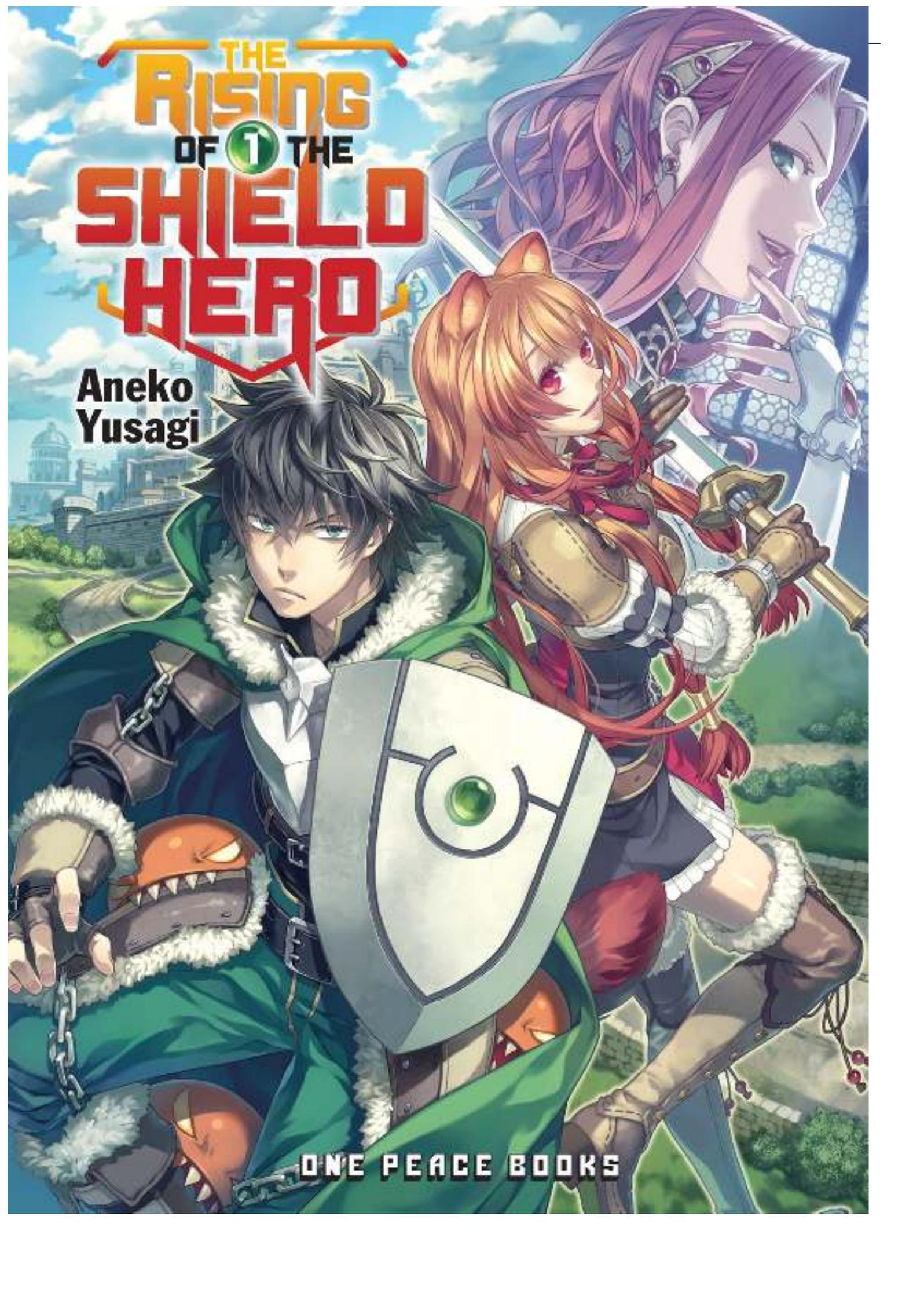


THE RISING OF 1 THE SHIELD HERO

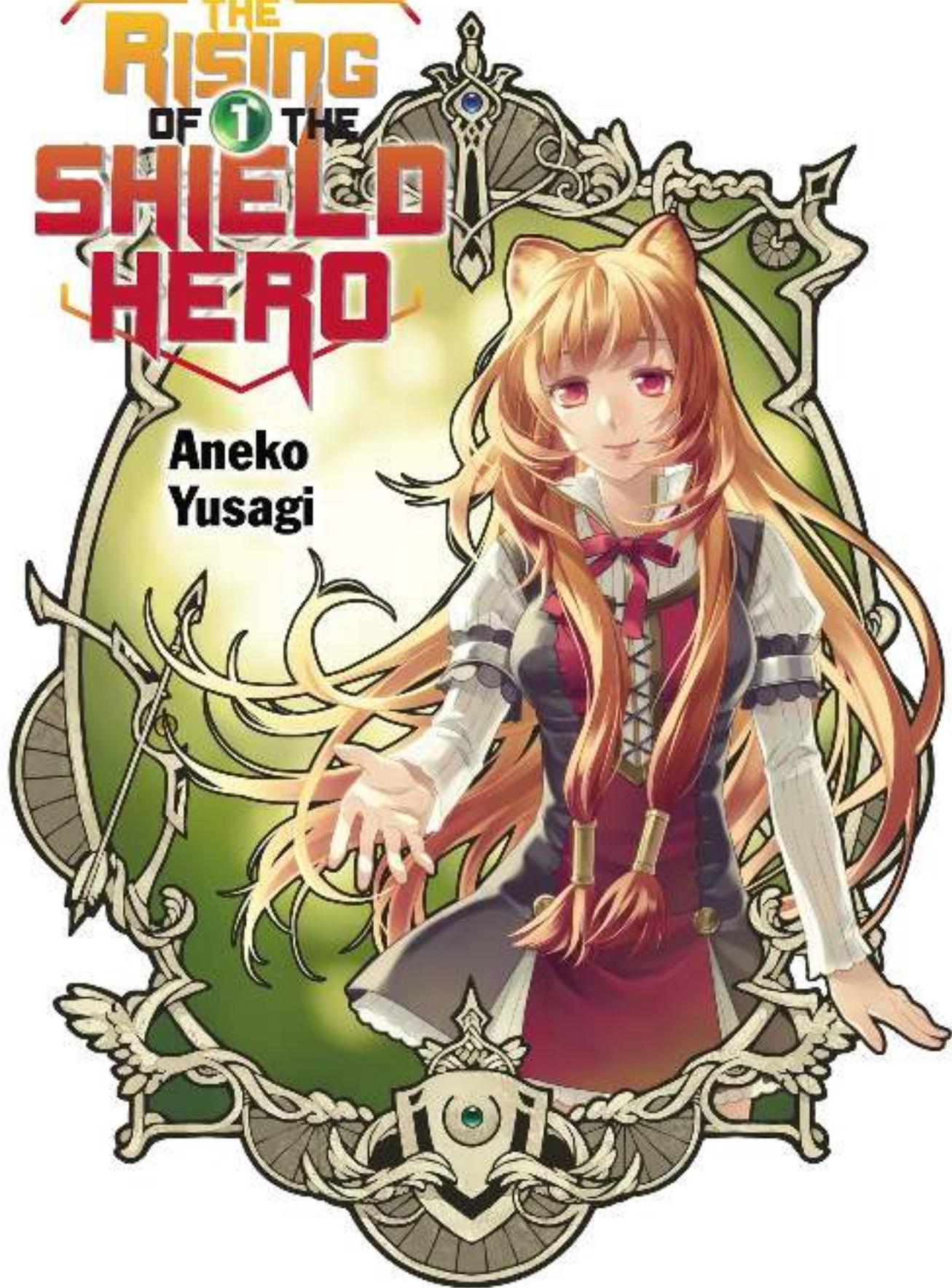
Aneko
Yusagi



ONE PEACE BOOKS

THE
RISING
OF 1 THE
SHIELD
HERO

Aneko
Yusagi





I threw the ball at Raptalia. She caught it,
looked at the ball, then at me, then at the ball.
She was surprised.
“What? You don’t want it?”
“That’s not... Yes...”



“Huh?”

I’d gone to the library to do a bit of reading.

My name is Naofumi Iwatani, and I’m a sophomore in college. I’m also aware that I am more of a nerd than the rest of my classmates. Ever since I first became interested in video games and anime and other *Otaku* past-times, I’ve given them more of my time than I give my actual studies.

My parents know this about me, and so they gave up on me early on. Instead they sent my brother to a famous prep-school in an effort to “secure his future.” But the pressure was too much for him. He got worn out with all the studying and turned into a troubled teen, dyeing his hair and yelling obscenities around the house. For a little while, the whole family was miserable.

But then a savior appeared to save the day: me!

He was always scowling and mouthing off to everyone, but I had an ingenious plan up my sleeve. I suggested he try playing a game, a popular one. It was a dating simulator, the kind where you get to go on dates with cute girls.

“What the hell?”

“Just try it! You don’t have to commit to liking it.”

I said that because I knew the real reason he had turned into such a punk.

When we were growing up, our parents had always given me whatever I asked for—but he had never received the same treatment. He wanted the freedom that I’d always had. I’m a specialist when it comes to having fun though, so he was interested in the game I suggested, if only because he knew I was an authority on fun. He told me this himself, later on down the line.

I’ll just skip right to the end: there’s one more *Otaku* in the world now.

If you walked into his room now, you’d see posters and figurines from the very same game I introduced him to. Not only that, but he also rededicated himself to his studies, got into a great school, and is apparently at the top of his class.

My parents were so happy about my intervention that they spoiled me even more as a result, so I am currently leading a very free life as a college student.

Ok, so that was a bit of a digression. I had gone to the library to do a bit of reading.

My parents give me an allowance of 10,000 yen every month. The naughty games and magazine

light novels and manga that my friends and I go through eat up that allowance pretty quickly. I have a part time job that brings in about 50,000 yen a month, which is great, but the various festivals I take part in during the summer and winter months use all that money as well.

My brother is not the sort of person to go out of his way to participate in a festival, but my parents rent a room for us near the festival grounds to encourage his participation. Well whatever they have their own lives to live so they can't give me all that much money. They try to help cover tuition and rent, so that's plenty. So whenever I need to save money, when I don't have all that much I go to used bookstores or to the library to read. If I have free time, I like to play games online, but you really want to be good at them there's no end to how much time you could sink into a character.

Besides, I consider myself a jack-of-all-trades, and I'm not really the type to invest all my time in one particular thing. That, and even when I do get into a game, I don't really care about leveling up my character. I just end up obsessed with gathering money in the virtual world. Even as I'm writing these words, I have characters and rare items that I collected up for sale.

Thanks to those sales, I somehow managed to secure free time for myself in the real world.

Ok then, so I was there in the library when all this craziness started.

I was looking over an old bookshelf in the corner that was dedicated to fantasy novels. I think that fantasy has a history at least as long as recorded human history. I mean, if you really think about it, even the Bible is a type of fantasy novel.

The Records of the Four Holy Weapons?

This really old-looking book just fell off the shelf. The title was pretty hard to make out, and I guess whoever had been reading it last hadn't taken the time to put it back securely. Whatever. Figuring it was probably destiny, I brought it back to the table, sat down, and opened it.

Flip... Flip...

It was the kind of book that starts off by telling you about the fantasy world itself. To sum it up it seemed to be about a different world, one with an apocalyptic prophecy to worry about. The prophecy said that many waves of great destruction would wash over the world until nothing was left. To stave off disaster and escape destruction, the people would call for heroes from another world to come and save them. Or something like that, anyway.

Hmm, well the idea seems pretty cliché now, but something about the book being that old felt ironically, fresh.

So the four heroes each possessed a weapon.

Sword, spear, bow, and shield.

I started to wince at the content. I mean, when you think about it, a shield is not even a weapon all. Anyway, I started to skim ahead.

The four of them went on a journey to train, gather strength, perfect themselves, and stop the prophesied destruction of the world.

My head jerked. I'd nearly fallen asleep in my seat. It was all too much, I was yawning. And the book was so old-fashioned. I mean, there were no cute heroines at all. The only girl was the princess and she was horrible because she was manipulative and obsessed with the heroes. She kept casting flirtatious glances at all of them, pitting them against each other. I wished she would just pick one of them to focus on.

The Sword Hero was active and powerful; the Spear Hero valued and protected his friends, and the Bow Hero would never tolerate injustice. All the heroes were good people with great personalities. There aren't many stories like that these days. You know the kind where all the characters share the protagonist spotlight?

What's this? The story was shifting to talk about the Shield Hero.

"Huh?"

I turned the page and let out an involuntary yelp. All the pages after the introduction of the Shield Hero were blank. I kept flipping, kept looking them over, but they were all blank, white pages. There was nothing else in the book.

"What the heck?"

I was thinking over how strange it all was when I started to feel dizzy.

"Huh? What's..." I heard my own bewildered whisper and felt my consciousness slipping away... I'd never dreamed that I'd be transported to another world.

Chapter Two: The Heroes

“Oh wow...”

I heard the sound of people marveling at something and suddenly was awake again. My eyes weren't ready to focus on anything, but I pointed them straight ahead anyway. There were men in robes, looking at me in awe, and apparently speechless.

“What's all this?”

I turned in the direction of the voice and discovered three other people there. Like myself, they didn't seem to know what was going on.

I scratched my head.

I'd been in the library only moments before, but then... why? And just where was I?

I flipped my head left and right and found that I was in a room. The walls were made of stone. That's what they call brick? Regardless, I don't think it was anywhere I'd been before. And it certainly was not the library.

I looked at the floor. It was covered in geometric patterns that had been painted in some sort of fluorescent material. There was also an altar of some kind. It looked like something magical, straight out of a fantasy.

We were standing on the altar.

Wait a second, why was I holding a shield?

I was holding a shield. It was feather-light, and fit my hand perfectly. I couldn't figure out why I was holding it though, so I went to put it down, only to find that I was unable to do so. It was like it was stuck to me.

“Where are we?”

Just as I was wondering the same thing, the man next to me, the one carrying a sword, asked some men in robes.

“Oh Heroes! Please save our world!”

“What?!”

The four of us shouted in unison.

“What is that supposed to mean?”

But the appeal of the robed men sounded familiar, like something I'd read on the Internet.

“There are many complications in this situation, but to offer a simple answer to your question, we have just completed an ancient ceremony and summoned you four Heroes.”

“Summoned?”

Yes, that was it. There was a really good chance that it was all some prank, but there seemed nothing wrong with hearing them out. Besides, it's more fun to be pranked than to prank someone else, anyway. I don't mind that sort of thing. I think it's fun.

“Our world teeters on the brink of destruction. Heroes, please lend us your strength,” said the robed men, bowing very deeply to us.

“Well, it wouldn't hurt to...” I began to reply, but the other three guys spoke up quickly.

“I don't think so.”

“Yeah, me neither.”

“We can go back to our world, right? We'll talk about your problems after that.”

What? Did they think it was okay to speak to someone like that? Someone that was bowing to me out of desperation? Why couldn't they save their conclusions until after they'd heard the bulk of the situation?

I glared at them in silence, and soon the three of them were looking me over. What were they smiling about? We could all feel the room growing tense.

What jerks! I bet they were actually happy to be there. Think about if it were true! They'd get the chance to have adventures in another world. It'd be a dream come true! Sure, it's a cliché, but still... couldn't we at least hear them out?

The guy with the sword looked like he might have been in high school. He pointed his sword at the robed men and nearly shouted, “Don't you feel any guilt for calling people into your world without their permission?”

“Besides,” said the guy with the bow and arrows, “Even if we save you and bring peace to your world, you'll just send us back home, right? That just sounds like a job to me.” He was glaring at the robed men.

“I wonder how much you've considered our opinion on this. I wonder how it could be worth our while? Depending on how the conversation goes, keep in mind that we might end up enemies of your world.”



So *that's* how it was. That's what they wanted. This is when they try and figure out their standing and demand a reward. Well, they certainly were an outspoken, confident bunch. I felt like I was somehow losing to them.

“Yes, well, we would very much like you to speak with the king. He will discuss future compensation with you in the throne room.”

One of the robed men, apparently their leader, leaned against a very heavy looking door until it opened, at which point he pointed in the direction we were to go.

“Whatever.”

“Fine.”

“I don't think it really matters who we talk to, but whatever.”

My outspoken companions complained as they left the room in the direction indicated. I didn't want to be left alone, so I followed them out.

We walked out of the darkened room and down a hallway made of stone. How should I describe it? The air felt fresh... and I can't think of any other words for it. Vocabulary has never been my strong suit. We were able to steal a glance through a window, and the scenery took our breath away.

The clouds were high, high in the sky for as far as you could see. There, below us, a town spread out from the building we were in, all the houses lined up pretty, just like one of those European cities you'd see featured in a travel brochure. I wanted to pause for a minute and take it all in, but there was no time. We were hurried past the window and down the hall, and soon enough we arrived at the throne room.

“Huh, so these kids are the four Holy Heroes?”

An important-looking older man was sitting there on the throne. He leaned forward as he spoke. He didn't make a good first impression on me. I just can't stand people who condescend.

“My name is Aultcray Melromarc XXXII, and I rule these lands. Heroes, show me your faces!”

I almost yelled at him to shut up, but I caught myself just in time. I guess he was in a position of authority, and he seemed to be a king of some sort.

“Now then, I shall begin with an explanation. This country, no, this whole world is on the brink of destruction.”

Seems like a rather regal introduction. The other guys with me spoke up. “Well, I guess that makes sense, considering you'd call for us from another world.”

“Yeah, figures.”

I’ll try to summarize the king’s story:

There was a prophecy about the end of the world. Many waves would appear, and they would wash over the world, again and again, until nothing remains. Unless the waves were repelled and the accompanying calamities avoided, the world was doomed. The prophecy was from long ago, though the time it spoke of was now, this very moment. There was also a large and ancient hourglass that would signal the times. The hourglass predicted the arrival of the waves, and its sands began to fall one month ago. According to legend, the waves would come in one-month intervals.

In the beginning, the citizens of the land mocked the legends. However, when the sands in the hourglass began to fall, a great calamity visited the land. A fissure appeared in the country of Melromarc, a fissure to another dimension. Terrifying and horrible creatures crawled out from it in great numbers.

At the time, the country’s knights and adventurers were able to repel the advance of the creatures, but the next wave was prophesied to be even more terrible.

At this rate, the country was doomed, having no way to ward off the impending disaster. Considering the situation nearly hopeless, the kingdom decided to summon heroes from another world.

That about sums it up.

Oh, by the way, it seems like the Legendary Weapons enabled us to understand the language of that world.

“All right,” said one of my companions. “I think I understand where you’re coming from. But does that mean you are basically commanding us to help you?”

“Seems all fine and good... for you”

“I agree. All this sounds pretty self-centered to me. If your world is on the road to destruction, just let it burn. I don’t see what it has to do with us.”

I could tell by the condescending giggle he struggled to hide that he secretly thought that this was all really cool.

Well it was my turn to speak up next. “As they have said, we don’t have a responsibility to help you. If we dedicate our time and lives to bringing peace to your kingdom, do we get anything besides ‘thanks and see you later’? I mean, I guess what I really want to know is if there is a way for us to go home. Could you tell me anything about that?”

“Hmmm...” The king shot his vassal a sidelong glance. “Of course we are planning on compensating you all for your efforts.”

The heroes, including myself, pumped our fists in celebration. Yes! Phase one of negotiation complete.

“Naturally,” continued the king. “I’ve made arrangements to support you financially, and also to provide you with whatever you may require, in thanks for your efforts on our behalf.”

“Oh yeah? Cool. Well, as long as you’ll promise us that, I don’t think we’ll have a problem.”

“Don’t think you’ve bought us off. As long as we aren’t enemies, I’ll help you out though.”

“Agreed.”

“Me too.”

Why did they all have to act so superior all the time? Think about where we are! Do you really want to make an enemy of the king? Still, I guess it was good to get all the particulars out of the way in advance rather than risk losing everything down the road.

“Very well then, Heroes. Tell us your names.”

Wait a second—I just noticed something. Doesn’t all this sound similar to the book I’d been reading in the library? *The Records of the Four Holy Weapons*?

A sword, spear, bow...and yes, a shield.

Even the four heroes were the same. Could I have somehow gotten pulled into the world of that book? I was starting to mull these things over when the kid with the sword, the Sword Hero, stepped forward and introduced himself.

“My name is Ren Amaki. I am 16 years old, and a high school student.”

The Sword Hero, Ren Amaki. He was an attractive young guy. His face was handsome, and his hair was relatively short, maybe 160 centimeters. If he cross-dressed, you’d mistake him for a girl in a moment. His face was so composed. His hair was black, and cut short. His eyes were sharp, and his skin was white. Overall he gave off a cool impression. Like a quick, slender swordsman.

“All right, I’ll go next. My name is Motoyasu Kitamura. I’m 21, and a college student.”

The Spear Hero, Motoyasu Kitamura. He came off as light-hearted and kind, something like an older brother. His face was at least as well kept as Ren’s, the type of guy who was sure to have a girlfriend or two. He was probably around 170 centimeters. His hair was pulled back into a ponytail, which I normally don’t like on men, but it seemed to suit him. Overall he seemed like a caring, older brother.

“Ok, my turn. I’m Itsuki Kawasumi. I’m 17, and still in high school.”

The Bow Hero, Itsuki Kawasumi. He looked like the calm, piano-playing sort of character. How to explain it? He seemed vain, and yet, at the same time, he held some unrevealed strength. There was something indefinite about him. Something vague. He was the shortest among us, probably somewhere around 155 centimeters. His hair style was slightly wavy, as if it had been permed. He was like a soft-spoken younger brother.

Apparently we were all Japanese, though I would be pretty surprised to see a foreigner here anyway.

Oh, my turn already?

“I guess I’m last. My name is Naofumi Iwatani. I’m 20 years old, and a college student.”

The king looked down at me condescendingly. I felt goose bumps crawl up and down my spine.

“Now then. Ren, Motoyasu, and Itsuki, correct?”

“Your Grace, you’ve forgotten me.”

“Ah yes, pardon me, Mr. Naofumi.”

So the old guy was a little slow on the uptake. But you know... I was still feeling somehow out of place among them all there. And now he forgot to include me in such a short list?

“Now then, Heroes. Please confirm your status, and give yourselves an objective evaluation.”

“Huh?”

What did he mean by status?!

“Excuse me, but how are we supposed to evaluate ourselves?” asked Itsuki.

Ren sighed loudly, like he couldn’t be bothered to explain it to us. “You mean to say that you haven’t figured it out yet? Didn’t you realize it the moment you arrived here?”

Oh come on, he just knew everything. Was that it? Guess he was some kind of genius.

“I mean,” he went on, “Haven’t you noticed any weird icons hanging out in your peripheral vision?”

“Huh?”

But since he mentioned it... if you looked off vaguely, and focused on the soft edges of your field of vision, there were little marks there. I could see them too.

“Just focus your mind on that icon.”

I did, and heard a soft beep, just like I was sitting in front of a computer, and the icon expanded to take over my field of vision. It was like opening an Internet browser.

Naofumi Iwatani

Class: Shield Hero LV 1

Equipment: Small Shield (Legendary Weapon)

Other-World Clothes

Skills: None

Magic: None

There were still quite a few things listed, but I decided to ignore them for the moment. So this was what the king meant by status? Wait. Just what the hell was all this? It felt like I was in a game.

“Level 1... That makes me nervous. “

“Good point, at this rate, who knows if we’ll even be able to fight at all.”

“What is all this?”

“Do these things not exist in your world, oh Heroes? You are experiencing ‘Status Magic’. Everyone in this world can see and use it.”

“Really?”

I was amazed at how normal everyone seemed to think it was, this numerical expression of your physical body.

“And what are we supposed to do? These numbers seem awfully low.”

“Yes, well. You will need to go on a journey to further polish your abilities, and to strengthen the Legendary Weapons you possess.”

“Strengthen them? You mean these things aren’t strong right from the get-go?”

“That is correct. The summoned Heroes must raise their Legendary Weapons by themselves. That is how they will grow strong.”

Motoyasu was spinning his spear and thinking. “Why don’t we just use different weapons while these ones are bulking up? Seems smart to me.”

That did seem like a good idea. And besides, I was stuck with a shield, not even a weapon in my own right. I’d better get another weapon.

Ren cut in to clarify, “We can work all that out later on. Right now, we should focus on improving ourselves, just like the king has asked us to do.”

It was so exciting! We were heroes summoned from another world! It felt a little like manga, but

any Otaku worth his salt would jump at a chance like this. My heart was pounding in my chest, and I couldn't get myself to calm down. It looked like the other heroes around me felt the same way.

“Are we going to form a party? The four of us?”

“Wait just a moment, Heroes.”

“Hm?”

Just as we were preparing to set out on an adventure, the king spoke again. “The four of you should set out separately, to recruit your own companions.”

“Why is that?”

“According to the legends,” he began, “The Legendary Weapons you possess will interfere with one another should you form a party. Both your weapons and yourselves can only grow when you are apart from one another.”

“I don't really understand all that, but if we stay together, we can't level up, right?”

Huh? Everyone found instructions near their weapons. We all began to read at the same time.

Attention: the Legendary Weapons and their owners will experience adverse effects if they fight together.

Caution: it is preferable that the Heroes and weapons are used individually.

“I guess it's true then...”

But why did all of this sound so much like a game? It was like I'd been transported into a game. Anyway, games don't feel this real, and there were real humans living here, so I guess it was still the reality of one kind or another. Still, the system reminded me of a game nonetheless.

The instructions on the weapons went on at great length and detail, but there wasn't enough time to read them right then.

“So you think we should try and form our own parties?”

“I will attempt to secure travel companions for you all. Regardless, evening draws near. Heroes, you should rest for the night and prepare for departure on the morrow. In the meantime, I will find companions for you from the village below.”

“Thank you very much.”

“Thanks.”

We all thanked the king and retired to our room for the night.

There were ornate beds prepared for us in the provided chamber. Everyone was sitting on them, closely inspecting their weapons, and letting their vision drift absentmindedly to check on their status screens.

I glanced at the window, only to find that the sun had set long ago, which just goes to show how much time we had spent reading the instructions.

Ok, so let's see here. The Legendary Weapons required no maintenance at all. They were powerful and sturdy enough on their own. The material the weapons were constructed of reacts to the level of the hero who wields them, and any slain monsters were recorded in something called a weapon book.

The weapon book was something that apparently kept a list of all the forms the Legendary Weapons were capable of transforming into. There was a weapon book for my own shield that could be viewed from the weapon icon. I opened it.

Fwip!

The border of the window quickly expanded to fill my field of vision, and it was filled with rows of weapon icons. It appeared as though none of them were currently available for upgrades. How would you believe it? It looked like certain weapons could be set and improved upon, growing more powerful with time.

Got it. It was just like the way that skills and weapons are leveled up in online games. It said that in order to learn skills, the powers hidden in our weapons would have to be set loose. It really did seem exactly like a game of some sort.

“Hey, this is just like a game, don't you think?”

It looked like the other guys were reading over the help menus too. One of them responded to my question.

“Like a game? I think it actually might be a game. I know games that are just like this,” said Motoyasu, bristling with an air of conceit.

“Huh?”

“Yeah, it's a pretty famous online game. Haven't you heard of it?”

“Uh, no? And I’m a pretty hardcore *Otaku*.”

“You’ve never heard of it, Naofumi? It’s called *Emerald Online*.”

“Never heard of it. What is it?”

“Naofumi, have you even played an online game before? It’s famous!”

“Nah, I’ve only played stuff like *Odin Online*, or *Fantasy Moon Online*. Those are pretty famous too.”

“I’ve never heard of them before. Must be minor titles or something.”

“Huh?”

“Huh?”

“I don’t know what any of you are referring to. This is nothing like an online game. It’s more like a console game.”

“Motoyasu, Itsuki, you’re both wrong on this one. If anything, it’s a VRMMO.”

“No way. Even if we suppose, for the moment, that we are in an online game, it still must be the sort that you control by a mouse, or with a controller.”

Ren looked confused by Motoyasu’s theory, and he jumped into the conversation. “A mouse? A controller? What kind of antique games are you guys talking about? These days, aren’t all online games VRMMO?”

“VRMMO? I guess you mean a Virtual Reality MMO? Cut the sci-fi crap. You know the technology isn’t ready for stuff like that yet.”

“Huh?!” Ren nearly shouted in surprise.

Thinking back on it, he was the first of us to figure out how to use the Status Magic. It kind of seemed like he knew what he was doing. He might have known more than he was letting on.

“Um, excuse me? You all seem to think this is like a game you know. Can I ask what the names of those games are?”

Itsuki raised his hand and answered quickly: *Brave Star Online*.

Emerald Online.

I spoke up next. “I dunno. I mean, are we even in a game world?” I also thought it seemed a bit like a game, but could we really have arrived in a game that I had never even heard of?

“I see. As for my opinion, this reminds me of a console game called *Dimension Wave*.”

And so we all seemed to think the world represented a different game.

“Wait a second. Let’s try to collect what we know for sure.” Motoyasu rested his head on his

hands and tried to calm us down. “Ren, This VRMMO you speak of means exactly what we said correct?”

“Yeah.”

“Itsuki, Naofumi, you guys understand what he means, right?”

“I think it sounds like a game from science fiction, but yes.”

“I think I read about something like it in a light novel once.”

“Fair enough. That’s about all I can think of too. Okay then, Ren. The game you mentioned *Brave Star Online*. Is that a VRMMO too?”

“Ah, right. The VRMMO I played was called *Brave Star Online*. The world felt very, very similar to this one.”

Considering the way Ren spoke of it, it seemed like this VRMMO thing was ordinary technology for him. It sounded like computers could read the user’s brain waves, and allow the user to dive into the computer world directly.

“Ok fine. Well, if that’s true, Ren, in the world you come from, do they have any games similar to the things we have mentioned? Like maybe in the past?”

Ren shook his head. “And just so you know, I consider myself pretty well-versed in the history of games where I’m from. I’ve never heard of anything like what you are all talking about. But the games you guys are talking about... You all consider them relatively well-known titles, right?”

Motoyasu and I nodded in agreement.

If we knew anything about online games, which we all thought we did, it seemed impossible that we wouldn’t know anything about the games we were all mentioning. Even if, for the time being, we grant that we were not as well versed in online games as we all assumed ourselves to be... We all thought we were mentioning famous games. How could we be so wrong?

“Ok then, let’s start with some common-sense questions. You can all name the current prime minister, right?”

“Sure.”

“Ok, let’s all say it at the same time.”

Gulp.

“Masato Yuda.”

“Gotaro Yawahara”

“Enichi Kodaka.”

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