

# AT 2 visual novel

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## Story Setting

Long ago, the surface of the planet was lost to a catastrophe called Grathnode Inferia.

In the land of Metafalss, at the incomplete Second Tower of Ar tonelico, people cling to life on the Rim, a device that was used to construct the Tower. Its capital, Pastalia, is located at the bell-shaped region in the center, and the [\[Grand Bell\]](#), which includes the Maidens, governs from here.

Infel Phira, a Song Magic server for creating Metafalica floats above Metafalss, and even further up in the sky is the artificial satellite Sol Marta.

“Ar tonelico 2 – The Girls’ Metafalica that Resounds Throughout the World” Game Summary

The world of Metafalss, where the little land they have is being lost to collapse. Metafalica, the Song Magic used to weave a paradise was the people’s ray of hope, but it was forbidden by the [\[Goddess\]](#). Amidst the fighting between the Grand Bell government, who declared war on the Goddess in order to make Metafalica a reality, and the Sacred Army, who does her bidding, the knight Croix, his childhood friend Luca, and the Grand Bell Maiden Cloche deepen their bonds with one another despite all their quarreling.

As they overcome hardships such as the failure of Metafalica, hidden truths about Luca and Cloche come to light. Two Maidens and two Songs are required for Metafalica. Luca is the [\[Maiden of Homura\]](#), who Sings EXEC\_METAFALICA/. Cloche is in fact Reika, the daughter of Luca’s foster mother Reisha, and the [\[Maiden of Mio\]](#), who Sings METHOD\_METAFALICA/. They confronted the darkest depths of each other’s hearts in the Infelsphere, and mutually accepted one another to become the two Maidens who would Sing Metafalica.

The people of Metafalss were once leaning towards [Hibernation], the migration to a form consisting of just the soul brought about by the Sacred Army, but their hope for Metafalica was restored thanks to a speech by Cloche. Croix's party, now including Jakuri, who was searching for a key to the world's regeneration, go up to Sol Marta and learn that the [Goddess] was in fact Infel. Infel, who was acting as Cloche's Mind Guardian, was the Maiden of Mio from 400 years ago who transferred her soul to Infel Phira. [Sublimation], the worldwide<sup>1</sup> migration to a form consisting of just the soul brought about by Infel and Nenesha was stopped, and preparations for the true Metafalica began.

## Characters

**Croix** A member of the Grand Bell Knights. Protects the two Maidens, and was victorious in the battle against the [Goddess].

**Luca** The Maiden of Homura. Croix's childhood friend and a popular Dive Therapist.

**Cloche** The Maiden of Mio. Was raised at Grand Bell Hall, but is actually Luca's sister Reika, who she was separated from when she was young.

**Jakuri** A Reyvateil who came from the First Tower. Her real name is Mir.

**Infel** The first Maiden of Mio, who perfected the Metafalica theory 400 years ago.

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<sup>1</sup>The phrasing here is "planet-wide", but Sublimation's range only falls within the range of the First Tower, in other words, Sol Cluster would be unaffected.

**Nenesha** The Maiden of Homura from 400 years ago. Lost her life due to the failure of Metafalica.

**Cocona** A girl who lives with Croix after having lost her family. She won't forgive any enemies of her beloved Croix.

**Frelia** A Reyvateil Origin and creator of the Second Tower of Ar Tonelico.

**Shun** Originally a human called Enja. Was changed into his current form in order to protect Frelia.

**Leglius** Captain of the Grand Bell Knights. Lost his wife and child in an IPD Outbreak.

**Amarie** A descendent of a family with Teru blood. Starts getting attached to Leglius through their journey.

**Chester** Leader of the Sacred Army. Seized power from the Grand Bell, though only for a short period of time.

**Targana** Crown Prince of the Papal Family. Was living in seclusion until the founding of the Sacred Army.

**Cynthia** The manager of a weapons shop. Showers Croix with her one-sided love, and continues to make weapons for him.

**Skycat** Poster girl for the restaurant "Bon Beltan". Madly in love with Luca.

**Sasha** An admirable girl who runs the general store "Nyanya Shop" all by herself.

**Spica** Came from the First Tower together with Jakuri. Her dream is to be "Queen of the Underworld".

**Rhaki** A maintenance droid deployed for the administration and defense of Sol Marta.

## Glossary

**Reyvateil** A woman whose mind is connected to a Song Magic Server, and is able to craft Song Magic. The original Reyvateils were artificial lifeforms created as Administrators of the Towers. Frelia was one of the first Reyvateils created, an “Origin”, and Jakuri is a clone of an Origin – a “Pureblooded  $\beta$ -Type”. Reyvateils such as Luca, Cloche, Infel, and Nenesha are called “Third Generation” Reyvateils, and are the descendants of those born from a human and Reyvateil.

**Song Magic** The result of a Song Magic Server analyzing a Reyvateil’s feelings to produce phenomena and matter. The strength of the Song Magic produced is proportional to the strength of the Singer’s feelings.

**Hymmnos** A language originating from incantations once used by shamans that was later optimized for controlling the Towers. Primarily used by Reyvateils in their Song Magic.

**IPD** A type of Third Generation Reyvateil, formally known as “Infel Phira Dependent”. A Reyvateil’s mind is normally connected to the First Tower, but IPDs are instead connected to Infel Phira. The IPDs’ cooperation is essential to the success of the Song Magic Metafalica, but on top of the Grand Bell keeping this fact under wraps, it was treated like an infectious disease for a long time due to occasional IPD Outbreaks. Cloche is also an IPD.

**D-Cellophane** A chip containing Spectrum Gene information installed in Origins<sup>2</sup> and Pureblooded  $\beta$ -Types during their cultivation. The Maiden of Homura has inherited Frelia's D-Cellophane generation after generation.

**Maiden of Homura**<sup>3</sup> A Reyvateil who can Sing Hymmnos used for controlling the Tower as if she were Frelia, because she shares the same Spectrum Gene as her. Responsible for Singing EXEC\_METAFALICA/, which creates the continent.

**Maiden of Mio**<sup>4</sup> The IPD who controls Infel Phira. Responsible for Singing METHOD\_METAFALICA/, which collects the feelings of many IPDs, and provides the power flow necessary for creating the continent to the Maiden of Homura.

**Infelsphere** A place for the two Maidens to make the preparations necessary for successfully Singing the two different Metafalicas together. The preparations are completed by clashing with each other's heart, deepening bonds, and accepting one another here.

**Cosmosphere** A Reyvateil's Soulspace. A guide called a "Mind Guardian" usually resides here, but IPDs don't have them.

**Ar tonelico** A soundwave amplification Tower built around 700 years ago from the accumulated knowledge of Sound Science. The original Tower built in Sol Ciel is referred to

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<sup>2</sup>Frelia is the only origin with a D-Cellophane, the others have HD-Cellophanes.

<sup>3</sup>Flame.

<sup>4</sup>Wake, as in the wake from a ship.

as the “First Tower” for convenience. Metafalss’ “Second Tower” lacks Song Magic Server capabilities.



# Chapter 1

## Prologue

There is a girl who carries around a large stuffed animal bunny.

She gazed below at the vast planet.

The planet Ar Ciel. It is a planet without land, as it is entirely covered by clouds called the Sea of Death.

She was in a satellite even further from the surface, high up in the sky – Sol Marta. At its center, a place called the Ar Ciel Sphere.

This place, now dead silent, was where a furious battle had unfolded just a few hours earlier.

It was a battle for the happiness of all people, a battle for the sake of creating an ideal land. She had ended up losing that battle.

Lost to someone who like herself, was trying to create an ideal land, and bring happiness to all people.

The name of the paradise the people she fought against desired was Metafalica. The same paradise that she too had devoted her life to trying to make a reality several hundred years ago.

On this planet without land, there exist three giant Towers called Ar tonelico. People have somehow managed to survive by building towns clinging to these Towers, or by making artificial continents surrounding them.

Metafalica is the hope of the people of Metafalss, a world that surrounds the second of the three Towers of Ar tonelico.

The realization of the ideal land of Metafalica as soon as possible was desired in this world where most humans live on a structure not originally designed for people to inhabit called the Rim.

Reyvateils – girls who can use magic by Singing Songs. By Singing the Song Magic Metafalica, the Reyvateil Maiden weaves a new continent.

The continent weaved by the Song Magic Metafalica is the one and only ideal land of Metafalica. It may sound simple when put like that, but weaving a continent is no simple task.

Within hundreds of years, Metafalica had only been attempted twice. In addition, both times ended in failure.

The second attempt at Metafalica was a quite recent event. Even so, the people she fought against were once again rising to the challenge of Metafalica. She couldn't help but think they seemed pitiful.

...After all, it was impossible that they would succeed.

She knew firsthand just how reckless it was to implement Metafalica.

To Sing Metafalica, several preparations are needed, by far the most difficult being the hearts of the people.

To be more precise, the hearts of a special type of Reyvateil known as IPDs must unite as one.

The term "hearts united as one" is occasionally heard even in day-to-day life, but here it means that everyone truly must want that single dream to come true from the bottom of their hearts.

Genuinely believing in its success, without uneasiness, distress, nor fear.

She had abandoned Metafalica precisely because she knew how difficult this was.

And she had wished for a new kind of ideal land that would surely succeed, where everyone could surely be happy.

Sublimation. It was purification of the soul, a way for people to exist independently in a state of being that casts away the body, becoming just a soul, forever in a happy dream.

Unlike Metafalica, which was, no exaggeration, impossible to implement, it was an ideal land that could doubtlessly be created.

Would it be Metafalica? Would it be Sublimation? She had ended up losing the battle that would determine this. Lost to the people who desired Metafalica.

There was no way Metafalica would succeed now. It still hadn't been long since a so-called Deathlandia overflowing with monsters had been created from Metafalica's failure.

The truth was, a lot of the fear and despair people had felt at that time still remained in their hearts.

Thanks to that, they couldn't possibly make Metafalica succeed. They surely realized this, and yet why were they going to try and Sing Metafalica?

Moreover, she felt uneasy.

"...After all, in the end, the people will inevitably betray you." she murmured, biting her lip.

We believe in you, Holy Maiden. We admire you, Holy Maiden. Please create a peaceful world, Holy Maiden.

She too was happy back when she was told such things, but in reality, they were just shallow words. Now, they were memories so awful that she felt sick.

She once again remembered them. Remembered those who had fought against her in order to stop her from bringing about

Sublimation, so that they could implement Metafalica. And the girl called Cloche, who now held the position of Maiden.

“I can see her ending up going through what I went through, yet even so...”

Even now she remembered the grieving, angry voices of the people whose expectations had been betrayed when Metafalica failed.

Who was the traitor? You who don't cooperate in the slightest and arbitrarily change your attitude because of a single sentiment. Were you not the traitors?

After all, people are creatures who do as they please like that. Therefore, there was no way something like Metafalica would succeed.

However, Cloche had a passion for Metafalica stronger than any Maiden before. As far as she knew, there was only one other Maiden who had devoted her life to Metafalica to such an extent.

Now of course, there was no one besides Cloche herself. Even if Sublimation couldn't be implemented, didn't she still have a chance to interfere in some way?

Despite knowing this in her head, she couldn't bring herself to do it.

She pitied and derided Cloche and the others who were trying to create Metafalica, which was bound to fail, and yet why was she going to quietly wait for Metafalica to be Sung?

Was it because even now, somewhere deep in her heart, she wanted them to implement Metafalica?

Was it because she, who had already given up on such empty dreams like Metafalica was able to meet Cloche, who was devoting her entire life to seeing it through?

She wanted them to succeed.

She felt as much, but when she thought about how low the chance of success was, even that feeling soon withered away.

If it was Cloche, who was devoting her life to Metafalica much like she herself had in the past, then perhaps. . .

But if it failed, then she would end up facing the same painful experiences as herself.

She did not want to have that happen. Therefore, she should take action to ensure Metafalica would not be Sung.

Could she not act despite thinking this because she wanted to bet on Cloche, who was the only Maiden within hundreds of years who could so much as make her think “perhaps. . .”?

Her dream she had once cast aside. . . was it because she believed Cloche would make that dream, that ideal land she had pictured together with Nenesha, the one person in her life who understood her, a reality?

. . . Either way, I hope Cloche doesn’t end up going through what I went through.

Thinking of her successor Cloche, she wished this from the bottom of her heart.

Her name is Infel.

The girl who perfected the flawed Metafalica theory, and Sung the first Metafalica – the first Maiden of Mio.

## **Chapter 2**

# **The Complaints of a Certain Pair of Knights – Part 1**

The town of Pastalia, which is located on the Second Tower of Ar Tonelico, is where the Grand Bell, the administration that holds Metafalss' political power is located. The streets were usually busy in downtown Pastalia City, but today they were bustling with more people than ever.

The reason was immediately clear if you looked around town. Flags and banners with “Metafalica Excitement Festival” written on them were hung up throughout town.

It had only been three hours since the Maidens had announced that they would once again Sing Metafalica again in a few days. In just three hours, the town had completely transformed into this revelry.

The main street, which was supposed to be spacious enough to walk through even with how busy it was, currently had many rows of stalls lining it. On top of that, there was such a huge crowd that a temporary stage had even been

constructed, and things such as a singing contest between Reyvateils and ordinary people were being held.

Knights wearing boorish armor, unbecoming of such a place, were standing in a corner of this now-festive main street. Both were knights serving the Grand Bell, currently tasked with guarding the festival.

Usually, knights below a certain rank in the Grand Bell wore white armor, but one was wearing blue armor.

“Haaah... Guarding the festival sure is lonely” muttered the white knight.

They were making sure there wasn’t any trouble, or people that looked like they would cause trouble. In front of them, they could see a smiling child running around holding cotton candy bought from a stall, and a couple holding hands and looking around the festival. And yet he was...

“Why the hell is it just us two guarding? Given our current task, wouldn’t it make more sense to be with a Reyvateil partner right now?”

“Wouldn’t it make sense to tell that sort of thing to Captain Leglius or the Holy Maiden? Even if you tell me, don’t you know there isn’t anything I can do about it?”

“That’s true but...”

“Actually, it seems like you’re having fun despite all your complaining, aren’t you?”

The blue knight said, eyeing the freshly baked Funboon held in the white knight’s hand. It was still steaming, as he had just bought it a moment ago.

“... Well, there doesn’t seem to be anyone causing trouble at the moment. Do you want half?”

“I’ll pass... Jeez, it’s too festive.”

The blue knight tutted while looking at the main street crowded with people attending the festival.

“Don’t be so grumpy. Basically, Metafalica may at last become a reality, right? When would they be festive if not now.”

“Even though the risk of failure still hasn’t passed? Jeez, everyone is crazy.”

The white knight saw the blue knight click his tongue again, and sighed.

Why was the blue knight so irritated? He knew it had to be for some reason or another.

The blue knight had not been a Grand Bell Knight until just a few days ago, he had been a knight of an organization called the Sacred Army, which had launched a coup d’état against the Grand Bell. Due to the coup d’état they had launched in order to create their own ideal land, they had succeeded in snatching away political power from the Grand Bell for a short period of time, but in the end, their plan had also ended in failure, and political power once again ended up returning to the Grand Bell.

“That paradise the Sacred Army tried to create, ummm, what was it, that... Hi-something or other? Do you still have some attachment to that?”

“It’s Hibernation! We even launched a coup d’état for its sake, so don’t forget it!”

“But it failed, didn’t it. Moreover, your guys’ leader, that... Chester, was it? Even he’s now taken up the important duty of leading the IPDs. Besides, thanks to Metafalica’s failure and stuff, you guys have quite frankly been pushed to the background, haven’t you?”

He said, and the blue knight couldn’t argue. It was true, as the white knight was saying – with them moving forward with their plans despite too many different events going on, there were quite a lot of people who didn’t know when Hibernation was carried out, nor even when it had failed.

“... But I staked my life on it.”



“You should probably move on to Metafalica... or else what? Do you really not want Metafalica to succeed?”

That wasn't it.

He didn't particularly care if it was Metafalica, Hibernation, or something else, it wasn't really worth worrying about. Since creating a world where everyone could be happy was their ultimate goal. If that happened, the method didn't matter.

But he had been working under Chester all this time to implement Hibernation.

Since he was told that unlike Metafalica, which would never be implemented no matter how much time passed, it could be immediately implemented, and yet everyone could attain happiness. That's why he had placed his trust in their leader Chester, and had served the Sacred Army.

Chester had announced that he was dissolving the Sacred Army and had joined the Grand Bell without even really explaining why to them.

“... Why are you so happy that Metafalica is gonna be Sung?”

“Huh?”

The white knight frowned at the blue knight's question.

“Why, you ask? That's because it would be the realization of the ideal land we've always dreamed of, of course.”

“That's if it succeeds. Surely you haven't forgotten when it failed?”

The previous Metafalica, which had ended in failure-

It should have created a continent that was practically a paradise, but it had produced something crawling with monsters called Deathlandia instead. It had plunged people throughout the world into an abyss of fear.

“It still hasn’t been very long since that, right? So something like attempting a second Metafalica is crazy. Don’t you think?”

What the blue knight had said was understandable.

When the Maidens had said they were going to Sing Metafalica again, his feelings of opposition against it had also surfaced, precisely because he was scared of that.

“They know what the problem with it was because it failed, right? Look, since the Holy Maidens and our superiors are intelligent, unlike us, they’ve surely found some kind of solution.”

“Even so, it hasn’t been long enough since then. Did anything really change in such a short period of time? Do you have confidence that they’re sure to make it a success?”

“It’s not like they can be so careless as to Sing to intentionally make it fail.”

“That’s exactly why it should be done after spending more time preparing! At least if it was Sir Chester, it probably would have been done like that!”

This was the reason why the blue knight couldn’t accept Metafalica.

He had always believed in and followed Chester’s words until now. Since to him, Chester’s words were equal to those of the Maiden. No, more than that, he had felt they were right.

It was something he knew, or rather, something anybody who was in Sacred Army knew, but the man called Chester always acted with a detailed plan. They weren’t something only other knowledgeable people like him understood either, they were perfect – even people with no skills other than swinging a sword around could understand and agree to them. The blue knight and his other former subordinates had heard about things like the method for carrying out Hibernation and the plan for the coup d’état in their entirety, and he was so

thorough that he made sure there was no opposition from any members before they moved.

Anyone who heard the plans he made could easily picture their success, and he had seemed so completely reliable that none of them felt even a hint of uneasiness.

They trusted and followed him because of that sort of thoroughness.

"There's no guarantee that Metafalica will succeed at all. If it was guaranteed to succeed, then wouldn't it'd have been Sung right away, and the continent immediately woven, and we'd have been doing this on the new continent by now?"

It was as the blue knight said.

Even the white knight agreed. But while that may be true, it didn't mean Metafalica was sure to fail.

"I can't believe it. That Sir Chester, who worked out such detailed plans to carry out Hibernation, would do something like approve of Singing Metafalica again, even though it just failed not too long ago!"

"Detailed, but Hibernation still failed."

"But at least there wasn't any uneasiness among us! That's why even if we failed, we wouldn't have any regrets about it. How does Metafalica compare to that? It just failed. Where's your confidence that it will surely succeed this time coming from? Is it really something that will simply turn out okay?"

"How could I know it? Not even the Holy Maiden nor Chester would know that."

"In that case, how can you have so much hope for Metafalica, when there's no guarantee it'll succeed?"

"How, you ask? That's because..."

The white knight couldn't answer. Since he – who was in high spirits without even a hint of uneasiness towards the fact that they were trying to once again Sing Metafalica, which had just failed – didn't know.

“Did Sir Chester betray us for this thing that doesn’t even have any proof that it’ll succeed...?”

“But didn’t you hear how when Chester joined the Grand Bell, he requested for you guys to join him?”

“That’s not it...”

There was no way he could accept the mysterious actions of the person he had placed his trust in.

The man he trusted was someone who proceeded with more caution. Where was that now?

“...Seriously, what is Sir Chester thinking?”

There was no way a low-ranking knight like himself would understand the kind of things Chester thought about.

Despite knowing this, he couldn’t help thinking about it.

## Chapter 3

# The Holy Maidens' Eventful Journey

The land of Metafalss was waiting for the Metafalica attempt that would take place in a few days, but there were still countless people with doubts and a sense of danger about it.

Song Magic was commonly seen, and wasn't even a particularly unusual thing, since Reyvateils, the people of this world who can use Song Magic, were everywhere. There were also times when magic failed of course, but in most cases, that consisted of the magic accumulated by the Song suddenly discharging, or else merely vanishing with a pop.

The appearance of a Deathlandia last time was an unforgettable event, since they thought that if it was Sung as usual, even if it failed, one of those two things should happen, as Metafalica was also a type of magic.

Metafalica was not something that was merely Sung by the Maiden alone.

She wanted people to at least know that much. That in mind, Cloche had personally gone to see the people of Metafalss until the preparations for Singing Metafalica were

complete. She had wanted to explain what exactly Metafalica was, and reassure people feeling uneasy about it, so that they reached a point where they believed in its success, if only a little.

“Ahhhh , I’m finally feeling relaxed.”

Amarie said in the bath, with an exhausted expression.

“I was also kind of tired.”

Cocona, who was also in the same bath, agreed with Amarie, but she seemed to be okay.

... Was it her youth?

Amarie felt a bit lonely thinking about the age difference between her and Cocona, who had only just reached her teens. But that thought quickly vanished as she saw where Cocona’s hand was reaching. Cloche next to her was resting her head on the edge of the bathtub and had stopped moving. Cocona had been massaging her foot.

“Cocona, is Cloche okay? It kinda seems like she isn’t alive...”

“Y—Yeeeah... though she’s responding for now...”

Cocona tried firmly pressing her thumbs into the sole of Cloche’s foot, and her body responded with a start. It appeared she was alive.

“Lady Cloche isn’t very good at physical activity. It was the same when Cro and I first met her. Whenever we would walk a short distance, she would quickly get worn out, and we’d be forced to camp on the spot.”



“You’ve been through a lot together, haven’t you?”

“Though I think she’d be fine even for a full day if it involved Gergo.”

She sure would. The two of them laughed.

Gergo was the name of a character so famous and popular that it was said practically no girl in Metafalss didn’t like it. Apparently, its appearance was based on a frog’s face which had somehow been arranged into a design that girls seemed

to like, creating a bipedal sort of creature. Cloche was a huge fan of this character's goods.

Perhaps because of the mention of the word Gergo, Cloche slowly lifted her head from the edge of the bathtub and looked tiredly at Cocona and Amarie.

"Of course... If it was for Gergo, I'd walk through Metafalss all night."

"Haaah... You really would give your life for Metafalica and Gergo."

Amarie, who had practically no interest in Gergo despite also being a woman, was simply astounded by Cloche's words.

Cocona was listening to what Cloche was saying and nodding in agreement, since she was also a huge Gergo fan herself.

"Hey, what are you talking about?"

Luca appeared nearby, having just finished washing her body.

"We're talking about how we're tired since we walked a lot today. Luca, you're..."

Tired too, right?, Amarie had begun to say, but stopped.

Luca was the same as usual, and didn't seem tired at all.

"... You're not tired despite having walked all day?"

"Not at all. In fact, I've gotten used to walking since I used to walk for hours to get back home when I didn't have enough for the train fare."

Amarie thought this girl might just be the toughest out of the four of them, though you would never guess as much from her cute outward appearance.

Luca looked at Cloche, who was still completely exhausted, and gave an amused laugh.

"You're overreacting, Lady Cloche. We just walked for a little bit."



“What do you mean ‘a little’? And whose fault do you think it is that we ended up walking longer than planned in the first place?”

Cloche appeared a bit angry, but perhaps because of her fatigue, there wasn’t much force in her voice. Seeming to find it amusing, Luca spoke with a huge smile on her face.

“Because it’s our goal right now to reassure people who are feeling uneasy, right? So, I thought it might be good to visit everyone as soon as possible.”

“I agree with that. But if I have to walk around until dark, I’ll end up collapsing.”

“That’s right. Lady Cloche has no stamina to begin with. And her calves are swollen, so won’t it be difficult for her to walk tomorrow?”

Hearing what Cocona had said, Cloche touched her foot and felt a bit dizzy imagining the foot pain awaiting her the next day.

... Though they still had to visit quite a few places tomorrow as well.

“It’s fine. Besides, this is important for making Metafalica a success, right? So Lady Cloche will surely be feeling fine in the morning by willpower alone, since she absolutely wants to make sure it succeeds.”

Luca seemed like a devil to Cloche, laughing as she spoke.

Although what she was saying was quite true. With Metafalica now close at hand, people who were uneasy and unhappy about it were surely hoping for their arrival as soon as possible. That’s what they had seen with their own eyes at each place they had visited today.

“... It’s surprising, isn’t it, all those people who are uneasy about Metafalica.”

It's not like Cloche had thought there wouldn't be anyone feeling uneasy, since not many days had passed since the previous failure, but there had been more than she had expected, and it had shocked her.

Of course, just as originally planned, they had succeeded in completely relieving their uneasiness, or at least somewhat, but even so, Cloche had been shocked.

"The uneasiness the people harbor towards Metafalica is proof that the Grand Bell, as well as myself, have continued to betray them."

"But this time, the two of us are going to Sing it together, so it'll surely go well. Last time, we couldn't truly Sing it as a pair, so it failed."

Just as Luca had said, Metafalica wasn't something to be Sung by a single Maiden. The Maiden of Mio and the Maiden of Homura. Only by both Maidens Singing their respective Metafalica could it take shape as Song Magic.

Last time, they had Sung without knowing that two Maidens were required, nor who was the Maiden of Mio and who was the Maiden of Homura, so it had ended in failure.

However, shortly after the previous failed Metafalica, they learned that two Maidens are needed and that Cloche was the Maiden of Mio, while Luca was the Maiden of Homura.

They could Sing the Song Magic Metafalica, as it was now complete.

However, there was one more thing that was absolutely necessary to make it succeed.

Sighing, Cloche remembered what had happened today.

The town of Enna on the Rim was a place full of people who were in opposition of the Grand Bell and the Maiden. For that reason, it was also where the base of the Sacred Army, a group who opposed the Grand Bell, was located. The Sacred Army had been supported all throughout town.

Although the number of people who supported the Maiden had surely grown by now thanks to recent events, Cloche had predicted that her discussions in this town would be the most difficult.

These people could think rationally and were aware of its dangers precisely because they were in opposition to them to begin with.

What Cloche had been thinking was correct.

It had been after she had arrived in the town of Enna, and had finished giving a general speech to the people gathered there.

“Still, I think Singing Metafalica is dangerous. . .”

Cloche heard the woman’s comment, spoken with uneasiness, and looked to her.

She thought her face looked familiar, and realized it was the woman who served as Enna’s mayor. She seemed to realize that Cloche had recognized her, and gave a small nod.

“... Could you inform me as to why you think it is dangerous?”

“Listening to the Holy Maidens’ speech just now, I understood quite well that unlike last time, there is a high chance of making Metafalica a success. Through Lady Cloche; the Maiden of Mio, and Lady Luca; the Maiden of Homura Singing their respective Metafalica, it becomes a single Song Magic, right?”

It was a simple explanation, but Cloche was happy that what she had said had been sufficiently conveyed to her.

“That is correct. Therefore, there is nothing to worry about this time. We completely understand the Song Magic Metafalica.

Isn’t that right, Luca?”

Luca had been spacing out next to her when she clapped her on the back.

“Hieh! Ah, eh? Me?”

Luca, who had only just become a Maiden a short while ago, was not good at speaking in public like this. Or rather, even though she could give off the aura of a girl who was popular in town, she didn’t have even a shred of the Maiden’s dignity, so she had completely given up, and left it to Cloche.

And so Luca had suddenly been mentioned, but her mind had gone completely blank.

“... It’s only natural that you are feeling uneasy about it.”

Cloche was troubled by the terrible gaffe she felt Luca had just made. Luca, upon seeing Cloche, seemed to realize her mistake, and her shoulders sagged dejectedly.

“Th—that’s not it. I realize that Lady Luca, as well as Lady Cloche, are fine Maidens.”

“Wh—what, a fine Maiden?! Not compared to Lady Cloche.”

Despite saying so, she didn’t seem to mind being called a fine Maiden. She was shifting about with an embarrassed smile.

Anyone could see that it was flattery, but to Luca, that one word had made her so happy that she didn’t realize it.

Cloche noticed the mayor and surrounding people laughing awkwardly, so she took a step forward and moved so that Luca was concealed behind her back.

“Ummm, this conversation ended up getting off track. Well then, could you tell me why you think Metafalica is dangerous, ma’am?”

She had been a little forceful, but Cloche had somehow succeeded in getting the conversation back on track, and awaited the mayor’s response.

“I understand that compared to last time, the probability that you’ll be able to make Metafalica a success is certainly high. However, it has not been long since its previous failure,

and it seems like it's being rushed too much. Shouldn't you Sing after you spend more time on it and can say for sure that it will succeed?"

A question she had expected. She would probably get the same question many times today alone.

"It certainly may seem rushed, but there is a reason for it. Do you remember what I said earlier, when I gave the speech? I said that everyone's power is required to make Metafalica a success."

It appeared almost everyone there remembered, as it was still fresh in their memory. She could hear them affirming it with one another that now that they thought about it, she certainly had said such a thing, and so on.

"You certainly did say that, but... is the power of us who live on the Rim really necessary?"

"It doesn't matter whether you're from the Rim or Pastalia."

Luca appeared from behind Cloche.

"Besides, I too have always lived on the Rim until just recently. I didn't have enough for the train fare, so I would do things like walk for hours to get back home."

Was it just their imagination, or did her Holy Maiden image seem to be quickly falling apart?

She knew Luca was trying her best to persuade everyone in a somewhat Maiden-like fashion too, but it was all a hopeless effort.

Cloche gave a signal to Amarie and Cocona behind her with the hand behind her back.

The two of them had somehow seemed to have noticed, and quietly approached Luca, separating her from Cloche.

"Ummmm... It is certainly true, as Luca said, that it does not matter whether you are from the Rim or Pastalia. It's only natural, as we are all people of the same world of Metafalss."

Those words were Cloche's true feelings. It was true that the lives of the people who lived on the Rim were difficult compared to those who lived in Pastalia. Differences in standards of living were inevitable in this world on the brink of collapse, but Cloche absolutely hated the discrimination caused by these differences. Eliminating such discrimination was one more reason to implement Metafalica, at least for Cloche.

Many of them showed joy and surprise at Cloche's words. There were even people so moved that they had tears in their eyes.

"Lady Cloche, may I add something?"

An old man with a cane came forth from the crowd. She didn't know his exact age, but he seemed to be over eighty.

"I am happy you told us that our power is needed, Lady Cloche. Even we will help out if it is for our ideal land."

There were people laughing, wondering if it was a joke, but there was power in the old man's words.

Cloche smiled.

"I am also happy you said as much."

She said in response, and there was a smile on the old man's face too. He seemed to realize that she had understood he was being serious.

"Even so, Lady Cloche. As was mentioned earlier, there's no guarantee that it will succeed, so I can't be wild with joy either. Moreover, couldn't you wind up creating that terrifying thing again if it fails?"

He was probably talking about Deathlandia. Cloche nodded.

"If that's the case, then I was even thinking... what if you don't Sing Metafalica."

The old man's words surprised not just Cloche, but the surrounding people as well.

"If we don't Sing Metafalica?"

“If you don’t... there would no longer be any need to worry about what would happen if it fails.”

The others were also harboring uneasiness towards its possible failure, so not a single person raised any opposition to the old man’s comment.

Since if they didn’t do anything, there would be no success, but the risk of failure would also disappear.

“I want our ideal land, of course. But when I think about the possibility of that being created again, and its demons once again overwhelming us, I’m afraid. I’m no longer young, so I would be helpless if I was attacked by demons. No, if it was just me, it wouldn’t matter.”

“It wouldn’t matter? That’s not...”

“It wouldn’t matter if it was just me... but when I think about how my children and grandchildren might face that danger too, I’m afraid. They were lucky enough to have even survived last time, were they not? I can’t help but be afraid when I think about what might end up happening if the same thing were to occur this time.”

It wasn’t about himself, it was the fear that the people important to him might get injured.

“At my age, it’s painful even just to imagine having to witness the death of my family, as well as those younger than me. While that may be true, I don’t want to die either. I want to live out the few remaining years of my life in peace. So, I think it wouldn’t be all that bad to continue living modestly like we have been, without Singing Metafalica.”

He didn’t mean Singing after success was guaranteed, he meant living peacefully with the world as it was now.

It might be hard for young people to accept, but as he said, it probably wouldn’t be all that bad for people with only a few years left in their lives.

He had reached the age where he was enjoying the remaining years of his life, and he didn't want to see his son and grandchildren in danger.

If he could live out the remaining years of his life in peace, it probably didn't matter whether it was on an artificial structure or a continent.

"Maintaining the world as it is now... I never considered such a possibility."

"Lady Cloche, you are strong, and above all, young. These are the thoughts of the weak and old, so you are free to ignore them."

"No, it is a valuable opinion... but it is impossible."

"I understand of course... since it has already been decided that Metafalica will be Sung."

Even though it had already been decided that Metafalica would be Sung, the Maidens were going around the world to improve their image. That's what it seemed like.

That certainly wasn't wrong, but it wasn't the only reason.

"That is not what I meant when I said it was impossible. The Rim itself has reached a point where it will only last a little longer."

"...In other words, it may even fall tomorrow or something?"

"It should be fine for a few years. However, there is no way it will last for ten."

It was the first time the public was hearing this fact, but Cloche had heard it beforehand, directly from the Tower Administrator and Goddess of this world, Frelia.

"Do you have proof?"

"This is something I heard from the Goddess. If you cannot accept that as proof, then I have nothing else, other than waiting until the Rim actually falls."



What she had said might be interpreted as a threat, but it couldn't be helped, since there truly was no other way of proving it besides that.

But even if it appeared as such, Cloche believed she had to tell them, since it was the truth.

"It is impossible to continue on with things as they are now, and even if we search for a way that is sure to succeed, we don't have time to spare anymore... In other words, you're saying we don't have any other choice besides Metafalica, right?"

Cloche nodded, and the people finally understood that in the end, there was no way they could survive without Singing Metafalica, regardless of whether or not they were uneasy about it.

"... Well then, why exactly did you Holy Maidens come to us? If it has already been decided that you will Sing, then there is no need to bother talking with us, is there not?"

"As I said earlier, I'm going around the world like this in order to get everyone's cooperation. This too is absolutely essential to ensuring Metafalica's success."

"... I'm afraid to ask, but what exactly should we do?"

A young man asked. Cloche had told them that their cooperation was essential, but no one seemed to believe it was all that important.

Catching the gaze of one of the many uneasy people, Cloche cleared her throat. She had seen the people staring intently in her direction, and had wanted to tease them a bit.

She savored someone gulping, and someone fidgeting as they awaited her words for a few seconds, then said

"Everyone... I want you to sing."

"..."

They fell deathly silent.

What exactly did she mean by "sing"? Come to think of it, Metafalica was Song Magic. Was she telling them to Sing

Metafalica? Not understanding what she meant, the people gathered there began to make a commotion.

“... Lady Cloche, we are not Reyvateils.”

“Uh-ummm, I cannot Sing Metafalica!”

She could see a girl in the back waving her hand wildly as she spoke. It seemed she was a Reyvateil.

“I am not telling you to Sing to create magic. I just want everyone to sing together.”

“Even if we sang, it would be pointless...”

“That’s not true. At least for Luca and myself, who must Sing Metafalica...”

She waited a moment for things to quiet down before starting to speak again.

“Metafalica is not just Sung by Luca and myself, it will not succeed unless we also have the power of the IPDs. Even if we are able to Sing, we will not be able to make it succeed by the power of us Maidens alone.”

Success wasn’t guaranteed to begin with, even with things as they were now, so it really was nothing more than a massive gamble.

But even so, Cloche at least wanted to make sure their preparations were flawless, since they had no choice but to Sing.

“If the hearts of the IPDs and myself do not share the same thoughts, Metafalica will not succeed. If someone feels even the slightest bit of uneasiness or fear during it, that will little by little shake our hearts to the very core... and you know what happens next, right?”

In short, a Deathlandia would be created. It would once again form from the stolen life of one of the Maidens.

“... In other words, you’re saying you want us to sing together as encouragement for the IPDs so they don’t feel anxious?”

“No way, don’t tell me you want something like a massive chorus of all the people of Metafalss?”

People started laughing at the joke, and Cloche joined in with a smile. But after her next few words, it was no longer a joke.

“I am glad you know where I am going with this. That’s right. I plan on Singing Metafalica in a massive chorus together with all the people of Metafalss.”

Cloche said with a smile, but the people there had all froze.

The world was on the brink of collapse in some places, and not all that vast, but it had a considerable population.

Cloche was saying that many people were going to sing a single Song.

“...Are you serious?”

“Yes, of course. If not, even I would surely end up being crushed by the pressure.”

“You would? Won’t we be singing to encourage the IPDs?”

“No, there is no need to encourage those girls. As far as I know, they are wishing for the realization of Metafalica more so than anyone in the world.”

Most of the IPDs were girls Luca had helped in Dive Therapy, and girls who had been living secluded in the Slums, but had voluntarily come to the Grand Bell Hall to help realize Metafalica. They wanted Cloche to hurry up and Sing Metafalica, and were looking forward to it so much that given the chance, they could get very excited talking about it. If you told them you were going to encourage them, you would probably end up getting scolded about how it wasn’t necessary.

Currently, the one most in need of courage was Cloche herself, as the inside of her heart would be seen by those girls.

There were many among the IPDs who were looking forward to seeing inside the Maiden Cloche’s heart just as much as they were looking forward to the realization of Metafalica.

They would be able to see inside her heart, but basically, nothing distinct would be seen unless they specifically planned on looking. If they were able to share the same feelings, they would feel comfortable, and if they were different, they would feel uncomfortable, something like that.

But if they really wanted to look, then they would be able to see all her everyday thoughts, as well as memories, private information, feelings towards others, and the dark feelings that one is not even aware of that lurk in the depths of the heart.

Having the inside of one's heart seen was something no ordinary person could endure. There were probably quite a lot of people who would rather die than have to do such a thing.

But if she didn't do it, then she would never realize the very thing she had devoted all her life to.

Therefore, she had no choice but to do it. Though the question of if she could stay composed and do it was. . .

"... I too, am a person before I am a Maiden. I want to Sing Metafalica. I want to make it a success and live in happiness with everyone. Although I am proudly telling you such things, when I learned my heart would be seen. . . I was very scared."

Cloche did not want to show her weak side, as she held the position of Maiden, symbol of this world. She always gave off the aura of a Maiden who could lead the people without being disheartened by anything, and she had been working the hardest of all thus far to Sing Metafalica.

A key figure like herself was afraid of Singing Metafalica.

Cloche herself thought it was pitiful, but none of the people listening to her had thought so.

What if their heart could be seen by others?

They didn't even want to think about it. Some of them felt sick just imagining it. It would surely be bad to have it seen by that many other people.

“So please sing... to encourage a coward like myself. If you can do that, then I promise to Sing to the very end, no matter what.”

Cloche no doubt would have Sung even if she couldn't get their cooperation, of course. Since no matter how difficult it was, if she didn't Sing Metafalica, her entire life up till now would have been all for nothing.

Would she have her life up till now be for nothing, or would she show others the inside of her heart? Those were her options.

“...No matter what, it does not change the fact that it is a huge risk, since there is no guarantee that it will succeed, right?”

The sounds of people sighing and scratching their heads could be heard upon seeing Cloche nod her head in response.

This visit had aimed to get rid of their uneasiness, but Cloche thought she had failed.

Above all, if things were left as is, the Rim would end up collapsing. If that happened, the people living here would not survive.

Would they fall into the Sea of Death, along with the Rim, after several years of not doing anything, or would they risk Metafalica, even though it would be taking a chance?

For them as well as Cloche, there were only two choices left.

...Although she didn't think anyone who wanted Hibernation would come forth now.

“I know your uneasiness towards Metafalica won't go away no matter what. The main reason for that is because we, the Grand Bell, have never been able to implement it even after all this time.”

400 years had gone to waste, and the people living on the Rim had been faced with hardship all that time. There were

probably quite a lot of people whose hopes had already been lost, having known nothing had changed in that much time.

She was saying they would once again Sing, right after failing to make them happy and give them hope for Metafalica.

Although there was nothing that could be done about it, it was self-centered on top of being way too unreasonable, but they really didn't have time.

"What I am saying is selfish. But my desire to make Metafalica succeed is genuine. Even helping just a little is fine. It may succeed, if you help make it succeed. So please, if you believe me, I want you to sing together with me."

There was nothing more Cloche could say.

She had said all she could, so if they couldn't agree to it, then that's just how little confidence they had. Visiting all these places would have been nothing more than a pointless trip for her own self-complacency.

It wasn't good, but it was one possible outcome.

If they couldn't give her an answer, she would leave the town behind today.

She chewed her lip in frustration at not being able to ease their anxiety nor get their cooperation.

"... We should sing, right?"

"... Eh?"

It was the mayor.

"If we sing, you'll at least be able to Sing Metafalica without worry, right Lady Cloche?"

Cloche couldn't believe her ears.

"... Lady Cloche?"

"Ah, y—yes! If you could do that..."

Cloche responded, and the mayor turned towards the people gathered there.

"How about it, everyone? Shall we all believe in Lady Cloche and sing?"

The mayor's words had fully surprised Cloche, but the people gathered there listening to her weren't particularly surprised, nor did they seem unhappy.

"It's not like our anxiety has disappeared. However, I think if Metafalica is likely to succeed, risking it wouldn't be as bad as doing nothing."

"...Are you sure? Aren't you opposed to it?"

"That's not true. It's not like we're unhappy about Metafalica, it's just that we're worried whether or not it will fail like last time."

Fear of failure may not be a good impression, but Metafalica was particularly risky. That's why they couldn't help but feel uneasy about it.

"In all honesty, I am still uneasy. But Lady Cloche thought of us, and came to visit like this."

"It was only natural. Metafalica should be everyone's hope, so I cannot ignore those who cannot agree with it and force it upon them... besides, I was thinking I should ask for your support for when I Sing."

"Even so, you didn't end with just giving a speech like usual, you came to us like this. At the very least, there was nothing like this during the previous Metafalica. Besides, if the Rim is going to fall, we will end up dying unless Metafalica is Sung. Lady Cloche said it would have been bad to use that as an excuse to force us into it, which I believe shows she is genuinely considering each and every one of our feelings... So, what does everyone else think?"

After a few seconds, the old man from earlier gave a small nod.

"...Ahh, I feel the same way."

"But earlier, you said it was better not to Sing..."

"That was because at the time, I never imagined the Rim was going to collapse so soon. Besides, it is the opinion of

an old man without many years left. I plan on accepting the decision of all the young people with many decades left to live on this issue no matter what.”

“However”, he continued.

“I am incredibly tone-deaf. Even so, would it not be a problem?”

The old man was in fact famous for being extremely tone-deaf according to himself and others. For this reason, he wondered if his tone-deafness might end up upsetting Cloche’s mood.

Wouldn’t her mood be disturbed by his voice while she was Singing, so she’d no longer be able to Sing?

Cloche tried her hardest to resist bursting into laughter at the meek-looking old man’s question.

“It—it’s fine. . . I’ll be happy if you can sing with all your heart, without worrying about things like tone-deafness. Since you singing to cheer me on is proof that you hold a quite a bit of hope for Metafalica.”

Seeing how relieved he was, it seemed he had been serious.

Cloche was also relieved that she hadn’t burst into laughter.

And as for the people around them, who had been listening to their conversation-

“... If I can help out even if I’m tone-deaf, I think I’ll try and sing too.”

“I’ll sing as well. After all, it would be awful to fall and die without doing anything like this.”

“I’m still uneasy but. . . It’s worth the risk, right?”

“Right. . . I think it’s better than constantly being anxious.”

One person started talking, and the conversation spread from there.

Not everyone was smiling. There were some people who looked a little confused.



But despite their looks-

"I want it to succeed if we're gonna put all this effort into singing."

They were talking about their hopes for its success.

"... Everyone, will you sing?"

They responded to her question.

"I'll sing with all my heart, Lady Cloche!"

"We will sing in a chorus so massive that it will be heard all the way in Pastalia!"

"In return, please make sure it succeeds. I really don't want to see that thing again..."

There was more than enough support for Cloche.

Along with everyone being in agreement, the people who had been uneasy also seemed to be feeling much better, and everyone was starting to get excited as they freely talked about Metafalica.

Cloche murmured something as she watched.

"Everyone... Thank you for believing in me."

That murmur couldn't be heard by the crowd over their cheerful conversations with one another.

Cloche remembered today's events as she soaked in the bath, and sighed.

"I'm happy... everyone had hope for Metafalica."

"Eh? Did you say something?"

Luca looked up from the duck floating in the bath that she had been staring at.

"I was remembering what happened today. Everyone is looking forward to Metafalica. And I'm so happy that everyone will be able to Sing Metafalica with us, regardless of if they're human or Reyvateil."

"Y—Yeah... that's right."

"Ah? Something's bothering you. Are you not happy about it?"

“Th—that’s not it, ummm. . .”

“Luca is envious of you, Cloche.”

Amarie saw Luca faltering, and helped her out. But Cloche couldn’t understand what she meant.

“It’s because she’s a Maiden just like you, Cloche, but quite frankly, she’s not very good at things like speaking you know. Even today she withdrew partway through.”

“That can’t be helped. After all, you only just became a Maiden, right Luca? You’re just not used to it yet, so you shouldn’t worry about it.”

“Th—that’s true but. . . I wonder if I seemed like a useless Maiden?”

“I doubt anyone thinks a Holy Maiden who is going to Sing Metafalica is useless. But well, you might have seemed like a Holy Maiden who says interesting things, ahahaha!”

Cloche glared at Amarie as she gave a cheerful laugh.

“Wait just a minute Amarie. Why don’t you say even just one thing that could be considered nice?”

“I think it’s good to be an interesting Holy Maiden. After all, it would be boring if Luca was just like you, Cloche. Although don’t you think it leaves a good impression to know even a Holy Maiden has experienced the kind of life where you don’t have money and can’t ride the train?”

Cloche thought she might have a point.

Although she had been overloaded with work, Cloche had always lead a life of elegance, without worrying about money. Although she spoke for the people, there were many complaints that she lived a bourgeois life.

No matter what she said, it was impossible for her to truly understand the feelings of the poor.

However, Luca had lead such a life until just recently. The things she had talked about today were things the people living on the Rim may have experienced once or twice.

... Naturally, it was surprising for that to be coming from the mouth of a Maiden.

"I see. It certainly is reassuring to have Luca there when talking about such things."

"It's not really anything to be proud of, but I have lots to talk about when it comes to being poor, so leave it to me. Things like a dinner consisting entirely of those hellish Kururuku Dango..."

It was no exaggeration to say the people of Metafalss lived on Kururuku Dango. Its recipe was extremely simple – you steamed Kururuku Fruit gathered in a field, crushed it, kneaded it, rolled it up, and it was done. It was easy to make, delicious, and moreover, packed with nutrients essential for a girl's growth, but even so, Luca hated Kururuku Dango.

"'Hellish' you say? That's just because you dislike them, no?"

"Grilled Kururuku Dango, Kururuku Dango in soup, finely chopped Kururuku Dango fried in oil. That's what was on our table, you know? It would be hellish for anyone, not just me..."

"... Is that a joke?"

"It's not a joke, that's truly all there was."

Cloche tried to imagine something like that laid out on the table. The large table in Grand Bell Hall's dining room filled with a bunch of dishes consisting primarily of Kururuku Dango.

... You'd surely get tired of it.

Though perhaps she would try it out sometime.

"Speaking of which, what was it like for you, Cocona?"

"Eh? Me?"

Like Luca, she stopped playing with her bath toy after suddenly being mentioned.

“You were living together with Croix, so weren’t meals a problem for you? Somehow, I don’t get the feeling that Croix is a very good cook.”

“No, that’s not true. Cro is good at cooking, and I can cook too.”

For some reason, Luca and Cloche felt a pain in their hearts upon hearing that.

The truth was, there was practically nothing they could cook. No, rather than being unable to cook, it was so bad that they shouldn’t cook.

Luca’s cooking turned into fearful objects of art that made everyone who saw them tremble, and Cloche’s cooking always burned into pitch black charcoal.

The two of them claimed it was because they had never properly been taught how to cook, but it appeared they didn’t realize the problem ran deeper than that.

“... Ah, uh-ummm, but still, today went really well, everyone said they would help out!”

Cloche nodded in agreement with Luca, who was forcibly trying to change the flow of the conversation.

“Th—that’s right! I wonder if everyone still had hope left for Metafalica in the bottom of their hearts? I’m very happy if so.”

Amarie and Cocona didn’t think there was a need to change the conversation so unnaturally, since it was already a well-known fact, but it seemed that’s how badly the two of them didn’t want to talk about it. Taking this into consideration, the two of them decided to nod along as well.

“Yeah, I was happy too. I was a little worried there might still be people saying not to Sing Metafalica.”

“I thought so too. Or rather, I really can’t complain even if that’s to be expected, but...” (?)

There was no way there wouldn't be people with complaints, since regardless of the reason, it had failed once before.

Amarie didn't understand, but there were surely people who had experienced the terror of being attacked by the demons that had materialized when the Deathlandia had appeared. It certainly wouldn't be strange if that had happened to a number of people in a large town like Enna.

Nevertheless, they had accepted that Metafalica would be Sung, and had said they'd give their cooperation.

One reason may have simply been because they couldn't turn back now, but still, it seemed at heart, everyone couldn't let go their hope for Metafalica.

"But I wonder, is it really gonna be okay? If it were to fail or something now, then..."

"Hey, stop that Amarie. It's so boo to think about that kinda thing, boo!"

"Ahaha, sorry, sorry... that's right, we've worked so hard thus far, so if we don't believe in it, no one will."

"Don't worry about it. Besides, even if there are people who are still uneasy, they'll be pulled in by our Song. Isn't that right, Luca?"

"Yeah. And everyone will no doubt follow along if they see Lady Cloche's heart... ah-"

Luca quickly covered her mouth, but it was too late – she had already spoke.

She looked over at Cloche with her mouth still covered, but "... Is something wrong Luca?"

Cloche was calmly wiping off sweat with a towel.

She had known Cloche would have the inside of her heart seen long before today. And also, that it was a pressure no ordinary person could endure.

But since there were people looking forward to seeing the Holy Maiden's heart, at the very least, Luca and the others were avoiding the subject, so they wouldn't add to the pressure she was already facing. They had been keeping this a secret from Cloche.

But right now, Cloche was perfectly calm. Perhaps she hadn't noticed?

There was no way that was true. It was something Cloche shouldn't have been able to ignore.

Nevertheless, Cloche remained calm. The three of them went dead silent.

"... Is something wrong? It suddenly got quiet."

Had she really not noticed? Was having her heart seen of that little concern to Cloche?

"... Cloche, there's no way you're not worried about it, right?"

"About what?"

"About what...? ... Having the inside of your heart seen? Normally, I'd expect you to be more like 'Nooo!', and crying or something, that sort of thing..."

Amarie spoke with concern, but even so, Cloche looked nonchalant. In fact, she was trying to suppress her laughter.

"Hey— Cloche! I seriously am concerned you know..."

"I—I'm sorry. But I'm fine, so don't worry so much. I'm a Maiden after all."

"B—But still, everything in your heart will be seen by them, right? If I were Lady Cloche, I'd hate it so much I'd end up running away."

Oddly enough, Cloche hadn't done so yet.

From the moment they knew the inside of her heart would be seen, everyone had been worrying if she'd object to it, and end up running away.

Although it wasn't as if they could've done anything to stop her even if she had, but...

"... Hey, Cocona. Do you have a dream?"

"Eh... a dream?"

"Yes, a dream. Something that you'd work as hard as you could for if you had a chance at making it come true?"

"Hmm... I think I'd work hard for it, but..."

"My dream is to make Metafalica a success. To create a world where all people who reside in this world can live in happiness. That has always been my dream."

Cloche had been educated since childhood to do just that.

She had lived her life thinking only of making Metafalica succeed, every day, from morning till evening.

"So this sort of thing is nothing... Besides, this time it may actually succeed, since the people we met today promised they would Sing to cheer me on, right? I'm happy knowing this, and hardly worried at all."

"So I'm fine." Cloche said with a smile.

The three of them had been with Cloche all this time, and knew her passion for Metafalica well. It was true that she was delighted at how likely it was that it would succeed.

However, it was a lie that she was fine with having the inside of her heart seen.

There was no doubt she was currently forcing herself to be caught up in the joy of being able to Sing Metafalica again so that she wouldn't think about it. Or at least the three of them thought as much.

Couldn't they somehow lessen the load on her mind?

Wasn't there something they could do for her?

"... Jeez, what's with the serious looks? The bath is a place to rest your body and mind, so relax some more. Your fatigue isn't going to go away like this."

They were supposed to be taking care of Cloche, but she ended up being the one taking care of them.

Realistically speaking, it was impossible to ease Cloche's current suffering. However, they also couldn't just say it was hopeless and do nothing.

Even if it was something small, wasn't there anything they could do?

"...Ah!"

Cocona had thought of something.

"Wh—what? What is it Cocona?" Cloche was surprised by Cocona's sudden outburst next to her.

"Ah, ummm... Th—There's something I've always thought..."

"Something you've always thought?"

"Y—Yeah... umm..."

Cocona was trying to say something, but she was having a hard time getting it out.

She had decided she would say it, since if she did, she may be able to ease Cloche's mind a bit. She wanted to do something for Cloche. So she should be able to at least do this much.

Or so she thought, but she found herself unable to speak.

What would happen if she said this? Wouldn't it be fine to say something else? Self-preserving thoughts bombarded her mind.

She was sweating profusely, and it had nothing to do with the heat of the bath.

"..."

The words on the tip of her tongue wouldn't come out no matter what.

"Cocona, are you okay?"

Tightly clenching her fist, Cocona finally spoke.

"I—I've... never liked Luca..."



There was no turning back now.

“Eh...”

It hurt Cocona’s heart to see the sad expression on Luca’s face.

But it was the truth. And there was a legitimate reason for it too.

Luca herself somehow knew that Cocona disliked her, but it was harsh having it said to her face.

“Wait just a— Wh-what are you saying Cocona! So out of the blue...”

Cloche quickly tried to stop her, but Cocona continued nevertheless.

“I—It’s because I believed I should say it no matter what... I didn’t want to continue hiding it like this...”

“... Yeah. I had a feeling you probably felt that way about me too. So is it weird to say... I’m a little bit relieved that you were able to honestly say as much? But really, I’m glad you told me.”

Luca laughed dejectedly.

Soon after Cocona had begun living with Croix, she had learned about Luca.

Luca was Croix’s childhood friend, and even though she was still young, she worked hard, and had covered the expenses for Croix to go and take the exam to become a knight at Grand Bell Hall. She was a caring and dependable childhood friend.

Cocona had secretly envisioned Luca as the ideal person she longed to be, since Croix placed his trust in her.

When she had met her in person, it seemed what she had imagined was true, but one day, something happened.

On that day, Luca had said she had been pretending to be Croix’s girlfriend, and was just using him.

If Croix became a Grand Bell Knight, she may be able to save her sister, who had been taken away to the Grand Bell Hall. That in mind, she had continued to use Croix for a long time.

When she learned the sister she had been looking for had died, she no longer had a use for Croix.

Croix was angry too, but even more so than him, Cocona couldn't bring herself to forgive Luca.

Croix, who had taken in Cocona and had provided her with a place to stay and a family after she had lost her own in an IPD Outbreak, was more important to her than anything else.

There was no way she could forgive Luca, who had used him, then to top it all off, had said she was breaking up with him. If Luca hadn't collapsed soon after saying that, she surely would have done something back then.

In the end, she had completely and utterly disregarded Luca ever since then.

"After all, Cro is... my only family. I can never forgive people who hurt Cro!"

It was only natural that Cocona was angry. Luca was quietly taking Cocona's words.

"So I hated it when I saw that Cro was still having evening talks with Luca... Cro is a softhearted person, so there have even been times when I've gotten worried that he's being deceived again, and have gone and checked."

"I—is that so...? I never noticed."

Cocona had pretty much invaded their privacy, so there were things she wanted to say, but it seemed that's all she had ended up doing. Luca couldn't complain.

"But I also wondered if it was because you had just learned your sister had died, and because you were needing your Life Extending Agent dose back then as well. But even so, I can't forgive what you said to Cro..."

There are three kinds of Reyvateils. One kind are the Reyvateils called Origins, who were created by humans, another kind are the Pureblooded  $\beta$ -Types, who are clones of the Origins, and the third kind are Third Generation Reyvateils, who are born between a Reyvateil and a human.

The Life Extending Agent has to be administered to Third Generation Reyvateils once every few months through their Install Port, a mark unique to Reyvateils that can be anywhere on their body. If they neglect to do this, they become delirious with fever and eventually end up dying.

Almost all the Reyvateils in Metafalss were Third Generations like Luca, so more so than that, it was just a necessary part of her life.

“... But what I said to Croix was all true. I had been using him all along.”

Even now, Luca still had dreams about that incident.

The angry, hurt look on Croix's face. Whenever Luca saw that, she would wake up, and be tormented by feelings of regret.

“Hey Luca, what did you truly think of Cro? Were you really just using him?”

Cocona hoped that wasn't the case.

It wasn't because she could forgive Luca in the least, or at least that wasn't something that mattered to her.

Had the person Croix liked had any feelings of love for him at all? Or had she just been together with him so she could continue to use him because she had realized his usefulness? She had wanted to know.

“... I”

Luca was a little confused, but began to speak.

“I've always liked Croix. I may not be able to get you to believe me, but I've always loved him.”

“However” she continued-

“I used Croix. In order to save my sister... in order to save Reika, who was taken away to the Grand Bell Hall. Because I had to go to Pastalia no matter what to do that.”

Luca looked over at Cloche.

Her sister, who had been taken away to the Grand Bell Hall and had forgotten about when she had lived with them, had been made to assume the position of Maiden as “Cloche”. Her memories had finally returned only a few days ago.

“I remember when Croix said he wanted to take the Grand Bell Knight exam. It was Croix, so he might actually pass the exam and be able to live in Pastalia. If so, his family could live in Pastalia. If I could make Croix have feelings for me, eventually I could live in Pastalia too, and go look for little Reika...”

Luca had been desperate. Feeling as if she was grasping at straws, she had placed her bets on Croix’s skill in order to take back the family that had been stolen from her.

“Then Croix really did end up passing. And I could no longer stop...”

“...”

Cloche realized she felt slightly happy listening to Luca’s story.

Cloche had been taken away to the Grand Bell Hall, so she never thought she had something like a family, and had spent every day all alone.

Therefore, she was happy that although she hadn’t known it, her sister Luca had been that desperate, and had gone that far to search for her.

Although if anyone were to ask if she thought what Luca had done to Croix in order to find her was right, it wasn’t. She knew this, but was very happy that she had a sister who had searched for her. She had always thought she was alone.

“I wanted to live together with my entire family again. I think I would have done anything for that... I’m sorry Cocona. And...”

Luca looked over at Cloche.

“... Sorry an awful person like me is your sister.”

“...”

She wanted to say thanks in return. But it was impossible, there was no way she could say that, at least not in front of Cocona.

In the end, Cloche just gave an awkward smile, unable to say anything.

“Luca, if back then... you had found your sister when you went to go look for her, what would you have done afterwards?”

After she found her – in other words, what if she had found her sister back when she had learned she had died?

“First, I’m thinking I would have taken her to Croix’s house. Since I think if a quarantined IPD were to escape, they’d soon be pursued. Croix’s house would probably serve as the best cover. Then when I felt like everything had calmed down, I would have taken little Reika with me, and returned to the Rim for the time being. Since I don’t think I could have performed Dive Therapy in Pastalia.”

Dive Therapy is forbidden in Pastalia. If anyone were to go to a Dive Shop with the intention of doing it, they would probably end up being turned away by the shopkeeper.

Although Luca had performed Dive Therapy in Pastalia’s Dive Shop many times.

The shopkeepers had turned a blind eye to it, perhaps because it was in the name of treating IPDs.

“And then, after I cured little Reika at the Rim, I would have returned to Croix’s place with her and our mother. All three of us.”

“The three of you?”

“After all, I wanted to live with my entire family. Croix lived with us when we were children, so it wouldn’t be everyone unless he was there too, right? If we did that, I could have stayed together with Croix too. Besides... I was also wondering if I could’ve had a second little sister...”

“A second little sister...?”

Cocona tilted her head – what did she mean?

She thought about what would happen if Luca and her family came to live at Croix’s house.

Luca, Reika, and their mother Reisha would have ended up living together with Croix and Cocona, so...

“...Eh—eehh! That’s...”

Luca scratched her cheek in embarrassment.

“B—but hey, living together means we’d all be family so... I was wondering if that would happen and was looking forward to it.”

“But...” Luca once again looked gloomy.

“That wasn’t on my mind at all back then... the moment I heard that little Reika had died, I was confused... to think that I willingly did something like parting with Croix... I really am an idiot, aren’t I...?”

What she was saying already seemed awful from her point of view, so it surely seemed even worse to Cocona and Croix.

But she had gone through the trouble of talking about it, so she wanted to say it no matter what.

“I had been using Croix all along. But regardless of whether or not I was able to rescue my sister, I really did always want to be together with him. After all, Croix is part of my family too. So if I could’ve remained calm back then, surely...”

It was unlikely that she would have simply forgotten about Reika and lived together with Croix at his house.

Having known that searching for Reika was impossible, she may have begun devising a plan to take revenge on the Maiden Cloche. No matter what, Luca thought she surely would have done something or other.

Although if that had happened, she would have continued to hate Cloche without realizing that she was her sister.

Either way, Luca ended up losing someone important to her.

... Was this karma? It probably was.

Although Luca was feeling a little bit better. Probably because she had been able to talk about what had been bothering her all this time.

"... Then you planned on always staying with Cro no matter what?"

"Yeah. It may seem pretty shameless, but that's what I've always planned on doing."

She was worried about what Cocona thought.

She knew Cocona wasn't one to speak ill of others, but in this case, Luca thought she should.

"Is that so...? Well then, perhaps it's just as I thought."

Hadn't she seemed shameless? Despite how bad her image was, she didn't even feel like crying.

"Earlier, I said that I went and snuck a peek at you and Cro talking, right?"

"Yeah, I remember... though I was a bit surprised, I never expected that you had been watching us all this time..."

"No, not always. I stopped after about five times. Since I thought it might be okay now. After all, you looked like you were really enjoying yourself when talking with Cro."

It wasn't just Luca, it was the same for Croix.

She honestly couldn't contain her surprise when she saw them talking normally as if nothing had happened.

But thanks to that, Cocona had started thinking about why they were able to.

“At that time I thought – Perhaps Luca hadn’t just been using Cro. Since if she had, you wouldn’t be able to have such enjoyable talks after that.”

Luca was surprised by Cocona’s unexpected comment.

In fact, she wouldn’t have been surprised if Cocona held her in contempt for having fun with Croix despite what had happened.

“B—but... what if I might still see Croix like how I used to? I’ve always seen him like that, so surely even now...”

“It’s fine. After all, you now know that Lady Cloche is your sister. So you’re no longer thinking about that kinda thing, there’s no way you are. Besides...”

Cocona sounded a bit lonely as she spoke.

“If I knew that my dad and mom were alive and being detained, I think I surely would have done the same thing too...”

She wanted to get them back if she could. Although she knew it was impossible, she had no idea how many times she had thought about it before. So if she knew she could, she too would have probably become desperate to get them back, to the point that she’d even use other people and treat them as stepping stones.

She couldn’t say it was impossible.

“But I’m relieved to know you don’t hate Cro, Luca. I think I was surprised because of how unexpected it was, but I’m glad to have heard that.”

“I feel the same way. It’s like I finally got that load off my chest... honestly, I should have spoken up sooner.”

“That reminds me, you guys have all talked a lot together, haven’t you? Although somehow, I doubt they’re important conversations...”



“We don’t have important conversations. We’ve only really gossiped and complained, that kind of thing.”

Cloche wanted to retort that they didn’t just have those kinds of conversations, but she stopped and gently stroked Cocona’s head.

“Heh? What is it, Lady Cloche?”

Cloche saw Cocona’s curious expression, and gave a wry smile. Cloche had been worried if she should thank her or not, but stopped.

More so than to make peace with Luca, Cocona had spoken her mind about her feelings towards Luca to encourage Cloche, who was going to have the inside of her heart seen by others.

If that was true, she wanted to say even just a single word of thanks, but if she did, she would end up admitting that she was just bluffing, and was actually scared.

So instead, Cloche had decided to stroke Cocona’s head.

She was praising Cocona for making up with Luca, while also thanking her for her encouragement.

Cloche’s body felt kind of warm, and she wondered if it was because she got to see something so nice.

In fact, it felt like she was burning up inside, and it was gradually spreading throughout her entire body...

“!?”

Familiar with this sensation, Cloche looked around the bathtub.

Luca and Cocona were looking at one another, perhaps because they had made up, but their cheeks were slightly red.

Once again shifting her gaze, she saw that Amarie had moved to the edge of the bathtub for some reason without anyone noticing, and had been doing something.

“Wait a second Amarie! What are you doing?”

“Eh?” Amarie turned around. A bottle with a suspicious liquid inside of it was held upside-down in her hand. The

milky-white liquid bath mix inside was being poured into the bath.

That bath mix's name was Syrupy Arousal, and its effect was... exactly what the name suggested.

“Wh—what are you putting in the bath?!”

“I was playing around since I got tired of hearing such serious conversations. Baths are supposed to be fun ”

“Cocona is in here too you know! Ahh, stop adding it already!”

The final drop fell into the bath the moment she started to make her way towards Amarie.

## **Chapter 4**

# **3313 AD – The Day Before Metafalica (afternoon)**

At that moment, in the isolated satellite Sol Marta floating high up in the sky, Infel was embracing her stuffed animal as usual as she watched Cloche and the others on the surface.

Watching them frantically move about so they could implement Metafalica was so laughable she found it amusing.

“So unaware, even now... You truly are idiots.”

She gave a mocking smile as she watched Cloche and the others try to unite the people’s hearts as one in order to make Metafalica succeed.

No matter how hard they tried, in the end, the outcome would be determined not by their hard work, but solely by how the people felt.

Their hopes for Metafalica would be betrayed by the people. Infel knew that better than anyone else in the world.

“... Back then, I too was an idiot.”

That was a story from 400 years ago.

3313 AD, the afternoon of the day before Metafalica.

On this day, the people of Metafalss had been very excited.

Tomorrow, at long last, they could finally obtain the paradise they had long dreamed of.

That excitement was the same in the past as it was 400 years later, however there was one difference: nobody harbored feelings of uneasiness nor fear.

That was because the Metafalica that would be Sung tomorrow would be the first in the world, and everyone unconditionally believed that it would give them their ideal land of Metafalica.

So when the two Maidens had announced that they were going to Sing Metafalica, Metafalss had shook with cries of joy. The entire world was in such a clamorous state of celebration that the excited voices of people on the Rim could be heard as far as Pastalia.

This had already been going on for three weeks.

The people were overflowing with hope. It had been a chaotic three weeks where they had been excitedly drinking, celebrating, eating, dancing, singing until they were hoarse, and so on from morning till evening.

However, in contrast to the lively people, one of the two Maidens didn't like wild partying very much at all. This was like hell as far as Infel was concerned.

She wanted to go somewhere quiet, even if only for a bit. Given how bad it was, it didn't even matter where, she just wanted a quiet space. Even a dungeon would be fine. That in mind, she had wandered around the Grand Bell Hall, eventually ending up at the Speech Plaza.

This place, which was overflowing with people whenever there was a speech, had been empty these past three weeks. That was to be expected, as it hadn't been used at all ever

since they had finished informing the people when Metafalica would be implemented.

No one was visiting this place since the Maidens weren't giving any speeches.

Also, as luck would have it, it had been designed so that noise from the outside wouldn't hinder speeches, so this one place alone was surprisingly quiet.

It was the perfect place to rest her sleep-deprived body, so Infel unabashedly spread out a sheet in the middle of the plaza and took a nap, using her stuffed animal Mimimi as a pillow.

She quickly fell asleep, probably because she hadn't been getting enough, and slept peacefully.

Infel wondered how long she had been asleep for. She noticed that Mimimi, who she had used as a pillow, felt strange.

... Was the cotton bulging out?

She sensed the sun's brightness spread across her eyelids. It would probably be bad for her eyes if she opened them now, so she grudgingly felt her pillow with her hands.

It felt like clothes, with something soft and warm on the other side.

"... huh?"

The moment Infel's eyes snapped open, she saw the sun's light... or not. There were the palms of two hands in front of her eyes.

To be more specific, realizing that Infel was going to open her eyes, someone had covered them the moment before she had opened them.

"... Morning, Infel. Are you up?"

Infel heard that voice and finally understood what was going on.

"... Morning, Nenesha."

She patted Nenesha's thigh, which she had been touching up till now.

She had no idea when, but Nenesha had taken Mimimi from beneath the sleeping Infel's head, and had replaced it with her lap. The now-free Mimimi had been sat down next to Infel, and seemed to have a happy looking smile on its face. Seeing this, Infel stretched and sat up.

"Mmmmmhh... I feel refreshed. Did I sleep well?"

"It's a little past noon. Lunchtime had passed but you still hadn't shown up, so I was worried about where you had gone and came looking for you, you know?"

Nenesha puffed out her cheeks. It wasn't the least bit scary, as it was an overwhelmingly cute way of expressing her anger.

"Yeah, yeah I apologize. But I hadn't been getting enough sleep, so I had no choice, right?"

"If only you had told me you were going to take a nap, I would have come with you..."

"You're the Maiden who's everyone's role model, so it wouldn't have been good if you'd done that."

"You're a Maiden too, no?"

"I'm a bad example of a Holy Maiden. That's a better way of putting it. I'm carefree." Infel said with a laugh.

It was true even when it came to her everyday duties as Maiden.

Nenesha was an active public figure, who went around making visits to places all throughout Metafalss.

On the other hand, Infel hated doing things like making speeches to the public and going on trips.

It's not like anything would change just because she spoke to the public. So it was better to concentrate her efforts on research, which she was good at, and make preparations to ensure Metafalica's success as soon as possible. That's what she believed.

Well, it was also no small reason that she just simply hated doing things of no interest to her.

“Even so, it’s been unbearably loud every day. Be it day or night, they’re making such a racket, I wonder if anyone’s getting any sleep?”

The Grand Bell Hall was a short distance away from the city of Pastalia, so it was true that it reduced the noise problem a little bit. Still, it was agony as far as Infel was concerned, so just how big was the heart of the uproar? Even merely imagining it would probably give her a headache.

“It’s because everyone is so happy, don’t you like it?”

“... I don’t think I understand.”

“Oh? Do you hate festivals, Infel?”

“I don’t like how noisy it is. You’re not bothered by it, Nenesha?”

“Oh, well... I think it’s nice since it’s a fun kind of noisiness. That’s why I’m really looking forward to tonight.”

“Tonight? Is there something going on?”

“There’s a festival celebrating the eve of Metafalica tonight, so we have to take part in it. But I thought you had heard about it?”

This was the first she had heard of it.

No, she might have heard about it, but she either ignored or quickly forgot things that didn’t catch her interest. So she had surely been told about it.

“I have no interest in it, but still, they’re holding an eve festival even though it’s already like a festival out there right now. Won’t that be a little too much of an uproar?”

“That goes to show just how much the people of Metafalss have been looking forward to Metafalica. But it’s no trivial matter. We have to take part in it too.”

“Ah, is that so?”

Despite answering as such, Infel had no intention of attending.

One reason was because she didn't like the noise, but she also wanted to rest even just a little for Metafalica the next day.

As the Maiden of Mio, she would have to share her heart with many IPDs, which would cause her an unfathomable amount of mental fatigue.

So Nenesha understood why Infel was trying to refuse to attend, but-

"I can't come today without you too."

"I don't want to. It's not like it would make much of a difference even if I did go, right?"

"That's not true. After all, all the IPDs are looking forward to getting to meet you."

"Everyone sure has a lot of time to spare."

"Don't say such things... shouldn't you make a public appearance once in a while too?"

Recently, it's only been me appearing before the people. You're a fine Maiden too, you know?"

Even though she was told that, Infel had never thought of herself as a fine Holy Maiden.

The truth was, she had not once in her life thought that she would ever become a fine Maiden.

...Although she could spend as much as she pleased on things like various research, so in that sense, the position of Maiden wasn't bad.

Aside from that, there were so few things that she enjoyed about the position of Maiden that she could count them on one hand.

"Anyway, tonight, I'm going to have you participate too. You can't run away or anything."

"I won't run away. Though I will shut myself in my room."

"Everyone invited us, you know? Since they said they want us to do our best tomorrow. Don't you think it'll be fun?"



“In that case, I want it to be quiet. You would have me Sing Metafalica in a sleep-deprived state?”

Nenesha let out a sigh upon seeing that Infel didn’t have the slightest intention of attending.

“Ah, then it can’t be helped. . . Though I was looking forward to getting to go with you Infel. . .”

Nenesha said, seeming disappointed.

“ . . . . .”

“I’ll tell everyone, so get some rest.”

“No, actually, I’m going.”

“Eh?”

Nenesha was surprised that Infel had changed her mind so suddenly.

She wanted to respect Infel’s decision of choosing to rest over going to the festival. After all, their most important duty as Maidens was Metafalica’s success.

“It’s okay if you don’t go, you know? Since tomorrow is going to be the hardest on you.”

“It’s not that bad. I’m fine”

“But. . .”

“I’m fine! It’s not like I’m so weak that it will make a difference on how things turn out. Besides, there’s an added virtue of having two Holy Maidens instead of just one, right? And if the IPDs are coming, I should humor them a bit for tomorrow, yeah?”

This would be for the good of Metafalica too.

“ . . . You’re so admirable Infel. You’re even able to endure things you don’t like if it’s for Metafalica.”

She just didn’t want to see the disappointed look on Nenesha’s face, but she didn’t dare say that.

“But Metafalica. . . If it succeeds, everyone will move to the new land, won’t they?”

“So it seems. If not, there wouldn’t be any point in creating it, right?”

Although it would be a problem if everyone rushed to it all at once.

Even if they did create new land, there wouldn’t be houses or anything else there, so if the entire population of Metafalss rushed to it all at once, everyone in the world would end up homeless for a bit.

... It seemed like things would be even busier after they weaved the continent.

But that wasn’t her job, so she decided it wasn’t worth worrying about.

“But yeah, I’m looking forward to it. If all goes as planned, then around this time tomorrow...”

Infel pointed to Infel Phira floating in the sky.

With an appearance much like Sol Marta, Infel Phira floated a little above Metafalss, and served as a Song Magic Server.

“A great land will spread forth, with that as its heart.”

Infel seemed very pleased as she said this.

She was also one of the developers of the Song Magic Metafalica, and had been the one who had perfected it, so for her, Metafalica also represented the fruits of her research.

The success of Metafalica could bring peace to the people, but above all, it would mean her research had been right. As she was also a researcher, that was perhaps even more exciting to Infel.

Infel seemed to be enjoying herself, without a shred of uneasiness.

“... Aren’t you scared?”

Infel tilted her head at Nenesha’s question.

“Scared? Are you asking if I think a continent floating in the sky is scary?”

“Not that. I mean because you have to connect your heart with all those IPDs tomorrow, right?”

“I don’t understand. What’s scary about that?”

“The inside of your heart will be seen by them, right? Even so, you’re really not scared?”

Ahh. Infel finally understood.

It was true that Singing Metafalica meant that they’d be able to see inside her heart. It was something that she as the developer knew better than anyone else. Why it would happen, and why it couldn’t be avoided as well.

They hadn’t actually created a continent before, but they had done a small-scale test of Metafalica. It was something Infel had conducted with around 10 of her IPD coworkers, but during it, her heart had been open to them.

They were able to create a forest as a result of that test. In other words, it was a success.

Although one could say that they were able to see inside her heart, it wasn’t as if everything about her came rushing into their minds the moment it was sung. It was a free to enter show, so those who wanted to see something were welcome to take a look as they pleased. Since that’s all that happened, you wouldn’t be able to see anything specific unless you intended to.

However, even if you didn’t take a look at anything, you would still experience things such as pleasant or unpleasant feelings and exhaustion depending on how similar or different your minds were, which would end up affecting the outcome.

It had succeeded, which meant that they had seen inside her heart and had still decided to cooperate with her, or else they had decided not to look. She had been curious, so she asked the IPDs working with her at the time what the inside of her heart was like, to which she had gotten the reply-

“I do not know because I did not look. However, you conveyed strong feelings of wanting it to succeed.”

No one had had any interest in Infel’s heart.

Was it because Infel had always immersed herself in her research and had tried to avoid contact with the people as much as possible?

Nenesha, who showered the public with kind words and smiles, and Infel, who immersed herself in Metafalica research, hardly ever appearing in public. They were both Maidens, but unlike with Nenesha, who they felt close to, they probably had no interest in a Maiden who never appeared in public like Infel.

When she had talked to Nenesha about that experiment and her thoughts at the time, she had replied: “... That’s a little bit lonely”

but Infel couldn’t understand.

“I’m able to keep my privacy, so why would I feel lonely. Besides, I think it’s more likely to succeed this way.”

She was happy they wouldn’t look, and didn’t feel even the least bit lonely. She was happier to be someone nobody showed any interest in, as opposed to having the entirety of her heart seen. At least that’s what Infel thought.

Nenesha still thought it was lonely, but she hadn’t dared say so. There were parts of herself she didn’t want show others either. That’s why it seemed truly amazing that Infel didn’t have any fear of having her heart seen and that happening.

... Though that was a good thing.

It wasn’t like she hadn’t felt uneasiness before, but...

“... Ah? Hey Infel, over there!”

Nenesha said, and Infel looked up. There was a person standing on the speech podium. She knew it was a woman because of their long hair, but the glasses-wearing Infel couldn’t tell anything beyond that.

Nenesha next to her laughed at how funny her face looked as she furrowed her brow trying to see.

“Infel, there are gonna be creases left on your brow.”

“It—It’s not like I care about that. . .”

Though it seemed she was bothered by it after all, as she quickly averted her eyes and relaxed her brow.

“... Ah! The two of you are here of all places!”

It appeared the woman up there had finally noticed them. Nenesha waved her hand in response to the voice, but Infel was ignoring it and smoothing the lines from her brow.

... she was afraid of how it would look ten years later.

It was something she secretly worried about because she wore glasses. She was a little bothered by the thought that they might end up learning about it if they looked inside her heart when Singing Metafalica.

“Please stay where you are!”

The woman up there yelled, before quickly heading back inside. It seemed she was coming to meet them.

“That person just now. . .”

“You couldn’t see? Infel, have your eyes gotten even worse?”

“I live a life of looking at nothing but books and small parts, I’ve already accepted that my eyesight will be bad. . . Once Metafalica succeeds, I’ll be sure to make an artificial eyeball with eyesight that won’t deteriorate, or perhaps glasses that automatically adjust to match the user’s eyesight?”

“The eyeball sounds scary, but the glasses seem useful. It’ll be a relief for when my eyes go bad too.”

“Right? I’ll start working out the plans as soon as possible tomorrow night.”

And then, the woman from earlier came running towards them, armor clattering.

“Lady Infel, Lady Nenesha!”

The woman stopped, still quite far away from the two of them, her body rising and falling. Had her stamina already run out?

“... Not very reliable, is she?”

“That’s a harsh thing to say. Besides, running while wearing armor seems difficult.”

After breathing heavily for a bit, the woman, now slowed to a brisk walk, reached the two of them.

Now that she was finally before them, she tried to say something as she took in the scene of the two Maidens sitting on a sheet spread out in the middle of the speech plaza. She had a hard to read expression on her face.

“What’s the matter, Ana?”

The woman called Ana thought for a second.

“Ummm. . . are you pretending to have a picnic?”

Infel was confused as to why she’d possibly think that.

“... We’re beyond the age where we’d want to pretend to have a picnic.”

“That’s right. Besides, if it was a picnic, we would’ve had bento boxes and water bottles laid out, right?”

Nenesha was saying ridiculous things, but Ana nodded in response.

“Now that you mention it, that’s true.”

“Don’t agree with her. . . And do you have some business with us?”

Upon hearing that, she remembered what she had set out to do.

“Th—that’s right! You two cannot just go outside of the Grand Bell Hall without telling me!”

“But this place is still on the grounds of the Grand Bell Hall, so there shouldn’t be any problem, right?”

Infel replied, without a hint of reservation. But Ana wasn’t satisfied.

“That is not the problem! This place is open to the public, so anyone can enter with ease, right? What would you do if someone dangerous came in?”

“How stupid. No one is going to come here, since everyone is enjoying the festival. As proof, look: there’s not a soul in sight, is there?”

There was no one in the plaza besides the three of them.

The deathly silent plaza with just the three of them there had a somehow eerie feeling to it. But for Infel, it had been a place to rest.

“While that may be true, I am worried because you did not say a single word to me. And it is my job to protect the two of you.”

Ana was a knight of the Maiden Chamber Imperial Guard, and had been given the duty of personal attendant to the Holy Maidens. However, her skill was closest to the bottommost amongst the knights. By all means, she was not someone who should have received such an important duty. Given her position, she should have only been doing chores.

However, Infel did not want a filthy male knight nearby, did not want a boorish male knight nearby, did not want a frivolous male knight nearby, and had rejected all male knights.

So when they were once again about to try to select who should undertake this duty, Infel, who had happened to notice Ana sweeping the hallways, had personally decreed that she was to take the position of their attending knight.

There was the question as to if a person who didn’t even have the ability to protect the Holy Maidens could be their knight, but seeing as they were the direct words of a Maiden, it was impossible to refuse, so Ana ended up becoming their attending knight just like that.

Incidentally, the reason Infel hated male knights so much was because she felt there was a danger Nenesha might end up being seduced, but of course no one had known, nor even realized this.

For that reason, Ana always acted together with the two Maidens, or else had to know what the two of them were doing at any given time.

“You worry too much. First of all, no one is going to bother doing anything to us, given how excited everyone is for Metafalica tomorrow.”

There was nobody who would try to oppose the Grand Bell these days to begin with, nor even anyone who had a negative opinion of Metafalica. Since the Maidens were great beings who were the closest to the Goddess, and could create a paradise in this world.

Nevertheless, Ana could not remain silent.

“Even if that is true, I would surely be held responsible if something unexpected happened, right?”

Given the reason why she had taken up this responsibility, it was clear that if there were any problems, people would immediately call for her dismissal. She could not leave them to do as they pleased, since her livelihood depended on it.

“I’m sorry Ana. I’ll be careful from now on, so forgive me.” Nenesha gave an honest apology, then shifted her gaze to Infel.

“Wh—what?”

“Infel, you have to apologize too.”

“Wh—what for! I haven’t...”

“You were the one who appointed Ana, right? So, shouldn’t you listen to what she’s saying?”

It was impossible to talk back to Nenesha’s gentle reasoning.

So despite her grumbling and complaining-

“... Sorry. I’ll be careful from now on.”



She spoke with a low voice that was practically a murmur, but still apologized.

“... Well, I am relieved that both of you are safe. Though really, please let it be just this one time.”

Seeing the two of them reflect on it cheered Ana up.

“By the way, what did the two of you end up doing here?”

“I was taking an afternoon nap. Since I haven’t been getting enough sleep recently.”

“Ah ... I understand. I have been having the same problem.”

Now that she mentioned it, there were faint circles under Ana’s eyes too. It seemed she was the same as Infel.

“Although the Holy Maidens taking a nap in such a place is rather...”

“It was only Infel taking a nap. I’ve been sleeping soundly every night, so I’m fine.”

It seemed Nenesha wasn’t bothered much by the uproar outside. The two of them were a bit envious.

... Well, it would be tough on her if she didn’t sleep when she could.

If Nenesha secluded herself in Grand Bell Hall like Infel, she could sleep whenever she got tired, but she actively went out on official business, so she couldn’t do that. It might cause a fuss if she was in bad health en route, so Nenesha would always at least take care of her health, more so than the average person. For this reason, she wasn’t really bothered by the amount of noise, and could fall asleep in no time.

“Then why are you here, Lady Nenesha?”

“I was also looking for Infel. There’s something I kinda wanted to ask...”

“So you didn’t just come to chat. Is there something on your mind?”

“Y—Yeah, well...”

Nenesha glanced over at Ana sitting next to her.

“Ah, sorry. Is it perhaps a secret?”

Ana quickly tried to get up, but-

“No, that’s not it. It’s just... I didn’t want to trouble you, so don’t worry about it.”

“F—for some reason I’m really anxious though...”

“So, what is it you wanted to ask me?”

Nenesha nodded and lowered her voice a little.

“...It’s about after Metafalica, but you’re going to quit being a Maiden, aren’t you Infel?”

She said in a voice only the two of them could hear. No one was nearby, but even so, given the subject matter, it wasn’t something she could say very loudly.

“Ah.” Infel didn’t seem to care, but the same couldn’t be said for Ana.

“P—please, w-wait just a second! Wouldn’t I be fired?! I’ll end up being ousted from the Grand Bell Hall!”

She had suddenly become the Maidens’ attending knight even though she was a low-ranking knight who only got to do things like chores. A person who had once assumed the well-respected position of the Maidens’ attending knight couldn’t be put to use doing chores, but since she didn’t have any other use, she’d surely be discharged.

...How long could she live with her family on severance pay?

“Ahh, calm down already, Ana! That has yet to be decided.”

“That’s right. Besides, won’t a peaceful world will be created if Metafalica is a success? If so, a position like the Maiden won’t be important anymore, so it will no longer matter if there even is one or not.”

Currently, the Maidens reigned as the individuals who were absolutely necessary to Sing Metafalica, but if they made

Metafalica a success, they would soon become nothing more than mere figureheads.

“If the Maiden is a mere symbol, it doesn’t matter whether there even is one or not, so it won’t make much of a difference to the world who the Maiden is. That’s why it doesn’t really matter whether I continue to be a Maiden.”

“... But I don’t want Holy Maidens who are not Lady Nenesha and Lady Infel.”

“But hey, there won’t be any need for you to continue being a knight either. If I remember correctly, you’re from the Rim, right?”

Ana was someone who had come from the Rim to take the enlistment exam to become a knight of the Maiden Chamber Imperial Guard. There was one sole reason why she had specifically chosen to become a knight – the pay.

“Well, I have a large family. So if I joined the Knights, we wouldn’t worry about having food to eat. I am poor.” she said with an embarrassed laugh.

“But hey, Ana. That’s also something that will change when Metafalica succeeds. If we make a good land, crops will grow, and we’ll have plenty of water too. The Rim and Pastalia will become things of the past, and everyone will live together in one place. If that happens, even if you’re not a knight, and live a normal life, I think there will be more than enough alternatives for you to choose from.”

If the world became peaceful, the number of knights would doubtlessly be reduced compared to now. If that happened, they surely would be able to make a good living on jobs other than being a knight.

“Hey, Ana. Isn’t there anything you want to do other than be a knight?”

“Other than be a knight? Yeah, well...”

Hmmmm. Ana puzzled over the question, but nothing immediately came to mind. She couldn't even think of anything in particular that interested her in the first place.

"...No way, there's seriously nothing?"

"A—ahahaha... well, changing jobs is a pain, so I am fine as is."

"That's the reason why you're our knight?"

"Er, was it not Lady Infel who gave me the job in the first place? Well, overall I am quite enjoying it, so I would be satisfied if I could live the relaxed life of a knight in a peaceful world."

She gave a cheerful laugh.

"I see... I would have looked forward to that if I had to keep being the Maiden."

"Or rather, Nenesha, haven't you wanted to quit being the Maiden for a while now? Did something bad happen?"

"If someone did something bad to you, I'll punish them, okay?"

With that, she drew the sword at her side and showed off a few practice swings. Even though she was low ranking, she was part of the Knights, so she could easily take down the average delinquent by herself.

Nenesha quickly stopped the two of them.

"No, that's not it. I just... don't really like being referred to as the Holy Maiden."

"Why not? Lady Nenesha, everyone..."

"Like that" she said, interrupting Ana.

"I don't like being called Lady Nenesha. It's not really all that nice being revered by everyone, and always being called "Lady", you know?"

She held the position of Maiden, so she couldn't have a casual conversation with anyone other than Infel. As for Ana, the three of them talked together as friends like this, but she

spoke respectfully and called them "Lady" due to the difference in their positions, so it was a little bit isolating.

"Well then, Lady Nenesha, what do you want to do if you resign as the Maiden?"

"Hehe... actually, I've already been thinking about it."

Nenesha happily began telling them.

"I think I'll build my house on the continent we create. A place with a lovely view sure would be nice. I'd like to live a quiet, leisurely life there. I'll also find a job of course."

Nenesha wanted to abandon her current life as the Maiden and live a simple, but freer life. That was her wish.

"I also want to do something like work in the fields. I've seen people growing Kururuku before, and it seemed really enjoyable."

"L—lady Nenesha working in the fields..."

Ana felt dizzy imagining the world-renowned Holy Maiden doing such work.

"You cannot do something like that! Such physical labor is not befitting of a Holy Maiden!"

"I'm talking about after I've resigned as the Maiden. And although it's not physical labor, the job of a Maiden is also quite difficult you know?"

"That's right. Sometimes you have to walk around all day visiting places, and other times you'll be in meetings all day preparing for a speech or something. It's mentally exhausting."

"Though I feel like that has nothing to do with you, Lady Infel..."

"I perfected the imperfect Metafalica theory, did I not? You may even think that was easily done, but it was difficult you know? There were even times where I would run into a problem and turn it over in my mind, not getting sleep for days... so the others would completely give up."

Infel would then solve it, and the others around her would once again regain their motivation. Infel hated people who gave up on problems and didn't try to solve them themselves.

"Is that so. Isn't that because there's no way someone else would know something Lady Infel does not? Right?"

"It's as Ana says. You are one of the greatest geniuses in the world. . . No, I think you are the greatest.

So if you don't know something Infel, it's only natural that the others would give up."

"I—is that so...?"

"It is. So don't get too angry about it."

Nenesha said to her, and her anger back then seemed pointless.

It was as she said, Infel was special, so it was only natural. If she didn't know something, there was no way anyone else would. There was no doubt about it, especially since Nenesha, who knew Infel extremely well, had said so.

"Right. . . W-well, it's not like I was even particularly angry."

Nenesha knew very well how dishonest she could be too.

"Well then, if Lady Nenesha is going to quit being the Maiden if Metafalica succeeds, will Lady Infel also quit?"

Ana asked with an apprehensive look on her face. Infel shook her head.

"No way, I could never part with such a wonderful job."

"A job. . . It is more or less a sacred position, so I am not sure I would really refer to it in such terms. . ."

"It doesn't matter. Anyway, I don't plan on resigning as Maiden."

"I never knew you cherished your position as Maiden so much Infel."

Infel neither liked nor disliked the position of Maiden. However, they knew how much of a pain she thought it was to have to do things like make public appearances.

That's why they couldn't hide their surprise at Infel so strongly insisting on being the Maiden.

"After all, if I remain the Maiden, the cost of all the research I want to do will be completely covered by the Grand Bell. And when we've made Metafalica a success, whatever influence we gain from that won't fade, so I bet large scale experiments will be allowed. Above all, even after Metafalica is over, I won't have to stand before public nearly as much as I do now. If that's the case, I'll be able to do what I love practically all day. It'll be the best!"

She had only been thinking about the extent to which she could use her position as Maiden to advance her research. But if they could make Metafalica a success, that amount of self-indulgence might be allowed.

... Since no matter what, they were going to create a world where all the people of Metafalss could live in peace.

Besides, unlike Nenesha, Infel was not a Maiden by birth. She was an orphan found in the Slums by Grammul, a genius scientist who was a part of the Grand Bell at the time. After that, Grammul became aware of Infel's astounding intelligence, and filled her head with knowledge.

Therefore, it wasn't like Infel particularly wanted the position of Maiden, she just ended up getting it. That's why it was of no other worth to her.

"Sorry Nenesha. A Maiden like me must seem like the worst to someone who's part of the Maiden lineage such as yourself, right?"

It had seemed like something Nenesha would think poorly of, but she was smiling at her.

“Not at all. I had been thinking that the Maiden is a tough position that just takes away your freedom. That’s why I think it’s amazing that on the contrary, you’re able to think of it as something you can take advantage of and use for your own sake.”

“Really? You’re not angry?”

“I’ll help you. So should I remain at the Grand Bell Hall too? I’ll take care of the work you have to do as Maiden, so that you can completely immerse yourself in the things that you love.”

“That’s no good. The whole point of Singing Metafalica is so that everyone can be happy, right? So you have to make your dream come true, Nenesha. Besides...”

Infel had another goal she wanted to achieve when they made Metafalica succeed.

It was perhaps the thing she most wanted to achieve. So much so that she would even be willing to abandon her research to make it come true.

“Besides, what?”

“...No, it’s nothing.”

“I am curious. Please tell us, Lady Infel.”

“Don’t worry about me, focus on yourself. You’re fine with taking it easy as a knight despite even us having things we want to do like these? You’re too halfhearted.

Take note of us, and do some reconsidering.”

“But, your plans are too extreme for me to use as a reference...”

Although Ana was happy to know that the two of them were thinking about their plans for after Metafalica.

...It was proof that both of them truly believed Metafalica would succeed.

They would probably be standing upon actual land tomorrow night. A smile escaped from her as she thought about it.



“Ah, what is it Ana? You seem really happy.”

“No, it’s nothing. More importantly, let’s head back soon. We have to prepare for the eve festival after all. We are going to have Lady Infel attend too, of course.”

“She will today. She told me earlier that she would.”

“... Well, just this once.”

Even though she thought it was a pain, she might be able to enjoy it if she was together with Nenesha.

No, Infel herself had no real intention of enjoying the eve festival.

But that was fine, as long as Nenesha enjoyed it.

Because if Infel saw Nenesha enjoying herself, then she too would be happy.

“... I’m looking forward to it.”

The two of them nodded in agreement with Infel.

## Chapter 5

# Freliia and Shun

Come to think of it, a long time had passed since those days.

Infel was thinking to herself as she overlooked the world that had remained unchanged despite 400 years having gone by since then.

...If it had already been 400 whole years, some other alternative should have been implemented by now, even if it wasn't Metafalica.

It was clear before her eyes that the people hadn't realized anything by simply wanting change and wanting to be happy.

Cloche, who was desperately trying to implement Metafalica.

The Sacred Army, who had desperately tried to implement Hibernation.

She felt a sense of futility, as no one who had been desperate to create a peaceful world like them had appeared within these 400 years.

... What was the point in helping those who had no intention of doing anything themselves?

Ordinary people didn't have the power nor the capacity, so they couldn't do anything no matter how hard they tried. She knew that, but in the end, she couldn't help but think as much.

Did they truly wish to create a paradise?

They were a bunch of people who selfishly left it up to others, and didn't really care what happened to them all, they merely wanted to party, did they not?

Anger welled up inside of her as she wondered if she had perfected Metafalica for such people.

"... They don't want a paradise. If they were truly wishing for a happy world, back then we would have...!"

"Infel, I'm baaack !"

Infel didn't turn around at the voice calling to her from behind.

She took slow, deep breaths and calmed herself down, so it wouldn't be obvious that she had been seething with anger.

As she did, she sensed the person who had called to her just now approaching.

But the footsteps weren't human, they were those of something with claws, like a dog. The clicking of the claws drew closer with each step.

... She couldn't believe it.

She turned around in disbelief, and saw a girl who seemed to be having fun as she rode on top of a large dog.

"I'm back, Infel. Sorry for making you watch over the place."

The girl had four wings on her back. They flapped as she waved her hand at Infel.

"..."

Infel held her head as she was struck by a sudden headache. The dog carrying the girl came to a stop in front of her.

“Are you okay, Infel? You don’t seem to be feeling well at all...”

“... Can’t you be a little more Goddess-like?”

She tilted her head, not understanding what Infel meant.

Her name was Frelia, Goddess of this world. To be more accurate, she was a Reyvateil Origin who served as the Administrator of the Second Tower of Ar Tonelico – the center of the world. Her outward appearance was that of a girl in her teens, but she had been alive for over 700 years.

“And you too. Walking around carrying a person on your back like that. What, so you really are a dog?”

The dog carrying Frelia growled in response.

“... It’s because Frelia asked. It’s not like I could have refused.”

And spoke.

“Shunny, did you by any chance not want to carry me?”

Frelia hurriedly tried to get off him, but the dog called Shun surrounded her with his big long ears. Or were they feelers, it wasn’t clear. Whatever they were, he could freely move them around.

“No, that’s not true. I don’t mind if you ride me for a little while longer.”

He said, and brushed Frelia’s head with the ends of his ear-feelers. Frelia, riding on his back, didn’t realize it, but there was a huge smile on Shun’s face.



But even Infel, who was standing in front of him, didn't realize it was a smile, as his face was completely that of a dog's.

This dog, Shun, was the one being Frelia could call a dear friend.

He was originally a human named Enja, but in order to become Frelia's guardian and protect her for eternity, he had abandoned his physical body, and had been reborn as the digital life form he was now.

“Whatever. Anyway, I never thought you would go out while leaving me here alone. What did you plan on doing if I did something while you weren’t watching?”

Frelia was one of the people who had fought Infel here.

Although they had won the battle to stop Infel from carrying out Sublimation, as long as she was still around, there was still the possibility that she would do something. Nevertheless, they had gone out, merely telling her to “please look after the place”.

...Although she had felt that she was secretly being watched.

But when she gazed at Metafalss, she really was disgusted at the sight of the people tottering around the Rim and Pastalia.

“Since I’m opposed to Metafalica, right? Doesn’t it seem insane to go out while leaving someone like me behind?”

“I know you won’t do something like that, Infel. The fact that you aren’t doing anything proves it.”

Despite Infel saying such things even now, it was true that they didn’t really hold any meaning. Even though Infel herself was saying how dangerous it was for her to be left alone, in the end, she had merely been getting lost in thought and remembering the past as she gazed at the world below.

“Besides, you’re one of the people looking forward to Metafalica too, Infel.”

“Wh—why should I be looking forward to it! You guys are the ones who are stupidly looking forward to it, right?”

“But Infel...”

“But nothing! Don’t lump me together with those festive idiots on the surface!”

Infel said, pointing to the planet below.

“They’re in such high spirits as if it’s already succeeded, yet it hasn’t even been Sung yet.”

“They know how to properly create Metafalica now, so of course. This time it’s not just Luca. Cloche will also be Singing together with her, as well as all the IPDs...”

“And they think it’s going to succeed because of that, how laughable. They are genuinely believing in the success of something that didn’t succeed in the past, even when everything was perfect.”

“Everyone believes in it. Believes in the success of Metafalica.”

“But it will end in betrayal! Hurray for Metafalica, do your best Holy Maidens, please create a happy world. They say such things, yet what do you think will happen when Metafalica is Sung? They don’t like the Holy Maiden’s heart, so they don’t need a peaceful world, but then they blame the Holy Maiden because there’s no peaceful world, and act as if they had no part on it. The people are so selfish!”

Infel remembered the encouragement she had been given by the people in the past. Just remembering those words was enough to make her feel sick.

Her reasons for making a peaceful world were for the happiness of herself and those important to her, and for the future of Metafalss.

And yet they had betrayed her.

She had Sung Metafalica and tried to weave the continent, but they had still betrayed her. And they had blamed her for everything when the resulting war against the Goddess was won.

“So it will never succeed... There is no way it could possibly succeed.”

“But...”

Frelia began to speak, but stopped.

She had thought about why Infel was so strongly insisting that Metafalica wouldn't succeed, and had finally found an answer.

"... That's right. It will be awful if they succeed."

Frelia's opinion had suddenly become the same as her own. Infel frowned.

"What are you talking about. You've lost your nerve now, despite defeating me and trying to Sing Metafalica? Then are you saying that battle was pointless?"

"I want Metafalica to be Sung. After all, if things are left as is, this world will fall into the Sea of Death, and everyone will die."

"If you realize that, then don't say such fainthearted things... Especially in front of me."

It wasn't a good feeling to see someone who had been trying to realize Metafalica, and had even fought and won against her to do so, become fainthearted about it to her face.

"But when they Sing Metafalica..."

"Well then, even if I were to do something, you'd have no complaints, right? Sublimation may be impossible, but there are things I could do."

"D—don't!"

"Then don't say such things, and have some confidence. Don't make me believe you've become a half-hearted person."

She had no intention of supporting them, but doing things halfheartedly was even worse.

"Infel... are you sure about this?"

Something was still bothering Frelia.

Infel felt like shouting at Frelia to cut it out. But why was Frelia so insistent on asking her this? Thinking about it, she finally found an answer, and wasn't able to just shout and tell her off.

"... What is it now?"



She answered like normal, as if she didn't realize anything.

"If Metafalica is successful, Infel Phira will be transmigrated into the consciousness of the land."

"I know. Wasn't I the one that designed it!? I don't need you to tell me. I understand it already!"

She knew it better than anyone else, and was ready for it. So she wanted to end this conversation as soon as possible.

"And once it gets transmigrated into the consciousness of the land, its Memory will be defragmented."

"I said I know! Because I was the one who designed it!"  
... You want to tell me that I'll disappear, don't you?

"Infel... Aren't you going to disappear...?"

Infel, the first Maiden of Mio from 400 years ago, could exist even now because she had abandoned her human body. She was able to exist as she was 400 years ago precisely because she had abandoned her physical body and had transferred her soul to Infel Phira.

"... I know... Didn't I just say that I designed it...?"

If Metafalica succeeded, her soul inside Infel Phira would end up being erased too. She had been prepared for it since even before she had switched to a purely spiritual form.

"... I don't need... you to tell me that... I understand..."

"Infel..."

At this rate, there was a possibility that she would end up disappearing. But Infel still had no intention of stopping Cloche and the others now.

She believed that they should Sing if they so wanted to.

"Frelia, do you really think Metafalica will succeed?"

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"Everything necessary for Metafalica to succeed is present this time. All requirements have been met. So I'll ask once again, do you think it will succeed?"

She was a bit hesitant, considering it was Infel she was talking to, but she nodded in response.

“Well, it’s certainly no wonder that you would think so.”

“Infel, you don’t think it will succeed?”

“That’s how it turned out for me. Even though the preparations had been flawless, everyone rejected Metafalica because they didn’t like my heart. Immediately after Singing, there will be a flood of people who want to fall into the Sea of Death and die along with the continent because they will have been disillusioned by the Holy Maiden’s heart. But wouldn’t it be fine if they made such a choice?

Everyone would surely fall into the Sea of Death with a smile on their face.”

What a joyous sight! Infel laughed as if she was enjoying herself.

Would they accept the Maiden’s heart? Would they fall into the Sea of Death? It was up to the people. No matter what the outcome may be, it was what the people wanted, so they would surely take joy in falling into the Sea of Death.

But Frelia was sad to see Infel like this.

Infel, the very person who had completed the Song Magic Metafalica and had desperately tried to create a peaceful world, was now thinking about the opposite. And laughing at the thought.

She had ended up like this merely because she had tried to create a peaceful world.

Yet the people were now going to Sing the Metafalica she had perfected and try to obtain their ideal land, despite having betrayed her.

“... I’m sorry Infel. What we’re doing is very selfish.”

A willingness to do anything if it was in the name of peace. She didn’t want to think like that.

But even so, Metafalica absolutely had to be Sung. She wanted to create a paradise upon actual, organic land no matter what.

Therefore, Frelia couldn't do anything but apologize.

Apologize on behalf of the people, as this world's Goddess.

But even so, it felt worthless to Infel.

"There's no real need to apologize. It's not like it's of any use even if you do."

Apologizing couldn't change the past, so it couldn't make her forgive them either.

"No matter how you look at it, it's impossible. . . There are so few people like Cloche, who genuinely wish for a peaceful world and would give up their lives for its sake."

Metafalica would not succeed.

She didn't care what happened to the people, but her and Nenesha's dream would end up as nothing more than a fairy-tale. That was unbearably sad.

A part of her still believed it might be attainable if it was Cloche, but the people remained an obstacle, so even then, it seemed impossible.

No matter how hard Cloche tried, it was meaningless.

"... Infel, I have a single favor I'd like to ask."

Shun said to Infel, after having remained silent all this time.

"Oh, it's unusual for you to ask for a favor. What is it?"

"If you care even a little about Cloche, then couldn't you try and help her out?"

Infel couldn't believe her ears. Such an unexpected request from an unexpected source.

Shun had told her to help Cloche.

"Help her you say. . . Hmph, so in other words, I should think of a way to prevent her from Singing Metafalica so she doesn't have to experience the pain of betrayal by the people?"

“Infel... do you hate Cloche... the same way you hate the people who betrayed you and Nenesha?”

“... Of course not. That girl is different.”

Cloche was a girl who was genuinely trying to create the world that she and Nenesha had sought, and was giving it her all. There was no way she could hate her.

“Then please. I want you to help Cloche. For her sake.”

“... What are you saying I should do? I have no idea what you mean.”

“Nothing much, really. I just want you to encourage her.”

Infel looked disgusted at what he just said.

Encouraging her, in other words, meant telling her things like “keep at it” or “you can do it”.

She wouldn’t have failed if Metafalica’s outcome could have been changed by a single word of encouragement.

Shun immediately sensed from her expression that Infel saw no real need to encourage Cloche.

“Infel, you may think it’s pointless, but that’s not the case for Cloche.”

“Is that so? Even though I have a feeling it would just end up putting extra pressure on her instead?”

Shun shook his head.

“Cloche is afraid of having the inside of her heart seen. Since even you, the one who perfected the Metafalica theory, was betrayed by the people when your heart was seen. Cloche considers you the only person who devoted her life to Metafalica even more so than herself.”

... Well, that was only natural. Agreeing with him, Infel silently listened to Shun’s words.

“It’s true that you failed. But to Cloche, you are also a distinguished person who perfected the Metafalica theory and

Sang Metafalica for the first time. That's why your encouragement can save her. I believe that if Infel, the designer herself, acknowledges her, she won't feel uneasy anymore."

Infel was somehow able to understand what Shun was trying to say, but she wasn't convinced.

"But I opposed Metafalica and fought against you guys. I don't think the words of someone like me will be of much encouragement to her."

"...I don't think that's true, Infel." Frelia said from atop Shun's back.

"Even though it was only for a short while, you stayed in Cloche's Cosmosphere, right Infel? So you're aware of how she's genuinely trying with all her heart to implement Metafalica, aren't you?"

Just as Frelia had guessed, Infel had been watching Cloche in the Cosmosphere all this time.

There had been plenty of uneasiness and other emotions of course, but she had seen for herself just how desperate Cloche was for Metafalica.

"You may not realize it, but along with being someone who Cloche respects, you're also someone who supports her, Infel. Since you were always watching over her in the Cosmosphere."

"I—it's not like I was really watching over her..."

"But you pretended to be her Mind Guardian and guided Croix through her Cosmosphere since you wanted to protect her, even just a little, right?"

"I entered Cloche's Cosmosphere because I thought I may be able to reunite with Nenesha..."

"That may have been your goal from the start, but it wasn't the only reason you ended up staying there, right?"

What Frelia was saying wasn't wrong.

Infel had slowly but surely felt that she wanted to protect Cloche, and had even helped her out when she really didn't have to on more than one occasion.

"The words of someone who understands you can hold a lot of power... I know because I've experienced it myself."

Frelia gently stroked Shun's back as she spoke.

"Several years before Grathnode Inferia happened, I used to go to school. Although it really wasn't for all that long."

Grathnode Inferia was the disaster in which the surface of the planet had been lost and covered by the Sea of Death.

It had happened around 700 years ago. In other words, it had happened 300 years before the first Metafalica would be Sung. Infel was more surprised by the fact that the Goddess of this world had once attended school than by how old the story she was telling was.

"At first, I was picked on by everyone. Every day was really rough."

Infel was even further surprised that the Goddess had been picked on in school.

Was Shun aware of this? His expression was hard to read.

"But Enja... my dear Shunny protected me."

...I don't want to hear about how much you love him.

Frelia continued her story, ignoring, or else not realizing, how annoyed Infel was.

"And after that, Shunny was always there for me, and continued to protect me, right?"

"...Although I wasn't that strong."

Shun remembered fighting and getting beaten up by a boy who had been one of his classmates at school. Shun had been alive for so long that he couldn't even remember his face anymore, but the memory made him happy.

Since he had fought to protect Frelia, and was able to become friends with her because of it. It was a precious memory to him.

"I continued to be protected by Shunny even further after that. Not just from the bullies. Shunny always encouraged me whenever I was feeling down or suffering all alone."

"Okay, get to the point already! Having to listen to you talk about how much you love him is making my back crawl!"

"Shunny's words had power because he was the one person who understood me, and I could always rely on him. That's why I was really cheered up just by him telling me to keep at it... so it will surely be the same for Cloche as it was for me."

Right? Frelia asked Shun if he agreed.

"I see... I was someone who could protect you."

"Yes, of course. I was always at ease and had confidence because Shunny was there. If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be here as I am today."

"That's why..." Frelia looked at Infel.

"You really will be able to encourage Cloche, Infel." she said, full of confidence.

Could she really help Cloche? Could someone like her, who had abandoned her body for a purely spiritual form, still help Cloche?

Infel even hoped that she could for a second, but shook the thought from her mind.

"...Regardless, it isn't going to succeed. Since they're clearly going to be betrayed and fail no matter how hard they try."

"But don't you think they won't be betrayed if you know that Cloche, having been acknowledged by you, is Singing without a shred of uneasiness? Besides, you want them to succeed too, right Infel? So..."

"Shut up! It's of no concern to me!"

Metafalica was the paradise she had pictured together with Nenesha, there was no way she didn't want to see it.

But Infel and Nenesha had been desperate for it too. They had staked their lives on Metafalica, and had Sung to try and create it. And as a result, they had been betrayed by the people, who had done nothing at all, and it had ended in failure.

That in mind, even if her encouragement alone could motivate Cloche, if she was just going to end up being betrayed, doing nothing would lessen the harm done to her.

She wanted to see the world she had pictured together with Nenesha, but she wouldn't be able to.

So she wanted to lessen the pain Cloche would experience, if only a little, since Cloche had devoted her life to that same empty dream.

So there was no way she could do something like encourage her.

"There's no way I'll help. Technically speaking, I'm already dead. If you think it can't be done without relying on a dead person, then just like last time..."

...Let's do our best, Infel.

She felt like she had heard Nenesha's voice.

This always happened. Whenever she would say those words, she would always remember the things Nenesha had said, as well as her smiling face.

And after that, she would be seized by a gripping pain in her chest.

Infel spoke, spitting out the words.

"... It's going to fail, I couldn't stand to see it succeed!"

A pain shot through her chest.



## **Chapter 6**

# **The Errand-Boy That Was Once a Prince**

There is a general store called the Nyanya Shop.

The so-called General Store Station was built in the same location where the shop stood, a strip of land only 3 stons (approx. 9 meters) wide. It had been constructed so that the track ran directly in front of the shop. In other words, the shop is in the best location possible, as you would be greeted by it as soon as you took a few steps off the train.

But the general store's exterior made it look like a deserted house.

On top of the store itself being old, part of its roof was peeling off and the lettering on its sign had begun to fade slightly, so even if they knew it was a proper store and not a deserted house, a newcomer would likely hesitate.

A rare "closed" sign was hanging on the storefront of the General Store. This was so that luggage could be organized in preparation for its move to the Metafalica continent, which would likely be soon.

But the general store was currently managed by Sasha, a girl who was only ten years old.

It was practically impossible for a girl like her to do all the work required for moving alone.

But there were three other people inside the general store today besides the girl who was its shopkeeper.

“Uh-Uuuuhn!”

Sasha lifted a box as tall as she was, her face flushed.

She had finished packing it, so she was trying to move it to the corner of the shop where the other boxes she had finished packing earlier were.

But the box had been packed to the brim, and was nearly twice as heavy as Sasha. She was used to carrying heavy things since she regularly purchased goods, but it was still unreasonable.

Realizing what Sasha was doing, a tall man who had been cleaning the floors of the shop with a rag quickly rushed over to her.

“Sasha, don’t strain yourself. Didn’t I tell you that I would move it if you left it there?”

“Ah, M—Mr. Targana.”

The young man called Targana took the box from Sasha’s hands, and carried it over to the corner of the shop.

“I—I’m sorry. I’m not very strong...”

“You needn’t worry about it. I’m here to help you.”

Targana used to be the successor to Pastalia’s Papal Family, so in short, he was formerly a prince. He had also formerly been a leader of the Sacred Army, or rather he had been a symbol of sorts, but now that the Sacred Army had dissolved, he served as a knight under the direct control of Grand Bell Hall’s Maidens.

It may sound like a good position, but in truth, it was probably closer to say that he was endlessly pushed around

by the two Maidens, a victim of their whims, the man who toiled away behind them.

As proof, the task he had been assigned to this time was to help the general store's shopkeeper Sasha.

Cloche had actually planned on making Croix go and help, but unfortunately, he had some other business to take care of with Leglius, so he couldn't. Cloche's work had been piling up, so there was no way she could go herself.

Although it would be inconvenient if there wasn't a man to help out with physical labor. She had been worrying about what to do, when Targana happened to pass by.

Realizing something was wrong with Cloche, he had asked why, then offered to go help in place of Croix.

He knew Sasha was an unsung hero, not to mention an important partner to the Maiden Cloche. That's why he figured that even if she didn't have as much faith on him as she did for Croix, he would do the best he could to respond to her requests.

Sure enough, Cloche had looked relieved as she assigned Targana the task of going to help Sasha.

She had explained that Sasha was-

"A girl whose grandma is in the hospital, who manages the store all by herself. She's extremely cute, an extremely good kid, an extremely hard worker, and an extremely reliable girl, so I think you'll be surprised when you meet her."

...Though frankly, he had thought her barrage of "extremelys" was just her own partiality.

However, now that he had been helping Sasha out, he knew quite well that what Cloche had been saying wasn't wrong.

She was polite despite being so young, and it was admirable seeing her work so hard at the shop.

Targana had secretly regretted it when he first saw her, but now he had been helping her out all he could.

...Although she was young, there was no doubt that she was an unsung hero.

Targana had been thinking that as he worked, but then he looked over at the two girls who were helping organize luggage.

“Wow, it’s a duck! To think there’d be this many rubber duckies!”

“It’s amazing! It would be a dream to have this many ducks floating in the bath!”

Targana saw them clamoring about the stock of toy ducks they had discovered, and sighed.

Much like Sasha, the two of them also provided support from behind the scenes. One ran a weapons shop, and the other was the poster girl for a restaurant.

The name of the girl who ran the weapons shop was Cynthia. She provided support in the form of weapons and items that could be used in battle, and probably had the most helpful service of them all.

The restaurant poster girl was called Skycat. It was the name she used at work, not her real name, but Targana didn’t know her real name. Although she was a restaurant poster girl, she was a scary girl who for some reason made weapons out of food, and weapons that were food in name only.

... Well, but hadn’t she been saying that Lady Luca and Jakuri played a major part in making that food?

In other words, the target recipes may have been something normal, and their cooking was just destructive, but that was also something Targana didn’t know, and he thought he may be happier that way too.

“Hey, you two over there. How about you stop playing around so much, and get your hands moving?”

The two of them looked up from the ducks.

“Oh, but isn’t it only natural to be captivated by ducks?”

“No it’s not, Skycat. A distinguished person would be captivated by not a duck, but a swan toy.”

“That’s your reasoning?! It’s bad manners to bring toys other than a duck into the bath!”

Cynthia and Skycat were a bit surprised that even Targana might have bath toys. Though it was somehow hard to imagine him poking and watching ducks in a tub.

“Anyway, leave the ducks behind. Both of you have someone depending on you to help out, right?”

With that, the two of them suddenly remembered.

This is what had happened yesterday. Cynthia had been tending the weapons shop while singing a love song for Croix to herself, when he had come in by himself and said-

“I want to help Sasha move her shop, but I can’t ditch my work as a knight no matter what. I’m sorry, but could you go and help instead?”

The person she loved was depending on her, so there was no way she could have refused.

“Leave it to me, Coo! I’ll even fix the broken furniture and stuff while I’m at it!” She had replied, a huge smile on her face.

This is what had happened this morning. Before the restaurant opened and Skycat went to work, Luca had been standing there and had said-

“Sasha is preparing to move at her store today. The truth is, I want to go and help out too, but I have my job as the Maiden, so it’s impossible for me to go... I wish I had the time, but I was wondering if I could have you could go in my place?”

The person she loved was depending on her, so there was no way she could have refused.

“Leave it to me, Milady! I’ll even bring refreshments for lunch while I’m at it!” She had replied, rubbing her cheek up against Luca’s.

Having remembered their promises, the two of them closed the box of ducks, and got up.

“Not good, not good, we ended up being charmed by the cuteness of the ducks.”

“That’s right. We don’t have time to be charmed by mere ducks, since this was a request from the people we love.”

Targana was relieved to see the two of them finally get back to work.

It wasn’t all that big of a store, but it was still enough to be too much for just Targana and Sasha alone.

Besides, it wasn’t just the building itself that was falling apart. The store’s shelves and the furniture she used every day were worn out too, so there were quite a lot of things that were impossible to pack and move without repairing first.

Unfortunately, Targana was a novice when it came to repairing things, so it wouldn’t get done unless Cynthia kept working.

... Even if he told Sasha he’d give her a new set of furniture, she’d probably refuse.

Even so, Targana swore to himself that he’d bring her something in celebration when she reopened business on the Metafalica continent. As he returned to wiping the floors, Sasha saw him and rushed over in a hurry.

“D—don’t do that Mr. Targana! I’ll do that kind of work!”

“No, I’m used to it. I used to do a lot of floor cleaning with Croix at the dojo we went to when we were kids.”

“But it would be blasphemy to allow a prince to do something like that...”

Upon hearing Sasha’s comment, Cynthia and Skycat remembered his position.

“Oh, His Highness Targana is a prince, isn’t he. I didn’t have any interest in the Sacred Army or whatever, so I had completely forgotten about the prince.”

“And I have no interest in men other than Co.”

“... Well, you don’t have to worry about me being a prince now. I’ve already decided to serve the Maidens. There’s no need to address me so formally. Treat me the same way you treat Croix.” Targana said, and once again began cleaning the floors.

He had said he wasn’t anymore, but still, he was a man who had led the life of a prince. He had a charismatic aura to him, even when cleaning floors with a rag.

“Wow, how cool!” Sasha’s eyes were sparkling as Skycat watched him carefully next to her.

“Wait, Targana! Your technique is all wrong!”

“Wha-!”

Targana was surprised by Skycat addressing him so casually, when she had just referred to him as “His Highness” a mere ten seconds ago.

... He had asked to be treated like Croix, but was it always like this for him?

That in mind, he couldn’t raise any objections, but he had no idea that they addressed Croix at least a little more respectfully.

Skycat snatched the rag out of Targana’s hand and wiped the floor vigorously, demonstrating how to do it.

“It won’t get clean if you don’t put your back into it like this. And look, you have to make sure you get the corners of the room as well. That’s the kind of place where dust collects.”

“... I—I see. It seems I was careless about a lot of things since I haven’t done it in a while.”

His charismatic aura vanished in an instant.

“Wow, you can’t even clean a floor... your house must be quite dirty with work like that.”

“Ahh, I know the type. They look cool on the outside, but live in a house full of trash. Is the former prince like that too?”

“... I don’t clean all that often, but my house isn’t full of trash or anything. I’ve only gone back home to sleep, so there hasn’t even been time for trash to collect. By the way, can’t you find something a little better to call me than ‘former prince?’”

“Hm, then how about Gaa? Since it’s fine to treat you like Coo and all. Ah, but I won’t give you my love, so don’t expect it.”

He didn’t expect it of course, nor did he even want it, but he thought she’d be quiet if he nodded along for the time being, so that’s exactly what he decided to do.

Having finally been handed the rag, Targana went back to work cleaning the floor.

Now that he thought about it, it was as Cynthia said, you couldn’t help but be a little doubtful of someone like him, who was cleaning another person’s house despite not even being able to clean his own.

Especially since Targana, as part of the Sacred Army, had been using the town of Enna on the Rim as a hideout until just recently. His home was also there, so he’d have to move to Pastalia or Metafalica in the near future.

In any case, he realized he had not once been able to return home ever since he joined the Grand Bell.

... Perhaps he’d drop by later.

“Umm, Mr. Targana...”

Sasha spoke to him as he worked.

“I’m really sorry for making you do something like this. I will talk with Sis Clo, so please get back to your job.”

“No, this too was a direct order from the Maiden. I appreciate the thought, but I can’t do that.”

“But don’t you have more important work to do than cleaning?”

Metafalica was now close at hand, so it certainly was very busy within the Grand Bell Hall.



Especially for someone in Targana's position. In addition to integrating former Sacred Army knights into the Grand Bell Knights, which they were still unaccustomed to, he had official duties to attend to.

Cloche had also been worried when he had volunteered for the job.

Targana had figured as much, and had lied, saying he would be free until evening since he had taken care of some of his official duties.

... Since finding a way to ease the Maiden's troubles was also part of his duty. Although he got a slight headache remembering the mountain of official business waiting for him when he returned.

"There is something, isn't there? If there is, you should hurry up and..."

"... No, it's nothing to be concerned about. I just tend to worry."

"But..."

"It was a Maiden's order, so regardless of what it may be, it's my duty as a knight to follow it. Besides, going back without helping a kid like you would be unchivalrous."

Targana personally wanted to help her out anyways, but there was no telling what would happen if Cloche were to know that he went back without doing anything just because Sasha had told him to.

He was staying here for Sasha's sake, as well as his own.

And since Targana kept insisting, she left it at that.

"Thank you... in that case, I'll presume on your kindness."

"Ahh, I don't mind. Don't hesitate to ask if you need anything." Targana said, and patted Sasha's head.

Targana didn't usually interact with kids, so it was the first time he had done such a thing.

So he just patted her head without much thought.

Sasha seemed a little embarrassed by it, but she was smiling happily.

Seeing this, Targana felt a strange feeling inside himself. ...How cute.

He genuinely thought so.

Seeing Sasha happy had brought forth fatherly feelings from inside of him. Incidentally, Cloche had come to care about Sasha for the same reason, so the same thing had ended up happening to them both.

“Eheheh...”

“...”

Targana continued to pat Sasha’s head, but realized he didn’t know when to stop.

Should he continue as long as she was happy? If so, he felt like he would have to continue for a while longer, but then they wouldn’t make any progress in their work. Though what if he stopped while she was still happy? If she were to look sad because of that, he’d feel bad all day.

He was unusually troubled by it, but thought a little longer might be good, so he decided to continue patting her. Sasha was happy, and he didn’t feel bad either.

But Targana realized the other two girls were staring at them.

“Hey, hey Skycat. Look at Gaa.”

“Heheh, he’s like a big brother. What a heartwarming sight.”

“No, what if he just likes little children?”

“Ew, gross!”

“Skycat, how out of character!”

“Oh, not good, not good.”

As a waitress poster girl, the ever popular Skycat had to be everyone’s idol – anytime, anyplace. For that reason, she

rarely showed her true personality, even when she was off duty, but it occasionally surfaced like just now.

Skycat cleared her throat and regained form, then swayed her body.

“Ugh, it’s because Targana’s a lolicon.”

“N—no, you’ve got it all wrong!”

Targana hurriedly took his hand off Sasha’s head and denied it, but it backfired.

“Wow, wasn’t that suspiciously quick? So it’s true, Gaa...”

“You can’t judge a book by its cover, can you...”

“Calm down, you’re misunderstanding!”

“There’s no need to panic. We can keep a secret, and won’t look down on you or anything.”

“Yeah, of course. We’ll gladly guard it, as long as you don’t do anything obscene.”

“Why don’t you try listening to what people say!”

Targana had a bit of respect for Croix, who dealt with these two on a regular basis. If it was him, he surely would have stayed away so he could have as little to do with them as possible.

“Uh-ummm...”

Sasha raised her hand nervously.

“Um, may I ask you something?”

“Wh—what is it?”

“Okay. What does lolicon mean?” Targana froze.

But Cynthia and Skycat calmly said-

“It’s a form of love.”

“It’s a somewhat deep form of love.”

The two of them had replied without any hesitation. Sasha’s face turned red.

“L—love?... Um, I-I’m too young to understand that...”

She looked down in embarrassment, trying as hard as she could to hide her blushing face.

“...Nice explanation.”

Targana honestly admired the two of them for cleverly dodging the question without lying. They proudly gave the V-sign.

“Although, I don’t think you’re too young. Age doesn’t matter when it comes to love.”

“That’s right. Besides, little Sasha is already 10, right? It wouldn’t be strange if she’s already had a first love or two.”

“No, I feel like there’s only one, but... how about it, Sasha? Is there a boy on your mind?”

“Th—there’s not! Nothing like a first love!”

Sasha hurriedly denied it, blushing all the way to her ears.

She barely even had friends around the same age as her to begin with, and she hadn’t once played with them now that she was the only one running the shop. There was no way someone like Sasha, who was hard at work from morning to evening, would have something like a first love.

“Besides, even if I had someone I liked, it would be no good as I am right now. It would be rude to my partner if I didn’t first become a proper adult who has studied a lot more and who can do things like housework.”

She was more than good enough in the eyes of everyone around her who saw her running the general store all by herself, but Sasha had never thought so.

Although,

“I kind of understand how you feel, Sasha.”

“Ehhh, does it really matter, as long as you both love each other? It’s not something I worry about.”

“You know it would be just to satisfy yourself. But while it may be true that your partner thinks so, you don’t just want to take advantage of that. So you want to learn how to do at least a few more things so you can become someone who

is able to support the person you like. Is that what you're trying to say Sasha?"

Sasha nodded in response to Targana.

"I'm poor and can't even go to school. . . so I at least want a talent that I can speak proudly of to everyone."

Sasha sounded a bit lonely as she spoke, and there was but one thing Targana understood.

The source of Sasha's overly-humble nature, despite having talent far beyond her years.

Perhaps it was because she lacked self-confidence.

He had no idea when this had started, but Sasha had been studying by herself, running a store by herself, and doing any housework she needed to by herself all this time. But there hadn't been anyone around to see and praise her hard work. She had been praised whenever possible ever since she got to know Cloche, but unfortunately, she had spent far too much time alone.

Which was why she was so happy to even just be patted on the head.

. . . Well, despite the way he had patted her, she didn't mind, so there shouldn't be any problem.

"But if you understand little Sasha's feelings so well, does that mean you feel the same way, Targana?"

"That's right. . . well, it's more like I don't disagree."

"Do you have a lover or someone you like, by any chance?"

"No, I don't. It's not that I don't have any interest in love, it's just I don't have the time right now."

"Or, to be blunt, because you're not popular Gaa?"

"I don't know what your basis for if I'm popular or not is, but I get sent love letters quite often."

However, most of the people who wrote them had seemed to be trying to marry into money for when Targana would

someday seize power from the Grand Bell. As proof, the number of love letters he received had been rapidly dropping ever since he became a Grand Bell Knight.

Thinking about it made him feel a bit lonely, but even so, the fact that he was still being sent some meant that not all of those women were simply chasing after power.

It made him a bit happy, and he couldn't help but smile.

"Wow, he's proud of himself. Somehow, I don't like it. . ."

"Yeah, no kidding. People like that always end up getting into trouble."

The simple misunderstanding from earlier was getting on his nerves a bit. But he no longer felt like arguing anymore.

"Still, no one has good taste. I mean, Milady Luca is 100 million times cuter than Targana."

"Coo is 100 million times more of a nice guy!"

"Wh—what! Are you saying I'm not as good as Croix?"

They weren't saying he wasn't as strong as Croix, but no matter what, it was still frustrating to be told he wasn't as good as him. Although it's not like he would have been happy even if they had said he was better.

Sasha had decided that the conversation was for adults, and had separated herself from it to get back to work around the time they started talking about Targana's love letters.

... It was a conversation she was still too young for.

And not just that. If she were to hear a word she didn't know, it would end up bothering her, and she'd probably ask Targana and the others what it meant, even if it was something she was still too young to understand. She figured that would mean she risked troubling them with explaining such things to her. But she didn't realize she already had.

The three of them were still engrossed in their conversation, but Sasha didn't plan on stopping them.

She had originally planned on preparing for the move by herself, but it would have been lonely to work all alone in a dead silent shop. But she didn't have to feel lonely, because Targana and the others had come. So she didn't have even the slightest intention of asking them to help out.

The three of them were so absorbed in their conversation that Sasha had already finished the rest of the packing, and had started cleaning the floors that Targana was supposed to be doing by the time they finally realized she had been working all alone.

"S—sorry, I got caught up in the conversation just now. Give me the rag, Sasha, I'll do the rest. "

"But I'll be done soon, so I don't mind. Please don't worry about it."

"I can't do that! Besides, Skycat taught me how to do it just now, so it would be a waste not to put that into practice."

"I—I see. Don't let it go to waste."

Sasha rinsed the dirty rag in a bucket to get the dirt off, then handed it to Targana.

"Okay then, I'll leave the rest to you. In the meantime, I'll prepare lunch, so please come to the back after you're done."

"Ooh, I'm looking forward to it. So let's work hard till then."

"I was in the middle of repairing the shelves. I'll have to finish by then."

"If you're preparing lunch, then I'll help too. Besides, I want to warm up the refreshments I brought."

Skycat and Sasha withdrew to the back of the shop, while Targana and Cynthia went to work in silence.

They didn't even talk while they worked like they had earlier, perhaps because they felt obliged not to after having gotten caught up in conversation and leaving Sasha to do most of the work alone, despite them having come over to help her.

Besides, Targana couldn't stand the fact that he hadn't once come off as a responsible adult.

...Cleaning this floor would restore his honor!

Targana would never be seen like this at the Grand Bell Hall, so this was an extremely rare occasion. Unfortunately, the only person there was Cynthia, who had practically no interest in him, so their work continued to completion without incident.

All that was left was to wait for Metafalica's success.

"... It won't be for much longer, but with this, it should be a fairly comfortable place, right?"

Cynthia heard Targana's worried murmuring and laughed.

"This shop is little Sasha's treasure, yeah? There's no point in worrying all the time."

"... You have a point."

They looked over the cleaned-up storefront, and nodded approvingly.

"H—hiaaaaaaaaaah!"

Suddenly, they heard Sasha screaming from the back of the shop.

"Eh, what's wrong?!"

"What happened Sasha?!"

The two of them rushed off towards the back of the shop.

They went through the shop curtain, and found an ordinary hallway like you'd see in any house. About half of the first floor of the building was being used as the general store, while the remainder served as her home.

They headed down the short hallway, and opened a sliding door on the left, which lead to a small, 9.91 square meters living room. It was a drab room, with a small shelf along the wall, a low-height table in the center, and pretty much nothing else besides floor cushions.



Sasha was sitting in front of the table, pale-faced and shivering as she looked at the pot that had been placed on it.

“Sasha, what in the world happened?”

“Are you okay, little Sasha? You’re shivering.”

“Ah, e-errr, umm. . .”

Sasha tried to explain, but couldn’t find the right words, so she pointed to the pot on the table instead.

“Is something wrong with that pot?”

“Oh, there’s no need to panic you two.”

Skycat came out from the kitchen with chopsticks and plates for everyone.

“Skycat, what exactly happened? I mean Sasha’s afraid of that pot, but. . .”

“It’s fine. She’s not actually all that afraid.”

Right? Skycat smiled at Sasha, but she was looking from Targana’s face to Skycat’s to the pot like she didn’t know how to respond.

“No, I think she’s clearly afraid but. . .”

“Targana, are you saying I did something to scare little Sasha?”

“That’s not what I meant, but. . .”

He looked away from Skycat, who was puffing out her cheeks in anger. Anyone could see that she was clearly putting on an act.

Targana noticed something strange about the pot. The steam escaping from it looked almost poisonous in color.

“What’s this. . . brown-colored steam?”

“Love-colored, it’s love-colored. Love-colored, made with the color of love.”

“I’ve never heard of such a color. And do you really think such brown-colored love exists?”

“Love is different for each person, Gaa. You still have a ways to go if you don’t understand that much.”

Skycat was listening and nodding in satisfaction, but Targana and Sasha thought they'd be just fine with having "a ways to go" their entire life.

Nevertheless, given Sasha's apparent fear, there was no doubt she had looked inside. Targana cautiously lifted the lid, fully prepared for there to be a demon lurking within.

"..."

He regretted checking.

"... Tell me something Skycat. Are you trying to poison us?"

"Wow, how mean! There's no way someone who works at a restaurant would make something that harms people!"

If Croix were here, he would have immediately retorted against that denial of recipes like Eattle Brand.

"Well then, I'm listening. What exactly is this garbage cooked in sewage water?"

Lots of fish bones and what could only be described as mysterious food scraps had been boiled in a brown liquid, and were floating inside the pot... In short, he didn't really know what it was. At the very least, it couldn't be called miso or any other kind of soup as far as Targana and Sasha were concerned.

"Ooh yes, this!"

Cynthia's eyes sparkled as she saw what was in the pot. Had she eaten it before?

"How can you be so happy?"

"You still don't get it?"

"..."

Did he have to? Targana thought long and hard about it, and finally came up with an answer.

"I know, it's a surprise potluck dinner?!"

“Don’t be rude! This is a refined version of Trulywaath soup, a soup filled with love, known as Milady-soup among connoisseurs. Its name is Lelina Trulywaath soup!”

“... This is soup?”

Targana had seen all sorts of delicious soups, unappetizing soups, and soups that had aimed to be original but had been huge failures in the 20+ years he had been alive, but he had never seen a soup this disgusting before.

“Lelina Trulywaath soup... though the “Trulywaath” part sounds similar to Lady Luca’s surname?”

“I see you’ve noticed one of its virtues. This dish was originally made by Milady Luca. But this time, I gave it my own twist, and incorporated my own stock into the soup on top of Milady’s. It’s the ultimate dish, with nothing quite like it in the entire world.”

“How could anyone even stand there being more of something like this?”

“But wow, you can really tell that it’s bursting with love. Is it because Skycat followed the recipe for a dish Luca made with love while adding even more love to it?”

“What a nice thing to say, Cynthia! Your love for Croix is magnificent as well, isn’t it?”

Skycat was serving the soup into dishes for everyone as they talked. There were plenty of soups that were visibly thick when served, but this was just about the only one that was flat out gloppy.

“Skycat, is this safe to eat? If you ask me, I think it’d be poisonous even just to put in my mouth, but...”

Skycat gave a small click of her tongue, looking quite fed up.

“Skycat, I understand how you feel, but your character!”

“... Honestly, I’m getting fed up with people saying that every single time. Everyone arbitrarily judges it based on

nothing more than its appearance, and some customers even order it as a punishment game, and... take a good look.”

Skycat took a spoonful of the soup she had made, and put it in her mouth.

The three of them watched as she took time to enjoy its flavor in her mouth before swallowing.

“...Mm.”

Skycat’s body trembled a little, her cheeks slightly red.

“...Just what I’d expect of Milady Luca’s love. It fills my heart with bliss.”

“...Seriously?”

“Wow, it’s good, so goood! I wasn’t able to have any when I went to the restaurant earlier, so I’m super happy!”

“Heheh, there’s plenty to go around, so feel free to have seconds.”

She was able to have seconds of this thing that would probably take him a while to even so much as put in his mouth? Targana had his doubts. And before anyone had realized, Sasha had slipped behind him to try and hide.

“Are you okay Sasha?”

“I—I’m fine... I think.”

Despite saying as much, she was shivering slightly.

Targana knew how she felt, but he couldn’t stay scared forever like Sasha.

“...Alright, fine. Well then, let’s try this refined Lady Luca soup.” He said, and finally sat down.

“At last you feel like trying it. Okay, here you go.”

Skycat offered him the soup with a smile. He grimaced at its dizzyingly sweet stench, but remained unfazed as he grabbed a spoon and whispered to Sasha, who was still cowering behind his back.

“Sasha, I’ll try it first to see if it’s poisonous.”

“You can’t, after all it’s, umm...”

She glanced at Skycat.

“... I—I feel like it’s dangerous.”

He was fully aware of that, but Skycat had come here on the Maiden Luca’s request. And the soup that had been placed before him was a dish the Maiden had created. If he judged it by its appearance and didn’t eat it, it might be taken as defiance against the Maiden.

And he had no idea what Cloche, the other Maiden, would do to him if Sasha were made to eat it.

All things considered, there was but one remaining option: he had no choice but to eat it.

“If something happens to me, contact the Grand Bell... There’s no need to be so scared.”

“Mr. Targana...”

“If I safely finish eating it, make miso soup or something. I’d hate for its taste to be left in my mouth.”

“... Okay, I understand. I wish you the best of luck, Mr. Targana.”

Targana prepared himself for the worst, her hopes riding on his back. Cynthia was already digging into a second helping next to him while saying how delicious it was, but she was the same as Skycat, so he didn’t care.

“Well then... here goes nothing!”

He psyched himself up and sunk his spoon into the soup.

“Hey! You’re supposed to show thanks before a meal, right?”

“... Thank you for the meal.”

With that, all his motivation vanished, and he dejectedly scooped up some soup.

If it wasn’t for Cynthia devouring it next to him, he might have even been able to stop going along with this joke and set down his spoon, take Sasha, and run. But such thoughts wouldn’t help him now.

He held his breath as he put it in his mouth and immediately swallowed, hoping he at least wouldn't have to taste it. gulp...\*

Targana felt himself tearing up at the uncomfortable feeling of the soup slowly making its way down his throat.

...He couldn't believe it, crying at his age...

"M—Mr. Targana..."

He realized Sasha was looking at him with concern, and forced a smile.

This was bad.

It was only for a second, but he absentmindedly took a breath through his nose.

"Nghh!"

He was instantly struck by an indescribably horrible taste on top of the unpleasant feeling in his mouth, throat, and stomach.

He desperately tried to suppress that vomit-inducing taste, but now his vision had begun to spin. Not good. He was biting his lip so hard that his teeth were cutting into it in an attempt to stay conscious.

And just like that, he lost consciousness.

"M—Mr. Targana! Mr. Targana!"

Targana's eyes were dilated, and he had stopped moving. Sasha frantically shook his body, but he wasn't responding.

"Oh dear, how dramatic."

Skycat gave a troubled laugh. Cynthia was laughing happily next to her.

"Ahahaha, no kidding. Well, I guess for Gaa, a dish overflowing with love was..."

Cynthia's body convulsed slightly.

"Nmbfff!"

Soup spurted out of Cynthia's nose, and she fell forward, no longer moving.

“E—Eeeeeeeeeeeeh!”

Sasha couldn't help but be shook up by the sudden hellscape in her living room, and had no idea what to do.

Skycat, the last remaining person, took a look at the scene and said-

“Heheh. . . It appears they weren't yet ready for this love.” and gracefully sipped the soup.

In the end, Sasha contacted the Grand Bell Knights, and Targana was safely taken into their care, but didn't wake up until three days later. His memory of that day had completely vanished, perhaps as an aftereffect of the all-too-powerful Trulywaath Soup.

Every time he started to remember having been given some kind of order, he was struck by an intense headache.

He had no memories of what had happened on that day, but it seemed the trauma of it had been permanently etched into his heart.

## Chapter 7

# Jakuri and Spica

Sol Ciel is the name of the world which is home to the First Tower of Ar tonelico.

There currently wasn't much interaction between Sol Ciel and Metafalss, the home of the Second Tower, and for the most part, they didn't even know the other existed.

Even the few that did would probably live out their entire lives without ever traveling to another world.

However, there were two girls in Metafalss who had come from Sol Ciel. Technically, one of them couldn't be called a girl in neither age nor appearance, and the other may be a girl in appearance, but her age was far from it. But at the very least, they still considered themselves girls.

One of the two, Spica, was in the middle of packing the airship they had come from Sol Ciel in with luggage.

She had been running a drugstore ever since she came to Metafalss, so she had even more luggage than when she had first arrived.

"Haah, what a pain... should I leave it all behind?"

She muttered, wiping sweat off her brow. She had realized someone was approaching her from behind.



The footsteps drew closer, but Spica didn't turn to look. There was only one other person who would be coming here other than herself.

"... Hey, what do you think? Should I leave this all behind?" Spica asked, her back still turned. To which the other girl replied-

"That would be a problem with such dangerous things. If you're going to go and leave it all behind, then blow up the entire store."

Spica laughed in amusement at her wild response.

"Sounds good. I bet onlookers would enjoy it too if we had flashy fireworks, and made it go out with a bang."

"... It was a joke. You're not seriously going to do it, are you?"

"Yes, of course I realize it's a joke, Jakuri."

She finally turned around to face Jakuri, who was making the same bored expression as usual.

"So, what business do you have with me today? Even if you hadn't come all the way here, if there was anything you needed me for, I would have returned this evening if you waited there."

"I thought you might be here and came to see but... It's just as I expected, isn't it?"

"Of course. After all, if Metafalica succeeds, this world will become peaceful, and if that happens, there won't be anything interesting here even if I were to stay."

"... If it succeeds huh."

Hmph. Jakuri gave a scornful laugh.

"You're not hoping it doesn't succeed, are you?"

"Oh, how horrible. I merely don't care if it succeeds or not. Since I'm not from Metafalss. However-" She continued.

"I have to be ready to escape no matter what. There's no way I'm going to commit suicide together with such a world." She said, quite sure of herself, and sat down on one of the

nearby boxes filled with luggage. She pushed the box next to her towards Jakuri.

“It seems you think it won’t succeed.”

Jakuri sat down on the box that had been pushed in front of her.

“It’s a precaution to ensure that I’ll survive in case it doesn’t.”

“So that you can run away by yourself, right?”

“What will happen if Metafalica fails? The people of this world would know better than an outsider like myself. So it’s common sense that they’d at least have a plan in case it does, which means everyone would surely choose to flee. That is, if they value their lives.”

Spica was looking at her, expecting an objection, but-

“... Well, it’s a sound argument. Metafalica failed twice and Hibernation once as well. Being unprepared despite such failures would be disadvantageous.”

“As the saying goes, what happens twice will happen thrice... and I can’t die yet.”

Spica dreamed of becoming Queen of the Underworld. In order to make that dream come true, she couldn’t lose her life here now. Even if the outcome was yet to be determined, that danger was still present, so it was only natural for her to plan to avoid such a risk. Spica was that kind of woman.

That’s why Jakuri had come here, and not to the shop. To the place they had hidden the airship they had come to Metafalss in.

... And sure enough, she was there, but well, if you knew Spica, it was a no-brainer.

“But don’t you think it might just succeed? You’ve seen those children all this time, right?”

By “those children”, she meant Luca, Cloche, and the others.

They frequently stopped by Spica's shop, and she heard all kinds of things from them, so she knew them personally. So she had seen just how devoted they were to Metafalica, even outside of speeches. Their words were always filled with hope, even when not in public, and she knew in detail what they had done for its sake, more so than most people.

Even so-

"But in the end, it all comes down to how the people feel, right? Some people will accept one's heart no matter how foul it is. But others will harbor animosity towards one's heart no matter how pure it is."

"Metafalica is the hope of everyone in this world. Cloche genuinely wants to make it a reality, and no one would deny those feelings. Besides, it's not like her heart will be united with everyone, it's just the IPDs that she'll be connected with. All the IPDs gathered at the Grand Bell Hall absolutely adore Cloche, so they shouldn't harbor any animosity towards her."

"People's hearts are quick to change. I'm sure quite a lot of people have had a sudden change in attitude while listening to Cloche's speeches as well. I have no intention of risking my life in this massive gamble with the fate of a world I don't care about at stake."

She stood up to get back to work.

Jakuri watched Spica diligently loading her luggage into the airship in silence, and started to think.

There was no doubt that Spica honestly felt that way. Moreover, she wasn't from Metafalss, so it was only natural that she didn't have any personal attachment to this world. Jakuri wasn't about to tell her to take interest in it and wait for Metafalica's success despite that.

However, she wanted her to have some kind of hope that it just might succeed.

Since Jakuri was the reason they had come to Metafalss in the first place.

She had always admired the land of Metafalss, from the time she was in Sol Ciel onwards. The Metafalica continent, that so-called ideal land enveloped in greenery. She wanted to see it with her own eyes. She had come all the way here with those such feelings in her heart.

But when she finally arrived, it was a world barely clinging to life atop an artificial structure on the brink of collapse, far from an ideal land.

Jakuri had been disappointed, and had even lost her will to work together with the people of Metafalss, but she found hope by traveling with Croix and the others, and ended up feeling like she might get to see the paradise she had always dreamed of after all.

And now they had finally reached the point where the two Maidens, Cloche and Luca, would either succeed or fail in realizing it.

“... Don't you want to see it?”

Spica continued to load her luggage without replying to Jakuri's question. Jakuri payed it no mind, and continued to speak.

“Don't you want to see Metafalica?”

“Well... I guess it wouldn't hurt.”

“Wouldn't hurt” meant that Spica would stay if she could just pique her interest enough to outweigh the disadvantages.

“But listen, Spica. Can you guess how big the Metafalica continent is going to be?”

“Big enough that your voice won't reach the other side?”

“Stop joking around. As far as I've seen, it should be a vast continent, surpassing the size of the current Metafalss of course, and even Sol Ciel.”

“I see... I feel like that will be a little too vast for the people of Metafalss.”

“It’s good that it’ll be so big. They’ve been confined to a small space for a long time.”

The continent Jakuri had envisioned for many years was that big at least. She wouldn’t be satisfied unless they created something vast enough to make up for the disappointment she had initially felt when she had come to this land, seeking to see that dream of hers made a reality.

“... It certainly may be worth seeing if it’s that big.”

“Right?”

Jakuri sensed that she was catching Spica’s interest, and nodded approvingly.

“Besides, it was originally attempted 400 years ago, so getting to see it is a miracle in and of itself, no? It’s not the kind of thing that’s created again and again.”

“So it seems. If it could be created many times, we’d end up completely covering the Sea of Death.”

“That would be a problem in and of itself. In the end, we’d merely be concealing the Sea of Death by weaving a continent on top of it.”

Although given the current state of the planet, it would probably be welcomed all the same.

“Well, regardless, they’ll no doubt be able to create something worthy of being called a paradise compared to how things are now. And not just because they’re from Metafalss, I dare say it will be a continent even a person from Sol Ciel would call a paradise.”

“... A paradise you say.”

Spica sighed.

“Then would this so-called paradise be beneficial to me in any way?”

“Huh?”

“A peaceful paradise where everyone can smile will be created. Hurray for Metafalss, the people of Sol Ciel will be envious. But things like paradise are revolting to me.”

Spica, who was aiming to be Queen of the Underworld, was always in search of danger. She couldn't be satisfied if it wasn't that kind of world. And she couldn't fulfill her dream.

Much like how the people of Metafalss dreamed of creating Metafalica, no one could make Spica give up on her dream either.

“...Hypothetically speaking-”

Spica spoke with a smile on her face.

“Well, say Metafalica does succeed, and the people of Sol Ciel are told about it, so they launch an attack to take over the Metafalica continent, and there's a huge war.

If something like that happened, I'd be a little bit interested but... It's not like the people of Sol Ciel are struggling to survive as badly as Metafalss right now, so there's no need for them to do something like that.”

“...Even if I told you not to think about such ominous things, it'd be pointless, wouldn't it?”

“You can relax, I'm just imagining it. Besides, I highly doubt Shurelia would approve of them doing something like that.”

Shurelia was the name of the Administrator of the First Tower of Ar Tonelico. She was an absentminded girl by nature, but especially as of lately, to the point that she was blinded by peace, and didn't seem to be doing her job as Administrator at all.

On one hand, you could say it was a sign of peace, but on the other hand, it could also be called negligence.

“So in the end, I simply don't care about this world anymore. There's no point in staying if there aren't any benefits

to it. Humans don't live long enough lives to waste time on pointless things."

"...I see, that's a shame."

Perhaps it was asking too much to have someone who wasn't even from Metafalss show interest in Metafalica. Though it would have been different if it was her goal to see it like it was for Jakuri.

"Hey, Jakuri."

She kept pointing to under Jakuri. The surrounding luggage had all been loaded before she had realized it, leaving just the box she was sitting on.

She stood up, wondering if she had failed, but still asked-  
"... When are you heading back?"

"I was planning on tonight, tomorrow morning at the latest."

"Would after they Sing Metafalica be too late? It would be fine as long as you could immediately escape if it fails, right?"

Spica shook her head in exasperation.

She didn't know what was going to happen, so she wasn't about to stay long enough for it to be risky.

"And I know I said this earlier, but aren't we lucky to be able to see this once in a lifetime event? If you're going to be Queen of the Underworld, shouldn't you see the sights of the world?"

Spica reacted slightly to the title "Queen of the Underworld". It seemed that had caught her interest a little.

"How about it, are you at all interested?"

Spica considered Jakuri's question for a moment, then replied with her own.

"... What are you planning on doing, Jakuri? Are you going to remain here for however many years?"

“... I’m still thinking about it. There are a few other places I’ve been considering going to, but I also want to go back to Sol Ciel to do research.”

“Regardless, you plan on staying here until you’ve seen Metafalica Sung, right?”

“Of course.”

That was the reason Jakuri had come all the way to Metafalss.

Seeing Jakuri so determined to stay made Spica begin to feel like there was no way she’d be able to head back. Jakuri would surely even try to stop her by force if she really were to leave tonight.

She had no interest in Metafalica, and there was also a chance that it would fail, so she didn’t want to risk her life to see it, but considering how she might end up arguing with Jakuri and destroy the trust they had built up, she decided that it was a risk she could accept.

“... If it fails, we’re coming here immediately and escaping together. If you can promise me that, I’ll stay.”

“... Are you sure?”

“If you keep your promise.”

Jakuri wore a relieved smile on her face.

“... Yes, I promise I will.”

Spica showed no reaction to her words.

Jakuri herself didn’t realize it, but her current expression was something she rarely showed others.

Spica couldn’t help but gaze at the unusual sight before her.

... She got to see something rare.

“What’s the matter, Spica?”

“... It’s nothing, don’t worry about it. I just thought about how I’ll probably get to see your childlike joy if Metafalica succeeds.”



“D—don’t be stupid! Why would I... I’m not a kid you know!”

Jakuri’s smile immediately turned into anger.

“Oh, what a shame...”

“What is?”

“This conversation. Well, I am looking forward to it though. Be sure to entertain me, Jakuri.”

“So look forward to Metafalica, not me!”

Not even realizing that she was being teased, Jakuri took Spica seriously and continued to argue with her.

She was angry, but also a little bit relieved.

Although she was too embarrassed to admit it, Spica was her friend, and she might get to show her the very thing she had always dreamed of seeing.

That made her happy.



## Chapter 8

# The Night Before Metafalica – Part 1

The night before what would be the third attempt at creating Metafalica in this world.

Everyone was looking forward to Metafalica the next day, and that excitement was seen throughout town now more than ever.

People in town were speaking of their hopes for the long awaited Metafalica tomorrow, and more and more people had begun to talk about not just their wishes for its success, but what they planned on doing after its success.

Their hearts, overflowing with hopes and dreams, were surely united as one now.

However, Infel wore a pained expression as she watched them from Sol Marta.

...The people were the only ones who could be in such high spirits.

Thinking back on her past, she knew exactly what Cloche would be dealing with right now.

She would no doubt end up remembering that time if she were to look at her now. That's why she honestly didn't want to.

But at the same time, Cloche was hoping to create a paradise through Metafalica every bit as much as Infel had, and she wanted to confirm that things were turning out the same way for her as well.

She was hesitant. But in the end, she couldn't help but watch.

Because she also wanted to confirm that the actions she took in the past weren't taken because she didn't truly desire Metafalica.

The inside of the Grand Bell Hall had fallen deathly silent.

On this evening, the night before Metafalica, everyone made sure to stay away from the Maidens' room so that Cloche and Luca, the two Maidens, could get some rest. That's why there wasn't a single sound coming from around Cloche's room. Noise from the festival held in Pastalia could be heard in Infel's time, but that seemed to have improved over 400 years, as it was completely silent.

It was faint, but there was the sound of flowing water in that deathly silent building.

It was coming from the bathroom a short distance away from the Maidens' room. Cloche was there.

She was already in her nightgown, but she hadn't been able to get a wink of sleep.

She rinsed out the sour taste in her mouth at the sink, then raised her head to look at herself in the mirror.

Her hair was a mess from tearing at it earlier, and her eyes were inflamed, with sunken eyelids. Her face and lips had an unhealthy color to them as well, making her look quite sick.

Cloche stared at her appearance for a while, then forced a smile.

“I have to smile... what’s a Maiden like me getting so worked up about? Tomorrow, everyone’s long awaited Metafalica will...”

Cloche suddenly felt sick to her stomach, and rushed to a stall.

She vomited, no longer sure of how many times this would make. Nothing even came out anymore, she just felt the pain that came with it.

Regaining her composure, Cloche once again returned to the sink to wash out her mouth. But that was all she could do. She couldn’t look at her reflection in the mirror.

She had to do something, so she furiously threw cold water onto her face and tried to focus, but it was no use.

...I’m scared.

Cloche collapsed onto the floor the moment the thought crossed her mind. She desperately crawled her way to a corner, wrapped her arms around her knees, and cowered there.

...I’m scared.

A shiver ran through her body. She dug her fingernails into her knees to try and stop it, but it was no use.

Why was this happening to her? She knew the reason, but couldn’t accept it.

If she were to accept it, that cowardly thought would end up taking root in her heart. If that happened, it might end up being seen.

So she had to have a strong heart.

Her field of vision began to blur. She knew her eyes were filling with tears, but she was trying to stop her body from trembling, and had no time to hurriedly wipe them away.

“Uueh, Uuu...”

The small sobs escaping from her echoed, making them feel large thanks to how quiet her surroundings were.

But she was too preoccupied to notice. That's why she also didn't notice the footsteps approaching her, even after they stopped in front of her.

"...Just as I thought."

Cloche jolted at the voice coming from above, and cautiously looked up.

"...Are you okay, Lady Cloche?"

"...Luca."

Luca was standing there looking worried at her.

Cloche forced a smile, realizing Luca had seen a side of her no one should ever see. Or at least she tried to, but it was really nothing more than a tearful face.

"Wh... what's..the matter?"

Luca saw that Cloche was unable to speak clearly due to her sobbing, and sat down next to her.

"When you left the room, I suspected this might be what was going on, but... it looks like I was right."

"....."

"You're... scared of the inside of your heart being seen, right?"

Luca reached out to stroke Cloche's head, but Cloche whipped around and repelled her with her hand.

"Ow!"

Such strength. Pain shot through Luca's hand, which had been smacked by the back of Cloche's as she spun around.

"I'm scared, you say? Don't be ridiculous!"

"Eh? Ahh!"

Cloche grabbed for Luca. Luca was knocked down, caught off guard by how sudden it was.

"You say I'm scared. What could you possibly know about me!"

She had a firm hold on Luca's shoulders, which she used to slam her to the floor.

“Oof! O-ouch!”

“You’re fine, since nothing will happen to you when you Sing! It’s different for me! Everything will be seen if I Sing!”

I’m scared. If only tomorrow wouldn’t come. I don’t want to Sing Metafalica. I don’t want to be here anymore. Why do I alone have to go through this? No one will save me. No one truly understands how I feel.

The pressure of Metafalica tomorrow had at last caused the thoughts she had been trying to avoid to come bursting into her mind.

“Why do I have to feel like this on top of everything else? I’ve devoted entire my life to Metafalica. I’ve worked harder than anyone else to implement it! And yet further cruelty is forced upon me? I’m not even allowed to keep my own personal secrets? It’s as if I’m a tool for Singing Metafalica!”

She gripped Luca’s shoulders so hard that her nails dug into them, and once again threw her to the floor. Luca let out a groan, but bit down on her lip and endured Cloche’s attack without putting up any resistance.

“Of course I’m scared! I’m incredibly scared, I want to run away right now! I don’t want to be here anymore, I can’t continue standing this! If I have to go through all of this, I’d rather Metafalica. . .”

“...”

Luca was being held by the shoulders, but it didn’t seem like she had to worry about being thrown again.

Even so, she didn’t try to do anything. She just watched as Cloche cried quietly, her hands still on Luca’s shoulders from when she had knocked her down.

“...”

The force from Cloche’s hands faded, and she at last removed them from her.

Now that she had started to calm down, the things she had just done slowly came to her, and she finally realized what she had put Luca through.

“Ah... I...I...”

She looked shocked as she was struck by a shiver different from her fear from earlier.

What should she do now? First of all, she had to hurry up and apologize to Luca. But how exactly should she apologize?

Cloche tried to say something, but her mouth merely opened and closed without a single word coming out.

She couldn't think straight, couldn't say anything, and couldn't stop shivering.

She had fallen into a complete panic.

Luca saw this, and rose up slowly so as not to provoke her in her current state. She nearly let out a cry of pain as she rose, but she tried her hardest to put up with it, in part so that she wouldn't provoke Cloche, then gently embraced her.

“...It's fine.”

Luca murmured those words into the trembling Cloche's ear, without trying to say anything more.

The comfort of words wouldn't help alleviate the pressure Cloche was currently experiencing, so she knew that even if she were to say something, it would do nothing but irritate her.

Therefore, Luca simply continued to embrace Cloche until her trembling stopped, without saying anything more.

...Of course.

Infel thought to herself as she watched Cloche and Luca.

It felt as if she were watching her own past. Although in her case, she hadn't treated Nenesha so harshly, and she also hadn't vomited.

But Infel had nearly been crushed by the pressure of having the inside of her heart seen just like Cloche. And then Nenesha had saved her from it.



“No matter the era, the Maiden of Mio is no match for the Maiden of Homura.”

## Chapter 9

# 3313 AD – The Night Before Metafalica

The Metafalica Eve Festival, held in the town of Pastalia.

Nenesha and Infel were seated on a stage that had been constructed in its center plaza.

A huge crowd of people were dancing to Songs and music around it.

“...what am I doing?”

Infel held her head in her hands as she watched the scene around them, but Nenesha next to her sounded like she was enjoying herself.

“Don’t you think it’s interesting? I’ve seen this kind of thing in some book before. If I remember correctly, when savage tribes would catch their prey, they would circle around it like this...”

“I don’t know what you read, but that’s wrong.”

Infel let out a sigh, and the music and dancing stopped.

She thought it was because they were shocked by her behavior, so she quickly fixed her posture, but Nenesha suddenly got up next to her and spoke.

“Thank you kindly for putting on such a wonderful display for us.”

It seemed it was just the end of the performance. But her relief was short lived. She was nudged on the shoulder by Nenesha, and looked up.

The people had turned their eyes towards Infel.

...Sh-should I say something too?

Startled, she looked to Nenesha, who smiled at her in return. It seemed she should.

Infel reluctantly stood up, but she didn't have any thoughts on the Song and dance. It honestly seemed like nothing more than a waste of time to her. Although she couldn't give a proper response if she couldn't speak her honest feelings.

Infel wondered what she should do. She looked to Nenesha standing next to her.

“.....”

“What's the matter Infel?”

Having thought of something, Infel cleared her throat and turned to face the people.

“Before I speak my thoughts, there's something I want to tell everyone.”

She sensed the curious looks of the people wondering what exactly she was going to say. She pointed to Nenesha standing next to her.

“It seems she wanted to join in too.”

There was a brief silence.

“...E, eh? M-me?”

A laugh slipped out as she watched Nenesha get flustered over something she had no memory of.

“I'm joking. Thanks for putting on such a wonderful display for us.”

Laughter broke out at Nenesha's flustered reaction to Infel's joke.

Nenesha had always taken an active public role, but she had been acting as the Maiden all this time, so she had only ever stood before the people as such. That's why it was the first time the public had seen her like this.

Seeing this new side of Nenesha and hearing Infel's praise for her had delighted the people, who were laughing and cheering for the two Maidens.

"A, agh... You're terrible Infel."

Nenesha sat down, her face bright red, and puffed out her cheeks as she complained.

"Sorry, sorry, I apologize... But it worked out well, didn't it?"

"Th—that's true but, still..."

"You make that cute face and everyone falls in love with you."

... well, I'll drive them all away though.

"A, agh, Infel..."

Nenesha was blushing with an embarrassed look on her face, unsure of what expression to make.

"Sorry, sorry."

Infel apologized again, though she was actually feeling quite relieved. She didn't have any thoughts on the performance, so she had decided it was best to mimic what Nenesha had said. However, if she had done nothing more than mimic her, it might have been exposed as a lie. That's why Infel had directed their attention to Nenesha by showing them a side of her she never displayed in public.

Infel thought of herself as an extra to Nenesha when it came to public matters, so she had believed she wouldn't leave much of an impression on the people no matter what she might say. That's why she had felt that she would end up dampening the mood with whatever she told them, so she had brought up Nenesha to liven things up. The results were as seen.

“Well then, I think I might head back soon.”

They had done what they had come to do, so Nenesha should be satisfied too. Infel thought she would hurry back and rest up for tomorrow, but her hand was being held tight by Nenesha.

“...Nenesha, the festival is already over, right?”

“Not yet. Look at those girls over there.”

She looked over, and sure enough, there was a group of girls. They appeared to be Reyvateils, but it seemed there were some rather enthusiastic looks coming from among them.

Infel had a terrible premonition, and turned to get off the stage from the opposite side, but Nenesha was holding her hand, so it was impossible.

It was a complete reversal from earlier: Infel with a worried look on her face and Nenesha smiling happily.

“...Seriously?”

“Of course.” Nenesha said with a nod.

“Those girls are the IPDs that are going to help out tomorrow, and they told me something last time we met. They said they’d like to meet Lady Infel at least once before Singing Metafalica. You sure are popular” she continued, delighted as if it were about herself, but unlike her, Infel found it bothersome.

After all, she thought it was pointless. Nenesha might not understand, but she would leave this revelry in a second to go to bed and rest, as she felt that was more important.

Perhaps it would be best to look for an opportunity to escape. Her chance would come when Nenesha let go of her hand.

“That’s why I promised everyone that I’d be sure to bring you with me today. So I was relieved, since if you had ended up refusing, I would have been anxiously wondering what to do.”

She couldn’t escape after all. If she ran away now, Nenesha might end up being called a liar. All because she ran away.

Infel couldn't even bring herself to sigh, but if that was the case, she'd get it over with quickly and head back. She lightly tugged at Nenesha's hand, clasped together with hers.

"Then let's hurry. We have an early day tomorrow, so we really can't be messing around here."

"I think it's best to enjoy good times when they come."

"I can't enjoy lively events. Look, let's hurry up and get this over with."

The two of them came down from the stage and headed towards the group of IPDs.

Unlike Nenesha, who was waving and being friendly with them as they shrieked with joy, Infel remained the same as always.

"Good evening, Lady Nenesha!"

"How are you, Lady Nenesha?"

Nenesha smiled as she returned the greetings of each IPD that had mobbed around her. Unlike Infel, she was sociable and made a point of going out, which was probably why she was so popular.

"Hey, Infel. You too..."

"Eh?"

With that, Infel finally remembered. The IPDs here had told Nenesha that they wanted to meet her.

Even so, Infel wasn't very sociable, and spoke with the same cold expression on her face.

"Good evening. My best wishes for tomorrow."

That was all she said. The surrounding IPDs fell silent. ...Had she messed up?

It wasn't that she couldn't read the situation, so she understood that much, but even so, she didn't know what to do.

She didn't show it on her face, but she had started to feel a bit impatient when a single I.P.D. spoke up.

"...Just as I thought."

Did she come off as an unsociable Maiden, unlike Nenesha? Well, even if that's how it seemed, it wasn't much of a problem. She didn't care.

"We are big fans of yours, Lady Infel."

"I see. . ." She responded, sounding uninterested, but then-  
"...huh?"

She realized what the IPD had said, and a confused noise slipped out at how unexpected it was.

"Lady Infel, please shake my hand!"

"No fair, me too me too!"

"I'll be doing my best tomorrow, so me as well please!"

"Eh, wait! Wh-what's all this, what's happening?"

They forcibly shook her hand and hugged her without her knowing what was going on, so she looked to Nenesha for help. But Nenesha was happily watching her.

"Wait, what's with you guys? What do you mean you're my fans?"

"It's because you never go out in public, Lady Infel."

"That's right. Even though everyone has been wanting to meet you."

"And we have at last been granted an opportunity to talk with you. So isn't this fine?"

She said, and clung to her arm.

"Hey, no fair, hogging Lady Infel all to yourself!"

Infel was once again mobbed by them.

She didn't understand. She realized they were showing her affection, but it was clearly excessive.

"... Why? It's strange that someone who rarely leaves the Grand Bell Hall like me would have fans."

"You have been focusing on Metafalica research, right Lady Infel? We know because Lady Nenesha would always tell us about you."

“A Holy Maiden who is also a researcher. And since you practically never go out in public, you’re a mystery to us. We don’t even know what your personality is like. That’s why everyone would always listen to Lady Nenesha’s stories and imagine what kind of person you are.”

“...Nenesha, this is the first I’ve heard about this, yes?”

“Oh, is that so?”

She watched Nenesha feign ignorance, and realized she had been deceived.

Nenesha had known this would happen, and had brought Infel along.

“Hehe, I’m sorry Infel. But you’re hopeless. You’ve always pushed public duties onto me in favor of research no matter how many times I’ve asked.”

“Uu...”

Although Infel’s research was for the sake of the world, it was also her hobby. She was contributing to the world, but enjoyed every minute of it, from the time she got up until the time she went to bed.

She was also currently a Maiden, so did Nenesha want her to pay a bit more attention to that as well?

“...I’m sorry for always pushing all the duties of the Maiden onto you.”

Infel gave an honest apology, but Nenesha shook her head.

“That’s not what I meant. I meant that there are so many people who’d like to meet you, so I want you to go out in public every once in a while.”

“...Have I really gone out as little as you claim?”

“Then I’ll ask, when was the last time you left the Grand Bell Hall?”

Now that she mentioned it, Infel tried to remember, and finally realized she had been living entirely inside the Grand Bell Hall for a while now.



Even when she would take a slight break every now and then, the Grand Bell Hall was large, so she wouldn't do anything more than walk around inside or go out on a terrace to get some fresh air.

"...I'm practically a shut-in."

"So you've just now realized it. Though it's just like you to be so careless about yourself."

Infel felt like what she was saying was a bit harsh, but she wasn't wrong, so she couldn't argue.

"Heeeeh ... it was exciting to see an unexpected side of you, Lady Infel."

The I.P.D.s, who had been watching the two of them, began to make an uproar.

"Lady Nenesha told us that you were a reliable, kind, cute, and incredibly intelligent girl, but we'll have to add careless to the list too."

"Nenesha, I need to have a word with you afterwards."

"Infel, I'm scared. Don't do anything to hurt me."

"I'd never do something like that to you, really now..."

Although she was slightly angry, it seemed she was incapable of doing anything bad to Nenesha, no matter what the reason. The IPDs thought Nenesha was right about her being a kind person.

"Lady Infel sure is an interesting person... I'm looking forward to tomorrow."

"You mean Metafalica? Don't worry, the experiment was a success, so probabilistically speaking..."

"Not that, I'm looking forward to getting to see inside Lady Infel's heart."

"...eh?"

Infel's face stiffened. However, the IPDs didn't notice, perhaps because they couldn't help but get excited thinking about tomorrow.

“... What do you mean by that?”

“You are the Maiden of Mio, so when we Sing Metafalica, we’ll be able to see inside your heart, right?”

“You are a woman of many mysteries Lady Infel, so it’s a chance to get to know what you are like. That’s why I was really happy when I heard about it!”

She had never thought there would be so many people looking forward to peering inside her heart.

It was different for Nenesha, since she made public appearances, but Infel never even went outside, so no one should’ve cared about her. That’s what she had believed. That’s why she had been able to go on as normal despite knowing her heart would be seen.

But she realized she had been gravely mistaken.

... It’s going to be seen. The inside of my heart is going to be seen. Everything about me. By everyone.

She felt a chest-crushing fear, and the smiles of the IPDs before her seemed leering as they talked happily about tomorrow.

They intended to infringe upon her heart. There was no privacy whatsoever. They intended to see everything.

“Well then, Lady Infel, Lady Nenesha. We’ll end here.”

“Okay, do your best tomorrow.”

“All right... Um, Lady Infel.”

Infel jerked in surprise, and looked to the girl who had called out to her.

“... Wh—what is it?”

“Let’s do our best tomorrow – together.”

With that, the group of IPDs went away.

Infel stared at their backs as they left with a stunned look on her face.

“... Infel, what’s wrong? Are you okay?”

Nenesha called out to Infel, sounding worried, but it wasn't getting through to her.

Her head was filled with fear for tomorrow.

Would they still cooperate with her if they saw inside her heart? Part of the reason why, unlike Nenesha, she did practically no work in public was because she had no interest in it. They had said they were creating a paradise for the peace of the people, but for Infel, it was also for her research, and above all else, because it was Nenesha's dearest wish.

Nenesha surely put the people first, and was doing it to create a world where everyone could live in peace, but that wasn't true for Infel.

Would they accept a heart such as hers?

"....."

"Infel? Hey, Infel!"

She realized her legs were beginning to shake. They had lost their strength, and it seemed she would collapse at any moment.

If she collapsed here, she would be immediately taken back to the Grand Bell Hall, and would be stuck with being cared for until Metafalica tomorrow. If that happened, she'd no longer be able to avoid her heart being seen.

"...no"

Nenesha hadn't missed Infel's murmur.

"... Infel"

Suddenly aware of Nenesha calling out to her, Infel looked to her with a face that seemed like she was going to cry before running off.

"Wait! Infel, wait!"

Nenesha's voice called out behind her as she ran away. But Infel didn't look back.

Far from the center of Pastalia, there was a plaza-like area that showed no signs of life. It was clear that the people of

Pastalia had gathered in the center of town to take part in the festival.

Infel was in a corner of that deathly silent plaza.

It was completely dark there, without a speck of light, and she was sitting curled up small, which made her melt into the darkness. People going by as usual would probably pass right by without even realizing she was sitting there.

Infel was holding her head in her hands and desperately struggling with what to do.

An uneasiness like she had never felt before was turning around and around in her head, but she couldn't let herself be crushed by it. And she couldn't let others find out what was causing that uneasiness, so she couldn't even discuss it.

If she didn't settle this herself by tomorrow, she wouldn't be able to Sing.

"... I found you."

Infel had figured she would soon be found, so she wasn't surprised. On the contrary, just hearing Nenesha's voice calmed her down a bit.

"Can I sit next to you?"

Infel wouldn't respond. Nenesha seemed to realize that, and sat down next to her in silence.

"... Are you okay, Infel?"

"... yes."

Anyone could clearly see she was not okay, but as a Maiden, she couldn't show her weak side. She had actively told herself this, and forced out that single word. Even Infel herself reflected on how poor of a lie it was.

"... You're scared of having the inside of your heart seen, right?"

She listened to Nenesha without giving an answer.

"Though, I'm a little relieved. You're also a researcher, so sometimes I wondered if you'd even feel anything about your

heart being seen, since it's for your research. I'd definitely be scared if I were in the same position as you. No, in fact, I might even end up running away."

"...No you wouldn't. After all, you're more reliable than I am, Nenesha. Even if you were in the same position as me, you'd never run away, and would Sing without complaint."

"There's no way I could."

Nenesha brought her lips to Infel's ear, and whispered softly-

"I too have parts of myself that people would no doubt hate if they saw them."

"Don't be ridiculous. There's no way you..."

Infel had started to speak, but then she remembered.

To Sing Metafalica, they first had to mutually accept one another, and furthermore, go to a world called the Infelsphere to assess their capability as Maidens. Unlike a Cosmosphere, this was not done using a Dive Machine. It was a world that could be reached by sleeping while using a winged dango-like lifeform called Soope as a pillow.

Their personal values and circumstances were shown to one another there, and although they occasionally fought, they could only Sing Metafalica after accepting even the darkest parts of each other's hearts.

Infel remembered having seen a Nenesha full of malice she couldn't even imagine coming from the real Nenesha there.

"..."

"...Right? There's no doubt I have parts of myself like that too."

Nenesha remembered her own experiences in the Infelsphere as she spoke.

"Everyone has parts of themselves like that, so don't think of me as an exception. I'll be in trouble."

“But... If that’s true for you, what’s gonna happen to me? You’re adored by everyone, so they’d surely accept whatever’s in your heart. But it’s different for me.”

She remembered the group of IPDs from earlier.

“They’re going to look just to satisfy their curiosity, you know? I don’t normally go out in public, so they want to know what I’m like. If they go and see every last inch of my heart, there’s no doubt...”

Metafalica will fail.

“I’m scared... I’m so scared...”

Metafalica, the paradise she had envisioned together with Nenesha. What would happen if it were to fail because of her?

All the people of Metafalss might turn their backs on her. But even more so than that, she was terrified at the thought that she may even lose Nenesha.

Nenesha tenderly embraced Infel as she trembled in fear.

Infel held the key to Metafalica’s success. If it failed, it would be all because of her heart.

Although she was a Maiden and a researcher, she was still young. It wouldn’t be strange if she were crushed under the pressure of all the hopes of the world that were resting on her.

“... Hey, Infel. Do you not want to Sing Metafalica?”

At least nothing would happen to the world if they didn’t Sing. She didn’t know how long it would last, but things would probably remain as is for several hundred years.

There was no way she wanted to Sing. Or rather, she didn’t want to Sing because she didn’t want her heart to be seen.

But that was the one thing she couldn’t say in front of Nenesha, no matter how much she wanted to.

Nenesha similarly wanted to suggest running away together.

But the two of them held the position of Maiden, and she knew that the creation of Metafalica was their shared dream. That's why it was the one thing she could never say.

Time passed in silence. The two of them didn't know what to say to one another.

"In that case, shall we run away?"

"Eh?"

Infel looked at Nenesha in surprise. But that voice didn't belong to Nenesha.

The owner of the voice was standing where she was looking.

"...Ana?"

"I was looking for you Lady Infel, Lady Nenesha... even though I talked to you about not going out without telling me first." She told them, two large bags in hand.

Familiar big ears were hanging down from one of them.

"Mimimi!"

"Here, I brought her along."

She took the stuffed animal rabbit out of the bag, and gave it to Infel.

"In addition, I just brought some daily necessities with me, so we shouldn't have to worry about living a normal life."

"...What's the meaning of all this?"

"I am your knight, right? As the person who serves you two, I know what's on your mind. Heheh"

Ana looked proud.

"We probably won't be able to avoid creating an uproar if we run away tonight. That's why I have been considering heading to the Rim or the Slums for the time being."

"Hold it right there! Ana, do you realize what you're saying? To think that you'd say such things to a Maiden, it's beyond rude!"

"Then why are you in a place like this?"

"Th—that's because..."

The inside of her heart was going to be seen, but she had gotten scared and ran away. However, she had realized there was no place for her to go, so she had been cowering here.

“Besides, I heard you saying that you are scared of having the inside of your heart seen. Is that not proof that you are afraid of Singing Metafalica?”

“... How long have you been listening?”

“Since the beginning of course. I cannot stray too far from you since you’re out in public, so I’ve been secretly watching over you all this time. Here, take these.” She said, patting the two bags.

“... Have I troubled you?”

“.....”

Infel accepted the bag that had contained Mimimi in response.

The bag really was filled with a bare minimum of daily necessities, as well as several precious metals that could probably be sold for money. It seemed she had taken them from the Grand Bell Hall to cover their living expenses.

“I can’t believe a knight is doing something like this. . .”

“It’s for the Holy Maidens, so I see no problem.”

“But, I. . .”

They were going to run away from Grand Bell Hall. If they did, they wouldn’t even be Maidens anymore.

“B—besides, do you really think we should be doing this? Metafalica won’t be Sung unless we go back, right? Don’t you want a paradise?”

“... What do you want to do, Lady Infel?”

“B—but I don’t care! I’m asking you right now Ana!”

“Is it not obvious? I am your attendant, so I will follow you. However-”

She continued.



“No matter what you choose, I will do all I can to stop you if I think you’re reluctant about it. Because that too is my job.”

Ana intended to follow Infel and Nenesha regardless of which choice they made. And even if they did choose something, she would force them take the other option if they were reluctant about their choice.

“Please make your decision, Lady Infel, Lady Nenesha.”

“Even if you tell me to choose, I...”

She wanted to run away. But what would Nenesha say?

She didn’t want to make a choice where she might lose the few people who understood her, especially Nenesha, the one who understood her most deeply of all. If she was going to, there was only one possible answer.

“... Hey, Infel.”

Nenesha accepted the other bag from Ana, and took out its contents. There was some cheap looking women’s clothing, and wigs they could use to disguise themselves, enough for two people.

She held out one set to Infel.

“I’m good with whatever makes you happiest, Infel. After all, Singing Metafalica is the hardest on you. It’s only natural that you should decide.”

Infel fixed her eyes on Nenesha, the clothes and wig she had received from her in hand.

“But at this rate, your dream will...”

“... Um, may I ask you something?”

Ana asked Infel, a serious look on her face.

“This is just my personal opinion, but is something obtained at the expense of its Singer and creator really an ideal land?”

“No one will know as long as I keep quiet!”

“It will come to light once they have seen everything tomorrow. Besides, Lady Nenesha and I have heard you just now, so it’s no longer an ideal land to us.”

Ana knew. Infel was trying to create Metafalica not for the sake of the people, but for the sake of fulfilling her and Nenesha’s dreams. And that dream of Nenesha’s was to weave the ideal land of Metafalica and create a world where everyone could live in happiness.

As it was now, she would end up destroying Nenesha’s dream depending on how things went. Infel was deeply troubled by this realization.

“I don’t know... well then, what the hell am I supposed to do?”

“What do you want to do Lady Infel? And why do you want to do it?”

She wanted to run away. Metafalica would no doubt end up failing if they saw every last inch of her heart.

However, just because she wanted to run away didn’t mean she would. She wished to Sing and make Metafalica a success. But to do that, she would have to reveal the inside of her heart. The IPDs were really looking forward to seeing Infel’s heart. If every last inch of it was seen, the darkness in her heart would be completely exposed, and everyone would harbor animosity towards her. If that happened, it would end in failure, and she would be despised by everyone.

That’s why she wanted to run away.

“... There’s no way it’ll succeed. Everyone will no doubt hate what they see if they look inside my heart.”

If the people who were saying they were her fans right now were to suddenly change their attitude the instant they saw her heart, it would be nothing short of rejecting Infel’s very existence.

“I don’t put the people first. One of the reasons I’ve immersed myself in my research is because it’s a pain to deal with them. Are you still willing to protect such a Maiden the same as before?”

“What’s wrong with that? The Holy Maiden is still a person. Not even having one such part of yourself? On the contrary, I could never believe that!”

Infel winced at Ana’s strong words.

“I have been by your side watching you all this time, Lady Infel, Lady Nenesha. Before that, I didn’t know what the Holy Maidens were like, and honestly believed that they were upright individuals who lived solely for the sake of the people.”

“Yes, that’s what everyone thinks. That’s why if they see a heart like mine...”

“That’s why I was relieved! Because you called out to me Lady Infel, and I’ve been by your side watching you two all this time... because I realized that the two of you are ordinary people with things that are important to you besides just Metafalica... I was happy to know that you have dreams for after Metafalica’s success.”

“What about that makes you relieved and happy?”

“You are able to talk about your plans for after Metafalica because you’re confident you will make it succeed, right? That’s why you are giving it your all. It’s the same for everyone. They have lots of things they want to do after Metafalica, which is why they cherish the Holy Maidens.”

Nenesha realized what Ana was trying to say.

“...Are you saying that we share the same wish as everyone in this world?”

Ana gave a big nod in response.

“What are you saying? It’s only natural that everyone wants to make Metafalica succeed, right?”

“That’s not it, Infel. Ana’s talking about after we make Metafalica a success... we’re Singing Metafalica to weave a continent and create a paradise. And also, to make our dreams come true. Isn’t that right?”

It was as Nenesha said. Metafalica was merely the means necessary to make their dreams come true. They had to create an environment in which that would be possible. That’s why they were going to Sing Metafalica.

“Everyone feels the same way too. However, there are a lot of people who think that the Holy Maidens’ dream is to Sing Metafalica. I was also one such person... But seeing inside your heart should make them realize.

Realize that oh, the Holy Maidens are ordinary people who share the same dreams as us. In which case...”

Ana took a second to consider her words.

“They will surely accept the true Lady Infel.”

People who would accept her true self. Was it really true?

Infel had experienced the Infelsphere, so she knew she had faults that weren’t easy to accept no matter how kindhearted you were. If people she had had barely any contact with were to see those faults, would they really accept them?

But if they were going to look that far into the depths of her heart, they would surely see that she shared the same dreams as everyone, and was trying to Sing Metafalica to make those dreams come true. In which case, they might accept her even if there were parts of her they didn’t like.

“Infel... I think there will be uneasiness, but they’ll surely accept you. So first, you’ve got to believe in everyone.”

“...Me?”

“Yes, that’s right. After all, if you can’t believe in them, even if you do Sing, they’ll end up abandoning you. They can’t follow a Holy Maiden that doesn’t believe in them.”

“.....”

“But if you want to run away, that’s also an option. I won’t look down on you or leave you even if that’s what you decide to do.”

With that, she took Infel’s hand.

“Me too. Life might be a bit difficult, but protecting the Holy Maidens is my duty. I’ll continue to protect you two not only when you run away, but afterwards as well.”

Ana took Infel’s other hand.

“So there’s nothing to worry about... Now let’s hurry up and decide before someone comes.”

“...”

Could she really make Metafalica a success?

Infel thought it was best not to Sing if the probability of failure was high. The Rim might fall if things went poorly, so it was better not to unless they were sure it would be fine, and success was guaranteed.

But they had everything they needed for Metafalica.

Now it all depended on what everyone would think of her feelings when they Sung it.

What exactly would they think of her heart? She was terrified at the thought.

Infel was attempting to run away from that fear. But the two holding her hands right now were saying they would support her.

Regardless of if she ran or Sang, they would be there for her no matter what the outcome may be.

She was scared. But her trembling had subsided.

“...really?” Infel whispered, and the two of them listened closely.

“It’s really okay to run away?”

Upon seeing the two of them smile and nod in response, Infel made her decision.

“...In that case, I’ll try and Sing.”

“... You’ll Sing?”

“There is no need to force yourself to Sing, Lady Infel.”

Infel shook her head.

“It’s okay... I’m a little scared, but I want to Sing.”

For their sake as well – the two who had told her with a smile that it was okay not to Sing Metafalica.

“I want to create a paradise, and make our dreams come true.”

She wanted to create Metafalica. And she also wanted to make Nenesha’s dream come true.

“So... I think I’ll try and believe in everyone.”

If the people wanted Metafalica like she did, they’d surely help her out. Regardless of what else they may see in her heart.

“I’m fine now... Sorry for making you two witness such a shameful scene.”

They gave her hands a slight squeeze in response

## Chapter 10

# The Night Before Metafalica – Part 2

Infel compared her own past with how Cloche and Luca were now.

She hadn't broken down as much as Cloche, but she too had almost been crushed by the same anxiety and fear. But there had been people there to encourage and protect her. Otherwise, Infel surely would have run away.

Cloche, like Infel, also had someone by her side supporting her.

Luca was currently talking to Cloche about running away, much like how Nenesha and Ana had with Infel in the past.

Cloche, still embraced by Luca, shook her head in denial.

Just the sort of answer you'd expect. Cloche's dream was to make Metafalica a success and create a paradise where everyone could live in happiness, no matter how scared and uneasy she may be. She had lived her life for the sake of that dream, so no matter how reluctant she was, she could never say she was going to run away.

Luca gently stroked Cloche's head as she continued to say she'd Sing Metafalica despite her body shaking with sobs.

Her little sister, whose aura made her come off as the older one. She had been someone who people relied on and adored for most of her life, and had lived each day working hard in the name of peace. For the good of the world, and for herself.

Luca, the older sister, had spent her life up till now hoping to find that little sister of hers so she could once again live together with her entire family. For her own sake.

There was no difference between the two of them in that they had spent their lives trying to obtain what was important to them, but the scale was much too different. In contrast to Luca, who was satisfied with thinking only of her own happiness, Cloche had lived her life with all the people of Metafalss in mind.

Luca had seen it for herself. She had also seen it in the Infelsphere. That's why she knew just how scared Cloche was as well.

...It wasn't having the inside of her heart seen that she was scared of, it was Metafalica failing because of it that was scary to her.

But if she ran away, it would be like throwing away her life up till now.

"... Will you be able to Sing Metafalica?"

Cloche nodded in response.

"... I'll Sing to the very end... I can't run away, even if I'm scared and anxious..."

"..."

Luca was debating on if she should say what she was planning to or not.

"... I have no choice but to Sing. I've lived for the sake of Singing Metafalica."

"... That's no good."



Cloche lifted her head in surprise.

"I don't like this... I can't Sing while anxious."

"... What's that supposed to mean? Stop joking around!"

Cloche pushed Luca away in anger.

"The inside of your heart won't be seen, so it shouldn't matter to you!"

"Yeah, my heart won't be seen."

"Then..."

"But if it fails, I'll die... I don't want to die yet."

Cloche watched as she gave a troubled laugh, and remembered the risk Luca faced.

Metafalica is Sung by two people, however they each Sing a separate Metafalica.

The EXEC\_METAFAALICA/. that Luca would Sing was a Song that connected her with this world's Goddess, Frelia, to weave the continent. But the energy required for weaving a continent was vast, so Luca and Frelia's power alone was insufficient. If she Sung it like normal, their life force would be drained away within less than a minute, and they would end up dying.

Therefore, the power of METHOD\_METAFAALICA/., which Cloche would Sing, was necessary. By Singing this, her heart would be connected with a large number of IPDs, artificially constructing a single person, which would collect their feelings. By doing this, it could then carry out its role of sending the continuous flow of energy required for weaving the continent to Luca.

If it couldn't, Luca would end up dying.

But there was something Cloche couldn't understand.

Luca wasn't any different from normal, despite Cloche, whom she was entrusting her life to, being this distraught.

"... How are you able to laugh?"

She probably couldn't afford to comfort Cloche. Cloche had used her own anxiety about her heart being seen as a pretext to act selfishly, so it wouldn't be surprising if Luca were to deride her.

However, Luca tilted her head at Cloche's question. She didn't seem to know what Cloche meant.

"Your life's at stake you know? How are you able to be laughing like that! You should be more scared, since you might end up dying."

"...I wonder if it's because the inside of my heart won't be seen?"

Did she think something like dying was nothing compared to having the inside of your heart seen?

"Lady Cloche, I've been watching you all this time, and I know you're bluffing. But no matter how tough you pretend to be, it'll all be exposed when the inside of your heart is seen, right?"

The truth was she'd always been uneasy, even though she hadn't shown it.

"But my heart won't be seen... so no one will find out if I pretend to be strong to the end."

"That's true, but still..."

"Besides, I somehow knew this might happen to you Lady Cloche... so I wondered whether I could cheer you up if I put on a brave face, but..."

It hadn't worked. Cloche had said she would Sing, but she was still anxious.

"I thought Metafalica would surely succeed if we Sing. And then I'd be able to live a happy life together with you, Lady Cloche... no, Reika... So I couldn't wait to Sing... but somehow, I feel like it's gonna end up failing as is..."

She might not be able to once again live life together with the sister she had finally reunited with. Luca wasn't able to

bluff her way through that anxiety, and had ended up saying what she had been trying to hide.

“Although I wanted to avoid telling you...”

No one had realized it, but Luca had been enduring her own anxiety to look out for Cloche. And even now, she had been trying to encourage her, doing all she could to conceal it.

How could she have done this to Luca.

“Luca, I...”

Cloche had to apologize. She had done something unforgivable, but there was nothing else she could do.

“I’m sorry.”

It was Luca who spoke.

She once again embraced Cloche, who couldn’t understand why she was apologizing.

“I wasn’t able to protect you when we were kids, Reika... And even though I was determined to support you to the bitter end this time, I wasn’t able to do that either... I’m so sorry I’m such a weak older sister.”

Luca’s grip around her back had a certain intensity to it.

She had once again failed to protect her little sister. It was unbearably frustrating how weak she was, both in strength and heart. She was so pitiful she wanted to cry out and sob even now.

But she couldn’t do that. She did all she could to hold back her tears. She wasn’t about to cry in front of her anxious, suffering sister.

“That’s not true... Not in the least...”

She was happy that Luca was putting her first, but she didn’t understand her feelings.

“You’ll end up dying if it fails, yeah? So if I’m anxious, I shouldn’t Sing, right? Saying we’re not going to Sing because it’s definitely going to fail is probably the right thing to do.”

Cloche couldn't see her since she was being embraced, but she felt Luca shake her head.

"...I could never say something like that. After all, I plan on Singing no matter what."

"Why!?"

"Because Metafalica is my dear sister's dream... I'll go along with anything for it."

"But it might fail because of me."

"I don't think so. I believe your feelings will be accepted by people all throughout the world, Reika... I'm your older sister after all."

Luca had no regrets, even if Metafalica failed and she ended up dying as a result. If she believed in her sister to the end, and they were able to Sing to the end, even that alone would be enough.

Cloche put her arm around Luca's back.

"...You believe in me? That I'll make Metafalica succeed?"

"I'll Sing with all my heart tomorrow as proof."

"...Are you sure? You might end up dying."

"I have faith that's not gonna happen."

There was no way she wasn't scared, it was a bluff. Cloche realized this, but she was grateful for it right now.

Her sister had been pretending to be strong to the end, and even though she had let her anxiety slip through for a second, she was continuing to be strong for her sake.

"...I can't let you die."

Cloche didn't feel anxious anymore.

"I absolutely cannot let my sister die, so..."

She couldn't afford to be feeling uneasy. She wasn't about to lose her precious family because of something like that.

"Will you work together with me, since we're definitely gonna make it succeed?"

"...Yeah. That's the Reika I know."

Luca continued to hold her in a tight embrace as she gently stroked her head.

“...”

Infel was left in shock as she watched the two of them from Sol Marta.

Much like Cloche, she had also been saved by the encouragement she had received after nearly being crushed by anxiety.

But had she considered that Nenesha might end up dying if it failed back then?

It might end up failing because the inside of her heart was going to be seen. She had been so caught up on that alone that she hadn't thought about Nenesha.

She had said she was Singing Metafalica for herself as well as for Nenesha, but she wasn't able to support her where she needed it most.

... Why hadn't she said even a single word to her.

Nenesha, aren't you scared to Sing Metafalica? Why hadn't she asked her that single question?

Realizing what she had left undone 400 years ago, Infel was all alone, tormented by feelings of regret.

## Chapter 11

# The Complaints of a Certain Pair of Knights – Part 2

It was the morning of Metafalica itself.

Many IPDs had already gathered in Grand Bell Hall's Speech Plaza, and were being guided into place by the knights, as instructed by Chester.

"Where do y'think we'll be this evening?"

The white knight, who had been guiding the IPDs, spoke to the blue knight next to him.

"Probably on Metafalica, right? Though there won't be anything there yet even if it's created... so maybe we'll just be looking at it from below for the time being?"

"You sure are getting ahead of yourself. You're already thinking about its success?"

"Of course, but... oh yeah. Weren't you thinking it's not gonna succeed?"

"I didn't say that, did I? I've just been considering the possibility."

“Haaah... you’re so negative.”

He had hoped his thinking might have changed a little since then, but it seemed it really hadn’t.

“Is that... really all you’ve been thinking about up till now?”

“... Well, among other things.”

The white knight held his head in his hands – it was just as he’d imagined.

“You’re so gloomy. I mean, haven’t you considered consulting with someone or somethin’ like that? Though I could hear you out for a bit if you’re okay with me.”

The white knight saw the look of blatant disdain on the blue knight’s face.

“You’re so rude!”

“I’m joking... but I seriously did consult with someone.”

Despite telling him to do so, the white knight thought about how disastrous it must have been for the person he consulted with. Though he was curious who in the world that unfortunate person might be.

“Who’d you consult with? Someone from the Cloche Fan Club, right?”

“Nope, wrong.”

The blue knight pointed ahead of them. Chester was standing over there directing the knights and IPDs.

“... No way, with Chester?”

The blue knight nodded.

“You’ve got a lot of nerve... so what’d you say? Did you yell “You damn traitor!” or something?”

“I just asked a question: Why did you switch to Metafalica?”

He had gone to see the ever-busy Chester a few nights ago, and had asked him that.

They had followed Chester, believing in a plan called Hibernation. Yet when it had failed, he had suddenly become a supporter of Metafalica and taken his current position at the Grand Bell, so wasn't that betrayal?

If it wasn't, he wanted him to clearly explain his reasoning. He had given them enough reasons as to why Hibernation would succeed to make them believe in it, so if he had switched to Metafalica, the blue knight wanted to hear a good reason why. Otherwise, he would be filled with uneasiness on the day of Metafalica.

He had honestly thought he'd be ignored.

Surely Chester had just reduced himself to becoming a dog of the Grand Bell in order to survive. He had even been considering leaving if that were true.

"So what'd that bastard Chester say?"

"Don't talk that way about Sir Chester."

The white knight wondered if that meant he had given a satisfactory response.

"... Actually, it seemed there were others with worries like mine who had come to discuss them as well."

Some other former knights of the Sacred Army had also been troubled by Chester mysteriously switching to Metafalica, and had gone to visit him.

The blue knight was glad to know there were others who shared the same concerns as him even now.

"And as for what Sir Chester said... he wasn't sure it would succeed."

"What the hell! How halfhearted!"

"Yeah, I thought so too... but I listened to him, and I could see where he was coming from."

Chester had continued to speak to a knight who held him in contempt, having switched to Metafalica without confidence in its success.



The people of this world long for the paradise of Metafalica.

While it was true that they had made plans for Hibernation and had tried to implement it, he had once been someone with hope for Metafalica. He had lost that hope somewhere down the line, and had ended up leading the Sacred Army.

It was the same for the blue knight as well. He had also once had hope for Metafalica. He had given up on it and had fled to Hibernation because no matter how much time passed, it remained nothing more than words, and was never implemented.

Chester had explained to him how this Metafalica was different from before. Although he added that this didn't mean it was guaranteed to succeed, of course.

But he had also asked the blue knight if he would rather see Metafalica or Hibernation realized if the probability of their success was the same.

Although he had been part of the Sacred Army, if the probability of their success was assumed to be the same, there was but one answer. He knew Hibernation was an escape they were running to because they couldn't obtain their ideal land.

There was no one who truly wanted Hibernation, after all. Chester himself had said that a world created in such a way was no paradise.

So he was helping out because there was a good chance Metafalica would succeed this time. He had joined the Grand Bell because he believed it might. Much like how the blue knight had believed in Chester and had followed him.

"There weren't any other reasons for it..."

"Eh... I didn't think he was the kinda guy who'd be swayed by reasons like that, but I guess he's full of surprises."

The blue knight thought so too.

He had always believed Chester would never be swayed by such reasons, so he could hardly believe his ears when Chester had told him that.

The Chester he had believed in was gone. Yet why was he still a Grand Bell Knight despite feeling that way? He had been thinking about all sorts of things, but that had been weighing most heavily on his mind.

“Hey, you two.”

Two of the IPDs that had been guided into line had shifted their gaze to them at some point.

“Did you two really talk with Sir Chester? Do you happen to be friends with him or something?”

“No, I was just his subordinate back when I was part of the Sacred Army.”

Although he was still his subordinate even now that they had joined the Grand Bell.

“Whaaat, they weren’t friends.”

“Really, there was no use getting our hopes up.”

“Hopes up?”

He had no idea what they were talking about.

“We were thinking of possibly getting you to introduce us to Sir Chester if you were friends with him. We’re big fans of his!”  
...Such bad taste.

Though the white knight didn’t say as much.

“Though I’m still envious. Hey, what exactly did you talk about?”

It seemed they hadn’t heard the details of their conversation. Which made sense, as he didn’t know what they’d say if they had known he had gone to talk with Chester because he had doubts about him and Metafalica.

There were also an especially large number of Cloche Fan Club members here. The blue knight finally realized the kinds of things he had been talking about around such people.

He'd gloss over it somehow. Or so he thought, but-

"This guy said he thinks Metafalica is gonna fail. Yet he apparently went and complained to Chester for helping out with it."

"Wha-? You idiot, what the hell!"

The blue knight rushed to stop him, but it was too late. The nearby IPDs suddenly looked angry, and had the two of them surrounded in an instant.

"Hey! You were rude to Sir Chester!"

"There's no way Metafalica will fail!"

"You don't believe Lady Cloche?! And yet you say you're from Metafalss?"

"Hey— Not me! I didn't say that!"

The complaints of the IPDs encircling them weren't just directed at the blue knight, but at the white knight with him as well. He shot the blue knight a look of "why the hell did you get them caught up in this", but it was met with a look of "you're the one who started it."

The blue knight was wincing at the harsh words of all the angry girls, but he had also noticed a Reyvateil who had been a fellow member of the former Sacred Army. She was hurling complaints at him just like the rest of them.

... Was it because everyone longed for Metafalica?

There was no proof for it, but he couldn't help but wonder if what Chester had been saying was right.

The white knight realized the blue knight was lost in thought with a serious look on his face despite the situation they were in, and decided he had no choice but to calm this uproar somehow.

"... Alright, I get it! So I'll tell you what!"

The white knight took out his wallet and showed its contents to the blue knight.

"I bet 100 leaf that Metafalica will succeed."

“... What?”

He wasn't surprised that the white knight had placed a bet. What surprised him was that there was only 100 leaf in his wallet despite knights having a reliable income.

But even though the amount was small, the surrounding IPDs cheered at the sentiment of the white knight betting on its success!

“Just as you'd expect from a Grand Bell Knight! I'll be supporting it too!”

“I'll also bet on its success!”

The two knights were relieved to see the atmosphere around them finally change.

“... Jeez, it's cause you always say weird things.”

“This all started because you went and told everyone.”

The atmosphere around them had changed, but the commotion still remained.

“Hey! The group making a racket over there!”

Chester called out to them from the front of the speech plaza, where he had been overseeing the organization of the IPDs.

“Please don't break out of line! You knights over there, guide them well!”

Upon hearing Chester's voice, the IPDs who had gathered around the knights hurried back to where they had originally been, forming a line. Chester confirmed this before going back to instructing the others.

“... Isn't him calling out to them more effective than our guidance?”

The white knight saw that despite Chester telling them to guide the IPDs, they had gone and formed a line at Chester's instruction alone. He sighed.

“Yeah, really... hm?”

One of the IPDs from just now brought her lips up to the blue knight's ear.

"I'll be betting on its success too. I'm looking forward to it."

"... I'd know that even without you saying so."

It was clear that everyone here was betting on Metafalica's success.

The people of Metafalss are wishing for Metafalica from the bottom of their hearts. What Chester had said was true.

"So, what're you gonna do?" The white knight asked, grinning.

"Right..."

He was uneasy. But in the end, they wouldn't know if it would succeed or fail until they tried. So what did he think would happen this time? No, what did he want to have happen?

... In the end, I feel the same way.

"I'll bet everything I own on its success."

## Chapter 12

# Croix and Leglius' Visit to the Cemetery

There is a small cemetery a short walk from Waterfall Hill Park.

The numerous gravestones are packed together as if nestling close to one another within the confines of the cemetery, much like how the people lived nestled close to one another within the confines of Pastalia.

The sound of a gravestone being polished with a scrubbing brush resounded throughout that small cemetery.

It was coming from a small gravestone in the corner.

“Whew... hmm, that’s good enough, right?”

Croix stood up from in front of the gravestone, having just finished polishing it. His knees felt heavy from crouching for so long, but he really didn’t seem to mind, perhaps because his sense of accomplishment from cleaning it was even greater.

He could still see some dirt here and there that had refused to come off, but today was the day of Metafalica. He couldn’t spend any more time here.

...Should he have at least brought a flower?

He had been focused on cleaning, so he hadn't thought that far. Now that he was done, he didn't have a single offering, which made it feel desolate.

"... Well, there's not much I can do about it."

He didn't have time to go buy something right now. He'd have to make do with just being able to clean it for the time being.

That in mind, he was about to leave when-

"Croix? What are you doing in a place like this?"

"Eh?"

Croix turned around and saw a rugged man in violet armor standing before him. He was initially startled by the sight of such a large man, but he knew who it was, so he immediately regained his composure.

"Captain!"

It was Leglius, captain of the Grand Bell Knights, or in other words, Croix's superior.

"You too Captain, what exactly are you...?" Croix had started to ask, but then he noticed something. Leglius was holding a small bouquet of flowers in his hand.

Leglius saw Croix with a scrubbing brush in hand and sweat on his brow, and seemed to understand what he had been doing as well.

"... Who's grave?"

"... My parents'."

Croix had never talked about his parents' grave with anyone besides Cocona before, so he sounded a bit nervous as he spoke.

Upon hearing this, Leglius remembered that Croix had lost his family as a child.

"If I remember correctly, you were adopted by Reisha, and lived with her for a while."

“Yes... thinking back, she let me go to the dojo and went through all kinds of trouble for me, despite how hard life was.”

Words alone couldn't express his gratitude for Reisha. Life was hard enough for her and Luca alone, but she had scraped together enough money to cover food for one more person, on top of the cost of the dojo.

But at the same time, his stomach knotted up as he remembered life back then.

It wasn't as if Luca and Reisha had hated each other, but they had had a somewhat distant relationship. So Croix had lived caught between the two of them, anxiously wondering when they'd next start quarreling.

...A silent dinner table was the worst.

He decided to change the subject.

“But still, it was thanks to that I ended up being hired as a knight. So when I moved to Pastalia, I moved my parents' grave here as well. Since it would be hard to visit their grave if it remained on the Rim. I could walk to it all the time if I moved it here.”

“I think it's rare for someone of your age to make a point of visiting a grave... although it seems no one does any cleaning these days either.”

“Ah, no... to tell you the truth, I've been busy, so I haven't come here at all lately. I was thinking I needed to clean their grave since Metafalica is finally going to be realized, so...”

That wasn't all, he had also come here to tell them about his hopes for Metafalica's success, and everything he had been doing to help achieve it. Though it was embarrassing, so he couldn't tell Leglius.

“...I see.”

Leglius then took a flower from the bouquet he was holding, and placed the rest of it in front of the gravestone.

“It's sad for there not to be even a single flower.”



“Are you sure?”

“I can’t not pay my respects to your parents.” Leglius said, then faced the gravestone and bowed his head.

“... Now then, I have my own business to attend to.”

Leglius waved and went to leave, but Croix hurried after him.

“Uh, could I come with you?”

“It’ll be dull even if you do.”

“You’re going to see your wife and daughter, right? I can’t not pay my respects to them.”



“... You're an odd one.”

Even so, Leglius was smiling happily.

The grave where Leglius' wife and daughter slept was at the back of the graveyard.

All the graves had gotten dirty in some way or another, and there were many among them in such bad shape that it was clear they had been completely forgotten.

Croix found only a single grave among them that was spotless. The gravestone itself was a simple slab, but it was

so clean that at first glance, it appeared to be brand new. However, upon closer inspection, there were parts of it that had been naturally chipped away and worn down over the years, so there was little doubt that it was indeed old.

“... Right here.”

“Okay... eh?”

Leglius had stopped in front of the spotless grave.

“T—this?”

“Is it a little too simple? They didn’t really like anything overly grandiose.”

He seemed to have misunderstood that Croix was surprised by how small the grave was, so Croix quickly denied it.

“That’s not what I meant... I was just thinking how much care you’ve put into maintaining it...”

“Ah.” Leglius placed the flower he had taken from the bouquet in front of the gravestone.

“It’s cause I’m a boring man with nothing outside of my job. Whenever I have a day off or a bit of free time, I just come here and tend to it.”

The job of a knight was a tough one, where you could rarely take days off. Leglius would be especially busy as knight captain. It was no doubt even more difficult for him to take days off than your average knight like Croix.

“Shouldn’t you use that time to relax at home or something?”

“Is that what you do on your days off?”

“I want to, but most of the time I get dragged around by Cocona, so...”

Come to think of it, whenever he had a break, she would badger him to take her somewhere, and sometimes the weapon shop owner Cynthia would tell him to come to her shop, even on his days off. It seemed he really hadn’t spent a single one of his days off at home this year.

“Looks like I have no room to talk.”

“That’s not true... honestly, there are times I feel envious seeing you guys.”

“Eh?” Croix looked over at Leglius.

He kept his eyes fixed on the gravestone as he spoke to Croix.

“Whenever I go home, I always end up thinking about my family... I can’t help but feel lonely.”

“Ah...”

There was nothing strange about what Leglius was saying. He had lost his dear wife and daughter, so of course he’d miss them.

But he’d usually never show it. He was as strong and reliable as he looked. Croix couldn’t help but be surprised at hearing the word “lonely” come from his mouth.

“I don’t think there’s any need to worry, but... how about you, are you doing okay?”

Croix gave a slightly awkward smile.

“It’s like I said before. Every day is enjoyable thanks to Cocona... though I don’t get to relax on my days off.”

“Is that so.” Leglius said, looking content.

There was something Croix was curious about.

“... Um, it may be rude to ask you this here, but...”

It seemed the meek look on his face had already given it away to Leglius what he wanted to ask. But Leglius didn’t mind.

“I have an idea what it is, but go on.”

“Okay... It’s been years now since you lost your family, yet haven’t you considered starting a new family?”

“You mean a second marriage?”

“That’s right... you should have lots of fans since you’re the Grand Bell Knight captain, right? Cocona was saying

there are even Reyvateils among the Knights who said they wanted to get acquainted with you.”

This was the first Leglius had heard of them, but he had no intention of doing so. He shook his head.

“Aren’t those Reyvateils young enough to be my daughter? These two might end up haunting all my dreams if you tell me to have a second marriage with someone like that.”

He patted the gravestone.

“That’s why I’m not considering a second marriage. . . not like that.”

“Huh? The way you’re speaking makes it sound like there’s something else you’re considering. . .”

“... Well, kind of. The whole reason I came here in the first place was to tell them about it.”

There was no doubt he had lots of duties that needed taking care of since Metafalica would soon be Sung. And yet here he was, so it must be something important enough that he had to neglect his duties in order to tell his family.

Croix wondered if it was okay for him to be here since he was an outsider, but there was no way he wasn’t curious what a person who lived for his work like Leglius would abandon his duties to report.

Besides, Croix remembered that he had asked if it was okay to come along with him first. Leglius probably would have given some excuse and refused if it was something he didn’t want him to hear.

“Actually. . . I’m not surprised.”

He seemed to be in good spirits for some reason. Something was strange about Leglius today.

“Please don’t keep me waiting.”

“The truth is. . . she’s interested in becoming my daughter.”

“Eh?! y—your daughter?”

Croix was genuinely surprised, he wasn’t expecting that.

He had thought about what Leglius might say, but he had never imagined he'd hear those words come from his mouth. It was so shocking that even Cloche probably wouldn't have been able to see it coming despite having known him for longer than Croix.

"Umm... is it someone I know?"

"Mm... well, you'll see when the time comes. Besides, that's just what she told me, it's not like I've made a decision yet."

"...Is that so?"

"Of course. If I'm going to have a daughter from now on, I can't so easily give an answer."

Or so he said, but judging from the cheerful expression he had been wearing all this time, it seemed he had already decided what his answer would be.

Moreover, it was clear he had already decided in his heart the moment he had come here to tell his family.

However, his expression was becoming more and more melancholic as he looked at the gravestone.

"... Would the two of them approve of it? Besides, come to think of it, it's not really like me."

"So? The world is going to change thanks to Metafalica. I think this sort of change would be good for you too, Captain."

Croix had gained something by Cocona becoming part of his family. If Leglius was going to gain that too, he intended to support him wholeheartedly.

"Is that so... hey, it's not weird, is it?"

"Not at all, I promise."

"Is that so... okay, I'll do it."

He had planned on living together with her as his daughter from the start, but sure enough, it seemed he had had some doubts. And thanks to Croix's encouragement, it seemed they had disappeared...

... Even so, he was different from usual.

Was it because Croix had only ever seen him cool and composed as he performed his duties, never saying more than necessary about himself? Leglius currently looked nothing short of your average, everyday father, happy to have a new daughter.

... It was proof of how happy he was.

No matter what, Croix hoped they'd be able to enjoy every day together like him and Cocona.

"By the way, where would my new daughter enjoy me taking her to? I'm not familiar with this kind of thing, so I have no idea."

"Y—Yeah, that's right..."

Actually, he thought it would be more of a problem if Leglius did know, but he didn't dare say so.

However, come to think of it, it wasn't like Croix was well-acquainted with the kind of places girls liked either.

"As far as I know, the Fancy Shop might be your best bet. Even Lady Cloche loves that shop, as well as Cocona... by the way, if you visit it with a girl, you'll be stuck there for an hour, so please be careful."

Croix got a distant look in his eyes and sighed, as if he had remembered something. It seemed it had happened to him before.

However, after thinking for a second-

"No, I don't think she's interested in that kind of shop. Do you know anywhere else?"

"No, I'm not very familiar with this sort of thing either. Besides, I don't even know what kind of person this girl is, so I really can't give you any advice."

"... I see, now that you mention it, that's certainly true isn't it."

“...Looks like you’ve suddenly been hit with a difficult question.”

Indeed he had. He could see her going on relentlessly about how disappointing and boring it was if he took her to the wrong place.

Leglius smiled happily as he pictured his bored daughter complaining.

“Well, thinking about it’s part of the fun.”

He patted the gravestone, as if seeking a reply.



## Chapter 13

### 3313 AD – Metafalica

Amarie had been watching Chester restlessly issue orders at the speech plaza.

All preparations had already been completed, and all that should be left was to wait for Cloche and Luca to Sing. Even so, he was checking over the IPDs yet again.

Everyone thought he was taking the utmost care to respond to whatever may happen until the moment Cloche and Luca began Singing.

However, Amarie realized this wasn't the case.

Wasn't the Song going to start soon? He was so excited he couldn't calm down.

...Chester was in such high spirits!

Realizing she was looking at him, Chester cleared his throat and turned away in a fluster.

Amarie had known him since she was a child, but this was the first time she had seen him in such high spirits.

...Don't worry, it'll definitely succeed. She thought to herself, as she looked to the highest point of the Grand Bell Hall and murmured something-

"Do your best, you two."

There is an altar called the Hill of Metafalica at the highest point of the Grand Bell Hall.

As the name suggests, it was a place built for the Maidens who would Sing Metafalica.

Croix and the others had already seen Luca and Cloche off. They were now standing alone at that silent altar, looking up to the heavens.

They had a clear view of Infel Phira floating in the sky from that open area.

Taking a deep breath, the two of them turned their backs to one another and joined hands.

The people of the world were awaiting their Song. They longed for the paradise that would be weaved by it.

...No matter what happens, this is the end. Infel thought to herself, as she watched them from Sol Marta.

Cloche shared the same feelings as her, and she hoped she would end up happy. Which was to say she hoped Metafalica would succeed.

But she wore an uneasy look on her face, probably because she knew that hope would almost doubtlessly be betrayed.

What sort of outcome would await them after Metafalica was Sung?

It didn't matter if it failed. Even if another Deathlandia was created, or the Rim fell and however many people plunged into the Sea of Death, none of it mattered to Infel anymore.

But wouldn't Cloche end up like her if it failed? She couldn't help but worry about that.

"...Are you okay, Infel?"

Frelia had sensed that Infel was feeling uneasy and expressed her concern, but Infel ignored her.

She hoped Cloche would make Metafalica a success, but no matter how hard she tried, she could only see it ending in failure.

... It's proof that I don't believe in people, isn't it.

However, she had never felt any kind of regret or sadness about it.

She never had much interest in other people to begin with, so her values had hardly changed since back then. She just felt resentment and hatred towards them now too.

"Hey, Frelia... I wonder what will happen after the two of them Sing Metafalica?"

"A continent will be created, of course. An enormous continent that will easily overshadow the current Metafalss."

"... You can picture it?"

"Of course! Luca and Cloche are surely thinking about it too right about now."

"... Well, I suppose so."

She couldn't picture the new continent, but she knew exactly what the two of them were thinking.

She too was one of the people who had stood there in the past when they had tried to Sing Metafalica, so she knew, even without Frelia telling her.

And she knew what the people around them were thinking as well.

... But people's hearts were quick to change.

Infel remembered the past.

And remembered the final hours she had spent together with Nenesha.

"Hey, try to imagine what it'll be like after we Sing Metafalica."

Infel and Nenesha were about to head to the Hill of Metafalica.

Nenesha was speaking to a group of IPDs who had wished to give them a final bit of encouragement.

To which the IPDs replied-

“That’s what we’ve been thinking about all day even without you telling us.”

Nenesha watched them answer with a laugh, and smiled in delight.

“And now we’re going to make what you’ve imagined a reality. Be sure to help us out, everyone.”

“Leave it to us! I’ll do all I can to help out!”

“But quietly listening to the two of you Sing doesn’t sound bad either...”

“Ah, that would be nice too! But Metafalica will end up failing if you don’t Sing...”

The IPDs were saying they wanted to hear their Song, so she was about to tell them they would Sing for them afterwards, but then she thought for a second.

“... So come up to the Hill of Metafalica after you’re sure the continent has been created. I’ll let you listen to us there.”

“Eh! A-are you sure? That place is sacred after all...”

“You’ll be helping us out, so I can allow this much. So keep Singing till the end, okay?”

The IPDs cried out in delight. Not only did they get to go to the Hill of Metafalica, they also got to hear the two Maidens Sing it live there. They probably never imagined they’d get such a privilege.

... Would she end up getting scolded afterwards?

Nenesha was a bit concerned, but those concerns vanished in an instant upon seeing how happy they were.

“Infel, you say something too.”

Infel had been watching from a short distance away, when she was suddenly addressed by Nenesha. She wasn’t sure how to respond.

“I—I’m good... I don’t really have anything I want to say.”

“Don’t say that. Look, everyone’s waiting.”

Nenesha led her by the hand and had her stand next to her.

It was the day of Metafalica, so sure enough, their eyes were literally sparkling with excitement, even more so than last night.

...It would dampen the mood if she were to make a thoughtless remark.

As IPDs, their cooperation was necessary in order to implement Metafalica. So she had to say something that would satisfy them.

“Uh-ummm...”

She probably wasn't cut out for this kind of thing. That in mind, Infel decided to take advantage of what Nenesha had said earlier.

“We'll give shape to the paradise you've imagined, so look forward to it.”

Infel was relieved to hear cries of joy and applause rise from the crowd. It seemed she hadn't said anything to lower their excitement.

However, that was to be expected. Unlike Nenesha, Infel wasn't known as someone who went out and spoke to the public much, so they got excited at how rare of an occasion it was, so long as she didn't say anything really horrible.

“Well then everyone, we'll see you later.”

The talk was finally ending, and it seemed they were about to head off. Although Infel was visibly tired of waiting, and wanted to hurry up and Sing rather than take their time talking here, deep down, she was also a bit nervous.

Even though she was going to try and Sing, she had been scared enough to run away, so there was no way she was feeling composed, as it wasn't like her fear had completely disappeared in one night.

The IPDs waved and headed back to the Speech Plaza as Infel and Nenesha saw them off. Ana, who had been watching from afar, approached the two of them.

“Ana, if Metafalica succeeds, you should come up too.”

“Yes, of course. I’ve been wanting to hear it too.”

“You’re curious, aren’t you?”

“It’s something you made, Lady Infel, so there is no doubt I’ll end up liking it.”

“Wh—! W—what kind of stupid things are you saying! For a joke, it’s not very funny.”

The two of them laughed in amusement as they watched Infel get angry, her face bright red.

“I’m serious though. But I’m glad you don’t mind.”

“I do, which is why I’m angry!”

“Hehe, Infel isn’t very straightforward, is she. But that part of her is cute.”

“It sure is.” Nenesha and Ana laughed happily.

“Y—You guys...”

They had expected Infel to yell again, but she had gotten a grip on her anger, and had turned away from the two of them. She realized how red her face was, so even if she were to say anything, it would end with her being teased.

“H—hey, enough with this nonsense! It’s gonna be night before we know it if you keep this up.”

“Yeah, you’re right... Well then, Ana. See you later.”

“All right... be sure to give it your all you two.”

Nenesha smiled in response, but Infel kept her back turned. Even so, Ana could see that Infel’s shoulders seemed to be sagging a little.

... It must be because of what happened yesterday.

She couldn’t keep them any longer, so she thought she might see them off in silence as they left, but-

“... Uh—um, Lady Infel!”

Infel came to a halt, but wouldn’t turn around.

“Lady Infel... no matter what happens, Lady Nenesha and I will be by your side.”

“...Is that all?”

“Yes, that is all.”

“...I see.”

Infel once again began walking, having never turned around.

It seemed her words hadn't lightened the load on Infel's heart in the least. If she were in Infel's place, she wasn't sure anything would have changed even if she were told something like that.

...Had she upset her?

She had done something so stupid despite being her attending knight, and was filled with regret.

But then she saw Infel raise a single hand as she departed.

She had brought her hand to shoulder height, and was waving it slightly as she walked, her back turned to Ana.

“Ah...”

This was a first.

Usually when Infel was troubled or worried by something, she would either yell at her or cry softly for some reason, even if Ana tried to comfort her. Infel wouldn't accept anything other than the words of Nenesha on such occasions.

Ana would surely get yelled at once again. But wouldn't it make her feel a little bit better?

She had wondered if she had done something stupid when Infel had responded with indifference, but it seemed she had jumped to the wrong conclusion.

“...Please stay safe, you two.” She said to them, though they were already out of sight.

Standing at the Hill of Metafalica, the two of them took each other's hands, and looked up at Infel Phira floating in the sky.

“...This will also be the last time we see Infel Phira like this, won't it?”

Nenesha sounded sad to part with it, and Infel agreed.

Infel's name had been given to her by her father figure Grammull, who had taken it from Infel Phira. Nenesha was the first person she was able to talk with on a personal level, but she had never even told her how much she cherished this name she had received from Grammull, the first person she was able to fully place her trust in. The loss of Infel Phira would probably be more painful to Infel than anyone else.

"But in exchange, we'll be able to obtain land. Besides, Infel Phira was something constructed to fulfill that purpose. We've got to accept that."

"... Won't you miss it Infel?"

"I will. But it would be even harder to see it end up having never been able to fulfill its purpose... look, as a researcher, I've experienced this many times before."

"I see... You'll miss it, but it'll be happy for Infel Phira."

"Yes, exactly."

... And also for the people who built it.

"That's another reason why we absolutely have to make Metafalica a success... Nenesha, are you ready?"

"... I'm good whenever."

They had been conversing as usual, but let out a strained laugh as they realized each other's hands were sweaty with nervousness.

"... Let's be sure to make it a success, Infel."

"Yes, of course... we've devoted so much time to this, so we'll be sure to make it a success."

Time, effort, and most of their lives, all for this. If they couldn't make it succeed, it would have all been in vain as far as Infel was concerned.

The two of them turned so they were back to back, then joined hands and quietly closed their eyes.



Nenesha felt the strength in Infel's hands, and smiled happily.

"You're more than ready for this, aren't you?"

"Of course. I said it's hard to see an invention be unable to fulfill its role, right?"

"That's right. After all, Metafalica is kinda like your child, isn't it Infel?"

Although Infel thought it was a strange thing to say, she felt Nenesha might just be right. Her research was important to her, regardless of what it was. And her attachment to Metafalica in particular was especially strong.

"... We also received a lot of support from everyone, so we'll surely be able to make it a success."

"... Ahh, yeah."

... Though how happy was she that the outcome was going to depend on something like that?

Infel had faced numerous setbacks trying to create Metafalica, but she had solved those problems by herself, and had finally succeeded in reaching this point.

She didn't want to accept that the success or failure of Metafalica, which she had struggled so hard to perfect, would end up being decided entirely by the support they received.

Metafalica was her pride. It was the invention she had perfected after all her struggles.

It was able to make her dream of creating the continent, and Nenesha's dream of wanting to live peacefully on top of that continent, come true.

It was also something that had been created to grant the people of this world's dream of obtaining a paradise made from real land.

An invention that would benefit all the people of Metafalss and would doubtlessly be accepted by them was worthy of being called a masterpiece.

... She never dreamed that something accepted by everyone would actually exist.

The probability of Metafalica's success had risen to the point that Infel felt it would almost doubtlessly succeed.

No, she realized she believed this Metafalica was sure to succeed, as she could no longer see it failing anymore.

... She wanted to hurry up and Sing.

She felt her heart rate increase. Though she hated the restlessness within her heart, she was excited because glory would soon be within her grasp.

Infel took quiet breaths, trying her best to contain her fluttering heart, and managed to bring her heart rate back to normal.

She felt Nenesha's warmth at her back. She held her hand tightly, and waited eagerly for the moment they'd begin their Song.

The two of them took a slight breath, and began to Sing.

"... Looks like they've started."

Ana saw the IPDs in the speech plaza begin to Sing, and immediately knew that Infel and Nenesha had started the Song.

She had been a little worried whether Infel would still be scared after yesterday, but it seemed there was no need to be.

"Still... it sure is incredible."

A huge chorus of IPDs filled the Speech Plaza. It wasn't a loud Song, but it felt as if the whole Grand Bell Hall was trembling, perhaps because of the number of people Singing.

She would report on how incredible the chorus of IPDs had been afterwards. It was fun to imagine how Infel and Nenesha would respond when she did.

"... Huh?"

Ana noticed a strange sight as she surveyed the IPDs.

She had discovered a single IPD among the crowd who wasn't Singing.

"Huh, if I'm not mistaken, that girl is..."

She was one of the people who had gathered to see Infel and Nenesha earlier. Was she really trying to listen to the Maidens Sing within this massive chorus?

... Well, she could understand that.

Thinking as much, Ana shifted her gaze, and discovered that there were several other IPDs who weren't Singing. Sure enough, they were also individuals who had gone to see Infel and Nenesha earlier.

Why weren't they Singing after they had kept saying they were going to help Infel and Nenesha out? Was that how badly they wanted to hear the two of them Sing?

... Should she give them a reminder, just in case?

Ana was about to head over to them, when she noticed something unusual.

She had found the girl who had said she would do all she could to help out earlier, but even she wasn't Singing. Even though it hadn't seemed to have been a lie to Ana.

... It couldn't be!

She looked around and discovered IPDs in several places who weren't Singing. They had definitely been Singing moments earlier, but had all stopped. Among them, she found many who looked indignant, who had tears in their eyes, who had appeared to have lost all interest, and so on.

The worst-case scenario she couldn't bear to think about.

Ana shifted her gaze, hoping it wasn't the case, and at last saw it.

The moment an IPD stopped in the middle of Singing.

Ana flew out of the Speech Plaza in a rush.

"Uuh..."

Infel had sensed an abnormality shortly after they had begun Singing.

She thought she had heard Nenesha groan several times during the Song.

She opened her eyes halfway and looked over at Nenesha behind her, but she appeared to be Singing normally, so she thought she must have been mistaken.

But the moment she shut her eyes-

“Guh, Uuuh...”

She hadn’t misheard.

She turned around and saw Nenesha crouched over, clutching her chest.

“N—Nenesha! What’s wrong?”

Infel stopped the Song and hurriedly lifted Nenesha up in her arms.

She was breathing wildly, and had sweat on her brow.

“Nenesha, what’s the matter?”

“I—I don’t know... I’m in so much pain... but it’s eased up a bit.”

“A bit...”

Nenesha’s complexion had clearly gotten worse from before they had started Singing. Her lips appeared somewhat purple as well.

Infel tried to figure out why this had happened, and realized what she had feared most had come true.

“... Don’t tell me it’s because of my heart...”

That’s when they heard it. Nenesha and Infel realized there was a strange sound coming from somewhere.

This was the uppermost level of the Grand Bell Hall, so there was no one here besides the two of them. But that sound was definitely getting closer.

“...! Watch out!”

Infel tumbled out of the way, Nenesha in her arms, as something fell with a staggering force moments later.

There was a thunderous roar as the shattered ground sent up smoke, concealing whatever it was that had fallen.

“Nenesha, are you hurt?”

“N—no, I’m fine...”

They didn’t know what it was that had fallen, but it had landed where they had been standing until just a few seconds ago. They probably would have both been dead by now if Infel hadn’t picked up Nenesha and moved.

The silhouette of a person stood up from within the rising dust.

... That was impossible, there was no way it was a person.

A normal human would have died if they had fallen at such a speed. So what was over there?

Infel was finally able to fully see what it was, and couldn’t believe her eyes.

It had the appearance of a girl, but it wasn’t human. Aside from her face, everything from her hair to the rest of her body was artificially reinforced – a robot.

“There’s no way... are you really...”

Infel didn’t want to accept the events unfolding before her eyes. Nenesha didn’t know what it was that had fallen, but Infel had read about it in documents while researching Metafalica.

“... Infel, what exactly is that? ... Who is that girl?” Asked Nenesha, unable to understand the situation, but Infel took Nenesha into her arms, and stood in a protective stance around her.

“... So you are the ones responsible.”

It spoke. It had a voice like that of an ordinary girl.

However, her entire body was mechanical, and her face, the one humanlike part about her, was void of expression, so they couldn't help but feel unsettled as they listened to her.

"...Rhaki... the Divine Messenger." Rhaki nodded in response.

Whereupon she suddenly readied herself and attacked.

"Watch out!"

Infel pushed Nenesha down and dropped to the ground as Rhaki rushed by directly overhead.

Realizing her attack had been dodged, Rhaki immediately came to a halt and turned to face the two of them.

"Wh—what's with that girl called Rhaki? Why is she..."

Infel couldn't answer Nenesha's question.

She didn't know why Rhaki had come either.

It was unprecedented, so no one knew the reason why.

But the one thing they did know was that she was trying to kill them.

"...Nenesha, let's run." Infel murmured into Nenesha's ear, so as not to be heard by Rhaki.

Nenesha gave a small nod in response, so as not to be noticed by her either.

But their opponent was the Divine Messenger Rhaki. Could they simply run away like this?

...I should have seriously practiced Song Magic.

Infel was a Reyvateil, so it wasn't that she couldn't use offensive magic, she just hardly ever got the chance to Sing, so she didn't have confidence in her abilities to do so. As for Nenesha, she had countless amounts of healing magic, but she had never Sung anything meant to harm others. They had no way to fight back. There was no other choice but to run away.

"The next attack will not miss."

Rhaki lowered her stance and took aim at the two of them.

The fact that they were able to dodge her earlier attack was merely a fluke. Infel and Nenesha had no confidence whatsoever that they could dodge a second attack, but even so, they waited for Rhaki to make her move. But Rhaki realized something was flying towards her, and took her eyes off the two of them to take out the object approaching her from behind.

They heard something hard get struck down and fall to the ground.

It was a sword. One that was carried at the waist by members of the Grand Bell Knights.

They looked to where the sword had come flying from, and saw a lone female knight, her shoulders rising and falling wildly as she panted for breath.

“Ana!”

A smile formed on Nenesha’s face as she realized help had arrived.

“I’m glad the both of you seem to be all right. . .”

Ana was deep down relieved that she had made the right choice to immediately come here upon sensing an abnormality.

... Though it looked like it would have been bad if she had arrived any later.

Infel and Nenesha had immediately run behind Ana the moment Rhaki’s attention had shifted to her.

“Lady Infel, what is that? Though it clearly isn’t human. . .”

“The Divine Messenger. Even I don’t really know why, but it seems she’s after our lives.”

“... You’ve sure been targeted by a fearsome individual.”

Rhaki stepped on the hilt of the sword Ana had just thrown. She broke the handle with ease, as if crushing an egg.

“... I’ll have to make sure not to let that happen.” Ana said, drawing a spare sword and preparing herself.

"I've instructed the others to come here after gathering reinforcements. So please escape ahead of me and meet up with everyone."

"No... Ana, stop with this nonsense! Your opponent is the Divine Messenger, you're no match for her!"

Nenesha desperately tried to stop her, but Ana kept her sword in hand, refusing to turn around.

"Ana, listen to me! I order you to as the Maiden!"

"I appreciate how you feel, but... all three of us would probably end up getting killed together."

Considering the speed and power of Rhaki's attack from earlier, it was clear just how dangerous it was to turn their backs on her and run.

"Then I'll stay here with you. Infel, you go on ahead and meet up with everyone."

"Don't be ridiculous! I'm staying too!"

"Please you two, this isn't for you to decide. Besides, as I've said many times before, protecting you two is my job. So please escape."

"But!"

"Even though my skills fall short, I've been training as a knight... you'll just get in my way, so please go."

Ana felt her heart constrict, but there was nothing else she could do.

...I'm sorry.

She silently apologized.

"Now hurry!"

"...Nenesha, let's go."

"Ana... don't push yourself! You're not allowed to die no matter what!"

"I know."

Rhaki tried to pursue the two of them as they ran off, but Ana stood in her way, sword in hand.



Rhaki stared at Ana, her expressionless face unchanged.

“... I have no business with you.” she said coldly.

Ana also had no desire to fight if possible, but if she didn't, Rhaki would hunt down and kill Nenesha and Infel.

... Would the reinforcements make it in time?

She didn't have a death wish. She didn't have anything she dreamed of doing if Metafalica was created either. But it was and always would be her job to protect the two Maidens.

... Though she hoped she could buy them some time without dying or even getting hurt.

“... I wouldn't be much of a knight if I didn't do something befitting of the title.”

She ran towards Rhaki, her sword gripped tightly in her hands.

Infel and Nenesha were running for their lives.

When would they meet up with the reinforcements they had been told were coming? Ana was done for at this rate.

“Haah, haah... h-hang in there Nenesha!”

“Ye—yeah...”

Every so often, the out of breath Maidens looked back to see whether Ana was coming as they ran for their lives.

“... She's okay, right?”

Nenesha sounded worried.

“... We've told her to run if it gets dangerous. Let's hurry, for Ana's sake as well.”

How far had they run? They could now see the elevator leading down to the Bell Strike Hall a floor below.

“Ah! Infel, look!”

The elevator had arrived, and they saw a group of Reyvateils and knights emerge from it. Most of the Reyvateils appeared to be IPDs who had gathered to Sing Metafalica. Had they come here because they were worried?

“Yay, we're saved!”

“Yeah! Let’s hurry. We have to tell them to go help Ana!”

The exhausted Maidens mustered the last of their strength, and ran over to them.

“Holy Maidens, you’re safe!”

They must have been relieved to have made it, as they sat down right there. The knights rushed over to them in surprise, but-

“Ana’s fighting! Go help her, please hurry!”

“U—understood. Further reinforcements are on their way, so be sure to meet up with them you two. C’m on everyone, let’s go!”

The Maidens watched as they ran towards the altar, and were finally able to calm down a bit.

The two of them had been running for their lives, so they weren’t exactly sure how much time had passed since they had escaped. Was Ana okay? Was she running away?

Their heads were filled with such thoughts.

“... Huh?”

Infel realized that the IPDs who had come together with the knights had stayed behind.

It seemed she had mistakenly believed they had gone to help Ana as well, perhaps because of how exhausted she was.

“You guys go too... that enemy will be tough without magic support.”

But the IPDs didn’t budge. They were looking down at Infel and Nenesha with cold stares as the two of them sat there exhausted.

“... What’s wrong? You came here to help, right?”

“Are you kidding, why would we have to do that?”

“Really, that’s asking too much.”

Infel didn’t get what they were saying.

They had just been talking about how they would do all they could to help her out, so why were they saying such things?

“...What do you mean? What did you come here for if not to help?”

“They were shorthanded, so they forcibly told us to cooperate and brought us along. There’s no way we would have come here otherwise.”

The other IPDs laughed in agreement.

“At the end of the day, we’re not all that important to you, right?”

“That’s right. You even take us helping out with Metafalica for granted.”

“Well, on the surface it may have seemed like you were thinking of us, but your experiment to see whether the Metafalica you perfected would succeed or not is what was most important to you, right? Don’t use us for something like that.”

They had looked inside Infel’s heart more than necessary.

They had taken advantage of their chance to see inside her mind to freely view all the true feelings that lie at the depths of one’s heart, then lost their faith in her and Nenesha because of it.

Infel couldn’t help but resent them for saying whatever they liked after having looked inside her heart all they pleased.

“Don’t be ridiculous! Metafalica’s your ideal land, right? So isn’t it only natural to help out a little?!”

“Even so, we’ll lose our motivation if we know you were thinking that it’s only natural for us to help, or that you worked hard in place of people who do nothing like us.”

“The Maiden pretty much exists to create a peaceful world, right? So it’s rather unusual for people of your stature to

work that hard for it. Can't you do something yourself without asking for our help?"

"That's right. After all, you're smarter than us, and seem to have been working so hard, right Lady Infel? So you can do whatever you please alone, right?"

Mocking laughter rose from the IPDs.

Infel understood practically none of what they were saying, so she couldn't even get angry or upset.

Everyone's wishes would have surely come true if they had created the continent. In any case, creating Metafalica was the greatest wish of the people of this world. And they were supposed to have cooperated with Infel in order to achieve it. Metafalica would have doubtlessly succeeded if they had.

... Their interests should have lined up, so why?

She tried her hardest to figure out why everyone had refused to cooperate, but no matter how she looked at it, she couldn't find an answer.

"Infel... everyone, stop picking on Infel."

The IPDs saw Nenesha gently embracing Infel by the shoulders, and stopped laughing.

"Lady Nenesha, are you the same as Lady Infel?"

Infel knew better than anyone how untrue that was.

She tried to deny it before even Nenesha herself responded, but Nenesha stopped her with her hand, and looked at the IPDs with a disappointed expression on her face.

"... People who change their attitude after peering into someone's heart wouldn't believe me no matter what I say, right?"

"Wha... what did you say?!"

They were glaring at Nenesha right to her face, but she didn't back down. She wore the same disappointed look as before.

More so than anger, she couldn't help but feel that it was truly a shame they couldn't think about things in any other way.

The IPDs never imagined she'd respond like that either. Everyone was at a loss for words and was unable to retort.

And Infel couldn't help but wonder if Metafalica had failed because of her heart, and if it was as foul as the abuse she had received made it out to be.

"...Ah!"

One of the IPDs cried out. She was looking at something behind Infel and Nenesha, in the direction of the altar. The other IPDs noticed it too, and grew pale.

They could hear a metallic clicking sound approaching from the altar. Infel and Nenesha didn't even need to turn around to know what it was.

"...This can't be happening."

Everyone was left speechless at the sight of Rhaki walking towards them.

There was blood splattered all over her body. Moreover, swords belonging to the knights were sticking out of her abdomen and left shoulder. But Rhaki paid them no mind whatsoever as she walked towards the group of girls.

"I will not let you escape."

There was still no expression on her bloodstained face. It was as if nothing had happened.

"What is that... N-no way am I fighting something like that!"

A single IPD ran away in fear, and the other girls began to follow, screaming and running towards the elevator all at once.

"W—wait!"

Infel grabbed one of the nearby girls by the shoulder to try and hold her back, but-

"Shut up! Maidens like you would be better off dead!"

Shaking herself free, the IPD pushed Infel away and ran off.

...She was better off dead?

Infel couldn't believe what she had just been told. Why did she feel the need to say such a thing? Infel had never done anything to merit being told something like that. After all, she had goals just like everyone else, and had merely tried to implement Metafalica in order to achieve them.

"Why... Why'd she feel the need to say that!"

Infel had undeniably strived for the implementation of Metafalica. If they had freely looked inside her heart, they should have clearly seen that as well.

And yet they still wanted more from her?

They had complained, having done nothing but infringe upon the heart of another, and now to top it all off, this?

The frustration of it all left Infel in tears.

"Infel... hey, Infel..."

Nenesha's voice was trembling.

"What's wrong, Nenesha?"

Infel realized it was something other than Nenesha's fear of Rhaki herself. Nenesha tried to say something, but couldn't put it into words, so she held out a trembling fingertip instead.

Infel looked down to where Nenesha's finger was pointing, and instantly regretted her mistake.

Long black hair wet with blood was twined around Rhaki's foot.

"It can't be... Ana..."

Nenesha broke down crying.

It didn't take much thought to understand. Ana had almost no ability as a knight. Why did they let someone like her take on the Divine Messenger?

...Why didn't they stop her, even if they had to do so by force?!

Infel asked herself these questions, but couldn't find an answer.

"... This ends here." Rhaki murmured, and the sky flashed. The moment Infel tried to look up, it fell.

A blinding light. She thought it might be lightning, but immediately ruled that out.

... It's aimed at us. It can't be, enemy reinforcements?

She wasn't sure if it had been a direct hit or had just grazed them.

Either way, that lightning-like strike had been powerful enough to blow away her and Nenesha.

Infel slammed into the ground, and her field of vision began to fade.

... No!

She couldn't lose consciousness here.

Infel bit her lip and did all she could to find the strength to stand up.

She saw that Nenesha had collapsed a short distance away from her.

"Nenesha!"

Infel made her way towards Nenesha, despite feeling like she was going to collapse as well.

Rhaki saw this, and calmly extracted the swords sticking out of her shoulder and abdomen.

"Please do not interfere."

She brandished the two swords, and threw them at Infel. "!"

Infel was unable to move before the oncoming swords.

Her mind hadn't caught up, so all she could do was recognize that they were coming towards her.

Resigned to her fate, Infel closed her eyes and heard the sounds of two swords piercing their target, as well as the unpleasant sound of something being crushed.

...I'm going to die.

But that might just be okay.

She had lived her life up till now trying to make Metafalica a success, but in the end, she wasn't able to realize it.

She was also unable to grant Nenesha her dream of resigning as the Maiden and living in peace on the newly created continent.

...She should have said something.

Among all the things she wanted to do if Metafalica succeeded, there was but one thing she hadn't told Nenesha. Infel had known she probably wouldn't be rejected, but she had been too shy to ever tell her that one other wish.

...She had wanted to keep living together with Nenesha.

She was done for, having never been able to tell her that.

So she at least wanted to see her one last time.

She couldn't feel any pain, but there were likely two swords sticking out of her. Infel was a little scared to see that, but slowly opened her eyes.

"...Eh?"

She was met with a strange sight.

She could see the swords that had been thrown at her. They were side by side, sticking neatly out of the ground right in front of Infel.

...What's going on here?

Thinking it strange, she looked towards the altar, but Rhaki wasn't there.

But it was also odd for her to run off just like that.

"...Nenesha, what happened to Rhaki?" She asked, but there was no response.

She remembered that Nenesha had been blown away by the lightning strike from earlier, much like herself.

"Nenesha!"

She turned around in a panic and found Rhaki.



Her heart jumped, and she almost screamed in shock, but was left at a loss for words when she realized what Rhaki was doing there.

Rhaki's stiff, mechanical hand was reaching into Nenesha's chest.

"...Nenesha?"

She called out to her, but sure enough, there was no response from Nenesha.

Instead, Infel watched as blood dripped down from the hand reaching inside her chest.

Gulping, she confirmed what was going on.

Rhaki's hand had pierced Nenesha's chest, and was burrowed inside her body.

"..."

The strength faded from Infel's body, and she collapsed.

"No... this can't... this can't be."

There was no light in Nenesha's open eyes, so she knew she was already dead.

And Infel remembered what Rhaki had said earlier, before she had thrown the swords.

"-Please do not interfere.-"

...She treated me as a hindrance.

"...Nenesha was your target from the start?"

Rhaki wouldn't even so much as turn towards Infel. After all, she knew she couldn't do anything.

"Was yea ra chs hymmnos yor... En chsee fwal fwal yor"

"...Hymmnos?"

Rhaki had suddenly started speaking in Hymmnos. Infel had an ill premonition, but was unable to do anything.

"exec na drone 0x11000101101 oter FRELIA\_ANSUL\_-SOL=MARTA."

The hand Rhaki had burrowed inside Nenesha's body began to emit a red light.

“What do you plan on doing! Stop it!”

Ignoring Infel’s desperate cries, Rhaki slowly pulled her hand out of Nenesha. A bloodstained red crystal chip was held in that hand.

That Grathnode Crystal-based chip was the D-Cellophane handed down by the Maidens of Homura generation after generation. Rhaki had crystallized it within Nenesha’s body as she took her life.

“... What do you plan on doing with that?”

“... I confirmed an explosive consumption of Static H-Waves. Do you understand?”

Static H-Waves were a Reyvateil’s soul. The Goddess was no exception. And if they had been consumed at an explosive rate, she could think of but one answer.

“Because Metafalica... because I couldn’t unite my heart with everyone?”

Rhaki neither confirmed nor denied this.

“Therefore, there is currently a need for the Goddess to enter a state of preservation. Thus, I am retrieving this.”

D-Cellophane in hand, Rhaki gave Nenesha’s upright body a slight push. Nenesha fell to the ground on her back without any resistance. Blood spilling from the hole in her chest slowly spread across the ground.

“.....”

Infel got on her hands and knees, and slowly made her way towards Nenesha.

“... Nenesha...”

She shook her body, but there was no response.

“Ah, uh-uhmmmm... h-huh? Th-that’s right! I have to stop the bleeding!”

Although she was unfamiliar with it, she attempted to Sing healing Song Magic, but the faint light that materialized quickly disappeared. She was trying, thinking she couldn’t

possibly be that bad at it, but no matter how many times she tried, the result was the same.

She saw why. Several drops of water had fallen onto Nenesha's face as she looked down at her. Her field of vision gradually became distorted.

...Aah, I'm crying.

Even if she was crying, that didn't mean she couldn't use Song Magic. But Infel was shaken to the bone right now.

Her mind couldn't concentrate, so it was only natural that she couldn't weave magic.

She wasn't able to make Metafalica a success either.

She had ended up letting Ana and Nenesha die because of her own error of judgement.

And she couldn't even properly use Song Magic.

...I'm... powerless.

Infel buried her face into Nenesha's body, and cried softly.

"...There is a risk you will also become a threat to the Goddess if you are allowed to live."

Rhaki raised her bloodstained foot with Ana's hair twined around it, and aimed for Infel's head.

Infel knew she would be killed, but she was okay with that now.

There was nothing left for her anymore. In this short amount of time, she had ended up losing her purpose in life, her hopes and dreams, and that which was dear to her. Everything.

...I don't mind being killed here. Besides, it seems there are lots of people who would be glad I died.

She recalled what the IPD from earlier had said.

"...I'm better off dead...?"

Was she heartless enough inside to be faced with that kind of abuse? That in mind, she couldn't even imagine how

painful the kind of things she made Nenesha go through in the Infelsphere must have been.

...But Nenesha saw all the way to the deepest depths of my heart, and accepted me.

So why the hell should I care so much about what some IPD told me?

“...I can’t die.”

Rhaki was preoccupied by Infel as she murmured under her breath, which momentarily delayed her reaction to the object flying towards her.

A pink colored bullet of light flew towards her head and burst open.

The explosion was small, so Rhaki was left was staring unaffected in the direction it had come flying from.

“Lady Infel!”

“.....”

A group of girls with familiar faces was standing there. They were a different group of IPDs than the ones from earlier.

“Lady Infel, please get down!” One shouted, and the group of IPDs simultaneously fired Song Magic.

The magic was small individually, but it seemed to be effective with several people firing all at once. Rhaki dropped the D-Cellophane clutched in her hand, and was blown away.

The IPDs confirmed this, then ran over to Infel.

“L—lady Nenesha... it can’t be...”

Their voices trembled at the sight of Nenesha’s dead body.

“...”

Infel counted how many of them there were.

...1, 2... 14, 15...

“17 people... where are the other Reyvateils?”

Several hundred IPDs should have been gathered at the plaza. But one of the girls gave a frustrated sounding response.

“...Everyone said they didn’t want to come. For some reason, they all felt as if they had no energy left right after Singing Metafalica... what’s that about?”

“...I see.”

In short, these were the only people who planned on helping out despite seeing inside Infel’s heart.

...Is my heart that corrupted?

Regardless of the reason, Infel had tried her hardest to create the continent. No one could deny the fact that she had devoted her life to it more so than anyone else in the world.

Her reason for doing so wasn’t to create an ideal land where people could live in happiness. But she had had no intention of harming them. If they created the continent, it was just a matter of making it into a paradise or whatever else they wanted afterwards.

That paradise was the hope everyone sought, so it was only natural to help out. Those girls had abused Infel without helping in the least.

...The Maiden must live her life thinking only of the people?

Was it excusable for them to encourage her all they wanted, only to not cooperate because they hated her heart?

Despite their wish for an ideal land, they didn’t cooperate. Despite encouraging her to Sing Metafalica, they betrayed her at the last minute. And Nenesha ended up dying as a result.

Who was the one at fault?

...Those utterly selfish and incompetent girls.

Infel reached out for the D-Cellophane Rhaki had dropped. She softly embraced that Cellophane, still warm with Nenesha’s blood.

“Attack all at once. Kill her.” Infel muttered in a tone only the IPDs could hear.

“Eh?”

“I said kill her... so go kill her.”

“...”

The girls were at a loss, but they had seen Nenesha with her chest run through, and were unable to disobey the order. The 17 IPDs Sang together, and crafted a single large-scale magic attack.

Rhaki took notice and prepared for it, but remained as expressionless as ever.

“You cannot terminate my functions with that. Please quietly hand over the D-Cellophane.”

Infel had no intention of doing so.

“... This is war.”

The IPDs were once again dumbfounded by Infel’s words.

Even Rhaki’s expression changed for a split second at the word “war”.

“I declare war against the Goddess.”

“... Then as I thought, I cannot allow you to live.”

Rhaki took action.

“S—she’s coming everyone!”

The enormous Song Magic the IPDs had woven was released, and crashed into Rhaki.

An explosion. A cloud of dust rose with a thunderous roar.

But the IPDs immediately began preparing to take a second shot, and once again started weaving Song Magic.

Infel held Nenesha’s corpse in her arms and addressed them.

“... I leave this to you”

The IPDs nodded obediently, but Infel didn’t bother to check. She didn’t really care what happened to them.

Nenesha’s corpse in her arms, she made her way towards the elevator.

“Take care of Lady Nenesha.”

Infel gave no response to the IPD as she entered the elevator.

The door closed, and she heard the sounds of Song Magic exploding as it began to move.

“...Nenesha”

Infel laid down Nenesha’s corpse and sat down next to it. ...I can’t forgive them. I can’t forgive even a single one of the people who did this to you.

Not the Goddess who killed Nenesha, nor the people who betrayed them-she couldn’t forgive any of it.

There was no telling how many victims there would be in the war against the Goddess. It was also clear that there would be furious protest the moment they opposed Her.

So what? What use were the words of the powerless people?

She was sick of being their pawn. War with the Goddess was absolutely unavoidable, no matter what anyone said.

She wasn’t afraid of how many troops would be dispatched.

She had more than enough pawns to throw away.

...I swear, I’ll take revenge.

Infel vowed, tightly clutching Nenesha’s cold hand, and the D-Cellophane held against her chest.

## Chapter 14

# Metafalica

... Maybe I should have stopped them.

Maybe Infel should have more firmly persuaded them not to Sing Metafalica back when she fought Croix and the others. She should have told them what had happened when she had Sung Metafalica. And she should have thoroughly questioned Cloche on whether she'd really be able to bear it should she happen to go through what Infel had. As someone who had also been the Maiden of Mio and as someone who had devoted her life to Metafalica, shouldn't she have done that?

If she didn't Sing, she wouldn't have to experience the pain of losing someone important to her, nor the bitterness of betrayal. Although Infel could have implemented Sublimation by now, and led everyone to a world of happiness before they could've complained.

... Even if Sublimation was impossible, she might at least be able to stop them from Singing.

If she forcibly dragged Cloche into the Binary Field, and convinced her not to Sing...

But Infel quickly realized she was too late.

The two of them had started Singing Metafalica.



... They've begun.

"... They've started."

"Yeah..."

There was no change in Frelia, which meant that things were still going well for the time being.

It would be all or nothing as soon as Cloche's heart opened up.

... In my case, they told me they felt like they didn't have any energy left or something like that.

Would the same thing happen, or something even worse?

The IPDs gathered at the Grand Bell Hall followed, and began to Sing too.

"... Any time now."

"Are you okay Frelia?"

"I'm fine, Shunny. Because it's sure to succeed..."

Infel couldn't believe Frelia was continuing with the lovey-dovey talk even now, but immediately after, a shiver ran through her entire body.

She had felt Cloche's consciousness flow into her.

"Wh—what is this... Uuh..."

Infel felt a pain in her chest, but oddly enough, it wasn't unpleasant.

She remembered it from a long time ago, during the time she had spent with Nenesha and the others back when she still had a physical body. It was something she had often felt while researching Metafalica.

... What is this... That's right, if I'm not mistaken, I've felt this before when I could see a solution to research that had come to a standstill.

She would have realized she realized wasn't going anywhere. But she puzzled over those problems to the very end, unable to give up. And when she really was about to give up, a good idea would suddenly come to mind.

Maybe I can solve it if I do this?

At that moment, her fatigue and everything else would be blown away. And she would be completely engrossed in seeing whether her idea was right or not.

What Infel was feeling now was the same as what she had felt back then.

An uplifting feeling, fraught with emotion that filled her with strength.

Looking over the IPDs gathered at the Grand Bell Hall's Speech Plaza on the surface, she saw that there wasn't a single person who wasn't Singing.

She took a look around Metafalss.

The people of Pastalia and the people of the Rim were all raising their voices to sing.

Infel's elation grew stronger and stronger, as if it knew no bounds.

...How devoted was this girl to Metafalica?

As an IPD, Infel was able to peek inside Cloche's heart. So she focused on a single thought-

...Show me your hopes for Metafalica.

Upon which Cloche's hopes for Metafalica came pouring into her all at once.

The first thing she saw was a vast continent.

It was an expansive verdant land centered around a large tree, with people living ordinary lives on its surface.

That was all. She couldn't see any other goal. There were no complicated motives behind it either.

Just one large continent where everyone could live an ordinary life in peace. That was the vision she saw.

...What exactly do you want to do here?

Infel once again focused her thoughts, and discovered two girls on the continent.

One was Cloche. She was laughing happily, a giant Gergo plushie in hand.

Next to her, her sister Luca gave a troubled laugh, though she still seemed to be enjoying herself.

The two of them, no different from the many people around them, soon disappeared into the crowd, and could no longer be seen.

Infel then returned to reality.

“...How ordinary.”

She said without thinking.

Cloche’s heart came flowing in in response.

...Ordinary is fine.

“That’s the ideal land you speak of? Is there anything special about it?”

...Ordinary is fine.

“Who’s gonna be happy if you make such an ordinary paradise?!”

...Everyone will create it together.

“You think everyone will accept this?”

...I believe in everyone.

Unbelievable.

The will of Cloche that came flowing into Infel in response to her questions didn’t lie. Which meant that she was seriously thinking about creating an ordinary world.

Everyone was simply living as equals on real land unlike now, with water and crops in abundance. Other than that, nothing else was different.

“...Is this truly happiness?”

...Ordinary is fine.

She looked down at the surface once more, and sure enough, none of the IPDs were stopping their Song.

“...How stupid.”

“Heheh...” Though she tried hard to suppress it, Infel couldn’t help but burst out laughing.

“I can’t believe it, what the hell is this ordinary world without a shred of ingenuity. To think that you’ve spent your life working so hard for something like this, you’re the stupidest Maiden who ever lived!”

Although Infel was laughing in amusement, she once again asked for the Metafalica continent Cloche desired so she could see the vision from before.

Infel saw that ordinary scene spread out before her and thought-

... Was this the kind of world Nenesha sought as well?

It wasn’t that Infel hadn’t also thought about what the world would be like after creating Metafalica. But it wasn’t something simple like this.

She had only thought about more complicated things, things that were currently impossible to do.

So she didn’t have a clear vision of it like Cloche.

... This is an ideal land.

She was looking at the vision had Cloche imagined, not the real thing. Infel knew that, but she couldn’t help reaching for it.

The continent that Infel and Nenesha had tried to create... would it have turned out like this too?

No, the continent Cloche pictured might even be better.

That in mind, she couldn’t help but reach out.

Immediately afterwards, Infel was forced back to reality. “Eh?”

She wasn’t sure what had happened.

Cloche felt her heart connect with the IPDs’.

It felt like someone else’s thoughts flowing into her head.

Their feelings as they Sang Metafalica. Dreams they wanted to fulfill if it succeeded. Plans to brag to everyone

about having joined hearts with Cloche. The thoughts of all those girls had been flowing into her heart little by little.

...Everyone's looking forward to Metafalica.

Cloche had been Singing with joy in her heart, but then they came all at once.

The thoughts of the IPDs gathered at the plaza flooded into Cloche like a wave.

“!”

She was no longer able to tell which heart was her own amidst the thoughts of the hundreds of other people that had suddenly come pouring in.

It was like she had lost her sense of self. Most of the thoughts flowing in were hopes for Metafalica, so there wasn't any dissatisfaction. But it was impossible for their thoughts to be in perfect consensus with one another.

Cloche was desperately holding onto her heart within the massive flow of thoughts.

Otherwise, it seemed like it would end up being washed away by them all.

And if that happened...

...I'm going to disappear?

“No! Stop it!!”

Cloche's Song stopped.

Cloche's scream from behind Luca worried her, but she wasn't about to stop Singing.

...It's okay, Reika's a strong girl.

Luca thought, and continued to Sing as a pain like she'd never felt before shot through her chest.

“Uuh, i-it hurts...”

Frelia was clutching her chest in pain.

“Frelia!”

Shun exchanged glances with Infel as he supported Frelia, who was on the verge of collapse.

“It can’t be...”

“... So it would appear.”

She saw that Cloche was crouched down with her head in her hands at the Hill of Metafalica.

“... She closed her heart.”

By connecting hearts, the thoughts of a large number of IPDs came inside you and disturbed your mind. It wasn’t easy to endure.

“... What an unexpected turn of events.”

The uplifting feeling had vanished due to the Song having stopped.

“To think that it would end with Cloche betraying the people. Heheh, well regardless, it’s a failure.”

She felt a pain in her chest, but she didn’t know why.

Infel had continuously wanted to get revenge on the people who had betrayed her and Nenesha.

It was a shame she couldn’t do it herself, but it might be possible if she got to see them get their hopes crushed, and fall into the sea of clouds.

“... It can’t be helped”

She felt sorry for Cloche, but she was crouched over with her heart closed off, so there was nothing that could be done.

... Well, she tried her very best.

But Cloche noticed Luca, who wouldn’t stop Singing despite being in pain.

The power born from everyone’s feelings wasn’t flowing in from Cloche, so Luca was currently transmitting her life force to Ar tonelico along with Frelia.

They wouldn’t hold out much longer, and could lose their lives at any moment. Luca knew this, but desperately continued to Sing all the same.

She trusted that her incredible sister wouldn’t be discouraged by something like this.

Cloche saw what she was doing, and once again began to Sing.

Because she wanted to weave the continent. And because she didn't want to lose her dear sister.

“.....”

Infel watched over the situation in silence.

They were desperately Singing, but Cloche's heart wouldn't so easily open after having been scared by what had happened. It wasn't just Luca who was suffering, Frelia was as well.

They were probably at their limit. If they kept Singing like this, both Luca and Frelia would soon die, and the world would fall into the sea of clouds.

“...”

The vision of Metafalica Cloche had pictured remained in her head.

A world where everyone simply lead ordinary lives.

It may have been called an ideal land, but in the end, they were merely weaving a continent. Whether they'd make it into a paradise or hell was up to the people who lived there.

Cloche wasn't trying to create anything special, she merely wished to create an ordinary world.

Infel didn't want to accept such an ordinary world as an ideal land.

However, she wanted to see it for real.

“... Really, that idiot!”

Infel took action.

Cloche's field of vision suddenly changed.

She should have been Singing at the Hill of Metafalica, but she suddenly found herself standing in an unfamiliar place.

“Th—this is...”

She somehow knew it wasn't reality. She had a feeling it might be someone's Cosmosphere, or rather, the Binary Field.

Whereupon Infel suddenly appeared before her eyes.

“Y—You’re...!”

Infel spoke to the surprised Cloche.

“Stupid! Stupid! Stupid!”

She continued, paying no mind to Cloche staring in wonder at what she had suddenly started saying.

“You really are the biggest of fools until the very end. How could you close off your heart now, after everything that’s happened!?”

“B—but, I’m just too scared...”

Infel was irritated by how frightened she sounded.

What did she mean she was scared now, despite showing others that vision of a continent that could put them in such a flutter, and even make them feel jealous.

... To think she’d show me something like that, then keep me waiting, it’s simply criminal.

Infel held back her irritation and spoke.

“Listen here! There is no other Metafalica-obsessed idiot that has a pure heart like yourself! I am absolutely sure you can make Metafalica a success.”

Cloche couldn’t believe what she was hearing from Infel, Metafalica’s designer herself.

She had kept insisting it wouldn’t succeed. Even though the designer herself had kept saying that, she was saying that Cloche could make it a success.

“No... you have to make it succeed. Because it was... Because it was my dream.”

Because there was no one but Cloche who could create the Metafalica she and Nenesha had dreamed of.

“... Infel!?”

“You can make it a success! And since I said it, there can’t be any mistakes! So, go and put all of your heart in iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiit!”



Cloche's field of vision rapidly changed, and she realized she was back at the Hill of Metafalica.

...Infel cheered me on?

Cloche then became aware of the Song reaching her ears.

It was the Song of the IPDs far below at the Grand Bell Hall speech plaza, as well as that of the people of the town of Pastalia, the Slums, and the Rim.

The people of the world were singing together in a chorus, eagerly awaiting Cloche's Song. Their voices could clearly be heard even all the way up here.

When Cloche and the others had traveled around before Metafalica, there were more than a few people who were still uneasy. But now, people throughout the world were Singing. For Cloche's sake, and for the sake of weaving their ideal land of Metafalica together.

And Luca, Singing at her back, squeezed her hand tight. "...I will do it!"

Cloche's Song returned.

"Ah... I think I feel a bit better..."

Frelia slowly got up from Shun, who had been supporting her up till now.

"Frelia, are you okay now?"

"Yeah... but could this be Infel's doing?"

Forcibly dragging Cloche's mind into the Binary Field to give her a talking to, then immediately returning her was quite difficult.

Infel ignored Frelia, and impatiently waited for the moment everything had been leading up to.

"...It's begun"

Infel said, upon which Frelia and Shun moved so they could get a view of the planet as well.

Infel Phira burst open below them as an enormous tree emerged from inside of it, and rapidly began to grow.

Countless branches extended from its sturdy trunk, entwining like a basket as it continued to grow, while the outside of the branches split open, releasing soil and water that filled the spaces between them, creating the land little by little.

“W—whoa! What’s that!” The white knight exclaimed at the sight of the tree growing from Infel Phira.

Some of the IPDs Singing at the plaza were also surprised by what was happening to Infel Phira, and had stopped Singing, but-

“Hey, don’t stop! Keep at it!”

The IPDs hurriedly resumed their Song in response to the blue knight. Chester caught sight of him attending to them from where he was standing in the speech plaza.

The blue knight had come to speak to him about his uneasiness towards Metafalica, but he was unable to give him a good answer. That uneasiness might even remain until the moment they knew its outcome.

But as Chester watched him now, he was looking up at Infel Phira with excitement on his face.

Everyone’s hearts were united as one, not just the IPDs’.

“We’re almost there! Please keep doing your best everyone!”

The IPDs’ Singing voices gained in strength in response to Chester’s encouragement.

“... Is it going well?” The mayor of Enna questioned as she watched Infel Phira.

It didn’t seem to be a Deathlandia, but did that mean it was a success? Or was it something else?

There was no one to explain it all, so she was left with nothing but questions.

She wondered what she should do, but then realized the people of the town were continuing to unite their voices in song even now.

...I'll continue until we know the result.



That in mind, she once again joined up with everyone and began to Sing.

“...It's taking longer than I thought.”

Spica was staring intently as the tree growing from Infel Phira gave shape to the continent little by little.

Jakuri next to her was a bit worried by her comment.

“... Wasn’t it interesting?”

Spica wasn’t from Metafalss, so it might not have been all that exciting to her.

But Spica shook her head in response.

“I just thought it was taking a while. I expected Infel Phira to explode and the continent to come gushing out.”

“... Then you couldn’t really say it was woven.”

“True.” Spica said with a laugh. “But it’s impressive... I was right to stay and watch.”

Which made a smile come to Jakuri’s lips as well.

Cloche and Luca stood at the Hill of Metafalica and watched as the continent took shape little by little before their eyes.

“Reika, it’s...”

“Yes! Yes! We... we did it!”

“Yeah! We did! We made Metafalica a success...”

Was it all in their heads? Were they just having a convenient dream, having not even Sung Metafalica yet?

The steadily growing continent was beyond their imagination. It was hard to believe they had woven something as amazing as this.

But that continent they were looking at was real.

The two of them had made the Song Magic Metafalica a success, and had completed the ideal land of Metafalica.

There was someone running towards the two of them.

“Luca, Lady Cloche!”

They looked back with smiles on their faces at the voice calling to them from behind.

“Croix!”

Croix hurried to their side, and they leapt into his arms.

“Haah... So they did it.”

Infel wore a slightly forlorn look on her face as she watched the scene unfolding before her eyes.

Cloche and the others had ended up making the Metafalica she, the designer thought would never succeed a success.

A difference in the feelings used to weave the continent had made the difference between success and failure.

Infel's feelings weren't accepted by everyone, but it wasn't as if every single person had turned their backs on her.

As proof, there were people who had come running to help when they were about to be killed by Rhaki.

There were also people who had said they would protect her no matter what.

She knew there really were such people. But Infel still held a grudge against the people even now.

Infel had even helped Cloche with this Metafalica just so she wouldn't have to experience what she herself had.

... Maybe I wasn't cut out to be a Maiden.

But regardless, Cloche had made Metafalica a success. That was honestly worthy of praise.

Their Song continued even now. And the growth of the Metafalica continent as well.

"... I wish you could have seen it too, Nenesha."

"I—Infel!"

Infel could tell from Frelia's surprise that her body had begun to disappear.

"... They event went as far as surpassing the designer..."

Truly worthy of respect.

What exactly would become of this new world she had created?

Would it become something worthy of being called a paradise? Would it become a hellish continent? Unfortunately, Infel no longer had time left to see for herself. Besides, perhaps she had lived a little too long.

Therefore, she would disappear, leaving nothing but her feelings behind.

Infel turned to Frelia and spoke.

“Please... take good care of this world...”

With those final words, Infel listened to that Song until the moment she disappeared.

To the girls’ Metafalica that resounds throughout the world.

## Chapter 15

# Epilogue

Luca and Cloche were on a small hill one fine afternoon.

It was the hill at the center of the continent. The Heart of the Land below that had given birth to the continent stuck out by about half a head, and a large monument stood there next to it.

Once most of the people living on the Rim had finished moving to the continent, Cloche had spoken about Infel and Nenesha in a speech.

She talked about how they had Sung the first Metafalica after Infel had perfected the theory. And about how Infel had saved Cloche with her encouragement during this Metafalica after she was almost crushed by the wave of thoughts that had come pouring in.

About how they wouldn't be here now without them.

This monument had been built by the people who had heard that speech.

"Ah, it's the Holy Maidens!"

They turned around in response, and found several children standing there. They could see small flowers held in their hands.

“Hello. Wow, what pretty flowers!”

“Yeah! We brought them for Lady Infel and Lady Nenesha.”

“They’re flowers we grew ourselves, but... I wonder if they’ll like them?”

There were already numerous gorgeous flowers laid out in front of the monument. It seemed they were worried about how theirs compared.

“They’re flowers you raised with lots of care, right? I’m sure they’ll like them.”

The children gave an embarrassed laugh in response, and placed their flowers in front of the monument.

“We’ll be sure to bring flowers again!”

And with that, they left.

“... Everyone’s truly grateful aren’t they?”

“Yeah... people throughout the world are praising their achievements.”

This monument was filled with the people of Metafalss’ feelings of gratitude. Since like the continent, it had been created by their feelings.

It would surely remain here forever, as long as the continent existed.

Hoping for as much, the 33rd Maiden of Homura and the Maiden of Mio left the monument behind.

3774 AD. First year of the Metafalica Sphere.

May everyone live in happiness upon this continent.



## Author's Afterword – Genki Tomimatsu

Living life shut indoors doing my job is incredibly enjoyable.

I'm Tomimatsu, and I'm quite happy as long as I have alcohol, my PC, and cold tanuki udon. Nice to meet you!

It is my first time writing an afterword, so I don't know what I should write, and even if I wanted to talk about serious things, I'm not the kind of person who can, so I asked about it, and was told-

"It will be different for each person, so I can't say for sure. Please do whatever you would like."

I thought oh, that almost makes it sound like it's okay to make lots of controversial statements, but if I did that, I'd be out of a job, and in addition, this book would doubtlessly be recalled, and it could lead to something even more dangerous.

We live in an overly sensitive world after all – I've got chills☆

Anyway, it's the afterword, I'll get talking for real now!

Even so, I won't talk about Reisha, the most moe AT character in my opinion. Still, it's not because someone would get angry with me, but rather because there aren't enough pages. Though I will say just one thing.

If I were to be hit by Reisha, I'd want it to be a straight punch to the face with her left hand!

Now then, this book is at its heart, a story about Infel's past from around 400 years ago more so than about the main game of Ar tonelico 2.

Actually, the story of Infel's past was based on an unused plot for the second drama CD.

It had already been completed a few months or so after the second game was released, but was left unused since it was brought up how it would be unwise, in many respects, to have

not Cloche's, but Infel's side come after Luca's. I'm extremely happy it finally got to see the light of day.

If there's a problem with it, it's that there is no Infel Breeze, right? It was even brought up in a meeting, but we came to the shocking idea that the Infel Breeze might not have existed 400 years ago. "She was focusing solely on her research while she was alive, so wouldn't she have gained that kind of knowledge after she lost her body?"

That's probably the case, isn't it? And it doesn't seem like the sort of thing Infel would have said back then.

Well with that, I'm getting close to the end, so unfortunately, I'm going to have to say goodbye here.

Thank you to all you readers, who read to the very end.

Thank you to all the staff members, who were quick to check my work in detail, and give me advice despite being busy.

Nooooow then, drinks for one in honor of its completion! If I drink alone, I won't cause trouble for others even if I throw up or collapse!

How about a drink for all of you too, in honor of finishing the novel? See you

Now I want to finish all those books piling up that I've bought, but haven't had time to read...

## **Supervisor's Afterword – Akira Tsuchiya (Gust)**

"The people" were the most important consideration when creating the world of Ar tonelico 2. The basis for this novel, Ar tonelico 2, is a roleplaying game (RPG) for the PlayStation 2. RPGs are usually stories where a hero and their party save the world. And in most cases, they often end up grandstanding,

don't they? What I mean is that although it's of course, the role of the heroes to eventually find the root of all evil and put a stop to their ambitions, I feel that the townspeople are too indifferent. The ultimate goal of *Ar tonelico 2* is for everyone to create their ideal land, the floating continent of "Metafalica", together. That of course means fighting with those who would stop it along the way, but in the end, a peaceful world is built together with the people. *Ar tonelico 2* was made with a special focus on this concept of "growing together with the people". You can overhear their gossip in the game, and there are all sorts of events with them. . . in any case, everyone is trying their hardest, and pressing onwards towards Metafalica! That's the kind of atmosphere I wanted to create. Of course there is also opposition and betrayal along the way. But after all of that, everyone in the world eventually joins together for a happy ending. This novel also takes a closer look at one particular aspect of this important concept – "creation together with the people". No matter how wonderful something may be, people will rarely unanimously support it.

The ending of the game was full of happy scenes, but sure enough, there was discord among the people even then. And the Maidens and the party took it seriously, and were there to walk alongside them.

The origin of this idea of the power of the people changing the world. . . Actually, it was something from elementary school that made me start thinking about it. There was a story in moral education class called "The Wine That Became Water". It was a story where a certain wine-loving scholar was moving away, so everyone was going to chip in and give him some wine as a farewell gift. In the story, a cask was placed in the center of town, and everyone filled it with wine, but when the scholar went to go enjoy the wine, it had somehow become water. You may already know what had happened,

but lots of people thought “Well if it’s just me...” and the wine ended up becoming water.

Each person alone is weak, but when added together, the power of the people is something incredibly strong. This has been true of revolutions throughout history. Japan’s postwar reconstruction was also thanks to this “power of the people” as well. Sometimes it is misused to start things like wars, but there is a truly miraculous power in the “strength of the feelings of many”. Taking down a giant final boss that extends to the ends of the horizon as the hero and party alone seems somehow impossible, but if you fight it together with the power of all the people in the world, then you get the sense that you may be able to defeat it... right? I would be very happy if you felt the power of feelings, even if only a little, in the game “Ar tonelico 2”, as well as in this novel.

## **Supervisor’s Afterword – Atsunori Kawachi (Bandai Namco Games)**

You probably already know this if you’ve finished reading, but the title of this novel, “The Girls’ Metafalica That Resounds Throughout the World”, fits it perfectly, the climax cannot be read without tears. (Go read it if you haven’t!)

While I was reading the novel, I remembered when I was thinking of a title for the original game, “Ar tonelico 2: The Girls’ Metafalica That Resounds Throughout the World”.

Gust’s Tsuchiya-san and I were bringing up the various bits and pieces of ideas that would comprise the second game from the time development was finished on the first game of the series, “Ar tonelico: The Girl Who Continues Singing at the End of the World”.

What kind of guy should the protagonist of 2 be? I want drama like this with the heroines! And so on. The keyword I personally discovered as we discussed these things many times over, and I took in the various ideas for 2 that Tsuchiya-san was conveying to me... that was “creation”.

The creation of bonds between Croix and the heroines. The creation of sisters from the misfortunes of Luca and Cloche’s lives. The continuing creation within Jakuri’s heart from the previous game. There is also the creation of drama by all the people who appear in game. And Song Magic is created by Diving. Items are, of course, created (synthesized) too. And above all is the creation of “an organic land”, which is treated as a theme of this novel as well.

When we settled on the story for one of the major highlights of the plot, the creation of the “Tower”, which serves as a symbol of Ar tonelico, the framework for the game became clear before our eyes.

I wanted an expression that would best convey this work’s theme of “creation”.

After thinking about it, I found that I could express “Metafalica” with the kanji for “creation Song”, read as Metafalica. Furthermore, as I carefully read through the main plot, you hear the Singing voices of the two heroines, which is what creates the land, so naturally, it became “The Girls’ Metafalica (creation Song)” ... and then that was followed by “That Resounds Throughout the World”, so that the grandness of it would be felt.

We were able to bring into the world another long-cherished installment of the final product, “Ar tonelico 2: The Girls’ Metafalica That Resounds Throughout the World”.

Tomimatsu-san, starting with the original games, delved into the world of Ar tonelico in places such as the drama CDs, Ar Portal, and the calendar, and made the characters stand

out in detail. He once again skillfully took on our completely unreasonable requests of wanting this or that character to appear, and worked hard to integrate them into this installment.

Nagi-san also put a lot of work into this novel, including the designs for the new character “Ana”.

My continued thanks to the many people who once again gave birth to a new world of Ar tonelico.

And above all, I'd like to give the biggest thanks to you who picked up this book.