

***\*Note: These are just excerpts from the novels that I personally recommend reading to enhance one's experience of the game, and do not reflect or substitute as the full passages and reading experience of the respective novels.***

**Replicant Gestalt Records Novel Excerpts (Devola & Popola specific):**

<https://imgur.com/a/cFD2GjB>



### **KAINÉ & TYRANN DEBUT, MEETING NIER**

AS SHE WRAPPED a new set of bandages around her left leg. Kainé found herself falling deep into thought.

Having entered the world in a body that was both male and female, she was used to being seen and mocked as an anomaly. And once a Shade came to occupy the entire left half of her body, she had also become used to being treated like a monster.

So when some kid showed up and started attacking her with magic, her only thought was a tired *Again?* She set about scaring him so he'd leave her alone-which was about the only kind of interaction she had with other people these days.

This boy turned out to be different. After the fight, he apologized for what he had done and he seemed to be *genuinely* sorry. She couldn't remember the last time someone had done that and in fact, she was fairly certain it had never happened before. Rather than providing comfort, this truth gave Kainé a horribly unsettled feeling in her stomach.

A ripple of goose bumps suddenly ran up the left side of her body as staticky laughter echoed in her ears. She would never get used to her Shade, Tyrann, speaking directly in her mind. It was more than uncomfortable-it was annoying.

*"Sure are some weirdos out there, huh? Kid musta had a few screws loose to treat a monster like people. I mean, unless he's the kind of idiot who thinks saying let's be friends is enough to keep him from being attacked! Kya ha ha!"*

"Shut up," replied Kainé. Though she didn't need to speak to the Shade aloud, the unpleasant feeling inside her could not be released in any other way.

*"Aww, are you taking the idiot kid's side? Do you wanna be fwiends with him? How precious!"*

The moment she realized Tyrann was just egging her on again, the jumbled mess of emotions in her heart went quiet.

"Whaaat, not gonna get angry at me this time?"

Tough titty for you, Kaine thought in response. The twisted Shade loved nothing more than to feed on the darkest, most horrible emotions; he would smack his lips and wait for wrath, hatred, and loathing to fill Kaine's entire being. Once she realized this, she also realized how stupid it was to get worked up over everything he said, which was why she would feed him no more crumbs today.

"See, this is what makes you such a terrific asshole."

You're old news. Get used to it.

Tyrann, no longer amused by the exchange, gave no reply. Yet he was old news to her and had been for a while. She'd stopped counting how many years it had been since he possessed her. Otherwise, the number would have been on her mind constantly. How many years since her grandmother died? How many years since her only living relative had been killed by a Shade? How many years since she had nearly died herself? How many years spent in this abominable body?

It wasn't as though her life before all that had been particularly peaceful. The other villagers had long shunned her for being intersex, despite the fact that she'd done nothing to any of them. They persecuted her family simply because she was different. The harassment proved too much for her parents, who both died when she was young. Even the elderly grandmother who took her in was forced to move their home beyond the bounds of the community. This experience taught Kainé that being different was reason enough to be attacked.

Still, the fact that those things were able to hurt her back then was. testimony to how peaceful the days were, relatively speaking. For human violence and cruelty paled in comparison to what Shades wrought.

The Shade that killed her grandmother had been massive. Overpowering. Brutal. It enjoyed the terror and pain it brought and did not make quick work of the old woman. Instead, it watched her slowly perish beneath its massive claw, all the while delighting in Kaine's anguish.

Though her grandmother had been killed right in front of her, Kainé could do nothing about it. The kindly woman who had placed a white flower in her hair and said, "You're my granddaughter, and I don't give two shits what anyone says," had vanished into a dirty red stain beneath the filthy talon of a Shade.

Rage had overcome Kainé in that moment, and she leaped onto the creature and attempted to stab it to death. This wasn't just reckless; it was stupid. And only now-after all these years-did she finally understand why. She never could have killed such a beast with the puny knife she wielded. The end result when she nearly died, and the Shade escaped unharmed, should have been obvious to anyone.

Yet the reason she did not die was the oddity that attempted to take over her body at the moment of death a sticky black thing slithered across her shattered left arm and into her missing left eye.

*"Give me that weird body of yours," it whispered in her mind. "Give it to me! I wanna stand on the ground, feel the rain, taste the wind..."*

The creature was Tyrann, but his desires did not come to fruition because Kaine's will to live stopped him. Her grandmother's dying wish had been for her to live, and she intended to do so no matter what.

Having failed at overtaking Kainé, Tyrann repaired her body and set up residence inside her. He was clearly intent on taking over the moment she slipped up, and he now spent his days provoking and abusing her for the sheer cruelty of it.

Kainé's musings on the past came to a halt as she raised her head. She sensed a Shade. This was something she had been unable to do when she was human, but she now shared the senses of the Shade who lived inside her.

Darkness spilled from the tunnel leading toward the village. Blades in hand, she rushed to beat them back.

*"There's more, Sunshine."*

As Kainé listened to the boy and book converse, a strange feeling overcame her: a smile that was gently tugging at the corner of her mouth. "Cram it, book," she said.

"BOOK?! How dare you! I am Grimoire Weiss, wielder of arcane-"

"Weiss, then."

"Do not abbreviate my name!"

Kainé was secretly delighted at how she'd managed to piss the book off so completely. And while she knew Tyrann wouldn't be happy with the whole friends development, he was staying quiet for the moment, which only amused her further.

"You're an ass-but you're right. I can't just live for revenge."

Kainé stood. Her footing was unsteady, but the sensation felt refreshing. New. The part of her that had lived solely for revenge had died, and a different Kainé was rising in its place..

"So you'll come with us?" asked the boy.

Rather than answering his cautious question, she reached out to the blades on the ground beside her. Now that her swords had fulfilled their role as tools of revenge, she wasn't sure what kind of weapons they would become. But...

"These swords of mine need a true home," she said. "But you'll do for now."

Indistinct as it was, Kainé was finally starting to see where her path might take her.



## KAINÉ & EMIL

"Get out of here, Emil!" she cried. But before she could say any more, Emil cut her off.

"No! I won't abandon these people!" Emil's voice grew louder as he spoke. "You once told me that my eyes had value, and that I shouldn't be ashamed of them! You told me that even a life like mine had purpose!"

Emil's words pierced her heart like an arrow. From the moment they'd first met-no, the very *second*-she could tell he was shunning his own power. In the battle they'd fought together, the

moment he'd shouted, "You guys go! This is my fight!" reminded Kainé of the version of herself from long ago-the version from before she met Nier and learned what friendship was.

That was why, as they parted, she'd brushed her fingers over Emil's blindfold and said:

*Your eyes are not a sin.*

There were people in this world who would lash out at what was different without a second thought-a truth Kainé knew from a lifetime of experience. People rejected her and held her in contempt, and before long, she assumed they were right and it was all her fault. It was her grandmother who'd finally righted that misconception, and she'd wanted to do the same for Emil.

*Don't ever be ashamed of them. They're a vital part of you.*

She had taken Emil's hand and placed it on the left side of her arm-the portion where Tyrann squirmed beneath her skin. *You're not the only one is what she'd wanted to tell him. You are not alone.*

*This arm is an accursed weapon.*

Emil had gasped when she'd said that. He must have understood that what he was touching was inhuman.

*I thought I would only need it until I earned my revenge.*

And earn it she had. She'd been ready to die at that point, but once she'd gained friends, the option of a meaningless death was no longer one she was willing to consider.

*But now I use it to keep my friends safe.*

*There's a reason I'm alive-that my arm is alive. And there's a reason for your eyes too.*

A reason to live. A future. A future every child should have a chance to seize, one where a horrible power did not mean you had to surrender everything that mattered.

*Keep going-always. Never give up. You'll find your answers.* Those words-the last she'd spoken to Emil until seeing him again in the village library-had encouraged him to act as he did.

"I can't stop now!" cried Emil, snapping Kainé back to reality. "I won't just sit around and let you fight while I stay behind! I want to use this power to protect my friends!"

*I can't hold him back any more than this,* Kainé thought, especially since she'd do the same thing in his place. She knew better than anyone how much force was behind the desire to protect what mattered.

"Just don't die on me," she said finally. Emil was clearly forgoing his own safety to take on the enemy, but those five words were the best she could come up with to hold him back somewhat.

"I won't, Kainé! Now let's take care of these shit-hogs!"

His word choice mimicked one Kainé had made earlier and was so out of character that she burst into laughter.

Right on," she cried. "I like it!"

## **KAINÉ PETRIFIED**

"No! Stay back, Kainé!"

Nier's voice halted Kainé in her tracks; she'd started moving before she even realized it. She likely would have dashed forward in an attempt to save her friends, completely forgetting about the danger behind her, had he not stopped her.

"You have to seal the door!"

Kainé was trapped. She couldn't move from her spot, and yet the strange attacks were still ravaging Grimoire Weiss. At this rate, both he and Nier would meet their ends before long.

*"Yeah, this looks bad, all right! You got the Shadowlord himself in front of you and Mr. Massive Head behind you. Looks like you and your little friends are screwed from all directions!"*

*No, we're not!*

*"Aw, really? C'mon, just give in already. Gimme your body. Not like you have any reason to keep living once your pwecious widdle fwiends are dead, right? Riiiiight?"*

*Wrong! This isn't over! Nier and Weiss and Emil are still alive!*

"Not for much longer! Hell, that book's writing his last will and testament while you and I sit here and gab!"

Though pain still colored Nier's face, Weiss had fallen silent. It was almost as if he'd been cut off from the rest of them just before some unknowable force stole him away for good.

"Our ultimate goal ." intoned Grimoire Weiss, "fuse Shadowlord... Become one..."

As the incomprehensible string of words spilled from Grimoire Weiss's mouth, Tyrann began cackling with glee.

"Now THOSE are some last words if I've ever heard 'em! Hell, you remember what it was like with a special someone else, right, Sunshine? You and your precious grandmama?"

*Shut the fuck up! This isn't the same, and those are NOT his last words!*

A sudden rage enveloped Kainé, lending her voice a strength she didn't know it possessed until she began to scream.

"Weiss, you dumbass! Start making sense, you rotten book, or you're gonna be sorry! Maybe I'll rip your pages out, one-by-one! Or maybe I'll put you in the goddamn furnace! How can someone with such a big smart brain get hypnotized like a little bitch, huh? Oh, Shadowlord! I love you, Shadowlord! Come over here and give Weiss a big sloppy kiss, Shadowlord! Now pull your head out of your goddamn ass and start fucking helping us!"

Amazingly, this caused no response at all; Weiss simply continued floating toward the black book, repeating nonsensical words like paradise and unite in a monotone voice.

"Dammit!" Kainé yelled again. "If we don't do something, that black book will absorb Weiss!"

Nier stood, blood spilling from the wound in his shoulder, and managed to wheeze out the name of his companion.

*"Ha! Keep trying, kiddos, but it ain't gonna work! You're all gonna die!"*

*You're done! Finito!"*

"Whoa, hold on!" cried Tyrann as he began to piece together what she intended to do. But this was her show now, and she paid him no mind.

"I want you to petrify me."

The corners of Emil's lips went lopsided. Even from a distance, Kainé could tell he was biting the inside of his mouth.

"You can use me to keep this thing locked away down there."

Even if Emil could, simply turning the door to stone would not be enough. This Shade was so powerful, it could live on even as just a head and would likely shatter a stone door with ease. They needed to fight fire with fire to seal it away for good-they needed the power of a Shade.

"Are you freakin' KIDDING me right now, Sunshine? You gone soft in the head or something? Because I am NOT cool with this!"

*I didn't ask for your opinion, Tyrann-but feel free to leave my body if you Oh, that's right! You CAN'T!*

Nier languidly lifted his head from Emil's arms. "Kainé ." he croaked. "Stop..."

"He's right!" Emil chimed in. "It's suicide! You can't do it."

Kainé smiled at him. "Your powers exist to protect others, right?"

*I'll use my Shade to protect others too. That's been the plan for a long time now.*

*"Stop it, Sunshine! I don't want this!"*

Tyrann began appearing on her skin but didn't attempt anything further. In truth, he couldn't do anything more than that, and though he might have been insane, he at least understood that much.

"Just do it, Emil," said Kainé.

"But-"

The more they argued, the more the door shuddered in its frame. Would it crack first, or would the remaining hinge finally pop free? Either way, no one would survive if things got to that point.

"We don't have a choice!"

After a moment that was both an instant and an eternity, Emil nodded. His slim shoulders and slender hands trembled as he untied his bandage. Large droplets rolled down his cheeks onto the floor below. It was the first time Kainé had ever seen his eyes, and they were beautiful.

"No more crying. Okay?"

Suddenly, she felt her limbs grow heavy. She tried to look down to see what was happening and found she couldn't move at all. The petrification had begun.

"Grow strong," she said to Nier. "Never lose hope."

*Do it for your sister. Save her from the Shadowlord.*

She didn't know if Nier replied-she knew only that he was there.

*"I don't want this!"* cried Tyrann from the depths of her increasingly foggy mind. *"I need more! I wanna kill more! Destroy more! I want to make your body my own and do whatever I want! No! No, no, no, no, nooooo!"*

Though he was throwing an increasingly noisy fit, she could no longer feel the writhing left half of her body. As her field of vision began to darken and narrow, something popped up in front of her.

"Weiss..." she began.

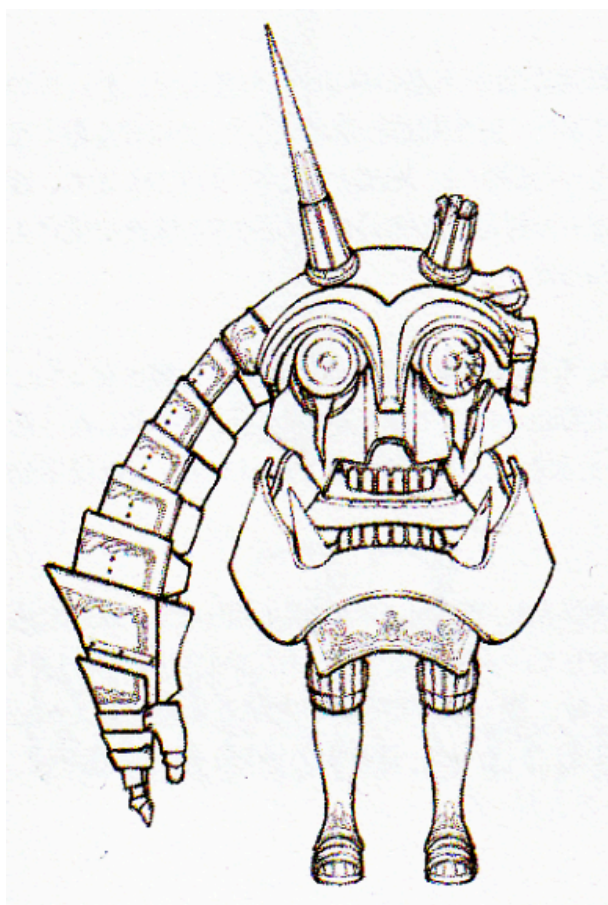
"Spare me the goodbye, hussy. I imagine it will take more than this to kill you."

"Heh. I doubt it."

Brief as their time together had been, Nier, Weiss, and Emil were the friends whom she fought with-and the first people in her life ever worthy of the name. She would never forget them. No matter how much time passed and even from within walls of stone-she would never forget them.

All was quiet. The noise from moments earlier felt like a dream. Tyrann was silent. If this was her reward for turning to stone, then maybe it wasn't so bad after all.

And with that, Kainé's time stopped.



## **KAINÉ AND GRETTEL**

A leader of Shades. That's all it was in Nier's eyes and Weiss's and Emil's as well.

*"I am not their leader! It is I who rely on them! It is they who saved me!"*

Kainé's eyes went wide. Gretel understood Weiss and Nier, which meant Shades could understand human speech even though humans couldn't understand them. Thinking about it, she realized the Shade that killed her grandmother had enjoyed the conversation between itself and Kainé. At the time, she thought it was because it liked to see human faces twisted in agony and hear human voices colored by pain, but now she realized it understood every word the entire time. In fact, it was because it understood human speech that it was able to cast a spell and speak to Kainé as if it were her grandmother. That thing had been perfectly aware of the entire situation and still chose to mutilate her only family while toying with her feelings.

Her gut lurched at the thought. That thing and this Gretel were both Shades, and she hated that fact.

*"Grimoire Weiss was taken away." Gretel cried out to the little Shades. "And when Hansel died, I thought there was no reason for me to exist anymore. But because I had all of you because you listened to me you saved me! I thought we'd be able to spend the rest of our lives together!"*

Gretel appeared ready to say more, but Tyrann's mad cackling drowned out the words.

*"Kya ha ha ha! Oh, you're funny! I'm gonna start cryin' here!"*

Kainé felt herself beset by dueling urges—one to scold Tyrann into silence and one to thank him for preventing her from hearing the rest of Gretel's speech. But she didn't want her possessor to notice how she felt, so she pushed both thoughts down and leaned into the weight of her blades.

"These little bastards just keep coming!" she yelled. Her voice was as loud as she could make it a desperate attempt to drown out the others around her. But Gretel only yelled back even louder:

"Dammit!" replied Kainé. She fired a bolt of magic at Gretel, who was now moving too quickly for swords to work. "Dammit, dammit, dammit!"

They needed to subdue this thing now. She wouldn't let it speak any more than it already had she couldn't take it.

"Hey there, Sunshine! You ain't feeling bad for this freak, are ya?"

*Shut up, Tyrann! What do you care?!*

Kainé continued to blast the Shade with spell after spell, emptying her mind so she didn't have to think, and Tyrann would have nothing to question.

*"Ain't no turnin' back now," said Tyrann, his voice suddenly quiet. "Gotta lust for blood. Embrace the slaughter."*

*I know.*

*"All we know is the thrill of battle. Ain't that right?"*

*My hands exist to kill Shades. That's it. Now that my grandmother is avenged, I kill Shades for Nier. I made up my mind. I...*

She heard the sound of metal clashing with metal, followed by someone calling her name. When she snapped back to reality, she saw something flying right at her.

A powerful force slammed into her.

"Oh, you're kiddin' me!" cried Tyrann. It was clear from his tone that she hadn't evaded the attack, and a quick examination revealed that Gretel's weapon was now embedded deep within her chest.

The world spun.

Her body collided with the floor.

Then came pain.

She couldn't breathe. She couldn't move. She couldn't even lift a single finger. While the battle wasn't over, her panicked urge to get up and keep fighting was quickly withering away.

"Move Move!"

For a moment, Kainé thought she was hearing her own voice. But when she saw Gretel out of the corner of her hazy vision, she realized the Shade was talking.

"Come on, you stupid arm, move!"

Gretel continued to scream from its position on the floor. It still seemed willing to fight, despite how heavily injured it was. But in that case, what was Kainé doing?

*"We are incomplete. But our friends make us whole!"*

*What was the Shade talking about?*

*"We are mocked, abused, and hated. But our friends keep us strong! That is what keeps us going!"*

Kainé understood the individual words, but the way they fit together made no sense.

*"Do not stand in the way of our lives!"*

She could hear Emil scream for someone to strike it down, then felt a thud as the creature fell to earth again. Clearly it had righted itself at some point, but Kainé wasn't sure, because none of her senses were working properly.

"Kainé, are you all right? Kainé!"

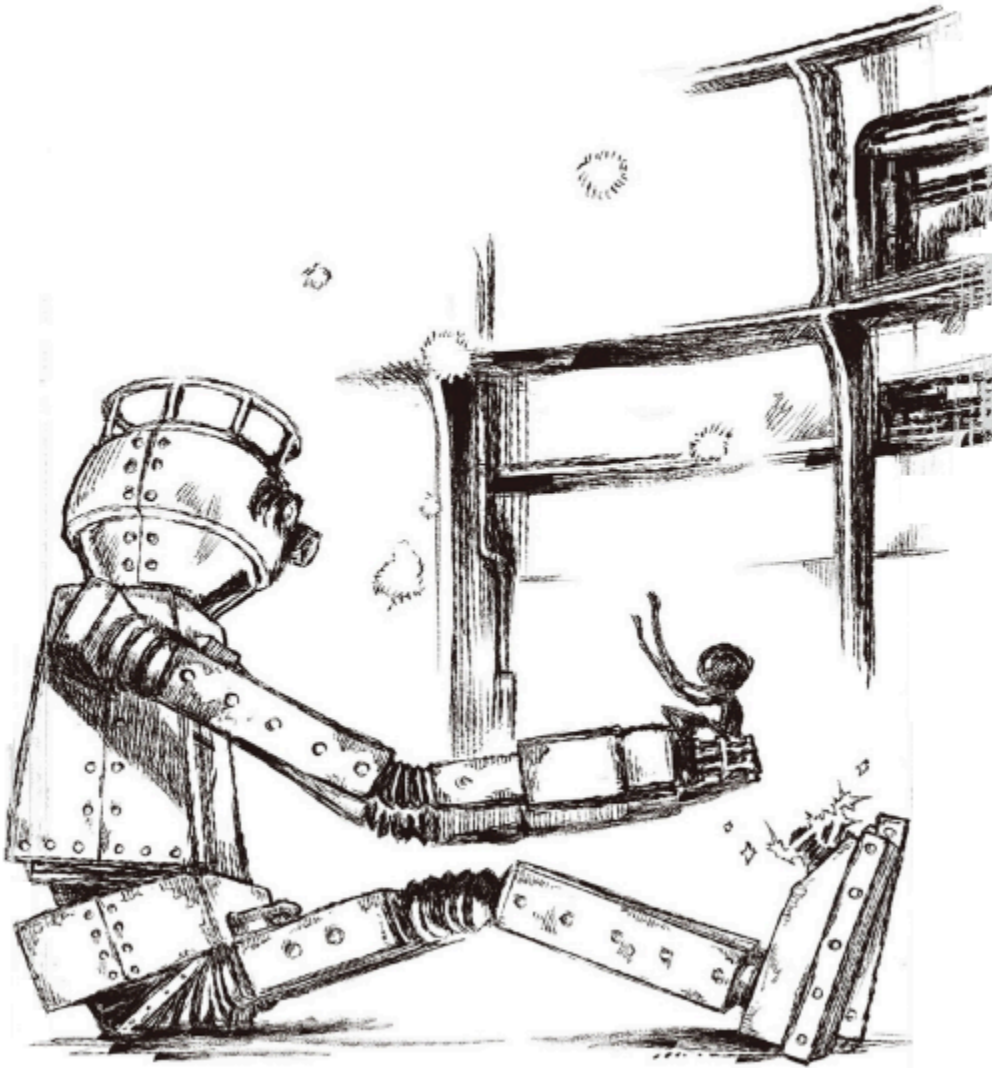
Nier's voice grew distant as Kainé's vision went dark. All she could hear was Tyrann laughing. This was bad. Soon—very soon—her body would be overrun by the Shade that was bloodthirst incarnate.

*Get...back* was what she wanted to say, but she could scarcely speak.

*"It's all over for you, Sunshine!"*

With Tyrann's triumphant screech came darkness.

**KAINÉ, BEEPY, & KALIL**



“I've never heard of a Shade living with a machine,” Emil said with wonder as they moved through the Junk Heap. “What's that about?”

“Don't know, don't care,” Nier spat. “All that matters is that we kill them both.”

“Right,” added Kainé. Nier hadn't been looking for agreement, but she answered anyway. His bold words were just what she needed to hear right now, so she decided to try her hand at it as well.

Still, a Shade and a robot were both enemies, which meant they'd launch an attack the moment the group encountered them. For Kainé's part, she felt it would be easier to kill the robot since they didn't talk. Even the Shades that only strung together meaningless, nonsensical sequences of words would have been all right. But more than that? Actual speech? She wasn't sure she could handle it.

*“How'd it go again, Sunshine? ‘Don't hurt my friends’?”*

Kainé scowled when Tyrann spoke. He had such a talent for saying the exact right thing to make her feel completely despondent.

*“So you did sympathize with that big ol' thing? Aww, I feel the tears coming—and the laughs! Kyaaaa ha ha ha!”*

Arguing would only make Tyrann happier, so she kept her mouth shut. But she still couldn't help thinking about it. Why were some Shades so intelligent? Why did they mourn the deaths of their companions? Their only function was to attack people, which meant their mental capabilities should be beneath that of worms.

Then again, was that *really* the case? Tyrann was crafty, cruel, and clearly very intelligent, and he was a Shade. The prospect that some of the creatures might have one of those traits shouldn't come as a surprise.

*“Hey, now!”* cackled Tyrann. *“Cruel? You're cruel—even if you're right! So what are you gonna do if this Shade talks, huh? What if it's intelligent but also nice and polite? What if you get an earful of a sob story? Then what, sister?”*

Instead of telling him to shut up, Kainé leaped, letting gravity drag her down as she plunged her blades into a robot near a large wooden crate. She withdrew her swords, then thrust again, throwing all of her momentum into the action. Over and over.

Again and again.

Suddenly, sparks flew and there was a horrible noise. Panicked, she leaped away, the blast of air from the explosion knocking her onto her ass, causing her to bark with laughter.

*Not exactly graceful there, huh?*

“Kainé!” Emil cried. “You okay?!” Nier called.

They started to approach her, but she held up a hand to stop them and picked herself up.

“Yeah. I'm fine.”

She plucked a few shards of metal out of her arm. Blood poured out momentarily, but skin soon scabbed over the wound as the pain receded. Even if she was wounded—even if she bled—Kainé always returned to normal. This was the power of a Shade—and it meant she wasn't human.

She told herself that even if their next foe was an intelligent Shade, she would still kill it. Even if it was kind and considerate, it was still a Shade. Not a person. All that matters is that we kill them both was what Nier had said, and Kainé knew he was right.

“Intruder detected. Scanning. Scanning. Exterminating.”

As the robot stomped the ground, the Shade atop it threw up both arms. *“Do it, Beepy! Beat 'em good!”*

Kainé couldn't believe her ears. That didn't sound like something a Shade would say—it was more like a phrase you'd hear from a human toddler. A childlike Shade? A talking robot? She'd figured their foe was going to cause her at least a little heartburn, but this was something else entirely.

The robot stomped the ground again, causing the floor to shudder and bring Kainé to her knees.

“That thing is commanding the robot somehow!” Grimoire Weiss cried.

*Wrong, book. Those aren't commands.*

“Aim for the legs!” yelled Emil. “Knock it down!”

It didn't seem Emil could hear it either. In fact, none of Kainé's companions had any idea what the Shade and robot were talking about.

*“C'mon, Sunshine! Rip 'em to shreds! I thought you were gonna kill every Shade you could find, so LET'S GET TO KILLING ALREADY!”*

Tyrann was jabbing right where it hurt, but he was right. She was going to kill every Shade—she had to.

“Take out the Shade!” Kainé yelled as a way to encourage herself. Her voice was louder than normal; without that effort, she wasn't sure she'd be able to keep a handle on her swords. As she yelled, Nier plunged his blade into the joint of the robot's leg, and Emil fired his magic. When Kainé followed suit a moment later, the robot's voice began to stutter.

“Exterminating . . . ing . . . ing . . . ing . . .”

A dull sensation ran up her arms as she swung her blades, almost like she was cutting into stone. The horrid sound of metal on metal reached her ears. She slashed again and this time felt something pop loose. She'd harbored doubts as to whether swords would work on a robot so thoroughly covered in metal plating, but the joints were weaker than she had expected. Once the outer plates were dealt with, the insides were surprisingly fragile.

"Beepy, stop!" the little Shade cried out. "That's enough! You're gonna be destroyed if you keep fighting!"

*Cried out? No. That wasn't right. That was a different voice. It had to be. Shades couldn't cry out in distress.*

"Dammit, that's a Shade," growled Kainé. "It's a Shade!"

When the robot raised its foot, Nier rolled out of the way, taking the opportunity to send forth a volley of magic. Kainé heard something break, and a moment later saw a crack appear on the robot's leg.

"Must defend... my mission...", sputtered the robot.

"Stop!" it cried, throwing its arms wide. *"Beepy's my best friend in the whole world! Stop hurting him!"*

The way it was trying to protect someone besides itself was the same as those incomplete Shades. And just like them, it was too weak to do so, fated only to disappear into mist. As it approached them, arms raised, Nier's sword flashed, tearing the Shade neatly in two and causing it to start melting.

*"I'm sorry, Beepy,"* Kalil whimpered as it collapsed to the floor. *"I'm not strong enough . . . I wanted . . . to be with you . . . forever . . ."*

As the lines of Kalil's silhouette began to fade, it crawled toward P-33. This was different from the other incomplete Shades—how it so desperately wanted to be with its friend to the very end.

"Kalil . . . Together . . ."

P-33's arms shuddered. Even though it was so horribly injured that it could barely function, the robot continued to reach out for its companion. But Kalil was already gone, its darkened form turned to mist.

"Beepy alone . . . Beepy . . . cry?"

The light vanished from P-33's eyes. The whirring of machinery fell silent. All Kainé could hear was Nier's breathing. Both robot and Shade were no more. But in the silence that followed, she heard another noise: the soft clatter of something falling from P-33's motionless body.

“Nier, look!” Emil cried. “It's a fragment! It's part of the key to the Shadowlord's castle!”

The party hadn't come to the Junk Heap to take out a random robot; they came because of the phrase “The Law of Robotics.” The fact the robot contained what they needed only meant it was doomed to die in the first place. Knowing its death had a purpose made Kainé feel slightly better about the entire affair—and yet she hated that she needed to be reassured at all.

“You stupid machine! You killed my family! You took everything from me!”

Gideon grabbed a nearby pipe and brought it down on the wrecked remains of the robot. The sound of the impact rattled the acrid air in the chamber in a most uncomfortable way. “Why did you have to be here?! Why you?! Why?!”

Kainé knew Gideon's mother had been killed by a machine; Weiss once mentioned her being shot by some kind of defense robot. Still, she found it unlikely P-33 had anything to do with it.

“You took everything from me!” Gideon howled as he pounded the robot.

“You killed my brother! You killed my mother! If it weren't for you, they'd still be alive!”

*Wait—P-33 killed his brother? The robot who called the Shade Kalil and who was called Beepy in turn? The one who vowed to protect and stay with his little Shade friend and wanted to see the outside world with him? The one who reached for him as he died? That robot?*

“Hey, come on. That's enough,” Nier said gently.

“I did it!” Gideon shrieked. “Can you believe it?! I did it! I DID IT!”

In truth, it was Kainé, Nier, Emil, and Weiss who took down P-33. But Gideon was too far gone to worry about such minor details.

“Now that this goddamn thing is dead, I can forage wherever I want! Just wait, you goddamn freak! Now I can make all kinds of powerful weapons! I'm gonna make a fine weapon! Gonna rip those machines apart! Every single one of them! Aaah ha ha ha! So many weapons! I'll rip 'em up!”

The laughter pouring from Gideon's throat caused Kainé to shiver.

“Just leave it to me! I'll rip every robot to shreds!”

“Look, we get it, okay?” Nier placed a calming hand on the boy's shoulder, but he kept laughing.

“Yesss. Gooooood!”

Kainé had been waiting for Tyrann to chime in. This kind of dark emotional outpouring was right up his alley.

*“People always pretend like they did nothing wrong. They always find a way to blame something else. And I freakin' LOVE IT!”*

*Something else?* That meant Tyrann, too, thought it wasn't P-33 who killed Gideon's brother.

*“Don't you get it, Sunshine? Kid pinned the blame on the robot so he had an excuse to kill it. Remember how he said Big Bro died in an accident? Well, I'm betting this psycho caused the accident HIMSELF! Kyaaa ha ha ha!”*

Though Kainé hated the idea, she knew Tyrann—the supreme connoisseur of the ugliest and most horrible parts of the human mind—knew all there was to know about such emotions. So perhaps it wasn't an idea at all but a fact.

*“Beautiful. What a perfect example of humanity!”*

*This? Humanity? Some kid smashing a pipe against a corpse while he howls in anger and madness is humanity?*

Kainé remembered the way P-33 said the word alone in his last moments.

She remembered how Kalil begged them to stop hurting him. So which of these things was the true example of humanity?

Kainé had no answer.

## **EMIL, KAINÉ, AERIE**

The way she spoke made Emil think she knew the people of The Aerie.

“You've been to The Aerie before, Kainé?” he asked. But his friend stayed silent, forcing Nier to answer in her stead. “She used to live there.” “Really?!”

*That* must have been where he'd heard the name before! People always bring up places they've lived at least once—and though Emil didn't recall discussing the matter at length, the name likely came up in relation to another topic.

“Aren't you glad to be going back home, Kainé?” he asked in his everchipper way. Her eyes narrowed—a sign she was unhappy. “That place is a shithole.”

Emil didn't understand what that meant, exactly, but he was acutely aware of how upset she was. Perhaps she'd had some bad experiences in her old hometown.

No. This wasn't a “perhaps” situation—she did have bad experiences. Emil knew full well the cruelty people who believed they were “normal” could show toward those they deemed otherwise.

This thought led him to recall what happened after he took on his current form and he and Nier set out to undo Kainé's petrification.

While Emil had been to the village library to check on Kainé before, that trip was different. People stared. They looked away. Some even made a display of scowling at him or whispered among themselves. Far from finding a friendly face, Emil encountered only hate and disdain. He was certain he would have faced even worse treatment—perhaps even had a stone or two tossed his way—had Nier not been with him.

So when Popola asked Emil to stay out of the village, he understood. Even walking the short distance between the eastern gate and the library showed him all he needed to know. And when Popola explained that he and Kainé were actually the ones at risk, Emil agreed at once, but he wasn't very happy about it.

When Kainé said she was used to sleeping outside, Emil took that to mean she'd been subject to discrimination and shunning in the places she'd lived before. He knew now that had been her situation in The Aerie, and he felt ashamed he'd called it her home.

As she began to walk away with the rest of the group, Emil whispered a silent apology in his heart.

## **NIER, AERIE, SACRIFICE**

Emil shuddered as he sobbed. Nier reached out and gently ran a hand over his head, but it did nothing to calm the tears.

“Yeah,” he said finally. “And you saved us.”

Emil looked up at last, confused.

“If it wasn't for you, we'd all be dead,” continued Nier. He didn't think his words would be enough to soothe Emil's conscience—it had been too cruel an act for so kind a person—but he still wanted to try. Even mentioning how most of The Aerie villagers had been absorbed by the vortex before he went out of control would likely do little to assuage Emil's guilt. Yet Nier still had to try something.

“We owe you,” he said.

“But I . . .”

“It's all right.”

Nier placed his hand on Emil's shoulder before standing up. The deep gouges in the ravine were blanketed by a white mist. As he looked across it, he was greeted by reshaped mountainsides and a callously blue sky. It reminded him how great the destruction had been—and also how great the sacrifice.

“Don't look back.”

He said this as much to himself as he did to his companions. They could not let this stop them. Considering the weight of what had been lost so far, they had to keep going.

He opened his clenched fist and held it out to Emil, showing him the meager compensation for all that had been broken and lost.

“That's . . .” began Emil before swallowing his words. In Nier's palm was the Sacrifice fragment—the entire reason they had come to The Aerie to begin with.

### **KAINÉ, LOUISE**

Louise gazed down at the postman with great sadness. *“But why? Don't you want to look at the sea together?”*

“You've been lying to me this whole time?! You . . . You're a monster!”

She paused. Though humans could not understand Shades, Shades could understand humans.

*“I want . . . to be human. I want us . . . to be together.”*

Kainé knew the pain of being called a monster—and though Louise was a Shade, she must have felt that same pain, if not something greater. She had so wished to be human for the postman's sake after all.



## **NIER, SHADOWLORD, DREAMS**

THE WORLD WAS white. Nier slowed his steps and tilted his head. Every step created a creak in both sound and sensation. It felt like he was walking through the desert, but the colors were all wrong. Sand wasn't supposed to be white.

But this wasn't sand. It was salt.

He glanced at the narrow sky above and found a series of staggeringly tall buildings clustered together. Looking at them made him dizzy, so he quickly lowered his gaze. As he did, he spotted a red tower among the haphazardly placed structures. It was tall and thin, the tip bent slightly like a sword.

Suddenly, the red tower vanished; a powerful gust of wind had stirred the salt into the air, blocking it from view.

Strange. Had he always known this white powder was salt? He'd never tasted it or smelled it, after all. And while it felt exactly like sand, it looked more like snow. The way it sat in heaps around him reminded him of a picture book he'd read to Yonah as a child—the story of a girl from a cold, snowy land who was searching for a stolen boy.

*Searching? Stolen?*

*Yonah.*

*I have to find her. The Shadowlord took her, and then . . .*

Nier began to run. For some reason, he knew exactly where to go: a squat building located nearby.

*I need to get back right now.*

*But why?*

*I killed them. I killed them all. I need to tell her it's okay.*

*Killed? Who? Shades? The Shadowlord?*

*No. That's not right. I haven't killed the Shadowlord yet.*

As he rushed into a dim building, he noticed his feet had begun to make a dry, scraping sound. Looking down, he saw they were clad in a strange pair of shoes.

*What are these?*

His clothes were also odd, as was the stick in his hand. It was some kind of metal; its compact size belied an impressive weight. When he saw it was sullied with Shade blood, he understood it was a weapon.

*How did I get this? And what about my sword? I hope I didn't lose it. That would be bad.*

He whirled around, determined to find his trusty blade, when a thin voice stopped him in his tracks.

“You're back?”

It was the voice he'd been so desperate to hear. The one he'd been searching for this whole time.

It was Yonah.

But was it *really*? He was terrified of turning around to see for himself, despite knowing he could never mistake anyone else for her.

Finally, he forced himself to move. It was no mistake. He was not imagining things. She was there.

“Look,” she said. “I found this while you were gone.”

His sister was cradling a flat canister containing a single cookie. They were Yonah's favorite, and...

*Hold on. How do I know there are cookies in there? And why is Yonah wearing those weird clothes?*

“Here. We can split it.”

Still, her clothes didn't matter. Nothing mattered so long as he finally got to see her.

“Yonah . . .”

As he leaned in to give her a hug, it dawned on him that she hadn't grown. It had been half a decade since she was stolen away, and yet the little girl before him was nowhere near twelve years of age.

His heart clenched when he thought about the missing time. Five years since the Shadowlord appeared. Five years since his only remaining family was taken—the little sister he loved more than life itself. He'd been through so much for her sake, and then she was just . . . gone. Not a day went by that he didn't think about her. She was a part of him always—even in his dreams.

*Dreams.*

*This is a dream. Of course it is.*

He suddenly understood why he wore such strange clothing. Why he wielded a metal pipe instead of a sword. Even the heaps of salt began to make a kind of sense.

This was all a dream.

“You need to eat,” said Yonah, as she offered him half of the small cookie. She was smiling, which made him happy. All he wanted was to see her smile, even in dreams.

Forever.

“Yonah!”

As his cry escaped his lips, his vision went black.

“What is it now, lad?”

Another familiar voice—one that was the picture of eloquence, even if it did often overstep the line into general annoyance. A voice belonging to a friend of arcane power and outstanding intelligence.

“Hey, Weiss,” murmured Nier. He opened his eyes to find the tome floating near his head. This was his house, his sword was an arm's length away, and Yonah was nowhere to be found.

“I thought you a bit old for nightmares. What manner of midnight reverie had you crying aloud in your sleep?”

Nier knew he'd been dreaming but couldn't remember it. All he understood was that Yonah was there—the rest had melted into shadow the moment he'd opened his eyes.

“I don't know. But it couldn't have been that bad.”

He could even consider it a happy dream because he got to see Yonah. And though he couldn't remember where he'd been, there was a strange sense of familiarity deep in his chest.

## **NIER, SHADOWLORD, DREAMS 2**

I HATE LAB coats, Nier thought. People who wore lab coats were always arrogant in the presence of those who lacked them. He didn't have the slightest idea why that was; he wasn't a doctor after all. Hell, he wasn't even a nurse.

The researchers were always the worst. At least medical professionals saw their patients as human—researchers only viewed them as test subjects. It was always a gamble to trust what they said, and the odds never seemed to be in his favor.

But what choice did he have? He couldn't afford not to take the risk or to throw in the towel if things turned bad. If he didn't do this, Yonah would die. That was all there was to it.

Nier stared at his sister, who slumbered inside a clear, medical-grade capsule. He pressed his forehead against a pane of reinforced glass and stared at the sterilized room beyond. Nier wasn't allowed inside, of course.

Cryosleep technology was a well-established technology at this point, and he'd been told the greatest risk wasn't a mechanical or system malfunction but infection.

Don't worry so much, the nurses said with a smile whenever they passed.

The doctors are working as hard as they can. They'll save Yonah.

Though there was something false in the way they spoke, Nier had no choice but to trust them. If he cooperated with the government's plan, they would save Yonah. If it took months, years, or decades for the new technology to be put in place, he would simply continue on so long as it meant another chance at a life with her.

Hang in there, Yonah, he cheered her on silently. He wished he could give her a word of encouragement as she lay suspended in slumber, connected to countless machines in a sterilized room without the gift of the sun.

“Will you be going back now?” said a voice beside him. It was familiar, belonging to the only person he could trust.

Wait. Why isn't it Weiss's voice? His only partner was Grimoire Weiss, and he didn't sound like that at all. Who was speaking to him? This book was—

“Are we sleeping in today, hmm?”

*Now, that was Weiss's voice.* After a moment of darkness, Nier's vision filled with the familiar sight of his bedroom ceiling.

“Oh. I was . . . dreaming.”

He sat up, his head heavy. Lately, he'd been having lots of dreams for reasons he couldn't identify—all of which vanished the moment he opened his eyes.

“You seemed to be slumbering quite peacefully from my vantage point, lad.”

As usual, Nier remembered nothing of his dream. Not the location, who appeared in it, or what was said.

“Doesn't matter. It was just a dream.” If it didn't bother Nier to forget the dream, it couldn't have been anything of value.

## **KAINE, MOTHER GOOSE, TYRANN**

“You okay, Kainé?” Nier called.

“Yeah. But I think we got even bigger problems now.”

Kainé could hear the mother Shade calling the babies over to her and realized they were forming into something much, much bigger.

“Uh-oh. This is bad, guys!” Emil understood perfectly, for he had learned his own painful lesson in how powerful combined Shades could be in The Aerie.

As the mother and child Shades came together, they began absorbing all their companion creatures in the ballroom. As their outlines began to blur, they briefly took on the form of a large undefined mass. A moment later, the mass resolved itself into the shape of a boar that looked exactly like the beast that roamed the northern plains.

*“There is no justice in the slaughter of innocents!”* roared the Shadeboar. *“How many have you killed? How many? Your actions can never be forgiven!”*

To the boar, Nier had committed a crime by killing baby Shades. But to Kainé, it was the Shades that couldn't be forgiven, for they were the ones that slaughtered her helpless grandmother.

Yeah, and how many have you killed? she wordlessly asked.

The same was true for the king of Facade, where a Shade-wolf had murdered his beloved and countless of his people. Yet for that creature, the humans were butchers who had cut down most of its pack. Neither could forgive the other; those being killed could never accept those who were doing the killing. It did not matter what reasons they had—that was simply how things were.

Hearing Shades speak always filled Kainé with guilt. She found it difficult to kill anything with intelligence and a sense of self. But she could only marvel at her egoism, for despite that guilt, she chose to kill anyway.

“We will never forgive you! Never!”

*Of course you won't,* Kainé thought.

It was a thought of such urgency, she suddenly turned to the Shade-boar and screamed.

“We don't need forgiveness, asshole!”

She would never ask for absolution while she continued to murder Shades. The days of pretending not to see her own blood-soaked hands were over.

*“Wait a second. Waaaaait a second!”* Tyrann crowed. *“Your heart is . . . different. What's going on here, Sunshine?”*

“How should I know?” Kainé spat. Frankly, the garbage musings of Tyrann were the last thing she was interested in right now.

“Kainé! Are you all right?!”

A worried Emil began to float toward her. Neither he nor Nier could hear the Shades, so she must have appeared to be saying strange things to herself.

“I'm fine. Let's just kill some shit and move on, all right?”

The massive boar bellowed and charged. Kainé dodged at the last second and fired off a volley of magic in return.

*“Iiinteresting,”* crooned Tyrann. *“Oh, how very interesting!”*

*Shut your trap. Don't talk to me. I'm killing this thing right now.*

*“Oh, you pissed her off now!”* Tyrann cackled in regard to the Shade-boar. *“Look at her! So full of scorn and hate! She's just like you, Sunshine!”*

*Like you're any different,* Kainé thought as she ran.

*“Eh?”*

*Hate is just another crutch for you. You're in pain. You're lonely. No one likes you. So you try to hide it under violence and hate.*

*“I'm not like that at all!”*

*It's okay.*

*“... It is?”*

*Look, I'm the same way.*

Tyrann fell silent. Because he knew.

Kainé had realized something as she listened to the Shades scream at them. She realized she wanted forgiveness for her selfish actions. She realized she chose to keep killing despite fearing the weight of her guilt. And she realized that despite it all, she continued trying to hide everything under a wave of violent tendencies. Because all these disparate parts of her were simply too much to handle.

But would such realizations change anything?

It's too late for us now. We're too far gone, you and me.

No. That wasn't right. Nier had accepted her for who she was—accepted her cursed, wrong self without question. He had given her forgiveness. And maybe that was enough.



## NIER AND FACADE KING

“He's fighting for you,” she continued, her voice unusually quiet. “And for Fyra. Don't let him die for nothing.”

The words pierced his heart more painfully than any blow. Having delivered them, Kainé whirled around and started off down the hall, seemingly unconcerned if he followed or not.

When Nier first saved the king of Facade, he thought their relationship was something akin to fate. But he was wrong—it wasn't fate at all. Their friendship was something far beyond the power of a single word to describe.

*Please survive this, King. Just hold on until I've killed the Shadowlord.*

With that silent wish echoing through his mind, Nier balled his hands into fists and set off after Kainé.

## **NIER, DEVOLA & POPOLA, AND TRUTH**

Five years ago, it had taken Kainé's insults and rage to pull Weiss back to reality. But this time, it seemed that would not be necessary.

"I . . . I remember . . ." began Weiss as the sound from Devola and Popola abruptly went silent.

"You okay?" Nier asked.

"Worry not for me," he replied before turning to the twins. "Devola . . . Popola . . . You are not human."

While this fact would have knocked Nier to the floor a few hours earlier, knowing they'd been on the Shadowlord's side this entire time allowed him to take it with a kind of eerie acceptance.

"In fact," continued Weiss. "Oh no . . ."

Devola chuckled. "Yeah, sometimes the truth can be a real bitch. You wanna finish that thought for him, sister?"

Popola turned her attention to Nier, the expression in her eyes as soft as when she'd bid him farewell back in the village.

"All of us, every person standing in this room, are mere shells created by the true humans."

"What are you saying?!" cried Nier.

"You still don't get it?" griped Devola. "You aren't human!"

Nier had no words. He couldn't even begin to comprehend what she was trying to say.

"So then humans—I mean, the true humans—are extinct?" Emil asked in a quivering voice.

It was Weiss who answered. "No. They still live on. You know them as Shades. Each Shade is a twisted remnant of what was once a human being."

Wait. The Shades Nier despised and loathed from the core of his very being were human? And he and his friends weren't? It was madness. Absurd.

Far from being shocked, he found himself having to suppress a bark of laughter. Sure, killing a Shade had felt like killing a human the first time he brought one down, but when he noted how it bled, he'd been told it was the same as goats and sheep. That was how he'd continued to think of them to this day: as goats and sheep.

“Your bodies each have a rightful owner,” said Popola. “A human in the form of a Gestalt—a being composed of soul only. Replicants are kept alive so that one day the Gestalts may be revived.”

“Replicants?”

“Yes. That's you. Humanity—true humanity—now exists only in the form of souls separated from their corporal vessels. This was done in order to survive white chlorination syndrome. This . . . is Project Gestalt.”

The words of the small white birds suddenly came back to Nier.

*Why did humans disappear from the world?*

*How can humans extend their lives?*

*What is the destination of souls?*

And Grimoire Weiss had replied to each of the questions with answers of his own:

*Because of a black disease.*

*By separating body from soul.*

*They are placed in their corresponding shells.*

The exchange clearly signified Project Gestalt, in which souls were separated from their bodies so they could be replaced and revived at a later hour.

“You are tools for Project Gestalt,” said Devola in a voice tinged with sadness. “Nothing more than empty containers for a soul. But Popola and I are tools as well. Our endless existences have a single purpose: to control the lives of others in accordance with the will of the true humans.”

The villagers had trusted and looked up to Popola and Devola. They coordinated all the rites, and they were always there to provide a helpful word or a shoulder to cry on. They were a constant source of advice, kindness, and warmth, yet it turned out that had merely been a method of control.

As Nier tried to take everything in, all signs of emotion vanished from Devola's face. “Right then! Let's skip the part where you stand there with your mouths agape and just get down to business. We're gonna be needing that shell of yours, because the rightful owner has been waiting a veery long time.”

Somewhere deep down, things were starting to make sense to Nier. The twins had told him where the Shadowlord's castle was, then sent him on a quest to collect the keys. All for a human who supposedly owned him unilaterally.

“Please don't be angry with us,” Popola added. “We are only doing our duty.”

“I still don't understand what your duty's supposed to be!”

Popola was done giving answers; she ignored the question and held her staff at the ready.

“You have your own motives,” she stated. “Your own desires.”

“And we have ours,” added Devola, raising her own staff high. “I fear it really is just that simple.”

“Don't speak such foolish-n-n-ness!” cried an irritated Weiss. Though his faltering speech made him sound like a child trying too hard, Devola lowered her head and whispered a single word of apology:

“Sorry.”

A moment later, the twins sent a magic spear flying, the same one Weiss once conjured from the Sealed Verses.

“Please don't do this!” Nier screamed. Once his mother passed away, the twins had been his lifeline. Popola read books to Yonah. Devola cheered him when he was down. The two of them had practically raised the siblings.

“I don't want to do this! I don't want to fight you!”

“Those two have watched the world wither for time immemorial,”

Grimoire Weiss remarked. “The cruelty of such a fate is difficult to imagine.”

“But . . . but still . . .”

Thousands of spikes burst out from the ground around Nier's feet—another instance of magic Weiss has used countless times against the Shades. Nier quickly raised a magical barrier to block it, but in the next moment, the magic hand crashed down upon him.

“You cannot win this with defense alone!” Grimoire Weiss shouted to him.

Devola and Popola were taking the fight seriously and were out for blood.

Though it had taken Nier a long time, acceptance and realization of this fact finally came to him in that moment.

“I know!” he replied as he let fly a spear and magic bullets. Neither of the twins' expressions changed in the slightest; they sang as they cast spells and danced as they fired off magic. It was almost as if they weren't fighting people but merely dispatching animals—or Shades.

Nier recalled how Devola had called him a tool, then named herself the same. “No!” he cried suddenly. “I'm nothing like you!” He wasn't a tool. He wasn't a vessel. He loved his family, worried for his friends, and had hopes for the future. He was alive. He was human.

“Stop bitching and start fighting!” cried Kainé. “It's the only way!”

She laid her twin blades into their foe as Emil launched magic of his own. As his companions attacked, Nier raised his own blade high.

I have my friends—we belong to us. I'm not giving that up or letting anyone steal it away!

He fired off magic with the help of Weiss—whom he thought of as a partner and not a tool.

And then . . . a scream.

It was Popola. A volley of magic had pierced Devola and slammed her to the ground.

...

Through the noise and turmoil, he thought he heard Popola roar with laughter. At the same time, he saw an impossibly dark magic swell in the distance—one Popola was using all of her remaining power to create. It enveloped the entirety of the building for a moment, then suddenly winked out as if it had never been there at all.

There was no more Popola. No Devola. No Emil. All that remained was a dark and empty void where all of them used to be.

## NIER, TRUTH, POST DRAKENGARD ENDING E



“IN THE YEAR 2003, a red dragon appeared over the skies of Tokyo as a white giant materialized in Shinjuku. This was the beginning of everything.”

The corridor was long. Every time there was a break in the waves of enemies, Grimoire Weiss would recount the details of Project Gestalt. For Nier's part, he simply listened quietly. The pain of losing Emil was hard to bear, and he couldn't find the energy to speak. Kainé was the same, and the two of them plodded forward in complete silence.

“The red dragon killed the white giant before being shot down by something called the Self-Defense Force. As the dragon fell, it was impaled on a red radio tower; I hear it took a considerable amount of resources to remove the remains.”

A red tower. A scene flashed in the back of Nier's mind of a strange, swordlike tower. He felt like he'd seen it somewhere before. Was it in a dream? Or something else?

“Is anything the matter, lad?”

“Nothing. Keep going.”

He was imagining things. Or perhaps it was an illusion shown to him by a Shade in the Forest of Myth.

“Upon dying, the red dragon spewed out a previously unknown substance called Maso, which introduced two things to our world: magic and a disease known as white chlorination syndrome.”

Nier remembered what Popola had said: This was done in order to survive white chlorination syndrome.

“As the name suggests, white chlorination syndrome was a disease that turned humans into salt. There was no cure nor a way to prevent it from running unchecked. One by one, the people of the world began transforming into salt.”

Another sight arose unbidden in Nier's mind: a thick layer of salt strewn across the ground. Perhaps these were memories of the one to whom his body originally belonged. Although, who could say if it was possible to inherit memories from a time before he was even born?

“A few rare individuals survived the illness without turning into salt. These poor souls would soon lose their sense of self and turn into monsters that attacked indiscriminately. Such creatures quickly became known as Legion.”

Sounds a lot like Shades, Nier mused. That meant the people of the time must have agonized over how to deal with the newfound foes, much like he and his friends worried about the damage caused by Shades.

“And so, various research institutes were established to find a way to rid humanity of both white chlorination syndrome and Legion. There were a small number of proponents for Project Gestalt, but they lacked both voice and influence in the beginning. Furthermore, the project's research had run into something of a snag.”

Weiss went on to explain that while separating a soul from the physical body was technically possible, such separated souls quickly lost all sense of self. It was a problem for which researchers had no solution. Gestalts who lost their sense of self were considered to have relapsed, and there was no meaning in returning them to their physical body once that happened.

The researchers, however, continued to experiment on live human subjects in secret, and at last found a case where the separated soul did not relapse.

“That was the only successful case, however,” intoned Weiss. “Though the experiments continued, all subsequent subjects relapsed. Progression for a blood relative of the successful subject is rather slow going, so that case did not reach total relapse. Both subjects, however, are outliers, and it is likely there is a genetic component to their unusual qualities.”

“Hold on,” Nier interjected. “You said the progression is slow going? Not was?”

“Indeed. She is essentially being kept in a state of mid-relapse.”

“She?”

“Yes. The successful subject's little sister is currently preserved in cryosleep. The older brother—the only successful case in the project thus far—wanted so desperately to save his kin that he made a deal with the research institute.”

The successful test subject possessed a unique type of Maso, and the researchers soon realized they could prevent others from relapse by having them absorb it. Knowing this, the research facility approached the subject with terms: If he allowed them to extract his Maso, they would devote all of their resources to finding a way to restore relapsing Gestalts. Though it would not happen for hundreds or even thousands of years, once the world was free of white chlorination syndrome and Legion, humanity would be revived, and the boy and his sister could be together once more.

“Thus was Project Gestalt put into motion. Gestalts survived thanks to the boy's Maso, and they soon came to worship him.”

And why not, seeing as he held the fate of all Gestalts in the palm of his hand? Maso was connected to the donor's mental state even after being harvested, so even if it was taken when the subject was doing well, it didn't mean things would remain that way. If the donor's psychological state ever grew unstable, any Gestalts that absorbed the Maso would likewise grow volatile. And if the original donor happened to lose his mind, any Gestalt in possession of his Maso would lose their sense of self and relapse.

“The one thing they wanted to avoid at all costs was relapse.”

“Why?”

“Because relapsed Gestalts cannot return to their human form. Do you remember The Aerie?”

Nier nodded. How could he ever forget seeing all those villagers possessed by Shades? Watching regular villagers having regular conversations suddenly morph into Shades had been a nauseating sight.

“That is what happens when the body rejects a relapsed soul. One may try to force the two together, but they immediately separate.”

Which was why the research institute not only requested that the test subject provide Maso but that he remain mentally stable as he continued to live far into the future. The reason Gestalts began to worship him was to ensure he remained sane—which was the only way they themselves could continue to live.

“But things do not always go as planned. A thousand years is a long time—too long, in this humble tome's opinion—to be separated from one's beloved sister. Who could blame him if such

solitude began to eat away at him? No matter what he does, he cannot stave off the loneliness that comes from the absence of his kin.”

“Even if he was worshiped as a king?”

“Even so.” Grimoire Weiss nodded.

It was all clear now: The king of the Gestalts was the king of the Shades, as well as the single successful test subject. And that man . . . was the Shadowlord.

“It seems the Shadowlord's psychological state has rapidly declined these past few years. The proof lies in how the Gestalts that absorbed his Maso have now begun to relapse.”

Ever since that fateful day five years ago, there had been a marked increase in Shades—and an increase in their ferocity. Once that thought crossed Nier's mind, he felt his heart practically leap out of his chest.

“The Shadowlord had a little sister . . .”

“I believe you may have pieced it together already, but they say her name is Yonah.”

Now everything truly fell into place. The Shadowlord stole Yonah away because that was his sister's body. And the reason Devola and Popola had called Nier a shell was because he was the Shadowlord's . . .

“Is the Shadowlord trying to return to a human form along with his sister?”

“Very likely.”

“I bet Devola and Popola knew everything, huh? They must have really been laughing at me when I was searching so desperately for Yonah. I bet they've been laughing for the past five years.”

All Nier could find within himself after learning why Yonah had been taken—where she was and what she was doing—was a painful silence. It was as if he'd been shattered into a thousand pieces.

“Not necessarily so, lad,” said Weiss. “It's likely what happened five years ago was the Shadowlord acting out erratically of his own accord—the twins could well have had nothing to do with it. In fact, if they did, they'd likely have brought us here sooner. All the conditions for humanity's revival have been met after all.”

“And what are those?”

“White chlorination syndrome is a dead disease, and Legion has been stamped out. These two things ensure humanity's survival. Once all was in order, it was the duty of myself and Grimoire

Noir to activate the program that would return the humans—who are presently Gestalts—back to their physical bodies.”

Was that even possible? No, that was a silly question—Project Gestalt had taken off because humans from a millennium ago had decided in the affirmative. They'd not even considered that the Shadowlord might lose his sanity, resulting in their fellow humans losing their senses of self.

“Hold on!” Nier exclaimed. Grimoire Weiss had just told him that relapsed Gestalts could not return to their human state. Which meant . . .

“So if Gestalts relapse, they can't go back to their bodies, right? That means we, um . . .”

He carefully considered his word choice; he didn't want to call himself and his friends Replicants and the Gestalts their owners.

“I know what you are considering, but unfortunately, no. Once a Gestalt relapses, the Replicant dies of the Black Scrawl.”

“What?!”

“Gestalt and Replicant were originally a single entity. When a Gestalt relapses, the corresponding Replicant develops the Black Scrawl. There has been a significant increase in hostile Shades of late, no? The rise in Black Scrawl cases began at around the same time. The causal relationship between the two should be quite clear to all.”

Now that Weiss mentioned it, Nier realized the Black Scrawl was considered an unusual disease back when Yonah caught it. While their mother, the lighthouse lady, and the previous king of Facade had succumbed to it, it remained a rather uncommon occurrence. But lately, every village and town had a patient or two. Though it remained a terrible—and terminal—illness, it was now a depressingly common one.

“Due to my memory loss,” continued Weiss, “I'd not realized the true significance in the rise of Black Scrawl cases.”

“Yeah. And the Shadowlord's little sister was relapsing, even though that had been stopped in its tracks.”

Which was why Yonah developed the Black Scrawl.

“But wait,” Nier said. “Does that mean she'll never be cured?”

If they couldn't prevent the Shadowlord's sister from relapsing, Yonah would have to live with the Black Scrawl forever.

“That can't be,” he said to himself. “There must be a way. I just have to think. I'll figure something out.”

Grimoire Weiss did not reply. Instead, it was Kainé who spoke.

“Yeah, yeah, blah, blah, enough with the chitchat. I sense a Shade nearby. It's incredibly large, incredibly powerful, and it's right fucking there.”

She pointed to a door, then turned back to stare at them.

Nothing else needed to be said: What lay behind it was clearly the Shadowlord.

“All right,” Nier replied.

“Then let's go kill him already.”

He could think about everything else once he finally had Yonah back.

### **KAINÉ'S FEELINGS FOR NIER**

*“Hey, Sunshine?”* came Tyrann's voice. *“I ain't certain about this, but I think your heart is . . . evolving.”*

*Meh. Who cares?*

Tyrann's words washed over her as she continued to fight.

*“The hate is gone. The sadness is gone. It's just a buncha white light now. What the hell's goin' on here?!”*

*You can't tell, Tyrann?*

She could feel the corner of her own mouth curling into a smile.

*You're not the only voice in my life anymore. I've experienced fear, hate . . . and now sympathy.*

The barrier around Grimoire Noir shattered.

*I'm a curse. A freak. I know that.*

The blades protecting him vanished.

*But guess what. He still accepts me. He still forgives me.*

*"You're doin' this for him?"*

Kainé nodded as she brought her full might down on the black book.

*I'm tired of this world and everybody in it. But I'll become his sword one last time!*

Kainé watched Grimoire Noir sink to the floor as Nier followed up with magic to obliterate him for good. The tome howled like an animal as his pages fluttered through the air before vanishing on the wind.

Only one enemy remained.

## **TWO NIER, TWO YONAH, KILLING HUMANITY**

Nier dashed in with his blade, but the Shadowlord blocked it with a sword that suddenly appeared in his hands. As they sparred, Nier noticed the Shadowlord attacked with movements similar to his own and also used a familiar defensive stance. It was a terribly uncomfortable experience; as much as Nier hated to admit it, it felt like fighting himself.

Kainé fired magic at the Shadowlord as he glided through the air. The moment his altitude dipped, Nier leaped at him, bringing his sword down on the enemy while dodging magic bullets.

The difference in strength between them had been overwhelming five years ago, but now Nier scarcely noticed it. It had been an insurmountable hurdle then, but now it was nothing—and Nier knew the Shadowlord had not weakened in that time. As Grimoire Weiss would say, *You've grown strong, lad*.

He thought back on how he had gained this strength and realized it was the years he'd been ripped apart from Yonah that had allowed him to grow strong. When he considered this devil's bargain, the rage and hatred inside him swelled anew.

He was going to kill the Shadowlord—for Yonah's sake. He didn't care what he had to give up in exchange or what might happen to the people who used to be human. He didn't care what might become of the world. Such things weren't his problem.

This was all for Yonah.

He narrowly dodged another shower of bullets as he made his way toward his goal. His blade sliced at the red-and-black wings before plunging into the body covered in writhing black patterns.

The Shadowlord staggered. Nier cut him again. Even if his foe tried to block or dodge or even run, he would never relent.

At last, the Shadowlord fell to his knees. Just one more. One more hit, and the Shadowlord's life would be forfeit. Nier tightened his grip on the handle of his blade and . . .

“Wait!”

It was a familiar voice, and Nier froze despite himself. When he whirled around, he saw Yonah sitting up in bed. She dropped her feet to the floor and slowly made her way toward them on unsteady legs.

“H-hey.”

Her voice was a reminder of simpler days. How many times had he heard it in his dreams?

“Yonah . . .”

*She's all grown up*, Nier thought. Her hair was longer, and her cherubic, childlike face had matured into that of a young lady.

Nier reached for her as she walked toward him. When was the last time he'd caught her in an embrace as she leaped into his arms, shouting how much she had missed him?

But then, a most unexpected thing happened: She did not leap for him.

Nier's eyes went wide. His gaze dropped first to his own empty hand, then back to Yonah as she walked right past him.

“Brother . . .”

She was speaking to the Shadowlord.

“Just stop. Please. I . . . I don't want this anymore.”

She gazed down at him, watching as his wounds left him crawling miserably on the ground.

“I don't need someone else's body. I don't want it.”

In that moment, Nier finally understood: It wasn't Yonah who was speaking but the Shadowlord's sister.

“There's another girl inside this body. I can hear her. She won't stop crying. She says she wants to see her brother.”

It was Yonah who was crying. His precious, only little sister—the one for whom he'd been searching so tirelessly.

“This girl loves her brother as much as I do. It's not right that she can't see him.”

At last, the Shadowlord's sister turned to look at Nier. “It's you. Isn't it?”

Nier sheathed his sword; he didn't want to frighten the other Yonah, even if she was the Shadowlord's sister. As he did, the Shadowlord howled something he couldn't understand.

“Yes,” Nier replied. “It's me. Let's go home.”

He gently extended his hand to her, and the other Yonah nodded. The expression on her face told him she knew exactly what that meant. She then began to walk toward the window. The curtains fluttered as the small, delicate hand grasped the fabric.

The Shadowlord howled again. He seemed to be desperately reaching for her, but he couldn't move—and yet he clearly wanted to stop her. Even though Nier couldn't understand his words, he could tell that much.

The other Yonah turned to look at them. “I'm sorry. I'm just so very sorry.”

The curtains flew open. Light flooded the room as black mist began to seep from her small frame.

“Just know that . . . I love you.”

For a brief second, the black mist took the form of a person. Then it dissolved into nothingness and drifted away on the breeze. “Hurry!” Kainé shouted. “The Shade that possessed her is gone!”

The other Yonah—the Shadowlord's sister—had walked into the sunlight and chosen death. The Yonah who remained staggered and fell to the floor, but Nier reached out and caught her on the way down. He was shocked to realize how thin and light she was.

## **WEISS, SACRIFICE, NIER KILLS SHADOWLORD**

“But the rest is up to you. Only you can see this battle to its conclusion. I wish you luck . . . my friend.”

Nier felt like crying. He had lost an irreplaceable companion, as well as two women he looked up to like sisters. He couldn't lose Grimoire Weiss now, the partner who had been by his side from the very beginning.

“You can't! I swore to fight by—”

“Bah! You are an exceedingly stubborn lad. You know that, yes?”

When next he spoke, Weiss's tone was almost blithe. "Perhaps that's why I've so enjoyed our time together."

*Me too*, Nier thought. Though theirs had been a life of constant danger, Weiss had been a reliable ally in that regard since Nier was a young boy. And once Yonah was taken and he was spurred on a journey of anger and hate, only the presence of Weiss had allowed him to maintain some semblance of human emotion.

"But I fear this is where our journey ends."

"Weiss!"

"Oh, and remember what I told you about using my full name?"

The light around the tome grew brighter; Nier could barely make out his friend beyond the brilliant glowing veil.

"Well, forget it. I've grown rather fond of Weiss."

"I knew you'd come around," said Nier as he forced the corners of his mouth upward into a smile. He didn't know if it looked good or not, but he was going to try. If he couldn't stop his friend, he could at least do that much.

"Don't let it go to your head, now."

Grimoire Weiss's tone was the same as it had been whether they were chatting leisurely aboard the ferry or strolling around town. Nier couldn't believe it was all about to come to an end. But end it did. There was a blinding flash of light as Grimoire Weiss scattered, and his separated pages become a torrent that rushed the Shadowlord. As the enemy collapsed with a scream, Nier thought he heard Weiss yell one final word:

"NOW!"

Nier didn't hesitate. He leaped forward, sword in hand.

"I have something to defend! I have a reason to live!"

He wasn't a tool. His body was more than just a vessel for a soul. And he was going to keep *living*.

The tip of Nier's blade caught on the abyssal form of the Shadowlord. The force against his hand was no different from the other countless Shades he'd killed; once he'd cut through, a dreadful shock wave erupted in response. Black wings crumbled to the ground.

The barrier around his foe vanished without a trace. All that remained was a young man on his knees with slumped shoulders.

The Shadowlord.

The other Nier.

Nier plunged his blade straight down. Blood rushed out, and then the body became dust and was no more.



### **EMIL, REPLICANT ENDING E**

After they merged, Emil always felt like Halua was inside him. Even though they couldn't have actual conversations, he felt like she was watching over him. That was how he knew she'd used all of her magic and was about to disappear.

*Don't cry, Emil. I want you to be happy.*

He didn't want that—he didn't want to say goodbye. But all he could do was throw a fit and sob.

*Promise me that you'll live for both of us.*

As Halua's voice drifted away on the wind, Emil was ejected from the Shadowlord's castle. His body was gone. His head flew far, and the next thing he knew, he was in a desert.

But he survived. And he journeyed. He created a replacement body and set off to reunite with his friends. He would not cry anymore. He would live in happiness, fulfilling his promise to his sister. He would do so because he wanted to see the others.

For three years, he traveled alone. He was successful in creating a replacement body—so successful, in fact, that he ended up creating an extra set of arms. Once this was done, he set off for the village where those he held most dear lived, looking forward to the day they could travel together again.

But on the way, he'd felt an odd magic coming from the Forest of Myth—and when he came to investigate, he found Kainé. At last they had been reunited, and the two of them swore to find whoever it was they had so unfortunately forgotten.

“Kainé?! Where are you?!”

Emil had no idea where he had flown, but the next thing he knew, he was outside beneath a clear blue sky.

“Is the air shaking?” he asked himself. A moment later, a deep rumble came from the earth, and Emil shot up in the air. He knew what was going to happen, and he raced straight toward the event.

The forest trembled. The trees shuddered. All the birds resting among their boughs flew into the sky as one.

“What's going on in the Forest of Myth?”

The great, ancient tree toppled as the ground shook ever more violently.

With splintering cracks, the other trees did the same. Then a white tower slowly rose from the earth. It grew and grew and soon stood at a height far above the mountains of the northern plains.

“What's that supposed to be?”

Emil approached the tower, hoping to get a better look. It continued to grow as he got nearer, and it stretched to a height above the clouds. He soared to the top and found it to be strangely shaped, with a pointed tip. In fact, it looked just like . . .

A flower bud.

Suddenly, it split down the sides.

“It is a flower!” cried Emil. “And it's blooming!”

White petals unfurled. The bud above the clouds bloomed into a flower as large as the entire northern plains.

“That's . . .”

There were people inside. Emil knew one was Kainé right away, just as he knew she'd reclaimed their treasured memories. Their precious person. Though he was some distance away, Emil could never mistake the other person for anyone else. The boy looked just as he had the day they first met—and though it was the first time Emil been able to see him with his own eyes, he knew it was him in an instant.

Memories flooded back to him. He recalled the name he had forgotten and absently wondered if this was not allowed. A sensation came to him, as though they were going against the very fabric of . . . something. And yet . . .

He didn't care if it wasn't allowed. Or if it was a mistake. Those he held most dear were now right before his eyes, and that was all he needed.

Even if it meant facing a day in the future where they would come to regret this choice.