

Chapter Five

-TUTORIAL-

[Mai...] Selene finally said after a minute. [It would be best if we get somewhere secure to make further plans.]

The glowing shield over the solid metal doors hummed at me. It didn't make sense. There was no sign of damage, that Anathema had tried to enter the shelter. So why? Why was it active?

"They activated the emergency shield," I thought to her numbly. *"Why would they do that?"*

[It is not unheard of for people to panic and override the automated systems to engage it,]
Selene answered somberly. *[The shield is very powerful, something that only incredibly strong Anathema could breach. Knowing this, they think it is better to be overly cautious and turn the shield on, even if it does condemn any potential survivors outside the shelter.]*

She... wasn't wrong. I mean, every drill we'd done at school, they made a point of saying the emergency shield was impenetrable, and that it would only come down with the deactivation code. Which was why *nobody* was supposed to turn the shield on manually, especially when the shelters were specifically designed to be capable of letting stragglers in without endangering anyone. The entrances were built like airlocks, two sets of reinforced doors with a room between them. That way, if people arrived after the Usurpation began, the outer doors could be opened, letting people into the airlock room. Once inside, the outer doors would close, and then the interior ones would open. People could safely enter or even leave the shelter without ever offering a direct access route to the Anathema.

But now that the shield was enabled, nobody would be getting in or out.

"There's nothing I can do as a Magical Girl?" I asked, a dull buzz in my head.

[No, not without the codes. They are automatically generated and sent to Guardian Command when a shield is activated. It stops Magical Guardians from arbitrarily attempting to rescue groups of survivors without authorization or a plan to properly evacuate the people inside.]

"I see..." I stared at the doors in silence.

[Mai, I know this is difficult, but we should move,] Selene said, her voice soft. *[Brian is getting scared.]*

I stiffened, looking behind me. Brian was a few steps behind where I'd collapsed in front of the door. His eyes were wide and confused as he clutched his action figure to his chest. He was shaking as he stared at me. I cursed at myself silently, standing up and wiping the wetness from my cheeks.

"Hey, come here," I said, gesturing. He ran up, throwing his arms around me in a tight hug.

"Why aren't they opening the door?" he asked me. "What's that glowy thing?"

"They... must have had an emergency," I told him, hugging him back tightly. "It means they're safe, but we're going to need to find somewhere else to hide."

"But I don't want to be out here anymore!" he cried, pulling away to look at me. "I want Mommy and Daddy!"

I felt myself start choking up, and so I cleared my throat before I continued.

"I know. But don't worry. I protected you from one of those things already, right? I'll definitely do it again. Besides, we have your lucky charm with us now, don't we?"

He didn't seem entirely convinced, but he still managed a hesitant nod. I gave a weak smile, standing and pulling him along as I left, stopping only to pick up my ice axe from where I'd dropped it on the ground. We started back down the hallway with the stairwell and room with the security-only sign. Selene was standing in front of it, staring at us. I almost tried to cover Brian's eyes to hide her until I remembered that even when manifested, she was invisible to anyone she didn't want to see her.

[This room is unlocked and empty,] Selene said. [It would make a good spot to hide while I give you the introductory tutorial to your new powers. I do not believe we will be able to make it much longer without encountering more Anathema, and so you must be prepared.]

I swallowed, the thought sending a shiver through my body. I gave Selene a nod and made my way to the room.

The door opened, leading into what looked like a break room of some sort, illuminated in the red emergency lights like the rest of the mall. There were vending machines, a couch, and a small coffee table with chairs around it. There was another doorway leading into a room filled with monitors and a third leading to what looked like a small bathroom.

I closed the door behind us as we entered, and Brian let go of my hand to run over to the couch. The door had a lock on it that I turned, but I decided to move the coffee table in front of it, too, just in case. With that done, I let out a sigh. It wasn't much, but somehow the lock and barricade made me feel better.

[Serviceable,] Selene said, and I turned to see her sitting on the chair in the monitor room, looking at me. [We should have plenty of time to go through the tutorial here, which we will need because we've reached the limit of instant telepathy. From now on, my words will be coming to you in real time, as if we are speaking normally. If you would get settled, we can begin immediately.]

"Selene..." I trailed off, struggling to arrange my thoughts. *"I just risked my life and almost died just to get to my only hope of safety and find it sealed off. I'm tired, angry, and I have no idea what the hell I'm supposed to do next. My only plan was to get to the shelter, and now I've got nothing."*

[I understand,] she replied in a soothing tone. [Things are not ideal, but there is another option: We head to one of the other shelters in the building. This mall was designed knowing there would be many people on every level, which means each floor has a shelter. I would suggest we attempt for one of those after you have outfitted yourself.]

I sighed. She was right, but the feeling of having my hope crushed still lingered in my chest. Still... it wasn't over yet. Brian was relying on me, and if I did nothing, both of us would die. There was no other option but to keep moving forward.

I took a deep breath, nodding to myself as I turned to Brian. He was curled up on the couch, playing with his action figure.

"Brian, I'm going into that room for a bit," I said, pointing to the monitor room. "I'll keep the door open, so come in if you need me. If you, uh, hear me talking to myself, ignore me. I just make plans better when I talk out loud."

He gave me a nod, but didn't really seem to be paying attention too much. The blank look in his eyes was shell-shocked, and I didn't blame him. I walked into the monitor room, setting my backpack down even as Selene gave up the chair for me, jumping onto the desk in front of the blank monitor screens.

"Alright," I whispered, making a conscious note to keep my voice down for the rest of the conversation. "Let's go through this 'tutorial' then, if it means I'll be able to take on Anathema afterwards."

[It will most certainly help, especially considering we have skipped many aspects of being a Magical Girl that should have been dealt with already.] Selene said. [The tutorial itself is mostly a lot of information on your new capabilities, and it covers quite a few topics. Luckily, you already have a basic understanding of the special mechanics involved that will greatly assist your growth.]

“Mechanics?” I asked. “What do you mean?”

[You observed earlier that certain aspects of being a Magical Guardian were similar to things you have experienced playing video games. This is not a coincidence. As humans are an unattuned race and cannot access magic normally through willpower alone, the Zenith developed an advanced piece of Magitech to give humans access. This device is called a “Soul Gem.” During the contract ceremony, it was teleported into your brain and attached. As a side note, it is also where I now reside.]

“You teleported a piece of technology into my *brain!*?” I interrupted with a furious whisper, eyes bulging.

[Indeed! I assure you, there is nothing to worry about. There has yet to be a fatality from the process. At any rate, more information about the Soul Gem can wait until later. What you need to know right now is that you have access to magic through an interface specifically designed with humans in mind. This interface is designed to translate many aspects of using magic via use of a familiar medium. Without further ado, would you please think of the word “Status” while putting a measure of will into the thought?]

Status? I tried, still trying to process the whole “teleported into your brain” bit of information.

STATUS	
Name: Mai Kuroki	Alias: None
Level: 1	Points: 130
Health: 73%	Mana: 162/300 (5/Min)
BASIC	
Origin: [Hidden]	Aspect: [Hidden]
Class: Locked	Signature: Unawakened

STATISTICS	
Strength: 10	Dexterity: 10
Vitality: 10	Agility: 10
Willpower: 30	Spirit: 1
PERMISSIONS	
GRIMOIRES / VAULTS	ABILITIES / AUGMENTS
	Unique Augment Available!
First Aid Vault (Common)	
INVENTORY	
WEAPONS	EQUIPMENT
None	None

I stared at the box that appeared in my vision.

Wait.

I had a *status menu* now?

[I knew this would be a pleasant surprise.] Selene said smugly. [Considering your aptitude at Magical Girls' Sunset: Rebellion and the amazing playtime you have racked up in a short period of time, I am confident you will adapt quickly to the System.]

“Wait. Just... wait,” I pressed a hand to my head. “I need a moment.”

I took a slow, deep breath, ordering my racing thoughts.

“Okay. First: What does *Magical Girls' Sunset: Rebellion* have to do with anything? Isn't it just a game?”

[Yes and no. While it is a widely popular game, it was also designed to mimic many aspects of being a Magical Guardian. Monsters in the game are based on Anathema, players use characters based on actual Guardians, and the stats that are managed directly resemble the stats Guardians possess in reality. For this reason, many attempts are made to get Guardian

candidates to play the game. Do you recall the special bonus you acquired when you first logged in?]

I blinked. “Yeah, I got the option to pick a free five-star character, so I picked *Blade Princess*. Wait, are you telling me that bonus was because of you?”

[Indeed!] Selene bobbed her head up and down. *[It was determined that giving Guardian candidates a very rare character choice not only incentivized them to continue playing but also allowed us to see what style of character you would play as. In a way, the entire game is a soft way to scout out the capabilities and mindsets of candidates without any real world risk.]*

I shook my head slightly. “Okay, but what’s with this... status menu? Why do I have it?”

[As I said earlier, it is an interface designed to help you manage the capabilities provided to you by the Zenith. While not a perfect representation, it simplifies many aspects of magic in a way that allows humans to use it. As a fairly primitive race, many restrictions and mechanics had to be put into place to even allow humanity rudimentary access to magic. Thankfully, video games, especially role-playing games, provided a perfectly functional medium.]

Selene’s tails began to swish excitedly.

[Your Soul Gem offers access to two major things: the “Gate” you are already familiar with, and the “Arcane System,” or simply “System” for short. A big part of the System is it allows you to simply purchase access to various spells and abilities. Instead of it taking years to learn even the most basic of magics, the knowledge is directly sent and stored into your Soul Gem for use. Instantaneous access and control with none of the work! A good analogy is to imagine a computer: Instead of coding a program entirely from scratch, you are simply downloading a pre-existing program to use.]

My eyes widened. That *was* insane. Now that I thought about it, books always did seem to paint actually learning magic as a long, arduous process. What Magical Guardians were doing was practically cheating by comparison. The Zenith had decided to entirely skip the step of even trying to teach us magic and were just *giving* it to us. Which begged the question...

“Why?” I finally asked. “Why are the Zenith doing this for us? Why give us so much power?”

[The Anathema are an existential threat,] Selene’s eyes took on an eerie gleam. *[Existential. As in, a threat to ALL existence, not just humanity’s. To let humanity fall without a fight would be to give the Anathema another foothold to use in their never-ending quest of consumption. They are predators, and reality itself is their prey.]*

I shivered, and gave a nod.

“Alright. So the Zenith gave us magic through the System, and we use points to buy access. Why not just give us access to everything at once?”

[Two reasons. The first reason is simple: complete access without first adapting to magic would make your head literally explode with magical energy. Soul Gems do not start at their maximum potential for this reason. Instead, they grow with their users by absorbing magical energy, better known as mana, as experience, or simply “Exp.” As Soul Gems grow, your physical abilities increase too. Meanwhile, the point system is designed to restrict what spells you can access, forcing you to earn points by doing tasks that also help your Soul Gem mature. Between the two, your physical and magical abilities remain in check without surpassing your limitations.]

“Okay. What about the second reason?”

[It’s the same reason you wouldn’t give a gun to a toddler, really,] Selene’s nine tails somehow gave a simultaneous and distractingly cute shrug. [Except instead of a gun that shoots bullets, imagine spells capable of ripping apart the fabric of time and space. By allowing a gradual introduction to magic, the Zenith, human authorities, and other Guardians can all keep an eye on how any one individual is using it and stop those who abuse their powers.]

“Oh,” I said, feeling a little dumb. “That makes sense.”

[Great! Now we can begin with the status menu. I would recommend we go through the items from top to bottom, for the most part. Even if you are familiar with RPGs, some aspects require further information or might be different.]

“Sure. I’m still new to gaming, anyway. I only started *Magical Girls’ Sunset: Rebellion* two weeks ago, and before that it was just whatever Lily was interested in at the time...”

I trailed off as my thoughts turned to her, my stomach clenching. Was she safe? She had said she wouldn’t let anyone activate the shelter’s shield, and yet...

I shook my head. Now wasn’t the time. I could think about it as much as I wanted later. Right now, I was still trapped in a mall with monsters, and I needed to get Brian and myself to safety.

[Beginning from the top then,] Selene had seemed to sense my distracted thoughts, waiting to continue until I looked back at her. [“Name” is, unsurprisingly, your name. “Alias” is what your Magical Guardian name is. Regarding that matter, would you like me to refer to you as a

Magical Guardian, or Magical Girl? While functionally the same, it does have implications on your appearance and future branding style.]

“Magical Girl is fine,” I waved my hand. “Though that might change depending on what my costume ends up looking like, I guess. How does all that work, anyway? Don’t I get a whole ‘transformation’ thing? Do I get to pick what my outfit looks like?”

Selene went silent and completely still.

Not still as in staying in one position, but still as in not moving *at all*. Every aspect of her was frozen, even her tails that never seemed to stop wavering behind her had stopped. It was like somebody had simply pressed the pause button on her. Selene sat there, staring at me, and panic began to rise into my throat.

“Selene!?” I asked with alarm, letting my voice raise slightly. “What’s wrong? Are you okay?”

Slowly, her tails began to move again. She blinked her eyes a few times.

[Apologies,] she said, her voice strangely tight and subdued. [Regarding your transformation... I would prefer to explain slightly later, if that is alright. It is a complicated subject that would only distract from the matters at hand.]

I watched her, sudden worry tightening my chest. I wanted to ask her what had just happened, but... well Selene was supposed to be my advisor now. If she thought it was best to wait, then I would trust her. Still, the fact that a simple question had caused her such a visceral reaction bothered me.

“Sure,” I finally said with a frown, eyebrows knitting together in worry. “As long as you’re alright.”

She dipped her head to me in acknowledgement.

[Continuing where we left off, then: Your alias is your Magical Girl name. It is how you will be referred to when discharging your duties. You are free to come up with your own name, but sometimes, a name is suggested by another Guardian. It has also become an informal tradition for the Guardian who names another to take on a more nurturing and protective role, like that of an older sibling.]

The idea of gaining another older sibling made my stomach turn, but I ignored it. I assumed Selene was talking about a brother who actually cared about their family and not... well,

whatever Dad had twisted my brother into. Selene didn't seem to notice my distaste at her comparison and continued.

[Next is "Level" and "Points." Both are self-explanatory as indicators of your current experience level and amount of points you have. Experience and points can be earned through a variety of activities, though the biggest source is defeating Anathema. Other things such as System-issued quests, helping civilians, and generally creating happiness also contribute.]

"I can get stronger by making people *happy*?" I asked incredulously.

[The Anathema feed on negative emotions. By fostering positivity and ideals of joy, peace, love, and serenity, it makes the Anathema weaker and diminishes their ability to tear rifts in reality. It is why the Zenith decided to promote the genre of "magical girls" with how the System expresses itself. The dresses, frills, and sparkles all do their part in actively combating the Anathema by inducing more wholesome emotions. As such, adorable, magic wielding warriors ended up being the best way to combat them in their entirety.]

"Wait," I felt a small smile try to stretch onto my lips. "Are you telling me we're killing eldritch monsters with *cuteness*?"

[...Yes?]

I had to cover my mouth to hide my smile as I gave Selene the most serious nod I could manage. "Right. No, that makes sense. Please continue."

[...When you earn enough experience, you "Level Up." This gives you 10 "stat points" to spend on your Statistics however you wish. We'll get to those soon. "Health" and "Mana" track the overall healthiness of your body and your magical energy. Your health is still recovering, but should reach your current maximum soon. Speaking of health, you should swallow the Greater Restoration Gum now. It will still function just as well being dissolved by your stomach, and I imagine the flavor has gone flat.]

Oh. So it had. I swallowed the gum, immediately missing the cozy sensation it had sent through me.

[Skipping the "Basic" section for now,] Selene continued, [we have "Statistics." They do not represent your normal physical abilities, but rather how much of a boost you gain after you do your "transformation sequence." By raising these "Stats," you will grow stronger. Please note: when you are not transformed, only a small fraction of these stats apply. While it still can be a noticeable boost, it will never reach the superhuman levels of your transformed state.]

I wanted to ask what transforming *was* exactly. I mean, I'd seen the infamous magical girl transformation sequence in shows before, where light surrounded the girl and clothed them in cute outfits, but I was curious to know what it meant in *reality*. How did it work, why did it happen, and would my previous clothes really just *disappear* before my outfit materialized on me? Those and a dozen other questions bubbled up inside of me. Remembering Selene's reaction earlier, though, I instead just chose to give her a tip of my head to keep going.

[The stats are as follows: Strength determines your physical strength and damage with strength aligned items.

Dexterity determines your finesse with various things, how well you move, how graceful you are, and your damage with Dexterity aligned items. Your speed slightly increases as well as you become more proficient in moving the most effective way possible.

Vitality is how much health you have, how sturdy you are, and your physical resistances.

Agility determines how quickly you move and your reaction time.

Willpower determines the raw power of your spells and the size of your mana pool. Every point in Willpower adds 10 maximum mana.

Spirit determines your finesse over spells, meaning how quickly you can cast them, how easily you can modify or aim them, how well they penetrate through magic resistance, your resistance to hostile magic, and your mana regeneration rate. Every point in Spirit adds five mana regeneration per minute.]

Selene stopped, giving me a moment to mull the explanations over.

Strength, Dexterity, and Vitality were all what I expected to see from my experience with games. Agility was interesting though, as it increased speed *and* reaction time. I suppose it made sense, as reaction time would be necessary for someone as their own speed increased to beyond what humans could normally process.

Willpower was basically Strength and Vitality rolled together except only for magic, and Spirit was the same way but Dexterity and Agility combined. I was slightly surprised there weren't more stats governing magic considering I was a *Magical Girl*, but I wasn't going to argue. More condensed stats meant less agonizing on what to spend my level up points on.

[Next, we have “Permissions.” The Grimoire and Vault section shows what you have spent points to gain access to. Grimoires and Vaults can be viewed as “catalogs” for magical spells and physical items respectively. You must unlock them to first buy the items they contain, just as you did with the First Aid Vault (Common). The (Common) tag indicates its rarity as the first of six known tiers, each tier providing a selection of better items or spells but also costing more. Every hundredth level you reach, you’ll unlock a higher tier of purchasable Vaults, Grimoires, and their corresponding items. Some people prefer simply calling them by their tier number, but others enjoy the rarity tags as it makes things seem more game-like.]

“What are the other rarity tags?”

[Common is the first tier, then Rare, Masterwork, Arcane, Legendary, and Mythic. There is also a second set of tags used for more... esoteric items. The Arcane System, while useful, also has some oddities. Magic is not something that can be entirely codified or neatly labeled, and as such, the System sometimes does surprising things in its translations. The esoteric rarities are used to help label such idiosyncrasies.]

I resisted a frown. It didn’t fill me with confidence that I was placing my life in the hands of something that had what even the Zenith considered “oddities,” especially when they were the ones who made the thing.

[The next section is your Abilities and Augments, together commonly referred to as your “Skills.” Slightly different from spells, Abilities do exactly what they prescribe without being able to be modified. They can cost mana to use or have a cooldown period before they can be used again. Augments are the passive or toggleable versions of abilities, constantly being active. Each Augment takes away from your total mana regeneration rate, even when not in use. You can have a total of seven Abilities and seven Augments, but acquiring them is slightly different. They are only unlocked through raising your level, your class level, or the corresponding stat requirements. Many require a combination, and once unlocked, they must also be purchased with points.]

“Can I see the requirements of them in advance?” I asked, wondering how far I could plan ahead.

[Only on the most basic, well known Skills,] Selene replied. [The System keeps most Abilities and Augments hidden until the person has either unlocked them or is simply missing stat requirements. The Zenith have attempted to... “patch” this quirk, but have been unsuccessful. There are information brokers who specialize in collecting such knowledge and selling it. As such, it can be quite lucrative to sell any details should you acquire a rarer Skill.]

I nodded as I glanced back at my status menu, frowning.

“Um... I’ve been meaning to ask, but what’s with the creepy looking red text in the Grimoire and Vault section? And why do I have a ‘Unique Augment Available,’ for that matter?”

[Unfortunately,] Selene sighed. [Those both have to do with the “Basic” section that we skipped. We’ll get to that in a second. Back on Abilities and Augments, know that both have levels of their own that increase through use. Their max level is limited by either your level, or your class level.]

I squirmed. I *really* was getting curious now about some of the things we were skipping, and seeing two entries on my status menu with colored text bugged me. It made something inside me itch not knowing.

[Finally, your “Inventory” is just a list of any weapons or equipment you have purchased and currently have on you. Please note, it does not function like a video game where you magically can store things inside of it. Other than the Basic section, that concludes the status menu. I should note that you can customize how your status menu appears at any time, as well as create additional sub-menus. Any questions on what we have covered so far?]

Having none but the ones I’d already expressed, I shook my head.

[As for the Basic section... let me simply say that I have hidden both your “Origin” and “Aspect” as knowing them will only cause further questions that we simply do not have the time to properly explore. Both are very important and have far-reaching implications, but I truly believe it is in your best interests to simply skip the explanations on them for now. Is this... acceptable with you? I do not relish the idea of hiding information, and if you insist, I will reveal them and their meanings to you.]

Selene seemed sincere in her words, and I watched as her tails twitched slightly, almost in nervousness. I thought about it for a second before giving a gradual nod.

“I think... it’s okay for now,” I said the words slowly, still trying to decipher my own feelings as well. “But maybe only because you told me? I think because you said you were hiding something but explained why you were doing it, I’m okay with it? It worries me that it seems to be a big deal, but... well, you’re supposed to be the expert. It would be kind of stupid not to trust your judgment, I guess.”

Selene gave me a deep, relieved nod.

[What I can tell you about them is that they provide bonuses. For you, your Origin gave you a special Grimoire. While you cannot currently use it due to the issues I am keeping from you, it will undoubtedly provide an invaluable edge in the future. As for your Aspect, it gave you a Unique Augment that we can explore momentarily. The next field, "Class," is locked until you reach level 10. Class refers to your combat style, and choosing one gives you bonuses as well as unlocks specialty Grimoires, Vaults, and Skills. Many games have similar systems, as you are aware.]

Nodding, I wondered what kind of Class I would end up going with. Normally, I played quick, dexterous types, but I wasn't sure how that fit with being a Magical Girl.

Selene resumed speaking, pulling me from my trance.

[Finally, your "Signature" or "Signature Magic" refers to your entirely unique magical ability. All Guardians have one, but no two are the same due to no two individuals being the same. While your Signature Magic is still technically magic, it is not something that will ever be truly replicated in a Grimoire. Signatures are incredibly powerful and capable of almost anything from actually stopping time to temporary invincibility. They do not function by the normal rules or limits of magic, and as such, are incredible resources.]

"So... it's like my own original superpower?" I asked.

[Exactly! For now, though, it will remain "Unawakened." Unlocking your Signature can take an unknown amount of uninterruptible time, and is best done through the proper facilities with the proper observational tools. Certain Signatures can be hard to figure out or downright dangerous to their owners without knowledge about them.]

"Yeah," I agreed, thinking about some of the crazier superpowers I'd seen in shows. "That might be for the best. So, what's next? That's the entire status menu. I think I have a good idea of what's going on now."

[Yes... there is still the issue of the "transformation sequence" that Guardians have access to...]

She trailed off, then let out a soft sigh.

[The official name of your "transformation sequence" is your "Astral Shift," and it is currently locked due to reasons beyond our control. As such, the benefits of your stats are greatly reduced. You will also be missing out on the significant protection your conjured outfit would provide. For now, the best resources to rely on would be the Gate and whatever you can purchase from it with points. While not ideal, it is... manageable.]

I peered at Selene carefully. It really didn't make me feel good knowing she was keeping secrets, even if she told me she was doing it. Something about not *knowing* was starting to bother me on a fundamental level. Maybe it was because I relied so much on making plans just to get through even the simplest of days. Without the proper knowledge, though, how was I supposed to figure out what to do?

No, I shook my head at myself. I was thinking about this the wrong way. Selene had already saved my life and was most definitely trying to help me. If she wasn't telling me things, it was because it might actively hinder my chances of staying alive. Besides, as nice as talking about the role-playing game mechanics had been, it didn't take away from the fact that we were still in an Usurpation Zone. As time went on, only more and stronger Anathema would start flooding the area. Already, our relatively brief conversation felt like too long.

"Okay," I said, gathering my thoughts. "So. I have a slight boost to my physical abilities now, and each level will help with that. I also have 130 points left to spend, and that unique Augment. That's what we're working with, right?"

Selene looked at me for several moments.

[You are taking this remarkably well, but yes that is the gist of it. As such, I would recommend unlocking a weapon Vault and buying something. The vault will cost 100 points, leaving 30 for the weapon. That should be more than enough to purchase something capable of ensuring your safety on the journey to the first floor's shelter. Judging by your playstyle in Magical Girls Sunset: Rebellion, I would recommend Dexterity and Agility based weapons. Two enchanted blades or a spear would fit you well.]

"Why not a spell? Wait, no... If my stat bonuses are reduced, any spell I use would be much weaker than normal anyway. Plus if I ran out of mana, I'd be left without a weapon."

[Correct.] Selene nodded. *[Even if your transformation weren't locked, a conventional weapon with an enchantment is the best option for now as spell casting does require some explanation.]*

I nodded and went back to thinking about her analysis about my playstyle. She had a point that I did play characters that were usually more focused on speed, but... this wasn't a game. Remembering how hard it had been to fight with my makeshift weapon, how tough it had been to even hurt the Anathema, it made me feel less than certain. I had no idea how to actually use a sword or spear beyond "stab them with the pointy end." Ideally, I needed something that wouldn't make for a long, drawn-out fight.

“What exactly are those enchanted weapons you mentioned? What would they do?”

[With access to only Common quality gear, it won't be anything too special. You could get a weapon enchanted with sharpening, making it capable of slicing through low level Anathema like paper. Alternatively, something more flashy like a fire or ice enchantment would be equally viable and effective. The only thing to consider is enchanted gear will draw from your mana. As you do not have much currently, you won't be able to keep the enchantment active for long.]

“Right, and if I ran out of mana, it would take a long time to regenerate it. Which would only be more time for more Anathema to come in...”

I went quiet as my mind worked through the problem. A weapon that I could use without much training, one that I could confidently use to take out Anathema without drawing out the fight. The problem was that I knew *nothing* about weapons. My only real experience would be using what I'd seen in movies or games, both of which I'd only really been into for a few months now after Lily had insisted on showing me all sorts of her favorites.

A memory flashed through my head, of popcorn and an endless movie marathon, and suddenly I knew what kind of weapon I wanted. It wasn't traditional and probably broke the entire “Magical Girl” image, but right now, it wasn't like I really looked like much of one anyway. It would be *me* using the weapon, not whatever Magical Girl persona I might want to cultivate later.

It could work, but it all depended on the answer to my next question.

“Selene?” I asked carefully. “How do you feel about *guns*?”