

*This short story was bundled with New Testament 17 exclusively to the Gamers! stores.*

Academy City's administrative agencies were concentrated in solemn District 1. Normal students rarely visited that district, but since Uiharu Kazari had said she was headed there to study, Shirai Kuroko decided to tag along. But once they entered the Board of Directors Library which contained all books and magazines in Academy City, Uiharu reached for something truly unexpected.

"A-a gaming magazine!?"

"This is a library, Shirai-san, so be quiet."

Kuroko was unsure what was so enjoyable about it, but Uiharu piled up back issues of the same magazine on the desk in a reading booth.

"The editorial department's official site is the fastest way to get the latest information, but they focus so much on speed that the articles are often rushed and sloppy. Paper media takes time to publish and sell, so the data tends to be more organized."

"...Honestly, I was wondering what you were so focused on, but it's only video games?"

"You can't take video games lightly."

Uiharu selected a random gaming magazine and flipped through it.

"Shirai-san, have you ever heard of final boss sociology? Well, I'll admit it's mostly just online slang."

"?"

"It refers to how video games, especially RPGs, tend to subconsciously use everyone's view of a villain for their final boss. Or maybe it would be better to say that many games are released, but the ones that best match society will be more highly praised."

Uiharu pointed to an article from two or three years before.

"Take this for example. It looks like a fantasy game, but the villain is wealthy and controls the distribution of goods using ships and trains. That would be pointing to online shopping."

"Well, now that you mention it..."

"And two weeks after the game was released, a report was published that a major global online store was applying pressure to local shops and further isolating different regions. This is a news article from that time. They had that pegged perfectly, didn't they?"

“Wasn’t it just a coincidence? It would have been difficult to acquire that data in advance and include it in their scenario.”

“Of course. Developing a game takes two or three years after the project is greenlit. But the makers have to determine what the players as a whole want and predict how that will change before the release date. It’s a lot like trying to read the wind. In that case, they may have been unwittingly picking up on a vague anxiety and giving it physical form in their scenario.”

“Hmm.”

“By pursuing the changes to final bosses, you can see the changes in the social evils people pursue. In that case, it seems to me you might be able to get ahead of future history by pursuing those fictional final bosses. I mean, I said developing a video game takes two or three years, right?”

The creators sharply picked up on the interests and anxieties of the masses and Uiharu gathered and analyzed the stimuli that those creators gave physical form.

“In other words, analyzing the officially announced projects allows you to predict major incidents three years in advance?”

“It’s still only a theory, though. Only by collectively analyzing dozens or hundreds of project articles each month can you finally start to grasp the trends. If I can create an algorithm to automatically select and analyze the new information online, I bet I could do some interesting things.”

Uiharu spread out several back issues on the table.

“This is the part I can’t quite figure out. There are a few unsteady trends, but they don’t combine into a single whole. It’s a weird feeling, like a double helix wrapping around itself to create a single path. If I can’t figure this out, I’m not sure I can get any real results.”

“I’m not sure I understand, so can you dumb it down for me?”

“Oh, sorry. Basically, I’m saying there are two candidates for the final boss. And they’re both interfering with each other.”

“Well, is that really so surprising? The word villain can refer to anything from an individual convenience store robber to a conglomerate of corporations.”

“Maybe so.” Uiharu tilted her head. “Hmm. But it resolves so clearly into these two extremes. On the one hand, a great witch in a magical kingdom. On the other, an immortal hooked up to a machine. Surely this doesn’t mean people like that are waging a secret war behind the scenes of the real world.”