

# Chapter 1: Black and White

After the large-scale merger four years ago, the port city of N-City became the largest metropolis in the region. There were bizarrely-designed buildings—exemplified by City Hall—and clusters of avant-garde skyscrapers all over the place, abandoned mountain villages, central hospitals with the latest in medical equipment, and large factories which had to be closed down when their owners went out of business. All of them existed within the same city, contributing to the warped sensibilities which were unique to “a city which had been haphazardly and forcibly put together.”

And in this very N-City, since June of last year, there had been eyewitness reports of Magical Girl sightings.

Something had knocked on the window of a car that was breaking the speed limit while travelling on the expressway. The driver thought it was just a pebble, but when he looked back, he saw a witch on her broom, smiling and reminding him to “drive slower”.

A child had rushed out into the middle of the road in pursuit of his ball. A truck happened to be driving up just then. Just as everyone thought, “It’s too late!” a female knight suddenly appeared before the boy, and stopped the truck with her bare hands before leaving without saying a word.

A girl had been unable to shake off a persistent skirt-chaser, and just as she was starting to feel distressed, a girl with dog-ears charged in on all fours and carried off the would-be pickup artist.

While all these girls had the common characteristic of “out-of-this-world beauty”, their looks, clothes, and the conditions in which they were encountered all differed from each other, and there was too much variation between them to be referring to the same urban legend.

At first, those rumors were laughed off as fantasies, boasts and lies. But as the number of witnesses kept increasing, someone took a video titled “Twin angels holding hands while flying in the sky” and submitted it to a video-sharing website, and then the rumors spread explosively.

That video was real. No, someone faked it. People debated the matter at their workplaces, in school, online, and in various locations. Sometimes, people who claimed to have been helped by these girls would join in the discussions on the veracity of the video and the existence of those girls.

Someone who had been helped by those girls had asked, “Who are you?” and the answer was “I’m a Magical Girl.” This experience led to these mysterious girls being known as Magical Girls.

Fan sites and research sites popped up one after the other, and the sites which collected eye-witness reports were updated daily. One of the latest sightings was particularly exciting.

There was a mansion in the entertainment district which was used by the mainland Mafia as a hideout. Apparently, a gunman-themed Magical Girl had showed up like she had walked right out of a spaghetti Western movie, beat up all the gang members, and then stolen all their weapons and cash.

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“Hey, do you think it’s true?”

There were three middle school students waiting for a bus at a bus stop. One of them was pointing the screen of her smartphone at her two friends. The screen displayed the announcement field for a Magical Girl eyewitness report site.

“You seriously like these things huh. How could anything like that be real?”

“Eh? Don’t you think it sounds like it could be true?”

“Isn’t this *too* realistic? It’s like a live report from the scene.”

“Yocchan, you keep shooting me down like that. Perhaps this was from someone who was there.”

“I shut you down precisely because you keep talking nonsense, Sumi. If you want to say it was from someone who was there, then there’s no way it could have been sent by the gangsters who were beaten up or the Magical Girl herself. Also, how old are you anyway, still believing in Magical Girls and all that.”

“But don’t you think it would be pretty interesting if Magical Girls really existed?”

The mature-looking girl who had been listening quietly to her friends as they debated the existence of Magical Girls could no longer hold herself back, and spoke:

“Yocchan, Sumi-chan, you’re both wrong. Even if Magical Girls really existed, they wouldn’t do things like that. After all, Magical Girls are friends of justice who help people in trouble.”

“Thank you very much for your dreamy opinion.”

“Koyuki, how do I put this, you really do like your dreams. They’re verging on delusions.”

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Behind the middle-school girls who were chattering over the smartphone in their hands, there was a seven-storey commercial building behind the bus stop—the No. 7 Sankou Building. On

the roof of that building, another girl was moping about the same matter. The girl was dressed in the style of a kimono, except that her outfit exposed as much as a swimsuit. She wore high, single-toothed geta sandals on her feet, and a shuriken-styled clip on her hair. This was not so much clothing as a costume, and right now in N-City, the only people who dressed that way were Magical Girls.

The girl pointed to the relevant article on her Magical Phone and asked,

“Is this true...?”

After that, the screen changed. The heart-shaped display of the Magical Phone glowed, following which a hard yet shiny spheroid, like a tile, floated above the screen with a lake as a backdrop. This was a three-dimensional projection.

The spheroid’s right half was black and its left half was white, it then sprouted a pair of small butterfly-like wings which matched the color of its body. Every time the wings flapped, they scattered brilliant sparkles. There was a smile on its inorganic face, but its expression was fixed and did not change. Its voice was as high-pitched as that of a child’s.

Its name was Fav. It was a mascot character.

“It could be a rumor ~pon. It could be real ~pon.”

The spheroid did a flip, and scattered a large quantity of sparkles. Surprised, the girl narrowed her eyes.

“If it was Calamity Mary, she would really do this sort of thing ~pon. After all, she lives with a band of outlaws, so she often does reckless things like these ~pon.

“Calamity Mary” was the name of the Magical Girl who claimed the Jonan district of N-City as her territory. While Magical Girls often called the areas they were assigned to protect their “area of responsibility” or their “home”, in her case, calling it “territory” suited her very well.

She was crude, brutish, and barbaric. There were countless derogatory terms that could be used to describe her behavior. Even the mascot character had gone and condemned her as an “outlaw”.

“So that means it’s true, right...?”

“How could Fav tell you that ~pon? If I reported every little thing the other Magical Girls did to you, then Fav would be an tattletale ~pon. Tattletales are despised in the world of fairies ~pon.”

“Then how about this...?”

The girl swiped her finger across the screen and went to another page. Sightings of a “White Magical Girl” were quite common so the website had set aside a special column for her.

“I feel that she’s too visible...”

“Ahh, that’s Snow White’s page. That’s because she’s the most hardworking ~pon. This is just the tip of the iceberg ~pon. She’s done three times this much for the people ~pon.”

Though it was furnished with organic-looking butterfly wings, the inorganic-looking black and white spheroid flipped another two more times in the air, and finally landed on a flower.

“Ripple, didn’t you see that page before ~pon?”

“I did...?”

“Could it be that you’ve started to see her as a rival ~pon?”

“No... I’m just impressed by how she can work so hard.”

“A sense of rivalry is to be encouraged ~pon. Competing with each other is a wonderful thing ~pon.”

“Hm...”

The girl—Ripple—looked away from the Magical Phone. She closed her dangling legs, then leapt down from where she was sitting on the edge of the roof. The girl fell about 20 meters, landing soundlessly on the ground below.

“Why did you jump down all of a sudden ~pon?”

“Someone troublesome showed up, so I thought of leaving...”

“Someone troublesome ~pon?”

Ripple looked up from between the buildings, and Fav looked in the same direction. A speck in the air gradually grew larger, and soon it resolved into the form of a human. As Fav saw it, it shouted,

“Top Speed!”

The broom-riding witch... the Magical Girl “Top Speed” landed in the space between the buildings, then leaned over to look at Ripple.

“How’re you, Ripple?”

Ripple clicked her tongue loudly in place of a greeting. Top Speed smiled bitterly and replied,

“As tsundere as always, I see.”

“I should have hidden earlier...”

“We’re all Magical Girls, so we should all get along, shouldn’t we?”

“Shut up...”

“Well, more importantly...”

Ripple clicked her tongue again. Top Speed did not reproach her, but continued speaking. While her habit of doing as she pleased was one of the reasons why Ripple disliked her, perhaps that personality of hers also prevented her from noticing that.

“Did you see this report?”

The Magical Phone which Top Speed handed to her showed an online news report. It said that the costumes of the mysterious girls in N-City known as Magical Girls bore a striking resemblance to the items in the popular social game called Magical Girl Raising Project.

“It seems a lot of people have realised that. Isn’t that pretty bad?”

“It’s fine ~pon.”

“Really?”

“If the information was leaked by a Magical Girl, she would be in violation of the Land of Magic’s laws and be in big trouble, but Fav knows that there aren’t any bad girls like that ~pon. Having normal people turn this into news is free advertising for us ~pon. We should be grateful to them ~pon.”

Sometimes, this mascot character would talk like it was a businessman. Ripple had pointed that out when she had just become a Magical Girl, but it nonchalantly replied, “I’m not so much a businessman as human resources personnel ~pon.”

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About two months ago, Sazanami Kano had become a Magical Girl.

Among the players of the social game Magical Girl Raising Project, one out of every several tens of thousands of people could become a true Magical Girl—Sazanami Kano had heard that urban legend, but she had not truly taken it to heart.

Since kindergarten, Sazanami Kano had always been the sort of person who believed in solving problems by “beating those who insult you for absurd reasons until they fall on their knees and submit to you”, but once she entered high school, all sorts of obstacles appeared in her way, and it was very difficult to continue using violence to solve problems.

The fifth man which Kano’s mother had brought home and who called himself her stepfather had touched her butt. Kano had repaid the insult with punches and kicks, and then she packed her things and ran away from home. Kano moved alone into an apartment which was small, but still somewhat liveable. Then, in order to support herself, Kano had to do part-time work. She cut back on various expenses and for the sake of her future, she had to finish high school.

Thus, she sought a hobby which she could use to relieve her frustration with school and while working. It just so happened that Magical Girl Raising Project fit her mindset—people who spent money on their hobbies were idiots—perfectly. As a result, Kano’s original two hobbies of “reading manga in the store” and “reading books in the library” were joined by a third, “Magical Girl Raising Project.”

After a certain company had managed to cut the production costs of its smartphones, every other company joined in the price war. Three years ago, smartphones already made up 90% of the mobile phone market. After that, the quantity of smartphones continued to increase, and they swept over the entire handphone market.

As smartphones proliferated throughout the populace, social games targeted at smartphone users had exploded in numbers. Many free social games called themselves that, but most of them were “free to start playing, but you need real money for a smooth gaming experience.” On that note, Magical Girl Raising Project fully lived up to its promise of “free to play”. In-game items could only be obtained with in-game currency; in other words, everything had to be done in-game.

When she had seen the boys talk about games in the past, Kano had mocked them as childish in her heart, but after trying it, she found that it was quite interesting.

She designed her avatar—in other words, the character that would serve as the player’s representation in the game—and then began playing. She cleared quests to aid people and combat quests, collected magic and item cards, used them to strengthen her character, and then sought out tougher missions and stronger enemies.

Because she had shackled herself with the restriction of “30 minutes a day”, her progress in the game was very slow. That said, she still found the work of actualizing the tactics and combos in her mind, collecting cards, combining them and defeating the enemy to be very fun. Since the game was very well-balanced, the work the players put in and the rewards they received for their efforts became joy for them, and Kano—who had no experience with these games before—found it quite refreshing.

While she was not too interested in the topic of Magical Girls, the game made her think of when she still had a TV at home, how she had laughed with the girls on the screen, and she realized that there had been a time when she had liked Magical Girls too.

Since she felt that inter-player conflict and cooperation was boring and annoying, she did nothing but fight CPU-controlled enemies and complete story mode quests. And then, after a week, something happened

The mascot character Fav, who had originally been nothing more than a swaying image on her screen, spoke to her.

“Congratulations ~pon! You’ve been chosen to be a real Magical Girl ~pon!”

At first, Kano thought she had triggered some sort of event, so she had tapped repeatedly to skip past the message. Just then, the screen suddenly flared brightly, enveloping Kano in light, and by the time she realized it, she was already a Magical Girl.

Kano took three deep breaths, and then looked at her hands, her legs, and then at her entire body. She then repeated the abovementioned events five times. She had clearly not been mistaken. She pinched her cheek hard, and it hurt. Thus, it was not an illusion either.

Kano sought a realistic answer to this dilemma, and concluded that she was tired from her part-time job and her studies. *It’ll be troublesome if this keeps up*, she thought, and then she looked at the mirror again and found that her transformation had ended.

She tried thinking “transform” in her heart, and her body was wrapped in light and she transformed. She thought “detransform”, and her transformation ended. She repeated the process of transforming and detransforming countless times, then looked at the mirror, where she found that she was still the Magical Girl Ripple. Her face, her body, everything about her was completely different from Kano, and she was even dressed in a provocative outfit which Kano would never have chosen for herself. The scene before her eyes seemed realistic enough, and it certainly felt real enough, nothing like a dream or delusion.



She clenched her right hand, then smacked it into her left palm. The sound and impact rattled the glass in the window frame and made the pullcord of the fluorescent lamp sway violently. Those ten soft, beautiful fingers were longer than Kano's and looked like works of art, but they were far stronger than they looked.

She lightly pushed herself off the ground. Her head nearly reached the ceiling. If she had broken through the ceiling, the landlord would scold her.

Her physical abilities had clearly improved. It was obvious that they were beyond the range of what a normal human being could accomplish.

She looked down at her limbs. Her skin was not even blemished by moles or chap marks, to say nothing of scars or body hair. It was clean and shiny and soft, with the moist fragrance of freshly plucked fruit.

She felt her body was filled with an energy that craved to be released.

There were kunai and shuriken at her collar and sleeves. If she fell down by accident, she might get hurt very badly.

The rumor was true. The Magical Girl Raising Project really did produce Magical Girls.

She looked at her dressing mirror once more. The face she saw there was beautiful and well-proportioned. It looked like that of a model or an artiste.

“Hmm...”

Even her voice had changed. It was higher-pitched and had a more penetrative quality to it.

She took several poses in front of the dressing mirror. She smiled, she blew a kiss, no matter what she did, they all looked good. However, she looked a little different from the Magical Girl in her mind. At the very least, it made her think that she was not quite an orthodox Magical Girl.

“What's the matter ~pon?”

The mascot character from inside the image suddenly called out to her. She almost jumped in fright, but fortunately, she did not show her shock on her face. However, the fact that her embarrassing smiles and poses in front of the mirror had been seen by someone else made her face flush red.

Kano did her best to fake a calm demeanor and answered,

“Who are you...?”

“Fav is Fav ~Pon. Since you’ve played this game before, you should know who Fav is, don’t you ~pon?”

“I didn’t mean that... what do you want...?”

“Fav is in charge of providing support to people with the talent to become Magical Girls ~pon. Ask me anything you want ~pon.”

There was no way to communicate with that creature. Ripple clicked her tongue and looked in the mirror. The person in the mirror was a Magical Girl, no matter how she looked at her. That was an inviolable fact.

“I heard that Magical Girls were all out-of-this-world beauties... is this what they meant...?”

“Well, when people are helped, their eyes adjust what they see. So a pretty face becomes an out-of-this world beauty ~pon. Are you unhappy ~pon?”

“Not really...”

Kano’s avatar, Ripple, was based on a ninja. She had black hair, long, narrow eyes, and thin eyebrows. While her costume looked like someone had added a kimono to a bikini and then divided it into two, the overall look was quite plain for a Magical Girl. Other than the red scarf which was essential for all ninjas and the huge shuriken-shaped hairclip which gleamed of metal, everything else was the same black.

The name “Ripple” had been chosen after translating Kano’s surname of Sazanami to English, but now that this form of hers had become reality, her Japanese-style appearance was at odds with her Western-style name.

“Can I change my avatar’s costume...?”

“Not any more ~pon.”

“Ahh, is that so...”

“Why ~pon? Are you not satisfied ~pon?”

“Not really...”

Fav continued its explanation. It hoped that the Magical Girls it chose would help others. Although Kano was not interested in helping others, she was very interested in her beautiful appearance, her superhuman physical abilities, and the Magic that she could use.

The most important thing was that Kano was sick and tired of her daily life.

“Fav will support you ~pon. I’ll even give you a shiny new Magical Phone~pon.”

“Support... how will you support me...?”

“Fav is a friend to all Magical Girls, so if you want to contact them, Fav will help you pass on the message ~pon. Also, Fav can answer any questions as long as they’re related to Magical Girls ~pon.”

“So what exactly are Magical Girls...?”

“Magical Girls are Magical Girls ~pon. Haven’t you seen them on TV before ~pon?”

“Like I was saying, what are they...?”

“They’re girls who have received magic from the Land of Magic and help others ~pon.”

“Principle, theory, and the objective of the Land of Magic...”

“Didn’t you see those on TV before ~pon?”

“Like I said...”

“You’re already a Magical Girl ~pon. That is an unerasable fact ~pon. No matter what you ask or hear, you will always be a Magical Girl ~pon.”

“Eh...”

This was very suspicious. However, Kano had just personally witnessed a supernatural phenomenon with her own eyes.

If Kano studied hard, she could get into a good university. But no amount of effort could allow one to become a Magical Girl. The factors affecting that probably involved luck and some sort of talent. If she refused it now, she would most likely never get a chance like this again. That being the case, she ought to agree with it.

And so, Kano weighed everything on the balance, and after working out the ramifications of doing so, she agreed to this.

Kano calmly watched herself through an objective lens as she calculated her gains and losses. Even she had to be impressed at the way that a practical person like herself could so readily accept this extraordinary situation. Perhaps it had read Kano's thoughts, but the mascot said:

"A girl who could not accept the fact that they had become a Magical Girl would never have been chosen in the first place ~pon."

Kano thought that she would have to start working as a Magical Girl right away, but that was not the case. Apparently, she needed to receive a lecture from a senior Magical Girl, which turned Kano glum. Just the thought of it made her think that it was "annoying" and "depressing".

"You said you would support me, Fav..."

"Fav will support you as much as possible... but Fav is only one person, so Fav cannot cover all the bases ~pon."

Come to think of it, the tutorial for Magical Girl Raising Project was incredibly annoying. The game would repeatedly ask the player to press a button time and time again, as though the player were a moron without any imagination. Kano turned off the Magical Phone she had just obtained, and clicked her tongue. The heart-shaped display was very inconvenient

Kano was not used to speaking with others. Bluntly speaking, she was not used to interacting with human beings at all. She disliked those people who always wanted to gather with others and felt that doing so would make them stronger.

That was the reason why she had been interested in Magical Girl Raising Project, but she had not expected that she would be tormented by "annoying" and "aggravating" interpersonal relationships in Magical Girl Raising Project as well.

The first impression she got from the senior Magical Girl Top Speed was that "she looked very stupid."

She wore a witch's pointy hat and a witch's one-piece dress and rode a magic broom. She was the stereotypical image of a witch-type character. Her face looked more Western than Ripple's, her big blue eyes—very fitting of her character as a witch—were round and swirly, while her golden blonde hair was braided into a pair of pigtails.

Only her purple coat and the mamoribukuro charm she wore around her neck looked to be out of character for a witch, Ripple saw that there were several words sewn in gold thread on the back of the coat, which read: "Who Cares What You Think". Not only was the broom equipped with a motorcycle's windshield and handlebars, it was even fitted with fancy boosters and

mufflers. Ripple thought, *Ah, this is stupid*, and then she lowered her original opinion of Top Speed by a notch.

(TL Note: Top Speed's coat reads 御意見無用; this is a bosozoku slogan commonly found on their clothes and banners)

Top Speed landed on the roof of the building they had chosen as their meeting point, the No. 7 Sankou building, and flashed Ripple a thumbs-up and a winning smile.

“Nice to meet you! I’m Top Speed, let’s get along!”

“...I’ll be in your care...”

“Aw, you’re so out of it! Have you eaten yet? Hahaha!”

She was referring to herself with a masculine pronoun. And she laughed like an idiot. Ripple adjusted her opinion of Top Speed down another notch.

Top Speed sat lightly on top of the building’s metal railing, then urged Ripple to take a seat too. However, Ripple did not want to sit beside her, and neither did she want to be looked down upon by her. Thus, feeling that it would be better that way, she continued leaning on the wall.

Top Speed began explaining the mission of Magical Girls to her. In other words, they used the power of magic to help others, perform good deeds, and through those means, they would accumulate Magical Candies.

“Good deeds...?”

“In the game, you can perform them by beating the enemy. But in the real world, there aren’t that many enemies. Therefore, we still have to knuckle down and work hard even at an unreal job like this.”

Top Speed had a know-it-all look on her face as she gave her lecture, and within her heart, Ripple clicked her tongue.

Apart from that, Top Speed also taught her how to use the Magical Phone which only Magical Girls could use. However ridiculous a “Magical Girl-only” device might sound, its operation was a little different from an ordinary smartphone. While Ripple was annoyed by the way Top Speed described it as a custom item, she did not show it on her face, though she still clicked her tongue mentally.

Ripple did as Top Speed showed and called up her personal data page. It recorded her height, weight and three-sizes. Kano might have been 3 centimeters taller than the average male, but after transforming into Ripple, her height, weight and body were all those of a girl.

The personality field read, “antisocial and violent”. Kano knew this was a very accurate description of herself, but it was precisely because it was that way that it frustrated her. The Magic field read “100% accuracy with thrown shuriken ~yo”. At that, she clicked her tongue in reality and not in her heart.

“Hm? What’s wrong?”

“I only have one Magic...”

Also, it was quite unimpressive. Ninjas being able to throw shuriken was not so much a special ability as a skill. Also, as a ninja, she ought to have many other abilities, like say, creating copies of herself, conjuring flames, and so on.

“Magical Girls only have one Magic. While you can use all sorts of magic in the game and doing so is convenient, things aren’t as easy in real life.”

In addition to that, everything else Top Speed said only served to depress Ripple.

Magical Girls had to obey the “Magical Girl Rules”. There were two of them; the first was “don’t let normal people know your true identity” and the second was “don’t talk about your abilities and the Magical Girl Rules with normal people”. Violators would be stripped of their Magical Girl status.

There would be a chat meeting every week. Attendance was not compulsory, but there might be important messages to be handed down, so it was best to show up every time.

Certain Magical Girls were very territorial. It was best to avoid the Jonan district which Calamity Mary was in charge of, and the western temple district which was in the care of Ruler. Calamity Mary was a combative sort while Ruler was very naggy, and getting tangled with either of them would be very troublesome.

Sister Nana had once entered Calamity Mary’s territory by accident and had almost been shot to death. The Peaky Angels had filmed the incident and when it hit the net, it had caused quite a stir. As Top Speed interspersed these accounts with her own lecture, Ripple began to feel that Top Speed was very lackadaisical.

At long last, Top Speed finished her spiel. She then mounted up on her broom and vanished into the night, while Ripple clicked her tongue.

“A question...”

“What is it ~pon?”

“Who chose her as a spokesperson...?”

“Your caring sempai volunteered herself ~pon. While Top Speed’s explanations take three times longer than normal, she takes very good care of her kouhais.”

After learning that Top Speed had lectured and advised her was because of her excessive intimacy and that her explanation time was especially long, Ripple’s tongue-click was the most forceful one she had made in several years.

And so, Ripple’s opinion of Top Speed changed from “stupid-looking sempai” to “an idiot who likes to act like a sempai.”

However, ever since then, Top Speed kept coming up with all sorts of reasons to look for Ripple. No matter how many times she clicked her tongue or even after flat-out telling her that there was no need to come any more, she simply countered with “as tsundere as always, I see.” After deciding that nothing she said would be of any use, Ripple decided not to bother with her, but even then, she would still come over, say her piece, and then leave. Several days ago, she had even brought a Tupperware box of cooked yams along. Ripple had reluctantly taken a bite, and found that they were delicious.



The tourists which packed Kube Beach in the summer were nowhere to be seen in autumn, and after the sun set, there was even less reason for passers-by to come here. An especially large steel tower sat atop a nearby hill, commanding a view of the deserted Kube Beach. Two Magical Girls sat side by side atop this tower. One of them was a white Magical Girl whose costume had been designed with a school uniform as a base, while the other looked like a knight from the Middle Ages, albeit sporting a long tail. The two of them were cheek to cheek as they spoke with the mascot character Fav through their Magical Phones.

Magical Girls liked structures like tall buildings and steel towers. Tall, deserted buildings were the ideal resting place for flashily-dressed Magical Girls. While only a rare few Magical Girls could fly, even those Magical Girls who could not fly had the physical ability to run up the side of a building like they were running on flat ground.

“I hope you two will attend the next meeting ~pon.”

“Why?”

“That’s because I have a very important matter to announce ~pon.”

“I heard there’s a newcomer, does it have something to do with that?”

“In addition to that, a big event is going to take place ~pon.”

“What is it?”

“Please look forward to it on the day itself ~pom.”

Snow White turned off her Magical Phone, then shifted her back—which was originally leaning against the steel tower—by 45 degrees so her knees touched those of La Pucelle, making it easier for them to talk to each other.

“Hey hey, Sou-chan, Sou-chan, did you hear all that just now?” Snow White asked her.

“I did.”

In response to Snow White’s strange voice, a gloomy look crept across La Pucelle’s face.

“What did you think of it?”

“Very few people have attended the recent meetings. I’m guessing Fav said that because he wants more people to take part.”

“Is it really very few?”

“Very. Weren’t there only seven people around yesterday? You, me, Nemurin, Clamberry, Top Speed, Sister Nana and Winterprison.”

“Isn’t that quite a lot for the recent meetings?”

“That’s very few. Tell me, so far, have we ever had full attendance for one of those meetings?”

It was recommended that they attend the weekly Magical Girl chat meetings, but it was ultimately just a recommendation and not required, so the participants decreased steadily after the first time. Although Fav often said something about sitting down together and exchanging information and deepening the bonds between their fellow Magical Girls, almost nobody took his suggestion seriously.

However, Snow White and La Pucelle frequently attended those meetings. That was because they were both Magical Girl lovers, so they wanted to make use of these infrequent opportunities to mingle with other Magical Girls. Thanks to these meetings, they had managed to forge close ties with several other Magical Girls, so at the very least, to the two of them, the Magical Girl meetings were not meaningless to them.

“Still, the chatroom is too cramped. Having too many people in there is tiring.”

The Magical Girl meetings were conducted by having SD versions of themselves—their avatars—meet in a virtual chat room where they could converse with each other.

“Well, even if it’s full up, it’s not uncomfortable in reality, so what does it matter?”

“Still, Sou-chan—”

“Hold it!”

La Pucelle erected her index finger and pointed it at Snow White. On her part, Snow White simply gawped at the finger pointing at herself and at the finger’s owner.

“When I’m like this, don’t call me Sou-chan.”

“Ah, I’m sorry, Sou-chan~”

Snow White laughed and smiled dumbly even as she made the very same mistake she was currently apologizing for. La Pucelle laughed as well, still pointing her index finger.

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Himekawa Koyuki had always admired Magical Girls.

When she was young, she had laughed and cried as she watched the adventures of Hyoko-chan on the Hyoko-chan series. After that, she began following Star Queen and the Cutie Healers series, and she was entranced by the noble forms of girls battling the forces of evil.

She had even watched anime which her fellow Magical Girl-loving childhood friend had managed to get from a relative’s big brother, like Merry-san, Rikkabell, Miko-chan and so on. Magical Girls always used their magic to make people happy, and they never despaired no matter what dangers they encountered. She had once declared that she would become a Magical Girl like them, and at that time, her male playmate, who could only be a mage at most, could do nothing but envy her.

From elementary school, to middle school and then to high school, one by one, her classmates had come to think of Magical Girls as childish things and they cast them aside. Only Koyuki clung to Magical Girls like she always had. To Koyuki, Magical Girls were not just fictional characters. Magical Girls had long since become a part of her soul, and she could not just discard them. Koyuki understood that foolish talk like, “I want to become a Magical Girl and let people live happy lives” would only invite laughter from others, so she hid those thoughts deep within her heart. Even so, while she hid them within her heart, she did not abandon them.

When she had become a middle-schooler, Koyuki encountered the Magical Girl Raising Project. To a girl who had always wanted to become a Magical Girl, it was only to be expected that she would know about a game which allowed its players to become Magical Girls.

That said, she had not started playing the game because she was certain that she could become a Magical Girl. Becoming a Magical Girl was a lie, nothing more than a rumor, she had thought, but what harm was there in just thinking about it? Even if she could not become a Magical Girl, a game themed around Magical Girls was still interesting, and besides, it was free no matter how long she played. With those thoughts in mind, Koyuki had begun playing the game. 28 days after the game began, Himekawa Koyuki became the Magical Girl Snow White.

In the mirror was the Magical Girl Koyuki had envisioned in her youth. Not only had she imagined her, but she had even drawn it with pen and paper. Her costume was based on a school uniform like the protagonist of the manga which had been popular back then. As the name implied, she was snow white from head to toe, with white flower decorations scattered throughout her outfit. Unlike Koyuki—who had only ever been called cute but not pretty—the Magical Girl in the mirror was beautiful. Her skin was as white as snow, and her eyelashes were very long. The person in the mirror was completely different from herself, but Koyuki was not at all disturbed by the fact that she was that person now.

She did not think that it was a dream. Even if it was unreal, it also felt very realistic. Koyuki cried out in delight and jumped for joy. Then, her head bounced off the ceiling and fell down again.

Her mother was startled by the great crash and ran up to her room to see what was going on. However, Koyuki had already cancelled her transformation by then, and she managed to chase off her mother with the extremely contrived excuse of “I’m fine, I just fell down”. After she returned to her human state, she began to feel that it was just a dream, so she decided to try transforming again.

The Magical Girl Snow White appeared in the mirror once more.

“Wonderful... wonderful... this is wonderful!”

“Congratulations ~pon.”

“Wonderful! Wonderful! Wonderful! Thank you so much, Fav. Please take care of me from now on!”

Koyuki had gone around all day with a smile on her face. After seeing her like that, her mother was worried that the bump on the head might have made her retarded.

After night fell, Koyuki stealthily slipped out of the house without her parent's noticing. She went to the school field in the middle of the night, when there was nobody around, and then she jumped, jumped some more, punched the air, did handsprings and consecutive mid-air backflips. She vented the energy welling up within herself, making sure that everything she did was something she could not have done before. *Ah, I've finally become the Magical Girl of my dreams.* This sense of undeniable reality filled her, along with joy and excitement.

She twirled to the side, and her skirt flew up as well. *Perhaps I should have drawn the skirt a little longer.* This skirt was much shorter than the one Koyuki usually wore as part of her school uniform. It would seem that it would be better not to make grand movements in front of people.

"Does that mean I can use magic too?"

"All you need to do is read your personal data page on your Magical Phone ~pon."

Koyuki started up her Magical Phone and checked her personal data. She saw the name of the Magical Girl Snow White and various other pieces of information.

"I say, Fav."

"What is it ~pon?"

"It's about my personality. 'Careless' and 'Strong sense of justice' aside, what do you mean by 'Delusional'?"

"Human beings have a hard time looking objectively at themselves ~pon."

"Is that so..."

"And the Magic field reads 'Can hear the hearts of people in distress yo~'"

One could say that ability was a perfect match for Koyuki's ideal of being "a Magical Girl that used her Magic for the sake of the world and mankind". Koyuki was very grateful to the Land of Magic. She thanked them for making her a Magical Girl. She thanked them for giving her such a wonderful Magic.

From that day on, Koyuki had begun working as Snow White. She slipped out from her house window at night. She looked for people in difficulty, and helped them solve their problems. Among the people she helped were a middle-schooler who had lost her house keys, a university student whose bike had been stolen, and a salaryman who was being threatened.

However, there were many things which troubled people that Snow White could not resolve. For example, there were people who were worried about how their affairs would be discovered,

people who did not know if they should confess to the subject of their one-sided crush, people who were afraid of not getting their pensions, and so on. Since Koyuki's Magic only allowed her to hear people in distress, all she could do to help those people was what her Magical Girl's enhanced arm-strength, leg-strength and senses would allow her. However, there were still countless people whose problems could be solved in such an eminently practical manner, and so Koyuki was kept very busy indeed.

After being a Magical Girl for just two days, before her sempai had even finished lecturing her, Snow White had amassed a massive amount of Magical Candies in the blink of an eye. Her Magical Phone was chock full of Magical Candies.

Koyuki had received a warm welcome during her first Magical Girl chat meeting.

The person whose avatar looked like a witch was Top Speed.

The one who looked like a nun was Sister Nana.

The avatar whose distinguishing feature was a long scarf belonged to Weiss Winterprison.

Nemurin was the one in pajamas.

The one wreathed in floral vines was the Musician of the Forest, Clamberry.

The avatar with the knight motif was La Pucelle.

Top Speed cheerfully related her experiences. Sister Nana took turns with her to speak, adding her own input and comparing Top Speed's accounts to her own encounters. Nemurin indicated that she much preferred to listen than to be listened to, and she ended up listening to everyone else speak. Winterprison stood silently by Sister Nana. Clamberry, on the other hand, simply played background music in the corner of the room.

After the meeting ended, La Pucelle approached Snow White. Since their areas of responsibility were side by side, she had asked to be given the chance of mentoring the newcomer. She asked Snow White if they could find a place to meet up and see each other. Snow White agreed, and arranged for them to meet atop the biggest steel tower near the beach after midnight the next day.

They had chatted in avatar form, but for Snow White, this was the first time she would be meeting another Magical Girl other than herself in the flesh. Koyuki had always been prone to daydreaming, but now she was so distracted that the teacher had cautioned her three times, and her friends began to worry about her. Even though Koyuki was now a Magical Girl, she still idolized Magical Girls. Now, she would be speaking face to face with her idol, and the two of them would not be star and fan, but fellow Magical Girls. How could she not be excited?

Snow White had rushed to the top of the steel tower 15 minutes ahead of time so she would not be late, but the other party was already there.

Magical Girls had very keen night vision. Even on a moonless night, they could see as clearly as if it were daytime.

A knight stood atop the steel tower. The important parts of her body were protected by bracers, a cuirass, greaves and so on, and she carried a sword on her back that was about one meter long and 40 centimeters wide. A roaring dragon was carved on the sword's sheath. Were her horned hair decorations and the tail-like decoration that stuck straight out from her waist also part of the dragon motif?

That costume was merely a crude approximation of the elements of knighthood, but even through that layer of armor, she exuded the charm of a Magical Girl... of a woman. That was because her thighs and breasts—which should have been covered up—were all exposed. Her shoulder-length hair was tied into two braids which hung on either side of her head.

La Pucelle had originally been looking at the sea, but when she sensed Snow White approaching, she turned around. While she looked very dignified, she also seemed a little worried. Snow White began to panic. Perhaps it was because she was late.

"A-ah, nice to meet you... while we spoke before, it was only in the chatroom. A-ah, this is the first time we've met in real life... in any case, nice to meet you!"

That greeting was hardly proper. Or rather, it was very bad. Nobody knew this better than Snow White herself, as the person bowing her head in apology. She glanced at the other person's face, and saw that La Pucelle had her arms folded across her chest. She nodded two or three times, and then huskily muttered, "As I thought."

"Koyuki?"

As she heard her real name from a Magical Girl she had met for the first time, question marks kept popping up in Snow White's mind.

"How, how do you know my name?"

"So you *are* Koyuki. It's me, Souta."

"Eh ?"

"I'm Kishibe Souta. We were in the same school until the year before last, weren't we? Don't tell me you've forgotten already."

“Eh, eh, eh... ehhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

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The reason why Koshibe Souta had discovered the true identity of Snow White was very simple. Snow White’s character design was based on a sketch Koyuki had drawn when she was young, titled “My Dream For The Future”. Her childhood friend Kishibe Souta had been there when Koyuki had drawn her ideal Magical Girl, and he still remembered the picture. Therefore, when he had seen Snow White’s avatar, he wondered “could it be?”, and after meeting her in the flesh, his suspicions were confirmed.

The reason why Himekawa Koyuki had not realised La Pucelle’s true identity was also very simple. That was because she could not connect the tanned soccer-playing boy to this pure and elegant lady knight. Koyuki knew that one’s bodily appearance, apparent age and physical abilities would change after transforming, but she did not know that even one’s sex could change after transformation.

The two of them sat side by side on the steel tower, reminiscing about the past until it was nearly daybreak.

“Koyuki, you played Magical Girl Raising Project too?”

“Mm. One day, Fav spoke to me and I wondered what was going on, and by the time I realised it I was already a Magical Girl. Sou-chan, when did you become a Magical Girl?”

“About a month or so ago. Still, I didn’t expect you to become a Magical Girl too, Koyuki.”

“That’s because I’ve always liked Magical Girls. I’m more surprised that you became a Magical Girl, Sou-chan.”

“I like Magical Girls too. I just didn’t tell anyone about it.”

Souta explained: there was a world of difference between girls liking Magical Girls and boys liking Magical Girls. A girl in middle school who announced that they liked Magical Girls would be considered a weirdo. However, if she were a boy, he would be regarded as a pervert instead, not just a weirdo. Apparently, he had to go to great lengths to keep things under wraps, like a secret Christian; for instance, he had to rent DVDs from a neighboring city where fewer people knew him, and he hid his Magical Girl manga and light novels in the deepest reaches of his desk.

(TL Note: refers to how Christians went underground in Japan after the Shimabara Rebellion)

”I thought you’d forgotten about Magical Girls and gotten interested in soccer instead.”



Since they lived in different schooling districts, they had enrolled in different middle schools, but Koyuki had seen Souta running several times as morning practice for the soccer club.

“Soccer is fun, but I like Magical Girls too.”

“I wonder if there are any other Magical Girls (male).”

“I think I’m the only one in this region. Apparently, Fav said that they’re very rare even throughout the world.”

“Did you really become a girl?”

“After I transform, I’m fully female. Mm, no doubt about that.”

As La Pucelle said this she seemed a little embarrassed for some reason, and her cheeks turned pink.

The two of them agreed to work hard from today onwards, and laid down a rule for themselves—even when it was just the two of them, they could not forget that they were Magical Girls and reveal their true identities.

Thus, Snow White and La Pucelle became partners.

Snow White could hear the voices of people in difficulty. However trivial or towering that difficulty was, it would reach Snow White’s ears. That was Snow White’s Magic. She would run through the city, looking for these voices.

La Pucelle, on the other hand, was in charge of helping her out. La Pucelle’s Magic was not as peaceful as Snow White’s; it was more suited to resolving violent incidents. She called herself a bodyguard, and she said she would protect Snow White in times of danger, but there were few beings that could actually threaten a Magical Girl.

## Chat Meeting 1

Magical Girl Raising Project’s chat function was essentially “realistic communication through the medium of an avatar”.

Every week, the Magical Girls would use the chat function of Magical Girl Raising Project to host a Magical Girl chat meeting. The chat room resembled a meeting room; its door opened, and the Magical Girl avatars entered one after the other.

☆ Clamberry has entered the Land of Magic.

- ☆Magicaloid 44 has entered the Land of Magic
- ☆Swim Swim has entered the Land of Magic.
- ☆Top Speed has entered the Land of Magic.

Magicaloid 44: Hi, everyone.

Top Speed: Yo~

Clamberry: ♪

- ☆Snow White has entered the Land of Magic.
- ☆Tama has entered the Land of Magic.
- ☆Nemurin has entered the Land of Magic.

Snow White: Good evening, everyone! Pleased to meet you!

Swim Swim: Pleased to meet you.

Tama-chan: Woof

- ☆Ripple has entered the Land of Magic.

Top Speed: Well, this is a rare sight~

- ☆La Pucelle has entered the Land of Magic.

Nemurin: Hi everyone

Magicaloid 44: Greetings, I am a rare character.

- ☆Ruler has entered the Land of Magic

La Pucelle: Nice to meet you.

- ☆Calamity Mary has entered the Land of Magic.

Ruler: Nice to meet you.

- ☆Sister Nana has entered the Land of Magic.
- ☆Winterprison has entered the Land of Magic.

Sister Nana: Hello everyone, nice to meet you.

Winterprison: Hello.

- ☆Minael has entered the Land of Magic.
- ☆Yunael has entered the Land of Magic.

Calamity Mary: [CENSORED]

Yunael: Hai~

Minael: Yay~

☆ Fav has entered the Land of Magic.

\*\*\*

The chat room was filled with Magical Girl avatars.

The Musician of the Forest Clamberry had originally been sitting on her bed as she worked her Magical Phone. Then, she turned over to lie prone on the tattered bedspread. Her hair—which was pinned up by flower-shaped hair clips—fluttered up and then settled near her waist.

If tall buildings were the best place for a Magical Girl to rest, then this run-down mountain cabin was the best place for a Magical Girl to live. For someone like Clamberry, who was a Magical Girl who did not need to live as a human being, all she needed was a roof over her head and nobody around her. Clamberry had taken a resort hotel on Mt. Takanami, which had been abandoned halfway through construction, as her living place, and she had been living here for over half a year without being discovered by anyone.

Because Fav had nagged them about an important announcement, none of the Magical Girls missed that week's chat. Ripple might have looked very reluctant about it, and she had not said a single word since entering the chatroom, but even so, all the active Magical Girls in N-City were present. This was the first time such a grand spectacle had been seen ever since the Magical Girl chats had begun. The cramped chatroom was packed full of avatars.

Top Speed: Speaking of which, wasn't there a new Magical Girl coming over?

Fav: Ah, she'll only arrive next week ~pon.

Fav: The matter we're discussing today concerns her...

Currently, there were 15 Magical Girls active in N-City. Since there would be a new Magical Girl joining them, this number would increase to 16 next week. 16 Magical Girls was still too much for even the sprawling N-City. The mana which powered magic resided within the earth, and it was also a limited resource. 16 Magical Girls would draw on mana at an accelerated rate, and if this kept up, they would probably drain the land dry of mana.

After explaining the circumstances, Fav finally announced the "important thing" he had been hinting about for so long.

Fav: Therefore, we have decided to reduce the number of Magical Girls ~pon. We will cut them in half ~pon.

A moment of silence followed. That was probably because they did not understand what Fav had just said. After that a storm of disbelieving cries and a torrent of outrage poured forth, and there was no silencing the undercurrent of doubt and suspicion which followed them. One could tell the size of a stone by the ripples it made when cast into the water. The avatars filled the screen with their brightly-colored words and extra-large fonts, making the already cramped chatroom completely unreadable.

Fav simply bowed and repeated, "We're very sorry, we're very sorry," and the amount of sparkles he was throwing off seemed fewer than usual.

The Magical Girls frowned one after the other and fired agitated retorts back at Fav, but no matter how much censure they rained on him, Fav simply apologized, so they decided not to bother with him and their invective soon turned to questions.

How exactly would they cut down the number of Magical Girls?

Fav: We will open this Magical Girl chatroom once a week ~pon.

Fav: Every week, we will announce a dropout in this chatroom, and we will announce another one the week after that.

Fav: We will eliminate eight Magical Girls within eight weeks.

Fav: The Magical Girls with the fewest Magical Candies

Fav: Will vanish one by one ~pon

Clamberry was very sure about this.

Among the people present, nobody would say, "I can't believe you're going to stand there and talk that nonsense despite not being prepared enough! If that's how it's going to be, I'm done with being a Magical Girl."

Everyone here enjoyed the fact that they were Magical Girls very much. Once they gained great power, they would be loath to let go of it.

The higher one stood, the deeper one's despair when they plunged into the abyss.

Fav: I repeat

Fav: Every week, the person with the fewest Magical Candies will be the loser ~pon.

Fav: Therefore, I hope you will all work hard and collect more Candies ~pon.

Fav: We sincerely apologize for the inconvenience this has caused you ~pon.

Fav: Oh, and one more thing

Fav: The Magical Phone firmware has been upgraded, please take a look ~pon.

Fav: That is all for our message to you ~pon.

Fav: See you here again next week ~pon.

Clamberry left the chat room, then turned off her Magical Phone and put it by her pillow.



During the week after that meeting, the aggregator site received even more eyewitness accounts than usual, and it boiled with activity.

*A princess helped chase away a scary dog.*

*The twin angels flying through the air helped me get back the balloon I accidentally lost.*

*When my car got stuck in a ditch, a girl in a white uniform helped me push it out from behind.*

As the Magical Girls increased their range of activities, the number of sightings increased as well. In order to become one of the eight who would remain, the Magical Girls worked as though their lives depended on it. Yet they did not expect that doing so would increase their exposure. This heated up the mood on the aggregator site and increased the amount of scrutiny on them.

“Ripple, what are you looking at?”

A voice came from above Ripple, who was seated on the edge of the roof of a tall building. Ripple did not answer, and neither did she turn back. She simply looked silently at her Magical Phone.

“Ahhh, so you were looking at the aggregator website. Everyone’s been working hard!”

Top Speed landed beside Ripple. Only then did Ripple turn to look at her.

“Especially Snow White. How much did she do by herself?”

The sightings of the White Magical Girl were particularly numerous. She kept a low profile, and she usually helped people solve small problems like “picking up scattered change”, “getting the bento I left at home”, “telling people to zip up” and so on.

Was helping people solve small problems in their daily life the easy way for Magical Girls? Or was it that she did not have the ability to solve bigger problems? According to the sightings on the aggregator site, it seemed to be the former.

She was like the pure and kind-hearted Magical Girl she had admired when she was young. One could say she was the polar opposite of Ripple, who declared that she was only helping others in order to collect Candies. It was not that Ripple did not want to help others. She had

only said so because she felt embarrassed about it. However, she felt that someone who could proudly and generously declare “I want to help others!” and put it into practice was a true Magical Girl.

“Ripple... you really seem to have Snow White on your mind. Is she your rival?”

Ripple clicked her tongue unhappily. It felt like being interrupted as she was waxing nostalgic.

“I thought your rival would be Calamity Mary.”

Ripple clicked her tongue again. Whose fault was that, anyway?!

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Several days after Ripple had become a Magical Girl, Calamity Mary had come to the the roof of No. 7 Sankou Building, which was now Ripple and Top Speed’s meeting point. She jumped lightly from one building to another. The woman who landed on the roof was dressed in a lady gunslinger’s outfit, just like the rumors had said. Ripple’s own outfit aside, she felt that such a costume was unbecoming of a Magical Girl.

Calamity Mary spoke simply and to the point.

“And is that little lady over there Ripple?”

From her appearance, Calamity Mary looked to be in her second or third year of high school. Her body was much more mature-looking than Ripple’s, with ample breasts and buttocks. Thus, she had the grounds to call Ripple a “little lady”. While she was somewhat opposed to being addressed in that manner, Ripple talked herself over and nodded.

Calamity Mary flicked the brim of her ten-gallon hat with her fingertip.

“I told Fav before that I’d be the one to teach the next newcomer.”

“Ahhhh, that’s because I already spoke with Fav to let me take care of a newbie if they were assigned to a nearby area. I mean, we’re neighbors and all, so in the spirit of friendship...”

Ripple’s area of responsibility was Nakayado, located in the center of a castle town district which had flourished for a brief period. Top Speed’s area was Kitayado, which was located to the north of that. Their areas were very close to each other.

“I asked Fav a long time ago, so he sent me the invitation first, right? I didn’t think you’d gotten one too, Nee-san. Sorry for being such a busybody.”

“Huh.”

Calamity Mary did not even bother looking at Top Speed, who had taken off her hat and was bowing in apology. Her eyes were fixed on Ripple. Ripple was displeased by the rudeness of Mary's gaze, and seeing how she ignored Top Speed bowing to her incensed her even more, and so Ripple turned an angry look at Calamity Mary.

Calamity Mary drew a pistol from its holster and fired on Ripple. Ripple drew the sword from her back and deflected the bullet coming at her. Both of them completed this sequence of movements in less than a second.

Top Speed hurriedly raised her head.

“What are you doing?”

“It should be obvious. Right, little lady?”

Ripple stared at the pistol in Calamity Mary's right hand. Reddish smoke coiled up from the black body of the gun. It was clearly not an ordinary gun. That was most likely Calamity Mary's Magic at work. Ripple's sword hand was still a little numb.

Top Speed hurriedly interposed herself between the two of them, and spread her arms.

“Nee-san! Please hold yourself back! Newbies often have cocky attitudes! I'll teach her properly in future. Please put your gun away! I'm begging you!”

As she shouted to Calamity Mary, she lowered her voice and told Ripple:

“You put that thing away too. It's too dangerous.”

Calamity Mary spun her pistol and slotted it back in her holster. Ripple sheathed her sword behind her back. Only then did Top Speed breathe a sigh of relief.

“Let's talk it out, let's talk it out, We're all Magical Girls, right?”

She did not know what Calamity Mary was thinking. However, she was certain that she had not holstered her gun because she thought of everyone as a buddy, like Top Speed had said. Ripple most certainly did not consider Calamity Mary a friend, and Calamity Mary must have thought the same way.

“Eh, fine. I'll give Fav some face this time.”

After saying so, Calamity Mary put a hand on the railing and vaulted lightly on top of it. Then she suddenly turned around. Ripple's heartbeat picked up again. Calamity Mary was holding her gun, its muzzle pointed in her direction. Ripple had not noticed her drawing at all.

Calamity Mary fired several times. One shot was directed at Top Speed, the other two were at Ripple. Ripple grabbed Top Speed by the collar and pulled her down, while she fell to one knee and deflected the bullets with her ninjato. Just as she was about to throw kunai at her, Calamity Mary was gone.

"Seriously, you..."

Top Speed rubbed her face as she got to her feet from where she had been pulled to the ground. Perhaps she had hit her nose and forehead just now.

"Why did you guys start fighting right off the bat?! Behave yourself a little! Behave!"

"She started it... so of course I'd finish it..."

"Then at least you should know who you're going up against! If you get mixed up with someone like that, ten lives wouldn't be enough for you!"

Ripple clicked her tongue. She had been shaken, and at the same time she felt irritated.

She was irritated by Top Speed, who had been practically ignored throughout the whole thing.

She was irritated by the abnormal way in which Calamity Mary could draw and fire on her with no hesitation whatsoever.

She was irritated by the fact that she was putting on a front, but the fact was that when someone had pointed a gun at her, she had been terrified. She could not stand, her heart was pounding wildly, and her sweat flowed like a river. If she was not careful, her tears might leak out, but she managed to control herself.

There had been a burst of pain on her right arm when she had deflected the bullets with her sword. When she had become a Magical Girl, Ripple realized about the strength of her body and she had even thought, "I can't die", but she was wrong. Indeed, she could not be killed by human beings, and she would not die from accidents or disease, but no matter how strong or durable a Magical Girl was, she could still be hurt by Magical Girls.

All this made Ripple furious. As though she could not bear it, Top Speed said:

"I'm getting the feel of a naked blade from you, just like how I used to be. It'll be dangerous to leave you alone."

After hearing Top Speed talk big as she folded her arms, Ripple clicked her tongue once more.



Every day at five in the afternoon, the hamburger place in front of the train station would be packed full of students. Everyone talked and laughed about their own things, but even so, the reason why this noisy place had not fallen into chaos was probably because it was an everyday sight. Both the guests and the staff had become used to it.

Amidst this clamor, the three middle school girls who occupied the third window table from the entrance, were chatting as normal. One of them pointed excitedly to her smartphone's screen and said:

"They say that the sightings are increasing rapidly! Magical Girls *do* exist!"

"Sumi... are you still going on about Magical Girls?"

"With so many witnesses, there's nothing you can say, Yocchan. They exist. I'm absolutely sure."

"I object, naturally. Magical Girls don't exist."

"Say, why do you think Magical Girls don't exist, Yocchan?"

"Oi, Koyuki, as the representative of all daydreamers, you should talk to her too."

"What are you saying, that's embarrassing!"

"Why is it embarrassing?"

"What's this, you seem particularly stubborn today."

"That's because it's weighing on my mind."

"Look, in anime, when girls transform into Magical Girls, aren't they completely naked for a split second? What kind of shameful play is that, anyway?"

"As if! No way!"

"Calm down a little. Didn't I tell you, I was talking about anime."

"Why do you have to treat it like anime? It's not anime. These are real sightings."

“How could there be anyone on earth who sprouts wings and flies and who can be hit by a truck without a problem?”

“Yocchan, you have no dreams, do you? If you’re not sure if something exists or not, clearly it’s more interesting to treat them like they exist.”

“Sumi, you dream too much. Reality is more important.”

“I’m not a fantasy lover like you say. It’s just that I can look at reality and think, “wouldn’t it be nice if it existed”. Yocchan, you’re going to lose out if you live that way. The mood on the aggregator site is super hot. There’s news about all sorts of Magical Girls. I like this one. The white Magical Girl. The way she helps people in a practical way puts me at ease. Or rather, it heals me.”

“...What are you laughing at, Koyuki?”

“I, I wasn’t! I wasn’t laughing!”



A week had passed. Perhaps the reason why these seven days felt so long was because Clamberry had been hoping for this day to come.

Just by looking at the aggregator site, one could tell that the other Magical Girls were working harder than usual. That was probably because nobody wanted to be eliminated. Clamberry operated her Magical Phone, and entered the Magical Girl chatroom.

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Just like before, the attendance at this meeting was very high, and the name of the Magical Girl with the fewest Magical Candies had also been announced. Nemurin, who had been named without spotlights or fanfare, did not look regretful so much as embarrassed.

Most Magical Girls wanted power, and they wanted to use that power. She alone preferred to listen to others’ stories of adventures rather than work herself. Nemurin took part in the chats every week, and she was very gifted at listening to people speak, and because of her, the other party was always happy to tell their stories. Clamberry had seen such scenes many times over.

The fact that she always showed up in the meetings meant that she was very close to the other Magical Girls. Unlike Clamberry, she was not simply “there”, but she eagerly interacted with the other people. Many Magical Girls knew her. Snow White, Top Speed and Sister Nana were all reluctant to let Nemurin go.

Before she left, Nemurin said that she would continue to watch everyone work from the aggregator site, and that she would support everyone. Fav said, “Goodbye ~pon”, and the pajama-clad avatar vanished.

At the same time as it bade the bottom-ranking person goodbye, Fav also announced the name of the top-ranking person. Fav announced that currently, Snow White possessed far more Magical Candies than anyone else.

“Everyone needs to work hard to catch up with Snow White~pon.”

As they heard Fav’s words, everyone tensed up.

The Magical Girls left the chat room one by one, and in the end only Fav and Clamberry were left. Clamberry had remained for a reason. There was a question she had to ask in the chat room.

Clamberry: I have a question to ask you, if I may?

Fav: What is it ~pon?

Clamberry: Could you tell me what exactly happens when a Magical Girl is stripped of her status as a Magical Girl?

Fav: When that status is removed, the Magical Girl dies ~pon.

Clamberry: Is that a metaphor? Does that mean that she is dead as a Magical Girl?

Fav: It means that she will be dead as a living being ~pon.

Its answer was very simple.

After hearing its answer, Clamberry said nothing, but left the chatroom, and then just like she had last week, she put the Magical Phone beside her pillow.

One could read the chat logs even without participating in the chats. Clamberry and Fav’s dialogue would probably spread rapidly throughout all the Magical Girls. The implications of “the loser” and “the game” had now been dramatically changed.

Clamberry put her hands behind her head, lay on her bed, and looked at the ceiling.