

In a breathtaking universe of infinite dimensions and overlapping realms, the line between salvation and chaos blurs into oblivion. Enter a world where the only path to traverse these extraordinary domains lies in embracing the mystical power of dimension-hopping, all guided by the enigmatic "Thazeroc."

But within this captivating tapestry of existence looms the ominous "Evil God," an entity paradoxically responsible for birthing the very realms it seeks to conquer. Demons and monsters, birthed from the mind of this deity, threaten to engulf Earth through three sinister conduits: they fall from the heavens, rise from the depths, or pierce through the fabric of space and time itself.

Amidst this extraordinary turmoil, the story unfolds in the heart of Sombrero City (Ach'ka Chuai), the epicenter of a world like no other. Are you ready to journey through realms unimagined and witness the battle for existence itself? Prepare for an action-packed odyssey that will take you beyond the boundaries of your wildest dreams.



DEWAN M.I. MUKTO



Colors Of *Infinite* Grief

111 - Colors Of Infinite Grief

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Dewan M.I. Mukto is a hobbyist author and poet born and raised in Sylhet, Bangladesh. Although his actual academic interests and professional occupations differ from the usual works of literature, Mukto aims to inspire and entertain countless people through the few publications he can spare.

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Colors Of Infinite Grief

By

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For **all** the talented members of Mux Anime Studios

Prologue 紹介

A firefly entered the room. And the room was silent.

Three seconds ticked off the clock, and the firefly fluttered down to the ground.

Clang! Clash! Cling!

Humans. Warriors, they seemed, by the audible range of effects being portrayed by their surreal reflection of action. Judging by the position of the firefly trembling in fear, the clashes of metal on metal wafted from outside the room.

Into the dark. The darkness of the forest.

Gently, the firefly's glowing illumination began to fade. Like a smoky blaze gnawing on the final embers. Innocent as it was, the lovely insect found it difficult to breathe.

Clang! Whoosh!

The metallic clangor rose up, possibly enough to induce a state of nausea for even humans who dare to stand nearby.

Blades cut through air outside the puny hut.

Two robed warriors were indulged into the art of warfare, their focus interlocked on each other's eyes. One of them expertly wielded a badly-damaged glaive, whilst the other figure was acquainted with the usage of.... roses?

Roses indeed. Perfect, beautiful and exotic. Glass roses shimmered in the palms of the latter. Sacred flowers that could capture more romanticism in each petal than by a 16th century French prince.

"Wan..." the hooded figure with the roses broke the ice of silence at last. "I.... I'm sorry...."

He raised his arm and thrust the roses towards his opponent.

"You mustn't interfere.... Please stop,
Wan...."

The other person, named Wan, reached out to grab the roses. Mid-air, they seemed to be normal flowery crystals. But with the first embrace, Wan's fingers came away bloody.

He had been tricked; the roses had razor-sharp petals.

Wan landed back on the blighted soil. Hands trembling. How could he be so ignorant of all the clues?

Meanwhile, a butterfly entered the chamber where the firefly had receded - carrying a droplet of sacred nectar with its feeble little legs. Swooping down in a slow arc, it let go.

The nectar fell right on the firefly, extinguishing its light forever.

"You... you're..." Wan's voice zoned out by the impending growth of the fake rose's

venomous nectar soaked in hatred. His grip on his glaive didn't diminish, luckily.

All around him, rose shrubs danced to the tunes of the passive breeze. Some were real, some fake. A few were lethal, and all of them were, no doubt, illusions. Soon, the entire forest lit up with the luminous roses.

Wan swung his glaive once more, slicing the air with a force that created a sonic boom.

Swooosh!

He prayed that it hit his target. For a fraction of a second, the world shattered in front of his eyes.

Everything became nothing.
And only he and that firefly remained stationary. Frozen. Floating. Free.

When he opened his eyes again, Wan's glaive was a burning staff. He dropped it on instinct, to observe it turn to ash immediately on impact with the ground.

From behind him, a voice sniggered.

As he turned his head, someone placed a finger over his lips.

"Sshhhhh...."

The person gestured towards Wan's hand.

As he braced to look at it, a blinding light appeared in the woods, turning all the silver roses to an ocean of blood-red sakura....

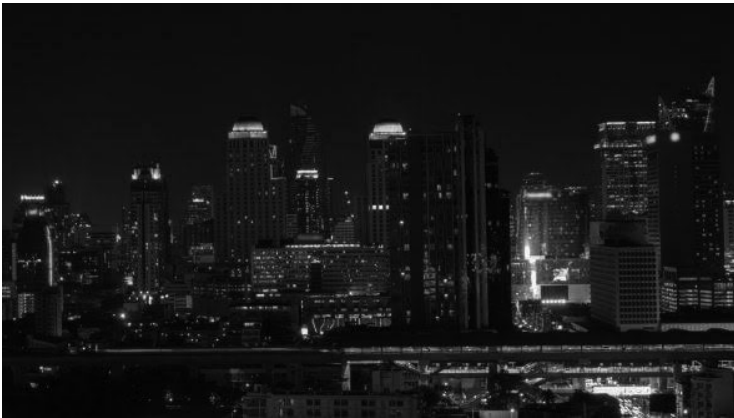
An emblem.

An emblem had been drawn.

"Wan...." the voice ordered. Not as a name; as a number.

Ice Breaker 碎冰船

Dogs were barking. Possibly fighting each other in the brutal uncivilized manner.



Night had fallen on the city of Ach'ka Chuai.
A slow boring process of the sun shutting
itself down the horizon.

"Ghaaah!" a woman opened a door and
entered her apartment, panting with
depression. "Ugh... I don't get it. Why does
it always happen to me?"

She was referring to her bad day of work that she was brave enough to face. Walking a small distance, she dumped her bag and flung herself on a couch. She let out a sigh - not out of relief; out of frustration. At herself.

"Curse my luck...."

She turned on the TV. It was automatically switched to an anime channel.

Her bag suddenly tipped over, and a namecard fell out. It read "Takira Honé, junior detective".

Lazily, with eyes half-enveloped with sleep, she peered over to see what had happened. The word "detective" drilled ill vibes of misfortunate memories into her head just by the sight of it.

"Nope. Not again."

She tried her best to ignore her past. Whatever had happened.

Eyes glued to the TV screen, Takira sought refuge. To escape reality. To allow her fascination for anime to act as painkillers to subdue the aftermath of her day at work.

Takira gulped and let out another sigh.

"Forget it. I'm never gonna be able to solve that case."

Her mind had been embedded with an infestation of boredom combined with regret. Wherever she looked, she remembered that face. That annoying face.

Her boss's face.

"Yaaaaaaaargh!" she clawed the air, as if her boss was standing right in front of her.

But there was no one around.

Takira blinked twice. Another sigh and she turned off the TV.

"I guess I'll goto sleep," she muttered to herself.

Roses are red,
The sky is blue,
She lay asleep on the bed,
But one thing she forgot to do!

* Imaginary arrow points towards an alarm
clock on the bedside table *

Screeeam!

Takira awoke with a hearty scream. The reason: she had forgotten to set the alarm and was now running late for office!

Downstairs, Takira's neighbor received a shock after hearing her scream. With a jolt, a swab of tea dropped onto a brand-new smartphone. The neighbor cursed her name eleven times while wiping the device clean.

Meanwhile, upstairs, Takira hurried into her daily official apparel, joining up the buttons on her fur jacket.

With a fog of crazed speed, she dashed out of her apartment, down the stairs and almost slips on the wet floor ahead.

"Hey! Watch your step!" the janitor warned. But it was too late. "Hey! What're you....
Aaargh!"

Takira grabbed the janitor's shoulder, conserving and transferring the momentum. Thus, the janitor slipped and fell down instead of her.

"Sorryyyyy!" Takira innocently smiled and faded out of sight from the janitor.

Finally, she touched down on the street.



Instantly, the flaring effects of the crisp sunlight made her shield her eyes with her handful of files.

'Must keep going,' she thought.

Her feet resumed the race. The forces of a typical employee vibe tugged her along.

Eventually, Takira arrived at a collection of crossroads, carelessly about to cross the road.

Everything seemed to be normal. Peaceful. Quiet. Only the natural ambience of birds hidden among the pink-leaved trees.

Alas...

Right at the moment when she was crossing, a car appeared in the horizon like a proud antagonist. She was about to die from a car crash.

Fortunately, she's unharmed. Unfortunately, someone else got smothered by the car instead.

- Swerve....Crash! -

Takira gasped as she turned her head towards the noise.

An hour earlier...

Hastily clutching the tie of his office, pacing up the walking rate...

A man entered his boss's room. Anyone gifted with the skill of critical observation could easily infer from his actions that he wanted to ask for a pay raise. Or perhaps a vacation opportunity.

The boss, however busy he looked at that moment, was actually knee-deep in a private business of his own - playing games on his PC.

At the sight of the employee who had just entered, the boss was startled. He pressed the "Esc" key and quit the game. Obviously he didn't want any member of the organization to discover his secrets.

"Wa.. Wan Dé... What's the matter?" he bit back a gasp that was about to escape his lying lips. "Err...any problem? What's wrong?"

"Sir," the employee, named Wan, loosened the grip on his tie. "I need... An emergency vacation."

"A vacation?!"

Wan nodded.

His boss blinked twice, as if attempting to process the information.

"Hmm... Ah, alright!" he drew out a file from a cabinet nearby. "Your file will just be... yikes!"

By accident, a sheet of paper flew out of the file stack. And by the look on the boss's face, Wan knew that it had some crucial info on it. Something so valuable that made his boss react in the manner he had just done.

Thanks to luck, it landed right in front of Wan's feet.

"No, no, no, no... Stop! Wan, don't.... Don't look at it.... Please, no! No! Noooo!!"

The boss seemed super-scared and stunned. And was already biting his nails.

Wan defied his orders and picked it up.
Turning it over, his eyes popped open
wider than the Pacific ocean.

'Hmmm... Impressive taste, Mr Kayun!' he
commented in his mind.

"Ooooh, I didn't know you were an otaku,
Mr Kayun!!" Wan smiled and waved the
manga poster over and over at his boss's
face.

Comically, Mr Kayun became a living
statue. For five full seconds, he didn't utter
a single syllable.

But, then...

"WAN!!! GET OUTTA MY FACE! GET OUTTA
THIS OFFICE!! NOW!!"

"Huh? But.... but.... All I did was...."

Mr Kayun walked up towards Wan, while he
kept blabbering reasons for not firing him
for such a silly issue.

Despite Kayun's deceiving gaze and pretending to listen to Wan's reasons, he simply walked up to him.

He paused. He patted Wan's shoulder.

"Okay. I understand your verdict, Wan," Kayun nodded, with his secret weapon of deceit armed and ready.

He snatched the poster with an iron fist.

"But you're still fired!" Kayun broke off the conversation with a feast of evil laughter.

Wan Dé simply had no choice.

He left the room, continuing to exit the management office.

~Sigh~

Wan Dé clutched at his tie again - this time, he attempted to tear it to tendrils.

Walking along the streets now, he had nothing much to do.

Unemployed.

Sinking into life's dosage of depression,
Wan sighed and threw his attention around
his environment. The sky. The trees. The
people.

Unemployed.

The delicate silence.

'I want to enjoy all of this while I still can.'

He slipped his hands into his pockets and
closed his eyes.

He didn't realize it, but he stepped right
onto the middle of the road.

- Swerve... Crash!-

A girl gasped and screamed nearby, his ears
noted. He felt pity for whoever that unlucky
person was. He thought that girl was the
one who got hit by the car.

Time slowed down.

Wan's eyes jerked open.

'Where am I? What am I doing? What is....'

He found himself holding the car above his head. A 400-kilogram object, balanced on one hand. How was it possible?

He gently placed the vehicle down on the other side.

Time went back to normal.

By the concepts of time, he had managed to lift and flip the car over his head in a fraction of a second!

'Damn. That wasn't so serious.' Wan crossed his arms and watched the driver of the car merrily continue on the journey, unaware of the events that preceded just now.

~Sigh~

'That was close. I was almost exposed to the human world. Luckily no one is around me, except for....'

Wan looked into the direction of the girl.

Takira and Wan's eyes met, as they both stood shocked by what they each had experienced just now.

Takira stared deep into the stranger's eyes. Midnight pools of mystery. And the hair is all garnet brown, uncombed likely.

Wan scrutinized at Takira. Brilliant blue colours highlighted her eyes. And her haircut... certainly unique!

A moment ticked by, and Wan's pupils dilated. Without a word, he sped away from her.

"What...wait! Waiiiit!!" Takira was speechless after what she had just seen. How the man just picked up a car and escaped certain death. So odd. Almost unbelievable.

Wan Dé darted out of sight, sprinting faster than the upper limit of humanity.

He switched direction into an alleyway and checked his surroundings.

'Hmm... That was close. That girl almost saw through my disguise. Course is clear. Time to move on.'

He cast a spell.

His office outfit was replaced with some red robes. On it, was inscribed, in runes: "Akaminé". In his hand, a glaive was equipped. Its blade thirsty for blood.

Another spell.

A shimmering portal materialized in front of him. He stepped through, just in time for the portal to collapse inwards and implode out of existence.

Takira was right near the alleyway, but dropped to her knees, panting.

A paper flew out of her file stack.

"No! Noo!!" she tried to grab it but the wind teased her and carried it afar.

She wanted to weep. A great storm of grief and depression overtook her soul, washing away her triumph. *What a terrible day! Again!*

She got back to her feet and spotted a café beside her.

She entered, but felt something cold and sharp slide past her. Like a strange wind.

The place was half-packed with people. *'And also half-empty,'* her pessimistic mind informed.

She ordered a cup of coffee and sat down at a table.

From out of the corner of her eye, she noticed some men dressed in black muttering about a very serious issue.

"...yes, yes. I heard it, too. The Evil God awakening...."

'What? Evil God? Who is he? Who are they?' She couldn't help but eavesdrop on their conversation. But she ended up confused with a deck of unfamiliar terms and names.

She peered over their direction but rapidly turned back again.

Unfortunately, one of the men noticed her actions. He whispered to his companions about it.

Takira's legs began trembling.

One of them walked up the aisle.

Tip-Tap.

Tip-Tap.

The footsteps echoed across the floorboards.

Tip-Tap.

Tip-TAP.

He was getting closer.

Takira gulped and closed her eyes.

TIP-TAP.

TIP-Tap.

Tip.

The footsteps seemed to draw away from her now.

She opened her eyes again. She was relieved.

The man was simply paying at the cashier.

However, now he was facing Takira directly. Which meant a very discomfoting situation for her.

Takira stood up and was about to pay her bill as well....

But the world suddenly crumbled under the touch of beings unseen.

From the 7th dimension, an invisible demon entered the Earthly realm and landed on a building rooftop behind the café.

A shockwave passed through the neighborhood. An earthquake.

Floors cracked.

Everyone inside the café screamed.
Everyone excluding the peculiar men.
But one of them did.

"Shut up, Fagin," one of them snapped at his associate. "Behave yourself. Or you'll only make a laughing stock out of us Alkynes."

"Looks like we finally got our hands on somethin'," the third member cracked his knuckles.

"Uh...okay," Fagin, the cowardly one, agreed. "Let's go...."

They hurried outside, running with skill.

They search around for the source of the quake, namely the demon.

"There! It's a Jinnic demon!" one of the Alkynes pointed.

They drew out weapons - swords, guns, and ropes. All made of an unknown metal.

Takira Honé, meanwhile, ducked for cover and crawled near the doorstep. An aura of curiosity overwhelmed her, though. And she decided to peek over to see what the Alkynes were doing.

Her eyes widened with awe.

A battle was in progress. But it appeared that the men were fighting with the air.

In fact, from their perspective, they were easily able to detect the monster.

Takira's subconscious personality dragged her forward, outside the café, inch by inch.

Without even realizing it, she was in the line of fire.

At the same time, Fagin's courage meter hit full throttle; he dived and absorbed the blow from the demon.
Protecting Takira.

A few minutes later...

The demon was dead. The Alkynes stood in their positions, nearly exhausted.

Takira was speechless just as everybody else who were now spectating the fight. Mostly because some unknown person had just saved her.

Fagin cast a healing spell on himself, luckily. And his wounds vanished.

The rest of the Alkynes braced for a memory recorection spell to be applied on the civilians nearby.

Magic was forbidden. Magic was a myth. And a combination of cults practicing magic was gravely shunned in the human community.

"You there," Fagin called out to Takira. "You are interested in magic, I see." He held her palm. As if reading her mind. "Now, now... Would you like to learn more about it?"

Takira gulped for the third time, because of the Alkynes.

She couldn't believe her eyes and ears. For all she knew. For all she cared.

"Y-ye...yes..." her legs trembled; this time due to elation.

"C-come with us, then! My name is Fagin," he stopped Takira trying to face the crowds of people who were about to be devoid of their memory of the events that had occurred. "What's yours?"

"Um....Ta...Takira," she replied, out of sheer joy. She didn't allow herself time for a logical decision.

"Nice to meet you, Takira. I'd love to take you to our world. A world of magic."

Meanwhile....

At the other end of town....



A girl hummed to the tunes of the birds as she engraved her name on a hockey bat on her lap, seated on a bench.

She was almost finished carving out "Miyumi Rakkan" on the surface.

She suddenly raised her head, her eyes closed.

A terrible color was portrayed in her mind.
A sensation. Of danger; danger to a friend
she knew.

Miyumi cried out her friend's name,
"Takira!"

Voice Of Disaster

災害の声

Visualize another universe. A different dimension.

Thousands of overpowered monsters surrounding a single entity on his throne. Their actions indicated that they were more than just paying their debts of respect towards him; they were worshipping him.

Allow me to introduce...
Aku no Kami, the Evil God.



These creations...,' he thought. 'They lack something.' A hand was propped up to his chin. Evil God sat on his immortal throne, lost in another world of thought and decisions. 'My creations aren't standing out against the humans' majestic existence. Despite being stronger, faster, evolved. I don't know why. Why? WHY?!'

Hesitantly, he raised an arm and wiped out half of the demons present nearby,

oscillating through the realm of Urottharonngomonasht (the name of this dimension) like a holy curse.

Via his far sight abilities, Evil God peered into Harthwa (the Earthly dimension). His mind demanded to check the condition of his latest work - the Jinnic demon sent after the Alkynes.

'Where is it? Where in my name did you go?'

At last, he found it. Dead, however.

His eyes dilated. Muscles clenched.

ROAAAAARRRR!!!

Evil God pounded his fist on his throne's arm.

'Again. I failed again. Why? Am I not destined to be a God?' he drew out his sword - a magnificent work of bone and a strange unknown metal.

He turned his gaze towards the remainder of the demons he had crafted using his own soul.

Pointing the sword at them, he ordered.

"Burn! Burn them down.... Search for clues. Whoever dared to defeat my demon..."

Back at Earth....



The island of Nasagna they called it. Home sanctuary to the Akaminé cult and faction. Right near the heart of the island itself, a

giant dragon fossil adorns the backyard of the main academy buildings.

That's right. An academy. For warriors.

Serving as the perfect training grounds for the new, proving grounds for the experienced, and assembling grounds for the lead. The Akaminé headquarters was well-guarded, no doubt. For it was the only safe zone on Earth where the Akaminé could harvest their time on practicing and resting.

From near the inner edge of the forests engraved on the island, a familiar character arrived via a portal. Dressed in red, wielding a polished glaive.

"Ah, Wan Dé!" a voice startled that person.

"Huh?" he allowed some time for his eyes to adjust to the scenario. "Who's there? Nokau, is that you?"

"Yeah, man," the Nokau guy closed in. "It's a surprise to see you here, all of a sudden. What happened?"

"What do you mean? I'm here for something more...entertaining," Wan scratched his head. "Office work as a normal person is getting tedious now."

"I see," Nokau narrowed his gaze. He nudged Wan in the ribs, gently. "Damn you, bro! I know you better than anyone. Your face clearly tells me you got kicked out of your job!"

Wan Dé managed a slow laugh, rubbing his torso where the jab had hit.

"You're right on time, Wan!"

"Why?" he placed the glaive's head pointing towards the ground. "Got trouble?"

"Nah. It's just some weird new plant species that is stored at the botanical attic."

Wan's eyes turned bleak.

"Hmm..."

"So c'mon, dude! Follow me," Nokau gestured with a smile.

Wan Dé obeyed.

While walking up the path to the academy zone, dozens of thoughts bombarded Wan's head. *'Nokau Ora is his name. A really fun fellow. Makes me laugh at times. Keeps me entertained. It's been a while now, since we went on demon hunting together. Especially due to the separation of roles....'*

Nokau peered over his shoulder to check if Wan was still following him or not.

They passed through the gates of the academy.

Wan's drifting stream of nostalgic vision continued. *'Nokau was skilled in the art of healing and magic. But I've never seen him in a real fight. Gets really lovey-dovey with a girl named Anita. For all I know, he's*

meant to be a druid than a trapper agent like me.'

They walked past the central courtyard, saving a peek to look at the aura of heavy discipline and fog of physical preparation in progress; trainers and students in their respective positions.

"There it is! The botanical section," Nokau informed when they arrived.

"Huh? That?!" Wan pointed towards a symbol etched in the stone next to the door. "Hell of a courage you've got, Ora! There's a restricted rune there. You seriously think we can trespass?"

"Yeah, Wan. Trust me," Nokau cracked his knuckles for action. "Simply follow my lead!"

- SNAP! BRRRRRTT!! -

"Aaaaaahhh!!" Nokau was hit by an enchantment guarding the door. "Shiiiit. Ouch. My nose. My neck!"

"Hang on!" Wan uttered a restoration spell immediately. And blasted it at his friend.

Like magic, (duh!) the enchantment's effects waned out. Unfortunately, a black pigment remained on Nokau's face.

"Great! Now Anita will quit our relationship together if she finds me like this," Nokau complained and blamed himself. "You're right, Wan. Pardon my decisions. Let's get outta here before the druid in charge returns."

Nokau was about to turn away and leave when Wan's hand sprung up and grabbed his shoulder.

"Wan...what're you..."

Wan stood there, gleaming and smoldering like a prince with charm. Eyes closed and face downwards.

A mischievous unexpected chuckle decorated his lips.

"Fear not, Nokau. Now that we've come this far. I say we should give it a shot at finding that plant. Yeah?"

"Uh.... Wan Dé? Did you get possessed or something?" Nokau found it odd, coming from someone pure-hearted like Wan, to obstruct rules.

"Ofcourse not, you idiotic..." he stopped midsentence and let it out with a sigh. "Jus' follow me."

Nokau gulped and nodded OK.

Inside, the storage attic was a campground for darkness. Nokau helped Wan to open the shutters, letting the sunlight take care of the rest.

"Phew! This place is full of dust. I wonder when was it last cleaned," Wan asked rhetorically.

"Umm....uh...." Nokau hid away the reason. He was supposed to clean up, after losing a bet to the druid in a game of chess. Instead,

he slacked off and pretended to be ill. Which is why the druid had currently travelled away to collect herbs for his treatment. "I don't know.... Ask the druid when he returns...."

"Ofcourse I will!"

'Aiii....' Nokau bit his tongue. 'Damn. I'm doomed!'

"Where's this forsaken plant?" Wan searched among the shelves of seeds.

"Um...here," Nokau pointed towards an obscure pot of seeds. "Careful... It reeks of a dark scent."

Wan blocked his nose with one hand and examined the obnoxious seeds with the other.

Like little shrapnel of obsidian, they glittered in the light. Wan picked one and stepped towards the windows for a closer look.

At that moment, a magpie robin suddenly entered the room. Swooping down like an airborne missile, it pecked at a seed and held it in its beak.

"Oh NOOOOOO!!!"

Nokau's scream scared the bird off. Right out the window.

"Holy slices of..." Nokau broke through the shutters while running after the bird.

"Nokau? What's wrong?" Wan noticed.

"Hurry! Catch that bird! It got one of the seeds! Help! The druid will peel my skin off and fry it with salt if he finds out!"

"Alright, alright... Enough of the exaggeration, dude. I'm coming. Hold up," Wan placed back the seed he was carrying and hurried after his friend. He ignored the broken shutters of the window.

Sprinting on foot wasn't sufficient. Unfortunately, they weren't taught the art

of levitation and flying yet. So they had no choice.

After five minutes of the mini marathon, they reached the edge of the island, panting. The bird was still on the loose.

"Great! How will he run after it now?" Wan turned towards his partner. "Is it truly necessary that we get that seed? I mean... It's just a seed. Right? What could be the harm?"

Nokau's face showed signs of nervousness echoing inside him.

"That seed.... if it falls anywhere.... it will start growing very rapidly...."

"What's so dangerous about it?"

"Forget the scolding we'll get if our master finds out. That seed will grow a dark tree that feeds on light. Worse, it produces toxic gases. And its roots can travel as deep as the core of the Earth! This plant doesn't

belong to our dimension. Which is why it's so... demonic."

"What?!!!" Wan felt his forehead. His fingers came away sweaty.

He opened up a portal back to Ach'ka Chuai. Nokau followed.

Meanwhile...
Somewhere in Ach'ka Chuai...



Takira followed the Alkynes innocently and on the brink of about to express her high excitement.

They walked silently through a maze of alleyways that she had never seen or heard of, before. And the environment dramatically seemed to grow colder and darker - even in the afternoon period.

"Um... Fa.. Fagin, are we headed in the right direction?"

Fagin didn't reply. Only a smile answered back insistently; a fake smile.

"Oh..." Takira's excitement shattered.

After a few more minutes, they stopped.

It was a construction site of sorts.

"This is it?!" Takira exclaimed.

Fagin nodded as the other Alkynes cast a spell that made the environment transform completely. The props and elements of the

construction site vanished in seconds. It was merely an illusion to ward off other humans.

Now the place revealed a flat piece of land.

One of the Alkynes snapped his fingers and stomped the ground with a leg. An echo was audible.

Out of nowhere, a couple of root-like structures grew out. They carved out some runes on the soil in a circular pattern.

The Alkynes stepped on top of those patterns. Fagin held Takira's hand, gently. To escort her there.

Takira didn't know where this was headed. But she couldn't say NO to anything either. Not now. Not at this stage.

The three Alkynes chanted in chorus. A blinding light surrounded the entire place beyond the boundaries of the drawn circle.

Lo and behold! As the misty lights cleared out, Takira was surprised to find that they were already INSIDE the hidden HQ!!



The whole environment had changed. Stunningly, Takira was impressed. At the same time, she was scared. Because now the surroundings looked as if they were all underground, somehow.

"Follow me..." Fagin's sweet words slithered into her ears. Like a python hypnotizing its prey

He grabbed Takira's hand. This time, a little harshly than before. Takira was too puzzled to do anything. All

she could do at the moment was to observe the surroundings around her.

The atmosphere was full of reddish shades. Red and black. From the ceiling, stalactites grew. But they looked artificial. As if made out of metal. The environment depicted some sort of scenario in Hell... except... there was no lava anywhere.

Only darkness and a few reddish-white lights.

(The light sources looked white, but the edges were tinged with red)

Many chandeliers and candles illuminated the hallways.

The furniture nearby looked very... expensive. The type of "expensive" you get in rich criminals' homes. Scaly objects. Some of them were even carved right into the stone of the walls.

One thing was clear: these Alkynes had been living and reigning in these areas for centuries it seemed.

Takira courteously followed Fagin; a fish being lured by an angler.

Into a room where another elderly person was already awaiting their presence. Fagin showed him the palm of his hand. In parallel, both his and Fagin's eyes suddenly glowed purple and went back to normal as soon as it had occurred.

A larger 'person' stood nearby. Blurred out of the scene by shadows playing on his face.

"Daneyo, you can go now," the elderly Alkyne nodded at the giant figure.

"Yes, master..."

Takira heard more of a growl than actual words slipping out of that giant person's mouth. That made her feel more out-of-place.

"Ah, yes... Takira Honé, I presume," the elderly Alkyne observed a wave of shock wash over her face.

'What? How? How does he know my name?' Takira almost murmured her thoughts aloud.

"Ah, don't be scared, my child. Don't be shy, too," he tried to neutralize her fears. "My name is Roguro Ganis. I'm the one who coordinates and leads the Alkynes. You seem to already know a little about us, I see..."

'What?! How does he know that, too? Is he reading my mind with a spell?' Takira stared down at the floor.

"Now, now, my child... Observe," Roguro held her chin upright and made her face his other hand. He worked upon a few harmless spells to demonstrate to her. "See? You can become one of us. Welcome to a world of magic. A world hidden from plain sight by the mainstream human population."

Catching Takira off guard, Roguro shoved her towards a wall without warning.

Shackles snapped shut around her wrists and ankles.

Takira screamed and called out to Fagin for help. He stares back at her, helplessly.

Roguro unveils his true persona with a packet of laughter. A brainwashing spell was ready and blazing in his right hand. Spinning like an orb, bound by insanity, orbiting with obedience.

"Fear not, Takira Chan.... From now on... You'll be with us. You'll be an Alkyne and embrace the power and possibilities of magic!"

Fagin clenched his fists in the corner. Trying his best to overcome his inner wish to stop Roguro.

Not able to cope up, Fagin darted forward to intercept the process.

"Fagin! No....." Takira warned. But it was too late.

"What's this?" Roguro found his hand sizzling. The 'Alkyne conversion' orb had hit Fagin instead of Takira. "A behavioral change? Ah, I hadn't seen that coming. Even my chronomancy hadn't seen that coming. Especially from you, Fagin," he kicked at Fagin's fallen body. "Arise, dog! Lick my boots right now!!"

Fagin remained fallen on the floor.

"So... where were we?" Roguro switched his attention back towards Takira. "Looks like my slave dog had a mental deficiency. Don't worry. I've got him cured off now."

Behind him, Fagin stood up again. Not normally, though. As if hypnotized.

Roguro prepared another orb for Takira.

~Sigh~ Takira averted her eyes to the side.
'Yes. Go ahead. I'm not worth living anymore. Wherever I step, karma is ready to assault me. I wasn't meant for this world. I'm weak. I suck. Even if this man kills me... I

have no regrets. 'A teardrop condensed from her eyes.

Time slowed down. So did Takira's heart.

At the last moment, a hockey bat came flying out to interrupt the spell's trajectory.

An orange-haired girl jumped out of the shadows from nowhere. In an instant, she teleported and punched Roguro's face. She backflipped and stood ready in a fighting stance, in front of Takira.

Takira's mood changed right before her tears had reached the bottom of her cheek. She is amazed at the sight of this 11th hour Samaritan.

"Mi.. Miyumi?"

Hearing her name being called out, Miyumi turned her head and smiled at her.

But the hope of Takira being rescued was quickly muffled out...

"Hoi! Who are you? How did you find our HQ?" Roguro barked out.

He drew out revolvers and began shooting. Miyumi dived and dodged them expertly.

One of the bullets hit Fagin, knocking him out.

Thanks to her teleporting ability, Miyumi attempted another strike at Roguro. This time, with her hockey bat.

The tides of victory were getting close....
But never reached the shore.

The combat situation had generated a lot of noise, attracting the nearby Alkynes to join in the fight.

Miyumi was thankfully adept at fighting bare-handed; but she couldn't fight forever.

She got pushed back by a female Alkyne, making her fall to the floor.

Then she realized how badly exhausted she had become.

Among all of these troubles, the giant Alkyne named Daneyo showed up.

Takira's eyes turned white (the kind of white eyes with bold black outlines you find in some anime comical moments)... and mouth gaped open.

"Well, well, young savior," Roguro clapped while approaching Miyumi. "Now we'll have two new recruits!"

He seemed untouched by all the blows landed by Miyumi.

Meanwhile...

On the other side of Ach'ka Chuai...

"There it is!" Nokau informed.

The magpie was perched high atop a building.

Wan and Nokau silently spied on the bird from a vantage point behind some clumps of bushes at ground level.

"Damn. How are we going to catch the bird?" Wan scratched his head and judged the approximate distance from his position to the bird's.

"It's not the bird we have to catch. It's the seed."

"Oh... yes... right right!"

The bird was about to fly away when Wan picked up a stone and tried to aim at the bird.

But mid-air, suddenly the bird flew so fast that Wan himself got startled. The bird changed direction and turned towards their direction.

"Oh, look! It's coming after us!" Nokau pointed, about to flee.

"Wait! Be ready..."

"For what?"

"Use your instincts and training to try to grab the bird or the seed when it swoops over our heads. Got it?"

The bird swooped down like an eagle, at quite an unnatural speed.

In slow-motion, Nokau caught the bird. But the seed dropped from its beak due to the shaking.

Wan and Nokau stood motionless, watching the seed fall to the soil.

Nokau let go of the bird, which pecked at his head before flying off.

"What do we do now?" Wan inquired, in a rather shaky voice.

"Hmm...ohh!" Nokau slammed his fist on his other hand in a "Eureka!" fashion. "The seed won't grow here."

"Whaaaaaaaaaat?!!!"

"Yeah, err... sorry for not mentioning before, but it requires some specific conditions to be met before it germinates."

Wan stood there burning up on his friend's words. Trying to hide his internal inferno growing.

"So all of this was USELESS?? Why did we run after the bird?!!"

"Sorry, man..." Nokau itched his back with one arm behind his head (in a typical "my mistake" anime expression.)

The sky turned dark without notice. And a lightning bolt hit the ground nearby... or what looked like one.

Where the bolt had placed its impact, some stray Alkynes and their shadow wolf pets apparated.

"Be sorry to THIS!" an Alkyne broke in.

Both Wan and Nokau were caught by surprise. They got into defensive stances immediately.

"What do you want?" Wan contracted his eyebrows.

"The seed," the other Alkyne answered with two words.

'Oh great! No one wants the bird.' Wan thought.

"No. No one's gonna take the seed," Nokau retorted. "It belongs to--"

A blurry figure of something landed between the Akaminé and Alkynes. It was the bird. But it seemed to grow now. Too fast. In a second, it grew to the size and shape of a man wearing a feathered robe.

"--Me!" the man answered.

"Sensei!!" Wan and Nokau's jaws dropped open. It was the druid in charge of the botanical gardens all along!

"I'll hear your excuses later, my esteemed pupils," the druid snickered. "Right now, we have some issues to deal with!"

He charged forwards with a spell, but Nokau tried to be a hero and accidentally bumped into him. The spell went off track and landed at the seed.

"There it is!" the Alkynes spotted it.

The shadow wolves (a.k.a. 'gagûns') were about to pounce on Nokau and the druid when Wan decided to use his special ability...

Wan had vowed never to use it, but the measures were desperate indeed. The special power. The one.

"One!" Wan raised his index finger and pointed at the opponents.

A lucky moment. All of them were standing in a straight line.

Instantly, like a miracle, a god-like burst of energy blew across the place, originating as a force from Wan's finger. Everything in his line of sight got vaporized and blown away – a series of buildings, trees, innocent humans... anything that stood as a barrier to the force.

Wan managed to kill the Alkynes. Almost.

The last surviving Alkyne got creeped out by Wan's ability and created a portal back to their den.

Wan pointed at him once more and shouted out : "One!"

His glaive was ready at disposal, and he had already dived through the portal before Nokau and the druid could even raise a word of caution.

Wan's shot was perfectly timed.

He managed to freak out Roguro Ganis by suddenly appearing into the scene and wrecking the majority of the Alkynes' HQ

into fragments. He swung his glaive in savage arcs... killing off a huge percentage of the Alkyne members nearby.

He allowed some time for his eyes to adjust to the darkness of the den. And he finds Takira Honé ('Oh. It's that girl again. Damn. Why do I run into her all the time?') and Miyumi Rakkan. ('Uh... I don't know about that one. Though she looks injured. Better help her out.')

Wan was certainly aghast by meeting Takira again.

Meanwhile, Roguro and the others retreated to the shadows. But he left Daneyo in charge of covering them while they fled.

"Ah, you're a Sikuinju demon," Wan recognized Daneyo's racial identity. "But wait... you're half human, too?"

Daneyo Ocraig marched forward silently.

Wan landed a slice at Daneyo's left arm, but the blade scraped across as if he was made of rock. Metallic rock nearly.

'Huh? What? My blade failed?!' Wan's blade had always managed to pierce through anything it touched... until today.

Wan changed his mind and swerved over to Takira's position, slicing the shackles open.

"You alright?" he asked her, out of instinct.

"I... uh... I..."

Daneyo threw a fallen stalactite at Takira. But Miyumi dived and absorbed the damage.

"MIYUMIIII !!!"

Wan shot his gaze at Daneyo one last time.

"One!"

Daneyo stepped aside and walked up closer, dodging Wan's killer move.

'That's it. I'm doomed. My friend is dead because of me. Even my savior is doomed. All because of me. I shouldn't have been born.' Takira closed her eyes.

'Oh great! I hope Nokau and Sensei Tihono have informed the HQ about this den, by now.' Wan's forehead shimmered with worries.

Wan's estimation came out right!

Due to a miracle, several portals opened up. Akaminé warriors came rushing out to raid the Alkyne territory.

Wan picked up Miyumi. And Nokau gestured at Takira to follow.

They passed through one of the portals.

Back.

Back to the safety of Nasagna, at last!

Hunted By Prey

獲物に狩られる

"Yes, that's it."

Colors. Everywhere.

"A little bit closer. Flick swiftly."

Like a blur slowly regaining definition of clear sight, fading the spectrum away.

"Aim softly."

Takira felt a new kind of power growing from her soul. A special force, yet as old as her, awakening from its sleep.

"And..."

Her arm was held by someone else, making it point towards a target in the distance.

"...attack boldly!"

The enigmatic force swam through her blood and thrust itself out from her fingers, sending a projectile much depicting a stalactite made of ice.

"Very impressive, Taki-san," that voice commented. Male. Old. Wizenened.

'Wow. I did it! I can't believe I finally did it!' She felt a wave of happiness never felt before. This accomplishment, of being able to manipulate the flow and control of magic -- it was her dream, one of the fanciest, that she deemed never to be possible before.

The person owning that particular voice clapped in applause.

"Th-thanks, Ha-Hamadaw Sensei," Takira felt her voice tremble, flavored by all that ecstasy of finally achieving the capability of magic. A wrinkled but kind hand patted her head as a bonus sign of appreciation. "I

never thought true magic existed in this world."

"You did well, Taki-san."

Takira had full rights to be pleased, indeed. Why?

Chiroshi Hamadaw was the forsaken leader of the Akamine demon hunting faction. And local legend says that he can sense great potential at first sight.

Many warriors would train hard, day and night, months and years, yet failing to receive the compassion and affection from the master. He would know the strengths of new Akamine recruits from the very beginning. Thus, his word was law. Affirmed and accurate.

From the looks of it, Chiroshi had already detected and judged Takira's fighting spirit.

"Ah, you call that impressive?" another voice jeered in a friendly tone.

They spun round to face Miyumi, who was trying her best to impress Hamadaw in her own accord.

"Watch this!" Miyumi held a trainee staff and tried to pull off a few acrobatics using her teleportation abilities.

Ziiim....zaam.... ziiipp..... *teleporting FX*

"Whooo-oo-oo-hoo-oo!" Miyumi's voice appeared sliced off by the violent effects of the air around her 'teleporting portals'.

Chiroshi cleared his throat, as a gesture that Miyumi should stop the ruckus.

"Oh?" she paused at once. "Anything wrong, sensei? How did I perform?"

"Excellent...."

'YES!' Miyumi closed her fist, raised it and brought it back in the typical "I did it" manner.

"....for a stunt show," Chiroshi completed his sentence.

"What?!" she didn't expect that response.
(Miyumi was being overconfident)

"In order to demonstrate some real combat tactics, why not take on some of the other recruits? See if you can defeat them."

"Oh. Who? Those guys?" Miyumi pointed towards a trio of Akamine swordsmen -- equipped with harmless trainee blades, nonetheless.

Chiroshi nodded.

"Careful, Miyu-san," Hamadaw offered his advice. "You can never reach the top shelf until you've grown tall enough. You may have the strongest arm, but not the longest."

'Blah, blah, bleh.' She ignored his quote lesson and prepared to confront the three boys on the other side of the training courtyard. They seemed slightly older and

likely stronger than her. *'Alright you big boys, let's see how hard you really...'*

She dashed forward and teleported instantly. She charged like a bullet through sand, concentrating on bashing against the guy standing in the middle.

~~Pzzziilft!

Unfortunately, she had miscalculated her movements and certainly underestimated her opponents.

'...are! Whoaaa!'

She almost tripped forward while stopping, flapping her arms around to maintain her balance at the last moment. Her feet were arched backwards and her body was standing straight, inclined at an angle. (Like this slash --> " \ ")

The sword boy had the blade aimed for her neck before she had even approached him.

"Wha-how-when-" Miyumi was speechless.

Chiroshi Hamadaw simply clapped again, with the purpose of mockery than motivation.

"Very impressive."

Miyumi hopped back into her normal stance. *'Wait... where's my staff?'*

"Here, you left your staff behind," Chiroshi stepped forward holding it, a fresh grin implied on his face.

Miyumi made a pouty face, with her mouth like this --> " ^ ", as she grabbed hold of the staff.

"Hmm.... you may not be a good fighter yet, but you can entertain me with your foolish acts, Miyumi," Hamadaw patted her head.

"Heh, do not worry, my dear child. You will get there soon. You see... you were fast, but not attentive. I had grabbed your staff silently right before you zapped forwards."

'Oh... why is this oldie after me?!' Miyumi felt eyes on her. 'Please... just stop... and let me practice to overcome my lacking.'

"Moreover, your speed is unmatched to these young men, whose eyes were trained to capture long distance movements within a blink. Anyways... I believe it is time for lunch. So let's get something to eat first before we take on the second training phase of the day."

Same location (Nasagna),

Akamine HQ, Library, 2nd floor

"Now let's see... the seed of evil..." The druid drifted past some shelves, picked up books and placed them on a long table occupying a major part of the library on this floor. "It must have been documented in here, somewhere."

"I think it was *Oldigrot's Botanical Nightmares*," Nokau Ora suggested.

Partly lit by a hundred candles resting atop ornate chandeliers from the ceiling, the library of Nasagna boasted twenty rows of three tier shelves, ten on each of its two floors. At this afternoon hour, sunlight volunteered for the illumination, too.

Wan inspected a book that caught his attention.

"Sensei, how about this volume?
The *Conquering of Seeds by Herbal Methods*. Weird title."

The druid hastily rushed to his side, rapidly scanning the cream paper pages with adept reading skills. He murmured to himself for a few seconds before breaking the silence with a great big "Aha! Found it!"

Nokau got up from his chair to have a closer look.

"The jackfruit tree," the druid read aloud, "is notorious for its pungent natural stench. A diluted scent, though, reveals a gentler tone of--"

The druid skipped over some pages in embarrassment. *'Ah, my eyes tricked me again.'*

"It produces a sticky sap that can contaminate and freeze the roots of the seed of evil. So that we can slow down its growth before carefully implanting parasitical herbs into its bark."

Wan and Nokau nodded in synchrony.

"Dear disciples," the druid smashed closed the book and stood up from his seat. His eyes flashed.

"Ow, ah, ouch!"

The druid slapped Wan and Nokau's foreheads with the book.

"Nokau and Wan-kun.... I'm displeased with your conduct. This has proved that you both need further training in controlling your desires for curiosity," the druid instructed and criticized. "It isn't the fact that curiosity is a bad thing. Only in some cases, it should be avoided at all costs. Be very cautious as this kind of behavior in the future may result in exiling you from the Akaminé forever."

'You're the one to talk, sensei! If you hadn't picked up that seed when you were a bird...' Wan pointed out in his mind.

"Yes, Master Doel," Wan and Nokau had no choice but to obey and respond accordingly.

"However, as a member of the Akamine, it is also prudent that you both should have responsibility over this," the druid, Doel, paced about the room, walking forwards and backwards as he spoke. "So I'm assigning tasks to both of you."

'Aiii....oh no...' Wan and Nokau felt an imaginary thunder bolt strike behind their backs. 'No, not again! Please no... not a task from Doel Sensei.... noooooo!'

Being already experienced at being an Akamine warrior, they knew what was coming ahead. Of all the teachers and trainers at the Akamine Academy, Doel's quests were always the most hated. Not because they were difficult or dangerous, but due to--

"And don't you dare complain of boredom, you two!" the druid returned all books back to their respective positions with a click of his fingers. "Every mission is a mission, indeed. And each of them offers an opportunity for lessons. Learn to walk before trying to run, lads."

Nokau gulped as Doel turned his gaze towards him.

"Nokau-kun."

"Yee-yes, master?"

"You're in charge of finding a jackfruit seed and planting it near that seed of evil. And Wan..."

"Hmm?"

"You'll go with Bain wun Donn at nightfall. To guard an armory of the Sirutov."

"The Sirutov?!! But...but... we're not in good relations with them...." Wan saw Doel raise an eyebrow as he blurted out his opinion. "I mean... Bain is fine... but..."

"Resisting your offer?" Doel scrutinized Wan. "Good."

"Nightfall, huh?" Wan analyzed the information he had been given. "Well, there's plenty of time then."

Wan almost was about to smile blissfully. Almost.

"That time is already preserved for you, Wan," the druid stretched his smile. His eyes flashed again.

'Oh, damn. I hate it when he does that!' Nervousness climbed up Wan's shoulders.

The room grew grim and the candles dim. Doel the Druid thrust his cane at Wan immediately.

Wan attempted to parry it, but his reflexes activated a second too late.

The druid hit him with one end of the cane, pushing Wan magically forwards through time, accelerating him through the 4th dimension.

He sent him into a portal.

"Master... you cheated!"

The final words broke off before Wan could fully pronounce them from the other side of the portal. Silence took its turn to return to the library again, except for the mild hubbub of the new recruits wafting from the courtyard across the windows.

The druid simply smiled to himself and tapped the ground with his cane in the way people scrub their hands after finishing a job.

'Holy.... this old man's seriously crazy!!' Nokau pretended to be a statue.

"Nokau..."

"Hai...yes, master?" he stood bristly.

"Get to work."

"Yes, Doel sensei. Right away."

Nokau sped to the stairs. Doel was about to turn away before he chuckled again.

"Or should I provide a boost?" a mischievous smile glowed.

"N...n...no thanks."

Meanwhile, at the dining halls of the headquarters...

Takira and Miyumi sat together, attending a banquet-level feast for lunch.

"Hiya! How's your training going so far?" they asked each other in chorus, surprised to an extent that made them hold each other's mouths with hands. They let go.

"Well... it has been going great for me," Takira merrily replied first. "How about you?"

Miyumi sighed before speaking. "I still can't keep up with their speed."

"It's okay, Miyu," Takira consoled. "You and I have been BFFs since childhood. As long as we're together, nothing's gonna stop us."

"Hmmm... yeah, Taki," Miyumi's heart melted from the faint bit of jealousy that was growing. "You're right, sis."

"Which reminds me..." Takira tried to recall what her inquiry was. "How come you had teleporting powers and you never told me??"

"Ehe~" Miyumi was shy to tell her about it. "Oh..that?....err.... hehehehe.... I'll tell you some other day."

Rainfall and thunder were storming outdoors where Wan had landed. He had accelerated 5 hours ahead of his 'current' time. Only now... his future tense was now the present.

'Dark. Hmm....' He took some time for his eyes to adjust to the environment. A long shadowy corridor, with large bare windows letting the idle moonlight and rain splash into the building from outside. Unlit chandeliers danced lightly to the tune of gushing winds.

A hand appeared out of nowhere... or so it seemed... and touched Wan's shoulder.

!!!!

~JUMP~

According to reflex, he jumped across the spanning width of the corridor.

"Whoa whoa...man..." a male voice peeked out from a darker portion of the corridor. Matching someone whom Wan had known very well. "It's me! Bain."

"Oh damn," Wan let his defensive stance melt away. "Can't believe it."

Bain walked towards him, out into the dim lunar lighting.

"Something wrong, brother? Why are you on attack mode all of a sudden?"

"Don't ask. Been a hard day," Wan felt slightly guilty for being so strangely rude to such a good friend of his. He decided to loosen the knot in his stress. "Full of unpredictable disasters. For the last 48 hours whoever I meet is a curse to my luck it seems."

A lightning bolt landed on the roof of the armory they were in, giving Wan a jumpscare again.

"GhaAAH!!"

Wan couldn't control it. It was almost as if by instinct. He felt embarrassed for his unusually wimpy behavior.

"Whoa, man, hold it in!" Bain checked the surroundings for any signs of hostile activity. "False alarm. Hold yourself together, Wan."

"Doesn't it look like I'm trying to?" Wan replied, panting.

"I've never seen you like this, homie," Bain equipped his gun. "You always used to be the badass killing machine. What happened to you? Anything you're hiding?"

A brief pause. Outside, it started to rain heavier and flashes of light and darkness decorated the windows all along the corridor.

"Nah. Nope. Nothing's on my head tonight," Wan sighed. "Nothing's in it, either. I don't know if I can guard this place with you."

"Don't worry, man. C'mon!! You're seriously telling that to me?!! I am supposed to always rely upon you instead!! Without you, whom can I trust? Who else can dare to defeat every monster that ever appeared before you?"

'That was an honest flatter.' Wan stared blankly outside for a while, into the rainy forest, remembering how Daneyo Ocraig managed to survive unscathed by his glaive's blows. *'But how right you are.....'*

"Alright. Enough of all this depression talk," Bain disturbed the white noise of silence. "Time to break demons' bones than to waste precious time...."

Bain began patrolling a sector of the armory.

Wan joined in after a while.

A room.

Pitch black darkness and shadows loomed everywhere, except for the doorway to the room, where a little moonlight was all that sufficed for illumination.

Something had stirred in that room.

"Wait!" Bain gestured at Wan to halt. "Did you hear that?"

"I can sense it," Wan closed his eyes as he spoke before reopening them again. His ambient vision skill allowed him to detect the life energy of nearby creatures with ease.

They peered off into the dark room nearby. Bain entered first, switching the lights on.

As soon as they came on, due to some magical force the light got sucked out of the bulbs. But not fast enough before Bain understood what was going on.

"There! A gagûn!" Bain pointed out.

Indeed, there were two red glowing eyes in the darkness, with some translucent teeth reflecting some moonlight off the surface. Belonging to the species of shadow wolves that the gagûn were. Perhaps the heavy scent of explosives had attracted it here. It was reclining between some sacks of gunpowder and volatile flame gel. The wolf was growling, about to pounce.

Wan charged forward.

"Wait! Wan! Stop!"

Wan raised his hand, extruded his index finger, ready to point.

His mouth opened, ready to shout.

"ONE!!!"

CR-R-R-ACKKKK!

Wan used his reality-transitioning spell, power piercing out from his finger faster than a snake made of light. An ability with such insanely high destructive

functionalities that all demons who knew Wan's whereabouts would avoid encountering him at all costs.

Instantly, the gagûn got overtaken by the power. But....

Also half of the armory instantly got destroyed in the process....

Hundreds of expensive weapons, supplies, and equipment -- all gone. All ruined and vaporized. As if someone had drilled a 4-dimensional hole in the building.

Wan was shocked to see what he had just done by carelessness of picking the wrong strategy.

Bain boiled up with anger.

'Oh no.... what did I just do?' Wan dropped to his knees.

"WAAAAAANNNN!!!!!! YOU....." Bain reluctantly aimed a punch for Wan's head but landed it into the wall beside him

instead. He bit his lip to dampen his internal disappointment down.

Rain showered down into the remnants of the armory, dissolving away precious chemicals and magical gels.

'What is wrong with me? My thoughts and decisions are not logical any more.' Rain swiped through Wan's hair and clothing.

He looked up at the sky vaguely for answers.

A few miles away....

Under the same sky....

'Hanadai.. Canadai...'he landed punch after punch at his opponent. 'Banadai... Manadai...'

Fierce movements. Rapid blows.

Sweat beads formed on the bald head.

~peeeeeeeep!~

The referee's whistle ended the game.

"Game's won for Daihatsu!! The man of the ring!! The champion of the night!!" the referee called out. The crowd cheered.

'Wanadai...' Daihatsu stopped hitting his rival on stage, looking at the blood smears he had created and the lethal attacks he had inflicted on the other boxer.

He grabbed the referee's microphone. The audience grew silent.

"Wheeehaaaw!!! I'm the moon, I'm the night!" he blabbered out phrases like a madman. "I'm Ren Daihatsu, protector of the --" he stopped. His eyes displayed the crazy mechanisms of his mind within.

He performed another unexpected activity.

"Yo referrrrrrrr...." he snored for a moment. "Take this." He handed over the mic.

"Tonight is a night of flavour. Enjoy it. I'm also going to enjoy."

The audience turned to a chorus of laughter.

He stuck the microphone into the referee's mouth before running off like a hooligan away from the boxing ring.

'Man, I'm tired of this.' He thought to himself, secretly changing himself back to his real identity.. 'They call me the mentally unstable maniac. Well... Thanks to that excuse, I can atleast punch people as hard as I can. No one lifts a finger. No complaints. Its their money they pay for watching the sport anyway.'

Daihatsu walked softly and gently down the athlete's exit hall, in a far more decent manner. *'They think I'm a crazy half-wit. Heh heh. Let them all laugh. Atleast I have my freedom to spare.'* He cracked his knuckles.

Outside, little did Daihatsu know that a street race was in progress.

Friend At Road Sight

道路上の友人

Packing up his stuff, Daihatsu Ren left the arena for the night.

Walking around the nocturnally active cityscape of Ichin Seruko (a neighboring citadel of Sombrero City), he heard some engines. Louder than the usual civilian cars or buses. Which could only mean one thing....

Some speeding automobiles were on the road, tonight.

'Ah, a race. Fast cars. Hmmm... this reminds me.' Ren smiled after cooking up an insane experimental theory in his mind. He planned to test his full strength by punching at a car's front when it will be in front of him.

He walked at a faster pace, taking some shortcuts between alleyways, following the noisy trail of where the speed machines were headed.

'They are fast.' He arrived at a point in another road where the cars still hadn't reached yet. *'But not too fast.'*

Cracking his knuckles, he braced himself for the unthinkable....

He charged immediately towards the first car he spotted. A punch landed at the front hood of the racecar.

~Slam!!~

The car stopped, the rear part lifting up to the air by 60° before landing back down on the ground. (Due to inertia)

But the effect on his fist was way too painful.

Ren yelled out in agony. Pedestrians nearby were already observing what was going on, nonetheless.

"Oi! That's my ride, you baka (stupid) hunk of flesh!!" the driver got out, styling an aura of unforgiveable attitude.

Rén was already in a lot of pain, clutching his right hand. But the identity of who the driver was sent an imaginary dagger through his heart.

It was Mahir Beats. Ren's role model.

He had wrecked the ride of his own hero.

"Ai ai ai... I'm sorry, Mr Mahir. I...."

"Don't be just sorry! I need to finish this race!!"

"Race, oh?" Ren's nerves fired up an alternate strategy to deal with the troublesome situation. "Um... okay okay... I have a plan..."

"Plan? What plan? Spit it out, fast!"

"Muhh....."

"Hurry before the cops arrive! Or I'm gonna knock out that skull of yours!" Mahir grabbed Ren's arm, crushing it with a single touch.

'Damn... Mr Beats is strong.' Despite Ren being a hulking giant-sized person, Mahir had more muscular skill and capacity than him. No doubt, Mahir was his role model in fitness. *'I'm not sure he'll approve of this idea, but I need to save his reputation. For Mr Beats. For the faith of working out!'*

"Okay... Mr Beats, get in the car. I will push it forwards."

"Nani (what)?! How're you gonna do that? All the way to the finish line?" Mahir was stunned by his solution. But he trusted his confidence and sighed. "Alright, do as you wish. Try not to dent my ride. And get there FAST."

Mahir got in as requested. Ren placed his massive hands onto the back of the car. Feet on asphalt, ready to propel forwards via the power of friction and potential energy.

"Here..."

The cars were coming right behind them.

"...we..."

Ren glanced at the road ahead of him.

"...GO!!!"

Like a monster uncaged, Ren darted forwards along with the car. His leg muscles shone with sweat and burst with veins popping out of the surface. All across his body, nerves and veins swelled up and burned in the might of adrenaline.

No, this was intense. Way more than any shot of adrenaline. His clothes ripped off at certain points due to his entire body shaking and trembling under his own

procedure of metamorphosis. Ren was transforming!

This was his own specialty. Ren's bodily power. His already massive boulder of a body was even bigger now, expanded and ready to rock.

"HYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!!!!!"

Ren bellowed and roared as his legs sprinted faster and faster. Gaining velocity. Gaining more momentum.

"Whoa, man," Mahir had never witnessed anything like this. "Are you a man or a monster?"

Civilians and onlookers began recording footage of the incident.

Ren slowed down and stopped the car. Spinning round, he landed five destructive punches to seven cars which had almost caught up to Mahir's position. (Two of them swerved and crashed with others)

Steam drove out of Ren's nostrils. He steered his attention back to Mahir's ride.

"Hello.. Sirutov... help... cars... race... casualties...."

Ren heard a civilian talk on their phone.

'Dang it! They're calling the Sirutov?'

Ren provided a big thrust to provide Mahir's car with a massive boost that even regular nitro boosters fail to achieve. However...

...instead of the cheery finish line they had anticipated, some Sirutov military vehicles had blocked the road and had set up a blockade.

Some more military vehicles arrived, flanking the car. Mahir had no choice but to kick on the brakes.

Some (corrupt) Sirutov soldiers get out of their vehicles. And they wielded guns.

"Your game ends here, racer," a Sirutov commander confronted them. He gestured at the other soldiers. "Arrest them."

Two soldiers subjugated Rén and Mahir.

"Tow the car away to the incinerator," the commander added further orders. "We could recycle the metal for weapons."

"No! NO!!!" Mahir yelled out at once.

"Ah, 'no' ?" the commander clicked his tongue. "Tsk tsk... okay then. Finish here and now. Open fire!!"

Several heavy guns sprayed the car with bullet holes. Another soldier launched a rocket to end it all. The car had been reduced to cinders, right in front of Mahir's eyes.

"You... " tears rolled down Mahir's cheeks. His eyes blazed with a new power. "You're not abiding laws, are you?"

"Hmm? Come again?" the commander pulled his finger from his ear. "Repeat that."

'True Sirutov would never harm or destroy civilian property.' Mahir responded in his mind. 'These guys are plain brutes misusing their power.'

The commander stepped forward and was about to slap Mahir when someone else slapped him instead.

~SMACK!~

It was Daihatsu Ren. His body still had not returned to normal size.

"You dared...." the commander faced him, clutching his cheek. "You slapped... a Sirutov comma--"

Blood spewed out of the commander's mouth midair as Ren used his knee to kick him.

Ren cracked his knuckles. Its very sound sent a shiver down the remaining Sirutov soldiers.

'This... this guy took down our commander?!' one of the soldiers exclaimed to himself.

Mahir and Ren stuck their backs together as they looked around their surroundings. There was no easy exit. They must fight.

"Yo big guy..." Mahir called out to him.

"Huh?"

"I've seen you before. You're a famous boxer, right?"

"That's true."

"Good. Now, now... let's see how adept your martial skills are."

'For real?' Ren couldn't believe this. *'Am I dreaming? This is a combat scenario with none other than my greatest training*

sensei. Damn. I'll not let this go to waste!
Fo--'

He got shot at.

The soldiers triggered their guns.

"What's this? A distress signal?"

Back at the armory, Bain received a signal on his Sirutov intel card.

"Wan, it's okay. Forget about what happened," he tapped on his friend's shoulder. "Some of my comrades have engaged on a target." He pretty much knew that it was a false alarm, and only part of a programming of their system to alert all nearby units about any activity.

"W-where is it?"

"Hmm..." Bain took a moment to read the details. "Ichin Seruko, Halberd Street 2nd,

some kind of assault. A commander has been killed."

"Understood. Sounds serious."

Wan created a portal leading to that location, getting his glaive prepared for an ambush.

"One more thing, bro..." Bain cut in.

"Yeah?"

"We're actually fighting AGAINST the Sirutov soldiers. Aim for their heads. Leave no witnesses except civilians."

Wan blinked twice. 'What's he saying? Betray his own comrades?'

"For your information, our current Sirutov leader is a tyrant. So until he is slain," Bain slid his electric blade out. "Assume every other Sirutov to be under his possession. No mercy."

Wan gulped before positioning himself in his battle stance.

"Ready? Go!"

At the right moment, they dived through the portal converging on a striking spree.

(Epic combat music.)

Wan doesn't use his special ability; only his glaive is his weapon.

Same for Bain. Although he knew several spells that other Sirutov didn't bother learning, he limited himself to using his primary guns only.

Mahir and Rén were startled to meet them at first sight.

Ren was about to hit Bain.

"Whoa, whoa! I'm on your side, big guy!" he blocked Ren's fist with the flat side of his blade.

"What? Bain wun Donn?! You are rooting for the wrong side," a Sirutov soldier exclaimed. "Are you in your senses?!"

"Yes... I," Bain sliced off that particular soldier's arms. "Am."

All three main heroes (+ one guest hero) burst into motion.

(Soundtrack shifts to a more energetic and crazier phase.)

Bullets firing up, guns barking. Rockets and fire flew across the quarantined street.

{ I have skipped some of the action scenes. Imagine them up yourself. }

After a loooong battle storm, the brawl party is over. Sirutov soldiers lay dead on the ground, brutally decapitated or severely injured. Their vehicles were set on fire.

"This... this is too cruel," Mahir glanced at Bain and Wan. And then at Ren. "Come with me, pals. We'd better get off the street before the Sirutov send in reinforcements. My studio is nearby. A five minutes' walk from here. We'll be safe. Follow me."

The characters meet up together. Mahir invited them all to visit his studio.

Before the episode ends.... there's a hint of another upcoming character's introduction.

Spying at the four men from atop a nearby building's rooftop, a mercenary had been watching the whole incident silently, an advanced sniper rifle in hand. He removed his mask (like an Alan Walker type mask).

A special phone was fixed to his ear. It beeped.

"Marlizo..." the caller began by calling out his name. "Come here fast. We've got a demon invasion."