

Magical Girl Grappling Project

“Are you both ready? Then... fight, pon!”

The two magical girls both moved simultaneously with Fav’s signal. Ripple backed up, wary for an oncoming attack while Snow White, anticipating Ripple’s caution, dashed forwards without defending herself to close the distance. Ripple was at a disadvantage in short-range confrontations, and continued to retreat, but Snow White kept up by dashing forward again.

The two were close enough to make contact, which was far from ideal for Ripple. She was forced onto defence by a series of attacks – a middle punch, an elbow, a heel, and a foot sweep. With Ripple unable to block all of them, the damage started to pile up. She tried to break away while guarding, but Snow White stepped forward into the resulting gap and grabbed her, throwing Ripple over her shoulder onto the ground.

Ripple rolled to her feet and drew her sword. Immediately Snow White crouched down to kick her shin, knocking Ripple back with the impact, and closed in again. Ripple was still stiff with shock. Snow White aimed a chop at her shoulder and, having not yet readied her sword, Ripple was forced to take the attack head-on. Snow White’s eyes flashed as Ripple staggered backwards.

“You aren’t acting as a magical girl... you’re a murderer.”

Snow White grabbed Ripple in a clinch hold and delivered four swift strikes with her knee, following up with a series of kicks – high, middle, high – then a superman punch as her opponent was blown back by the onslaught. Stepping forward again she struck with a savage uppercut, before finishing off with a heel drop.

If Ripple was an ordinary human, she would’ve died dozens of times over from this flurry of blows. But both combatants were far beyond human, and Ripple wasn’t the sort of magical girl who’d die from this. She grit her teeth, got to her feet, and made a quick jab.

The attack hit Snow White clean in the jaw right as she was reaching for another throw. Two more jabs followed, then a sideways slash of the sword before Ripple brought the blade upwards in another strike. This time, it was Ripple whose eyes lit up.

“I don’t care... I’ll just be a murderer if I have to.”

There were countless shuriken and kunai between the fingers of both her hands. She threw wave after wave – far more than she could fit in just two handfuls – and Snow White was shredded under the barrage of projectiles.

Snow White was also a magical girl. She wouldn’t die even from being sliced up like this, but as she staggered to her feet, her eyes were unfocussed and her footing unsteady. She was totally stunned.

Ripple leapt high into the air, launching a flying kick straight at Snow White. Her sword flowed like water as she swung it, attacking with everything at her disposal. A hit from her elbow, her shuriken and kunai, and a solid kick to the chest before she finally swept Snow White’s legs out from under her. Ripple backed up, this time able to create enough distance before her opponent got to her feet.

From this point onwards, Snow White had no hope of winning. She tried to attack Ripple, but she couldn’t even get close under a rain of shuriken and kunai, and before long her health bar reached zero.

“Aaaand that’s game, pon!”

The player who was using Ripple, named “Rapid Swallow”, stood up out of her chair and raised her fist in celebration as the crowd cheered. Her opponent, “Akoko”, also rose a moment later, and shook hands with Rapid Swallow. She bowed with a weak smile on her face. On the other side of the cameras watching the two of them, a pair of commentators gave a polite but unenthusiastic applause.

“Well, that was a great match... though you seem a little dissatisfied, Morino”

“‘Dissatisfied’ is one way to put it, I suppose. I can’t say it was an unexpected outcome.”

The professional commentator, Morino Strawberry, snorted.

“If all you’ve got in your hand is some low-numbered diamonds, you haven’t got a chance of winning. You won’t reach the finals if all your opponent has to do to turn the tables is land one lucky hit. Ripple wasn’t particularly strong, it’s just that Snow White is too weak. I don’t know why they picked such a poor character. How can you expect to win with that?”

Morino Strawberry’s commentary (or rather complaints) continued, but Akoko, real name Ako Hatoda, age 22 years old, left the venue without bothering to hear it all. After all, she knew better than anyone else just how weak Snow White was.

◇ Ako Hatoda

When she got home, Ako didn’t feel like doing anything except taking a bath and going to bed, but she still booted up the game and started a ranked match. That sort of routine couldn’t be interrupted just because she was in a dour mood. It helped her think of herself as more of a professional.

Nowadays you didn’t have to win every game to call yourself a pro. You could earn enough to live off of without placing high in major tournaments. Whether you had sponsorships, or if you were a streamer, influencer, or coach; if you earned money from gaming, you were a professional gamer.

Ako was one such pro. She mainly played fighting games, chiefly Magical Girl Grappling Project, or MGGP for short, but she never won tournaments. She could beat ordinary players in ranked matches, but when it came to pros who competed in tournaments, she didn’t stand a chance.

The person she had played against today, Rapid Swallow, was primarily a speedrunner rather than a competitive pro gamer, and she played fighting games as more of a hobby. Her movements were unrefined and she had made several mistakes in her combos. But Ako had still lost.

Ako finished her daily ranked matches and leant back on her chair, staring up at the ceiling. As images of today’s game came into her mind, she suppressed a sigh and opened a new window in her browser. Even just typing “Snow White” into the search bar brought up a list of unflattering suggestions.

When MGGP had first released, Snow White hadn’t been so maligned. She had still been weak, but only a little. However, because some of her special moves were too effective against certain characters, they were gradually weakened with each update, and she wasn’t given any buffs to compensate.

Her health was low, it was difficult to perform combos and even if you did, they didn't do much damage. She was easy to stun and moved slowly, her jump was strangely floaty, making her a good target for anti-air attacks, and she didn't have any decent anti-air attacks of her own either. Her animation for falling over was floaty too, which meant that every character had a combo that could only be used on Snow White. The recovery period on all her techniques was slow, if you were too far forward when you attacked you were bound to be countered, and her hitboxes were small which only made combos harder. All the characters with shorter limbs – the Peaky Angels and Magicaloid – had much more generous hitboxes on their magical attacks, so Snow White's reach was the absolute shortest among all characters. Her hurtbox was wider than you'd expect, she had no projectile attacks and no elemental moves.

That wasn't to say Snow White had absolutely no good points. She was the only character to have automatic counter moves. Once activated, if she was hit by the right sort of attack within a given time frame, she would automatically respond with a swift strike to a vital area. In theory she should be able to react to any attack by listening to the voice of her opponent's heart, but unfortunately that wasn't how it worked in MGGP. Although her stats were low across the board, within the first season she was simply a technically demanding character with a number of difficult but useful countering skills. When she was nerfed, things started going downhill.

With each update, the time between input and execution became longer, and Snow White's array of counters lost their utility. With her special moves rendered unusable, Snow White was forced to fight using her base abilities, which were sorely lacking.

The hardcore crowd soon started to ignore her, and those who just liked her appearance and colour scheme soon followed, until the only people playing as Snow White were the ones that liked her as a character. Still, being called "cute tofu" or "Slow White" whenever they played as her tended to get to them, and they largely stopped too. If playing as a character is only going to annoy you, why bother?

Ako was supposedly the best Snow White main in the country, but that wasn't really a compliment. It just meant that Ako was the only pro who studied Snow White in detail with the aim of actually winning with her.

She'd lost in the first round today. Her opening had been strong, but after she lost most of her health from Ripple's combo attack, there wasn't much she could do except try to close in as she was pelted with projectiles. Ako had had many games against Ripple players which had gone like that, which wasn't surprising – Ripple had the strongest ranged attacks in the current meta.

Morino Strawberry's words echoed in her head, even now that she'd gotten home. Morino was a veteran of fighting games, being the oldest female pro who grew up in the era of arcade games where angry male players would smack the cabinets and throw ashtrays in frustration. She was a hardcore elitist who carried her experiences of her younger years into the present day, sneering at ideas like "even getting to participate is valuable" or "there are more important things than winning". She always used the strongest character available, and in the current season of MGGP that was Cranberry, with whom she had won many perfect victories. Cranberry's normal attacks had a long reach and were strong and reliable, and she had few weaknesses and high firepower. She was Snow White's opposite in every respect.

Morino had been annoyed – that is to say, she'd been upset with Snow White, and thus with Ako for choosing her.

It was easy to see things from her perspective. It was frustrating for the creators to make a character which was so pointlessly underpowered, and it was equally frustrating for a pro to choose to play as that character anyway, knowing that they'd lose if they did.

Although Ako had very different values and beliefs to Morino Strawberry, she still respected her as an incredibly talented player who had reigned supreme at the top of the fighting game world for many years and a forerunner as a female pro gamer. So when her actions upset Morino, she felt so bad that she wished she could just disappear. She felt worse about that than about losing the match.

If she didn't want to upset the likes of Morino, there was one thing she could do. Stop using Snow White, stop researching her, and put that time and effort towards a different character. It was that simple. And Ako couldn't do it. No matter how easy it seemed, her heart wouldn't let her. She didn't want to lose Snow White, and that was why she was still stressing out over this now.

She sighed, but there was nothing she could do about it. Ako opened a new tab and navigated to a video sharing website. She intended to blow off some steam, but maybe she would also find a hint for what to do next.

Could she find some way to win, or would she give up and try something else?

Ako clicked on one of the recommended videos, which were based on her viewing history. "K@NON", a pro gamer, was playing Top Speed in ranked matches. She was flitting about the screen, making use of the character's incredible movement speed which was so fast it was said to reach the limits of human reflexes. Top Speed was ten times faster than Snow White.

K@NON, like Ako, had some trouble communicating, so you might assume she was ill-suited to video content. There had been a big incident a while back when she'd clicked her tongue at an interviewer who'd asked a particularly challenging question. However, her idol- or model-level looks and distinct playstyle meant she had quite a sizeable audience. Although her communication skills were about on par with Ako, she earned a lot more.

Ako changed to a different video. This one was of "Shizuku", explaining how to perform combos as Sister Nana.

"Starting with a crouching mid-range strike, we can use this combo to catch the opponent in Sister Nana's Magical Art as the finisher for maximum damage, or you can stop the combo midway through and perform a command grab into an overarm throw, which can't be interrupted. Now, if you don't strengthen the throw by using some of the magical gauge, your reach may come up a little short..."

Her content was great, but there were more donations than you'd expect. Shizuku wasn't just beautiful compared to other pro gamers – she'd been introduced on TV as handsome too – and last year she'd made it to the top 8 in the MGGP World Championships. Whenever she went to parties or meetups her manager always tagged along, and she hovered around Shizuku to stop people approaching her. Ako had been terrified by even the plump and friendly-looking manager and had backed down on reflex.

Ako didn't think Shizuku was selling herself on visual appeal alone. She was clearly talented – even if you weren't playing as Snow White, that didn't make winning tournaments easy by any stretch of the imagination. But Shizuku's face was definitely a part of her appeal.

It didn't seem like there would be any hints here, so Ako clicked on another video. The screen went dark for a moment, and Ako saw her own face on it. It was laughable to compare herself to Shizuku.

The simple hairstyle she wore at home, with her brown hair pulled back, only made the difference more apparent.

The screen lit up again. Two girls' voices came through the headphones, one calm and composed, the other panicked and flustered. The first was "Ayana", an elementary schooler, and the second was "Tamacchi", a middle schooler. Together they were apparently the top earning duo at their agency, Jupiter King Productions.

Although they tried to play seriously there seemed to be some disconnect between them, maybe because of their ages, or perhaps their personalities.

"Huh...? Ayana, are you using Swim Swim?"

"Yeah."

"Well... I wanted to practise with Tama, and you said you'd help, but... Swim Swim isn't good for practising with because you have to attack her in a special way to get through her armour."

"It's starting."

"Uh... wait, why are you attacking normally? I wanted to practise with Tama without using her Magical Arts... you said you'd only jump..."

"I'm playing the game."

"You're awful... I'll just have to beat you then...!"

The contrast between the two was fun to watch. Their audience had a wide age range, and it wasn't just made up of fans of MGGP. The company president seemed to be very proud of this.

You can't beat youth, after all. Another pair of streamers at the agency, the twins "Mina and Yuna", had said as much.

"An elementary schooler and a middle schooler... what a killer combination."

"They're basically invincible, right sis?"

The twins were best known for their witty, fast-paced banter, which played into how close they are.

At age 22, Ako was still considered young to the wider world, but you can't make youth your selling point if there are others in your profession who are younger and more active. Even in elementary school and middle school, Ako had been shy and made few friends. Nowadays she got so nervous when streaming that the sweat on her hands would sometimes make the arcade joystick slip, and when other streamers invited her on as a guest, she just figured out how to politely refuse instead.

Her streams on the team account were her lifeline. It was the only place online for Snow White players to discuss and research the character. Although the number of regular viewers was small enough that Ako knew all of them by name, they all donated quite a bit of money – so much that sometimes she started to worry.

There were five – DarCu, Magical Girly, GEEK, Luk Luck, and I Love Hair. In fact, not only did Ako remember their names, she even knew exactly how much each of them had donated. Their heartbreaking comments and strong desire to see Snow White somehow win a major competition were sometimes a little scary, but it all came from a place of genuine love and enthusiasm. Ako truly wanted to respond to that desire, to reward them for the time and money they had given her.

But she couldn't. She couldn't win, and she couldn't give them what they wanted. Ako was consistently ranked towards the bottom of the team she was part of. If she wanted to win, she should just use a different character, but would anyone care about her if she didn't play as Snow White? Perhaps if she had more confidence in herself she'd be able to feel more positive about whichever choice she made, whether that was to stick with Snow White or finally give up.

For the umpteenth time today, Ako sighed, and turned off her computer.



That night, Ako had a dream. She was standing on a fluffy cloud, her feet sinking into it a little. Looking up, she saw a deep blue sky with star-shaped candy scattered across it and rainbows that looked like they were made of sweets. And up in that sky was a girl in pyjamas. She slowly descended, and soon the magical girl called Nemurin landed in front of Ako. Well, perhaps "landed" wasn't the right way to put it – like in MGGP, this Nemurin was floating about 10cm above the floor. Characters like that could often avoid low attacks.

Ako didn't realise this was a dream, but nor did she think anything was amiss, and she reacted as if this situation was completely normal. Nemurin had a divine aura, so the natural thing for Ako to do was bring her hands together in worship.

"Well now, no need for that sorta thing. Nemurin's just a magical girl who can visit you when you're asleep, so you can be a bit more casual."

"Ah, if you say so. Then what can I do for you?"

"Actually, Nemurin thought you were in a bit of a pinch."

"Yeah... a pretty big pinch, actually. If I want to call myself a pro gamer then surely I have to win, but I can't win if I use Snow White, but I'd feel like I was betraying people's expectations of me if I used someone else instead. I really don't know what to do."

"So do you like Snow White?"

"I love her! When I first saw her in a commercial, I dropped my chopsticks. It felt like fate. But because of her, my life as a professional gamer is seriously strained... No, it's not Snow White's fault. Her character design is great, and she's kind and hard-working. Just seeing her move soothes my spirit. I love the manga version of Snow White too. It's like, 'This is how Snow White really is!'. I think the author, Karin Sonoda, loves Snow White too."

"Hmm, yeah, I can tell how much you like her. Nemurin'll give you some advice."

"Advice?"

"You're stuck cause you're trying to solve it all by yourself. At times like this, I reckon you should get advice from someone else."

"Wait, weren't you supposed to do that?"

Ako abruptly woke up. She was lying on her back, one hand outstretched and her lips pouting slightly. Ako slowly lowered her arm, but she didn't sigh.



Nemurin hadn't been particularly reliable, but it was ridiculous to try and rely on a fighting game character who'd appeared in her dreams. That said, she had made a good point – if working through it alone wasn't helping, she should reach out to someone else.

Nothing Ako could do would make Snow White stronger. Even if she had somebody to help her, that wouldn't change. But they could help her feel better about her situation, and when you were stressed out that's exactly what you needed. Ako joined into a voice chat so she could complain to her friend.

"Hey Ako, what's up? Seems like something's got you down. If it was that tournament, don't... hang on, Makoto, how long are you planning to stay up? You've got school tomorrow, get to bed already."

This was Naoko Karamitei. She was a gaming veteran who'd fought with Morino back in the day, but now that she was a housewife as well as a pro gamer, she'd settled down into mostly streaming. With her excellent communication skills and the personalities of her two daughters, her parental-style commentary was always a big hit no matter what game she streamed. Her main in MGGP was Mary, who was famous for her flashy fighting style using a variety of weapons.

Ako had first met Naoko at their team's year-end party. She'd only recently joined and as such there was no-one there that she knew, so she'd been trying to blend into the background while hoping that the party would end soon when Naoko came up to talk to her.

"Don't pay any attention to Morino. She's been like that forever. In fact, I don't think she was much different when I first met her."

"Still, what's the point in competing if I don't expect to win?"

"No matter if you win or lose, you're still a gamer."

"I don't think that's enough if I want to call myself a pro."

"Then do you want to stop using Snow White?"

"Well... a little"

"It's not going to stay this way forever, Ako. Stronger characters will get nerfed, weaker ones will get buffed. No matter the game, it always happens eventually."

"It's nearly the next season already, I'm sure she'll be stronger in the next update'... I've heard it all before. It's been so long I just can't believe it anymore. This is just how Snow White is. Maybe the creators hate her."

"That's not true. Snow White has plenty of fans."

"Really? I don't see that many."

"Isn't she the most popular among people who don't play MGGP? There's plenty of fanfiction about her. So if Snow White becomes stronger, more players will use her again. The more people who play as her, the more fans she'll have. Now is the time to wait."

“Wait?”

“I reckon they’re banking on a big response because she’s so weak right now. There’s no point in nerfing her any further – the only way is up.”

“I see... yeah, I guess she can’t really get any weaker. Thanks for cheering me up a little, sorry to bother you.”

“Oh, not at all. To be honest, I’m an introvert at heart, but I can’t help wondering if anyone in the team has any problems. I’m just glad yours can normally be solved with a bit of talking.”

“Ah, well, thanks. Umm... well... when you said you’re introverted, was that a joke?”

“No, I’m serious.”

“If you’re introverted, what does that make me? Before I start every stream I have to calm myself down with deep breaths.”

“Yeah, I’m pretty similar.”

“No way! You’re a great talker, and I can never think of what to say. Even if I did, I can’t say it right in the moment, and I start to trip over my words.”

“That’s just a matter of getting into the mood beforehand. Before I start streaming, I always make sure to lift my spirits a little.”

“Lift your spirits? How?”

“Alcohol. I don’t need to drink much. A bottle of beer is enough.”

“Hahaha, so that’s your secret.”

“No no, it’s not that big a deal.”

After the voice chat had ended Ako thought over what Naoko had said, as she put her headset away. She’d been shy and unsociable her entire life, and she’d thought there was nothing she could do to change that, but sometimes all you needed to be more extroverted was a little alcohol, right?

She couldn’t make Snow White any stronger, or become drop-dead gorgeous, or suddenly turn into an elementary schooler, or spontaneously develop a twin sister, or play games with her parents. But she could at least try to be a bit more cheerful and talkative.

Ako had never liked the smell of alcohol, even in chocolates or savarin. As an adult she still drank oolong tea or orange juice when she went out to fancy meals. But in hindsight that might not have been such a good idea – it’s important to always try new things, after all.

The next day, at the supermarket, she visited the alcohol section for the first time in her life. One particular brand of Junmai Ginjo sake caught her eye. It was called “Magical Boy”, and the name alone was enough to convince her to get it.

As she prepared for her scheduled stream that evening, Ako sat down in front of the camera, poured a cup of sake, pinched her nose and drank it. Immediately the room began to spin. Everything went dark and fuzzy, and she blacked out.

Ako was woken up by the sound of a bird singing. She tried to get up, but the pounding in her head made it impossible. She put a hand on her head and moaned. Stretching her back, she crawled like a worm towards the fridge, opened her mouth and drank mineral water straight from the bottle.

She was still feeling far too sick to be remotely comfortable, but she was at least regaining the ability to think. She began to remember what had led up to this and checked her clock. It was 8 in the morning. Ako sighed. It felt like she'd skipped a huge chunk of time. It was then that she realised this could be a lot worse than just missing out a few hours. She could remember everything up until she'd been about to start the stream, but what happened after that? If she'd been too intoxicated to actually start it, that would be fine, but if she'd somehow managed to stream while blackout drunk... Ako hurriedly booted up her PC as she felt panic build up inside her.

The first thing she did was check her channel and sure enough, even though she had no memory of it, she had still managed to stream last night. Her face pale, Ako navigated the cursor over the video and clicked on it with a shaking finger.

A mumbling, muttering voice came out of the computer. As she turned up the volume, she realised it was her own voice. While playing ranked match after ranked match, Ako was cursing into the microphone – or, more charitably, “complaining about Snow White’s weaknesses” into the microphone – losing over and over, not even mentioning what was happening on screen. Ako held her head in her hands, not that that would do her any good now.

She glanced over to the chat. She was morbidly curious about how her regular viewers were reacting to this shameful display. She didn't really want to look, but she felt like she had to. As the archived video played back, the real-time chat scrolled through too.

For some reason, everyone was discussing how they wanted Snow White to get stronger. Luk Luck thought that a cute special move would be added, while DarCu said Snow White should grow into the role of a heroine. I Love Hair commented that Snow White had a lot of potential, and GEEK said they would support her no matter how she developed.

Magical Girly was of a different opinion, however.

“I think Snow White is perfect as she is. She’s the complete opposite of those who think it’s enough to simply be strong, a heroine who never fights – that’s the true Snow White. Karin Sonoda’s manga portrays her the same way, so I think MGGP has recreated her perfectly. I don’t see anything wrong with her... though Akoko seems to be upset about it.”

Ako could see where Magical Girly was coming from. Still, objectively speaking it was better for her if Snow White did become stronger. In the chat, the discussion shifted to whether Snow White should stay as she is, rather than how she could be improved. No-one was paying attention to the streamer who mumbled curses as she played.

They all thought of Snow White differently. Almost like a classmate, or a childhood friend, a relative they see often, or just a cute girl who they’re close to. But no matter how they saw her, they all loved Snow White.

The pro gamer Ako was embarrassed to have streamed while blackout drunk. But thanks to that, she had realised something.

She didn't have to try to do something she couldn't. It was fine for Ako to just be Ako. She may not have been good at talking, and her looks were average, but her love for Snow White was second to none. She could proudly call herself the best Snow White player in the world, and that was enough.

Ako looked at the chat one more time.

“Snow White won’t stay like this. She’s the heroine.”

“I admire her potential, but above all she had excellent hair.”

“Good luck, Snow White! Do your best!”

“Snow White is the number one magical girl, chosen by the gods, and anyone who says otherwise is a moron.”

Ako nodded along to the fans’ words, putting strength into the hand holding the mouse. They were right. Snow White didn’t break or bend. Even if she was hurt, she always got back up again.



One month later, Snow White received a major buff in the update accompanying the new season. Her stats were increased, her techniques were powered up, but the biggest change was the addition of “Magical Girl Hunter Mode”. Her new weapon in this mode greatly improved her reach and power, and players soon found out that Magical Girl Hunter Mode should be used very differently to base Snow White, who still fought unarmed.

The fanbase went crazy over the change, which was practically on par with adding a whole new character. As the foremost Snow White expert, Ako’s workload greatly increased, and she struggled to find enough time to both research and practise, but she was glad for it. She had no intention of using her busyness as an excuse to slack off on training, and so in the “Archfiend Cram School Cup”, the first tournament with cash prizes following this update, Snow White won for the first time in MGGP history.

In hindsight, Naoko had been right. It became clear that this sudden powerup had actually been intended from the start, and the creators had probably meant to make the difference all the more stark by weakening her. The artificiality of this annoyed some players, but they eventually grew to accept it.

Ako was so busy that she didn’t have the time to look up negative information about Snow White anymore. So she totally missed that the gaming VTuber “LaPu Kishibe” had come under fire for complaining that Snow White shouldn’t fight with weapons.

Translation Notes

I'd prefer to call the game Magical Girl Fighting Project or Magical Girl Brawling Project, but the abbreviation MGGP is used throughout the story and I'd rather not change that.

The "superman punch" Snow White uses in fight at the start is a genuine martial arts move, where the user brings their back leg forwards then kicks off of it to put more force into their punch. It also doubles as a feint.

Finally, the characters from Magical Girl Raising Project, or rather the analogues to those characters. Everyone from Unmarked appears in some form or another, plus a few extras. In order of appearance:

Rapid Swallow – Tsubame Murota, aka Top Speed. Rapid Swallow is the name of Top Speed's broomstick, and the fact she's a speedrunner in this story also fits. As we'll see, there's a pretty obvious link between who each person is and which character they play, so it's cute that she plays as Ripple.

Akoko/Ako Hatoda – Ako Hatoda, aka Hardgore Alice. Her name is the same, though she's been aged up quite a bit for this story. Her adoration for Snow White is also unchanged. It's cute that she plays as Snow White

Morino Strawberry – Musician of the Forest, Cranberry. "Strawberry" is an obvious play on Cranberry, and as of unripe duet it has been confirmed that Cranberry's human first name is "Ichigo", meaning "strawberry". "Morino" is pronounced the same as "of the Forest" in Japanese (森の), but there is a difference in the characters used – the "no" is 野 rather than の, probably meaning "wild" in this context. Morino's history is also analogous to Cranberry's (albeit presumably less lethal), Endou mentioned the "Children of Strawberry" being a thing in a bonus tweet, and Cranberry is the character she plays in MGGP.

K@NON – Kano Sazanami, aka Ripple. Her streamer name is based off of her real first name, Kano, though it's more leetspeak-y than I would've expected from her. Her difficulty communicating and signature tongue-clicking are retained from her original character. It's cute that she plays as Top Speed.

Shizuku – Shizuku Ashu, aka Weiss Winterprison. Shizuku is still as beautiful, handsome and competent as she is in MGRP. It's cute that she plays as Sister Nana.

Shizuku's unnamed manager – Nana Habutae, aka Sister Nana. The manager is deliberately mentioned to be a woman, and her physical description and possessiveness fit Sister Nana perfectly.

Anaya – Anaya Sakanagi, aka Swim Swim. She still works with Team Ruler, she's still an elementary school student, she's still as deadpan and ruthless as ever, and her first name at least is the same. Also, she plays as Swim Swim.

Tamacchi – Tama Inubozaki, aka Tama. She still works with Team Ruler, she's still a middle schooler, she's still as timid as ever, and her streamer name is based off Tama, which was her first name in MGRP. Also, she plays as Tama.

Jupiter King Productions' unnamed president – Sanae Mokuou, aka Ruler. Based on her being the leader of Jupiter King Productions, which is the agency of the rest of Team Ruler, we might assume as much, and the name of the agency all but confirms it. Jupiter in Japanese is 木星, literally “tree star” which uses the same kanji 木 as the “Moku” part of Ruler’s surname. The “Ou” part means king, hence Jupiter King Productions.

Mina and Yuna – Mina and Yuna Amasato, aka Minael and Yunael. They still work with Team Ruler, they’re still twins I guess, and their dynamic and their first names are the same.

DarCu – Dark Cutie. The name is a contraction of Dark Cutie and they like Snow White from the perspective of her being an ideal heroine.

Magical Girly – Souta Kishibe, aka La Pucelle. Magical Girly is La Pucelle’s online chat name in “Knight on the Day of the Offline Meetup”, and their opinion of Snow White as someone who doesn’t fight fits La Pucelle perfectly (see also: Magical Girl Raising Project in Dreamland).

GEEK – Keek. The similarity to the word “geek” is the reason she’s called Keek. GEEK also supports Snow White unconditionally and is presumably the person who has such an obsessive adoration of her towards the end of the story, both of which match how Keek acts.

Luk Luck – Puk Puck. This is the only one I’m not certain on. The kanji is 福福, pronounced “fukufuku” and with each character meaning fortune. This could also fit Premium Sachiko, but I think that’s supposed to be a tangential link to Puk Puck. Fukufuku spelled out in katakana is very similar to Puk Puck in Japanese - フクフク vs プク・プック. Finally, Luk Luck’s focus on Snow White being cute and just wishing her good luck is similar to how Puk Puck sees her in MGRP. The localised name Luk Luck was suggested by PlatFleece.

I Love Hair – Pythie Frederica. Frederica is a straight up hair fetishist, and I Love Hair calls out Snow White’s hair as being particularly attractive. They also comment on Snow White’s potential multiple times, which is something Frederica is interested in.

Nemurin – Nemu Sanjou, aka Nemurin. Nemurin only appears as Nemurin, and it’s ambiguous whether that was a figment of Ako’s imagination or if Nemurin really does exist in this world/can cross between universes. Frankly her appearance in this story raises far more questions than it answers.

Karin Sonoda - Karin Sonoda, aka Genopsyko Yumenoshima. The name is completely identical, and Genopsyko is known to be an aspiring manga author in MGRP.

Makoto – Makoto Andou, aka Magicaloid 44. The first name and familiarity with this universe’s Calamity Mary are the only things to go off of here. It’s ambiguous whether Ako was intending to talk to her friends (plural) or her friend (singular) when she joined the voice call, since in Japanese plurality is usually implied by the context rather than being explicitly stated. Makoto could have been in a group call which Ako joined, and Naoko was just fussing over her, or Naoko could be her actual mother (either adoptive or biological) and she told Makoto to go to bed in person. We don’t hear Makoto respond and the way Naoko speaks to her makes me think the second option is most likely, as does the fact Naoko has two daughters in this story rather than the one that Calamity Mary has.

Naoko Karamitei – Naoko Yamamoto, aka Calamity Mary. Her first name is the same as in MGRP, and her surname is meant to sound like “calamity”. Naoko still likes to drink, and she plays as Mary in MGGP. Out of everyone here I think Naoko is the one whose life most drastically improved compared to her MGRP counterpart, setting aside that most of them are also dead. Good for her.

LaPu Kishibe – Souta Kishibe, aka La Pucelle. LaPu shares the same surname as La Pucelle, and their first name is clearly a contraction of “La Pucelle”. LaPu has similar opinions about Snow White as Magical Girly, which as I’ve already mentioned fits La Pucelle too. This also strengthens the idea that LaPu Kishibe and Magical Girly are the same person.

As a note, the only link to Koyuki Himekawa (Snow White) in the story is through Snow White the videogame character. There is no indication that Koyuki actually exists in the real world, or even to the extent that Nemruin does. In a sense, despite the entire story more or less revolving around her, Snow White is the least “real” character in it.