

Chapter 9: Middle School of War

☆ **Tetty Goodgripp**

“Form a line! Numbers!”

Following Tetty’s command, there were a couple of murmurs that could be heard, and Arlie herself responded with a shriek. Everybody knew there was no one to read out the numbers, but they followed her command as if it were a ritual. The Magical Girls, who shouted out their numbers seriously, loosened up and smiled when they were all done, forming a circle.

Tetty looked around the circle, then placed her hands on her own shoulders. There wasn’t a cloud in sight, and the moon shone on her face. Magical Girls didn’t need a light to see in the dark, but this was better than walking a dark, cloudy, path.

“The mountains have a nice mood to them at night, don’t they? They feel like small hillsides in the day,” said Tetty.

“Small or not, you shouldn’t let your guard down. Accidents happen here all the time, after all,” said Miss Lille.

“Pssh, accidents smaccidents, we’re MAGICAL GIRLS, am I right? We got nothing to worry about! Especially not ACCIDENTS!” yelled Wrappy.

“Yes! Just ‘axe’ anyone!” said Dory.

Dory’s pun left everyone laughing and breathless. After that, Tetty looked up at the sky.

“Well, I know it’s an exaggeration, but let’s all try and be careful, okay? Even training homunculi could hurt you if you aren’t careful,” said Tetty.

Tetty’s mind came back to the mock battle the other day. It was the reason why she acted instinctively. When someone was in danger, she didn’t want them to get hurt. If there was one thing Mepis hated, though, it was being rescued. Next time, she’d try

harder to resist the impulse. This forest was quite large, though, and it was unlikely she'd meet any of the other groups. She wasn't exactly grateful that she didn't have to save anyone, though.

"Hang on a minute guys! I got something to SHOW ya!" said Wrappy, holding out a small roughly spherical object in her hands. It was colorful and shiny.

"What's that?" asked Tetty.

"I DUNNO! It's like, some ore or somethin'. I thought I'd hold onto it for Lille, ya know! If anything happens, ZAP, she can just use it in an emergency, yeah?"

Miss Lille had the ability to change her body to any metallic object's properties that she held in her palms. Like Wrappy said, this would be quite useful in a fight.

"That's quite useful, but... where'd you find this?" asked Miss Lille.

"The science room in the New School Building, DUH. Thought I'd borrow it."

"Wait, that's *probably* against the rules," said Miss Lille.

"Don't WORRY about it, geez! I didn't STEAL it, I asked the science kids if I could BORROW it."

That wasn't out of the ordinary. Tetty had heard that there were several Magical Girls who went out of their way to the New School Building and interacted with some of the middle schoolers there. Though just because others had done it didn't make it right. Their punishments were also lighter than theft from the science room.

Tetty smiled at Miss Lille—though Miss Lille's own expressions hadn't changed—and Wrappy handed over the borrowed ore to Miss Lille.

"That's a wonderful plan, Wrappy," said Tetty.

"YEAH right!? I've been thinking a lot about like, the other groups and all. I didn't wanna graduate with low grades, y'know, so I thought HEY! We should do something. C'mon, let's get good grades and be HONOR STUDENTS!"

"Honor students don't go in the New School Building," said Miss Lille.

“You’re just not talking to the right KIND of honor student,” retorted Wrappy.

As Tetty grabbed the hem of her skirt, Dory pointed to the distance. Tetty saw a black humanoid figure rising up. She checked her watch. It was still 11:25, five minutes earlier than they were supposed to start. Still, their teacher wasn’t usually uptight about time.

The black humanoid figure rushed down the mountainside, its claw-like arm swinging down at Tetty, but before it connected, Tetty grabbed its arm and ripped it off. As Tetty pushed the figure away from her, she spoke to the others.

“Wait, it’s not 11:30 yet!” said Tetty.

“Nope. Not yet.”

“But it looked like we started, right?” asked Tetty.

Just on cue, more black humanoid figures came rushing down at them. Tetty crushed the arm she held, grabbed onto one of the rushing figures’ heads, and ripped it straight off.

“Maybe we started EARLY!” said Wrappy.

“Do we wanna check in with Miss Calcolo?” asked Tetty.

But there was no time to contact their teacher, because the homunculi hordes kept coming. After a while, Dory even started using her drill, and Arlie started slamming her fists into the homunculi. The battle had already begun. Maybe they really did start early. Tetty started giving instructions.

“No point thinking about it! We need to go in deep!” said Tetty.

“Okay!”

“Good luck, everyone!” said Tetty.

“Good luck!”

Using a formation they worked on a long time ago, Tetty and Dory were at the vanguard, charging into the homunculi's center, while protecting everyone at the same time. The mountain roads were relatively well-maintained, and the flow of homunculi made it easy to tell where to go. As they tore, grabbed, crushed, and defeated the homunculi, their numbers gradually decreased.

"Forward!"

There were more homunculi at the back. The squad kept their formation and pushed forward as much as possible, defeating any homunculi that got in their way.

"WE'RE KEEPING SCORE RIGHT?" yelled Wrappy.

"I heard there were cameras around... not that I could see them," said Miss Lille.

"Cause they're magically HIDDEN, DUH!" said Wrappy.

"More over there!"

As the horde of homunculi grew thinner, the squad moved as one. But after a while, Tetty stopped, and because of that, her entire squad stopped as well. Wrappy and Miss Lille both asked what was going on, but Tetty didn't respond, merely standing still. It was less that Tetty stopped and more that she had no idea how to react.

The homunculus standing in front of Tetty was completely different than the others. It was wielding a rapier and had knee-high boots. It wore a costume, and its appearance looked more like a Magical Girl. The feather tipped on its head swayed in the wind. Still, its skin was still liquid-like and pure black, characteristic of any other homunculus, and there was a layer of grotesqueness in it taking the form of a Magical Girl, but that wasn't what made Tetty stop in her tracks. For some reason, with the presence of this homunculus Magical Girl, Tetty felt a chill run up her spine. Like her heart was jumping out of her body.

The Magical Girl stepped forward, and instinctively, Tetty blocked her sword with her right mitten. Tetty didn't realize the Magical Girl even moved, let alone thrust her sword. She moved so fast that it looked instantaneous. By the time Tetty processed what was happening, her right mitten had already taken the blow. If she weren't wearing those mittens, her hand would've been stabbed. The swordsman launched a kick to her

left, and Tetty reacted by grabbing her foot. In the single moment where Tetty wondered if she should rip it off, she saw a faint glow.

Wrappy yelled, and Miss Lille screamed.

The swordsman pulled a smaller blade with her left hand. Since there were only two mittens, with her left mitten busy blocking her kick, and her right mitten busy blocking her rapier, the swordsman was able to slice Tetty, who had no way to guard. Blood spurted from Tetty's cheek.

Tetty didn't even get a chance to process the situation. She let go of the swordsman's sword and leg, got down on her knees, and bowed down.

"Forgive me, Shogun, for your humble servant's brashness," said Tetty.

Her Imperial Highness acknowledged Tetty's apology with two claps, and Tetty stood up, grateful for her generosity, before turning around to the bandits.

"Tetty!" shrieked Miss Lille.

"Hang on, wait. WAIT! What's going on!?" shouted Wrappy, confused.

They were all powerful Magical Girls, but Tetty would be able to defeat them all. She would defeat anyone to protect Her Excellency.

☆ **Psyche Plains**

The homunculus Magical Girl launched several punches at Psyche, but then stopped halfway to lowkick her. Despite being able to keep up with her, the speed that this Magical Girl moved in was almost too much for Psyche to handle.

Diko jumped on the spot and evaded another Magical Girl's attack, and when the Magical Girl swung at her, she disappeared in the blink of an eye. That was just the start. More Magical Girls started to flood down towards Group Three.

Sally grabbed onto a raven's foot and flew upwards. Lightning hopped across trees, kicking the homunculi as she went along, whilst Psyche slid forward towards the homunculi, spraying vapor in front of her. The speed at which she was sliding combined with the vapor reduced her friction, which allowed her to move with such speed that any impact would break their ankles. Despite her brilliant plan, though, more of them were trying to get in her way. Not to mention Sally and Lightning would be collateral damage if she couldn't stop herself. Psyche clicked her tongue in frustration.

The Magical Girl with a rose struck at Diko without hesitation. Diko intercepted, and the Magical Girl extended her palms. In response, Diko counterattacked by kneeling her, but the Magical Girl intercepted it, and followed up with an elbow. Once again, Diko disappeared.

"Luxury Mode, On!"

Lightning slashed towards another Magical Girl. An armored figure holding a halberd. The two of them clashed blades, and as the armored Magical Girl jumped high, one of Lightning's drums shot towards it.

The Magical Girl before Psyche was holding a large object in her hand. When Psyche realized it was a *gatling gun*, she quickly moved from treeline to treeline, dodging it as best as she could. She heard the crackling sound of the gatling gun fire at her. The bullets decimated the trees, bushes, and the ground. Slowly but surely, the bullets were getting closer to hitting Psyche, and she ran faster than she ever ran before, straining her legs just to avoid it.

She was reaching her limit, trying to bounce around without accidentally causing friendly fire. Though surprisingly, she was able to navigate the trees without accidentally causing any of her teammates to get shot. Psyche rolled to avoid her attacks, then jumped up atop a tree. A Magical Girl wearing a karate uniform jumped up after her. Psyche guarded in time, but it made her right arm numb. She broke apart some branches, its leaves shattering, as she turned around and went back to her teammates. The black shadow-like Magical Girl, however, turned back and ran the other way. Psyche's own teammates were slowly spreading apart.

Psyche had no idea what was happening, but these shadow-like Magical Girls were probably homunculi. Psyche herself had seen what Mao Pam's actual wings were capable of, but the ones she just saw now were close enough to the Magical Girls they were copying to be the real thing.

Psyche started to draw a course to reach her teammates again in her head. This wasn't a situation she could handle alone. If she got surrounded, she'd be dead in an instant. Another shadow Magical Girl seeped out of the ground, holding a spear in both of her hands.

Not this again, damn you!

Psyche dodged the spear by weaving right, then sprayed magical pepper spray at the Magical Girl's face. That didn't seem to do anything, and the red-faced Magical Girl merely thrust her spear once more. Psyche retreated backwards until her back hit a tree. Just as the Magical Girl charged at her, Psyche went down on all fours like an animal, dodging the spear as it stabbed into the tree behind her. At the same time, Psyche kicked her leg outwards to launch herself underneath the Magical Girl, putting some distance between them. The Magical Girl took out the spear embedded in the tree, then combined her two spears together to form a halberd. Psyche, who actually took notes during class despite her badmouthing habits, understood what was happening. This was Halberd Emimin, a Magical Girl who went around the world committing robberies.

Halberd raised her halberd, swinging and cleaving. Psyche avoided the swings, but the strikes hit the ground hard, making cracks that made it difficult to stand. As the soil and foliage fell around her, Psyche ran around the shadow Emimin and sprayed lubricant on the ground. Psyche held back her urge to scream as she avoided three strikes from Emimin, and on the fourth strike, her halberd struck the ground where Psyche was spraying her lubricant. Finally, Psyche was able to maneuver herself in a way that reduced her friction to the bare minimum possible, breaking Emimin's ankle with her slide, and even more, breaking her whole leg.

When Emimin staggered and fell, Psyche stood up, sprayed adhesive on her, then left her on the ground as she ran away. The next moment, Psyche ducked down to evade another attack from behind her. *Someone else*. Psyche sprayed some acid upwards, but despite being burnt, this new foe grabbed onto Psyche's shoulder. Since Psyche's water guns could only be sprayed in mist form, their power can be inferior to their liquid versions.

Psyche was pushed downwards, her hands and water gun pinned down. When the part of the Magical Girl that looked like a mouth opened, she could see many sharp

needle-like objects inside. The Magical Girl was then blown away off of Psyche, rolling down a cliffside before stopping.

“Hurry! Climb on!”

The Magical Girl who blew away Needle-Mouth was Calcolo, who was wearing glasses even in her Magical Girl form. Just as she said, Psyche climbed atop her back. She was balancing her weight with her arms while riding a huge abacus she piloted forward by kicking the ground with her right foot like a skateboard. This wasn't exactly the right way of using an abacus. Psyche sprayed some more lubricant behind them as they skated away, causing some of the homunculi to slip as they tried to chase them. Still, more and more homunculi followed.

They just keep coming!

The number of homunculi kept increasing. Calcolo began shouting at something. In front of them were even *more* homunculi Magical Girls rising up. In response, Psyche sprayed some lubricant in front of the abacus, allowing it to slide faster than the Magical Girls can rise.

“AH! Don't just spray! AH! Like that! Without me telling you to! WAH! If you're not careful! AH! We could slip and fall over!” yelled Calcolo.

“MISS CALCOLO!” shouted Psyche, who rarely, if ever, shouted at all. “What's going on!?”

“They're out of control! The homunculi! I don't know why! Should only be the principal and I! AGH! Who can give them instructions! But there's an Experimental Site person! He's dead!”

The abacus bumped into a fallen tree, and like a speed bump ramp, caused it to fly high.

“Everything in the lab was broken! Even the Magical Phones! No signal! So I went to get the master control! It's at the top of this mountain! On an observatory!”

Calcolo flipped her abacus in the air, then stuck the landing and slid down once again like a drifting race car. The stunt made Psyche scream.

“You can’t tell anyone!?” asked Psyche.

“I told you! The information terminal is broken! No way to contact the Homelands! It’s the Experimental Site people’s fault! They developed! New homunculi! Just like that! A new security system! It’s not my fault! I didn’t do anything! I-”

“Okay, you need to *stop crying* right *now*! I’m not-”

‘Having any of it’ was what she was going to say, but she was cut off due to the sudden stop of the abacus. Another black figure arose in the distance. Her posture was proper, complete with a swollen puffed out skirt, a crown on her head, and various other decorations she wore. Psyche heard a shriek, like a draft in an old house. It was the sound of Calcolo shrieking.

“Miss Calcolo, why are we *stopping*!?”

“Grim... Heart... Another incarnation... But how? How!?”

The black queen moved quite slowly. She didn’t seem to realize they were there. Psyche believed it would be faster to crush her now than to escape, but just as she thought of it, Calcolo turned the abacus around and ran away, causing Psyche to hold on tight to her for balance, going the opposite direction of where they originally went.

“Miss Calcolo! The other way! There’s way more enemies here!”

“That’s still better than having to fight *her*!”

Calcolo increased the speed of her abacus as countless more shadow Magical Girls blocked their path. Cursing under her breath, Psyche readied her water gun.

☆ Kumi-Kumi

Kumi-Kumi had no idea what was going on, but it was obvious to anyone that an anomaly had occurred. Gunshots, noises, and screams all broke the silence of the night, and it wasn’t stopping anytime soon. Group Two was surrounded by a countless number of Magical Girls, and slowly but surely, they were closing in on them.

Kumi-Kumi looked at Adelheid, Mepis, and Lillian. They all nodded, and Kana—who Kumi-Kumi wasn't sure understood the gravity of the situation or not—nodded as well.

“You wanna fucking fight!? Let's fucking go you bastards!” yelled out Mepis

“Yeah!” shouted Adelheid

“Yes!” shouted Kumi-Kumi

“Leave it to me!” shouted Lillian

“Fighting's good,” said Kana.

Contrary to what she said, Kana had a very normal tone of voice. Still, she seemed excited enough.

Mepis and Adelheid ran off to the enemies side by side. The liquid black gooey body was like a homunculus, but the shape was something Kumi-Kumi had never seen before. Mepis was attacking at random, kicking and hitting the homunculi until one of them blocked Mepis's punch, before following up with a flowing combination of their own. Jab, jab, straight hook. They were moving so fast and so smoothly, they were practically on the level of Magical Girls.

Adelheid, who had been supporting her, got between them. She sliced off the hands of the Magical Girl whose hands were wearing boxing gloves, before slicing her throat with a single stroke of her sabre. The homunculus's body then collapsed into a heap of black goo. But there were far more homunculi Magical Girls behind Adelheid, ready to replace her.

“Hey!” shouted Mepis.

“What!?” asked Adelheid.

“That girl just now! She was one of the Magical Girls we talked about in class!”

“Yeah, you think!?”

Adelheid charged in again, and finished off one of the Magical Girls with one strike. However, when she attacked the second one, she was stopped by her large shield which deflected Adelheid and pushed her away. Adelheid's body crashed into a rock, but that didn't stop her.

"Kaiserschlacht!"

She bounced off the rock and slammed into the shield, carrying the energy of the damage until it vibrated beyond the shield. Adelheid hit the shield continuously, while building up energy in her legs. When the Magical Girl's flank was loose, Adelheid launched a kick with whip-like speed, but before she could connect, Adelheid retreated and dodged a bullet that was being shot from behind her.

Behind her was a gunman Magical Girl with a ten gallon cowboy hat, firing three more bullets to pursue her. Adelheid rolled away to evade the first shot, then sliced the next two shots with her sabre. The cowboy Magical Girl threw away her pistols and took out a shotgun from her waist. However, Adelheid couldn't be taken down that easily. She rolled and jumped away, despite the shotgun blasts destroying rocks and breaking the soil.

"Hey, fuckface!"

Mepis came in and attempted to kick the Cowboy Magical Girl, making sure not to disturb Adelheid's dodging. After the Cowboy Magical Girl dodged, she aimed her shotgun at Mepis.

"Don't you try to dodge *me* you yellow-bellied *bitch*!"

Mepis's insults seemed to have caused the Cowboy to flinch. In that moment, Adelheid struck. Despite being able to avoid Mepis's kick, she couldn't avoid Adelheid's slice. Her back was cut, spraying black liquid onto Adelheid. As she was wounded, Mepis kicked her straight in the shoulder, sending her tumbling away. In response, the Cowboy Magical Girl rolled back into the flock of homunculi.

"Stubborn bitch, isn't she? C'mon, let's finish her off!" said Mepis.

"She's pretty powerful though out of the four we fought, might wanna be careful, they may mix strong ones with weak ones," said Adelheid.

As if the horde noticed Adelheid's alertness, they started moving as a group towards the mountains, disappearing in the trees in a liquid form. Before she could figure out why, she saw two spherical objects tossed beside her. Adelheid pushed Mepis out of the way, while Kumi-Kumi ran towards them.

Adelheid covered Mepis, while Kumi-Kumi jumped atop Adelheid to cover them both. The two grenades exploded, sending shockwaves that blew up their surroundings.

Mepis, who was beneath two Magical Girls, shouted out.

"FUCK! You two are heavy!"

"Sorry... I had to..." said Kumi-Kumi.

"AND YOU WERE FUCKING SLOW!"

"S-Sorry..."

When Kumi-Kumi stood up, she made a sound that was like the sound of metal stomping against the ground. Adelheid stood up next holding her own head and supporting Mepis on her shoulder.

"Hey, you all hurt? You hear me?" asked Mepis.

"I've been worse," said Adelheid.

"No problems... here," said Kumi-Kumi.

"Fuck. More coming!" said Mepis.

When they saw their surrounding area, the trees had all been blown away by the explosion of the grenades. It became easier to see further in the distance, and the night sky was even clearer. From here, they could spot even more black gooey figures coming towards them.

Adelheid kept her eyes straight at the horde, Mepis put her fists up, Kumi-Kumi lined up along with them, with Lillian protecting their back. Kana looked at Kumi-Kumi. "Oh?"

“That’s an interesting thing you have there. Something your powers made, I presume,” said Kana.

“Mine and... Lillian’s,” answered Kumi-Kumi

Kumi-Kumi was currently wrapped up in some kind of armor. In Kumi-Kumi’s spare time, she would often find grates, bricks, concrete, wheel stoppers, home appliances, and other oversized items found in the garbage and magically rebuilt them. She would reassemble them and hide them in the school warehouse, at first lightly, in case she got caught. But she never did get caught, and the amount of items she kept gradually increased. Thus, she now had a suit of armor that could withstand Magical Grenades if it had to.

By weaving all of this concrete with thick rubber, asphalt, and tires found in playground equipment, strengthened using Kumi-Kumi’s powers, it was practically a wearable fortress. Kumi-Kumi was excited to try this out in tonight’s practice match, but wasn’t expecting that this could potentially save her life. By using Lillian’s threads, she was even able to manipulate her joints as if they were her own limbs, despite being huge and bulky. Now, Kumi-Kumi was three times more efficient, being able to move as flexibly as she could normally. At this point, could you really call it armor? It was two meters tall and acted more like an exo-suit. Kumi-Kumi already named this form, despite not telling anyone. *Powered Kumi-Kumi Fortress Mode*. Kumi-Kumi wanted a moment just to herself, but with the amount of Magical Girls attacking them, there was no moment left to spare.

Kumi-Kumi moved with a mechanical heaviness in her steps. She swung her right arm to blow away one of the homunculus Magical Girls, before swinging her left leg with the speed she normally had, destroying two more Magical Girls at the same time. Kumi-Kumi backstepped to avoid a kick, and blocked one of the Magical Girls’ sawblades with her right arm, acting like a heavy shield. The sawblade only managed to cut a third of the shield before it got stuck and stopped moving. Had this hit the body of a Magical Girl, it would’ve torn them in half. Just like Adelheid said, there were strong ones mixed with weak ones.

“Leave the small fry... to me... go... get the stronger ones!” said Kumi-Kumi.

“Got it!” said Adelheid.

“C’mon! Lemme at ‘em!” said Mepis.

“Be on guard, everyone,” warned Lillian.

“Wait, we need to establish the definition of ‘strength’ before we-” said Kana before getting cut off.

Kumi-Kumi was busy defeating several Magical Girls on her own. The ones that survived were mopped up by Mepis and Adelheid, whilst Lillian kept watch over their blind spots. Although it was difficult for Kumi-Kumi to see, it seemed that Kana wasn’t really attacking them, but rather avoiding all the attacks coming at her, while also muttering something at the same time. It was too noisy for Kumi-Kumi to hear properly, though. Well, as long as Kana didn’t get in the way and was distracting the Magical Girls, that was helping. Speaking of which, Kumi-Kumi had to keep advancing.

Kumi-Kumi stepped into the blasted area. Their current mission was to break through the horde of Magical Girls and escape the mountainside. Since practice hadn’t *technically* started yet, no one could blame them for evacuating. Kumi-Kumi wondered if the other groups were safe, too, but shook away those thoughts, as she had no time to be thinking of the others when her own team’s safety was on the line. She simply kept swinging and attacking, paving the way for her own group. But when she swung her right arm, she suddenly felt a sense of losing weight on that part of her body.

She looked at her right arm, and a portion of her fist had disappeared, with only black dust scattered around it. She saw the Magical Girl she was about to hit, but that Magical Girl hadn’t even attacked her. She simply stood there. Part of Kumi-Kumi’s fist disappeared just by touching her. The Magical Girl had a headdress that was filled with plenty of fluffy and frilly decorations, and despite the black gooey appearance, she could see that her dress was patched up and stitched within the seams.

Kumi-Kumi grazed her left arm to the Patchwork Magical Girl, and part of her left arm disappeared. The Magical Girl seemed to be smiling heartily. A cold chill ran up Kumi-Kumi’s spine. This one was different from the other Magical Girls. It wasn’t a matter of strength, this Magical Girl was on a whole other level compared to Kumi-Kumi, even with the power of Fortress Mode. Kumi-Kumi disconnected from the gigantic suit of armor, just as the Magical Girl grabbed onto the armor’s shoulder. Kumi-Kumi retreated away from her. She had to abandon her armor mercilessly. Kumi-Kumi thought she could’ve had more time with it, but she didn’t even have that luxury. As if there was nothing there, the Patchwork Magical Girl went through the armor, then rushed to chase after Kumi-Kumi, smiling while she ran. She was fast approaching her, and Kumi-Kumi

was already jumping in the air. The Patchwork Magical Girl extended her right arm. There was no escape from her.

At the very least, she wanted to open her mouth to tell her friends what to do, before suddenly feeling a thump at her side, swallowing some spit as a result.

It was Kana, tackling Kumi-Kumi from the side, grabbing onto her, then running away. The Patchwork Magical Girl landed as well, chasing after Kana. Kana had broken off their original path, and instead headed deep into the mountains. Kumi-Kumi tried to tell Kana not to run, but when she saw the person chasing them, she bit back. There was no way of fighting her. They *had* to run. How do you fight someone who disintegrates someone just by touching them? Not even with Mepis, Adelheid, and Lillian helping them could they hope to defeat her. The only thing they could do was to drag her away, so that the others could escape.

Kumi-Kumi took out her pickaxe and started swinging into the soil. Square cubes that were once dirt were thrown to the Patchwork Magical Girl, but they all disappeared in a puff of black smoke. It didn't slow her down, let alone stop her.

The Patchwork Magical Girl was unbelievably fast, but somehow Kana was able to surpass her in speed. Kumi-Kumi began to think positive thoughts as Kana slowly spread the distance, but for some reason, Kana stopped. Kumi-Kumi groaned as the whiplash made her head hit Kana's.

"Why are we stopping...?"

Kumi-Kumi looked ahead. A homunculus Magical Girl was standing in front of them.

☆ Kana

Kana didn't even have trouble remembering who the homunculus in front of her was. She knew immediately. Kana jumped up vertically, hanging on a tree branch to avoid the Patchwork Magical Girl running behind her. Using the tree branch, Kana turned around, swung away, and ran in the opposite direction with increased momentum.

“Why are we... running... we were doing... good...” asked Kumi-Kumi.

What Kumi-Kumi said wasn't wrong. Certainly a single homunculus standing on its own wouldn't be a problem. It was natural to think this, but Kana knew better. Kana knew there was no way forward in that direction.

“That queen's appearance back there, that was Grim Heart,” said Kana.

“Grim... Heart...?” asked Kumi-Kumi.

“The Osk Faction's strongest Magical Girl. These homunculi perfectly copy the abilities of the Magical Girls they assume. That means that the homunculus Grim Heart would have the same combat skill as the original. Our entire class would be annihilated fighting a Magical Girl even a third as powerful as Grim Heart.”

“She may be strong... but she wasn't paying attention... she was just standing there...”

“No, not standing. Guarding. If I recall, atop the mountain is...”

“The observatory...”

“Right. They're guarding the observatory for some reason.”

“We still... have to worry... about... Patchwork girl... chasing us...”

Kumi-Kumi was right. The Patchwork Magical Girl eliminated anything coming at her and was completely unaffected by anything. At first glance, she seemed invincible, but nothing was invincible. Kana turned her head and shouted at her.

“Hey! What's your weakness!?” shouted Kana.

Kumi-Kumi muttered an “oh, that's right,” as she gripped onto Kana's shoulders tightly.

“You could ask her... her weaknesses... using your powers... then we can...”

“Unfortunately, I don't think she speaks our language. I don't think she can understand my question,” said Kana.

Kumi-Kumi groaned, and the grip on her shoulders tightened. Kana tried to run through the trees back to where she came from, but nobody was there anymore. No silhouettes that she could see of her friends. Kana had no time to think. Black ooze started appearing in her blind spots, slowly forming into more Magical Girls. Behind her, she could hear footsteps of someone far too happy to be chasing her.

Kana placed her hands on Kumi-Kumi's, and Kumi-Kumi loosened her grip on her. Although the Patchwork Magical Girl didn't understand her, there were plenty of other homunculi whose minds weren't as slow as hers. Kana was listening closely to their weaknesses. Homunculi Magical Girls had three glaring weaknesses; light, especially sunlight, which would slow their movements; the inability to attack their allies; and the need to listen to anyone with administrative power. Since it would be a while before the sun would shine again, and Kana didn't know where anyone with administrative power would be, the only weakness left to exploit was...

Kana ran towards a homunculus, placed her right hand on her shoulder, and her left between her legs. With no fear of the homunculus Magical Girl hitting back, Kana swung her body hard towards the Patchwork Magical Girl. The Patchwork Magical Girl wouldn't attack her own allies, and disintegrating this homunculus would be an attack. Would she deactivate her powers? Even for just a moment? Kana didn't know. It was just a guess, but it should buy her enough time.

There was the sound of water splashing. Kana had slammed the Patchwork Magical Girl's upper body so hard that it physically tore apart from her legs, who stumbled down falling down to the ground, melting as well. Kana dropped whatever remained of the homunculus she had grabbed, which melted to the ground as well. Kana punched away the remaining homunculi who came after her, and kicked away the rest chasing her from behind.

On Kana's back, Kumi-Kumi sighed with relief. She got down from Kana's back, stretched, then tried to walk a few steps. Finally, she placed her hands on her knees, and looked up at Kana.

"That was... a bit much..." said Kumi-Kumi.

"Apologies."

"But... you saved me... thank you..."

“I’ve never been happier.”

Just as they were talking, more black oozes started appearing. They were automatic, and gave them no room to breathe. There might be powerful Magical Girls like the Patchwork girl, or worse, someone like Grim Heart.

“I wonder what we should do,” said Kana.

“Over here...” said Kumi-Kumi, pointing downhill with her pickaxe.

“You’re telling us to run away, then,” said Kana.

“We can barely find our teammates... Our Magical Phones... don’t work... so we need to go outside... back to the school... contact someone...”

“I see. Good idea.”

Kumi-Kumi stood in front of Kana, starting to walk towards the city again, but as she stepped forward, a black wall-like object appeared in front of her. Kana grabbed the nape of Kumi-Kumi’s neck, and pulled her back, switching places with her, and Kana’s body started to get sucked into this black wall, whose texture was similar to a homunculus.

Kumi-Kumi stepped back with a surprised face. Kana’s body was slowly getting sucked inside, her body temperature cooling. Kumi-Kumi reached her hand out to her.

“Don’t get any closer!” said Kana.

After saying her last words to her, Kana’s body got sucked fully into the black wall. She could see nor hear nothing. The only thing she could feel was pain, and the crushing sinking feeling as her body temperature lowered even more. Kana realized she was going to die.

Her last words weren’t fitting at all. Even in Manga, most characters were able to say a lot more than “Don’t get any closer!”, but this was reality. Kana convinced herself that she was helping her classmates, and that made her quite satisfied. She had wanted to enjoy her student life more, and though she was still inexperienced with Manga, the fact that she tried made her quite happy.

☆ Thunder General Adelheid

Enemies everywhere, and only a few of her allies in sight. Despite there being plenty of battle maniacs in the Mao School, there were only a few who would find enjoyment in these odds. But Adelheid wouldn't complain. She wouldn't run away just because of insurmountable odds. She kept slashing and fighting, back to back with Mepis, and finishing off any enemies caught in Lillian's nets.

After Kumi-Kumi and Kana split off, their defense wouldn't hold. Waiting for them would only be suicidal, so they had to retreat somewhere as well. All she could do now was pray that those two would be okay.

Adelheid's sabre was covered in a black tar-like substance. She shook it off and stabbed some more Magical Girls. As she cut down more and more, she saw one of the shadow Magical Girls wielding a sword. She was about to swing it, yet she was way too far a distance for it to connect.

...Or perhaps she wasn't.

Despite the samurai Magical Girl swinging into empty space far in the distance, Adelheid could feel that it had some purpose. Something was coming, but she didn't know what.

"Blitzkrieg!"

With a lag time of 0 seconds, Adelheid's face took the slash of the sword that wasn't supposed to hit. She instantly transferred the energy she received from the slash to her legs, running towards the samurai Magical Girl, while slashing other Magical Girls beside her. Adelheid ran across her, like two dueling samurai in the movies, slicing her lower body from her upper torso. However, despite being sliced in half, the samurai Magical Girl grabbed onto Adelheid. Before Adelheid could figure out why, she felt a sharp pain in her waist, and let out a groan.

A black pole-like object had stabbed her through her cloak. When Adelheid turned around to the source, the shadow Magical Girl that had been there just a moment ago had disappeared.

“Adelheid!” yelled out Mepis.

“Don’t worry ‘bout me!” said Adelheid in a raspy voice, despite wanting to shout it out. Adelheid had taken considerable damage. The samurai Magical Girl wasn’t just going solo, she was assisting her allies, perhaps even sacrificing herself for them.

Adelheid broke off the pole protruding from her waist, which made it easier for her to move. It was an arrow, though significantly larger than normal, fired from a bow. However, the bow Magical Girl had disappeared. Finally, Adelheid recalled the Magical Girl behind this. This ‘arrow’ was a harpoon, and there was only one Magical Girl who fired harpoons from her bows, Melville.

“Hey! Careful out there! We got a chameleon-powered Magical Girl!” warned Adelheid.

Mepis responded with a shout. Lillian jumped on one of the enemies, then landed on Mepis’s shoulder, before using that to jump up once more. She then swung her threads towards a tree branch, allowing her to swing up into the air. There, she twirled her threads around in a radial pattern. Any and all shadow Magical Girls that got caught in her large thread net were sliced in half. In addition, her net became entangled on something empty.

“There!” shouted Lillian.

Mepis kicked into the spot where the net entangled something invisible, and the invisible thing rolled onto the ground, creating a slight depression as it did. Adelheid slashed into it, and their invisible target rolled further, becoming slightly more visible. The shadow Magical Girl’s cloaking powers began to flicker, and became less effective than how Melville would use it. Lillian dropped down in front of her, planning on finishing her off. Lillian pulled her knitting yarn hard, and hooked the shadow Melville by her legs, but suddenly, she seemed to cloak herself as perfectly as before once again. Aiming her bow at Lillian, before a black raven came swooping in, slicing her throat.

“Sally!” said Lillian.

Looking at their newest reinforcements, Sally seemed to be just as tired as they were. On her back was a detransformed Lightning, seemingly unconscious.

“Hey, fuck you!” shouted Mepis in the distance as she beat up several shadow Magical Girls. Approaching Sally, she continued shouting. “Just what the fuck did you do, huh!? Care to explain yourselves?”

“We don’t know what’s happening either!” said Sally.

The ravens began to glow brightly, slowing down the homunculi enough for Mepis to beat them up, Adelheid to slice them up, and Lillian to cut them apart. Sally wiped her forehead in exhaustion.

“I don’t know what happened... Psyche’s gone off somewhere, Ranyui and Diko split up from us, and Lightning fainted because she overworked herself and burnt out of energy... what do we do?” asked Sally.

“Kumi-Kumi and Kana got chased by someone dangerous. But they’re better than her, so they’ll win,” said Mepis.

“Don’t matter who’s better than who. We just gotta survive,” said Adelheid.

While it was painful, Adelheid looked at Lightning’s unconscious face. She wasn’t acting, she really had fainted. If so, why didn’t she run off when she was taking blows from Adelheid? She should’ve had extraordinary durability, but of course, when they needed it most, she goes unconscious. Still, now there were four of them, with one unconscious. Adelheid had to struggle to maintain her posture, putting pressure on her bleeding waist. Trusting her powers, flapping her cloak, brandishing her sabre, and noticing that their enemies were decreasing.

However, instead of feeling relieved that there were less enemies, she was more anxious. This wasn’t the first time the homunculi had retreated. Before the grenades, or before the samurai Magical Girl swung her sword... meaning whenever a homunculus was about to launch a large scale attack, its allies retreated first...

“We need to move, now!” shouted Adelheid.

Adelheid managed to smell the scent of fire just before everyone jumped away. The entire area where they were exploded. The black flames flickered and spread. Adelheid placed her hand over her mouth. Black smoke and fire were everywhere, and a smiling shadow Magical Girl melted into the flames. Adelheid remembered that silhouette. A Mao School graduate, The Lake of Fire, Flame Flamey.

The black flames continued to explode everywhere. Adelheid thought she heard a scream. There was no way to find Flamey when she'd melted into the flames, and she didn't do many physical attacks, which means Adelheid's powers would be ineffective against her.

The shadow Magical Girls attacked all at once. They couldn't avoid them, as their paths were blocked by black flames. Sally got beaten down, and Lightning got thrown off of her back. Quickly, Adelheid jumped ahead and caught Lightning, still peacefully unconscious. She thought about throwing her off herself, but she couldn't bring herself to do it. She wrapped her cloak around her, carrying her with her, all the while parrying and absorbing any blows coming at her, transferring the energy to her sabre strikes.

"Shit! What now!?" asked Mepis.

Adelheid didn't have the answers. There wasn't much they *could* do. All Adelheid could do was absorb, parry, and strike, over and over and over again. Until she noticed that a certain someone on her back started moving.

"Had a nice beauty sleep?" asked Adelheid.

Lightning tapped on Adelheid's temple twice, transforming into a Magical Girl.

"Thanks for the energy, Adelheid," said Lightning.

"What? You're *stealin'* it now?" asked Adelheid.

"You wouldn't call it stealing if it was leaking out now, would you?"

Adelheid didn't quite understand how Lightning was doing it, but she understood the theory of what she was doing. Still, no Magical Girl had been able to do that before, but Lightning's not an ordinary Magical Girl. When Adelheid absorbed attacks, she didn't immediately release that energy, but circulated it across her body. When it reached her back, Lightning must've also absorbed it.

"That's what you're *doin'* though, literally stealin' my thunder."

"Now now, no badmouthing," teased Lightning.

From now on, Adelheid kept redirecting her absorbed energy inwards, so that Lightning could steal it. It didn't matter now, because if anyone's going to break through this, it was Lightning.

"Perfect! I'm getting stronger," said Lightning.

"Then you better make it count!" said Adelheid.

Lightning raised her sword. Thunder rumbled and lightning crackled as it spread out and disintegrated several shadow Magical Girls all at once. Ecstatically, Lightning softly spoke out.

"Lightning Bolt!"

"You're supposed to say it *before* you attack," said Adelheid.

"Does it really matter, though?" asked Lightning.

"Your namin' sense could use some work too."

"Oh shush, as if I'd tell *you*."

Lightning smirked, and Adelheid chuckled. Being carried by a raven, Sally landed down beside them, feeling somewhat happy for some reason.

"Hey, you two were kinda like Cutie Healer back there," said Sally.

"We were?" asked Adelheid.

"Was that a compliment?" asked Lightning.

"Course it was!" said Sally.

Lightning continued to fire lightning strikes as Mepis and Lillian took care of the stragglers. Adelheid ran across the black flames. She heard another scream, but it wasn't nearby. It was actually quite far away. She saw a huge abacus, with Psyche and Calcolo riding it, jumping up towards a tree.

The two Magical Girls then landed in the flames, and shouted at least three times as the flaming sparks shot out.

“HOT! HOT HOT!”

“AAAA!”

Psyche quickly sprayed a mist of white foam around her, which eliminated the flames around her. More importantly, the shadow Flamey screamed in agony as the white foam soaked her, disappearing into black goo.

☆ Ranyui

Ranyui was overwhelmed by the horde of shadow Magical Girls that were practically covering her entire field of vision. No matter how much she beat down, more and more kept coming. Psyche ran off, Lightning had fallen, and Sally took her away to retreat.

Ranyui kept wandering. It hurt just to move. She wanted to stop fighting, but Diko hadn't stopped fighting yet. Diko was fighting one of the shadow Magical Girls. The one who was copying the Forest Musician, Clamberry. Ranyui had seen several videos of Clamberry, and she knew that their power and speed were inferior compared to hers. Now that they had to fight against the real thing, albeit a perfectly copied form by a homunculus, she saw how terribly strong she was. Just before the shadow Clamberry managed to stroke Diko with her hands, Diko disappeared. She stroked a tree, and the tree exploded from the inside.

Diko kicked several shadow Magical Girls away while shaking her head. It seemed she still got stunned somehow. Ever since she had enrolled, Diko trained more seriously against the homunculi than any other student. Ranyui didn't. She didn't think the mock battles were that important to be chosen as the next Lazuline. If you think about it, Diko was more serious than anyone in the class. But on the other hand, despite how seriously she trained, she still hadn't been chosen as a Lazuline.

Ranyui *wanted* to be the next Lazuline. That was why she endured so many hardships, and yet, she gave up after not getting chosen. Diko, though, was different. Even though they weren't chosen to be the Third, she kept training. Diko didn't think

about the idea that she might be chosen as the Fourth, she just kept training and training like it was natural.

Ranyui took a deep breath. She had nearly reached her limit. Then she locked eyes with Diko. Diko grinned. It wasn't an insulting grin, nor was it a smile of resignation. She was just grinning. Ranyui took another deep breath. Silently, she asked Diko what was so funny. Silently, Diko responded that it was the look on her face, near the edge of tears, that was interesting to her. Ranyui took another deep breath, and accidentally bit her own cheek. The taste of blood spread throughout her mouth. Then, she noticed a change.

Her scenery had changed. No longer a mountainside full of trees, but a vast blue horizon stretching endlessly. This was how a Lazuline should see things. There, Diko and Clamberry were fighting, while the other homunculi danced around them. When Diko told her what she said, it felt like a threat. Diko grinned. Such a lovely grin, too. A grin that only Diko could do.

Ranyui crouched low, as she noticed a Magical Girl with a gatling gun aiming it at her. Before she could fire any bullets, though, Ranyui had closed the distance between them. She broke the Gatling Magical Girl's elbows, before kicking her shin in, then launching a high kick to her forehead to send her flying away.

"Not going down *that* easily..." muttered Ranyui.

Using her tail as a springboard, Ranyui jumped upwards, flipping and landing on a tree branch. She used that to launch herself towards Clamberry, kicking her rose decorations and jumping off of them. When she landed, she saw the black petals dancing in the air. She sent a silent signal to Diko, and Diko grinned in response.



She eliminated all the other homunculi from her mind's eye. These could be ignored safely. They were also the reason Clamberry wasn't using any of her large destructive sound waves. She didn't want to harm her allies. No point dealing with obstacles to her enemies.

Ranyui would jab when Diko did a low kick, then switched to blocking for the both of them when they got attacked, letting Diko handle the offense. They were silently communicating with each other, moving like a single organism. A Lazuline should move solely by intuition.

Clamberry performed a fast high kick. Despite blocking it, Ranyui was blown backwards. Without barely giving her another glance, Clamberry turned to attack Diko, who was weaving left and right. Ranyui smiled. A Lazuline should always smile, even when in great pain.

The other shadow Magical Girls were kicking, biting, and clawing them, but they ignored those wounds, because they didn't exist. They didn't matter. Ranyui used her tail to bounce off the ground, flipping forward towards a weakened tree, then kicked it down. Then, Ranyui dove through the triangular 'entrance' made by the gap in the fallen tree, connecting an 'entrance' and an 'exit'. The 'exit' being another gap made by two leaning trees, just behind Diko. There was no need to speak, as Diko disappeared soon after Ranyui approached her from behind. In front of Ranyui was Clamberry. Ranyui leaped towards her.

Ranyui grabbed onto Clamberry's elf ears and pulled her head close. At the same time, Clamberry's fingers stroked Ranyui's belly. Ranyui felt something popping inside, as hot liquid began to overflow from her body. Ranyui spat out blood, silently telling Clamberry not to underestimate her, before headbutting Clamberry, quickly twirling her body to stand on her head, before kicking her towards Diko, who followed up with an uppercut punch to Clamberry's belly.

Clamberry still hadn't fallen. As expected of the Forest Musician, the First Lapis Lazuline's most hated foe. The two of them sandwiched Clamberry and launched several consecutive short strikes. Her kidney, spine, the back of her neck, it was free shots for them. Diko elbowed Clamberry's collarbone, and disappeared the moment Clamberry counterattacked. Ranyui didn't flinch, and lowkicked Clamberry's calf, hearing bones crack.

But then, Ranyui felt something strange. She felt abnormally heavy, and was unable to move her body. Her vision was red, and she saw Diko with a serious expression on her face. The shadow Magical Girls were about to swarm her. She had to move, but she couldn't move. She couldn't even lift her fingertips. Clamberry kicked Diko away, bringing the fight far from her field of view. She didn't even glance at Ranyui, as if she wasn't there.

Hey, your fight's with me! shouted Ranyui silently.

The Forest Musician turned around, but she wasn't staring at Ranyui. She still didn't consider Ranyui her opponent. Instead, she saw someone beyond Ranyui. A girl in a white middle school uniform, jumping out through the darkness. Something flickered within the Forest Musician's expression. Still, the White Magical Girl charged forward, wielding a Naginata, while the Forest Musician stepped forward to meet her in battle, but the White Magical Girl was much faster than her. Before the Forest Musician could even move a single step, she cleaved her Naginata, and the Forest Musician's head came flying off.

The White Magical Girl exhaled all the breath she had been holding. Then shouted to someone behind her. Then, a Magical Girl carrying a rifle appeared and shouted out,

"Uluru's an administrator! Everybody stop fighting!"

Ranyui sighed in relief, including all the blood in her mouth. She was relieved that an administrator had finally showed up. So relieved that she lost consciousness.

☆ **Wrappy Tip**

The homunculi Magical Girls kept coming, and not only that, but Tetty had now joined their ranks. The way she moved, and the look on her face showed Wrappy that she hadn't betrayed them, but was being mind controlled. That meant that they couldn't just beat her up like any of the others. They couldn't even contact anyone with their Magical Phones, since they didn't get any signal.

Nobody could let their guard down. Miss Lille was fighting the Rapier Magical Girl all by herself. Wrappy was dealing with the horde and trying to disorient them, but their attacks hit harder than usual, and caused wounds. Deep wounds.

Dory drilled one of the shadow Magical Girls, and called Arlie with a shriek. Arlie replied in an even shrillier voice. Their urgency transmitted despite Wrappy not understanding what they were saying. In the middle of it all, Wrappy saw that Tetty grabbed onto Arlie's armor and ripped it off, detaching it faster than Arlie could regenerate. Tetty Goodgripp was surprisingly powerful. When under mind control like this, she didn't display her usual meekness, and attacked with pinpoint precision. At this rate, she would dismantle Arlie and rip her to shreds.

"ARLIE! TAG OUT!" shouted Wrappy.

Wrappy slid across in front of Arlie. Tetty moved fast, grabbing onto Wrappy's arm, but when she pulled, she didn't rip off her arm, instead ripping off one of Wrappy's wraps that she had already attached to her arm beforehand. At the same time, Wrappy held onto Tetty's mittens, flipping above Tetty behind her. She used both her legs to lock Tetty's arms and used her arms to scissor Tetty's neck, choking her until she groaned.

Arlie yelled out something as she punched the homunculi trying to swarm Wrappy. Tetty groaned in pain, but despite how strongly Wrappy choked her, she wouldn't kill their team leader. She kept gripping, until she felt a sharp pain towards her side. Her arms loosened, and Tetty fell to the ground coughing. Wrappy pulled the sword that stabbed her from her waist and applied wraps to stop the bleeding.

The Rapier Magical Girl threw her small dagger from far away to help Tetty. Wrappy saw that Miss Lille had already collapsed. No matter how strong Miss Lille was, this Magical Girl was beyond average. A one on one wouldn't take her down.

Wrappy elbowed a homunculus running straight for her, before kicking her away. She made sure that all of this was done by her own will, and that she hadn't somehow been mind controlled as well.

Arlie was being barraged by several attacks from homunculi Magical Girls. Whipped, clawed, and sliced until her armor was practically destroyed. Black ooze seeped through the destroyed parts, almost like a homunculi ooze itself, trying to remake and regenerate her armor, but it wasn't regenerating fast enough.

Miss Lille was also being pressured. There were plenty of cracks around her body. Everytime her joints were struck by the Rapier Magical Girl, fragments of Miss Lille's metallic body would come loose. When the Rapier Magical Girl moved to stab her face, however, it suddenly deformed like liquid and trapped the Magical Girl's hand. One of the metals Wrappy gave to Miss Lille just happened to be mercury.

Nice! Knew that mercury would come in handy!

Dory rushed off to try and help Miss Lille. Wrappy slammed into one of the homunculi trying to get in her way, paving the path as much as she could. Dory activated her drill and aimed for the Rapier Magical Girl's waist. The Rapier Magical Girl used both her arms to stop her drill from spinning, however, Dory's drill was part of her Magical Skill, and her ability was for her drill to never stop spinning until it has completely destroyed what Dory intended to destroy. By stopping the drill, it would only spin faster and faster, with no upper limit on its speed. Despite the Rapier Magical Girl's strength, the drill eventually overpowered her, as it pierced her belly and pushed her down to the ground. Miss Lille tried to move away from her, but something was preventing her. The Rapier Magical Girl had held onto Miss Lille still.

Wrappy thought she saw something sparkling, but it was the Rapier Magical Girl tearing apart Miss Lille's body in two, wrapping her fist in mercury. When she saw Miss Lille's mercury puddle trying to reform into a body again, the Rapier Magical Girl slammed her fist down, causing the liquid to scatter. The Magical Girl smiled. Despite only having her upper torso, she moved with blinding speed, punching Dory, then slicing her from below, causing Dory to cough up blood.

Arlie quickly came to support Dory, who had collapsed to the ground. At the same time, her armor deflected the brunt of the Rapier Magical Girl's attacks, despite her crawling back and forth like an undying cockroach.

Tetty got back up, her eyes awash with fear. Her brainwashing had been undone, but she was slow, and all she did was avoid the homunculi attacks. Wrappy ran ahead, despite all the pain she endured. She scooped what remained of Miss Lille's body into her wraps, ducked to avoid any attacks, then slid by Arlie. Just breathing was painful for her. Despite stopping her bleeding, the damage she endured wasn't light at all. She could say the same for her teammates. They were reaching their limit. Dory was injured, Tetty was panicking, Miss Lille had no body, Arlie was enduring the Rapier Magical Girl's attacks, and Wrappy was in no better shape. Arlie looked towards the distance, and Wrappy looked there as well. They heard a loud noise in the distance.

The sound got closer and closer, and swarms of homunculi gradually broke apart. Finally, a blue Magical Girl jumped up, landing on one of the homunculi, and piercing it with her trident. The homunculus froze up and shattered in a split second.

“Sorry I’m late, Arlie!” she said.

Wrappy was confused. An acquaintance of Arlie’s? Why was she here? She had no time to ask the Trident Magical Girl that question, as she quickly fired several ice shards from her trident that pierced the homunculi Magical Girls. The Rapier Magical Girl, however, was quick on her feet. She grabbed another homunculus beside her, and used that homunculus’s body as a shield. Afterwards, she jumped over Arlie and swung her rapier at the Trident Magical Girl. The Trident Magical Girl blocked it with her trident, and as they locked blades, Arlie came in from the side and punched the Rapier Magical Girl so hard, she crashed into the horde of homunculi Magical Girls.

The shadow Magical Girls started to separate, but still surrounded them from a distance, careful of any more attacks from the Trident Magical Girl.

“HEY! HEY! Stranger! What’s going on!?” asked Wrappy.

“Sorry, not sure myself,” replied the Trident Magical Girl, responding to Wrappy’s question while raising her spear. “Come on! All together now!”

“We’re really doing *that*?” asked Dory, to which Arlie responded with a shriek. Wrappy had no idea what *that* was.

Dory raised her drill, and Arlie raised her fist, touching the trident. Wrappy and Tetty were being wrapped by Arlie. Wrappy felt this was more for safety than anything else. Then, the Trident Magical Girl shouted out,

“Ultimate Princess Explosion!”

Wrappy felt a crack in the air, before her vision turned completely white.

Epilogue

☆ Kana

Kana's thoughts as she was sucked into the Wall Magical Girl were thus,

Wasn't this Bella Wraith's power? To collect all the thoughts of corpses and turn them into materials?

She just learned it in class yesterday, after all. Unfortunately, she didn't learn how to deal with her powers, so there was no way she would be prepared to fight her. She floated in the darkness, being unable to breathe, feeling her body losing temperature. Eventually, even the feeling of losing temperature was gone. It reminded her of prison, as if she was back at square one.

After what felt like an extremely long time, she thought she heard someone talking to her. *"We can't have you dying here,"* is what she thought she heard. It was certainly quite fun to have friends, but it would be sad for those friends to die. The hallucinations one has near their death really were haunting.

She felt someone's hand grasp her neck, before pulling her towards them quite roughly. Kana had no idea where she was being taken to, and then light pierced her eyes. She could see the trees and the sun shining down on her. Dawn had broken. Kana raised her arms. They could move again. She raised her upper body to sit down, then moved her legs as well. She looked around. The homunculi were gone. It was morning and the sun was rising in the east.

"...I'm alive. How did I make it?" she asked out loud. Nobody answered, though.

"There! Over there! She's okay!" shouted a familiar voice. Kana turned around. It was Mepis, and she was smiling. Kumi-Kumi was behind her, wiping tears. Did something sad or happy happen? Their expressions conflicted with each other. Kana was confused. Mepis shouted into her Magical Phone,

"She's alive! She's still alive! Whoo! C'mon, hunt's over everybody! Back to school! Huh? Whaddya mean it's not a 'hunt'. What? Okay, okay, a 'search and rescue'. Same difference!"

Kumi-Kumi ran up crying and tackled Kana to the ground, hugging her tightly. She cried while babbling words that weren't words. Kana *still* had no idea what happened, so she just petted Kumi-Kumi's head. When Kana got up though, this time Mepis tackled and hugged her to the ground.

☆ **Calcolo**

Calcolo stood in front of the Principal's Office. She told herself that it would be alright. She faced literal death down the mountains. Surviving was a miracle already, so this should be nothing. She didn't faint, none of the students died. There was nothing better she could ask for.

When Calcolo heard the voice behind the door allowing her in, she was shocked. Halna's voice was higher pitched than usual, meaning she was in a good mood. But why *would* she be in a good mood? Calcolo held her trembling hands to calm them down, and entered the room.

"Hello," Calcolo said, entering the room and immediately closing the door. Halna was smiling.

This felt horrible. Was Calcolo going to be responsible for the accident, or would she be sent to one of the Experimental Sites and be torn apart?

"I heard that you tried to stop the mountain incident," said Halna.

"Y-Yes?"

Halna was *praising* her. Where's the "but"? Where's the "did you stop and think about this?" Halna was still smiling, an expression Calcolo had never seen.

"It seems this error was caused by a mistake in setting up the security system by one of the technicians of the Experimental Sites, or some other human error. The homunculi generator malfunctioned and produced many homunculi beyond their limiter's parameters. A series of unfortunate events from management," said Halna.

Normally, Halna would say some foul words about the Experimental Sites, but she was still smiling, her elf ears bouncing rhythmically.

“The Examination Division found out and sent their best to handle the situation. Then, using admin authority, they were able to eliminate the rest of the homunculi and safely regroup,” said Halna.

Calcolo heard about some mysterious explosion, but Halna hadn’t said anything about that.

“The person in charge of the security was forced to commit seppuku. That’s apparently the Experimental Sites’ ways. Well, it’s great that no one died. I wouldn’t be surprised if they abolished the Magical Girl Class, otherwise,” said Halna.

No one died? Then who was that corpse back at the lab with the crest? He was one of the Experimental Site Mages, right? Halna didn’t know what Calcolo knew, but Calcolo kept that information secret. Halna said that the accident was due to a series of unfortunate events and human error. But something was wrong. Something *felt* wrong. Why were the homunculi taking on the forms of Magical Girls? Calcolo didn’t know they could even do that.

Then there was that homunculus that copied Grim Heart. She was simply standing there, defending the road to the observatory, where anyone could disable their combat capability. No homunculus would spontaneously decide to defend their weak point. *Someone* had to be behind that.

Calcolo held her trembling arm and managed to stop it from shaking. She scolded herself for overthinking things yet again. There were countless people who came to an unfortunate end just because they noticed things they shouldn’t be noticing.

“I’ve got good news, too,” said Halna.

“Yes?” asked Calcolo.

“We have a new transfer student. Not only would she be good for publicity, both externally and internally among the students, but she’ll also be a good role model for them. Not to mention, she’s had experience,” said Halna.

The moment the topic became about the transfer student, Halna's pitch raised even higher.

"I have to head back to headquarters. Give her a warm welcome for me, would you?" asked Halna.

Halna smiled brightly, which made Calcolo shake in fear, as she smiled back nervously.

☆ **Tetty Goodgripp**

What kind of accident happened back there? It was lucky that no one died, but there were a lot more injured. Adelheid was stabbed, and was still healing, while Ranyui was still hospitalized, on the border of life and death even now.

Wrappy had been stabbed, Dory too. Arlie's armor had been ripped apart by none other than Tetty herself. They didn't even go to the hospital. The memories of when she had been brainwashed were still vivid in her mind. She felt nauseous just thinking about it, and had nothing but respect for her classmates, fighting in such a chaotic situation.

It was good that there weren't any casualties. Of course, Tetty didn't think everything was okay, but she was happy that no one died. Every time she saw a classmate, she would feel some sense of relief.

Only five days after the incident, the school was reopened. Magical Girls had stronger mental fortitude, but five days felt a little short. Still, Tetty kept her chin up, and attended school regardless. When Tetty saw the gardener, she cried and hugged him. When she went to the classroom and saw her group members, she cried again and hugged them all tightly. She was just so happy that everyone was okay.

"Miss Calcolo's coming!" said someone's voice as everyone returned to their seats. It felt just like any other day, but not quite. Ranyui still wasn't here, hospitalized until who knows how long. Then there was Kana. She was sitting more closely with the other Group Two members, and surprisingly, chatting with Mepis about something. Tetty wondered what it was they were talking about, but she couldn't quite hear them.

Calcolo entered the room, and Tetty, as class president, had everyone stand up and bow. Then, she noticed that Calcolo didn't look too well. There was a girl standing beside her as well. She didn't look familiar to Tetty.

Arlie shrieked out. Tetty didn't know what she was saying, but the tone seemed to be one of joy.

"Er... this is our newest transfer student, Snow White."

After Calcolo spoke her name, there were murmurs everywhere. Even Tetty recognized the name. She was a celebrity.



...Where had she heard her name before?

“Hello. I’m Snow White. A pleasure to meet you all.”

The girl bowed her head, then raised it immediately. Her appearance, her voice, her posture. All of them looked far more mature than what her age would indicate.

Afterword

Hello, my name is Asari Endo! It's been a while since I've written a main arc. But here I am, the Magical Girl Asari Endo, one who doesn't show up in the books because he writes the books!

I did manage to write Episodes Delta, but I knew that that would just be a buffer until the real thing got out! (I did manage to hit deadlines though). It can feel painful to miss deadlines because publishing can take a long time afterwards (but hey, e-books can publish immediately).

Black is a little different than other arcs. There are a lot more than just sixteen characters here that are being focused on. Not only that, everyone here is on the same team. There are no secret traitor maids, or elves with harpoons killing people left and right. Everyone is actually a team.

You may be wondering "Did he commit heresy?" "What happened to all the death?" "Was he corrupted by all the short stories he wrote?" Well don't worry guys, because in White, the latest transfer student may just get a one way ticket to... well, I can't say too much, can I? What I can say is that the next volume will be White. Actually, my editor, Mr. S, encouraged me to be 'more creative' and try and think of a less obvious title than White. I mean, what else can I make? White's pretty much the default. I guess I could always change it to Viridian Green.

But I digress. The reason I made this setting a middle school setting was because I'm introducing so many new characters while also reintroducing old characters, that newer readers might get confused if there were too many varying occupations and ages. So everyone's in middle school. Well, not *everyone* is a middle schooler. Some are, but some aren't, but they're in middle school anyways. You can't escape school, kids.

Now, this may surprise you, but I myself am *not* a middle school student, so it was quite difficult for me to imagine what middle school students do. However, I do have a middle school niece, so she was able to tell me just what middle schoolers do. Thank you so much, dear niece of mine.

Now, perhaps one of you middle schoolers reading this would say "hey, I'm not like this at all." To that, I say, my niece is actually a Magical Girl, so she doesn't really

have that much time in middle school, so she can only give me the vaguest details. Being a Magical Girl is hard work y'know. So even if you think these aren't middle school kids being middle school kids, don't blame the Magical Girl who gave me this information. Thank you.

I'd like to thank my editor for spending so much time with this book in a mountain of my manuscript just going at it day by day, like a lion eating its prey. Thank you so much Mr. S. I know I gave you a mountain of work, but I couldn't have done this without you.

And thank you Maruino for all the illustrations and the design pitches we did. Lots of them had changed since the initial designs, but I kept all of them in my secret treasure chest. I know, I'm despicable, but I still get profit from this book. Alas, that's just how the industry of Magical Girls works...

Thank you to Chihiro Yuuki and Kazaki Morinaka for their wonderful comments on Black. Virtual Light Novel writer Asari Endo thanks you~

I'll be publishing the sequel to this book as soon as possible, not to mention finishing up Breakdown.

See you next time in Viridian Gre... I mean, White!