

First of all, I owe everyone who wanted to see more of this fic an apology. The clan has been gearing up to welcome a newcomer, and I was pulled into helping prepare the house for the young one. Lots of moving things, painting, new walls up, then issues with the bathroom, flooring, the list goes on. I was supposed to get this chapter out in August, but while work on it began then, I didn't finish the chapter until late in September because I refused to prioritize it over the poll winners. Then I realized a major issue with what I had written in terms of what needed to happen in what order, because I never want to fall into the trope of writing villains unable to react to events, so I had to rewrite segments again. Thus, I basically have bits written for the next two chapters after this one written so maybe the next chapters won't take as long? We will see.

Regardless, I was only able to send it off to my editor for this work on the sixth of October. I hope that in the future, I will have more time, but I just don't know.

This has been edited by [Nad Destroyer](#) and myself with Grammarly. He helped a lot, pointing out a few weird copy/paste errors and incomplete sentences.

Chapter 33: Magical Research Goes Zoom

A school's rumor mill was a very odd thing, especially in Japan or at a school like Hogwarts, where all life revolved around the school, and each school was its own small social system that was almost entirely separate from the rest of the world. Such was the importance schools had in Japan, and of course, Hogwarts was a boarding school.

Harry well understood the power of celebrity status in such a society. While somewhat bemused at the whole Two Great Ladies thing at first, he had gotten used to the fact that Akeno and Rias were held in special regard by the student body for reasons that had only a surface connection to why he adored them. He was always amused by the waves of sighs and longing glances the two trailed behind them on a daily basis. He even normally found the rumors that reached his ears as a teacher funny.

For example, the school mysteries were hilarious, especially once you knew what had caused them. An unknown cat girl roaming around at night looking for souls to take had been started by Koneko searching for her cat familiar, who was a tiny white kitten. The flying witch rumor started one time when Lily came by months ago and somehow convinced Rias to fly her around, with Lily cackling all the while. Although Rias's devil-style illusion spell had meant no one saw them, Lily's cackling had not been so hidden.

Not so funny was the series of rumors Akeno shared with Harry and Rias one afternoon in the days following their return from Egypt.

This was the first day that the real Rias was in school since they had returned to Kuoh. She had decided to use a few days in a row to address some clan-type work in the Underworld before coming back that morning, replacing Yubelluna, who had been wearing her guise for those few days.

Akeno, in turn, had been very busy. Along with Kalawarner, she was part of the think tank, but unlike Yubelluna, who could act as Rias covered by one of Harry's simulacrums, Akeno had simply decided she liked coming to school enough to put up with things. Thus, Harry transferred her from Danan and the think tank there to school every morning and then back late at night. It had been somewhat jarring for Akeno in many ways, thanks to the time dilation, but she had still enjoyed being a regular schoolgirl, using it like a break from her real work with Padma and the rest.

Now that her best friend was here, though, Akeno could have even more fun, and as she looked across the tea table between her, Harry and Rias, a wicked smile appeared on her face. Ever since he had taken up the position as the ORC's advisor, Harry had taken his lunches in their clubroom, trusting to the fact that there were always several of the club's members to keep any rumors at bay, but this had not quite worked out, as Akeno was about to explain, in her own way. "So tell me, are either of you going to do anything about the rumor that the two of you are together romantically that's been going around the school? And that 'Potter-sensei' might have gotten you pregnant?"

The busty, black-haired woman had timed it perfectly, speaking up just as Rias was sipping from a cup of tea her Queen had prepared.

The redhead instantly spluttered, nearly sending some of the tea across the table at Harry, and began to cough to clear her throat, her words coming out in a series of gasps. "W, what? I, I w, wasn't even here, Akeno! What's Yubelluna been doing that started that rumor!?"

"Does it have anything to do with the way Yubelluna was rubbing her stomach on the first day she took Rias's place?" Harry asked calmly, although he was frowning, and he might have stared at Akeno wide-eyed for a moment. After all, the school year wasn't over, and while he had already handed in his resignation and would be cheerfully moving on to other things, Harry did still feel an obligation to the school to see the year out before going on to larger and more important projects. He had talked with Rias about that very thing, and she had agreed at the time.

Although, given our actions back on the island, Rias obviously rethought that agreement. Not that I objected. Quite the opposite, really, he thought dryly. Still, my simulacrums can cover Rias's belly if...

“Some of the first hints of this rumor did, hence the pregnancy aspect. The rest has to do with this morning. Apparently, several people saw you drop Lily off at school along with Kunou and Teddy.” Akeno’s purple eyes gleamed with amusement as she looked at her lover and her sister from another mother, her words interrupting Harry’s thoughts. “The way you are with Lily is rather obviously motherly to many, and some suspect you have your own little one on the way because of that.”

As Rias sipped some more tea to help her recover from her coughing fit, Akeno went on, always enjoying teasing Rias. “The rumor mill has three different scenarios pairing the two of you together. One of them, the one with the least traction, is from the girls who have always detested you and me for our following among the student body.” Her lips curled into a contemptuous sneer, her purple eyes lighting up with sadistic delight. “And the fact we’re curvier, with better skin, better personalities, more intelligence, better asses--”

“Yes, I know the group you’re talking about, Akeno. You don’t have to go on about them. A rivalry only exists if both sides acknowledge it,” Rias interjected, then smirked a tiny bit. “Besides, it isn’t as if we need to rub our superiority into their faces to prove that. We do that just by walking down the school’s hallway every day, let alone everything else. The only rival I’ll ever acknowledge is Sona-chan, not those worthless girls who scowl at us from around corners.”

“I was going to say that you are obviously far more mature when it comes to school rivals than I was at Hogwarts with Draco, but then you had to ruin it,” Harry lamented, shaking his head, before looking at Akeno, one eyebrow rising. “I’m not going to like this rumor, am I?”

“Of the three different scenarios the student body has come up with, I think you will only ‘like’ one of them,” Akeno chuckled, holding up her hands to make air quotes. “And that is certainly not the first one. The one from our one-sided rivals among the student body wants people to believe that you are trying to horn in on Harry and Yasaka’s love life. Two widowed individuals who are trying to make a new relationship together, only for a younger girl to come around and try to seduce poor, innocent Harry, getting pregnant to trap him into marrying you.”

“... How do they know about Yasaka? I don’t think she’s ever been by school, has she?” Rias asked, honestly having trouble remembering if anyone at the school had ever seen Yasaka in person. *Perhaps walking around town while on dates with Harry after her tether to Kyoto was removed. But not at school.*

Rias then turned to Harry, a small, seductive smirk on her face, seeing him still snickering under his breath at the term ‘poor innocent Harry’ to himself. “And I agree with Harry, poor and innocent or two words that can never be used to describe him considering how rich he is and what he has done to the pair of us and the others whenever we have the opportunity for some adult-type fun.”

“Oh, I completely agree! And I would cheerfully raise my hand and say we don’t have nearly enough time for such fun.” Akeno agreed cheerfully, biting her lip seductively as she looked at Harry, running one finger down her cleavage for a moment before shaking her head and going back to teasing the twosome. Akeno was normally so mentally exhausted when she returned from Danan that she just cuddled with Harry instead of anything more rigorous during the few hours after school she remained on Earth before transporting back. *Well, that and watching that stupid American comedy about the police academy with him and Lily yesterday. Nothing quite like American comedies to turn your brain off.* That had made them kind of late to head back to Danan, but Akeno couldn’t bring herself to care.

“As for our dear foxy lady, the students don’t know about Yasaka personally, but they do know that Lily and Kunou treat each other like sisters. From there, the rumor that Kunou’s mom was seeing Lily’s dad started at the elementary school and somehow spread. No doubt through familial connections,” the black-haired woman explained, shaking her head.

“Well, so long as that rumor doesn’t shift into all three of us being in a relationship somehow, I suppose it isn’t too close to the mark to be worrisome. If it does, even having lunch like this would become troublesome, regardless of your telling the teachers several times how much you like our sofas, Harry,” Rias said, shaking her head. “And the other two?”

“The next one is the least amusing to me, as it is so prosaic,” Akeno rolled her eyes. “In fact, it is so normal that with our lot, it probably is the least likely of the three. It’s built on the fact that we started that rumor that you wanted to be a teacher and suggests that you offered to tutor Lily, which turned into starting to treat the girl like she was your own. That eventually led you into Harry’s bed, obviously.”

“You’re right. That is a little too normal. Although I will cheerfully declare to loving Lily like she was my own,” Rias stated, smiling fondly over at Harry, who returned the look in equal measure. “It still amazes me that she’s taken to calling me Mum as much as she has.”

Looking at the two of them, Akeno had to hold back a wide, loving smile of her own. It was clear to Akeno from the moment she first attempted to join this relationship, and then again when she had matured enough, and Harry had changed enough to allow Akeno in, that while Harry had come to truly love and appreciate Akeno for her own personality during their time apart as well as Yasaka and the others. Yet at the same time, it was obvious Harry nearly worshiped Rias for the simple fact that Rias had opened her heart to Lily at the same time she became interested in Harry, stepping into a mother-like role for Lily while also slowly becoming a wife to Harry. *And that road goes two ways, she thought. Rias worships Harry, too. They’re so cute together. It makes me want to tease them all the more.*

Her smile twisting into a smirk, Akeno interrupted the moment by continuing on. "As for the third rumor, that one is my favorite because it is the silliest. And yet also a little too close to home."

The two of them looked at her expectantly, and Akeno snickered. "That rumor states that somehow, Harry and Rias used magic, demonic magic, mind you, to go back in time, at which point you married. Rias then gave birth to Lily, only for Rias to somehow lose her memory and be transported back to the present day for some reason. The rumor mongers aren't so clear on how all of that came to be, although the strangest idea I have heard has you somehow extracting the morals and tact from the Perverted Duo and somehow sacrificing that aspect of their souls for the power to travel back in time. Why you would want to go back in time isn't said, but the rumor finishes up by stating that due to the gods of fate, you two have met again and fallen in love once more, only for neither of you to be able to be open with your feelings thanks to the tragic teacher-student divide."

"That was perhaps the most convoluted thing I've ever heard," Harry said, his tone torn between horror and admiration. "Whoever came up with that one might have a decent future ahead of him or her as a fantasy author. Although personally, I've never liked the idea of time travel. The whole trousers of time issue, you understand."

Rias simply laughed, lightly kicking Akeno in the shin. "Why do I get the impression, Akeno, that you somehow pushed all of those rumors along?"

"Mah, little old me? Would I do something like that?" The amused looks Akeno got in return said that most definitely she would, which Akeno acknowledged with a giggle before she admitted, "Actually, I didn't. If I wanted to start rumors, I would have made myself the star of them. Maybe even have a rumor start about how Harry's had me bent over his desk a time or two, or maybe--"

"Those were scenarios we played out in the privacy of the island of Aine Fand, not here on school grounds," Harry pointed out repressively. "I am a teacher here, and that would just be asking for trouble, especially given you're a student."

"Hmmm... but that would just add to the thrill. And judging by how you're shifting around, you agree, lover. I wonder what I would find if I crawled under this table, hmm?"

"While you certainly deserve some disciplinary actions, I can tell that would completely defeat the purpose. Perhaps I should withhold such things or make you watch as Yubelluna or Yasaka, and I act out a few more of your fantasies, leaving you in the cold?"

Akeno and Harry continued to tease one another, with Harry asking if there were any rumors about the two of them. To his sad lack of surprise, Akeno said there were two rumors pairing her and Harry together, although both of them were older than the ones around Rias.

As her husband and sister-wife spoke, Rias fell silent. Her hand slid down to her stomach as she thought about one aspect of the rumors, something that Akeno noticed out of the corner of her eye.

It wasn't certain yet, but everyone in the clan knew that Rias was probably pregnant already. Harry had been very **thorough** about making sure of that during their first night on the island, on top of making certain all of the other girls had an equal amount of his affection. *Godly endurance indeed.* Rias would be the first of them to have a child, with Yasaka being next.

By a day if we're going by when the two of them were creampie'd, anyway, Akeno thought now with some amusement, remembering Rias coming in with some breakfast for Akeno, Yasaka and Harry the morning of the first day they'd spent on the island. The three of them had stayed in bed a bit later than the others that morning, but when Rias had opened the door, she, Yube and Kala had heard Yasaka shout about how she wanted Harry's kits as he came inside of her.

Yasaka had turned towards the door, and the raised eyebrow Rias was giving her, smirking slightly before kissing Harry lightly on the lips and then gesturing Rias towards the bed. "I promised that you'd be the first to get pregnant. I never told you how long I would wait before asking for my own kits, Rias-han."

"Well played. Although that just means we'll have a second generation of Lily and Kunou. I expect that our children will get along like a house on fire irrespective of what gender they are," Rias had said before placing the pancakes next to the bed and sliding in with the other two. Akeno, who had been watching this from the other side of the bed having already had her session with Harry, had then leaned over, grabbing at the syrup, a naughty idea coming to her.

Then had turned into a very fun morning, even if making love to Harry right beside where Rias and Yasaka were doing the same had been somewhat unusual. Still, she and Rias had experimented with Harry before, so it wasn't exactly a big hardship. Akeno simply did not find the female figure as attractive as the male, nor their touch as arousing. That did mean that she was turned off by the other girls around.

Now, though, Akeno shivered a little at how happy Rias and Yasaka were at the idea of becoming mothers, or in Yasaka's case, becoming a mother again. That was very much not her scene. *I'm perfectly content with my position as teasing big sister, thank you very much. It will be*

decades, perhaps centuries down the line, before I am willing to have a child. I know I will want one eventually, but with our lifespans, what is the rush?

Harry had also noticed Rias's movements, although he hadn't stopped bantering with Akeno, giving her most of his attention even as one hand wound around Rias's shoulders, hugging her gently to his side. Akeno smiled appreciatively at that, but when Rias seemed to break out of her momentary revelry, Harry called a halt to the fun. "Now that you have had your entertainment at our expense, Akeno, how is the research going? Are you, Kala, Hermione, and the rest getting along?"

While Kala was part of the think tank due to her ability with blacksmithing and working runes into objects, Akeno and Tsubaki were part of the think tanks due to her mastery of Onmyodo and Ankhsera magic and runes, but Akeno's fellow Queen stayed with the think tank while Akeno went back and forth, leaving Kuoh late at night and returning early in the day after spending several days worth of time in Danan. Tsubaki's presence at school had been taken by a young kitsune Yasaka had found to step into the role under one of Harry's simulacrum, having proven within a few hours of meeting Tsubaki that she could play the role of the vice president of the student council very well, unlike the pair that attempted to try out for the role of Akeno.

However, while kitsune loved to trick people, they also loved to play pranks on them. Now, Akeno had to wonder if Tsubaki would appreciate some of the rumors that the stand-in had decided to put in place. During school hours, the young kitsune acted just as Tsubaki would but afterward was a different story. *I am not certain which rumor Tsubaki would like less, the rumor of her planting kick me signs on the unpopular teacher's backs and stealing cheat sheets or the idea she is a streaker. Certainly, Sona-chan's reaction to both those rumors has been hilarious, although young Aisha's ignoring her hasn't won the young kitsune any points.*

Kiba and Tonks were also not back yet from Egypt, although both were supposed to be back that evening from what Harry had told everyone that morning after returning with Akeno from Danan. Kiba was also the only one of the group who was actually not replaced by someone else under a simulacrum. He had officially come down sick, which, here in Japan, was a huge deal, as spreading sickness was even worse than being forced to take time off.

Thankfully, when it came to thinking about Egypt, the Wizarding World had devised a solution to their own Interdict. Shackbolt had handed that solution over to Harry prior to his clan and their allies returning home. They were called Dispensations, special small ruby marble coins on necklaces, enchanted to keep the Interdict from impacting their minds. They had been made initially as... well, a means to remember what was going on just in case. The Interdict had been added into the Wizarding World Wards nearly a hundred years after those wards had been raised, and at the time, there was a lot of concern that they wouldn't be able to take it down,

and indeed at first, during testing, they hadn't been able to. Hence, having some people being able to figure out what everyone else involved in the project could no longer talk about was a good thing, just in case.

Harry had nodded, smiled and thanked Shackbolt, all the while internally screaming, *THE BLOODY FUCK! Why didn't we know about those beforehand!? It would have made getting some more backup a lot easier.* Regardless, there were enough such enchanted coins to go around the Kuoh Group and more than a handful besides. So now, all of them carried the coins on necklaces under their clothing.

"We are making some headway, but it is extremely slow going. That is despite the time dilation you have set in place between Danan and Earth, Harry," Akeno reported.

"What was the dilation again?" Rias asked, holding up a hand to forestall Akeno going on for a moment.

"10 to 1," Harry answered simply.

That meant that every ten hours in Danan was one hour on Earth.

Rias stared at Akeno. "You and Kala can monopolize all of Harry's time whenever you stop in, regardless of anything else. That is just crazy. You're essentially over there for around eighty hours every night. And the others are spending even more time on this. You all must have spent almost as long on this already as we did when constructing the wards here in Kuoh."

Everyone bar Akeno that had been assigned or roped into joining the research team had not left Danan since being brought over. For Tsubaki, Padma, Kala and Luna, who had been involved from the beginning, that meant every day here, four or so since the project had begun, had been the equivalent of ten days. Hermione had joined them after a bare day spent acting as Harry's stand-in with the rest of the Wizarding World when Harry had stopped in to check how things were going. Since Tonks and Kiba had been up to the task, with Fleur, Bill, Ramagupta and Husukai, that had been fine by Harry. By this point, Harry didn't doubt she had taken over the whole project, although Tsubaki might have put up a fight for that position.

But Rias was wrong. Akeno spent twelve hours every day in Danan. That was five days over there to every day in Kuoh, and Akeno smiled, bowing her head in thanks to her friend, although a part of her perhaps would've liked to actually have a small argument with her friend on that score just because it would be fun. "When I have time to stay a full night, I will wholeheartedly take advantage of that. But back to the topic at hand, we've split into smaller teams: runes, Arithmantic and research teams. We have a general outline of a plan, but the details are still up in the air, as is some of the math, as Harry will no doubt tell you from when he and I stepped through to Danan yesterday."

Rias pulled away to turn to look at Harry, one eyebrow rising, and he shook his head with a faint sigh, remembering the incident in question. "They blew themselves up. Quite spectacularly..."

Flashback:

Harry and Akeno stepped away from the Fal Stone, looking around the area. While the Fal Stone itself had been moved at some point, the rest of the area directly around the stone was mainly unchanged from that morning to Harry, anyway. There were still a dozen small British-style camper vans set to one side serving as a home for all but Dutugamunu, brought in by Harry when the think tank initially transferred fully into Danan. There were several dozen small to large sand tables scattered around the area, with an equal number of whiteboards. Several large bookshelves stood nearby, looking even more odd than the rest of the think tank's possessions in the otherwise natural scene. However, in Harry's opinion, the fact there were dozens of articles of clothing, both men's and women's, hanging from a wire attached to a few trees well away from the rest and apparently being cleaned via a Wizard-type spell that made them all look alive was at least in the running for being a touch odder.

Yet what grabbed Harry's attention even more than that was the fact there didn't seem to be anyone around. Although over the top of a large table, Harry could see a large version of a regular rune etching tool flying, the end of it glowing with orange-colored magic. That, in turn, was within a large Protego, which Harry traced to either side to Padma and Hermione. "Huh... I wonder what they are up to."

"That is where the permanent runic plate was, where we would transfer those parts of the runic array we were working on at the time. That color is the color of Tsubaki's magic," Akeno mused, gazing at where her fellow queen was standing with several others across the experiment from where Harry and Akeno had appeared. "Although why they are doing it that way does not make me happy."

Harry nodded and was about to toss his own Protego in place when magic flashed up and into the rune etching tool from below. Even as Harry completed his spell, there was a loud *KRUMP* noise as something in the runic array being worked on went very wrong. The burst of magic was much larger than Harry had anticipated, though, shattering Luna and Hermione's shields and then Harry's own.

The outward edge of the explosion continued on, and Akeno squawked, throwing up her own shield as Harry did the same, one magical, the other a transfiguration of the ground into a wall of stone in front of them. The flash front slammed into and through all of the camper vans and everything else in the area, vaporizing everything but the metal within the camper vans, which became so much debris being hurled in every direction.

One such direction was right towards Hermione, whose eyes widened in shock and horror before Luna appeared out of a large flower behind her, tackling Hermione to the ground as the bushy-haired woman's shield failed at the impact. The pair rolled as they hit the ground, clinging to one another as the others who could react in time defended their fellows, Tsubaki and Luna's husband Rolf being the fastest among them.

The explosion did not stop for some time, roiling up and over where Akeno and Harry huddled, with Harry shifting his wall creation up and over them, creating a cave almost as it continued to roil above them. "What in the hell were they up to?"

"Mixing the Norse word for strength with the Ankhsera ward for up, I think? That was the last thing we were working on when I was here last. Who knows what caused this? Although I will note the testers did anticipate some kind of negative reaction," Akeno muttered, staring at the wall of stone less than a foot away from her face, the Fal Stone within inches of her feet. "Normally, I would enjoy being stuck in a small, enclosed space with you, Harry, but this is a bit much."

With another gesture, Harry transfigured the walls around them into a clear crystal. It was quite pretty, Harry thought, watching the explosion of magical power wash over them like this.

A moment later, Harry collapsed the transfigured cave back into the ground around them and stepped forward into the blasted, charred remains of the think tank's makeshift base. "Well, Hermione, Tsubaki, what have we learned?"

It was Dutugamunu who answered, standing while surrounded by wizards and witches who would normally disdain him as a nonhuman, all of them staring in shock as he bellowed. "What did I tell you!? There is no way Norse runes can work directly with Zoroastrian, you buffoons! I do not care what your books on runic theory state. Zoroastrian Magic Tongue is a dead language for a reason. It cannot work with anything else!"

End Flashback

"That was more than six days ago to me and the research team, and since then, we've called a halt momentarily on further experiments. Harry also brought in more people from MACUSA, magical architects, to build some permanent homes," Akeno explained as Rias shook her head with a wry laugh. "We have also learned that books might be wrong, something that took both Tsubaki and Hermione aback, hehe."

"So if you aren't blowing things up, what are you all doing?" Rias asked, still giggling.

"Hermione and a few other wizards and Tsubaki are still trying to see if our general idea is feasible via Arithmency."

Rias nodded at that, as it made sense. *Magic as math is amazing and something only Beelzebub-sama has ever used among devilkind.*

“Kala, Dutugamunu and two of the wizards Hermione brought in are working on the runic aspect, or rather, are building the tools to make the tools, so to speak. I join that group when I am there. Padma and Luna are two of the research team members, as is Cú when he’s around, and Momo, who, as you know, I bring with me every night. While Cú and Momo devote their time to going over the memories of being in Akhenaten’s underground pyramid and everyone’s notes about it, Padma and Luna set out to raid magical libraries across the Wizarding World.” Akeno smirked. “With your remit as temporary Emperor, they can access a lot of secret knowledge, research and so forth that groups like your British Unspeakables would normally be unwilling to share.”

“Apparently, in terms of the Unspeakables, at any rate, whoever forced those dozens of conflicting Magical Oaths on them had also put in an Oath about needing to help the Emperor if such a person was put into power over the Wizarding World during a crisis facing the very survival of the Wizarding World,” Harry answered at Rias’s confused look. “That was almost word for word, something Padma passed on before they set out yesterday. Regardless, we’re leaving that in their hands.”

“I know that the general idea is to shunt the magical energy boiling into Earth’s magisphere into Danan, but have you worked out any specifics?” Rias asked.

“Honestly, we have all agreed that is but one part of the problem. We also need to deal with the physical impact of the magical energy.” Akeno shook her head worriedly. “Padma brought in someone from America she called a Geomancer, and he says that the magisphere is starting to impact things a lot...deeper... than simply the disasters we are seeing around the globe.”

Those disasters had not stopped in the last few days. Quixotically, the Dragons Nest in Kyoto seemed to help, absorbing or directing the background magic of the world in a more controlled manner, thus shielding Honshu from the majority of the natural catastrophes happening elsewhere to a certain extent. The only small-scale disaster that had hit the main Japanese islands over the past few days was an earthquake down in Ryukyu. It hit without any warning and caused quite a bit of damage, but the rest of the main islands had yet to feel much beyond major waves and one even smaller earthquake up in Hokkaido.

That did not mean that Japan had not taken losses, though. The tunnel from Honshu to Hokkaido had collapsed utterly, and several of their cities had been hammered. The Kuril Islands, which Japan and Russia had long argued suzerainty over, had been hit by so many tsunamis that the Japanese had offered to remove anyone from the islands who wanted to

move, and many ethnic Annu and Japanese people took them up on it. The Russians had not done the same to Sakhalin Oblast, and it had caused yet another humanitarian crisis, one the American 7th fleet was forced to deal with, among several others.

Despite that, though, Japan's government had urged for calm. Schools were, obviously, still open, and most Japanese just went on about their lives, trying to ignore everything going on. To Harry's surprise, the normal Japanese people seemed to be following that suggestion, not worrying and assuming that whatever was going on would subside or the governments of the world could deal with it. This was a truly Japanese way of dealing with things that Harry could not understand and was thankful the Onmyouji did not follow.

Around the world, it had gotten to the point where normal, intelligent people were thinking all these disasters hailed the end of the world, some kind of biblical Armageddon. But there were a lot of crazies out there who are already saying it might be while also pointing fingers as to the true cause, the final straw that forced God to push the restart button.

"The damage from Ophis' errant magic is going deeper below the Earth's crust to the upper mantle in greater quantities. The Geomancer's named Professor Harkins, and he's MACUSA's leading expert on long-term earth-based magic and is an internationally accredited Transfiguration Master. Padma had that waiting for me when I brought her and Luna through to Egypt yesterday," Harry shook his head, even as he elaborated on what Akeno had said. "He says that as more time goes on, the more magic starts to impact the upper mantle. If it reaches... he used some kind of scientific term, I suppose you could call it critical mass. If the magic that has flooded into the magma layer reaches a certain point, then the reaction will become irreversible."

Akeno nodded grimly while Rias shuddered at the implications. "That's not good at all. There've only been a few earthquakes, and none of them above a seven on the Richter scale. Bad but survivable, especially since most of them have happened out in the ocean. What if an eight-pointer hits California on top of the seven-pointer that hit it a few weeks back? Most of America's non-naval resources are going to help their own because of that. Or worse, what if the Dragons Nest's protection fades? Japan's gotten lucky so far, it can't continue."

"Yasaka's working on that aspect, actually. She can help reinforce and direct the magic of the Dragon's Nest thanks to her bond to it. It's why she isn't around. But even that can only do so much." Harry sighed. "I just wish my knowledge of anything but runes and the Fal Stones was at all helpful to you all. I can control the Undertaking, and I can use my deific magic consciously to a certain degree, but there's a limit to how helpful that can be for this problem. While I might have some of his power, I'm nowhere as knowledgeable about the whole crossing dimensions thing as Manannán Mac Lir was, and simply using a Blessing to absorb all the excess magic is

way beyond me. And when it comes to runes, you, Yasaka, Hermione and Master Dutugamunu are all just as good as I am.”

“I think we will have to agree to disagree on that score, love,” Akeno said, even as she smiled at the compliment, reaching over to take Harry’s hand in hers and bringing it up to her mouth to kiss. If the topic of conversation wasn’t so serious, she might well have taken a moment to flirt with him in some way, always getting a minor thrill when they did it on school grounds on top of the actual thrill of flirting with Harry in the first place. The danger of discovery added a certain flavor to everything.

However, the topic of conversation was serious, and Akeno continued on. “So, the problem of reversing the damage is one aspect. We haven’t made much headway on that score just yet. There is no chance that a wide area repair spell would be able to penetrate deeply enough to do anything, even powered by... well, someone like you, Harry, or multiple someones. The spell would need a conscious mind behind it that understands the forces involved, and we just don’t have that yet. However, we made far more progress on the idea of removing the magic.”

“When you say you’ve made progress, I presume that means that your Arithmantic group has gotten a general idea of what is needed?” Rias guessed. “As well as figuring out what those Indian runes Harry received from Shiva do?”

“Exactly. Hermione and the others believe we need to construct the magical equivalent of a Faraday cage. Draw in and separate as much magic as possible from Earth’s background Magisphere and essentially ground the magic into the Faraday cage, then shunt the stored energy into Danan. We’ve worked it out mathematically, and that is partly why I wanted to talk to you today, Harry.” She winked at Rias. “As nice as it is to see the real Rias-chan and tease her, I did want to ask you how many Fal Stones you might be able to gather.”

As Harry had been called into school early that morning, it had been Lily who had gone through to pick up Akeno. This was actually the first time Harry had a chance to sit down and talk to Akeno that day.

Now, Harry frowned, thinking. “One in Egypt, one here, one in Ireland, one on our island. One we use to travel to Tir Na Nog, and the one originally on the large Australian-sized island. That’s six so far. There are several on Tir Na Nog that are currently unused. The Fal Stones in Ireland... I don’t know offhand how many of them there are, but part of my taking over the Undertaking in the first place allowed me to repair them, thus blocking out any magic coming through the Undertaking or Fae influence. So all of them should be useable. I have no idea offhand how many there are, though.”

“That... might be enough. We’re going to build on the power of five. As we all learned, it’s a far more stable number when mixing different magical schools than the more powerful seven or nine. That doesn’t seem, so far at least, to fade when you add in further magical schools. Five, twenty-five, one hundred and twenty-five, six-hundred and twenty-five,” Akeno said, holding her hand at a different height over the tea table to describe each number in turn. “Building on one another across several layers.”

“There’s no way that there’s six hundred and twenty-five Fal Stones! Heck, there’s no way there’s a hundred!” Harry said, shocked at the very idea. “I might be able to stand in for Mac Lir when it comes to transferring from one dimension to another, but that doesn’t mean that I know how to create and add more Fal Stones into the Undertaking! Between us, maybe me and Cú could **maybe** recreate most of the runes. How to add new Fal Stones into the ritual? No chance. Remember, Undertaking was created by several different Tuathans and both Fae Courts. We wiped out the Winter Fae, who in turn tried to wipe out the Summer Court. And while there are a few Tuathans around, none of them have any power or knowledge that could help us enlarge the Undertaking.”

“Cú has been a big help, I’ll admit, when he isn’t off exploring Danan anyway. He spends about two days with us, then goes off on his own for a bit before coming back,” Akeno shook her head, turning back to Harry’s main worry. “At any rate, we don’t think it needs that many Fal Stones. What the plan is so far is for us to create a layered kind of net around the earth. At each interval as you go from one area to the next, we will use a different magical school to connect from one aspect of the net to the next, with the ritual binding it all together. At that point, it will be your job to use the ritual to take the magic that the net has gathered and shift it into the Undertaking.”

“What’s to stop Ophis from just, well doing what she already has been doing? Just letting her magic fill the magisphere without any control,” Rias questioned. “Just because we can solve the symptom doesn’t mean we’ve dealt with the underlying sickness.”

We believe that once that is accomplished, the process will take on a life of its own. We’re... honestly, at that point, we’re leaning heavily into the ritual aspect for that, as well as some Indian concepts, but that is the gist of it.” Akeno tried not to look Rias in the eyes, knowing that really sounded far too much like they were relying on luck and Harry’s Blessing to do most of the work at that point.

“I see... Good work. I know how long it took you all to get even that far, love.” Now it was Harry’s turn to reach across the table and take Akeno’s hand, both of them this time, kissing the knuckles one after another.

At that, Akeno blushed heavily. While she had spent many a night with Harry making love, romantic overtures like that always got to Akeno for some reason. “Yes, *ahem*, w, well. Er, we um also shifted ourselves to a nearby island that Cú discovered. We, we decided we didn’t want to wreck any more of the real estate that may be handed over to the Egyptians in time, and since Cú had found us a new place to set up, we moved everything there relatively quickly.”

“That brings up two other points,” Rias said, leaning back in her chair and looking on with joy at her best friend and husband’s actions. She enjoyed seeing Harry being romantic with Akeno and the other girls almost as much as they enjoyed being the recipient of it. But her mind was on the conversation, and Rias asked, “We might need to do a study on Danan itself, Harry. I know you think that Danan will be able to handle that influx of magic, and I’m not disputing that. But we might need to know the effects it will have regardless. And the second point. What about Egypt? I haven’t been kept in the loop the past few days. I know they started to do consensus-based surveys but...”

Pulling away from where he had begun to nibble on Akeno’s thumb, Harry also leaned back, becoming serious again. “I think it was the fact that nearly three thousand children across Egypt have begun to exhibit magic that finally pushed the government into full gear on that score. Essentially, Egypt’s government approved our agreement. Going forward on the magical side of things, Egypt will become a kind of satrap to Danan and to me. They will have access to magical education, Danan, and everything else. I will need to go over there soon to create the binding Oath, so that none of the Egyptians can let slip the secret of magic to the rest of the world when the Interdiction is shut down, but that isn’t for another week or so, since we need to have a story in place and all the physical evidence and so forth match. That’s a huge project, despite how many Obliviators and so forth have been tasked to the job.”

He smiled then, shaking his head. “On a more personal level, we know some of those kids from the orphanage, and they need someplace to start learning magic. Sona and I have been going over plans that the magical engineers came up with for the school that is supposed to be centered here in Kuoh. Sona’s quite enthusiastic about that project, and I think she’s actually meeting with a few magical engineers from America today. Or is it tomorrow?” Harry shook his head. “I’ve been busy preparing a few rune-based surprises for our enemies when they try to break into Cocytus in my copious free time.”

The droll tone Harry used when he spoke those last four words had both girls laughing. “Anyway, beyond that, Sona apparently had already begun the process of advertising for magical teachers. Bill is heading up that project for her, vetting some teachers who already applied, while Charlie is already in town hunting for houses.”

"He's not going to give the game away in terms of the magical world, is he?" Rias asked quickly. "You told me several stories about his father and how utterly pans he was anything 'Muggle' despite being fascinated with the non-magical world."

"Charlie is much more at home in the non-magical world than his father. He told me that he dated a non-magical girl for a bit when he was working on the dragon reservation in Bulgaria." That had been a surprise to Harry when he heard about it, but really, Harry was more worried about the impression Charlie would make on the Japanese than anything else. He was, after all, a decently tall, broad-shouldered and bald foreigner, which fit quite a few stereotypes here in Japan of troublemakers.

"In any event, Kiba is supposed to come back tonight, local time anyway, from Egypt with Tonks. Bill, Fleur, Rama, and Husukai will stay there to help direct the cleanup and make certain that the wizards and witches brought in to help plant the evidence of the story they're going to create don't get a little too Obliviate happy."

"I will be happy when all of our family is under one roof again," Rias said with a smile. "I spent some time with Gasper, Lily and the rest this morning at breakfast, but it isn't the same without Kiba and even Imoen missing."

"Ara, what about Cú?" Akeno asked, giggling. "I rather doubt he will be coming through from Danan anytime soon, given how into his search he is. He had to rebuild his ship recently, crashed it on some shore and had to swim back to our little experimental island." Her lips and face twisted into a scowl. "That sounded a bit off. Island for experiments or laboratory island sounds much better."

"Laboratory island," Rias agreed before smirking a little and looking over at Harry. "As for our wild dog, he'll return when he smells blood on the wind. Since I presume you and he agreed that Cú will be helping you ambush Nefertiti and Akhenaten?"

"Oh yes. Cú was quite enthusiastic about the idea. Although I'm surprised you're not insisting you come along." Harry said, looking at areas quizzically.

"I fully believe my brother will be there, and if so, the only thing I would be able to add is an extra set of eyes. Besides, if you're off in the Underworld, someone needs to be here in Kuoh in case of trouble." She then frowned pensively. "You know, Akeno, considering that a lot of this magic has to do with transferring or rather teleporting energy from one area to another, perhaps we should look into bringing my father into the research team? He is by far the best at teleportation and spatial magic that I know, and if nothing else, you'll need someone like that to help put your web array in place. In fact, we may want to plan on bringing in the entire Gremory clan at some point if we're talking about putting a web around the entire world."

Frankly, the mind boggles at the logistics of that, Rias thought. I will wait until they have a more concrete idea of what it will entail, but still.

“We will! And that is a magnificent suggestion,” Akeno said, standing up and picking up the tea set, moving to place it back into the small kitchen as the clock chimed ten to the hour, signaling it was almost time for them to head back to class. “I had thought that you would need to be the one doing all of the transportation, but you’re right. Your entire family is good at magical teleportation. That’s a resource we need to make use of.”

Harry smiled and kissed Rias on the forehead, adding his own words to Akeno’s appreciation of that suggestion before moving into the kitchen behind Akeno. Knowing that she would leave as soon as school was over and would be gone for what, to her, would seem days, Harry was determined to give her a bit of a naughty memory. Rias watched on as Harry walked up behind Akeno, waiting a moment for her to put the tea set down, then reached around her. Harry grabbed her breasts in both of his hands, kneading them roughly through her uniform, his fingers sinking into Akeno’s pliant, soft chest, pulling her back into his arms. When Akeno gasped, Harry swooped down into a kiss, and the gasp quickly turned into a heated moan.

The two lovers kept on kissing for a few moments, and then Rias released a magically enhanced clapping sound. “*Ahem*. As much as I love the sight of the two of you being so into one another, we do need to get back to class, you know?”

Akeno spent a few more moments in the kitchen to make sure that her uniform wasn’t in disarray as Harry exited, whistling under his breath. She then reapplied her lipstick as she hurried after Harry and Rias. Later that day, feeling a bit guilty about not being there on time the day before, Harry transported Akeno over to Danan the moment school ended. The two of them then spent a few moments together on the island before teleporting them both to the research island and then himself back to Kuoh, making a note as he did that the researchers would need more food-type supplies soon, although the MACUSA architects he’d brought in after the explosion had already made some serious headway.

Harry came out of the old school building that held the central hub of the magical side of Kuoh in time to see Koneko coming into the school, leading what Yubelluna and Akeno called the ‘chibi’ trio, Lily, Kunou, and Ted. He was about to move towards them but saw Rias coming out of the main school building, and saw Lily break off from the others, rushing toward her, waving something in the air. Seeing that, he stopped, watching with a smile on his face.

Rias smiled, going down to one knee, smoothing her skirt and looking at the test that Lily held out to her. Despite being far more intelligent for her age than most going on nine-year-olds, Lily still enjoyed doing well in things, particularly stuff she found hard, like Japanese history or writing. The other two also came forward, showing Rias their own scores on a recent test

they'd had on reading assignments they had been forced to do over the break. Harry watched as Rias seemed to praise them all before turning them around and walking towards where Koneko had stopped by the gate into the school. One arm was around Lily's shoulder and the younger redhead was hugging her around the waist.

The sight caused Harry's smile to soften, even as his eyes shifted around to other students in the area, many of whom were watching this, and he shook his head, the loving smile shifting into one of amusement. *Well, that certainly won't make the rumors go away anytime soon. Then again, I don't think Rias cares much any longer, and frankly, so long as I can finish the school year and my obligations as a teacher, I don't think I do either. We have far more important things going on.*

OOOOOOO

Later that day, after transferring the Fal Stone from the ORC room to the clan compound and having a meeting with Sona, Rias and Yasaka, Harry passed through to Danan once more with supplies. He decided to make a stopover on the island of Aine Fand again simply because he enjoyed being there that much. And to retrieve a board game Rias had bought in Egypt, oddly.

To his surprise, he found Kalawarner and Tiamat there. Tiamat lay along the lip of the dormant volcano, while Kala's blue hair and light grey wings marked her out against the sand of the shore, even from where the island's Fal Stone sat. **"You had best go down there and calm the girl down. Kala asked me to fly her back here, hoping that the island's aura would soothe her mind. It seems to have energized her somewhat, but the work has obviously come with her and---"**

Harry didn't need further explanation as he watched Kala whip away from where she had been digging at the sand, the motion barely visible from here. In contrast, the sight of Dozens of holy spears crashing into the ocean, causing momentary bursts of steam, was very visible, and Kala's shriek of "Why won't the runes work, blast it!" was very audible.

Harry spent an hour giving Kala an ear to vent to, during which her momentary transportation left. He then spent another half an hour showing his appreciation for her efforts before teleporting them both over to the research island, dropping off the supplies he had brought through. There, he found Akeno, who took Kala from him and explained that the runic team was taking a break for the rest of the day, with even Dutugamunu showing signs of burnout.

After getting a list of things the group wanted to make or procure, most of which amounted to magical lab equipment, he left his two most research-inclined lovers and traveled to Egypt. There, Harry was surprised to see not only Kiba and Tonks waiting in the hotel

ballroom where they had put down the Fal Stone but Sala as well as two of his kids. The two kids were both boys, one nine, the other looking thirteen or so. Harry had only met them in passing before, but they were just as cheerful and outgoing as the rest of Sala's horde. "Sala, good to see you. But why am I seeing you right now?"

Chuckling, Sala welcomed Harry with a handshake before gesturing to his boys. "Thanks to that little pamphlet young Hermione passed around, we were all told to be on the lookout for odd and unusual things happening around our children, and I have to say that some very unusual things have happened around these two. So much so, I was hoping that you would take them through to one of your magical schools and have them tested for magic?"

It had not surprised Harry to learn that Hermione had put a pamphlet together for parents on things to be on the lookout for in terms of accidental magic from their kids before requesting a transfer to the think tank. He had only been surprised by the fact she had thought to do so, made it easy to understand, and had distributed it in the millions across Egypt in barely a few days during and after Harry and the rest of his group had headed home.

When asked about it, Hermione had deadpanned, "Well, my parents always complained about how they never got any information about my adolescent magical mishaps. And I've gotten some practice lately writing simply enough for politicians to understand. It wasn't hard to raise that level up a notch to that of harried parents."

"Well, we can certainly do those tests in Kuoh if that's what you want. Do you want to come through with them as well?" Harry asked Sala.

"If I don't, my wife will have my hide. Sending them off to a foreign land on their own? Hah, I would earn myself several months of charred food and lonely nights," Sala chortled, and Harry laughed quietly.

"But I bet you have another reason to come to Kuoh, yes?" He guessed. "Testing the waters, are we?"

"Hah. You see the right of it. Given how closely we've worked together since Tiamat came slamming down out of the sky, I was the natural choice to move to Kuoh and act as a liaison. Kuoh is where you and young Sona are planning to set up your new school, yes?" When Harry nodded, Sala shrugged. "Then having a liaison there makes good sense."

"Transporting you back and forth is probably going to get annoying, especially with all the other demands on my time. And as a nonmagical, even if there was a direct line set up, you couldn't use the Floo Network. That could be something to look into in the future. And once we move against our enemies or if I get tangled up in the research team's project, I will have to put my foot down to further back and forth," Harry warned.

“That is fine,” Sala answered, smiling with all the aplomb of a Buddha moonlighting as an Egyptian bandit. “My wife can control the rest of our brood without me for a good while. My boys and I are just supposed to start house shopping and so forth. But if I were you, I would get some of those magical engineers together and start pushing for work on the magical school to start as fast as possible. There are hundreds of families here in Alexandria or elsewhere with a daughter or son who has shown interesting abilities, and all of them wish to live directly under you and your Lady Rias.”

“Huh. Well, I’ll put it on my list of priorities. Right behind dealing with the Earth tearing itself apart, Ophis, Akhenaten, and his wife having to keep up appearances as a teacher, my own kids, the rest of the Khaos Brigade and all the other smaller responsibilities me and mine are dealing with.” Harry answered, cocking a wintry eyebrow at Sala, who nodded sheepishly.

He understood that he and his fellow Egyptian’s desire to get their children started on learning how to control their powers was but a small personal thing in a sea of catastrophic-sized troubles. But that didn’t mean that those concerns did not matter to the families of the young wizards and witches. “I understand, Harry. And I swear I will keep any request, recommendations or anything else from my superiors from reaching your ears. But it might be best to start looking into housing at least as soon as possible.”

“You have a point, I suppose. But for now, I need to do some shopping. Or at least pass along demands for certain equipment. So you and yours, Kiba and Tonks will have to wait a bit longer. And I have something you three will need to have on your person at all times to even think about your homeland once we leave.” When she heard that, Tonks volunteered to help, and the two of them were soon off, using the Floo Network to travel to first the ICW tower and then through that to a few other places, buying what was on the list Harry had been handed, catching up with one another in a way they hadn’t been able to since Harry had woken up after helping Asia with her Miracle.

Soon, though, they were back, and after popping over to drop off the mokeskin pouch containing everything Hermione and the rest had ordered, Harry was back, gesturing Sala and his boys forward. Since this would not be the first time Harry had transported nonmagicals around with the Fal Stones, he knew it would work, unlike with the Floo Network.

The group came through the Fal Stone so quickly that Danan, in this case, the magi-scientist’s island, barely registered with any of them before they appeared in the clan compound in Kuoh.

There, they were greeted by Rias and Yubelluna. Without Kala around to do the cooking, it had fallen on the bandrui and Harry’s primary wife to cook for the clan. Rias smiled at the

boys, then exchanged warm handclaps with Sala. "Welcome to Kuoh and Japan in general, Sala. Lily and the rest of the kids are outside, and you'll find a large patio table out there, too."

While Kiba decided to head off and take a few hours to just be on his own for a bit, Tonks immediately went off to find her son, finding him roughhousing with Lily, Koneko, and Kunou's familiar. The three-eyed dog had grown several feet in length and a foot in height since Kunou, and he had bonded and now was strong enough to enjoy wrestling with the rook and werewolf phoenix girl just as much as Lily's gryphon did. Soon, the two Egyptian kids had, at the behest of Koneko, joined a less physical game while their father found himself sitting at the outside table.

"Are you all satisfied with the story that's going to cover up everything that happened in Egypt?" Harry asked as he sat across from the older man.

"Yes. It makes sense and can be tied to another disaster that hit other nations along the Red Sea. Given everything else that has been happening in the world beyond, I doubt anyone will even look at it twice, which made a lot of your, what are they called, Obliviators, both happy and annoyed. Happy at the fact it won't take as much work. Annoyed that some of the work they've already completed might not be needed," Sala chuckled.

"What is the story you came up with?" Rias asked as she placed a large bowl filled with antipasto in the center of the table.

"There was an earthquake that hit the entrance to the Red Sea, creating massive flooding along it. In short, the story will be that the canal and the Nile both flooded because of that, but the flood bled off by the time it neared the Delta. That will cover up a good deal of the destruction and the... the utter desolation that is the area of Egypt past Cairo to the southeast. Although not all of my nation's losses, considering that several of the smaller communities built out into the desert were also wiped out. But as I said, if you wish to look at recent events positively," and here, Sala's lips quirked into a bitter smirk. "All the other disasters occurring in the world means that it will be decades at best before anyone is in a position to care about such communities. It is doubtful most nations will even be able to send us aid at present."

He then shook himself, his smirk shifting into a full smile again as he looked over at his two children, who were playing hacky-sack with Koneko as Lily and Kunou talked to their familiars. "Er... I hate to ask, but there is no way my boys are mature enough yet to handle pets that size on their own..."

It was Asia who answered, coming out of the house and moving over to join the game of hacky-sack. "Don't worry. I rather think that getting familiars will be something you have to be trained up to. I know that my little Raiter sometimes causes me trouble."

Sala blinked in confusion before noticing what he first thought was an overly affectatious necklace of scale around the young girl's shoulders was moving. A moment later, a small draconic face shifted to look at him, then nuzzled back against his mistress's neck. "I, um, I see..."

He watched as she joined the game, with his boys making room for her easily, exchanging greetings with the older Potter girl. Like Lily, Asia had met all of Sala's children during the Egyptian crisis, and the gentle healer had become a favorite of all of Sala's children. To the extent that he was certain one of his middle-most brats had a crush on her. *Not that I think he has any chance*, Sala reflected. *In fact, I would wager Asia may take vows of chastity in the future as a nun. I doubt she will ever find love in a man as much as she has for God.*

Shaking his head, Sala turned back to the other adults, his lips quirking into a wry smile behind his short, well-cared-for beard. "On a lighter note, the temporary government, which is becoming about as temporary as most governmental things, is dealing with several thousand petitions from young men and women who wish to volunteer to move through the portal already. Apparently, the idea of building their own community from the ground up appeals to many of them, while others simply want to explore or, in the case of one petition I saw, get away from domineering parents. Considering that the last one came from a young man in Alexandria, and space is still at a premium there in a way that it is not in other cities given the disaster, I can well believe it."

Harry laughed, and Sala laughed with him before becoming serious, looking at Harry closely. "And you are positive that you will not involve yourself with the non-magic government? That was something I was asked to question you on again. Your word on that score was good enough for me, but..."

"I don't want anything to do with even the magical side of the government!" Harry snorted. "I'll do the job, but that's all. So long as the stories in place, and I speak for Egypt when it comes to the magical side of things, that is all I want. That, and I might check to make certain that, shall we say, no religious extremists are taking over. In Danan, it will be a different story, but right now, that's it."

"Well, I don't think you will need to worry about religious extremism much." Sala's eyes shifted over to Asia once more. "The revelations of everything that happened during the horrible Culling and everything else has taken a marked bite out of those most inclined to religious fervor within my nation. To know that the older gods existed and could be chained somehow by merely mortal wizards was one thing. To learn that Allah existed in some form is another. But Saint Asia over there, and her preaching for acceptance and kindness while

practicing it and the Miracle she produced at such horrible expense to herself... Let us just say that those who can think as well as believe are questioning quite a bit at the present moment.”

The middle-aged, slightly overweight general leaned forward, emphasizing his next words. “They believe. In fact, I would say they believe in Allah far more strongly now than ever, but it is doubtful that any of them will ever adhere strongly to the Koran or Sharia law. Equality, kindness, acceptance, and showing one’s faith through helping others, that is a message any can get behind, with such magnificent examples to try and live up to. Do not be surprised if Asia is touted as a living saint sometime soon, even without access to her Sacred Gear.”

Harry wasn’t certain what to think about that, although he could easily picture Asia’s wide-eyed shock and quick refusal of any such label. She had been the ‘Holy Maiden’ before and even then had problems with the title. To be labeled a saint would be even worse.

“Oh, and can I thank you personally for leaving the golems in place?” Sala went on. “They have been a monumental aid across the board. Not only in helping the police and army to keep order but in lending their strength to construction efforts and being a visible sign of, well, your rule, honestly. What we have to gain and what we can learn all in one. Them, and the dwarves that have remained in Egypt. There was a clash near the Great Pyramid with the goblins there, but even those extremely nasty creatures seem to be leery of your golems. And your lady wife, too. Her name was reportedly on their lips more than once after the goblins backed down.”

Rias smirked slightly at that. “I will need to set up an appointment to speak to them again. With other matters dealt with, I think the goblins will more willingly concentrate on being bankers rather than trying to become conquerors.” *With my brother defeating Hades, their internal social conflict should have petered out by this point. Good. One less, albeit tiny, issue.*

Sala looked confused at that, but Rias waved it off. “I’d like some details about the goblins and what they are doing in their little enclave among the Giza Plateau, but right now, what are your plans while you’re here in Kuoh? Surely you haven’t brought your sons around just to try authentic Japanese food.”

Soon, the meal was laid out in front of clan and newcomers alike. The conversation shifted to more banal things for a time until, two hours later, Yubelluna volunteered to show Sala and his boys around Kuoh. For now, they would live with Kiba and Loup in the so-called Men’s Quarters that made up one point of the clan compound’s triangle. But they would need to find a home here, too, if they intended to live in Kuoh. As Harry wasn’t certain if the magical school he and Sona wanted to build would follow the Hogwarts model or the Japanese school model, that was a necessity.

Waving Yubelluna off, Harry was about to volunteer to help clean up after the meal when he felt a pulse of magic coming from the Fal Stone nearby. He looked at it quizzically, excused himself from Sala and moved over to place his hands on it. The pulse repeated itself, the feeling almost becoming like someone had knocked on the door somehow.

With a frown of puzzlement, Harry moved over to the Fal Stone he'd set up outside. His mind following the strange pulse of semi-foreign magic through the Undertaking, Harry popped out into Danan, finding himself standing on the small island the research team had claimed and staring across the stone at Cú. "Cú? I take it you discovered you were able to interact with the Undertaking in some fashion."

"I'm able to push some of my magic into it if that's what you mean, I can't control it or anything. But the blood of Lugh in me veins at least allows me to signal you like that. I want to come through." Cú said with a shrug, the wode tattoos on his body slowly losing the blue light they'd held a second ago. He gestured over to where Hermione stood, arguing about some mathematical formulae on a large whiteboard with Rolf and several other wizards.

The whiteboard in question was two stories tall and as wide as a row of houses, with several broomsticks and even a rolled-up magic carpet laid out haphazardly around it. Despite that size, it was still crowded with enough numbers and symbols to make Harry's eyes hurt just looking at it.

Nor was that the only difference since Harry had been here some thirty hours Danan-time ago.

Nearby, Dutugamunu stared down at a series of runes, all of them in a jumble, one written over the other in a gigantic sand pit. His eyes were bloodshot, and his trunk twitched spasmodically. *Hmm. Evidently the coffee and tea have begun to run out again. Good grief, do I need to set up a ration system?*

Several other rune scribes, both Onmyouji and wizard laid out on the grass of the large, open area that the scientists had decided to take over. Tsubaki was at another sand pit, which, if her glare had any kind of magic to it, would have been turned into glass. Momo, Sona's queen, who Harry had transferred in that morning to replace Akeno, was standing beside her, running both hands through her hair as a Dicta-quill worked nearby, writing down her muttered words. Akeno herself was kneeling down beside Kala, both of them staring at a set of six runes, each of them representing a different runic language, including the Sanatana Dharma. But from their drawn, wan looks, it seemed as if Harry's ladies, despite being far more rested than the rest, had also hit a roadblock.

A few MACUSA magical engineers were also there, although only three had joined the think tank. The others were looking down at a map of the island done in sand and were talking

about where to put small buildings, houses and other things. The way they were pointedly ignoring the mad scientist on a bad day type looks all around them was kind of hilarious, in Harry's opinion, drawing more attention to the low-key madness that had seemingly infused the entire think tank.

"This lot are spinning their wheels at the moment. They all need to take a bit of a break but tell them that, and none'll listen. Their minds are gettin' sick off their own juices. Me, I am..." Cú broke off for a moment, staring out over the horizon, his eyes far away. "I'm chasin' a scent that seems ta want ta disappear and reappear at random, teasin', tauntin' reminding me of bad times somedays and good hardly ever. I need a break. Take me through ta Earth, will ya? And then give me some money to go buy one of those cheeseburger things that brat Issei went on about. And either more money or access ta enough ale ta drown a whale."

Wondering when that conversation had taken place, Harry shrugged his shoulders and agreed before looking over at Kala and Akeno. When calling their names elicited no response, he walked over and gently pulled both of them to his feet. "Come on, you two, I think you both need some time off. And you, Kala, haven't been back in Kuoh for a few days our time, and this isn't the first mental breakdown I've seen you have. Come home, cuddle with Asia and me, and get your head cleared, okay?"

Akeno snuggled instantly into his side, needing no second urging despite being the most rested of the two. Kala struggled for a brief second, then nuzzled into Harry's neck, sighing. "You're right. We, we've made a lot of progress, but that just makes it even worse when we slam into some new problem. Right now, I'm not doing anything here."

Moving back to the Fal stone, Harry spent a second looking over at the others in the area and then said aloud, "You know, even the greatest brains sometimes need a break! If I come through tonight to return these three and all of you are still looking this harried, I'm going to make you rest by stunning you all and leaving you that way. I'm certain none of you want that, do you?"

Before Hermione could reply, and Harry knew she would be the first to do so from long practice, he and Cú were gone, shifting back through to Kuoh. As they appeared, he chuckled a little. "It always annoys Hermione when someone else gets in the last word in an argument without giving her a chance to make a rebuttal. But she'll also listen more, and Hermione will get the others to rest."

"Kala-san," a call came, and Kala turned away from Harry, her eyes lighting up as she moved over towards a widely smiling Asia, hugging the girl tightly, who returned the hug. A moment later, her grey wings popped out, enveloping the shorter girl in a hug of their own as Kala lost control of her human form for a second in her exuberance.

Smiling at that, Harry looked back only to find Akeno had entered the house, heading toward where Gasper and Mittelt were playing some kind of game on the TV. "Yes! Mindless violence. Move over, you two."

He wasn't the only one who frowned at that, as Rias looked up from where she had been wiping down the kitchen table, but they glanced at one another and shrugged. Akeno, like the rest of the think tank was under a lot of pressure, and if she wanted to relieve some of that pressure in pixelated violence, that seemed harmless enough.

Harry turned back to Cú, catching him watching the kids. For a moment, it looked as if his eyes were on Koneko and Lily, and Harry snorted, smacking the Hound of Ireland upside the head. "Down, dog. Koneko's way too young for you."

Cú snorted, shaking his head, his face shifting from the almost calculating look he'd had a moment before to a salacious smirk as he held up his hands a ways away from his chest. "Meh, I prefer bigger fruits, if ya know what I mean. Was just surprised to see the little frails wrestle around like that. Reminds me of how I was with me friend Ferdi."

For some reason, Harry felt that wasn't all, but Cú had already turned around, looking into the kitchen. "Hamburger me, woman!"

"I can turn you into a hamburger, you poster child for all dirty Irishmen," Rias snorted. "We have some hamburgers, but it will take a bit to make one up for you."

"I'll do it," Kala said, coming in with one arm and one goose-feather soft wing over Asia still. Asia, like the others, knew how long it had been since she had seen any of them from Kala's perspective and seemed perfectly willing to put up with being the target of Kala's sudden craving for cuddles. "You keep on doing whatever it was you wanted to, Rias. I'll feed the mutt."

"Heh, so long as I get fed and let out ta play, ya can call me whatever ya want," Cú teased.

Chuckling, Harry sat down at the patio table, gesturing with one hand towards a bottle of wine on the table, indicating Cú could finish it off if he wanted to. "More seriously, your ability to knock on the door like you did pointed out a bottleneck that didn't occur to me. Not only are Lily and I the only ones who can use the Undertaking to teleport from Earth to Danan, but we're also the only ones who can communicate through the Fal stones. Do you think Aibell or Dubhalin could do the same thing?"

Here, Harry was speaking of the river goddess Aibell and her mortal lover. The pair of them had been among the first to come through the Undertaking and had survived the betrayal planned by the Winter Court and Gwyn Ap Nudd, hiding away in a river behind Aibell's magics. In terms of power she was more a demigod and on the weak side of that scale, but she was still

a Tuathan and thus might be able to interact with the Undertaking. Further, she, like the dwarves and Luna, in her position as Queen of the Summer Fae, had sworn to follow Harry as the High King of Danan.

Sitting down across from him, Cú snorted. “You think you can wrinkle that gal out o’ her river? Hah, Better you than me, mate. I met her more than once, and she wasn’t ever interested in things beyond her own river and those rivermen who used ‘er.” Harry twitched at Cú’s wording but before he could ask, Cú switched the topic. “I think that group of big brains’re close to a breakthrough, but I couldn’t keep up with ‘em. How goes things on planning the trap in Cocytus?”

Smiling thinly, Harry gestured Cú down to sit at the table. “Well, that is going about as well as it can. I’ve got a few traps that should be invisible to anyone who doesn’t know Onmyodo runes, which we **think** is a blind spot for Nefertiti and Akhenaten, but they might not be powerful enough to do anything to them or to anyone of sufficient magical resistance. I’ve been working on more with Celtic runes, specifically wards to warn of trespassers because we know that Akhenaten or Cao-Cao didn’t know any of that school of magic because no one did. The big thing is keeping the traps hidden, but if you have any ideas, I’m more than willing to listen.”

Cú grinned. “Let’s get some drinks and get down to thinkin’ up some little nasties. That’s always fun.”

This turned out to be the most fascinating conversation Harry would have that night, but not the most surprising.

It was around eight o’clock by the time Cú and Harry finished talking, and he left off to, in his words, “Drink a few bars dry and either find a gal ta bang or some fools ta punt for fun.”

When he did, Harry joined Kala in cleaning up the little amount of the kitchen they needed to while Rias took over the kitchen table. There, Rias was sitting behind a book set upright in front of her while Koneko, Teddy, Tonks, Kunou, Lily, and Gasper were looking down at a few sheets in front of them, then from it to the board in front of them, small metal models in front of each of them. How she had done it, Harry didn’t know, but Rias had somehow convinced Lily and Kunou to get their homework done and then take part in an RPG board game of some kind while he was talking with Cú. The fact that Koneko seemed so enthusiastic about it might explain some of that, but Harry hadn’t thought that his daughter would have the patience to write out her character’s background story. That Teddy and Tonks would have fun with such a thing was pretty obvious.

In the TV room, Akeno was still cheerfully killing things with Mittelt, although she had taken the time to change into a pair of tight sweatpants and a t-shirt that very obviously showed

she did not have any bra underneath. This allowed Akeno to add teasing Harry whenever he looked in her direction (she honestly seemed to have some kind of sixth sense for that, it was uncanny) to her fun with the game. Along with listening to Mittelt growl in jealousy occasionally.

Outside in the backyard, Yubelluna and Sala had returned, and she was grilling him and his two boys on some do's and don'ts in Japanese society, as well as reminding them to keep magic a secret. As the Egyptians were not yet bound by an Oath to keep the secret, that was very necessary.

Kiba and Loup were not there, having a boy's only night in, having already prepared the boy's dorm for their three newcomers. Yasaka also had yet to show up, but Harry knew she was busy with her own duties, and this would not be the first night since they returned from Egypt that she wasn't able to join the rest of the clan.

As Harry finished putting the cleaned plates back, he, Rias, and Akeno all twitched as something at the outer edge of their territory niggled at the wards. The feel of it thought was highly unusual, something that Rias put into wards, looking over at Harry as Akeno stood up, scowling. "What do you think that is? And why did the wards feel... Exasperated? Annoyed?"

The fact that the wards of Kuoh were almost animalistic in how they responded to stimuli was something that everyone who had felt them had gotten used to prior to this. Normally, it felt like an eager, hungry lion, ready to pounce on its next meal or a snake ready to strike. Sometimes it felt like a protective blanket to those who had been read into it.

But this time, Harry had to concede it really did feel as if the giant creature that was the wards was somewhat exasperated. It felt like a large animal reacting to a small animal entering its territory, but with the full knowledge that once it reacted, the animal would get away before it could do anything.

"Of course, that tells us something there already. If someone was using active magic, the wards would have already slammed down on them. This feels like some kind of probe directly against the wards by a magical person, rather than anyone using magic where they shouldn't," Harry mused aloud.

When Rias made to stand up, Harry waved her back down though. "You stay here and call Sona. I'll handle this." Harry looked over at Kala and Akeno. "Do you two want to come with me?"

Kala sighed, then nodded. "Sure, this might be interesting." Turning, she moved to lay a gentle kiss on Asia's forehead. "I'll be back way before it's time for our evening prayers, Asia. Have fun."

"Mm!" Asia smiled, then turned back to talk to Rias, asking a question about racial abilities in the RPG as Harry, Akeno, and Kala headed out the door and into the air.

Soon, the trio were winging their way toward where Harry and Akeno could both sense the disturbance had come from. A brief mental message to the wards had them stand down for a few moments, which would hopefully convince whoever was out there poking them that they had somehow discovered a way in without rousing the wards to outright violence. The wards didn't feel like they wanted to obey for a moment but did so, and Harry shook his head, surprised anew at how alive the wards of Kuoh felt.

"What do you think this is about?" Akeno asked, her unique, half-bat, half-feathered wings flapping as she zoomed along beside Kala, whose own light gray wings beat the nighttime air just as strongly.

"I got the impression that whoever this is has tried this before, so it's someone cautious, someone who can feel out the wards and their power, and someone who isn't willing to fight them. Someone a little too curious for his own good, perhaps, curious enough to override his sense of self-preservation, if only slightly. And someone who likes to sneak around rather than simply ask to be invited somewhere," Harry mused. "It isn't as if Kuoh is a closed city after all. Youkai, Onmyouji, and now wizards are being read into the wards all the time, and devils and Youkai are always coming through the teleportation ring heading towards Kyoto or the other way around. Admittedly, we haven't seen many fallen, but considering the whole Kokabiel disaster, that isn't exactly surprising."

Kala suddenly shuddered, and Akeno and Harry looked over at her. "Ugh, you just gave me a terrible premonition. I really, really hope I'm wrong, though. On the one hand, yeah, it probably would be a good thing, but..." Kala shivered again, shaking her head at the same time. "Is it really worth the trouble?"

Harry looked at her, confused, while Akeno got it almost immediately, and she sighed, already feeling a new headache replace the one that she'd had after coming through from Danan. Looking at her husband and seeing his confusion, Akeno explained. "She's talking about Azazel. He is known to sneak around a lot and is a bit of a mad scientist."

Browse furrowing, Harry had to admit that his description of who this could be did match what he knew of Azazel, leader of the Grigori. He was supposedly a mad scientist sort of person, but also supposedly devoted entirely to the research of Sacred Gears. To the point that he had, according to Sirzechs, actually created artificial ones.

That was impressive to Harry, but it went with several very bad impressions that Harry had gotten. Kala and Mittelt's abandonment by their higher-ups for one thing, despite the fact that they had been following what they had thought were lawful orders. *Not that Kala would*

have gone back even if she could after we dealt with Raynare. The fact that he was a known pervert for another, although admittedly, Harry probably would not hold that against him... right up until the man tried to flirt with one of his wives.

Then, there was the fact that he had sent Vali Lucifer to try and take Kokabiel prisoner. Instead of letting him be executed for his crimes in what was, in terms of the Three Factions, foreign soil. That was a big no-no in Harry's opinion. *Then Vali turned out to be a traitor. The youngster Azazel adopted and brought into the Grigori turned out to be a traitor, walking away from them. Now, Sirzechs did say that Azazel was prepared for that and did raid a few Khaos Brigade bases, but that's it. Still not a good look.*

He was also the leader of the Grigori. But frankly, Harry would be hard-pressed to see what beyond basic manpower the fallen could offer the Kuoh Faction. The fallen were pretty much a middle ground between the church and the devils when it came to their magic. They used devil runes use some holy spells, but those were few and far between, and from what Kala had told him, their mastery of Ankhsera wasn't really all that much to write home about. They had a few tricks up their sleeves in terms of mixing technology with spell work, tracking spells, and the ability to detect Sacred Gears better than either of the other two factions, but that was about it.

All in all, Harry wasn't certain there was any point to Kuoh reaching out to make any kind of agreement with the fallen unless the fallen, in turn, felt as if the Kuoh Group's refusal to do so was in some way taking sides against them in a way that might force the fallen to try and make some kind of preemptive strike. Frankly, Harry couldn't see anyone thinking that, considering how Raynare and Kokabiel had been the source of so much trouble in the area, but Harry was not a politician. *Merlin, why does it feel as if those things happened years ago! It hasn't even been a year yet. Of course, there's Akeno, and her issues with one specific member of the Grigori to consider.*

Moments later, Kala's groan of "I knew it" rang out, and Harry stared at the portion she waved one desultory hand towards down below them. "That's Azazel."

Physically, Azazel was a tall man in his twenties with an average build, black hair, golden bangs, and a black goatee. Currently, he was wearing what looked like a biker jacket over jeans and a white t-shirt. The fact he was standing on top of a roof with no visible way to get there gave his somewhat normal appearance the lie, and his eyes were a deep violet, almost like Akeno's, as he stared up at them.

He seemed almost to dismiss Harry for a moment, his gaze locked on Akeno and Kala, but Azazel's stare wasn't the one a lecher would normally send either beautiful woman's way.

Rather, he was staring at them inquisitively, like a scientist who was looking at some kind of new data.

That didn't really raise him any higher in Harry's eyes, and he landed across from the man, who twitched a bit then waved a hand at the trio. "Yo, I don't suppose little Kala over there's told you who I am yet?"

"She has, Azazel. And frankly, I am somewhat of a loss as to why we should bother listening to you," Harry said bluntly. "The Grigori as a whole are not among my favorite people, and to be frank, your leadership seems to be quite lacking given the issues certain members of your faction have caused me and mine. There's more to leadership than knowing when to cut your losses. Sending Kala here where I could meet her... along with Mittelt, I suppose her mastery of aerial combat has been helpful... is enough to get you a hearing, but that's about all. To say nothing about your missteps with Vali."

Azazel mimed holding his chest and moaning theatrically about how Harry's words wounded him for a moment before smirking and rolling his eyes. "Well, that was a nice little speech I guess. But if you think I don't have anything to offer, I think you're gravely mistaken. As for my son, I raised him to be an independent thinker. Sometimes, that means that the son goes against the father to make his own way in the world. I can't hold that against him, although that doesn't mean I won't fight him if he shows up again as part of the chaos brigade."

"And Kokabiel? What about him? How could you not know what he was up to? He had a legion at his back!" Akeno interjected.

"So did I when I fell," Azazel answered blithely before becoming a little more serious. "It turns out that Kokabiel had suborned the people I had watching him. Little Raynare was one of those and, frankly, the least important of the group. Because of that, they falsified reports to me and the other high-ranking members of the Grigori about his actions and concealed the fact he had brought his legion back into one group. And before you ask, yes, I did order Kalawarner, Mittelt, Dohnaseek and Raynare to Kuoh to watch Hyoudou and Genshirou. They were to watch and observe, not to do anything else. The devices I've made can sense Sacred Gears in people, but no one can tell you what kind of Sacred Gear a person has until it is awakened."

"For diplomacy's sake, say I believe all that, Azazel. That still isn't enough to make me want to actually talk to you or let you stay in our territory. So what do you have to offer?" Harry demanded, crossing his arms.

"What kind of Sacred Gears do you want? I've learned how to create artificial ones. I've made robots too, and scanners that can tell you if someone is human or not, and my gender swap raygun," Azazel snickered, but when Harry simply glared, and only Akeno looked intrigued, he went on quickly. *This Harry is no human, for damn sure, not with that Aura. Fuck me,*

Sirzechs warned me he had changed, but where did he get that kind of power-up?! “They don’t last very long, but then again, if used properly, they don’t have to. I also know how to basically upgrade existing Sacred Gears, making them more powerful, less energy intensive.”

“My power doesn’t come from a Sacred Gear, and I doubt that Ddraig would consent to being put through whatever process you’ve developed. Other than that, Kiba’s achieved Balance Breaker and Dawn Healing is... no longer with us. Sona might be interested, but I’m not. And I doubt she’d be willing to make any deal without it coming through formal diplomatic lines.”

“Are you sure about that? There are ways, you know, the Sacred Gear is a part of a person’s soul. That’s really hard to do,” Azazel frowned, staring at Harry thoughtfully, examining his aura. “No... on second thought, you, of all people, probably do know that. What did she do to...”

“Asia Potter, my daughter, brought back several hundred thousand people from the dead,” Harry said with bleak pride, still with his arms crossed. “Anything else? I know what you want from us, but I am no closer to agreeing to simply let you examine our wards or whatever else you think you want here, and you’re ignoring Kala since your hello is not exactly winning you any points.”

“Well, little Kala’s a second point entirely. Considering that the Grigori were forced to disavow all knowledge of her actions or that of Mittelt, I can’t exactly say I have any hold on her any longer,” Azazel said, looking closely at Kala’s wings once more.

“Good to know you’re not that foolish,” Kala muttered, her wings gently flapping behind her for a moment before folding back inward, disappearing a moment later, to Azazel’s apparent annoyance if his slight pout her way was anything to go by.

“What do you want then?” Azazel asked, looking back at Harry.

“Nothing you wouldn’t give regardless, considering that you and the Grigori probably want to survive anyway.” Harry shrugged. “I’m not going to insult your intelligence by thinking you’re not aware of the crisis facing Earth as a whole or Ophis and everything going on there.”

“True enough. Although, word is that you’re planning some kind of showdown with two up-jumped humans who want to be gods?”

“And how exactly would you know that?” Harry wondered, his eyes narrowing. *Seems to me Sirzechs is a bit too loose with such things, although being so vague allowed him to share the gist of things despite the Interdict. Considering that the Grigori were the weak link when it came to secrets and connections to the Khaos Brigade before this, though, sharing more information with them seems foolish. The Old Satan Faction might be tied to them, but they aren’t part of the Underworld’s political structure nor any social position of power.*

However, Azazel surprised him a little by coming clean. “While me and the other scientists among the Grigori were able to figure out what’s been going on with the planet, I’ve got to admit that Sirzechs told me about that last bit. He wasn’t able to tell me much, but apparently, two wizards or a wizard and witch figured out some kind of spell that could drain people’s life force? Nasty stuff. Sounds more like something the devils or my group would come up with, frankly. But then again, humans have always been just as nasty or even nastier than my folk when it comes to ways of hurting one another.”

“That last, at least, is true. But with that knowledge, you also have to know that my group and I are looking into ways to solve the magical saturation issue facing the Earth right now. And yet you’re here, apparently empty-handed. Unless you think you have a Sacred Gear that can do something about it?”

“I’m afraid not. I’ll hold my hands up and say I’m a pretty dab hand at spell construction, though, and research in general,” Azazel stated simply. “Did I mention my gender-bending raygun and my robots?”

Harry snorted. “I don’t have any interest in becoming a member of the distaff side, and I see your robots and raise you our golems.” At that, Azazel’s eyes narrowed in interest, but Harry went on blithely. “I already have researchers, I already have an extremely good group of such, the two ladies beside me not being the least of that group. Try again.”

“Now come on, Harry!” Azazel huffed, now becoming a bit angry at being so dismissed. “I’m thousands of years old, man. I’ve probably forgotten more about magical research than any of your group knows.”

“I quite resent that. Just because you have thousands of years under your belt means very little when it comes to a problem that has never been faced by the Earth before. You don’t bring any specific rune-type knowledge nor any Arithmantic understanding,” Akeno said sharply. “To be blunt, it seems as if you have far more to gain out of an alliance or even a brief exchange of information with us than we do with you.”

Azazel frowned. “But can you take the chance that you’re right on that score? What if I’m the one to--”

“We’ve already begun to find a solution,” Akeno interrupted him as she spoke up again, cutting off the older man in a way that few normal Japanese women would do. Then again, Akeno was very much not a normal woman, and Harry watched with some amusement as she stalked forward, glaring at Azazel. “I find it very telling that instead of taking the blame, you have tried to explain your own lack of power when it came to Kokabiel and Raynare away. Instead of apologizing to Kala about the fact that she had to be cut loose, you simply

acknowledge it. Would you do the same if we had killed her and Mittelt, as I believe you thought we would at the time?"

"Wait, you've already found a solution!?" Azazel latched onto that with shock visible in his face, for a moment forgetting the rest of what Akeno had said. He did still feel a bit of remorse about cutting the pair of fallen loose, but not much, considering how well they seemed to have landed on their feet. "You can't have been working on it for more than what, a week? That's impossible. What kind of solution are you..."

"You will get no information from me. Not on that score nor about our wards, nor about anything else. In the future, we may work with the Grigori, but it will be fully in the open, as one powerful group to another, not a thing of individuals," Harry stated firmly, placing a gentle hand on Akeno's shoulders as he did, holding her in place, fearing her temper might get the better of her for a moment.

Azazel scowled, tempted for a moment to flare his magical aura, unused to being spoken down to like this by anyone. He was, after all, an incredibly powerful fallen angel, one who had seen the great war of heaven and survived it. But he didn't. One glance Harry's way told him that at least in pure raw power, Harry probably topped him by at least an order of 3 to 1 at this point. *He might even be stronger than Sirzechs, fucking hell, demigod my ass. In terms of raw power, he could be a mid-tier Olympian from what I remember of fighting them. And then there are the wards to consider. They haven't ever liked it when I've flared my aura a tiny bit before. I doubt they'd like it any better now. And I might not be able to get away fast enough before they come down on me.*

Sighing, Azazel reined in his moment of temper, then held his hands out to either side, shrugging. "You're right. I don't have much to offer. I can offer my experience, and my abilities when it comes to research. When it comes to actual resources, the Grigori can also help you a bit. But I'm not here on behalf of the Grigori, I was just here on behalf of my own interest. The Grigori as a whole is still recouping its losses from the Kokabiel debacle."

And that, Harry felt, encapsulated in a nutshell the entire issue with Azazel. While Azazel might be the leader of the Grigori, he had very rarely acted as such, leaving the day-to-day operations of the Grigori to others, something that was a bit of an open secret among the factions. Azazel very much preferred to see to his own interests, his perversions and his interest in Sacred Gears. And while he might've said something about the watchers on Kokabiel having been suborned, Harry wasn't certain there was the truth. It could just have been as simple as not really caring about the fact that Kokabiel had gathered his legion to him again, only realizing what that could mean after the fact.

"That's not enough," Harry said aloud, shaking his head. "Come back in peaceful times as leader of their Grigori, and maybe we will make some kind of deal with you. At the moment, you're bothering our wards. If you keep doing so, I'm going to give them your magical signature and tell them to fry you on sight." Harry couldn't do that mentally, but back in the basement of the ORC building, where the central ward control was, he could.

With a sigh, Azazel shrugged his shoulders. The moment that Harry had stated he had no interest in Sacred Gears Azazel knew that he had been almost destined to lose this discussion, although how dismissive Harry and the others were of him rankled more than a bit. He had one more card to play, but he was reluctant to do so, considering how volatile it might be. Deciding to err on the side of caution, he simply said, "All right, that's fine a suppose. I am practically the next best thing to immortal; it isn't as if I'm not used to waiting for something. But there is one other matter, a personal one. One of my men, Baraquiel, he..."

"My father. Let me guess. He wishes to somehow reconcile with me?" When Azazel nodded, Akeno frowned, crossing her arms and staring out into the distance for a few moments, not noticing that Azazel let his inner lecher out for a moment to stare at her chest.

Harry put an arm over her shoulders but otherwise said nothing, simply giving her his wordless support. "... I think, I think that my answer will mirror Harry's. I no longer hate my father, but I think that the time has passed where he and I could become a family or whatever image he has in his head about the shape any kind of reconciliation between us might take." She turned, bestowing a warm smile on Harry. "I have built my own family here. I don't need him in my life."

That smile faded as Akeno looked over at Azazel. "I may be willing to meet with him in the future, perhaps after the peace conference? But that is all."

With a jolt, Harry realized he had completely forgotten about that. There was indeed supposed to be a peace conference set this summer here in Kuoh. Originally, it had been meant to just be the Three Factions meeting about the Khaos Brigade, but Harry and Rias had pushed for their own place at the table as well as the youkai having their own group. The Wizarding World would probably also need to be represented. *Unless, crud, will they expect me to speak for them too on top of the Kuoh Group? I suppose I can if Rias wants to be our chief speaker? Well, whatever. Hopefully, the primary issue for that meeting will be the only issue we'll be facing by then.*

"Well, I suppose in the interest of future diplomacy, I can take that as an answer back to Barquiel," Azazel muttered, shaking his head slightly. Akeno had also surprised him. He hadn't thought she would be that mature.

Azazel did not know that Akeno had, in point of fact, buried the hatchet with her entire family up to this point, thanks to her Aunt Suzaku reaching out to her at the New Year's festival that Harry had taken her, Kala and Rias to. It helped matters that Suzaku had buried many a hatchet metaphorically (and some not so metaphorically) in several family members' heads on the issue of Akeno before that.

With a sigh, Azazel turned his attention to Kala. "And then there's you, Kala. I, I really am sorry that you got caught up in Raynare's scheme and everything else. If there was any other way other than cutting you and Mittelt loose, I would have tried it, but at the time, we feared any attempt to even rescue you might lead to war. I'm sorry about that."

"I'm not," Kala said firmly, although inside, she rolled her eyes as she knew that if Azazel had led with that, he might have done way better in these impromptu negotiations. "In fact, I think it's the best thing to happen to me since I fell."

"Yeah. Speaking of which, what's up with your wings?" Azazel nearly demanded. His own wings flared out for a moment, twelve wings of black feathers so dark they seemed to suck in everything around them.

Almost instantly, the wards began to slam down on him, much like a cat that had been sitting by a mouse hole would pounce. This time, Harry didn't try to stop them, nor did Akeno. Seeing that, Azazel grimaced, pulling them quickly back in, and the feeling faded, but he had made his point. The difference between Kala's own goose gray feathers and his raven black ones could not have been more pronounced.

The other fallen chuckled, her own wings appearing again, folding over her as if forming a cloak for a moment, and Kala looked at them thoughtfully before shaking her head. "Just because I fell does not mean I cannot rise again. I do not ever think that I will reach the heights I did before, but that does not mean that I could not find Father's message again, follow his ways again."

Her smile turned a little bitter, and she shook her head. "Unlike you and the high-ranking members of the Grigori, I fell because of a lie. I thought at the time that lust equated to love, and I fell willingly because of that. When my lover proved false, I wallowed in my Sin for my entire time with the Grigori. For hundreds of years. But the thing about Lust is that it does not feed the heart as much as love."

Azazel held back a scoff at that, thinking she was just being poetic, but when she looked at Harry, he wondered if that was all there was to it. The look of affection and love on her face for a moment was surprising on the face of one of the better seducers among the Grigori. *But then again, she isn't among us anymore, is she? My word, Kala's changed even more than Akeno, it seems. A part of me is proud of her, but what the heck does that have to do with those*

wings of hers? Fallen is fallen; you can't change back, and none of us can change the color of our wings.

"I found that I wanted more, I found myself lost, and then, I found a guide. A guide to lead me back, perhaps not to what I once was, but to a future me that I could be proud of. And I am. I've accomplished quite a bit since leaving the Grigori, grown quite a bit as a person in a way in these past eight months than I ever did in the hundred years up to it. Not in power, but as a person." She looked back at Azazel as she went on quietly. "There is no grand secret, no spell or trick to it, and the grayness of my wings does not indicate that I am any more powerful than I was when I left the Grigori in terms of raw magical talent, if that is what you were wondering, Azazel. I have simply found myself back to our Holy Father. I will never rise again to Heaven, but simply falling does not mean you cannot dare to fly."

"That was part of it. Although, I wouldn't be selling yourself so short on that." Azazel shook his head, looking over at Harry. "Well, if you're sure I can't entice you to at least let me examine these wards or everything else you've been up to here in Kuoh, I think we're done here."

"I think we are, too," Harry said dryly, shaking his head. "You know the way out."

He stood there, watching as Azazel turned with a final chuckle at that, turned, and leaped off the roof. He was not at all surprised when, moments later, the leader of the Grigori zoomed off down the streets on some kind of extremely expensive-looking motorcycle. "Well, that was a nonstarter. Still, I hope we've warned him off from bothering the wards again. If he really does keep on poking them, he'll eventually get caught, and I don't think I would be all that sad about it on a personal level. Politically, it would make issues, but we've got so much bigger issues at hand at the moment I can't bring myself to care."

When the trio reported this small meeting to Rias later that night after the kids had been put to bed, her own impression was much like Harry's. "If he reached out immediately to us after we stopped Vali from taking away Kokabiel, he could almost have been in with us from the ground up. At that point, the resources of the Grigori, and in particular, their holy magic might have been interesting. But as it is, we really don't need that any longer. The youkai, WW and our own resources suffice. Although, it is truly fascinating to think that only Gasper and Kiba use Sacred Gears among our clan."

"Gasper... I suppose I could've asked for some help in training his Baelor's Eye. But I have to confess it didn't occur to me," Harry mused before going on in a more joking tone. "You're right. Most of us don't use Sacred Gears, although having Ddraig around has been important a time or two."

Since he was currently wearing the boosted gear on his arm to get the Red Welsh's opinion on things, the Dragon was able to respond to this, which Harry relayed to the others. **"Important a time or two is it? Koneko would probably say I've been useful far more often than that, but you're right. Most of your power base you all have made yourselves by mixing your various magical schools together. It's been very interesting to watch, to say nothing of the fights we've all gotten into. And there is no way in the universe I'd go through whatever kind of training or whatever Azazel might come up with to make me stronger or my partner stronger. With that bastard, you know there'll be some nasty kind of prank somewhere in it."**

"Exactly my point. I might have given Azazel a pass in terms of waiting, considering that he had to deal with his own internal matters directly after that event, but he never reached out to us before this, not even through my brother. No, he's missed the boat entirely, I am afraid." Rias said, mentally adding, *and that might cost the Fallen Faction a lot down the line. Just as it will the Church. Neither of them are allied with the power structure we've here in Kuoh, and it is through Kuoh that Danan is accessible. But at least the Church's reasoning for not reaching out to us is more acceptable in a way, and we have a few real allies among them. And Asia. How the church reacts to our little saint will be the major telling factor in any future dealings with them.*

"That is enough political talk," Kala said, poking her head up into the attic bedroom, having spent time with Asia doing their nightly prayers after coming back from the meeting with Azazel. Now, she rose out of the hatch, her fingers already beginning to work at her dress, undoing the placings at the back of her neck and sighed, letting it fall to her feet, before walking forward, naked save for her lacy bra and panties. "Akeno and I should be getting back to the think tank. So unless you want to come through with us and wile away a few days on the island I..."

That was as far as she got before Harry bounded towards her, lifting her up into a hug, his arms around her waist as his mouth found hers hungrily.

OOOOOOO

Teleporting through to Danan the next day to Akeno and drop off Cú, Harry took them straight to the laboratory island, only to find someone shouting his name the moment they appeared. "Harry! Thank goodness! We really need to figure out a way to communicate between dimensions without you or Lily being involved and simply teleporting people from one place to another."

Turning in the direction of his oldest friend, Harry smiled at her. "Hello, Hermione. You're looking much more put together today than the last time I saw you. I take it you followed my orders on getting some rest?"

“That was days ago our time. Do keep up,” Hermione said, rolling her eyes and moving forward to give him a quick hug. “But thank you anyway for reminding me that all we needed to do so. But we actually have things to show you.”

“I can see that,” Harry said, looking around the area. The makeshift sand beds were gone, and several houses, magically crafted out of the ground (they looked like Hobbit smials to Harry’s eyes) stood around the glade. A large circular area directly around the Fal Stone had been kept clear. There was a road leading to what looked like a strange indent in the ground as if the think tank had been experimenting again, although Harry could see a gleam of stone around the edge. To the other side, there was a new path leading through the forest and what looked like the beginnings of a greenhouse across the series of houses from where the path began. “And if the MACUSA magi-neers did all this in however long it’s been since I left last, I am definitely happy to have them working on the Kuoh School of Magical Disciplines.”

Hermione looked around, her eyes blinking for a moment before snickering. “Er, yes, well. They do good work. I wish I could say I took part in any of it, or remembered any of the discussion about the housing and everything, though.” She coughed, then shook her head. “Um, anyway, I didn’t mean all of that. Know, we have progress to show you with the magic draining problem!”

Now it was Harry’s turn to blink in surprise, and he looked at his old friend, cocking his head to one side. “Do you mean you have something to show me personally or something to show everyone? I don’t want you to make the same presentation twice. And where is Zeoticus?”

“Mister Gremory should be around here someplace or maybe working with a few of our rune scribes near the sand tables. I have to thank Rias for thinking up his addition to the research team, his help took away one of the main bottlenecks. And I definitely think our presentation is for more than just you. Give us another hour of your time to set it up, and then bring everyone through that you think needs to be involved in... Well, I suppose the logistical aspect of this? I didn’t really think about it at all if I’m honest, but Tsubaki pointed it out, and the Onmyouji rep agreed. We’re not quite finished with everything, but she thinks we’ve gotten to the point where we need to start gathering supplies and a workforce.”

“A far cry from what you had when Cú demanded a break back on Earth. I take it the rest of you were able to work out the math and stop the various runic disciplines from trying to kill one another?” Harry quipped although he was genuinely impressed. When he had been here last, the group looked as if they had come to a dead end, but it seemed as if only some rest (and several days' worth of time) had been enough to get them past whatever issue they had been having.

“Yes, it only works because a sufficient amount of magic equals gravitic mass, but...” At Harry’s suddenly wide-eyed look, Hermione waved him off. “Yes, I will be making a paper on that at some point, but, right now, I believe that you should bring along anyone you think will be involved in that process.”

Shrugging, Harry nodded to Cú and turned to lay his hand back down on the Fal Stone in preparation to teleporting through, changing the time dilation effect between the two realms to 2 to 1 again. He reported this to Hermione, and said that he’d be back in a few hours max. “Unless you want me to pop back in immediately with some more food?”

This was answered by a near-universal shout from several of the other researchers. “Coffee!” Was that general shout, with only Luna popping in with the suggestion of McDonald’s hashbrowns for some reason as the sole exception to the rule.

Still chuckling at that, the last thing he heard before transferring back to earth was Hermione turning on Cú, saying, “And if you think you can skive off again, you best think again! We’ve got some questions about the Fal Stones and Celtic runes that we need you to answer.”

Bringing together Rias and the other members of the clan who would be involved in any kind of procurement project was simple enough. This meant Akeno, Rias herself, Yasaka, and that it. Kalawarner came along because she had been part of the project, too, leaving Yubelluna to stay with Lily and the others. With that settled, Harry gathered as much coffee and tea as he could, transferred it over, and then came back in time to see off Lily to school.

Getting in touch with Sirzechs was handled by Rias at around the same time. When he was free, he brought along Ajuka and Grayfia. Getting in touch with a few people on the Wizarding World side of things took a good bit longer, although, within a few hours, there was a representative for the Onmyodo government arriving in Kuoh despite it being around twelve at night at that point. Getting a sufficient number of WW reps, given the disparate time zones, was also somewhat irritating. Still, by the time the school day had ended once more, around sixteen representatives had gathered in Kuoh once more. From there, they transferred back through to Danan and the island.

In the nine hours they had been gone, it was clear that all of the researchers, wizards, Dutugamunu, devil and even the sole demigod had taken time off to make themselves more presentable. The crater Harry had seen before turned out to be a small open amphitheater centered around what looked like the magical equivalent of a hologram projector, which Harry had seen before used during the Tri-Wizard tournament.

Although many of them were still slurping at the tea or coffee Harry had brought through. Thankfully, none looked too wired to make sense, and that was good enough.

Harry was not surprised to see Hermione still taking the lead despite not being the most senior or experienced member of the research team. She at least liked to talk to people, unlike Dutugamunu, who saw dealing with other people as a boring chore completely unnecessary in his old age. Tsubaki might well have done just as good a job as Hermione, but she didn't have Hermione's grasp of Arithmancy or wizarding-style magic. *And let's face it, Hermione's had years to get used to putting on presentations to earn funding for her and Padma's spellcrafting. Japanese schools don't seem to believe in using class presentations all that often. Zeoticus probably doesn't have a grasp on everything, and Cú, the less said, the better.*

"Ladies and gentlemen, I won't go over why we're all here," Hermione began, her voice a well-trained cadence. "The magisphere of Earth is edging ever closer to **lethal levels** of oversaturation. I hope that you have seen the report from Professor Harkins about how Earth is approaching a final cliff's edge in terms of how much magic has been pumped into it and the damage it is doing to the physical world. Frankly, given how long it's taken us to work on this project already, it would probably already be too late if not for the time dilation effect that the Undertaking which links the Danan dimension and Earth has within its magical matrix."

There were some mutters about that from several of the Wumpus reps who hadn't realized that time and Danan could be so different from Earth, but most of the listeners understood what she was talking about, even those who had not read Professor Larkin's report. The continuing disasters going on around the world were more than enough to make it clear to everyone that Earth was in a very bad way. Just that morning, there had been a massive Tornado that hit Argentina and the Falklands, while southern Africa was getting battered by horrifically nasty waves, making any ocean traffic practically impossible from the tip of South Africa up to Madagascar on one side and the Republic of the Congo on the other.

"Lord Potter basically commissioned those of us you see in front of you to work on a solution because we were in a unique position to bring together many different magical schools of thought. And it is only because we have been able to do so that we **have** come up with a solution. That, and the fact that we have a place to send the magic in the first place."

Here, Hermione, who was being far more formal towards Harry than normal, nodded to Harry before letting her gaze sweep around the amphitheater. "I will warn you all now. This is going to be **huge**. It will be the biggest, hardest magical project since the Wizarding World's Notice Me Not and anti-non-magical wards were created. In many ways, this project will be even bigger."

"Consider us sufficiently warned about the grandiose scale of the project, Miss Granger-Patil. I can speak for all of my fellows when I say we are ready for the main presentation," Roberto Lyle, the former Chief Mugwump, stated, while Neville Longbottom, who Shack had

chosen as the British rep to this meeting, watched on in interest beside him. Most of the others there were not Mugwumps or politicians, but rather Arithmancy or Rune Masters, but even the other politicians looked on with interest.

Hermione nodded, and Tsubaki and one of the Onmyodo experts moved forward, carrying between them a giant globe of earth. It was taller and wider than either of them. They set it down in the middle of the runic array that Harry had recognized as being those that would project images up into the air. A wave from Hermione's wand had the globe floating above the ring of runes, and a moment later, outside the ring, Padma tapped her own wand down on two other runes, starting the array up.

A halo of light began to encompass the globe, shifting and moving, changing colors as it went. One color was yellow, another dark red, and a third a light aquamarine color so that it could stand out against the oceans on the globe. Underneath all of that was a pure white color.

The white color originated in five spots around the globe projected onto the surface of the globe itself rather than around it. Unlike the other lights, they did not expand save for one single spot, which looked like it was somewhere in Japan, growing to become several times larger than the others. *On the main island to the south, but not the farthest point, Kansai...it's got to be in Kyoto.* Harry suddenly realized. *Right over the Dragon Nest, I'd wager. It's the only thing that makes sense.*

To one side of Harry, Yasaka also made that leap of logic, releasing a slow breath. "Mah, isn't that interesting."

As the lights started to settle into their final positions around the globe, that one spot was connected to each of the other colors. Soon, under the direction of Hermione and several others, the network of different colored lights shifted and changed. Two of the colors, yellow and blue, expanded to encompass a greater area around the central globe than the red, with blue being the outermost. Each level was connected by varicolored bands of light, showing that they were not separate but all part of a larger whole, each layer of the net connected to one another and then down to the white point in Kyoto.

When it was all finished, the globe began to turn, and with it, the net, showing that the connecting points of the net, which looked like little bulges of light in various segments all around one another and the earth as a whole, had to remain in specific places. Rias hissed at that, shaking her head. "How precise do those points need to be? That alone is going to cause trouble."

"This is the solution, ladies and gentlemen. A web of three different layers that will pull ambient magical energy into itself and the ley lines of the planet, then shunt that accumulated magic into Danan," Hermione explained.

“Everything involved is designed to emphasize durability and the concept of ‘transfer’. Arithmetically, the net is obviously based on the base number five,” Padama added. “Five Fal Stones on this side of the Undertaking. Twenty-five Fal Stones settled into the center of special rune stones in the first layer, and twenty-five here in Danan. The rest of this enchantment will be connected to that layer in five places, with each layer of the net connected to the lower one in five places.”

“You’re talking in large-scale terms, but what exactly do you mean by rune...”

The words from the Onmyodo rep cut off as one of his countrymen stepped forward, gesturing with a talisman in either hand. A huge slab of granite rose up, pushing off a tarp, and began to hover in the air. It was cut in a precise seven-sided figure polygon and was around fifteen feet across, thin enough to be a table almost, flipping to show the crowd its front.

As it did, everyone stared.

Many in the audience had been impressed by the underlying magic of the presentation, the runic array in use, the way it seemed to shift and move at command. But that runic array, which was mainly Wizarding World in nature with a bit more interactivity added by five scattered Ankhsera runes, had been but a side project, something made to help the researchers with the main project and the presentation itself.

The complexity of the runic array on the granite slab made the magi-science already on display seem like child’s play in comparison.

Harry’s group were perhaps the only ones in the audience that could pick out every different runic language on display there. Even he could barely follow it all, but he at least understood the basics of what he was seeing. *Absorption, strength, rebound, air, gather long with two of the runes from Shiva, the one that means ‘same’... linked to the absorption rune from Norse. It... it... could work. However why not the ‘equal’ rune?* That had been the last of the three Sanatana Dharma runes Harry had been given by Shiva.

“Wizarding style including runes from India’s school, with Onmyodo specific glyphs used to connect them together with Ankhsera. Which in turn is livened by runes taken mostly from the Norse runic school. Celtic runes to gather the energy in one place, with Egyptian, Indian, Mayan and Ankhsera runes acting as the principle absorption points,” Hermione said, shaking her head and looking over at the wizard and world members of her crowd of listeners. “It is horrifying to contemplate, but a portion of this ritual is going to be based on some of the research that Nefertiti and Akhenaten did prior to the horror they unleashed on Egypt. The underlying principle of area saturation and absorption. Other principles go even further back, Aztec runes, which we think is where part of their knowledge came from, mixed in with

Ankhsera and Celtic. If not for the carte blanche we were given, we would never have found that information hidden in MACUSA's archive."

There were several noticeably stiff faces at that, and more than one man or woman there leaned forward, trying to scrutinize the massive runic array. None but Harry and his group, though, could grasp it all. While most of the reps had been chosen for their knowledge of runes or magic, it was clear to Harry they still could not flow what was in front of them. *Heck, I can barely follow it all*, Harry thought before speaking the next bit aloud. "Is it just me, love, but is there a portion to one side of the main center of the runic array devoted to runes that look like those in your teleportation tunnels."

"You're not too far off. That would be my father's contribution, although they are different too, not physical transportation, but energy... that's clever," Rias hummed, sending a look of admiration her father's way that caused the man's chest to puff up a bit.

"Pointing out the obvious, but how exactly are we going to make a net around the entire world made out of a contiguous runic array? Especially for something like this, which seems to be mostly in the air," the Indian representative asked. While he had no idea what he was seeing, he had enough faith to trust those who had obviously put in the work. "I have to imagine that any interruption of a line between the various points would be very bad."

"That is actually why we're putting on this presentation. We're not quite finished tweaking this yet. There are still a few things we need to iron out. But the basic premise is sound, and the math **finally** works," Hermione stated, her voice trailing off into a grumble-mumble, out of which Harry's enhanced hearing could make out the words research, gravity, mass, and theory.

While she had been brought through by Harry the last time he'd come through, Kala had decided not to stand with the other researchers. Instead, she was snuggled into place beside Harry on one side with Akeno on his other side and Yasaka beside Kala. Rias was beside her queen, but wasn't about to argue with the seating position, considering that Akeno and Kalawarner were the ones who were most involved in the research project. "Thank the Holy Father that they were able to work out the math. I swear, if they had asked me to help on that side of things, I would probably have had to be committed to a madhouse."

Snorting, Harry wrapped an arm around her waist, pulling Kala more tightly against his side as Hermione continued the presentation. "...Still working out the exact positions of the various nodes in the second and third layers, which have to match the preceding formula as well as the precise wording for the final portions of the ritual, which Cú is helping us with. But that is essentially what we will be doing: Each point on the web will absorb the background magic of the world in a specific area. The web, with energy transferal points designed and created by the

Gremory clan, will funnel that energy around, with each layer connected to one another by runes taken from different magical schools, and then down into the Fal Stone. From there, the ritual will transfer it into Danan. Thus while on this image we have used lines to connect the nodes, we believe there should be no physical representation of that in the real world."

"Implementing this is going to be quite a bottleneck, as the Indian representative just pointed out, because frankly, the positions of those nodes will be **incredibly** important. They can't shift, and nothing can be allowed to get in between them. While we have already tested the effect of a wider Notice Me Not Charm being placed on the node, we know for a fact that keeping that spell in place will grow noticeably harder once the ritual begins. We have run various tests, and even without using the full runic array, a Notice Me Not from Akeno Himejima fails within minutes.

"And before anyone asks, no, we cannot put up a full ward around these nodal points." Hermione shook her head firmly, looking in particular at the Wizarding World reps. "The magic flowing into the array is directly opposite the magic in the ward. They clash, don't work well, and eventually cause a cascading event in both warding and ritual array. And bluntly, a ward is hard to maintain in the air in any event."

There were some murmurings at that, as that seemed something they should have already figured out, But Tsubaki spoke up quickly, glancing at Sona, who had been staring at the rune stone for some time in silence. "We haven't run any tests on the full array, obviously, but considering that what will be funneled from one area to another is part of the ritual enchantment, which shouldn't impact anything on the physical level, but recall the sheer amount of magic we're going to be shifting here." Tsubaki shook her head, staring at the globe in its web of light and color, then over it toward her King again. "Although I would hesitate to call this an enchantment, it is simply too small a word for what we are trying to do here. Ritual even doesn't quite come close, although a ritual is at the bedrock of this enchantment."

"We've devised solutions to various problems up to this point, but we can't get out of the fact that significant segments of the ritual will have to physically be in place at the chosen areas of the world. And then they will need to be covered by Notice Me Nots, which will, in turn, need to be continually recast." Hermione agreed.

"And outside of the Kuoh Group, none of you can even contemplate how difficult it has been to make all of these different runic languages work together without any of them falling apart, attacking one another or simply not working at all," Dutugamunu grumbled. "We had to practically take every portion of the runic languages apart to figure out what they had in common. Energy, strength, force, push, pull, absorb, fundamental concepts which--"

“Yes, thank you, Dutugamunu,” Harry interjected, knowing a lecture was about to come his way, and wanting to save both himself and the other representatives that torture. “So essentially, we’re going to need whole armies of Obliviators. We’re going to need to infiltrate the non-magical world to a certain degree to make certain that planes and so forth aren’t going to go through the areas where the nodes are... wait. We’ve seen proof that enough magic in an area impacts the Earth and people. The number of young magicals who have been found recently in Egypt is proof of that second point. What happens to a plane if it comes near a node? What’s a safe distance?”

“That’s a point. There’s no way to get the non-magicals to down all of their planes and helicopters, especially considering everything else going on in the world. That’s just not going to happen,” The Onmyodo government rep added. If they needed that, then the team might as well go back to the drawing board.

“The lines on this map weren’t just to show the way the ritual interacts with all of its layered nodes. Thanks to Zeoticus-san, we have determined that, when transferring significant magic from one node to another there is a noticeable impact on the physical world.” Hermione answered, bowing towards the Gremory clan head, who stood to one side of the rest of the think tank. “Not much of one in comparison to transferring it without teleporting the magic, but it is still there. However, the upside is that those lines are the only real threat to anything nonmagical. So long as something physical doesn’t intersect them, going through the rest of the net will be alright.”

I note she isn’t talking about the effect on people, Harry mused, sharing a glance with Yasaka and then Rias, who had both talked to Sala and his kids the night before. That could be good, as in, it isn’t a problem and thus ‘Mione’s ignored it. Or the number of wizards and witches is going to go through the bloody roof. Then again, there’s been no reports of anyone above fourteen showing signs of magic in Egypt. So maybe not as big a problem as I fear. Still a problem, but a smaller one.

“What we really need to start gathering and organizing are teams to actually create the various runic arrays,” Tsubaki picked up the thread of the presentation again. “Emplacing them will be another issue, but I believe sufficient scouting and the Gremory clan should help with that. Luckily we don’t need Gremory clan members on the actual arrays. Magic carpets and so forth to let the nodes hover over the ground at significant points will be harder to come by, and yes, what wizards call Obliviators and other specialists with Notice Me Not Charms from both the Wizarding World and our Devil variety will need to be brought in. We’ve worked out some aspects of those already.”

At that, Padma stepped forward. A tap of her wand had the globe floating back down to the ground and the web disappearing. This was replaced by a segment of the triple-layered web, coincidentally one right over Japan. This allowed the crowd to look at all of the different layers of what they were proposing, seeing every node in turn. “Essentially, for each aspect, we will need a force of...”

At that point, many in the crowd pulled out parchment or notebooks and began to write down information. This portion of the presentation was why most of them were there in the first place. From the conversations Harry had with them as they arrived in Kuoh, most of them, although many were experts in rune craft or enchantment, didn’t care to know how the problem was getting solved, only that it was. He found that quite sad, really, but wasn’t about to complain again about the insular nature of the Wizarding World. Not when, after listening to Padma explain how many written scribes would be needed just for that one portion of the net, he had done the math and compared that portion to the rest of the entire thing.

“I presume that you want us to bring through to Danan as many runes scribes and everything else is possible? Get all of the large rune stones ready here, and then transport them out?” He asked as Padma finished her portion of the presentation.

“That’s correct,” Hermione spoke up for her wife. “It’s frankly the only way we’ll be able to get all of this done in time. But we will need veritable armies of Obliviators and at least enough large-scale carpets to carry the rune stones and hold them in place.”

The wizard and officials all looked at one another, with the Indian representative scratching at his beard thoughtfully as the others just stared in shock at the sheer size of the enchantment they were talking about. “I, I cannot promise that there are that many magic carpets in existence. Especially after the rest of magical Europe and America tried to use the passage of laws to make them practically nonexistent. We may need to bring through the carpet makers.”

“We have nearly three hundred teams of Shinsengumi, with each team consisting of four members,” the Onmyodo representative stated. “I think for this, we can hand over the vast majority of those, perhaps keeping only fourteen for ourselves for emergencies?”

“While I thank my fellow from Japan, my concern is, indeed, how many Obliviators are going to need to be on standby the world over,” Patrick said, shaking his head. All of the other magicals, devil, wizard and youkai alike, nodded at that. “Especially considering the power the Notice Me Not will need when the ritual begins, that could be a major problem.”

Even as she nodded agreement to that point, Rias noted that her father was staring at where the holographic projector had shifted back to covering the earth again in the triple nodes, biting his lip worriedly. When Rias spoke, she voiced what she felt were his concerns

despite his having been part of the think tank for at least seven days or so. "I have two questions." The others were finished speaking, then spoke up his own concerns. "One, how are we going to get all of this into place? I presume you mean for my clan to help with the transportation. That is fine as far as it goes, but our people will need time and practice to teleport to these coordinates. That will take time and a lot of effort. And my second question is built on my first: how precisely do these nodes have to be placed? When you're up 40,000 feet in the air, there isn't any actual viewable landmark to note your position."

"We will need to use the nonmagical GPS system for that kind of thing. And the placement of the nodes will need to be very precise, I'm afraid," Tsubaki answered, also looking over at Zeoticus for a moment, who had brought up that point before. "The good news is that we don't have to start the underlying ritual until everything else is in place. We only get one chance at this, and having a cut out like that is a very good thing."

Sirzechs raised a hand at this point. "I feel there's also something else we need to talk about. We've spoken about what will happen if nonmagicals stumble through a node or the lines directing the absorbed magical energy. But what if someone on the magical side of things tries to interrupt the ritual deliberately? Like the Khaos Brigade attacking one of the nodes, some of the workers, or Ophis appearing to attack the ritual site? Because there is no way that any Notice Me Not or even a ward from anyone here would be enough to stop Ophis or even someone like Vali from noticing what is happening. And magic on this scale will attract their attention."

Frankly, Sirzechs wasn't certain ritual was going to cover the portion of this that Harry would be seeing to. It sounded much more like a Blessing to him. But as with most deific magic, Sirzechs didn't really have an idea of where a ritual to call upon the power of a god started and where Blessing ended. So, he was willing to trust Harry on that point. So long as Ophis didn't come out to play.

The members of the think tank looked at one another, trying through nonverbal cues to shout 'not it' to one another in as loud a manner as possible. Cú, however, who had indeed worked on this project if not nearly as long or as hard as any of the others, knew precisely what would happen and took it upon himself with a certain amount of relish, it had to be said, to explain things. "Boom!" he shouted, startling many in the crowd to flinch.

Fighting an urge to slap the Irishman upside the head as she had Seamus numerous times after becoming a prefect, Hermione spoke up quickly. "If anything interrupts once the ritual begins, if Harry is attacked or something interrupts the flow of deific magic into the ritual as the ritual begins to shift the accumulated magic through to Danan, there will be a blowback of tremendous portions. If someone destroys even one of the nodes, the magic that will have

already accumulated within the net will have to go somewhere, and it will go straight back to where it came from with catastrophic results on the physical world, the overall impact dependent on the magic held within the net at the time.”

Harry scowled, shaking his head and cursing himself for not realizing the same thing that Sirzechs had: that someone was almost bound to come and investigate. *We might be able to talk to Indra or his reps, but Ophis and the Khaos Brigade? Maybe Vali and Cao-Cao could be talked down. Not Ophis. And that’s not even considering Akhenaten and Nefertiti. No way those overblown energy vampires would ignore such an event.*

“So we almost have to be certain that someone is going to try to interrupt the ritual. Either through simple paranoia or through malicious intent,” mused Yasaka.

“I’m sorry, but I don’t think there’s any way to completely hide the ritual from those with magical senses,” Hermione said with a sigh.

Harry scowled, putting his hands together in front of his face and kneading his eyes for a moment. “That honestly may be a dealbreaker, Hermione. Tsubaki, everyone, I don’t want to denigrate what you’ve all done, but if we need to defend the ritual, heck the entire net, at the same time as we’re using it, then we just don’t have enough people. Not strong enough to fight off Ophis, the stronger members of the Khaos Brigade or someone like Akhenaten or Nefertiti.”

“Yeah, If Ophis shows up at any point, we’re screwed,” Sirzechs said. He wasn’t all of that good a magical scientist, although he had been amused by how many notes his friend Ajuka had taken throughout the presentation, as well as the look of interest on his face as he looked at Tsubaki and several of the others in the research group. “Maybe, maybe, if me, Harry, Ajuka and the rest of our heavy hitters are ready and able to intercept her, we **might** be able to fight Ophis and keep her away. That’s a big maybe. And if Harry is tied up in the ritual...”

“Along with me,” Rias murmured, looking across Akeno to her husband. “Hermione did mention that, correct?”

“Your powers of teleportation will be added to the ritual, yeah.” Harry said with a nod. “The starting node where all the magical power will be transferred to will need to be continually powered by you or one of your clan members.”

“Can we reach out to these other two factions of yours? The church and the fallen? They might not be able to deal with this Ophis creature, but surely they will be able to give us significant numbers to deal with anything else,” Roberto questioned.

“Perhaps. Getting the Church to agree will be an issue. Getting the Fallen to agree might be easier,” Sirzechs murmured, unaware of Harry suddenly scowling along with Kala and Akeno. “But that still leaves the problem of Ophis.”

“Which might mean we need to be a little sneaky,” Harry said thoughtfully. When all eyes turned to him, he shrugged. “What is Ophis’s goal? Not for the chaos brigade, but Ophis’s personal goal? To get into the Dimensional Gap, right?”

Everyone there in the know about Ophelia nodded, while those who did not look confused. “Well, it seems to me that looking as if we’re going to give her what she wants one way or another might be a way to keep her attention elsewhere.”

Sirzechs hummed under his breath, then asked Hermione politely how much longer it would take them to work everything out and then how much subjective time back on earth it would be before the parts of the ritual and everything else was ready. The people who would be working on procuring the various large granite slabs for the warm wardstones of the carpets and everything else would need quite a few conversations back on Earth to figure that out, but they could state unequivocally that it would be at least a week in earth time before they could even begin to get the ball rolling, and that presupposed that they had the manpower necessary to create Obliviator/devil equivalent teams to cover the entire globe in the first place.

“In that case, I think we’ve all got work to do. Ajuka, you and I need to figure out a way to somehow use some of those spies we know that the chaos brigade has in its employ. I think it’s time to set out some bait, not just for one enemy, but several.”

Harry and Ajuka both nodded, as did Cú, who added, “If yer hunting an elephant, you create a pit trap. If ya hunt a wolf, bring a spear. If ya wanna kill an alligator, use poisoned meat.” The Irish demigod snorted. “All those work on humans, too, sometimes.”

“We will leave you to your work then.” Harry stood up, looking down at Hermione with an eyebrow raised, asking if they had anything else to go over but she shook her head, and he smiled. “In that case, gentlemen, ladies, I think we’re done here. I will escort you all back through the Fal Stones, and you lot can get to work.”

He looked over at Sirzechs. “And I hope that you do find some way to convince Ophis to look elsewhere for a bit, preferably somewhere in the Underworld. If she’s anywhere on Earth, she’s going to be feeling this happening whatever bait we use and that’s not going to be good for us. Although, do you think that if I could contact Shiva, and get him to work alongside us, we might be able to overwhelm her?”

“If the earth could take our fighting, you mean?” Sirzechs asked archly. Considering that he was wearing several dozen pieces of jewelry that were normally not on his person, as energy dampeners even just coming through from Kuoh, that was not a rhetorical question.

“Point. But what about in the underworld?”

“Probably not. I don’t have as good a handle on Shiva’s overall power as I do yours or my own Harry, but I think if he or his family could somehow face Ophelia. They would already have done so.” At that, Harry had no answer, and a moment later, he began to organize the trips back to Earth through the Fal Stones. They had a lot of work to do.

OOOOOOO

Unbeknownst to Harry and the others, other forces at work would also push those seeking Cocytus to act.

Le Fay Pendragon’s estimate of how long it would take to figure out how much power she would need to power the enchantment to enter the Dimensional Gap had been spot on. The rest, not so much. When it came to working out the runes and the various enhancement and targeting spells, Le Fay needed a **lot** more help than she had thought she would, and while the power quotient was pointing towards the need for nine sources, there needed to be far more stability built into the enchantment than she had initially thought. This meant still more in terms of runes, specifically Ankhsera runes working in tandem with the various Wizarding World styles.

Luckily, with Ophis making this the top priority of the Khaos Brigade, that help had begun to flow in almost at once. At first in the form of physical items, and now in terms of the help Le Fay needed when it came to the various runic languages.

The young British girl tugged at the edge of her witch’s hat as she looked around the laboratory that she had put together for this project with a smile. The various sand tables, the massive slab of granite against the wall for any finished runes, the different whiteboards for equations and a bookshelf in one corner looked good. All in all, it screamed research to Le Fay, and she enjoyed it.

At a noise behind her, Le Fay turned, a bright smile on her face that only grew brighter when she saw her brother opening it, leading in the group of experts that the Khaos Brigade had found for her. “Good afternoon. My name’s Le Fay Pendragon and I’m the leader of this project.”

The bright, cheery greeting from the young girl and her age drew many a strange look from the wizards and witches as they entered the room. Several of them had actually been kidnapped by the Khaos Brigade for this purpose in the past twenty hours, then forced to submit to the spells and draconic tattoos to keep them from sharing the Khaos Brigade’s secrets by Ophis. As well as being outright utterly terrified of the diminutive creature in a girl’s body that was the Infinite Dragon. Finding themselves being placed under the command of a cheerful, extremely cute young girl with a British accent was not the way they thought this would go.

The only one in the crowd who wasn't thrown off by Le Fay's age, attitude or appearance was a devil woman. Her wings were currently visible over her shoulders as if to make a point of the fact that she was a devil, with small glasses on her nose, the devil woman dressed almost like a dominatrix, but Le Fay wasn't going to judge her on her appearance. If Ophis didn't feel that this woman had some skill or intelligence to bring to the project, then she wouldn't be here.

The devil woman pushed through the card and moved to the side of the doorway opposite where Arthur stood while the rest of the crowd bunched up in the doorway, leery of entering and yet knowing that trying to run away meant death.

"Le Fay Pendragon. I do not believe we've been formally introduced. I am Katerea, the true inheritor of the Leviathan name." Katerea glared at the young girl as if expecting Le Fay to know her name, but the fact was, Le Fay hadn't had anything to do with recruitment or, indeed, most of what the Khaos Brigade had been up to, so she didn't know that this was one of the two representatives of the Old Satan Faction who had been sent to treat with Ophis, and had ended up dominated by her. "Although, I have to wonder why you were tasked to lead this project and not me. I would have thought that Ophelia would be intelligent enough to put someone with more experience and sheer power over a project of this nature. Especially when I am a superior devil, and you are but a human."

While Arthur bristled a little, although most would've been hard-pressed to tell that he was doing so, Le Fay did not. She simply smiled back and gestured them all into the lab. "Please, come in."

The humans and, she noted, two vampires looked a little leery, but a few did start walking forward. Not the two vampires, who stared where they were, looking between Le Fay and Arthur. Le Fay wasn't certain how to read their faces but decided it wasn't as important as talking to Katerea, who was obviously the Ankhsera expert.

Gesturing Katerea to follow her, Le Fay moved over to one of the whiteboards, flipping it around to show the back of it where most of her Arithmantic work had been written out in very small letters. "I think I'm the leader of this lab because my brother and I became involved in a cross-dimensional incident, and that is where I acquired some of the information that allowed me to start this project in the first place. It took me a good while to figure out everything, but I think in the main, my math is right anyway. We need a certain amount of power and impetus to break the Dimensional Barrier but not too much to move past it. The trick will be in what I call the Funnel Effect and the lack of 'Destination' when it comes to the spell structure--"

"I will be the judge of that." The devil woman interrupted harshly, moving forward, blocking the view of the others as she examined it.

Not that Le Fay supposed many of the men in the group were complaining, given what Katerea was wearing. *G, good grief, that outfit doesn't leave much to the imagination, does it? I wonder if I'll ever be brave enough to wear something like that? Well, not exactly like that, I don't think the leather look will ever be for me. But something as daring, as sexy? Mini skirts and things like that...*

After a few moments, Katerea's haughty, cold exterior of the woman started to melt away, and when she looked over at Le Fay, it was with more... not respect precisely, but interest certainly. Le Fay wasn't quite sure if she liked that look or not. It felt almost like Katerea was looking at her with the same approval a dog trainer would give a dog who had mastered a trick without the need to actually train it. "This is fascinating. I had heard of Arithmancy from Ajuka Beelzebub. Say what you will about the man. He is a genius. But I did not think that humans had come up with an equivalent. Fascinating. If I understand all this, you're right. It could work, although we might need to revisit the idea of nine foundations, or as you put it here, power sources. That feels unstable to me, but I will need to work on it a bit to figure out why. I also understand why you need a master in Ankhsera now."

"Exactly. I was able to work out the math of it, and some significant portions of the ritual. The lack of a destination, for example. But I'm not a rune scribe," Le Fay admitted. "I've barely begun my own studies in that area. And I have little to no knowledge about ritual enchantments."

That wasn't entirely correct. Le Fay did remember a good chunk of the ritual that Harry Potter and his group had used to cross dimensions, but she could talk about it to anyone beyond vague statements, so Le Fay felt the white lie was justified.

Katerea nodded thoughtfully, then looked around the room. "It seems as if you have everything we will need to work here, bar servants to bring us food and drink."

"Those can be arranged," Arthur said from where he was leaning against the wall next to the door. "You will find Ophis is very accommodating. Beyond the fact that none of you will be allowed to leave until after your work is done."

And I don't know if most of the witches and wizards we kidnapped will be allowed to leave even then. Cao-Cao said something about keeping them from joining the enemy, but whatever that means, I have no idea, Arthur added internally. *I haven't bothered following news from the Wizarding World since Le Fay and I returned from Ireland, but I might need to rectify that. And here are many nonaligned wizards and witches to ask about it.* Since Arthur was closer to Vali and Le Fay was, essentially, closest to Ophis given her research and the wizards who still survived in the Khaos Brigade were allied with Cao-Cao that wasn't a small consideration.

As Arthur thought that, one of the wizards spoke up, moving around the still-immobile vampires leerily, heading deeper into the room as he did. "Well, I suppose this beats out trying to get out of being volun-told that you're conscripted to help the nonmagicals with all the various disasters plaguing their world. As if we should care about what muggles get up to. It's probably their fault it's all happening in the first place," he muttered to one of the witches, who nodded back.

Le Fay blinked at them, turning away from where she had watched Katerea march over to one of the sand pits, a magically created copy of the whiteboard in front of her as she began to write out something in the sand. She appeared to be going over the math part of it, but Le Fay was more than willing to have anyone check over her work. This was the kind of thing you wanted to get right the first time. For many reasons. But the man's comment about natural disasters in the world had caught her attention. "I'm sorry, what?"

"There are a lot of disasters plaguing the non-magical world right now," one of the other wizards said, shrugging his shoulders. "A few of them have even hit magical communities, and like my colleague, I think that's where our attention needs to be, not helping the blasted muggles and their overbreeding issues."

"Define the term natural disasters. The base was hit recently by an earthquake, but that is all either of us knows about such things." Arthur interjected, stepping forward from where he had been leaning against the wall.

As he did, the vampires flinched and scooted away, heading deeper into the room and away from both Pendragon siblings. Several of the normal wizards and witches noticed this, and wondered about the mild-seeming man in his sharp, Victorian-era suit and glasses, but they had seen sufficient horror today to not comment.

"We don't know what's causing it all, although I heard some rumors about some kind of magical experiment gone wrong. Now, if that is the case, yeah, I suppose we do have to clean up after ourselves," one of the other wizards said, ending the words in a grumble, which caused Le Fay to scowl. She wasn't going to pick a fight about things, but she didn't like how a lot of the wizards and witches of the magical world tended to look down on non-magicals, and hearing that statement from several of these so-called Masters was irritating.

"But anyway, there's a lot of natural disasters hitting all at once out there," another said. "A lot. Small, large, mostly storms and a few scattered earthquakes and those huge waves. I heard MACUSA was hit by several."

"I tell you, it's a problem with the background magic of the world! Some things started up, and the physical world can't take it. That's the official stance of my government, and if you

can't trust the government, who are you going to trust?" The person with an American accent said.

At which point every other witch and wizard said as one, "Nearly anyone else!" They were even joined in this by the two vampires, and even Katerea snickered while the MACUSA man just looked on, bewildered at their attitude.

One of the witches went on to say, "And anyway, it doesn't really matter. The Wumpus declared it an international emergency and gave Emergency powers to Harry Potter. He'll deal with it, just like he's dealt with every other Dark Lord or Wizard that's been dumb enough to try their luck while he's still young and full of himself."

That started a mild argument, as it seemed to many of those scientists that what was needed was a more intellectual mind when it came to solving this issue. Others believed that there was indeed some kind of dark Lord behind all this and that, yes, that meant Harry Potter was the man for the job and that denigrating his work was stupid.

Frowning, Le Fay shook her head, looking over at Arthur and gesturing to the crowned with a little finger. He nodded and clapped his hands. "Ladies and gentlemen, we haven't finished the tour of the area you all will be living within until this project is finished. Let me show you to your rooms, and the commissary. After that, you will hopefully know your own way back to here and can get to work."

The Katerea waved him off when he looked her way, frowning and looking over at Le Fay. "Do you have some of the books you've based this conclusion off of? Judging from my own understanding of the magic of devilkind, your conclusions seem somewhat off. And why nine sources of power? That feels... strange. Based on the math, I can see it works, but it doesn't quite carry over to Runic Theory."

With a smile, Le Fay hastily moved over to the bookshelf, pulling out two tomes of wizarding-style Arithmancy and then a sheaf of her own notes on various equations she had used to figure out that nine was actually more stable and necessary than it first appeared. "These should answer your questions, although if you want to talk about it after you get settled into your quarters, I'll be happy to do so."

"I think that sounds like a good idea. On a project like this, you need to first get to know your team after all. And..." Katerea sighed, some of her earlier arrogance flowing off her, a faint shiver going through her body as she remembered trying to argue with Ophis that she should be allowed to come and go rather than stay within the Khaos Brigade's base until the project was finished. "I suppose I do need to settle in somewhere." She then rallied, sneering faintly. "Hopefully, Ophis has arranged a room that is suitable for someone of my tastes."

Le Fay nodded pleasantly, and the two of them moved over to join the crowd. It turned out that most of the humans were hungry, and they decided to head to the communal lunch area after seeing their rooms. Katerea retired to her own room with the notes and books that Le Fay had given her, leaving behind a final demand that Le Fay come by to- ‘talk about this ritual of yours after the annoying humans have finished shoveling food down their throats.’

During this time, Arthur somewhat cornered the American after he had gotten his food and demanded a further explanation of what all the Wizarding World Folk had been talking about. In this manner, he and Le Fay learned about recent events in the WW.

To a certain degree, anyway. The ICW wasn’t being completely open about whatever was causing the background magic of the world to skyrocket, but they could no longer hide that fact from the public either. Not least because several magical creatures, leprechauns, giants, centaurs and others, were feeling it too, and some more belligerent because of it.

On top of that, MACUSA had been forced to acknowledge the destruction of the Magical Galapagos community. Instead of trying to bury that news and try to hide what had happened, they came out and announced it to the world, along with the fact that Harry Potter had been given emergency powers to deal with it.

Leaving behind the group, Le Fay looked over at her brother. “Do you think anyone else in the Khaos Brigade has put that together?”

“Doubtful. Most of the wizards who survived the purge that Ophelia ordered after Akhenaten’s betrayal have been sequestered among us here.” The fact Le Fay’s new workers had been vetted to make certain no Metamorph was among them and then coerced into keeping the Khaos Brigade’s secret was something they dwelled upon. “And it looks as if none of the other magical communities have worked out what’s going on either, or if they have, no word has gotten out to us.” Arthur looked down at his little sister, reaching out to carefully sweep one of her locks of hair back behind an ear. “Don’t tell me you want to talk to someone about it.”

Le Fay nodded, smiling at how well her brother could read her. “But not Ophis. I don’t think she would care, so long as whatever this is doesn’t interfere with the ritual that I’ve created to open the way to the dimensional gap. “Lucifer, or Cao-Cao?”

“Cao-Cao, I think. Vali might not care either.” As much as Arthur believed that Vali was an acquaintance of his, not quite a friend, but certainly friendlier than he was towards Cao-Cao, there was the fact that Vali, outside of his ramen addiction, didn’t really care overmuch about whatever happened in the nonmagical world. All he cared about was fighting. That was it. Or at least that was the case from Vali’s perspective. There might be depths to the man, but he had never evinced any interest in any goal greater than finding strong opponents.

Cao-Cao, at the very least, believed that he was doing what he was doing in the name of humanity as a whole and thus might feel some kind of obligation to humanity as a whole. Le Fay did not like him all that much, but she had to admit his goals were seemingly a bit more noble than Vali's.

Finding Cao-Cao was easy, although explaining what was going on took a little longer. Cao-Cao had no idea that enough magic could warp the physical world and was not happy with that knowledge.

But after explaining, Le Fay watched the wheels turn in Cao-Cao's head for a few moments before he nodded decisively. "I understand, and thank you for bringing this to me, Arthur, Le Fay. I believe I have taken your announcement to its logical conclusion, that being that some creature is pumping magic into the world as a whole. And that is the problem that must be dealt with."

Blinking, Le Fay frowned, then nodded. "That, that makes some sense I guess. Could it be all of those irritating cross-dimensional teleports that Ophis once mentioned?" Le Fay knew those were probably Harry Potter, but once more could not say anything, the knowledge hidden even in her own mind under a Magical Oath.

"I do not doubt that those have made it worse, but no. I believe that there is an alternative source of magic flowing into the world now, and it is that magic source which must be excised." With that, he nodded politely to the two siblings and gently ushered them out of his room, closing the door after him and marching off himself in another direction.

Even as he strode off, Cao-Cao's mind was in turmoil. Rizevim wasn't quite ready to move just yet, but with this information, Cao-Cao knew he could no longer wait to get his hands on what was within Cocytus. No, they would have to move as soon as possible. *Earth's time is running out, and I mean to save it!*

As they walked away, Le Fay shook her head. "Well, I suppose he's decisive anyway. While his methods are horrible, there is still maybe a kernel of a hero somewhere in there."

"Not enough to redeem him, though, certainly?" Arthur asked rhetorically.

"No, probably not. But if Cao-Cao's being so decisive, maybe he has a plan. We'll have to wait and see. We're certainly not in any position to do anything about that problem." his little sister replied before leading back towards the commissary.

OOOOOOO.

Within moments of leaving the Khaos Brigade's base, Cao-Cao stood in front of the castle-like mansion of the Vali clan. When he rang the door. The door was answered By Euclid,

held open by the same, submissive female servant that had served Rizevim during the meeting Cao-Cao had with the man. "We have run out of time. Take me to your Master. We must move up our plans. I have already contacted my spy to move up her theft, if possible. But we need your master's forces and mine ready to go at a moment's notice."

As somewhat angry Euclid led the worried Cao-Cao deeper into the mansion, Nefertiti remained where she had been bidden to, one eye flicking back to her now-normal cat-like eye as she watched the pair walk off. *Thank goodness! Akhenaten and I were becoming concerned we'd have to prod them along!*

Of course, the two Pharaohs were aware of what was going on in the world at large. Their little vacation island had been nearly swamped barely a few days after they arrived. But the knowledge of that issue was one thing. Dealing with it another. For that, they needed what was hidden in Cocytus, something their secondary plan had called for anyway. *No extraterrestrial dragon is going to destroy the world my husband, and I have worked so hard to rule as gods! No, my husband and I will take her power and use it to ascend to our true place at last! 3*

But to get the item they needed to do that out of Cocytus, they needed scapegoats. *Which, by the end of the day, we will have. Our ascension is once again nigh, and no one will stop us this time!*

End Chapter

I thought to put in some of the specifics of Cocytus and the rest here, but I decided I would rather just show that and the various traps Harry and company have put in place when they occur. That way, they come as a bit of a surprise. So, this chapter basically has set up the next three conflicts.

Anyway, here is the chapter. Hopefully I will be able to get the next chapter out next month as expected. And as always, read and review.