on a desk, few would be able to predict what the result will be.

Take the number that came up from that throw as one example of an outcome. Now, what will happen when the dice are thrown again?

Of course, it usually isn't possible to know for certain what will happen, but let's assume some certain conditions. These conditions are the ones that match the previous conditions of the dice - in other words, the initial states of position, angle, and force.

What happens then? The dice will dance in the air, rotating as they did the first

time, striking the desk at the same place, at the same angle, at the same time, and bounce identically. Matching the same exact conditions may be something a youkai could do, but it is much more difficult for human hands. In that case, you could make a device that could do such a thing. In doing so, the dice should once again fall upon the same exact result.

The meaning hidden behind this reality is that everything in this world, no matter when or where it happens, will reach a condition identical to one in the past, and from then on, history will repeat itself. This point in time marks a predictable future. Furthermore, it is safe to assume that the conditions at the end of that repetition must return to the point it is at currently. Perhaps this world has already gone through some untold number of loops?

Ring-a-ling.

I was in the middle of my work when the door made a noise that indicated my usual visitors. It is work to confirm whether or not daily life forms a loop.

That task would be writing in my journal. I had begun writing two or three years ago, and already I had filled several books. I was recording my viewpoint of the structure of Gensokyo, and I frankly believe that one day it will become a history book.

Youkai live longer than humans to an overwhelming degree, so there are few sources on Gensokyo's history. Because of this huge advantage over the humans, the youkai likely twist what little history remains to whatever will benefit them. Humans can learn much from history, but the youkai have intentionally stolen this away from them.

The youkai who live near the village are solely concerned with enjoying daily life, the youkai who live in the mountains only record history for the sake of the other residents there, but humans don't have much of an opportunity to make any. It's practically as if the history of Gensokyo has yet to begin.

I am writing a journal for both humans and youkai. I expect it to become an unabridged history book of Gensokyo. It will be a breath of fresh air into the ordinary lives of both humans and youkai who live in Gensokyo.

"But man, that sure was a big'un, wasn't it? I don't think we'll see somethin' like

that ever again."

"You're exaggerating - it's like that around this time *every* year."

Both Marisa and Reimu entered the store, brushing fallen leaves from their shoulders and hats.

A few years ago, the ghosts began increasing in numbers at the turn of the season. Since then, Reimu and Marisa's ghost-herding had become a yearly occurrence. I could faintly remember this infestation happening every year. I suppose history is repeating in this world after all.

"How did the ghost extermination go? Have their numbers decreased a little?"

"We had our hands full of them, the same as always. I wonder if I should come up with a countermeasure...there's more of them every year."

"Would leaving them alone create that much of a loss? But anyway, ghosts are cheerful beings, so maybe throwing a party or festival would gather them in one place."

"If we did *that*, there *would* be a loss."

"What would that be?"

"We can't eat the ghosts."

I believe it was over 60 years ago...there was a time where ghosts had increased in number, just like they are now. Gensokyo had resigned to the changes at the time, and resumed their peaceful life in spite of that.

Stable and resistant to change, Gensokyo today exists in a similar "peace" to those days from 60 years ago. History is repeated over 60-year cycles. In other words, everything in the future 60 years may be rather nostalgic.

"Don't you have any ghost traps in this shop? Something you can just leave somewhere that will catch ghosts, or...?"

"Hmm...it's difficult to catch something that has nothing to catch on to. And they'd

just slip through boxes and things like that."

"But I have to do something about them. If more keep showing up, this world might become the next Netherworld."

"It'll be fine. The ghosts will settle down after a while. The future is predetermined like that."

Reimu gave me a dubious expression. "The vampires and youkai said the same thing you just did."

Ghosts will appear in public places, but they don't show up at my store often. To begin with, ghosts tend to gather easily wherever there is a lot of commotion. This is because of a ghost's transient nature, where they may vanish at any moment, so they gather at a lively place where it is easier for others to notice their existence. It is likely just as when they were human, preferring to be in crowds of people.

"There's no way ya can predict the future. Some people are only able to get by on luck, y'know," Marisa said, looking at Reimu.

"Well, if by 'luck' you mean 'intuition', there is actually a foundation for intuition."

Marisa's expression said that she didn't believe her.

"Whenever we play Chinchirorin at parties, you've seen horrible odds win out anyway. How can ya say there's a foundation for *that*?"

Chinchirorin? Oh, the 'Simple Game Played with Dice'. It goes hand-in-hand with the Underworld.

"Marisa, I believe the reason why Reimu can guess the outcome of dice rolls must be because she can forecast using the predetermined future."

I told them my idea, about the mechanism by which the outcome of dice was set. Perhaps Reimu can determine the initial state and result of the dice by her intuition? There are those in this world with such "luck."

"That's not it at all, Rinnosuke; I can't forecast anything no matter how long I look at the dice. People who do that only think of probabilities. Besides, for all their

calculations, they can still be wrong."

"Why do you think so? While I suppose you don't do that, wouldn't that still let you tell the future if you could?"

Reimu looked shocked. "I happen to have a very deep understanding of fortune, so today, *I'll* be doing the lecturing on the mechanism of fortune - and something you *won't* be able to forecast afterward."

Reimu brewed tea for the three of us and gladly served it.

We looked forward to hearing the reason behind the quality of Reimu's intuition. I brought the tea to my lips, forgetting it had gone cold.

"...Ah. So what you're saying is that even if the initial conditions of the dice are the same, it's still possible to get different results?"

"Of course I am. Those are the only things deciding the outcome."

Reimu's tale was a complex one, but there was a shocking truth contained therein.



She says that the world is made up of three layers:

First is the physical layer that moves in accordance with the laws of physics, including all living things, objects, etcetera. It is on this layer that an object falls toward the ground, and that the water of the river flows.

The second layer is one that moves with the spirit, which includes things such as magic and sorcery - the mental layer. One's mood turning sour when meeting an unpleasant person, and releasing all your stress and cares during a party lie here. Since most youkai can control the world through both the physical and mental layers, they say that history repeats itself and the future is predetermined as a prank.

But according to Reimu, there is a *third* layer that rejects loops: this third layer is the memory layer, which is the recollection of events that lies within all things. Since it is only possible to add to the memory layer, it's impossible to completely

recreate the past; if something were to happen that already occurred in the past, then there would be a contradiction because that would imply that that memory was lost, which is impossible. The memory layer always continues to build up.

The physical layer follows the laws of physics, the mental layer explains the outcomes, and the memory layer alters probability, mutually creating the future. Reimu said that excepting the cases when something has already happened in the past, it is absolutely impossible to predict the future with certainty.

So, take the dice roll as an example. If you were to somehow throw them with the same initial conditions as before, unless they don't recall being thrown in that way, the probability of the same outcome isn't as high as you might assume.

I followed her explanation up to that point, but then Marisa asked, "So how *are* you able to tell how the dice will fall?"

While I was entranced by Reimu's new illustration of the world, Marisa was unfazed. I didn't think she wanted to know just to beat Reimu at Chinchirorin, but to use that idea to become as lucky as Reimu.

"I'm not really 'telling' anything; the way I can guess how the dice will fall is by feeling the dice."

The naturally-lucky Reimu, simply by using the memory of the dice, could make the outcome favor herself. The results just seemed to side with Reimu.

"Whaaat? Howzzat gonna help anyone but Lady Luck over here?" Marisa sulked.

I doubted the existence of things such as fortune in this world, deeming it too unreliable. This was largely in part of my thinking that the future was predictable. I saw good luck charms as nothing more than lumps of fallacy.

However, upon listening to Reimu's world, I have reaffirmed the existence of fortune. The blessed man and the cursed man both exist, certainly. There is a man who succeeds in shouldering his trials. There is a man who is a failure, captive to jinxes, as well. It might certainly be reckless to just think of each one starting in the same initial conditions.

If we assume that probability is determined by the power of memory, it may be

natural that such a power can be manipulated by good luck charms. The more complicated and unusual the origins are, the more knowledge a charm will have, thereby raising its effectiveness.

Reimu added to this, "In this world, both physical and mental probabilities are determined by how fortunate they are in the memories they hold."

I remember hearing that phrase before. "In the material world, that all things exist without probabilities is already common knowledge;" something along those lines was written in a science textbook from the outside world.

With only a vague understanding of its meaning, I wondered, "So that means someone already determined these probabilities?"

But Reimu had come up with the same idea, and even worked in her idea of the memories changing the probabilities! It was surprising.

"Memory determines probability...in other words, it works like karma. That's pretty amazing. It may very well be true. By the way, how did you come across this knowledge?" Your lifestyle appears so idle, I was about to add, but to preserve the current subject I changed my mind.

"I heard it from a really, really smart human."

"If ya say it like that, it makes ya sound even dumber..." Marisa muttered.

I wondered if there was any human in Gensokyo who knew the roots of the world like that.

"The reason why it feels like history repeats itself to youkai is purely because they aren't human. A human's memory is only as short as its lifespan, but in a youkai's lifetime, they will see the same things over and over again. Just like you, Rinnosuke," Reimu said smugly. The situation is usually reversed, so I was slightly annoyed. "And this really, really smart human has the memories of all the books stored by her ancestors for generations. She knows things that not even youkai who have lived for a long time know, much less any other human."

That was a rather lengthy conversation. The color of the window has already changed to match the color of the evening. The autumnal tint of the leaves outside

had begun to permeate the room.

"Even though the sun is beginning to set, did you have any business for coming here today?"

"Ah, that's right. We were here because we had nothing else to do."

"Chase out some ghosts, then go have a party at the shrine. We came here to invite ya. Whaddaya say, Kourin?"

I see. It took quite a while for it to come to this. They hadn't announced why they were here, and we thoughtlessly ended up talking for longer than expected.

"I appreciate the offer, but I still have an important job to do. And besides, if we played Chinchirorin, I doubt I would be any match for Reimu."

"Job? Ya mean writin' your book?" Marisa said while pointing at my journal.

"That's true, but I also have to tend to my store, as well."

"So you're still writin' that thing, huh? Thought ya gave up on it by now."

"Sooner or later, this journal will become a history book; I cannot stop so easily. This will be a history book that enriches human knowledge, a product of Kourindou."

A number of years ago, I started writing this journal since paper had become an easily-obtainable commodity, and I now have a considerable amount stored up. I plan on making a book to pass down these records. If the book becomes the history book of Gensokyo, the academia of Gensokyo will begin to move rapidly. This will bring Gensokyo closer to the outside world, and it will become a secure place in the future. (At the same time, if it sells well, the shop will also be secure.)



And today I learned about the mechanism of how reality can be determined from randomness, why there is a difference in the amount of fortune between people,

and how there are people who can know the coming reality - surprisingly from Reimu. I should note the "not records, but memory determines the future" concept in my book. And then, if whomever reads my book learns of this person who already has the mechanism of fortune, then they will probably be unable to guess the future. Humans living moving forward in a future unprecedented by youkai. And since the youkai will also be unable to know what will happen tomorrow, they will be fortunate enough to get a taste of the future we humans will enjoy.

It had become completely dark outside. I wonder if Reimu and Marisa are holding a party at the shrine by now? Their behavior, as always, drinking sake, as always, with Reimu winning the bets, as always, and drinking too much, as always...

However, this world has never repeated itself.

Because Reimu, Marisa, the youkai, and myself, the half-human, half-youkai, remember these things.

Because these memories make every day more enjoyable, little by little.

[<- Back to Chapter 22](#) | [\[Back to the Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Read Zun's Afterword ->](#)

[<- Back to Chapter 23](#) | [\[Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Read Transcriber's Afterword ->](#)

Afterword from Zun

Nice to meet you, Zun here.

Compiled from several serial publications, changed into an internet serialization, and somehow continuing through the jumps from publisher to publisher, the mysterious short story collection known as "Curiosities of Lotus Asia" has finally reached book format. It even includes the story I contributed to a doujinshi. This is Kourindou's first novel.

I wrote this story to progress with the main plot of the games, but there may have been parts that were difficult to understand while it was being serialized. Even if it never crossed the readers' minds, I greatly enjoyed writing this story.

While re-reading CoLA's first story, I noticed I set up a lot of ideas. I guess it's best for me to deal with the finer details of the world through short stories.

The individual stories don't particularly feel like they're part of one big, overarching plot, and likewise, the final chapter doesn't particularly have a feeling of definitive closure; at the heart of CoLA

is how the humans of Gensokyo handle their surroundings, and it could continue even now just the same. It was written as though it could be picked up again at any time, and it seems like I would if given the chance.

The fact is that having a character who is bad at (physical) combat is annoying, and having a great number of characters in the same place is troublesome. It begins to be like making fun of argumentative people. It's hard to like that kind of story, but people can relate to a character like Rinnosuke, so writing the stories becomes more enjoyable. This is because it's Rinnosuke's character not to think about other people.

Rinnosuke started writing a book in the 17th chapter, "The Price of Paper in Luoyang." At the exact time, talks about a standalone book were looking favorable, and a first volume was actually planned. Those with keen senses might have picked up on hints of Rinnosuke's book being included with the first volume. However, just before it was released, the publisher went bankrupt, but Ascii Mediaworks picked up the series, and I was somehow able to continue on. But because of that, we were back to square one as far as a book went. This naturally delayed the release quite a bit. Well, it was a miracle that I was able to continue the story regardless, so I'm fairly certain a book will happen sooner or later.

By the way, Rinnosuke's supposed vast storage of knowledge comes almost entirely out of thin air; indeed, he doesn't know nearly as much as he thinks he does. If you read closely, you'll notice a lot of wild, meta ideas, but I think that's supposed to be the joke.

- Zun, Team Shanghai Alice

(I get the feeling there are a lot of winter scenes in CoLA for some reason.)

[<- Back to Chapter 23](#) | [\[Table of Contents\]](#) |

[Read Transcriber's Afterword ->](#)

[<- Back to Zun's Afterword](#) | [\[Table of Contents\]](#) |

(You're done.)

Transcriber's Afterword from Ace Of Hearts

Hey there, this is your loyal Touhou material provider, Ace Of Hearts.

This is the second major project of this nature I have worked on; some of you may be familiar with my downloadable guide to the game "Bunny Must Die & Chelsea and the 7 Devils" last year, though that was not a transcription project, but rather, a self-created game guide. (If you're interested, both the game and the guide are still available on the Extras page of my website, [Ace Of Hearts Simfiles](#).) If you are curious, yes, this project too was fueled by coffee (and Love Power).

I started this transcribing project in Novemeber of 2010, working on and off until finishing in April of 2011, a total of about 6 months or so when I had the motivation to do so.

It's been a long 27 chapters, and actually, Chapter 27 wasn't even translated until the day I transcribed Chapter 26 - a pleasant coincidence (or would Rinnosuke have guessed that it was predestined to be that way?).

I hope you enjoyed the insight into the world of the Kourindou shop as much as I enjoyed transcribing it.

If you were to ask me my favorite chapters, I'd say chapter 4 ("Rain Furnace") because Marisa is the speaker for the first half, and she shows some of her insightful side, and Chapter 9 ("Phantasmal Light & Snow on the Window") because Youmu getting covered in snow is hilarious, though all the chapters are worth reading simply because Rinnosuke has all kinds of insights (some of them rather farfetched, but still) into things we normally don't think too deeply on.

Hopefully you enjoyed this iteration of "Curiosities of Lotus Asia;" perhaps there will be an opportunity for me to do something like this for the Touhou community again in the future.

- David Bernardini, aka "Ace Of Hearts"

[<- Back to Zun's Afterword](#) | [\[Table of Contents\]](#) |

(You're done.)

Seriously, that's the end of the book, there isn't anything else.

Really! ...Don't look at me like that.