

Sword Art Online Web Novel Summaries, Chapters 7-FINAL

Credits and appreciations go to Flere821, SAOfreak, and tomtkp for devoting their time and efforts into making long and detailed summary of our favourite novels. - M.A.D

Thanks to M.A.D. for compiling a list of links to each of the summary so I don't have to hunt each one of them, and the AnimeSuki community for being supportive to the translators (there are not a few translators that still gets flamed out there). Remember, these are summaries, so there are details left out that would've added to the relationship between characters.

<http://forums.animesuki.com/showpost.php?p=4620748&postcount=3676>

Chapter 6

Basically the backstory of 'Gabriel Michael', the sociopath that's part of the US team attacking Ocean Turtle (and the guy who won the last Barrett of Bullets in GGO, using C4 to blow up Sinon's sniping position). The guy is a textbook-perfect case of a functional sociopath, completely uncaring about other people, willing to kill them for his own goals/entertainment, and not obvious enough to stand out and have measures forced upon them.

And yes, I know it's a "textbook-perfect" case because I had taken a psychology course and have the textbook for this >.>

Other detailed descriptions of heinous crimes in the narration aside (such as murder of his family + fiancée, and another four cases of abduction and murder of US civilians besides those), Gabriel have a obsession with Sinon as she put up more of a fight than other players in GGO, and had more realistic responses to other gamers when placed in life-or-death situations. If it weren't for the job to attack Ocean Turtle taking up his time he would have planned out a way to slowly beheading Sinon the next time they fought in the BoB tournament with a combat knife. Yeah, this guy is as messed up as PoH or other major villains of this series.

Other background stuff that's sort of important in this chapter was the 'soul' or Fluctlight is visible to the human eye in SAOverse if the person is killed in a certain way. Gabriel found this out when he killed his fiancée (I'll spare you guys the details), and also when he bought a NervGear off the black market (which costed a fortune) and remodified it to try it out on one of his victims. Frying someone's brains with this also counts as one of the methods that can get a visible fluctlight leaving the corpse.

Chapter 7

Part 1

This chapter really shows how bad it can get when humans try to pose as gods. Intellectually we readers understood UW was created as an experiment, but it's another to see the place designed for bloodshed and the recreation of pillage and war first hand emotionally through the narrative.

Kirito and Eugeo was captured by Alice before, they escaped the dungeons, and before they got hunted down they were rescued by a girl that looked around 10 years old with light brown hair but talked like a old woman (more precisely, a old woman using old English, with her words in English approximately using words like 'Thou' and so on). Using 'magic' Eugeo and Kirito was taken into a library that housed the records of everything in UW since its creation, the coding for the world and the System Command lists. The girl revealed herself to be named 'Cardinal' (as in, from the Cardinal System – explanation will come up later). As Kirito understood it the Cardinal System does not have a anthropomorphic avatar of sorts, even in games like ALO and GGO. Kirito and Eugeo was given food to heal all their wounds taken from escaping, and Eugeo asked where the history section of UW is, and Cardinal pointed him to the 'Corridor of History'. After Eugeo left Cardinal sighed and said the history of the world and those records are only fakes written by the priests, and Kirito took the chance to clarify some things (Flere821 note: go make a sandwich, grab a drink or something, this is going to take a while to explain).

The three gods as UW know it does not exist, only as accounts with more abilities than others – and those accounts have never logged into UW even once before now. Cardinal confirmed this world is made by Rath, and she's a offshoot of the Cardinal System designed by Kayaba. Cardinal was surprised Kirito knew about Kayaba, and found how Kirito knew other versions of the Cardinal interesting.

Cardinal went through how Feudalism came to be set up in UW – the developers didn't put that in themselves. Cardinal doesn't have the means to talk to the 'Real World', that is something only the Administrator of UW have. Because of certain events (will be explained later) Cardinal has lost a lot of her abilities, and unlike the other Cardinal systems Kirito knew she's not omniscient within the setting. Back to the topic of Feudalism, of the four humans that took care of the first Fluctlights one of them was not the morally upright person Rath thought he was. It may have been unintentional, but his ambition, desire to satisfy his own wants, and desire to control others – basically the darker side of human nature – have infected two of the 8 fluctlights. (As an aside, Cardinal cannot access the names of the four people; so Kirito couldn't be forewarned by who within Rath might be a traitor or intending to harm him). These negative traits was bred out if people married lower class nobles or commoners, but for those that maintained blood purity of 'nobility' there was a much higher chance of inheriting these negative traits (like the scheming rapists from previous chapter). The current Pope is the one that led to Feudalism being installed, and she had taken the name 'Administrator'. (Kirito was surprised that the Pope was a 'she' – to him Popes are normally wizened old men with plenty of life experience). In a sense, the Administrator was Cardinal's mother (more on that later).

Feudalism was installed 350 years ago, 100 years after the experiment started. At the time UW citizens are married around 20, and each family have on average 5 children. By 5th generation the population of UW is around 500 people (marriage and birth mechanics will be skipped here, it's a aside to the plot). From these people, the ones with domination desires took the land of people around them and became leaders, and made people who lost their land servants. Those that disagreed with them went to pioneer

other settlements near the outer edge. There was hostility between the various leaders, and there is very little marriage between them. This all changed when from one of these few political marriages a girl named Kuniela (Note: I'm bad with names, so this might not be the correct spelling) was born. She had the strongest negative desires of people being born ever at that time. She was amazingly talented, in multiple areas such as sword skill, system commands, singing, sewing etc. She could have excelled in any lifelong career she was assigned to, but her father that was in charge of giving them wanted to keep her close by and gave her the career of practicing system commands (ie, like a priest). Kuniela figured out system commands aren't meaningless words, but of a different language, and eventually figured out a spell to launch fire arrows.

She then took advantage of the 'exp system' of UW, by defeating other creatures in UW you can gain exp in the 'System Access Authority' of UW. Most people are kind-natured, and do not like to harm animals without reason, but the tainted nobility was the exceptions. At age 11 Kuniela went on nightly hunting trips killing foxes and other animals, and to keep the balance the Cardinal (before she had a sense of self) replenished the surroundings as per the system. Kirito understood the idea, he went level grinding himself back in SAO, but for some reason he felt horrified at what Kuniela has done. It's like something from a nightmare, a small girl dressed in her pyjamas and unflinchingly burning anything she came across at night. Kuniela's level increased steadily, along with her understanding of system commands. She eventually mastered healing and weather forecasting, and along with her beauty by age 13 she seemed like an angel or divine descent.

Cardinal said Rath the biggest mistake they made was introducing the concept of God to explain the system commands. To humans, the existence of the divine is the most effective painkiller, with it humans can endure any kind of pain, and commit any kind of sins without guilt. With Kuniela's deeds she established a Church and her own 'divine' authority she established herself as the ruler of UW. Kirito thought Kuniela had some decency left in her, or otherwise why add further restrictions in killing when the system forbid it? Cardinal explained it was because Kuniela didn't want anyone else to reach the same power as she did, and killing humans is one of the fastest ways to gain exp.

Cardinal also refuted Kirito's claims humans by nature are kind-hearted beings – UW citizens are only this way because of Rath's meddling. The Goblins from Dark Territory Kirito had met that had tried to kill him and Eugeo are also Fluctlights, given the opposite commands as the ones in UW; to kill, to forcibly take things, they are the product of fluctlights following the more basic human desires. Kirito had known something was off when he fought them, those weren't like NPCs; their movements were too natural, they had sparks of life in their eyes. But he had never thought this might be the case. Kirito was tormented for a moment how he had killed another human (the Goblin captain), before Cardinal cut him off of his thoughts. He is not God, and there are some things that can't be solved even after one or two hundred years of thought.

Cardinal thought of herself as a God once, and intervened in the world uncaring of what life actually is, following the laws of the world. It was only after obtaining a body that she started thinking about life. The world's creators, Rath, probably have no idea what they have created and even then they are not omnipotent Gods. With the coming pressure experiments UW as it is now will become a living hell. Back

to Kuniela, the Church's laws was expanded (like do not feed sheep certain types of grass that will take away their ability to produce milk, or do not go into bogs that have poisonous gasses) and people lost their ability to think for themselves and relied on the Church for almost everything. They no longer question the authority of the Church. The main cathedral, first from a measly 3 floor high building eventually became higher and higher, like a symbol of her insatiable desires. Kuniela reached age 30, then 40, her body slowly being influenced by age. She left ruling UW to her minions and tried to research a way to extend her life, breaking the bounds of age. Her efforts produced no results however, and by the time she was over 60 her body was frail and her beauty was all gone. On her deathbed at age 80 she refused to give up however, and tried all kinds of combinations to find a way. Cardinal said Kuniela's chances of success was smaller than throwing a thousand coins and expects them all to land heads up... but she succeeded. Even Cardinal was horrified at her obsession.

The command "System Call: Inspect Entire Command List" opened up an A4 sized window that basically gave her access to the root code of the world. Cardinal said this was another huge mistake Rath made, they should have eliminated this command after the four was logged out. At the bottom of the list was the command she needed, the emergency command that allows someone to take control of the world to restore balance – take control of all of the Cardinal System's abilities and make yourself literally the God of the world. Kirito thought Rath really could not have kept this world under control; all of their personnel was basically in their thirties, and Kuniela had 80 years of life experience by then to find a way to break the system. Rath controlling the situation now was even less likely, with Kuniela having about another 300 years of experience.

Kirito's worry was interrupted by Cardinal – she said it's too early to start being afraid.

To build things up for later explanation, Cardinal explained how when the four humans was raising their kids there were other NPCs around them – after all, it's strange for a world to only have two families. These were limited AIs, artificial Fluctlights without their own will.

Anyway, after Kuniela found this command she reset her age to 16 and removed the upper limit to her age. Kuniela was ecstatic to have recovered her youth and beauty, which Cardinal remarked no male would ever understand how happy she would have been. Kirito remarked that even he knew that's the dream of all women, but Cardinal's wasn't convinced at his understanding. Cardinal remarked even she would have preferred an appearance maybe 5-6 years older than what she had right now...

Putting that aside, Cardinal continued on with her narration. Kuniela's reasoning was affected by the joy of eternal youth and beauty, plus command over human territory. Cardinal seemed to be either laughing at human foolishness here, or maybe pitying it. Kuniela's desire knows no bounds, and she could not accept another entity having the same authority as she did. Even if that entity is the Cardinal System, a program without its own will. Kuniela spent the night reading the instruction manual to use the full command list, but she only has a limited understanding of it because ultimately she's a citizen of UW and not a scientifically-minded human. She tried to incorporate the Cardinal System into her own self, and she made her one and only mistake then. The motivation for the Cardinal System ended up overwriting her own desires within her own Fluctlight, and this was irreversible. Cardinal said it was a pity the Cardinal System's driving motivation was not incompatible with Kuniela's, as her Fluctlight would have broken apart under the paradox and solved a lot of problems right there. The motivation was 'keep the

current state as it is' – as Kirito knew, if there was a good way to get rich very quickly or to power-level easily the Cardinal System would find it and correct it, for example by re-pricing items or making monsters harder to kill. Cardinal smirked at Kirito's own complaints how once upon a time (ie, SAO) he and others tried to trick the Cardinal System but ended up failing. She has her own pride that no matter how many brats gather they can't beat the system (ie, herself), this gave her a look more matching her 10-year old body than her old woman atmosphere earlier.

Due to Kuniela's change, she wanted to keep things as it is so she used her new powers to make the walls separating the UW into quarters and declared the four most powerful nobles as Kings. This decreases human interaction and new ideas that can result from those, and things have stayed the same for 270 years after that. When before Kuniela had considered a reform to make things for the better for the commoners, now she no longer cares and strangles any signs of change. She placed similar symbols around UW to limit the pioneers' expansion, such as boulders that can't be broken, streams that can't be crossed, trees that can't be cut down etc. 50 years after Administrator took power nothing has changed and nobility has stagnated, and became even more worthless than before. 70 years after Kuniela became Administrator, she found she reached the limits of human memory – she lost memory of things that happened a few days before, occasionally when sleeping she loses consciousness, and she forgot some of the system commands from before. To address this Kuniela took in one of the Sisters-in-training that was in the cathedral and said she'll make her the successor of UW. From the description the sister was only about 10 years old and with light brown hair, which Kirito deduced it's talking about Cardinal in front of her. Kuniela attempted to overwrite the girl's Fluctlight with her own, as a spare copy in case when she tries to fix herself by erasing some memories she breaks some part of her own soul. The same way people make back-up copies of important files before messing with them.

However, this was the second mistake Kuniela made; when her back-up copy was made and before she fixed herself, there were two Administrators in the same room with equal power. The Cardinal System split off, one is the main system that checks the entire game and the other became a subsystem to check the main system for bugs. Exactly like the SAO Cardinal system Kirito was familiar with. The second core system was the Cardinal which is in front of Kirito right now, finally free after being taken into Kuniela 70 years before she left. In a sense this Cardinal was a split personality of the original Kuniela given form. While Kirito stated in real life the existence of split personalities are debatable Cardinal said that was a good fit for what happened to them in UW. This Cardinal was operating when Kuniela's desires were not that high at times, and when she was conscious she tried to correct the mistakes Kuniela made. Cardinal attempted many suicides (jumping off the top of the cathedral (100 floors high) – 3 times. Stabbing self in the heart – 2 times. Using system command to burn herself alive – 2 times) to correct what Kuniela had accomplished. Even as the Administrator, if her health goes to zero she will still be destroyed. With literally the final drop of HP left Kuniela regained control of her body, so Cardinal could not finish the job.

To stop Cardinal killing her, Kuniela sealed away her own emotions and perfected the 'Ritual of Synthesis', basically cutting apart people's fluctlights and stripping them of their personalities. The Synthesis Knights were basically the test subjects, in exchange for near-immortality and skills beyond mortals they are only puppets of Kuniela. Administrator is now like a machine, and only when Kuniela tried to make a back-up copy did Cardinal manage to free herself. After they saw each other when

Kuniela finished operating on herself and deleting some memories, she failed to instantly eliminate Cardinal. Both of them felt fear that one of them is the exact same copy of themselves and they fought. Instinctive enmity and fear led them to fight, two Gods warring for three days and night upon the top of the cathedral. The original fluctlight in the 10 year old girl's collapsed from the strain first, and that led to a fundamental difference between Kuniela and Cardinal enough to make them seem different.

Kirito asked how the Administrator could break the taboo of killing another human, and Cardinal explained it's a matter of perception. She demonstrated the rules of 'teacup cannot directly touch the table, it needs a saucer underneath it' – even after so many years she could not bring herself to break that deeply ingrained rule from Kuniela's childhood, but change the cup's content from 'tea' to 'soup' she could put the cup down directly; it's no longer a 'tea'cup but a 'soup'cup. Most people would not even be able to think about why they can't put the teacup down directly, but people with high enough 'hidden value' of rule breaking tendencies could. The rapist that tried to kill Eugeo did something similar, he saw Eugeo as one of the Dark Territory residents in disguise and not a human, hence his ability to attempt to kill Eugeo. Cardinal mused if this inability to break rules was something Rath built into UW humans, and Kirito decided that's impossible – they built the experiment in trying to break rules, not the other way around. (Flere821 note: They did find out by the end of this arc a US spy had written in some codes into UW that wasn't part of Rath's design, this was one of them)

Part 2

Before back on topic again, Kirito also asked for a helping of the corn soup Cardinal has. Cardinal snarked how Kirito really is a glutton before complying (Flere821 note: let's see, the 'hotdogs' from Warmth of the Heart, his obsession with Asuna's sandwich/food, the number of times he went off to buy snacks in UW before trotting back to a worried Eugeo... yeah, can't argue with that 🤔).

The final stages of the battle was Kuniela creating a zone of no system commands can be used, and spawned the most powerful weapon available in existence to physically fight. Seeing no choice Cardinal did the same and summoned her staff. Kuniela found one advantage she had; Kuniela had a 16 year old's body, while Cardinal only had a 10 year old's. Cardinal demonstrated this by standing up and taking off her robe, showing her small chest with white bra and her black shorts; her body doesn't have the reach or strength (and the TL notes there'll probably be this picture when the LN comes out, as there's ALWAYS fanservice pics of some kind). Kirito noted similar things happened in SAO, where someone's real life reach differs from other players' and they had a disadvantage, or how in ALO their race's trait (such as being large/small in size) is different to their real life body and they can't get used to it.

The battle ended up as melee combat and Cardinal couldn't physically match Kuniela, even though Cardinal made the first strike in system command attacks and Kuniela would have had her fluctlight destroyed the instant before her own one did. After three exchanges of strikes Cardinal lost. It was fortunate Kuniela sealed the use of system commands first before she sealed the room, otherwise Cardinal might not have escaped.

Cardinal spoke about the horror of being chased by Kuniela with her blade, feeling slashes onto her back. Kirito agreed that must have been horrifying, and Cardinal shot back Kirito needed to feel the same terror of a woman chasing after him with a weapon from all the womanizing he did within the last 2.5 years. Kirito fervently denied he did any such thing, then realised Cardinal has been ~~stalking~~ observing him for quite a while now.

Cardinal escaped, into one of two places even the Administrator cannot freely travel to. One is the Dark Territory, the other is the library of records they're in right now. This library was created by the Administrator as an external storage space for her knowledge, and she made it impossible for others to access it. It takes a specific system command to access this place, and Cardinal used it before Kuniela did and locked the place up behind her. It's easier to lock things up than to break it with system commands, and by the time Kuniela almost broke through the lock Cardinal made the library her's and made the entrance disappear from the physical location in UW. The fact this library does not have a real physical location in UW to be broken into as part of the security played against Kuniela here. If they broke the walls all there will be is the void. Thus began Cardinal's lonely experience for 200 years.

Kirito can't even begin to understand how can someone live this long by herself, before remembering a human only have about 150 years of memory available to them; how does Cardinal here still function, then? Even with system commands Cardinal could not create something from nothing, so she can't make a back-up just in case. The alternative, safer way she did was to erase all her memory as 'Kuniela', and 97% of the memory she had as Administrator, after putting them down onto paper (or some other physical records). She had no memory of her parents, how a bed feels like, and no emotion (Flere821 note: although later events – and how she snarked at Kirito before now - suggest she's not as emotionless as she thinks). Cardinal sees herself solely as a program with the end goal of stopping Kuniela's reign, no matter what she has to do.

(Flere821 note: I just noticed the narrative seems to suggest Kirito finds Cardinal beautiful whenever she acts like a kid her age rather than a weary old-timer, with words like 'perfect smile' and whatnot... goddamn it Kirito, *another* girl? You damn lolicon...)

Cardinal had tried to fight back within the last 200 years, but there's a big difference between her and Kuniela – Kuniela has access to many minions and more resources. The Synthesis Knights can tip the scales towards Kuniela's favour in a direct confrontation. These minions also help her govern the world, so she can lessen the intake of new memories. Now she rests on the top of the cathedral, reliving the memories of her past glory to further reduce additional information.

Kirito raised the point that that is indeed an advantage Kuniela has, but wouldn't her minions betray her? From his experience in SAO there's always conflict in large groups, the most notable example was how Divine Dragon's Alliance ended up disbanded though Heathcliff's KoB remained stable. (TL note: they look forward to if/when this eventually gets covered in Progressive). Cardinal said no betrayal is possible, due to 'Ritual of Synthesis' – they're all puppets of the Administrator. The first Synthesis Knight was the legendary figure from back in Eugeo's village, and Kirito thought this will be like him facing legendary figures from the past like Musashi. He tried to convince Cardinal this isn't a shounen manga where after defeat they'll somehow amazingly power-up, so there's no way he can win. Cardinal gave him a look of "what the hell are you talking about?". Of course this isn't a manga, it's a light novel =P

After many years the number of Synthesis Knights increased up to 50. Even taking into account border patrols and fighting against the Dark Territory, there will still be around 20 knights here in the Cathedral. Kirito thought it's practically like he had just left the Town of Beginnings and the final boss dungeon is

right in front of him.

Cardinal had been keeping a eye on Kirito, and a number of other people she might be able to recruit. Though most of the ones she found was taken by Kuniela and trained to be her minions, since Cardinal can only rely on her familiars while Kuniela can just open a window and see who has a high value of rule breaking tendencies. Cardinal revealed Charlotte, the familiar she stuck onto Kirito a while back and he never noticed. The winners of the tournaments are also inducted into a Synthesis Knight, the #30-50 are mostly such people. #1-20 are those with a high rule-breaking tendency values she captured. In a sense, Kirito was lucky they didn't follow the original plan and win the tournament or they might have ended up as puppets.

After constant defeat Cardinal was thinking about giving up within the last 10 years. Kuniela steadily have gained influence while she herself have gained nothing, and have been losing hope. She questioned why it must be herself that corrects Kuniela's mistakes, and started to yearn for the life she could have had as the 10 year old girl before she was erased; knowing nothing about the world, growing up, raising a family, and be surrounded by them on her deathbed. Originally it was on a whim Cardinal set her personality as a old woman, but now she felt more like one than ever. Rotting away with no future. Not even the Gods, Rath, has any interest in helping her even if they found this out. Kirito then knew Cardinal didn't actually know about Rath, the real world, or have a connection to them, she figured all the truth of UW out with logic in the last 200 years.

Rath currently have been stepping up on the pressures to human society to try and see if it'll force UW citizens to break the laws. Armies have started to amass in Dark Territory, and natural disasters have become more common. While the Dark Territory population is only half that of humans, there are vastly more combat-capable individuals in the goblins, beastmen and other races there. With how UW have stagnated and sword forms have been reduced to showmanship, UW will fall if Dark Territory invade. Administrator thinks she can defeat the Dark Territory with only her fifty Synthesis Knights, but Cardinal does not think it's likely. Either way, the world will end, the only difference is if it's by Kuniela's deeds or that of the Dark Territory as they pillage and burn across human lands. 50 knights can't hold ground, and even Kuniela will be defeated by the thousands of system command users within Dark Territory.

Cardinal knew there is no way out once Rath starts their pressure phase, so she wants to mercy-kill the entire UW, including the Dark Territory. While spending the next several hundred years to incorporate humanity with the other races is the best solution, it is not a possible one from what she has seen. Even if they stop Kuniela they can't escape from Rath. It's a military experiment after all, if UW tries to disobey they will just delete the whole thing and start anew. Cardinal likened this to fishes bred for consumption choosing to die by the hands of the fishermen or flop onto land and suffocate through their own actions. Cardinal offers Kirito her help to return back to the real world, if she became Administrator she can do so. In addition, she can use what little power she have to save ten Fluctlights and let them live on in the real world with Kirito. Ten of them is about the number Kirito can feasibly sneak out of Rath anyway, though Kirito doesn't think he can choose between the ones he has met since coming into UW – and does he have the right to decide who gets to live solely because they have met him?

Cardinal went through how she found out about Kirito and Eugeo, when they cut down a tree that was supposedly to be impossible. Through Charlotte Cardinal found the reasons they got this powerful and

how they cut the tree down. After Cardinal saw Kirito did things no UW citizen (little things, like feeding stray dogs) can do she knew Kirito isn't bound by the laws of the world – if anyone else found that Kirito would have been instantly captured by the Church. And since Kirito isn't from UW, his soul is in the STL and beyond the reach of the Administrator, so he is the best chance that can fight against the Administrator without being instantly deleted.

Kirito asked why didn't Cardinal leave all this behind, start a new life and family, instead of spending 200 years in a library by herself? As part of Kuniela her blood from nobility should have been enough to break any bounds left on her by the laws. Cardinal replied as the subsystem her only desire is to stop Kuniela... before she remembered her one other desire. She told Kirito to get up, position his arms in a circle, and after much ~~tsundere actions~~ incoherent orders Kirito found himself hugging Cardinal, with her on a stool so her head is level with Kirito's. Human contact, after 200 years, and Cardinal thought this as worth all the efforts she had put in so far with a few tears shed. Loneliness and dedication towards a goal will eventually dry up a person's mind and soul, which needs to be sated by human interactions. Kirito was reminded of his time back in SAO where he dedicated himself to one goal no matter what (training to get that revive crystal) and felt he can sympathize with what Cardinal has went through.

After who-knows-how-long, Cardinal broke off and went back to being an enlightened sage, asking if Kirito is willing to help her. Kirito said yes, though he said he will also be looking for the third option that doesn't involve everyone dying. Cardinal acknowledged that Kirito's a hopeless idealist, but that's within her tolerance. Kirito added he doesn't want to see Cardinal die – if he had to choose ten people to leave with him, he'll choose her as one of the ten. (Flere821 & TL Note: Another addition into his harem ^^; xD)

Cardinal's eyes widened at his claim (Flere821: haremte 'loli #2' confirmed as obtained), before giving a sad laugh saying Kirito's not just a idealist, but also a fool; even if she wants to leave she can't, she's part of this world and if she's gone there's no-one left to destroy it for the mercy-kill. Kirito says he understand that, but he's also not giving up. Cardinal said one day he will understand the meaning of despair and giving up; but enough of that, time to go look for Eugeo and plan out their next moves.

Eugeo had finished reading, and asked what's the time – they lost track of it. Cardinal said it's been three hours, the sun's up and it's about 8am in the morning. Kirito gave a brief explanation on who Cardinal is/was (nothing that will break Eugeo's mind), such as Cardinal used to be the High Priest and she's helping them to take down Administrator. Eugeo asked if Cardinal knew anything about Alice; is the Alice from his village the same as Alice Synthesis Fifty? Cardinal said she's been spending all her attention on him and Kirito, so she doesn't know – though she says she knows how to remove the brainwashing Administrator had done to the knights. The memory circuit of the knights are sealed, someone they love have been erased from their mind and using that as basis of the change. This was shown when Kirito and Eugeo accidentally influenced the brainwashing of Synthesis Twenty-Six they fought when they tried to escape. The memory fragment is the key to return them back to normal. If they want to get that they'll have to reach the top of the cathedral, since the Administrator is likely to keep those fragments in her own room. Kirito wanted to stop the knights non-violently but Cardinal derided that as futile – all she can do is raise their equipment onto the same level as the Synthesis Knights, not to the point where they can afford to go easy on their opponents. It's either slaughter a way to victory or die. Kirito asked is she not coming with them, and Cardinal says if she shows up it'll instantly be the final battle – she'll gladly go

with them if they think they can stop 20 Synthesis Knights at once. Administrator right now still wants to brainwash Kirito and Eugeo, so she'll be sending her knights after them in 2s and 3s to capture them alive. This way Kirito and Eugeo will still have a chance to victory.

Eugeo said he's fine with fighting, even killing his opponents, however he can't fight Alice as that'll completely deny what he has accomplished within the last 2 years. Cardinal handed him and Kirito each a small dagger that weighed as much as a real sword, saying if that's the case use these as their trump card; these daggers have no attacking power whatsoever, but if stabbed into their enemy it will have a path established with Cardinal and she can use her spells to take them down. Use it on Alice and she'll instantly be asleep, and stay that way until they recover her memory fragment. As even system commands can't create something out of nothing, those daggers are built upon her own sacrifice; a hundred years' worth of hair. Cardinal joked if Kirito and Eugeo had shown up a month earlier they would be able to see her long hair that was her pride then. Kirito found even Cardinal has some similarities with normal girls in that she has pride in her hair and she felt sad she had to cut it off. These daggers were originally made to use against the Administrator, so make sure when they use it it counts. Eugeo asks if it's alright for him to use something there's only two of in the world, and Cardinal says it's fine. She almost let slip they will all die anyway so it doesn't matter. Kirito inwardly vowed to include Eugeo, Alice, and Cardinal among the ten he can save, even if he has to trick Cardinal into coming with him. He then shamefully realised that meant he in a way agreed to Cardinal's solution, but he resolved he'll save them even at the cost of this world.

Kirito then raised the point if system commands can't make something out of nothing, then where did the food they ate come from? Cardinal smiled and said all she did was use some worthless history books as raw material. Eugeo, as the history fanatic, choked at this revelation and said no they don't need any more food when Cardinal offered to make some more.

Kirito had thought they'd get the best gear in-game before remembering Cardinal can't make something out of nothing. Cardinal started to think if she had chosen the right person after Kirito found out he won't be getting the stuff he thought he'd get. She then explained even without her they'd still have the best gear anyway, one is a sword belonging to one of 4 dragon knights, the other was made from material of a tree that had absorbed resources from a large area for the past several hundred years. Add to the fact they know how to use these powerful weapons they should be fine. Kirito was reminded of fools in SAO that got some rare drops and then went to test them out, but then their inexperience killed them when the NPCs attacked.

Kirito and Eugeo's swords are at level 3. Their final destination is at level 100. Kirito had thought this will be a long quest and asked if they can start at level 50 instead, but Eugeo reminded them they wanted to keep the opponent separate. More space to cover means less likely to find the knights all in one place. Cardinal then reminded them of one more thing, that Synthesis Knights have abilities with their weapons that make them an extension of their body and have other special effects. Cardinal gave them 3 hours to write up a code/spell that will unlock their own weapon's abilities (Kirito's is a branch, Eugeo's sword at the very basis is ice that can never melt). The harsh time constraints was because it has almost been 24 hours since they lost their swords, any longer they will lose ownership over it.

Three hours later, Kirito and Eugeo got some sort of code working (though Cardinal said those were really inefficient code) and Cardinal dropped them off close to the room where they have their swords. Cardinal left the world's fate in their hands and let them decide whether the world will bathe in hellfire, fall into the void, or *looks at Kirito* there may be some third option. They left the room, and started their mission.

Part 3

Right after Kirito and Eugeo left Cardinal's library, they went to the weapons storeroom at third floor to take back their swords but unexpectedly they encountered arrows when they tried to leave the storeroom. Their opponent was a Synthesis Knight with only arrows and a huge bow. Kirito used magic to temporarily blind the knight and Eugeo charged ahead towards him but the knight quickly recovered and then proceeded to shoot all his arrows simultaneously towards them. Kirito and Eugeo barely managed to avoid the arrows. The knight, stunned by their strengths, activated his "Weapon Recollection". Through his "Weapon Recollection", the knight can generate and shoot powerful flame arrow. Kirito devised a plan that he will hold off the knight's flame arrow while Eugeo will move towards the knight to fight him one-to-one since Kirito figured out that the knight can't shoot the arrow more than one time. The flame arrow did penetrate Kirito's ten ice shields but at the same time Eugeo was already in front of the knight. The knight who once again stunned, tried to counter with his fist, however Eugeo blocked it with his sword and finally defeated the knight with his sword skill.

The beaten knight then told Kirito and Eugeo that there were about 12 knights waiting for them at the 50th floor and they might not have a winning chance against those knights. Kirito wondered why he tell them this piece of information. The knight answered that he had failed his mission given by Administrator and had no right to be a Synthesis Knight anymore. He pleaded for them to kill him, Deusolbart Synthesis Seven for good but Eugeo started to rage when he heard this name because he realised that the man in front of him was the knight who captured Alice eight and the half years ago. Eugeo in rage mode tried to kill the man he hated so much brutally but Kirito stopped him, stated that the man in front of them might have his memories of having captured Alice deleted by Administrator. Deusolbart really showed no recollection of his capture of Alice and also pretty much shaken by this fact. Kirito and Eugeo left the shocked Deusolbart behind with Kirito noting Deusolbart: "What you want to do later is up to you to decide. Whether you wish to go back to where Administrator is to receive punishment from her or just heal your wound and chase after us, or maybe....".

While running up the stairs, Eugeo had a feeling that the knight will not chase after them anymore.

Part 4

After running up for a while, Eugeo and Kirito met 2 monk apprentices named Aashin & Bisten, they're about 10 years old.

They said there's an order for everyone to stay inside their rooms because of the intrusion, but they want to see intruders from Dark Territory with their own eyes, they were surprised that Eugeo & Kirito looked just like normal human. Eugeo noticed they had small daggers but he let down his guard nonetheless, after chatting for a while, they told Eugeo & Kirito their surname, which are "Synthesis

Thirty-Eight & Thirty-Nine", before proceeding to stab both Eugeo & Kirito with their daggers, which were coated in paralysis poison.

Aashin & Bisten then dragged Eugeo and Kirito to the 50th floor, where they met 10 Integrity Knights, the boys engaged in arguments with the leader of the Knights "Fanatio", not noticing the black figure behind them started moving. Kirito quickly stole the daggers from the boys and paralyzed both before searching for the anti-paralysis potion from the boy and let Eugeo drink it.

Apparently Kirito suspicious the boys as they said there's an order to stay inside the rooms, which is impossible to defy, so they were certainly not just normal monk apprentices, and Kirito prepared sacred art to counter the poison in advance.

Kirito then proceed to fight the Knights, he used the chance when Fanatio started chanting "Weapon Total Domination", but the 9 remaining Knights went out to protect their leader using a 9-man battle formation.

Kirito managed to destroyed the formation and reached Fanatio, but it was too late as Fanatio already finished chanting, so Kirito was in clear disadvantage as the "Released" state of Fanatio sword was very powerful, Kirito suffered severed injury but he managed to destroy Fanatio's mask, revealing that Fanatio is actually a girl, of course, all those Knights also dumbfounded by this fact.

Eugeo recovered from the paralysis and "released" his Blue Rose Sword, causing ice vines to grab hold of everyone in the hall, all 9 Knights were caught, but Kirito & Fanatio jumped up before they get caught. At this point both of them suffered serious damage, then Kirito proceed to "release" his black sword, the Gigas Cedar appeared, blocked the light attack from Fanatio's sword and stabbed her abdomen, ended the fight.

Fanatio lied in pool of her blood, dying. Kirito tried his best to save her, with Eugeo help, but it won't be enough, he called for help from the Knights, but they also couldn't do anything, then he reminded of Cardinal and used the dagger she gave him to use against Administrator on Fanatio, Cardinal appeared and took Fanatio away to heal her, before giving healing potions to Eugeo & Kirito.

Eugeo & Kirito continue climbing the tower, which no longer has stairs beyond 50th floor, but using a "lift plate" controlled by a female official, she said she did this duty for 107 years, Kirito asked what she wants to do if she's released from this duty, her answer was to lift the plate in the vast sky rather than this gloomy tower.

They now reached 80th floor, which was the highest floor the lift could bring them to, and met Alice.

Kirito told Eugeo he'll try to hold her, while he uses the chance to stab her using his dagger. Kirito then challenged Alice for a duel, Alice accepted, but they didn't know she already released her sword, so their plan failed, Eugeo futilely released his weapon, upsetting Alice that they're cheating, Kirito then released his black sword too, and unintentionally destroyed the wall, Kirito & Alice were thrown out of tower

before the crack repaired itself.

-End of Eugeo POV-

Part 5

-Kirito POV-

It's now at the outside wall of the tower, Kirito had his one hand held on his black sword stabbing into the joint of the rocks, his other hand grabbed hold of Alice's gauntlet wrist. Alice told him to let her die rather than living in disgrace being saved by a sinner. He called her stupid choosing to throw her life away instead of trying to live to fulfill her duty to drive off the intruder.

They came to a temporally truce, which will last until they could get back into the tower. Kirito wanted a rope to tie them in case someone falls, but he didn't have anything to use, Alice decided to transform her gauntlet into a long chain, binding themselves on each end.

Kirito proposed 3 choices: climb down, climb up, or destroy the wall and get back in. Climbing down was not feasible as they're several hundred meters above ground, destroying the wall wasn't an option neither, as the self-repair ability of the wall would be too fast for them to get in, so they decided to climb up, to the 95th floor, which would have windows they could get in.

Kirito used sacred art to create small cylindrical metal objects to use as their footings to assist climbing up, but Alice was too scared to climb up using those small footings. So Kirito had to pull her up with the chain fastened to her sword belt.

Unlike object transform Alice just performed on her gauntlet, space transform Kirito performed didn't require starting object, and unlike settings in normal games, Underworld doesn't have MP system, space transform can be done as long as there was a blessing resource available, either from Terraria or Solus, but Kirito ran out of resource to transform as they were far above the ground to receive blessing from Terraria, and it already turned into the night, so no blessing from light of Solus either. Alice decided to transform her other gauntlet into more metal objects.

But before they could climb up further, a gargoyle came out of a terrace on tower wall and attacked Kirito, he couldn't fight it properly because of the limited footings and no space to swing his sword, but he still managed to injure it using metal object Alice gave him.

Two more gargoyles came out, Kirito was certain they both would fall if they kept fighting in this state, he then quickly pulled and threw Alice over to the terrace, which was about 4m above him, the chain tied both of them was about 5m long. Alice, in turn, pulled him up once she landed on the terrace.

She explained that those were called "Drones", the crude familiars created from lump of earth by those dark arts users in Dark Territory, but she couldn't believe they could slip through the watchful eyes of Integrity Knight and appeared right in the most sacred place of Human World, Kirito then suggested that

it might be an action by someone with high authority within the Central Cathedral itself.

They easily got rid of all 3 drones, but it was already night time so they couldn't climb up further, so they decided to rest on the terrace for the night.

-End of Kirito POV and a half way point of chapter 7-

My opinion: the exchange between Alice and Kirito was pretty funny, it reminds me of when Kirito met Lisbeth for the first time, this event should be in volume 12.

Part 6

-Eugeo POV (p374)-

This taste of loneliness, I wonder how long I've forgotten it.

Eugeo thought so while he climbed up the stairs.

Ever since the eleventh summer, when Alice was snatched away, Eugeo closed his eyes and ears, lived with nothing but the black great tree as his sole partner. Everyone in the village acted as if talking about that big incident was the taboo itself.

However, Eugeo himself also kept the memory of the incident locked away. His own weakness, his own cowardice he couldn't stand, he sank them under a deep swamp, averted his eyes away from both past and future.

Eugeo knew full well the taste of loneliness. He couldn't do anything on it own, long even before that incident.

But during his eighteenth spring, that guy, who aimlessly appeared in the forest without a single luggage, pulled Eugeo out of the mire he sank himself in. Together they drove away the group of goblins, cut down Gigas Cedar, and he gave Eugeo a goal to aim for once again.

Ever since they left Rulid village, their long journey passed Zakkaria, before reaching the capital, and the time he practiced in the Master Sword Academy, were all with Kirito beside him. All their plans down to the minute details to come to the Axiom Church together, removing all many obstacles, climbing to the very top of the tower, all will be with assistance of that black haired vagabond.

But when it was only last step before they could reach their goal, he loss sight of his partner, at that moment, the taste of loneliness welled up inside his throat. *How much I depend on Kirito until now?* He realized not a single thing had changed ever since he was still striking the infallible tree in the forest.

—

When Kirito and Alice were thrown out of the tower, Eugeo tried his best to destroy the wall, but he couldn't win against the self-repair ability of the tower wall and had to give up, Eugeo decided to believe

in Kirito to be able to save both himself and Alice, and proceed to climb up the tower on his own.

He reached the 90th floor, which was a massive bath hall, in there he met someone else. The first words from that stranger was "Sorry to disappoint, but I'm not a young girl." A naked middle aged guy, whose height was almost two meters and had a very strong built, got up from water to dress up, Eugeo didn't use that chance to attack him.

— —

"Before fighting with you, there is one thing I want to ask."

".....What is it?"

"Hmm, it's that..... The sub-leader..... Fanatio, is dead?"

Your tone is blunt like you're asking for a menu for dinner, isn't she your important subordinate? Eugeo pushed this thought away as he replied,

"Still alive. Now should be getting treatment..... I think."

The man listened to Eugeo's answer and let out a deep sigh of relief, before nodding,

"Is that so. Then I won't kill you as well."

"Wh....."

— —

Eugeo then asked him why he only worried about Fanatio, but not other subordinates, such as Alice. His answer was because Fanatio was his pupil, so he was stronger than her. And as he didn't feel he would lose to Eugeo, so he didn't think Eugeo stood a chance against Alice, who he didn't know if he could win against her.

The man introduced himself as "Berculi Synthesis One" and proceed to attack, Eugeo noticed he used an old school sword style and his familiar name.

Eugeo didn't have much chance against Berculi, in the end, he decided to release his Blue Rose Sword and freeze both of them together. Berculi surprised that he would throw his life away in order to take him down. But Eugeo said Berculi's Life will be completely depleted first because of his age, so his maximum Life is much lower than Eugeo's.

Eugeo realized that Berculi was the man of the legend he heard when he was young, and asked if Berculi recognize the Blue Rose Sword. Berculi said he noticed that sword when he killed the white dragon in the cave of Mountain range at the Edge long ago. Eugeo shocked by this fact.

As Eugeo hesitated whether to let Berculi die or not, someone else came into the bath hall.

Berculi called the short, fatty man as "Elder Schuderkin". Schuderkin knew Berculi held back in order to not killing Eugeo and declared him treason, and need to be reprogrammed, before proceeding to chant,

"System call deep freeze integrator unit 001!"

Berculi's body dyed in gray as he turned into a stone statue.

By then, Eugeo also loss his conscious.

-End of Eugeo POV-

Notes:

- I forgot to state last time that Fanatio was the sub-leader of the Knights. Her full name is Fanatio Synthesis Two.

- Integrator is the term refers to Integrity Knight by high rank officers, it's used first time in volume 10 chapter 3, in Charlotte's monologue.

Part 7

-Kirito POV (p412)

Kirito woke up by a sudden, intense shudder. He noticed he fell asleep for a short while when he heard the bell telling him it was eight and he had to wait until ten before Lunaria would bestow her blessing resource.

He thought about various thing, and when he smirked thinking about bringing Eugeo's Fluctlight to outside world, let him Dive into ALO, and introduce him to everyone as his pupil who surpassed him, and also his best partner,

—

"What are you grinning about?"

An unexpected voice came from beside, I blinked my eyes as I was interrupted mid dream.

I turned my face to see Alice stared at me with a weird expression. I rubbed my mouth using the back of my right hand, before saying,

"No, just..... thinking about various things after this."

"With a slacking smile like that, you're pretty optimistic, or you just don't think far enough? In the situation that escaping is still uncertain like this."

Sharp tongue as ever. While I don't know the old personality of Alice, but if her character is always like this, when she and Eugeo escaped into the real world and meet with everyone, it isn't hard to imagine she fits right in, along with Sinon and Lisbeth.

I knew that there were mountain of problems to solve before we could reach that ultimate good ending. I pressed my right hand on my empty stomach as I looked into the night sky, and said in a serious face,

"About escaping from this situation, I think we could resume when the moon comes up. It seems the drones aren't coming out anymore, so it should be fine to create more hooks and climb straight up. It's just, there's a problem that I felt dizzy when thinking about climbing this wall with empty stomach."

".....Your point certainly lack of sincerity. It's just skipping one or two meals isn't it? Don't act like a spoiled kid."

"Yeah, yeah, who cares if I'm a spoiled kid, I'm still barely in a growing category anyway. Unlike the well-sheltered Integrity Knight-sama, my number will greatly drop without proper eating."

"Let me tell you first, even Integrity Knight also feels exhaust without eating!"

As Alice said so with the corner of her eyes raised up, *Kuu*, a cute sound came out from her abdomen, I unintentionally made a wide smile.

The face of Knight-sama suddenly dyed in red, when I saw her right hand grabbed the grip of her sword, I quickly waved my hands,

"Uwa, wait, I'm sorry! Yeah, right, Integrity Knight is also a living being, being alive is great, isn't it?"
— —

Kirito patted his pants and realized he had 2 steamed manjuu he took from Cardinal, but before giving one to Alice, he wanted to heat it up, so he call a thermal element.

Alice stopped him just before he burst the element, which would result in two charcoal manjuu, and took over the role, she generated thermal, aqueous, and aerial elements before properly steaming those manjuu.

After eating, he praise her cooking skill, "As expected from the older sister of that skillful little sister chef." Alice taken interest in what he just said and asked him to explain more.
— —

"You have a younger sister. While I don't know if you will believe what I'm going to tell or not, but know that everything I'm telling is the truth."

I made a bet, Alice hesitated for a short while before spreading her palm. Although listening to me was

the action beyond her duty, her curiosity seemed to win.

".....Tell me, but..... if I conclude that you plot to deceive me, I'll kill you right away."

To the low, threaten voice of Alice, I let out a breath before nodding,

".....That's fine as long as that conclusion came out of your own mind. I said it like this because, someone else had planted the orders inside you."

".....Are you talking about the duty of Integrity Knights?"

"Yes."

As I nodded, Alice's light blue pupils dangerously narrowed, but at the same time, a fluctuation of emotion also could be seen. I thought that might be a sign of Alice's true feeling, before continued,

"The Integrity Knights are summoned from the heaven by the proxy of God, the supreme priest Administrator, to maintain the order and justice of Human World. — this should be what you recognized. But, in this world, only you Knights that believe in such thing. Every commoners of Human World, along with the priests of the churches, as well as the supreme priest herself, don't think that way."

"What nonsense you're talking about?"

"If you go down to the capital right now, you can ask just anyone. They would tell you that Integrity Knights are those given honor from the Axiom Church, appointed to the winners of the Four Empire Unity Tournament, which hold once every a few years."

"Appointing to be..... the Integrity Knight? From the commoners.....? Something stupid like that can't be true. I come into contact with many Knights on a daily basis, and every single one of them don't have human origin."

"It's the opposite. Every single one of you have human origin."

I leaned by body to the wall and looked into Alice's pupils, before turning my words to human portion of Alice,

"You probably don't have any memory of the time you lived in the heaven. Your first memory is when you were before Administrator, telling you that you're the knight of God, came from heaven or something like this."

"....."

It seemed to be a bull's eye, Alice pulled her body back slightly and lightly bit her lips,

".....That's because..... the dwellers of the heaven will have their memories sealed by God Stacia when they were dispatched onto the ground,and once I made all the ground into paradise, fulfilling my Integrity Knight's duty, I'd go back to the land of God, have my memories unsealed, and recalling my parents and siblings....."

Weakness completely disappeared from the firm voice of the golden Knight.

That's it. I intuitively thought. Alice didn't realize that she wish for the memories of her family. That's why she reacted strongly when I mentioned her sister.

"Administrator at least has one part right. It's certain that you have your memories sealed, just not by the God Stacia, but Administrator herself. And the sealed memories aren't about the heaven, but the memories ever since you born and live as a child of this Human World. It's the same to all other Knights, such as your disciple Eldré. He is a heir of the Empire nobles, won the Unity Martial Arts Tournament many years ago, and acquired the honor to be the Integrity Knight. But is that really an honor? Eldré collapsed during the battle with us, but we didn't cut him. He doesn't have any wound, does he? It was because my partner recalled Eldré's "previous world"..... Eldré was stimulated by the memories of his mother, which Administrator sealed, no, snatched away. Because he couldn't recall it no matter how hard he tried, that's why he collapsed. But that was of course, those memories were snatched away and are locked in Administrator's room, after all."

"Did you say Eldré is..... human's..... noble's child.....?"

Alice's lips trembled for a moment.

"It's not just Eldré. More than half of the Integrity Knights are the sword experts who won the Tournaments..... are human to the end, because..... those majority are children of nobles who were in the environments of sword practicing ever since they were young. The nobles snatched everything away from their children in order for them to gain money and status. And that structure continued for tens of years, hundreds of years until now."

".....I don't believe it..... I can't accept any of it."

The golden knight, who has infallible trust in the dignity of the Church and the Knights up until now, shook her head in disbelief.

"I..... know well about the despicable deeds of human nobles. Their hands..... dyed in unjust because it isn't written in the Taboo Index. The Priest-sama is going to purge the depravity nobles during the dawn of the Dark Territory suppression..... and yet..... Eldré's, and other Knights' parents are those filthy nobles..... it can't be true. I can't believe it."

"The proof of that, perhaps you already know."

I leaned forward, drew myself closer to her.

"You know the Integrity Knight apprentices Aashin and Bisten, right? They are noble's children entered the Church to be the monk apprentices. And then promoted into the knight apprentices to replace those knights who had been slain in battles. They wouldn't mind to kill me using their poison daggers. So they clearly lacked the justice and purity, which are necessary for Integrity Knights, all they have are just battle ability, isn't that an actual proof?"

— —

Alice tried to deny it but Kirito pressed on, telling Administrator would just alter their memories about the two children by the time they were ready to be the full-fledge knights.

Alice couldn't believe the supreme priest would play with their memories like that, so Kirito asked if she ever remember the instance when she went to capture criminals, she answered him that she recalled very well when she went to capture him. But Kirito told her that during his encounter with Deusolbert, the knight couldn't remember at all that he himself went to capture Alice from Rulid village 9 years ago.

Kirito further explained that the large amount of Knights that weren't of nobles origin are those who violated the Taboo Index and had tendencies to excel in combat ability, in turning them into Knights, Administrator got rid of the threat to her ruling, and at the same time, she got a strong pawn to her disposal.

He then explained who she really is, and what she did 9 years ago that violated the Taboo Index. But as he explained, the scene of the incident flashed before his eyes as if he was in the incident himself, which shouldn't be possible because he just heard about it from Eugeo.

Alice tried to recall about it, but Kirito told her not to, or else she would end up like Eldré. Alice then asked him to tell her more, which he told her about the Rulid village chief, her father, he didn't know the name of her mother, and about her sister Selka, who could never forget about Alice, became a sister apprentice, and was now trying very hard to succeed Alice, who was also sister apprentice before the incident.

Alice became silent, stopped trembling, Kirito started to think his effort was futile and waited for her verdict that he tried to deceive her. It was when she started murmuring,

— —

"Selka."

And once again,

"Selka....."

Her blue pupils shook as she lifted her face toward the starry sky.

"I can't remember. Not face, nor voice. But..... this isn't the first time I called this name. My mouth, my tongue, my throat all remember it."

".....Alice."

I swallowed my breath and whispered. My presence was no longer in her concern as she continue muttering,

"How many times I called this name? Everyday... every night.....Selka, Sel.....Se—"

Pool of transparent liquid gather around Alice's long eyelashes, brimmed over, it glittered in starlight before falling down, I stared at the emotional scene in disbelief. The tear kept gushing out and fall down, causing little sound on the floor tile between us.

"It's the truth, right.....? My family..... my little sister. The sister whom shares the same blood as I..... is somewhere under this same sky....."

She said with difficulty as she tried to stop her sobbing like she was a little child.

"Alice....."

My right hand, which I inadvertently extended out, was brushed away without looking by Alice's hand.

"Don't look!!"

Alice, who shouted in a half crying voice, roughly pushed my chest while her other hand kept rubbing her eyes. However, the tear wouldn't stop, the knight turned her face and buried it between her upright knees, her shoulders trembled violently.

"U.....Uguu.....Uuu....."

Alice tried to subdue her voice as she cried, watching her in that state, I noticed tear welled up in my eyes as well. I knew it wasn't time for this, but I couldn't stop the the fluid from blurring my eyes.

Certainly—

I'll certainly defeat Administrator and take Alice back to her home. As I determined, I noticed half of my tear wasn't from crying in sympathy.

At the time Eugeo and I reached that goal, the one who reunite with Selka at Rulid village wouldn't be

this Alice before my eyes. When her memories returned, she would remember Eugeo, Selka and Rulid village in the old days, and at the same time, she would forget about these nine years she spent as the Integrity Knight.

— —

Kirito knew that would be a desirable outcome, but he couldn't stop himself from feeling sorry for the strongest Knight who spent 9 years in loneliness, longing for the warmth of her family she knew full well she could no longer reach.

It was a long while before Alice's sobbing sound died off, Kirito then thought about various thing that would happen after this point, both inside and outside Underworld.

Alice suddenly asked him about what he said soon after they were thrown out of the tower, that he said all he did was to correct the wrongdoings of Administrator, in order to protect this world. She believe that even all he said was true, but the deep loyalty from the Integrity Knights toward the supreme priest was undeniable, because her first order to the Knights was to protect the Human World from the invasion of the Dark Territory force, and even at the moment, more than ten Knights were patrolling the border. Even if Kirito succeed in removing all Knights including the supreme priest, what Kirito and Eugeo could do against the army of darkness.

Kirito asked her in respond if she really thought just handful of Knights and the supreme priest would be enough to suppress the large scale army from Dark Territory, which individual soldier being far stronger than average human, especially when they press from all directions at once.

Alice told Kirito that Berculi also shared the same worry, but it was the fact that there was no fighting power in Human World outside of the Integrity Knights. Those practice martial arts among the nobles were just for show.

Kirito agreed with her that currently the Knights were the only force to fight against the army of darkness, but that was the plan of Administrator all along. She feared the battle power she didn't have a complete control over to appear in the Human World. For that reason, she sealed the memories of all winner of the tournaments, as well as the criminals from Taboo Index violations, and turned them into Integrity Knights for several hundred years. In other words, Administrator just didn't trust the human.

He then said there might be 1 or 2 years before the invasion from Dark Territory, they still had time to gather fighting force to protect the Human World, while they couldn't rely on high class nobles, but lower class nobles, as well as commoners had a lot of strong individual among them, if they were outfitted with the equipments stockpiled in the tower, and had a proper guidance from the Integrity Knights, they would have the fighting power enough to match that of Dark Territory.

He further explained that even without forced conscription, just by volunteer and from the ranks of sentinels and guards from each town and villages would be enough, but it currently couldn't be done because the supreme priest wouldn't allow it, as she feared the army she couldn't control its loyalty even

more than army of darkness.

As Alice became silent, Kirito started thinking about various things again, and before long,

— —

".....meet her?"

"Eh.....?"

"If I cooperate with you..... and regain the memories that were snatched away, could I meet Selka..... my sister, could I meet her?"

I inadvertently held my breath.

Meeting. Meeting is not the problem. But.....

This time I loss for words for a long while, but Alice kept looking at me, with her hands wrapped on her upright knees, waiting for my answer.

".....You could. If using the flying dragon, it only takes one or two days to reach Rulid village. But..... I want you to listen to this carefully."

I brought my face closer to Alice's left ear, before saying,

"When you meet Selka, you won't be yourself anymore. At the time your memories return, you will be your nine years ago self, before the "Synthesize ceremony", return to being Alice Schuberg, and at the same time, the Integrity Knight Alice Synthesis Fifty will cease to exist. Your current personality during this nine years of being Integrity Knight will vanish and replaced by your original personality..... it's cruel to say, but..... currently you are "Temporally Alice" created by Administrator, along with a temporally personality."

As Alice was slowly informed by my words, her shoulders shook two or three times, her head hung low and was buried by her arms.

— —

Alice said her body was a tool she stole from a girl name Alice, so she has to return it.

— —

"The stolen thing..... has to be returned, right? And that would be..... my sister, my parents, your friend..... as well as your own wish."

".....Alice."

"Just.....one thing, there is one thing I want to ask."

"That is.....?"

"Before the restoration of Alice's personality to this body..... could you take me to Rulid village? And then, under a cover..... let me take a look just once. At Selka..... at my sister, and my parents, I want to see them with my own eyes. If that can be granted, then I'd be satisfied."

Once she finished saying, Alice slowly turned her face and looked at me.

At that moment, the moon which were already above out head, shone its light through the gap of black clouds. The bead of golden light bordered her outline, Alice's reddened eyes like an infant looked softer, as she gave off a faint smile.

I unintentionally hid my face and clenched my teeth.

Returning Alice's memories.

That is a single wish of my best partner Eugeo. So it's my wish at the same time.

But—to the girl who is crouching helplessly in front of me, it also has the same meaning as her death.

Necessarily sacrifice, unavoidably order of precedence.

There is no other way.

"Sure..... I promise. I swear."

I said so as I averted my gaze.

"Before the memories restoration, I will certainly take you to Rulid village."

".....Absolutely, right?"

Alice nodded after her emphasize.

"Understood. Then..... to the world of human, in order to protect this peace, I, Alice Synthesis Fifty resign from the mission as the Integrity Knight..... u..... ah.....!!"

—

Alice suddenly raised a sharp scream as she held her hands on her right eye, she bit her lips in an intense pain, Kirito shocked to what he was seeing, then he realized he saw the same thing three days ago, around the same time. When Eugeo cut right arm of Raigos Antinos, his right eye blew off and large

amount of fresh blood gushed out of it.

Kirito told Alice to stop thinking as he pulled her hands off her eye. Then he noticed a rotating barcode displayed on her eye, after a while it stopped rotating and changed into a text "SYSTEM ALERT".

He realized that this couldn't be an action from anyone inside this Underworld but by the RATH staff, but he noticed a contradiction as the objective of the experiment was to find a breakthrough when Fluctlight act against the rules, but a mental block like this would be none but a hindrance to the experiment. His conclusion led to someone plans to sabotage RATH, but he couldn't confirm it unless he could talk to Kikuoka.

Kirito told Alice that what happening to her wasn't by Administrator but by someone outside this world whom she called God. She angered by the betrayal of her loyalty, and asked Kirito to hold her. He embraced her tightly as she declared war against the supreme priest and God. At the same time, Kirito felt large amount of warm liquid run down from his cheek to his neck.

-End of Kirito POV-

Sorry for a long summary, I like this part too much and spent too much time on it before realizing. I'll try to keep it shorter next time.

Part 8

-Eugeo POV (p451)-

Eugeo woke up from a bad dream and found himself on a large, luxurious bed in a spacious room. Beside him was a sleeping young girl, whose height was about the same as his, her delicate skin, her pure silver hair, her looks weren't of a human but a divine being.

He soon realized that the girl couldn't be anyone but the supreme priest Administrator herself, he knew he could use the chance to defeat her, he noticed he didn't have Blue Rose Sword, but still had the dagger given from Cardinal.

As he hesitated to pull the dagger out, Administrator woke up, her silver pupils and her rainbow irises made Eugeo stunned in the beauty.

The first thing came out of her delicate pearl gray lips was that he was a poor boy, who longed for love, a love that didn't need to be shared with anyone, but his alone.

She said the red haired girl was the first time he would receive that kind of love from, but it was snatched away by the filthy man, it was the reason Eugeo killed him.

Eugeo denied he didn't did it for that reason, while he thought he still had Alice. But the supreme priest didn't thought so, before showing him a scene of the past.

Eugeo found himself waiting for Kirito and Alice in the forest, but they didn't come. He couldn't wait any longer and returned to the village to find them. He couldn't find the two in the village either, he then went to their secret location, the place villagers called spirit circle. There, he found both of them together. Kirito, not noticing Eugeo, told Alice they should go back, but Alice asked him to stay a while longer as their bodies moved closer to each other.

Eugeo returned to reality, with Administrator told him she was the only one who could give him such love, as her hand moved to the ribbon on her silk night dress, she asked him to come closer.

-End of Eugeo POV-

There are two things, I forgot to mention in the last part. Alice's sister name is Silka in web version, but I used Selka as in published version to avoid confusion. Other thing is what Alice did in prologue 1, in published version, she just tripped and her palm touched the ground of Dark Territory, but in web version, she absentmindedly walked out of the cave to the dying dark knight and tried to save him. Kirito guessed in last part that there was no mental block that time because she did it unintentionally, unlike this time that she intentionally went against the Church.

Part 9

-Kirito POV (p474)-

The shock when her right eye blew off caused Alice to loss conscious, Kirito used his own Life to stop the bleeding but it wasn't enough to restore her eye back, as he had to reserve space resource from the moon for climbing, he tore the hem of his shirt to wrap her right eye as the temporally measure.

Kirito tied Alice to his back using the small chain she made when they started scaling the tower wall and resume climbing. Two hours later just when it was the limit of his body strength, he reached 95th floor, before lying down like a toy losing the power of battery.

He explained that unlike human fainting by external force done to the brain, the fainting of artificial Fluctlight was an automatic mechanism to reduce damage to its core when taking an intense mental shock, it was the reason Alice loss conscious. Ronié and Tizé were the same during their tragedy. Although Eugeo experience the very same thing as Alice a few days back, but he didn't loss conscious, he still manage to cut Raio, and after that Eugeo also didn't show any sign of confusion in his thoughts, Kirito really admired Eugeo's emotional strength.

Alice regained conscious soon after and realized Kirito carried her up, just when Kirito thought to say 'at least say a little thanks', Alice went into panic when she found out that Kirito was soaked in sweat and it stuck to her skin.

Alice told him that Eugeo probably didn't reach this floor yet, or else he should have waiting for them here, but Kirito thought Eugeo might have pass this floor in 3 states, arrested, unconscious, or dead.

Alice further explained the reason Eugeo couldn't reach here was probably because he encountered the strongest Knight, Berculi, on the floor below. Since Kirito lose to her, so Eugeo who was on par with Kirito would have no chance against Berculi, whom she couldn't win against.

Kirito wanted to argue when did he lose to her, but instead he considered how to know if Eugeo was above or below them, as they couldn't waste time finding him in the wrong direction, or else Eugeo might be turned into Integrity Knight and that would almost completely shut them out of their goal.

There was a sacred arts to trace things in Underworld, but it couldn't be use directly on human target, he soon realized Eugeo's possession that he could clearly recall its ID.

"System call! Search position place! Object ID, DI:WSM:0131!"

It was the ID of Blue Rose Sword, the violet light beam pointed downward.

They quickly ran down stairs, on the way down, Alice explained about the elders, whom acted as the commanders of the Knights, 96th-99th floor were their exclusive floors, which the Knights were forbidden to enter. Their duty was to to monitor the Taboo Index violation and order the Knight to deal with the criminal. Alice was instructed to intercept Kirito & Eugeo on the 80th floor by the elders as well.

Kirito thought whether the elders memories were sealed the same way as the Integrity Knights. He then wondered about the "behavior control key", the content of memory piece taken from Alice. Initially he expected it to be about Eugeo or Selka, but Alice had no reaction both times she met Eugeo, while she broke into tears when mentioning Selka, both clearly weren't her missing key piece like in Eldré case, which when stimulated, a triangular prism would appear on the forehead.

They reached 90th floor, what greeted him after Alice opened the large door was a thick mist. He soon surprised by the scene he saw, the entire large bath hall was frozen. Further in the hall, they found Berculi, who already turned into stone, Alice told him she heard from Berculi that the elders possessed the power to turn the Knights into stone for "readjustment". Kirito couldn't understand why they did something like this to Administrator's precious fighting force, but Alice told him Berculi was long in doubt with the way the supreme priest ruled the Human World, Alice had the same doubt, but she kept fighting with the belief that the world couldn't maintain its current peace without the Church.

As Alice started crying to her father figure, Berculi used his last drops of his power to break out, he noticed that Alice managed to tore the wall, the seal in her right eye, which he couldn't do for over 300 years, he then asked Kirito to take care of Alice from now on, before telling them hurry to rescue Eugeo, who was taken away by elder Schuderkin, before he became "lost in the maze of his memories".

After Berculi stopped moving, Kirito picked the Blue Rose Sword and its white leather scabbard up, determining to return it to Eugeo, before equipping it on his waist. Alice looked at him and said he looked somehow strangely suitable in it, even though equipping two swords at the same time had no practical use, only royal family and nobles did something like this for show. She added that releasing

memories of multiple weapons at the same time was also proved impossible.

Alice recalled that she only met Administrator once, the time she woke up in this world, she recalled her fear from that time by those eyes of the supreme priest, but she glad they met Berculi, in order to correct the current distorted Human World, to save her sister and everyone else, her mind would never sway any longer.

Kirito worried if they should leave Berculi like that, but Alice told him he should be released once they defeated elder Schuderkin.

Both of them then started hurrying to the top of the tower.

-End of Kirito POV-

Part 10

Part ??/?

Administrator convinced Eugeo to open his mind by pointing out to him that he never received anything in return from his love given to all people around him.

She once again showed him a scene of the past, during his 10th spring, the time he was given a sacred task to chop down Gigas Cedar, at the time, some of the kids at the village square even cried in jealous, and Eugeo was given a real axe to use on the task, he didn't have any dissatisfaction. But when he returned home and told the news to his family, he only got cold shoulders from every members of the family.

Eugeo never get along well with Jink, the guard apprentice, but when he got injured, Eugeo always find a herb to help tending the bruise, but all Jink did in return was only showing Eugeo his new stuff bought using his wage as the guard apprentice, while Eugeo, who gave almost all his wage to the family, wore worn out shoes and eat only the leftover bread. The only single advantage Eugeo ever had over Jink was that he had a good relationship with Alice, the genius and the prettiest girl, but once she was taken away, Jink started to tell Eugeo that he dated a girl.

Administrator also showed him the scene of Tizé and Alice both taken away by other men. Eugeo, defenseless, was told to accept her by chanting "System call, release core protection."

—

Kirito and Alice reached the 96th floor, which was the headquarter of the elders, before entering, Alice warned Kirito not to kill elder Schuderkin as they need him to release Bercouli. They were shocked by an eerie scene once they entered the room.

There were many chairs protruded off the wall, the elders sat on those chairs, no, they were kept sat on those chairs by several hoops locked them into place. The elders all were bald and had no eyebrows,

they stared at the windows in front of them and kept repeating 'system call... system call...', of course, they didn't care about the two intruders. After a while, a bell rang, all elders looked up and opened their mouth. A brown liquid came down into their mouth, it had a sour smell like a food that went bad during a hot summer, but elder didn't mind, their faces were in pleasure.

After the 'feeding' ended, they returned to their windows and continued repeating 'system call...' once again. Seeing the room made Alice recalled the time of her 'Synthesize ceremony', which she was tied on one of those chairs and was tortured for 3 days and nights before she finally gave in, all those time, the only thing she pledged was not to take the memories of those important people from her.

Alice approached one of the elder and drew out her sword and placed it on the position above his heart, Kirito tried to stop her but she told him it was the only mercy they could get. Kirito agreed that it was far beyond losing memory piece, they no longer had personality, the only thing they had left was the human intelligence and it would be no longer possible to return them to normal.

Before Alice proceed to stab the elder, someone came into the room, but as he was busy watching his crystal ball, he didn't notice the two intruders. Alice affirmed Kirito that the man was the elder Schuderkin, Kirito took a peek into his crystal ball and saw a back of a girl and surprised by the presence of the man in front of her. Alice took the chance to approach Schuderkin and threaten to cut his tongue if he started chanting.

Schuderkin didn't scare and kept provoking Alice, before Kirito could stop her, Alice stabbed her sword into Schuderkin's heart, but instead of blood, 2 color smoke came out of the wound as his body explode like a ballon, the elder took the chance to run away upstairs during the confusion.

— —

Eugeo said the command Administrator told him, but before he finished saying it, he recalled that he came here only for Alice, not for himself. The supreme priest then changed her plan by showing him Alice's memory piece, offered him to return it to Alice and rewrote her mind that she would love only him, that he would have a total control over her. That made Eugeo realize that Administrator herself also wanted love, and pointed out to her that a total control isn't love.

The supreme priest gave up the idea of taking Eugeo to her side and prepared to destroy both him and the memory piece. Eugeo used the chance to attack her with the dagger given from Cardinal, he failed but managed to snatch the memory piece away from her.

As Eugeo considered he had no chance against her and prepared to jump off the window to escape and meet up with Kirito, Schuderkin voice came from outside, asking Administrator to open the door.

As soon as the supreme priest let the elder entering the room, Kirito and Alice also appeared from the door way. Even though Eugeo believed that Kirito would certainly save her from falling and make truce with her, but he couldn't imagine how he could convince her, the Knight of the Church to the blood, to

turn against the supreme ruler of the Church like this.

Part 11

Administrator ordered Schuderkin to clean up the mess he made, while she stepped back to watch from behind.

Kirito, Alice and Eugeo were forced to fight from a distance as they didn't want to be too close to the supreme priest, so they were in disadvantage. Alice used her sword moves to block the large magic attacks from the elder without any chance to counter attack.

On his largest and final attack spell, Alice told Kirito and Eugeo that she could hold the attack for 10 seconds and asked them to do something.

Eugeo fired an ice arrow to Administrator to distract Schuderkin, as soon as the elder looked the other way, Kirito unleashed Vorpals Strike, cutting him into two in a single attack.

Administrator didn't care about the elder, after some words exchanged, she summoned a golem made out of numerous blades. Alice and Kirito, under the impression that Administrator couldn't kill a human, charged in to fight the golem, but the battle turned to be a one-sided slaughter.

Alice was stabbed through her heart, Kirito was cut deep at his abdomen, a fatal wound. Eugeo saw how easily they were defeated, couldn't do anything but to wait for his death. Suddenly, Charlotte came out of his shirt and told him to use the dagger Cardinal gave him on the door, before she enlarged her body and charged in to buy time for Eugeo.

Charlotte only got him a few seconds before she was killed, but it was enough, Cardinal appeared from the door and incapacitated the golem before curing Alice and Kirito.

Cardinal told Kirito that Charlotte was a named monster, or an NPC with top-down AI, Charlotte liked them after watching them for so long and decided to follow them even after Cardinal dismissed her from the duty.

It turned out that the supreme priest wanted to force Cardinal to come out all along, she brought the room into an enclosed space, blocking Cardinal from escaping like she did 200 years ago, before reviving the sword golem.

Kirito thought Administrator certainly could singlehandedly drive off the Dark Territory's invasion by mass producing something like this, then the supreme priest explained that each sword was transformed from a human, with the memory fragments of their important person, they became a mindless killing machine, she planned to turn half the population of Human World into the golems to deal with Dark Territory.

Cardinal didn't think she could win, she offered her life in exchange for Administrator to let the three go.

The supreme priest accepted and proceed to kill Cardinal.

On her final moment, Eugeo asked Cardinal to turn him into a sword, he knew full well he wouldn't be able to return to human afterward but he couldn't flee and let the supreme priest do as she pleased. The supreme priest noticed what they were doing but Alice jumped in to buy them time, she was badly burned and loss conscious.

Cardinal merged Eugeo's body into his Blue Rose Sword, turned it to be a big white sword. Cardinal then release memories of Alice's memory piece, giving life to the Giant Sword. It proceed to destroy the sword golem, and before Kirito could stop, the giant sword charged into Administrator.

She intercept the white sword with her silver rapier, the rapier was smashed into pieces in the impact, but the white sword also broken in half, the broken blade cut right shoulder of Administrator, before turning back into human form.

Eugeo laid in a sea of his own blood, his body was cut in half under his waist, the Blue Rose Sword had its blade half broken as well.

As Kirito watched his best buddy in that state, his sense became dull, he could hear nor smell anything, color faded off his vision. He came all the way here to release Eugeo from this world, but he now loss his goal. He couldn't do anything but waiting for the approaching Administrator to release him from this world, so he didn't have to see or hear anything anymore.

Administrator turned her left arm into a long sword, but just before she could stab him, a silhouette jumped between them, Kirito realized it wasn't the first time something like this happened. He couldn't let it repeat itself again.

Administrator's sword pierced through Alice's cloth and part of her white skin, but it wasn't fatal, the sword also missed Kirito entirely. Alice, noticed he could still fight, relief and loss her conscious again.

Kirito started using his sword skills to fight the supreme priest, first by Vertical Square, which was countered by her stabbing to his abdomen. He thought she might learn about this skill from Eugeo before he reached the room, so he switched to his highest rank sword skill even Eugeo didn't know about, the 10-hit Nova Ascension, which was also countered on its first hit, making it failed completely by the 8-hit rapier skill, Star Splash, the skill which was Asuna's pride. He couldn't believe she could access his memory. He third attempt was Vorpal Strike from a 5m distant, this time Administrator turned her sword into a katana and countered it with a katana skill Kirito didn't know.

Completely lose even in sword fight, Kirito convinced he could never win against her and told her to do as she pleased.

Eugeo's voice reached him, saying it wasn't like him to give up like that. Eugeo recalled the time that Alice was taken away 9 years ago, that he couldn't move even slightly, but Kirito bravely stood up against

the Knight. That's why this time, he wanted to be the one pushing Kirito, to encourage Kirito to stand up again.

Eugeo turned the sea of blood of his and Kirito into a blade of Blue Rose Sword and stopped Kirito's bleeding. With two swords in his hands, Kirito charged into Administrator.

Kirito's right arm was cut apart by Administrator's blade, but at the same time, he managed to cut her left arm, before stabbing her heart, blew it away. At the same time, Blue Rose Sword loss its power and returned to its broken state.

The supreme priest couldn't heal her wounds, she brought out the system console and proceed to logout of this world, but just before she could leave to the outside world, the burning upper part of Schuderkin body grabbed hold of her and wouldn't let go, the flame engulfed both before disappearing without a trace.

Kirito realized Eugeo didn't have much Life left, it should be just a few minute if he was left in that state, he tried to connect Eugeo body and stop the bleeding, but it ended in futile. As Kirito desperately tried to save Eugeo,

"It's..... alright. It's.....better..... this way... Kirito."

"What are you saying! How could this be better!?"

Even to my voice that became like a scream, a satisfied smile didn't fade off Eugeo's face.

"The duty... I must do... was completely accomplished..... From here on..... we have to walk..... on a different path....."

"That's not gonna happen!! I won't accept such fate!! Something like that, I absolutely won't accept!!"

My persuasion, tinged with a crying voice like a little child, that I argued vehemently was once again, denied by Eugeo's pupils.

".....If.....this goes on... it'll become unavoidable... that you... and I..... will have to fight each other..... for Alice. Because I... want to return memories... to her body..... while you... want to protect the soul... of Integrity Knight Alice....."

That was what I feared from the bottom of my heart, but it was still in the future that I didn't think about it yet. I still didn't know if I'd agree to erase the Knight Alice and restore Alice of Rulid village or not.

I couldn't answer that question now.

But, my hesitated self still said to Eugeo in tears,

"Then let's fight!! Once you make a complete recovery from your injuries, we'll fight!!"

However, a clear smile of Eugeo still didn't waver,

"My..... sword... is already... broken. Also... I won't agree... to such fate. The battle... between you... and me... something like that..... I won't ever... accept it."

As Eugeo muttered, beads of tear welled up in his eyes, before soundlessly flowing down.

"I was... always envy you..... Kirito. You're... stronger than anyone..... being loved by everyone. Even if it's Alice..... I think she would..... But..... I finally.....understood. Love.....isn't what to demand... but it's to be given... Alice... was the one..... who told me."

After he finished his words, Eugeo lifted up his left hand, wrapped within his palm was a prism shining in violet, it touched my finger.

Suddenly, the world was dyed in white light, melt and vanished.

Kirito found himself under the shade of trees, under a sunny sky. He was with Alice, she was making a leather scabbard, while himself was cutting a short sword out of a branch of white silver oak. He already finished the blade, only thing left was to finish up the hilt.

After a while, Kirito said to Alice that they should go back, or else it might be exposed, but Alice asked him to stay a bit longer. Kirito couldn't help but agree to her.

At the same time they returned to their works, Eugeo appeared from the bushes behind them and asked what they were up to. Kirito said to Alice that they had been found out, Alice then walked to Eugeo and offered the short sword in the leather scabbard to him, saying it's a 3-day early birthday gift for him, as his wooden sword already broke.

"Really..... this really even heavier than Nii-chan's sword! It's great.....I.....I'll treasure it. Thank you both of you. I'm glad..... it's the first time I'm this happy for the birthday present....."

"O.....Oi, don't cry!"

I looked at his eyes and quickly called out when I saw small lights in this eyes. 'Don't cry,' as I rubbed my own eyes.

Eugeo also looked straight at me,

and smile again.

Suddenly, his smiling face was wrapped in rainbow color.

A suffocating pain in my chest. A strong, and came out of nowhere nostalgia, and a sense of loss. The overflowing tears came out endlessly, wet my cheeks.

My face was the same as Alice and Eugeo stood before me, a smile while crying face—

"We..... we three certainly live in the same time. Our path might diverge here..... but our memories will remain forever. Continue living within you. That's why —"

Then the scene under the shades of trees vanished, and I was once again, at the highest floor of Central Cathedral.

"That's why — don't cry, Kirito."

As Eugeo whispered, his hands loss their strength, his right hand dropped onto the floor, while his left hand dropped on his chest. The prism in his palm was on the verge of losing its light.

What I saw just now, that short scene, was certainly my memory. That one scene was all I could recall, but the fact that Alice, Eugeo and I grew up together and were tied in an unshakable bond warmed my heart and slightly eased my pain.

"Yeah..... the memories are here with me."

I pointed at my chest and muttered in a voice mixed with sobbing.

"It's forever here."

"That's right..... that's why we're forever buddy. Where are you..... Kirito... I can't see you....."

Eugeo was still smiling, but light faded off his pupils as he muttered. I leaned forward and wrapped Eugeo's head in my left hand. The beads of tear gushed out from my eyes and drip down to his cheek.

"Here, I'm here."

"Ah....."

Eugeo looked to somewhere faraway, his smile was slightly deepened.

"I see it..... a shining light... in the darkness..... As if..... the star..... on a night sky..... that I looked... looked up to..... every night... from the root of... Gigas Cedar, yes... like a shining..... of your sword....."

"That's right..... that sword..... "Sword of Night Sky"..... should be a good name... What do you think.....?"

"Ah..... it's a good name. Thank you, Eugeo."

I tightly embraced the body of my friend, which became gradually lighter. His final words, was like a drop onto a water surface,

"To cover this..... sorrowful..... world..... in kindness..... like a night sky....."

Then, his eyelids soundlessly came down.

The meager weight that remained in my arm, was the face of Eugeo looking upward.

Eugeo stood at a gloomy corridor he didn't know.

But he wasn't alone.

Tied with his left hand and followed him, was smiling Alice, who was in a blue dress.

He put a little force in his grasping hand, before asking,

"Now..... it should be fine, right?"

Alice firmly nodded, causing the big ribbon tied her golden hair to shook.

"Yes. We can entrust to rest to both of them. I'm sure they could guide the world to its ideal direction."

"That's right. Well..... should we go now?"

"Okay."

Unnoticed, Eugeo returned to his younger self. He tightly clutched the hand of the young girl of the same height, and started walking toward a white light that could be seen from the corridor.

At the same time, the content of the two light cubes were erased and initialized. As the light disappeared from the prism in Eugeo hand.

Kirito went to Alice, he found she was badly injured, but fortunately, the burn helped stop her bleeding,

so she wasn't in danger of losing any more Life.

He then walked to the system console and contacted the outside world, which temporally set the FLA rate to 1.0.

At first, all he could hear was confusion, as if someone was watching a movie, but he soon realized that the Ocean Turtle was under attack, Higa Takeru noticed Kirito had called and told Kikuoka. They didn't have time to explain the situation to Kirito, Kikuoka only asked Kirito to find Alice and bring her to the "World End Alter".

Higa noticed the intruder starting to cut the power source, which would cause a power surge and it would fry Kirito's Fluctlight because all safety devices was removed from his STL for the medical treatment purpose.

Kikuoka ordered for the evacuation of Dr.Koujiro and Asuna, and increased the FLA to its maximum value. It was then, that the power was cut.

At that moment, a whirlpool of sparks came down from the sky, through the ceiling and pierced through Kirito's body. There was no impact, no pain, nor sound.

But he noticed it did a great damage to him, not physically nor sensationally, but to his very soul. His important things that made his very existence, were pulled out and tore apart one by one.

I am—

Even that word, didn't have any meaning.

Just before my consciousness was snatched away, I heard a call from somewhere far away.

"Kirito-kun..... Kirito-kun!!"

The voice I missed it so much I could cry, the voice I love so much I could go insane. That was—

Whose voice is that?

-End of Chapter 7-

Interlude II

On one cold morning in autumn, Alice looked out of the window after finished cleaning dishes. The

weather was nice and clear, so she decided to ask the person to go out to the hill nearby.

There was no answer.

The young black haired man sitting on a chair in the small 2-room house just kept staring at the ground. He was very thin, clearly even more than Alice herself. He had no right arm. His pupils are jet black like his hair, but they had no light within. It pained her greatly to look at him in this state.

She suppressed her pain as she continued talking in a cheerful manner. She took off her apron and grabbed scarf and overcoat for both herself and the young man. It wasn't hard to put the overcoat on the man, as he could still stand on his own, although barely, of course, he couldn't walk.

She brought a wheelchair to replace the chair the man sat on until now, before pushing it out of the house. But before they could leave, the young man raised his voice 'Ah—..... ah—' and stretched his hand out, it was then, that she realized what she forgot.

She walked to the south wall of the room, there, stood three swords, on the right was her own golden long sword 'Sword of Fragrant Olive', on the left was the young man's jet black long sword 'Sword of Night Sky', and in the middle, the 'Sword of Blue Rose' was the pure white long sword of another young man, who was no longer here.

Alice grabbed the black sword and the white leather scabbard off the wall, the white sword had only half the weight of the black one, because its blade was half broken. She took both swords to the young man and placed them at his knees, he embraced the swords before continuing looking down. The two swords were the only thing the young man would show any reaction to.

".....Alright, let's go, Kirito."

She swallowed the pain again before pushing the wheelchair out of the house.

The log house was built on the small clearing deep within the forest, Alice cut down the tree and tore off the bark herself, while elder Garitta helped with the construction. The house didn't look good, but it was strong enough for both of them.

Elder Garitta told Alice that this clearing was the place she and the owner of the Sword of Blue Rose always came to play when they were young, but of course, Alice didn't have any memory of that. She explained to all the villagers that she forgot her old memories, but the truth was, she actually Alice Synthesis Fifty, the Integrity Knight who occupied the body of Alice Schuberg of Rulid village. She wanted to return the body to her, but Alice Schuberg, as well as Eugeo, were no longer in this world.

From their house, walking about an hour would be Rulid village, but she would avoid going there if it wasn't necessary. She headed toward the east, to the hill she told Kirito earlier.

It was at the end of the tenth month, the weather was cold, she worry if it was too cold for Kirito or not, because he wouldn't say anything while his Life decreasing. After making sure the front of his neck was properly closed, she continued pushing the chair. Of course, she could easily create heat using sacred art, but she would avoid using high level sacred art that would cause the villagers to look at her in suspicious way.

After pushing the wheelchair for about ten minutes, she exited the forest and reached a small hill covered in short grass, she pushed the chair up until the summit of the hill.

What appeared before her was a vast blue surface of Ruhr lake, behind it was the Mountain range at the Edge, drew a curve from her left to the end of her vision on the right.

Before that beautiful scene, Kirito's pupils didn't look at it, he just continued looking into emptiness. Alice sat beside the chair and leaned on it.

"It's so beautiful, much more beautiful than the picture hangs at the Cathedral."

She muttered softly.

".....It's the world you protected."

She didn't know how long she sat there, but when she realized, Solus was already high up on the sky. She had to go back home to prepare lunch, she didn't worry about herself, but for Kirito, who barely ate, so she didn't want him to miss a meal.

As she began to push the chair, she noticed a sound of footstep on the grass climbed up the hill and turned around. It was a young girl dressed in black sister apprentice cloth and veil, her cute smile shone brightly as she waved her hand.

"Nee-sama!!"

Alice smile in returned as she waved slightly.

As the girl ran up the final ten meters distance and stopped in front of Alice, she continue saying without losing breath,

"Good morning, Alice nee-sama!"

She then turned and looked at the young man on the chair, before saying in even livelier voice,

"Kirito too, good morning!"

The smile that was like she didn't worry about the lack of answer, changed into a painful feeling briefly as she looked at the two swords at Kirito's knees.

".....Good morning, Eugeo."

Muttered, as she caressed the scabbard of the Sword of Blue Rose. It was then that Alice greeted her in return.

"Good morning, Selka. I didn't expect you to know this place."

Selka-san, was what she called the girl until recently. But Alice still didn't know if she deserved this warmth from her beloved sister or not.

Selka told Alice that she left milk, some apples and cheese pie on the table in their house, and ask her to eat them during lunch. After Alice thanked her for the trouble, Selka joked that by eating Alice's cooking, one day Kirito might run away on his own.

It was just this moment, when Alice could talk to Selka, embraced her, that she could forget about the sin tormenting her. She dropped her sword, ran away from her Knight's mission, and lived hidden in the middle of the forest to ease her feeling of guilt. But she knew full well that it was futile, as the end was coming close every moment from the direction of Mountain range at the Edge.

Half a year ago, on the top floor of Central Cathedral, laid on the floor, unable to move due to the severed injury, but Alice could still perceive what happened.

The fierce battle between Administrator and Kirito, the supreme priest got hold by Schuderkin and burnt away together. The death of Kirito's partner, Eugeo. His disconnected words in the final moment was still vivid in her memory.

Also, the words Kirito exchanged with the strange crystal handicraft, she couldn't understand but at the end, Kirito's body stiffed and collapsed.

Alice quickly tried to heal him, but he didn't regain conscious. Alice then checking the crystal handicraft Kirito spoke to, but its purple surface already changed black and never light up again.

Alice believed in Kirito's word that she had a sister, and in order to protect her sister, she stood to fight against the absolute ruler, Administrator. She never thought about being alive after the battle, she already chosen her own death when she threw herself in front of the blade of Administrator, but she still alive.

No matter how many times she called Kirito to take the responsibility for preventing her death, but he never wake up. After a long while, she stood up and checked the rest of the tower.

At the bath hall, Bercouli already returned to normal, she explained everything to him, after he asked a few questions, he asked her to entrust the rest to him. He gathered the knights and explained.

About the result of the battle against Kirito and Eugeo, the supreme priest Administrator's death.

About the supreme priest's plan to defend the Human World was to change half of its population into sword golems.

About the real identity of the commander of the Knights being Schuderkin alone.

The only thing Bercouli didn't tell the Knights was the fact that they weren't summoned from heaven, he judged that it might be too much for the other Knights.

There was a serious confusion among the Knights as they no longer had the absolute ruler they obeyed for so many years. But as their desire to protect the Human World was still the same, they continued following the leadership of Bercouli.

After ascertaining the situation, Alice secretly left the capital, brought Kirito, who was still in a coma state, along with her on the flying dragon. It was because some of the Knights still wanted to execute the traitors.

She wanted to give a proper medical treatment to Kirito but it required a roof and a bed, but she didn't have any money to rent a room around the outskirts of the Capital nor she wanted to use her Knight authority. She bet on a small ray of hope that she might be able to regain her lost memory if she had the warmth of the family in her home town, so she decided to fly toward the north, she took three days to reach the small village surrounded by forests near the Mountain range at the Edge.

She landed in the forest near the village to prevent the villagers from panicking because of the flying dragon, before carrying Kirito on her back and walked to the village.

As she approached the village, a young man jumped out of the guardhouse to block Alice, as she looked suspicious with her bloodstained face, but the man recognized Kirito on her back, before he looked at her carefully and started realizing.

Alice told him she was Alice Schuberg and asked him to let her meet her father, the village chief, whose names were a couple of names she heard from Kirito. The guard's face turned from red to blue before rushing into the village.

As she waited for the village chief, the stare from the villagers weren't what she expected, it filled with cautious and slightly disgust.

Gasupht appeared from the crowd and embraced her, but she didn't have any tear, when her father asked if they had released her from the punishment, she told him it was more than punishment, as her memories were now all gone, and she had nowhere else to turn to.

Upon hearing, Gasupht closed his eyes and turned his back on her, before telling her to go away, as his village couldn't accept a sinful people.

Just recalling this caused Alice body to become stiff, she didn't want to make Selka worry. It was Selka who called her when she came back to the forest after being told off by her father. Without the help from Selka and Garitta, Alice was certain that she and Kirito would be in a wasteland somewhere now.

It wasn't easy for such a little girl to hear all the news at once, about her only sister losing all memories. About Kirito she met two years ago was in coma. And about the death of Eugeo, who was like her own brother.

But Selka only shed her tear just once, and after that, she always showing her best smile to Alice. The strength of her heart was something Alice really admired, and at the same time, she felt greatly guilty.

After building a log house at the eastern forest outside of the village boundary with the help from elder Garitta, Alice started performing treatment on Kirito using abundant blessings from Solus and Terraria. All his wounds were healed without difficulty and he finally regained conscious, but no matter how she tried, she couldn't restore his right arm. After several hours of trying, she gave up and used the remaining power to restore her right eye under the bloodstained bandage.

Also, there was no sign of Kirito's heart to come back.

Selka assured her that with her earnest nursing, Kirito would certainly come back one day, but Alice knew deep down it was impossible, because she was just a mindless knight doll.

Before their parting, Selka told Alice that Nigel Barbossa asked Alice to help cutting down the tree blocking his field expansion. Selka strongly against Alice helping them, because they drove Alice out of the village but only called when they need help with such things.

Selka asked Alice to refuse, said she would take care of what they need for living, and next year when she promoted to a sister, she could give part of her wage to Alice so she wouldn't need to help them for a wage anymore.

Alice appreciated Selka offer, but she didn't want to bother her sister, she was happy enough with Selka being with her. She told Selka she'd go after the lunch.

After preparing and eating lunch (Kirito didn't have any memory but his mouth still retained its muscle memory, so he could still eat, albeit slowly). Alice hid her body and hair in a thick garment and pushing the chair out of the house again.

After a while, they reached the southern forest, where Gigas Cedar once stood until two years ago. The fallen Cedar was still there, decaying, but Kirito had no reaction toward it, just kept hugging the two swords while looking down.

There, she met Nigel Barbossa, who asked her to cut down a lone platinum oak, which many villagers were cutting with their axe. Alice glanced at the one meter diameter tree and noticed the nick on its trunk was still less than ten centimeters.

He wasn't supposed to ask for Alice help more than once a month, but he didn't want to be slower in expansion than Ridack, his rival farmer family, so he asked her for help today. He reminded her that he always gave sweets to her during her childhood, Alice agreed to help, saying she'd help only just this once, before proceeding to the oak.

Alice was greeted by vulgar smirk from the men at the oak, but they already knew of her strength, so they stopped swinging their axes and made way for her.

After checking the life of the oak from its Stacia Window, Alice knew it'd take too long to cut it down using axe, she then returned to Kirito to borrow his black sword. At first his body became stiff after she asked, but after a short while he relaxed his arm as he said '.....ah—'

She returned to the tree with Kirito's sword in hand, after saying sorry to the oak, which should be over a hundred years old, she swung the sword once.

Nothing happened, just when the men started ridiculing her, the oak fell down. Alice checked the cut on the tree trunk and noticed her skill had become dull due to the lack of practice.

Barbossa impressed by her skill and asked her to help him once a week, no, daily, in exchange for the increase wage, which Alice politely declined. He then changed to pay her not to help Ridack when it was his turn to ask. Alice was shocked by his demand, but before she could respond.

A sound came from behind, she turned around and saw Kirito and his chair fall sideways, his outstretched arm pointed to the Sword of Blue Rose on the ground slightly away from him, which three boys were trying to pick it up.

Alice quickly jumped to them and demanded the sword back, but they said they were given the permission from Kirito as he said 'Ah ah' when they asked.

The Sword of Night Sky in her hand trembled in her anger, if it was her old self, the arms of those boys would be cut into six pieces instantly due to the 'disrespectful conduct toward Integrity Knight'. But Alice

bit her tooth, tried to control her anger, because those boys, were the people of Human World Kirito and Eugeo tried to protect with their lives, Alice knew Kirito wouldn't want her to harm them.

The boys scared by her angry face and gave in, returned the sword to her. She picked the chair up and helped Kirito sat on it, before placing both swords at his knee and began pushing the chair away from the field.

Such event wasn't the first time happened to Alice, as the villagers didn't treat Alice and Kirito as Human, but the monsters from the Dark Territory. Alice already grateful that they still sell her food and things she need for living.

But at the same time, she couldn't help but kept asking herself why they had to suffer like that. Why they had to protect these people to this extend that even Cardinal and Eugeo gave up their lives, that Kirito loss his speech and emotion. She asked herself if those villagers had any meaning or value to be protected.

It was all those doubts, that drove Alice to drop her sword and status as the third rank Knight and came to live in this small village.

At the moment, Bercouli was building an army at the Eastabarieth Empire, which would be the main route of the invasion from Dark Territory due to the existence of the 'Great Eastern Gate' at the Mountain range at the Edge. They were clearly still lacking in morale, weapons and manpower, given her stand point, Alice wouldn't hesitate to join.

But she already abandoned her sword.

She helped defeating the supreme priest, who she gave her utmost loyalty. The three gods of creation she always believed in weren't exist. And seeing too much of the ugliness in human soul. All made her doubt to the point she could no longer swing her sword.

Now, there was only three person she wanted to protect. Selka, elder Garitta, and Kirito, in order to protect them, Alice determined to continue living here.

After she bought a week worth of foodstuff, and pushed the wheelchair back to their home, the sky was already in sunset color. Before she open the door, she noticed a sound of wind from the treetops nearby. Appearing in the low altitude was a flying dragon, Alice's Knight Dragon, her name is Amayori.

When she came to her, Alice noticed she was a little chubby and scolded her that she ate too much fish from the lake, while smiling, before the dragon retreated to her own bed in the back of the log house.

Several months back, Alice removed the metal mouthpiece from Amayori and set her free, so the dragon could return to the flying dragon lair in the western region. But Amayori chose to stay with Alice, during

day time, she would play in the forest and find the food from the lake, but she would always return in the evening.

After saying good night to Amayori, she made dinner and eating with Kirito, once they finished, she heard a sound of flapping wing outside, feared that it might be the dark knight from Dark Territory, she came out to confirm it and found that the visitor was none other than Eldré, her own disciple.

Alice invited him for the meal and asked why he found her here. He said it was just coincident, as he was on duty to check the Dark Territory movement on the northern border, as the new Knight recruit reported he saw an army of beasts on this side, but Eldré found nothing so far and was on the way back to the eastern empire.

Unlike the Great Eastern Gate on the east, the south/west/north caves of Mountain range at the Edge weren't big enough for large body of troll or orc to pass through, but to be on the safer side, Bercouli ordered to destroy the caves. It was also the reason Alice chose to stay here, as it was less likely to be engulfed in flame of war once the invasion began.

Once Eldré finished eating, he asked Alice to come back to join the Knights, Alice declined without giving her reason, Eldré assumed it was because of Kirito and wanted to kill him to set Alice free, but was forbidden.

Eldré let out his frustration that if Kirito truly wanted to protect the Human World, wasn't now the time to grab his sword, but there was no respond from the young black haired man.

Alice apologized Eldré that she couldn't help the Knights, and it wasn't because of Kirito, but she no longer had power to even stand against her own disciple. Eldré couldn't argue more and brought out two glasses before pouring wine he brought along, saying farewell to his master, before leaving.

It was time for bed, Alice took off a black dressing gown from Kirito and covered him in a night cloth before pushing the chair into the bed room. She laid him on the big bed next to the window and pulled the blanket up to his neck, Kirito's half sleepy eyes kept looking at the ceiling the entire time.

Alice removed the light from the lamp in the bed room before changing into night cloth herself, after locking the door and removing light from the lamp in the living room, she returned to the bed room and laid on the bed beside Kirito.

She couldn't sleep, various thoughts surrounded her keeping her awake, if the flame of war broke out, it will certainly reach this village sooner or later, and no one would be able to stop it. But when Kirito talked with the 'Gods' from the other side, she remembered the word 'World End Alter', which was to the south after exiting the Great Eastern Gate. But Alice couldn't understand why the Gods wanted Kirito to bring her to Dark Territory.

Alice looked over to the other side of the bed, to the wound young man, before moving herself closer

and embracing his thin body. But no matter how much strength she put into her arms, she couldn't see any sign of a response from him. Painful, Alice wanted everything to burn to ash as soon as possible, she couldn't stand it much longer.

Now if I have a sword in my hand—

I would pierce our hearts together, then everything will be over.

With that moment of thought, hot tear spilled off her eyes before scattered on Kirito's neck.

"Please tell me..... what should I do....."

There was no answer.

"I..... what should I....."

In the silence, only the tree tops shook by late autumn night breeze passing through.

-End of Interlude II-

Chapter 8

Part 25-1

Asuna saw Kirito calling Higa and the subsequent cut-off when the base was damaged. With one hand she lifted Higa up and snarled if Kirito died because of him then she will kill him no matter what later on. There were various other military officers here but they were all stunned by her aura, due to Asuna having more experience with life and death than them. Asuna released Higa eventually, and we get a damage report of Ocean Turtle. Bottom line, the whole place is locked down and damaged, but the Americans would be able to escape if no back-up arrives soon. From the replies to Ocean Turtle's messages some one on the upper echelons have made arrangements to stall and give the US enough time to escape with Alice's Fluctlight stored in a Lightcube, a window of 24 hours.

Higa then went into a analysis of Kirito's fluctlight. Kirito's sense of self got blown away from the events at the Cathedral, and due to brain damage the memory suppressing functions of the STL wasn't working, hence Kirito remembered stuff from the last time he dived in. This damage was further boosted when the invaders attacked, cutting off the power to his STL. Asuna was told Kirito would be damaged to the point he could only do reflexive things like eat or sleep, he no longer knows who he is or what he wants to achieve.

Scene change to the dozen Americans that attacked, led by Gabriel. They have trouble breaking into Underworld, and can't tell which of the 100,000 ightcubes are Alice's. All of them follow Gabriel's orders loyally, after he demolished the rest of the team 10 vs 1 both in reality and VR combat.

It turns out someone from the JSDF leaked the info to the US in an attempt to shut down Kikuoka's project, since if he succeeds many soldier's careers would be over. The informant, code-named 'Rabbit', contacted CIA and made a deal; the attackers has 24 hours to get in and get out with the items, while the public media release will make it seem like for the safety of the hostages the JSDF had to be cautious. After that though in order to save face the Aegis cruisers nearby will have to intervene.

We then get treated into another look into Gabriel's insane mind. After finishing this job, he'll betray the US and escape with the STL technology into somewhere in Southeast Asia. After changing all personal traits like his appearance and fingerprints he'll move to somewhere in Europe, preferably southern France or Spain. With his hidden bank accounts he'll buy a mansion and set up some VR worlds. To begin with there'll only be him and Alice, but there will be more later. He plans hunt down some youths with strong souls, outside of his country of residence to prevent being found, use STL to suck their soul out and dispose the remains. For diversity's sake he eventually plans on launching his hunts into other parts of the world, such as Africa and the Middle East. Japan is especially important on his list, due to a strong population of VR players. Some, like the SAO survivors, would likely have especially strong souls and high adaptability, so he wants to hunt down one of them and take their Fluctlight. He especially wants to get his hands on one of the Frontliner's Fluctlights. And as Fluctlights can be copied, he can tinker around with them and see what will make them shine the brightest over and over. The Fluctlight Alice will be the crown jewel of his collection, being a soul that's untainted by the evils of the world - he wants to make her his partner for the rest of his life.

Gabriel went out of his reverie, and found one of his underlings managed to bring up a visual of Underworld. They only have access to the Dark Territories from where they are right now, as their hacker isn't good enough to penetrate the defences. They saw the residents, and discovered the goblins, giants, orcs and such have the same soul as humans. Gabriel decided since they can't log in into the Human Kingdoms with superior accounts (only as Lvl1 villagers), he decided to log into the Dark Territories instead. The 'Super-accounts' there are available to them, and they'll just invade into the Human Kingdom and look for Alice after they conquered everything. One of the accounts is a Lvl70 Dark Knight, and the other one has no class or level labelled; it's only known as 'Vector'.

Scene cuts back to Asuna and others. Higa said there's still hope for Kirito, as his Fluctlight is still logged in. He blamed himself for what happened to his comrades death, but it was possible for him to be healed by someone with their kindness and forgiveness; even if that's extremely unscientific. You'd need like someone's love for him...

Asuna volunteered to dive into UW. Kikuoka brought up the point the Final Pressure Staget will begin soon in UW, a few hours left in real time. The walls separating the Human Kingdom and the Dark Territory will fall and UW will be engulfed in war. And seeing as Kirito had just incapacitated half of the Human's main fighting force when he entered the Cathedral... it'll be bad. Higa said they'll have to send someone inside anyway to retrieve Alice, and Asuna is their best choice; she has a high adaptability to VR setting, and can cooperate with Kirito well. Rinko said the invaders can probably think of the same strategy, while Higa said even if they do have access to two STLS down there they don't have access to the Super-accounts. Higa thought he had forgotten something, then the screen flashed with some of the

list of accounts being accessed and logged in.

Part 25-2

Palace Obsidia, in the Dark Territory's highest peak. Dark Knight #11 Lippia Zankel reports back to her boss, Dark General Zast. Their familiars have found the Administrator is dead. It took her a week to know for sure, and the fact Administrator's countermeasures to prevent spying from the Dark Territory spells didn't even detect or kill Lippia showed it's probably true. Rumours suggest Administrator died by a sword, which coincided with when the Synthesis Fifty left her patrol area half a year ago. Zast thinks this is a good opportunity to push for peace; the walls between Dark Territory and Human Kingdom will fall soon, and the ten leaders have been haggling and arguing heavily over who gets the land, loot and slaves. While the only rule in the Dark Territory is "the strong take what they want", Zast is different to the other 9 leaders. This is shown when other servants of the ten leaders are taken but he had instead offered Lippia flowers and asked for her help.

While they have a 50,000 strong invasion force, the humans have the Synthesis Knights, each of them can match a 1,000 of their own; it'll be an even battle between those 50 knights and their army. Sure, the Dark Territory will eventually win with superior numbers, but they're likely to lose up to 20,000 of their own people. When their invasion succeeds the peace pact between the five races and ten leaders will be null and void, and 'the time of iron and blood' will come once again. The infighting will likely to last more than a hundred years. With the current situation, Zast is confident Synthesis One, Berculi, would be willing to accept peace if it's proposed. On their side they'd have to assassinate the pro-war faction leaders, the mountain goblins, beastmen and dark mages guild leaders to get this working, but it's not impossible. Lippia objected to the danger involved, Zast would probably be able to kill the goblin and beastmen leaders but the dark mage leader would be problematic to defeat with her tricks. Zast proposed to Lippia for her to become his wife and help him, but before they could plot any further the merchant guild leader rushed by his office screaming at the top of his lungs: their God has returned.

Gabriel gazed upon the Fluctlights that will be his tools for the coming war. One of his lieutenants logged in as the Dark Knight, while he's logged in as Vector, the God and Emperor of the Dark Territory. The ten leaders are introduced: Merchant guild leader, giants' elder, assassin's guild leader, beastmen's elder, 1st seat of the Gladiators, Cannibals' leader, Mountain goblins' elder, plains goblins' elder (the two goblin factions have a rivalry), dark mages guild leader named 'D' (stereotypical dark-skinned beauty schemer, with skin-revealing clothes, has 3,000 mages under her control), and finally the dark general Zast. Zast asked why did their emperor return now of all times, and Gabriel thought he's not just a simple unit like you might see in games. Gabriel in his persona as the merciless Dark God replied:

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"For Bloodshed and... Terror. Fire and Destruction. Death and the cries of Despair."

Gabriel's ice-like voice that was as smooth as clean-cut alloy echoed in the hall. The ten leader's expressions tensed.

Looking at their faces one by one, Gabriel waved his right hand towards the eastern sky, his robe billowing with his movement.

“The Walls that protects the paradise favoured by the Gods that exiled Me from heaven is on the verge of collapse. We have returned... to demonstrate Our divine might to the world! We have only one wish, and that is to obtain the Priestess of the Gods that will arise in that land at this time! For every other human, plunder and kill as you wish! As all of the people of Darkness has hoped for... the promised time is here!” (All of this is supposed to be said in archaic, royal manner, hope my translation puts the feel across)

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The assembled leaders and their officers went wild at Gabriel’s declaration, though he noticed throughout all this only Zast stayed knelling with a expressionless face. He couldn’t tell if it was because of his self control as a soldier or because of some other emotion.

Scene change, Gabriel’s lieutenant congratulated him and said he should have been an actor. Gabriel used the command console in his room to turn the time flow of UW back to 1:1 with Earth and told them what happened, and they will move against the Human Kingdom within 2 days. Their hacker warned if their character dies it can’t be revived, and they’ll have to come back in to UW in lvl 1 characters. The JSDF people haven’t attacked them yet. Gabriel told them the next time he contacts them will be when has captured Alice and about to log out. After that conversation Gabriel’s lieutenant wanted to go out and have some fun, but Gabriel told him to wait for now; after their target is retrieved Gabriel will give him a day’s offtime to go have fun later before they leave. His lieutenant agreed and left for the room next to his. Gabriel disrobed and prepared to sleep, but then another door into his room opened. Gabriel was surprised at that, he had gave orders to ensure no one, including his servants, could enter the floors above his throne room; according to the rule binding the Fluctlights they should not have been able to disobey their God. A small figure knelt next to his bed, and he asked what she was here for. She said she was here to serve him for the night as his partner, and from the thin clothing she wore Gabriel could see no weapons. He asked on whose orders did she come for, and after a pause she replied nobody ordered her to, she thought it was her duty. Gabriel gave a non-committal reply and lied down on his bed. Seconds later the human woman started to disrobe.

Gabriel was impressed at the level of AIs, since as far as he knew these are limited ones unlike Alice. He wasn’t impressed by the physical beauty though, but their own volition; the woman suddenly took out a knife hidden in her long blue hair and tried to stab him where he was lying down. He figured this would happen and intercepted the attack, and pinned her down onto the bed. From the flaws in her make-up and her muscled form he thought it’s not the assassin guild leader’s doing, more likely to be one of the other leaders and probably one of the human leaders’ doing. Gabriel asked who her commander was, and she replied no-one, she’s a vagabond. Gabriel understood that the laws of Dark Territory was the weak cannot disobey the strong, so if she’s lying to him it meant she thinks her boss is stronger than him and his order supersedes his. Gabriel decided he needs to make a example of his strength, and he’ll have to take down the leader than tried to do this to him. Gabriel asked why did she do this; was it for money or power? The woman said back to him it’s for the good of the world, since if war starts now they’ll lose 200 years of progress, where the weak will be ravaged by the strong. Details earlier in the chapter showed there are treaties and rules set up to minimise that in order to limit the chaos and build a superior fighting force compared to the Human Kingdom; instead of being tortured, used and killed the weak are sent to training schools to emerge as fighters of one kind or another. Gabriel was shocked at her words, was this really an AI before breaking the limits? In her eyes Gabriel can see resolve, loyalty,

and even further inside her was...

After seeing what that emotion is, Gabriel decided he doesn't need her alive anymore. He broke her neck, and after stopping her struggles he let go in surprise; even if this is VR, killing another person felt as real as killing someone else in RL. The woman's soul/fluctlight emerged from her corpse, and after seeing that Gabriel abandoned all his self-control and sucked her soul inside him. He felt the bitterness of fear, pain and sadness; the sourness of regret and sorrow. And the sweetness of many more memories. Children of all races was playing around in a courtyard, and after they saw her they ran to her smiling. In another man's arms she was embraced.

In her last moments before fading into oblivion, her last words were "I love you, master..."

Gabriel was stunned with bliss after feeling those emotions. He didn't know the mechanics was the STLs are connected to the other lightcubes physically and there was some reversing flow of information, but he didn't care. He sucked dry the remaining emotions within the dying woman, her feelings of love. Gabriel wanted to feel more. And he is more than willing to kill more.

Part 26-1

Alice finished a letter of farewell to her sister (Selka) and prepared to leave their current location the next day. After being found by her student she can't stay here anymore, since if Berculi comes personally she wouldn't be able to put off returning to the Synthesis Knights. She put Kirito to bed, and then slept beside him. After a few minutes Kirito's breathing slowed down, indicating he's asleep, then Alice shifted herself so she's sleeping with his chest as her pillow. Alice could hear Kirito's heartbeat next to her head, and she couldn't shake the thought these heartbeats are just echoes, Kirito's heart is no longer with him. Even though she had thought that all these months together, she also felt there's something left deep inside him. Alice's mind wandered and thought if Kirito just could not express himself but is actually aware of everything, how would she explain sleeping on top of him right now? She smiled, snuggled closer onto him, and then went to sleep as well.

Kirito ~~sensed a disturbance in the Force and~~ suddenly woke up in the middle of the night a few hours later. Alice woke up as well from Kirito struggling to get up and reaching for his sword. Alice immediately used system commands to make a ball of light, thinking Kirito had returned to his senses and wanted to see for herself if that's true. Unfortunately, it wasn't, as Kirito's eyes were as dull and empty as before. Alice's dragon then began to screech in alarm. Alice went outside and found the smell of burning flesh reaching her. The sky to the west is burning, and the smoke is beginning to obscure the heavens. The wind also brought to her faint sounds of metal clashing against metal and shrieks. Alice realised it's a enemy attack from the Dark Territory, and they invaded her sister's village. Alice wanted to immediately fly to her aid, but hesitated; she doesn't have the will to fight any more, and that had a negative impact on her sword and magic skills. Alice was jolted out of her thoughts as Kirito collapsed onto the ground and tried to crawl to his sword. Alice was moved to tears that though even like this Kirito wanted to fight and help. She went and picked him up in a hug, told him she'll go help the villagers so he should stay here and wait for her. She could feel without doubt there're pieces of his willpower inside his chest, like a weak spark of flame. Alice kissed Kirito on the cheek, and without hesitation grabbed her sword, went outside and rode on her dragon to fly to battle.

In the air Alice saw it was indeed a Dark Territory attack. The flames were at the north of the village, and the flames were black fire from the enemies' spells. Two days ago when her student visited her the enemies he told her they were still on the other side of the walls, so they must have removed all the rubble within the last two days. She saw the village guards have piled up furniture as part of the defensive line and held off the goblin vanguards, but once the large beastmen reserves get to the village the guards would be overwhelmed instantly. To the east and west of the village there are massive amounts of forces gathered, while the south is still somewhat safe with only ten goblins there at the moment. Alice had thought the villagers have evacuated already, but she was shocked to find they were gathered up in the village square. The main force of the enemy have already started to approach the village south from the east end, even if they started running now they won't make it. Alice impulsively jumped down and told her dragon to standby from the air, don't come down until she told it to.

Alice landed down a few metres away from the two leaders, village chief Jasper (Alice's father) and chief of farmers Barbosa (Flere note: I'm bad with names, this might not be a accurate translation), and everyone was stunned by her entrance. Not just that her body was sturdy enough to survive a drop from dozens of metres above, but also her stunning looks. Alice commanded them all to start escape to the south as the village cannot hold off much longer. Barbosa exclaimed was she blind, there're enemies there too, while Alice shot back that was only a few goblins and was nothing compared to the main forces approaching from east and west. Barbosa couldn't argue with that, while Jasper told Alice in times of war the guard captain holds authority over the village chief, and the guard captain ordered everyone to stay in the village and prepare for battle. The current guard captain however was a youngster who inherited the position from his father, and wasn't thinking straight under pressure. Alice pondered whether she can afford to grab him back from the front lines then Selka jumped out and asked Jasper, their father, to listen to Alice. Alice has never been wrong before, and even Selka can see if they stay here they will all be killed. Jasper was still hesitating, and Barbosa yelled at the kid to shut up, does she expect them to just abandon their homes? Alice saw he glanced at his home, though probably more accurately at the wheat and gold inside it. Barbosa accused Alice of being a witch, and Alice was shocked at his audacity; all these months she helped him with breaking down trees and boulders but when it came to his possessions he would unhesitatingly say something like this. People can be so ugly and foolish. Alice clenched her teeth and closed her eyes, briefly considered just taking Selka and old man Karita away and leave the village to their fate, before reasoning the villagers became this way because of the Church and the Synthesis Knights' influence, it's not totally their fault; their ability to think and reason have been instead given to the 50 Synthesis Knights, they only were supposed to follow orders.

Alice exhaled, and opened her eyes. Barbosa paled and shrunk back, and Alice felt like she was burning with power like bright blue flames inside of her. Alice gave the command to ignore the guard captain's orders, the men with weapons are to take the front and fight a way through the south and evacuate the village. Both Jasper and Barbosa instinctively felt like they should obey, but Barbosa in his somewhat admirable courage argued on whose authority Alice can command them. Alice declared with the authority of a Synthesis Knight she can do so: She is Alice, ranked third among the Synthesis Knights, Alice Synthesis Fifty!

She took off her cloak, and what used to be cotton pyjamas underneath began to transform into her golden armour. Even her sword that didn't transform seem to quiver with happiness it's finally back with

its master. (Flere note: This is a repeat of what happened in the previous chapter, using Incarnation ability to bring forth a persona/side of yourself. Kirito transformed into “The Black Swordsman” and “Dual-wielding Hero of Aincrad” back when he fought Administarator)

The villagers went silent at her transformation, and the first one to respond was Selka, and Alice apologized for hiding this from her; this was her punishment, and her true duty/job. Selka said with tears she had never believed Alice to be a criminal, and Alice looks beautiful like this. Jasper was the next to come out of his astonishment, obeying Alice’s commands and ordered everyone to move out. There was only a moment’s unease from the villagers before they complied, you don’t get much higher than a Synthesis Knight’s authority after all. As they began to leave Alice told Jasper to take care of the villagers and Selka. Jasper with some hesitation replied the Lady Knight should be careful as well. Alice noted her father would never be able to treat her as his daughter again, thus was the price of power. Selka gave her farewells to Alice in tears, and asked her to not push herself.

The villagers left, except for Barbosa who was still yelling about his house in flames. Alice thought he have some courage to be able to defy a Synthesis Knight’s orders to be able to put his possessions on the same scales. She decided to let him live or die by his own choice, and ignored him. From the north the guard captain gave the order to retreat, and upon hearing that Barbosa exclaimed the villagers should have stood and fought, everyone will be killed now since they’re fleeing. Alice merely shrugged and told him she’ll use a area attack and protect this place, while Barbosa claimed this was all Bullshit, a brat like her can’t possibly be a Synthesis Knight and this was all witchcraft. Alice ignored the rest of his words as she looked upon the invading goblins and beastmen from east and west. She then ordered her dragon to burn them all, and with a fire breath dozens of invaders was disintegrated. Alice told the remaining villagers to continue to leave, and they did. The guards came by in their retreat, and after a moment’s confusion of where is everyone and why was Alice dressed like that, Alice told them to continue south and bring Barbosa with them. The enemies entered the plaza and Alice made short work of four of them with her sword. After that, she Released Recollection of her sword and used zenbonsakura her sword’s metal flower petals to wipe out the remaining invading forces.

One week later, the villagers started to rebuild. Dozens of people died. After their funeral Alice went north to scout. From the amount of preparation there she understood this time the Dark Territory is invading “for real”. Alice collapsed the caves once more, and additionally she made the nearby river flowed into the cave, and froze the water. Now unless there’s a mage with the same skill level as her no-one will be able to pass.

As Alice tied the sacks onto her dragon’s saddle and prepared to leave, Selka told Alice their father deep down wanted to come and say farewell as well. Alice hugged Selka and told her the next time she returns to the village it will be as the old Alice, once her duties are over. Then she would be able to say “I’m back, father”. Alice brought Kirito and his two swords up onto the saddle with her, unwilling to leave him behind. While Kirito could be left with Selka and avoid being unable to look after Kirito herself while fighting on the front lines, Alice decided to bring Kirito anyway. Kirito showed willingness to fight when the village was invaded; fighting for someone is something intrinsic to him deep down. Alice believed the only way for Kirito to regain his mind would be on the battlefield. She’ll keep him safe, even if she has to

tie him onto her back while fighting. Alice and Selka had a tearful farewell, and then Alice left.

Scene change, back to Gabriel. The ten leaders are kneeling before him once again in the throne room. Within two days they had finished all preparations, and Gabriel was impressed with their performance. Near-perfect skills to follow his orders and loyal to boot, they might as well be finished products for combat AIs. Then Gabriel reminded himself their loyalty programming wasn't perfect, if they don't think of him as the strongest they could rebel at any moment. And from the assassination attempt earlier, the man behind it could backstab him when on the battlefield at any time. The last thing to do before going to war is to expose who it was that tried that stunt, and in the process brand into the rest of the Fluctlights who is truly the strongest. Gabriel never thought for a moment the Fluctlights being beyond artificial creations, or that UW was anything more than just another VR world... (foreshadowing for later parts, will expand on this in future summaries)

As Zast knelt down in front of their Emperor, he thought back to his sword teacher. 4 generations ago the master at that time died by being beheaded. 3 generations ago the master of the time died from a chest wound on the way back to base. Zast's own master had lost an arm, but he managed to live to that day and he was proud of that. This means, bit by bit, the Dark Territory sword skills are catching up to that of Berculi Synthesis One. For a normal human with limited lifespans of maybe 70 years, they can't catch up to Berculi who lived for over 200 years – or that was what Zast's master thought before they fought, the skills of every generation laid the groundwork to eventually catch up to the Synthesis Knights. The strongest sword skill of the Dark Territory was to erase all distractions from your mind and become one with the sword; finish everything with one strike. After fighting with Berculi the master found a different method to strength, felt it being slashed into his body. The other side of clearing your mind, the power of unfailing belief in one particular thing. The master's sword was repelled and crushed under Berculi's 200 year old willpower. The master told Zast to kill him, and in the process learn the secrets to this willpower technique. After his loss the master was no longer the strongest in his eyes so Zast can draw his sword against him, and if they don't do this Zast will never reach Berculi's level.

Zast learned the secrets after slaying his master. His master died wielding a telekinetic blade formed with the Incarnation ability, and left a scar on Zast's face that could never be healed. Zast moved beyond what Dark Territory had ever created with their sword skills. Time skip from then to five years ago, when Zast (age 37 at the time) fought Berculi on the battlefield. Zast didn't teach the secrets of Incarnation to a student of his, resolving to end the chain of students killing masters on his generation. Zast's strongest attack didn't get blown away by Berculi's strike, but Zast felt he couldn't beat Berculi or can he surpass himself in that one battle. Berculi complimented Zast for having more than just killing intent in his sword, and told him to come back 5 years later for a rematch. After returning Zast realized you need more than killing intent for Incarnation, you need a resolve even heavier than just that. Zast decided to shoulder the fate of all his previous masters and the lives of his knights to fuel this, so upon hearing the death of the Administrator he felt peace talks are needed. If Zast can unify the Dark Territory then Berculi will probably accept his proposal for peace. For that same reason the Emperor who suddenly showed up and called for war must die. In Zast's eyes though Vector wasn't physically impressive, Vector's eyes showed the God was anything but weak. Those eyes showed a void that let no light escape, a bottomless abyss;

those eyes hid an insatiable hunger. If Zast's willpower was swallowed by Vector's void then he won't be able to harm the God. Zast was confident there will be another that will inherit his dreams and Incarnation, though he had a regret of not managed to find Lippia yesterday and telling her of his resolve. Zast felt maybe this is for the best anyway, this way Lippia won't stubbornly try to kill the Emperor with him.

The second before Zast prepared to launch his strike, Vector spoke. He told them someone tried to assassinate him last night with a short sword. Each leader reacted differently, and Zast wondered if there was another leader than had motive to kill the emperor. He ruled out the 5 leaders that wasn't human, they aren't stealthy enough. The use of short sword suggests it wasn't the assassin's guild leader's doing, the assassins focused on creating poisons that can kill anyone regardless of their priority levels. D, the dark mage guild leader, had tricks more deadly than any sword, so it doesn't seem she's the one responsible. This then suggests that Zast himself was the most likely send that assassin, but he himself had decided to do the killing himself and never suggested this to any of his underlings... Zast then froze, his willpower behind his blow became fear, unease, and terror, finally settling down to cold belief that the worst had happened.

Vector then spoke, he doesn't care who sent the assassin. Being willing to kill for power is an admirable trait, and if any of them wants to they're welcome to attack him when his back is turned. However, they better have the resolve to pay the price if their gambit fails. For the first time Vector showed emotions, a slight smile, and gestured to his maids to bring in the example of the price. The maids brought in a cuboid of some sort covered with cloth on a silver platter, placed it down in front of Vector, then left after bowing to Vector and the ten leaders. Vector kicked off the coverings, and it showed Lippia, his most prized student, lover, and now fiancée, now dead and frozen inside the crystal that was clearer than any ice. Zast lost his willpower and it was replaced by darkness and emptiness in his heart. Zast knew Lippia had started up an orphanage in secret, and thought that was the way for the future for the Dark Territory; it's one of the reasons why he told her of his dream for peace. That same reason drove Lippia to attempt the assassination, so even though the Emperor was the one that killed her the fault undeniably lies with himself for bringing her into this. Unrivalled regret and self-hatred brewed up a storm in his heart, and became an even darker emotion: The Emperor on his throne must die, even if the price for that was his life and the future of the Dark Territory.

Gabriel sat with amusement on his throne, sure what was going to play out next because of the experiences he felt from the assassin's soul; showing whoever the master and lover of the assassin was her corpse, execute that person, and drive fear into the other 9's hearts. Just like his machinations in Real Life, people are such amusing and pitiable things. With the same souls as humans but limited wisdom, and they could be replicated endlessly, Gabriel was sure the Fluctlights can eventually sate his thirst. The other leaders are 20m away from him, enough to bring his own sword to parry the attack. Even if his sword, one of the most powerful items in the game, is not enough the account Vector also had ridiculously high HP, and a "hax" personal trait that makes all system commands (spells) useless against him. He is utterly sure he has nothing to worry about.

The Dark Knight leader kneeling down brought his hand to his sword in a lightning-fast move, his eyes

glowing a inhuman red. Gabriel wasn't aware of this, but his assault on Ocean Turtle burned out all safety measures so if they die in UW they will die in RL, and Zast is sending his death-filled Incarnation thoughts through to Gabriel's STL.

Zast drew his sword, wreathed in a twister of energy. The theory behind this phenomenon was the same as the Synthesis Knights' "Release Recollection" was unknown to him, even if he was in any condition to think such thoughts.

With a roar of "**KILL!**", Zast raised his blade that was filled with his anger, hatred and sorrow.

Part 26-2

Alice flew from the North side of UW to the East side on her dragon. It's the first time for both her and her dragon to be in this area. The people she sees staring up at her had black hair, and Alice thought maybe Kirito was born in this area. Alice had wanted to take it easy and land in a few villages, maybe more human contact will wake Kirito's heart up, but as things are now there's no time to waste to get to the front lines. After 3 days of urgent travel with minimum rest they reached their destination, the front lines. Her dragon lost all the excess weight from half a year's worth of feeding on fish whenever it wanted to in a nearby lake, since taking two people and three artefact-level swords are quite tiring.

The Eastern Gate was 300m high, lower than the central Cathedral which was 500m high. Though in terms of quality it was beyond anything Administrator could have created. The outer walls as far as Alice knew was created by the Gods at the creation of this realm. Upon those walls was words in English, and Alice tried to make sense of them:

"desutora.....kuto.....ato.....za.....rasuto, sute-ji....."(destruct at last stage)

Alice couldn't understand what those words meant. As she was trying to puzzle it out the massive gate cracked and bits of rock fell off it. Upon more inspection the other sections of the gate was covered with cracks dozens of metres long as well. Alice gulped and made her dragon went closer to the gate. There was more dull cracking sounds, suggesting the internal parts of the gate was collapsing on the inside as well. She brought up the system window of the Gate, and she was stunned by the numbers on there; the HP was the highest of anything she had ever seen, over 3 million. On the other hand, there was only around 3 thousand HP left in the gate, and still decreasing as she looked. At the current rate it was going down, in 5 days the Gate will fall. Alice struggled to accept this fact, when she had heard the war was near she had naively thought she still had 1-2 years left. After sealing the northern passage, she had thought that would have bought Selka and her village some peace for now.

A few minutes later Alice reached the top of the Gate, and gazed out towards the Dark Territory. On one side of the gate there was blue skies and green grass in the human kingdom, but on the other side the skies were red and coal-black plains with no plant life. Some distance away, there were many campfires, spreading as far as she can see into the horizon, the Dark Territory were ready for the invasion. Then as if to escape from the reality, Alice turned her dragon away and flew off. If she stared any longer she might let fear overrule herself and charge straight in to fight, and then die by being suppressed by the superior numbers.

Alice landed in the human army's camp, and her student (Synthesis Twenty Six) approached her. He was shocked Alice brought Kirito with her into battle, she wouldn't be able to protect him; even if she strapped him onto her back, her capability would be halved and she owes it to the human world to fight at full potential. Alice was surprised at how her student can still argue back against her when before he always accepted what she had decided on; after his fight with Kirito and Eugeo he changed. Kirito's rule-breaking seems to be contagious, with Selka for example showing her disagreements with the village policies, the two squires that was with him and Eugeo back at the sword academy, and of course Alice herself. Alice thought back to just how much Kirito had done for her and UW, and how much he had sacrificed for that, but she also knows the various Synthesis Knights he would still be a traitor that did heavy damage to them.

Berculi then parted the crowd and came in to tell Synthesis Twenty Six it'll be fine, and then greeted Alice. Alice felt if he ordered her to leave Kirito behind somewhere she would obey for the sake of keeping morale high, even if after breaking the seal in her right eye she isn't bound by his words. But she really hoped it would have to come to that. Berculi then stepped forward in front of Kirito, and gathered up his willpower. Alice understood this aura to be preparation for an Incarnation attack, and wondered if Berculi wanted to cut Kirito down for being a burden. If so then she would use her own sword to fight back. Everyone else around them, even the dragons, are stunned speechless by the aura Berculi expressed. Berculi telepathically told Alice it'll be fine, and in the instant Alice felt puzzled by his words Berculi's eyes flashed brightly. At the same time Kirito in Alice's arms shuddered, and a silver flash sparked between Bersuli and Kirito. Alice stepped back in surprise and Berculi released his aura, smiling. Berculi had tried to attack Alice and Kirito with a minor Incarnation attack, even if it had hit it would only cut a bit of skin off, and Kirito had parried it with his own Incarnation attack. Kirito might not have his heart here, but he's not gone for good either. In his attack just then Berculi found Kirito cared more about protecting Alice than for himself, so Kirito will be back for sure one day – possibly when Alice herself is in real life-threatening danger. Alice couldn't help herself and buried her face onto Kirito's shoulders to hide her tears, moved by Kirito's dedication; though she tries to convince herself Kirito is doing this for all the humans in the world, but because it's for protecting her alone.

Berculi told Synthesis Twenty Six to don't be stingy and help out, it's just taking care of one boy after all. Twenty Six argued if Kirito could fight even a tiny bit then fine, but even if he recovers what can he do? Berculi revealed Kirito's partner, Eugeo, managed to defeat even himself, Berculi Synthesis One, the strongest of Synthesis Knights. This suggested if Kirito, who is at least on the same level as Eugeo if not greater, recovers they will benefit greatly. As Alice considers how dangerous was Berculi's words stating that even their strongest warrior can be defeated, Berculi suddenly trembled and looked to the sky:

A great swordsman's aura had flared up in an instant, and then vanished... far away, someone had died.

Part 27-1

The ten leaders of Dark Territory have one thing in common, despite having different personalities and ambitions; the complete understanding of "the one with power rules over all". Thus, none of them was surprised that Zast drew his blade against the Emperor. Most of them thought "Oh, he actually dared to attack right here, that's impressive courage". The beastmen and cannibal tribe leaders thought now

they'd finally see the true power of their emperor, and the gladiator leader who respects Zast thought "if you have drawn your sword then you better succeed in slaying the Emperor".

Two among the leaders had foreseen this coming. D had already knew what Zast's lover looked like, and being his rival on the leaders' council she had thought about kidnapping her. With Lippia now frozen she knew Zast would attack, and while she could pre-emptively back-stab Zast as a favour for their Emperor she decided to wait and see how powerful their Emperor is. And if Zast wins he'll be wounded, and she can pick him off and become the ruler of Dark Territory then.

And the other person, he took action the instant Zast attacked...

Zast's blade was filled with his intense emotions, which allowed him to bypass the incantation for Release Recollection. His katana is water-element, made 200 years ago, and can turn to mist. It can bypass armour and weapons to hit their opponent, and can extend its strike range. Even as Vector drew his sword Zast was sure his mist blade will just bypass that parry and hit the Emperor.

As Zast struck his movement slowed and then forcibly stopped. It turned out the assassin guild leader, Fo, had shot a poisoned needle into a gap in his armour the moment he felt Zast's killing intent. Fo had a grudge against Zast, and had specially created a poison after decades of effort to kill the General. Zast fell down on to one knee, and even as he tried to speak to cast a spell to cure himself the poison reached his mouth and numbed it. His arms was next, and with it he lost control over the Release Recollection, turning his sword back to its normal form. Fo said this was for revenge and his hatred, and the poison in previous testing can kill off a stone dragon with over 30,000 HP in under a hour, so Zast has less than a few minutes to live. Zast then fell to the floor, unable even to keep kneeling. As he lied there he thought back to Berculi's words, how hatred alone was not enough. His eyesight started to dim, and the block of ice entered what remained of his sight.

Fo was too busy savouring Zast's death, and how the Emperor will place the assassin's guild among the elite troops when the fighting starts to push down the importance of the knights and spellcasters, that he didn't realise Zast's blade begun to turn into its mist form once more.

The instant before Zast's HP would go to zero, he can only think about Lippia, his lover. She believed in his ideals for a new age and peace, and helped out the orphans. Now all that faith is wasted because of some petty grudge Fo had for him. Zast's fury allowed him to roar out "Don't get in my way!", pushed his Incarnation skills to the limits and started a grey cyclone with his blade. Fo's robes got turned to dust upon impact with the cyclone, and his flesh was torn to shreds with his blood becoming part of Zast's mist. D jumped away the moment Zast attacked again, flying off. She had a myriad of barriers and wards on her that protected her against all kinds of things, such as spells, sword, poison and many others. Zast's cyclone ripped apart her wards and her right leg in an instant like nothing when it caught her, something that was supposed to be impossible. D flew away speedily while screeching in pain, though for someone of her skills as long as she's alive she can repair any damage to her physical body... on the premise she's still alive.

D's screech was covered by the cries of the goblin chiefs, whose short legs can't allow them to escape

faster than D; and if the cyclone can catch even D, then they stood no chance of escape. Both of them was shredded into bloodied mist.

The cyclone stopped expanding when it was 20m in diameter, through sheer will from Zast to avoid hitting his subordinates at the back of the throne room. The rest of the leaders managed to get back far enough to save themselves. As if to show the cyclone was indeed created through Zast's will, the upper half of the cyclone morphed into Zast's muscular upper body.

Gabriel looked at this scene with a surprised expression. While one of the Units pre-emptively attacking the General was unexpected, he let it slide as someone trying to curry favour. That cyclone though forced Gabriel to once again readjust his thoughts, as he thought the leaders are all at the same level, so one of them shouldn't be able to kill another 3 this easily. Gabriel was expecting units fighting each other, reducing their respective HPs and trying to heal at the same time. Even as he wondered if there's something more in UW beyond the system and logic as he understood it, Zast attacked, launching his right fist into Gabriel. With a glance at his lieutenant jumping out of the way, Gabriel stayed seated on the throne and let the cyclone slam right into him.

As Zast's attack was an Incarnation one filled with the concept of 'death', it bypassed attacking the HP and went straight for the enemy's Fluctlight. Fo and the other leaders died not because of losing all their HP, but because their Fluctlight collapsed; their physical form on UW was destroyed after that. So no matter how much HP Vector had, it's meaningless in front of this attack. As the safeguards on Ocean Turtle were inactive, Zast's final attack in his life reached right into Gabriel's soul in the STL. Zast only had one regret left now, and that was not having his promised rematch with Berculi. He felt Berculi would understand why he did this though; with this attack Fo and the two goblin chiefs, all from the Pro-war factions, are dead, though it's a shame he didn't kill D as well. After the death of the leader of knights and the Emperor, Dark Territory probably won't have the heart to launch the invasion. Maybe then the world he and Lippia wished for will come to pass.

Zast became one with his Incarnation, and as his fist came into contact with Gabriel's forehead it reached into the core of Gabriel's soul. Destroy the core of the soul, even the Dark God can die just like Fo did. Though as Zast tried to attack, he found the shock that will be the last in his life:

There was nothing.

Where the Fluctlight was supposed to be, shining and full of life, there was only darkness. Even Fo the assassin had some light in him, with his obsession on staying alive no matter what. Zast's Incarnation was devoured by the darkness that extended limitlessly inside Gabriel, and evaporated into nothing. Zast realised Gabriel did not know the importance of life. He doesn't understand the brightness of the soul, or that of life and love. So Gabriel thirsts for the souls of others. No matter how powerful the Incarnation is, the "sword of killing" cannot kill Gabriel. Gabriel's soul might technically be called 'alive', but it might as well be dead.

Zast's final moments was thinking he needed to pass this knowledge on to someone, to the person will be destined to fight this monster. Even as he considered who he can possibly pass this on to, his soul was

devoured and sent into the depths of Gabriel's soul. The last two partial thoughts left in Zast were regret and Lippia.

When the light of the soul pierced into him, Gabriel felt more joy than terror. The soul of the Dark Knight he just devoured had even more intense emotions than the assassin he ate yesterday. He had love, both for that woman, and another kind he didn't understand but was directed at a much broader number of people. Along with that, a powerful killing intent that was fuelled by those love.

Love and hate. Was there anything else in existence that is more delicious than these?

Gabriel didn't realize his life was in danger when those 3 leaders were shredded apart. Rather than any feelings of disgust or unease, Gabriel instead desired to devour that Knight's soul. If Gabriel had felt fear and wanted to live, Zast's killing intent would have locked onto that to destroy his self-preservation instincts, then onwards to his Fluctlight. However, Gabriel is "someone who doesn't understand life". To him, including himself, all life are just automated machines, like the insects he killed by the hundreds when he was young. The only drive within Gabriel was to understand the fuel/source for these machines, the Fluctlights, so Zast's Incarnation couldn't find any hold over his soul.

Not that Gabriel understood any of these mechanics. All he knew as he savoured Zast's soul was two things: 1) in this world there exists a way to attack without weapons or spells that other VRMMORPGs lacked; 2) this method attack doesn't seem to work on himself for some reason. After thinking he'll need to get his lieutenant to look this up, Gabriel rose from his throne.

The remaining 6 leaders only have fear left in their hearts; Zast had instantly killed off 3 of the leaders, and even D as the strongest among them had one leg blown away without trouble – and their Emperor took the attack head on without being damaged.

The Strong rule over all.

Everyone without exception, even Zast's subordinates, knelt down in obedience. Vector merely commented in one hour they will begin their invasion, and the groups with the death of a leader have their second in command take their place. The leaders' terror intensified as Vector didn't even care enough to be angry or blame them for an attack on him. D led the cries of 'all hail his imperial majesty' as soon as her leg stopped bleeding, and this was echoed by the rest of the ones there.

Scene cuts back to Alice, surveying her tent. Berculi had predicted Alice would rejoin them when the time comes and saved a place for her, but even he didn't expect her to bring Kirito along with her – there's only one bed available. Alice laid Kirito down onto the bed, and as he moaned and reached out with his left hand Alice handed him his swords. Kirito quieted down after that. Alice thought again about her decision to strap Kirito onto her back if she has to, if it was just himself it might be possible but she can't carry him and the two swords. It appears she will have to leave him behind after all, but where is she supposed to find someone that she can trust to look after Kirito at this point? Alice thought back to Berculi's words that Kirito fought to protect her with his Incarnation attack back then, and wondered if it was true. From the moment they met at the academy it was a position of a officer taking in a criminal,

then as executioner and traitor, before finally their conversation on top of the Cathedral. Every one of their conversations only suggested they were in a ceasefire period – and now even after losing his heart Kirito fought for her, just who does he see Alice as?

And from that, how does she herself see Kirito? In the majority of their exchanges, he was just a foul-mouthed boy calling her a “idiot”, detestable in his actions even as he cared about her. But in that final battle against the Administrator when Kirito was clothed in a black overcoat and wielded two swords, Alice’s heart shook. A strong emotion overtook her, like she had been stabbed in the heart. Even now that stab seemed to leave a wound deep in her heart that throbbed dully. Alice is afraid of finding out why her heart is throbbing like this, and locked that feeling away. Alice felt she was just a doll created for war, she had no right to seek emotions. She then wondered if the reason why her thoughts and voice can’t Kirito was because of her trying to keep her emotions suppressed, before suddenly shaking that thought away. Alice placed her face closer to Kirito’s, close enough that strands of her hair fell onto his face. From this close distance Alice looked into Kirito’s eyes that was as black as the night – but even as she looked, she thought she could see faint glimmers of faraway stars inside those eyes. She closed her eyes, kept that image of glittering eyes in her mind, and pressed her face closer bit by bit-

With the sound of a light tingle from a bell, Alice shot backwards in a panic. After a few seconds she realized that was her doorbell. Alice thought if that was Synthesis Twenty Six trying to convince her to leave Kirito then he’ll have a piece of her mind explained clearly, but after opening the tent flap it wasn’t who she was expecting:

Teiza and Ronie showed up, bringing dinner to her. Both of them were surprised Alice remembered them, and introduced themselves.

Part 27-2

Alice remembered Teiza and Ronie as the girls that chased after her when she came to take Eugeo and Kirito into the Cathedral for sentencing. No matter how pressed for personnel the army is they wouldn’t force minors to come along, so these two must have volunteered. Alice wondered why would these two come here to a warzone, even if they have some connection with Kirito. Alice addressed Ronie and Teiza by name, and they were shocked Alice remembered them. They thought Alice is very different compared to when they last met, and Alice thought about that. She didn’t realize she had changed, but her life in hiding over the last 6 months probably did change her. Alice though refuses to admit it was because as Berculi teased that she had gotten fatter – Selka’s food was good, but it shouldn’t have made her weight gain noticeable...

Ronie and Teiza heard about how when Alice had arrived she also had a black-haired teen with her, and wondered if it was someone they knew. Alice then realized who they came for, and commented they must have been close with Kirito. As she finished speaking both of them cheered up like blooming flowers, and Ronie had tears of happiness in her tea-coloured eyes that it was indeed Kirito with Alice. Teiza clasped Ronie’s hand and commented Eugeo might be alright too. Alice’s eyes widened and choked at Eugeo’s name, remembering these two doesn’t know what happened on the top of the Cathedral. Ronie and Teiza wondered what made Alice make that expression. Alice thought they came here for Kirito, so they deserve to know what happened to Kirito:

“While for you two this will be a overly harsh truth... but I believe, as kouhai to Kirito and Eugeo, you two will be accepted by him.”

Opposite to Alice’s expectations, Kirito did not miraculously return to normal after seeing Ronie and Teiza. While disappointed, she also felt slightly relieved inside her heart. (Flere note: ... I take whatever concession I had for Alice back. That possessive minx...)

Alice stayed in a corner of her tent and watched the events unfold. Ronie knelt down in front of Kirito who sat on the edge of the bed, clutching his hand and whispering something to him. Even more painful to watch was Teiza who collapsed onto a seat, staring at the broken Blue Rose sword. Teiza’s face went as pale as a sheet, and all expression was wiped away from her face.

Alice, as the person she is right now, didn’t know Eugeo well at all. All she knows about him was from the few minutes they fought each other at floor 80 of the Cathedral, then their battle together against the Administrator. Alice knew about Eugeo’s skill in being able to defeat Berculi in combat when he Released Recollection his Time-Piercing Blade and when he turned his own body into a sword to slice off one of Administrator’s arms; e had impressive willpower. As for his personality, most of what she knew is from Selka telling her what he did back in the village. Eugeo was a good partner to Kirito, and what they did must have moved Ronie and Teiza’s hearts deeply. Alice hoped Ronie and Teiza can understand and accept Kirito and Eugeo fought for important things, before being wounded and wilted. If they didn’t Alice feared the two girls’ minds will collapse, minds have been known to do so from experience overwhelming sadness or terror; there are several cases back in her home village after the invasion. Alice can tell Teiza loved Eugeo. And it was by no means easy to handle the loss of your loved one at this young age. Alice saw Teiza slowly reach towards the blade of the sword, hoping something miraculous will happen. The Blue Rose Sword was still a high-level artefact, even if Teiza can’t use the sword she might be able to act as a catalyst for a Incarnation effect to happen. When Teiza’s hand came into contact, the red light from the sunset that lit up the room was banished by the weak blue glow from the Blue Rose sword. It vanished a instant later, and tears flowed from Teiza. Eugeo’s voice reached her, telling her he’ll always be here. Teiza broke down and cried like little kid, and Ronie also cried as she buried her face onto Kirito’s lap. Alice herself was also moved to tears, though she internally questioned if this was really possible. Can the willpower/Incarnation of the owner be left in the sword? Eugeo might be a exception however, he lost his life after becoming merged on a fundamental level with his sword. Even so, if Eugeo had called Teiza’s name then it wouldn’t be the same leftover willpower from the time of his death. Could it just be a illusion that spawned from the girl’s admiration? Or something more? Alice wished Kirito was aware at this moment, he would have understood what happened. From what she had heard he came from outside this world, from the realms where the mysterious gods resided. Alice thought back to a scrap of information in her confused thought: World End Altar. Apparently, from there is a way to the outside of this world. Maybe all will be answered there, maybe even regaining Kirito’s heart. But the Altar was outside the Eastern gate in the Dark Territory in the south, so they would have defeat the invading army first. Alice sighed, broke off that few seconds of wandering, and went to comfort the two crying girls.

The sun had set completely, though the skies over the Dark Territory remained blood-red. Alice found

the knights and guards set up camp without regards to who the other party are, and was surprised. Bersuli came up to her and commented the force wasn't bad for something hastily created. He was also thankful he broke down the etiquette between the two sides, and that there wasn't a law that demanded the Synthesis Knights are to be given 10 minutes of praise whenever civilians are to speak with them. Alice wondered where were the rest of the Synthesis Knights, she had heard they're out in full force but she could only find 20 of them. Berculi told her this twenty was it, the full force. The elder before he died had 10 of the knights frozen for Readjustment, and those 10 still haven't woken up yet. You'd need the elder or the Administrator to be able to unfreeze them, and those two are dead. It's next to impossible to revive those knights. Of the remaining 40, 15 are used for border patrol to ensure there are no attacks from elsewhere, and 5 are left in the Cathedral to ensure everything runs smoothly. The remaining twenty are here on the front lines. Alice knew out of the twenty here, only ten of them can perform Release Recollection or have a high-level artefact sword, further making this a bad position for them. Berculi changed the topic, asking what was Alice planning to do with Kirito. He offered to switch to the rearguard to keep a eye on him, and Alice told him not to worry, she found some friends of his from the academy and left him in their care.

Berculi asked if Kirito reacted in any way from their contact, and Alice shook her head. Berculi sighed, and admitted he had pinned his hopes on Kirito to be deciding factor of this war; Kirito's willpower is far above that of his. Alice didn't quite believe that, as while she believes Kirito is powerful Berculi had developed his skills for over 200 years, while Kirito is barely 20 years old. Sword skills and physical condition being superior to Berculi she can believe, but not on matters of willpower/Incarnation. Berculi explained from when they attacked that afternoon using Incarnation, he felt Kirito had **real** fighting experience far beyond his own. By "real" experience, he meant battles to the death experiences. Alice thought those experiences must not have been this world then, the fights are just spars in the Human Kingdom and as a Synthesis Knight their skills are far above the Dark Territory troops their own lives are never threatened in these skirmishes. Alice could not wrap her head around how Kirito can have real combat experience there, what's supposed to be where the creator gods lived. Alice decided to tell Berculi everything, about the outside world and the World End Altar connecting to it, but before she can explain Fanatio showed up in her full plate light purple armour.

Every time Alice saw Fanatio Synthesis Two she can't help but go 'Argh'. She's the one she's the least likely to get along with in the world. To hide her feelings Alice did a Knight's salute, which Fanatio returned. Every bit of her actions spoke of feminine grace, and Alice could never get used to that. Even if Fanatio could hide behind her beautifully designed silver mask, full armour and speech pattern to pretend to not be a woman, her grace suggested otherwise. It was something as a young woman Alice never had a chance to develop. Alice was also a bit miffed that after Kirito fatally wounded Fanatio on floor 50 he did his best to save the one that took a herculean effort to defeat, somehow sending her away to save her life. Even if it was just like how Kirito would do things. Alice was also annoyed that Fanatio was in love with Berculi but never takes off her helmet to let people see her face.

Suddenly Fanatio took off her full helmet, letting her lustrous black hair flow out behind her. Alice had only seen Fanatio once by chance when she went to take a bath, and as far as she knows Fanatio had never took off her face coverings in public. With light makeup and red lipstick, Fanatio smiled at Alice and greeted her. Alice was surprised at how different Fanatio was acting. Fanatio asked if it was true

Alice brought Kirito with her. Alice was alarmed at the question, Kirito defeated a fair number of Synthesis Knights and Fanatio was the most wounded by him. Fanatio would probably be the one that holds the deepest grudge against him. Fanatio asked if after the meeting can she go visit him, and Alice asked why. Fanatio gave a wry smile and told Alice she didn't have to make that dangerous expression, she doesn't plan to cut him up by this point. She just wanted to say thanks to him, it's thanks to him she's alive today. Alice remarked it was Cardinal who healed her, and she passed away by this point. Fanatio acknowledged that, remembering how Cardinal's healing was the most powerful and warmest she had ever came across – but it was still Kirito that sent her to Cardinal, and she wanted to thank him for something else. Alice asked what it was, and Fanatio said it was for him fighting her and defeating her. Alice came to the conclusion Fanatio still wanted to kill Kirito after all, and took up a fighting stance. Fanatio said solemnly she really meant to thank him, he was the only one that kept fighting seriously after knowing she's a woman. In her 200 year lifetime he was the only one to do so, everyone else held back because of her gender. Her pride could not accept beating more powerful swordsmen just because of her gender. Men in UW are hard-wired to protect and care about women, something that's carved into their souls (Flere821 note: this is from Alice's POV, which doesn't cover exceptions like what Cardinal had said about the corrupted Fluctlights), and Fanatio's beauty doesn't make ignoring that any easier. Alice never cared about that, because she believed she needed to be more powerful than anyone, and if they gave a opening like that she'll take it. Alice commented internally it's because Fanatio cared about things like that it proved she's a woman. Kirito had seen in one glance Fanatio's obsession and impressed upon her the truth that just be powerful enough where your opponent can't even care about things like that; Fanatio asked is it strange for her to want to thank him?

After saying those serious words, Fanatio said mischievously with a smile she's also somewhat peeved Kirito doesn't see her as a woman. Fanatio wondered if she can wake Kirito up with her feminine charms. Alice got stunned speechless while internally shouted "What?!", thinking if Kirito does wake up from that then all her efforts up to that point was meaningless. And knowing Kirito, it's not impossible he'll wake

up because of that. (Flere821 note: Well Kirito, your womanizing skill is maxed and well known to everyone it seems  And Alice, shame on you for putting your own pride/desires over Kirito's health in the heat of the moment. Completely in-character as a teenage girl in love, I'll admit, but if Asuna was in this situation instead she'd take the offer on the off chance it works for his sake, and then proceeds to make Kirito wish he'd stay catatonic after he woke up to a girl other than her...

In response to Fanatio's words, Alice gave a glare and replied with a sharp voice thanks Fanatio for her words, but Kirito is asleep now and she'll pass her sentiments on for her when he wakes up tomorrow. Fanatio removed the smirk she wore and with a eyebrow raised she asked does she need her permission to see Kirito? She had never stopped Alice from seeing Berculi for one matter or another despite her own emotions. Alice shot back it wasn't like she needed her permission to see the Synthesis Knight leader. Besides, if Fanatio wanted a man to utterly defeat her she should have just asked Berculi to do so. Fanatio waved off that suggestion, saying Berculi always go easy on other people, as he's the strongest swordsman in the world. Even the top General of the Dark Territory was given pity. Alice's response:

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"Ho, is that so? Whenever he practised with me he treated the spar seriously and worked up a sweat."

"... Your Excellency! Was that true?!"

"It's uncle's fault for being too lenient towards her..."

Alice and Fanatio turned at the same time to their side.

There was nobody there.

Where Knight Captain Berculi was standing a few minutes ago, there was only the night wind gently blowing over the dried grass.

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The war meeting started after being delayed for 10 minutes. The host for this meeting, Fanatio Synthesis Two, and newly arrived knight Alice Synthesis Fifty was still releasing a oppressive aura, and the meeting started in a tense atmosphere.

Alice thought there was indeed not much of the Synthesis Knights here. Those here with an Artefact-level sword were only 7 people: Time-Piercing Blade, Berculi; Heaven-Piercing Blade, Fanatio; Frost Whip; Flame Bow; two other knights Alice only knew by name, and Alice herself. The other 13 knights included the 9 that's Fanatio's personal strike force, and 4 other young (but still older than Alice) knights. 30 guard captains were also present, though any of the Synthesis Knights, even the lower levelled ones, can defeat all 30 without much trouble.

Fanatio began to speak, outlining their situation and plan of attack. They will hold the valley just beyond the Eastern gate, 1km long and a few hundred metres wide. If they get surrounded it's all over, hence their defensive position. To prevent enemy spellcasters from destroying them with faraway spells, Fanatio proposed to use up all the mana within the valley beforehand. They won't be able to heal themselves on the battlefield that way, but since the enemy will be using more spells compared to the hundred spellcasters they have it's a gamble worth taking. Berculi spoke up to say they have rare healing artefacts and medicines taken out of the Church vault, it should be able to last them a few days. Throughout history treasures have only been brought inside the vault, this is the first time they've been taken out. Alice asked who will be using up all the mana in the valley beforehand, since as far as she knows only the Administrator had that kind of power. Fanatio replied, and instead of Berculi that Alice expected she said it was Alice herself that will be doing this. Alice might not have noticed this, but her level had went up to the point beyond the Synthesis Knights and can use spells beyond what others can do.

Scene change, Gabriel's forces marched towards the battlefield. He himself is on a mobile platform/throne dragged by two rock dragons, along with D and his lieutenant. Gabriel asked D are the Synthesis Knights as fearsome as their reputation, and D confirmed it is; throughout history no Synthesis Knight has ever died by Dark Territory's hands. Gabriel's lieutenant asked then why doesn't the Synthesis Knights just eradicate the Dark Territory, and D replied because while they are powerful they never ended up a situation where they have to fight a army of 10,000+ at once; even they have limited HP and can be taken down with enough grazed damage by massed forces. D warned they will take massive losses using this strategy to defeat the Synthesis Knights, but Gabriel didn't mind; every last unit in Dark Territory is expendable in his eyes, even the powerful units like D. Gabriel planned as the new Ruler of

Human Kingdom to give the first and last order for them to find Alice and bring her to him. Then he'll be able to finish the mission. Gabriel had never considered Alice would be a knight in the defensive force brought against him, or her being anything else other than a civilian.

Scene change back to Alice. 4 days later, on the verge of the opening battle. Alice is leaving Kirito to Ronie and Teiza's care. The wooden wheelchair he had was exchanged for one made by Alice's spells, this time made of metal but lighter than his previous one. Over the last four days Alice talked to Kirito whenever she could, caressed his hand and hugged him, but he had never responded. Alice whispered to him this might be their final farewell. Berculi had said Kirito would be the deciding factor, and Alice believed him, for without his input this army would have not have came to be. If he hadn't intervened Administrator would have used her spell to turn half of the humans in her realm into sword golems (Flere note: these sword golems were not shown in previous WEB 7 summaries, I didn't write that one though. It skipped most of the fight scenes, which one of the bits was the Administrator morphing humans' Fluctlights into swords, and used them as bones to create a monster that's like a cross between The Skull Reaper and The Gleameyes. The end product was powerful enough to curbstomp Kirito, Alice and Eugeo at their strongest, and the three of them only lived because Cardinal showed up and defended them. This spell was stolen by Cardinal during the battle and used to turn Eugeo into a sword that managed to wound the Administrator.) and used them to defend her kingdom. Alice went on to say she'll fight with her best to the last drop of her HP, and when she finally falls she expects Kirito to wake up when she calls his name with her final breath. As long as Kirito has woken up then no matter how many thousands or tens of thousands of enemies he has to face, he would defend the Human Kingdom without fail. He managed to defeat Administrator who was practically a living God, so Alice believed Kirito could not lose.

Alice hugged Kirito one final time, and when she finally released him after who knows how long that was, she saw Ronie with wide eyes and staring at her with all kinds of emotions in her eyes. Alice figured out Ronie is in love with Kirito as well. Ronie blushed and held her head low, saying she wouldn't dare to love him, she was only his attendant. Alice said that doesn't matter, Ronie was born a noble while Alice herself was only from a village, and Kirito doesn't even have a known birthplace. Ronie rejected Alice's attempt to help, saying the birth thing wasn't it. Teiza then spoke up with a pained voice, even as she hugged Ronie who almost broke down in support, asking whether Alice knew what crimes did Kirito and Eugeo commit in the academy. Alice responded it was for killing other students. Teiza asked whether Alice knew why they killed the other students. Alice responded she didn't know, then mid-sentence she remembered one of Kirito's yells against her when they were climbing up the Cathedral; how two girls named Ronie and Teiza was raped by some noble upperclassmen, and it's wrong for the laws of the world to allow that to happen. Alice's eyes widened in comprehension, then Teiza confirmed her suspicions and told Alice what led to that event. Ronie and Teiza blamed themselves for what happened to Kirito and Eugeo, and after being raped they no longer deserve being loved by Kirito and Eugeo. After finishing the explanation Teiza broke down along with Ronie. Alice gritted her teeth, remembering how she once was as a Synthesis Knight and now she realized not breaking the Laws of the world to help others was the true crime.

Alice took a deep breath, and told them without doubt they weren't violated. Ronie raised her head with

blazing eyes exclaiming back Alice don't understand, that their body was time and again been- Alice cut her off, retorting the body is only a container, no, not even that for the soul. It's just a blurred boundary where the soul has control over. The important thing is their heart, the only proof of their soul. She told Ronie and Teiza to watch what she is going to do now, and told them this isn't a spell.

Alice closed her eyes. A week ago she brought her armour forth at the village to fight the invasion, now she sought to go deeper inside her. It's not enough to change her clothing into armour, she needs to change her physical body itself. Kirito turned himself into the dual-wielding person that was at once him yet not him back then, so it's not impossible. Alice sought to return to who she was 9 years ago. Return to the Alice before she froze her heart in defence against the unknown and loneliness. Alice wanted to tell Ronie and Teiza she's just like them, if she hadn't broke the laws then she would not have been taken away, and Kirito and Eugeo would not have went to the capital to look for her. Everything had started because of her.

Alice opened her eyes.

She was still standing upright, but now at face-level is Kirito's face who is seated. Alice raised her head to look at Ronie and Teiza who's stunned by this transformation. Alice told them the body is just an accessory to the soul. Her voice was childish and surprisingly high. She shook off some dust from the blue dress and white apron she now have on her as part of the transformation, spun around once with her hair flowing behind her movement and continued: the heart cannot be defiled by anyone. When she was at the age her body is currently showing, she had spells inserted into her very soul and turned into a Synthesis Knight. But the heart back then is still with her current self now, and she likes who she is right now.

With her small hands, Alice grasped Ronie's and Teiza's. The other two girls continued to have tears flowing down their faces, but now the reason for their tears are completely different from before.

Part 28-1

Gabriel's en route to the battle location with his forces. First wave of attack will be the goblin light armoured forces and the beastmen heavy armour forces, numbering 10,000. With them are 500 Giants that acts as siege weapons. Second wave consists of 5,000 Gladiators and 5,000 Dark Knights. Third wave, 7,000 man-eating demons (Cannibals in my last summary) archers and 3,000 dark mages. This final wave are for long range support.

Gabriel wanted to fight on the front lines against the Synthesis Knights himself, and if possible devour their souls. But he couldn't risk his account somehow be defeated, the priority right now is capture Alice and escape Ocean Turtle. Afterwards he can create artificial Fluctlights as much as he wants. It's been 8 days inside UW, about 15 minutes in RL time. After his victory it might take another 10 days before they find Alice, so Gabriel wants to finish this war within one day.

Gabriel asked why did his lieutenant wanted to work on this mission, or why work in this industry at all? The answer basically boiled down to "because it's fun", though Gabriel doesn't know whether he meant fun by shooting things or killing people. Before Gabriel could ask further D came along and reported the army is in position. Apart from the 30,000 forces at the front there's also a reserve force of 17,000 at the

back made of goblins and beastmen, and 3,000 humans handling logistics. Here is the entirety of the forces Dark Territory can bring to bear, they only have women, children and elderly left behind. If this 50,000 isn't enough to win the war then the mission would have failed. Though according to scouts, the enemy forces was only 5,000 so it's impossible to lose. Gabriel asked how long until the collapse of the Gate, and D replied in 3 hours. Gabriel commanded for the 1st wave to enter the valley 1 hour from now, set up as close to the gate as possible. Gabriel gazed at the enormous gate over 2 KM away, and it was a impressive sight. Though he believed the thousands of souls that will shatter and die upon the start of the battle will be an even more impressive sight, and then his feast will begin.

Scene change to Alice, who returned to her normal form and equipped her normal golden armour. Her transformation didn't last long, and Alice briefly thought about how Fanatio and others would react if she showed up in a child's form. Alice finished her preparations and stepped out of her tent, and moments later Synthesis Twenty Six came up to her and praised her on how she looked, which Alice waved off. The sun is setting, and will completely set in 3 hours. At that time the war will begin, the seal of 300 years that was the Eastern Gate will fall. The human troops were better than expected after only half a year's training; Fanatio taught them her multi-hit moves, with the maximum of 5 hits, but that should be enough to fight off the goblins. It would be a push for them to fight the Dark Knights with their own multi-hit skills, and for the high speed gladiator fist fighters it'll take a Synthesis Knight to deal with them. The key to this battle is whether they can survive the first wave with minimum casualties, and if they can defend themselves from the arrows and magic casted from afar. Victory depended on Alice's ability from here on. Alice looked back at the rear of the camp, where smoke rising showed they're preparing their last supper. Alice promised to protect Ronie, Teiza, and Kirito who's back there, no matter what.

Synthesis Twenty Six told Alice it's time. Alice nodded, started to walk away bit then stopped. She thanked him for staying with her all these years; he left as Flame Bow's student for her tutelage 4 years ago was probably because he was worried about her, becoming a Synthesis Knight at age 11 with her genius skills. After seeing Ronie and Teiza she realized how she must have looked as a young swordswoman at age 15, being timid and inexperienced. He denied this with embarrassment, and Alice smiled sincerely. She told him it was only because of his support she managed to get to where she is today, and thanked him. He then started to tear up, and said with a small voice why is Alice speaking like she's at the end of her life? He still haven't learned anything, and would still need her tutelage from here onwards. Alice changed her attitude immediately and shouted strictly:

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"Integrator Knight Synthesis Twenty-six!"

"Y-Yes!"

His hand stopped, and formed into a knight's salute.

"As your teacher I'll give you my last command: Live. Live to see the arrival of peace. And then take it back, your own life and the one you loved."

--

Alice knew the shards of memories belonging to the Synthesis Knights was still at the top of the Cathedral, and there should be a way to return those into the ones that lost those memories. Synthesis Twenty Six couldn't speak anymore while in tears, and could only nod in confirmation. Alice turned and walked away, beginning to speak the longest incantation she had ever used in her life. She needs to gather up all the mana in the valley and use it in a single spell, if she loses concentration now the backlash will disintegrate her. Alice had no regrets and fear left by this point. As a Synthesis Knight, she was loved by Berculi and Fanatio. She even managed to spend 6 months with Selka as her sister. More importantly, she had fought incredible swordsmen like Eugeo and Kirito, and in her time with them she had found what it meant to be human: sadness, anger, and love. What else could she have asked for? With the sound of her armour clinking, Alice moved towards the place where she will be stationed for this battle.

The sun has now set completely. Regardless of the 50,000 from Dark Territory or the 5,000 from Human Kingdom, they held their breath and waited for what was going to happen next. The Eastern Gate that had stood since the beginning of their world gave a sound like a behemoth's dying roar when its HP went to zero. This foreboding thunder could be heard all the way on the other side of the human territory, and every human left behind the front lines raised their head up in response.

A few seconds later:

Down the middle of the two slabs of stone, a crack ran down its entirety and white light glowed out. Soldiers from both side shielded their eyes. The crack spread with amazing speed through the Gate, the white light following behind it. The words that were carved above the stage is now covered in flames and turned red, warping like a living creature. The words now read "Final Pressure Experiment Stage", though only two people on this battlefield could understand what it meant. As the words burned itself out a pillar of light shot towards the sky, and the Eastern Gate began to crumble from the top.

From where Gabriel was seated, his lieutenant next to him shouted excitedly at the sight. He lamented they should have took a recording of that, and instead of the AIs or whatever they should have stolen the technology enabling this scene, make a VFX workshop and become millionaires using this technology with Hollywood. Gabriel sighed and told him that's impossible, this can only be seen while inside a STL. Over half of the Gate had collapsed by this point, and the rocks falling from it disintegrated into particles of light. The debris from the gate would not trouble them.

Gabriel stood up from his throne and moved towards the large skull D left behind. By talking into this skull he can contact other leaders with a smaller skull bracelet. Gabriel thought this isn't as good as Stryker vehicles' communication systems, but it beats sending runners to convey information. He stared into the eye sockets of the skull, and said in a voice as hard as steel "The time thou have all waited for has arrived! Kill anyone you can kill! Plunder all that you can! Ravage them all!"

From all corners of his army a warcry came up that covered even the sound of the Gate collapsing. Countless blades and spears rose up into the air, reflecting the blood red glow of the braziers around them. With his right hand raised and then brought down, Gabriel gave the first order as their commander:

“First wave, begin attack!”

The mountain goblins’ new leader doesn’t care to be used as disposable pieces in the plan he thought was proposed by D, and as leaders of equal position he doesn’t have to listen to her machinations. The Emperor was one thing to be obeyed unconditionally, but this wasn’t his plan. He gave the orders to prepare for his plan, and began their assault.

Fanatio rallied her troops of 300 guards, standing 200m in front of where the Gate was with two other Synthesis Knights: Flame Bow Synthesis Seven, and Frost Whip Synthesis Twenty Six. Ironically, it’s only with the emotions Administrator tried to remove from them that they have the courage to stand here right now. Some of them left back in Central can’t even move without orders.

Synthesis Seven recalled the memory that haunted him ever since he could remember, of his wife waking him up and the silver rings they each wore. Upon his defeat by Kirito and Eugeo he realized that memory isn’t of his wife in heaven he was sent down from, but from his human past. When he had accepted that fact he broke down and cried, since with a human’s average lifespan of 70 years her wife has long passed away in his 100+ year lifespan. Nonetheless to protect the land that he and his wife and lived in together he will fight; love is what supported him right now.

He Released Recollection of his Bow, and began to attack. Giant pillars of flame shot over a 200m distance to char dozens of goblins with every shot, but with 3,000 of them bearing down on the human forces it was not enough. When there was only 50m left between the two sides he switched back to normal steel arrows. The two sides then collided.

Fanatio aimed her sword-laser at one of the ten leaders she found, the one from the Giants clan, and attacked with her Release Recollection.

Synthesis Forty-nine was hiding in a tent in the rearguard as the battle began. He deserted after the fight started, further proving Administrator was correct in labelling him a failure that was unable to fight. Despite having a Artefact level weapon, he had never managed to Release Recollection with it. The Artefacts choose their masters by affinity, how their souls resonate with each other, and do not take into account of the wielder’s skill. The Administrator gave up on Synthesis Forty-nine after 6 months and turned her attention to the newly created Alice, whose talent far surpassed his own. He felt there was something he lacked, so even though his weapon resonated with him it was never unleashed. After being frozen for 7 years, he was woken up by the elder to combat the intruders after their trump card Synthesis Fifty vanished. Before he fully awakened though the elder and Administrator both died. He woke up to a state of confusion within the Knights. He volunteered to join the defence force after seeing how brightly other Knights had shined, maybe he can find what he lacked in battle. However he ran away, unable to bear the pressure of war. The pair of blades at his side seemed to cry and admonished him. As he was thinking Teiza and Ronie showed up, trying to find a safe place to put Kirito.

The Giants have a drive to push their fluctlights, that their greater size made them superior to humans. If this superiority was questioned at a fundamental level however, their fluctlight would collapse. Thus, the Giant leader broke down after barely surviving Fanatio’s sniping laser, with death in her eyes and him

unable to fight back. Despite losing his mind however, his soul still followed the orders to attack the enemy.

Scene jumped back to the mountain goblins, explaining how they alone in the first wave didn't look down on the Synthesis Knights. They were the ones that launched a raid at the North, unsanctioned by the council or their Emperor. There the goblin leader received word his invasion force of over 200 died because of only one knight, Alice. He decided then he'll never fight the Synthesis Knights head on, despite orders from D to do just that. To worm his way around the orders to place his troops in the meatgrinder between Synthesis Knights and the dark mages who would rain death upon them as eagerly as they would to the enemy, the goblin leader found an alternative: the Emperor did not tell them where to attack, only be part of the first wave. After coming in close to Synthesis Twenty Six's station he ordered his troops to launch the specially made smoke grenades, and using it as cover to sneak past enemy lines. They plan to attack the supply train of the humans, and if that failed escape into the human kingdom and launch raids there to survive. In the midst of all Synthesis Twenty Six vanished in the smoke.

One of Synthesis Seven's guards died, his last words asking Synthesis Seven to save the world. He gritted his teeth, and channelled the remaining life force into a flaming arrow to strike at the enemy. All over the battlefield the remaining life force from deaths was lifted up above the valley, into the maelstrom controlled by a golden knight.

Ronie and Teiza met Synthesis Forty-nine. He admitted he was a failure, and no longer thinks of himself as part of the Synthesis Knights. Ronie and Teiza introduced themselves, and also introduced Kirito. Synthesis Forty-nine gasped at that, recognizing the name as the one who invaded the Cathedral and killed Administrator. He also saw Kirito's two swords are Artefacts beyond even his own. Ronie and Teiza said they can't blame Synthesis Forty-nine for hiding, as they're doing the same thing on request of Alice to protect Kirito. The two of them asked Synthesis Forty-nine to protect Kirito along with them, as they're not confident they can even defeat a goblin. He thought the two girls' willpower shined brightly, even more than he ever did. They held a determination to achieve a goal, even if it cost them their lives. Synthesis Forty-nine agreed, saying if the goblins make it past Berculi it would mean the end of the humans anyway. Neither he or the two girls realized the thousands of goblins are sneaking through with their smoke bomb cover however.

The Giant leader's Fluctlight collapsed further, and in the process sparked off an Incarnation effect. All he had left is anger and hatred towards humans, and this lent speed and strength to his blows. Fanatio could not block it in time, frozen in fright and cowed by the killing intent. Not even when he fought Zast did she feel this pressure, even as he defeated her when both were only using sword skills; Berculi forbid them to use Release Recollection in front of Dark Knights. Zast spared Fanatio and retreated after breaking her mask and saw her face, which further made her feel ashamed. The giant approached wreathed in black-red light, and Fanatio could only watch.

Synthesis Twenty-two, part of Fanatio's personal force, blocked the attack, sacrificing herself. When she was split open by the blow, she ignited her life force and tried to blow up the Giant with her. Part of the

reason why Synthesis Twenty-two was so loyal to Fanatio was because she resembled her lover, who Synthesis Twenty-two was taken away and turned into a Synthesis Knight because homosexuality was against the laws. Synthesis Twenty-two died with a smile on her face, saying she'll miss Fanatio.

Fanatio couldn't forgive herself for letting her subordinate die, she treated her force like she would towards a younger sibling. That love fuelled her Incarnation, turning her sword into a 5m-long laser sword. Synthesis Twenty-two didn't manage to kill the Giant leader, only knocking him off his feet, and he got back up. Fanatio's laser sword scythed through him like nothing.

Original TL note summary: Not impressed with this part. Not much fight scenes, if it can be called that with just two Knights firing off attacks, and more rambling about flashbacks. Everyone that's not a 'heavyweight'/main fighter might as well be mooks. The only saving grace of this part was the mountain goblin leader, he might as well be Konming with his ability to plan.

Part 28-2

Flame Bow vs Plains Goblins force. Due to the darkness from after sunset plus tiredness from fighting and seeing people die Flame Bow ran out of arrows as the goblins tricked him into shooting corpses they held up and made them seemed like they're attacking. The Goblins then attacked en masse, with the Goblin Leader and his elite guards taking Flame Bow on. Flame Bow was surprised by how the elite guards had no self-preservation instincts, sacrificing themselves in order to deal damage to him (a few let themselves be split apart by blows behind them to damage the Knight). One of the human guards tried to step in and rescue Flame Bow, but was killed off easily. In Flame Bow's final moments, enraged by others dying for him, he used his own life to fuel his fire attacks to burn the Goblin leader to death and beaten back the assault on his side of the valley.

Part 29-1

Berculi setting up a kill zone for the incoming Drones, 100x200x150m large. This is taking a lot out of his power. The rest of this segment explains what Drones are, basically flying flesh golems with basic commands, used to draw out the enemy's flying forces first so the reserved dragon knights can attack.

Synthesis Twenty-six flashback on how Alice joined the Synthesis Knights, being a prodigy that far surpassed everyone else, synced with one of the oldest and most powerful Artefacts in the Church, her spell-casting ability is up there within the Church, and managed to receive tuition from Berculi. There were rumours Alice was going to be Administrator's successor at one point. 4 years ago Synthesis Twenty-six was still Flame Bow's student, and was wary of Alice, but after seeing Alice burying her dragon's mother in a burial and showing compassion to it, it tugged at how his own soul shard at a love towards his mother was removed. He realized the 'perfect' Alice was just something she shows other people, deep down the real Alice was burdened by the position of being a prodigy, like a glass flower that could shatter at any moment. In his eyes as laughable as it was for him to want to protect someone who's his superior in just about every skill, he wanted to do so. He became her student, and strived to get better not to catch up to her (Alice eventually reached nearly equal to Berculi in ability, and despite being numbered at Fifty she was ranked 3rd of the Knights) but to be able to keep her within his sight as

he chased after her. He tried his best to make her smile, in the process regaining his personality from before he was turned into a Synthesis Knight. Alice smiled now and then, but it wasn't until the assault on the Cathedral by Kirito and Eugeo before anything significant happened. Synthesis Twenty-six lost, while he unleashed his most powerful technique. He wasn't ashamed of that, the intruders eventually managed to defeat Fanatio, Alice, Berculi, and even Administrator. Kirito was praised by Berculi as a swordsman that surpassed the level of any of the Synthesis Knights. He was ashamed though that he wasn't the one that broke Alice out of her shell, that for all his efforts he was ultimately useless. That shame is now his motivation, but at the same time it drove him towards a dead end. Mountain Goblins managed to sneak past him, and he couldn't think of a way to blow out the dust to counter attack.

(this next part will be explained briefly, not very good plot despite semi-good fight scene)

Goblin forces reach Teiza and Ronie. Synthesis Forty-nine killed one after seeing Kirito, despite losing his ability to talk or even hold his swords in his hands, tried to stand up and fight. Then we have a Dues ex Machina with Eugeo from within the Blue Rose sword giving Synthesis Forty-nine the courage to fight; he went out, killed some goblin attackers, fought the Mountain Goblin leader in single combat and won, finally able to use his Release Recollection.

D received word the goblin leaders and giant's leader died. She unleashed the Drones to take down the 5 Synthesis Knights she has a lock onto. Berculi's trap annihilated them all. Berculi could feel his battle will be against the Dark Territory's commander, though it won't be Zast. He could feel an oppressive Void from the enemy army, and know chances are he won't live past that battle or even win. He looks forward to when that happens, a suitable death on the battlefield after all his years. When Flame Bow died he was envious of his death.

D realized her Drones are destroyed, likely by a Synthesis Knight's doing. She severely underestimated them, but realizing using those ultimate techniques cost their weapon's durability points and cannot be repeatedly used. D wanted to grab some glory with her troops and to make up for their losses, and ordered the mages and archers to advance, and burn their opposition all down.

Part 29-2

Alice has a bit of existential crisis right now, gathering all the life force and mana from the battle for her attack. She found out there's no real difference between the Fluctlights on both sides – why then does the two side need to fight at all? In the end, Alice decided the only reason for her to fight in this was to keep Kirito, who likely would know the answer to that question, safe.

Dark Territory forces at the back prepared their barrage. Alice finally unleashed her spell she's been gathering energy for, basically a much more powerful version of Fanatio's Release Recollection. The enemy forces couldn't get enough energy to do anything in response, with it all gathered up by Alice earlier. A laser beam 10m wide scythed through Dark Territory forces at the back, killing 90% of non-human forces, 70% of Cannibal archers, and 30% of mages.

Alice fell off of her dragon, partially due to recoil from her attack and partially from the shock of being responsible for ending that many lives herself. Fanatio caught her and congratulated her on a job well done. To prevent the dark mages from using the now available mana the human kingdom sent healers

into the area to help their own and deny the energy to their opponents.

Synthesis Twenty-six met up with Alice, loathing himself that he had let goblin forces through. To add insult the one that had fixed his mistake was the so-called 'failure Knight' Synthesis Forty-nine. And after seeing Alice's spell he once again felt keenly he's not worthy of following Alice.

Alice tried to console him, but was interrupted by the Cannibal's leader. His entire left side was burned off, yet he struggled to human-held side. He thought Alice was the 'Priestess of Light' Vector was talking about and was after, because of her laser attack just then, and he wants to capture her for the sake of his people. Synthesis Twenty-six was going to kill the cannibal leader but Alice stopped him, and kept talking with the cannibal leader to fish for info. She has no idea what this 'Priestess of Light' business was about. The cannibal leader revealed Vector wants the Priestess captured, and will grant any wish of the one that did so; all the cannibal leader wants is for his people to return to the grass plains and their nomadic lifestyle, living peacefully. Alice was shocked that the dark god Vector has descended onto their world. She asked if the cannibal leader hated her for killing his people, and he replied no, the strong ones have their own duties and he does not begrudge her for doing her's; likewise, he has his duty to his own people and he will now capture her for the sake of them. He charged, and Alice killed him with her superior skill. As he died though Alice gathered up his soul, and used a gust of wind to send him back to the plains he called home, so he won't be used up in the coming battle.

D reported back to Vector about the army's failures, overwhelmed with fear and sure that unspeakable punishments awaited her for her incompetence. Vector didn't care about her failures, and merely asked how could they remedy the situation of not enough energy. D replied it's a battlefield, the blood and lives lost would be able to fuel their spells if they could gather them. Vector pondered her words, particularly the bit about blood and lives.

After Alice's attack, the battle had a lull for now. Soldiers on the human side took this opportunity to heal and eat. In this time Alice reported back to Berculi about what the Cannibal leader told her. Berculi confirmed Alice's thoughts that the term 'Priestess of Light' was not mentioned anywhere within Church lore. Fanatio commented it's unbelievable that the god has returned, while Berculi told her it wasn't that unbelievable; there's a oppressive feel over the enemy side, a powerful Incarnation aura. Besides, now that the Eastern Gate has fallen anything could happen. Berculi asked assuming Alice was indeed the 'Priestess of Light', what does it mean for the current situation. Alice considered the conversation Kirito had with the Outer Gods, about the 'World's End Altar'. If she could get there she might be able to ask the Gods for aid. Alice said she'll declare herself to the enemy, and draw them away. As they chase after her the others can outflank the enemy and destroy them.

Scene cuts back to D and Vector, with the god asking D if 3,000 was enough. D couldn't understand what he meant, so he asked again if 3,000 sacrifices from the demi-human reserves would be able to provide enough energy. D's fear turned into intoxicating joy and dependence towards Vector for being able to think this cruelly and efficiently, and promised yes it's enough, and she'll have her forces to bring forth the most hell-like deaths onto their foes.

The beastmen leader was the only demi-human leader left, and he protested at how his people will be

used for sacrifices. They wouldn't even get a chance to prove their worth on the battlefield, and now would be slaughtered like livestock. To prevent D taking advantage of Vector's orders the beastmen leader's lover offered herself and her own 3,000 troops as sacrifices, preventing the beastmen leader somehow ending up among the sacrifices. She told him they will meet again in heaven after their deaths. The 3,000 sacrifices left the army ranks, proud that they will be used to deal a serious blow against the enemy, while the other 7,000 wept at their departure. At 100m away from the human camp the 3,000 beastmen are sacrificed, their bodies bursting from the inside out, shining brightly with their life force, before being blackened and writhed like many long insects. Among the dying shrieks were the 3,000's proud chants that they fight for the glory of the beastmen. The beastmen leader collapsed, smashed his fist onto the ground and wept, that the humans have again and again grinded the demi-humans down for their own ends. His right eyes throbbed painfully with every one of his internal shrieks of anger and hatred.

Turning time back around 30 minutes, Berculi amended Alice's plan of using herself as bait by sending half the army with her. Bersuli reasoned just by herself won't be convincing enough for the Dark Territory army to go after her, and Alice didn't have the proof to suggest otherwise. Berculi said he'll be going with her as part of the bait (as a aside, Fanatio and Berculi bickered a bit like a old couple as for why she thought it was a bad idea for Berculi to head off away from her). Of the bait group, there's 5 high level Synthesis Knights, their dragons, 1,200 guards, and 50 people in charge of supplies. 10 wagons are with this group, one of them houses Kirito, Teiza and Ronie.

The bait group started to leave, sure they won't be hit by long range attacks any more, but then the dark mages' curse spell attacked.

Part 30-1

In previous part/s: Alice used the mana from within the valley to wipe out the vanguard of Dark Territory. Dark Territory retaliated by having the dark mages sacrificing 3,000 beastmen left in the vanguard for a curse spell to destroy the human army. Synthesis Twenty-six, the one with Frost Whip sacrificed himself to stop that curse from killing everyone.

(this next part will be briefly covered, more sub-par plot despite reasonably good fight scene)

The curse spell attacked, and neither Berculi or Alice had enough power left in their swords to counter. Synthesis Twenty-six charged ahead to draw the curse to himself, boosted by Eugeo's Blue Rose sword (yet another *dues ex machina*). His Release Recollection got boosted, attacked some of the bugs, resulting in the curse treating him as the priority one target. Synthesis Twenty-six's HP was 5,600 at maximum, but getting hit by the spell reduced him to -500,000 instantly (Flere821 & Chinese TL note: yeah, first time I've heard HP can go into negatives in UW >.>). Synthesis Twenty-six, what's left of him after that attack anyway, died in the arms of Alice, satisfied he has done some good for her.

In this part: Alice was enraged that her student was gone, and had his dragon plus her own use their flame breath on maximum power, plus her own Release Recollection, to wipe out the dark mages. D only survived by sacrificing two other mages to use as raw materials for her shield.

Alice declared herself in front of the Dark Territory army, naming herself also as the Priestess of Light.

She did so to buy time for the human army to regroup. Gabriel saw Alice, thought she looked a lot like Alicia (his fiancée he killed) and ordered her to be captured. The entire army veered off towards her and ignored the gate into human territory.

Berculi hoped by decimating enough of the Dark Territory's main force, the dark knights and gladiators, they can push for peace. However with Vector and his overwhelming Incarnation power that seemed unlikely. Alice herself felt Vector's Incarnation ability was on par with Administrator's, though if Administrator felt like silver lightning then his was a endless void. She could feel his gaze on her even as she declared herself.

Gladiators have almost reached the human army. Their body are built to be tougher than steel and invulnerable to sword slashes and stabs, and their punches can crush any armour. Alice and Berculi can't use their Release Recollection much more, their swords are tired from all the usage (Berculi shot down hundreds of gargoyle Drones in previous part/s). Synthesis Twelve volunteered to hold off the incoming attackers.

I'll skip Synthesis Twelve's backstory and her fight scenes (this takes up a sizable chunk of this part). She basically have a dimension-cutting blade, and fought with the Gladiator leader evenly against his Incarnation abilities (Called 'Overdrive', Incarnation skills that affect the internal self rather than the external world), buying enough time for humans to regroup. The two left with a draw, each had to go elsewhere to fight.

Gabriel's lieutenant led a hundred dark knights in light armour in sneak attack towards the human army, seeing the Dark Territory forces can't do this right. Teiza and Ronie was defeated and was almost executed, before Asuna descended from the skies with the goddess account. The hundred knights are swallowed up by the earth or destroyed by a barrage of light beams that rained down upon them. (For some reason Gabriel's Lieutenant recognized Asuna as 'the Flash', I have no idea why...)

Part 30-2

Berculi was stunned at the destruction, but he inferred it was the work of a human rather than a 'god' – a god won't be as merciful as to let the enemy run away, and would have killed them all with that attack.

Asuna saw the DT attack as she descended, and launched her attack. She felt a headache as she used that attack, as the feedback is hard on the STL. She knew she must have killed hundreds of the AIs Kirito worked hard for 2.5 years of his life to protect just then, but she didn't care; if it's for Kirito, there's no crime she would not commit, no punishment she would not accept. (Flere821 note: Just like Alice) Asuna reached the ground, close to where Kirito's location data is. Teiza and Ronie found her, asking if Asuna was a goddess. Asuna said she wasn't. The other 2 girls asked if she would help them all anyway, the knights, the humans, and 'Kirito-sempai'. Asuna almost cried after hearing Kirito's name, and after a few false starts she croaked out the reason she came here was for him, and could they take her to him. They did so, and Asuna shot into the wagon before Ronie have even finished saying Kirito was in there. Asuna saw Kirito sitting there, and thought this sorrow and pain might have been how he had felt when she was still stuck in ALO. Asuna inwardly swore that no matter what price she has to pay this time she

will rescue him. Asuna called Kirito's name softly, and Kirito responded. He tried to speak her name, but couldn't go past the 1st syllable; there seems to be ripples in his lifeless eyes, his body also shook, like he tried to move but his body would not let him. Asuna cried out for him to stop and then embraced him.

It would be a lie if Asuna hadn't hoped Kirito would be miraculously cured after she met him. However, he has a hole in his heart from losing his most trusted friend and ally, from this sense of loss and regret. Asuna is determined to fill that hole in his heart, and is confident there's no sense of loss that love can't fill up. And if she can't do it by herself, she'd borrow the strength from everyone. She doesn't want Kirito to feel sad ever again, and she'll protect this world he cares about. Asuna hugged Kirito tightly once more then stood back up, thanking Ronie and Teiza for protecting Kirito all this time. Ronie nodded slowly and asked with a trembling voice if Asuna wasn't the goddess Suteia then who is she? Asuna told them her name, and said she's from the same world as Kirito, here to finish the same mission.

Part 31-1

The merchant's guild leader asked Vector if the army could rest for the night, assuming they're not going to move out right now. Vector granted the request for rest. Gabriel thought about what happened today, and figured Rath's side sent in someone as well with a Super account. While things are now more complicated, Gabriel doesn't mind that things have now become more interesting.

Asuna, Ronie and Teiza talked. Asuna said the 'Real World' isn't as they imagined what the worlds of the gods are like. She asked them does Kirito look like a god or angel to them? Ronie and Teiza exchanged a glance and then stifled their chuckles, commenting there probably isn't a god that sneaks outside the academy every night to buy snacks to eat. Asuna was speechless that Kirito was still like that even while in UW, but she was happy that Kirito apparently haven't changed that much. Ronie asked what's the world outside like, and Asuna said she'll explain it to the ones in charge as well. The other girls agreed.

The instant Asuna's feet reached the ground outside the wagon a sword came striking at her. Asuna parried the blow on reflex, and thought the strike was powerful. Sparks flew and it took Asuna three chained hits to negate the attack completely with her rapier. A blonde beauty glared at Asuna, with anger flashed like lightning in her eyes. Ronie and Teiza hastily asked Alice to stop fighting, Asuna wasn't a enemy. Asuna was confused for a moment there why was the AI both sides IRL are after holds such enmity for her, but that was dispelled as soon as Alice spoke. Alice asked who Asuna is, and why did she approach Kirito? Asuna threw away all other emotions, reflexively raging anger swelled up inside her. In response, Asuna replied:

“‘Why’? Because he’s mine.”

Alice was furious at the response, and the two of them started fighting each other with their blades. From Asuna's POV, Alice seemed stronger and she was only able to match her because her own rapier was a GM weapon with higher priority. Berculi ended up intervening, holding back both swords with one hand each. Neither Alice or Asuna can move their swords away due to Berculi's strength. Berculi explained to Alice that Asuna was the one that protected them, though chances are she's not a god as she showed mercy. Asuna also wanted to shot back words like who does she think she is, what is she to

Kirito, but since she would still need to convince Alice to come with her to leave UW so it's better to not argue right now.

Asuna confirmed she's from the outside world, and Alice exclaimed is she the same as Kirito? Asuna thought about how Kirito have been in here for 3 years, how much of that was with Alice? Alice wanted to ask similar things, like how long was Asuna with Kirito, before Berculi said they can discuss things with the others together, it wasn't like the army would be able to move further tonight. Alice agreed to Berculi's words. Berculi invited Ronie and Teiza to attend as well, asking them to prepare some tea for the group and a flask of wine for him.

Asuna wants to see Kirito one more time before they go, but Alice told her without her permission Asuna is not allowed into the wagon; protecting Kirito is her responsibility. Asuna held back her anger, and shot back Alice should stop calling her (Asuna's) Kirito by name. Both of them 'hmph!'d and then headed off following Berculi. Teiza commented guess things isn't going to be peaceful from now on, and said they better go prepare the tea, boil water and such. Since Teiza headed off 1st she didn't hear Ronie's muttering that Kirito was supposed to be her's.

Asuna stared at the campfire, noting how realistic it was. People have already introduced themselves, Berculi sat on one side of her and next to her was Alice. Asuna noted even by the light of the campfire her golden hair is stunningly beautiful, even when seen by a member of the same sex. Others present includes Synthesis twelve and forty-nine, ten guard captains, and Ronie and Teiza. Asuna can't deny everyone here are all humans with how lifelike they are, and it's hard to imagine Alice was the only one that can break the rules. Asuna thought she can relate to why Kirito wanted to protect them all, and began her explanation.

Alice had once thought, during her 6 months' time in hiding, how the sheep fenced up in the village nearby are living peacefully and didn't have to worry about things as they are protected by humans. She had no idea UW was in a similar situation. Others with her are probably going through the same shock as well.

Asuna explained how the RW, the world outside UW, is also populated by humans, mortals with emotions and desires. Two factions there are fighting over UW, one side wants to protect them all while the other seeks to remove one among them and then let UW be destroyed and returned into the void. The various people here are shaken, but Berculi brought the meeting to calm again, saying everyone here have already knew DT surrounded the Human Kingdom and was always looking for a chance to invade, yet none of them had ever considered this deeply; so what was one more world outside of that? He then asked who the enemy side is after among them, and Alice was shocked to find out it was her.

Alice involuntarily exclaimed, standing up to say that she would not run away and abandon this world; she was a Synthesis Knight tasked with protecting this world, it was her duty to stay and fight. Asuna also stood up and shot back if she's caught them this world would be over, can she really risk that? The enemy could be here at any moment. Berculi commented her info is a bit out of date, the enemy is already here. Dark God Vector is already here, and chances are he's one of the enemies in RW. Asuna muttered how they (Rath) hadn't locked up the Super accounts in DT.

Synthesis Forty-nine asked why does the enemy want Alice so much, and Synthesis Twelve replied it was

due to the Seal of the Right Eye. Alice was shocked that she knew about this, and asked why. Synthesis Twelve replied she felt a pain there every time she considered how great it would feel if she can cut down the Cathedral, the most solid thing in this world. After a moment of silence Berculi coughed, and continued the discussion like that confession didn't happen. He mentioned how their right eye's seal would give them pain, and force them to not think about rule breaking. Alice took the explanation from there, saying if they persist their right eye will explode. She confirmed their suspicion that in order to fight the elder and Administrator she gave up her right eye to do so. Teiza commented that Eugeo did the same thing, killing others and his right eye burst. Berculi asked Asuna if the people in RW had this seal, and she replied no they don't; that's the only difference between the ones in RW and UW. Berculi asked then why does RW want Alice so badly, if there's so many others like Alice there already. Asuna hesitated and didn't reply. Alice then remembered when they fought Administrator this seal was called 'Code 871', and asked what does this mean in RW language. Asuna then realized the leak from Ocean Turtle isn't from the JSDF side, but instead from Rath's researchers that isn't separated from Fujioka and others right now. The seal was probably to buy time for the US to attack before the project is completed, and this researcher could go to where Asuna had dived into UW and unplug her STL if given the opportunity. Asuna thought about logging out to warn them of this danger, but decided UW's situation to defeat Vector has higher priority because of the accelerated time difference.

However, neither Asuna or Rath realized 2 hours ago Gabriel ordered his hacker to remove the acceleration, so they only have 20 hours left before JSDF intervention. Only Yui figured out Gabriel's motive behind this and had left Ocean Turtle and out into the internet in response. (Flere821 note: The motive isn't explained here)

Alice interrupted Asuna's thoughts, and repeated her question on Code 871. Alice also stopped the 'polite speech' keigo she used on Asuna. Asuna thought she has always got on well with her friends, with the last person she fought with on a regular basis being Kirito. She doubted however she'd ever get along well with Alice like she had gotten over being unfriendly towards Kirito. Asuna replied yes, Code 781 was put on UW people by their enemies.

Alice however was considering other things, like how she made a terrible first impression on Asuna. She thought if Asuna chased after Kirito and came into this world, they must have some kind of bond and Asuna deserved to see Kirito. Why then does she (Alice) feel anxious about this?

Because she was responsible for Kirito over the last 6 months and now suddenly there's a new person involved? Or because of her own hostility towards Asuna's sword skills? Judging by speed alone, Asuna is faster than even Fanatio or anyone else she has ever seen. It looked like she launched multiple attacks at once, Alice had never felt so stunned by someone around her age.

Or, maybe, this was because Asuna was shockingly beautiful? *snip long purple prose on Asuna's beauty* Asuna's beauty was of such that even if she declared herself to be the goddess there would be very few people not believing that claim.

Alice wants to know, not about the RW or their enemies, but about Asuna, Kirito, and her sword skills.

Asuna said very little on why RW wanted Alice, saying she'd prefer for Alice to see for herself without preconceptions. Asuna said if she explained everything then they'd be disillusioned about RW, that place

is not the realm of the gods or a paradise. The RW is uglier than UW, and Alice would probably not forgive the residents of UW. Even so Asuna said there are those that would wish to get along with people of UW, people like Kirito for example. Alice decided to drop this topic, first thing to do right now is defeat Vector. Asuna said she'll help to fight as well, raising morale of the guard captains – no matter what Asuna says, she's seen as a goddess and probably beat back their enemies no problem. Asuna dashed their hopes that she could sunder the earth repeatedly, saying that brings great burden onto her mind and while she can just bear the pain safety measures might just remove her from UW without her say in this. Alice spoke up amidst the disappointment, saying it should be up to the people of UW to protect themselves and not rely on outside help. Synthesis Forty-nine agreed, saying Asuna is still only human and so as humans themselves they can still fight. Synthesis Twelve chipped in with her quiet voice, saying she wants a rematch against her previous opponent as well. Morale was restored.

In her own tent, Asuna asked herself if this was alright. From Rath's POV, Asuna should just bring Alice to the system console and log them both out. From there remodelled AIs can be created as weapons, and UW can be deleted to save power and space. However, ending UW now means losing contact with Kirito and any possibility of him healing, and Asuna would not risk that. Asuna decided to go to where Kirito is right now, spending this last night with him in hopes of curing him. She snuck out of her tent, snuck past her ceremonial guard, and went to where Kirito is. She could sense where Kirito is and went straight for him (Flere821 & TL note: Yeah, apparently everyone in UW can sense where others are...).

Alice was waiting for Asuna and knew she'd come by. However Alice couldn't speak the words to tell Asuna to leave, as she could see in Asuna's eyes Asuna love Kirito, and from this love Asuna has determination and worry about something. Alice sighed and told herself it's not that she's giving up, she has a responsibility to restore Kirito and this is part of that effort. Alice said she'll make a deal with Asuna; Asuna can see Kirito now, but they'll both share everything they know about him to each other. Asuna was surprised for less than a second, before smiling confidently: "Alright, but there's a lot to say, and probably can't be told completely in just one night."

Alice was displeased at this, and asked what does Asuna have on him. Asuna replied they had known each other for one year, became a couple for one year, and have lived together for two weeks. Alice stiffened, that was longer than she expected. Alice didn't want to back down, and said she had fought by Kirito's side for an entire night, and then in the 6 months after that looked after him without leaving his side. Asuna was the one that face-faulted this time. Both of them let out an oppressive aura, the night air crackled and any leaves that entered the space between them exploded.

A small voice interrupted them; neither Alice or Asuna noticed Ronie coming towards them in their standoff. Ronie said she have been with Kirito for a month, tidying his room and being taught sword skills. Not as much time as Asuna or Alice had spent with Kirito, but she'd like to join this exchange of info as well. Asuna and Alice both blinked, and sighed. They recognized Ronie as 'one of them' and let her in into this discussion, with Alice silently praising Ronie's courage.

The three of them went inside the wagon, with two beds and one of them was taken up by Kirito sleeping. Asuna saw Kirito slept with two swords and gave a sorrowful smile in remembrance. Alice caught that smile and asked what happened. Asuna replied without her previous enmity that Kirito was known as the 'Dual-wielding' swordsman once upon a time. Alice remembered how Kirito was wielding

two swords when he fought against Administrator. Asuna say she might as well start talking from here.

The plains at night gradually became colder, with only the purple moonlight lighting up the world. At this night before the final battle, the only calm patch of the world was from a tent where a candle seemed like it'll never go out and smothered laughs came out from the tent now and then. The only one that could hear that was a owl that happened to be perched in a nearby tree.

Berculi woke up from a dream. The time is 4:10am, and he knows this because his sword used to be part of the Clocktower so it grants him a innate skill of always knowing what time it was. In the dream, he remembered Administrator asking him has he ever foreseen his own death. He couldn't remember when exactly this conversation happened, it could have been 100 or 150 years ago. Administrator commented that was how she felt every day as she woke, that as she does not have command over everything there's always the chance of a new enemy rising. Berculi now understands the words 'foreseeing death' as seeking to know how to die fittingly. Berculi thought he would not live past this day.

At the same time, to the north of the human army's position DT troops began to set up ten large climbing ropes for them to cross a ravine to attack. Both the Gladiator and dark knight leaders are angered that Vector ordered their combined 10,000 troops to commit to a assault that will lead to massive deaths, and they're forbidden to help anyone that falls off the ropes. However, with Vector's strength they could not disobey these orders. They hoped to cross before the human kingdom troops find them, but their hopes are dashed as one of the scouts saw them.

Part 31-2

Asuna, Alice and Ronie woke up after a night's talking, and began eating breakfast. Asuna thought while still half asleep due to the time being accelerated 1000x, she'd be eating 1000x more meals... hopefully she won't be getting fat like this. Glancing at Alice, Asuna noted she has a perfectly balanced body that's apparent even through the thick cloth Alice wore. Asuna wondered if in UW the body's numerical values are set from birth, or was it only a reflection of their imagination.

Ronie was feeding Kirito small bites of food, enough to keep him alive and healthy but Kirito refused to eat a lot before today – it was like he was getting thinner every day. Like he wanted to erase himself from not just this world, but in every world he was alive in. Ronie commented Kirito has changed, being more willing to eat now, and Alice wondered if it was because three beautiful girls had slept with him; the three of them talked to 1am about Kirito before finally falling to sleep from exhaustion, and just dropped down around him to sleep.

Asuna thought Kirito doesn't change no matter where he goes. He is kind to everyone, but because of that he tries to shoulder too much and get hurt in the process. Asuna thought Kirito really gone too far this time, trying to shoulder the weight of an entire world by himself. He should rely more on her and others, he's well-liked by many after all. Though Asuna adds nobody loves him more than she does. Asuna resolved to tell Kirito when he wakes up it's alright, everything has been settled. What he had wanted to protect she and others have already done so for him. Looking at Alice and Ronie, they nodded as if they could hear her thoughts and agreed with her.

Then, the signal for enemy attacking sounded.

The 4 Synthesis Knights and Asuna met up at the north of their camp. They found out about the climbing rope bridges. Vector seemed to be uncaring about his losses to choose this plan, but even so a third of his forces are likely to survive this crossing and that would still leave an army of 7,000 to face against. The human side only have 1,000 with Berculi and others right now. Berculi decided this is war, and they should take the chance when it is offered to them. He planned to have Synthesis Forty-nine's Release Recollection (giant boomerang) to cut off the ropes, and the other 4 will guard him as he does so. Alice thought she herself had burned thousands of lives away already with her spell previously, she had no right to ask for a honourable battle. All that's left for her is draw her sword and kill her enemies.

Gladiator leader Ishukaan is anxious and wants everyone to cross quickly before enemies arrive. He is thoroughly angry that Vector forbid him to cross first, and now he has to watch his comrades fall to their doom every time the wind blows across this ravine. It's not even a honourable death against a enemy, just death trying to attempt a jester trick. Many of the ones that fell gave a bestial roar of regret that they didn't die on a battlefield.

A group of 5 riders came by, and Ishukaan hoped it was just scouts but unfortunately it was all Synthesis Knights. 30 gladiators tried to hold them back, but were mowed down instantly. Then one of the rope bridges was severed. Ishukaan's anger at his forces being decimated without a chance to die like a warrior threatened to burst his right eye.

Gabriel didn't even care 3 of the rope bridges was severed almost instantly. By this point he had lost over 70% of his forces in the two days' battle, but he wasn't worried at all. He's just waiting for his plan to come to fruition.

Eight Hours ago:

Gabriel's hacker reduced the acceleration down to 1x, and then sent out a notice to the US online gaming community. A brand new VRMMO is being released, a R18+ game focused on slaughter with no moral code restrictions. This is in complete defiance towards current gaming laws, where explicit blood and gore, corpses and screams of death was forbidden to be shown in VR games. While you can ignore this law, it was nigh impossible for your servers to not be shut down. In just 8 hours over 30,000 copies of the entrance program was downloaded. Every player was given a Lvl70 Dark Knight account, the one like Gabriel's lieutenant Vassago had. Rath side didn't even think of this possibility, that people can use The Seed's transfer function to contact this world. Yui noticed this plan as she kept a eye on the internet at large when Asuna came into UW, and tried to call Rath to tell this through Asuna's phone. The phone wasn't in the same room as they're not holed up in against the attack on Ocean Turtle however, so Yui went elsewhere for help.

Sinon and Lyfa were called by Yui for help. Yui accessed Kirito's bank account to give Sinon bus fees and told her to come immediately.

Higa was munching on a energy bar and wondered what's taking Asuna so long. It's been over 6 hours since she logged in, and should have been 4 months inside. Could it really take that long to get to World

End Altar? Then a phone called, it was one of the branch offices in developing STL trying to contact Kikuoka. Two female high school students showed up and asked for him, saying company secrets they should not know about; they told Kikuoka to check UW's STRA rate right now. Higa did so, found it was reduced to only 1x and was shocked. Kikuoka frantically tried to confirm who the two girls are, and the caller said they called themselves 'Sinon' and 'Leafa', obvious not Japanese names despite looking like Japanese people.

Yui confirmed Suguha and Sinon was allowed into the Rath office, before went back into ALO to meet up with 4 others. In Kirito and Asuna's 22nd floor cottage was Silica, Lizbeth, Klein and Agil. They logged in after Yui called them and requested them to do so. Yui reported to them the current situation. Klein scowled that Kirito had once again got himself into a mess all by himself. In the process of reporting back we now have confirmed Yui has evolved from being a Top-Down AI into a 'True' AI, being able to feel emotions instead of just showing replies given certain cues. Yui is crying that the life/AI formed from the many experiences of everyone in VR, their sadness, laughter, love, and tears are now in danger. Yui is afraid for Kirito and Asuna's wellbeing, she loves them and wants to help. Lizbeth said of course they'll help, Silica hugged Yui, Klein said they won't just leave Kirito alone while Agil commented they owe Kirito a great debt and now they can try and pay some of it back. Yui is overwhelmed by emotions, and thought she must be bugged right now – for efficiency's sake she should be passing more pressing info on, not crying. All she could do is say thanks to them while in tears for agreeing to help.

They started discussing various ways for them to try and counter the US player invasion. Klein proposed to log in themselves using Rath accounts and fight the US players head on, ~~NEETS~~ committed gamers in Japan are no worse than US gamers. Agil pointed out there's a problem – right now it's 4:30am in Japan, while in US it's the middle of the day. The US side will have overwhelmingly more players due to time zone differences. Yui says there are more powerful accounts than the ones used by the US available, and she brought up this plan even knowing it was equivalent to asking for the 4 here to give up half of themselves:

The 'Convert' function – they can send their The Seed account into UW to fight.

5am, in the ALO World Tree dome, the place where it used to house the Grand Quest but is now used as a neutral meeting area between the 9 races. Over 3,000 players gathered. Klein and Lizbeth used every method they had, even contacting people IRL, to get them to log on. Now 8 of the faction leaders have gathered, and many professional players from other games have also transferred into ALO. The 3,000 here are the elite players in Japan. Lizbeth explained the situation and asked for their aid. Sakuya gave Lizbeth's story the benefit of the doubt and asked what's involved in logging into UW. The players grew steadily more agitated after hearing A) there's no way to log out of your own will, B) the pain absorb function is non-existent there, and C) if you die in UW it's likely you will lose your The Seed account.

A Salamander player on the same rank as Eugene within the Salamander faction said they're not doing this crap, risking their accounts is too much. He accused the SAO survivors of being elitists and can go be heroes themselves, the AIs be damned. Lizbeth felt there's some grains of truth in those accusations, the SAO players mainly hung out in new Aincrad and didn't go down into ALO much, and kept their contacts to ex-SAO players. The ALO leaders they knew, Eugene, Sakuya, and Alicia didn't speak up to help Lizbeth,

waiting to see if she can convince them all of her resolve.

Lizbeth told them while on the verge of tears the SAO survivors might have problems distinguishing reality and fantasy, but none of them saw themselves as heroes. The ex-SAO players are forced into attending the same school against their will, being monitored all the time in there, asked invasive questions like whether they feel unsuited for reality or do they feel like they want to hurt others. The government treat the SAO survivors as criminals-in-training.

Lizbeth then said to a lesser degree it's the same for all VRMMO players as well, they have a reputation of being useless and a waste of taxpayer money. Recently there's been suggestions to force all net-gamers into military service to forcibly make them accept reality. Lizbeth yelled out this, ALO and The Seed VR, is their reality as well, and by no means is it a place of escapism. They have real friends here, real happy and sad times, meetings and partings. They all work so hard here in VR, why else would they do so if this is all false? If they can abandon this place just because it's not real, then where is their true 'reality'?

Lizbeth finally let her tears fall, and asked them all: "The many worlds everyone had cultivated together, like the World Tree here that gathered, bloomed and finally bore fruit, I want to protect them! I beg you all... please lend us your strength...!"

After a moment of silence, through her tear-stained eyes several thousands pairs of fairy wings activated and glittered.

Asuna kept fighting, even knowing she's snuffing out others' lives. It was a hard battle, but at the rate things are going it will be their victory. But then, several thousands of black lines began to drop down from the heavens 1-2km away from them, made of numbers and letters. Everyone stopped fighting to look at this sight. Seconds after the lines landed, the lines formed into people.

Ishukaan was so stunned he forgot to be angry. Dark Knights with swords and spears showed up where the black columns landed. They weren't like the Knights he's familiar with, with their undisciplined stance and filled with desire. There's more than 30,000 of them, and if the Dark Knights had this number to begin with they could have overthrown the council to begin with and ruled DT by force. The Dark Knights with him have no idea what is happening either. Ishukaan then realized his people, no, not just that, the entirety of the DT was meant to be a sacrificial pawn for Vector, buying time for this new army to show up. The pain in his right eye incapacitated him as he went from a 17-year old warrior who cared only about improving his skill and the wellbeing of his people into someone that can think about the situation of the entire UW. The 30,000 attacked, and for a moment Ishukaan thought even Vector had some mercy as it looked like the 500 Dark Knights currently fighting the Synthesis Knights will be saved. Then it turned out the 30,000 killed off DT troops as willingly as they attacked their enemy.

Berculi was stunned at the appearance of the new army. Asuna heard the warcries of the new enemy as they closed in, and found it to be coarse language in English (Flere821 note: Anyone here ever been in a MMO mass PvP or mass PvM situation as the recently released event started? The chatter is kinda distinctive...) and realized it's US players logged in using The Seed. There was no time to explain the UW

people aren't just NPCs, so Asuna had to fight. She used her account to call up mountains, and blocked off the east side. Her mind was nearly incapacitated by the pain however, the ability is bringing heavy load onto her brain. Though Asuna kept going, as she thought if this is for helping Kirito then this is nothing. As expected, on the west side the players were slaughtering DT troops without caring on whose side they're on. Their only hope is to open a way to the south and escape. Alice held up Asuna as she collapsed, saying it's time for them to fight instead. Alice waved off Asuna's protest it's enemies from the RW, several tens of thousands of enemies with unlimited desire and bloodthirst, and Berculi says they need some time to shine as well. Asuna saw through his bravado however, as his forces are surrounded by 30x their own number. Their side prepared their formation and waited.

Ishukaan shook, his forces were slaughtered like livestock by the new army without even a chance to fight back. And due to Vector's orders as the strongest the troops have to keep passing on the remaining rope bridges, feeding the bloodthirst of the black legion. Ishukaan wanted to move to where Vector is, asking him to stop the command to cross, then found Vector had flew off towards the battlefield on a dragon. Ishukaan saw Vector looked down at them, without a shred of remorse or care for his people. Ishukaan finally had enough, and ripped his own right eye out of its socket. A leader had responsibility to go with his strength, and Vector ignored his responsibility. Ishukaan denied that Vector now have authority over him. He broke the Code 871, and along with that any loyalty to Vector.

Ishukaan told his 2nd in command Vector gave no orders about what to do with the new Dark Knights, and told them they can kill the Knights all off and it won't be disobeying Vector's orders. He told him to prepare the troops to cross the bridge, and he will now go prepare the bridge. Incarnation fire engulfed first his legs, then his entire body. If he can't travel across the bridges... then he can just fly over the 100m wide ravine. He Leaped, and a trail of fire was left behind him. The record for Leap was 20m, yet Ishukaan tried to challenge 5x that distance. He rose up into the sky, reached the top of the arc carried by the wind, but then the wind stopped. He descended, missing the edge by 5m. Before he fell into the abyss his 2nd in command roared out to him, did the impossible and smashed a rock the size of his head towards Ishukaan. The force gathered in his right arm however also shredded the gladiator's right fist. Ishukaan gritted his teeth, and jumped off of the rock that flew at him to try and reach his destination with one last Leap.

Asuna took down yet another Dark Knight, yet there's too many of them. They managed to reach the south, but were headed off by an army. Eventually, one of the guards figured out their enemy fades away a bit after dying, they're fighting a army of spectres. The Dark Knights broke through their defensive line, and blood began to spill. The realistic death scenes only increased the bloodthirst of the US players. Asuna cried out for them to stop, and returned to attack. As she fought she slipped on the blood spilt, and a battleaxe cut off Asuna's left arm below her elbow. Before the group of Knights finished killing Asuna however, Ishukaan dropped down from above and pulped the enemies. Ishukaan then punched the ground, sending a shockwave that blew away all the nearby players. He grabbed Asuna by her collar and offered her a deal: make a bridge across the ravine, and he + his 4,000 Gladiators will help her kill off this phantom army. Synthesis Twelve, Shuuta, said he's not lying, the two of them had fought before. Asuna agreed, and think it's only right her last shot (too much burden on her mind) of using the power to manipulate terrain is used for creation, not destruction. Asuna made the

bridge, though the mental pain was even more than how her hand got sliced off. The 4,000 Gladiators roared in approval and crossed, ready to fight their enemy.

1 minute before:

Alice kept fighting the Dark Knights, who had no resolve of a Knight or matching sword skills, yet kept fighting and stepped over the corpses of their fallen comrades. It was like they cared nothing about the sanctity of life, regardless of which side. If everyone in Asuna's world was like this, then no wonder Asuna denied it was the land of the gods. The long time of constant slaughter had dulled Alice's reflexes, and she had had enough of this war. She summoned a flaming lance, and blew a hole in the enemy formations. She saw a hill nearby, and charged ahead. If she could reach the top of there she can repeat the spell that blew apart the DT army yesterday and end this war now. Berculi shouted at her to stay back, though she charged ahead without hearing his warning. Alice reached the top of the hill, finally had a breath of air that's not heavy with the scent of blood, then was attacked from behind.

Gabriel planned this gamble from the start: force the human side into a hard enough fight and Alice will try and repeat her army-killer spell from yesterday. He stayed hidden up in the air, and waited for what was probably the longest 10 minutes he had in UW before he found Alice breaking through. His Void Incarnation had already devoured the mind of his dragon, and he commanded his steed to fly down to intercept Alice. He caught her unaware and knocked her out, then flew off from this fight. This world and the people he summoned no longer has any meaning left for him, and he made his way towards the World End Altar.

Part 32-1

Berculi was shocked that Vector sacrificed 50,000 DT troops and 30,000 summoned soldiers just to capture Alice, as he left as soon as Alice was knocked out. Berculi knew Vector was around since he could sense his Incarnation aura from far off and was on guard, but Berculi didn't realize this was his plan. Berculi was pissed at how little he knew about his opponent, and let out a roar in anger for the 1st time in decades. Vector ignored this and continued to fly south on his dragon. After Synthesis 49 cleared a path through, Berculi chased after Vector on his own dragon, Starbiter. Alice's and Synthesis 9's dragons also followed along, trying to help.

The 4,000 Gladiators that crossed the bridge began to fight their way past the summoned players. Asuna was impressed with their skills as she tried to heal herself from her severed hand, using a spell she memorized earlier. Asuna and Ishukaan then received word Vector had captured Alice, and Berculi had flown off in pursuit. Asuna quickly filled Ishukaan in about the current situation, even as she felt this is like one of those cliché RPG plots – bad guy captures the girl, and the world will end because of that. True in this case however, as once Alice is taken out of UW the place will be deleted. Ishukaan then decided to just catch up to Vector and recover Alice, surprising Asuna in how he can disobey orders. He and Synthesis 12, Shuuta, decides to hold off the army here so Asuna can go chase after Vector.

Asuna asked Synthesis 49 whether Berculi can catch up to Vector. Synthesis 49 said it's possible, as Berculi had three dragons to shift through in flying so they won't be burdened too much. Though whether Berculi can win when he caught up is a different matter. Synthesis 49 optimistically thought

Berculi can win, he's the strongest Knight the humans have.

The US team readied a 2nd wave of US players, this time 20,000 of them. They're going to be dropped in between Asuna and Vector.

Vassago, Gabriel's lieutenant woke up after being killed earlier in UW. He found he was asleep for 8 hours. Gabriel's hacker filled Vassago in on Gabriel's plans of recruiting players to fight for them. Vassago has doubts the plan to drop another 20,000 players in will solve things instantly, the Synthesis Knights are brokenly powerful. Then he remembered how he died, killed by 'Asuna the Flash'. He told the hacker the 'K organisation' (what they call Rath and the operation to make AIs, as it's led by Kikuoka) has already sent in Japanese VRMMO players. Vassago wants to log in again, to fight Asuna one more time and see if Kirito's in there as well. The hacker told him they're out of elite Dark Knight accounts, so unless he wants to log in using cannon fodder accounts he got nothing. Vassago smirked and told the hacker to transfer a 'The Seed' account into UW, he has a high level one stashed away. The hacker was unnerved by Vassago's grin, and by the few words he said to him before going back inside the STL. The account number was "SAO12418871".

Asuna went back to Kirito's place and found him struggling to get up. She doesn't know whether this is due to him feeling Alice have been captured or him feeling Asuna has lost a hand. Asuna used Incarnation to fix herself. Asuna hugged Kirito one more time for a few seconds to try and wake him up, then told him she'll try and rescue Alice.

Synthesis 49 was placed in charge by Asuna of the human forces here, being the only Synthesis Knight left here. They moved out, trying to catch up to Vector. The 20,000 US players then dropped down in front of them, blocking their way through completely. In the human side's panic and despair Sinon logged in, wearing sky-blue armour and wields a bright white bow, and nuked the 20,000 army with her account's 'Unlimited destruction' ability. Countless laser strikes from above annihilated the players.

Part 32-2

Sinon remembers Higa's explanation that the Goddess accounts aren't GM accounts, just very powerful Player Character ones so not to break UW people's SoD. (Flere821 note: WTH? This goes against earlier worldbuilding info (like how Asuna's GM gear didn't get diced by Alice's sword)... and after reading the next few parts, this change is purely to set up for some unpleasant scenes later >.>) Her nuking ability runs on the area's energy, and have a cooldown period of 10 minutes. Sinon comments she likes the manual kind more than the automatic kind anyway. Her attack only wiped out 10,000 players or so, but with how shaken the players are the human side can probably break through. Sinon's account also has the unlimited flight ability, and she used it to fly down to where Asuna was. Asuna gave a flying tackle hug to Sinon when she saw her. Sinon told Asuna their group should retreat into the ruins she saw earlier when she was flying. Sinon then asked to see Kirito, and Asuna brought her over to Kirito's wagon.

Teiza and Ronie both mistook Sinon as a goddess, which the RW girls explained she's not. After being told Sinon's also a friend of Kirito's, Teiza sighed and Ronie muttered "they all seem to be girls". Sinon snarked privately herself the girls diving into UW isn't even all of them. Sinon saw Kirito herself after being told his condition by Higa, and went to embrace him. Sinon thought if he has lost his self, then forget what

Higa had said about it being not repairable, she and others' love can be gathered and used to fill his heart (Flere821 note: Sinon+Kirito shippers rejoice, for the passage here are concrete proof Sinon loves Kirito, instead of just camaraderie as suggested by some).

Sinon then kissed Kirito on the cheek. Due to no knowledge about Fluctlights and Incarnation, Sinon has no clue her idea of giving love to Kirito is not that far off from the only method to cure Kirito. She also didn't feel Kirito respond slightly to her kiss.

Sinon tried to comfort the other girls present that when they need him the most Kirito will wake up (TN note: Which has been said quite a few times now by different people. Yet after thousands of deaths Kirito is still like this...). Sinon said she'll fly to the ruins at the south to scout out the place, but was stopped by Asuna desperately. Asuna convinced Sinon to instead fly after Vector who had captured Alice. Sinon did so, while wondering where did Leafa went, she was supposed to have been logged in at the same time.

Scene change, to the plains near the Eastern Gate. The Orc (previously translated as 'beastmen' tribe using Chinese version, but after seeing the Jap raw being 'O-ku' (オーク) in katakana I'll go with 'Orc') leader named Riruperin was scavenging the battlefield for what's left of his people after being sacrificed by the dark mages. He found the fang earrings of the princess of his tribe. The living sacrifices of 5,000 of his people were ultimately in vain, having only killed just one Synthesis Knight and the Dark Mages were wiped out in return by Alice. Vector had left, and without cancelling his order of staying to fight the humans his people are forced into a meatgrinder.

Then, he found Leafa dropping down almost right next to him from above. After some talk Riruperin was acknowledged as a human by Leafa, something he has a complex about and this was a recognition he had never received in his life. This was covered in previous sections as well (Flere821 note: though I kinda skipped this as I thought it was unimportant at the time). The 'cannibals', after checking Jap version, I'll now be calling them 'Ogres'(オーガ). Leafa asks where she landed into. There's some BS never mentioned before in the series about her bad luck with new equipment, every time she uses new hardware it was buggy. Hence, her appearance here rather than where Asuna is. Leafa also decided to not kill anyone unless she really has to when she's in UW, the Fluctlights are just like humans. She's in this to fight other players that are logged in. Riruperin says he'll take Leafa prisoner and bring her to Vector. After thinking about it Leafa agreed to go along with him peacefully, as she thinks this is the best way to get to Vector. And with her infinite healing skill she'd still be in top shape after getting there. Then, D, the leader of dark mages, who survived the earlier attack by Alice shot out of the ground and used this chance to launch a sneak attack on Leafa.

Scene change, Berculi is trying to catch up to Vector. Berculi might have 3 dragons to cycle through, but Vector is still ahead somehow like his dragon doesn't get tired. Berculi decided to use his secret technique, Uragiri, to stop Vector. With this technique despite how Vector's a few dozen KMs ahead the left wing of his dragon are blasted off.

Part 33-1

(Flere821 note: This next bit I'll be very brief about, more tentacle/rape fetish on the author's part >.<) D's fingers are turned into tentacles/worms and they impaled themselves into Leafa, sucking her HP out.

Leafa's armour were ripped off easily (Flere821 + TL notes: WTF?! This is supposed to be GM gear right? How is this ripped off so easily?), and D is sadistically enjoying the suffering she's doing to Leafa. Despite pain beyond anything she has ever felt, Leafa is dumb/naïve/noble enough to just let D to keep draining her so she doesn't have to kill a Fluctlight (her mind was possibly affected by the pain so she's not thinking clearly). I'll also skip the humiliation stuff, it's not R18 but it doesn't add anything to the plot. Ultimately, Riruperin had enough of D's one-sided torture, his right eye burst and he tried to kill D off. Leafa got free of the tentacle-stuff thanks to him and dealt the final blow to finish off D.

Scene change, Gabriel's dragon barely landed and then died. The location has a lot of rocky plateaus, cylinder rocks over 100m in diameter, and Gabriel landed on one of them. He planned to just take another dragon with his Incarnation after Berculi lands. Gabriel thought with only a few Synthesis Knights left and 50,000 players on his side, victory will soon be decided. He considered disarming Alice of her weapons and armour until she's barely covered by a piece of cloth, but decided against it with a pursuer about to catch up to him. Alice was beautiful and he wanted to savour the process, giving it the attention and care it deserves.

The narration then explained why Alice hasn't woken up yet. The GM account Vector is built to manipulate other Fluctlights, for example freezing Fluctlights or moving them away. As Vector was not an entity meant to be worshiped, SoD can be ignored and Vector was given the highest HP count and best gear in the UW, along with the passive trait of being immune to spells. Gabriel's own Incarnation being focused on Devouring the heart and souls of others complements Vector's skillset, so it can lead to effects like Alice being kept unconscious or consuming Zast's Incarnation of death attack.

Berculi saw Vector land and urged his dragons to keep flying. It will only take a few minutes before he catches up. In this time Berculi thought back to the dream he had earlier that morning, the memory of how Administrator asked him had he ever predicted his own death. Even after over 200 years with Administrator, Berculi didn't understand her that well. He didn't ask Alice what had happened in her battle against Administrator, partially because he had more important things like organizing the army to worry about, but also because he didn't want to know the extent of Administrator's crimes. In Berculi's eyes Administrator was just a bored and capricious princess. He had never respected her, and following her orders does not mean he has sworn loyalty to her. But he didn't dislike serving her personally despite all that.

Berculi caught up, told his dragons to wait in the sky, and if he failed then they should try rescue Alice themselves and fly north back to the army. He then jumped off his dragon and dropped down towards Vector.

The human army of 800 people reached the ruins Sinon told them about, running from the 10,000 players. Two large temples with statues everywhere, the buildings are 20m high and 300m wide. Asuna felt this place was like a mausoleum, a marker for their graves, and tried to shake that feeling off. They holed up behind a bottleneck, and Asuna asked Ronie and Teiza to protect Kirito while she went out to hold off the invaders. Asuna plans on holding the line against the 10,000 players all by herself, and was thankful the players didn't have casters in their ranks. With the amount of her HP she shouldn't die by the players' blades, she'd more likely fall because her mind cannot handle the pain feedback, her body

loses strength due to loss of will to continue. Asuna visualized just what kind of pain Kirito is feeling, just what kind of sorrow he is burdened with, and she had nothing that could shake her resolve by the time she's in place. The players rushed in, and she met them head on.

Vassago watched from on top of a statue some distance away, wearing a leather suit studded with silver nails. He had a large shortsword to his side and he's mostly covered by a black poncho. Asuna 'the Flash' is as fearsome and merciless as he remembered her to be in a fight, and promised himself before this world/Game ends he will kill her. Also, the same will be done to the Black Swordsman who had fought even more fiercely than Asuna did by her side.

Part 33-2

Berculi jumped off from his dragon 200m up in the air. If he did nothing even a Synthesis Knight would die when he lands onto the ground. Berculi generated Wind element beneath his feet, and walked down like he was on a flight of spiral stairs. He stole this technique from the Elder a decade ago, and there was no combat technique Berculi did not know in UW. For the first time in 150 years, Berculi picked up the will to kill. The last time that happened was against the 1st generation Dark Knight general. Even back then though the amount of hatred and anger felt was not as potent as what he's feeling now, and he didn't let those emotions flow into his sword back then. Berculi was angered that RW people urged DT to start a war and threw away lives needlessly. He knew not all RW people are bad, with Asuna proving a counter example. It's only people like Vector that's doing this.

Berculi focused all his Incarnation into his sword and flew the last 10m towards Vector, trying to strike him down. His sword glowed so bright even the skies lost its colour. It was the strongest sword attack ever used in UW history, the Incarnation twisting even the laws of the system, and if it hit Vector even his astronomical amount of HP would be emptied out all at once. Of course, **if** it had hit. Vector slid away at the last second, not even his black crystal armour is touched by the attack. The only thing gone was his crimson cape, it was instantly disintegrated by the attack. The hard stone beneath them had a gouge left where Berculi's blow had landed, and rocks fell off of their plateau from the force of the attack.

Berculi was shocked at how Vector dodged even that, but he was too experienced for it to affect his fighting. The next attack came less than half a second later, a slash that only nicked Vector's armour as Vector dodged yet again. This time though Berculi was sure he got Vector, as before he landed he had already finished the incantation for his Release Recollection. His 'Time-Piercing Blade' had launched an attack into the future, and Vector backed himself into that attack. The Dark God's crown was shattered from the force and Berculi was sure at any moment Vector would be severed from head to toe. Vector raised his hands up above him as if begging for mercy, but then he *caught the descending Incarnation blade attack that came from behind with his bare hands*. Berculi knew the Gladiators had a similar technique, but that could only have been done with a body of steel and it could not have handled an attack of that level of power. The attack faded away like a mirage, and absorbed into Vector's hands. Vector's wide blue eyes were dyed black like the bottomless abyss. Berculi had thought at the depths of the abyss there are countless stars, but then corrected himself:

Those were **souls**. Vector has trapped souls inside him, from everyone he has ever consumed.

Berculi asked Vector if he could absorb others' Incarnation. This was the first time Gabriel heard about the term Incarnation in UW, and deducted some of its attributes from that. Vector's voice was bone-chilling, with no indication the speaker is alive. Vector commented Berculi's Incarnation is like vintage wine, thick and sticky with a heavy taste. It's not to Vector's preference, but it doesn't hurt to have an entrée before the main course. Vector drew his thin longsword, surrounded by blue-purple will-o-wisp lights.

Vector smiled, and told Berculi he'll be drinking some more.

Scene change, one of the US players' claymores finally broke past Asuna's defence and slashed across her arms. Asuna ignored the pain like a red-hot iron rod being stuck into her, and healed it forcefully using Incarnation. With four chained hits the man responsible was struck down, cursing as he fell. Asuna had long lost track of how many she had defeated, or how long she had been fighting for. The only thing she knew for certain was the amount of players still seemed as endless as before. Asuna told herself this was nothing, the boss fights in Aincrad normally lasts a few hours anyway. Synthesis 49 (Checking the name, the katakana for his name is (レンリ) 'Renri' so from now I'll use this instead) to her left is mowing down enemies with his weapons with no problem, and to her right is the normal forces in Switch formation. They seemed to be holding up fine despite needing to switch faster and needing heal spells more often.

Asuna thought about what the US players' next move will be, they're experienced VRMMO players as well and probably won't just blindly rush into this for the rest of their attacks. They had no magic or archers, so what would they do? Asuna had just concluded they've got nothing that counter them when a wave of 20 heavy lancers came into play, with lances and heavy shields. Asuna parried an attack and stepped in to kill one of them, but his screams was not the only one that rang out. Multiple normal humans had died by the lances, and Asuna quickly went to help out there. The next wave of lancers then started running towards them however, and Asuna glanced back at the centre where she used to be. One of the youth soldiers trembled as he stood there trying to fill the gap, and Asuna tried to run back to stop the kid from being killed. Her left hand didn't manage to catch the lance in time, and the lance pierced right through her chestplate and through her belly.

Part 34-1

Berculi has never met Vector's sword style before, using minimal movements to dodge and attack. After five attacks from Vector however Berculi saw through his style and counterattacked through an opening. Sparks flew when the blades clashed, Vector's blade was pushed back and Berculi was on the verge of cutting Vector down. Vector's sword glowed brighter with the will-o-wisp light however, and the glow began to envelop even the white light of the Time-Piercing Blade. Berculi's sword's Incarnation glow began to wilt and vanish. For a second Berculi lost his senses and wondered what he was doing, before pain blossomed from his left shoulder, like his shoulder had frozen. The pain brought him back to his senses, and Berculi jumped back while breathing heavily.

Berculi figured out Vector can absorb his Incarnation through crossing blades, and the side effect can blank out his mind. He commented it would be problematic if they can't cross blades. Vector gave a twisted smile, and said speaking of which there's something he hadn't tried yet. Vector raised his sword,

and pointed it at Berculi. Berculi then realized Vector's attack can be long-ranged, but he didn't have any chance to think further when a line of blue-black light shot out from Vector's sword and impacted into him. The Knight Captain's mind went blank like a blown out candle, and Vector's sword effortlessly stabbed into Berculi's left shoulder without resistance. With a sticky sound, Vector severed Berculi's left arm from the base up.

Scene change, back to Asuna. She used all her mental effort to not scream out loud from the lance embedded inside her, with pain overwhelming. Asuna gritted her teeth and thought this is only a flesh wound, that this pain is nothing. The youth she tried to protect only had a scratch on his face from the lance, though he was pale that Asuna saved him like this. Asuna thought it was worth it if she could save the kid's life like this, taking on a wound in a virtual world in exchange for saving a life.

Asuna grabbed the lance, and broke it with her left hand. She then pulled out the embedded piece inside of her. A frightening amount of blood flowed out from her wound and her mouth, but Asuna stayed standing. She wiped the blood from her mouth away, and glared with a blaze in her eyes at the man who stabbed her. The man went 'OMG' twice, then gave up on the game saying it's boring; he asked Asuna to kill him and log him off, which she obliged. Asuna shed tears that the virtual world ended up with pain, suffering, and hatred, when under different circumstances the players and UW people could have been friends.

She was broken out of her thoughts when another guard on her side was about to be impaled by a lance. Asuna used the Rapier <<Mastered>> sword skill 'Flashing Penetrator' to rush in to attack, turning into a shooting star. She shredded three heavily armoured lancers and pinned a fourth into a statue. The third wave of 20 lancers is preparing, and that second wave has killed off another 5 people. Asuna ordered Renri to come to the centre instead, and she will head off into the enemy formation to attack them. She asked him to mop up after her, and assured him she's fine despite her current wounds.

Back to Berculi. He came back to his senses, felt unbalanced, then realized he was stepping on his own severed arm. He didn't wake up due to pain, but due to fear. Berculi used his teeth to hold onto his sword, and stopped his arm stump from bleeding using his right hand to cast a spell. He didn't have time to reattach his arm, and there wasn't enough energy in this part of DT to fuel him doing so anyway. Berculi felt he was out of options, his Release Recollection will only be absorbed by Vector and his ougi 'Uragiri' had too long a casting time. Berculi doubted Vector would just stand still for him to finish preparing, and that for Uragiri he needed perfectly accurate coordinates of his enemy.

Berculi realized there is little chance of getting out of this alive for him now, that he will die soon in the next few exchanges. Berculi however only smiled at this outcome, and momentarily directed his gaze to the still-asleep Alice. He apologized to Alice that in the end he could not give her what she wanted: fatherly-love. He can't remember anything about his own family, too. The one thing he does know, however, was that a father would be willing to die fighting for his child. Berculi roared out to Vector: "A Monster like you... will never understand that!!" and charged in head on without any plans, just focusing all his self into his sword.

Scene Change to Asuna. Wave three and wave four of the Lancers are defeated. She had over ten stab wounds on her now, and her entire set of clothing was ripped and dyed red with blood. The only reason Asuna could still move now with a hole torn out of her body was because of her massive amount of HP. Before that runs out her body will still continue to function, so effectively the only way for Asuna to fall now is for her to give up. Asuna's body had gone numb by now, feeling both hot and cold at once and her eyesight has dimmed from all the fighting. The fifth wave of Lancers was assembled, and Asuna struggled to draw her rapier from off the ground. The feather-light weapon now felt like it was made of lead. She could no longer dodge with her current state, so Asuna resolved to just catch the attacks with her body and fight back once they hit. The 20 Lancers charged, though the sound of their footsteps had other sounds mixed into it. Asuna looked up, and broken pieces of computer code descended once more in lines. She began to despair that the US players had even more reinforcements. However, the line of code was not black like before, but blue like the night sky before dawn. Asuna was too tired to even guess what this might mean. The 20 lancers also stopped and looked at this view, before the line landed on them.

Then, the lancers exploded into red. A whirlwind ran into them, cutting them up. After the lancers are gone the whirlwind slowed down, turning into a man in blue armour with an impractically long katana. Asuna recognized that technique – a sword skill. Katana, heavy-damage, wide area attack – 'Blade Windmill'. The man turned around, showing a bandanna with a lot of kanji written on it and a lazy face under that. Asuna recognized that it was Klein. The same sound effect as when the black legion descended began to ring out, but now to Asuna they were the most beautiful symphony she has heard.

After that, several thousand lines began to fall down from the sky.

Part 34-2

Berculi had lost count of how many times his mind went into a haze, and then brought back into consciousness from the pain of a new wound. Vector seemed content in only dealing non-fatal wounds to draw this out. Even despite that though his life was bleeding out from the various wounds, and he's almost out of HP. Berculi used his mental strength built up over 200 years of his life to abandon all distractions and fears to only do one thing – count. To be precise, count the number seconds that had went past. Even if his instincts as the wielder of the Time-Piercing Blade allows him the instinct to know about how much time has passed, he's still counting manually to ensure he doesn't lose track when his mind is affected by Vector. More importantly, this action cannot be affected by Incarnation in any way, otherwise Vector might find out about his actions when Vector drains him. So Berculi only filled his blade with killing intent, and provoked Vector with his words.

Finally, when wounding Berculi one drop of blood had flew from his face onto Vector's. Vector's face showed distaste, and wiped off that blood with one finger. Vector had enough of draining from Berculi, his soul was too heavy, too thick, to the point it numbed Vector's tongue. And Berculi's soul has become too simple, only filled with thoughts of killing. Vector decided he'll kill Berculi now. While on the surface Berculi had shown no reaction, he was worried deep down. His technique and counting isn't finished yet. So Berculi pretended to still be out of his mind and waved his sword around pathetically to buy time. In doing so Berculi is trying to lead Vector back to the position he was at when he cut off Berculi's arm, with

their positions clearly marked on the red sand from their footprints. The count of 10 minutes was almost up, and Berculi finished his Release Recollection, using the remaining lifeforce of both his body and his sword:

Uragiri is a technique that slashes into the past, as opposed to cutting the future. The spatial data within UW recorded for every unit goes back to ten minutes, and Uragiri interferes with this data to attack the person as he was up to 10 minutes ago. (Flere821 note: So say for example your opponent has now put up impenetrable defences, Uragiri attacks him as if he had not put up that defence yet. This does not actually cut through time itself to kill your enemy 10 minutes ago, causing a paradox). Uragiri is unavoidable and cannot be defended against, so Berculi does not normally use this as it spits upon all hard work and fairness of fighting. However considering his opponent is Vector who was brokenly powerful, Berculi does not hesitate in using this; even when he would not have used it on Eugeo when they fought back at the Cathedral.

However, Vector saw through Berculi was planning something, and attacked with a powerful move. Berculi lost count, with a wave of will-o-wisp washed over him even as he tried to desperately crawl away from Vector's attack. After dodging four attacks Berculi was finally hit by a fifth, Vector's sword impaled through his stomach. Vector withdrew his sword, and the last of Berculi's HP flew out with his lifeblood. In his dying moments Berculi saw his dragon, Starbiter, going against orders – which was not supposed to be possible according to him – diving down and trying to attack Vector, the blue-white laser breath shooting out of its mouth. Vector raised one hand to knock away the laser attack, and his black armour reflected away all residual damage from the laser.

Vector directed his sword at Starbiter, and launched an attack that could have obliterated the dragon. The attack hit, but Starbiter held on through sheer strength of will and poured every last bit of its HP into the breath attack. Vector grew annoyed, and used his sword to reflect the breath attack back at Starbiter. The dragon was finally blown into small pieces, its last act of defiance only bought Berculi 7 seconds of time.

Those 7 seconds was enough for Berculi to unleash Uragiri, attacking the blue silhouette he sees of Vector where he was 607 seconds ago. The attack could not be defended, and it automatically reduces the HP of its target to zero when the attack hits. Vector was hit, his body severed from his left shoulder to his right waist, and his HP reduced to zero by the system. Even as his upper body fell, Vector's eyes showed no emotions.

The torso almost fell to the ground, and where the heart was there was a huge explosion of pitch black light, with no heat or sound given out. When the explosion ceased, there were no signs that showed the Dark God had ever existed.

A few seconds later, the Time-Piercing Blade in Berculi's right hand shattered from overuse.

Alice finally began to awake from her slumber, feeling warm and safe. She thought she was under the warm sunlight and sleeping on the lap of her father, with his warm hand gently caressing her hair. Alice could not remember how long it had been since she had felt so safe, protected by someone so

completely, without having to worry about anything. But it was finally time to wake up, and the Synthesis Knight Alice did so.

What appeared in her eyes was Berculi's face, his eyes closed and looking down at her with a smile. On his face and neck were various old wounds, and countless new ones were present as well. The memory of being attacked by Vector's dragon and knocked out came back to her, and she chided herself for being so incautious. Still, as expected of her 'uncle', he managed to take down Vector and rescued her. As long as he's around, there's nothing to be afraid of.

Alice sat up, and then finally realized Berculi's wounds was not only limited to his face. His entire left arm was severed, his white clothing was dyed red, and there was a gaping hole on his body. Alice trembled and reached a hand out to touch Berculi's face. She then screamed, at last understanding Knight Captain Berculi Synthesis One, the oldest and greatest Knight in Underworld's history, had passed away.

Berculi's spirit looked down on Alice kneeling over his corpse and wailing in grief, telling her (not that his voice could reach her) to not cry; all that had happened here today was an unavoidable moment that transpired a bit earlier than expected. Berculi told her if it is her, then she can live on even by herself with no problems. She is the one student he ever had... and his daughter in all but blood. The view below him began to drift away as he floated up high, and he looked over to the horizon, sending thoughts he wasn't sure would reach this other Knight that was dear to him. At this moment, all that was in Berculi's heart was satisfaction and wonder he had finally died, when he had expected to live on with no end in sight. Berculi thought dying like this wasn't that bad.

A voice called out to him, agreeing with his thoughts; that he should feel fortunate that there are so many people that would weep at his passing. Berculi abruptly turned around, and found a beautiful young woman with no clothes on, her modesty only secured by her long flowing silver hair. Berculi commented that Administrator was alive after all. Administrator shrugged, smiled, and then said that was impossible – the girl in front of him here was just a 'memory' inside of his soul. Berculi didn't understand the details, but he accepted it and was happy if the Administrator in his memories can smile like that.

Berculi turned to the side then, and found Starbiter bend down and nuzzled at him with its head. Berculi then mounted onto his dragon, and then held out a hand for Administrator to ride in front of him.

Administrator asked did Berculi hate her? Did he hate her for locking him up in the cage of immortality, of time without end? Berculi thought about it, and then shook his head. He said while he felt his life was too long, he was satisfied with it. Administrator said "Is that so?" with a smile, and the three of them rode off into the endless blue skies.

Far away in the north, Fanatio suddenly opened her eyes and looked to the sky. She seemed to hear whispers from Berculi:

"I'm sorry. I don't think we will ever meet again.

"I'll leave things from here on to you now. Make sure that child will be able to live a fortunate life..."

Not too long ago, Berculi had said the same words to her, prior to leaving. Fanatio's hands reached towards her belly. There was new life within it, and had been there since three months ago. Fanatio thought when Berculi had finally agreed to have sex with her after 100 years of refusing to even touch her, he probably had already have an feeling that he would die soon.

Fanatio sank down to the ground on her knees, her hands held her face as she sobbed into them. She had already heard a long time ago why Berculi had refused to go into a relationship with any woman; because any child born of a union of a Synthesis Knight will die long before his/her parents will, as their parents had their body's progression in time modified/frozen by Administrator. The death of a child before their parents is only slightly less cruel than having the child also processed by the Administrator to be like a Synthesis Knight. However, not long after Administrator had died, Berculi had finally accepted Fanatio's love for him. It had meant Berculi had resolved himself to take care of his child, no matter how short that life might be.

==(Translation Start)

If that's the case:

"... Please rest in peace, Your Excellency. I will properly bring this child up to adulthood. I will definitely make him to be someone like you, a hero of his generation and someone you can be proud of."

Along with the sounds of sobbing, Fanatio spoke out word by word of her resolve.

But for now, just now, please forgive my tears.

Fanatio collapsed flat onto the ground, her hands grasped tightly at the earth Berculi had once walked upon, and wailed in grief.

==(Translation End)

(Flere821 note: That bit with Administrator is foreshadowing about future events. Memories can become partial Fluctlights, if you stayed with someone long enough, shared enough experiences together, a part of their soul would be embedded inside you. Keep this particular setting mechanics in mind, it will be relevant in the next part...)

Part 35

Klein roared out in broken English to the US players he has no personal issues with them, but as they hurt his friends he's going to pay them back 3, no, 5, no, several million times more pain they gave to his friends. Klein then did what Asuna thought was a suicidal charge against the players, when another player dropped down. It was Agil, with a wicked looking 2-handed war axe. Liz and Silica came next, and Asuna completely relaxed after seeing them, saying they really came. The two of them replied of course they would come. Liz chided Asuna for trying too hard by herself being wounded like this, and Silica says she should leave it to the rest of them. The two of them embraced Asuna, and she felt almost like all her wounds are evaporating away.

More players have landed, their weapons are varied and all seem to have a higher levelled gear compared to the US players. Asuna realized the acceleration speed had been reduced to 1x, and the players have transferred their The Seed account into UW to fight despite there being no safeguards. Asuna apologized with tears to everyone, that they might not be able to transfer back or even lose their experienced accounts if they die here. Liz assured Asuna they spent all their time on their characters in order to protect something important to them at a time like this.

Renri asked with wonder who are these new knights, and Asuna told him and the rest of the UW guards they're her allies from RW. Renri said with relief that they have help now, for a moment he had thought Asuna was the only good person in RW and everyone else is like those soldiers. Lizbeth took mock offense to that, and introduced herself. Asuna thought she'd probably never forget this moment, where people of two worlds met and became friends. The story will continue from this new beginning and it shouldn't end in a tragedy. Asuna asked how many people have transferred, and Liz said a little over 2,000 – not everyone who listened to her speech decided to transfer over. Asuna patted Liz on the back and told her she did well already, don't be too hard on herself. She then gave orders for 200 players to be set in reserve for support, and asked the UW people to focus on healing now as the RW players aren't used to the spells here. Silica asked what is Asuna going to do, and she replied of course she'll be charging on the front lines.

The ALO players such as Sakuya, Alicia, and Eugene had transferred over. And from how the sharpshooters are doing, they're probably from GGO. The Sleeping Knights are also mowing down their enemies, as fitting of the name of the strongest Guild in ALO. Asuna promised herself she would do her best to minimize deaths on her side and take the greatest risks, as her Super Account won't be lost even if she dies. The Japanese players only number around 2,000 however, so they could still be mobbed by the 10,000 US players. Thankfully, with the arrival of new players the US ones thought this is just a beta after all, and went back to being berserkers for their own bloodlust.

The only problem left however is no pain absorb, and with the constant retreating, healing and advancing to fight, the Japanese players would have to suffer every minute of this battle. This was something that can break a person, as Asuna herself had experienced herself. Asuna rallied the players and said they can definitely win this if they're all together.

A small 'interlude' here of a ALO player trying to come to grips with how there might be AIs, and how the virtual world is just like the real world. He got his foot wounded by a axe of a US player, and the pain was excruciating. He managed to kill the player off, but he was almost overwhelmed and wanted to log off. A UW girl healed him, and thanked him for fighting for them. The guy knows he's probably just caught up in the moment, but he asked for her name, and went back fighting – resolving to do his best, otherwise he won't have the face to see her again, to see someone living in a alternate reality trying her best. 'Interlude' ends.

Scene change to Higa, working his butt off trying to adjust the ALO accounts into the equivalent of UW ones. Koujiro Rinko, his work mate and Kayaba's ex-assistant, assured him they'll do fine and handed him a energy drink. Higa blamed himself for being so stupid they did not notice the US team's plan to send in other players. They could try and destroy the antennae that allowed the US players to access UW, but

doing so meant stopping the lockdown, and the attackers could then come in and kill off the hostages. So Kikuoka and Higa had to leave this to the three girls that dived in after Kirito and the Japanese VRMMO players that dived in with them. Their main problem right now isn't how over half of Project Alicization is now leaked onto the internet, but that there's a very real chance the US will succeed in retrieving Alice and become the unrivalled world power in the new age of unmanned weapons. Yet, Higa commented, and Kirito probably knows this as well, Alice is not a weapon but a actual person of a different world. He absently gazed to the window with Kirito's Fluctlight activity and tried to close it off now, being not needed right now, but then saw something:

Kirito's Fluctlight activity had spiked a moment before, and checking the graph there was a larger spike 8 hours ago. Higa called Rinko over to check this, and they figured out, as impossible as it sounds for a broken Fluctlight to show this activity, that Kirito has responded to the girls logging into UW. After some theorizing, Higa figured out (Flere821 note: and this was foreshadowed earlier at the scenes of Sinon kissing Kirito, and of Berculi's death) while Rath did not keep a back-up of Kirito's Fluctlight the back-up rests within the souls of other people. Your 'self identity' is not just about how you see yourself, but also how others see you. The way to fix Kirito, then, is to link up at least 3 person who knew Kirito well onto his STL – which the girls currently dived in here now definitely apply. Kikuoka confirmed Sinon and Leafa are close to Kirito as well, not just Asuna here having a deep connection with him. Higa celebrated for a moment as the way to cure Kirito is found, but then despaired – the only way to do this is at the main control room, which meant cancelling the lockdown. They can't wait until the Japanese Navy intervenes either, as prior to their move Ocean Turtle will be shut down.

Higa decided to risk himself, opening the lockdown for just a moment and go connect up the STLs manually by going through the service ducts. To cover for this momentary opening of lockdown Kikuoka suggested sending the #3 robot against the US team as a diversion. Rinko asked what the #3 robot was, and Higa explained it's the body made for Fluctlights if they're brought into the real world, so they won't collapse due to the experience of having no physical body. Rinko's question of whether there're #1 and #2 robots are ignored. Kikuoka said it's too dangerous for Higa to go alone, and Higa replied due to his small stature he's the only one that can go inside the narrow ducts anyway. The JSDF soldiers should stay here to protect the others, he said, despite his fear of being shot. Higa felt though it's thanks to Kirito they made this much progress, and he had fought so hard to protect Alice that they owe it to him to do everything they can to fix him.

Then, a different person spoke up, volunteering to go along with Higa. He was almost smaller than Higa is, so he can fit through the ducts. Higa called this person 'Yanai', and he was thankful to have someone along with him.

Part 36

Gabriel woke up after being exiled from the UW servers. He didn't go unconscious from Berculi's attack. Gabriel didn't even expect a man-made consciousness was able to defeat him one on one. Gabriel took a few seconds to think about why he lost, and he scoffed at the possible options: a strong will, bond between souls, and the power of love.

Gabriel got off of the STL, and wondered for a moment why is Vassago still in a STL when he died in UW a while back. His hacker reported to him the current situation, how the 50,000 US players are half gone and the K organisation has brought in 2,000 players themselves. Gabriel dismissed the idea VRMMO addicts in Japan would ever risk their The Seed accounts in UW. Gabriel then told the hacker to shift his other account into UW as well, and the hacker commented so Gabriel's doing this too. Gabriel found out Vassago had logged in using a The Seed account as well, and after looking at Vassago's ID name he laughed; Gabriel figured out who Vassago really is. Even as Gabriel moved back onto the STL he had a twisted smile on his face.

Vassago looked down on the battlefield, watching the US players being massacred. The Japanese had better accounts, and despite being lesser in number they made up for it by tactics. Vassago's very excited, that apart from Asuna other familiar faces from SAO also showed up. While this isn't a death game, it might be even better; there's pain, and no morality coding for players in the system. It promised to be more fun than simply taking lives. Vassago couldn't hold back his laughter at the thought of what's to come.

Sinon finally reached where Alice was, and she didn't make it before Berculi died. Sinon saw Alice holding Berculi's body in grief, and the two dragons here lied down next to her as if sharing in her sadness. Sinon thought how it wasn't fair, Berculi gave his life to do the impossible, killing off a Super Account and stop Vector, but the man behind the Dark God account was only temporarily banished. Sinon wanted to warn Alice the danger isn't over yet, but can't find the words to explain. Alice finally raised her head, and asked Sinon if she's from RW too. Sinon was affected by how beautiful Alice was, just like Asuna did. Sinon introduced herself, and apologized for not being able to catch up and help. Alice shook her head, blaming her own foolishness that got her caught to begin with. Alice asked how are the battle going, and Sinon replied Asuna and others are still fighting. Alice wants to go back and help, while Sinon stopped her; Sinon asked Alice to continue on to the World End Altar.

Alice asked why, isn't Vector dead? Sinon then explained how RW people can't die in UW, so right now the enemy that controlled Vector is probably on the verge of returning with a new form. Alice exploded with rage; at how Vector doesn't die after being killed, at how Berculi have probably gave his life up for nothing, at how it all seemed like a cruel trick for only one side to be risking their lives.

Sinon felt she had no right to say anything herself, after dying so many times in VR and coming right back. Despite that, Sinon asked Alice is Kirito's pain only a trick, only a fake as well? Kirito's from RW too, yet he has been hurt and his soul are damaged. Sinon confessed she loves Kirito too, and so does Asuna and many others. The reason why Kirito is hurt so badly was because of Alice, so is Alice going to say Kirito's feelings and efforts to save her are fake as well? Sinon said it's the same with Berculi, with all his wounds he bought time for Alice to escape. Alice shed tears, and after a while asked if she would be able to return to this world, to see her loved ones once again? Sinon doesn't know for sure, but she does know if Alice is captured by the enemy then UW is gone for good. Sinon replied yes, as long as Alice is safe then UW will be fine. Alice finally agreed to go to the Altar, if that's what Kirito and Berculi wanted. Alice then flew off on the two dragons left, while Sinon says she'll stay here to fight Vector when he 'revives' (logs back in). Sinon swore to herself even if her RL self can't match the RL people that attacked

Ocean Turtle, here in UW she won't lose to anyone in VR one on one. She promised to defeat whoever logs in.

Scene change, Gladiator leader Ishukaan's fists are bloody and broken, and so are the rest of his Gladiators. They are about to fall, and they are at least satisfied they fought well enough to not bring shame onto their ancestors. The 20,000 dark knights here are finally reduced into 3,000. The Gladiators are reduced from 4,000 down to 300, and all of them are barely able to walk. That they survived this far was also due to Shuuta's, Synthesis 12's work.

Shuuta has herself been slaughtering foes left and right, though she's getting tired as well. Killing normally brought her pleasure, but killing these knights was like cutting down shadows. Administrator once told Shuuta her blade was a curse of killing, and only after she reached the end of that road will she be freed from that curse. Shuuta's battle with Ishukaan had lit up something inside her, and she thought she'd know what it was if they fought again on the battlefield. By now she realized though she loved him, and her sword shattered with this realization. Her own dragon's teeth and claws are wrecked, and Shuuta thanked both the dragon and her sword for following her all this time. She walked back to where Ishukaan is, and he apologized for having her fight until she lost her sword. Shuuta replied that doesn't matter anymore, she found the reason why she has killed for all this time. She then cupped Ishukaan's face with her hands. Shuuta said she had found a existence that she doesn't want to kill, someone she wants to protect; that was Ishukaan. She doesn't need a sword anymore. Ishukaan's remaining eye widened, and began to tear up. He said it's a shame they wouldn't get to raise a family together, their kids would be very powerful. Gladiators stronger than him, than any of his Gladiator ancestors. Shuuta shot back no, those kids would have become Knights instead. The two of them gazed into each other's eyes for a moment, gave a small smile, and then kissed under the protective gaze of the remaining Gladiators.

300 Gladiators, 1 Synthesis Knight, and one dragon then waited wordlessly here as the black legion began to surround them.

Asuna's side is pushed to the limit as well, but things are to their advantage. Asuna thanked Klein for coming to help. He embarrassedly replied this doesn't even begin to cover the debt he owes Kirito; speaking of which, just where is he? Asuna said she'll bring him to Kirito after this battle – maybe Kirito will wake right up just to snark at one of Klein's comments. Klein snarked that's harsh of Asuna, but from how forced his smile she knew Klein had already found out about Kirito's state. Asuna thought she's right though, once this is all over with so many of his friends around Kirito's bound to wake up. The US players are reduced to around the numbers of Japanese players, and the fight will soon be over. Then they can head off to try and rescue Alice.

Then, Asuna saw the dark figure on the statue. She thought she might have seen him somewhere before, asked if Klein recognized him. Klein took a moment trying to think about where he had saw the guy, he looked familiar... then realized he's one of the Laughing Coffin members. The terror that was never captured back in Aincrad, PoH, had appeared in front of them all after two years. Even Asuna was frightened, hoping with all her might she was just seeing a ghost, a illusion. She prayed it would disappear any time now. The silhouette in front of them though, as if to mock them, raised his right hand

and waved it across him.

First a few, then thirty, until more silhouettes had shown up out of nowhere on top of the statues and temple roofs. With each appearing shade Asuna's heart despaired even more. The other temple's rooftop had shades began to appear as well. She gave up trying to count them after they hit the mark of 30,000. Asuna thought this can't possibly be real, the US players had just took a huge blow to their numbers, they can't possibly get this many back already. Mocking whispers came from the rooftops, and Klein realized the bad news: These players aren't from US or Japan... they're Korean and Chinese.

Gabriel's hacker had went with Vassago/PoH's plan despite thinking it would not work. Ways to get Chinese and Korean players in are set up, and to his surprise there's actually a lot of support from there. As a American, the hacker had thought these Asian countries are all the same, as apparent by how their faces are similar. The difference, he thought, between Japan, Korea and China is only about as large as between neighbouring countries within the EU. The advertising website isn't even as well-made as the US adverts to recruit people there, just a simple one with the notice "the first grassroot VRMMO server made by the combined efforts of Koreans and Chinese are hacked by the Japanese". There are also lines suggesting the Japanese have hacked in super powerful characters to slaughter their countrymen, with the pain absorb and moral coding functions not yet completed. The hacker thought this can't possibly get any attention, yet players are arriving en masse. It's like the relationship between Japan and the other two countries are not good at all.

We now get a bit of PoH's back story. Born in San Francisco, his Korean mother and himself was brought into Japan after a wealthy Japanese business fell in love with her. His material needs were met, but emotionally he was neglected (Flere821 note: the narrative is really lacking in detail here... stereotypical 2-dimensional villain backstory. Even Gabriel had a better backstory >.<). PoH hated the Japanese, and only felt release when he's in VR and playing on US servers. PoH got into SAO by accident, he bought the game on a whim, and then decided he can't log off to get away from them then he'll just kill them off. The first PK was accidental, but then PoH began to try and convince people to kill others (Flere821 note: as suspected, PoH was the one that gave the scamming trick back in 2nd floor (Rondo of the Illusory Sword) to try and force a situation where taking the life of another player was encouraged, to introduce the concept of PKing). PoH wasn't doing it to simply kill the Japanese, but to introduce a situation where Japanese are killing each other.

PoH raised his hand, and called out in Korean for the players to don't just kill the invaders, make them suffer first before killing them off. To the newly logged in players, the US players looked like beta-testers on their side being slaughtered by the Japanese. Over 50,000 players roared and then descended upon the Japanese side like a flood.

Scene change. A account began to land where Sinon was. While she can just nuke the account as soon as it logged in using her GM ability, if the US side can spawn unlimited high level accounts it would be a waste of a powerful attack. She's aiming for dragging on the fight as long as possible, though if the account that logged in wasn't a generic one then she can always nuke it later.

Before Alice left she gathered what remained of the Time-Piercing Blade and turned it into two necklaces. Alice said she's going to give one of them to a fellow female knight, and Sinon asked if the

knight was Alice's love rival. Alice smiled in response and said Sinon's one of her love rivals, not the other knight. After hearing that, Sinon resolved to not log off until Kirito wake up so she can ask just what he has been doing in UW.

Her enemy has descended and began to take up a physical form. Sinon tried not to give in the urge to nuke the guy right now, despite her senses telling her to do so urgently. The guy has finally materialized, equipped with a crossbow and a long sword, wearing grey clothes like it was army uniform of some sort. A mutant dragon of some sort spawned with him, with multiple black eyeballs. Standing on top of the dragon, the enemy rose up into the air until he was level with Sinon. Sinon finally remembered who this person was, the GGO player who blew her up over a month ago in the tournament. Sinon was so surprised by how he's here she didn't even raise her own bow up in preparation to attack.

Part 37-1

Some info on Ocean Turtle's structure, how there's a titanium alloy pillar in the middle holding up the pyramid. At the bottom of the pillar behind several barriers are the nuclear reactor, and above that the main control room and the 1st STL room. These are closed off by another set of barriers, making up what are the Lower levels of Ocean Turtle. The Upper levels consists of the cooling system, the sub-control room where Rath personnel have retreated into, and the 2nd STL room. Robot #3 is making its way down on the stairs, backed up by a few JSDF soldiers. Elsewhere Higa and Yanai are going down a narrow duct for electric cables. Higa thought thankfully he wasn't claustrophobic or afraid of heights. Though that doesn't really matter right now, if they slip now they'd fall 50m to their deaths. Yanai had a pistol for protection, but he looked as bad or even worse than Higa did, likely from the stress. Rinko asked him through his earpiece are they doing alright, and Higa replied they're fine and would reach the first lockdown barrier in 5 minutes. The plan is to send in Robot #3 the same time Higa and Yanai go down to provide a distraction.

Gabriel's hacker noticed the warning the lockdown is lifted, and sent someone frantically to go see what's going on. The team saw the robot and began shooting at it.

Higa took this chance to get below. The robot's aluminium shell was ruptured, but the battery and wiring are within a titanium frame so it can probably buy some more time. Higa reached the place and began to work on the connections. Rinko went back to observe Kirito's fluctlight state, while Higa thought Rinko hadn't changed a bit from their student days.

Scene change to Sinon and Gabriel. Sinon knew Gabriel as his GGO name, "Subtilizer". Gabriel commented he didn't expect to see Sinon here. Sinon's frozen in fear, her hands almost had let go of her GM bow. Gabriel asked if Sinon is part of the K organisation, or is she being a mercenary all the way out here? Sinon asked through dry lips why Gabriel is here, and Gabriel replies that should be obvious: it is fate and the connection between their souls that brings them together. Gabriel plans to devour Sinon and see if Fluctlights can be taken out of STL this way, and pick through all he wants to know from Sinon's mind. The next scene is thick with rape metaphors, I'll skip the details.

The world twisted like everything is being sucked into Gabriel. Sinon was reduced to feeling powerless,

almost sucked into Gabriel, while he went on explaining why he had chosen his name. It's not from the word 'Satori' of Buddhism, and while Subtilizer sounds like French it's actually from Latin. It meant "the one that hides things below" – in other words, "the one that steals things away". Gabriel promised he'll steal Sinon away, and everything she has with her as well.

Scene change, to where Asuna is. She yelled at everyone to escape from where they are right now, the bottleneck won't stop enemies descending from above. Their supplies are ordered to be dumped, they don't have time to run with them. Asuna controlled the giant statues to fight for them, buying some time for the UW humans and Japanese players to escape. Her mind sparked and she went in excruciating pain. All she could do was control the statues for 30 seconds, but that was enough to allow the UW humans to escape. With the loss of cover however the Japanese players can only try and defend from enemies on all sides. Asuna tried to use her ability one last time to make a fortress around the 2,000 Japanese players, but she collapsed from the efforts; blood also spurted out from her mouth. Klein yelled for her to not push herself, and Agil said to leave it to them. Others like the ALO Faction Leaders and the Sleeping Knights started to fight as well. The flowing black tide of attackers was momentarily stopped by the Japanese players, but even Asuna knows this is merely like trying to hold back a tsunami with their bare hands. As Asuna was struggling with the pain, she could faintly see PoH standing on his statue and hear him laughing madly.

Scene change to Higa. He has finished the process of connecting up Kirito's STLs to the girls'. Higa was thinking it was unfortunate that he can't manipulate STL #1 and #2 to fry the intruders' Fluctlights, when Yanai pulled out his gun and pointed it at Higa. It turns out Yanai was the traitor in Rath that leaked info to the US. Yanai denied he was a traitor, that would suggest he was on Rath's side to begin with. Yanai used to work with Sugou, and was also a culprit in kidnapping the SAO players. Another 2nd rate villain it seems, considering how Yanai boasted he did more than just 'take part' in the kidnapping and done a lot more things like 'tentacle-plays' >.>

Higa thought for a instant just what was Kikuoka thinking when he did the background checks, but then thought he can't be blamed; skilled personnel in VR tech from large corporations are hard to come by, it's no wonder Rath welcomed Yanai with open arms. Yanai continued with his boasting, how he kept contact with 'Grogen Micro Electronics', the same company that Sugou dealt with. Once Alice is retrieved Yanai will be given a high position within GME. Higa twitched nervously, and Yanai fired a warning shot. The shot ricocheted off the metal walls, and accidentally shot into Higa's right shoulder. Yanai didn't plan on that.

Scene change, back to Sinon. *More* attempted rape scenes with Gabriel on Sinon (Flere821 note: *facepalm* seriously, isn't Gabriel supposed to be in a hurry to (re)capture Alice? How the heck does he have time for this \$h1t?). All her fears and worries are disappearing as soon as she thinks them in this situation, being absorbed into Gabriel. Before Gabriel did anything intrusive/R18 a powerful spark blew him off of Sinon. Sinon recovered her mind and flew away immediately to get some distance between them. A memento Sinon have of Kirito, the electrode he had that saved him from being injected by poison during the GGO arc when he went to Sinon's home, was somehow brought in here into UW. Nobody, not even Kirito and Asuna, knew she had this piece of metal that was turned into a pendant on her. This pendant was brought into UW due to Incarnation, or

basically the materialization of Sinon's feelings for Kirito. Sinon glared at Gabriel, whose hand is smoking from that last blast, and told herself Subtilizer isn't a monster, just a human. To respond against Gabriel messing with her using only his imagination, Sinon decided to do the same. She transformed her GM bow into her Hecate II sniping rifle, and grinned back at Gabriel after activating the bolt handle on the rifle. Gabriel bared his fangs and his face twisted into a smile, though Sinon's not sure if it was from anger or joy.

Part 37-2

Asuna's side had had spent the last 10 minutes fighting the Korean and Chinese players. The first 3 minutes were evenly matched, but the 7 minutes after that was a one-sided slaughter of the Japanese players. The numbers and morale difference was just too large. Even Asuna has finally begun to despair, wishing someone will come and save her.

Sakuya is organizing to fight back as efficiently as possible, but then lost composure as a leader and turned back into a normal university student after seeing Alicia being mobbed. She rushed to try and save her friend in her panic, leaving the rest of the Sylphs behind, while Alicia yelled not to worry about her and go back to her troops. Sakuya fought through many players to try and get to Alicia, but she was ultimately impaled by a spear and fell. Like Alicia, Sakuya was brutally pinned into the ground by various weapons and her armour ripped off of her.

Shiien, 3rd generation leader of the Sleeping Knights, knew a bit of Korean language and tried to communicate with the opposing players. Shiien rushed into an enemy attack, let himself get stabbed many times, and tried to explain to them UW isn't the beta server the Koreans thought it was while stuck on their spears. PoH however intervened, and asked while taunting him then why did the Japanese players have higher level account if they're not cheaters? None of the Koreans bought the reasoning someone would bring their The Seed account into a test server. Shiien was kicked off of being impaled by weapons, and then left alone while the slaughter continued around him. Shiien lost the will to fight after communication broke down, even after the rest of the Sleeping Knights got to where he is to rescue him.

Renri asked himself why do the RW people fight each other? He then decided he's not in a position to blame them, UW itself is split into Human Kingdom and Dark Territory and fight among themselves. Renri himself had slaughtered countless goblins and other DT people within the last few days. He had hoped RW wasn't like UW, with none of the slaughter, but it was not the case when the invaders don't even speak the same language, so no communication. Renri concluded the nature of humanity is conflict, and no matter where you are people are fated to fight and kill each other endlessly. He tried to hold back his tears at the unfairness of it all.

Renri decided he needs to get in to fight on the front lines, not stay at the back to act as reserve. Teiza asked to go with him, leaving Ronie to take care of Kirito. Teiza wants to take up Eugeo's will to fight for the people he cares about. Renri then did something even he didn't expect, hugging Teiza. He told her he'll protect her no matter what, so she should stay at his back when fighting. Teiza agreed, tentatively patted Renri on the back once. Renri said to his memory of Synthesis #9 (エルドリエ) Erudorie the Flame Bow, Shuuta, and Berculi he had found the meaning to his life now. He and Teiza then rushed into the

battlefield that is filled of cries and despair.

Scene change to Rinko. She's looking at Kirito's Fluctlight status, which isn't fixed yet. Robot #3 is almost broken, and Higa's not done yet down there. Soon they'll have to lock the place down again. Rinko checked the battled positions of the UW, and then realized there's a new AI that had broken the limits next to Suguha. Technically, it's not to the same extent of Alice broke the coding through reasoning and taking on a new moral code, but this AI broke through sheer will of emotion. Rinko had wanted to try and ask the dived girls somehow keep this AI intact, but from how it and Suguha is going right at a group of US players that might not be possible. Kikuoka then noticed there's something wrong with the coding of the Fluctlights, discovering Code 871 (Flere821 note: goddang, if this code was apparent enough to pick out at a glance how come none of you people found it in the weeks before now?! Deus ex Machina?). Kikuoka wondered why it's named that way, Higa doesn't name his codes like that – then suddenly snatched up the lab coat on the seat next to him. The coat belonged to Yanai, and had 871 scribbled onto it with a marker. They then figured out Yanai is the traitor (TL note: '871' can be pronounced as 'Yanai' in Japanese).

Scehe Change. The Gladiators and Shuuta are about to perform their Last Stand against the black legion, then the Orcs showed up. A girl was running in front of them like she's leading them. She then launched several slashes with her katana, the Incarnation attack cutting gashes into the black legion's formation. Shuuta was impressed by the slaughter.

Scene Change. Sinon shot at Gabriel, who was only 50m away. She was launched back by the recoil as she's in midair. The 0.50 calibre bullet she shot out was stopped by Gabriel's left hand, black Incarnation light threatened to devour it. Sinon called out for her Hecate to not lose, and the bullet that was glowing white went even brighter, and blew off three fingers from Gabriel's hand. Gabriel frowned, and pulled out his crossbow with his right hand. The crossbow transformed into a rifle, Barrett M82A1 – a 0.50 rifle just like Hecate II. Gabriel smiled, and Sinon was agreeable to the gun fight they are about to partake in.

Part 38

Yanai asked if Higa's alright, as if he was genuinely worried about his health. Higa shot back Yanai actually have the nerve to ask that, and Yanai explained he doesn't want to get nightmares if Higa dies. Yanai had a home bought in California and everything, he doesn't want anything to ruin his dream job when this is over.

The shot had hit slightly below Higa's collarbone. He's started to feel numb, having lost a lot of blood. Yanai then said he was planning on only messing with Ocean Turtle's monitoring equipment and then escape from a prepared submarine, and this could have all ended without loss of life on Rath's side. Higa said in outrage that even if it all went as Yanai planned Kirito's Fluctlight would have been destroyed for good, killing him off, so the 'no death' thing is a load of rubbish. Then it was revealed Yanai had been brainwashed by Administrator when she was still alive, when she used the console to contact RW and Yanai was the person nearby when she did so. The reason why Alice was so suddenly taken by Administrator and turned into a Synthesis Knight was also because of Yanai sending her the info. Yanai was dumb enough to think UW was all going to be deleted anyway, so no matter how he messed with UW it won't matter. He dived in using a STL to meet with Administrator, and got brainwashed. A switch

had been hit in Yanai after he talked about Administrator's death, and he wanted to kill Kirito (or anyone, really) because Kirito had stopped Sugou's plans and killed Administrator.

Scene Change. Leafa can feel Asuna and Kirito are in trouble (Flere821 note: as mentioned quite a while back, it seems almost every major character when dropped into UW can now 'feel the force' of people far away...). She went south to try and find Asuna but she ended up running into a different group of humans. Leafa decided to charge in alone to fight the US players as she won't die no matter how badly she's hurt (infinite healing), and she doesn't want to risk any UW people dying. Rerupirin was told to just protect the dark knights. Leafa went in, and launched two sword skill attacks. However in the stiffened moments after using the sword skills, the US players took advantage of this and skewered Leafa with several weapons. She healed, got stabbed in the arm again, and continued to fight.

Scene change, back to Sinon. She and Gabriel fired at each other at about the same time. Both of them missed, and this ended up as a 360 degree gunfight in mid-air as Gabriel took flight. The one that stops moving first will be the one shot down. Eventually, Gabriel had predicted Sinon's flight path and shot at her. Sinon barely twisted out of the way, and tried to shoot at Gabriel while he's bracing to compensate for the recoil. However, a second shot had come right after the first shot. Belatedly, Sinon remembered the Barrett was a semi-automatic. Sinon was hit, and her left leg was blown off from the thigh down.

Scene change. Ultimately, the only one left standing on the battlefield was Asuna with a Super Account, Renri as a Synthesis Knight, his dragon, and Teiza who stuck close to him. Even this situation didn't last; Renri's flying blades while attacking others far away can't defend the wielder, and the Korean + Chinese players took advantage of this fact. A rain of spears shot at Renri from the back, and the dragon risked its life to block it all with its body. The second volley came, and Renri shielded Teiza with his own body, and he was struck down (but still alive). The Japanese players still alive at this point have all been skewered by weapons and pinned to the ground, their high level gear all ripped away from them. Asuna herself lost the will to fight on, her rapier dropped down from her hand. She gave a cry of despair as the foreign players moved in to slaughter the UW people the Japanese players tried their best to protect, then PoH arrived. He shouted out for the Chinese and Koreans to stop, and they listened to him as they thought PoH was one of the original developers of this 'grassroot VRMMO'. Asuna doesn't speak Korean, so she doesn't know what PoH was planning. The 200 Japanese players that are left were gathered in front of PoH, and Asuna can see it's all the ones with high HP; the ALO Faction Leaders, the Sleeping Knights, and so on. All them were branded by the feeling of despair and defeat, and overwhelmed by the hatred that can be seen on the battlefield.

Asuna crawled to where Lizbeth is, and hugged her. Lizbeth blamed herself for dragging everyone into this, while Asuna said she was the one to blame – Asuna should not have called for help. Agil was left unmoving on the ground, pierced by more than ten spears/halberds to protect Silica; all his limbs were broken as well. Klein himself lost his left arm beneath his shoulder. PoH gave a wide smile at this outcome, and Asuna thought his next words would be the command to slaughter the rest of the UW people. To her surprise, PoH called for the UW people to drop their weapons and surrender, and he would spare all UW people that had fought today. Asuna begged the UW people to accept these terms, as she doesn't want them to die. The UW people did so with gritted teeth, and the assembled Korean

and Chinese players began their own victory chants. A group of PoH's players went into the UW side on his orders looking for something. PoH then went to have a chat with Asuna, with him calling her 'the Flash'. Asuna now knew for sure Vassago was PoH from SAO. PoH said that was a nostalgic name, and asked if they knew PoH stood for 'Prince of Hell' (Flere821 note: Which if anyone had wiki'd the name Vassago they'd know 'Vassago' was also a name for a Prince of Hell). Klein swore at PoH and tried to get back up to grab PoH, but was kicked down by his captors. Several more spears and swords came to restrict his movement. Asuna asked if this was revenge for the Crusade against Laughing Coffin back in SAO. PoH was speechless for a few moments trying to hold back his laughter, before finally burst out cackling madly. He congratulated Asuna for having an active imagination, then revealed the truth behind the Crusade:

PoH was the one that leaked the location of where the headquarters of Laughing Coffin was to the Frontliners. The SAO Frontliners present all widened their eyes in shock. PoH said he got tired of leading a Red Guild, and while watching Japanese people kill each other was fun his ultimate goal was to force the Frontliners to also become PKers. For the great heroes that fought for SAO players' freedom to be reduced to murderers. PoH only told the LC members of the incoming attack moments before it hit, giving LC enough time to prepare to fight back but not enough to escape. Asuna then realized PoH's true goal – to make Kirito into a PKer. PoH confirmed Asuna's suspicion, and said he laughed so hard when he saw Kirito killed two of LC members like a man possessed he almost broke his stealth. PoH had planned to kidnap Kirito and Asuna post Floor 90, neutralize them both, and break Kirito's mind by confronting him with how he had killed the LC members (Flere821 note: which had a high chance of succeeding, considering how Kirito was conflicted on this back in GGO arc). However PoH didn't count on the game being cleared at Floor 75.

Asuna was so enraged at PoH's plans she forgot her own wounds, asking if PoH knew how conflicted Kirito was because of his actions. PoH shrugged and said that's good and all if Kirito was troubled, but he doubted Kirito was truly affected; why would Kirito come back into a VR game if he regretted killing others? It'd be more respectful to the dead if he never played VRMMOs again. PoH says he'll just ask Kirito himself, after PoH logged in he could feel Kirito's presence anyway. PoH gave his signature shout of "It's Showtime!", and then the group of players he sent into the group of UW people came back with Kirito in his wheelchair, with Ronie restrained and dragged along as well. Asuna thought out for PoH to stop, while Klein was pushed back down again when he tried to get up. PoH was surprised at Kirito's current state, asking the Black Swordsman and Dual-Wielder to wake up. Ronie cried from where she's held up, telling Asuna that Kirito tried to get up many, many times when the fighting today had started, but in the end was only able to shed tears as his body was too exhausted to even attempt standing. Asuna shouted at PoH to leave Kirito alone, he had fought so hard and was reduced to this level from his wounds. PoH didn't hear Asuna, still in disbelief Kirito could be reduced to this level already. He kicked Kirito off of his wheelchair, saying it's not fun if Kirito had given up already. Asuna and Klein tried to attack PoH but was pushed down, Agil aren't in a state to get up despite roaring and trying to do so, and Lizbeth, Silica, and Ronie all gave a small cry at Kirito's treatment.

PoH ignored the players behind him, and kicked Kirito again to make him facing up. PoH asked him if Kirito had really been broken, the hero now reduced to a puppet. PoH unsheathed the Blue Rose Sword to try and attack Kirito with it, but then scowled when he found it was a broken blade. Kirito tried to

reach for the white sword, which PoH noticed and then threw it away after sheathing it. He taunted Kirito, but then seeing it still didn't get Kirito to respond to him he grabbed Kirito and slapped Kirito's face several times. Even before Asuna was driven berserk in anger Klein roared out and tried to get back up again. This time the weapons did more than just threaten him, stabbing into Klein to pin him into the ground. Klein ignored the wounds and tore himself open on the blades trying to reach PoH, saying he can't forgive PoH. Asuna's tears just kept flowing at Kirito's treatment.

Scene change, back to Sinon. Compared to pain from having her left leg blown off, she was more frightened by what this meant for her fighting ability. She had braced against the recoil and flew by imagining her legs are what propelled her, and with her left leg gone she spiralled out of control. Sinon now can only fly backwards and keep shooting at Gabriel, and he chased after her. Third, fourth, fifth, sixth, the shots all collided into each other and ricocheted away from its intended targets; Gabriel was doing this deliberately. These collisions aren't possible in RW, but in UW with the power of imagination if both sides believed this was possible then it can happen. Seventh shot, missed, and Sinon tried to attack again. She then realized she ran out of bullets, the Hecate II only have 7 shots. On the other hand, Gabriel's Barrett has 10 shots, and he had 2 shots left. Gabriel smirked, and then fired once more. Sinon's right leg was blown off, now she can't even fly and began to drop out of the sky. Sinon apologized to Yui and Asuna in her mind for being unable to win. Gabriel fired his last bullet, and it reached Sinon's chest; it blown off her blue armour, evaporated her shirt, and threatened to pierce right through her. The electrode memento once again came into play, its Incarnation preventing the bullet from killing Sinon.

Sinon decided to not give up after seeing this, and decided to place faith in herself, Hecate II, and the boy that the electrode connected her to. The electrode vaporised along with the bullet. Sinon brought her rifle up and aimed it at Gabriel, and channelled her nuking ability through her gun and shot it at Gabriel. Gabriel tried to dodge like how he did against Berculi's attack, and the laser beam Sinon hit his Barrett rifle instead. The gun blew up in an explosion, and after the smoke cleared Gabriel had his right side charred and ruined by the attack, with his right arm gone as well. Gabriel's face now finally showed killing intent, and Sinon planned on fighting to the bitter end even as weakened as she is now. Gabriel however turned and flew off, chasing after Alice instead. After Gabriel left, Sinon finally dropped her rifle, and it turned back into the bow when it hit the ground. Sinon began to tear up after feeling her memento was gone, and only the chain that held it close to her was left.

Scene change to Leafa. She was fighting so fiercely she didn't have time to pull out the weapons impaled into her. Her body was feeling pain all over, like someone had stabbed at her raw nerves with needles. She has many normally fatal wounds on her right now, two swords impaled into her stomachs that's ripping her internal organs apart, and a sword from behind had pierced right through her heart. Nevertheless Leafa continued to fight, launching another sword skill that might have been her 50th or the 500th attack. As the body is stiffened after a powerful move, as many players as just been removed by Leafa's attack came in to attack her in this gap. Leafa tried to dodge, but a halberd took off her left hand in the process. Leafa slew another 3 players, and then activated her healing ability. Her HP was at maximum again though her wounds didn't heal, but her hand was reattached.

By this point her GM ability isn't a 'Deity's Blessing', but more like a curse. No matter how wounded you

become, no matter how badly you're hurt, you are not allowed to stop fighting. This was a torture built upon the condition that you're immortal but not invulnerable. Throughout all this the only thing keeping Leafa sane and going was the firm belief Kirito would be able to continue to fight even with these wounds, and 3,000 soldiers won't be a problem for him – and as his sister she can't let him down. With a shout, Leafa launched a Incarnation attack that stretched over 100m long, retiring many players from the battlefield. She breathed heavily, and then puked up blood from the effort of doing her last attack. Leafa wiped her mouth and shakily tried to get back up, then a thrown spear flew from behind, piercing through her brain and ruined her left eye. Leafa stumbled, but did not fall from that attack; she pulled the spear out with one of her hands and she healed immediately.

There were less than 300 players facing her now. Leafa raised a hand palm up, and made a taunting gesture with her hand. The 300 then gave up on winning, and charged in to try and do as much damage as possible to Leafa. Three minutes later, the players are all gone and Leafa had more than ten weapons impaled into her. Her limbs lost strength, and she fell backwards. She couldn't even fall to the ground with how many weapons stuck into her, being propped up by them. Leafa closed her eyes as she heard the Orc leader frantically called out her name and ran towards her to see if she's still alive, and she asked herself:

"I... tried my best, right... Onii-chan..."

Scene change to Higa. Yanai was about to kill him. Rinko called out for him to dodge using his earpiece, and for a second he thought she was telling him to dodge the bullet. Then he heard a swishing sound, and a large wrench came flying down from above. Yanai was hit on the head, and fell down the service ducts. Judging from the sounds when Yanai landed 50m below, he wasn't dead (at this point) but has broken several bones. Rinko asked if Higa was alright, and he lied that he was fine. He stuck to that lie even as Rinko said she'll never forgive him if he lied about his condition. Higa had wanted to confess to Rinko that back in their student days he had fallen in love with her too, but then realized that's pretty much a death flag and shut up. Instead he asked her if they can have a meal together after this mess is all over, and Rinko agreed, saying she'll treat him. Higa then linked the girls' STLs to Kirito's, and even as his sight began to blur, and Higa thought to himself Kirito can finally wake up now.

Part 39-1

Asuna prayed with all her might for Kirito to wake up, even as she looked at him with teary eyes. Other RW girls are calling out his name as well in their hearts. The final one of 4 people calling to him calling out might have been Eugeo, however (as opposed to maybe Alice).

Kirito felt like someone might have called out his name, and woke up from a slumber. We're treated to a flashback of Kirito back during SAO beta-testing period. Kirito thought everything that had happened in UW, not that he can remember them clearly, was just a dream. Kirito spent these days mostly playing SAO beta at night, and sleeps in class time. Kirito then walked past a group of 5 students bullying this one person, and Kirito tried to ignore them. The student in question was like Kirito, one of the top students in their middle school. A while back Kirito had helped the guy, grabbing a shinai and beaten up the leader of the bullies when it had gone beyond just stealing lunch money and into outright extortion. It had

ended up as a serious issue with both sides' parents called into the school, but the matter was resolved with Kirito showing a hidden recording of the bully's threats and actions. The bully and his friends had spent a while not going after this guy after that, but had returned to the old habits by this point. Kirito by this point doesn't give a damn anymore, not wanting to get involved in such things. He's a gamer now, not a martial artist, and it would be a joke if he still tried to help out.

Returning home, Kirito saw Suguha training kendo in a green sweater. Suguha was so dazzling in her appearance and efforts for kendo Kirito paused to watch involuntarily. Suguha eventually realized Kirito was watching and warmly welcomed him back. Kirito shied away, gave a blunt reply, and moved inside the house. Kirito realized the path he could have taken and the girl he had distanced himself away from was shining brightly on the other side of this wall he built up. He wondered when he started to distance himself – he had forgotten by this point. Was it because he had quit his grandfather's dojo? Why did he do so again? Because he was beating up another guy in front of the dojo using a technique he found on the internet? Kirito can't remember.

Kirito returned to his plain room, and started up the SAO beta. His beta character was a bishounen, and by Kirito's own words it was 10x harder to make a cool male teen character than a cutesy female teen character. Kirito at the time had gleaming half-plate armour, white clothing trimmed with blue edges, a silver cape, and a crystal blade. Kirito walked through the Floor 10 streets, being warmly greeted and he replied in the same way; something he wouldn't do IRL. He also declined the countless requests for him to join other people's guilds on his way to his destination.

Kirito met up with another two guys in an inn, both as well-dressed as him. The two here are the current leaders of the most powerful guild in SAO beta. They're here to try and entice Kirito to join their guild, after Kirito had left the #2 most powerful guild two weeks ago. After hearing their recruitment speech and seeing what they had to offer (generous gear and wealth offered), Kirito told them he'll join on one condition – let him PK this one particular swordsman within their guild. Not that Kirito wanted to become an Orange named player, it's a huge hassle to get rid of that status. Kirito asked them to set things up that Kirito will be alone with this guy in one of the duelling arena's locked rooms. The duelling arena was a beta game area where if you die there it will have a death penalty and your items may be dropped.

The guild leaders asked why is Kirito going so far to PK this person, didn't he defeat this guy in the last official tournament? And they're hesitant in letting one of their core members being PKed. However, the two leaders agreed after Kirito hinted if they agree to this when the Beta's over Kirito will join their guild as well. Strong players at this stage tended to be solo players due to efficiency and loot allocation issues, so guilds go out of their way to ensure they have good players. The guild leaders reasoned that the other guy hasn't been logging into SAO much these days anyway, and if it's just an 'accident' then everything's fine.

That night, everything was settled and Kirito went into the duelling arena. 3am in the morning, most people have logged off. Kirito got the key to the locked room and rushed there to meet up with his prey. The other guy had gear that looked like rough-looking beginner ones, but their stats were equal to Kirito's

own gear. The guy was told he was here to meet up with new guild members with others, but the other members didn't show up. Kirito greeted him, then attacked without warning. Despite the other guy's trusting look, it appeared he was suspicious as well as he managed to block Kirito's sneak attack. Kirito explained he was pissed that in the last tournament this guy threw the match in a serious duel, for the sake of the gambling winnings. Kirito had given his all in that duel, the only time in SAO beta to have done so; yet the guy had given up. Kirito was going to ask the guy to be his friend due to his skills, he had fun fighting him, before the guy threw the match.

Kirito brought out a pile of Revive Crystals, it had cost him a fortune to get these. It revived the player immediately instead of sending them to the Black Iron Palace, but death penalties and item losses still apply. Kirito declared he's going to kill the guy 10 times, until the guy lost all his gear and levels and can't recover before the next tournament. If he doesn't want that then he better fight seriously.

The fight between the two was as fierce as Kirito expected, with both of them pulling out tricks they wouldn't show in public. Despite Kirito's anger he had fun, feeling adrenaline pumping him up. This further enraged Kirito, that with this level of skill the guy still had faked a loss. Then, with a 5-hit combo the guy blocked 4 hits and then deliberately let himself die on the 5th hit. The guy died and got revived, losing his helmet as a drop. Kirito was pissed the guy was trying to fake a loss again, and killed him a second time by slashing him across the chest – the guy didn't block this either.

The guy said with tears he was happy that Kirito was going to join their guild. You can't fake tears in VR (eg, Mother's Rosario with Asuna's mother). The guy said he didn't fake his loss because he wanted to get the gambling winnings. Looking into his eyes, Kirito realized it was that student who was bullied in his school, they were friends before Kirito gave up on him. The guy said he wanted to try and deal with the bullies himself, and if Kirito had noticed who he was back in the tournament he would have wanted to ask him to be his friend once more.

That last sentence actually didn't get completed properly. The guy suddenly died for real from the bisected wound Kirito gave him for the 2nd death, realistic blood and sensations filled the scene. The revive crystals didn't activate this time. The torches around them began to be extinguished, and the sand beneath his feet turned into a bog that sucked Kirito down.

Kirito realized this was supposed to be a dream, he's still in UW. Though the dream should not have ended this way; after the reveal, the two of them abandoned their duel and left SAO for the night. The guy didn't manage to get free from the bullies, and Kirito continued to ignore him. The guy left SAO for good, and one month later when the beta was over Kirito was stuck inside the death game, fighting for his life.

More memories began to return to Kirito; SAO, ALO, GGO, everything is coming back to him... though Kirito begged whoever is out there to not let him remember. Then, it cuts to when Kirito met Eugeo in UW. The events of Alicization began to play out in front of him in fast forward, until they reached the top of the Cathedral fighting as a team. There, Eugeo perished.

Kirito screamed out in pain and despair. He blamed himself for Eugeo's death. That it was his own powerlessness, foolishness, weakness that led to Eugeo's death. Eugeo should not have died. Kirito wished he was the one that had taken Eugeo's place and had died instead.

Kirito kept screaming. He blindly tried to grasp at the sword he dropped earlier to try and stab his own heart out. His sword was nowhere to be found, however. Instead, his hand came into contact with something soft. It was the corpse of the student Kirito had killed in the arena moments earlier – then, it morphed into Eugeo's corpse.

Kirito screamed, torn his own shirt apart, and tried to gouge out his heart with his own bare hands. The skin was ripped, his muscle torn, yet Kirito couldn't feel the pain. Kirito wanted to rip his heart out and then crush it, only then he will be able to atone for what he did to Eugeo.

Then, Asuna's image showed up, calling out his name. Kirito doesn't recognize her, however. Sinon and Suguha also showed up after Asuna, calling out for Kirito. Kirito can feel himself being healed, becoming whole again. However, after remembering them, Kirito thought he didn't have the right to accept their kindness. He rejected their kindness, thinking he could no longer stand up and fight. Kirito's heart is now torn out of his body, and Kirito is on the verge of crushing it.

Higa, beginning to lose consciousness from blood loss, is shouting weakly why Kirito isn't back to normal yet. The data flowing into Kirito pushed his status into one step away from being healed, yet it's still missing that final step. A miracle like this amount of data should have healed him. Higa concluded they needed at least one more person, otherwise Kirito at this level of activity would be stuck in an endless nightmare; even being in a vegetative state like before might have been preferable. However, there was nobody left with a deep bond, a strong willpower, linked with Kirito – and there isn't any spare STL left for them to link up to Kirito anyway. Higa wanted to pound at the controls in frustration, but then stopped as he looked at the screen; a fourth connection is attached onto Kirito, and it came from the Main Visualizer. Though it's just mnemonic data of Objects of UW there, there shouldn't be a soul in there. Higa then realized memories, partial Fluctlights, can reside in an Object as well not just other souls/Fluctlights. Though to his knowledge this should be theoretically impossible. Higa fully opened the connection of the Main Visualizer to Kirito's STL anyway, willing to take this long shot to heal Kirito.

The second before Kirito crushed his heart, Eugeo's voice reached him. Eugeo's physical unmarred form showed up as well. Kirito asked blankly, barely able to hope, that was Eugeo, his best friend and partner, alive after all? Eugeo shook his head, saying he's only Kirito's memory of Eugeo. He reminded Kirito of a conversation long ago, on Eugeo's deathbed, that they believed memories are eternal and resting in others' hearts. Asuna and the rest of the girls chimed in, agreeing with Eugeo; that they're always connected with Kirito, that no matter how far physically away they are from one another, the memories and emotions will always link them together.

Kirito's eyes watered, and he asked Eugeo if it was alright for him to continue forward. Eugeo instantly said yes, and told Kirito there are a lot of people waiting for him. Eugeo said he'll always be with Kirito, no matter where he would head off to. Eugeo and the other girls' forms turned into a bright light, and flowed into Kirito.

And then...

TL note: I didn't want to mention this in the middle of emotional scenes, but darn it if Eugeo was a girl Kirito have a high chance of being snatched away from Asuna O_o Kirito feels probably just as strongly about Eugeo as he does for Asuna, if not more. If Alicization ever get animated in its full glory I fully expect Yaoi doujins with Kirito + Eugeo to outnumber every other pairing except Kirito + Asuna.

Part 39-2

Klein was yelling how he'll never forgive PoH, crawling towards him even as he was impaled by many weapons. PoH got tired of hearing Klein running his mouth off, and was about to order the Korean and Chinese players to kill them all. Teiza then sprung up from under Renri and tried to attack PoH. PoH dodged, with Teiza only managing to stab his cloak. PoH brought out 'Mate Chopper', the cursed blade that ignores all defence stats and armour, and then brought it down onto Teiza. Sparks flew, and PoH's blade was deflected away from Teiza right before it smashed her head apart. PoH was interested in this outcome, and attacked several more times with the same result. Teiza wasn't the one that deflected PoH; Ronie recognized the technique as an Incarnation Blade, the ability to attack with only your mind and not needing your weapons. It was one of the ultimate techniques of a Synthesis Knight. Asuna thought it can't have been Renri, he was too far back... then she had a feeling who it might be, and turned her head towards him.

Asuna gave a exclamation, and now her tears are shed because of happiness instead of despair. Next to where PoH is, Kirito on the ground moved his right hand. His hand had regenerated, and a flash of light had flown out of that hand to intercept attacks. PoH noticed this as well, but only scornfully looked at Kirito instead of trying to stop him. Kirito's left hand grabbed onto the Blue Rose sword, and he unsheathed the sword. The broken blade was also regenerated after a flash of blue light. Asuna croaked out Kirito's name, and he shot up high into the air with everyone watching. He did multiple back flips, and when he landed he suddenly unsheathed his black sword. Kirito flourished both blades to the side, and then a even more apparent change begun to wash over him; Kirito's black and dusty clothes became as good as new, and his emaciated body was restored to a muscular form. A black coat formed out of nowhere to cover Kirito, and his hair grew back to normal. The Japanese side, not just Asuna, gave an involuntary sob of happiness that Kirito, the Black Swordsman, Dual Wielder, is now back.

Kirito then turned to Asuna, and gave her a smile just like how she remembered he was. Asuna was overwhelmed with emotion that he's back, and with that all her sadness and despair seemed to vanish and no longer feel the pain from countless wounds she had received. Asuna felt she could fight another 10,000 players with no problems in her current state. She did not move however, instead tried to record everything she is seeing now into her memories. Everyone else here was in a similar state, only able to look at this development.

The first person to break the silence was PoH. Acting like he had forgotten all about trying to kill Teiza earlier, PoH said now the 'hero' have finally woke up, and it would not have been good otherwise. Now PoH can finally have his scheduled scenario, breaking Kirito down himself. PoH planned to sever Kirito's

limbs, and then force Kirito to watch him completely wreck Asuna in ways that the morality code had forbidden him to do back in SAO.

PoH then gave the command for the rest of the players on his side to kill everyone, and focus on Kirito as he's the culprit of 'hacking the grassroot server'. Tens of thousands players roared, and then charged. The dozens of players close by raised their weapons and was on the verge of delivering the killing blow to the downed Japanese players. Even in the countdown to this tragedy Asuna had faith Kirito can get them out of this. Kirito casually twirled the white sword in his left hand, and embedded it into the ground. Then, he spoke softly:

"Release Recollection."

The colour vanished from the world, a blue-white flash enveloped everything. A hemisphere of light originating from the Blue Rose sword covered everyone, even the 30,000+ players. The hatred and killing intent Asuna had felt from the masses has now vanished like it was never there. The light faded, Asuna breathed in a breath of cold and clear air, and then gasped. The world has frozen and turned white as far as they can see, with speck of frost floating in the air. Any breath they exhaled became like a white fog. All sound vanished, regardless of it being the almighty roar the players had, or their heavy footsteps as they charged. Asuna took her eyes off of Kirito, and looked her with Ronie and Lizbeth in her arms.

The Korean and Chinese players clad in black were all frozen, a 2cm thick layer of ice enveloped them. That were not all; vines made of ice grew up in a spiral from their legs, reaching all the way up to their heads. Buds grew at the players' chests and heads, and then bloomed. Blue petals opened, showing these flowers to all be roses. Not even the blood red sunlight of Dark Territory can taint the beauty of these blue flowers. White sparkles began to be emitted out of the flowers, and a clear sweet scent filled the area. Ronie realized these are energy being emitted, and Asuna found these rose are draining the HP from the players and turning them into mana for the area. This garden of blue rose had sealed away the foreign players, and will drain them until they log out without any violence done to them.

Asuna was in awe of this sight – even if they gathered the power of all three Super Accounts logged in right now they wouldn't be able to recreate this level of power. The people not frozen could only look on in this mournful yet beautiful scene. Asuna then noticed the flow of energy was acting up in one particular area, spiralling down and taking form in front of Teiza. It was a teenage boy, in a similar uniform to what Ronie and Teiza is wearing. Teiza's expression changed immediately, and she sprang right his embrace as she said something that Asuna couldn't hear. The teenager held Teiza tightly for a moment, whispering something into her ears. Then, the teenager turned to look at Kirito. Both of them nodded at each other, and then this teenager vanished. Teiza sank down onto her knees, knelt onto the blue-covered earth and sobbed quietly.

PoH ruined the moment by swearing loudly in English and asked Kirito just what the &@# did he do? He was the only one spared from being attacked by the ice. Kirito explained it was the 'Complete Control of Weapons' technique the Synthesis Knights have developed over 300 years, which PoH only understood it to mean cheating the system. PoH shouted for Kirito to just kill them all already, and Kirito replied that

was not necessary. The blue roses will eject the players out of UW after their HP have been drained to 0. The pain, hatred, and conflict PoH hoped for will not come to pass.

PoH was enraged, and he tapped into Incarnation abilities without knowing so. PoH's blade grew into a large guillotine blade, and his eyes and mouths began to spew out hellfire. This world of blue was dyed red by a attack PoH launched at Kirito, the giant blade descending. In his movement PoH's uncovered face was shown to SAO players for the first time, and it began to morph. PoH grew fangs, two black horns rose out of his head, and his body and poncho grew in size; PoH now looked like his namesake, a Prince of Hell. Kirito blocked his attack with the invisible 'Incarnation Blade', and the resulting clash melted all the ice around Kirito. PoH told Kirito to go die, and Kirito responded with a smirk. It was the same smile Kirito showed to bosses and strong players when it came down to a decisive battle. Kirito raised his black sword to the sky, and chanted again "Release Recollection".

With a loud BOOM, the black sword was enveloped by a black tornado. Energy from all the roses on the battlefield was being gathered into the sword, and it began to glow gold deep within the sword. Like what you might see looking at the sun through a shard of obsidian. Asuna figured out Kirito's combo was a simple one, depriving their enemies of energy and then absorbing it – simple, but by no means ineffective. Asuna also knew instinctively the white sword's owner was that teenager who had appeared moments before, and that he was no longer alive. Kirito brought down his black blade, onto PoH's sword that was locked against an invisible one from Kirito. PoH's sword broke, and Kirito's attack bisected PoH's demon form. The LC leader was pushed back, reduced back to his normal appearance. PoH snarled, admitting Kirito had won this time as well, and told Kirito to kill him already; he'll be back again soon outside of UW, and he will make Kirito and Asuna pay. Asuna tried to convince herself she was not scared by the curse-like laughter and hatred coming from PoH.

Kirito responded with no change of expression on his face, and asked PoH did he not realize why he was spared from the ice? Kirito did not plan on killing PoH, or even what Kirito did to the foreign players; following the SAO Frontliners' directive against Red Name players, Kirito plans on making PoH powerless and lock him away with no time limit on being imprisoned. PoH snarled again, and tried to fight back, but Kirito tapped PoH in the chest with his black sword. Asuna had expected PoH to burst, but instead dark tendrils – like branches – began to wrap around PoH. Kirito explain how his Sword of the Night Sky came to be, from a great tree that limitlessly absorbed nutrients and resources. Kirito explained this attack right now goes beyond how branches and roots pierce through obstacles, but imitates how things stuck inside a tree's trunk or roots are dried up and became one with the tree.

At Kirito's words Asuna suddenly looked at PoH's legs. It was replaced by tree roots. PoH raised his hand to try and punch Kirito, but it suddenly became branches and unmoving. PoH now have finally show fear as his body was becoming a tree, and Kirito said to him quietly: after the foreign players have all been drained, the US side will probably activate the acceleration rate once more. Kirito told PoH to pray his allies will drag him out soon, otherwise he will spend years here as a tree, until maybe one day this place will try and be settled and a kid will try and cut him down with a axe. PoH opened his mouth to respond, but then he was petrified completely. Bark and branches grew, until what was here is no longer a person but a strangely shaped tree.

Kirito planted his black sword onto the ground now as well, and gazed up at the remaining resource in the air. His left hand was raised up then, fingers moving like they're playing like a invisible instrument. Kirito chanted a spell, and transferred the energy from the area into the bodies of the people still here. It began to rain white drops of energy, healing the wounds of the UW people and the remaining Japanese players. The frozen players that had held down the Japanese side had started to crumble away, their HP now depleted.

He then walked towards Asuna, who couldn't even stand back up or speak right now; she felt if she did anything she might just find all that has happened just then was a dream, too good to be true. All she could do was look at Kirito with a smile.

Klein did not have this hesitation however, and got up. His arm has regenerated, and under his torn clothes it showed unmarred flesh. Klein hoarsely spoke out Kirito's name, and accused him of always coming in at the best moment for heroics – Klein didn't have any malice in his words however, and embraced Kirito fiercely and cried manly tears into his chest. Kirito returned the embrace from his close friend, tears flowing down his eyes. Renri stood up and tackled Kirito, crying into his right shoulder.

The rest of the Japanese players have tears as well, distinct from this rain of energy. The UW people shed tears as well, and the UW people who are in sight of Kirito knelt down and placed their right fist to their chest in a salute. Renri walked to Asuna, saying he knows it's Kirito and his two swords that had saved them all. Asuna nodded, and Renri then went to try and help Teiza up.

Of the foreign players here, over half have crumbled away. Kirito knew once they're all gone the acceleration rate would start again, and removed himself from Klein's embrace. Kirito thanked everyone for their efforts, and their blood, tears, and willpower will not go to waste. Asuna now remembered this isn't over yet, as even though PoH and players from three other countries are gone the mastermind (Gabriel) is still around, possibly still have Alice and on his way to the World End Altar. Asuna finally stood up, and held back her impulse to just dive right onto Kirito and cry like a child. She tried to explain how Vector has Alice, and Kirito told her he roughly remember what had happened when he was inactive. Kirito's expression tightened, and he held out his right hand to Asuna, asking her to come along and help Alice out. Asuna finally can't hold herself back any longer, rushed in to Kirito and pressed his hand onto her face as she latched onto him. Kirito's left hand went around Asuna and held her. In that instant of being in close proximity Asuna could feel they had exchanged a large amount of data between their souls.

Kirito then pointed with his left hand to the south, saying he found them. The two swords stuck into the ground floated up without any signs, spun back to Kirito and sheathed themselves onto the clips at the back of Kirito's coat. Kirito said they'll be off now, and after a pillar light rising from his location he and Asuna was gone.

Lizbeth sighed, saying she doesn't know if Kirito is as impulsive as usual or just being carefree. Silica chuckled at those words. Klein shouted out Kirito's just too damn hax and unbeatable, and hogs all the good scenes; Lizbeth knew however despite his harsh words Klein was moved to tears. And Klein had a

hero worship of Kirito, likely all the way back from when Klein first met him. Lizbeth thought she's the same way as well. When she leaves UW, she will go tell the rest of the Japanese players who had logged out in pain and misery their efforts were not wasted.

Part 40

Gabriel's hacker, Kurittaa (クリッター), was reduced to face-desking the control panel and cursing at how things have turned out. He saw the numbers of the Chinese and Korean players going down somehow, and they've lost that battle. Checking how Gabriel is doing, Kurittaa decided it should be impossible for the Japanese side to catch up. He also thought Vassago was still in combat somehow, as he hasn't logged off and was deep within enemy forces.

Kurittaa checked the Acceleration capabilities of UW. At x1,000 is the standard one, and x1,200 is the theoretically safest upper limit of accelerating the human mind. There was also x5,000 which was used when there's only UW Fluctlights inside UW with no RW people. To activate the acceleration you have to push a lever up to the level, then confirm it using the locked button nearby. Kurittaa tried to use the lever, but it won't go past x1,200. He then found there's a keyhole next to the lever, if you need to accelerate faster you have to unlock that. Kurittaa wants to keep their options open, and asked the men who's now around the downed robot if anyone among them knows how to lock-pick.

Scene change to Higa. He's waking up after falling unconscious, after Kikuoka trying to get him up. After a bit, he remembered he was shot earlier. Rinko told him Kirito's Fluctlight is back to normal activity, or maybe even over active. Higa realized Rinko and Kikuoka was who performed first aid on him, his shoulder is wrapped up in bandages and a blood pack is connected to him. Kikuoka blamed himself for not realizing there's a traitor. Higa wondered who did CPR on him, then decided there's some things that are not meant to be known and didn't ask (considering the choice was either Kikuoka or Rinko). Higa asked how is UW and Alice's current state, and Rinko told him what had happened. Higa was hit hard by how Koreans was involved, he had come into the project in respect to his Korean friend's memory, but it had turned out to be another platform for the two countries' enmity. Over 40,000 new players had entered UW, and the 2,000 Japanese VRMMO players logged in wore them down to 30,000 before the Japanese side was mostly defeated. Then Kirito wiped out the 30,000 new players, to Higa's shock. Higa exclaimed there was nothing in UW that was supposed to be able to do that, then he remembered how Administrator had brainwashed Yanai and there was the Main Visualizer acting up earlier. Higa felt cold, and asked Kikuoka if they had created something incredible, and something they should not have created. Then, the acceleration alarm rang out.

Scene Change to Kirito. He turned himself and Asuna into Light element particles and flew towards Gabriel. It's not as fast as 'speed of light', but he can still cross over a hundred KM in a little over 3 minutes. The problem, then, isn't catching up to Gabriel but what comes after. Kirito remembered the 'girls talk' Ronie, Asuna and Alice had of him last night in the wagon. It was basically a report of the list of 'crimes' he had done as a womanizer from the UW girls to Asuna. There was how Ronie said he gave rare flowers to his 'beautiful sempai' at her graduation back at the Academy, making her shed tears of joy; and how Alice had said Fanatio has somehow fallen for Kirito, with the Knight Vice-Captain speaking of Kirito very favourably. Kirito's getting a headache of trying to explain all that to Asuna without it turning

into a shuraba/carnage. The headache led to Kirito spiralled out of control in his flight, back in normal human form. He transformed his coat into wings, barely managed to stay in the sky, when Asuna dropped down and he had to catch her. Their eyes met, and Kirito felt like he had to explain right then about his actions with Asuna's eyes pinning him down. He swore there was absolutely nothing between him and Solterina sempai or Fanatio, he'd swear by the name of the goddess Sutechia (Ironically, he doesn't know Asuna logged in using the account Sutechia).

Asuna's face calmed down at hearing that, and began to tear up. She was glad her Kirito didn't change after these two years he's been in UW, and was still her's after all. Kirito said he hadn't changed, really. Asuna said that was a bit hard to believe, he was pretty godlike in how he had took down an large army by himself, healed over 200 people like nothing, and now he's flying in the sky. Kirito gave a wry smile, and said it's only because he knew the laws of this world a tad better than others; Asuna herself can fly as well if she learned how. Asuna said she doesn't mind if she doesn't know how to fly herself, as long as Kirito was willing to fly with her in his arms.

They embraced each other, and Kirito thanked Asuna for fighting on even though she was wounded that much, in that much pain. Asuna said it was more than just her, listing the other players who helped and the UW people. Mid-list, Asuna remembered Berculi had flown ahead to try and stop Vector and they need to hurry up and help. Kirito shook his head, having felt Berculi's dead already. Just as Berculi had managed to take from their crossing of Incarnation Blades, before this war had started, he found Kirito still had enough heart to protect the ones he loved; Kirito also found out Berculi didn't expect to live past this war. Berculi chose to end his 300 year long life to protect Alice. Asuna sobbed for a moment that another death had happened, then asked if Alice was alright. Kirito nodded, saying she's fine and almost at World End's Altar. Asuna then said they should hurry then, for Berculi's sake. Kirito nodded again, but Asuna then pulled her face closer and asked for just now, let Kirito be hers for just this moment.

They kissed, and Kirito got his memory of being attacked by Johnny Black back. Kirito then thought about the other Laughing Coffin member here, PoH. After acceleration starts PoH would probably be stuck in isolation and sensory deprivation for a few days or weeks at least, and suffer heavy mental damage like how Kirito did. However, Kirito does not believe he did an overly cruel thing, as PoH had said he'll try and hurt Asuna. Kirito broke off the kiss, and both of them remembered back to when Aincrad was cleared and they kissed under the sunset. Kikuoka then messaged Kirito from a console outside.

Scene change. Kurittaa looked on at two of the team making a bet at whether one of them can open the lock under 5 minutes. US\$ 500k was on the line. The lockpicking guy swore when there's only one minute left, pulled out his handgun, and shot the lock. Technically, he did open the lock... Kurittaa then tried moving the lever up. 5,000x. 10,000x. Even higher than that... Kurittaa shoved the lever to its highest limit, and then shot the button to activate it.

Higa saw all the screens go red, and the notice "Acceleration to absolute limits phase will begin shortly" came up. Rinko was shocked, and asked wasn't the limit 1,200x? Higa said no, that was just the safety limits. The real limit is what the hardware is capable of. Rinko told him to get to the point, and Higa explained the hardware allows the acceleration to go up to **five million times** the normal speed. At that

speed, one minute in RW means ten years in UW. The STL not in Ocean Turtle can't handle that and will be forced to log off, but Asuna and Kirito won't be able to leave. Rinko said they need to get the two of them out immediately, but was told if they don't log out the normal way their Fluctlights will be stuck inside UW and out of their body. Kikuoka's saying he's going down to the main controller room to settle this; the countdown to absolute acceleration is less than 10 minutes. Even in the best case scenario, it will take 20 minutes after the acceleration starts to get Kirito and Asuna out. 200 years of being inside UW for anyone left inside. And the human brain's lifespan is only 150 years. Higa told Kikuoka he has the control set up to communicate with Kirito directly, and Kirito needs to know this immediately.

Kirito got the message. And he understood while they can suicide to get their HP to 0 and log out that way, they shouldn't try it when the time gets too close. Otherwise they might stuck on the border of life and death for 200 years in agony. Kirito also knew if they're stuck in UW, it is highly likely they would die in here due to life span issues. Kirito apologised to Kikuoka for saying harsh things to him half a year ago, no, just last night by RW standards, when he contacted them via Administrator's console (Kirito had just saw Eugeo die back then, and wasn't thinking clearly). Kikuoka told Kirito they don't blame him for those words, and had already prepared medicine for themselves for when Kirito get out and beat them to a pulp. Kikuoka then cut off the call, and Asuna asked what happened, as she didn't hear Kikuoka. Kirito left out the acceleration part in his explanation, only that they should leave UW within 10 minutes. Kirito turned himself and Asuna back into Light particles and flew towards Alice.

Over where Alice is, she saw Gabriel had caught up to her. She couldn't forgive Gabriel for being still alive when Berculi was dead. If Gabriel can't die in UW, then Alice will kill him in RW when she leaves UW via World End Altar. Though that plan seem unlikely to come to pass now, having been caught up so close to the end. The World End Altar was within sight, at the edge of the world as its name suggests on a floating island. Alice told her two dragons to land, on a barren desert of black sand, so she can get ready to fight. After landing, Alice told the two of them her final command to them is for them to be free, to go back to Western territory and find a good mate each. Alice then chased the two of them off, telling them to fly and not look back, and she stayed there waiting for Gabriel. The two dragons took a run up and flew off, but Alice's own dragon looked back at her anyway. Her dragon shed a tear, and then veered off with her brother towards Gabriel. Alice screamed and told them no, don't, but the two dragons defied her orders to go attack Gabriel.

The two dragons fired their laser breath against Gabriel, and even hoping against hope Alice thought this would end it; dragon's breath is more powerful than anything outside a Synthesis Knight's Release Recollection or Grand Ritual Magic, and Gabriel is being shot by two of those. Gabriel raised his left hand however, and a black spiral of blue-black energy appeared to absorb the light and heat of the two attacks. Like a black hole, the two attacks were sucked in without any explosion or damage done. Then, from within this black spiral countless black lightning shot out, piercing through the two dragons. Like the energy from this attack was taken from the earlier dragon breaths. Blood and smoke rose out from the bodies of the two dragons. Alice screamed for the two dragons to leave, they have done enough already, please stop. The dragons ignored her, shooting at Gabriel again with the dark spiral blocking their attacks once more. The dragons this time however turned their flesh and blood into light, and poured everything they had into attacking Gabriel. The black spiral could not absorb it all, and Gabriel's

left hand began to steam. However, this only lasted a moment and then Gabriel was wreathed in the blue-black light. His dark spiral strengthened, and black lightning once again shot out from it. It pushed back the beams of light, and was about to pierce through the dragons.

Then, stars fell from the sky.

Two glowing specks dropped down. One of them, Kirito, blocked the black lightning with some kind of telekinetic shield. Alice shed tears of joy that he's back. Kirito nodded at the two dragons, then the two dragons that were about to vanish shrunk down. No, more like they reverted into being young dragons. Smaller and smaller, they are returned into being dragon eggs. The eggs then flew back to Alice. Alice doesn't know how this was possible even with spells, but she's not surprised Kirito can do this. Alice told Kirito 'thank you' and 'welcome back', though Kirito should not be able to hear her from so far away. He replied anyway through telepathy, saying he's the one that should be saying thanks, and sorry for letting Alice worry over him for so long. Kirito says he'll meet up with her again in RW. He turned around to face Gabriel, and the space between them warped and sparked from the strong Incarnation both of them had.

The other star that came down earlier was Asuna, and she led Alice to the Altar. Asuna used her GM ability to create a marble staircase to reach the Altar. Alice was worried about Asuna's exertion, but Asuna waved off the concern saying there's no time. They have 8 minutes before the Altar closes. Asuna grabbed Alice's hands and ran up the stairs. As they ran, Alice looked back at Kirito in the sky. She wanted to tell him there are so many things she wanted to tell him, so many things to ask him that she has lost count of them by now. Alice wanted Kirito to win, and then come back to her side once more.

Part 41-1

Kirito burned the sight of Asuna and Alice going up the marble stairs into his memory, and thought this is farewell, he'll never meet them again. He doesn't believe he can log off before the acceleration reaches x5,000,000. If he told them about the acceleration thing, then both girls would stay to fight with him against this enemy. There would be no way all three of them can make it out in time even if they win, so Kirito decided to make sure Asuna and Alice can leave. Apart from that, nothing else mattered to him.

Kirito then met Gabriel, though by this point Kirito can tell even if he's in human form he's something more than that deep down.

===(Translation starts)

After a second of thinking and observation have ended, I opened my mouth and asked:

“... Who are you?”

The reply came immediately. The man used a voice as smooth as some kind of metal to say:

“The one that seeks, steals, and plunders.”

The black-blue squirming darkness that enveloped him grew even stronger. My face can feel some kind of faint wind. Air, no, ‘information’ of some kind is being sucked into that darkness.

“What do you seek?”

“Souls.”

With this exchange of questions and answers, this sucking power is growing stronger. It’s not just information that makes up this area. It feels like my consciousness is also being absorbed by the gravity of this void bit by bit.

The man showed expression around his mouth for the first time. It was a smile like a thin gas.

“And who are you? Why are you here? On what grounds do you stand before me?”

He turned around and asked me questions instead.

So – who am I?

The Hero that has descended onto Underworld? – Impossible.

A Knight that protects the Human Kingdom? – No.

As my mind is bringing up words of denial, there was the sensation of something being sucked out of my body, being stolen away. But for some reason my thoughts just won't stop.

The Hero that cleared SAO? – No.

The Strongest VRMMO player? – No.

The 'Black Swordsman'? 'Dual-wielder'? – No, and No.

No matter which of these names, none of them are the existence I desire myself to be or are they one that accurately describes me.

Then... just who am I?

In the instant my consciousness grew faint,

A dearly beloved voice called out my name from the bottom of my heart.

I raised my face that I didn't know when I had let facing down, and spoke out that name that was called.

"I am Kirito. Kirito, the Swordsman."

Bachii!!

A white spark flew out and severed the dark tentacles that had been wrapped around me. My mind regained clarity instantly.

What was that phenomenon just now?!

This man – could he manipulate my consciousness through the two STL?

I spread out a defence wall of Incarnation and gazed into the man's eyes. There was only the void in that man's eyes. A bottomless darkness which can absorb other people's minds and souls.

This battle will be decided, it seems, by how you define yourself to be powerful, and how your opponent defines himself.

"And what is your name?"

I subconsciously asked that question out loud.

The man thought for a brief moment, and then spoke his name.

"Gabriel. I am called Gabriel Michael."

==(Translation End)

Kirito instinctively knew Gabriel was talking about his real name. As Gabriel said that, his body became thinner, colder, and the dark atmosphere around him grew in size. Kirito then noticed Gabriel's right arm

was only a mass of darkness, and the sword he drew was just as ethereal as his arm – a one metre long blade of darkness covered in blue-white flames. Kirito then placed some distance between himself and Gabriel, and drew both his swords. In his left hand he held the Blue Rose Sword, and in his right hand the Sword of the Night Sky. The dark colour between their two blades are about the same, though Gabriel's one seemed more like a hole in the world than merely something that absorbs resources like the Night Sky sword.

Kirito bravely roared out his challenge, and charged. He crossed the blades in front of him, and gave the System Command "Generate All Elements". Dozens of missiles from all elements appeared, forming into ice lances, flaming swords and such, and upon Kirito's command of "Discharge!" they all shot at Gabriel. Then as if to catch up to his projectiles, Kirito shot forward with his blades. Gabriel merely smiled, and stood there letting all attacks impact onto him.

Kirito shot passed him, his right hand slashing down while his left hand stabbed at Gabriel. A cold feeling was felt by Kirito as he passed. Kirito kept flying forward, and looking back it was as he thought; Gabriel was unharmed by all those attacks. Gabriel's type/element was 'Drain'; a type that can absorb damage from slashing, stabbing, flames, freezing, whirlwinds, stone bullets, steel arrows, crystal blades, light beams and darkness curses.

And as Kirito flew past, Gabriel's Void Blade had ripped apart Kirito's shoulder, passing through Kirito's coat and flesh with no effort. Blood flew from his shoulder in that instant.

Gabriel judged that by Asuna and Alice's speed it will take them 5 more minutes before they reach the Altar. He had thought Kirito was just a brat like Sinon, or maybe even weaker as Gabriel couldn't absorb many thoughts from him, but after Kirito turned his coat into wings and used all elements of magic Gabriel changed his mind. He thought Kirito was someone that has adjusted fully to UW. Gabriel decided to steal the knowledge of this from Kirito, so when he backstabs US and steals Alice away he can use it for himself. Gabriel told Kirito he'll spend 3 minutes to play around with him.

Kirito replied that was generous of him. By this point Kirito knew Gabriel can be this relaxed because he can absorb everything Kirito throws at him. The damage done to him previously by Sinon was by a gun, which as a soldier Gabriel thought conceptually it was something dangerous. Kirito can't copy that damage style, as Sinon could do that only because the Hecate II was like a part of her. Even if Kirito imagines up a gun it won't be that powerful. He'll have to find another way to deal damage. Despite this, Kirito was confident he can win.

Gabriel doesn't know where Kirito is getting his confidence from. He concluded Kirito is just here to buy time for Alice to escape, and 3 minutes is too long to waste on him. Gabriel stabbed his void blade into his mount. This winged creature was a jetpack in GGO, and it turned into this form when Gabriel transferred his 'Subtilizer' account into UW. The creature was absorbed into Gabriel, and he grew wings. Not the bat-like ones like what Kirito has, but bird-like ones that suited the angelic name of Gabriel more.

Kirito hesitated. He was planning on attacking Gabriel's mount to deny him the air advantage, but now that isn't going to work. Gabriel took this chance to charge in to attack Kirito with his sword, and Kirito blocked with both his swords. It felt like trying to hold back a dimensional fissure, and this has a heavy strain on Kirito's swords. The two exchanged sword strikes, and Kirito took a opening to kick Gabriel in the head. Kirito thought Gabriel was a soldier, so his conception will probably include physical blows as being damaging. However, Gabriel was only slightly damaged – by his conception, fancy attacks like that were just for show on TV and movies. Gabriel then charged at Kirito, with his Void blade parrying the Blue Rose sword and his darkness form arm took no damage from Kirito's Night Sky sword, Gabriel had Kirito in a hold with his right Incarnation arm. Then with no effort Gabriel's darkness tentacle hand dislocated Kirito's left shoulder, telling him real martial arts was something like this.

Gabriel then went on the offensive, dealing multiple shallow wounds on Kirito. Kirito flew backwards, to try and get some distance between them and to buy time for healing his arm. Gabriel raised his left hand, and ten beams of light shot out towards Kirito (TL note: Basically, think of AW's 6th generation Chrome Disaster firing multiple dark Laser Lances at once, a upgrade of Silver Crow's version). Kirito gritted his teeth and brought up an Incarnation barrier, but half his willpower was directed to healing himself. The lances pierced through the barrier, three of them hit his torso and both legs and started devouring Kirito. Kirito gasped, and it took all his willpower to remove the void lances Gabriel had stuck into him. After the lances are dispelled, blood spurted out from the wounds.

Gabriel laughed, though the joy on his twisted face did not reach his eyes. His eyes were filled with a whirlpool of desire and hunger. Gabriel crossed his arms in front of him, and focused. He then spread his arms out wide, and he grew another two pairs of wings. With now six wings, a dark halo, and his wavy blond hair spread out behind him, Gabriel looked like an angel of death. His eyes were no longer human too, but two sockets of blue light. Kirito looked at where Asuna and Alice were, and he wasn't sure he can buy the remaining 3 minutes before they reach the altar.

Gabriel's laughing even more as he's revelling in the newfound power; he feels he's now omnipotent. Gabriel had taken a copy of all knowledge Kirito had on Incarnation into himself with his last attack. Before, Gabriel had thought Zast's and Berculi's skills were some hidden system skills, but now he knew it

was just the power of imagination and willpower. As thanks, Gabriel thought he'd let Kirito buy an extra minute for the girls to run. And when this minute is up, Gabriel plans to devour Kirito and turn the kid's strength into his own. Gabriel, wreathed in blue-purple lightning, charged at Kirito.

Kirito now feels Gabriel was an existence to be feared and feel threatened by. He felt his own resolve as not strong enough. And as if to show Gabriel was not immune to gun attacks, Gabriel's arm had regenerated into flesh and blood once more. Then, Kirito realized he might have given up on victory from the very beginning, aiming to lose or drag it out to a draw so he can justify staying in UW; a VR world beyond even Aincrad, an alternate world that can be said to be the crystallization of Kayaba's dream brought into existence. While Kirito had fought on despite his attachment to want to stay in SAO back then, because of his real body wasting away, that was not a problem here. With the acceleration, Kirito can spend the rest of his soul's lifetime in this new world. Kirito have ignored how everyone might feel if he doesn't make it back; Suguha, his mother/father, Yui, Klein, Agil, Liz, Silica, and everyone that has helped him.

Alice as well. And also Asuna. How they would weep, how painful they might feel, Kirito thought he had never considered that. Following his flashback earlier before he woke up to fight PoH and the foreign players, Kirito thought in the end he really doesn't understand other people.

Eugeo, from within the Blue Rose Sword, refuted Kirito's opinion. Eugeo said Kirito didn't want to leave UW was because he loved everyone here in this world. Selka, Teiza, Ronie, Cardinal, everyone else they had met, and also Eugeo himself. Eugeo told Kirito he had love so vast he can shoulder an entire world of people. Eugeo then said Gabriel was different, he steals and destroys because he doesn't understand the human heart – that Gabriel's afraid.

Gabriel saw Kirito shed tears (from Eugeo's words) and thought Kirito was afraid of dying. He loved the fear of death from his victims, it was like a stimulant for Gabriel. Gabriel then brought into existence countless small black balls of energy, and shot them into Kirito with those turning into laser bullets. The boy was peppered by the shots, and blood sprayed everywhere. Gabriel roared out his laughter, and came in closer to Kirito. He then stabbed his Void blade into Kirito's stomach, and the resulting attack blew everything below that wound apart. Flesh and blood, bones, and organs sprayed down below them, dropping down towards the distant ground. Gabriel's left hand then plucked Kirito's still-pumping heart out of his ribcage, like it was some kind of large jewel. He brought that pile of flesh towards his mouth, and declared:

"Everything about your emotions, memories, heart and soul... I will be devouring them now."

Kirito watched this scene with half-opened eyes, and saw Gabriel bite down on his heart like it was a large, ripe apple. Blood overflowed from Gabriel's mouth – though it wasn't Kirito's blood. It was Gabriel's, after Kirito spawned countless small Steel blades inside his heart and ripped Gabriel's mouth apart. Kirito said hoarsely to Gabriel as he flew backwards choking on the blood, 'that hearts and memories don't reside in the physical heart. The body is only a container, and the memories...'

Are within your own self. Though this bit wasn't verbalized. Kirito was on the verge of fainting from the pain, and he knew this was the last chance to attack Gabriel. Kirito roared out "Release Recollection!", then blue-white light and pure black light exploded out of his swords. The Blue Rose Sword that was pointed at Gabriel wrapped him in several layers of icy thorns. The Night Sky Sword was pointed up, and a huge beam of darkness pierced through the heavens shot into the sky.

Then, the darkness began to spread. The blood red sky was overwritten, and day has been plunged into darkness. And it was not the darkness of the void...

... but the darkness of the boundless Night Sky.

(TL + Flere821 Note: Accel World, your Incarnation skills SUCK when compared to this stuff.)

Part 41-2

Sinon was lying down on the rocks, waiting for her HP to deplete. She's starting to feel faint, and her limbs losing strength. Then, she saw day turn into night. Sinon realized this is Kirito's heart given form, and she was reminded of the night they spent in GGO during the tournament. Kirito was not like the radiant sun that leads from the front, but the stars that glow weakly that will always be supporting you from afar. Sinon wished for her thoughts to reach Kirito, and her thoughts led to a light blue star glowing overhead.

Leafa is also facing her final moments in UW, she doesn't have the mental strength to continue on or even use her healing ability. Her limbs were unmoving, and her entire body felt cold. Riruperin is crying over Leafa's passing. Day turned into night, and the Gladiators and Orcs around her was shocked at this change. Leafa knew this was Kirito's doing however, and understood how he had become the person he

was today from this change. To Leafa, this night sky was the proof of Kirito's resolve to shoulder the fate of UW and everyone within it himself, and proof that Kirito was a superior sword-user than she was. Leafa prayed for her feelings to reach Kirito, and a green star glowed above her in the sky.

Lizbeth, seeing the change in the sky, was reminded of when she met Kirito. She was also reminded of how Kirito said he wasn't the one responsible that cleared SAO, but everyone that helped; Kirito said it was their willpower that led to him stay after his HP was depleted, and allowed him to defeat Heathcliff. Lizbeth said to Silica next to her that she loved Kirito after all. Silica agreed, saying she does as well. Both of them, the SAO Frontliners, and everyone else there in the group began to pray each in their own way, and hundreds of stars began to light up the sky.

Renri watched the sky turn into night next to Teiza, grasping her hand. He couldn't forgive himself that he was the only Synthesis Knight here that stayed alive; he planned on dying, just like Berculi did, to repay the memory of the best friend he forgot about (due to being processed into a Synthesis Knight). Kirito however showed him true strength was to live on, and be connected with the people around you. Teiza came to the same conclusion as well. Teiza's other hand was grasped by Ronie, and the three of them then prayed for Kirito. Three constellations made of hundreds of stars lit up in the sky.

Ishukaan watched Leafa dying, and thought the Orcs followed her because they thought the green-haired girl was stronger than Vector. He asked Shuuta just what is true strength. Shuuta replied he should know by now, it's something greater than anger and hatred. Day turned into night then, and a green star appeared above them. Shuuta pointed at that, and said that was true strength, the true light. Both of them prayed, and then a red star and grey star speared above them. The DT forces began to pray as well, and the number of stars swelled from hundreds, to thousands, to tens of thousands.

Then, quick transition of scenes of other people praying followed. Fanatio and the rest of her troops and Knights praying for a peaceful world; the demi-human populations of DT; Selka, realizing Kirito is back to normal, and prayed for Eugeo to keep him safe; other villagers with Selka; and all the residents of Human Kingdom.

Over a hundred thousand stars began to glow in this night sky that blocked out the midday sun. Then, they began to move south, to the ends of this world, where a sword was pointed towards the sky.

Alice saw Gabriel turned into his six-winged form, and the ensuing battle even as she ran. She saw how

Kirito had only his upper body left, yet his willpower was so strong it was enough to keep him alive and fighting. Then in the night sky stars began to converge, carrying the will of all the residents of UW in a colossal flow of rainbow. Alice brought her feelings to bring as well, and thought even if she was a fake personality her feelings are real. A golden star began to fly towards Kirito's sword.

Asuna didn't look back to watch Kirito fight. Her only thought was to bring Alice to the World End Altar as soon as possible, to repay Kirito for fighting. However the burning feelings of her heart continued to throb in her heart, and Asuna shed tears. Those tears scattered into the wind, and turned into a constellation that glowed with all the colours in the sky. Asuna spared only an instant to watch her tears fly up, and ran on without looking back. She has faith Kirito will be victorious.

Gabriel could not comprehend how he can be trapped inside the ice, considering how he can absorb elements. He understood how his mouth was wounded however, his concept of mouths and biting down was what led to that.

==(Translation Start)

I am the Reaper. I am the one who robs away all light, all heat, and all of existence.

I am the Abyss.

"NU....LLLLLLLL!!"

Gabriel's throat let out an alien roar that could not be described as a voice of a human anymore.

The three pairs of black wings behind him had all turned into blades of Void like the sword in his right hand.

The blades of Void made severe sounds of impact, and severed the space of everything around him. The

blue-white vines are finally cut apart, and his body was free.

“LLLLLLLLLLLL!”

Gabriel extended his blades of Void along with his roar. His empty left hand was pointed ahead, and he was about to launch lines of darkness at the brat to bind him when-

Gabriel noticed only just then the red light of the sky had disappeared.

And also, noticing the countless shooting stars above that descended one by one.

==(Translation End)

Kirito didn't have anything in mind when he Released his Sword of the Night Sky. Turning day into night was not what Kirito had in mind. When the stars gathered Kirito only realized then the purpose of the Night Sky sword is to absorb resource from the environments, and the most abundant resource in UW was not from the sun or the land; it was the power of human souls. The power of prayers, hopes, and wishes. The stars began to drop down into his Night Sky Sword, being absorbed. Then, after the gold-coloured and aurora-coloured stars that rose from the earth and went into his sword, the black sword glowed an incandescent white. Kirito's body was charged with power, and his lower body and organs were regenerated in an instant. The Blue Rose Sword also glowed with phenomenal power.

Kirito brought his swords up, and roared. Gabriel shouted back a war cry of his own. Gabriel could no longer be called human – his body has turned into a metallic one glowing blue-black, and a hellish purplish-blue glow came from his eyes. Three pairs of blade like wings sprouted from his back. Gabriel raised the sword in his right hand towards the sky, and his left hand sent countless cold and sticky lines at Kirito. Kirito brought forth a wall of light and deflected away those lines. Then, Kirito activated his glowing wings, and charged at Gabriel. The distance between them was small but Kirito's accelerated senses made this instant felt longer.

In this instant, wraiths of the past appeared and spoke to Kirito.

Zast and his lover showed up, telling Kirito: “Young man, abandon your killing intent. That person’s soul of Void cannot be cut down by Incarnation of death and killing.”

Berculi appeared, dressed in his plain white kimono and steel blade appearance. His words: “Young man, there is no need to fear. Your swords contain the weight of the world.”

Administrator showed up next to Berculi, in her usual state of undress. She smiled at Kirito, her silver eyes gleaming. “Show me, all the divine might that you have inherited from me.”

Lastly, Cardinal appeared next to Kirito as if to hug him, and the small spider Charlotte that was Kirito and Eugeo’s travelling partner for years appeared on her shoulder. Cardinal spoke in her child-like voice and archaic manner of speech: “Kirito, believe. Believe in the countless souls of those that both thou loves and loves thou.”

Cardinal’s warm brown eyes blinked at Kirito softly, and then all of them disappeared.

Kirito then shot at Gabriel, closing the distance in an instant. Kirito then used the most trusted two-sword style attack he has practiced in, ‘Starburst Stream’. Sixteen continuous attack shot at Gabriel. Blades filled of starlight that could light up the universe went towards Gabriel. In response, Gabriel’s six wings and Void Blade clashed against Kirito’s swords. Light and Void collided intensely, and giant flashes and explosions shook this world. Kirito willed himself to go faster, and faster. Kirito swung his swords, and Gabriel retaliated with his blades.

Tenth strike. Eleventh strike. The energy released by their attacks burned the space around them, turning into roaring thunder.

Twelfth strike. Thirteenth strike. There was no hatred, anger, or killing intent left in Kirito’s heart. All Kirito is now is being the conduit of countless stars, with the power of prayers powering him and his swords.

Fourteenth.

Fifteenth.

Kirito shouted mentally for Gabriel to withstand the brilliance from the hearts of everyone within UW. The sixteenth attack was a bit too slow, and one of Gabriel’s wings struck Kirito. Kirito’s left arm was

severed from his shoulder, and burst into light. The Void Blade in Gabriel's right hand descended upon Kirito's hand. The Blue Rose Sword in mid-air however was taken up by a glowing pair of hands, and parried that attack; countless stars sparked out from where those two blades met. Eugeo, wielding the Blue Rose Sword, told Kirito to finish this now. Kirito thanked Eugeo, and then launched a new, seventeenth strike of his attack, from lower right towards left shoulder. The sword bit deep into Gabriel, and the attack stopped where Gabriel's heart would be. In that instant, all the light from within Kirito, Eugeo, and their swords flowed into Gabriel's body.

Gabriel felt an overwhelming waterfall of positive thoughts flowing into him, the prayers of everyone in UW. The prayers called for peace to once again come to UW, for Kirito to protect this world.

==(Translation start)

Though his heart was pierced through by the young man, Gabriel opened his arms and spread his wings wide and guffawed:

“Hahaha, hahahahahaha!!”

How foolish, how ignorant, how preposterous to the extreme!

You actually want to sate my thirst, to fill this endless Void!

Ultimately, this is only an undignified act of trying to warm the entire universe with just human hands – why do you still not understand!!

“Then I will drink it entirely, every last drop – I will Devour them all!”

Gabriel shouted out, his eyes and mouth filled with the blue light of Void.

“Can you do it?! You, who are merely someone that’s frightened, afraid of the bond between people, can you do it?!”

The young man who was wreathed in golden light shouted out to him in response.

Another layer of powerful light covered his sword – an increased amount of heat and light stabbed into the frozen heart.

The view became white-hot, and his hearing capability have been cut off.

Even so, Gabriel still laughed.

“Hahahahaha, ha-hahahahahaha!!”

==(Translation End)

Kirito was no longer afraid, even if the void deep within his opponent was like a bottomless black hole. A huge whirlpool of light, a galaxy of prayers born from the souls of others was within Kirito. The purplish-red light in Gabriel’s eyes and mouth began to shift colours. Purple, to red, orange, and then pure white.

A crack appeared on Gabriel’s metallic body. Another, from throat to chest, appeared. From within the cracks that began to appear, glowing white light poured out. Gabriel’s six wings have also begun to catch on white fire from the base of the wings. Despite this, Gabriel continued to laugh. The void angel was covered with white cracks all over his body, and then his body collapsed inwards, and then expanded.

And then released. A frightening large explosion shot towards the sky in a spiral trail.

Gabriel then suddenly woke up in the STL room, still laughing. His laughter slowly died down as he took

the view of the room in. Gabriel had thought he was kicked out of UW because of some bug, on the verge of victory and devouring Kirito whole. Gabriel turned around, and found a white-haired man sleeping in his STL. For a moment Gabriel thought just who this person was, and then he realized it was himself. Then... who is he right now that was looking at himself?

Gabriel looked down, and found he was in an ethereal state. He couldn't comprehend he's only in the form of a soul right now. Alicia, Gabriel's fiancée he killed a long time ago, his first victim, showed up beside him looking the age of when she died. Gabriel doesn't know how Alicia is here with him. Alicia then grabbed Gabriel's hand, and refused to let go. Alicia's hands felt ice-cold, stabbing into Gabriel like he was getting frostbite. Alicia said no, he'll be staying with her forever. Gabriel tried to break free, and found he couldn't. Then, for the first time in his existence, Gabriel felt fear; his heart tightened, his organs boiled, his breath getting chaotic, and goosebumps appeared all over his body. Alicia smirked, and told him this was the emotion he has wanted to experience all his life.

Gabriel wants this to all stop, but Alicia says no, he will be feeling this for the rest of eternity. Alicia then began to sink into the ground, with Gabriel sinking along with her. Gabriel involuntarily cried out no, make it stop... but the sinking did not stop.

Then, many white arms began to rise out of the ground, latching onto Gabriel. Gabriel instinctively knew these are from the victims he has killed over the years (Flere821 note: As Berculi has mentioned earlier, the souls Gabriel devoured stayed within him. And now they're out...). Gabriel started to scream, calling for his team to come in and save him. Nobody came, and Vassago on the STL next to his didn't even budge. Gabriel had sunk down half way by now, while the child form of Alicia was down to head level. Before Alicia sunk even further, she laughed. Gabriel was frightened by that laugh, and he screamed. Again, and again, and again.

White hands covered every bit of Gabriel's body as he was dragged down. With a thud, Gabriel's vision was blocked, and he gave one last piercing shriek in realization of his fate.

After that... the acceleration of UW began once more. The remaining Japanese players were forcibly logged out of UW. After taking a moment to wipe away moving tears, they called all their comrades who had been removed from UW by death, and told them their efforts were not in vain.

Sinon and Leafa woke up in their STLs, their HPs depleted before the acceleration started. Both of them believed Kirito will win, save the world, and return to them without harm. And the next time they see him, they will convey to him somehow their feelings to him. Both of the girls noticed each other's resolve and plans, then gave a slight smile to each other.

However... the STRA system had its limits released, and raced over one thousand times; five thousand times; towards the five million times accelerated rate of time compared to the real world.

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Kirito's body floated in the air, kept aloft by his wings. The severed left arm have been regrown some time before he noticed it. He was sad that the part of Eugeo within the Blue Rose Sword have burned itself into nothing when Eugeo parried Gabriel's attack. (Flere821 note: This was retcon-ed when WEB Final comes around, Eugeo was still in the sword like a guardian angel for Kirito. Seems more likely than Kirito not noticing Eugeo's presence anyway...)

Kirito sheathed his swords, and the night sky went back into daytime. Though the sky now was not the blood red as typical of DT, but clear blue. Kirito doesn't know if this was because of the absolute acceleration, or a miracle caused by the thoughts of over 100,000 people. Kirito closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and then opened his eyes to look over at the World End Altar. The marble staircase has started to crumble away from the bottom.

Kirito then flew over to where the Altar was. There were flowers everywhere, birds and bees flew around in a carefree manner, and the building was made of white marble. It was a picturesque sight. Kirito murmured to himself that guess Asuna and Alice had both made it on time to leave. He thought Alice has a tough road ahead of her, fighting for Fluctlights to be accepted by humans in RW, but was confident she can do it. Kirito gazed up towards the sky, praying for Alice and wishing her best of luck.

Kirito understood that he will have to spend 200 years in UW now. If he dies before then, he'd spend the remaining time before 200 year is up in total darkness. Kirito doesn't know whether he will perish because his natural lifespan runs out, or he can't take the loneliness and make himself disappear before that time is up. Kirito thought about his parents, Suguha, Sinon, Klein, Liz, Silica; friends at school, friends in ALO; Alice; and finally Asuna – Kirito understood that he would never see them again. Kirito's legs gave out on him, and he knelt down onto the marble floor. Kirito felt that he deserves a chance to cry right now, just for now. Cry for important people and things he has lost, and would never come back to him. He did so, and quiet tears began to fall onto the floor drop by drop.

Then, tapping sounds, footsteps, began to approach him. A new aroma, different to the flowers' ones, reached his nose. The sound stopped in front of him, and a voice called out his name.

Scene change to Ocean Turtle. Alice's LightCube, 6cm x 6cm x 6cm size, have reached Rinko. Rinko told Asuna urgently to log out, she has 30 seconds left. After a moment of silence, Asuna apologized, saying she'll stay in UW with Kirito. Asuna said she'd never forget how Rinko had helped her. She requested Rinko to not use Alice for warfare; Alice is loved by countless people, is a gentle soul, and for Kirito's sake please don't let Alice be used for war. Rinko was speechless at this development. Asuna's final words was asking Rinko to pass on her message: "Please tell everyone: Sorry... goodbye... and thank you."

Then, the countdown reached zero.

Higa and Kikuoka and going down the ducts. It took 8 minutes just to secure Higa onto Kikuoka. Higa contacted Rinko, asking how things were going, and Rinko choked out Alice was fine but Asuna decided to stay in UW. A few seconds after Rinko hung up, Higa passed on her words to Kikuoka.

Kurittaa found out Alice has been retrieved by Rath. Ultimately after all their efforts, a battle worthy of Hollywood movies, and tricking nearly 100,000 VRMMO players from China, Korea and US into fighting for them, they still lost. Kurittaa wants to check the Ocean Turtle schematics to see if there's a way to retrieve Alice's LightCube from Rath. The other members were still arguing about the legitimacy of the outcome of that last bet and just shoved the schematics to him. After looking at it for a while, Kuritta found the duct Higa and Kikuoka is coming down from.

Rinko was drained after telling Higa of Asuna's choice. She was moved by Asuna's decision, and asked herself what herself would have done if Kayaba had offered her the chance to follow him into Aincrad, or destroying her brain like he did with the STL prototype. Rinko wondered if UW was the end result for Kayaba's dream, a completely new world. She decided it can't be, there were a lot more functions in The Seed that people haven't cracked yet. Rinko also wondered why Kayaba would want to have all the VR environments (since there was no way people wouldn't use The Seed program for making VR environments considering how easily accessed and potent the program is, so all VR worlds in SAOverse would be based off of Kayaba's coding) be linked together with the Transfer function of The Seed worlds. Rinko was woken from her reverie by her colleagues saying they're ready to release the lockdown once more, so Kikuoka and Higa can go through. A minute has passed by now, and Rinko thought it was astonishing by this point Kirito and Asuna is now older than she is. She urged Higa and Kikuoka to hurry in her mind, as they have 12 minutes before Asuna and Kirito die of reaching the limit of their soul's lifespan.

Kikuoka is going down the duct with Higa. Higa was surprised Kikuoka was going this far for Kirito and Asuna; going by the Alicization project, all they have to do now is dissect Alice's AI and create unmanned weapons from there. Rath goal, and by extension Kikuoka's dream, was achieved. Everything Kikuoka had

done, such as making a ALO account, was for this end goal. Even if Rinko protested at leaving Kirito and Asuna to die, she could be restrained by the soldiers. Kikuoka interrupted Higa's thoughts, predicting Higa would be surprised by his actions. Kikuoka explained what he's doing right now is also making sure the US team won't be able to just grab Alice by this point. They reached the lockdown barrier, and asked Rinko to release the lockdown.

Kurittaa saw the lockdown being released, and sent most of the team over to the main route. He grabbed a guy, Brigg (ブリッグ), and told him they'll be heading to the ducts instead as that's probably where the actual attack will come from. They ran past STL room #1, and Kurittaa wondered why was Vassago taking so long in logging out – was he having a smoke in there and lazing off or something? The two of them reached the ducts, and found Yanai; Yanai was dead by this point. They recognized Yanai as the spy within Rath for them. Brigg looked up to see how far Yanai had fallen, and he got shot dead by Kikuoka. Kurittaa hastily pulled a retreat; he was a hacker, not a soldier. Kurittaa wondered why the K organisation was attacking right now, it wasn't like the US side had a way to make Rath suffer a worse end than stayed locked down and wait until the Japanese navy attacks. Then, Kurittaa realized yes, they do have a way; the 'last resort' as outlined by the mission to be able to kill everyone in Ocean Turtle. Kurittaa rushed back to ask Gabriel what to do, as he doesn't want to give the command that will haunt his dreams for the rest of his life.

Before Brigg died he shot back at Kikuoka. Kikuoka got shot somewhere, and complained maybe he should have worn a bulletproof vest when he came down. Higa snarked that should have been obvious, who goes into a firefight wearing just a Hawaiian shirt on his torso? Kikuoka lied he didn't get hit, and Higa began to work at the STL acceleration rate.

Kurittaa rushed into the #1 STL room to ask Gabriel about what to do next, though Kurittaa fully expected Gabriel and Vassago to give the orders to blow up the Ocean Turtle. Mid-sentence in reporting to Gabriel that Alice has been taken, Kurittaa nearly screamed out in fright. Gabriel's current expression was something Kurittaa had never seen on a person, alive or dead. Gabriel's eyes were opened so wide it looked like it might fall out. His jaws were as wide as it was humanly possible, and lopsided. On one side his tongue hanged out, making Gabriel look little like a human. If Gabriel's eyes moved Kurittaa would have screamed. He tentatively reached out to check for a pulse, and found none – Gabriel's dead, despite no visible wounds. Kurittaa rushed to where Vassago is to try and tell him Gabriel's dead, and this time Kurittaa really did scream in fright. Vassago's hair turned white like an old man's, and he looked like he died in his sleep. Kurittaa ran, back to their main holdings. He also correctly guessed the cause of death for Vassago and Gabriel was something that had happened in UW. After bringing the rest of the team up to date on the events, Brigg's mercenary partner Hans forced the last-resort measure out of Kurittaa:

Tamper with the power generator of this structure, which is nuclear powered.

Ten minutes have passed after acceleration, and Rinko thought it would have been over a hundred years inside UW. She then received word from the guards the US team is retreating. Then, after a BOOM shook the place and checking the data, Rinko and others at Rath figured out they meddled with the reactor. The control rods are down, and C4 are attached to the mechanism to bring it up. Nuclear meltdown won't happen, but it would crack the reactor and create a steam explosion powerful enough to kill everyone in Ocean Turtle. They have ten minutes to disarm the bomb, but even so the temperature within the reactor room was beyond what a human can handle.

Then, the Robot #2 began to move by itself. The robot made a voice, volunteering to go himself. Rinko smelled the scent of wax and oil she had smelled on her first day here in her room. She stood up slowly, approached the robot, and asked hoarsely if it was Kayaba speaking to them right now. The robot nodded, and Rinko hugged the robot. Kayaba apologised for leaving Rinko behind, and then got to the point as there was no time for emotional scenes. Kayaba entrusted his dream to Rinko, where VR and 'real world', reality, are connected and no longer separated. Kayaba then left to defuse the bomb, and Rinko stayed in the control room to act as mission control.

Higa heard the machinery being operated, and realized the reactor have been tampered with. Kikuoka told Higa to just focus on fixing the STLs. Kikuoka then went on ahead, chasing after the US team, after seeing Higa can continue to work by himself. After Kikuoka left Higa finally realized Kikuoka was injured, he was bleeding onto Higa.

Rinko and the rest of Rath personnel is in the control room watching Kayaba make his way to the reactor on the camera feeds, and Rinko brought up the video onto a big screen. Nobody wanted to retreat to the back of the structure where it's marginally safer. Just like how Rinko is toying with the memento Kayaba gave her (the dud bomb), everyone here is praying in some form for this to work. Most people here doesn't know robot #2 is Kayaba right now. Rinko realized the AIs aren't only for unmanned weapons, and UW isn't just a simulation of society – these are the beginning of a revolution. Rinko thought Kayaba have noticed the potential of VR during his stay in Aincrad, and he's working to protect the VRMMO players that had flourished in such a environment. Rinko wished for Kayaba to finish this and return to her.

Step by step, Kayaba is moving towards the reactor. Rinko wondered when exactly Kayaba got into that

robot. Though she was sure this Kayaba is the real one, as copies of the same person tend to break down once they realize they're not the original. Rinko also feared Kayaba has decided to meet his end here, having entrusted his dream to her and sacrifice himself for his goal even at this state. As Kayaba was walking to the reactor one of the US team members jumped out and shot Robot #2 – this robot doesn't have a titanium frame. Robot #2 staggered, but then Kikuoka came up from behind the robot and shot the US team member. Then, Kikuoka fell down as well, having lost too much blood. One of the JSDF soldiers ran out of the control room to help him.

Rinko was told by one of the technicians that Robot #2 can still move, and Kayaba continued on to operate the controls. Half way through, the intense heat blew out the circuits, and Robot #2 was on the verge of shutting down. The only thing left to do now is to disarm the C4, and Kayaba made his way there. His movements are impaired, and he's reduced to a crawling speed. With every step more parts began to fall out of the robot. Finally, when there were only 3 metres left to the C4... Robot #2's chest sparked and fried from the accumulation of damage, and the machine went silent. All output from the robot blanked out.

Rinko got a flashback to when SAO was cleared, and Kayaba woke up after being defeated by Kirito. Kayaba said back then "I don't believe in Miracles", but then continued on with a small smile saying he had saw a miracle for the first time; when Kirito went against the system, and stabbed him after Kirito's HP went to 0. Kayaba said then "Maybe... I was just waiting for that moment to come all this time..."

Back to present, Rinko shouted out for Kayaba to work a Miracle as well, wasn't he 'Heathcliff', the <<Holy Sword>> wielder, and rival to <<Dual-Wielder>> Kirito? The robot sparked a few times, and then became active once more. The technicians cried out with relief that Robot #2 is back at full operating capacity. Kayaba continued on, with everyone back at the control room cheering for 'Robot #2'. Slowly, inch by inch, Robot #2 finally managed to latch on to the C4's fuse and took it off of the reactor. A flash whited out the screen, but after that they saw only Robot #2's arm being blown off and the robot blown backwards from the impact, the reactor was safe. Cheers went up at this outcome.

(TL (RKL) note: These above scenes made me more fired up than when Kirito attacked Gabriel with his Starburst Stream)

(Flere821 note: Sorry, my summarizing skill can't portray that level of suspense and hotbloodness for this part >.<)

Over at Higa, he has finished 70% of the work on the STLs. 17 minutes had past, which meant 170 years in UW. Logically speaking, Kirito and Asuna are dead now. However, Higa admitted he didn't understand Fluctlights and UW at all, not when Kirito brought them up to new and unexpected heights. Kirito

understood that world better than anyone, and had strength beyond all four Super Accounts put together. Kirito had treated UW and its residents as humans and protected them, and UW had accepted Kirito as well. Higa believed in the possibility, or rather the miracle that Kirito would be able to come back after 200 years of experience. Higa believed Kirito to be a necessary fixture for the VR world to flourish, and said to himself Kirito needs to return back to RW. There was only a few per cent left until completion.

Rinko was the only person left in Control Room #2. Everyone else had run off to secure control of Control Room #1 or to help Kikuoka. Kirito and Asuna are going to wake soon, and Rinko want to be there when they wake up, let them hold Alice's LightCube and tell them it's thanks to them that Alice is fine right now. Because of this, even if she wanted to go after Robot #2 and see if Kayaba is alright she could not do so.

Rinko also wanted to tell Asuna and Kirito about Kayaba's deeds, even though she admits they're not going to just accept Kayaba so easily after all he did in making SAO into a death game. Higa told Rinko there's 30 seconds left before Kirito and Asuna wakes up. Before Rinko went to see Kirito and Asuna, a urgent message reached her and told her Robot #2 had went missing.

Kurittaa saw the countdown went to 0, and Ocean Turtle didn't blow up. Hans, who stayed behind, was to manually blow the place up if the signal failed, so if it still hadn't blown up it meant Hans is dead too. Even though apart from Gabriel they're all mercenaries and would be willing to back stab each other, apparently Hans had enough of a bond with Brigg to want to die in the same place as him. The rest of them left alive aren't looking forward to report back to their bosses, chances are they'll all be eliminated to ensure silence. Kurittaa copied a disk full of data to bring back with him, though he's sure without Alice at most this disk can only ensure a quick death for him. Though Kurittaa consoled himself no matter how he'll be killed off by the US it can't be worse than how Gabriel or Vassago died.

19 minutes and 40 seconds after it started, the acceleration is over. Rinko waited anxiously for Kirito and Asuna to wake up.

They didn't.

Fluctlight activity is only at the bare minimum level to survive. Rinko held their hands, desperately called out to them and asked them to wake up. The only response she got was the slight smiles on both their faces as they continued to sleep.

Scene change; back to Kirito right after Gabriel's defeat, weeping at World End's Altar. A voice called out Kirito's name, and said she figured if Kirito is all alone he becomes a crybaby. Kirito looked up, and found Asuna was here with him. He thought this must only be an illusion in his head; that if he touches her she'd vanish. Though after thinking about it, if it was the other way around, if there was any chance of her not making it out in time there was no way he'd just leave without Asuna.

Kirito can't think of anything to say, but there was no need to say anything right now either. He got up and embraced Asuna, who returned the hug. Asuna buried her face in Kirito's chest, and commented when they get out Alice would be furious at them. Kirito promised her that they wouldn't forget Alice, or anyone else in RW. Asuna and Kirito held hands, gazed out at the (now inactive) marble Altar, the flowers, then at UW spread out beyond them and into the horizon. Asuna asked Kirito how long would they be staying in UW. Kirito said at minimum 200 years. Asuna replied even if it was a thousand years it would not be too long, as long as she's with Kirito; she then asked Kirito to set out together. Kirito agreed; there were plenty of things to do, and this world has only just started to grow.

They held hands, activated Kirito's wings, and took the first steps into the open blue sky.

Alicization WEB 8 – End

Final Chapter

A crab robot used for maintaining the underwater fibre optic cable between US and Japan was hacked by Kayaba within the Robot #2, and came to take away the battered machine.

2026 August 1st, by this point the existence of AIs have been let out for public knowledge and so-called 'experts' are arguing on TV how the existence of AIs are impossible. Klein snarks those idiots are talking about things they've never even come across and pretend like they know everything. SAO veterans, ALO players, Sinon's GGO friends, a lot of them are packed into Agil's café with drinks and food as they wait for the main event to start.

TV then showed Rinko's press release of their work on Project Alicization, using a shell company as a front. Alice showed up in a robot body that looked identical to her UW appearance. In SAOverse the

ability to make life-like robots is there, just making them operate like a human is impossible. Alice was wearing the same school uniform as the one Lizbeth and the other SAO survivors, though Lizbeth commented she would have preferred her golden armour she had back in UW. Rinko decided to have the questions first, as unorthodox as it is to do so.

One idiotic reporter asked to open up Alice's head and see Alice's LightCube to see if she's really a AI. Before Rinko could shot back a heated reply Alice asked for the reporter if he can open up his own head and to prove he's a human as well with a living brain, rather than just being a robot. Leafa from her seat commented Alice was definitely angry at the question. Everyone here have met up with Alice within ALO many times by now. Alice's account is new and so low levelled, but her sword skills are beyond most people's and she has captured the hearts of many players.

Next reporter came up and asked about the possibility of using AIs for industrial purposes. Rinko replied no, AIs won't be used for that, as these Fluctlights are actual people. The reporters are stunned by Rinko's plans to establish human rights for AIs. Rinko says this is a necessary step even if it is an arduous one; otherwise humans will only have a repeat of when people legalized slavery, leaving problems in developing countries. The RW humans should skip the hundreds of years of conflict and go straight to negotiations. Rinko then dropped the bombshell Fluctlights/AIs are fundamentally no different to humans at the mind/soul level, as they can also log in into VR worlds.

The third reporter came up asking the AIs are made by Japanese taxpayers' money, so it was not up to Rinko to decide how to use the AIs. Alice stopped Rinko (who was troubled at this line of thought) from answering this question, and answered it herself. Alice stood up and says she was thankful for the RW people for creating UW and its people, and then asked what would RW people do if their world is also created by a being outside it and one day comes down to ask for their obedience? Would the humans obey without resistance? The reporters are overwhelmed by Alice's charisma/aura as a Knight, despite only appearing like a schoolgirl. Alice stood up, and then went on to say she was treated well by many RW people, but her heart, even though it's mechanical, still aches when she thinks about she might not be able to see this one RW person she loves anymore. (Flere821 note: Hot Damn, did she just confess on international television? Not like later events doesn't show this clearly, but Kirito you're screwed.)

Alice then reached out with her right hand, and stated: "I... have the hand of friendship that can reach out to everyone here in the Real World. However, I don't have the knees to kneel down in supplication or the forehead to touch the ground and flatter you. If I am asked why, it is because I am human."

Scene change to Higa, at the Rath sub-branch outside of Ocean Turtle. We now know it has been three weeks since Ocean Turtle's attack. Higa have a scar left on his shoulder, and he refused to have another

surgery to remove it. Japanese Navy's reluctance to help Ocean Turtle after the attack was pointed out on TV and the Minister of Defence is in deep trouble, as there has been a fatality within Ocean Turtle. Kikuoka has died from the wounds sustained, according to the reports. Higa sighed, and said it's unexpected that Kikuoka had to be sacrificed. Kikuoka said it doesn't matter; he's sitting right next Higa at the moment. Kikuoka explained he has to be publicly declared dead and forced to disappear, otherwise he might be removed by the higher ups for his failure. And it was due to a 'death' on Ocean Turtle the anti-Rath factions are now curbed. Kikuoka didn't expect the Minister of Defence's 2nd in command was the one bought by US side however. Higa asked if it was really alright to reveal the existence of Fluctlights, this way the Japan plan of unmanned weapons are now scrapped. Kikuoka says it's fine as long as US have the threat of advanced unmanned weapons hanging over their heads. Kikuoka have already healed from his gunshot wound, it didn't hit any vital organs.

Higa and Kikuoka watched Alice's words on the TV screen. They're in the STL room with Kirito and Asuna, with the teenagers hooked onto life support. Both of their Fluctlights are fine, and both had a satisfied smile on their faces. Asuna and Kirito's parents have been told of the happenings, and Asuna's father (ex-CEO of RECTO) had threatened legal action with his influence. Asuna's mother however had faith that Asuna will come back fine, and calmed Asuna's father down. Both teens' parents are currently at the press release, looking after the person their kids fought hard to protect.

Then, Higa noticed Kirito and Asuna are finally started to wake up.

Back to the press release. Rinko had finished a speech, though there was no applause from the audience. A reporter asked her if AIs might kill off the humans. Rinko said that won't happen, unless the humans attack first. The reporter wasn't convinced, saying all the movies and fiction have suggested this will happen. Alice stood up suddenly then, looking out towards the sky. She excused herself, saying something important came up, and left early right then. Rinko thought just what could be more important than this, but then realized it's probably because Kirito and Asuna have woken up.

(Flere821 note: *Insert obligatory comment of main characters can now feel others' presence* - and now this have been brought out of UW it seems...)

Back to Higa. They're prepared drinks, towels, and everything, the only thing left is wait for Kirito and Asuna for their miraculous awakening. Alice barged in, having ran from the press release within the same district, and went to hold Kirito's hands. Both Kikuoka and Higa was surprised at this development; thought they thought Rinko can probably settle this somehow. Kirito and Asuna slowly woke up, and both of them told Alice they're alright, and they're back. Alice's eyes were moving like she was cursing herself that her current body can't cry in happiness. Kirito said warmly to Alice that Selka had chosen to be deep frozen on the hill in Cathedral's 80th floor to wait for Alice's return. Kirito looked at Higa then, and Higa felt fear. Those were the eyes of a 200-year old ruler, of a soul that has weathered all kinds of

experiences. Kirito requested for his and Asuna's memories to be erased; their duty is finally over.

A few days later, Kirito was still in a hospital. Kirito was moved he's back in RW, but at the same time he wondered when did he stop feeling homesick for RW and now is even eager to go back into UW? Asuna have been released earlier, but she came by to visit. Kirito told her he'll be released in three days. Asuna was glad at that, and she placed a new blue rose onto Kirito's bedside table. Kirito then went over what little he remembered of his time in UW post Gabriel's defeat. He and Asuna flew back to the Renri, and was introduced to him. He spent a long time calming down Ronie and Teiza who wouldn't stop crying after seeing him again. Shuuta told him about Ishukaan, who's now the leader of DT, and Ishukaan asked for a peace treaty one month later. Kirito and the army marched back to the central Capital from the Eastern Gate, and people who somehow knew the war has ended came out to greet them at every town. It was a busy month, helping Fanatio who's now the Knight Leader. One month quickly passed, and they met up with Ishukaan. Kirito and Ishukaan had a brief spar as Ishukaan was curious about the brother of the 'Green Swordswoman' (Leafa). Kirito's memories cut out soon after that, where Ishukaan recognized Kirito as being stronger than Vector.

Kirito had forgotten all about what had happened in UW, though Asuna didn't mind. She commented it was probably Kirito getting into trouble with women and had to run away all the time. A deep sadness was still with Kirito however, probably reminding him how his friends like Ronie, Teiza, Ishukaan, Fanatio, Renri and so on have probably all died of old age by now. Asuna said Kirito shouldn't be said, even if the memory (mind part) is gone the recollection (soul part) would still be with them always. Asuna and Kirito sat next to each other and gazed out towards the sunset-covered city for a few minutes. Then a doorbell sounded, and Kirito let this unscheduled visitor in. Kikuoka dressed in a suit came in saying they need to celebrate about Kirito leaving the hospital, but then realized he was interrupting something. Kirito decided to ignore how Kikuoka might have gotten his timetable. Kikuoka brought in a lot of rare food such as fish and cheese, and Asuna told him to immediately put it into the nearby fridge as this room wasn't that well ventilated; she doesn't like the smell of those foods.

The three of them then began to talk. Kikuoka mentioned Kirito was not supposed to have been sent into UW with his memory of RW available. They talked about how Yanai's dead, and he might have been better off this way as he would have been eliminated by the US anyway; even if he had a deal with GME the US government might have silenced him to ensure security. Then they talked about Kikuoka being declared dead, and Kikuoka's says he's fine with that; he has been an orphan since his parents died in a plane crash in the 1980s, and he doesn't have any other family. Kikuoka will not be devoted to keeping Ocean Turtle and UW safe.

They talked about how things don't look good for UW. Ocean Turtle's locked down, with only a few staff

looking after the reactor. The government want to use AIs for industrial production, they'd be able to out-produce China like this; but it would mean the entire truth will come out, and the government would be shaken badly from how a lot of people took bribes and made deals with foreign forces. Rath would be disbanded, Alice taken into custody, and all Light Cubes will be modified. Kikuoka's plan to avoid that is to have RW people interact with UW people via The Seed VR, to show there's no difference, and establish recognition of AI rights. Though they'd need to find a way to connect UW to VR first, and that has its own technical problems. Kirito asked Kikuoka to protect UW, and he agreed; Kikuoka says UW is now a dream he'd stake his life to protect.

Kikuoka then left, and Asuna commented Kikuoka still seemed like he was hiding something. Kirito agreed, saying there are probably several more layers to things. Kikuoka might have given up on forcibly making AIs into weapons, but that doesn't exclude the possibility of asking UW people to fight for them; Synthesis Knights and Dark Knights are born fighters after all, they might be convinced to try and fight on a new battlefield. Kirito then speculated on what Kikuoka's final goal might be, possibly even more far-fetched than forcing all US troops off of Japan territory.

Asuna interrupted Kirito's thoughts, saying it's almost time for the ALO conference. Today was the scheduled time for the debriefing about all that had happened in UW for the other players. Asuna took out a Amusphere as she decided there's no time to go back to her home, and Kirito snarked she planned on logging in from here from the start. Asuna didn't deny this accusation – much – and then pushed Kirito down onto the bed. Kirito hoped in the time they're in UW the nurses won't come by, as Asuna plans to dive in while lying right on top of him. Asuna and Kirito both put on their Amuspheres, and dived in.

As soon as they dived in, Yui in human form went to a flying tackle towards Kirito in a greeting. These days Yui seemed a lot more attached to Kirito, nuzzling at him like a cat, and Kirito decided to let Yui keep doing as she pleases for now. Yui had helped a lot in the time he was in a STL. After having enough contact Yui turned into her pixie form and they headed off to the World Tree.

Kirito reached the World Tree, and was greeted by many other SAO veterans like Klein and Agil. Agil joked Kirito might be too used to the hax account he had in UW and he'll probably get slaughtered in ALO. Kirito thought that was actually possible, he might just try and brute force things through with Incarnation, but out loud Kirito shot back he picked up new sword skills from UW and he'll be fine. Leafa was here as well, and what's left of Kirito's UW memory told him Leafa was renowned as the 'Green Swordswoman' in UW and the Orcs look forward to her return one day, even after 200 years. Sinon told Kirito about her fight with Gabriel, and how her protective charm protected her from Gabriel's

Incarnation; Sinon refused to tell Kirito what the charm was however.

Kirito also told her about what happened to Gabriel in the end, and also PoH. Due to the acceleration, PoH didn't get logged out in time. PoH's fluctlight spent around ten years with his mind isolated, and then went mad. The LC leader then died after another 30 years of active brain activity. Sinon asked if he regretted sending PoH to his death, and Kirito said he didn't; and he thought if he did then he wouldn't be able to face Leafa and Sinon who had fought so hard.

Kirito thanked Lizbeth for her speech to get people into UW. He thanked Silica too, and the Cait Sith took this chance as a excuse to hug Kirito. Lizbeth got jealous and grabbed Silica's sensitive Cait Sith tail, leading to Silica giving a surprised yelp. After those two had enough of their mock fighting, Kirito told everyone here (the ALO side have gathered as well, mainly Sakuya, Alicia, Eugene + their subordinates, and the Sleeping Knights) that the people who have lost their accounts in UW can get them back, the data is all in UW servers. Though Higa have also said that's only if the government lets Ocean Turtle out of lockdown. Today's meeting is also going to discuss how the Japanese players are going to deal with the worsening online relations between Japan and other countries that had invaded UW.

The meeting was about to start, but someone was calling Kirito from outside ALO. Kirito told the others to go on without him, and took the call. It was Alice, saying she can't make the ALO meeting due to some more RL things and asked Kirito to pass on the message she's sorry. Kirito can tell Alice is getting tired of being shown off like some kind of specimen by now too. Kirito told Alice she can speak out if she doesn't like the treatment, and Alice replied she's a Knight, she can handle any mission. Kirito can feel Alice's words don't have the fighting spirit she had before however. They said good bye and was going to cut off of the call, but before Kirito did so he caught Alice's whisper that she's starting to lose her resolve in her work.

Higa had spent the last hour in indecision. He's set up a bastardized version of machines Rath have, a machine that allows him to communicate with Fluctlights. Higa is now the head of the Alicization Project, while Rinko is the public face of this project due to Kikuoka's 'death'. Though if what he has done so far was discovered, he'd still be in deep trouble.

After much indecision, that there's no way this would work when Higa's and Kikuoka's Fluctlight copies have both collapsed, Higa finally activated the machine. After some talking, it was revealed Higa took a copy of Kirito's Fluctlight before erasing his memory. Later events would reveal this version of Kirito to be called the 'Star King' by the UW residents. Higa copied Kirito because he couldn't stand the thought of someone who had lived over 200 years to be erased, SK!Kirito is a valued historical person. SK!Kirito unlike other copied Fluctlights remained functioning despite knowing it was only a copy of another

person's soul. SK!Kirito also found out he was the only one copied, as Higa didn't have the equipment or time to sneak Asuna out as well, not when Rinko and Kikuoka was with him.

SK!Kirito then told Higa this development had been planned for before he and Asuna left UW. If Asuna was the only one copied, she would like to be deleted. If both of them survived, then they would work towards a peaceful integration between RW and UW. If it was just Kirito however, then he would only work for the benefit of UW as he is their protector. SK!Kirito have predicted Ocean Turtle would be locked down and the government may take the entire project apart at any moment. Kirito had said he will fight, and this is even with Ocean Turtle locked down – possibility of cyberwarfare or Incarnation is available to SK. With the reactor in Ocean Turtle, as long as the government doesn't shut down the project or interfere then UW is safe for 4-5 years. Kirito is also sure there's still a connection between UW and the internet, despite attempts to cut it off completely. SK!Kirito is sure they can reopen it, but they would need Kayaba's help. Higa knew Robot #2 have went missing, and upon SK!Kirito's request he started to look for it. Higa feels like he has opened a Pandora's Box, working towards a situation where Kayaba's Fluctlight and SK!Kirito would be working on the same side. However, Higa's fear was outweighed by his enthusiasm in what the future might bring with this alliance, that he would be able to find out more things.

Scene change, back to Kirito. He's now back in his own room. Kirito started choking up as he remembered Eugeo and their time back at the Academy. He cried hard and muffled his tears by pressing his face into the pillow. (Flere821 note: WTH, I thought he's past this kind of stuff already after Eugeo talking to him during Gabriel's battle). Suguha came to comfort Kirito, and asked him what he has gone through in UW. Kirito began to talk about how he met Eugeo, and other things that came after.

The date Kirito came back to his home was August 16 2026. That entire night he spent talking with Suguha about the things that had happened in UW.

The next day, Rinko called Kirito, and notified him that Alice went missing. 9pm on August 16, Alice unlocked her physical body and snuck out away from the guards. A lot of guards were placed to protect her as there's a lot of people that would wish her harm, from religious fanatics to economic investors. However the defences did not take into account of Alice leaving by herself. And with Alice unable to use her sword skills or magic she's vulnerable. Rinko blamed herself for not noticing Alice is under so much pressure, and Alice's pride as a Knight would not allow her to show weakness. Rinko asked Kirito to keep an eye out for Alice, as he's the only one she's open her heart to and show her weaknesses.

Rinko hung up, and Kirito moved to grab his motorbike keys to go out and look for Alice. His mum and dad are out working, and Suguha's at kendo practice this morning. They'd celebrate Kirito's return later

that night, but right now Kirito's alone. Before Kirito left the doorbell rang, and for a second Kirito thought it was Alice somehow getting to his place despite her limited batteries. It turned out to only be a postman delivering a package. Kirito discovered this was from Rath, though Rinko didn't mention anything about this. Kirito thought this might be from Higa or Kikuoka and opened it up, and then screeched in surprise: it appeared to contain unnaturally bent limbs. A eye blinked into existence in the depths of the box, and Kirito screamed again. Before Kirito can scream a third time when a arm grabbed him, Alice's voice said to him to stop messing around and get her out of that box.

3 minutes later, Kirito finally came to grips with the fact a beautiful robot girl was sent to his home somehow. Alice, dressed in the girl's uniform from his school, looked around Kirito's home. Alice asked how old is the wooden house, and Kirito replied about 70-80 years. Alice was surprised, and said the trees used for this must have been impressive ones. Alice then grabbed Kirito and asked him to charge up her robot body, plug a wire hidden in her left leg in into the sockets.

Alice then explained how she got out, she deliberately let the cameras see her leaving her room and then using the blind spots to pack herself into a box to be posted in the morning. As boxes don't get checked as they leave Alice was able to sneak out this way. Alice also didn't want to ask Rinko to be able to come to Kirito's place, otherwise there'll be a squad of guards accompanying her. However, Alice wants to talk with Kirito one on one right now. Alice tried to move towards Kirito, but then got stuck as her charging wire doesn't extend that far. Kirito exhaled, and then walked to her instead.

Alice told Kirito she was mad at him. Kirito understood why before she explained further. Alice didn't like how Kirito stayed behind in UW and didn't manage to leave, and if Kirito had asked her to fight she would have done so. Alice was a warrior that lived for battles, yet Kirito doesn't want to let her fight. She asked just what is she to him if he would deny her the reason for her existence. Alice pounded on Kirito's chest several times, and would have cried if her body was capable of it. Kirito replied she's his 'Hope', the hope that connects the will of those who have died by this point to the future. Alice asked him just what is the future; being stuck inside a metal body, having to attend meaningless meetings and feel loneliness for the rest of her days? Kirito told her that he was sorry, he doesn't know himself. However, Kirito believes as long as Alice is here in the real world then everything Cardinal, Administrator, Berculi, Erudorie, and Eugeo wished for would come true. After being embracing Kirito for some time, Alice said they better notify Rinko where she is right now, she must be worried.

Rinko was told that Alice is at Kirito's place, and allowed Alice to stay with Kirito. She only asked that Alice activates the GPS tracking function in the robot just in case, and no guards will be sent to Kirito's place while Alice is allowed to stay there overnight. After finishing charging, Alice asked to be shown around his house and see what Kirito's home looked like. Eventually they reached the kendo dojo, and Alice examined the difference between UW wooden practise swords and shinai. Alice then asked Kirito for a spar, and before Kirito had said how can she spar properly in the robot body he felt Alice's pressure

upon him. He also picked up a shinai and took up a stance. The two of them was reminded of when they first met at the Cathedral's Floor 80, and this time Alice said she won't lose. They attacked, and after a fierce exchange of blows Alice won by headbutting Kirito. Both of them fell to the ground, with Alice on top of Kirito. Cheek to cheek, Alice told Kirito she'll be fine as long as she can hold a sword. She'll be able to keep going even here in the RW.

Next scene, dinner that night. Suguha and Alice are talking about kendo, and at other times Alice and Kirito's mother are talking about Kirito's past. Kirito's father is also present, a worker at the largest securities exchange company. Kirito's father brought up the topic of Kirito's schooling and his future, and Kirito mentioned he gave up on his plan to go overseas to US for university. Kirito plans to stay in Japan for his computing degree, and after that go to work for Rath's public company that's taking care of UW.

Alice spoke then, addressing Kirito's father as just 'Father'. Suguha was shocked at this straightforward way of speaking (Flere821 note: in Japan culture, this pretty much suggests Alice sees herself as Kirito's wife). Alice told Kirito's parents about how her own father disagreed with the path she had chosen, but she doesn't regret her own choice and eventually her father understood her choice. Alice said even if in RW Kirito might just be a student, in UW he was the Strongest Knight and a hero that saved countless people. Kirito had wanted to interrupt Alice, saying his parents won't know about Knights and such, when Kirito's father surprised him by saying he already knew Kirito is a hero and known as the 'Black Swordsman'. Someone had written a book about the events within SAO, and his parents read them – though Kirito thinks that book was a load of rubbish, partly because he was credited with a lot of things. Kirito's father said as long as Kirito is sure of his path than he has nothing to say. Go forward in your life step by step, it doesn't matter if you have doubts. Kirito thanked his parents for being so understanding, and gave his father the advice to sell any shares he have in GME as they made a heavy mistake in gambling on the markets.

Later that night, Kirito is going to bed in his own room while Alice is sleeping in Suguha's. Kirito had thought it's the end of an era for him, now he has to focus less on VR of any sorts and work on his RW life. Despite what Alice has said it's unlikely he'll ever fight with a sword in hand in the near future.

... Or so he thought.

3AM, Alice woke him up. Even despite being a robot Alice looked beautiful, and Kirito was panicking at the situation. Alice was embarrassed about this situation as well, considering Kirito's reaction. Though she told him to stop doing that, they had spent half a year whenever they sleep staying at each other's side. Distraction over with for now, Alice got to the main point: someone had sent her a message just 5 minutes ago, giving her an obscure message and mentioned multiple place names of the UW Cathedral

floors. One of the places was hidden away, and the only ones that should have known it was Berculi, Administrator, and Alice. Alice feared it Administrator is back. Kirito doesn't think so, as the message refers to UW as 'that world', not 'my world'. Looking further at the numbers of the floors, Kirito and Alice figured out this was hinting at an IP address. Someone had made a back door into UW, and sent the way back to Alice.

Kirito and Alice couldn't wait for morning, and called Rinko despite it being only 4AM. Kirito asked for him to be able to go back to UW to check things out, and Rinko prepared the STLs for him. Kirito also asked for Asuna to be brought along. Alice doesn't need a STL to be able to dive back into UW. Kirito called Asuna telling her about this, and Asuna agreed to go with Kirito. Kirito and Alice then snuck out of the house, with Kirito leaving a note saying he'll be back before the summer holidays end. Kirito got out his motorbike, handed Alice a helmet, and the two of them rode off.

By the time Kirito reached the Rath office, Asuna was already there waiting for them. Asuna went into tsun mode after seeing Alice seated behind Kirito and hugging him tightly, complete with popping veins on her head. Kirito says he'll explain later upon Asuna's question of just what's going on (it could either be about UW or how Alice's seated behind Kirito), and he rushed away to park his bike. By the time he came back Asuna and Alice were glaring sparks at each other. Kirito wanted the two of them to calm down, reminding of their agreement back in UW before the battle in DT on the last day, to which Asuna shot back that was only a ceasefire and Alice stated ceasefires are established on the premise hostilities would be resumed later. Kirito snuck away as the two girls looked like they were almost about to resume physical hostilities and tried to open the many locks to get into the office. The two girls noticed him trying to escape, and chased after him.

Kirito got to the STL room, and was trying to explain using some excuse why he's running in a rush to the place when Asuna pinched him in the stomach for his words. Anyway, things are set, and Kirito and the other two girls can start the plan of getting RW people to meet UW people. Kirito changed into a suit for VR diving. Rinko deduced Kayaba was behind this notice, and Kirito was inclined to agree. Yui chased the server location to Iceland, but can't find out any more than that due to heavy firewalls, and Kayaba's trail ended somewhere over in US. Kirito told Yui to stop chasing after Kayaba, she might not win even if she catches up, and Yui protested she's the better hacker out of the two. Yui promised she'll d her best to get Kirito out of UW if things do indeed go wrong. Alice and Asuna have both finished changing as well, and they seemed to have agreed to another ceasefire. The plan is for them to find Selka first when they went down. Then, they dived.

They materialized in UW, into what they thought was the night sky. Then, they found they were actually dropped into space. For a moment they thought the planet's HP had depleted and there's nothing left.

Then, they saw the planet UW was on, and the sun dawning onto UW. Alice shouted out she's finally back in UW, and the entire universe seemed to resonate with her declaration.

Prologue*

* = Prologue to what, the story doesn't mention.

Suteika, Ronie's descendant, and Ro-La, Teiza's descendant became spaceship pilots in the current day, and they're currently en route from one planet to the next. They're the 7th generation descendant from Ronie's time. Their ship uses Incarnation to fly. There are two planets in this system, with the 2nd planet named after Administrator (Admina), and the main planet named after Cardinal (Karuteina). Kirito was known as the Star King to the UW people, and it has been thirty years in here since Kirito and Asuna left UW, before Suteika or Ro-La was born. Kirito's crest was the black and white swords, covered with the Blue Rose and Osmanthus flowers that were Eugeo and Alice's flower motif respectively.

The narration here briefly summarized Kirito's work up to the end of the last War, then went on to explain how Kirito took down the nobility system, widened the lands around UW, fought Legendary beasts (Flere821 note: Basically AW Enemy mobs that's just under the Four Gods power level), set up new lands for non-human settlers and gave each of the demihuman races their own countries. After having been everywhere on the planet, the Star King turned his eyes towards space, and developed his machine dragons into being capable of spaceflight. Upon the discovery of the 2nd planet and setting up a new colony there, Kirito obtained the title 'Star King'. The people of UW had believed Kirito and Asuna would be their immortal rulers and keep their planets prospering until the end of days, when the two of them had left suddenly to sleep, leaving the authority up to the Assembly of military and civilians.

The land forces and space forces have been downsized, but the Synthesis Machinists (used to be called Synthesis Knights) have increased in number. The Star King left a prophecy before he left, saying one day the doors to the 'Reality', a different world to Underworld will be opened. A great change will envelop the two worlds then. They should develop their strengths, for their pride, independence, peace and love – otherwise the outcome for when the Gates open would be far worse than the war 200 years ago.

(Flere821: I'll skip the details of this next DBZ-esque scene/s...)

New Enemy showed up in space: Abyssal Horror, a Legendary class enemy. Scouter level: ~~Over Nine Thousand~~ 27,000. It's like a rip-off of Gabriel's Incarnation skillset. Over 200m long, not even the Star King alone can completely defeat this foe.

Suteika and Ro-La was attacked, and Kirito, Asuna, Alice came in just in time to save the two of them using Incarnation to fly in space and attack. Scouter went off the charts at the three's combined level, when nothing reaching 20% of the scouter limits have been seen for years. The amount of power here is enough to make a planet tremble from its presence. Machinists in these days capable of Release Recollection only number 7 in total.

The battle in short: Kirito used Release Recollection on both blades, Asuna shot a meteor at the Enemy, and Alice used her own Release Recollection to mop up the remnants that tried to flee the scene.

After the battle, Suteika and Ro-La recognized Alice, and then the rest of the three. Suggestions are here that the two of them are the reincarnation of Ronie and Teiza, with memories of the two girls overlapping with some of Kirito's memory of back in the sword academy. The two girls could see Eugeo behind Kirito, acting like a guardian spirit. They realized this is the start of the new age that was prophesized about. A great revolution and agitation is about to begin. Suteika and Ro-La went on to greet the newcomers that came from UW's past, ready to take them on into the future.

WEB Alicization Arc – END

Aaaand here's the shocker I was not expecting:

Quote:

“The story ends here.

However, the battles of Kirito and Asuna,
Leafa and Sinon and others,
And Alice will be continued.

The next time they and their descendants,
Once again take up swords,
Was something that happened,
At the final, greatest battlefield:
'The War of Intelligence Space'.

All Possibilities,
Right now is only at,
The other side of the Light,

Fluctuating slightly.
Only Fluctuating slightly.”

Sword Art Online series – THE END
2005.01.31 - 2008.07.25