

Chapter 3:

The Detective and the Murder

☆ Detick Bell

Detick Bell is a detective.

She had a cape and detective's hat. As props, she also had a pipe and a magnifying glass. You could say she was a female Sherlock Holmes.

She's not just a Magical Girl dressed in a detective costume. Why else would you call her a detective, then?

Pre-transformation, Shinobu Hioka's profession was, in fact, a detective.

At kindergarten, Shinobu had a brother four years older than her. She always stuck around with her brother. When she was depressed, she always stuck around him.

They got a discount for the Children's Club bus trip in town.

The Children's Club.

Basically, it was a gathering of mostly elementary school students.

"Why does *he* get to be in a club, but *I* can't? No fair!" complained Shinobu, crying and shouting.

Her father, who couldn't stand that vitality, talked it over with the Chairman of the Neighborhood.

On one of the Children's Club bus trips, she went to a ranch in the neighboring city. It was spring, and the weather was very sunny. The temperature was like early summer.

In a condition where it wasn't fitting for children to play, they fussed around watching cows, looking at horses, feeding sheep and rabbits, and experiencing milking.

When they went on their home trip, that's where Shinobu had a fateful encounter.

The tired children were asleep, and there was an Anime being played on the TV inside the bus. She had been looking forward for this bus trip, so ate dinner and slept early the previous day.

Shinobu, who slept just a while before the trip, still had a lot of energy remaining, even if she did work hard on that ranch.

In the TV screen, there was an elementary school boy detective. He revealed the murderer in a locked-room mystery.

The words he spoke were jargon that Shinobu didn't understand yet at the time.

He was a kid, just like me. But he defeated the evil plot of an adult.

He was praised by adults, detectives, and senior detectives.

He was respected, and his weapons were only his secret items and dependable companions.

Also, his intelligent mind.

The phrase 'murderer' was more shocking to an elementary school child than 'conquer the world' or 'destroy humanity'. He was a hero who took down someone like that.

Shinobu was on a bus full of sleeping children. She clenched one fist at the boy detective's success.

Shinobu became a huge fan of boy detectives. She asked her brother to borrow some old Manga from his friend. Fortunately, there were Furigana everywhere, so she was able to understand most terms.

Alibi, Tricks, Locked-Room, a number of enchanting phrases fascinated Shinobu.

She no longer had to follow her older brother. Her brother said he finally felt relieved. Though, somewhere, he still looked lonely... It may have been just Shinobu's misunderstanding.

She asked her father if she could borrow some DVDs. Both Anime and Movie versions, all of them she checked out. Her interest shifted to general mysteries. In conclusion, she began to look at her father's bookshelf.

The bookshelf whose color box was remodeled with a Do-It-Yourself carpentry tools was filled with mystery books.

She found it! '*Adult-Level Reading Material*'. She picked it up and read it in secret. This time it didn't have any furigana, so she couldn't self-teach herself. There were words that she couldn't understand in there.

While other children were obsessed with Anime or Tokusatsu, Shinobu was hiding alone reading mystery novels.

Among her favorites was a novel of a famous detective. Shinobu's original Anime experience, Detectives.

Absolutes.

He transcended everything, and was a jack-of-all-trades at everything.

Elementary school, middle school, all of her time was spent reading detective novels. In high school, she was the *Mystery Club* President.

Some with outstanding minds and knowledge have even solved locked-room mysteries. Pointing their fingers on the murderers.

Some of them wanted to help girls with no one to turn to, and defeat mighty organizations for no compensation.

She was excited about the activities of detectives, and about how tough and cool detective successes were.

At the High School Culture Festival, they planned a performance of *The 8-Tomb Village* in the school gymnasium.

She was scolded by her PE teacher for staining the gymnasium with bloody stains. Flashy plays of that kind were usually successful.

The audience seemed to be excited by it. Solving the mystery in the spotlight. The main character, Kousuke Kindaichi, was played by Shinobu, was met with a roaring applause. Even just remembering it made pleasure flow through her body.

So this is what it felt like to be a detective.

No, if I were a real detective, surely it'll be even more amazing.

Originally, she may have wanted to be an actress, but Shinobu decided that her admiration for detectives was more important.

Ignoring her parents' opposition, when Shinobu graduated Junior College, she finally went through the doors of a Detective Agency, just 3 years ago from today.

Later on, she received an e-mail about a Magical Girl selection test by chance. She passed that test and became a Magical Girl.

Becoming a Magical Girl. This will definitely be useful for detective activities.

For Shinobu, detectives always come first.

She'll never forget the first time she transformed into a Magical Girl.

She became a beautiful girl. Although Shinobu wasn't the type to adore beauty and cuteness, her heart was greatly moved. Just looking at herself made her heart throb.

She stretched and bent twice, three times, thinking she was deceiving herself. Just by moving a little, she could smell a sweet fruity scent.

That mail was neither a joke nor a prank. Pinching her cheeks and feeling pain taught her that it wasn't a hallucination or a dream.

She could tell this was impossible with modern science.

This was happening, in the flesh, this was real.

She was a genuine Magical Girl.

Detick Bell's costume looked like something that adults would be fine with wearing, making it possible for her to work besides people in the city.

Her physical abilities far surpass creatures that are more capable than humans. Her excellent durability made it great for working in sleepless days. At night, she could see, just as clear in the darkness as it is in daytime.

All skills suitable for a detective.

Also, for every single Magical Girl, there is a Magical Skill, even for a detective like her.

With Detick Bell's magic, it didn't matter if it was a *Locked-Room Mystery* or an impossible crime, all of them were nothing. She'll never miss the culprit.

Unfortunately, real life detective activities had no *Locked-Room* mysteries or *Phantom Thieves*.

Three years have passed since Shinobu aspired to be a detective.

Using the abilities of a Magical Girl, shadowing or stakeouts always guaranteed results. She also tried to remember her clients. Some people wanted to provide her capital to become independent.

Now she knew the reality of being a detective.

Adultery or runaways from home cases are perfectly fine, but novices are stuck with sorting documents and phone numbers, ordered to clean and serve tea, and other odd jobs include caring for pets and spring cleaning.

She was crammed with baggages from moving offices until she collapsed. Her Director always ordered her to do a variety of odd jobs, saying grandiose things like "This is for your sake" "The first step of a first-class detective". Coupled with his appearance and poor persuasive skills, his disposition seemed bad.

But Shinobu's spirit never waned. Even though she knew the reality of a detective, she never abandoned the dream of a detective.

No matter where she goes, she'll always try to be a detective. She loved playing the detective role.

The Magical Girl known as *Magical Daisy* was eliminated from the game.

Her deathblow skill, *Daisy Beam*, was something to concern about. The special ability of the Powered Skeleton was '*To reflect long-ranged attacks*'. So it reflected her beam.

She was felled in one stroke.

She had talked with her party members, confirming the situation in the scene of the crime. After inspecting the body, there was no mistaking the facts.

This wasn't a murder. All evidence points to an accidental death.

It wasn't the accident that was the problem. Something else was.

As soon as she logged out of the game, she requested a vacation from her Director.

"I'm going to be busy. I'd like to use 3 of my vacation times," she said as her boss screamed over the phone. He ended the call by slamming his phone.

I'm truly sorry about that.

Shinobu's priority at the moment wasn't her normal job.

First, she searched on the net using her Magical Phone. There were also some things she'd like to ask the Land of Magic. But for some reason, all the texts and mails she sent to the Land of Magic keep being sent back.

No matter how many times she tried, it was the same. She gave up on the mail, and prioritized the searches instead.

First, she inputted '*Magical Daisy*', pressed the spacebar, and began swapping search terms after that. Finally, she saw a lead. One of the background scenes of the Magical Daisy Anime matched a local station.

She matched the information she received from Yumenoshima Genopsycho with information posted on websites. Together with info from her search results, she was able to find out where the Magical Daisy Anime's surroundings were modeled from.

It seems that there was a time where it would be known as a pilgrimage spot for Otaku. However, *Magical Daisy* has long since stopped airing. It was a popular Sunday Morning 8 o'clock show for children.

It seems at that time, that pilgrimage site was filled with hustle and bustle.

Shinobu turned off her Magical Phone, and transformed into a Magical Girl, lowering her hat down so that her eyes couldn't be seen. She packed necessary items such as her wallet into her work bag and left her apartment.

She headed towards the Tohoku area by bullet train. Midway, she transferred to a private railway. She connected with 3 more stations.

She deposited a ticket to the unmanned ticketing station and stopped off in B-Town.

After looking left and right, making sure nobody was around, she gently kissed the wall of the station. On the cracks and surface of the wall, a human face began appearing.

The face on the wall looked more like an Anime or a Manga face compared to an actual human being. This face seemed like an elderly middle-aged man.

The objects affected by her magic have different faces depending on several factors. For example, in this old unmanned station, of course such a face would have those features.

The large 1-meter cartoon-like face gently moved his eyes slowly, as Detick Bell watched.

"You called?"

The voice was a bit muffled. It seems this neighborhood has that kind of personality.

"Do you know someone named Magical Daisy?"

"No, I'm afraid I don't."

"She looks like this"

She showed him the picture of Daisy on her phone.

“Ah, I do know that girl. She often helps around in the station.”

“Okay, thanks for your help.”

Once again, when she kissed the nose of the face, the face melted in the wall and disappeared.

This was Detick Bell’s ‘*Can communicate with any building*’ Magical Skill. Everytime she wants to activate it, she has to perform a kiss.

However, a person’s property will not betray its master, those were the kinds of restrictions that existed, which is horrible for detective work.

Incidentally, when she tried to use it in the buildings in the Wasteland Area, all the faces said “I am my Master’s property. I’m not at liberty to say anything my Master doesn’t want me to. Please find your Clear Event hints the usual way.”

Even if she tried talking to other buildings, there wasn’t much difference in what they say. Detick Bell was disappointed that she thought she could find hints easily with her powers.

Immediately after leaving the station, she purchased the regional newspaper at the local convenience store. In the countryside, these stores were everywhere, and their parking lots were huge.

Bell sat on the parking lot, opening the newspaper.

According to information from Nokko-Chan, when *Magical Daisy* aired, Daisy was still a middle school student. It’s then possible to calculate her age backwards.

If she was in middle school, she shouldn’t be doing her Magical Girl activities far from home. If she’s never moved, her parents’ house should be nearby.

If she were a Magical Girl, there has to be a place where she would detransform. Even if she was careful not to let people watch, no one would care if a building watched them.

There has to be a building somewhere who’s seen Daisy detransform. From building to building, Bell asked about *Magical Daisy*’s usual route, trying to figure out her residence.

If no one could answer her, she’ll follow the possibility that her parents have moved. If she did move, there has to have been a building that saw it. A building’s memory doesn’t fade away.

It would be possible to determine whether Magical Daisy was dead or alive this way. This was the purpose of the investigation. Even Detick Bell hoped for her survival.

Fal said in the game that damage taken there won't feedback into reality. She participated in the game because she believed those words. This was also true for Shinobu.

This was a matter of confirming if there was a mistake somewhere. She didn't want to be motivated by unpleasant feelings or baseless accusations. She should be self-aware about these things.

Detick Bell closed the newspaper. She left the parking lot. She has 3 days.

☆ Pechika

Just like last time, Pechika changed her clothes, then gave her lunch to Ninomiya-Kun. Even if Pechika stepped forward the same way, she could hear no complaints from anyone.

"Hey, it's that girl!" "Who is she?" said the surrounding voices around her.

She felt proud, happiness, joy. Yet, in the back of her heart, she felt only pain and agitation.

Now, for the second time, she didn't feel happiness nor joy, only pain.

In this autumn day, a well bucket was missing. Dusk was fast approaching. There were no children in the Children's Park.

There was only Pechika, sitting down at the swingset.

Thinking about the game made her feel depressed.

Just as Fal explained, she heard the Logout announcement, and as soon as she realized it, she was in her bed. She looked at her clock, and sure enough, the minute hand hasn't moved at all since before.

However, that doesn't mean it's okay.

She should've refused, but she couldn't. Also, there seems to already be a Magical Girl who was eliminated. She remembered that her party members looked dejected.

Damage shouldn't reflect to reality, that's what they said in the game.

But she knew there was something more to that game. Ultimately, its main goal is fighting, something not suited to Pechika.

Pechika sighed.

Even now, she didn't think she could refuse. She was afraid to even say it. If Pechika was eliminated without doing anything, then surely the other Magical Girls would be disappointed in her.

She may be badmouthed, she might get beaten up. Even though damage doesn't transfer to reality, she'd still feel the pain. She felt the same pain when she tried to pinch her cheeks in the game as she would in real life.

So the pain of death should feel the same as a real death.

Just imagining it made her feel depressed. Did the other Magical Girls never think about these things?

The game concept of killing all your enemies doesn't seem to be fitting for a Magical Girl. A Magical Girl's job is to help people.

Of course, there may be violence involved when trying to help some people. Even then, for the sake of rescuing humans, Magical Girls were given enhanced physical abilities and magical powers.

So even though she may not be able to avoid violence when helping people, defeating enemies to earn Magical Candies shouldn't be what Magical Girls do.

But of course, even if Pechika screamed this out loud, it'd probably just be a cowardly escape from reality.

Nobody would even listen to what Pechika was saying.

Pechika sighed.

She at least considered the rewards. The prize for clearing is 10 billion Yen. That's about the winnings of dozens of jumbo lotteries.

If one of her party members defeated the Demon Lord, then the prize money should be equally divided amongst them. That was the promise that they made.

That's why she didn't feel like participating in the battles. Does Pechika even... have a chance?

For Pechika, that's just not realistic at all.

If she had to choose one, she'd be glad to have the participation prize of 100,000 Yen. If she got it, she'd quickly deposit and book it as securely as she could.

She considered its uses. Since she can easily make her own food, then it should be used to buy clothes, then maybe rings and a necklace, maybe some earrings...

...Okay, no. piercings are scary. No earrings.

Shoes, bags, famous brand-name products, items used in fashion shows.

If 100,000 Yen isn't enough for that, she could add up the money she saved up from New Year's Gifts. Even if it might not suit Chika, if Pechika wore it, they would be gorgeous decorations.

She immersed herself in her escapist fantasy. She just noticed that the sun has already fallen. Her shadow in the park deformed into a long black shape as night fell.

She heard the tap tapping footsteps of someone approaching her. When she noticed it, beyond Pechika's shadow, there were the spikes of baseball shoes. Looking above those feet, she could see a baseball uniform.

When she lifted her face, she gasped. Ninomiya-Kun was standing there. He lowered the black baseball club bag.

Even while he was wearing his uniform, Pechika could see his athletic body breathing heavily. This was because he ran. With his forehead full of sweat, he watched Pechika.

"Um..."

As his voice called out, he came closer. Pechika tightened her grip on the swingset. The swingset's chains were covered with vinyl. The cold steel transmitted over to her body. She realized her body temperature was rising.

"You're the girl who brought lunch, right?"

Like a spring, she instantly bounced up and nodded furiously. Her facial muscles were stiff. The hands that were grabbing the swingset chains now grabbed parts of her one-piece skirt.

"Um, this is embarrassing, but thanks a lot"

Ninomiya-Kun was right in front of her. If she stretched out her hand, she could feel his breath, his sweat could already be smelled from over here.

An absolutely unreachable star. She could never speak to him at school, only watch him from a distance.

She was sweating. Her body temperature was rising. Her heart was beating. She felt dizzy.

So it was true when they say that love feels like a disease.

Ninomiya-Kun placed his hand behind his head. Seems like he was feeling bad about something. Then, he spoke.

"Um, that lunch. Sorry for asking, but could you cook one up again?"

Pechika nodded over and over, so much that her hair began to shake up and down.

"It really was delicious. Seriously the best. I'd do anything to eat that every day!"

It was food that was made using Pechika's Magical Skill. It was because of her magic that made it delicious. Ninomiya-Kun gestured with both his body and his hands. He kept on emphasizing how delicious the lunch was.

"Is it really okay, though? Y'know, no one in the team knew who you were, so I had to run around until I could find you. If, if it's okay with you, I'd like to ask one more favor."

Ninomiya-Kun lowered his head down to Pechika. Pechika could see the back of Ninomiya-Kun's head.

The baseball club had a rule. They had to shave off their hair. Ninomiya-Kun's head was well shaped. His cleanliness came before the show of shame. Maybe it'd be nice to the touch.

Pechika's right hand moved.

"Because the team took turns, I never really got to eat the full lunch course."

Ninomiya-Kun raised his head slightly. Pechika caught a glimpse of his face. Their eyes met. In a panic, she pulled back her right hand.

She sweated even more intensely. She began to breath so hard that she needed to breathe through her mouth.

Ninomiya-Kun looked at Pechika. Pechika looked at Ninomiya-Kun as well. Ninomiya-Kun looked at Pechika, and Pechika looked at Ninomiya-Kun.

That's why their eyes met.

"Even though we're so far, and I kind of feel really tired, that lunch was to die for. So uh, um, if no one's around, you wanna share it with me? No, really, even if everyone in the team didn't want to, I'd still want that lunch. Is that okay?"

With a dizzy feeling that made her almost faint, Pechika nodded.

"Understood!"

Too stiff and tense. She sounded very monotone there.

"Really? For real! Alright! Thank you so much!"

Ninomiya-Kun shook Pechika's hands vigorously, repeatedly saying thank you to her. Pechika could only look as her face turned white.

She decided that this park would be a good meeting spot to share lunch. Ninomiya-Kun also turned white and nodded.

After that, Pechika saw him off as he ran, humming a tune to himself.

She couldn't stand anymore, and sat back on the swing. She felt cold and wet. So that's how much she's been sweating.

Her heartbeat gradually calmed down. Her flames of passion resided. While she was calming down, her fire still created smoke.

Pechika's Magical Skill, that she only thought was an extra add-on, turned out to be helpful. Ninomiya-Kun was happy. He praised her. He said he'd do anything if he could eat it every day.

That's it. Cooking. A new path opened before Pechika.

☆ Shadow Gale

Several years ago, the reason why she's serving the Hitokouji family today, was Kanoe's grandfather.

His eye and legs continued to worsen. He always used a wheelchair. His body and head were giving out from old age.

He managed everything,

Human resources, investments, agreements, bid riggings.

He provided detailed instructions for others.

There were rumors that, despite being over 80, that he had an illegitimate child. Those rumors even came towards Mamori's ears. It may or may not be true.

He continued to work every day until he collapsed with a stroke. Even in death, the Hitokouji family never stopped.

You could say that was the cause.

Although Kanoe didn't seem to treat others with respect, she loved her grandfather.

You could tell, because year by year, her tone slowly resembled that of her grandfather. Her parents and older brother found it weird and left. In the private girls' school she went to, you could tell her awful tone.

Afterwards, when she became a Magical Girl, you could even see it in her costume. Her wheelchair was obviously influenced by her love. Decorated with luxurious gold, with excellent craftsmanship, like a throne.

It makes you think of old kings who would lead at the apex of their clans.

Her eyepatch also symbolized the eye disease. Crafted with a wooden bird motif. She loved her grandfather, even when his feet worsened and looked like sticks.

Kanoe's way of life was similar to her grandfather.

At least that's what Mamori thought.

No hesitation, without thinking.

No.

She did think, she was very thoughtful, she just didn't show it to others. She always seemed to promptly choose the right decision out of nowhere. Her admirers grew because of that.

And there Kanoe was.

There was no one in the Science Lab but Mamori. She was looking outside the window. She seemed to be thinking of something. Usually, she'd chat with her classmates, while also reading the books that she brought to school.

You could tell she was thinking hard. Frankly, Mamori wasn't worried.

From yesterday until today, all she prioritized was the game.

For Kanoe to be worried so much about the game. If Mamori were to put herself in her position, just thinking about it would make her lose sleep.

"Even if we're in tough times, I still have some wonderful news for you"

“...So you can read minds now?”

“How long have we been together, again? I think that’s a good enough reason.”

This shallow human being seemed a little bit whitish.

Outside the window, there were many students playing soccer energetically outside. Even though this was a Private Lady’s School, there were a variety of Lady-types in it.

Even though it’s Fall, it was still scorching hot. The heat even reached Mamori. She loosened her scarf.

“It’s about the game”

Of course it’s about the game.

“You probably dislike it. Fighting enemies, saving money to buy items. With your Magical Skill, Mamori, you could technically cheat. With that thought in your head, isn’t it interesting?”

“My Lady, if you want me to do it, then I can’t exactly say no, can I?”

It’s ironically because of you that we’re involved in all of this.

Kanoe didn’t seem to be concerned by it. She was watching the students running around outside the window.

She placed her knees on the chair, her skirt slid exposing her thighs.

“Your thighs are showing”

“There are two kinds of Magical Girls”

“Combat Magical Girls and Non-Combat Magical Girls, right?”

“That’s right. That game was made for Combat Magical Girls. Yet, it doesn’t mean all the participants are Combat Magical Girls. For example, me and you. There was also another girl that wasn’t willing to fight. Now why would these girls participate in the game?”

“I’m guessing because of the reward.”

“Speaking of the rewards. Remember that reward we got for Clearing an Area last time? It was deposited earlier to an account normally used for Foreign Exchanges. I don’t know how they looked it up. Their name was also anonymous. Hm, regardless, if we clear 2 areas, that makes a total of 2 Million Yen.”

“2 Million? Seriously?”

“We also have the Participation Awards, too. You should check your account. Also, try to keep your head out of just material pleasure.”

That amount of money would be 5 times more than what she would’ve earned last January. That would be nice to get.

“I asked Fal, and it seems like no one refused participation as a test player.”

“Not even one?”

That was surprising. If they were forced, there should be at least one or two rebellious people that would’ve refused.

If a human became a Magical Girl, then such a person, everyone, should be strong.

“It’s strange, isn’t it? There’s so many people. Even though it seems like participation was forced, no one refused. Someone strong should’ve refused. There are people who prefer peace instead of fighting, so why did no one refuse?”

“My Lady, you didn’t refuse as well, did you?”

“I’m a young girl, I know I can be a little odd sometimes”

“Yes, you are quite odd.”

“Smell, touch, sight, taste, hearing. Nothing has changed from reality. Meaning if you were hurt, then you should feel the same pain. They say that damage won’t transfer back to reality, so that might be a good reason for Non-Combat Magical Girls to give this a second shot, but then why did they respond to the game invite in the first place?”

Kanoe raised one knee, and her skirt fell even more. Even though this is a Lady's school, the reason she often had fans was because she'd do those strange things.

"I'm tired."

"Is that so?"

After saying those words, Mamori turned around, and came face to face with a skull. She became frustrated.

It was just a science class prop, and unlike the game, this one wouldn't attack her.

Oh yeah, she always finds little pranks like these amusing, doesn't she?

"My Magical Phone is acting a bit strange. I can't contact the Land of Magic at all."

"You know I can't fix the Magical Phones with my Magical Skill."

There were several guards in place to protect a Magical Phone's information. When Kanoe ordered Mamori to use her Magical Skill on it, it became useless.

Luckily, she was able to falsify the reasons for it being broken, and was given a new Magical Phone.

Since it was Kanoe who ordered it, the one that actually had to talk about the forged reasons was Mamori. She got angry when she remembered that.

"Like I said, it's strange."

Her feet dangled from the chair, her skirt falling back to its original position. Mamori was relieved.

It seems that the soccer game outside has reached its climax, ending with an amazing goal kick from the corner of the field. Mamori saw teammates high fiving each other.

Their face then turned towards this place. She could see them mouthing "Ah!" outside the window. In response, Kanoe smiled softly and waved at them.

Mamori could hear the students voices as they came up the stairs. She furrowed her eyebrows.

After 3 days, she returned to the game world. Dark brown buildings and wastes all around. The smell of the earth penetrating her nose. This was the same place she started in.

She opened her map, checking the positions of her party members. First, she should meet up with Kanoe.

“You had me waiting quite a while. Could you speed it up next time?”

“Yeah, yeah. Next time I’ll run as fast as I can.”

Masked Wonder seems to be staying in a place that was a bit more distant than where they were.

Although she was a weirdo, compared to Pfle, she was much more straightforward and easier to get along with.

Masked Wonder’s icon kept still and didn’t move. Next time, she’ll go to her first.

Although Pfle blamed Shadow Gale for her delay, she didn’t say anything about Masked Wonder not moving.

Mamori has seen the Hitokouji family for more than 10 years. They are capitalists who exude an excellence about them.

Only in compensation, spirit, and their treatment. Other than that, they were just as average as anyone else.

Shadow Gale pushed Pfle’s wheelchair. They reached the building where Masked Wonder was waiting in.

When she stretched her back, Shadow Gale felt a bit cold. She was sweating.

That girl must be practicing her *Victory Pose*. Shadow Gale was tired, but she opened the building door.

Inside, Masked Wonder was collapsed. Her arms and her face reaching forward, as if she was trying to grab something.

She was collapsed with her face on the ground. Her purple cloak was smeared with a reddish black liquid. Not just the cloak, it also spread across the floor.

The source of the reddish black liquid was the back of her head. Beside her was a stone that was pulled out and dropped to the side.

Pfle stepped onto the blood pool with her wheelchair and approached Masked Wonder. She picked up the Magical Phone that Masked Wonder had and turned it on.

“Hmph, Of course... All the items and candies are gone.”

Pfle’s tone was like that of a scientist examining the results of a test. As Shadow Gale listened to her words, nausea came piling up.

☆ Pechika

Pechika received a pot.

Depending on the Town, there were differences in the shops. In the Wasteland Town, there were Healing Potions, in the Mountain Town, there were Picture Books. It was these kinds of variations.

As they went on, there were even stronger items ahead.

In the Wasteland Town, there were only *Weapons* and *Shields*, but in the Grassland Town, it changed to *Weapons +1* and *Shields +1*. In the Mountain Town, it became *Weapons +2* and *Shields +2*.

After installing it, it took a more complicated shape, and its robustness also increased. It also changed according to each Magical Girl.

When installed in her Magical Phone, Pechika got a Spatula. When Leonetta installed it, it became claws extended from her hands. Its name was *Weapon +X*. Very uncanny, yet high in compatibility with her.

There were common items, and there were random items you could get by purchasing the 'R' item.

The *R* item was pretty popular when the game had just started.

The first item that they received was a *Map*. A convenient and extremely useful item.

If this class of item was available randomly for 100 candies, then they're not too sad about it. The reality, however, wasn't that sweet.

The second time they purchased the *R* item, it was a *Map*.

The third time was a *Map*.

The fourth time was also a *Map*.

The second time this happened, they had a bitter smile, by the third time, their smiles disappeared. After the fourth time, they had a mixture of doubt and anger.

What's wrong with this R thing? Why does it only pop out maps?

"Some items in the *R* category have different rarities. So their probabilities are different, Pon."

After pressing the Help Button and demanding answers, Fal responded without fear.

"And yet, all that we've procured so far are *maps*," said Leonetta with a voice that would make you tremble.

Despite the edge of her lips shaking, Fal remained calm.

"Maps are high probability items, Pon. It's common for them to show up 4 or 5 times in a row. Keep trying, though, Pon. I'm sure you'll get a Super Rare Item as well, Pon!"

Leonetta, with a beautiful form that made her feel experienced, threw the map towards the shop wall. The message that appeared was,

Purchase of maps will now be 3 candies.

Since then, the purchase of *R* items has been strictly forbidden by the Team Leader.

The Ogres that appeared in the Mountain Area often dropped a lot of candies. Because most items on the shop were basically cheap, their number of candies began increasing.

They wanted to purchase the *R* item. Miyokata Nonako wanted to purchase the *R* item. Clantail also allowed it.

Clantail now had a long spear for attacking on her right hand. On her left hand was a huge shield.

Although the other 3 didn't want it, only one person who was armed could use the candies. Even so, it seemed like it would be hard to refuse Miyokata's request.

Still, Leonetta was reluctant. Finally, after a while, she nodded. They used 1000 candies and bought 10 *R* items.

The results,

8 Maps, 1 Shovel, and 1 Pot.

The shovel seemed to be just a normal shovel. It was about 1 meter in length. The pot was also an ordinary sized pot.

It wasn't magical, there were no special effects at all.

At this point, Leonetta was already furious. She started shouting about how it was stupid to use 1000 candies for something like this, swearing and calling Miyokata Nonako an idiot, to which she refuted, and then the two started arguing again.

Hearing the two of them argue, Clantail began scolding them both.

Their argument continued until they divided into the Combat and Scouting groups and left each other.

Miyokata Nonako's mood soon got better.

While scouting, whenever they encountered an enemy, Pechika would escape and avoid it, while Miyokata Nonako would annihilate them.

They encountered one Goblin out of four surrendering.

“IT’S CUTE! CUUUTE!” cried Miyokata joyfully. She tied up a ribbon around its neck.

When they were attacked, Pechika could only see it as a foul creature. After Miyokata tamed it, even though it looked the same, you could say it looked rather cute.

It was definitely something you’d call a pleasant sight to behold.

However, Leonetta’s mood was just getting worse.

Night. They rejoined the Combat group. At that time, Clantail and Leonetta were quiet. The sound of Clantail’s hooves on the ground were that of tiredness. Leonetta averted her eyes.

“Just what in the hell are we supposed to do!?”

And then her anger was revealed.

“Why on earth should we let that gigantic *rodent* tell us what to do?”

Before then, they encountered a group who drove them away, saying they couldn’t hunt in their territory. Now, in the Mountain Area, it seems they encountered the same problem.

Leonetta was angry at almost everyone who caught her eye, but it was natural for her to feel that way.

Miyokata Nonako carried her Goblin and raised him up. She absolutely won’t let Leonetta approach him.

When the Goblin began to smell, Leonetta started shouting. By doing that, once again, they restarted their argument.

Clantail barked until they stopped.

Then, they all turned their eyes to Pechika.

“What are you doing?”

“Well... I had the pot, so...”

“I realize that I’ve squandered my money and got irritated, but even so, that doesn’t mean you should flaunt that thing in my sight. Need I remind you that I can’t just sleep off the idea that we spent 1000 candies to buy a *shovel* as well?”

In the game, there was no need to sleep, even if they still needed to eat and drink. In other words, she couldn’t sleep it off.

“And besides, what’s the occasion? Why are you putting both your hands into- Huh?”

Leonetta’s nose twitched.

Sniff Sniff.

She tried smelling the pot. She began to get closer, Pechika smiled nervously, also a bit frightened. She tried to explain what she was doing.

“My uh... My Magical Skill... How do I say this, like I said... Uh... It’s a cooking magic... Since we have a pot, I thought... whew, Ahaha, unlike... Preserved Meals... This won’t cost any candies... Cause I can make it from anything, so... Maybe, uh, I think, it’ll... kinda... taste better than Preserved Meals... Probably.”

“You seem quite confident in that assumption.”

“I’m not confident at all, actually... Uh, see, there’s no food yet, so... If you could please wait a bit...”

“Leaves!? Well, that’s a rather interesting choice for dishware, I suppose.”

“Well, I think that those who complain should not be allowed to eat, isn’t that correct?”

When Miyokata Nonako laughed, the little Goblin also jumped up. Leonetta clicked her tongue, offended by that statement. She sat on a nearby rock to purposely stir up dust.

Using Pechika’s Magical Skill, she can cook as much food as she wanted. However, in the outdoors, she had no choice but to use leaves for dishware.

There were hard food to eat, and there were easy ones to eat. She thought of the perfect delicious dish.

“Rice balls? And after all that boasting, too.”

Leonetta spent no time insulting it at first sight. She wondered why she was even bothering with this. She’d rather eat Preserved Food instead.

She took a bite out of the rice ball as if it were poisoned, and furrowed her eyebrows.

Clantail and Miyokata were watching Leonetta carefully. Leonetta ignored the eyes of those two. She took two bites, she took three bites.

Without saying anything, she continued eating the rice ball. She devoured and gobbled it all up.

Miyokata timidly bent the rice ball. “Oh...” she said, with her mouth open. Soon, she couldn’t stop eating it, just like Leonetta. Her small Goblin, who saw his master, also gobbled up the rice balls.

Clantail calmly ate the rice ball, but her tail was wagging left and right.

For the time being, everyone seems to be pleased. Pechika breathed a sigh of relief. She started eating her own rice ball.

Everyone was all doing the same thing. She couldn’t really remember when, but there was a time where it felt like this has happened before.

Because she wanted everyone to get along, Pechika made meals using her Magical Skill.

It was a long time ago, when she became a Magical Girl. There wasn’t any reason for her not to remember it, but why can’t she remember?

Leonetta, Miyokata, and Clantail. All of them were eating rice balls. Until a while ago, they were all angry that they’ve been driven out of a hunting ground. Yet, they’re eating with full power now.

Pechika’s Magical Skill, which she thought was just an extra add-on.

Ninomiya-Kun, and everyone here was happy.

I guess cooking really isn't a waste

☆ **Nokko-Chan**

Manabegawa Elementary School, 4th Grade, Class 2, were known as the *Pleasant Class*.

They worked together for things such as athletics meetups or culture festivals. They never ridicule or condemn any failures.

If you make good results, then everyone would be delighted. Even if they made mistakes, everyone could laugh about it in the end.

Friction between boys and girls, bullying the weak, badmouthing, none of those existed at all.

Their Homeroom Teacher, Mr. Noguchi, was in charge of 6th grade until last year. They knew he had a habit of yelling at his students.

He was nicknamed the *square*, because he had a square looking face.

When Mr. Noguchi went into 4th grade Class 2, he changed. He became very bright and cheerful.

Since then, he's never shouted at any students ever.

But why does 4th Grade, Class 2 exude an atmosphere like that? The only one that knows the truth is Noriko Nonohara.

Whenever someone's in a bad mood, she'll change their heart to become happy and joyful.

Whether someone feels sad, anger, jealousy, or any negative feelings. In the *Pleasant Class*, such emotions were always reduced.

She controlled them to become a bright and cheerful class.

She used her powers to propagate and spread her emotions to others.

That's why the Magical Girl *Nokko-Chan* can change this depressing and gloomy class into something else.

Noriko Nonohara is a very committed Magical Girl. How committed was she?

From the moment she was reborn as a Magical Girl, until now, she's been a Magical Girl longer than she's been human.

She became a Magical Girl when she was 4 years old. Now, she was 10 years old. She was a 6-year Magical Girl veteran.

As a Magical Girl, she also had a philosophy of how to live, and she knew how to remove the proper authorities.

When she's talking about removing proper authorities, she doesn't mean sabotage or laziness.

Rather, it's more like she knew loopholes than newbie Magical Girls didn't know. The Land of Magic can be inflexible, they'd stubbornly and obstinately never yield to their decisions. It was similar to offices in the real world, too.

Regarding Noriko's origins in becoming Nokko-Chan, everything she said to Magical Daisy was true.

However, the inflexible Land of Magic had a very lax monitoring system. In Nokko-Chan's district, their experimental system was below standards.

For some Magical Girls, they had a supervising Magical Girl, who would report back to the Land of Magic. It was kind of like an intermediary role.

Because the Land of Magic doesn't directly supervise them, how strict the rules are enforced is on the supervisor's discretion.

Some supervisors were loose, mediocre, unruly, unprecedented, and rarely compliant. She wouldn't report anything even if who she supervised wasn't acting seriously.

As for Nokko-Chan's group, her own supervisor probably never reports anything back to the Land of Magic. She didn't blame Nokko-Chan for wanting to improve her own living environment, rather than going out into society to save people.

She was very inconspicuous in class, solving any problems secretly using magic. After school, she'd visit her mother, who was hospitalized. Making her heavy heart just a bit lighter. After that, she'd go back home and do some housekeeping.

Nokko-Chan's magic couldn't be used to manipulate emotions as she wished. She had to spread her own emotions. If she wanted to make someone happy, she had to desperately remember, remember, and remember anything that made her happy. Then, her magic will succeed.

Thanks to her youthfulness as a 10-year old, she became a master of deceiving herself.

Because her mother was hospitalized, Noriko was in charge of all the housework. Then, she'd get tired once more. She had no time to spare to use her Magical Skill to serve the world, she had to first take care of herself.

However, she was still managing to hold on, at least until now.

About half a year ago, Nokko-Chan's supervisor had been expelled. The reason for her expulsion was that apparently she'd done something bad, and it had been exposed then. Magical Girls are usually full of hopes and dreams, yet she had produced a scandal!

The Land of Magic didn't want it to get out of hand, so they quickly found a successor to her. That replacement supervisor was a lot more serious with her role.

Because of that scandal, they specifically looked out for a supervisor who would be inflexible in her job. That's just what the Land of Magic was like.

Nokko-Chan had to do the regular Magical Girl job of going out to the world and saving other people.

That damned serious supervisor sent a report that said, *"She's a non-active Magical Girl who prioritizes herself over others."*

Even worse, she could strip her of her qualifications.

While she tried to lead her class to a good direction, she helped the people in town. While doing that, she also took care of housework. Now, she also has to focus on the game.

She wasn't interested in the game itself. She didn't have time to raise a new generation. It was the participation fee and Clear rewards that interested her.

If she could get over a billion, then she'll do the best she can.

Nokko-Chan checked her account. Last year, she didn't have much money deposited. Now, she had 10,000 Yen.

If she could clear an Area, then she could get 1 Million.

She tilted her head.

From the lava, Genopsycho's helmet emerged.

Then, her visor, her neck, and her hand followed just after that. On her hand, there was a small key.

Standing just besides Nokko-Chan, @NyanNyan breathed out a sigh of relief.

"Score! So, according to that scroll, there's an altar thingy somewhere at the bottom! Took me a few tries, but I found it!"

"Yumenoshima, I really thought you melted, Ru"

"Nah, it's all good! This suit could withstand the big bang itself!"

Genopsycho placed her hands on the shore, and climbed up to land.

She was right, nowhere in her suit did it show any signs of melting or burning. The person inside seemed to be fine as well. Genopsycho brushed off any remaining lava, tilted her visor, and smiled.

"One gate key, aaand One Million Yen comin' right up! Alright, let's a *GO GO* to the next area!"

After the Grassland Area, next was the Mountain Area. When the game resumed, it was already opened. It seems that some party must've opened it before the game ended.

Armed with short spears, daggers, bows, shields and leather armor, was an army of Goblins.

Their strength and tactics were a little better than the skeletons.

Some had dirty little robes, with twisted wands and canes. They'd mumble and chant something weird, then cast a large fireball.

Sometimes, in a group of them, there'd be around 2 larger creatures mixed with them. Their strength was comparable to a Magical Girl's.

They'd stomp around with a gigantic club.

Still, they were no match for a Magical Girl. They were too slow and clumsy to keep up.

When a Goblin moved once, a Magical Girl would be able to move ten times. Although it would hurt if a Goblin's attack hits a Magical Girl, if a Magical Girl's attack hits a Goblin, it would be fatal.

However, unlike skeletons, if they hit a Goblin, blood was shed.

It was a little more disheartening to attack them. They'd look bloody and bruised, and sometimes you may even feel pity if you saw their teeth and face smeared with blood.

When Nokko-Chan crushed their cranium with her mop, it felt far more visceral than the skeletons.

It felt like she was actually taking a life.

Although corpses disappear in about two hours, that feeling will remain with her forever. It was an all too real feeling.

However, although the shock of Magical Daisy's death was still there, she was still able to defeat the monsters. They wouldn't be able beat the game if they let it bother them every time.

Nokko-Chan was able to deceive herself as best as she could. She filled the heads of both Genopsycho and @NyanNyan with those feelings of happiness and joy.

Magical Daisy's death was an accident. Nobody was responsible for it. Next time they faced an unknown enemy, they'd be careful.

If they fight monsters after they purchase the Picture Books, then they'll eliminate any 'What Ifs' from the equation.

Still, the gaping hole in her body. Nokko-Chan will never forget the figure of Magical Daisy, who died as blood spilled through it. For as long as she lived, she will never forget it.

They dug a grave and buried Magical Daisy's body there. They placed a stone as a grave marker as well. She'll never forget when the three of them cried while hugging each other.

But, it was an accident.

"Magical Daisy may have died here, but I'm sure she's fine in real life!" said Genopsycho to Nokko-Chan, trying to comfort her.

That's what Nokko-Chan hoped for, that's what Nokko-Chan thought, and Nokko-Chan could help with that as well.

They can't be sad forever. Deception is good. Players should forget their sorrows and focus on clearing the game. Nokko-Chan will also do her best to clear the game.

As they entered the Mountain Area, they saw a decayed old mountain. In there, they found an ancient scroll. The scroll definitely didn't lie, but everything from its annotation to its post-script were written in an ancient language.

There was an app that you could purchase in the Mountain Town, the 'Translator-Kun'.

Find the branch of the mountain people. Use that branch to perform a ceremony in the mountain people's shrine. There, you will gain the mountain people's testimony. Using that testimony, perform an ancient dance in front of the lake of lava. Once you do, the altar of the mountain people shall emerge. There, you will find the key of the mountain people. Only then can you open the gate to the next Area.

PS. To learn the dance of the mountain people, place a hookah on the scales located within the Mountain Town. It will then be taught to you through your Magical Phones. To create the hookah, you will need three materials. There are hints as to what the materials were scattered in various places. From there, you should guess the answers as best as you can.

After finishing reading those long instructions,

“Aaaalrighty!” said Genopsycho, happily raising her right arm high.

“If it’s just a little lava, then it’s a piece of cake!”

She lowered her visor.

“Check this out,” she said to Nokko-Chan and @NyanNyan, and dived into the lava lake. She jumped in without warning, and got the key from the mountain people’s altar.

“Genopsycho’s super cheat! Haha, I knew it’d work! 1 Million Yen! This is the greatest day of my life! Well then, should I use it in our next Logout period or no, hmmm?”

“Ah, that’d be good won’t it, next time we Logout!”

“1 Million Yen means that I could go out and drink as much Sake as you’d want, right, Ru?”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, you can’t spend all that on *alcohol* NyanNyan! Save a bit of it! Money’s *super* important, y’know?”

The sulfuric odor and burning heat, the lava lake that demanded them not to stay longer, now became a wonderful memorial place.

Teasing, grabbing shoulders, the three of them were smiling. Ever since Magical Daisy was gone, they haven’t been able to smile for a long time.

Right now, Nokko-Chan felt joy, and thus, she spread that emotion to the other 2 as well.

“Let’s continue on to the next Area, Ru! There should be some candies and more money as Area rewards as well, Ru.”

“AH! YOU’RE RIGHT! That’s 500 more candies to add to the collection! WOOHOO!”

“Okay, let’s head back to the Mountain Town first...”

The text ringtone sounded. The help button blinked in their Magical Phones.

“Urgent meeting, Pon. Everyone is to return to the Wasteland Town immediately, Pon!”

Genopsycho placed her fingers on her helmet, she had a panicked look, like she was trying to pull out her hair, though Nokko-Chan guessed her helmet prevented that.

“Oh, come *on*! I’m having a moment here!”

“This is an emergency, Pon! You’ll all be teleported 1 minute from now, Pon. Thank you for your patience, Pon.”

The black and white sphere disappeared as soon as he said what he needed to say. Even if the 3 of them were left there, if there’s no one to argue with, they had no choice but to follow.

“Huh, I wonder what all the fuss is about... For now, let’s just go, kay?”

“I swear, I don’t know what’s going on in that sex beast’s head.”

“I hope it’s not something bad, Ru.”

@NyanNyan was anxious. Genopsycho was frustrated. That’s why Nokko-Chan had to remember happy and joyful feelings.

☆ Pechika

“In addition, there’ll be some corrections I have to announce, as well as some additional announcements, Pon.”

Just the other day, Magical Girls were lining up in the Town Square. Today, Magical Girls were lining up in the Town Square.

Some were sitting on the edge of the fountain, some were leaning on the walls of the buildings. Although this was the second time she saw it, it was still a spectacular sight.

Fal contacted them just a while before. The party’s atmosphere had changed considerably. A whole day has since passed since Pechika cooked food. She’s cooked 3 times so far.

Because of Pechika's Magical Skill, she can make any elaborate food she wants, so long as she waited 5 minutes.

She can make a full-course meal in the amount of effort that people would need to reheat frozen food. No matter what the dish was, Pechika's cooking was always welcome.

Miyokata Nonako and Leonetta both competed in giving compliments, while Clantail kept her mouth closed, though her tail always seemed to buzz around left and right.

*"Delicious! Pechika's the **best**!"*

"Exquisite taste! You don't mind becoming my personal chef, do you?"

Their change in attitude continued, even after mealtime, and they alternated between physical labor, prioritizing item distribution, and they were willing to do things they didn't consider before.

There were no more complaints, even when Pechika didn't participate in combat.

*"If you *do* decide to fight, please be sure to keep your hands safe. It would be a great shame, not just for the party, but for the whole *world* if you lost your ability to cook!"* said Leonetta jokingly.

While lightly grabbing Pechika's hands, Leonetta praised her with high spirits in her eyes.

Pechika gained confidence. She was no longer the one who needed these girls, but these girls needed her as well.

The other party members also looked like they were having some fun... wait.

There was one exception. The Black Nurse Magical Girl. She had a pale blue face about her, and was shaking.

She looked like she's going through some hard times...

Pechika thought about the Magical Girls who she never talked with.

“First, let me make a correction.”

Sand was collected in the middle of the fountain. A Magical Phone was set up there, and from it, emerged Fal.

Even though they couldn’t see dust collecting on it, there were particles emitted in the light of the 3D Stereoscopic image.

“Both I, as your Mascot, and my Master have made a mistake. Regarding how damage won’t be feed backed into reality, Pon. Damage won’t be feed backed into reality if you cut your skin or break your bones, Pon. However, if you die, a strong shock will be applied to your heart, Pon. Unfortunately, if you die in your virtual form, there will be an unavoidable adverse effect to your real life form, Pon. Please forgive me. Also, as this is a secret game, if you talk to non-participants, then the same penalty as death will be applied, Pon. That is all.”

The sound of wind could be heard flowing through the Square, combined with the sound of dust flying as well. No other sound was made other than that.

Everyone looked at Fal, everyone thought about those words, everyone was silent, no one opened their mouths.

A Blue Magical Girl spoke first.

“This is a prank, right?”

“No. From now on, I’m only speaking the truth, Pon. If you want to survive, please clear the game, Pon. I know there’s risk of death, but the rewards you were presented with in the beginning will still be properly paid.”

“You’ve gotta be kidding me!”

“What are you saying?”

“How can we let something like that slide?”

Anger flew out at the same time. Fal, who had an expressionless face, calmly looked at them all.

“This is the same as your tests, Pon. A test to see if you’re proper Magical Girls, Pon. If you were all proper Magical Girls, then surely you can clear the game. If you want to survive, please clear the game, Pon. You can survive if you clear the game, Pon.”

He repeated the same words over and over.

“That is all. Those were my Master’s words that she wanted to say to you, Pon.”

Those weren’t Fal’s words. He was relaying a message from his master. That was what Pechika concluded.

Pechika was trembling. She wanted to run away, but there was nowhere she could run to. She felt like all the blood had drained from her head. Her feet were trembling. She felt like she would collapse any moment, yet she didn’t collapse.

The other Magical Girls were angry, shouting, beating the walls, and some tried to lunge for Fal, though because he was just a stereoscopic image, it didn’t work.

“I’d like to ask some questions, if that’s alright with you?”

The Wheelchair Magical Girl, Pfle. When Pechika met her in the Grassland Town, she was just as calm as she was now.

Even though she was in the middle of all this confusion and chaos, her voice was heard. Although everyone was screaming and shouting, they all turned around to look at her.

Pfle began speaking with Fal.

“You say that a strong shock will be applied to the heart. Is there no way to endure it?”

“Impossible, Pon. Obviously not for a human, but even if you’re a Magical Girl, it’s unendurable, Pon.”

“What if you tried to resuscitate them?”

“Impossible, Pon.”

"I see, I assumed there would be some way out of it... Well then, my next question. Our Magical Phones have malfunctioned, and I'd like to know the cause of that. Were you the ones responsible for prohibiting contact with the Land of Magic?"

Murmurs started spreading. It's true that they couldn't seem to contact the Land of Magic. Pechika had tried to confirm with them about this game. Everytime she sent mail to them, it was always sent back to her.

She's always thought that it was a bit strange, how could such a thing even happen.

Ninomiya-Kun filled her heads, so she decided not to think at all.

Fal blinked.

"Because we wanted to start from scratch in teaching the game to players other than you on NG, we'd thought that contact with the Land of Magic and vice versa should be prohibited, Pon."

"Did you, now?" muttered Pfle.

She spread out both palms widely, and an even larger voice came out.

Her voice, its height, its beauty, she silenced the hustle and bustle of the Town Square with just her voice.

"It seems that we've been forced to play this game. You've all seen that they're using brute force to do this. Our enemies have enough power to do what they want to us."

"I will *not* lose to bastards like those!"

A Magical Girl dressed like a doll spoke up, interrupting Pfle. Pfle glanced at the Doll Magical Girl.

"In our present condition, we have no way to win."

Afterwards, she continued,

"I say we continue the game."

Instantly, people began to object against Pflé.

“You’re willing to accept the enemy’s arguments?”

“You’re just going to *give up*?”

“There’s no point in participating in this game!”

Pflé nodded at all their opinions, yet she affirmed none of them.

“We’re cut off from the Land of Magic. We are facing a game that we don’t understand, and a powerful Master behind it all, who, if we decide to move against her, *will* show resistance. However, it is because we are Magical Girls that we were pulled into this game, and we *will* complete it with ease. Defeating enemies, that goal hasn’t changed at all for us. But first, for the time being, I will listen to you all.”

“You realize there is *no* guarantee that we’ll be released from this game if we complete it.”

Leonetta. Of course she was irritated.

“I know this is strange, but for the time being we have no choice but to trust this Master. I know that others can confirm it, but the rewards promised to my team have been deposited in the account as promised. Money has been deposited. That’s given me *some* peace of mind, at least.”

“It’s great that the rewards that they promised are true, and we know now that we can die in the game, but how do you expect us to believe anything they say?”

“About that...”

Fal took over. Everyone’s gazes gathered at Fal. Each one of them harsh.

“From now on, there won’t be any falsehoods from me, Pon. My word is my Master’s words, Pon. Everything I say will be the truth, Pon.”

“And who can guarantee that?”

“All I can say is that you believe what I say, Pon.”

“Even without any guarantees, all we can do is believe you. We’re all birds in a cage, now.”

Although Pfler casually threw those words out, Pechika couldn’t see any sign of resignation from her words. Her expression was ominous and vivid.

“I’d like to add to this discussion.”

A Magical Girl’s right hand was raised as she took center stage. She had a hunting cap, a cape, and a coat. She dressed like a detective.

“My name is Detick Bell. As you can see, I’m a detective.”

The Detective Magical Girl who said “*As you can see, I’m a detective.*” probably meant it as a joke to lighten the mood. Maybe. However, no one laughed.

She didn’t even want to point it out. Detick Bell continued,

“The other day, as soon as we were released from the game, I spent my time investigating a certain someone’s whereabouts. I wanted to know what kind of state they were in. I’m sure this information has a very important meaning for us all.”

“Bellsie, I’m not tryin’ to interrupt you but, who’s this certain someone that you’re talkin’ about?”

The Blue Magical Girl had some doubt, and Detick Bell closed her eyes.

“That person would be Magical Daisy. I wanted to investigate what kind of state Magical Daisy was in.”

Detick Bell opened her eyes and continued,

“I’m sure some of you may already know. Magical Daisy. She once had an Anime based on her successful activities. Based on the Anime’s setting and location, I found the area where it’s based on and started there. I confirmed it using my own Magical Skill, the place I investigated was where Magical Daisy was active as a Magical Girl. Of course, I investigated further. Using my magic once more, I got closer to finding out her status. I found her family home, and from there, her apartment. At her apartment, there were police cars and ambulances. After that, the bystanders told me everything I needed to know. I listened to what they say. The time that she

died was when she was playing the game. To be precise, it was exactly a few moments after. That about covers it.”

Magical Daisy was dead. That means that what Fal said, about how dying in the game means you die in reality, was true.

“Magical Daisy was a famous celebrity. Her sudden death should make the Land of Magic suspicious. They may begin to distrust themselves, and that may lead to a discovery. Perhaps then, they may stop the game if they find out that deaths in here are linked with the real world.”

Detick Bell looked at Fal. Fal rocked silently.

“I don’t mind if it ends up playing out like that, Pon.”

Detick Bell nodded, satisfied with that reply.

“That’s all from me.”

She returned to where she was standing before and sat down.

“That was *amazing*, Bellsie! As expected of The Great Detective!” said the Blue Magical Girl. Pechika wondered if she understood the situation right now. Everyone that *did* understand was confused.

Clantail strutted her hooves in small steps, her tail hanging down limply. Miyokata Nonako seemed to be angrily crying, messing with the Yin-Yang decorations on her hair. Leonetta was clearly angry.

“ARGH, DAMN IT ALL! How the hell did it turn out like this!?”

“I simply **cannot** believe it!”

While everyone else expressed themselves to each other, Pechika felt empty inside. She understood that this situation was completely abnormal.

Everyone aside her didn’t just accept that things turned out this way.

Everything that was said seemed to have been prepared before. But where has she heard these lines before? Where has she heard these words?

“However, as Detick Bell has said, Magical Daisy **has** died in real life, didn’t she?”

“We shouldn’t discount the possibility that the Master has a spy amongst us, who is secretly reinforcing her threats to us.”

“I want to say that we shouldn’t trust anyone, but I...”

“I have one more thing to add, if that’s alright.”

Pfle. Taking the stage after Detick Bell, just in front of the mermaid statue.

“Although it might not be appropriate at a time like this... I’d like to say this now, because of how bad it might be.”

Pechika met eyes with her. Why did Pfle smile at Pechika? Pechika gazed away in panic.

She was smiling right now, but what kind of mental state was she really in?

Pfle shouted out in a loud voice that reverberated across the Town Square.

“I’d like to have everyone’s cooperation!”

Everyone’s attention was focused on her, and she continued without hesitation.

“After I logged into the game earlier, I wanted to meet up with my party, however, one of my party members, Masked Wonder, was killed! If death in the game is linked to death in real life, then she really was killed in the truest sense of the word, it seems.”

At the end of her sentence, she seemed to murmur.

“Before our logout period last time, I’ve given her the event item that I won. All of those items, including Magical Candies were all stolen! I’d like the culprit to step forward!”

“That can’t be true!”

The Blue Magical Girl shouted out.

“Masked Wonder is a super strong Magical Girl! She can’t have been killed *that* easily!”

“Only Magical Girls exist in the game. Being strong isn’t a sufficient condition as to why she wouldn’t be killed.”

They couldn’t argue with Pfl’s words. The Blue Magical Girl fell down, her face looking distorted. She tightly clenched her fist. She was trembling. Detick Bell placed her hands on the girl’s shoulder. She talked to her, probably trying to cheer her up.

This was terrible. Of course it would be. They listened to Fal’s outrageous words.

And their disturbing atmosphere still wouldn’t be over.

“Are you sure a monster didn’t kill her?”

Leonetta’s question was legitimate. Needless to say, Magical Daisy was an example of that. It would’ve been natural for a monster to go after players.

“The Wasteland Area’s encounters only contained basic skeletons. They’d have trouble killing something that’s not a Magical Girl, I guarantee you. Moreover... Is anyone here from Magical Daisy’s team?”

A 10 year-old looking Maid Magical Girl raised her hands. Pfl faced the Maid and asked her a question,

“What happened to Magical Daisy’s items and candy?”

“Erm... Uh... Well... We still thought it’d be useful so... Uh... Um... After we uh... Discussed it... We decided to divide it up... Between everyone...”

She tried to speak as smoothly as possible. Indeed, it does seem difficult. Looting a corpse wasn’t exactly something good to do, either.

After she finished talking, the Maid retreated, making her already small body look smaller, hiding behind the China Magical Girl’s back.

“Did you hear that?”

Pfl’s palm was raised, waving around.

“A monster killed Magical Daisy, yet her items and Magical Candies remained in her Magical Phone. Meanwhile, Masked Wonder’s Magical Phone was completely devoid of any items or candies. That’s the utmost proof that someone robbed Masked Wonder.”

Leonetta, Clantail, Miyokata Nonako, and even Pechika. All four of them looked at each other’s faces.

Restarting the game was mandatory. Everyone should have respawned in their original starting points.

Pechika’s group couldn’t have done anything. They joined up together immediately. Who would’ve had the time to commit a murder and steal from their Magical Phone?

Of course Pechika wouldn’t be the one to do it, and she didn’t think the other 3 had time to do it either. At least the culprit shouldn’t be in Pechika’s party.

“I’d like the culprit to truthfully reveal themselves! After we restarted the game, we have yet to learn the truth of life and death within this game! Masked Wonder’s murder was an act that you’ve done as part of the game, I don’t blame you, so come out!”

There was no reaction, only murmurs. Pflé took out her Magical Phone.

“Very well then, I’d like to examine all your Magical Phones. The culprit’s Magical Phone should have Masked Wonder’s Miracle Coin inside of it.”

More whispers. Clantail took a deep breath, then moved forward.

“What’s with this shakedown. Is this a witch hunt?”

“Isn’t it fitting that we have a witch hunt for the Witch hiding among the Magical Girls?”

With that remark, Clantail sharpened her eyes against her opponent. As if they were two duelists in a shootout.

Pflé cleared her throat, and changed her speech,

“Faultless Magical Girls, when pulled into this game, may travel down a dark path. In other words, they may turn to to PvP. Should they reveal themselves now, I ask only that they return

the Miracle Coin, and I won't blame them otherwise, case closed. However... If they choose not to reveal themselves, then that's concerning."

"What do you mean?"

"It means that within us, one of the supposed victims is only pretending, and is really a perpetrator... We shouldn't discount the possibility that there isn't a Magical Girl here who moves according to the Master's will."

Clantail couldn't answer. Pfle kept on,

"A saboteur, possibly mixed in with otherwise honest people. Don't you think that's a possibility?" She asked Fal.

Fal said nothing. Remaining silent and floating.

"Fal, you say that you'll only speak the truth, yet you won't answer me now. That's why I'd like to clear my concerns. So then, does the culprit still not want to reveal themselves?"

No one opened their mouths.

"Once again, because of this, I'd like to examine all of your Magical Phones. If you are one of the Magical Girls forced to be here like us, then simply showing your Item column shouldn't be a problem."

Clantail spat on the ground and glared at Pfle. If it were Pechika, she would've burst into tears looking at her glaring eyes. Pfle simply calmly looked back.

Clantail threw her Magical Phone furiously at her, and Pfle caught it with one hand.

The murmurs continued, everyone was staring at the two's exchange.

"Thank you. Much appreciated."

Pfle checked Clantail's Magical Phone.

"Ah, no problems here. There are no Miracle Coins in her Items column. Well then, as a precaution, would you like to check mine as well?"

She returned Clantail's Magical Phone. At the same time, Pfle also gave Clantail her own Magical Phone. Clantail silently accepted it.

"...I don't see any problems either."

After a press, she returned the Magical Phone.

"Alright then. I'd like to ask everyone to do the same, please. Only the culprit should be in trouble now. If you're innocent, then you should have nothing to worry about."

"Why are you suspecting me?"

"Is this seriously happening right now?"

Many complaints were being shouted. It seems that everyone's come to the conclusion that everyone else is a suspect.

Pechika, like everyone else, lined up in a row.

Pfle checked her Magical Phone. Pechika couldn't possibly be the culprit. Yet, she was nervous until Pfle confirmed it and returned her phone back.

Pfle checked her other party member, the Black Nurse, the same way she checked Clantail's phone.

Why would she check her own party member's phone? They were teammates with Masked Wonder, right?

Immediately, Pechika thought of another possibility,

She said that Masked Wonder's items were all stolen, with a calm and innocent look on her face.

When Pechika thought of the possibilities, she felt frightened with herself.

One by one, everyone was checked. The line that formed in front of Pfle slowly disappeared, and everyone returned to where they were.

Pfle spoke to the corner of the Square.

“Well then, we’ve investigated everyone but you. If you aren’t the culprit, I’d like you to cooperate as well.”

Pechika looked at the direction of where she spoke. She saw a Samurai Magical Girl, with a Katana lowered on her right hand.

Pechika remembered. She could never forget. Her encounter at the start of the game. She annihilated the skeletons, and then, she grabbed Pechika by the throat, with the intention to kill.

“Well then?”

Pfle urged her. The Samurai Magical Girl didn’t move. It didn’t seem like she didn’t hear her.

Her line of sight was aimed directly at Pfle, the Katana on her right hand lightly shaking.

“Come now, let’s be quick, please. Everyone’s waiting for you.”

There was a passing breeze... At least that’s what it felt like. Pechika gulped. Pechika wondered if everyone else thought the same thing.

Everyone’s Magical Phones had already been checked, and none of the items were found on any of them.

Which means, the only remaining person left to check may be the one.

Pfle stretched out her arm, the Samurai Magical Girl moved.

Everyone held their breath and watched. Her Katana was still hanging limply on her right hand. Pechika didn’t think anyone would have the mental strength to approach someone like her.

“Whoa whoa whoa, slow down there, girl.”

Pechika’s expectations were surpassed.

One Magical Girl stepped forward. She had a helmet on, with cat ears covering the top, a semi-transparent visor pulled down, and a suit that looks like something out of a sc-fi show.

She looked like one of those rerunning B-Movie level Tokusatsu shows.

“I know people are suspecting you and all, but let’s just be as honest as we can, alright?”

Pechika couldn’t imagine how she could act so calm around someone suspicious with a blade in their hand.

The B-Movie Magical Girl placed her hands on the Samurai Magical Girl’s shoulder. It was shaken off. The Samurai Magical Girl glanced at the B-Movie Magical Girl.

Her line of sight was pointed directly at her.

“...Are you the Musician?”

“Scuse me?”

“Musician”

“Ah, well, I guess you could say I am, though really it’s just me using vocaloids to post music videos of my own songs.”

The Katana swung up swiftly. A slicing sound was heard, accompanied with the sound of wet liquid hitting something. The inside of the B-Movie Magical Girl’s visor was stained red, and she collapsed.

Someone screamed out.

☆ **Nokko-Chan**

“Please, calm down.”

Pfle kept her hand out, she had talked with the Magical Girl holding a Katana. There were no stains on the Katana. Instead, it reflected the sunlight, shining silvery white.

@NyanNyan rushed before Nokko-Chan to reach Genopsycho.

“GENOPSYCHO! MEDICAL CARE! SHE NEEDS MEDICAL CARE!”

“Calm down... just calm down...”

It'd be dangerous if she rushed now. Nokko-Chan understood that @NyanNyan was extremely worried for Genopsycho, but it's still too dangerous.

If she makes any sudden movements, that assassin will strike again.

If she strikes, then there will be another death. Then, others will move in. It'll create a chain reaction of deaths.

Nokko-Chan had to calm herself down. Then, she had to spread that calmness towards @NyanNyan. She had to stop her from heading towards Genopsycho.

“Why don't you put that sword away for now. Let's discuss this peacefully.”

As if nothing had happened, Pfler kept smiling. She was gently urging her opponent to surrender.

At the same time, a single light beam was shot, and that light stream was sliced into two just as fast. The Black Nurse dashed ahead, carried Pfler, and jumped away.

The ground where Pfler had been just a moment ago had been sliced in two.

Nokko-Chan was a veteran Magical Girl. She's seen many Magical Girls like her fighting. Even the most esoteric ones. She was easily able to analyze what had just happened.

From the wheels of Pfler's wheelchair, a small bird decoration popped out. It had opened its mouth and shot a beam of light.

That beam of light was instantly sliced in half by the Katana of the Samurai Magical Girl.

Then, the Katana Magical Girl was about to swing her Katana once again towards Pfler, but the Black Nurse jumped from the sidelines and saved her.

While she was analyzing what happened, Nokko-Chan ran behind a building.

Some of the other Magical Girls joined in the attack, while some retreated, hiding within the shadows of the buildings, away from the line of sight of the enemy.

Several giant harpoons flew and pierced the skies. Each one of them was intercepted.

Vertically.

Horizontally.

Diagonally.

All of them were sliced in half. Broken and cut before they could reach their target. A loud and heavy sound accompanying them as they crashed to the ground.

The Katana Magical Girl hasn't moved from her spot at all, yet all the harpoons were sliced, rolling down on the ground.

Gigantic sunflower seeds flew across the air, those were cut as well.

Boulders were thrown too, all of them cut and broken.

They were probably long-range slashes. Genopsycho's *Invincible Suit* didn't work, because she was sliced through the visor.

The suit was never damaged. Only Genopsycho, who was inside the suit, had red blood sprayed out.

In other words, she can kill anything that she *sees*. Genopsycho's face may be covered with her visor, but she could still *see* her face.

That was what Nokko-Chan was thinking. That's also why Nokko-Chan couldn't do anything.

In other words, if she came near her, then she'd be killed.

In the shadow of the building where Nokko-Chan was hiding, another Magical Girl was hiding there as well. She was holding her knees, shaking hard. She had a white hat on her head. Nokko-Chan expected nothing less.

She couldn't find where the other Magical Girls were hiding from here.

The sound of the attacks stopped. A few minutes have passed, though that was only what it felt like. It may have actually been a few seconds.

No one moved. A loud rubbing noise in the Town Square was heard. It was a loud sound of something being dragged. Like two pieces of concrete rubbing each other. Gradually, it became larger.

Nokko-Chan looked above. The building that she was hiding in, it was going to collapse. Not the whole building itself, but only the upper half.

Its height was around 20 meters, and its length was about the same. It was sliced diagonally in half.

It was falling this way. She'll be crushed. Even as a Magical Girl, this wasn't safe.

Nokko-Chan kicked away the Magical Girl hiding next to her. Afterwards, she jumped towards the other side. In this way, she escaped from the impact of the falling building. The other girl she kicked should also have been kicked away from danger, she hoped.

The upper half of the building made a thunderous sound as it crashed to the ground. A shattering noise that could hurt your eardrums.

Thanks to the vibrations of the falling building in front of her, Nokko-Chan couldn't stand. Both her legs and her arms were on the ground.

From behind the large smoke cloud, the Katana Magical Girl was standing there calmly.

"Musiciaaan...."

She breathed out those last bits of those words. She lifted the sword up. They were standing around 10 meters apart.

She swung her sword down. A large boulder that appeared 3 meters in front of her was sliced in half.

"Hnngh...?"

If she had swung down the sword while Nokko-Chan was in her line of sight, then Nokko-Chan would've been sliced in half.

However, before the Katana was swung down, her line of sight was blocked. A giant boulder appeared in the space between Nokko-Chan and the enemy.

Consequently, instead of Nokko-Chan, the boulder was sliced instead.

“Stay *away* from her, Ru!”

@NyanNyan stood in front of Nokko-Chan. In between each of her fingers, were a series of small scrolls. She was standing with the stance of a Chinese Kenpo fighter.

She glared at her enemy. With a deep breath, @NyanNyan ran across, sliding her foot. Her opponent began to raise the tip of her Katana.

The Katana was swung down. At the same time, a scroll was thrown. It disappeared with a small explosion.

Afterwards, a gigantic boulder appeared in its place. As a result, the boulder was sliced in half, its broken wrecks overlapping with each other.

The scroll that had an *At Mark* drawn on it flew in front of her, splitting open and transforming into a boulder.

The Katana Magical Girl raised her voice. She pulled her left arm in, bringing it together with her right one.

Her left arm’s index finger, middle finger, and thumb held and supported the Katana in her right hand. Together with her right hand, she swung her Katana with a speed that no one could perceive.

The boulder was cut. Its broken and crushed pebbles came darting out. Everything was crushed into dust. The boulder that was sliced caused everything to be blinded with the white mist of the sandy ground.

The wind blew, and the dust danced in the air, the pieces of the boulder sitting on the battlefield.

The two people confronting each other emerged.

The Magical Girl holding a mop, Nokko-Chan, and the Magical Girl holding the Katana.

Although it was now possible for Nokko-Chan to stand, that doesn't mean there was anything that she could do.

She had no means of attacking her opponent, who was over 10 meters away from her.

The Katana Magical Girl. From her previous actions, Nokko-Chan knew what to expect from her. The Samurai Magical Girl tilted her neck, and Nokko-Chan could see her teeth show. She was grinning.

Nokko-Chan knew that there was nothing she could do to prevent herself from being killed by the slash. That must be why she grinned.

Suddenly, the sun became dark, @NyanNyan was nowhere to be found, yet she wasn't concerned.

She didn't care about the details right now.

The enemy in front of Nokko-Chan moved, her intention being to kill.

The Magical Girl who smiled, she didn't stop smiling, even after she was crushed by the desolate building that fell above her.

Nokko-Chan looked on top of the building that fell down on the ground. Standing on top of the building was @NyanNyan.

In contrast to the Magical Girl that smiled before she was crushed, her face was covered in tears.

If @NyanNyan wasn't there, then Nokko-Chan would've been killed. @NyanNyan's boulders protected Nokko-Chan.

Earlier, @NyanNyan had used her scrolls. While she was continuously conjuring boulders, she was ran up the surrounding buildings. From above, she jumped up and summoned the Wasteland Buildings.

Thanks to that, Nokko-Chan wasn't killed. Nokko-Chan gave her thanks, but she was still crying.

Genopsycho had been murdered. The two of them looked at the place where her body had fallen after she was killed.

Genopsycho wasn't there.

Only her Magical Phone was left lying on the ground.

Master's Side

Part 3

"Weeeell, how was it~?"

"*Sigh*, it was horrible, Pon. Everyone was angry, crying, and they tried to kill me, Pon. If I wasn't a stereoscopic image, I'd be minced meat, Pon."

"I see, I see"

The girl lightly smiled. Her left index finger touched the frames of her glasses, raising them up and repositioning them.

"But *hey*, they got the message now, didn't they~? I'm sure those girls will have realized it by now, the situation that they're in, I would think. Yet, they're still going to participate in the game. No one refused. Nobody was disgusted. They've accepted that they're forced to participate in the game."

The girl's long speech continued on and on. Fal cleared his throat, cutting off her speech. The girl blinked twice, and glanced at Fal.

"What?"

"I have a proposal, Pon."

"I'm listeniiiiing~"

"You still have time for now, don't you think, Pon?"

“Have time for what, hm?”

“If you surrender now, the Land of Magic might still give you a reduced sentence, Pon.”

“And if I don’t think I will?”

“I can’t guarantee that you won’t get the death sentence, Pon.”

“Oh, that sounds horrible! Certainly, a Magical Girl needs to be alive if they want to stay a Magical Girl, don’t they?”

Her words were choppy.

Fal.

The girl.

They stared at each other.

“There’s still a way out for you, Pon.”

“Whatever are you saying, hmm?”

The girl was wrapping her own bangs around her fingertips. The girl’s hair, although it was short, had a habit of doing that. She seems to always care for it.

“Master, I don’t mind that you threatened me. I don’t mind that you deceived me. I don’t even mind that you ignored all my pleas, Pon. You can still frame me as the criminal, Pon.”

“And just what do you mean by that?”

“Turn yourself in. Tell them that I did it all. Tell the Land of Magic that ‘my Mascot Character gathered some Magical Girls and put them in a killing game’. They’ll accept it, and they’ll take action.”

“Hey now!”

The girl began rotating the chair she was sitting on half a turn, her body now facing Fal. The centrifugal force of the spin made her glasses messed up again, and her left middle finger adjusted it once more.

"I'm not just going to turn tail just because I'm afraid of my own sins, now. What, do you think I'm a wimp? Man, the version of me inside of you sounds like a *super boring* Magical Girl. It's disgusting to think that *I* would beg forgiveness for my actions. I'll *gladly* accept them all as my own."

"If you surrender now-"

"Oh, shut up, already!"

The girl took her hands away from her bangs. They were separate before, but have joined together again.

"Don't you go dampening *my* justice, Mascot! Only proper Magical Girls are allowed to be Magical Girls. What's wrong with that? *Nothing*, that's what! If a Magical Girl that's improper becomes a Magical Girl, then the Land of Magic's institution and selection tests are broken. The worst of them all is *that* woman. The next thing that comes close may be her *Children*, don't you think so~?"

The girl smiled at Fal.

"I'm going to honor my mentor's teachings. *That* is how I'll become a proper Magical Girl."