

Chapter 5: From the Land of the Rising Sun >> Unofficial Island Nation Landing Operation

Part 1

“Quenser.”

“Are you ready to go, Princess?”

Two people spoke quietly in the darkness.

They were on the way to the Island Nation. The fleet was completing their final maintenance checks while hidden within a ship scrapyard in Southeast Asia.

The Baby Magnum was completing its final tune up as well.

Once that work was complete, they were headed straight to the Island Nation.

The Princess showed him the hand she had hidden behind her back. Or more accurately, the small box she held in it.

“Here.”

“?”

“In the Island Nation, you give chocolate on Valentine’s Day.”

“Oh?”

“Girls give it to boys there!!”

“Gweh!? Why are you attacking me with the corner of the box like that!? Stop shoving it against me!”

The Princess didn’t answer and continued attacking him with her eyes squeezed shut.

But that aside...

“Yahoo!! This is handmade, isn’t it!? Anything handmade by a girl is cause to celebrate if you ask me!!”

“Anything!? This is supposed to be special, Quenser!!”

“?”

“(Oh, but I can’t tell him girls give it to the boy they l-l-l-like. There’s just no way. But he won’t understand if I don’t because he doesn’t know the Island Nation traditions!)”

Rejoicing Quenser tore off the wrapping paper and began devouring the chocolate with the ferocity of someone starved for flavor after so long with nothing but flavorless rations.

The Princess stared in disbelief when he did this right in front of her.

“Quenser...” she said.

“Hey, I have to eat it while I have the chance,” he said in his usual flippant way. But then he lowered his voice and took a more serious tone. “I might not be coming back alive from this one, so I don’t want to leave anything undone.”

“...You’re right.”

The Princess narrowed her eyes.

This really was not the time for something like this. Neither of them said so, but they still shared the moment together. Quenser could hardly have complained if he got stones thrown at him for this, but that was why he wanted some time to smile together while they still could.

He knew she had to feel the same. She had to know now wasn’t the time, but she had still neatly wrapped up the small box. He didn’t know what meaning that held for her, but she may have been afraid of ending up dead all alone in her empty cockpit.

“Quenser, what will you do now?”

“We’ll see.”

“People think Objects are terrible things that will destroy the world. Even though we were fighting to protect everyone.”

Quenser only smiled vaguely.

He couldn’t bring himself to say that was wrong.

At this point, he didn't have the willpower left to continue hiding the environmental destruction by Objects theory from the Pilot Elite.

Plus, Quenser himself had killed a certain mother. He had repeatedly stabbed her to protect the Legitimacy Kingdom home country of Paris.

The Princess had only been one cause among many, but it had been one-on-one for Quenser. Setting aside whether or not his actions had been justified, Cheddar Affinity would not have died if he hadn't been there.

He would have to live out the rest of his life with a child resenting him for the loss of his mother.

"Well..."

"..."

The Princess was a Pilot Elite. He couldn't pretend to understand how this made her feel.

But he had come to the battlefield dreaming of being an Object designer. This new direction for the world had robbed him of his dream.

So she wanted to hear his answer.

She hoped to find something there to help her.

However...

"I'm sure I'll be doing something related to Objects. I don't care what anyone says - I just love them too much."

The ever-expressionless Princess actually blinked twice in surprise.

"Sure, I'll have to see how people view Objects and what position they hold in the world," he said, unfazed. "But I'm not going to let the ghosts of some dead terrorists decide that for us all. So let's end this silly world war and decide for ourselves what Objects will be in the new world. I'm hoping it'll be something we like."

"Yes."

"You can't stand how the world sees Objects as villains now, right? Then let's start from there. Let's destroy all of this and create a new era where everyone's thankful for Objects. I don't know what

actual work they'll do – could be construction and could be garbage disposal – but let's create a peaceful age of Objects so we can walk up to those so-called experts insisting Objects would destroy the world and give them the finger."

"...Yes."

With the softest of sounds, the Princess rested her forehead against Quenser's chest.

And she spoke in a vanishingly quiet voice.

"I would like that too."

"Then let's do it. Someone pulled the trigger on all this to accomplish who-knows-what, but this is still our lives. If we want to do something, we should just do it."

Time seemed to stop for a while after that.

They might not have the chance for any of that.

They might all die in the upcoming battle.

But no one had the right to deny them this moment.

Eventually, the Princess pulled her head away and spoke quietly.

"And don't forget, Quenser."

"?"

"When someone gives you Valentine's Day chocolate in the Island Nation, you have to give them a gift worth three times as much on White Day."

"What kind of loan shark holiday is that!?"

The Princess held a hand to her mouth and giggled when the boy jumped in surprise.

In that rare moment, her icy expression melted.

"You had better repay me, Quenser."

“Sure...”

Ordinarily, making promises now might have been a bad idea.

They shouldn't have been creating extra causes for regret.

But.

Quenser Barbotage couldn't help but smile as he responded.

“You got it. It's a promise.”

Part 2

The world war blossomed before a freelance battlefield cameraman's eyes.

Sewax pulled his SLR camera from his face and muttered to himself: “This world deserves to be destroyed.”

The Legitimacy Kingdom home country of Paris was surrounded by three defensive lines and the outermost one had been breached.

But the attackers were not free to do as they wished.

A 50m colossus crushed the massive wheat field in its path, switched the format of its main cannon, and unleashed a deafening boom and a bright orange beam of light. That was a brutal railgun.

The infantry down below covered their ears and shouted up at it.

“You're overdoing it, Excalibur!! If we really do eradicate the Faith Organization, the table will permanently lose one of its legs. As much as I hate it, this world needs all four of those legs. As knights of the Legitimacy Kingdom, we have a duty to protect world peace!!”

The Pilot Elite did not care.

Even if the target was officially a civilian medical group arriving on the battlefield for peaceful purposes.

The Elite figured there was probably a Faith Organization assassin hidden among the doctors.

Their food and water supplies had been contaminated earlier, leading to several losses among the Legitimacy Kingdom troops. The only outsiders on base at the time had been a choir there to provide some comfort during such a difficult time, but the entire choir had been “dealt with” by the soldiers after the problem was detected.

The clean wars system had already collapsed.

And it was their fault. So they only had themselves to blame if the Legitimacy Kingdom made some harsh decisions during this world war.

“Excalibur to 22nd Division. Then are you asking me to sit here twiddling my thumbs while we lose more of our people? They are directly attacking Paris. I was granted this sword by my king, so I must use it to protect our people.”

The ordinary soldiers had done the right thing.

But at least three suicides by sidearm had been reported after the execution of the choir. The number of soldiers who were clenching their teeth and suffering from PTSD had to be tens or even hundreds of times greater. And this result had probably been part of the Faith Organization’s plot. Knowing them, they might even cut open a baby’s belly to hide a bomb inside or threaten an elderly woman into wielding a gun.

The Excalibur’s Pilot Elite would not let their horrific deeds continue. He would not allow any more losses from the youths who had sworn to fight for the good of the world.

...So he had chosen to shoulder all the dirty work himself.

He calmly double checked the defense target only he would be attacking.

They would learn the hard way not to underestimate the sword granted him by his king.

The Faith Organization was not going to take this lying down.

The Capitalist Corporations and Information Alliance intervened a lot sooner than expected. The Faith Organization had assumed those third parties would just keep watch from a distance and only join in at the very, very end when they knew which side would win, but they had jumped into the fray almost immediately.

They didn’t want this European war to reach the New World.

Perhaps the greatest driver of war was fear, not desire.

"Yes, yes. We just called in the Bad Maidens, the Tartaruses, the Poison Forests, and all the other infamous units engaged in unofficial missions in the Northern Restricted Zone. We might not have as many Objects, but we can turn this around with their help."

"What about the volunteers?"

"They don't even suspect what their real purpose is. Or that they have bombs packed inside their bags."

This conversation would have been unthinkable once, but now no one questioned it.

They would use everything at their disposal.

In this new era, even a stuffed rabbit was no more than a weapon that could be stuffed down an enemy soldier's throat to suffocate them to death.

"Detonate those in hospitals and schools across Paris and the Legitimacy Kingdom won't know who they can trust. We must not fear their wrath - we must use it to our advantage. Once their battleline panics, they will make mistakes and their superior number of Objects will not be enough to determine the outcome."

Why should they fight fair and square?

Quite a few of their Objects had been rendered inoperable or unmaintainable during the chaos following the collapse of Rome, so they had been forced out of the fight before it even began. They were starting at a disadvantage. If they chose to ignore that reality and attempted to fight fair and square, the raging Objects would cause even further damage in Naples and Milan where they had established a distributed emergency government.

So the Faith Organization would not rely on a direct fight.

"I pray the peaceful age of god will arrive to this sinful planet."

But their faith was not broken.

When people had something to protect, they gained the ability to accept even the cruelest of actions.

It was strange how they had gotten to know each other.

The black-haired, dark-skinned bodyguard crossing his arms must have left a good impression back

when they met at the Technopics. They were inside a luxury hotel room on Bali, but nothing sexy was going on here.

People gathered around the rich when they were winning.

In the bodyguard business, you helped build your brand by being the first person who came to mind when the rich began to lose and felt they couldn't trust anyone anymore.

A woman calmly sat behind a laptop at a nearby table.

Her name was Alicia Sloppyjoes.

But wasn't she supposed to be an agent for an advertising firm that worked mostly with Capitalist Corporations' companies?

"Alarms are sounding in South America, Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe. This could be a problem. I need to decide where to shelter my assets soon. The LA main bank could be shutdown at any moment. Oh, but I can't trust Oceania because they've always been politically unstable."

"Quit trying to make yourself sound smart. The point is you can't trust any of the digital data, so you want your assets with you in a physical form, right? Diamonds would be your best bet. Cash and gold are too bulky to guard while on the move."

"Can you guarantee they would be safe during this world war with no safe zones to speak of? Diamonds are easily broken by impacts and I have heard they scorch in fires."

"If you don't like it, then I'm leaving. This is stupid and I'm only here to earn money for my family. Especially for my little sister who was separated from me when our parents divorced. It doesn't really matter to me who I earn that money from."

They heard hurried footsteps in the adjacent room. (Their suite actually had multiple rooms.)

That would be Pharmacist Stacy Palmetto providing a special service for a mercenary working for them. ...Specifically, she was providing the "safe doping" designed for professional athletes. The bodyguard man had no interest in receiving that service himself.

He sighed and asked another question.

"Dammit, I can't believe we're still stuck counting money during a world war. Is the Capitalist Corporations going to come out on top again with the war industry consuming the world?"

"It doesn't look that simple. The situation has moved past the limits of the investment programs. Everyone is pretending things are working out just fine, but it's looking like the New World won't be able to stop a chain reaction financial crisis. If this keeps up, a lot of companies are going to go bankrupt and shut down. And there are signs of the Information Alliance using cyber attacks to take out the crypto assets spread out across the world."

"Will this affect 7th Core too?"

"Yes, even them. Are you familiar with the Object that guards LA?"

"I'm not familiar with its detailed specs, but I have heard it controls animals. Something about using ultrasonic waves, artificial pheromones, and other things to summon swarms of locusts and edible earthworms to form a massive wall protecting the border with Central America."

"The Xanthippe is the Capitalist Corporations' strongest Second Generation. It's a special Object designed and constructed by the burger chain that's globally famous even for a 7th Core company. Beyond simple combat, it was apparently designed to prevent starvation tactics where a unit is isolated with all supply lines cut off."

"..."

The bodyguard man grimaced slightly. The combination of earthworms and burgers may have been to blame.

Alicia, on the other hand, didn't seem to mind.

"Its title as the strongest should help discourage an attack, but simply preventing the damage from spreading too far is costing so much money that actually fighting would probably cause the company to go under."

"Seriously?"

"Their funds are already running low. It isn't a fierce warrior or a mysterious prototype weapon that brings down major countries and ends wars - that honor always goes to economic collapse. 7th Core might be the seven wealthiest companies in the world, but the more money required to keep things operating normally, the greater the risk if the ordinary financial engineering equations fall apart. To be fair, this hasn't happened overnight. The CEO of Salem Logistics was assassinated by Nyarlathotep recently and the Elevator Alliance jointly funded by 7th Core failed pretty spectacularly. This blow hit all the harder because they had yet to recover from those other issues. Things are reaching truly scary territory here. That's why I can't trust the banks. Maybe I really should convert it all into diamonds or platinum and look after it myself."

A dull roar reverberated across the dictator's ocean.

The roar came from the Manhattan 000, the Information Alliance's strongest Object and their home country itself.

No one remained who could stop it.

The baptism of fire and lead had taught the smart ones to remain silent. The less smart ones had been plunged into the watery depths along with their weapons.

"But the Manhattan 000 is our home country. No matter how effective it is, I can't keep it on the front line for too long. 114. I need to cause enough damage to open the way for our other Objects and then pull back."

Melly Martini Extradry was speaking as a Pilot Elite, not as the Martini Series in charge of New York's security.

She spoke like she was humming the latest hit song.

Was she speaking out loud to help organize her thoughts, or to assist the massive AI network that operated the Manhattan 000?

"But it bothers me how a few Objects have vanished from such a crucial battlefield. The Information Alliance is supposed to be second to none when it comes to information, so I don't like the feeling that I'm being manipulated by some unseen information. 994."

Part 3

The local time was February 15 at precisely 2 AM.

The sound of the ocean parting intruded on the pitch black world.

"Welcome, courageous warriors!! Whether we go down in history as the heroes who saved the world or filthy deserters is entirely up to your actions. I'm sure you all have different thoughts on your mind, but I know you joined us because you weren't willing to throw out everything you believed in just to obey the orders passed down to you from on high. It doesn't matter if you're fighting for the world. Let's start by protecting our own lives."

Quenser and Heivia's group was soaked with oily seawater as they used the veil of darkness to land on one of the small islands protecting the Kanagawa area at the entrance to Tokyo Bay.

They snuck up behind the self-defense PMC soldiers managing the giant fortress gun and silently slit their throats with knives. The Island Nation had once fought a fierce civil war, but it looked like they

could join forces again when necessary. Not every guard out here was necessarily a villain, but Quenser and Heivia's group needed to get past them to reach the villains manipulating them.

"Hurry up and set up the bomb, skinny boy." The prestigious noble sounded impatient. "If we get rid of that 400mm railgun, we can call in the fleet!"

"There were supposed to be three of these artillery islands. Blow this one up right away and the others go on alert. I can detonate them all simultaneously using my radio, so let's get back into the ocean and move on to the next island."

"The world war was started here in the Island Nation, the very technological country that developed the first Objects and introduced them to the world."

Something was floating on the ocean surface.

It was not a boat.

It was an amphibious continuous track armored vehicle weighing more than 25 tons and designed for river crossings. It could be used as a boat when a propeller and rudder were attached. Wydine Uptown of the Battlefield Cleanup Service PMC (which actually worked for the Information Alliance) gave a troubled look up at the top hatch.

The source of her troubles was Karen I Winchell, the eyepatch maid next to her.

"Ma'am, I would prefer not to have a real maid anywhere near us. I'm wearing cat ears!! This really draws attention to how fake we are!! Why would anyone choose us over a milkmaid who serves a fancy noble family!?"

"A-a milkmaid is in charge of looking after the cows and making cheese and butter. I don't know what exactly you think it means, but it isn't that!!"

"You're capable in every way, you're a coolheaded and strict instructor with an eyepatch, and yet your defenses crumble at the drop of a hat? Your maid level is off the charts, so we don't stand a chance. Someone please send help!!"

Karen looked coolheaded but was actually very easy to get a rise out of, so she found it easier to relax when focused on her maid work. She cleared her throat and then turned to face Quenser.

"Ahem. Sir Quenser, please have this towel. I can never thank you enough for looking after our ill-behaved cockroach in place of the Winchell family maids."

“Pfft. Cockroach? Ha ha ha.”

“Don’t encourage her, Quenser!!!!!!”

“The Island Nation is officially part of the Capitalist Corporations and defended by a self-defense PMC purchased with Capitalist Corporations money, but in truth, a complex power balance between the Legitimacy Kingdom, Capitalist Corporations, Information Alliance, and Faith Organization has settled in there. They invited in all those foreigners to fight against their plummeting birthrate and now very few of the original Island Nationers are left. In fact, no one can even agree who counts as one anymore.”

They used the ocean currents as much as possible, using the engine only when absolutely necessary.

After approaching one of the concrete-covered islands as much as possible, a highly mobile infantry force silently landed and eliminated the self-defense PMC (who were almost all foreign mercenaries due to the limited number of Island Nationers).

They caught some glimpses of some people more frightening than the island defense force.

“Geh!?” Quenser’s eyes widened. “A bunch of Martini Series girl just left a different armored truck!!”

“Keep in mind that I am one of the more sensible ones. Those easy-going and coldblooded triplets are nothing like me.”

Wraith Martini Vermouthspray looked exasperated while spinning a pen-like device in her hand, but...

“Aren’t you our commander!? What are you doing out here!?”

“Oh, do you want the Stopgap Grim Reaper to boss you around that badly? I’ve only ever treated my borrowed units as disposable tools, so I’m not great at keeping my people alive.”

“How are you different from the rest of the Martini Series again!?”

Wraithy was accompanied by a silent young man named Frank and she had zero interest in getting along with the triplets in red uniforms. She puffed out her cheeks when she was thrown into the same category as them.

After the highly international PMC unit was eliminated, Quenser attached a bomb to the base of the

400mm railgun that had a metal jacket of gel around the entire barrel for shock absorption.

The guns being on remote islands meant they didn't have to bother hiding the bodies. They didn't have to worry about an unlucky civilian seeing one and screaming.

The seabirds would probably eat them after waking up at dawn. Nature could be cruelly unbiased at times. But Quenser's group didn't have time to worry about the dignity of the corpses. This was a battle between professionals. If they encountered each other on the battlefield, they had to fight and they couldn't exactly bring the enemy's bodies back with them.

"I've gotten so used to killing. Makes me want to vomit."

"It's that world war that taught you to be like that. I don't know what the people sitting around in their living rooms would think about it, but I'm not about to let the bastards behind all this complain about our actions."

Quenser pictured that hemispherical prosthetic eye lying on the rooftop.

He had robbed Carat Affinity of his one and only mother, but he would have to wait until after this was over for that boy to repay him for it.

"The small Island Nation is secretly used by agents of all four world powers to speak with each other and work out deals behind the scenes. That international group is known as Azumaya. They have built a secret base deep within a self-defense PMC base in Ichigaya. They make all the decisions there. Each member is officially just some random soldier and the higher ups of each world power know nothing about this. They are the ones who fed information to Bad Garage and started this world war."

They met some sporadic resistance.

But this was the last of the three artillery islands. It was too late for them to go on alert now. The armored truck's 40mm machinegun fired from the concrete coast, tearing through a concrete wall and the enemy soldiers to silence them. Afterwards, Quenser attached a plastic explosive to the base of the giant cannon aiming south from the ocean.

"That's the last one."

"The party's all ready to go, so it's time to open the door for all the invited guests pounding on our door."

Heivia and Myonri trudged back to the truck, but Quenser looked back just once.

“What is it, Quenser?”

“Nothing really. I just thought these 400mm railguns would have a round reactor attached to them.”

“They probably dug underground to run an undersea cable. That’s nothing compared to the Break Carrier. C’mon, let’s go.”

“Of course, the top brass back in the home countries have more authority than some agents shipped out to Asia. But only inside their world power. If anyone gets in these agents’ way, they have one of the agents of another world power kill them. That is the truth behind so many wars. It was a global scale murder exchange. They eliminated each other’s problems. That gave them the freedom to kill a Legitimacy Kingdom king or a Capitalist Corporations conglomerate president with the press of a button. And eventually, those lowly agents gained the influence needed to manipulate their entire world power. Their names are never found on any documents and they remain nothing more than a random soldier no one has ever heard of. The Island Nation is of course closely watched by the four world powers, but that is what made it so perfect for hiding something. Think of it like a stage magician’s table. When everyone is focused on something, they fail to notice what is happening right under their nose. Try this sleight of hand in a living room with all the lights out and they would make a mistake pretty fast. I bet this group would have been caught and eliminated a lot sooner if they hadn’t used the Island Nation, which acts as a sort of taboo.”

Once he was back inside the floating armored truck, Quenser flicked his radio’s switch with his thumb, triggering three consecutive fireworks that illuminated the late night sea. With the three artillery islands down, the Objects and their maintenance fleet could pass through to Tokyo Bay.

The colossal weapons controlled by Pilot Elites moved past Quenser’s group. The Baby Magnum waved one of its seven main cannons in greeting as the armored truck was retrieved by a landing ship.

“Thanks, everyone.”

“Oh ho ho. You all worry too much. Fortress guns? You should have just let us crush those puny things below our nuke-resistant Objects.”

The triple explosion acted as a trigger.

Air raid sirens began to sound from the harbors at Yokosuka and Yokohama and searchlights shined into the sky, but that was not what Quenser’s group had planned. Burning Alpha and Ice Girl 1 used aerial bombs to precisely blow up just the docked defense ships and then the entire fleet continued north.

“Hey, little lady? If you rely too much on your own bombs, you will run out eventually, no matter how

many you're carrying. And you don't want to have to land on the aircraft carrier every time that happens, do you? The harbor is our target. The most effective and economical method is to block up the ocean with the enemy's rubble. Aren't you from the Capitalist Corporations? Then you need to worry about the cost of all that ammo, don't you?"

"Shut your mouth, Burning Alpha. I am the leader Ice Squadron. I was just immersing myself in some hard rock after finally getting my hands on a phone with a proper subscription, so if you want me to show you who's the better pilot, that can be arranged!!"

Why did it sound like those two fighters were competing over kills before the real battle even began?

Their destination was Ichigaya, Tokyo.

They needed to land near Odaiba and fight their way almost all the way to Shinjuku.

In other words...

"Your job is to work your way from Tokyo Bay to Ichigaya and crush Azumaya there."

Their only objective was Azumaya.

This battle was meaningless for the majority of the people defending the Island Nation, but a shootout was unavoidable when they were attacking those defenders' bases and garrisons. Trying to persuade the troops here would only give the mysterious members of Azumaya a chance to escape.

The Ichigaya garrison was officially known as a Capitalist Corporations self-defense PMC base, but it was more like a joint facility for the four world powers sharing control of the Island Nation. People were rapidly being pushed into the box that had been left nearly empty after the civil war.

That meant there would be Legitimacy Kingdom soldiers there as well, but they could not ask them for help. Quenser's group had already left the Legitimacy Kingdom's chain of command, as would anyone who had stayed on the Island Nation long enough.

This was a deadly battle between outsiders.

They were here to end the world war, but if the side with the superior justification always won, military might wouldn't be necessary in the first place.

A point in the night sky flashed and then a small destroyer was vaporized disturbingly close to the landing ship that had collected Quenser's group in their truck. The steel ship and the seawater

around it literally melted to an orange liquid and erupted into bubbles while falling to the bottom of the ocean.

“A laser beam!? But it came from so high up!!”

They could see the fighters rapidly reducing their altitude. Quenser initially thought a flying Object had shown up to break all the rules they took for granted, but that wasn't it.

The blonde-haired, brown-skinned fake maid named Wydine Uptown shouted out from where she was strapped into her seat in the armored truck.

“Sirs and madams. We only have an estimate at this point, but that was fired from 100km to the west at an altitude of around 3800m. That matches the peak of Mount Fuji!!”

That wasn't a joke.

That explained why the fortress guns protecting Tokyo Bay had all been railguns specialized for targeting ships past the horizon. They already had a powerful anti-air defense to shoot down ballistic missiles and bombers.

As usual, Frolaytia's pre-mission briefing had been lacking crucial information.

Quenser had experienced this more than enough already, so he paled and cursed that busy commander.

“A-are you saying anywhere you can see Mount Fuji is in range of that laser fortress gun? Heh...heh heh heh. But doesn't the Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji show you can see it from pretty much anywhere!?”

“It doesn't really matter. You saw how huge that laser beam was. They can't fire it on us once we're inside Tokyo!!”

“Just so you know, it doesn't look it's going be that easy, you peeeeeeeeeeeeeesssssssssssst.”

The eyepatch maid harshly criticized the noble boy's idea (because she so so sooo couldn't bear the idea of her beloved master getting himself killed here□).

Their Objects could battle at 600km/h, so they could cross Tokyo Bay in no time. Yet the Baby Magnum and Rush had come to a stop.

Something was rising from the dark ocean surface up ahead.

Just like one of those giant kaijus the Island Nation loved so much.

It came from near an artificial island service area in the middle of the highway that connected Tokyo Bay from east to west. Something had been activated, like it was moving to prevent these uninvited guests from entering Tokyo.

It goes without saying what that 50m shape was.

A mysterious Island Nation model had finally shown itself.

“You can remove all the wind and oil you want, but you can never extinguish the forest fire if you don’t remove the actual source of the fire. ...We must crush Azumaya underfoot. The giant feet of our Objects will stamp out the cigarette butt they so rudely discarded on the filthy ground!!”

No one had thought this would be easy.

But everyone here had still joined in because they truly wanted to stop the world war. So the appearance of an Object wasn’t going to stop them.

Operation Tokyo Invasion had begun.

Part 4

“Ksh!! We are experiencing some unexplained signal noise. The Island Nation must be doing something!!”

“The complex arrangement of metal pipes and smokestack exhaust in Chiba’s industrial zone are interfering with our radars and sensors. Ksh, be careful you don’t hit any civilians!!”

Chiba, Kanagawa, and Tokyo.

Thick artillery fire pushed in to greet the Area By Chance fleet traveling north through the bay.

Very few people could stay standing on the shaking deck. Even the highly experienced old maintenance lady was carefully pressing up against the wall while she carried some repair materials. She knew relying on the metal railings would just get her thrown overboard when an impact rocked the ship.

Among all that, one commander held her right hand straight out, holding a rapier with the tip standing straight up. Lendy Farolito stared past the sword and into the distance, almost like a

painter using her brush to decided where to start on the scenery.

(I can leave the stifling combat information center to that Legitimacy Kingdom smoker. I need to make up for the malfunctioning radars and sensors. That's the best way to help that girl.)

The decoration at the base of the sword was what mattered here.

Lights flashed in the distance. Supersonic artillery shells were tearing through the air and pillars of water burst more than 20m up from the dark ocean near their ships. The fortress gun didn't even need a direct hit. If a piece was torn from the plastic garbage floating in the ocean and hit her, it could tear off a limb.

But Lendy did not bat an eye.

This put her life at risk, but it also gave her a crucial hint.

Anyone who couldn't think like that was not fit to serve as a soldier.

(The enemy is likely using 175mm guns. The muzzle flash is 1/2 the width of the Ki-Yong, so the range must be about 10km. The 30 second gap between light and sound confirms it. Double check complete.)

"Central command to Gatling 033. Set your reference point to 1200m west-northwest. The Island Nation fortress gun is loaded on a freight train. It appears to be traveling north at a cautious 40km/h to avoid tipping over from the oversized load, so correct your aim accordingly. Fire."

A scorching light and a sizzling of the night air erupted simultaneously.

The laser beam secondary cannon unnaturally bent at a sharp angle from the exhaust heat coming from the industrial zone's smokestacks, but that sent it straight down to accurately vaporize the enemy fortress gun hidden in the gap between industrial complex buildings.

"G-gun destroyed. The enemy mobile artillery gun in the Kisarazu area has been silenced!!"

"Wow, that laser beam flew over the industrial zone and then dropped straight down on its target. I never want to fight against that."

A rush of reports came in, but cheers were the norm for an idol.

The idol Elite must have been able to see Lendy standing on the deck with rapier raised in front of her because she commented on it.

"Oh ho ho. I like that pose. I doubt you will go for it, but why not start your own career as an idol? You could go the thick and sexy route."

"Please. I shine best as the manager working behind the scenes."

Of course, taking out that one gun wasn't enough to end it.

But each new instance of destruction tilted the overall battle further in the one direction.

The following conversation was held on the combat information center that Lendy found so stifling.

"Major Capistrano, the destroyers and small aircraft carriers have sent a request to our flagship!!"

"This is only a camouflaged cruiser - the Scarlet Princess."

(Tch. That Information Alliance idol freak left the worst jobs with me. And now I find out that little girl in black and the red triplets from the Martini Series are mixed in with the potatoes entering the Island Nation. Damn, maybe I should have gotten out there too.)

The ship Frolaytia and the others were using was a special warship disguised as a cruise ship to lure in and slaughter pirates. Bringing it to the front line was like advertising the fact that they were so short on resources they had to use whatever was available.

"Our real flagship is that one carrying the Nikolaschka princess. Come to think of it, were they offering sunbathing and a chance to rest on there?"

The busty commander's comment brought a troubled look to the operator's face.

"It's 2 in the morning. The sun isn't out yet."

"That's too bad. I could really go for some sunlight after spending so much time in this windowless combat information center. Maybe I should at least have a sterilizing blacklight installed."

Frolaytia's comment earned a shrug from Captain Alfonso Zoom.

"We'll do our best to avoid it of course," continued the busty commander. "But this might end up being our final battle. Once things really get started, we won't be able to get any fresh air."

They were up against an unidentified Island Nation Object and a laser fortress gun installed at the summit of Mount Fuji.

It was an abnormal situation, but they had two Objects of their own.

(It's two-against-one, so if we make an aggressive attack, they should try to keep their distance to avoid being trapped between our Objects. This isn't going to end right away. Our ships are exposed to their laser fortress gun, but an Object's laser beam or low-stability plasma cannon can increase the ocean temperature enough to bend light with steam or a mirage.)

She couldn't let the great scale throw her off.

She couldn't let the Island Nation's legendary status stop her from thinking rationally.

Frolaytia Capistrano gradually gathered up what little odds they had and combined them into a real chance at victory.

"But first, we need to come up with a name for the enemy Object. Calling it 'unidentified' gives it an air of mystery we don't want."

That was a mass of metal ruled by physics and bound by chemistry.

It was not deflecting their bullets with a magical barrier or anything like that.

Part 5

"The Island Nation Object will now be referred to as the Asian Monster. I repeat, the enemy codename is Asian Monster!!"

"Oh, shut up! Quit wasting time naming the baby and get us out of here!! Evacuate!!"

Heivia proved how well trained he was by snapping back at their commander's radio transmission.

The firing rate of the fortress gun atop the Mount Fuji was unknown, but a single shot could erase a ship from the sea. They couldn't ignore the Asian Monster directly in front of them either. It had four diamond-shaped air cushion floats, with one in the front, back, left, and right, and the long main cannon on its right side was probably a low-stability plasma cannon. That cannon was an obvious threat, but it could probably also sink a destroyer just by tackling it.

So now was not the time to be huddled together in a bunch of landing ships. Quenser and Heivia's group hurriedly operated the lever to unfasten their synthetic belts and clung to the amphibious armored truck to leave their ship.

Fortunately, they were not just adrift and helpless.

The Baby Magnum and Rush moved out and clashed with the Island Nation Object long enough for the potatoes to head for Tokyo Bay's reclaimed land.

Of course, the one Object wasn't the extent of the Island Nation's defenses.

"Ice Girl 1 here. I have confirmed enemy fighters preparing for takeoff at Haneda. We will now attack that airport as an enemy military facility."

"Burning Alpha here. Haneda is an unstable airport constructed on a reiver delta and reclaimed land. So instead of simply dropping a ton of missiles on them, I recommend calculating how the impact will propagate across the surface and trigger soil liquefaction to prevent them from taking off."

"Do I need to shove a big fat missile down your throat to shut you up first, Burning Alpha!? Anyway, commence attack. Engage!!"

Quenser's eyes widened when he saw some flashing lights across the dark ocean and then a nearby part of the ocean swelled more than 10m straight up with a deafening roar.

"They're firing something from the north!? Hey, isn't that where that famous theme park is located!? When did that place arm itself!?"

"The Island Nation clearly has no fear of god."

But if the enemy had made their test shot and were preparing a corrected shot next, they couldn't just wait around here. Land was right in front of them now.

They needed to get on land before the second shot arrived.

They didn't need to fear direct targeting if they used the buildings as shields.

Just as Quenser's group arrived at the end of one of the reclaimed land sections, they heard several muffled explosions from an inland point to the west.

Quenser ducked down, thinking it might be a sign of mortars about to fall their way, but fortunately he was wrong.

"That appears to be some bridges and tunnels blowing up," said Putana Highball while inspecting her assault rifle nearby. "I don't sense any eyes on us."

The reclaimed land contained a lot of parks and fish markets. It was still mostly undeveloped, so

there was a fair bit of unpaved gravel and weed-filled fields. That meant a shell could easily reach them.

“___”

The radio transmission wasn't quite silent.

Quenser heard a suppressed sigh from the old maintenance lady. Ayami Cherryblossom had chosen to leave the Island Nation and join the Legitimacy Kingdom, so how did this homecoming feel to her?

Unfortunately, someone wasn't so considerate.

“This is the legendary Island Nation?” groaned Frolaytia, an Island Nation fanatic, viewing the footage coming from the potatoes' small body cameras. “I had high hopes after seeing Mount Fuji light up like that, but where are all the geishas and ninjas? What's keeping you, Island Nation? Where's the samurai unit that can slice through an Object with no more than the power of their own muscles and a katana?”

“Has this bitch completely forgotten our lives and the fate of the world are on the line here?” grumbled Heivia.

Things might have been differently in Kyoto or Shimane which had been taken by the Faith Organization or were highly influenced by the Legitimacy Kingdom, which valued history and tradition, but Tokyo and Kanagawa belonged to the Capitalist Corporations and Information Alliance who preferred math and logic. Frolaytia wasn't going to find anything she had hoped for here.

And on that note...

“I'm not delusional like Frolaytia, but this is the Island Nation,” said Quenser. “I was expecting half the scenery to covered in symbols or to find ourselves inside a giant hologram.”

“Oh, you're delusional all right,” said the old maintenance lady over the radio.

A new figure emerged from behind some roughly-stacked steel beams.

Someone wielding no guns or knives spread his arms and dark red flames surrounded him.

Quenser watched as those flames surged up and descended toward him. It felt like he was a frog being swallowed by a big snake.

“I want you all to take back everything you said about this place being too normal!!!!!!” shouted

Heivia while they all scattered.

The flames crashed into the gravel ground and scattered in every direction. The flames were unnaturally sticky like with a Molotov cocktail or a flamethrower.

Quenser had been slow to react and froze up, so 12-year-old Catherine had to push him to the ground and drag him behind a pipe. The boy shouted while clinging to the little girl's hips.

"What was that!? Some occult stuff like with Putana!?"

"Teacher, our powers are mostly boosted sensory abilities, so they are not actually what you would call psychic powers. We cannot shoot fire from our hands or bend a spoon with our minds. If you see anyone doing that, they are probably tricking you in some way."

The flames bent like a great serpent, so the rules of bullets didn't apply. They could easily circle behind whatever cover you were using.

But it was being used by another human.

Putana could predict the attack timing using his "gaze", so she gave some pointed instructions and the maid group, led by Wydine and Karen, nodded from behind different cover a short distance away. They pulled the pin from a smoke grenade and threw it to rob the enemy of his sight and oxygen while Heivia, Frank, and some others fired bullets and grenades in from multiple angles.

No one could avoid coughing or crying in the smoke. No one but the dead.

"It's a high-tech flamethrower."

Heivia approached the corpse and lightly kicked a weapon resembling a thick gun.

He knew what had given the man his pyrokinesis.

"I think it's called a Kagutsuchi 9. It uses microbubbles filled with particles of flammable fuel to distribute them over an area. The bubbles can be burst at the desired timing so the fuel mixes with the oxygen in the air and is detonated. Basically, it's like microscopic napalm bombs. It lets you create midair designs with the flamethrower, so you can make your own dragon breath or flame sword if you want. I guess it's like a small Be Ablaze."

"The Kagutsuchi series was originally used for musical parades, you know? The Island Nation must really be desperate."

The old maintenance lady's words were full of doubt and suspicion since she alone knew what the Island Nation had really been like.

The corpse didn't look Asian. He must have been a foreign mercenary or only half-Island Nationer because his hair was a bright blond. Hadn't the old lady mentioned something about this already?

Quenser gulped.

"If this is what their individual equipment is like, what are their Objects like?"

That thought scared him, but he couldn't come to a stop.

That one man naturally wasn't the only enemy they came across. Soon, they saw steel construction beams and a tunnel-like pipe floating in the air. Just when they noticed something small gathering together, one of them coughed up blood and collapsed.

But all of it had to be magic tricks.

If they didn't let the legend of this place influence them, they wouldn't panic or take unnecessary damage.

"Is that an experimental tornado generator?" said Quenser. "Basically, it's a drone that alters atmospheric pressure using an extremely powerful vacuum cleaner. I'm guessing he coughed up blood because of microplastics. They're probably meant to be mixed with the air and ignited."

"I don't see how any of this is better than an old-fashioned bullet," said Heivia.

"It's not and they know it. That's why they've set things up so we can't use bullets. Once they realize we're not falling for their tricks, they should shift back to the basics."

Quenser's group traveled across the reclaimed land to reach a beach TV station where they found the giant bridge had entirely collapsed. But that didn't matter much to them. Once they crossed the ocean with their armored trucks designed for crossing rivers, they would be in Tokyo proper.

The somewhat muffled explosions they heard in the distance were probably the Island Nation troops blowing up their own elevated railroads and highways. Quenser beckoned some girls over.

"Putana, Catherine, come here. You too, Wraith!"

"Hmph. At least it's better than being stuck in that truck with those dangerously stubborn triplets."

Quenser invited over the Martini Series commander and then pulled her up onto the roof of the Battlefield Cleanup Service truck. She tried to play it cool, but as short as she was, he basically had to pick her up like a kitten.

The truck's continuous tracks were grinding across the artificial beach to reach the dark ocean. They were less than 2km from the other side.

"Once we arrive on the other side, our primary landmark is the Keihin-Tohoku Line," said young Wraith up on the roof. "After we follow that coastal route north and reach Akihabara, we turn west. Follow the Sobu-Chuo Line from there and we reach Ichigaya."

Their amphibious truck followed the fallen bridge through the rubble-strewn ocean. Following the road using the railroad as a landmark wasn't the shortest route, but Quenser agreed it was for the best. Trying to take a shortcut in this complexly laid out enemy territory could get them lost, stranded, or dead.

"I need to recharge, big brother!"

"Whoa, don't hug me like that, Catherine! We're in the middle of a battle! Keep an eye on your surroundings!!"

"Heh heh heh. Our boat is all floaty, so try not to fall off, big brother!"

And...

"..."

"Mh?"

Catherine made a confused noise.

Wraith Martini Vermouthspray toyed with her pen-like device in one hand and grabbed at Quenser's uniform with the other.

Catherine puffed out her cheeks while hugging him from the front.

"And who is she, big brother? Just so you know, he belongs to me! You can tell because my name is Catherine Barbotage. Heh heh."

"Cough, cough! Y-you married this small child, pedo teacher!?"

"Please don't make this more complicated than it already is, Putana! She's my stepsister!!"

But there was more than one eye of the storm here.

Wraith spoke up, still spinning her pen-like device.

"You can have this average and filthy potato if you like, but I retain the right to borrow him for some fun whenever I like."

"Borrow!?"

"How's that for mature? (Why would This wriggling wharf roach crawl all over him when she is out there in the ocean watching it all? Has she no sense at all?)"

The younger girls were engaging in some kind of battle here, but Quenser couldn't make sense of it. He also wasn't sure why Wraith puffed out her (flat) chest so proudly or why Catherine grew pale and trembled.

Heivia, meanwhile, muttered to himself with a shadow over his face.

"God, why couldn't my little sister be even half that cute?"

After being defeated(?) by Wraith and reduced to trembling in Quenser's arms, Catherine decided to change the subject.

"Anyway, big brother, won't the Azumaya weirdos run away with all this going on? It was just those four who started the world war, right?"

"How are they supposed to run away? Listen, Catherine. On paper, they're just low-level grunts. They have no special rights. If they leave their posts without permission and run, the Island Nation will shoot them in the back for deserting. And even if they get away, they'll stand out once recorded as wanted deserters. Running away dooms them sooner or later, so they won't run away. They know taking any conspicuous moves will mean their deaths."

"Wow. You're so smart, big brother."

"This really isn't something I should be explaining to a 12-year-old kid."

But even if the self-defense PMC soldiers were mercenaries gathered from all over the world, Quenser felt kind of bad killing them to get at the villains they had no idea were hiding among them. But holding back for that reason would be playing right into the villains' hands.

Meanwhile, their truck arrived at the opposite coast.

The tank-like continuous tracks made a loud grinding noise. It was incredible they could reach 70km/h with those.

After crossing the ocean from the reclaimed land and climbing up onto land, the scenery changed entirely. This was prime waterfront property. Fancy high rise office buildings and luxury apartments created a world for the winners of urban life. They probably drank more vintage wine than chlorine-filled tap water here. One of the countless windows around here probably had a beautiful woman pressing her boobs against the glass while having sex.

In that jewelry box of a world, Heivia, Myonri, and some others climbed down onto the ground and readied their weapons.

The low rumbling of a motor was impossible to miss. Unless some wealthy female company president had a tungsten toy with the power of a jackhammer up her tight skirt, that had to be the enemy approaching.

"Here they come, here they come, there they come. Spread out and stay alert, everyone. There's no point in keeping just one line of fire with this many people! They're sending in the ordinary troops this time!!"

It happened suddenly.

A giant roll of something rolled out across the giant intersection of two 6-lane roads like the red carpet for a visiting noble. Tire spikes were deployed across the entire area. Then something emerged from behind a building: a thick powered suit. Even with its great size, it must have had trouble fully controlling the recoil of its 155mm sniper rifle because it had a special device attached around its legs. It looked like it was permanently sitting on something like a wheeled office chair. The chair legs moved on their own to get over bumps and the two humanoid legs out in front could be used to change direction.

"Is that from the Walk Optimization Project? It's been decades since then, so why is the Island Nation still playing with those toys?"

"What's even the point of it being a powered suit anymore!?"

No one bothered listening to Quenser's complaint. With deep booms of gunfire, the Battlefield Cleanup Service truck was torn through like a stick poking into a clump of clay. The average armored truck couldn't have survived, but Wydine and the others couldn't escape the truck while the gunfire continued. Heivia kept his head low and ran away while pulling the pin from a stun grenade.

A lightning-like flash hung around as an afterimage.

The powered suit briefly froze up, not because the pilot had been blinded but because the camera footage had automatically switched the negative and positive in response to the intense brightness. That was the most effective method, but it still confused people when it happened without warning. It was a common problem when enclosed inside a powered suit.

Wydine and the other fake maids used that moment to escape the (wreckage of the) truck. The Martini triplets' truck was still functioning, so they opened fire with their 40mm autocannon. That was only meant to hold the powered suit back, not defeat it. They aimed for the exact moment the powered suit fired, adding to the recoil and causing it to lose its balance while essentially seated in a chair.

"Yikes, yikes, yikes, yikes!!"

Keeping his head low and tearful with fear over being hit by a ricocheting bullet, Quenser ran toward the enemy. He threw a clay-like Hand Axe bomb with a pen-like fuse in it and it attached itself to the powered suit's armor near the right collarbone.

That was supposed to be the most fragile point with a powered suit that could not escape the limitations of the human skeletal structure.

Quenser practically leaped to the asphalt in order to get down as he pressed his radio's switch and blew up the powered suit.

He had gotten closest to the intersection, so he was the first to notice and shouted back to the others.

"One powered suit down, but there's something else further back!!"

"Only one, foot soldier?"

"I'm just a student!!"

Quenser heard an exasperated female voice over his radio and then the continuous track of an armored truck passed by right next to him. It accepted whatever malfunctions the tire spikes would cause it and charged straight toward the second powered suit. This one was leaning against something like a giant stepladder set up in front of it. The stepladder was part of it. That looked like it would affect the movable range of its arms, but it must not have wanted to crawl on all fours like a dog. It all came down to using the poorly-balanced human body as a base. The truck seemed to tilt back as it partially drove up onto the enemy, keeping the powered suit from moving.

At that close range, the long 155mm sniper rifle was meaningless. The giant powered suit struggled like a little girl trapped underneath a large pet dog, so Heivia launched a shoulder-fired missile into it.

“One more down! I’m not letting that skinny boy get all the credit!!”

“Oh, shut up! There’s shrapnel way worse than nails flying all over the place, dumbass! You turned this blast area into a danger zone!! I’d be dead if I hadn’t gotten down!!”

“You should be thanking us,” said the triplets. “We had an entire continuous track taken out by the tungsten spikes. On that note, could you grab any usable repair tools from the scraps of the Battlefield Cleanup Service truck? They don’t need them anymore.”

It sounded like Quenser would have to give a thank you foot massage to those triplets who couldn’t perform their own maintenance. He cautiously approached the damaged truck that could blow up at any moment, raised it with a jack, and swapped out the track that was linked together like rosary beads.

“Th-this is terrifying. It’s not right that I just get paid ordinary wages for this. I should get hazard pay and more for all this extra work I do.”

“Did you forget we’re in Area By Chance now? We aren’t working for an actual military, so we don’t get paid at all until the world war is over. Did you still think we were with the Legitimacy Kingdom?”

“I swear being a hero is nothing but a big scam!!”

At any rate, Quenser and the others didn’t like the idea of charging on foot at such a heavily-equipped enemy group. They needed as many functional vehicles as they could get.

But even if they didn’t explode like a tank gun, the Island Nation was firing back with enormous 55mm sniper rifles. Weren’t they afraid of destroying a piece of their own city with stray shots that could punch right through a tank’s composite armor?

“This is weird. Really weird.”

“What is? Don’t assume the Island Nation is going to make any sense. Oh, look. That blue sign says Akihabara.”

“Hold on. I thought it was weird this didn’t look like the electronics district I’d heard so much about, but are we on the end full of office buildings? We’ve gone too far past the station,” said Wraith. “Turn back! I don’t care how confident you look; we’re headed the wrong way. The partially-destroyed elevated railroad must have confused us. We need to turn back and pass below that railroad to reach the main road.”

Once they did reach the electronics district, they found Akihabara to be a desolate place this late at night.

Even on the main road Wraith had mentioned, all the stores had their shutters down. Worse, several powered suits had set up a barricade that resembled a giant concrete box. These ones hadn't tried to forcibly make up for the inherently poor balance of the humanoid design, so they simply stood on two legs. The concrete block with an anime-style drawing on it was apparently meant to stop their vehicles and provide cover, but couldn't they have just thickened the armor around their cockpit so they wouldn't need cover? Quenser found it odd. And if they just made it so that block could move and shoot, wouldn't they need fewer parts at those specs, which would make for easier mass production?

"Humanoid weapons are so wasteful," said Quenser. "Why is the Island Nation so obsessed with weapons like this?"

"Hey, I wouldn't be badmouthing humanoid weapons or railroads in the legendary Akiba," said Heivia. "You're liable to get yourself surrounded by an angry mob."

"The greatest advantage of powered suits is the ability to intuitively operate it like your own body without needing to read through the manual. That can still be worth it even with the balance issues," said the old maintenance lady. "And let's not forget that Objects are pretty wasteful too. Especially in the earliest stages when they were built for no other purpose than ending the nuclear age."

Simply put, powered suits were a convenient weapon that let you kill as easily as operating a smartphone.

But Quenser wasn't interested in being killed by a shiny kuro gyaru's device of choice.

An exchange of high caliber gunfire began in a strange area with only gyudon shops open despite the lack of customers.

"Ohhhh!! Don't you dare mock me and look down on me just because I'm the indoorsy type studying to be designer! What's so great about being the gaudy popular girl in class, anyway!?" shouted Quenser.

"Eh? You sure are throwing a lot of bombs. What's gotten into you? Do you think the powered suits in Akiba are being piloted by a no-name underground idol or by a phony maid who normally hands out fliers on the street corner?" asked Heivia.

"Akihabara's maids do get a lot of attention, but maybe think twice before assuming they are the same as the popular kids at school," warned the old maintenance lady.

Since the powered suits had prepared their own cover, their armor had to be no thicker than an armored truck's, so specialized equipment could punch through them. Quenser's group turned west while using shoulder-fired missiles and the armored truck's autocannon to shoot the powered suits on the ground or hiding behind the rooftop billboards for 3D printers and mobile games.

"Damn, it was all men inside. Now I wish I had just shot the powered suits along their center lines. Were they from a butler café or something?"

"Can you please stop thinking about Island Nation cafés, Quenser?"

"(Beep!) Ehh!? You have to be in Akiba to find the Baby Magnum? Why didn't anyone tell me? No wonder I couldn't find it on any of the other battlefields we visited!!"

"What the hell, Myonri? Do you have your personal phone with you?" shouted both idiots.

The battle to determine the fate of the world was changing positions.

They were now following the Sobu-Chuo Line. Using the elevated railroad blown up by the Island Nation itself as a landmark, they walked down a road following the Kanda River and finally approached the city center.

But the closer to the center they got, the more desolate things seemed.

The buildings were all so short.

"That domed stadium is past Ochanomizu. There must be something there," said Quenser, hoping he was wrong.

"What, did it only now occur to you they might have something waiting for us at the baseball stadium? Look, more enemies are coming!!"

A patrol boat traveled down the cramped concrete-banked river. It looked a little bigger than a fishing boat, but its front and back deck were equipped with a 20mm Gatling gun and an 81mm mortar. Fortunately, the river was a level below the road, so the boat's firing range was extremely limited. Putana and Catherine descended the gentle slope and threw grenades from a blind spot so they landed on the boat's deck and blew it away.

The stadium combined with the theme park did indeed have something waiting for them.

"Charge!! Hurry!! That's a railway gun reinforced with earthen walls and armor panels. They used the nearby railroad to send in the materials they needed to set that up. Quenser, we're stuck here if you don't blow that up with one of your bombs!!"

"Why should I have to do it when I'm not even getting paid!? Okay, Myonri, show us how it's done!!"

"Bff!? I was trying to be inconspicuous so no one would notice me, but you just had to ruin that,

didn't you? Stop using me as a dumping ground for all the jobs you don't want to do. Besides, this was Heivia's idea, so he should do it!!"

The idiots started arguing and grappling, so Karen and some others took swift action and slaughtered all of the enemy soldiers.

With a caliber of 800mm, a single shot from that railway gun could obliterate an entire school with its powerful blast and shrapnel, but it was fairly helpless within a range of a kilometer. Since they hadn't shot it earlier, the Island Nation must have set it up in a hurry and didn't manage to complete their final targeting in time. Remember, the Island Nation had been caught by surprise, forcing them to hop out of bed and prepare at the last second.

Quenser's group followed the railroad from there until they saw the river pass below the road. That was called a culvert, wasn't it? It was extremely noticeable and stank like a ditch.

"Are we almost there? Ichigaya has a fishing hole, right?"

"Wait, wait. We still have a station to go. Don't get it wrong. This is the station after Suidobashi, so we're still at Iidabashi."

"After Iidabashi, you won't be following the Kanda River anymore. It changes to Sotobori there," said the old maintenance lady via radio. "The green algae is just as bad either way, though."

When a 110mm cannon fired on them from the roof of some short buildings a short distance from the station, Quenser's group quickly hid behind the station mall. It was another of those powered suits. That made it a job for the Martini triplets' armored truck. It helped that they had attached a mortar they had picked up somewhere. Alisa - or was that Rica? - crawled out from the hatch, crouched at the back of the roof, and performed some kind of work.

Heivia aimed his assault rifle toward the night sky and checked through the scope to detect something through all its sensors.

"Air temperature: 2 degrees. Humidity: 50%. Not much dust or dirt in the air. The wind is mostly 3m/s from the southwest, but the skyscraper walls are creating their own winds too."

"Got it."

With what sounded like a louder version of a popping cork, a projectile flew like a long throw in baseball. The first shot exploded near the roof, catching the powered suit in the blast.

The enemy had been silenced.

The filthy potatoes used their binoculars to check where the mortar had hit.

A building labeled “Kadokawa” was now tilting at an angle.

“Uh, oh. Let’s get outta here.”

Part 6

The Baby Magnum and the Rush fought a high speed battle in late-night Tokyo Bay against the mysterious Island Nation Object known as the Asian Monster.

Tokyo Bay was not as large a battlefield as you might think. There was a chance of being fired on from Tokyo, Chiba, or Kanagawa there, but that was all.

The terrain worked in the Princess and Oh Ho Ho’s favor.

With less available space to move in, the enemy would have trouble avoiding the simultaneous attacks from the Baby Magnum and the Rush.

However...

“Stubborn thing. We have to have hit it so many times, but it won’t sink!!”

“Oh ho ho. The Object’s primary job appears to be holding us here, so their real weapon must be-”

The two Objects took nimble evasive action the moment before a white beam split apart the dark night. The giant laser fortress gun installed at Mount Fuji’s peak was to blame. The large circle from Kantou to Chubu was within its firing range. If they took too long with the naval Object, the laser would target them out here in the open ocean.

The Princess was using special goggles that placed a burden on her pupils and irises to read the movement of her eyes with lasers, but the Baby Magnum felt so slow it was like swimming through an invisible slime. This wasn’t about whether any immediate attack could hit or whether she could avoid the enemy’s shots – she was falling behind in a more fundamental way.

Frolaytia sent a tense suggestion.

“Princess, we can use our thermobarics to create a mirage if necessary.”

“That would affect my targeting, so don’t. But if they target your ships, do it immediately.”

“Oh ho ho. I will move out ahead to keep the Island Nation’s attention on me. I can’t have them targeting the slow fleet.”

Even Oh Ho Ho was the Pilot Elite who fought as the central figure of a battalion.

The two Objects approached even closer to the Asian Monster.

They were not the only ones that could make simultaneous attacks.

In fact, the Island Nation had the greater destructive power. The Mount Fuji laser fortress gun was powerful enough to destroy an Object in a single hit.

“That thing has a lot of power, doesn’t it?”

“Could it be adding volcanic energy on top of an ordinary reactor? Oh ho ho. It might be stable now, but Mount Fuji is technically a volcano.”

“But how is it getting rid of all that heat?”

“The summit is more than 3000m up, so maybe it’s covered with a thin layer of ice or something.”

But the attack was nothing to fear when they knew what direction it would be coming from.

The fortress gun was still a fortress gun. A stationary sniper was much less of a threat.

“We sent out meteorological weapons to produce thick clouds around Mount Fuji’s summit, but it isn’t going well,” reported Lendy Farolito. “Missiles and shells are just a poor match for anti-air lasers.”

“Oh ho ho. Try not to draw so much attention they focus their fire on you. It’s best if your attacks appear ineffectual.”

The Princess sighed.

(I really want to reach land so I can support Quenser and the others.)

The Asian Monster slid gently to the right and then cut sharply back to the left.

It was a classic feint.

The Princess kept an eye on the laser fortress gun's movements while sliding out of the way of the low-stability plasma cannon aimed her way. Then she repaid the enemy by firing a railgun counterattack a bit to its left to cut off its escape route. That stopped its movement long enough for the Rush to fire the killing blast.

The unpleasant sizzling of vaporized metal burst into the air. The Rush's rapid-fire beam Gatling cannon had punched right through the center of the Asian Monster's spherical main body. Tens of thousands of deadly shots formed a single thick line that tore through more and more of the Object. The mechanical wound melted with an orange glow, giving the Object an actual donut shape.

"Oh ho ho! Do you see now what I am capable of? Spectacular results like this are all the proof you need I am a true idol!!"

"You never could have done it without my support."

"Kyah!!" shouted Lendy Farolito over the radio. "A global top idol just does things differently!!!!!"

"Stop encouraging that idiot, you stupid commander," replied the Princess in disgust. "Sigh. This is how popularity messes with people's heads, isn't it?"

The Asian Monster produced a creaking sound as it tilted.

The reactor would not last like this. To avoid getting caught in the blast before it sank into the ocean, the Baby Magnum slowly backed away.

The Princess caught it at the last second.

That was the only reason she managed to send her Object sharply to the side in time.

A beam of light roared through.

One of the Baby Magnum's seven main cannons - the leftmost one - was sliced away by the intense energy.

But that hadn't come from the laser fortress gun atop Mount Fuji.

It had clearly been a low-stability plasma cannon blast from the Asian Monster on the ocean directly in front of her.

In fact...

“Oh ho ho. It...isn't sinking? But I destroyed its reactor!”

“There must be more to this. It is an Island Nation model, after all!!”

Part 7

After passing Iidabashi, they finally arrived at Ichigaya, where the self-defense PMC had their base.

“Ichigaya, huh?” muttered the old maintenance lady over the radio. She may have had some memories regarding the place.

It was officially registered as a Capitalist Corporations garrison, but it was effectively a shared facility where all four world powers came and went freely.

The location they wanted was obvious enough from the distinctive antenna towers sticking up past the building rooftops. One area's were very different from the rest.

Heivia let out a visible breath in the late February night.

“So we've finally arrived at Azumaya's home. Can we just blow up that building?”

“Azumaya is only four people out of the self-defense PMC personnel packing the place like a beehive,” said Quenser. “Do we know their names or what they look like? The end of the world war is counting on us doing this right, so we want to make sure they're actually dead.”

“I feel bad for all those PMC soldiers who are only following their orders here.”

“If you feel that bad, then throw down your weapon and go try to convince them with a rousing and courageous argument. Me? I'm afraid of the Island Nation tech. Let's silence all of them and then check through the computers in the building. There's bound to be something left inside-”

Quenser came to a sudden stop.

They hadn't done anything yet, but an explosion had already erupted from the Ichigaya garrison building. But the location of the smoke was unusual. Instead of the windows, toxic-looking smoke billowed from something like vents leading underground.

Heivia stared blankly for a while. It took an exasperated tap on his shoulder from Karen to snap him out of it. The noble boy realized what the enemy was up to a few seconds later.

“Th-the bastards set fire to their server room, didn't they!? Those four are more interested in

eliminating any information on them than in stopping us!!”

The mission was falling apart.

To protect their classified information, the self-defense PMC apparently did not call in the fire fighters all their neighbors in the city used. When some soldiers rushed out, attached a thick hose to the fire hydrant, and started toward their own fire fighting equipment inside the building, Heivia, Myonri, and some others aimed at them from behind and mercilessly fired into their backs.

It wouldn't have gone that well under normal circumstances, but unexpected accidents were one of the greatest threats during a battle.

The four villains hiding behind their anonymity as random soldiers could not run away without getting shot as deserters.

But that changed here.

Soldiers and prisoners were allowed to evacuate their posts or cells during a fire. And it would take time to count and ID the bodies, so even if those four went into hiding for a while, it wouldn't stand out too much if they later insisted whoever was taking roll had marked it down wrong.

Meanwhile, Quenser's group could not stay in the Island Nation for long since they were reliant on the element of surprise. The shitty quartet knew perfectly well it was Quenser's group that would be surrounded if they stayed too long.

(Carat.)

If the villains could escape for just a moment here, they could get away forever.

So Quenser's group had to capture them here.

(I will create an age where you can blame me for what I did. So let me fight just a bit longer.)

It was like they had stirred up a hornet's nest.

The unlucky self-defense PMC soldiers were caught between a fire and gunfire, but there was no way to know who was part of Azumaya. The four villains had likely expected a lot of lives to be lost here. Meanwhile, the fire was spreading and enveloping the distinctive building.

“Find something we can use! I don't care what!!” shouted Heivia, his assault rifle at the ready.

"I guess we'll have to run into the burning building, huh? And this was a base, so there will be an ammo dump inside, won't there!?"

They only knew Azumaya had four members, but they had no information on the names or appearances of those four. It wasn't a problem if the Azumaya members were among those they had shot here, but they doubted it. No matter how good those four were at blending in with the other random soldiers, surely they would have done something more once a gun was pointed their way. Surely they would have played some kind of trump card that an actual random soldier wouldn't have. But Quenser's group hadn't seen anything like that.

That meant they needed to check through the burning building.

Azumaya setting fire to their own hideout proved there was something there they needed to erase lest their identities get out. Assuming they hadn't just been paranoid, there was some evidence in there. But that evidence would be erased if they didn't act fast.

On the other hand, this was extremely dangerous. No matter what people thought, you couldn't guarantee your survival in a burning building by dumping a bucket of water over your head.

"I think you should stay here, big brother," said Catherine Barbotage when she saw the main entrance spewing dark smoke and embers.

"No!! I'd rather go in there myself than sit back and watch my 12-year-old sister do it!!"

In the end, war was all about vanity.

He charged inside with the Little Girl Army of Catherine and Wraithy accompanying him. His vision immediately narrowed due to the smoke. It was also as hot as a sauna. He was worried about his plastic explosives. Soft plastic could melt in high heats, so he feared the explosives in his backpack were being transformed.

"Hey," called Wraith Martini Vermouthspray while cautiously aiming her submachinegun this way and that. The taciturn young man wasn't with her, so he was likely doing some other job. "Time is of the essence, so where should we start the search, my panicky but slow pawn."

"We need to read Azumaya's mentality. Whatever they most wanted to hide will be at the source of the blaze!!"

When you wanted to erase evidence as quickly as possible, no one would set the fire far away from said evidence. Thus, Quenser and the others couldn't avoid the fire as they searched. They would never find what they wanted that way.

Quenser started to open the door leading further in, but Wraith and Catherine both tackled him

aside. As soon as the door opened a crack, it exploded out from within. That was a backdraft. They couldn't do that every single time.

"Eek!!"

"Hee hee hee. I love the way you let your guard down and let your weak side show only for me, big brother."

"You are delusional. He wasn't trying to open up to you there."

They needed equipment allowing them to walk freely through the fire.

Quenser made a trembling suggestion while collapsed on the floor covered by little girls.

"L-let's find some powered suits. The self-defense PMC has been using a lot of them, after all."

Fortunately, the search didn't last long.

But instead of finding the cutting-edge Island Nation tech lined up on standby in the maintenance bay, they found them abandoned in a burning hallway. Those enormous suits couldn't always fit through smaller doors. There would be a labyrinthine path that allowed them this deep in the building, but the pilots hadn't been willing or able to exit the same way during the panic of the fire. Quenser, Wraith, and Catherine each procured and boarded a powered suit.

Wraith's emotionless voice arrived over the radio.

"This is better than nothing, but if an ammo dump detonates, we're dead along with anyone else in the building. Make sure you complete your mission before that happens, my cowardly attackers."

The suits did more to stop the smoke-induced pain in their eyes and noses than it did protect them from the oven-like heat, but they still appreciated it. Image correction let them see despite all the smoke, so they clanked their way through the orange heat zone with ornamental plants burning like torches and an anime-style poster for some kind of public awareness campaign blackening and peeling off the wall.

"Will that poster of a smiling and saluting anime girl really get anyone to join the self-defense PMC?" wondered Quenser. "I mean, she's a short magical girl with inexplicably big tits. You aren't finding anything like that in the macho world of the military."

"Don't ask me. But we do have a lot of people who enlist because of that G-cups idol. It probably works better than a wild plant sommelier or a yoga instructor," said Wraith, giving her big powered suit her usual cool but cute mannerisms.

Apparently Quenser wasn't the only greedy person out there. But he did wish for a word of warning before he was confronted with a girl's cold and calculating greed. It was bad for his heart.

Their objective was the source of the fire. That naturally brought them down the stairs into the basement. There were secret areas not found on the official diagrams and the place was full of smoke, so it was a nerve-wracking ordeal. Would a diver feel this kind of anxiety if they were trapped below a rusty ceiling while exploring a sunken ship and they discovered their oxygen tank had less left than they had thought?

They descended a metal stairway heated as hot as a grill and unintuitively found the intensity of the flames decreased as they approached the source of the fire.

"That means the oxygen is decreasing."

Quenser had started to breathe a sigh of relief, but his 12-year-old stepsister's comment forced him to rethink that. If not for the powered suits, they either would have had their eyeballs and lungs roasted by the heat or they would have passed out from asphyxiation.

They found a blackened metal door at the bottom of the stairs. Catherine and Wraith checked the door's seam and knob, perhaps to prevent a backdraft, but Quenser couldn't tell what they were looking for. In the end the two little girls in big armor exchanged a cute nod and gently opened the door.

They found a large space within.

That was the large server room supporting the self-defense PMC's datalink. It felt like a locker room larger than a soccer field lined with vending machines instead of lockers. The place had to have more than double the processing power of a communication data center covering all the phones and tablets in Kantou.

The stairs leading down by the wall suggested this was just one floor, so how many computers did they have set up in all?

"The flames must have spread out through the ducts in search of air," said Quenser. "Okay, where should we start the search?"

"The emergency data transfer route. There's no way a facility this size doesn't do backups."

"Wouldn't the people wanting to hide their data know about the backups?"

"What if these backups were done secretly outside the usual official military regulations? In the military, it isn't unusual for a commanding officer to install keyloggers on all the computers in their unit to monitor everyone under their command. Although sometimes it backfires when the poor bald-

headed fool discovers one of his subordinates is sleeping with his wife and his daughter and essentially taken over his family. You don't want others to know you're gathering their data. If they don't know, they have no way of defending against it."

Wraith really was a former(?) Information Alliance commander.

All of the cases had melted from the heat, but not all of the computers were broken. Wraith pointed at a functioning one (using her powered suit's thick fingers) while explaining that to the others. And Azumaya's fire gave them a hint here. The computer that had been directly set on fire was the most suspicious one.

"Big brother, the fuel was only poured on this one. It's labeled N-88."

"There's your answer, Wraith."

"N-88 itself was physically burned, but these are parallel computers. The shared cache should remain in the surrounding servers. Yep, there it is. N-88 contained a personnel condition visualization and quantification service providing their skills, physical condition, motivation, etc. Basically, it's the data used to determine their pay. The place is officially Capitalist Corporations, but it was actually a mix of the world powers."

Quenser frowned, but he made sure to speak aloud since she couldn't see the frown through his powered suit.

"Um, but won't that database have tens of thousands of people in it?"

"The four we want were sent to the Island Nation from the Legitimacy Kingdom, Capitalist Corporations, Information Alliance, and Faith Organization at around the same time. Coordinators like them would have no past offences on their record and know at least three languages. We know they have to be experts in psychology and negotiation technique and they definitely have to know a thing or two about economics and geopolitics. ...And unless you're putting together a hacker team, you wouldn't care too much about the academic history of your general personnel, so the unusually educated ones will stand out. And voila: here are exactly four with a ton of qualifications unrelated to killing."

She read off the list.

"From the Legitimacy Kingdom, we have Caines Ambrosia. Age: 28. Sex: Male.

"From the Capitalist Corporations, we have Isabelle Millionaire. Age: 22. Sex: Female.

"From the Information Alliance, we have Fong-Lan Greendevil. Age: 39. Sex: Male.

"From the Faith Organization, we have Daria Weddingbell. Age: 15. Sex: Female."

They had finally found them.

They had identified Azumaya, the villains who benefited from this shitty world war.

"I can't believe this," groaned Quenser. "I thought this was an Island Nation conspiracy. But this is all outsiders - not a single Island Nationer among them. I know they're all mercenaries, but the self-defense PMC really got the short end of the stick here."

"Azumaya only wanted a magician's table they could use to fool everyone watching. And the taboo of this place worked quite nicely there."

Snipers, hackers, and global string pullers all had one thing in common: they worked best when no one knew who they were.

Part 8

Shooting through the Asian Monster's reactor wasn't enough to sink it.

The battle against an immortal monster had begun.

"Tch!!"

Lendy Farolito had returned to the combat information center at some point and now she clicked her tongue while facing a whiteboard. She used multiple pens to fill that board with letters and arrows colored black, red, and blue.

Multiple reactors?

Sub power system?

Reactor not fully destroyed?

A spare sent up and attached from the ocean floor?

Does it even use a JPlevelMHD?

She wasn't even considering if these possibilities were realistic. She would list out all of her ideas and pit them against each other to achieve greater inspiration. The possibilities would grow more specific and realistic as she went. As long as the countless theories combined into the right answer in the end, it didn't matter how absurd they were to begin with. This may have been how she organized her thoughts.

"Oh?"

Frolaytia Capistrano was somewhat impressed. Not so much by the technique than by Lendy's willingness to show it off in front of the Legitimacy Kingdom.

That may have shown she had accepted them more than Frolaytia had thought.

Then there was the text written extra large in the center of the whiteboard.

How can I shine the spotlight on that girl?

"..."

Frolaytia Capistrano silently put her kiseru in her mouth when she saw it. Why was defeating the enemy Object not her top priority?

She stiffly turned her head to look at the brown woman using the pens and saw she was breathing heavily.

"Risks are necessary for a return. Risks are necessary for a return. Yes, a true idol can't just be strong. She needs a weaker side that you feel like she's only letting you see! Pull that off and it becomes the greatest rocket fuel toward stardom!!!!!"

"Hold on."

Lendy may have seen war as nothing more than a way to advertise her idol. Frolaytia began to wonder if she had only joined Together By Chance because ending the world war was the most heroic option.

But there was something else written in tiny letters at the very edge of the whiteboard.

The Legitimacy Kingdom would make a good sacrificial pawn□

Frolaytia finally grabbed the heavily-breathing woman by the collar.

"That's it!! Don't you dare write that with all those cutesy decorations!!!"

Part 9

The Baby Magnum and the Rush needed to gather information and come up with a new plan fast. They were the ones being exposed to enemy fire after all.

Time didn't actually stop when the unexpected happened.

In her cockpit, the Princess glared at the unbelievable sight through her special goggles.

“How is it still operational!?”

“Oh ho ho. Could it have another reactor attached elsewhere?”

That couldn't be.

Even a bare reactor was 10m across. There was no way it could be hidden in the main cannon or propulsion device. There would be an obvious bulge there if it was. That was how it had worked with the Extra Arc.

They were making some kind of fundamental misunderstanding.

And if they didn't figure it out fast, they would be in serious trouble.

“This one looks stronger than the Lizard Tail, so we need to find a solution fast. But it sounds like the important people like Frolaytia and Lendy aren't going to be much help here.”

“Hey!”

“Hey!”

She had forgotten to switch off her radio, but she didn't have time to worry about those complaints.

The Princess nodded with a completely serious look on her face.

“Help me, Quenser. I'm scared.”

“Hey, no fair!! What kind of puppy dog voice was that!?”

They were up against an immortal Object they couldn't seem to destroy and a laser fortress gun accurately firing from Mount Fuji's summit.

When she explained the situation over the radio, Quenser Barbotage responded with exasperation in his voice.

“So you have two problems: you don't know where the Asian Monster's reactor is located and there's a laser fortress gun using an absurd amount of energy on Mount Fuji's summit. Sounds simple enough to me. So, Princess, what is the surrounding EM situation like? Have you encountered any

radar or communication interference? Like a bit of static or a drop in transmission speed?”

“Yes, but it isn’t on the level of jamming. The Island Nation is desperate, so aren’t they sending all their radars out from Tokyo, Chiba, and Kanagawa?”

“That’s not it at all.” He fully rejected her idea and gave the real answer. “It’s wireless power transfer. And the communication interference confirms the medium they’re using is EM. Simply put, the reactor is located up on Mount Fuji and the naval Object is running off of the power sent from there. We thought it was waiting for you out in the middle of Tokyo Bay because fighting in the complex urban area is tricky – and I’m sure that is part of it – but all the buildings would get in the way of the EM waves while the open ocean doesn’t.”

“Oh ho ho. But it rose from below the surface at the start of the battle. EM waves have trouble penetrating water. That’s why sonar is used instead of radar.”

“That’s probably why it uses an air cushion. The initial surfacing action was just it using its floats. It only started receiving the wireless power after reaching the surface. ...The 400mm railguns on the artillery islands didn’t have reactors either. Heivia guessed they used an undersea cable, but they didn’t need to. It was all EM.”

“...”

“And if the Object isn’t acting scared after you’ve given it such a beating, I doubt the cockpit is there either. But drone-style remote control signals are pretty distinctive, so you would have picked those up by now. It may use a form of human body communication instead.”

“Human body?”

“The body is mostly water, so it conducts electricity. Human body communication uses that fact to send and receive data using the body in place of an antenna or wire. The idea is to keep the data inside an implanted chip or a wristwatch and have it sent when two people shake hands or something. That way the signal can’t be intercepted by a third party. ...Isn’t that perfect for this? Tokyo Bay is full of salt water, so if you wanted to, you could send electrical signals through it and control the Object floating in it.”

Simply put...

“The Object’s true identity is Tokyo Bay itself. The Pilot Elite’s nerves reach every part of that ocean, so what looks like a clean hit doesn’t really matter. Even when it reacts like it’s hurt, that’s just an act like the bit parts in a samurai movie who have to be ‘safely cut down’ by the samurai’s sword. You’ll never deliver a finishing blow to the Asian Monster if you fight normally and strike where you think will work. But now that you know the trick, you have nothing to fear. Existing tech gives you plenty of ways to scatter and attenuate the EM waves and the electrical signals in the ocean. Wars aren’t won by clever tricks. Show this monster just how frightening the fundamentals can be,

Princess. You can win this."

Part 10

After removing the radio from his mouth, Quenser stared off into the distance.

"Yeah, that's the job I should've been doing all along. Why am I even on this mission?"

"You don't want to spend time with me, big brother?" asked his sweaty sister with a glare.

But as much as the blonde braid girl put her hands on her hips and puffed out her cheeks, she still had a lot of growing to do and lacked the seduction skills needed to draw that idiot's attention.

After escaping the burning Ichigaya garrison, they had removed the powered suits. The armor had done the job, but those weren't specialized firefighting gear. The overheat alarm had been beeping at them the entire time, so they hadn't been comfortable staying in them longer than necessary. Staying at the site of the fire would have cooked them alive in those oversized foil wrappings.

Azumaya.

They had names and faces to search for now, so they wouldn't have to shoot all of the PMC soldiers here in Ichigaya. Well, they would unfortunately still have to silence those soldiers if they resisted.

Just as Quenser was thinking that, he heard some heavy tires tearing at the ground.

It was an eight-wheeled...something. The hunk of metal was about the size of a large fire truck, but it didn't seem to be a black armored truck. It appeared to have a boxy silhouette at first, but it actually had a folded-up crane arm on the back.

"That's an armored recovery vehicle!!" shouted Wraith Martini Vermouthspray, eyes wide.

"Eh? It's a what???"

That was apparently a type of military vehicle. Quenser wasn't sure what it meant, but it didn't particularly matter right now. He could only think of four people who would try to escape in the confusion right now. Unlike an ordinary bus or van, it had no rear windows, but Quenser still glimpsed the young man in the driver's seat.

That was Caines Ambrosia, one of the Azumaya members in the data they had extracted. Quenser had also glimpsed some other people inside.

"You're not getting away!!"

"This sounds like a job for us."

An armored truck started forward.

Most of the potatoes had come here on foot, so they didn't have many vehicles available for a car chase.

When the Martini triplets' truck passed by, Quenser grabbed onto the side. The tank-style continuous track seemed like it would be slow, but the truck could actually move at highway speeds.

"Big brother!!"

"You stay there, Catherine!!"

"Your clothes will get caught in the track! Climb up on top!!"

His stepsister cutely formed a megaphone with her hands to give him some very helpful advice that made his balls shrivel in fear. He was now intensely aware of the track grinding away as loudly as a chainsaw. He was dead if he didn't obey her and fast.

He found Heivia had climbed atop the truck from the other side. When their eyes met, the idiots exchanged a greeting.

"Wanted to be a part of ending this mess?" asked Quenser.

"Nah, I just don't trust those triplets," said Heivia. "Who knows what they'll do once we're not watching."

That was the way of things in a messy war.

The elevated highways had already been destroyed by the Island Nation, so the vehicle the size of a large tour bus was trying to escape along the labyrinthine collection of ordinary roads. It couldn't quite make the turns, ignored the lights, and covered both sides of the road. That was all necessitated by its size, but it still felt like too much.

"Yikes. Am I imagining things or is the rubble burning over there?"

"That isn't the explosives. There was a parking lot below the highway and the crushed cars would have been full of gas. That could explode at any time."

Anyone who would have been out this late was staying indoors due to the war, but they would have run over quite a few people in just a few minutes otherwise.

Heivia checked the blue sign hanging over the road as the wind whipped at him.

"Looks like we're headed west. They aren't driving all the way to Mount Fuji, are they? Come to think of it, that laser fortress gun is still up there, isn't it?"

"Are they trying to get help from whoever's at the summit? Or they could be trying to lose us in Aokigahara forest at the foot of the mountain. The thick forest creates a tunnel that satellites can't see through and I've heard compasses malfunction in there too. Not to mention the self-defense PMC has a largescale training camp at the foot of the mountain."

Simply put, they needed to take those four out before they left Tokyo.

Together By Chance's two Objects were in Tokyo Bay and Quenser's group did not want to get too far away from their Objects in the unfamiliar Island Nation.

The Martini triplets used their radio to speak to them from within the truck.

"If we know they're the villains, we can just kill them now, can't we?"

"Wraith," said Quenser.

"It would be best to leave one of them alive for a court martial, but the documents and data we have acquired is enough to prove their murder exchange and that they started the world war through Bad Garage. Think of taking one alive as a bonus. Now get firing."

"You heard the lady."

With the hum of a heavy motor, the gun on the roof slowly turned. It was a lot slimmer than a tank's gun, but a 40mm autocannon still had more than three times the caliber of an anti-materiel rifle. A spray of bullets from that could tear someone apart along with the thick reinforced concrete wall they were hiding behind.

Two seconds before it started firing, something hopped up from the ground.

It came from the armored recovery vehicle. It was basically a large tow truck used to tow destroyed military vehicles and missile launchers from the battlefield. The wire had been released and the J-shaped hook that resembled a monstrous fishing hook had bounced off the asphalt.

Orange sparks flew while the wild hook soared toward the Martini triplets' truck. It crashed into the side of the autocannon barrel that was a bit thicker than a construction pipe.

The 25ton truck slid diagonally from the hit.

Quenser clenched his teeth and clung to the roof before shouting about what he had noticed.

"Stop!! Do not fire!!"

"Eh? Why not?" asked the triplets.

"The barrel is bent. Fire now and you'll blow us up!!"

The truck had no device to detect a bent barrel with laser reflection, probably because the reflectors would get wet whenever the amphibious vehicle went in the water.

With more heavy clangs and crashes, the thick wire and metal hook flew into the air again. It was like a morning star used to crush a knight's helmet. Quenser would be helpless to stop it if it happened to fly toward his head. And if it caught the edge of the truck, the entire truck would probably be thrown around.

Their only remaining weapons were the 12.7mm heavy machinegun attached near the hatch and the 81mm mortar forcibly attached at the rear.

Heivia slid back across the roof to get at the more difficult mortar.

"I doubt I can hit a moving target with this, but I can give you a shot if it lands in front of them and forces them to slam the brakes. Quenser! You aim for their ass with that machinegun! Just get it aimed and pull the trigger when the time comes! It's fixed to the roof, so you don't have to worry about the recoil!!"

When Quenser hesitated uncertainly, the nearby hatch burst open and triplets in red parade uniforms crawled out from between his legs while he sat on the roof.

Alisa Martini Sweet.

Rica Martini Medium.

Orsia Martini Dry.

They moved more like a single sea anemone than individual sisters. Quenser could only tell them

apart by their hair styles and chest sizes.

“What are you doing? Hurry it up.”

“Oh? Do you not know how to use it?”

“Fine, we’ll show you how it’s done. First, hold this like this.”

They were all over him a moment later. If they were going to lean against him and move his arms for him, why couldn’t they just operate the gun themselves!?

Meanwhile, Heivia was shedding tears of blood.

“Why is it always him!!!???”

Also, hadn’t Catherine mentioned in her journal that she liked how he didn’t use guns?

Alisa Martini Sweet licked her lips and blew a breath in Quenser’s ear.

“Now, just move this like this and you can shoot out all of that hot stuff built up deep inside□”

“Um, um, wait. I made a promise to innocent Catherine. Stop! I can’t betray a 12-year-old like this! No, I can’t stop iiiit!!”

The 12.7mm bullets showed a complete lack of stamina by shooting out in full-auto mode at the lightest of touches. Sparks blossomed from the asphalt to the left of the armored recovery vehicle, so Orsia Martini Dry’s slender hand grabbed the long, thick shaft and yanked it to the side. The full-auto bullets formed a line like a sewing machine that finally found its target.

The bullets tore through thick metal and sent orange sparks flying. The flying wire thicker than a thumb was severed and the metal hook bigger than Quenser’s head flew toward them.

Terrified, Quenser accidentally buried his face in the boobs of one of the triplets.

“Watch ou- mgh!!”

“Oh, my□”

“(Medium, do you really think he’s going to notice we’re trying to make him jealous when he has his hands full driving?)”

“(He’s as dense as they come, so I seriously doubt it. But it’s his clueless and harmless side we fell for, so it’s not like we can complain.)”

The triplets were smiling darkly about something, but Quenser had bigger things to worry about.

A few of the heavy machinegun’s bullets had hit eight-wheeled armored recovery vehicle, but it was still running. Just like a fire truck or crane, its special equipment doubled as thick armor. Think of it like a dump truck full of gravel. That wouldn’t matter if they could fire directly to the front or side of the driver’s compartment, but it was hard to do serious damage when firing from the rear.

A light flashed in the night sky.

By the time he noticed that, a powerful laser beam had already sliced through the darkness and torn through Sendagaya. The luxury apartment buildings alongside the road glowed orange after being melted through.

“Damn them!”

“Are they twisting around in that shaking vehicle to use a binoculars-style handheld targeting device? I don’t see any other way an anti-air optical weapon would miss a moving truck like that.”

Quenser was boiling with anger, but the Martini sister supporting his face with her boobs kept her cool. And once he extracted his face from those soft cushions, he noticed something else.

“What?”

Quenser was forced to look back to get a second look at the destruction alongside the road.

“Those aren’t office buildings. They’re apartments where people live. But I didn’t hear any screams as they collapsed and I don’t see any bodies among the rubble.”

“They’re probably empty.”

But why?

He could understand an office building or department store being empty in the middle of the night, but it didn’t make sense for apartments. Those were people’s homes, so they should have been there sleeping at this hour.

(Have they already completed a largescale evacuation of all the residents? No, we caught the self-defense PMC by surprise, so they barely had time to get their railway gun set up. I doubt they would

have had time to think about anything other than defense.)

But now was not the time to worry about this mystery of Island Nation culture.

He noticed a few signs for musical instrument stores and live music venues before they drove past a blue road sign saying Shinjuku. A distinctive building shaped like a rugby ball standing on end was visible in the distance. They also passed by the wreckage of an elevated railroad. Heivia gave a shout when he noticed.

“We’ve moved outside the Yamanote Line loop!? How far are we from the ocean now? We can’t move any further from Tokyo Bay. Nothing good comes from leaving your Object in enemy territory!!”

This was never going to end at this rate.

The buildings rapidly grew smaller and more closely packed after they crossed the Yamanote Line. That meant the layout of the roads would get more complicated as well. Only so many routes were accessible to the large armored recovery vehicle and armored truck, but Quenser’s group was still worried they would lose sight of the enemy at any moment.

That was when new instructions arrived over their radio.

“Ice Girl 1 to ground team. We finally neutralized Haneda Air Base’s ability to get aircraft in the air, so we can provide you with air support. You just want to stop that vehicle in front of you, right? I can take care of that before you leave Shinjuku. I’ll give you a countdown, so prepare for a bumpy ride.”

The unique silhouette of a Zig-27 fighter flew in from out ahead with an aerial bomb already detached from its main wing. Instead of hitting the fleeing armored recovery vehicle itself, it blew up the road ahead to keep the vehicle from continuing.

“That’s a hit.”

“What happened to the countdown!?”

To Quenser, the noise felt more like being hit by an invisible wall.

Even with its continuous tracks holding tightly to the road, their truck slid to the side. An expanding gray cloud of dust rushed in at them from the front.

That filthy screen blocked their view of the armored recovery vehicle up ahead.

But that wasn’t their biggest problem.

As the armored truck regained its balance and continued on ahead, it suddenly broke free of gravity.

Or rather, it fell into a large hole opened by the aerial bomb.

The actual fear crawled up Quenser's spine after they were already falling. He clung to one of the triplets' waists and buried his face in her boobs again.

"An underground...space!?"

"I don't care if you bite your tongue when we land, but I have to admit I'd be mad if you bit my nipple off, okay?"

Part 11

A distinctive delta wing fighter cut across Tokyo Bay late at night. That was Burning Alpha's S/G-31. The enemy Object was still functional and the anti-air laser continued to fire from Mount Fuji's peak, but the ace pilots' dance continued unabated.

The fighter flew above the Baby Magnum and radioed a report and a suggestion to the Pilot Elite.

"Burning Alpha to naval team. We liquefied all of Haneda's runways, so nothing is getting off the ground there. We're switching our objective to supporting you."

"Burning Alpha, the Asian Monster is using EM-based wireless power transfer. Do you have any ideas how we can prevent that!?"

"This'll be the easiest commendation I've ever earned."

The delta wing fighter reduced altitude and flew between the Baby Magnum and the Rush at supersonic speed while dropping something. What looked like glittering confetti was the chaff normally used as a missile countermeasure.

The metal foil spread through the air would scatter the EM waves used for radar.

However...

"Th-the output levels we're talking about are on another level entirely! Oh ho ho. I doubt that can block energy on the level of a power plant!!"

"I wasn't expecting it to. This is the Age of Objects, isn't it? You two aim your main cannons at the ocean. Fire on the surface and you'll create pillars of chaff-filled seawater!!"

The Princess's low-stability plasma cannon and Oh Ho Ho's rapid-fire beam Gatling cannon produced deafening booms.

The instant their shots contacted the dark ocean surface, they produced a loud sizzling sound. But that was not just a steam explosion from the seawater. It included a lot of the chaff Burning Alpha had distributed beforehand.

It all transformed into a hot spray.

That coated the Asian Monster's surface, making it shine like a mirror's silver coating.

And what happened next?

"Oh?"

The Asian Monster's fierce movements clearly slowed. The wireless power coming from the mountaintop could be blocked if its EM receptors were given a metal coating not even a millimeter thick.

"But this won't stop it for long. This is far from a perfect solution. Young lady, does it have any other weaknesses!? Or is the wireless power all we've got!?"

"U-um, Quenser said it uses something called human body communication. The ocean surface itself is used to send it electrical signals to remotely control it."

Lendy Farolito cut in, pounding excitedly on something. Maybe a combat information center console and maybe a whiteboard.

"Then move your Objects around to stir up the seawater!! Make a circle with a diameter of greater than 100m and you can win!! This part is crucial!!!!!!"

They complied on reflex.

The Baby Magnum and the Rush repeatedly swapped positions. It looked like they were ballroom dancing, but their naval floats were rotating the seawater like a washing machine.

Sending a faint electric current through the water meant there would be some magnetism there too. And it was a known fact that rotating a fluid containing a magnetic field would generate electricity. For example, it was theorized the earth's geomagnetic field was produced by the planet's own rotation turning the magma deep below the surface and its own core into a massive generator.

This was the same.

They already had the information they needed. The Asian Monster communicated with electric signals passed through the ocean just like similar signals passed through the human body. Changing the direction of the existing electricity and giving it a rotation would create a new electromagnetic field.

And as weak as that might be, it would still interfere with the electrical signals.

The Asian Monster stopped moving altogether.

The error lasted less than a second.

But Burning Alpha's delta wing fighter passed right by the colossal weapon in that moment. The laser fortress gun atop Mount Fuji was still active. It might try to shoot down the interfering aircraft now that the situation had changed.

In fact, Burning Alpha had goaded it into doing just that.

"Go to hell smeared in your own shit, you freak."

After that rude declaration of victory, the enormous laser fortress gun's thoughtless shot missed the fighter and pierced the Asian Monster.

Part 12

How many meters did they actually drop?

"Ugh..."

When Quenser came to, he found himself on his back. He had been clinging to one of the Martini sisters last he remembered, but none of them were around. He noticed a scorching smell and found the armored truck lying on its side.

He was below Shinjuku.

The vast space was encased in concrete.

There were lights, but not nearly enough. A tunnel-like darkness remained.

Containers were piled up like this was a supply warehouse, but the space was larger than a soccer

field.

Yes, this was simply a space. It wasn't a subway tunnel or a highway. It wasn't a route leading somewhere. It felt more like a public facility of some kind. He shook his heavy head and slowly got up while guessing this was a common utility duct used to manage rainwater, power cables, and more.

A handgun he didn't recognize lay nearby.

He silently picked it up and walked onward. The armored recovery vehicle they had been pursuing was stopped a short distance away. Its eight wheels were on the ground, but the driver's compartment was half scrapped after crashing into a concrete wall.

Someone was groaning below the passenger side door.

She was a blonde-haired brown-skinned girl of about 15. That would make her Daria Weddingbell of the Faith Organization.

She was part of Azumaya.

She was one of the villains who had started a world war for their own benefit. The shock of falling underground must not have killed her, but she appeared to have severe internal injuries. Quenser slowly approached from head on, but she didn't even have the strength to ready a gun or knife.

If not for her...

If not for that piece of shit, that boy and his mother would still be...

"You..."

He immediately fired a shot into the center of her body.

He didn't care if he was violating the rules. She continued groaning even after collapsing into a pool of her own blood, so he fired another shot into her head at close range. That fully silenced her.

Immediately afterwards, a scorching bullet tore through the air from a different angle.

It hit Quenser, knocking him to the side. Someone else was lurking in the shadows here. When the younger girl had said "you", she may not have been talking to Quenser.

Had she been cursing this other person for using her as bait?

The four members of Azumaya had used the confusion to escape Ichigaya together, but that didn't mean they were good buddies. It was damage to the Faith Organization alone that had led to the start of the world war which had made the strength of the world powers crumble, so they may have been at each other's throats already.

"Ha. Ha ha. I'm not dying here."

"...Azumaya."

This one was an Asian man of around forty.

He was probably Fong-Lan Greendevil.

"I will do whatever it takes to survive. It's not like this world is worth protecting anyway!!"

Quenser had still not let go of his gun. His muscles may have locked up while he gripped it in his overexcited state.

He held the gun out while collapsed on his side.

But the man was faster.

A dry gunshot echoed through the enclosed underground space.

Quenser was untrained and his hand was trembling, so his shot missed. It hit the wall, sending orange sparks flying.

But the Azumaya man, Fong-Lan, didn't hit either.

"Oh?"

The global villain had a final question on his lips as he doubled over and collapsed to the filthy floor. The man had sacrificed his comrade to survive, but his fate was a swift one.

There was someone else here.

That was the answer to his question.

"Are you alive, boy?"

That someone else wore a Legitimacy Kingdom uniform.

But Quenser had never seen him before. His smile did nothing to put Quenser at ease. But the last time Quenser had seen this man, he had already used plastic surgery to alter the face he was born with.

He could only think of one person this could be.

“Are you...Nyarlathotep?”

“That name holds no meaning,” said the faceless man.

He was a monster in a different way from the Objects.

He had started out as a Capitalist Corporations spy, but he had refused to forgive the society that stole his family and birthplace from him and become a true “evil god” who had assassinated a 7th Core CEO all on his own.

“If you can ask a question like that, you must not be bleeding too badly. Something in your survival kit pouch must have stopped the bullet. Your gear will be a mess, but it’s better than dying.”

“What are you doing here?”

“I never intended to show my face again, but the current age demanded it. And I think I’ll repay it by tearing down this world war.”

When had he infiltrated the 37th? Come to think of it, hadn’t someone Quenser didn’t recognize pulled him out from below the rubble after the plasma strike on Charles de Gaulle Airport?

He heard some movement.

From deeper in.

“Let’s go.”

“...Yeah.”

They opened the door to find stairs leading down.

Their eyes met someone else’s when they took a look down the metal stairway. Quenser and

Nyarlathotep fired simultaneously.

The third Azumaya member was holding something, but she could only shoot one person at a time. One of the two bullets hit the woman, knocking her back against the wall where she slid to the floor with a red stain growing around her.

Quenser remained standing.

Nyarlathotep had fallen to the floor and stopped moving.

There was nothing special about it.

No matter how long he had remained undercover and no matter how much he acted like it was a piece of cake, a single bullet was all it took in a real war. The same conditions applied to Quenser as well.

But Quenser would almost certainly have died without him here.

“Nyarlat-”

“You moron!! This is Yog-Sothoth!! The last one is still alive and unfortunately you’re the only one still capable of doing anything about it!! So go!! End this world war!!”

The voice of an elusive female hacker came from the phone in Nyarlathotep’s pocket. She would have been the one who gave him the electronic ID he needed to infiltrate the Legitimacy Kingdom military.

Quenser didn’t have time to be sentimental.

There was only one left.

He had no one left to rely on. From here on, it would be one-on-one.

He would stop them, no matter what.

(Wait just a little longer, Carat.)

“Caines Ambrosia.”

He was the bastard who had come to the Island Nation from the Legitimacy Kingdom.

Quenser had four rounds left in his gun. Killing this man would eliminate the Azumaya group that had taken root in the Island Nation. That would prevent him from attempting the same thing again.

Quenser pictured the hemispherical prosthetic eye lying on that roof.

And he recalled the message inside the amulet: Good luck, mom.

“...”

At the bottom of the metal stairs, found a door leading to a small chamber and another door. That was to keep people from tracking dirt inside and to keep even small amounts of dust from blowing in with the air as the door opened and closed. It was a common feature at semiconductor plants. He passed through both doors.

On the other side, he found bright lights and a model roller coaster filling a vast space.

The automated factory had a great number of test tubes traveling along conveyer belts arranged in all three directions. Some kind of thick, clear jelly filled the bottom few centimeters of the tubes, but he had no idea what the factory was meant to do.

“Those are sperm and ova.”

Quenser wordlessly spun around and aimed his gun toward the sudden voice, but that spot was already deserted. A young man’s voice came from behind a metal box larger than a refrigerator. It may have been a control panel of some kind.

That was Caines.

The final member of Azumaya and the bastard who had started the world war.

No one would have suffered without him.

“The Island Nationers are created here. They labor away, follow the government’s recommendations even in how they use their days off, and make sure to pay their taxes – all without questioning any of it. You should have noticed something off about things on the surface.”

“The apartments you blew up were empty even late at night. And again, those were apartments, not office buildings.”

“The civilian evacuation happened awfully quickly for how unexpected your attack was. You didn’t see anyone out on the streets or a single abandoned civilian vehicle, did you?”

Quenser slowly circled behind the piece of machinery with deadly gun in hand, but there was no one there.

Caines Ambrosia's voice came from a second-floor walkway overhead. There weren't any stairs nearby, so what had he used to climb up?

"They didn't disappear - they weren't there to begin with. The country's poor birthrate has caused the population to fall to critical levels over the past decade. Maybe 20% of residences are occupied anymore. Really, the mystery is how they built up such large cities in the first place. Do you know the Island Nation's food self-sufficiency rate? Even with ample ocean resources, the place couldn't support itself without importing a lot of food if all of those windows really did have people living behind them."

That was why the place was full of empty homes like a city set up for a movie shoot.

That was how they had continued on with the resource and food consumption rates dwindling.

That was why the world powers no longer considered the Island Nation a threat.

Eventually, the resource and food consumption rates would drop to zero. The country would destroy itself on its own, so why bother fighting it? This was the trick to turning that around.

The real population of Island Nationers could be massive.

There could a hundred million of them, if not a billion.

They were mass-producing humans to bolster their national strength without anyone the wiser. If you could create humans like that, you could build factories for other kinds of meat as well. And if that wasn't enough, chemically-created jellies and supplements could be made.

It was all meaningless of course.

It was an empty trick created to cling to their pride. They didn't want to grow old and die off, so they were using their precious technology to fool the rest of the world.

Quenser Barbotage thought carefully and aimed his handgun straight up.

"So what?"

"..."

"I'm not talking about the Island Nation's crisis or contradictions. Don't dodge the issue, Caines. You're part of Azumaya. You aren't an Island Nationer; you're one of the coordinators sent in from one of the world powers. You don't really care if this nation of modified Asian DNA crumbles - you just want to use it to escape."

"Can't really deny that one."

"Why did you start the world war? War profiteering? But if that's all, you could have lived the high life using the clean wars just as well."

"I removed the hindrances," said the young man. "Each of the world powers has its own problems just like the Island Nation. And those distortions are concentrated at the very top of the four pyramids. Did you know about this? Bloodline and history are everything to your Legitimacy Kingdom. You might think that means the royals and nobles there are lionized, but that's not actually true."

"..."

"Ever heard of the Caesar Project? That isn't a specific name - it's just a catchall term for all the titles like Kaiser and Tsar. Not that I expect you to have heard of it since you need to be at least a major general for that. And in fact, no one in the military even get to know what it entails. The real leaders of your Legitimacy Kingdom are sperm and ova. They're being automatically crossbred in a shelter deep below the home country even as we speak. The calculations apparently said the 59th generation of crossbreeding was the earliest that the process could create the ideal ruler, but they are apparently in the middle of around 176 generations of detours to reduce or neutralize hereditary diseases."

The young man continued with amusement in his voice.

"The Body File saying the Legitimacy Kingdom is fighting wars to gather the rare herbs and minerals needed for the frail royals and nobles is secretly a way of gathering materials for the Caesar Project. The nobles are all catalogued and the commoners are only allowed to live as sources of highly-randomized genes. Did you realize what it was you were kneeling to? If you're fine with bowing your head to a smelly refrigerated pool sprinkled with pubic hairs and if you're fine being no more than a faucet that provides all the white goo your superiors demand, then feel free to turn around and go home."

Quenser heard an electronic beeping.

Was it coming from Caines Ambrosia's pocket?

Whatever it signified, he laughed quietly before continuing.

"That means the bomb sent by the Faith Organization has blown away Caesar. The gilded test tube has been shattered and the Legitimacy Kingdom's idol is no more."

"..."

"It's a real tragedy what happened to the Faith Organization. With Rome sunk, its people have finally realized that relying on charismatic religious leaders does not actually protect you from bullets. The alchemy holding together the Capitalist Corporations' 7th Core is in fact a financial calculations computer designed for computing life insurance. To them, human life isn't even something to preserve. It is a resource to be either sold off or consumed as efficiently as possible. Unfortunately for them, the incalculable world war caused such violent fluctuations that the 7th Core companies are filing for bankruptcy left and right. ...The current world is ending. Anyone should have seen that from the very beginning. This was never about the disasters brought by Objects or what the Island Nation did to avoid its slow demise. Our world was broken in a more fundamental way from the word go."

The world powers were like the four legs of a table.

If just one of them broke, the table would be tilted.

But what if all four were broken? Then they would reach a new stability after the catastrophic fall.

Quenser Barbotage had considered that a bit himself.

And he had arrived at an answer.

He did not hesitate to fire straight up.

Something wobbled, tumbled over the walkway railing, and dropped down.

Quenser aimed his gun at collapsed Caines.

"Everything about this stinks."

"Kah...ah."

"You said you needed to reach the rank of major general to have even heard of the Legitimacy Kingdom's Caesar Project and no one in the military knows what it entails, didn't you?"

The boy's expression was unchanged.

No matter how disgusted he was, he couldn't just ignore that long-ass speech.

"Then how did the coordinators of Azumaya learn about it?" His tone was icy. "How would a member of the military like you know a secret no one in the military knows about? Did you think it was a coincidence? Did you think you were just so clever you were the only exception? Not a chance. No one can keep a secret like that if there's a loophole someone like you could exploit."

"..."

The man must have realized the truth.

But it was too late now.

"How did you learn about it? That'll tell you who was really behind it all. You were only being fed information like so many others."

"Ah."

Quenser aimed for the center of the head and pulled the trigger multiple times, permanently silencing the poor young man.

Now he was out of ammo.

He tossed the empty handgun aside.

He didn't need to hear the answer from the man because he had already arrived at it himself.

It all came down to paying attention to what Caines Ambrosia had said.

The top of the Legitimacy Kingdom, the Caesar Project, had been blown up with a bomb.

The top of the Capitalist Corporations, 7th Core, was being driven to bankruptcy.

The top of the Faith Organization, their religious leaders, had disappointed the people and lost their charisma.

But what about the Information Alliance?

The massive AI network that ruled over all people and things in that world power was the sole survivor of this world war. More than that, it was entirely untouched.

The human factory shook violently around Quenser. An error must have been detected because the many conveyer belts carrying the test tubes came to a stop and the lights switched to red.

It didn't matter how far he was from Tokyo Bay or that he was deep underground.

A normal Object never could have done that. Something so massive was approaching that it required a 200 thousand ton Object that cost 5 billion dollars to be qualified as "normal".

He could only think of one option.

"That damn thing."

Part 13

There was no applause.

No one got to work analyzing who deserved how much credit for the Asian Monster's destruction. They had even forgotten about the presence of the laser fortress gun atop Mount Fuji.

Everyone had noticed the appearance of a much more dangerous enemy on the battlefield.

And this may have been an enemy of the Island Nation as well as the Princess and Oh Ho Ho.

"Th-there's something there." The operator paled inside the combat information center. "It's 20km long? I don't believe it. This isn't a megafloat airport. It's...it's an Object!!"

Frolaytia and Lendy both watched in silence.

Only after working up the nerve did they quietly speak.

"Hey, that toy belongs to your people, doesn't it? Got any information on it?"

"It isn't from my department. I might be able to find some small loophole or trick to use, but do you really think I have the detailed plans for that thing?"

Tokyo Bay was completely sealed off by something rising from the ocean to the south.

The culprit was more than 20km long. With it stationed at the narrow entrance to the bay, it physically blocked the way out to the open ocean, no need for cannons at all.

That was the Information Alliance's strongest Object and its home country.

That was the Manhattan 000.

"Ah ha ha."

Melly Martini Extradry.

#29 of the genius girl project.

The blonde-haired brown-skinned girl had her butt inside a large swim ring and wore VR goggles upside down while gently speaking toward the notebook-sized video game system she held.

"Now, let's extract the rest of the world's pus. 819. I lend the Manhattan 000 to you, Capulet. I'll just make any necessary corrections□"

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