

I can't draw, and I ain't British.

As mentioned last month, I once more overestimated how big the FILFy chapter would get and had to cut it in half. Then I realized I seemed to have forgotten that communication is a thing and that scenes here would force people to respond there, and had to add bits, and then rewrote segments and... yeah. Still, this time, I knew that was possible, so instead of having one large story and one small story, I have this story, then ***Stallion*** and ***Magic of the Force*** being updated. ***Magic*** will be a small story, while Stallion is medium-sized.

This has been edited by me with Grammarly and by Nad Destroyer. Alas, RL got in the way of Morde24, as it does to the best of us at times.

Chapter 28: Egypt Tours, Harvest

In Damanhur, the losses among Harry and Flavius's command had reached the point where forward progress had stalled. As the attack on Damanhur reached its second hour, Harry pulled the attackers back into the defensive zone, shaking his head at the Colonel. Ever since they had begun to make real progress reclaiming the city, he had been busy dealing with one overwhelming aerial attack after another, a sure sign that the Pharaoh had turned his full attention on Harry and his force once more.

The proof of this was that these attacks had included several undead Sphinx. Instead of simply attacking themselves, they had dropped other troops down onto the ground in areas that had already been cleared and with talismans placed, intent on destroying the talismans. That was sneaky, but the overwhelming magical power Harry could bring to bear had dealt with the attackers each time even as he slowly began to feel the strain of keeping his aura out covering such a huge area. After all, the three cities created a triangle a little under three-thousand miles in area.

After that, Loup would lead his team back to clearing out any attackers who had been able to get into the buildings. At the same time, the Himejima clan members, all of whom were complaining about carpal tunnel by this point, redid the destroyed talismans.

There was some good news, though. As Harry's forces pushed forward, locals came forward. These men, women and children had hidden here and there in buildings that had been previously cleared or from small police stations. By this point, they had discovered more than eight thousand civilians, of whom many wished to fight back, at least once they were given weapons or ammunition. Nearly all of those who had guns had run out of bullets and had taken to simply hiding. But like the men of the Northern Army region's field headquarters in Damietta, they were still game thanks to Harry's aura and the artificial sun overhead.

Now, Harry conferred with Flavius. With the newly acquired 'troops', Flavius wanted to keep on pushing as they had, citing the fact that many had been in the army and were part of the Egyptian militia, so they were in okay shape. "If we can bring in a few hundred out of every

thousand, we can start to really push the monsters hard. Especially now that we have developed plans to deal with the building-to-building fighting. We can reclaim our homes!”

Harry gestured in negation despite feeling more than a bit of sympathy for the man wanting to protect his home city his way. “No. We need to speed things up and cut down on our losses, Colonel. You and your men are still taking too many losses, as are the Aurors. Remember, we might have to do this kind of assault in every Egyptian city behind us in the rest of the Delta and going further southeast along the Nile. And I think we can do that best by mixing up our troops. That, and destroying any building that doesn’t have people within it.”

Flavius looked pained, and not just because of the idea of doing all this over and over again. “Lord Potter, I **really** don’t want my home city to be destroyed.”

“Better to rebuild a few dozen buildings later than bury an equal or greater number of dead. If you are bothered by it, Colonel, tell your superiors that I overrode your concerns.” Harry answered with a sympathetic smile.

The man winced, but seeing the resigned compassion in Harry’s face, nodded.

Stepping back, Harry sent up a Patronus, ordering down a dozen Aurors from the aerial portion of the outer perimeter dove down. When they were hovering in the air in front of him, Harry ordered, “Take over pushing forward to that nearest column and the military men out there. Use Homenum Revelio in those directions past our perimeter. Watch out for musket fire and then send up sparks, green for clear, red for humans present.”

Harry wasn’t going to just destroy every building between their safe zone and the ones controlled by the columns. But he was going to bring down a lot of them.

As the Aurors obeyed, Harry flew up into the air, hovering above the city so he could see the territory they had already reclaimed and the Aurors. When each reported their findings, Harry was ready. And a second later, a blast of conjured fire roared down, devastating each building in turn before returning to float around Harry’s head in the form of a fiery owl, the Japanese spell letting Harry control the element until he canceled the spell.

Meanwhile, buildings where living people had hidden themselves, and there were several of them, were cleared by the new teams that Harry and Flavius formed from their disparate forces. Instead of attacking from one direction, now two assault teams struck each building. First were the roof hoppers, an infantry squad with four dwarves on two magic carpets, who would attack the building from above, followed instantly by a single Himejima clan member who would emplace their talismans on the building and two fireteams taken from the Egyptian militiamen.

The second team would attack from below and consisted of six leprechauns, two Aurors, and an army squad to clear the building from below. Loup and Shen were in overall command now of those, with their teams ready to move in to support. In this manner, they created far

more platoon-sized units which could fight inside buildings effectively against the monsters and Infreri.

Harry felt that those units would do that job with the least amount of oversight from him. This was a good thing because the report from Sala had come in at that point about the pillars. On the heels of that, Hermione and Padma had dropped their bombshell on the high command back in Alexandria.

At first, Harry argued with Abraxas. With Hermione's words about the pillars and specifically the idea that they were under a time limit that Abraxas had pointed out himself, Harry felt they should destroy the pillars as soon as possible, even sending out expeditions beyond their lines to do that. Since the aerial attacks into Damanhur had shrunk dramatically, Harry felt he could handle most of the anti-air work, which would allow him to cut out half of his available Aurors for such missions. "At least let me destroy the pillars within the triangle between Alexandria, Damietta and Damanhur," he nearly demanded.

"Lord Potter, as much as I too am concerned about the long-term ramifications of the pillars, my staff and I have conferred, and we have decided they are a necessary evil right now. We cannot destroy them until we are in a position to protect the people hiding underneath their control." Abraxas answered, his tone firm. Firmer than it would have been if Harry was in front of him if the Major General was honest.

"Major General, I understand what you are saying. But if those things are brainwashing them or worse, we could be facing an even greater problem going forward than just the monsters and various undead. Besides, they might be some kind of power source for the magic summoning both types of monsters into being."

Harry had briefly explained how someone was doing that but hadn't really hit on the whole different types of magic thing. That would have taken too long to explain and opened too many cans of worms. "And we have to wonder why the brainwashing is bringing religion into it at all. Why are the people within the area of effect of those pillars being convinced they are a gift from a god? There is magic with the power of belief general, and you brought up the fact we might be under a time limit. But to what?"

For a moment, Abraxas was quiet, a murmur of voices in the background telling Harry that he was consulting with his officers. Eventually, Abraxas came back, but when he spoke, his voice was still unyielding. "Brainwashed right now is better than dead in a few seconds before we can defend our citizens. As much as we appreciate your assistance Lord Potter, you are not Egyptian. This is a risk I am not willing to take with millions of our citizens at the present time. Later on, we might revisit this topic, but not right now."

It sounded as if Abraxas was trying to convince himself even as he somewhat attacked Harry for his position. *Or could this be his way of telling me to take my chances later? It's true we really are stretched thin here, so breaking off troops would be difficult. Or is he just unwilling*

to take responsibility for the deaths that might come from destroying those pillars in areas where we don't have troops?

Shaking his head and determining that he would try to think of something about the pillars later, Harry decided to end this conversation. "Very well, Major General, we'll go along with your decision. But if more information comes to light, I will act on it, even against your objections." He let those words settle into the communication between them for a moment, ignoring the leprechaun holding the button, giving him a thumb's up before going on. "For now, could you put Akeno on?"

A moment later, Akeno's dulcet tones came out of the small leprechaun enchanted button. "Yes, Harry?"

"Get ready. I will be back at the Nile in fifteen and opening the water transportation. It will be very, very quick this time."

"Will you be joining us?" Akeno inquired.

Harry grimaced, then shook his head. "I can't. It's my presence and my Aura that is keeping the monsters from popping up wherever they want again. No matter how fast we can overcome them and thinking we could do so even with me there along with you and the others is stupid, our allies would lose hundreds and maybe all the progress we've made, not to say anything about the millions of civilians in Alexandria and the millions we haven't yet helped which no longer have to fear the monsters spawning wherever they wish. No, Akeno, this is your mission, and your team, as much as I would like it to be otherwise."

Knowing this wasn't the time for teasing, Akeno simply answered in the affirmative and Harry ended the communication. Thanking the leprechaun with the button, Harry gathered up Flavius and a few of the locals who were standing nearby, telling him where they had seen human-style movement before Harry's sun had appeared in the sky above the city. "We need to change lines of advance. Where is the nearest pillar?"

One of the Aurors resting nearby answered while the locals just shook their heads. None of them had been willing to venture out from their hiding places to scout around, and there hadn't been a pillar in sight from their hiding places, those that had any ability to see the city around them at all. "It's about three blocks southwest of here. Follow that road over there you'll hit the edge of it. And from what we were told the other assault ran into, it's pretty typical. There are thousands of people there, out on the streets and more in the buildings. Not packed like sardines, but close."

"Right. We won't spread out in a circle from the Nile any longer. Instead, we're going to use our current method of advance to move to each pillar in turn. We will isolate each pillar, or group of pillars if several are close together, stun the people within, and destroy the pillars."

Flavius slowly nodded. "All the fighting happening within the buildings will actually let us have an easier time of moving the civilians out. We'll still be overstretched unless we run into more volunteers, but... I think you're right. If those pillars are slowly starting to mind-control the people, then we need to get them out of there quickly."

"Good." Harry nodded but didn't voice the thought that he was concerned that that would be the only thing those pillars were doing. While mind control was worrisome, especially when paired with the religious tones of the pillars' message, it still felt too, too small! *All this just to brainwash enough people so that maybe they could come forward as Pharaoh or something like that? That doesn't feel right. And then there's the possible time limit we might be working under. Could... is it possible for a human being to become a god if enough people believe them to be such?*

His thoughts were interrupted by the Colonel saying, "You know, My Lord, one thing that you haven't done is announce yourself. According to my family, that helped bolster morale throughout Alexandria on its own. Yes, your aura is being felt throughout Damanhur, but the holdouts out there don't know enough to realize its significance. An individual they could rally around is something anyone could understand, especially with this madness tearing away at what they thought was normal."

Harry stared at him, then very slowly drew one hand down his face. "I'm a moron. Thank you, Colonel. I was concentrating so much on the magical and the military side of this attack that I neglected to think about the morale aspect, something I shouldn't have."

With that, Harry flew up into the sky and used the Sonorous spell on his throat. He was about to speak when a thought occurred to him. *Could I somehow use my deific magic to connect my voice to my aura, make my voice heard wherever my aura has expanded?*

Considering that was a rather large chunk of the Nile Delta, it was not a small consideration. The attack on Damietta and Damanhur had been decided on because of the number of people there and the fact that Damietta could be used as a beachhead to further attacks up that portion of the Delta, while Damanhur was simply further along the main Nile river than Alexandria. That didn't mean that there weren't other towns and cities between them, especially since the Nile Delta was one of the most populous areas in Egypt.

Millions of more people are out there, millions of people we haven't been able to help yet. And I'm not in a position to do so, but I can at least tell them they are not alone. And... Harry looked up at the sun, then shook his head. *No. I can't combine the three suns into one large enough to illuminate that large an area. Maybe if Ddraig were with me, but he'll be of more use when Koneko and the others hit whatever base Akhenaten is operating out of.*

Shaking that thought off, Harry turned to something he could do. *I might not be able to create a sun that large, but I think I could create a one-shot Blessing to bolster courage that could cover that area. It is going to wipe me out a bit, though.* Shaking his head ruefully, Harry

looked over to where an Auror was hovering nearby, keeping a watchful eye out for incoming threats. "Could you please go and grab a Pepper-Up potion? I am rather afraid I am going to need it."

Harry gathered himself, creating an image of what he wanted, to uplift and encourage, in much the same way the Solarus spell did, but not as strong or connected to a single source of light. Instead, it and his voice would carry through his Aura everywhere it could touch.

At first, it didn't work. The image wouldn't come. But Harry then had a thought. *After all, it's called the Nile Delta for a reason, and I have control of the river now. I can use it to spread this Blessing around like I used it to spread my control before. And I have to be by the river for a bit anyway to help Akeno, Hermione and their team.*

Moving back to the Nile River, Harry knelt down and then smiled wanly as the power of the Nile and the still existing Blessing there soothed his mind and will. With that, he had an even better Idea and thrust his head down into the water of the Nile, the new Blessing forming in his mind easily. After all, most of the parts of this were things he'd already done tonight. It was just putting it all together that was hard.

When Harry spoke, his voice roared out from one end of the Nile from the Mediterranean to the Indian ocean, heard for miles and miles. So powerful was his voice that it made nearby buildings tremble, and one of them, already damaged internally, crumbled.

Reverberating from the Nile River with power, Harry's voice was heard in every city, town, and village within the triangle his Aura was protecting, carried by the connection between his aura and the river. The power couldn't spread beyond that, Harry wasn't strong enough after the many demands on his power he'd faced this night. Nor would it last as long as the uplifting Patronus-like impact of the Solarus suns over the three cities. But in the triangle, people both inside and out of the pillar's control area felt the impact of his words and took heart in them. And even better, the Nile now gleamed with golden light, banishing the dark of the night.

"People of Egypt, I am Harry Potter. By my magic, the creatures, the jackal men, the scorpions, and the harpies can no longer spawn within reach of my voice. Regretfully, I lack the strength to stop them and the undead both from coming back once slain. But I am working with your military to regain control of your land one city at a time and overcome the mind behind this assault. Stay in hiding, fight only if you must, and do not trust the pillars among you. If you can, find hiding places beyond their influence. And know that this night, no matter how dark it might seem, will end!"

What the effect of those words might be in other cities and towns, Harry didn't know. But, as he rested by the Nile, Aurors and troopers both reported men and women who had been hiding in various places outside their area of control began to appear. They moved up to the rooftops of their buildings and got the attention of the Aurors in the air. With no aerial

attack into the city at the moment, this allowed many of the Aurors to concentrate on the ground, and with their help, thousands of more civilians were moved into the safe Zone.

With Harry having to open up the water teleportation back to Alexandria anyway, Harry took the time to send the civilians who didn't want to fight back to Alexandria along with the wounded. As they did, these men and women, one and all, bowed towards Harry, somehow knowing he was the one behind the voice and the magical sun in the sky above them. The looks in their eyes sent shivers down his spine, but he simply nodded and then gestured them down to sit in the solid, tram-like area of water his water transportation spell had created. "All aboard the water express, ladies and gentlemen, straight to Alexandria with no stopover on the way."

Unfortunately, this took forty minutes, after which Harry used the same spell going in the opposite direction. This took them well past where his ability to project his aura out of the water ended to the city of al-Minya, the capital of the district with the same name. As the attack force exited out onto the shoreline, Harry took a brief second to smile at Akeno, knowing that he couldn't stay for more than a minute. Already, Harry knew that his area of control was disappearing quickly. "Good luck to you and the others, Akeno. I love you, now go out there and shock them dead."

"Fufufufu, you can be assured of that, my love," Akeno answered before Harry disappeared down into the water once more to reappear back in Damanhur.

As soon as he did, his Aura snapped back in place, far faster than it had before, and covering the full triangle between the three cities again. *Huh, is that like, like working out a muscle? A god can spread his aura further and more easily with training? Weird.* Shaking his head, Harry turned back to wiping out the hundreds of monsters that had appeared in the sky above the city without him there, as well as the next wave of flyers from outside his influence. *Think about that later. Concentrate on what's going on right now.*

After a hasty conference with Major General Abraxas, Harry opened another water teleportation to Alexandria. A truck that had been on duty with the civilians there came through, laden with weapons and spare armor. With it came Charlie Weasley and a few local wizards who began to conjure up bullets for the locals while Harry turned his attention to other matters.

Specifically, the plan to push forward to the pillars, one after another. This kind of advance would open up their progress to flanking attacks, but everyone agreed it was a good idea at this point. Thankfully, most of the people in the buildings along their route had already made themselves known, and Harry, much of his reserve having slowly risen again, destroyed three out of every five buildings along their route.

When they reached the edge of the pillar, the people there were already looking a bit hostile. A second later, as they approached, the Aurors and troopers came under fire. "Down with the followers of the False Gods, down with the traitors!" came the shout.

Hearing that, Harry looked over to Shen, who was currently hovering on a nearby magic carpet. "Huh. I think Akhenaten has tweaked his mind control a bit."

"Right. Still, unless Akhenaten can emplace some kind of anti-stupefy ability into their brains..." Shen shrugged.

"Yep. Stun them all, and let the Major General sort them out," Harry quipped, eliciting a round of laughter from the surrounding Aurors and Shinsengumi, a moment of humor among the ongoing horror.

With Protegos around them, a group of Aurors swooped around the pillar, letting the men within its area of effect who still had guns and ammunition fire at them while Harry moved to hover directly above the pillar, hidden under his invisibility cloak. A second later, a blast of Stupefy knocked out the six thousand or more people in the area below, with teams of Aurors entering the houses within the protected zone stunning everyone they came across. Transporting them took longer than knocking them out.

Meanwhile, nearby, Shen and Loup led the defense against a sudden upsurge of attackers, undead, cobras and scarabs, who boiled out of buildings nearby which they hadn't yet cleared or destroyed coming from buildings beyond the pillar site. Most died in the now more open terrain of the wrecked zone Harry had created, but the Aurors were little help as a new aerial assault crashed in at the same time.

Harry helped out with that last, flinging out waves of cutting spells against the enemy when they came close and using Japanese element-style attacks at range. Eventually, the last of the unconscious civilians were back by the river, waiting for transportation. They would do so for a while, though, as Harry didn't want to continually interrupt his aura that often or halt their forward momentum again.

Landing by the pillar, Harry staring at it while nearby, Flavius worked on plans to push toward another pillar, and the evacuation continued. This time the target was on the other side of the Nile, but it was closer to their existing area of control than the next one on this side.

But Harry didn't care about that. Instead, he was staring at the pillar, using his deific senses to try and get a feel for the magic within. Now that the pillar had activated, Harry could tell a bit more but once more knew there was more he wasn't seeing underneath the surface enchantments of protection, like feeling a rock under a mound of sand. He knew there was something there, but not what. Something that caused Harry's hackles to rise and since he was still in his werewolf form, that was a sight to see. *But what is it?*

Shaking his head, he sent out a Reducto, blasting the pillar to dust. *Whatever it is, it's dangerous, and these things need destroying as soon as possible. I need to figure out a spell to do that in the triangle, whatever Abraxas thinks.*

OOOOOO

“GRAAH!!!” Akhenaten snarled in wordless fury. “They have begun to destroy the pillars once more in both attacked cities, curse Potter to...”

“Akhenaten, hush,” Nefertiti soothed. “You are concentrating too much on Potter personally and missing the great scheme of things. His words and aura spreading across that massive triangle his aura covers are much more important than the loss of a few pillars in the cities he and his allies are already fighting our forces in. We need to concentrate on combating the upsurge of independent thinking that his words evoked.”

Breathing so deeply his mask moved, the ancient Pharaoh slowly regained control of his temper. “You are right, my dear. I am sorry. But while the pillars within that area are still part of the Harvest, his words and that Blessing have had an impact, and it, it frustrated me.”

“Then we counter that impact, not Potter himself. Push forces from the areas around the Nile beyond his aura’s touch, kill anyone and everyone beyond the protection of our pillars, let their screams carry to those still under the pillar’s protection. Add to the influence aspect of the Harvest, the idea of Potter being a false god, perhaps?”

Another breath, then the Pharaoh nodded his mind fully back online. “You are once more correct, my dear, as you were with your earlier observation. Potter has spread his forces too thin. The chromatic dragon is flying around Damietta. Many of his own personal posse have been spotted there. The only ones who haven’t been seen there are the wielder of the Bombardier Sacred Gear, the Himejima Devil girl, the fallen whore and that new spear wielder. I wish I knew more about that one’s abilities, but they alone cannot protect Alexandria.”

“You see? Look at the bigger picture,” Nefertiti crooned. “I have almost finished bringing forth enough monsters and undead nearby to swamp Alexandria by land and by air. And once that happens, Potter will have to pull back. We will have gained both the momentum of this war and time. We only need to hold out until dawn, after all, and that is barely two hours away.”

Nodding, the Pharaoh got to work, as did Nefertiti. Their personal defenses were ready, and now both concentrated on different aspects of the Culling, shifting troops around. Hundreds of people died as this happened, but that was next to nothing compared to the rest of this night’s cost in human lives. *But it will all be worth it, worth it and more if we succeed...*

OOOOOO

Lily’s sighed, staring at the teacher, willing her to be more interesting as if it was a new magic spell she was trying to learn! *I hate math!* This was a familiar refrain for Lily. She liked reading and writing and knew for a fact that in those classes, she was performing far better and at a higher level than her peers by at least two full grade levels. Especially considering that most of that was happening in Japanese, which wasn’t her native language. But math? In Lily’s opinion, math was pure evil. There was way too much memorization, way too many multiplication tables, way too much repetition. She didn’t like it, and she didn’t think she ever would. *And don’t get me started on social studies, ugh.*

Kunou, on the other hand, actually was okay at math. She didn't enjoy it any more than Lily, but she could at least listen to the teacher and participate in class without being prodded as Lily did. Lily also knew that her bestest friend/sister from another mother (a phrase Lily giggled at for various reasons) simply enjoyed being at school, except for when the work really piled on. Then Kunou was just as prone to temper tantrums and acting out as Lily was.

But right now, Kunou was just sitting there like a normie, dutifully taking notes and watching at the teacher with rapt attention. Whereas Lily, well, if her Daddy were there, he would've asked Lily if she had ants in her pants given how much she was twitching in her seat.

The class droned on for a while, and Lily started to doodle in the margins of her work page, although she made a point of connecting each drawing to the numbers that they were currently multiplying together, to make them at least look as if they had something to do with the actual work they were doing. But then Lily looked up when movement just outside the window caught her eye. Turning slightly in that direction, Lily paused, staring at a fairy.

It was obviously a fairy, maybe one that she had seen on Tir Na Nog in Danan. At first, Lily didn't believe her eyes, then as she narrowed them, the fairy smacked the window, pointing at Lily, and then flew away, then flew back, pointed again, then pointed to herself, and then flew around in a circle.

"Potter-chan, I realize it is a lovely day out, but I'm afraid that you need to concentrate on class for just a bit longer," came the half-teasing, half-scolding voice of Mrs. Sanju. "Unless you have already solved this problem and are just letting someone else answer first?"

There was a round of snickering from the rest of the class, and Lily rolled her eyes while Kunou looked at Lily, then out the window, her eyes following the fairy. Evidently, it wasn't just Lily who was seen the thing. There was a relief to Lily as she turned her attention to the board at the front of the room, looking at the math problem there, then answering, "forty, ma'am."

"Very good, Potter-chan. But I still would like you to pay attention rather than stare out the window, hmm?" With that, the teacher turned back and began to drone her way through the multiplication tables, although Lily noted she was looking the redhead's way more now.

Okay, this is weird, Lily thought to herself, trying to keep her head down now, letting her eyes drift out to the window where the fairy was now performing some kind of midair dance but keeping her head turned toward the teacher. Where did the fairy come from? Heck, how did she get to Earth? Daddy wouldn't have brought it through if he thought she'd run off and try to cause trouble for me at school. And didn't Auntie Luna mention most of the fairies didn't want to come to earth anyway? And if it's here, why is it trying to cause trouble for me at school? That seems a silly thing to jump across dimensions for.

That the Fae would probably cause trouble for fun's sake wasn't something Lily questioned. She well understood the fairy would. It was a Fae. When allowed to cause mischief,

they undoubtedly would. But why Lily? *As protective of me as Daddy and Momma Rias are, that's a short way ticket to pain.*

She glanced over at Kunou, who was also glancing out the window, far more subtly than Lily. Kunou even answered a question of her own from the math teacher before going back to glancing at the window out of the corner of her eye. In doing so, Kunou caught Lily's eyes and mouthed the word 'recess' to her.

Lily nodded slightly back, and the two of them went back to trying desperately to pay attention while curiosity ate them alive.

When it came to time for recess, the two of them were two of the first to line up, and they dutifully followed the next class over into and out the door, where they raced to one of the far ends of the school's play area.

Aqua Thistleborn breathed out a sigh of relief, grateful that she wouldn't have to report to the Titania's descendent that Aqua hadn't performed her duties. It had taken her several hours to cross the world from the place where she had come into the human world to here, where her quarry was, and the trip had been a little fraught occasionally when birds of prey had spotted her and assumed that she was some kind of Hummingbird or another swift snack. Thankfully, her powers of flower-based teleportation had allowed her to cover a large amount of the distance quickly, heading into the area of Earth that was facing the sun.

When Aqua arrived here, she quickly found that her target was with many other children being instructed in some fashion about something that the humans had written down on the board. Why humans thought that writing things down like that was so important, Aqua had no idea, nor did she care. And she was kind of incensed that her perfectly obvious attempts to get the High King's daughters' attention had failed because the older human had thought that such strange markings were more important than Aqua performing the danger dance.

With that and how long it had taken her to get there, Aqua had half a mind to appear before them all, just to make certain that they understood the importance of Aqua's presence, but Queen Luna had been very specific. She could play a few pranks along the way, so long as they didn't slow her down and so long as no nonmagical saw her before she arrived here in this place.

That, and the fact that Aqua felt the magic all around her, watchful, waiting to pounce if given the opportunity. Whatever the humans had done in this area, it felt to Aqua like she was being stalked by a giant kneazle who could follow her every move. It was terrifying slightly, but Aqua's didn't show that on her face as the two young mortals joined her. "Well, it's about time! Did you think I was flying around that window because it was pretty?"

"Well, a lot of fairies do like to fly around mirrors and windows because they can see the reflection in them," Kunou shot back, smirking a little as she crouched down in front of the little

creature, Lily doing the same. “We don’t have to worry about anyone but us seeing you, right? And if you say something like ‘hey listen’, I’m going to squish you.”

“Queen Luna was very specific. I can’t be seen by nonmagicals, so I am making them not see me,” Aqua answered, although confused by the threat. “And soon, they won’t see either of you either.”

“I wouldn’t use magic on us if I were you,” Lily warned, feeling the wards rise up in anticipation. But to Lily, it was like the rest of the pack was here watching, waiting to pounce in her defense. It was nice, but not quite as nice as having Daddy or her new Mum around in person. “The wards around here are awfully protective of those who are read into them, and Daddy and Mum read Kunou and me into them long ago. You’re not.”

Aqua’s wings stopped fluttering for a moment, and she looked at the two youngsters in some pain. “But how am I going to get you away from here, then?”

At those words, Lily perked up, but Kunou grabbed her arm and shook her head very slightly, almost glaring at her more rambunctious stepsibling. Lily drooped a little but still turned back resolutely to the fairy, her eyes gleaming. This felt like an **adventure**. “Why do you want to take us away from school?”

The word school went straight through Aqua’s mind and out the other side without leaving an impact. Whatever humans called buildings was just as bizarre to her as building the things out of stone and steel or unilaterally assigning lines and stuff on a map, calling one segment one name and the other segment another. If a portion of the land wanted to be called something, the land itself would tell you that as it had with Danan and Mother Earth. Or you could give them a name to a place because of something happening there, like Tir Na Nog. That made sense. Beyond that, naming places was just strange.

Shaking her head, Aqua tried to concentrate on the two youngsters’ questions. “I am here on the business of Queen Luna. Queen Luna wants you, Lily, to come to Danan. There is a problem there that requires someone of the High King’s family to take care of, and he is busy.”

For a moment, the fact that her father was busy caught Lily’s attention until she remembered that he was in Egypt and nothing interesting happened there. He was probably bored out of his mind if he couldn’t get out of it. *Hmm... which could mean that something is going on in Danan that Mama Rias should see too.* But Mama Rias had still been sleeping when school began, and Lily had no idea if she was up, yet the lazy bones.

Which left it to Lily, who was also the only one who could use the Undertaking. *So it makes sense this fairy came to me.* Having convinced herself over the part of her mind that knew her Daddy would want her to just stay in school and be good, Lily nodded. “Okay! But since neither of us can read you into the wards, we still can’t use magic to get out of here.”

"I still would like some more information on what Miss Luna wants us to do in Danan before agreeing, and if Poppa gave the okay," Kunou interjected repressively. "I don't want to get into trouble if this is some kind of prank, Lily or something that we could do after school ends."

"It isn't! It is... It's something that you have to do right away. The moment you get to Danan, you'll understand." Luna and Kunou looked confused, and Aqua reminded herself that these two, as smart as they were, were still very young mortals. Exactly the kind of youngsters that could be led into the Fae Lands and kept for a while before being released back into the wild for fun.

But they were also right about the wards, and Aqua had no desire to try anything with them. "Trust me, Queen Luna was extremely specific. I have to get you there as soon as possible."

The two youngsters glanced at one another, then over to the teachers and the other kids. "... I don't know how we could even get away, even if it is important. Neither of us knows any kind of magic that could get us out of here," Lily said, scowling a little as she plucked that the grass in front of her, shaking her head as reality intruded on her fun.

Kunou looked back at her class and then over at Aqua thoughtfully. "You swear on your name that this is serious?" She demanded, sounding remarkably like her mother for a moment there. "We're not going to get in trouble for this?"

"Nope. Or if you are, you will be excused almost immediately," Aqua amended, going on quickly. "Trust me, whatever is going on in Danan is big. You'll be able to tell when we get there."

Sighing, Kunou stood up and held out her hand, moving her fingers this way and that. "In that case, I think that Okuri-Inu can help us here. He can create minor illusions and mess with people's minds a bit. Nothing complicated, but we can get the teacher to think that the two of us became sick and were picked up by Mama or one of the others."

A moment later, the three-eyed dog was there. The Bai Ze looked like a cross between a Chow-Chow, with the breed's large shoulders and lion-like mane, but with the body of an Akita beyond that. Long as the two girls were tall, Okuri-inu had grown quite a bit from his previous puppy size. He snuffled at Kunou's hands and side before doing the same with Lily. Kunou knelt down, hugging her summoned beast to her, whispering in his ear what they wanted.

Despite being happy as always to see his mistress, Okuri was a good deal more mature for his age than Titan and looked at Kunou askance, knowing the older pack members would be annoyed if they left the school place before time. But at the persistent looks from Kunou and Lily, Okuri decided to go along with things. After all, it wasn't like **he** was going to get in trouble for this.

A quick planning session later, Kunou led the dog back towards the rest of the class. The rest of the kids quickly began to gather around them murmurs and shouts of delight at seeing the unusual and friendly-looking dog quickly growing throughout the class.

Even the teacher looked interested for a moment, and then, the rules reasserted themselves in her mind. "Miss Kunou, you know the rules. No pets can be brought to school except for show and tell day. And where did this one come from anyway?"

"Okuri seems to have escaped on his walk Mrs.," Kunou answered, very carefully not allowing herself to turn into her Kitsune form as the urge to grin rose within her. As much as Kunou preferred to be a good girl, this entire episode called out to the normal Kitsune desire to play pranks in her. "He must've smelled me and decided to come to me instead of heading back home."

"Then he is a very smart dog," the teacher began, patting the dog in the head. "However, I must insist that we call home and..."

That was as far as the teacher got before the third eye set into Okuri-Inu's forehead opened. There was a flash of magic, and suddenly, the entire class was frozen. A moment later, false memories based on Kunou's suggestion were put into their heads and a few adults and children within the building who had been watching.

Soon, all of them knew that Kunou and Lily had become sick during recess, both of them complaining of stomach pains. The nurse had decided to send them home for the day.

With that, Kunou and Lily were free. They moved back along with Okuri-inu to the far end of the play area, where Lily transformed into her werewolf form and hefted Kunou up onto the wall, where she helped pull Lily up alongside her. "This is like a prison break!" Lily said excitedly as they hopped back down.

Luckily there was no one else on the street outside the school just at that moment, and a moment later, Okuri-Inu joined them, having flown up and over the wall. With the dog covering the quartet in an illusion, they made their way to Kuoh Academy, where they snuck in and headed towards the ORC room. "Why did Poppa want the stone here anyway? Why not at home?"

"I think he was thinking that maybe other people would eventually be coming and going, so he didn't want to put it in the house," Lily said with a shrug.

They snuck into the room and, thankfully, because it was still a school day, found no one about. Even movement through the teleportation tunnel from here to Kyoto had specific hours of operation, and on a school day, those hours were limited to the afternoon when one of the peerage members of the Gremory or Sitri houses would be able to note down the comings and goings.

The two girls grinned at one another, high-fived, and then Lily moved towards the fal stone that her Daddy had placed here. With that touch, Lily sort of thrust out her mind into the stone, connecting to the Undertaking and holding out her hand towards Kunou, the fairy, and Okuri-Inu. "You'll like this place, Okuri. There are lots of trees, lots of water, lots of little animals to chase, and a whole mess of places to explore. I doubt we'll need you for whatever Auntie Luna wants us to do, so you'll be free to have fun."

The dog barked happily at that, and a moment later, all four of them were in Danan, at the fal stone overlooking the Tir Na Nog version of the cliffs of Dover.

And Aqua had been telling the truth. Almost the moment they arrived, both girls understood that something big was going on, the Interdict's influence gone from their minds.

Lily was the first to realize something was wrong. "Mama Rias! That, that Knight piece that came out of her, the only reason it would do that and then mutate, was if the dog was in danger or had a major power-up. And my dad is in Egypt, and we know about the problems they're facing! Why didn't it bother us more!?"

She turned, reaching for the stone, but Kunou held her back. "Wait, Lily!"

Lily fought her, transforming into her werewolf form. "No, I need to help Mum. She might be really hurt!"

"But..." Suddenly someone else was holding Lily, and it was only now that both girls realized that a group of dwarves, leprechauns and fairies had been sitting around the stone in their own groups. Now two dwarves had moved to help contain the young werewolf, wary of her claws and fangs.

It was an open question at this point if Phoenix werewolves like Lily and Harry could infect someone else. It hadn't occurred yet to Harry, but that was because he routinely killed those he struck with fang or claw in his werewolf form, the only exception being Yasaka, who was a kitsune, and who could not be 'cursed' with werewolf blood thanks to that. As for Lily, she had never attacked anyone in her werewolf form, but it was clear by this point her saliva at least couldn't carry the curse to other youkai and Devils, given how often she had licked Rias, Yasaka, or Koneko.

The dwarves didn't have the same level of natural defense. But unlike Kunou, they were more than strong enough to wrestle with the werewolf. "Easy, lass, easy!"

Scowling, Lily shifted back into her normal body, growling as she looked at her now ruined school uniform with some chagrin. "Oops." Then the serious nature of the moment came back, and she looked up. "Okay, I'm calm now. But what the heck's going on?"

"I'm Dill Woodcrank, and I'm the leader of this lot. We were preparing for wounded and such, but no one's yet come back from Egypt. As for what's going on there, none of us know much. All we do know is that the High King came through, demanding aid, and we all were

ready to give it, so my people and our allies went through. Nearly three hundred gryphons and their riders, and two hundred dwarves.”

A kick to the ear from a leprechaun had Woodcrank adding, “Aye, and more leprechauns too, although I couldn’t tell you their numbers. The tiny fellows are hard to keep track of at the best o’ times.”

“Right, and remember, Rias and Momma had both set up their own reinforcements. Momma had captain Montoya ready to go, and Rias said something about the Gremory family having a few peerages on call just in case. But... but none of that happened because none of us could think about anything interesting happening in Egypt until now,” Kunou mused.

“Now that we’re here in Danan instead of back on Earth.” Despite her rambunctious nature, Lily was a good deal more intelligent than most girls her age. “That means some kind of spell, maybe? Ooh, like the Notice Me Not wards in the Wizarding World!” Lily’s face fell. “It might come back into a fact the moment we are back on earth.”

She snarled then, almost changing back into her werewolf form. A large part of her wanted to charge off, to instantly go to her Daddy and get involved with whatever he was facing. Another part wanted to rush to Rias and bring her back to Danan. But both sides knew that they needed to listen to Kunou and Woodcrank. “Okay, so what do we do? Did Luna leave any message or anything?”

“Nope,” her work done, Aqua buzzed around them, shaking her head as her wings flashed through a kaleidoscope of colors. “All she said to me was to get you two to Tir Na Nog. Now it’s up to you.”

While Lily scowled at that, Kunou had an idea, looking at the dwarves. “I think we need a dwarf, Mr. Woodcrank. Fairies might be playing tricks, but a dwarf wouldn’t be, no offense, but you’re all, well, serious folk.”

“Why in the world would I take offense at that little Miss?” the dwarf, who Lily realized might be one of the oldest of his species she had yet seen, answered with a snort. “We dwarves have our own sense of humor, aye, but pranks are not a dwarven thing unless we’re drunk. But how much help could we be? We dwarves think in similar terms to humans in many ways, and we might be caught by the spell.”

“Maybe. But if you and Lily go to my mom and convince her that another adult is needed here in Danan, that might work better,” Kunou explained. “Keep any mention about Poppa out of it except mention that he’s busy. That will be enough. I hope.”

“Hmm... I’m willing to try, I suppose, although I’m a little concerned about whether or not all of the urgency in all this will disappear from your mind the moment you’re back on earth, Lass,” Woodcrank answered, looking over at Lily.

“I can help there!” Aqua’s shouted, gleeful at the fact that here in Tir Na Nog, she could use her magic freely again. Being under the wards in Kuoh had been a startling and kind of humbling experience for her. And no Fae was good at being humbled. “I can enspell you both to think that there really is a problem here. What kind of lie do you think would work best?”

All of them looked at one another, and then Lily frowned, pointing at Aqua. “There are fairies, not many, but a few small colonies still exist on earth, and leprechauns too. We could say that daddy brought them through to Tir Na Nog, assuming they’d get along. But they’re not, and now there’s talk of them even causing a little war here on Tir Na Nog.”

“That’ll work. And the fact that I’m still going to be here will get my mom to come to even if it doesn’t,” Kunou answered with a little giggle. “She’ll have to get Lily to take her here in the first place, so she can’t ground her. Not until everything’s been done, anyway,” she added, causing Lily to pout at her.

With the plan in place, Aqua enspelled Lily to think that was the reason why she had been summoned here. Lily then held out her hand to the dwarf, taking his larger, far more muscled hand in her own, waving at Kunou with the other before placing it on the fal stone. As much as she didn’t like the whole repetitive nature of school, Lily had to admit that the teachers had a point when they said that repetition made things easier. This was the fourth time Lily had connected to the Undertaking, and it was becoming easier each time.

Within a moment, Lily was back in Kuoh Academy with her passenger.

Woodcrank looked around, impressed with some of the craftsmanship in this room, although the color scheme wasn’t one he approved of. Then he looked down at the runic array that marked the end of the teleportation tunnel between Kuoh and Kyoto. “I assume this is the teleportation tunnel here?”

Lily nodded, waving her hands. “Get on with it! The faster we get Yasaka back into Tir Na Nog, the faster we can get the Earth-born leprechauns and Fairies to start calming down.”

“Right.” A small wintry smile appeared on the dwarf’s face. “And how am I supposed to operate this thing?”

Lily stared at the dwarf askance, then stared down at the sign of the teleportation tunnel, looking a little lost. “Er...”

“You let one of us do it, as soon as I am positive that there is no reason to do so,” a somewhat cold voice said from the doorway. Lily turned hastily, as did the dwarf, and seeing who was there, Lily waved sheepishly at Sona while the dwarf simply crossed his arms, staring at the young human woman. As a dwarf, Dill had some magical senses, but he wasn’t a blacksmith or a Rune scribe, so his magical senses had never been trained to the extent they would be to see through Sona’s normal human disguise.

For her part, Sona stared right back at the dwarf, then over at Lily, crossing her arms and cocking one eyebrow behind her glasses. “Well? I’m waiting. And it better be good, Lily, as I know you should still be in school. If you expect me to be any gentler than your parents would be about you playing hooky...”

“Don’t look at me! What was I supposed to do? Kunou and I had a fairy buzzing our heads at school and threatening to try to appear before people. That wouldn’t have caused the wards to activate, but it would’ve busted the secret of magic. And with no adults nearby,” Lily shot back, waving her arms wildly.

Sona was still looking dubious, and Lily hurried on, using the story that Aqua had implanted in her head. “The fairies told us that some leprechauns and ferries from Earth had come through to Tir Na Nog thanks to Daddy. They’re making trouble there, and there’s even talk of the leprechauns from Earth wanting to start a war against the rest of the Summer Court for some reason! But my daddy is busy with boring stuff, and Luna’s with him, so the fairies came to get me.”

Sona continued to stare, but Lily was adamant, fully believing what she said, and stared back, gesturing to the dwarf. “I brought him along to explain things more to Yasaka and so that she can know that it isn’t just me trying to play pranks or hooky like you said.”

“Miss, if you believe any dwarf would go along with such a prank, you’ve never even heard of my race, let alone met one,” Woodcrank grumbled. “We can’t contact Lord Potter and Luna. Whatever they’re busy with, they’re not communicating with us. So we need someone to come and mediate things. Someone from High King Potter’s court.”

“Which means Yasaka or Rias. And I understand Rias exhausted herself magically doing something,” Sona mused, taking the dwarf’s words at face value, although she still wondered how this fairy had gotten to Earth from Danan in the first place. *Although perhaps Harry brought her through, and he just can’t get away from whatever he’s doing in Egypt.* For a moment, that thought bothered Sona, but the more she concentrated on it, the more the idea of caring about whatever Harry was doing seemed silly.

“Yeah, something weird happened to one of the chess pieces from her peerage. I don’t know much about it,” Lily said, the impact of the Interdict making itself known even from that brief brush with what might be going on in Egypt as it was in Sona’s mind.

Sona didn’t like it. It felt like she was aiding and abetting Lily’s attempt to get out of going to school, and that was something she could not condone. And yet, the dwarf at least seemed a sensible, serious fellow. And he believed the same story Lily was telling her, even giving a few points of contention between his people and the leprechauns when called on to explain why the new group of leprechauns and fairies wanted to cause trouble.

“Very well. I will activate the circle, and the dwarf will go through,” Sona interrupted, holding up a hand. “After that, it will be up to him to convince Yasaka to come along.”

“Good. We don’t want Kunou to be there all alone for too long,” Lily answered brightly.

“That will probably work much better to get Yasaka to come with you to Danan than any appeal to mediate an argument between Fae, although I rather doubt it will put her in any better a mood,” Sona snorted, as she moved over to the teleportation tunnel. Since Rias had created it, anyone with sufficient control over their magic could activate it. So long, that is, as the wards of the area around them allowed it.

Sona leaned down and touched the runic array of the teleportation tunnel, allowing her magic out into it for a brief moment. The Gremory mark appeared in the center, followed by the Sitri Mark, and then the tunnel opened. “Step onto the circle.”

A moment later, the dwarf disappeared. And Sona turned back to stare at Lily. “You realize that you will be punished for skipping out on school, even for a good cause, correct? And how did you get out of school anyway without this fairy you mentioned using her magic, which would have caused a reaction in the wards.”

Lily nodded in morose agreement but knew she would probably not be in as much trouble as Sona might think. After all, there really weren’t any adults at home at the moment. Even Lily couldn’t call Mittelt a responsible adult, and the only other one from the extended Potter-Gremory clan that was here was Gasper, who again could not be called an adult figure. As for the rest, Lily just whistled innocently, looking away, unable to through Kunou and Okuri under the bus.

A few minutes passed as Lily attempted to avoid Sona’s eyes, and then the tunnel opened once more, depositing Yasaka and Woodcrank into the ORC club room. Yasaka was in Kitsune form, her tails waving erratically behind her, her long ears flattened to her skull, and she crossed her arms as she glared at Lily. “Lily, you better not have dragged my daughter into any kind of adventure, or else we are going to have words.”

“I know, no adventures until I’m twelve,” Lily snarked back, causing Yasaka to lose some of her anger, a bit of good humor returning to her.

She nodded to Sona, who nodded back and then moved to take Lily’s hand as the dwarf touched it as well. A moment later, as they were once more in Tir Na Nog. And the real reality of things hit Yasaka just as it had Lily and Kunou. “Rias! That mutated Knight piece! Something must be going wrong with Harry, but why couldn’t I think of it before?”

Again the explanation was given, and Yasaka frowned, looking over at the fairies. “I can’t say as I like the idea of you using a mind control charm on Lily and the dwarf like that. But I think that kind of thing is the way forward. Concentrate on things here in Danan for now, then when we are here, make plans going forward.”

“Then...” Lily began, looking hopeful.

“Yes, Lily, we are going to get involved in whatever your father is up to.”

“Yeah, I don’t like the idea of Daddy needing the help, especially with Auntie Luna, Koneko and the rest with him, but he might. And I want to move Rias here to get over the magical exhaustion.” Lily didn’t really think Harry was in trouble even now, but the nature of the Interdict had put a hole in her normal confidence in the natural law of the universe that said that her Daddy was invincible. “And maybe reach out to Ms. Sona?”

“Oooh, good thinking, lovey. I doubt Sona will agree to leave Kuoh, but I wager she would be willing to come to Danan for a bit and then maybe loan us her peerage,” Yasaka mused. “We should bring in Gasper and Mittelt too.”

At that, Lily and Kunou both nodded, agreeing to the plan, and Yasaka held her hands up Lily’s head, creating the same kind of compulsion charm that Aqua had put on Lily before as she mused aloud. “And I think we should also bring along Akeno and Kalawarner’s little projects too...”

OOOOOOO

Left behind by Harry, Hermione, and the others stared around them at a cityscape that was empty of all life. Like the rest of the zone, a few hundred feet of the Nile, the monsters and undead had been wiped out here when Harry had claimed the river as his territory. And with Akhenaten’s attention on the front with Harry, no new undead or monster had been sent into the open area.

Unfortunately, Hermione didn’t see any survivors either. *Whatever locals had survived up to this point must be too far away to have realized or even seen what Harry did*, she reflected, as the two Shinsengumi laid out the flying carpets noting absently several dozen nearby bodies. Like the rest of Egypt, this place, despite its current eerie silence, had been a battlefield tonight.

The eight-man team of Aurors, Bill, Tonks, Koneko and Akeno were all in the air already, but Hermione waited until the five magic carpets were out before sitting on one of them primly. *And now we go in search of the heart of darkness.*

“Heh, not using one of the broomsticks?” Cú asked, holding a spare he’d been given. He was looking forward to this, having never flown before.

“I very much prefer to have both feet on the ground. Thank you so much,” Hermione muttered. “I spent years watching Harry fly around as if falling to your doom was something that happened to other people, and what little interest I had in flight died an early death. A flying carpet is much better.”

Cú laughed, and soon he and the others were up, joining Akeno and the Aurors. Once everyone was in the air, the Queen instantly took over, putting the Aurors out to either side of the attack force in twos, front, back and sides. She sent Cú downward while Akeno herself took

the position above the group. "Disillusion charms on everyone. Don't engage the enemies unless we have to, no matter what we see around here."

The pilot of the flying carpet nodded in thanks as Hermione tapped him on the head. The charm, which looked almost like water as it flowed down from the point of contact to cover the individuals it was cast on, passed down his body and then through the carpet and up Hermione and the others on the carpet, the fireteam of troopers who had been added in, one of five with them. Hermione was happy for their inclusion, as reports from the two battlefields before this had indicated the combination of overhead fire and the magic carpets had been a tremendous asset.

"That is so bizarre," one of the troopers muttered, shaking his head. "I don't think I'll ever get used to all this magic business."

"It does take some getting used to," Hermione agreed, causing the man to look at her in surprise. "I was a muggle-born, a Witch born to a nonmagical family, so I went from the normal daughter of a pair of dentists to a Witch, and over the course of a single summer, my worldview changed dramatically."

"Judging from what Harry has told me about how intelligent you were as a young woman, I rather doubt you were ever normal. Now, silence, please. Talk through the leprechauns if you have to. And if you leprechauns could please use that glow spell you mentioned so we know where everyone is?" Akeno requested.

The three Leprechauns they had added to the team moved from one magic carpet to the Aurors on the broomsticks and the devils flying under their own power. As they went, the leprechauns touched a patch of cloth they had previously sown into the individual's clothing. The leprechaun's touch created a spell that caused the piece of cloth to glow to their eyes and those they wished to see it. This would let the disparate groups see one another in the air, which they wouldn't have given they all had different Disillusion charms on them.

The group flew on through what Akeno could only call enemy airspace in silence, seeing hordes of harpies and one or two undead sphynx here and there. Away from the front, the harpies predominated, with only a few scattered groups of flying cobras.

As they flew, the group had to move out and around or even high above these groups of flyers, and more than one of the Egyptian troopers and Aurors had to bite their lips to keep silent at the devastation below them. None came from this city, something Abraxas had his people look for when choosing these fireteams from the remnants of several devastated platoons. But even so, it was hard to see a city like this, silent, smashed, dead. Many of them thanked Allah for the night, which meant they couldn't see any of the dead, which were certainly below them as well.

Twice they passed within sight of a pillar, and in contrast to the rest of the city, they could see lights from torches and even a few repaired flashlights. And in those lights, the flyers

could make out the mobs of people around them. But knowing the mind control those pillars were slowly embedding in the minds of the thousands of people in those zones, the sight was more disturbing than hopeful, even for the Egyptian natives, all of whom had been briefed on them.

“Remember, we are after the minds behind this disaster. Cut the head off the snake, the body dies,” Akeno whispered into the button her assigned leprechaun held out to her. The little fellow was sitting on her shoulder, and up to a moment ago, had been just staring down at the vast expanse of her chest but had switched his attention to the crowd of people below them. “We cannot be bogged down here trying to protect these people as much as we want to.”

Akeno’s words worked, thankfully, and the troopers low muttering cut off.

From al-Minya, it took them barely thirty minutes through the air before they started to see the ruins of Amarna. But as they moved downward, Akeno gasped, seeing her body appearing, the Disillusion charm fading. They had just passed through a ward that canceled out the concealment spell and possibly others. *And no one would be stupid enough to leave just that type of ward as their sole defense...* “Evade!!!”

Akeno’s cry had barely echoed out before the assault force obeyed, hurling themselves every which way. Most of them were expecting aerial attackers to fly up toward them, maybe even spellfire. What they got was the rumble of modern munitions, rockets, followed by the thrum of Gatling guns. The rockets flashed up towards them, but thanks to their agility and size, the rockets didn’t amount to anything. But as they exploded in midair, they covered the fire from the defensive machine guns, which cut apart one Auror, then battered down another’s Protego before killing the man behind it.

“Oh fuck!” One of the troopers with Hermione shrieked at the top of his lungs. “How are they using Bofur guns!?”

“I don’t even know what that is!” Cú caroled, grateful that he had asked one of the dwarves to craft a bandoleer for him that could hold Gae Bolg on his back. This let him use both hands, and one rose from where he had been controlling his broomstick to run up and down two of the Celtic runes on his chest. A blue light flowed from them over his skin, then down into his broomstick, and Gae Bolg on his back in a special holster he’d made somehow when no one was looking. The next moment, one of the Bofur guns caught him with a full blast. The impact pushed him through the air, but when the gunfire cut off, it left Cú unwounded.

“They must have been shut down and the computer parts disconnected before the Curse or whatever hit and then replaced,” Hermione mused, then ordered her pilot to concentrate on evasion. “I’ll work on defense, at least until my stomach gives out.” With that, she started to create a shield, only to realize that at least one of the defending guns was targeting anyone who used one. “But someone needs to do something about those guns, darn it!”

Akeno and Koneko had been dodging around just like the others, although Koneko wasn't certain she had anything to fear from a 40mm/60 Bofur autocannon thanks to her Rook-given durability. *Still, a lot of little bruises would be kind of annoying, and I don't want to call out my Boosted Gear armor just yet. Who knows what else might be down there?*

But Akeno had dodged upwards, bracing the fire coming from the two rocket launchers below them. A dozen small rockets flashed out towards her, but Akeno wove a web of lightning that destroyed them all well before they could come near her current position. From there, she began to lash out downward, destroying one rocket launcher and silencing another Bofur gun right after it had cut another Auror in two.

While the nonmagicals and wizards were forced to just evade and wait for Akeno to knock out enough guns, Koneko had enough of waiting by that point. "I'll see you all down there," she muttered, her words unheard by any, though the sight of her diving down towards the ground left very little to interpretation.

The massive guns were not the only defense hidden within Amarna. With her sight being upgraded at the moment with a few of her own specialized spells, Hermione saw magic flashing in various places and tried to shout a warning, but she was too late to stop the girl from directing her flight downwards and into the ancient cityscape.

Several runic traps activated as she flew down to try and get below the gun's angle of fire, tearing at Koneko's mind, attempting to muddy her senses, her ability to think and discern reality. Thanks to her Senjutsu training, the illusions didn't stick to her mind, but the Confoundus charm hit hard, and Koneko squalled, losing control of her wings, not even remembering why she had them. The Confounded Nekoshuu crashed into the hardpacked dirt of an ancient rooftop, crashing through it to lie on the ground within, snarling and spitting to herself.

Greatly daring, one of the Aurors flew down, hitting Koneko, visible in the ruins of the building, with a cancelation charm. The charm hit, and Koneko's mind cleared just in time to see her savior being cut in two by another rain of bullets. She stared up at where he had been flying, her eyes tracking the bits of his body as they fell, and then Koneko yowled in wordless fury. The Boosted Gear on her arm expanded, and she was soon covered in the Balance Breaker armor.

"I can give some protection from spells that are designed to attack your mind and senses, Koneko, but only some. I've not dealt with a lot of those since I was turned into a Sacred Gear," Ddraig warned.

"Understood," Koneko snarled, smashing her way out of the building, making a straight line to the Bofur, which had cut the brave Auror down.

A soul trap, a specialty of the ancient Pharaohs, activated then, but the Boosted Gear's armor was proof against such a direct attack. But to protect herself from another type of trap, Koneko leaped to the side, smashing down another wall to stand in the rubble, glaring as the

trap seemed to have released some kind of smoke which gleamed in the light of the moon and the tracer rounds flying around above her. "I don't think I want to know what that would have done to me," Koneko grumbled, watching as an arc of lightning lit the night, another group of better-aimed rockets exploding right over the city.

"This Akhenaten fellow and his woman are clearly clever and disturbed, a dangerous combo," Ddraig nodded. **"I'd keep moving if I were you."**

"Tell me something I don't know," Koneko grumbled. She slammed a foot down. Like Nefertiti had done in Oslo, the blow created a shockwave that went through the ground, but with Koneko's added strength, the effect was more in a radius around her than just a straight line. This disrupted many nearby traps, either making them go off prematurely or simply destroying the runic arrays creating them.

With the way clear, Koneko moved forward once more, taking the time to use the same attack twice more. Then as she passed by a building, the building faded out and a huge fist, easily the same size as Koneko herself, smashed Koneko off her feet. Rolling with the hit, Koneko cracked her neck and stretched out her shoulders, smirking inside her helmet as she took in the thing that had hit her.

Where the building had once stood, a large giant now stood. It wasn't alive, the lack of half a head was proof of that, and the rest of its body was covered in the same wrappings a mummy would have been. Koneko hadn't run into any of that particular undead before this, but she knew they were supposedly far stronger than the normal Infreri type like the Ottoman Janissaries, Mamluks, and Roman legionnaires. On top of that, Koneko could see several bits of runic script glowing here and there.

But Koneko didn't care. It had a body, a physical one, and that meant she could hit it. "That ain't a punch."

"Boost!" the Boosted Gear shouted, on cue, as she charged forwards.

An illusion attempted to grab at her senses, but like her sister, Koneko was a natural when it came to Senjutsu. She still wasn't very well trained with it, she couldn't take power from the world around her yet, but she could at least tell when something shifted too fast to be real and knew when her senses were being tricked.

She didn't change her direction, instead crashing into the giant undead. "This is a punch!!"

The blow crashed in, there was a flare of magic, but whatever defenses the thing had, it wasn't enough to withstand a Rook's punch enhanced by the Boosted Gear. The magic resisted for a brief second, then shattered, and the blow plowed into the large undead monster, causing it to explode.

Landing, Koneko grimaced, wringing out her gauntlet-covered hands. "Ouch," she intoned, her tone its normal deadpan, but even so, Koneko had to grimace. Whether through the defensive magic or the giant's typical durability, that had been very tough even to her.

Elsewhere, one of the Shinsengumi-controlled magic carpets had been struck by a rocket, killing all aboard. At the same time, another Auror had fallen to spellfire directed at them from below. Evidently, there were actual wizards down there as well as undead monsters and automated defenses.

"I think the wee cat girl's got the idea," Cú bellowed, darting downward. As he too began to fly directly above the ancient ruins, more defenses flared into being, but a series of the tree-like runes covering the side of his head flared, and they could get no purchase on his mind or body. A moment later, he slammed into the ground, rolling as he hit., coming up with Gae Bolg off his back and in his hand, the remains of his broomstick sticking out of the ground behind him. He lashed out to either side, cutting down two jackal men who had leaped out of another illusion towards him.

He took a step forward, and a plain old claymore mine clicked under him. Blinking, Cú looked down, his face becoming puzzled. "What..." then there was an explosion, hurling Cú off his feet.

Yet the attack didn't even singe his clothing, and he rolled through the dirt, cackling as he hopped to his feet once more, a wild, fey grin on his face. "Hah, now that's more like it!"

He wasn't alone. As Tonks came under attack, she roared, "Bloody fuck this shite!" Tonks actually set her broomstick on its end as she flew straight up, dodging incoming fire from one of the Bofur guns. And as she did so, Tonks concentrated, using her Metamorph skills.

But instead of becoming someone else, Tonks just **changed**. She became taller, stronger looking, while still remaining Tonks. Something like chitin started to appear from out of her skin, covering her body from her stomach, moving up and down until she was completely transformed into something else.

Ever since she had become a Devil, Tonks had spoken several times with Rias and others about how she had retained her Metamorph ability and how it might have changed. This form, which she called her combat form, was the result. After all, if Tonks could transform her body into anyone, then why just use humans as a template? And if Tonks could change any one part of her, as Tonks had been doing her entire life, then she could mix and match, couldn't she? So Tonks had come up with this form. Muscles, tendons and speed of trained athletes, cat eyes and calcified shells of a mollusk.

A blast of Gatling rounds caught Tonks, but although her broomstick shattered under her, Tonks lived through it. Bits of her shell armor shattered, falling away to be replaced by more, and she fell, using an Arresto Momentum to slow her descent before landing on the ground among the enemy wizards who had revealed themselves a moment ago.

The defenders scattered quickly, efficiently, already lashing out towards her with spells. Tonks was momentarily impressed. They were acting like the best-trained Auror squads would, shifting targets, spreading out quickly, working together to create a seamless offense and defense. Spells flew towards her, and shields rose to block fire from her and the attackers still in the air.

It didn't help them. Tonks's first spell rocked the ground underneath them, causing one of them to be a little too late in backing up his fellow with a shield. The first Protego shattered under Tonks's next spell, and her third spell lashed out, catching one man across the mid-drift, slicing him in half. Another man was caught by a fourth spell, and his clothes began to attack him, his sleeves and neckline developing teeth, which began to gnaw at the man, unable to do much damage, but certainly frightening the man badly, judging by his screams and cries of "Get it off, get it off!"

"I got these wankers. You two keep pushing towards those guns!" Tonks ordered, even as she dodged the green dart of an AK, returning fire with a hurled stone then another spell, before closing with one of her attackers.

Koneko and Cú nodded and pushed towards the remaining Bofur guns, which seemed to be concentrated in one area of the city. Only their angle of fire didn't quite match where it seemed to be coming from, and when Akeno's trikes lashed out directly along the line of fire, it didn't seem to do anything.

With three attackers on the ground, more of the defenses scattered through the ruins revealed themselves in the form of undead and monsters to go with the dispersed magical traps. Yet the anti-air guns were still firing, trying to keep the other attackers in the air from landing in turn. This was made worse by the harpies and flying cobras from several nearby villages arriving.

One of the magic carpets wasn't quite fast enough to dodge out of the way of a harpy, who tore one of the troopers from the carpet before being shot down. Akeno ordered the magic carpets up and away, moving to the west as they gained height while using another lightning assault to break contact for a moment with the aerial monsters.

Then, as the machine guns of the troopers finally started to come into their own against the aerial attackers, Cú pushed close enough to see through the illusions hiding where some of the Bofur fire was coming from, having cast a spell on his eyes. It was a very basic one, but considering how much time the Tuatha De Danan's time spent making sure that the Fae couldn't use their illusions and tricks on mortals, seeing through them was a must.

With a cackle, he hurled his spear towards one of the guns. At the same time, a few Janissaries among the rubble fired at him. Unfortunately for the undead marksmen, Cú's magic was fully activated, the runes on his body gleaming, and they did nothing but rattle.

As always when he wished it, Gae Bolg flew true. It slammed into one of the guns, destroying it just as much as Koneko landed feet first onto the barrel of the other one, smashing it into flinders.

Two more giants made themselves known at that point, attacking Cú. Summoning the spear back to his hand, Cú danced through the two giants, slicing at their legs. But these giants appeared to have special enchantments on them, as unlike the undead they'd been facing before, which would have reacted by being at least slowed down by his attacks. These two didn't seem to even feel it.

And as he struck them, Cú winced slightly, shaking his head hands out one after another as he danced through another series of attacks from the same janissaries as before. "Gah, hitting these things is like hitting granite! Or maybe marble?"

"Wonder about what kind of stone they are supposed to be like later," Hermione directed as she sent a spell up at one giant. Or rather, a series of spells shot out so fast it seemed to be a single spell: two Reductos, then an Incendio, then another Reducto. The mummy giant stumbled backward, its face on fire but otherwise unharmed.

Cú looked at her in surprise. "Where'd you come from?"

"I Apparated. There was enough fire now around here thanks to Akeno's destruction of the rocket launchers to let me see the ground," Hermione stated primly, making no comment that she had done so to stop herself from throwing up at the maneuvers her magic carpet's driver had been doing. *Dammit, there's a reason why I don't like roller coasters, and only thirty-four-point-five percent of it has to do with having spent far too much of my time in school watching Harry perform maneuvers like that thank you so very much!*

Even as she spoke, her wand was alive with spells. She didn't have the sheer raw power that Harry did or the flair Tonks had, but Hermione had a far wider repertoire of wizard-type spells and was quite effective and how she used him. Instead of concentrating on offense and defense one after another, she mixed up her spell chain to do it for her. One spell would launch towards an attacking undead or monster. Another would grab up a large stone using it as defense from another Janissary. The next second, the stone exploded, the effect like a shotgun the bits crashing into still more undead, followed by more spells, as she ducked undercover.

Cú disdained defense entirely. He crashed into and through every defending group he could find, using his magic to shatter the traps, see through the illusions, and cut down every undead he could find.

The defenses started to concentrate on the magic users on the ground, which was precisely what Akeno had been hoping for. With her backing them up, the Aurors, only three of whom had survived to this point along with Bill, had already wiped out most of the harpies, who had proven once more to be little threat if they couldn't close. Now the last of the anti-air guns were down, and they moved over the ruins of the ancient capital again.

The mortar team on one of the magic carpets had survived up to this point, and now with a series of thumping noises, the mortar rounds began to land here and there throughout Amarna.

Many of the Egyptians on the other carpets winced at the damage each round did to this, one of the largest archeological discoveries ever made, despite its somewhat blasé nature. Every Egyptian was brought up to believe that their past was important and should be preserved as part of their cultural heritage. Large or small, it didn't matter. But there were so many monsters here, and the giant undead were proving extremely durable. And in among the regular monsters and Infreri style undead were regular-sized mummies as well.

Like the giants, these mummies were also marked out by runes, enhancing their strength and speed. They were each masterpieces of the art of necromancy, whereas the undead they'd faced before had been more like mass-produced models.

In particular, the janissaries who Nefertiti and Akhenaten had enhanced over the years proved deadly as the fight shifted to the ground, with Bill leading the Aurors and two of the fireteams down, leaving Akeno in the air providing overwatch with the mortar team and a crew-served machine gun team. Their rifles were newer model guns, German-style 43s from World War 2, which had been magically enhanced and could now shoot through the ancient mud-brick, killing one Auror and forcing the others to defend themselves with magic.

Two more soldiers died as the fight went on, spreading throughout the ancient ruins, but the battle slowly turned against the defenders due to the simple fact they lacked anything that could even slow down Cú and Koneko. Cú was the son of Lugh, the unstoppable Irish Hercules, while Koneko had her Rook-derived durability and the armor of the Boosted Gear.

Cú even tried to make a game of it. Slicing the leg off of one giant even he winced at the impact of his hands but ignored them to stab upward, finishing the giant as he shouted out, "Hey White Hair, I bet I kill more of these weaklings than you do."

"They're already dead, moron," Koneko ground out.

"Come on, don't be like that. Just fighting these things isn't fun enough! Maybe a bit of a competition will get my blood rioting."

"Riot on your own time," Koneko growled. Finishing off another giant and getting a thank you from the Auror it had been attacking, she nodded back then leaped away, trying to put distance between her and Cú. *What is it with me attracting the combat junkies? Do I have a sign on me or something? I don't like it,* she whined mentally, even as the fight continued.

OOOOOOO

Grunting, Nefertiti growled, her claws once more coming out, as her tail whipped in agitation behind her. "They are blasting through our defenses. I don't think we can hold them back for longer than an hour at most."

“How did they discover the importance of Amarna? Well, never mind, just slow them down, my love,” the Pharaoh muttered. “Let the defenses up top slow them down, and then sacrifice the two cobra goddesses if need be once they enter our Fortress of Vengeance.”

Nodding, Nefertiti agreed with the sentiment, but her own mind had already shifted to another battle zone. “I think we’ve built up enough attackers near Alexandria, husband. I am going to release them now. There’s little I can do to bolster our defense above that I haven’t already done.”

Akhenaten nodded, and far away in Alexandria, doom came.

OOOOOOO

Yubelluna sighed as she stood outside the medical area, stretching luxuriously, twisting at the waist and stretching her spine. *Ugh, I need to take some time to move around a bit. Sitting in that damned chair has done me no good at all. And it looked so comfortable too. I don’t know what hurts worse, my back or my throat.*

When Harry had put her in charge of the medical side of things, one of the first jobs she’s had was to create a central control center. After she had done so through the use of leprechauns, runners and numerous secretaries, Yubelluna had thereafter been stuck there for the past two hours. *Still, it’s been pretty successful so far. The triage is working, the teams of doctors are working well, and that group of toughs has seen off four groups of fanatics who want to interfere with Asia or the Medi-wizards since. All in all, pretty good for a night’s work. Now, where was that pharmacy again? I need a throat lozenge something fierce.* Talking non-stop for around three hours could do that to you.

Communication was a bit of a trouble since most of the leprechauns Yubelluna had used at first had joined the armies out in the field or had been assigned to Abraxas and Alexandria’s defense forces, but she had already begun to use a system to overcome that. There were lots of young teens around, too young to be used in the slowly growing effort to spread out survivors or in combat but too old to just be sent to sleep in the hundreds of children’s shelters that had sprung up throughout the night. And many of them were athletic enough to be used as runners.

Indeed, setting up a system of runners to pass along written or verbal messages had been a major windfall for all the various efforts going on in Alexandria at this point, and Yubelluna had to smile to herself as she spotted a few of them racing along the streets this way and that, through the still crowded areas around the medical zone. Efforts to spread out the Alexandrian population had begun to work, but outside the medical aid center, there were still far too many people

We certainly aren’t up to taking in hundreds of thousands of new refugees just yet. Which we might have to, depending on how long this campaign lasts. On the other hand was the food issue. The night hadn’t gotten to the point where people were becoming hungry or

desperately needed water. Toiletries would start to be a problem, but at least people could still flush the toilets.

And this is just one city, she thought to herself, one city among dozens and all of them are going to have to be liberated. The amount of work that entailed made Yubelluna shiver to think of it, even as she continued to walk down the streets, determined to make the best use of her break as she could. *Well, the best use without Harry here, she thought, a small, private smile appearing on her face. Flirting with Harry would have been a much nicer way to spend a few minutes.*

And of course, with the universal law of dramatic irony, that was the moment when the repaired air sirens began to wail throughout Alexandria.

Those air sirens had been one of the few things beyond bullets, trucks and crew-served weapons that Major General Abraxas's had asked the wizards to help his men repair. With them, the locals were able to warn of any incoming attack. They hadn't been used before this. With Harry and Sala's assaults going forward, Alexandria hadn't seen any attack beyond a few desultory groups of harpies.

But now, it became clear to the Major General and his officers that the enemy had simply been waiting until they could conjure up enough troops to make any assault decisive.

In the air coming towards the city was a monstrous mass of flyers. Flying cobras were close to the top of the buildings, only a few stories above the ground. Above them were harpies and undead sphinx, so high they couldn't be seen. So many flyers as to look like a vast storm front was descending on the city.

And below them came the land forces. Jackal Men, thousands of them moving in formation like an ancient army. Thousands upon millions of scarab beetles, darkening the land before their larger brethren. Undead mummies, shambling along, carrying bits of stone masonry or walls of wood as a defense. Millions of undead cavalry and infantry attacked the city from the west, southwest and northwest, creating a 'C' shaped assault that meant to envelop the tip of the triangle that Harry's aura was defending.

The defenders drew first blood as the flyers came into range of the anti-air guns. With trucks proving more difficult to repair than the guns, only half of them had been sent out Sala and Harry, and all those remaining had been moved, with some difficulty, into position defending the city's perimeter.

Flinging flechettes rounds into the air, the old KS-19s killed hundreds of flying cobras and harpies with every blast. When the land assault came close enough, Mortar teams began to fire. And there were whole squads of them, not the scattered one or two mortar tubes that Harry and Sala could call upon. After all, while they had taken the majority of the trained soldiers, you really didn't have to be all that well-trained fire to press a button or stuff a mortar round down a tube.

Thousands of the undead monsters died, but it was a drop in the bucket.

Worse, once they reached the city's suburbs, the city's own buildings served as defenses for them. This area hadn't been cleared before this, and the houses and rubble allowed them to close.

Of course, the defenders were ready for something like this. The Major General had not been born yesterday, and he knew that attacking a base behind enemy lines was a possibility. To combat this kind of assault, he had called up every able-bodied man and not a few women into the militia. Egypt's mandatory military service served them well here.

With more than a hundred thousand militia to call upon, Abraxas had created a system of what amounted to pillboxes in teams of three out of buildings large and small throughout the outskirts of the city. The bottom two floors or sometimes more were boarded up with metal and stone by willing wizards, and a few militia companies were stationed in each with one or two squads of regular troopers to stiffen them when needed. With the accompanying firepower, each of those fortresses was a death trap for the attackers, and every three fortresses could provide enfilade fire to one another.

It didn't matter. The minds behind this assault had carefully gathered enough forces to wipe out any defense short Tiamat and Potter, and they showed it now.

The battle in the sky became vicious almost immediately, as Aurors rose from every one of those fortresses. A hundred and eighty of them had been kept back from the assault teams, and all of them could be pulled in easily from across the city and had been reinforced with more wizards and witches willing to take to the skies and use their magic to help as best they could.

The flying cobras started in on them while the harpies darted down, aiming to attack the people on the rooftops. Several, more disorganized militia groups who weren't willing to work with the majority for one reason or another had set up on other rooftops beyond the fortresses and paid for it now as the harpies fell on them, despite the best efforts the anti-air guns could do. The scarabs also began to be a problem almost instantly, swarming forward. The sound of it, the skittering noise underneath the sound of the enlarging battle, terrified many a defender, as did the sheer sight of them, billions of scarab beetles swarming forward like locusts.

However, as those cockroaches reached the front, they too ran into trouble because Yubelluna had arrived at the center of the defenses facing the assault. Vines festooned the buildings in a wide-angled curve around her, set up by Gabrielle and several other witches at Yubelluna's behest. Now, as she stood on the rooftop of one of the larger defensive structures, staring out over the scuttling holocaust.

All around her, the men sharing the rooftop blasted away as fast as they could, going through ammunition so fast that, were it not for the amount of ammunition that the wizards had created for them, they would've quickly gone empty. Yet, even so, it was very obvious that they would run out of ammunition before they ran out of targets.

For the moment, Yubelluna left that to the other defenders. Instead, the bandrui concentrated on the horde of scarab beetles attempting to climb up the root fortress walls. As soon as she felt them reach saturation point, she clicked her fingers, shouting out her attack. "Blasting Vines!"

With the power of her sacred gear Bombardier passing through the vines, the entire front here in the suburbs of Alexandria exploded in fire and fury. The buildings those vines were connected to remained largely untouched. A few did collapse, but none which had been made into pillboxes by the Major General. And the destruction to the horde of scarab beetles was near-total, wiping them out for little gain.

The magical blast took it out of Yubelluna, who collapsed back onto her rear, shaking her head. "Oof, I don't think I'm going to be able to do that more than once more."

"With respect, ma'am, I think you just did more than enough for now. Rest for a bit, take one of those pepper potion things," an Egyptian officer said from nearby, even as he turned the attentions of his mortar squad to a more distant mass of monsters. "We can only hope."

Above the battlefield, that scant hope had disappeared. The undead sphynx had completely ignored the battle going on below them, getting past the outer defenses. Now, as Yubelluna stymied the scarab beetle assault, the sphynx dove down into the city, ignoring the aerial battle. And on their backs, they carried teams of Jackal Men, who instantly hopped off, spreading out swiftly even as Aurors attempted to pounce on them. They went not in search not of enemies but of the talismans the Himejima clan had set out.

For a time, no one at the front line realized that they were even there. The civilians, those unable to fight or too young to do so, had been pulled back into the inner city, leaving the suburbs and the city's outer edge to the fortresses and their defenders. This, unfortunately, let the Jackal Men start to spread out with little impunity.

If they had been able to go about their business without interference for a time, it could have been disastrous. But here, the defenders had some luck, at least.

Lieutenant Abraham was leading a force of militia men towards the front. He had been in charge of helping in the wounded area for a time, but now, thanks to Lady Asia and Yubelluna, they were ahead of the curve there. It probably wouldn't last once wounded from the two offensive campaigns were transported back, but that was neither here nor there right now.

At the moment, he was pushing his men, a full two-hundred and twenty platoon-sized forces towards the outer fortresses, hoping to do what they could. They didn't have orders to do so, but the battle had been going on for fifteen minutes, and no call had come in from the front line for more reinforcements, so Abraham had acted under his own initiative.

Above, several more Aurors were heading towards the front, only to stop and begin a battle against four sphinxes as they rose into the air ahead of Abraham's men. Fire spells worked as well as they always did against the undead, but one of the Aurors fell to a bullet from below, the musket ball slamming into his head and removing it entirely.

"What?!" Abraham had barely a second to shout before a force of undead Mamluk cavalry appeared at the far end of the street he and his men were moving along, cantering forward. Now, as they spotted his men, they lowered their lances and charged as one.

"FUCK! Fire, fire!" He shouted, "First rank on the ground, second rank break for cover, third rank fall back!"

The militia men were not as well-trained as his original soldiers had been, but they had good weapons, at least in the Egyptian Maadi, and they'd seen the charge coming. Many enemy horses and men lost limbs, tumbling to a halt and blocking their fellow, although few stopped moving, being undead. And as they did, Abraham suddenly realized what was wrong with this picture. "They're undead!" He fell back, shouting up at one of the Aurors above him, trying to get the man's attention. It didn't work, as more of the enemy flyers were coming down from on high.

The next second, Abraham realized with sickening certainty that he should've really been concentrating more on his immediate surroundings. The reason being the sword of a dead Roman legionnaire punctured his side, a man wearing the plumed helmet of a centurion leading his men out of a nearby alleyway to flank his company. None escaped.

Five of the makeshift pillboxes fell from attacks from all sides before the defenders realized what was going on, and the Army headquarters began to issue new orders. Every first and fifth fortress defending from the other sides of the city were abandoned, and their men moved into the city. Their mortar squads remained behind with their fellows to call in fire into the city, while the rest of those men moved through the city in squads doing what they could while the reserves of wizards and witches also moved out, doing what they could.

During this time, Yubelluna had been forced to redo her Blasting Vines attack. The effort had her gasping, reeling away to grab up a Pepper-Up potion before turning her power on an attack from the air that got a little too close. The Pepper-Up potion, the second she had taken tonight, would keep Yubelluna on her feet, but she knew that was a false promise. *Once it wears off, I'm going to crash like a freight train. But since that implies I will have lived through this night up to that point, I will take what I can get.*

Yet despite the mortar teams and troopers moving through its streets, there just weren't enough armed defenders to defend the civilian population. Hundreds of people who had spread out through the city now found themselves under attack once more, and hundreds died.

Those in the wounded area, however, still had two defenders.

Asia stared at the incoming rush of Jackal Men and undead cavalry, the undead cavalry vastly outnumbering the attackers from the air. "Issei, do you think you can take care of those snakes?"

Issei looked up, then shrugged. "Maybe, I mean, they've got... er... yeah I think I can," the brown-haired man stumbled to a halt. Somehow, he just didn't want to explain the one spell that would probably impact those snakes in front of Asia.

She didn't seem to notice and nodded, then gestured with one hand, the other grasping her rosary. "You will not pass!"

A shield appeared between the edge of the aid center and the first attackers to reach them. Denser and more powerful than a Protego, it was one of the spells that Harry had taught her personally. Knowing that Asia didn't really want to hurt anyone even in a fight, he had made certain that she could defend herself and others as best she could. The shield appeared like a yard-thick ball of energy across the street and then grew concave before spreading to it either side encompassing Asia slowly as well as the area around her in blocks in every direction. Once it had formed a circle, the shield would grow to defend the aid center from above.

Even as the shield began to form, Asia let go of her rosary, with her other hand moving her fingers this way and that in the summoning spell. "Come, Raiter!"

Her little familiar had grown a bit since they had met. Originally, Raiter had been the size of a Chihuahua. Now, he was the size of a bulldog. Except, of course, that he could fly, had claws, natural scale armor that could sneer at most sword blows, and a lightning attack.

Upon seeing the charging undead, the little dragon roared, furious at this assault on his chosen mistress. Whipping his tail around, Raiter zoomed forward, almost like a flying snake, but without wings. From Raiter's mouth, a lightning bolt emerged, crashing into one of the undead, then bouncing from that one to another, to another, before being cut off a second later, as the little dragon was in and among them, roaring and slashing, moving from one enemy to another.

Meanwhile, Issei had turned all of his attention to the battle above them. Whenever the attackers came within range to assault the shield, he would lash out with his spell. The spell passing through the shield was a relief, as was the fact that now he could see hundreds of writhing snakes, trying to bite at their own rear ends, in complete confusion as to what was going on.

Heck yes! Let's hear it for perversions, baby! Issei added mentally.

Even the harpies were no longer interested in attacking. Instead, they made to land, whereupon each of the harpies Issei caught in his Itchy Ass spell began doing some kind of weird dance to try and scratch without actually harming themselves with their sharp talons. That this allowed Issei to stare some more at the dancing boobies. *Ah, is this a glimpse of*

heaven? If only they had cuter faces instead of being mostly beaks and eyes. Still, Issei didn't let them try to move away. A glue gun attack snared them, taking them out of the fight entirely.

And then, when the undead attacked, Issei used his Clothes Destroyer spell on them, shattering weapons and armor alike. On two mummies, this completely unwrapped them, causing him to laugh aloud and thrust his fist into the air with a triumphant bellow.

But that was only in the area where the wounded had been.

But as the attack passed the half-hour mark, the news wasn't good, and in his headquarters, Abraxas knew it. "Can we get a report off Lord Potter? We need him or Tiamat back here quickest."

"Maybe, but if Lord Potter retreats, will either have to do it slowly, pulling back all of his men, or quickly, leaving them in place and thus making them a target in turn."

"It's the Devils choice, Sir," said one of his officers with a sigh. "The same goes for Sala, only worse because we'd have to rely on Lord Potter to get him and his men here. No, what we really need to get Tiamat back here."

"I've got the plonker who went with her now," interjected one of the communication-providing leprechauns nearby, his accent noticeably thicker for a moment as he shook his head. "The flaming idiot didn't answer at first. Took me five minutes to get him! But Tiamat is coming back this way, hell for leather."

"And considering her wings might technically be called leather, that is no mere statement," The Major General answered with the ghost of a smile, before one of the other leprechauns, one of the ones that were on local communication, marked off another fortress fallen at the outskirts of Alexandria. "If there are any of us left when she gets here, I am certain they will appreciate her effort."

The horde of undead and monsters continued to attack, press further into Alexandria, and now the undead from behind them started to become a true threat. Luckily, the fortresses, the larger defensive structures, relied on wizards to supply them, so there were no supply lines to be cut.

But they were still being attacked from all sides, and knowing that the undead were also attacking their people deeper into the city was having an impact. More than one pillbox commander attempted to break out under their own initiative to retreat deeper into the city only to be wiped out.

And to put it bluntly, the militia men were just not as tough, well trained or in as good a shape as serving soldiers. In the main anyway, there were exceptions, but they were far between. Another pillbox went silent, and then a fortress and Abraxas bit his lip before shaking his head. "Get Lord Potter back here, now. Tiamat can't make it in time. Flavius and his troops will just have to fend for themselves until this attack is dealt with."

But before the leprechaun could go through with that order, salvation arrived from an unknown quarter.

OOOOOOO

Unfortunately, when Yasaka attempted to talk Sona into helping them with a problem in Danan, she ran into a simple problem: Sona had gone back to class. And her one attempt to get her attention and convince her to assign Yasaka a few peerage members to help diffuse a political crisis in Danan was firmly rebuffed. With her head muddled by her own magic to believe what she was saying, Yasaka couldn't come up with enough specifics to convince the Sitri heiress that it was important enough to leave class for. However, with Sona no longer in attendance, Yasaka convinced herself that bringing along the golems could work as a good force multiplier far more easily than she would have otherwise under the mental charm.

In contrast to trying to convince Sona, it was easy to convince Gasper at Casper and Mittelt to come with them to Danan. Yasaka just headed to the Guys House where she found the two of them playing dress up and told them both that she wanted to show them something, and then took them along with Rias to Danan.

"Wait, what's Lily doing out of school?" Gasper asked. "Erm, n, not that I'm not happy to see you, Lily-chan, but um, well, I just want to um..." Gasper balked for a moment before rallying. "I just wanted to make certain you're not doing anything naughty that Harry-nii-san would be worried about."

"Heh, um, kind of not really?" Lily answered, somewhat thrown by the way Gasper spoke like a girl, like always. It reminded Lily almost of the way Victoire would talk when they met occasionally. "Daddy won't like how I'm not in school, but the trouble in Danan's serious enough he'll be proud of me helping solve it."

Mittelt cocked her head to one side, staring between the unconscious form of Rias, being covered by one of Yasaka's tails and held in the air by another. While Mittelt couldn't care less about Lily being a good girl, she was somewhat annoyed that this was pulling her and Gasper from their own playtime and curious about why they were bringing Rias. "What about Rias? Why are we taking her along?"

"Because Rias can rest as long as she wants in Danan, and it won't matter much here," Yasaka answered for Lily. "We have no idea how long Rias will be dealing with her magical exhaustion, but the Undertaking means that time won't pass as fast in Danan as here."

"Mmm," Lily nodded. "It's set at four to one now. I can't do anything about that, wouldn't know how. Now come on, let's get going."

Transporting the golems, all seventeen of them, took a few trips. But then, the moment they were back in Danan, Gasper gasped, staring at Rias and rushing to his King's side, eyes wide in horror. "W, why weren't we worried about this before!"

“Some kind of spell was affecting us. We think it might be a WW thing,” Lily said, looking over at the taller redhead, biting her lip as Yasaka picked her up and led the way down the side of the river to the little settlement they had made on the island. Knowing this place was more comfortable for them and that the background goodness might help Rias, Lily had brought them through here instead of in Tir Na Nog. “Hopefully, being here will help her to recover quicker. Do you think you can do anything for her, Gasper? Speed up her personal time, maybe?”

Gasper thought about it for a moment, then shook his head, watching the others enter the houses ahead of him. “No, it doesn’t quite work like that. W, while I can stop the time of those within my line of sight, that won’t impact the amount of magic she needs to take in after being so magically exhausted.”

“Which would not be a good use of your time,” Yasaka said tartly, turning back from the bed she had just placed Rias on in the main bedroom. “I think you would do best to come with me into Egypt.”

The others all looked at her and then nodded. This whole thing, which started but certainly didn’t finish with the Knight piece evolving, had to be caused by something going on in Egypt. Mittelt put their worries into words. “That happened hours ago, and none of us were even able to think about Egypt. Which means whatever’s going on still is. That means Potter’s probably in trouble somehow. It must be a day ending in a ‘Y’.”

“Enough of your sass, Mittelt,” Yasaka answered brusquely, leading the way up the hill once more to the island’s fal stone. There, she waited until the golems were in place around the stone, with Mittelt, Gasper and Yasaka’s men, eighteen Youkai of various races, between them. Montoya, at least, she had been able to convince to bring his ready-force along.

Lily concentrated, and now, with the experience of going back and forth, Lily was able to do a bit more than before. Instead of just transporting herself and whoever she was touching, the fog began to spiral out from the fal stone, covering a large area around Lily. “Ready,” the young redhead grunted with the effort of visualizing what she wanted.

“Great job Lily.” Yasaka finished hugging Kunou and pushing her gently away so that she was outside the area of the fog out onto the walkway leading around the pond. The younger kitsune continued backing away, watching them go, biting her tail in worry. Yasaka gave her a final, bright, confident grin before turning to Lily, laying a very gentle hand on the redhead’s head. “And once we’re through, you’re going to come back here instantly, right, young lady?”

At any other point, Lily might have argued. But Yasaka had the stern mother look down pat, and Lily knew that her Daddy wouldn’t like her anywhere near where someone was fighting. The whole thing that had happened here in Danan had been because she was connected to the Tuathans and the Undertaking. Despite Lily’s own thoughts, all the adults in

her life were clear: the battlefield was no place for a young girl. “Yes, Yasaka,” she answered, not docilely, but with actual understanding, which was much better in Yasaka’s mind.

Moments later, they all appeared in the hotel room in Alexandria, the golems smashing the interior walls down as they came through, as well as the ceiling for a few of them, causing Yasaka to bat aside some of the debris before it could hit Mittelt or Lily. Harry had placed the stone there after the full force gathered in Danan had come through, believing it wasn’t necessary to have it on his person any longer.

Once she was certain they were all there and not hurt, Yasaka knelt down in front of Lily, hugging her tightly. “Good work Lily. You’ve done your part. Now it’s up to us to find Harry and the others, okay?”

Lily pouted but nodded, and a moment later, she was gone. Yasaka smiled sadly at where she had been for a moment, shaking her head in some amusement. *That girl is going to be a right terror in a few years.*

But then Mittelt’s worried voice grabbed her attention from the hotel room’s balcony. “Get out here, Foxy. We’ve got problems!”

Staring out over the city a second later, Yasaka snarled. “Right, first things first, we have to deal with this scene out of the War of the Titans. Mittelt, take back the sky. Gasper, head over to that golden dome, that’s got to be Asia, and she might need your help. I’ll send two golems with you.” With that, she turned to the seventeen golems, picking out two to go with Gasper, ignoring, for now, his flinch as his crippling anxiety hit him.

Each was slightly different, representing a product line almost, signs of Akeno, Tsubaki and Kalawarner’s work on the golem concept. Indeed, that was the only reason there were so many of them: it was easier to just make a new golem after a certain point than to try to upgrade an existing one. That, and it made for easier comparison.

Some were short, though most were tall, and all were very wide in the shoulders and waist. Their heads were universally small, squatting almost on their shoulders, and only the first few didn’t have some form of armor added onto their clay bodies.

The one built in Danan since Kala and Akeno had moved their work there had the heaviest armor and was the tallest in build and the most different in terms of build thanks to the dwarves getting involved. It had a small waist, two massive spherical shoulders, and a nearly human lower body, with a massive club in one hand, whereas the others wielded short swords and small shields. It also had metal plates on several places and two large magically infused jewels set into the metal armor covering its chest. The small head remained but had been given a grill, behind which Akeno had somehow figured out how to create a magical speaker to give the golem, like several others, a voice.

But all of them were able to respond to verbal commands given to them by those added to their command 'protocols'. Once Yasaka had them back on the ground, Yasaka ordered. "Head out into the city. Destroy the undead and protect any humans you find against anything attempting to harm them."

"To war!" shouted seven of the golems as one, causing a shudder in many of their listeners. Those voices were not human. They sounded almost like a computer, but one whose speakers were set deep into a tunnel almost, giving it a sepulchral, deeply disturbing tone.

Psychological warfare Akeno said, and by Amaterasu did she get that right! Yasaka thought, watching as the golems charged forward at varying speeds.

Almost as they moved out of sight, the golems ran smack dab into a Mamluk cavalry assault on a group of refugees who were fleeing down the streets. The civilians stopped, staring at the monsters ahead of them, then behind, and the father of the family grabbed a small dagger, the only weapon he'd ever been able to use, looking around his fingers before holding it, staring at the incoming enemies, shaking his head in some despair.

Then Yasaka was reaching forward with her magic, lifting them up and over the golems, who had shifted to go around the humans already. When the incoming cavalry attempted to run down the golems, it was as if they had slammed smack dab into a brick wall. A brick wall with swords, which cut and rent at their armor, tossing them every which way.

Setting the humans down, Yasaka smiled, waving a few of her tails at them. "Please keep moving towards that golden dome, do not be afraid of the golems. They are here for your protection. Please spread the word."

"Praise Allah for that," a woman within the group muttered, shaking her head as she watched the golems make short work of the undead. Swords, lances, hoof, it didn't matter at all. All of it bounced off the golems, who tore the undead into shreds, and then moved on. They were all slightly slower than a man in a straight line, but the golems moved with a certain unstoppable air to their progress.

Yasaka waited until the humans were down the street once more, then shifted into her full fox form, her nine tails twitching this way and that. And then she grew, and grew, and grew some more until she was so tall that her shoulder was taller than most of the buildings around her. "Mittelt, you're in charge of clearing the sky above me," Yasaka ordered her voice now a subterranean shout. "I will deal with the more distant enemies and at least cut off the majority of this assault. Gasper, move with my men to that golden dome. Montoya, push out from there, work with the locals and clear this city!"

Cackling, Mittelt took to the air while Gasper muttered and flinched away but still followed the Youkai as they all moved forward, abandoning their human guises as they did.

OOOOOOO

Yubelluna was on her last legs at the front. She was so tired that she had actually picked up a rifle from one of the troopers and was using that to hose down a Jackal Man as he tried to land on the roof. Elsewhere, she could see the nearest pillbox beginning to fall, and once it did, the one Yubelluna was currently on would be isolated and would no doubt fall quickly as well. For a moment, she wondered if Harry would be able to get here in time, and then she wondered if the Major General had even called him in. *Maybe he thought we could win this on our own. I really hope he wasn't that foolish...*

She pulled back from the edge of the roof, letting another trooper take her place, looking with some distaste at another Pepper-Up potion. This would mark the third such potion she had taken tonight, and Yubelluna knew that the more such potions you took, the worse was coming off them. She was about to tip it into her mouth despite knowing that though when a cry arose.

“What now!?”

“What the hell is that?”

“A Fox? A giant fox is attacking us now?”

“But if they could do something like that, why haven't they...”

That was as far as they got before fire raced out in every direction from the giant fox's multiple tails, as well as her mouth.

A second later, the attack cut off, and Yubelluna put down the potion and began to laugh gaily as Yasaka's voice boomed out over the city. **“People of Alexandria, magicals and nonmagical, my name is Yasaka, and I am an ally of Harry Potter. Do not be afraid. Keep fighting. Help has arrived!”**

By this point, the fight in the air had mostly begun to die out. The number of Aurors still in Alexandria had been spread too far and then overwhelmed, losing dozens of men. The survivors had gone to ground on the outer pillboxes or in the rubble throughout the city, but the air belonged to the monsters.

That ended with a cackle. “Let's get bloody, bitches!” Thousands of Holy Spears appeared all around her as Mittelt lanced through the air space above Alexandria. Mittelt was always better at creating more of those than Kathy, although nowhere as accurate, nor could she make blades as big. Now it was as if a tiny asteroid shower was in the sky as Mittelt began to launch her Holy Spears faster and faster.

With two of her tails, Yasaka gestured block-sized shields into being over this or that embattled group of civilians or even one of the fortresses while also blasting out attacks at any large scale group of monsters or undead she spotted. It was a show of both amazing power and control that none had seen bar what Harry had accomplished here in Egypt before. But while

Harry was still feeling his way towards what he could and could not do with his power-up, Yasaka was an old hand with her own monstrous magical pool and showed this now.

While not as skilled or powerful as Rias's peerage, Montoya and the Youkai were still more than enough to slay the undead or the jackal men and others, and there were more of them. They began to push out from Asia's territory, dislodging the undead, placing the talismans down once more, and pushing on again and again while Yasaka provided them with long-range firepower that made the mortars seem both inaccurate and tiny in comparison.

The city was very much still a battle zone, but with Yasaka having just annihilated the incoming enemy forces, that left the undead popping up everywhere. But this was enough to let the defenders on the edge of the city rest, recuperate, and reorganize. All the troops who had been stationed on the other sides of Alexandria left their positions quickly, moving under the Major General's directions to reinforce their fellows already within the city. He'd made this mistake there, believing that they would face an attack on all fronts, but the secret infiltration attacks had been worse even than that.

Eventually, the incoming waves of the enemies started to peter out, slaughtered by the remaining anti-air guns and Yasaka's power, power which awed every surviving witch and wizard. Unlike the nonmagicals, they 'knew' that Yasaka was both decidedly not from the Wizarding World proper and had far more power at her tail-tips than nearly any wizard living. So there was quite a bit of awe there, but also some growing fear, wondering about Yasaka, about Akeno and Harry's other allies, and even Harry himself. The wizards were learning that while they had more spells, they were very much bottom feeders when it came to power. This wasn't a revelation many wizards were mentally ready for.

Still, that didn't matter right now, not even to the wizards and witches themselves. They had been given a reprieve, and they were going to milk it for all it was worth. The surviving Aurors and militia men quickly took to working with the golems. Under Mittelt's instructions, the larger golems were set out near the perimeter on major roadways leading into the city. The smaller ones were used to help clear the buildings once more.

Major General left his headquarters, heading outside as the reports of Yasaka moving towards them came. He was by the entrance as Yasaka padded into the open area around the headquarters, the fire break that's Tiamat had created earlier that night to save them from continued assaults.

The nine-tailed Fox stared down at them for a moment, then shrank, continuing to shrink until she was the size of a human, at which point Yasaka started to transform into a short but still extremely curvy and quite gorgeous woman. She was dressed in something that looked like a religious outfit of some kind but still had the nine tails flicking behind her and two long ears twitched upon her head.

Bowing her head very slightly towards the men in the uniforms, Yasaka spoke. "Hello, good sir, my name is Yasaka, as you no doubt heard. Could I ask what is going on here and where Harry Potter is in all this madness?"

OOOOOOO

With Gasper helping Asia, Issei was free to help on the offense reclaiming Alexandria. Yasaka eventually pulled Yubelluna off the city's outer edge, putting Gasper, Yubelluna, and Issei in charge of an equal number of golems and ordering them to clear out any buildings while defending the Himejima clan members as they once more created and put down their talismans. The remaining golems were sent out in teams of two to guard the largest roads leading into the city, adding still more strength to the defense against the ongoing, if desultory, land-based attacks. None of the enemy, not even the Mummies, were up to fighting the golems in close combat, though they lacked any long-range firepower. They were simply too durable and too strong for the Jacal men, undead and others to do anything to the golems.

With this, the sight of Mittelt in the sky and the area around them clear once more, Asia allowed her shield to lapse at last. Then, with a faint sigh and a single sip of Pepper-Up to sustain her, Asia once more resumed her task of helping the wounded.

More wounded were coming in from around the city, both civilians and the militia pulled off the outer perimeter not facing external assault. Thankfully, Yubelluna's triage system and spreading out the work between Asia and the various teams of doctors was holding up under this new strain well enough.

At one point, Asia pulled her hands away from a man who had taken a wound to his groin and thigh that would have caused complications for his life going forward. She nodded up at the man who had been holding the screaming man still, smiling in thanks, only to realize that the man who had been doing so was the same Mullah who had come so close to assaulting her earlier that night. The man looked back at her, his face showing some shame, as well as in introspection that hadn't been there before, and she smiled a little wider, and nodded at him, and turned away without saying anything, moving on to the next injured.

OOOOOOO

In the ritual room at the tip of the upside-down pyramid, the Pharaoh and his wife stared at one another in shocked horror as they sensed the arrival of Yasaka thanks to her impact on the background magic of Egypt. "How?!" Nefertiti gasped, surprise and fear in her voice, as it was her turn to start losing control. "How is that kitsune bitch here, so far away from Kyoto?! She can't travel like that, not that far, never that far nor for any length of time!"

"Evidently, the wards in Kuoh are not the only things that Potter has developed when mixing Ankhsera, Onmyodo and European magical styles," Akhenaten answered, scowling and shaking his head. "With her there, any assault into Alexandria is doomed to failure. We've

slaughtered thousands, but we won't force Potter back to defend the city, curse it. Still, that was but an attempt to gain us more time. How goes the defenses above us?"

"Nearly wiped out. Once I set the assault into Alexandria, I pulled back from that aspect and concentrated on the defenses above, and there is no chance we'll be able to stop this attack force. The spear wielder and that lightning using devil bitch are too strong, without even mentioning the Nekoshuu who is wielding the Boosted Gear."

"Fine, but I think we might be forced to abandon this place, regardless of how strong we become. I certainly don't want to face Potter and all of his allies at once. Not even after ascending."

"...You're right." Akhenaten grimaced and pulled a segment of his mind further out of the massive web of enchantments, grimacing as he bellowed an order. "Come!"

Two of the Ushabti moved from the door, bowing as they did so. "Gather everything, all of our notes, books, and artwork, quickly. Come back here to report when you are done." He looked over at Nefertiti. "When they are done, break off your control for a moment, then send it away. I refuse to give anything to these people that I cannot help."

Akhenaten stared after the Ushabti for a moment, then looked across at his wife. "We just need to hold. Dawn isn't that far off. If we can hold them, think of what..."

"Forget it." Normally Nefertiti wouldn't interrupt Akhenaten like that even in the direst circumstances, it being both rude and a pet peeve of the immortal Pharaoh that was sure to spark an argument. But now, she had to make him see reality. "Our defenses won't last that long," she warned. "I suggest you start to push the Harvest to its conclusion now."

For a moment, the Pharaoh was silent until there was a booming noise that reverberated down from on high. They both flinched, and Akhenaten nodded. "I will start on that, my love. You start creating the portkey to take us to our safehouse in Madagascar and get it linked into our wards."

OOOOOOO

While the attack on Alexandria had gone in, the assault on Amarna was slowing down for lack of targets.

While the others were busy trying to clear out the ruins and failing to establish any kind of set perimeter, Bill knew that fighting wasn't what he was here for. Now, as he looked around, he tried to get a mental image of the city's layout. "So, any hint of where I should start looking for an entrance to the tomb we're assuming is somewhere around here?"

Being nearby, Cú answered first even while dodging the attacks of more mummy men. "Rats always go for cellars. We ain't looking for a building. We're looking for something hidden underneath."

Akeno had come down from her place as overwatch to emplace some Himejima talisman around. Now she nodded in agreement. "What was this place built for, exactly? Refresh my memory."

"It was built to..."

Hermione's impromptu lecture was interrupted by the sound of machine-gun fire coming from above and a shout of, "We might need one of you magi-types up here to conjure up more bullets and help out! We've got incoming moving towards us again through the air."

With the distances involved, no land-based forces could get to the ancient capital in time to help, and Akeno and her clan members had been spreading around talismans since they had landed, so only monsters could appear. But with the various traps already sprung or destroyed, the Aurors and troopers had spread out and were now able to bring down fire on any group of monsters from above. This let Bill and Hermione search around for hints as to where Akhenaten was hiding.

As several of the Aurors joined the Shinsengumi and their passengers in the air once more, Hermione resumed her explanation. "It was built to be the new capital of Egypt. Akhenaten built it because he wanted to distance himself from the existing power structures. Or at least, that's the story. Whether or not that was real, I don't know."

"That ain't the whole story," Cú said, looking around him thoughtfully, the remains of his last opponents scattered all around him, providing an odd counterpoint to his calm tone. Before speaking up, he had tapped one of the Celtic runes on his face, and it had begun to glow with pulsing orange and blue energy, imbuing his eye with the same colors. "The Ley lines around here are all messed up. If Potter had been able to feel out anything beyond the edge of the Nile, he could've found this place easily. All of the Ley lines in are coming together here in one big boondoggle."

"You mean like the Dragon Nest under Kyoto?" Tonks asked.

"I never heard of that one. I was thinking about Hogwarts in Scotland. Though there it isn't all of the ley lines, just a few crossing underneath the castle," Bill hummed thoughtfully, tapping a few of the stones before ducking under a blow from Jackal man, cutting the beast's head off with a Sectumsempra and then moving toward where he estimated the center of the city was. "That would give them a lot of power to manipulate, wouldn't it?"

"Power and the ability to manipulate the rest of the underlying magical energy of the area," Hermione muttered from where she had taken cover behind a rock from a group of Janissaries. "Precisely the way they would've had to in order to use the enchanted items Padma and I found out about on such a grand scale."

Akeno shook her head, lifting up into the air once more with a burst of her wings. "We don't have time for this!"

“What are you...” Hermione didn’t get time to finish before she and Bill were picked up by Koneko and Tonks respectively, soon they were floating in the air, and Cú, with a shrug, followed, pulling out his broomstick from the same sheathe he had previously been using for Gae Bolg.

Akeno pulled out her lightning whip, twirling it above her head as she intoned a spell. "By the power of Raijin and Amaterasu, let the holy power of the gods flow through me. Banish, oh creatures of darkness! Holy Lightning!"

A moment later, the lightning crashed down, covering the former (if for a very short time) capital of Egypt from one end to another. Many of the buildings had been smashed already during the battle, and now many of the ones that hadn’t been were turned into so much rubble. Here and there, the others spotted still extant traps going on under the impact of Akeno’s spellwork or mines going off here and there due to rubble hitting them.

Cú started to clap, holding his spear against his body with an elbow as he hovered in midair next to Akeno, shaking his head with a laugh. “Damn me, are all you ladies with Potter so magnificent? If he’s got a lock on the market for such, he and I might be having words.”

Akeno giggled, shaking her head. “I would say we all are indeed magnificent, but there are other magnificent ladies out there. I’ll introduce you to a lady of my acquaintance named Sona. Her or her sister might take your fancy.”

“Ooh, sisters, the forbidden dream,” Cú answered, chuckling causing Akeno to giggle again, delighting in mischief as always.

“Glad he’s not flirting with me anymore,” Koneko murmured from behind Bill.

Turning his head, the older man winked at her, nodding his head in amusement. “That was a little disturbing, wasn’t it?” he whispered.

“Remove the little from that statement, I mean, he’s older than Harry,” Koneko grumped, her tail lashing out behind her in agitation, and then she glanced down at the ground. “Yo, Ginger, you see anything else down there now?”

“Bah, you’re gonna have to come up with more original insults than that, Shorty,” the Hound of the answered, still chuckling even as he shook his head. “I can’t see a damn thing, magically speaking. That doesn’t mean there still aren’t normal traps, though.”

“Still, we seem to have at least wiped out the defenders. Best we keep moving.” With that, Bill politely asked Koneko to bring him back down.

Yet as they landed, more monsters and undead were already beginning to appear. There was no way for them to stop it without Harry's Aura, and Akeno had brought along only so many Himejima-style talismans.

“Ah, there’s more fight to be had here, good!” Cú laughed, dropping down to the ground next to Bill, then launching himself forward, his spear flashing as he crashed into the nearest group of monsters, letting the machine gunners above concentrate on other targets.

With the others covering him, Bill began to move towards the city's center once again using an echolocation spell. “It was designed to let us find secret rooms, especially useful in the late Second Intermediate Period era tombs. They began to design the tombs so that the various curses and protective arrays were connected into a single room, which could be disconnected, thus depowering the rest. Kind of an ingenious idea, really,” Bill said happily as he began to talk about his old trade, going into the details about how he and the Gringotts Curse Breaker team he’d been a part of had discovered that bit of information.

Hermione lapped it up, but the others...

“Bill, I kind of like you.” Koneko began, moving over to him. She did so while dragging a struggling Jackal man, her arm locked in a chokehold around his throat. Despite this, she reached up with her free hand, grabbing Bill’s shoulder and pulling him down to eye level. “But now is not the time for a lecture,” she growled. “Get on with it.”

“Right, right, um sorry,” Bill muttered, waving his free hand in apology, startled despite everything he had seen Koneko do at the sheer strength Koneko exhibited.

“Anyway, there’s a space here, and...” Bill fell silent as he began to move along, casting the spell every few yards, leaving a bemused Koneko behind, suddenly realizing the jackal-man under her arm had stopped breathing.

As they protected him from the monsters and had to stop at one point to conjure more still more bullets for the fireteams in the air above them, Bill marked out a massive area underneath the city. Then he moved into the interior, with Hermione helping occasionally. The others were too busy with the monsters and undead to truly help all that much, as the two of them essentially covered in the square he had already marked out.

“Okay, good news, bad news and worst news. Good news, I think I was able to discover where the damn thing is,” Bill announced loudly over the tumult of the ongoing battle. “Bad news is, whatever it is is at the edge of my echolocation spell, is a hundred feet down maybe, below the admittedly limited sewer system that they had.”

“What’s the worst news?” Koneko asked, grunting as she pushed off the ground and up into an uppercut that removed the head of another undead giant who had stepped out from behind another illusion. Unfortunately, unlike the master-crafted version they’d dealt with first, this one was a mass-produced version, and the blow, while decapitating it with ease, also nearly covered her in guts and puss.

“Oh, yucccck!!!” Koneko yowled, thankful that her helmet deadened her sense of smell.

“**Damn girl, you owe me a bath after this!**” Ddraig growled.

"I owe myself a bath," Koneko grumbled even as she charged to meet a band of jackal men who Tonks was already fighting.

"The worst news, I can't find an entrance. There's no tunnel leading down into it. They've got to be coming and going by using magic. That's really unusual, even for the ancient Pharaohs. As in I've never seen..."

That was as far as Bill got before Cú was in the air above Bill, hovering there on his broom once more. "So if I strike the center, we'll probably discover something?"

Bill had barely a second to stammer a yes before Cú pulled back on his spear and hurled it down with a wordless roar. Then he felt Koneko once more grabbing him up and was in the air flying away from ground zero as Tonks did the same for Hermione.

Blue energy flashed out around Gae Bolg in a corona as it crashed into the ground. The ground of the city exploded in every which way, leaving behind a gaping hole several hundred feet wide in every direction.

Bill gaped at the destruction, shaking his head. "Okay, great, now all that rubble is in our..."

He was interrupted again as Akeno lifted up next to them, along with Tonks. "Wingardium Leviosa!" Both of them shouted, lifting the rubble out before hurling it in several different directions, slamming into monsters and undead alike as they attempted to respawn.

Staring down, they found themselves looking to what looked like a storage area seen from on high, almost as if it was indeed a basement of some kind. However, most basements didn't look like they were made of black marble, nor did they have staircases leading further down. Or give off a kind of miasma of danger just waiting in the dark.

"Right," Tonks muttered, taking command quickly. "Guys and girls, I think the time for pussyfooting around has truly passed. Hermione, Bill, stay up here with the Aurors and troopers."

Hermione instantly shook her head. "I don't want to argue, but you might need me my abilities down there."

"Fine, but stay behind us."

"Exactly," Cú said, cracking his knuckles. "I don't want to be the one to tell the High King that one of his oldest friends died tonight."

Hermione opened her mouth, then closed it, having learned over the years that a sense of self-confidence should not get in the way of common sense and observational data. Cú *Chulainn has already proven to be durable enough to take anything they put out. Don't get in their way just because of your own pride, stupid.*

The spear wielder darted down into the still expanding dust cloud, with Koneko on his heels. Above them, Akeno took over the defense in the air once more. Her abilities were of better use at range, and already still more harpies and flying cobras were coming towards them, and more monsters were appearing among the ruins.

Meanwhile, Koneko and the rest of their band had reached the top of the stairwell leading down, where they stood, looking at one another then down into the stairwell. Instantly Koneko began to call on her Balance Breaker, the armor covering her from her elbow up to her chest and then all over her body, her armored tails swishing behind her.

Cú too nodded, staring into the dark below thoughtfully before shaking his head. He was tempted, almost so tempted, to call on his Riastrad, to call it and to demand its obedience, rather than have it control him as it had when he was under the mental domination of the Wild Hunt. But given the surprise attacks and traps that their enemies liked to use, that would be next to useless. Instead, *I'll have to rely on that I'm durable as the stones of Ireland*, Cú thought, twirling his spear.

Without a word, the two of them moved down in lockstep moving swiftly, but slowly, with Tonks and Hermione behind them. The two casters conjured up little stones over their heads to land on the ground, hoping to cause any traps to activate before they reached them. This worked, and several times the group paused for a moment as various traps went off ahead of them. Stone slabs crashed together, the shadows coalesced into daggers or cutting blades, magical spells of various sorts, many of which Hermione had never seen the shape or color of before went off one after another.

"Oh, well, this is all just too much fun for words!" Hermione grumbled while shaking her head as they continued ever downward. "How many floors of this do you think there are?"

"Meh, if not for my fears of maybe tripping one of those exploding things big enough to bury us all and this base 'o theirs, we'd only have the one," Cú answered

This didn't bring Hermione any comfort, and she sighed as she set up another Lumos spell ahead of them, continuing their way downward.

OOOOOOO

Harry sent another lance of animal-shaped fire down to get another building that hadn't had anyone living within it, for gesturing with his hands to sweep the fire forward, along the road, destroying several more buildings, for lifting his fingers up into the air, sending it hovering there. Elsewhere, he could see Shinsengumi doing the same with fire, water or mental constructs of their own from the platforms of their magic carpets. Below, more Oni had been added into the building clearing platoons, cutting down their losses further. *We're learning, getting better at this every time we push forward. Our flanks might be exposed, but with the amount of aerial firepower we can bring to bear, that isn't such an issue. I don't think we've lost a single man in the last twenty minutes.*

Of course, just as Harry was thinking that and was about to move forward to destroy another pillar when another aerial assault came in. It crashed over Damanhur just as news about the attack on Alexandria came through. And this wasn't a small attack either. This was an assault practically from every direction as Nefertiti sent the mustered ranks of conjured flying cobras and harpies against Harry's position.

But Harry dealt with the attack in the same fashion he had dealt with the others, searing flame, cutting spells, explosive spells, curses like the bowel exploding curse made into an area of effect weapon, and more hammering into the oncoming flyers even as they reached the outskirts of the city. This attack didn't do any more damage than any of the other aerial attacks had, but what it accomplished was to take Harry's attention as the attack on Alexandria gained momentum.

When the attacks started to slowly dissipate about thirty minutes later, Harry landed by Flavius, who was constantly moving, pushing his command post forward as they advanced from one pillar-covered zone of influence to another. Once he had landed, he barked out, "What's going on in Alexandria?"

"Nothing good. My Lord, I believe that you should retreat," Flavius said in reply, shaking his head even as both of them missed the use of the formal address. "Tiamat hasn't reached the city yet. She was apparently ranging on the other side of Damietta and was shepherding a unit of the Army who had apparently been able to survive up to this point when the call came in."

"More flyers incoming!" The shout came from on high at the same time as another report coming in from a leprechaun. "The enemy infantry are pushing forward too! We're seeing more undead and monsters coming out of buildings to attack us!"

"They're making us choose," Harry growled grimly. "If I retreat, all of you here will face an equally large counterattack. And there's still the thousands of civilians by the river which we haven't transported back. I thought that keeping my aura in place was more important, especially after it dimmed so much when I transported Akeno and the others, but..."

"High King!" The nearest leprechaun held up his button, grinning wildly for some reason. "We've got good news! More help has arrived from Danan!"

For a moment, Harry didn't understand. He was the only one in Egypt who could use the Undertaking to pass from one dimension to another. *So how...*

Before he could ask that question aloud, Luna came down from one of the nearby rooftops, hopping off of her broomstick with a certain flair before patting down her sundress. "Oh, excellent, Aqua did it."

"Aqua, whos' that? Did what?" Harry questioned, frowning. "What are you talking about?"

Luna explained her little trick, and Harry gaped at her. “How the hell did a fairy cover that much distance! And why didn’t you mention this plan to me?”

“Because it was a long shot, and I didn’t want to get your hopes up,” came Luna’s remarkably normal reply. “As to Aqua covering that much distance. Aqua is a flower fairy and can transport from one type of flower to another. As long as her magical strength is up to the task, the distance between the flowers doesn’t really matter. Much like distance doesn’t matter to the Undertaking.” She paused at that, going on conscientiously. “Well, that, and her ability to actually stay on task for a long time. That last actually wasn’t something I was willing to bet on. But it seems to have worked.”

“It has indeed,” Harry breathed, then he lifted back up into the air and spent about seven minutes destroying the latest aerial assault before falling back towards where Flavius and his command team waited. “Connect me to Alexandria! I need to talk to them, make sure that the city is all right, and then I want to talk to Yasaka.”

When Harry was able to speak to Yasaka, the whole tale came out, and Harry had to shake his head, proud but bemused at how his daughters had dealt with things. “On the one hand, we don’t want to encourage them to just leave school whenever they think they can get away with it. So we might want to make certain that Okuri-inu doesn’t help them again with stuff like this. But on the other hand, it really was an emergency,” Harry said with a chuckle. “This whole balancing being a leader of our faction and parenting thing is getting a little annoying.

Yasaka guffawed at that, shaking her head unseen by Harry. “Preaching to the choir, my dear. Then she became serious. “Now isn’t really the time to really catch one another up on most of what’s going on. I’ll just ask where you want me?”

“Right where you are,” Harry answered firmly. “I’ve already contacted Tiamat and had her turn around. The grumbling she gave me was quite magnificent, but she obeyed. Hopefully, that will keep Akhenaten from attacking the men there in turn.”

“So you don’t want me to go on the attack?” Yasaka’s nose wrinkled in annoyance. “That’s no fun.”

“Unfortunately so. But in doing so, you’ll free up a few teams of Aurors from Alexandria to help.” Harry answered, smirking slightly as he saw Flavius stiffen, although there was no humor in it as both of them stood in front of the shattered remains of the pillar in front of him, Harry has taken the time during the conversation to destroy another pillar. Even now, the magically-stunned people who had been under its ‘protection’ were being transported back to the river.

“And what mission are you thinking of sending our greatly reduced magical protection on?” Abraxas asked, interjecting into the conversation.

“Has the Major General mentioned the pillars yet?” Harry asked instead of answering directly. When Yasaka answered in the negative, Harry gave a brief explanation before discussing his fears in that direction. “So unless you can tell me I’m completely off base, and humans can’t power of belief somehow...”

“I’m not going to say any darn such thing,” Yasaka answered brusquely. “I might never have run into such a thing, but I have no doubt there is such magic out there, given how many different magical cultures have existed on this planet of ours. I agree. Those pillars have to be destroyed.”

“And I have said before, we need to put faith in Akeno and her attack team. Whatever their real purpose, those pillars are still defending millions of my people,” Abraxas answered. “We cannot destroy them until we are in a position to defend the people that those pillars are currently doing so current.”

“Abraxas, you yourself mentioned the time limit might be operating under. While I have the utmost trust in Akeno and those with her, it took us all too long to figure out where the Pharaoh and his wife might be hiding. So long that they undoubtedly had time to set up defenses. But if you want confirmation on that score, that’s easy enough. After all, there’s no danger in our communications being intercepted.” Harry paused, looking at the leprechaun holding the enchanted button he was currently speaking into. “Can you contact one of the leprechauns who went on that expedition?”

“If you can be but telling me their names, aye,” the woman replied.

That took a bit to discover but eventually, they were connected to the third assault force. Akeno sounded somewhat breathless as she answered while in the background, the noise of machine guns and the screeching of harpies could be heard easily. “We were able to discover their hiding place, but we’re still facing heavy assault by monsters and undead and have lost many of our people. I’m stuck out here keeping the ruins relatively suppressed, and I think the others can win through, but I’m certainly not willing to say they can do so quickly, Harry. Not with them knowing we’re coming.”

Harry nodded and then asked Abraxas if he had heard all that. He had, and Harry went on grimly. “Which isn’t even thinking of the fact that they could simply speed up whatever they’re up to. No major general, those pillars must be destroyed. Now.”

Abraxas sighed but then shook his head. “On your head be it, Lord Potter. I cannot argue anything you’ve said, but still, thousands of my people are going to die because of this. I just hope you are ready for the consequences.”

“I am,” Harry answered, his tone like iron and both Yasaka and Abraxas heard it, understanding that Harry had indeed taken responsibility for what was about to happen onto his shoulders alone. “Give the order Yasaka.”

Within minutes, squads of Aurors, eight strong at least, were sent out from Alexandria, Damietta and Damanhur. With how many pillars in and around Alexandria had already been destroyed, they would have the farthest to go to find more, but within minutes of leaving their starting cities behind, the Aurors were finding targets, diving down onto the pillars like birds of prey, destroying them at range.

OOOOOOO

“No!” Akhenaten roared, feeling the destruction of several pillars in Damietta and Damanhur. “Damn Potter to the depths of the Hades, may his Sheut be torn from his Ba, may his qadib (penis) shrivel and become gangrenous! May...”

This was his nightmare-made flesh. With Nefertiti jumping the gun to claim Yasaka, there had always been a concern that someone who could see the deific magic would understand the importance of the pillars. When Potter arrived, that fear became a reality. But rather than see their work be dismantled without a fight and be forced to try again somehow, Akhenaten and Nefertiti had decided to roll the dice, pushing things forward. But now that Potter was destroying pillars at an alarming and growing rate, there was a real fear that if he had enough time, their gamble would not pay off, and the Harvest would not be sufficient for what they needed.

“We have better things to do than curse Potter as he undoubtedly deserves, my husband!” Nefertiti barked. “The attackers are nearly through the storage levels, and we haven’t set up any defenses between our prison cells and the outer edge of the ritual room.”

“They still have Wadjet and Meretsegar to deal with,” Akhenaten muttered, reining himself in once more. Being so close to their goal and facing so many threats was burning through his self-control like a torch through a carpet.

“I have no faith in their combat skills at this point,” Nefertiti retorted. “Besides, can you not feel Meretsegar’s sanity slipping away? She Who Enjoys Silence is being slowly driven insane by our using her to power the Blessing in the Staff of Set.”

With a blink, Akhenaten realized his wife was right, but after reflection, he knew it made sense. Meretsegar’s original job was to keep doors closed, particularly between one dimension and another. It was why her power had been a foundation of the ward they had created to keep Harry from reaching out to whatever pocket dimension he could teleport to. Through that power, Meretsegar was also supposed to keep the undead from leaving their resting places, hence her necromantic powers. Though those necromantic powers made her a natural for it, the use they had put her to was directly contrary to her normal task, a task that was a large part of Meretsegar’s personality if not her powers.

Now faced with the reality that one of his more docile servants, an ancient goddess once worshipped by millions, had been driven insane, Akhenaten frowned behind his mask, then shrugged unconcern. “Oh well. Perhaps madness will let her fight more effectively.”

With a snort, the self-made Nekoshuu pulled more of her will from the greater ritual to send a tendril of thought elsewhere in the ritual room. Instantly the defenses around the room's physical shell rose to life, covering everything with a magical shield that would have balked anyone short of the level of someone like Yasaka. Unfortunately, Nefertiti knew that the attackers had that odd spear wielder, as well as the Toujou girl wielding the Boosted Gear. So who knew how long it would last?

At that point, Akhenaten looked over at the door to the ritual chamber, where a large ornate sundial hung above the pintle. For a moment, he stared at it, stared at the time visible there, and then he roared, his anger coming back to him in an instant. "DAMN IT!!! We were so close, so close to claiming the power of the sun as well! I would have become a new Ra!"

Then, as if just shouting those words had burned through the last of his anger, Akhenaten sighed, shaking his masked head from side to side, slowly restoring his control. "Hold out for half an hour. That is how long we have for the Harvest to build up power now that we've sped things along."

Nefertiti nodded, and she too threw her mind back into the ritual, hastening it to its conclusion. "For our ascension!"

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The group of explorers with Koneko and Cú in the lead moved through several levels like this, each level being more storage than anything else.

Eventually, they reached the second floor of the complex. But when they spotted the staircase at the far end leading further downward at the end of a hallway, they missed one trap. Koneko stepped on a smaller than average stone in the floor, and there was a buzz that caused Koneko to jerk around before long ribbons of magical force wound around her within an eyeblink. So tight were they around her that Koneko couldn't get enough leverage to break out and found herself falling backward onto her tail.

And then, as Koneko tried to fight her way out of the trap, the two remaining goddesses struck.

Released from where she had been empowering the Staff of Set but now made thoroughly insane by being forced to use her powers in such a manner, Meretsegar rose from the ground behind the two frontline fighters, biting and scratching at Tonks, who cried out in pain, her fangs dripping with poison. Tonks' chitin armor was no defense against the jaws of a goddess, and Tonks collapsed, her visible skin going green from the defender of the throne's poison.

Wadjet flashed up towards them from the front, springing up and over the trapped Koneko, her tail lashing out and crashing into Koneko, sending her sprawling onto another trap, even as she bit at Cú. Cú blocked Meretsegar's bite, the butt of his spear flashing out to smash

the snake goddess's head to one side, but he couldn't dodge the coiled body behind that, which crashed into him.

For a moment, he was somewhat distracted by the feel of scale-covered breasts hammering into his chest, taking into the floor. "Kind of forward, aren't ya? I mean, I know it's been a few hundred years for me, but still, I do have some standards, *cailín nathair* (snake girl)," he muttered, even as he brought his head back and headbutted the snake creature.

The goddess reeled back, unable to respond to his quip, instead looking to once more bite Cú. Wadjet dodged his spear thrust, and then the next one, arms appearing from her sides as she did. They were covered in multicolored feathers, the fingers tipped with claws. Jumping forward, Wadjet once more dodged another spear thrust, her claws raking up his chest, not doing anything but making the runes covering half of Cu's body light up blue. Suddenly rearing back, Wadjet spat out touch-based poison, much like that of the flying cobras, only her attack was larger and sizzled like acid when it struck.

Once more, Cu's magical defenses stopped it, but for a moment, he was blinded and being shirtless meant he couldn't wipe the acid off easily even when he lifted a hand from Gae Bolg. This forced Cú to fall back entirely on the defensive. As he stumbled back, Cú felt his Riastrad rising within him, the need, no desire to give in to it, to transform into the beast, becoming an unstoppable warrior.

But he couldn't. Not here, not in an enclosed space with at least two very squishy allies nearby. However, this made the fight doubly difficult for him, as he had to concentrate half of his attention inwardly, pushing down his Riastrad. This was shown in the spiraling treelike runes slowly turning red here and there on his body, even as he tried to fight off the Egyptian defender of the throne.

Elsewhere, Hermione was trying her best to get Tonks away from the snake creature, but none of her spells could even register to Meretsegar. Weakened though she was from the power she had once held and maddened though she be, the guardian of the Theban necropolis was still a goddess, and Hermione, for all her knowledge and skills, was a mere Witch. A second later, Hermione found herself smashed aside by the snake goddess's elbow, several ribs breaking on the impact as she was hurled the length of the hallway.

Gah, I knew I should have stayed behind! Sorry love, but I think you were right one last time here, She thought, staring up at Meretsegar as she reared over her.

But then, the snake goddess was pulled back by the tail as Tonks grabbed at it. The Metamorph's fingers had shifted into scythe-like fingers, even as she had pushed her metabolism as fast as she could trying to fight off the poison. "Fuck no, bitch! Hermione, transfiguration!" She shouted, even as she tried to use contact like that to get through Meretsegar's scales.

Meretsegar tail twitched this way and that, sending Tonks into first one wall, then the other, but while her spells did nothing, fizzling even as they left her hands, Tonks clung on grimly. Meanwhile, the floor under the snake goddess shifted, reaching up with dozens of hands to grab at the creature. But this didn't slow her down at all, nor did the conjured spears of stone that Hermione hurled her way. But they at least smashed into Meretsegar's head, stopping her from turning back down her body to attack Tonks.

This left the still-clinging Tonks to wonder if maybe some non-attack spells could get through the goddess's defenses, putting thought into action instantly.

To Tonks' astonishment, the tickling charm worked, and for a moment, Meretsegar spasmed. After all, that charm wasn't designed to hurt, rather it was just meant to make the target laugh, and thus, the natural defenses of the goddess didn't work against it.

It didn't work for very long, a mere second, but that was enough for Hermione, who lashed out with her own spells, transfiguration once more, but on a larger scale. The walls and floor transfigured into so many jaws, crashing down into the goddess. Once more, it didn't hurt the creature, but it held it still for a moment, and the next instant, Tonks was flying towards Hermione, landing at her feet with a thump. Blood was flowing from a few wounds still, but like with the poison, her metabolism was dealing with the wounds, albeit slower, and she had been able to ignore the pain again thanks to her combat form.

"We are out of here, Hermione!" Tonks snapped, grabbing Hermione up into her arms, turning the magical researcher into a passenger for the third time that day. "The better part of valor and all that."

Even as devil wings sprouted and she raced towards the staircase leading upward into the sunlight, Hermione concentrated on something else. Taking careful aim through the haze of agony and between Cú and the writhing bodies of Wadjet and Meretsegar, she lanced out with a specialized cancelation charm that she had created with Padma's help over the years, for when their experiments went horribly wrong. "Interficiam Eam (Cut it out)!"

The overpowered spell crashed into the trap that had covered Koneko with the acid-covered net, fraying it badly and finally giving Koneko the leverage she needed to break free. Growling like a lion, Koneko pushed her arms out to either side, snapping the binding around her. Now freed, she leaped up and over the ongoing fight between Meretsegar and Cú, lashing out with a kick as she passed.

Wadjet was flung backward down the hallway to the distant staircase leading further into the underground structure. Meanwhile, Koneko used that momentum to land on top of Meretsegar just as she broke out of Hermione's transfigured jaws, bearing her to earth.

Meretsigar hissed, but instead of fury or hatred, it was a spell, a greenish gas-like miasma spoken in ancient Egyptian, a language long dead. When it touched them, the spell seemed to deaden Koneko's limbs even through her armor. A second later, Ddraig's voice

crashed through her head in a warning. ***“Watch out, that spell is a necromantic spell designed to drain your life force!”***

“Thanks for telling me,” Koneko grunted and leaped up off of the monster, lashing down with a kick while life slowly returned to her arms now that they were not in the miasma. “Now, tell me something I don’t know!”

The punch was augmented by the Boosted Gear’s armor and crashed down into the goddess with such energy that one of her fangs shattered, as did the ground underneath Meretsegar’s head, several scales going flying at the impact. Now for the first time, the maddened goddess truly felt pain as she pushed herself out from the rubble, only to find Koneko in front of her face. She attempted to breathe out the same miasma, but Koneko’s fist was already flashing forward.

“Boost, Boost, Boost,” Ddraig caroled happily, his prison having gathered power throughout the battle up to this point. **“Eat shit and die!”**

“Cat Punch!” Koneko yowled, the blow catching the goddess right in the face and hurling her up and into the ceiling above with shattered all along its length. The goddess hurled through the blasted remains and up into the night beyond. Once more, teeth shattered, along with Meretsegar’s jaw, and several dozen scales exploded along her lower jaw.

But even as the goddess’s cry of agony faded away, Ddraig’s voice once more rang into Koneko’s mind. ***“That hit definitely hurt her, but she’s not dead yet.”***

“Is she going to be able to fade away again?”

“Doubt it, not with the amount of pain she’s in. I also don’t think she’s in her right mind either. Those eyes were not the eyes of someone sane, not even a goddess.”

“Good,” Koneko paused then, taking in Ddraig’s words, before sighing and shaking her head. “In that case, it’s best we put the snake woman out of her misery.”

With that, Koneko leaped up and out of the three-story hole that she had been in for a moment, landing in the dust and sand of the city around them. Nearby, the goddess writhed in agony, her landing having destroyed several buildings. One hand was on her jaw, the other thrusting up, creating a shield against Akeno’s lightning. The lightning flashed out and around her throughout the entire city of Amarna, slaughtering hundreds of undead and monsters, but it couldn’t quite get through Meretsegar’s shield, although the shield was cracking as Meretsegar’s mind began to falter.

Unfortunately, the Lightning Queen was being pressed hard, along with the remaining Aurors, Troopers, and Shinsengumi right now. With Koneko, Tonks, Hermione and Cú inside the underground complex, the monsters had begun too fast for them to destroy. It was all Bill could do to keep up with the demand for bullets and help on the defense, using his broom to switch

from one magic carpet to another. If not for the machine guns and the mortar team, they might well have been overrun by now.

Under the reflected white and yellow magic, one baleful, maddened eye glared at Koneko, and apparitions appeared all around the goddess, accompanied by a sound much like a drawn-out scream escaping through Meretsegar's broken jaw. The spirits were Egyptian warriors holding forward long stabbing spears who launched themselves forward.

Koneko snarled as she charged to meet them, even as the gunners above attempted to fire at them. They could only send a few bullets their way, however, because of how many monsters were still around in the area and after that first attack, Akeno too couldn't help much beyond keeping other monsters from joining in.

Meanwhile, Hermione and Tonks rose into the air, heading for their fellows.

And on the second floor down of the underground fortress, Cú, now released from worry about his allies, finally released his Riastrad. The runes on his body turned red instantly, and his skin began to crack and peel as all the power of those runes and Cú Chulainn's soul turned inward, as he became a true monster. His body grew several sizes larger than it had been, his teeth larger in his maw, his hands bigger even than his new size would indicate, his body harrier.

It wasn't quite the Werewolf transformation. It was more bestial than that, more apelike, but there was certainly a hint of that kind of madness that the Wizarding World always attributed to werewolf transformation. Then he roared, smashing Wadjet into the side of the tunnel with a blow that was felt for a hundred miles around them in the form of an earthquake.

Wadjet hissed and slashed, biting deep into his shoulder, but he stabbed with his spear at the same time, opening a rent in the goddess's side. And now, her attacks were getting through, causing deep rivulets of agony through Cú's body. But they healed instantly, as he became more and more monstrous, more and more powerful with every wound.

She raked him with her claws, and those claws dripped poison, which ate not at his skin, but at the magic within his tattoos. Bodychecking Wadjet, Cú took her to the ground, stabbing again with Gae Bolg in one hand while the other clawed or grabbed.

Desperately the goddess dodged it, knowing the power within Gae Bolg, only for Cú to smash him with a blow from his off-hand that shattered one of her fangs, and hurled her backward. So powerful was that strike that the stones for several yards around them were shattered or pulverized by the sheer shockwave.

She lay amidst the dirt, stunned by that blow, and he moved over to her, hefting his spear above her head.

She lay there, staring up at him, and something passed through her eyes. **"Do it, Irishman. Release me from this!"**

For just a moment, even in the height of his rage, Cú understood those words. With difficulty, he opened his mouth, the words a growling sort of noise from a throat that wasn't made to create intelligible noises. "I know not wherrrrre godsssss and goddesssssssss go when they die crrrreaturrre, but I would have yerrrr name before I ssssend you therrrrre."

The goddess blinked, and Cú could see in her the urge to continue to fight, the urge to continue to obey her nature and the chains binding her warring with her desire to be free of the Pharaoh who was no longer worthy of the name. **"I am Wadjet, the guardian of pharaohs. And I will be free!"**

Cú nodded, muttering. "I will rrrememberrr yourrr name," before hurling the spear down with the murmur of "Ssstrrike the Hearrrt, Gae Bolg!"

Desperately Wadjet twisted around, unable to overcome the desire of her Master to keep fighting, to keep obeying Akhenaten. She even tried to slink away, her form becoming gaseous, slipping down and through the stones underneath her. And yet, Cú had activated the spells within Gae Bolg that Akhenaten had never been able to access, the spells that truly made it worthy of the moniker 'Spear of Mortal Pain.' The spells which meant that no matter what, Gae Bolg would find his target.

Reality shifted, and despite her best attempts to dodge, the spear found its mark in Wadjet's heart. The spear's tip penetrated deep into her body as the feelers around the head of the spears burst out through the spearhead and through Wadjet's body. They acted like tiny flying knives or hooks within the victim's body, causing an insane amount of damage and pain.

For a moment, even as her heart was turned into slurry within her body, Wadjet stood upright on her serpentine body, her eyes lucid, as she stared down at the demigod who had killed her. **"Thank you, Man of Ireland."**

Then, she collapsed into her own coils, finally, finally dead, as her body turned into gold and precious jewels from the point of impact outward.

Cú backed away, and with difficulty, gritting his teeth all the while, pulled his Riastrad back under control. It was far, far more difficult than it had ever been before Cú Chulainn had been Cursed by his grandfather to hide him from the Morrigan's stares. His time in the Wild Hunt under the whip of Gwyn App Nudd had frayed his control badly.

I'm going to have to be very, very careful with that, Cú thought, as he fought until his inner demon was once more under control. Finally, he was back into his normal form, which showed a few of the wounds he had taken during his time under it to control his inner demon. But they were already slowly fading,

With a sigh, Cú nodded towards the goddesses body, taking it in for a moment, then shook his head. "What a waste," he murmured, turning away from the goddess in sorrow now, even as he grunted a bit in pain. The bite to his shoulder had yet to heal, the energies in the

goddess' fangs being more condensed than those of Wadjet's claws. "What a damned waste. Ain't never tried to do it with a snake girl before, coulda been interesting."

Koneko landed next to him, a scowl on her face and blood on her still-armor-covered fists.

"You done with yours too, then?" Cú asked.

Somewhat subdued, Koneko nodded, then attempted to make light of things, not really wanting to think about how, as hard as it was and for all of Meretsegar's magic, that fight had more in common with putting down a rabid dog than a fight against another thinking creature. "Yep. Going to make me some new snakeskin boots after this."

Cú guffawed at that but didn't say anything in reply, looking back at the goddess he had slain. And for the second time since he had come back into himself murmured as someone who has been under the leash of a master, he had to admit to some sadness there.

Hermione joined them, shaking her head. "Tonks is out of it for now. Speeding up her metabolism costs her endurance, and she is dead to the world right now, snoring as always. At no point did Hermione share her own wounds. "And the monsters are still pushing in hard above us. We're on our own.

"Fine by me," Cú answered with a snort. "Just do a better job of keeping out of the way, okay Chatach (curly)?"

That caused Hermione to scowl, but she nodded, taking up the rear once more, joined by Bill to help them if they ran into any kind of maze or mechanical trap. The group moved along the third floor of the underground fortress. Koneko stopped in her charge after Cú. He, too, stopped, frowning and looking at a blank wall. "I'm not the only one who hears that, right?" Koneko asked.

Hermione looked at them both, a scowl crossing her face. "I don't have your hearing, you two."

"There's like a tapping or thumping sound coming from this wall," Koneko said, tapping it. She then looked down at the Boosted Gear, then over at Cú.

Hermione stepped forward and used a spell on the wall. A segment of it glowed instantly, and she nodded. "There is a hidden doorway here. Probably locked magically. I..."

Cú didn't bother with anything fancy. Instead, he simply reared back before lashing out with a kick that shattered the doorway.

He wasn't prepared for a raging black-haired hellion to hurl herself through the debris, slamming into his chest before he had a chance to put his foot down again. He tumbled backward, but even so, Cú was able to toss his attacker off him and over his shoulders. But the

woman's claws still attempted to rake at his skin. It didn't do any real damage, but one of the claws caught at the bit to his shoulder, which had yet to heal, causing him to curse.

The black-haired harridan was grabbed by Koneko, who shouted out, "Kuroka-neesama!" as she slammed her back into one of the walls.

That voice did more than the impact to the wall to break Kuroka out of her fury, and she stared down at her little sister, who was holding her up against the wall. "K, Koneko, what are you doing here, nyaa!?" Then she paused and smirked slightly, getting some of her normal poise back. "That's quite a grip you got their imouto," she said, tapping the Boosted Gear where it pressed into her chest like a ton of bricks. "But don't get so angry at my puppies just because you haven't grown some little kittens of your own yet, nyaa."

"This is your sister?" Hermione asked quizzically, one eyebrow rising in surprise while Koneko looked torn between horror at that line at a time like this and sheer embarrassment at her sister's words. "The one who was supposed to have been captured or disappeared by her opponents? She doesn't quite look like I expected. To wit, not nearly as seductive as Tonks and Harry mentioned she looked."

"You caught me with my hair down and without my makeup, nyaa," Kuroka shot back, her tone mild although her eyes flashed with fury, which her next words showed easily as she turned to look back down at Koneko. "That bitch Nefertiti used some runes or ancient magic to take my ability to use Senjutsu powers and everything else. Like, she copied it all out, leaving me with only the bare minimum of my Nekoshuu abilities left. It'll all come back, but I haven't built up even a quarter of my magical reserves since I've been stuck in here, nyaa."

At that, Kuroka blinked. "How long have I been stuck in here anyway, nyaa?"

Koneko glanced into the small cell that Kuroka had been captain, her ears flattening against her skull at the sight. The cell was tiny, without any windows, nothing to give light beyond that of a small glowing stone set in the room's roof. One look was enough to tell Koneko that if it had been her, she probably would've been driven insane by the isolation.

But Koneko forced herself to put on a stern expression as she looked back at her sister. Despite how they had separated the last time and how Kuroka had left her with the Gremorys, they were still siblings, and it was hard to be harsh with her. "Are you going to try to go back to the Khaos Brigade?" Her other fist raised in warning. "I'd have to capture you if so."

But Kuroka shook her head. "I don't, honestly, see the point at this moment. Besides, it wasn't fun anymore, nyaa."

Koneko nodded, and released her sister from her grip, then pulled her into a rough hug, nuzzling her head against Kuroka's for a moment. "Good to see you then, onee-chan."

Then she dropped Kuroka and turned back to the others. "Let's get going."

“If you’re going after Nefertiti and her husband, you know he’s here right, I’m going with you, nyaa. I want to tear that bitch’s tits right off, nyaa!” Kuroka snarled.

“Damn, that was catty,” Cú observed. Everyone just looked at him, and he shrugged. “I’ve been a dog for several hundred years. What do you expect?”

“Down boy,” Bill quipped, taking the lead as Kuroka began to tell them about what she had seen and knew of her captors.

“You think this ritual room is at the tip of this upside-down pyramid, right? And there aren’t any more traps that would bring this whole place down on top of us between us and it, aye?” Cú asked, hefting Gae Bolg out of its sheathe once more. “So how powerful are the defenses, do ya think?”

Kuroka stared at the Irishman then at his spear before smirking. “Powerful, but if you hit anything enough times with a big enough hammer, you’re going to make a dent, nyaa.”

“Heh, in that case, I suggest you all back away.” With that, Cú pulled his arm back again, readying his spear, as green and blue magic began to coalesce around him. “I’m thinkin’ we shouldn’t waste more time.”

Koneko shifted her head this way and that, then wordlessly held up the Boosted Gear gauntlet. “Let’s do it, Irish boy.”

OOOOOOO

There was an almighty boom, the sound of which might have sent both Nefertiti and Akhenaten reeling away from the lapis lazuli orbs at the center of the ritual room if not for their sheer willpower keeping them there. “AGGH!” Nefertiti mewled in pain, her enhanced senses an agony now as the sound of something hitting the ritual room’s outer shell.

“We, we are out of time,” Akhenaten shouted, biting his lip as he sent a few final commands into the ritual. “Be ready with the teleportation spell, I...NO!!!”

OOOOOOO

Harry had been feeling it for several minutes, the thrum of magic gathering everywhere. It was like a mix between a barely discernible weight at the back of his mind and the feeling a human would get if they were being stalked by a predator. Harry knew the feeling was false, but even so, it was there, and Harry knew what it meant. *Whatever Akhenaten and his wife are up to, they’ve pushed it forward. We need to act, damn it!*

Thinking desperately, Harry tried to think of something more he could do here, something more he could do to stop what was coming, every instinct in him screaming it was going to be deadly. He even reconnected with the magic lying within the Nile, letting it renew his magic for a time as he tried to figure out a way to stop what was coming.

But he had already destroyed the last of the pillars in Damanhur, and the cutting-out expeditions had done a lot of work as well as they ranged out from the city. *So I would need to reach out further than they have. I can only be in one place at a time, and I can't see beyond the Nile's environs. I can't push my power any further out beyond the river as I have already, and if the locals haven't listened to me before this, I doubt as brainwashed as they are, they'll listen to me now after still more time under the pillar's influence.*

Pulling his mind back from the Nile, Harry instead concentrated on his aura, trying hard to see if he could use it somehow to figure out where the pillars were. It was hard, much harder than sensing the magic in the river or the fact there weren't any pillars within a block of it any longer. After all, this was the first time Harry had done anything but blast out his deific aura or keep it under control. Trying to use it like a kind of scrying spell was well beyond that.

But after what felt like hours but was actually only a few minutes, Harry could discern tiny patches of **otherness** within the area his Aura had spread. Where his willpower didn't dominate. *Now for the hard part*, Harry thought, wincing as pain began to build up behind his eyes. He had been using his magic, in particular his aura, uninterrupted for hours now. And while the Nile River's magic refilled his own, his mind still wasn't used to this much effort.

But Harry had to press on. Slowly he concentrated on the nearest pillar heading deeper into the center of the triangle, knowing that the cutting out teams had simply headed towards the next biggest city down the Nile River. "Okay," he said aloud, "Now, let's see how accurate I can be as artillery."

With that, Harry clenched his hand and whispered, "Mizu (water)." A chunk of the Nile river rose under his command, flying into the air and away as he directed it toward the pillar. He gasped at the effort it took to keep the spell together, but he did it and could almost feel the spell flashing down towards his target.

In a small town devoted to agriculture on another tributary of the Nile, men and women bowed and prayed to the pillars within their midst. However, a few of them looked away as a noise like tearing cloth came to them. "What is that?"

The answer came swiftly, exactly like a bolt out of the nighttime sky, still dark although dawn was not far off now. Before anyone could even shout in shock, the pillar they had been praying was struck from on high by a bolt of water going at near-supersonic speeds. The pillar shattered from the top to bottom as water splashed everywhere, and the madness induced within the message of the Pharaoh took them, sending them racing every which way for a target, right into the arms and swords of the waiting undead and monsters.

Luckily, Harry couldn't feel that, and so he just moved on. Concentrating once more, Harry split his attention now between his Aura and his control of the river. It wasn't the same thing at all, and doing so put more strain on his mental senses. But a moment later, another spear of water rose from the Nile branch that passed through Harry's target city, followed by

several more as Harry felt out the position of several pillars at once. The pounding in his head grew worse, blood dripping from his nose and ears, although here, at least his phoenix werewolf healing ability kicked in instantly. And as his magical senses strained to control things dozens of miles away and sense other things at the same time through a different medium, Harry bared his fangs. *It's all about pain, you utter cocks, and I consider this pain to be in a very good cause: to wit, fucking your plans up like a gremlin in the works!*

OOOOOOO

Both of them felt it, the destruction of more pillars. More than the two partially reclaimed cities would have amounted to. No, someone was deliberately destroying them at range, someone well beyond the reach of normal magical attacks. "Potter! It must be him. The Kitsune bitch might have the ability but not the skill to target the pillars at such a range, and the dragon lacks any offensive magic capable of attacking out beyond sight."

"Who cares!?" Nefertiti shrieked as another blast of power struck the magical defenses separating the ritual room from the rest of the inverted pyramid. "NOW! The time is now, husband, or all is lost!"

Akhenaten was already acting, unwilling to let more of the people within Harry's aura be pulled from his grasp. The final mental switch was flipped, and the Harvest was pushed to its conclusion. "It begins, it begins now! Our ascension!"

Nefertiti echoed his words as the Harvest hastily began. It did so without nearly as much artistry and about forty minutes before it should have begun gradually, but it began.

The massive ritual whose parts were hidden in the hundreds of thousands of columns scattered around Egypt was based not just on Egyptian runes and magical theory. Instead, it called on Egyptian and ancient Aztec symbols in a strange, horrifying synergy.

The Egyptians had the concept of the five different parts of an individual's soul: Sheut, Ba, Ka, Ren and Ib. From that school had come the method with which to take the strength and abilities of other people, the Ka and Ba, or physical and magical abilities. That, the ancient Pharaohs had long known to do, although Akhenaten and Nefertiti had perfected the skill, as shown by how Nefertiti had used that kind of magic to take Kuroka's Senjutsu abilities and add them and Kuroka's identity as a Nekoshuu to Nefertiti's own.

However, they couldn't go one step further. The two immortals couldn't drain the soul from a person entirely and take the power of that soul onto themselves, only the physical and mental aspects, which was what the magical ability of a person counted as. The Egyptians also couldn't take the entirety of the vitality of an individual, not in any economic fashion anyway. There would always be enough left over, as destroying the soul was something that even the Egyptian Gods only did very, very carefully. The Ib would always remain to be judged, with the larger part of what most people spoke about when they spoke of the soul.

So they had searched for other religions that had practiced human sacrifice. Unwilling to venture into India even with their Metamorph skills, Akhenaten and Nefertiti studied the ancient Chinese human sacrifices to the water god Hebo but found nothing magical about it. The same was not true for the act of burying retainers alive with the Emperor in the Qin era, but that merely provided the Imperial resting sights with an undead guardsman, nothing more.

For a time, they despaired. And then had come the discovery of the Americas. There, they finally found what they were searching for. The ancient Aztecs had practiced human sacrifice to a scale that no other religion ever had, while the Incans had worshipped death to a degree that was astonishing even to the Egyptians, dedicating whole cities to the entombed dead. And their priests, like many of the early quasi-religions, had all been mages, who had developed the means with which to take the death of an individual and empower themselves physically with the death of the individuals thus sacrificed.

While unwilling sacrifices could be used in such a manner by both peoples, willing sacrifices were even better. A willing person opened up his Ba and Ka to the 'god' in question, letting them be drained, turned into further magical power.

With this knowledge, the two ancient immortals had the last piece. And with it, they had devised the Harvest.

Even with the ongoing destruction of the pillars, there were still thousands of them throughout Egypt. And even with the various efforts of Harry, Tiamat and Yasaka, the large majority of Egypt's population were within their area of influence.

Hastening the ritual to its conclusion took Akhenaten a few precious moments as the attackers came ever closer to the last defensive wall, as Harry's power smashed one pillar within his aura's area of control after another. But the ritual had come so far already, it took only those few moments to finish it, and millions across Egypt heard the final portion of the 'prayer'. "Praise the sun, praise the name, praise the true God, praise him, Praise Aten!"

And as they all ecstatically shouted the name of the god back at the columns, so too did they offer their very souls as a sacrifice to the Harvest.

Unfortunately for many who were wary now of the pillars, just being near them was enough. The Aztecs had, after all, also sacrificed unwilling prisoners of war. The amount of energy this gave them wasn't as much since their souls remained sacrosanct, but it would still be enough.

For more than an hour, Irina, Xenovia and Dulio had argued with the Aza'imi, saying they should follow Harry's words of warning and move away from the pillars. But they hadn't. Instead, All three were still within range of one of the pillars within Cairo as it truly activated. And because they were, all three died, their vitality and magic snuffed out in an instant. Their souls remained, to be funneled to the Great Wheel, the system of life and Rebirth, but that was all that set them aside from the teeming hundreds of thousands throughout Cairo... and beyond.

Across Egypt, tens of millions of people died, their lives snuffed out as quickly as a candle. The vitality of their bodies, the power of their souls, the strength of their minds. All of it was converted into magical energy, stored in the pillars, and then fed into the Pharaoh and Nefertiti as the ritual dictated, the name 'Aten' being used as a conduit to the two individuals at the center of the ritual room in the Fortress of Vengeance under Amarna. Even the Sacred gear Dulio had wielded, Zenith Tempest wasn't safe. The Harvest, like the device Raynare, had used months back to try and extract the Boosted Gear from Issei, the Zenith Tempest had been torn from Dulio's soul. Its powers were split between the married couple.

And as that energy entered their bodies, the two of them ascended, jumping straight from human albeit very powerful ones, to Gods. And with the energy of the millions of willing sacrifices came the power and spells connected to the Blessing caught up, as it were, in the tide of magic being transferred into the two humans. More power than Yasaka could take from the Dragon's Nest, more powerful than the power-up Harry had gotten from the Hallows or even the one he had been given upon taking command of the Undertaking and becoming High King of Danan.

Both were now almost as strong as Harry, stronger in many ways, buoyed by the deaths of those who had looked to their creations for salvation. But what they weren't was experienced in using their new powers. Hence why, as the defenses to the room finally crashed down to a draconic howl of "**BBBBOOOOOSST!!!**" Nefertiti pulled a hand off the lapis lazuli controls, which were already turning to dust, unable to withstand the power that had roared through them, to grab her husband's shoulder with one hand as the other grabbed at a portkey.

Seeing the faces of the attackers who had smashed through her defenses, Nefertiti couldn't stop herself." Too late, too late! You have lost! We are ascended!" she cackled, a hint of madness in her voice that only Kuroka noticed, causing the older Toujou sister to stop and stare.

Akhenaten also couldn't let the moment go without a brief, last moment taunt. "When next we meet, you will face us as Gods!" He said, even as their bodies turned intangible, allowing the charging Koneko to pass through them to crash into the opposite side of the ritual room.

With that, the Pharaoh and his Queen disappeared, leaving behind Cú howling in rage as Koneko pushed herself out of the new hole in the wall her charge had created. Idly she noticed it had shattered an already crumbling statue of a cat, and a pretty good one too. "What the hell was that!? What were we too late for?"

"Some kind of transformation. Those two Ascended," Cú growled, fury rising so much his runes started to turn red before he shook himself, regaining some measure of control. Then at the looks of confusion on the faces of the people around him, he explained, calming down a bit as he did. "Those were Gods that just popped out of here, not humans. No matter how

powerful a human is, their presence and eyes are different from that of a god. Believe me, I should know.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“They might have been human in the past, but now they are not. I can’t explain it any easier than that,” Cú said, shrugging his shoulders. “Don’t ask me how they did it, though.”

“Does it matter? We were too late to stop it,” Koneko grumbled.

“Still, I know the difference between human and god isn’t nearly as easy to jump across as a human to a low power devil. Where would they get the raw magical power to change from a human to a God from?” Hermione muttered while Bill looked a bit lost at all this talk about gods and such even as he looked around avidly, awestruck at the number of runic arrays and ritual-based magic he could see in this room.

Cú frowned, and Hermione realized that for the first time since Hermione had met him, the slight air amusement he always had was gone, and he looked around, his face grim as he bared his teeth in a snarl that would not have looked out of place on the face on his former Cú Sith body. “Sacrifice. A lot of it. I... I don’t recognize any of this work, but that’s about the only way I can think of.”

“Nyaa, I don’t get it,” Kuroka admitted.

Bill and Koneko also didn’t look like they had figured it out, but Hermione understood almost instantly, and she collapsed to her knees, her face going green as she stared around her, more horror than she had felt even at the height of the war against Riddle and his Death Eaters coursing through her. “Oh, Merlin. Oh, Merlin, Morgana and Maeve, no, **no!** Instead of mind control, it was...Those, those evil, vile, fucking **bastards!!**”

“Hermione, what is it?” Koneko asked, shaking her, looking shocked at Hermione’s cursing and now very worried.

Leaping to her feet, Hermione pointed around them wildly, her voice rising into a near shriek. “Break this, all of this! Erase it from fucking existence!”

Without explaining further, Hermione turned, racing out of the underground pyramid. It took her some time to climb out of the hole Cú and Koneko had created, by which point the others had caught her up. Outside, they found that many of the attackers had descended to the ground. The conjured beasts and undead Akeno and the others had been fighting were all gone now. Indeed, they were gone throughout Egypt. the magic in the two Blessed Items had also been converted to further fuel Akhenaten and his wife’s ascension.

Ignoring their shouted questions and even Akeno coming towards her, Hermione pointed at one of the Shinsengumi and then one of the leprechauns who had come with them to provide communication, the only one who had survived the battle to this point. “Let’s get

out of here. We need to get in contact with the rest of our people. I pray. I legitimately pray that I am wrong.”

While Koneko and the others hastened to obey in destroying the ritual room so that no one else would ever be able to duplicate the mad creation, Cú simply stood there, head bowed in prayer to his dead grandfather and the other Tuathans who had fallen centuries past. He knew Hermione wasn't wrong.

And soon, Hermione knew it too.

OOOOOOO

Harry stumbled, his attacks on the pillars within his area of influence cutting out in shock as he felt the subtle pressure on his Aura disappear, the underlying Blessings that had been raising the undead and conjuring monsters throughout Egypt shattering. With that, the monsters that his men were fighting started to disappear. The undead took longer, but after a time, they too began to disappear.

This should have been cause for jubilation, but at the moment, Harry was too weary to feel much of anything. He collapsed to the side, his wolflike head following his hand into the water of the Nile, its magic once more filling his own core while his head throbbed in agony, and it was not just a physical pain. Once more, Harry had pushed his magic beyond what he could safely control, and it was only because of his regeneration ability that his physical brain hadn't exploded from the strain on his magic.

About ten minutes passed as shouts and cheers from men and women who had believed they had been saved could be heard all over Damanhur. Then, as Flavius came to find Harry, Hermione's report wound its way through the leprechaun network, and what triumph the defenders of Egypt were feeling turned to ash in their mouths.

Hearing this, Harry wearily pushed himself to his feet, waving a hand weakly as he transformed back into his human body for the first time since launching their assault. “F, Flavius, you are in charge here. I, I need to...”

Flavius too had heard the reports coming in, and his eyes shown with unshed tears while many of his men had retreated nearby, either screaming, crying or just throwing up in response to the news. “Go, Lord Potter. And remember Lord Potter, you, you were right to destroy the columns within your area of influence before whatever happened. If my nation has enough people left to be considered such after this, Allah himself has blessed your actions.”

“If those reports are right, Flavius, it was too little, too late. Far too little, far too late.” With that self-recrimination echoing between them, Harry used his water transportation to transport himself to one of the cities within his area of influence, but beyond where he knew his destruction of the pillars had just reached, the city of Kafir El Sheik. There, he came out of the river, and after a few minutes of flight, Harry spotted people moving around. Some of them

were just looking around in shock, having seen the monsters disappearing like so much sand on the wind. Others, several thousand his actions had saved and been driven into momentary madness, were looking as if they had woken up from a dream into a horrific nightmare but were otherwise alive and well. Still more had come out of hiding places and now were staring at the area around a pillar Harry hadn't been able to destroy.

One of them was sitting almost directly outside the area, shaking his head and staring, a policeman's machine gun on the ground next to him. He looked up as Harry landed nearby, but then his eyes shifted back to the horror in front of them. "L, Lord Potter, your first words to us, I, I wanted to, to search for my brother, his family, lead them back. I had barely found them. They're hiding in the building over there. I, I came back to see if there was room for them under the pillars protection and... and... what happened!? Wh, wh..."

Harry placed a gentle hand on the older man's shoulder, silencing him for a moment as Harry stared wordlessly at the windrows of the dead in front of them. "Dark magic. The darkest, most vile, most evil magic that I have ever heard of. I... I'm sorry... we, we should have done more..."

The man was shaking his head, knowing that Lord Potter had already been doing more than any human could ever have, his brother having reported seeing the destruction of one of the other cursed pillars in the city. But Harry wasn't listening.

Instead, he was kneeling down next to a young boy, a boy of only around nine. He had died as he knelt on the ground, bowing towards the pillar as Muslims would toward Mecca, his mother beside him. Both were dead, their lives snuffed out, their faces locked in religious ecstasy. There was no sign of pain there, only joyful knowledge, which somehow made the scene all the more horrible.

Closing the boy's eyes, Harry pushed himself to his feet, stumbling only for the local man to catch him by the arm. These two men, who had little in common and would likely never have met otherwise, shared a look now, a look of bottomless horror and grief, as they looked out over the area the pillar had 'protected'.

There were thousands of them. Several thousand around this one pillar, a scene Harry knew would be repeated elsewhere throughout Egypt.

Some of the dead had fallen against one another, so tight were they packed in, and now were just standing there, dead on their feet. Like the mother and son pair, others had died in a moment of religious observance to the pillar in their midst. Few had ever left the control of the pillars like the man beside Harry, having listened to Harry's warnings.

Nor were they alone. Such scenes could be found throughout Egypt from one end to the other, in every city, town and village beyond the three liberated cities. Egypt had now become truly a land of the dead, the silence of the desert invading it in a truly horrifying way.

“I, I destroyed something like six hundred pillars beyond Damanhur. I know that Tiamat destroyed twenty, maybe more beyond Damietta? Alexandria was already free of them, and the Aurors were destroying as many as they could find as fast as they could find. But, but that is so little, not enough! I should have done more, should have moved to destroy them the moment Hermione found out about that cursed symbol, whatever Abraxas said! I should have done more,” Harry mumbled as he knelt down next to a young teenage boy and girl pair, obviously brother and sister, their eyes wide and staring as they looked to the cursed pillar.

Closing their eyes as he had the young boy before, Harry stared ahead of him, eyes unseeing as he grappled with the sheer enormity of the loss of life this represented. *How many millions just died here? How many millions died so that Akhenaten could ascend to godhood?!*

OOOOOOO

Something that Harry, Luna, and several of the others knew, but which they had rarely acknowledged, was the fact that Earth was no longer at the stage of its existence where it could deal with as much raw magic as it once had. The physical world couldn't contain that level of magic and suffered as it tried. Since Ophis had arrived, natural disasters of all sorts had begun to appear more often. She created magic, pumping it into the magi-sphere of the world in a way that only the most powerful deities could. And that sphere was straining.

Harry's own semi ascension to deific status had weakened that magi-sphere even further, although there hadn't been anything he could do about it at the time. Now, with two more gods on the seas and 'born' in so violent a fashion as well, that background web of magic frayed, snapping in many places, which leaked out even further into the physical world.

Natural disasters rocked the globe from one pole to the other. Mount Vesuvius exploded. Earthquakes rocked China and Japan, so much so that the Youkai Association felt it beneath their feet.

And in America and Europe, there were problems as well. Particularly in California, where a magnitude seven earthquake hit, while a hurricane boiled out of the Gulf of Mexico to hammer Florida under. At the same time, Greece and Norway were rocked by earthquakes.

It would take a long time for people to realize why all of this was happening, but it would. It would, and then the blame game would start in earnest, but at the moment, there was only one group pointing fingers and trying to place blame.

For many centuries the Indian Pantheon had not looked past their own borders, for the most part anyway. There were always exceptions, and Shiva was known to have taken an interest in places beyond India's ancient borders a time or two. But in the main, they had their own enmities and divisions. Even when Yahweh was ascending, that had been the case, though they had allied with him eventually. Even Ophis and the direct threat to them all she represented wasn't enough for the Indian Gods to ignore their natures and ancient hatreds.

Indeed, that was what this meeting had been supposed to be about. Shiva's wife Parvati had organized it, hoping to get Indra and her husband to talk over their differences. And while Shiva, now locked into one of his more laidback but erudite personalities, was willing to talk, Indra and Brahma were not.

"Your interest in the world beyond our borders is showing even now in these reverberations we are feeling through the jaadoo ka kshetr (magic Realm). Tell it truly, Shiva, you have begun to dance the dance of Tandav, haven't you?!"

"You are fools," Shiva bellowed, suddenly switching his personalities. Gone was the benign homely husband of Parvati, and in his place, the face of invincibility and might. He reared to his feet, staring across at Indra. "You sit there and accuse me of that!? When it is clear that Ophis was the start of this trouble when it is clear to all of us that there is a new god or perhaps more out there, flaunting their power and wounding Gaia!?"

"It has happened before," Brahma announced. "When Parvati's father refused to let you wed."

That joke at his expense calmed Shiva, and he pulled back from glaring at Indra, yet when he spoke, it was clear he was still in full Lordly Destroyer role. "You have long disdained humanity, fearing their great potential like Lucifer before you, Indra. And in so doing, you have turned your back on their potential. Yet you are so blind to the fact that humans, for all their potential power, have just as much potential for good. I am not. Do not disdain my attempts to make connections among powerful humans beyond our borders."

"Especially when you have done the same," Parvati interjected, causing Indra to twitch, and Parvati, the goddess of love, bravery and devotion, smiled dangerously at him. "I'm sorry, was that supposed to be a secret? Or the fact you hoped to control Ophis's actions through one of them? How exactly is that working out for you?"

Holding his wife's hand, Shiva stood, and when he spoke, it was with a mix of his personalities, switching between them one sentence to another. "There is potential in humanity for growth, not just for them, but for us. So fuck you and fuck your hats, Indra, Brahma. I have begun to ally myself with them and will continue. If you want to stop me, come on if you think you're hard enough!"

With that, he turned, and he and Parvati left the meeting, ignoring the glares behind them as their children, Ganesha, Kartikeya and Ashokasundari followed after them.

OOOOOO

Back in Egypt, the news of the disaster elsewhere reached the civilians in Alexandria. The leprechauns were not being the best at keeping secrets and were too horrified themselves to even try.

Asia looked up from where she had been healing one of the wounded, pushing to her feet as she looked over to where several troopers injured in the recent fighting here in Alexandria had begun to curse, and one had collapsed to his knees, quietly sobbing. She moved over to him, touching his shoulder gently. "Excuse me, is there anything I can do to help?"

The soldier looked up at her, then slowly shook his head. "I, I doubt even the angel of healing can bring back the dead."

"What's wrong?" she asked, frowning a little pensively now and trying hard to ignore the nickname, knowing this wasn't the time to make an issue of it. This didn't seem to be the kind of reaction that a soldier would have if they lost someone in battle, especially someone like this young man, who she had only recently healed himself.

"It's those damned columns, Miss Potter," another soldier said. "They, they finally did do something beyond brainwashing our fellow Egyptians they... your father, Lord Potter, he was right. He and Miss Granger, they were right all along..." The other trooper, who had brought the news from the headquarters, broke off, visibly steeling himself before going on. "The pillars, they killed them all, miss."

"W, what?" Asia exclaimed, her eyes widening in alarm and her exhaustion disappearing under shock.

A nearby wizard, a squad leader with a leprechaun of his own, came over, limping slightly. Since his wound hadn't been life-threatening, Asia hadn't seen to the man personally, but it looked like it would be fine in a day or two.

"The columns activated, Miss Potter, a secondary enchantment within them, I mean," The Auror, an Egyptian himself, said in a dull, stunned tone of voice. "The enchantments within them, they were apparently based on the idea of human sacrifice. All the people within their radius died."

Asia stumbled back, one hand going into her mouth, the other clutching her rosary in shock. "But, but why!"

"That's either not known yet or hasn't been shared yet with us lower rankers, Miss Potter. But Lord Potter had already ordered the destruction of as many as he could as well out from Damanhur, despite the nonmagical Major General not wanting him to. The dragon and the fox creature joined in too. But they weren't able to do as much damage as we could've hoped for. It's... we still saved millions, but we might've just lost even more millions."

Asia stumbled back, then muttered something under her breath before touching her rosary and making the sign of the cross. "I will, I will pray for them."

She turned away, staring blankly down at her hands, and then looked up at the magical sun above them as the first hint of real dawn began to appear to the east. Then Asia looked

down her hands once more, bringing them up to clasp her rosary. "What would you have me do, Oh Lord? What would you have me do?"

That thought wound its way through Asia's mind for a few seconds, and then, she smiled. It was a tremulous thing that smile, full of worry and fear, but also iron-hard determination. *What you have always asked of me. What I have always demanded of myself. What I can do, to do good.*

She looked around, then saw Issei nearby, looking strained as she stared blankly down the street, obviously also grappling with the enormity of what had happened.

Moving towards him, Asia gently tapped him on the shoulder. "Issei-kun, do you think you could fly us to where Father is?"

"I'll join you." Yubelluna hopped down from a nearby rooftop, having been resting up there since the battle had ended. She looked mentally exhausted and had nearly collapsed into Mittelt's arms when the short Fallen had met with her, taking over the aerial defense of the city. She had also rather grimly asked a few Aurors to set a suicide watch on Abraxas and the other high command. That was the last thing they needed right now. "I, I need to see this for myself, I think."

Asia nodded, and the three of them went in search of some broomsticks.

OOOOOOO

Harry was still there in Kafir El Sheikh, staring at the dead when he felt other people beginning to arrive. He had heard that Yasaka had come through from Danan, so her arrival didn't surprise him. Nor did Yubelluna, the feel of her arms around him giving some comfort as he just stared at the dead, his mind blank with the horror of what had occurred. For a moment, all three just clung to one another, wondering what the hell was going to happen now, what they could have done differently to prevent this.

Only Asia's arrival snapped Harry out of his despair. She moved around him and into the mass of dead, looking at them sorrowfully, going down on one knee to close eyes or gently touch hands. Sorrowfully, but with determination growing as she took in the sight, tears falling from her gentle eyes. "Asia? Asia, you, you shouldn't be here," Harry stammered, pushing to his feet, gently removing Yasaka and Yubelluna's arms from around him as he reached forward to stop Asia from going deeper into the mass of dead.

Turning to him, Asia showed him the same tremulous smile she'd been wearing since the group had left Alexandria, a smile that frankly worried everyone when they saw it. Staring at it from nearby, even Issei shivered. Normally having a girl, even one who wasn't all that stacked, pressing against his back as Asia had due to the flying broomstick they were using, would have been amazing. But Asia hadn't spoken at all, nor had her expressions strayed overmuch from that same weak seeming smile.

“Father, these columns, are they dead?”

Harry nodded, his mind focusing once more through the miasma of despair as he reached her, one hand coming up to pull her away. “Yes, the pillars are dead. Whatever magic was with them, it was a one-shot thing.”

“I see. So it can’t hurt anyone else? Even if they are within its area of influence? And even if they, um, they believed in its false promises?” Asia questioned insistently.

No lovey, it, no. None of the pillars can hurt anyone ever again.” Harry sighed, pulling his hand back from where he had been about to take Asia’s arm, gesturing to the dead. “The hurt has already happened.”

“But hurt and pain can be healed, Father.” Without another word, Asia knelt there among the dead, pressing her hands together in prayer, her rosary held between them as she scrunched her eyes closed. Dawn Healing instantly appeared on her fingers, and then they began to glow so bright that everyone there had to turn away for a moment.

“Asia,” Harry made to speak but then paused, staring at his most self-effacing and shy daughter as she looked back at him, her own light green eyes staring into his emerald ones over the growing light of her Sacred Gear. Harry had never seen that look of raw determination on her face before, and the sight of it stopped his throat.

He knew now what she was going to try, what Asia would fail at. There were too many dead, far, **far** too many, and they still didn’t know the full extent of what had been done to them. There was a limit even to a Balance Breaker like Dawn Healing, and the cost to Asia would be extreme, very much so. *But that doesn’t mean that Asia won’t try, and that doesn’t mean she couldn’t succeed with help.*

Moving forward, Harry breathed in, centering himself as he gathered all of his magic before moving around and placing his hands on Asia’s shoulders from behind. He then began to push out his magic into her, in a way he had rarely done before, feeling the magic thus shared being funneled into Dawn Healing under Asia’s will.

Understanding, Yasaka and Yubelluna instantly moved forward to do the same, touching Asia’s upper arms under where Harry’s hands lay. They hadn’t made the intuitive leap that Harry had, but they knew that Asia was up to something.

Issei watched this with a frown, turning away when a nearby Auror asked, “What are they trying to do?”

Around him, Issei saw many other people, arriving Aurors and other survivors, also looking confused. But the young pawn just shook his head. “I, I don’t... I can feel the magic they’re putting out, but what they’re trying to do, I’ve got no idea.”

“Isn’t it obvious?” The survivor Harry had talked to upon arriving at the pillar earlier asked. He gestured to another soldier, who had arrived with a band of Shinsengumi from Damietta to see what had happened here and report back to Sala. They had told him about Asia, and with that knowledge and how Lord Potter had reacted to the disaster, what they were trying to do seemed simple enough to understand. “I think they’re trying to perform a miracle.”

Survivor and Auror alike stared at the speaker. Before this night, the wizards might’ve scoffed at the idea of miracles. But they had seen a lot that didn’t fit into their world views, their basic understanding of magic tonight. So as they turned to look at Harry and Asia, the two centers of most of the positive events beyond their previous understanding, they began to wonder.

Wizards didn’t really have a religion per se. They had ancestor worship, as Harry had once pointed out. And yet, as the soldiers around them knelt down, as the magic continued to build, the wizards and witches present also bowed their heads. They didn’t pray, but they did wish fervently to see one more wonder this dawn.

Even the few leprechauns present doffed their hats and bowed their necks, Not in prayer, so much as in acknowledgment of the great gamble about to occur. “Good luck, High King,” one of them muttered, “Good luck.”

For several minutes, the power grew as Yasaka, who was at peak condition at this point, and Harry, who most decidedly wasn’t, poured all of their own magic into Asia, with Yubelluna adding her own, albeit much smaller amount of magic into the mix. Their magic joined Asia’s own magic and soul as it poured from her into Dawn Healing.

Nor was this power coming from just Asia, Harry, Yasaka and Yubelluna alone. Because in the hour it took for the power to build in Asia to the breaking point, so too had word of what Asia was attempting spread. Leprechauns were notorious gossips.

After the night they’d had, the surviving Egyptians needed something to believe in. They had seen horror, now they hoped against all evidence for a miracle. When a person hopes without evidence, they call upon faith. Before this night, those prayers would have gone to the Heaven System, adding to its power.

Now? Now, Harry had already proven to be on the side of good and to hold the power of a god.

Now? Now Asia Potter had proven to be an angel in human disguise.

Thus hundreds of thousands of Egyptians sent their prayers not just to Allah but to those they took to be His avatars in this, Egypt’s darkest hour. And unlike Akhenaten and Nefertiti, Harry was already a god, if only technically. He didn’t need an elaborate ritual to take power from belief. Although Harry himself didn’t know it, all he needed was someone to believe in him.

When Asia spoke, her voice was a clarion call heard from one side of Egypt to the other, taut with the strain of containing the power but as bright and clear as the dawn itself. “Dawn Healing, Balance Breaker, **Fate’s Overthrow!**”

OOOOOOO

In the hidden pocket dimension hidden beneath the earth of Greece that bore his name, Hades faced off against Lucifer and his peerage. He had been somewhat distracted by the events in Egypt, but even so, the speed with which the Devils had pushed through the external defenses of his realm had surprised him. Then they had completely bypassed the maze, bested his Cerberus without even slowing, and then burst into his own castle.

At first, Hades had assumed that Sirzechs had bought into his own hype as a so-called Super Devil. That when it came to a direct confrontation, even with Sirzechs being backed by his peerage, Hades would have more than enough raw power to deal with them. But that turned out to not be the case. The rest of his peerage was not called the strongest Peerage without reason, and Sirzechs’ Bishop, Macgregor, had devised a spell that grounded much of Hades’ powers, siphoning it off into his dimension. This meant that Hades could only use about two-thirds of his power.

Macgregor Had paid for this, of course. His corpse was currently cooling sans its head and upper body nearby. Likewise, several others had been hurled away, while Sirzechs and Hades exchanged blow after blow, punch after punch. The Devil was getting the worst of it, but Hades had already realized that his lack of personal combat experience (the last time he’d fought someone like this had been back before the coming of Christianity) was also holding him back. *As is the fact my only ally is Typhon.*

The Titan had been one of the last children of Gaia and had been made to curtail the powers of the Gods. Zeus and Poseidon, in particular, had been abusing their powers. But the Sons of Chronos had been able to overcome him together, and since then, the Titan’s power and strength had been sealed deep below Hades.

The Titan was huge, even shrunk to fight here in Hades’ realm, standing near to four stories at the shoulders. His body looked somewhat like a brontosaurus, with four legs, a fat body and a long tail. But there, the likeness ended as arms sprouted from all around Typhon, each ending in large, powerful hands, their fingers tipped with claws. And instead of one head, Typhon had ten long necks that ended in lizard-like heads, each mouth containing so many teeth they seemed malformed.

The many-headed, many-handed Titan was busy currently dueling with Beowulf and Surtr Second. Beowulf was a master at facing monsters, and he and Surtr Second were doing much better than Hades had expected. *Even as weak as we are in comparison to what we were before I lost all my believers, this is somewhat humiliating,* Hades thought, smacking aside a beam of Power of Destruction, then returning a magic blast of his own, purple and glowing

green. The Power of Destruction ate into the magic shield of his defense even as he batted it away, but Sirzechs yelled as the bolt of necrotic magic slammed into his armor. Luckily that armor had been made and enchanted by his friend, Ajuka, and though it melted away, it defended Sirzechs enough to let him dodge the next few bolts, small but insanely powerful.

“Dance, dance foul one! Foul Devil, the evil of the one who took Persephone from me, die, like the world will like everything must!” Hades howled, his frayed sanity breaking for just a moment under the impact of facing the rush of direct combat after so long.

Then even as he nearly killed Enku with another attack and blasted Grayfia out of the air, searing her devil wing to nothing but rotting flesh, Hades stumbled, gasping, and all of them paused, staring at tiny lights suddenly appearing out of the walls, floor and ceiling of Hades’ castle.

While even Fate’s Rewind could not re-create souls, it could do something else: it could reclaim the souls who had begun their next step on the Wheel of Rebirth and return them to the bodies of the previously dead. While that didn’t matter much to those slain by Akhenaten’s horrid Harvest, the souls of nearly all those who had died before that throughout the horrid night in Egypt were suddenly reclaimed from Hades, Heaven and the rest of the system of Rebirth.

The number of souls wasn’t much in the great scheme of things, but the sudden reversal threw Hades off, allowing Lucifer to get in a blow that otherwise would have been blasted away or negated by the devil King. The Power of Destruction seared through Hades’ armor and magic, nearly removing his leg from the hip. Even a God such as he couldn’t simply take a blow from the Power of Destruction as powerfully condensed and controlled as Sirzechs could make it.

Then, Grayfia was there, a similar attack from her hammering into his defenses in the shape of a bar of ice so cold it was almost like dried ice in its properties. But Hades was still just too powerful, and while his leg was nearly falling off at this point, Hades concentrated through the haze of agony, setting aside the mystery of what had just happened to thousands upon thousands of souls that should have been under his control.

He thrust out his hand, blasting through the ice Grayfia was hurling at him and then closed instantly battering aside three more attacks, green-colored deific magic knitting his almost ruined leg back in place.. Grayfia tried to dodge, but with her wings, as horribly wounded as they were, Grayfia couldn’t move any faster than Hades. She thrust out one final attack, but while Hades blocked a blast of Power of Destruction, he ignored her attack. His armor cracked and shattered around his arm, but Hades’ bony hand grabbed at Grayfia’s out-thrust arm.

A desiccation curse instantly began its work, and Grayfia screamed in agony before Souji and Surtr crashed into him, hurling him away from their Queen. He laughed, holding out his hands to either side. battering them aside, slaying Beowulf as he did with a blast too wide for

the Knight to evade. "That's right, that's right! Fight, fight against the death you know that awaits you. How very human of you."

But distracted as he had become, Hades hadn't realized that the twosome fighting Typhon had not been fighting him so much as removing his chains. Now the last of the magical chains which had bound it fell away

The samurai Knight of Lucifer, Souji Okita, smiled up at the now freed Titan, collapsing to the side. *I really hope I was right about this!* "Now, I wonder, with you free, what will you do, Typhon, last son of Gaia?"

The answer was obvious a second later as the massive beast stepped over his body, batting aside Surtr Second gently before quickly gaining momentum as it charged towards Hades, its many jaws snapping angrily as it spoke for the first time in the battle. "You and Zeus, Poseidon, all of you! All of you believing yourselves masters of the universe, Lords of every domain you see! When all you are and all you have ever been you owe to humanity and Mother! I can feel her tremors, her screams of anguish from here! Too many gods, too many creatures of power on her surface when mother has become old and frail. You all need to be taught a lesson, starting with you, Brother!"

With that, the many-headed Titan crashed into Hades, bringing him to earth. Hades screamed as jaws bit down hard while claws slashed and tore at his sides. Meanwhile, dozens of hands pressed Hades down, keeping him still to let Typhon bite him.

Lucifer and his remaining peerage all piled in two, but even Lucifer found himself almost a side character as Typhon and Hades battled. All of them were thrown away like so much chaff, while Lucifer found himself blasted by another Necrotic spell which finished off his armor and nearly tore his arm off while the others groaned in pain, dealing with broken bones and worse.

But Grayfia, easily the worst injured of them all, refused to just sit on the sidelines, and moving to Sirzechs, she kicked him lightly in the side. "Get up, my lord. We are not done here yet."

"Mou, so cold Grayfia-chan." Lucifer pushed himself to his feet from where he had been hurled, looking over at his wife, who was holding in a magical attack in one hand, ice flashing out from her hand while the other rested at her side, desiccated and dead. "I had thought we've seen our last war. How I wish that was true."

"We must finish this now, husband," Grayfia answered, ignoring his words as they were superfluous. "Slay him, and we do away with a large portion of the problems facing the human realm, a dagger hidden in the dark."

"Poetic," Lucifer grunted, pulling himself to his feet. He watched as the Titan was rocked by several point-blank magically assisted punches from the cadaverous god, only to come back and snap at Hades again. "Now, any idea how to do that?"

“Call in reinforcements,” Grayfia answered instantly as if it was the simplest thing in the world.

Lucifer looked at his wife, then around them, suddenly beginning to smile. From here, he could see the anti-teleportation and defensive wards, and he could destroy them. And for something like this, I wager I can get Ajuka away from his labs. “Have I mentioned how much I love you recently? Here’s hoping that Ajuka isn’t too busy right now.”

OOOOOOO

A blast of powerful magic splashed out from Asia. It moved from one end of Egypt to the other, and where it touched, the dead came alive once more, not like an Infreri or mummy would have, but alive and fully healed to stare at the dawn splashing over them from the east.

Of course, the spell couldn’t heal everything. If the person had lost his head and heart, the spell couldn’t heal them. Nor would it bring someone back to life who was still buried or impaled. But if someone had died through blood loss, suffocation, or any manner of horrible wounds, they were indeed brought back to life.

Hundreds of thousands were thus saved across Egypt, particularly where Harry and the others had destroyed the pillars and allowed the monsters access to the previously protected zones. People were brought back to life, staring around them in shock, unable to understand what had happened, how they had been given a second chance at life.

And yet... and yet... those hundreds of thousands, those million souls, were not the tens of millions that Asia had hoped to save. The lives of the people who had believed in the Pharaoh, who had given of themselves willingly in worship, they were gone. Their souls had not been taken by Hades or the Heaven System, not returned to the Wheel of Resurrection. They had been snuffed out as entirely as if each and every one of them had been struck by the Killing Curse. The energy of their souls had been converted in a truly unholy manner to raw magical power, fueling the ascension of Nefertiti and Akhenaten. They were dead, and not even a Balance Breaker like Dawn Healing could bring them back.

Indeed, what Asia was currently doing was still well beyond what any sacred gear should be able to do, and even setting aside the power necessary for it, there was always a cost to going above and beyond like this.

Yubelluna slumped to the ground insensate, so exhausted she was asleep before she hit the ground. Yasaka stumbled, slumping to her knees and then to her face, and Harry stumbled backward, his own magic drained to such a degree that such that he had never felt more, falling to his knees even as he opened his arms in preparation to catch Asia.

Asia too collapsed, looking for all the world as dead as the men and women around them, collapsing back into Harry’s waiting arms, bearing them both to the earth. And on her fingers Dawn Healing, shattered. Their power entirely expended, never to return...

End Chapter