

King of Blades

Written by

Paul Hikari

[paul.hikari@yahoo.com](mailto:paul.hikari@yahoo.com)

FADE IN

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Waves wash against the pristine, sandy shoreline and glisten in the sunlight filtered through the clouds above. A samurai and a knight face each other, ready for battle.

The samurai, YOSHIHIRO (34), wields a katana and wears white composite plate armor with red and black highlights reminiscent of medieval Japan.

The knight, JOSHUA (31), holds a montante at his side, pointing backwards. He is covered head to toe in pitch black plate armor reminiscent of medieval Spain.

Joshua charges at Yoshihiro and engages him in a fierce battle. After several exchanges, they stand facing each other again, weapons ready. A thin line of bright red pixels shimmers on Yoshihiro's cheek where blood would be in real life.

INT. YAMASAKI HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

The fight is being streamed on a large wall-mounted TV set in the living room of a well-kept, middle class house.

KIERAN (V.O.)  
(fading in)  
...moving beautifully, today,  
ladies and gentlemen! Truly a  
battle worthy of the final match of  
Children of the Earth!

Kieran's commentary continues in the background, accompanied by that of his colleagues, Juniper and Harold. The silhouettes of three elementary school girls peek over the edge of the couch.

One girl, MAKOTO (6), wavers in her seat as she points to the sea on screen.

MAKOTO  
Come on, Dad! Force him into the  
water! He can't move easily there!

The other two, conjoined twins YUKIKO and NATSUMI (6), jump to their feet, revealing their having one body and two heads between them.

(CONTINUED)

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI

(excited)

Slice him! Dice him! What are you waiting for?!

Makoto's mother, ERI (32), walks in on the girls and sets a tray of food on the table in front of them.

ERI

(joking)

You know he can't hear you, right?

Makoto shrugs. Natsumi, the left half of her and Yukiko, grabs a rice ball and bites into it.

YUKIKO

Yeah, but it's fun to cheer anyway. Right, sis?

NATSUMI

(still chewing)

Uh, yeah. That's right, sis.

Eri turns to watch her husband continue fighting the knight on screen. Yukiko grabs another rice ball and eats alongside Natsumi. Makoto, instead, picks up a curry udon bowl and a pair of chopsticks but pauses to look at Eri.

MAKOTO

Want to sit with us, Mom?

ERI

Sure. Why not?

Eri circles around the couch, sidles up beside Makoto, and wiggles her way into an empty space between Makoto and the armrest...

ERI

Scoot over.

Makoto and the twins comply, and they all settle down to see...

EXT. BEACH - DAY

...Joshua flipping forward with an acrobatic downward stroke. Yoshihiro parries the attack, sidesteps, and strikes Joshua in the back of his helmet, barely missing his neck.

INT. YAMASAKI HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Makoto jolts in her seat.

MAKOTO

Ooh, almost!

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Joshua retaliates with a wild swing at Yoshihiro's head. Yoshihiro ducks, but Joshua follows up with a downward stroke to Yoshihiro's helmet. Another swing knocks the helmet off and sprawls him.

KIERAN (V.O.)

Ooh, and Strada knocks off  
Yamasaki's helmet, straps and all!

Yoshihiro rolls out of the way just in time to avoid a diving stab from Joshua and scrambles to his feet, his katana held behind him.

HAROLD (V.O.)

That had to cause some major  
whiplash to Yamasaki at the very  
least.

His back turned to the sea, Joshua readies his montante again.

HAROLD (V.O.)

And now that his head and neck are  
unprotected, he's that much more  
vulnerable.

INT. YAMASAKI HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Yukiko and Natsumi hold their breaths and almost drop their half-eaten rice balls. Makoto tightens her grip on her udon bowl and chopsticks.

JUNIPER (V.O.)

Don't count Yamasaki out just yet,  
Harold. We've seen him come back  
from worse than this.

MAKOTO

(under her breath)  
You got it. You got it.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Yoshihiro digs his katana into the sand and flings a clump at Joshua's visor, but it misses. Joshua charges at Yoshihiro again, briefly bogged down by the water washing up around his feet.

HAROLD (V.O.)  
Perhaps, but even established  
veterans lose from time to time.

The two exchange blows again.

KIERAN (V.O.)  
That may be, but right now, it's  
still anybody's fight.

Joshua tries to tackle Yoshihiro, who spins away from him...

KIERAN (V.O.)  
And it looks like the fight just...

...and sends him crashing into a huge boulder behind him.

KIERAN (V.O.)  
(excited)  
...turned in Yamasaki's favor!

As Joshua stumbles away from the boulder, Yoshihiro slashes out both of his legs at the knee joints. Shimmering red pixels spill as the sword connects.

JUNIPER (V.O.)  
Down goes Strada!

Joshua crumples to the ground and tries to fend off Yoshihiro's follow-up attacks.

HAROLD (V.O.)  
If he wants to stay in this fight  
now, he has to beat the clock.

A bell rings, the battlefield dematerializes...

INT. MILKY WAY STADIUM - ARENA - DAY

...and Yoshihiro and Joshua materialize outside the simulator in the middle of the arena, physically unscathed. Highlights of their duel play on the holographic projection above, including Joshua knocking Yoshihiro's helmet off and Yoshihiro cutting out Joshua's legs.

(CONTINUED)

The crowd watches in the jam-packed stadium seats surrounding the two combatants.

KIERAN (V.O.)  
What a fight!

JUNIPER (V.O.)  
What a fight indeed, Kieran! I was on the edge of my seat the whole time!

HAROLD (V.O.)  
Calm down. The judges haven't made their decision just yet.

INT. YAMASAKI HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Eri glimpses between Makoto and the twins, the former fishing out some noodles from her bowl and blowing on them and the latter swallowing the last bits of their rice balls.

HAROLD (V.O.)  
Now, for those of you not paying attention, each fighter can be awarded up to fifty points: as many as ten for damage, ten for aggression, ten for strategy, ten for field control, and ten for style.

Kieran, Juniper, and Harold continue discussing the match, and Eri nods along.

ERI  
(under her breath, anxious)  
Come on. Come on. Come on.

Makoto swallows a bite of her udon, and Yukiko and Natsumi grab two more rice balls.

MAKOTO  
It's okay, Mom. I know he won.

YUKIKO  
Really? He hardly got any hits in on Joshua.

NATSUMI  
Yeah. He didn't even chop off his legs all the way.

Yukiko and Natsumi bite into their rice balls, and Makoto looks back at the TV.

(CONTINUED)

MAKOTO  
 (confident)  
 Guess we'll find out right now.

INT. MILKY WAY STADIUM - ARENA - DAY

The tuxedo-clad announcer, FRANCIS (48), approaches the center of the arena with an antique microphone in one hand and an index card in the other. He stands between Yoshihiro and Joshua while another official carries a gold-colored crown resembling a ring of tiny swords beside him.

FRANCIS  
 Ladies and gentlemen, after fifteen minutes, we go to the judges' score cards for a decision. All five judges score this contest forty-eight to forty-seven for the winner by unanimous decision  
 aaaaaaaaaaand still!

INT. YAMASAKI HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Yukiko and Natsumi leap to their feet, jump around, and scream for joy, unwittingly squishing their rice balls in their hands. Eri throws her hands above her head and claps while cheering. Makoto pumps her fist and grins, leaving her chopsticks in her bowl.

FRANCIS (V.O.)  
 The Undisputed King of Blades of the Children of the Earth...!

Yukiko and Natsumi stop jumping...

FRANCIS (V.O.)/YUKIKO AND NATSUMI  
 Yoshihiro "the Angel of Death"  
 Yamasaki!

...and then resume jumping. Eri drops her hands to her sides. Makoto puts her udon bowl on the table and smiles at Yoshihiro on screen.

EXT. RAILWAY TO EARTH - ARCADIA STATION - EVENING

With his newly won Crown of Blades on his head and a gray suitcase trailing behind him, Yoshihiro walks amidst a crowd of people trailing into and out of their respective trains.

(CONTINUED)

Just then, a rustic melody rings from the wristwatch-like N-patch strapped to his wrist. He taps it and sees an image of Makoto projected from it.

YOSHIHIRO

Hey, Makoto.

MAKOTO

Dad, Mom and I saw your match today! You were amazing!

YOSHIHIRO

Thanks.

MAKOTO

The twins came over to watch with us...well, actually, they kind of got locked out of their house. Again.

Yoshihiro snickers.

YOSHIHIRO

You know, I couldn't have done it without you.

MAKOTO

Huh? What do you mean?

YOSHIHIRO

I mean you and your mother were in my heart, and therefore gave me the strength to keep going.

Makoto pinches her chin with her free hand and nods assent, eking a faint smile. Then, she lowers her hand.

MAKOTO

So, when are you coming back?

YOSHIHIRO

I'll be home tomorrow morning at the latest. Now, get to bed. It's late where you are, isn't it?

MAKOTO

Yeah, you're right. Love you, Dad.

YOSHIHIRO

I love you too.

(CONTINUED)

The projection disappears, and Yoshihiro lowers his hand and grips his luggage. Just then, Joshua arrives, carrying a bulky backpack on his back and looking around the area until he spots Yoshihiro.

JOSHUA  
Hey, Yamasaki!

Yoshihiro turns to see Joshua approaching him.

JOSHUA  
You did great back there.

YOSHIHIRO  
Thanks. You were pretty good yourself.

JOSHUA  
Not as good as you, obviously.

YOSHIHIRO  
Oh, don't worry too much about that. You've already got the makings of a champion in you.

JOSHUA  
(bashful)  
Yeah, maybe.

YOSHIHIRO  
Just keep refining your technique and adapting to new situations and opponents, and the next time we meet, maybe you'll beat me.

He nods assent...

JOSHUA  
I'll keep that in mind.

...and then glimpses the train marquee overhead to see that his train is departing soon.

JOSHUA  
Oh, I have to go. It was a pleasure talking with you.

YOSHIHIRO  
Likewise.

Yoshihiro watches Joshua walk away and boards his own train. Joshua quietly salutes Yoshihiro.

INT. YAMASAKI HOUSE - MAKOTO'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

In the dim light of a flashlight, Makoto lies in her bed with her hands beneath her pillow and stares at the ceiling, her eyes drifting shut. Yukiko and Natsumi lie in a sleeping bag on the floor nearby, holding the flashlight.

At the foot of Makoto's bed and the twins' sleeping bag are a sheathed toy katana and a squeaky mallet duct taped to an old plastic broom handle.

YUKIKO

Hey, Makoto? Are you awake?

Makoto turns her head to the twins, who sit up together in their sleeping bag.

MAKOTO

Yeah. What is it?

YUKIKO

We've been thinking. What if we all got into Children of the Earth someday?

MAKOTO

We'll have to wait until we're grown up, but I can see us all competing there.

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI

For sure.

Yukiko and Natsumi turn their body to Makoto.

NATSUMI

...and you know...

Makoto sits up in her bed.

MAKOTO

Yeah?

NATSUMI

Wouldn't it be wild if you won the Crown of Blades?

MAKOTO

What? Me? No way.

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI

Yes way.

(CONTINUED)

MAKOTO

You know I'm more into books than swords.

NATSUMI

Well, we just saw your dad win. Fighting's in your blood, right?

MAKOTO

Fighting's all about intelligence and adaptability. Blood's got nothing to do with it.

...and gleans the toy katana.

MAKOTO

...although, I guess I could win if I put my mind to it.

Yukiko and Natsumi nod assent, then grin at each other and stand up, letting the sleeping bag crumple at their feet.

YUKIKO

Of course, you'd still have to get past us!

Yukiko puts her hand on her hip and Natsumi clenches her fist at their shared chest.

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI

(a la Francis)

The inseh-pair-able Yukiko and Natsumi Itou!

MAKOTO

(joking)

Considering that you two only have one brain between you, I don't see you getting past me.

The twins drop their hands...

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI

(playing along)

What's that supposed to mean?

MAKOTO

My point exactly.

...look between each other and Makoto several times, and then scowl.

(CONTINUED)

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI

Hey!

Natsumi grabs the squeaky mallet and she and Yukiko brandish it at Makoto.

YUKIKO

We'll make you eat those words!

NATSUMI

For breakfast!

Makoto grabs the katana and kneels up on her bed.

MAKOTO

Bring it!

The girls play fight each other, making a mess of the bedroom. Soon, Makoto whacks Natsumi's hand and Yukiko's foot, tackles them both to the floor, and draws her katana across their necks. They all laugh as the twins try to push Makoto off of them, but then, a knock rings through the door, and they stop play fighting.

ERI (V.O.)

Girls, keep it down in there,  
please.

MAKOTO

(frantic)  
Sorry, Mom!

YUKIKO AND

NATSUMI  
(frantic)  
Sorry, Mrs. Yamasaki!

Makoto scrambles to her bed, Yukiko and Natsumi to the sleeping bag, and they all tuck themselves in and drift off to sleep.

EXT. JAPANESE SUBURB - VARIOUS - NIGHT

The lampposts illuminate parts of the empty, tidy, sparsely lit streets. This view soon reveals the well-lit but nearly empty train station...

EXT. RAILWAY TO ORBIT - NEAR CHIBA STATION - NIGHT

...where a luminescent, ethereal train track forms from the sky above and leads into the station below. The train appears and rides the track toward the station, but suddenly, it slips off the track and careens to the ground below.

INT. TRAIN CAR - NIGHT

Alarms blare, lights flash, and the train rattles as it plummets. Loose carry-ons tumble about as some passengers try in vain to secure them.

CONDUCTOR (V.O.)  
 (trying to remain calm)  
 Attention, passengers! We've lost  
 control of the train! Please remain  
 seated, keep your seat belts  
 fastened and all valuables secured,  
 and brace for--!

Radio static cuts off the conductor's announcement, and Yoshihiro braces himself against his seat, watching from inside as the train plummets toward the earth.

Some of the other passengers close their eyes in prayer. Others grab onto the sides of their seats, the seats in front of them, or the poles nearby.

CONDUCTOR (V.O.)  
 (frantic)  
 Hold on!

Yoshihiro closes his eyes and takes a deep breath.

EXT. RAILWAY TO ORBIT - NEAR CHIBA STATION - NIGHT

The train turns over to its side...

CONDUCTOR (V.O.)  
 (frantic)  
 Everybody, just hold on--!

...and slams into the ground.

INT. YAMASAKI HOUSE - MAKOTO'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Makoto opens her eyes and jolts upright in her bed at the distant boom of the crash. She catches her breath and starts to lie back down, but she glimpses smoke rising from behind the houses across the street through her window.

EXT. JAPANESE SUBURB - YAMASAKI HOUSE - NIGHT

She opens the window and leans outside, listening to the sirens of emergency vehicles blaring as they speed toward the crash site and the indistinct chatter of neighbors leaving their homes for a better look. Her eyes widen and her mouth hangs agape.

INT. TOWN HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - MORNING

Makoto and Eri sit together in the chairs. Makoto eyes the other people sitting in the nearly full waiting room, and then sees a DOCTOR enter near the front desk.

DOCTOR  
Eri Yamasaki?

Eri stands up...

ERI  
Yes?

...and the doctor approaches her.

DOCTOR  
I have good news and bad news. The good news is that your husband has regained consciousness. The bad news is that he's paralyzed from the waist down.

ERI  
(wavering)  
Can we see him?

Makoto stands up beside Eri.

MAKOTO  
Doctor?

The doctor turns to Makoto.

MAKOTO  
Can't you fix his spine or something?

DOCTOR  
We can try, but it's very risky, and whether he wants it or not...that's his decision.

INT. YOSHIHIRO'S HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

Eri and Makoto stand beside Yoshihiro lying in his wiry hospital bed. A heart monitor beeps a steady rhythm.

MAKOTO

What do you mean "no"?

YOSHIHIRO

I mean just that, Makoto.

Yoshihiro scoots upright in his bed, his now immobile legs weighing him down.

YOSHIHIRO

I'm finished. It's not worth the risk.

MAKOTO

(tearing up)

But you're Yoshihiro Yamasaki. You're the King of Blades. You can't quit now! You're at the top of your game!

YOSHIHIRO

I was. Now...

He gestures to his legs. Eri puts her hand on Makoto's shoulder.

ERI

Makoto, please. He's made his choice. All we can do is respect that.

Makoto looks down and clenches her fists at her side. Then, she looks up...

MAKOTO

No, Mom. That's not all I can do.

ERI

What?

...and brushes Eri's hand away.

MAKOTO

I'll enter Children of the Earth...and I'll win that crown. Watch me.

(CONTINUED)

ERI

Maybe when you're older.

MAKOTO

Next year. That's all I need.

ERI

Makoto, no. You're only six. I forbid you from entering.

MAKOTO

Forbid nothing, Mom. I'm going.

ERI

No, you're not.

MAKOTO

Yes, I am!

YOSHIHIRO

Excuse me.

They both look at Yoshihiro.

YOSHIHIRO

Why don't you let me train you, Makoto?

MAKOTO

What? But you can't walk anymore.

YOSHIHIRO

Maybe not, but I can still teach you.

ERI

Yoshihiro, we're not encouraging her. She's too young.

YOSHIHIRO

She's too young right now, but with a few years of training, she'll be ready.

Eri glimpses between Makoto and Yoshihiro.

MAKOTO

Define "a few years".

YOSHIHIRO

As long as it takes to get you ready. Besides, you have to be at least twelve to enter. What do you say?

(CONTINUED)

Makoto sighs.

MAKOTO

All right.

Eri nods.

MONTAGE - MAKOTO'S TRAINING - OVER THE NEXT 10 YEARS

- Makoto waves her toy katana around in her room. At some point, she unwittingly knocks over the squeaky mallet and pauses, but then, she resumes swinging the toy katana.
- She watches a video of a past match that Yoshihiro won.
- She tries to do push-ups, sit-ups, squats, and pull-ups alone at a playground, barely managing any.
- In a sword fighting class, she fights another student to a standstill while Yoshihiro--now in a hoverchair--watches her.
- Yukiko and Natsumi are carried away from the base of a tree on a stretcher. Makoto watches from among the other onlookers, holding back her tears.
- Makoto does more push-ups, sit-ups, squats, and pull-ups alone at a playground, more successfully this time. Several kids playing nearby glance at her, then resume playing.
- She stands in the backyard of her house, waving her toy katana around with weights on her wrists. Yoshihiro scoots beside her.

YOSHIHIRO

Don't tighten up your grip so much.  
Hold it more in your fingers.

- Late at night, she stays up at her desk, studying complicated library textbooks.
- Back in her sword fighting class, she defeats another student, pointing her sword at his face.
- Yoshihiro and Eri eat together at their dining room table. Makoto enters, grabs a plate of food, and leaves. Eri's gaze tracks Makoto as she leaves, and then, she looks to Yoshihiro.
- Makoto runs laps around the playground while Yoshihiro times her using his N-patch.

(CONTINUED)

- At school, Yukiko and Natsumi sidle up beside Makoto and wave at her...

YUKIKO

Hey, Makoto.

NATSUMI

Sachi's having her birthday party  
at the pool, and you're invited.  
Want to come?

...but she gives them only a passing glance focusing on her sword fighting class schedule instead.

MAKOTO

Sorry. I can't make it.

- Makoto loses a match in a simulated training zone to a combat drone.

- She does yet more push-ups, sit-ups, squats, and pull-ups alone at the playground.

- She again practices her sword fighting in the backyard, this time using a weighted replica katana. Yoshihiro hovers beside her.

YOSHIHIRO

Okay. I think that's enough for  
now.

She pauses to scan Yoshihiro's chair. A notification appears on her newer model, quarter-sized N-patch stuck to her hand...

MAKOTO

No. Let's keep going.

...but she dismisses it and resumes practicing.

- She runs more laps around the playground, timing herself with her N-patch. Yukiko and Natsumi catch sight of her as they walk by with a small group of friends. They stop and turn to Makoto as she runs, Natsumi waving her hand over their heads.

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI

Hey, Makoto!

But Makoto continues running, taking only passing notice of the twins, who pout at her lack of reaction.

- She defeats the combat drone in another match in a simulated training zone.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. YAMASAKI HOUSE - MAKOTO'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Now a teenager, Makoto sits alone on her bed, skimming a holographic note on the penny-sized N-patch stuck to her wrist. Its opening section reads...

*Congratulations on qualifying for this year's Children of the Earth. You've been randomly selected from the pool of 437 fighters as an exhibition fighter.*

She scrolls through more of the note with several flicks of her hand, pausing on another section, which reads...

*...score is accumulated based on your number of victories and determines the equipment you can access.*

She resumes scrolling, pausing on still another section, which reads...

*You can, of course, trade equipment with other players--even if they're eliminated--as long as your score allows...*

She scrolls through the note several more times and then dismisses it.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Makoto descends the staircase, lugging a midnight blue suitcase beside her. Yoshihiro and Eri await her by the front door.

YOSHIHIRO

Well, look who's ready before the sun is even up. How are you on your big day?

MAKOTO

As ready as I've ever been.

YOSHIHIRO

Good to hear.

Eri steps aside toward the kitchen.

ERI

Aren't you going to stay for breakfast?

(CONTINUED)

MAKOTO

I have food packed for the train ride. I'll be fine.

ERI

But the train won't be here for another thirty minutes.

MAKOTO

Maybe not, but I prefer going early.

Eri pauses.

ERI

You know, you're still very young. You don't have to do this just yet.

MAKOTO

Mom, we've been over this. Twenty times, in fact.

YOSHIHIRO

She's right. You said so yourself. She made her choice. All we can do is respect that.

ERI

(to Yoshihiro)

No, I said that you made your choice.

MAKOTO

About Dad refusing surgery, yeah, and now, I've made mine. I can do this. I will do this.

ERI

...All right, but stay in touch with us, okay?

MAKOTO

Okay.

Makoto glimpses Yoshihiro's hoverchair.

MAKOTO

And Dad?

YOSHIHIRO

Yes?

(CONTINUED)

MAKOTO  
Thanks for all the training.

EXT. YAMASAKI HOUSE - MORNING

Makoto opens the door, steps outside, and waves to her parents inside.

MAKOTO  
See you.

YOSHIHIRO  
Bye.

ERI  
Good luck.

She closes the door behind her, looks to the sun...

EXT. JAPANESE SUBURB - VARIOUS - MORNING

...and walks toward the train station. A cat yawns atop a neighbor's fence post.

EXT. RAILWAY TO ORBIT - CHIBA STATION - MORNING

She arrives at the station and sees the train arrive from high above and dock at the station, the luminescent track disappearing behind it. She hesitates at the gate but then taps her N-patch to the gate's sensor, passes through the gate, and boards the train.

INT. TRAIN CAR - MORNING

She sits down, ignoring the other passengers crowding inside. The train computer's holographic avatar, Y.A.A.K.O.V., materializes before the passengers.

Y.A.A.K.O.V.  
Good morning, everyone, and welcome aboard the Red Dawn Line of the Global Atmospheric Railway Network, or G.A.R.N. for short. I'm your guide, Y.A.A.K.O.V.: Your Automated Artificial...

(awkward)

...uh, something...

(normal)

Anyway, for those of you who don't know the rules, regulations, etc.,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

Y.A.A.K.O.V. (cont'd)  
etc., in case of an emergency, the  
exits are...

Y.A.A.K.O.V. jabs his increasingly numerous "hands" every  
which-way...

Y.A.A.K.O.V.  
...here, here, here, there, here,  
and right next to that old guy's  
head.

...and then absorbs all but his original pair.

Y.A.A.K.O.V.  
Fasten your seat belts. Put your  
tray tables away.

EXT. RAILWAY TO ORBIT - CHIBA STATION - MORNING

An array of ion projectors pulses beneath the train,  
reforming the luminescent track leading into the sky.

Y.A.A.K.O.V. (V.O.)  
Keep your legs and arms inside the  
train, and hang on to your heads,  
everyone! This is gonna be a bumpy  
ride!

The train floats just above the track...

Y.A.A.K.O.V. (V.O.)  
Ten...nine...eight...oh, who cares  
about that stuff anyway? One!

...and takes off, riding into the sky.

Y.A.A.K.O.V. (V.O.)  
And we have liftoff!

INT. TRAIN CAR - MORNING

Makoto looks away from the window and breathes a sigh. She  
fishes her hand into her pocket, pulls out a pair of  
wireless earbuds, and inserts them into her ears.

She taps her N-patch to summon a music playlist and then  
taps the Shuffle icon, prompting a frenetic technopop song  
to play in her earbuds. She drums her fingers to the  
music...

EXT. EARTH'S UPPER ATMOSPHERE - DAY

...as the train breaches the clouds and rides the ethereal track to a colossal orbiting hulk of a city. Before long, the train arrives at a huge set of double doors, which open to let it inside.

INT. ARCADIA STATION - COMPRESSION CHAMBER - DAY

The train stops at the platform and settles down as the track disappears behind it. The doors ease shut...

Y.A.A.K.O.V. (V.O.)  
We're almost ready to drop you off.  
Just sit tight.

...and air jets hiss.

EXT. RAILWAY TO EARTH - ARCADIA STATION - DAY

Makoto faces a floating SENTRY that resembles a giant Tetris block with a TV monitor for a face. It flashes a cheery smile...

SENTRY 1  
Enjoy your stay in Arcadia.

...and floats away, taking her luggage with it. On its back is a bumper sticker with an ornate sword pattern and the words, "49 and counting."

Makoto watches the sentry leave, glances at a nearby map of the city, and walks onward. Along the way, she passes...

EXT. STARLIGHT RISE HOTEL - ENTRANCE - DAY

She sees a huge crowd of people around the towering hotel building, some entering, some leaving. Many talk about the upcoming competition, some even wagering with each other. Unknown to her, a lanky woman, PRASHASTI (38) exits the hotel and looks down the street.

EXT. RIVER OF HEAVEN WATER PARK - ENTRANCE - DAY

Makoto pauses to scan the park, with attractions that include steep, twisting water slides; a wave pool; and ground fountains; but then shakes her head and moves on.

EXT. TREE OF LIFE MONUMENT - DAY

She watches the branches of the metallic tree and can almost hear a faint electric hum coming from within. Finally, she reaches...

EXT. MILKY WAY STADIUM - ENTRANCE - DAY

She looks around to see the spectators streaming into the giant metallic bird's nest of a stadium and the thirteen holographic placards lining the hallway.

Each placard commemorates a previous King or Queen of Blades and all of the Crowns of Blades won throughout the past forty-nine years, as well as the year each crown was won. Joshua's placard is right after Yoshihiro's and lists nine Crowns of Blades won, tying Yoshihiro's record.

Makoto stops in front of these last two placards, her eyes fixed on Yoshihiro's. She lowers her gaze, closes her eyes, takes a deep breath, and then opens her eyes again, steeling herself. Then, she proceeds to the girls' locker room.

INT. ARENA - DAY

Tens of thousands of spectators fill the stadium seats and cheer. Prismatic lights crisscross through the air.

KIERAN (V.O.)  
Ladies and gentlemen! Children,  
teens, and everybody between!  
Welcome back to this year's  
Children of the Earth!

The audience ripples with excitement.

INT. COMMENTARY BOOTH - DAY

The lead commentator, KIERAN (50), sits in the middle of the booth. To each side of him are JUNIPER (35), a woman with a green beret on her head; and HAROLD (28), a young man with wiry glasses.

KIERAN  
I'm Kieran McCain, and with me as  
always are my faithful associates,  
Juniper Greene and Harold  
Richthofen.

(CONTINUED)

JUNIPER

That's right, folks. And what an event it's going to be this year! With over four hundred fighters from all over the world, who knows who's going to win?

HAROLD

Nobody yet. We'll just have to watch and see.

JUNIPER

I can hardly wait.

KIERAN

I'm sure the audience can't either, June.

INT. ARENA - DAY

The uproar dies down as Francis arrives, pausing only to adjust his bow tie.

KIERAN (V.O.)

And to introduce today's exhibition fighters, here's Francis Teague.

Francis stands tall center stage...

FRANCIS

Ladies and gentlemen, we! Are! Live! This is the exhibition match of the Children of the Earth, set for ten minutes!

...waves his hand to the audience...

FRANCIS

Presented by Into the Night. Happy from Sunrise to Sunset. Sanctioned by UN Sports Arcadia. Commissioner: Elijah Afolayan. Our five judges scoring this competition are Giovanni Bonanno, Rory Giles, Xianghua Lee, Alejandro Mendez, and Herb Soren.

...and summons a wave of excitement from the audience.

FRANCIS (V.O.)

Introducing first! Fighting out of the blue corner!

(CONTINUED)

Taking his place at the far end of the arena is GIL DONG (16), a fairly built teenage boy, roughly the same age as Makoto.

FRANCIS (V.O.)

A gladiator, making his Children of the Earth debut. He stands one hundred seventy-five centimeters tall, weighing in at seventy kilos. Fighting out of Dongducheon, Korea! Presenting...

A cloud of pixels gathers around his body and then just as quickly vanishes.

He is now dressed in a brigandine vest, his head adorned with a gray headband. His gloves are outfitted with metal spikes and his boots have metal caps. Tied at his hip with a rope rests a sheathed short sword.

FRANCIS (V.O.)

Gil Dong "Hangul Pride" Rhee!

The audience greets him with a loud cheer.

FRANCIS (V.O.)

And now, introducing his opponent! Fighting out of the red corner!

Makoto takes her place at the other end of the ring.

FRANCIS (V.O.)

A samurai, making her Children of the Earth debut. She stands one hundred seventy centimeters tall, weighing in at sixty-one kilos. Fighting out of Chiba, Japan! Presenting...

A cloud of pixels gathers around her body, and then just as quickly vanishes.

She is now dressed in midnight blue composite plate armor reminiscent of Medieval Japan. A long, silk scarf hangs from her shoulders. Tied to her hip with silken cord is a sheathed katana.

She stares across the stage...

FRANCIS

Makoto "Angel Blue" Yamasaki!

...as the audience greets her with another loud cheer.

(CONTINUED)

FRANCIS

And when the action begins, the  
battlefield will be as follows!

A holographic display materializes high above Francis' head,  
forming the image of a pristine, grassy meadow on a clear  
day.

KIERAN (V.O.)

A meadow. A bit too peaceful for a  
battlefield, wouldn't you say?

JUNIPER (V.O.)

Almost an ideal battlefield, to be  
honest. Perfectly flat, few  
obstacles. I don't see any issue.

HAROLD (V.O.)

We're about to find out if any  
issues do come up...

Francis signals Makoto and Gil Dong to come to two circular  
lights to either side of him, which they do.

HAROLD (V.O.)

...in three...two...one...

Cybernetic blips and lights engulf the two fighters.

INT. ARENA SIMULATOR - MEADOW - DAY

They find themselves standing at opposite ends of a grassy,  
sunlit meadow. Birds chirp in the distant woods, and thin  
wisps of cloud hang overhead.

Gil Dong smirks at Makoto and steps back.

GIL DONG

I'm gonna enjoy this far more than  
I should.

Makoto rolls her eyes at Gil Dong as she grips her katana.

The arena computer sounds its signal...

ARENA COMPUTER (V.O.)

Fight!

...and Gil Dong charges at Makoto, short sword drawn.

(CONTINUED)

KIERAN (V.O.)  
And here we go!

He leaps at Makoto with a flying side kick, only to be parried and lashed at with her katana.

KIERAN (V.O.)  
(excited)  
Oh! And a beautiful exchange  
between the two fighters already!

Gil Dong recovers, landing on his feet.

HAROLD (V.O.)  
It looks like that strike hit  
Rhee's shin guard, though.

INT. COMMENTARY BOOTH - DAY

Juniper is now standing with both fists clenched and raised, hopping up and down in her seat as she chants...

JUNIPER  
(excited)  
Fight! Fight! Fight! Fight! Fight!  
Fight!

Harold rolls his eyes at her, and she shrugs back.

JUNIPER  
What? You're both thinking it.

INT. ARENA SIMULATOR - MEADOW - DAY

Gil Dong and Makoto continue to exchange blows. Kieran, Juniper, and Harold's commentary follows along, including...

KIERAN (V.O.)  
Rhee's doing well, but he just  
can't breach Yamasaki's defenses,  
can he?

HAROLD (V.O.)  
His attack pattern seems too  
linear.

JUNIPER (V.O.)  
He's attacking her in a straight  
line?

(CONTINUED)

HAROLD (V.O.)  
Yeah, I suppose.

JUNIPER (V.O.)  
Looks more like he's just attacking  
her nonstop.

HAROLD (V.O.)  
Points for aggression, but it's  
really not helping otherwise.

At one point, Makoto grabs Gil Dong's ankle, flips him and follows up with a lash to his neck, blocked by his short sword.

GIL DONG  
You're good, but I'm better!

MAKOTO  
Just shut up and fight!

They break away, stand ready, and resume their battle. The commentary follows along.

KIERAN (V.O.)  
It's anybody's fight!

JUNIPER (V.O.)  
This is getting exciting! I'm on  
the edge of my seat!

Eventually, the two stand off. A weary Makoto glimpses herself and the equally weary Gil Dong to see shimmering red pixels where there should be blood spilling from their collective cuts and bruises.

Suddenly, Gil Dong throws his short sword at Makoto's face and charges at her, jumping up and preparing to kick at her face. Makoto deflects the thrown sword, grabs Gil Dong's leg, pulls him past herself, and retaliates with a slash to the back of his neck.

Gil Dong crumples to the ground, bloody pixels spilling from the wound. Makoto swings her katana to her side, eyeing the defeated Gil Dong.

ARENA COMPUTER (V.O.)  
Finish!

INT. COMMENTARY BOOTH - DAY

Kieran half clenches his fist atop the table.

KIERAN

And that's it, ladies and gentlemen! It's all over!

JUNIPER

Not bad for an exhibition battle, huh?

HAROLD

Indeed.

INT. ARENA - DAY

Makoto and Gil Dong materialize outside the simulator and step away, the highlights of their duel on display on the holographic projection above. The commentators discuss these highlights until Francis appears at the edge of the arena.

HAROLD (V.O.)

And here to make it official is Francis Teague.

Francis approaches the center of the arena.

FRANCIS

Ladies and gentlemen, this contest has come to an end at four minutes, twenty-nine seconds. Declared the winner by knockout...

The holographic display highlights the winner.

FRANCIS

Makoto "Angel Blue" Yamasaki!

EXT. STADIUM ENTRANCE - DAY

Makoto walks alone, her arms sagging. She looks along the walls, then to the arched ribbing above, and finally forward to see Prashasti waiting for her.

PRASHASTI

Ah, Makoto Yamasaki, I presume?

MAKOTO

Yes. You saw the match, didn't you?

(CONTINUED)

PRASHASTI

Uh-huh, and congrats on the win.

MAKOTO

Yeah, thanks.

PRASHASTI

I mean, it's kind of clear that you've never been in Children of the Earth before, but you took to it like a fish to water.

MAKOTO

It's not that different from the sword fighting lessons back home. Except that it hurts more when they cut you.

PRASHASTI

A lot more, yes. Take it from me. And it also helps that you're the great Yoshihiro Yamasaki's daughter, huh?

Makoto pauses.

MAKOTO

Not really.

Prashasti clears her throat.

PRASHASTI

The name's Prashasti, by the way, and I'll be your coach for this event.

Makoto raises an eyebrow.

PRASHASTI

What? You thought all those sports legends ever made it all on their own? Behind every great athlete is a great coach. The brain to the muscle, the spice to the kabob, the blueprint to the machine--

Makoto waves her hand.

MAKOTO

Okay, okay, I get it.

(CONTINUED)

PRASHASTI

Oh, good. Very good. You and the others are going to go far this year. I can feel it.

MAKOTO

Others?

PRASHASTI

Duh. You read the acceptance note, right?

Prashasti grabs Makoto's arm, taps her N-patch, summons her acceptance note, and scrolls down to a section that reads...

*...teams of 2 to 5 fighters, each assigned to a coach for the duration of the pools phase. The 32 fighters with the highest scores at the end are eligible for the tournament phase, wherein all teams are disbanded.*

PRASHASTI

See right here?

Makoto snatches her arm away from Prashasti and dismisses the note.

MAKOTO

(defensive)

If you don't mind, I can manage my own N-patch.

Prashasti holds up her hands.

PRASHASTI

All right. I see how it is. Boundaries, right? Sorry.

Makoto nods.

PRASHASTI

Anyway, since you'll be stuck with me for a while, what do you say I give you a tour of the city? You know, to help you familiarize yourself with everything?

Makoto shrugs.

MAKOTO

What have I got to lose?

Prashasti smiles.

(CONTINUED)

PRASHASTI  
That's the spirit.

EXT. ARCADIA STREETS - VARIOUS - DAY

Prashasti walks throughout the city, showcasing every spot of interest she can think of with a big grin on her face. Makoto takes only passing notice of the city and the people bustling throughout.

EXT. MOONPHASE - FRONT COUNTER - EVENING

Eventually, Makoto and Prashasti arrive at the shuttered box building that is Moonphase. An inventory list scrolls, displaying various weapons, armor parts, accessories, and souvenirs.

PRASHASTI  
And this is Moonphase, where you can find all the gear you can ever want for the competition.

MAKOTO  
Noted.

Makoto scans the front counter, her eyes falling upon the inventory list scrolling. She finds stats, classifications, and score ratings instead of price tags on all the equipment stored there.

PRASHASTI  
Yeah, go ahead and browse. You can't get any gear without the shopkeeper's approval, though.

Among the equipment is a katana with prodigious stats for its low score cost and a blade covered in thin red lines that resemble blood vessels. She only glimpses its flavor text and part of the disclaimer that follows:

*WARNING: This weapon is programmed to reflect the curse supposedly associated with it in antiquity. Neural feedback from prolonged use and/or possession may cause...*

Soon, the ancient shopkeeper, SERGEI (72), arrives at the stand...

PRASHASTI  
Speak of the devil.

(CONTINUED)

SERGEI

And he shall appear.

...lifts the shutter, and vaults himself over and behind the counter.

SERGEI

Good to see you again, Prashasti.

PRASHASTI

Likewise, Sergei, and this is one of my pupils for the year, Makoto.

Makoto bows slightly.

MAKOTO

Nice to meet you, Sergei.

SERGEI

And you as well, Makoto, but aren't you a little young to be competing this year?

MAKOTO

The minimum age requirement is twelve. I think I qualify.

SERGEI

Fair point, but don't expect to get far.

PRASHASTI

Hey, there's a first time for everything.

Sergei shrugs at Prashasti, then leans onto the counter and seats his head in his hand.

SERGEI

Tell me. What brings you here when my shop's not even open yet?

MAKOTO

It's part of Prashasti's little tour of the city. I'm here to get a better idea of what kind of equipment is available.

JOSHUA (V.O.)

You're not the only one.

Joshua arrives, towering above any of the three others at the counter. Despite being ten years older than when Makoto saw him fight Yoshihiro, he is still visibly muscular.

(CONTINUED)

MAKOTO  
Joshua Strada.

JOSHUA  
Given my reputation, everybody  
should know that name. Who are you?

MAKOTO  
My name is Makoto Yamasaki. This is  
my rookie year.

Joshua raises an eyebrow...

JOSHUA  
(already knowing the answer)  
You wouldn't happen to be related  
to Yoshihiro Yamasaki, would you?

MAKOTO  
Yes. He's my father. Why do you  
ask?

...and shakes his head.

JOSHUA  
(dismissive)  
I'm sorry. I don't speak with pale  
shadows.

PRASHASTI  
Now, Joshua, is that any way to  
treat a fellow competitor?

Joshua scoffs at Prashasti.

JOSHUA  
Do you speak for her?

MAKOTO  
I speak for myself.

Makoto taps her N-patch and taps the challenge icon on her  
scorecard. A message appears and shows Joshua as the only  
other fighter in the area.

MAKOTO  
(feigning confidence)  
I'll show you just what kind of  
"pale shadow" you're dealing with.

She taps Joshua's icon, indicating her challenge.

(CONTINUED)

PRASHASTI  
(whispering)  
What are you doing?!

MAKOTO  
(whispering)  
Getting a better idea of what he  
can do.

Joshua taps his N-patch, sees the notification of Makoto's challenge, and accepts. Then, he sets the time for the following morning.

JOSHUA  
(dismissive)  
Don't disappoint me.

He taps his N-patch, dismisses the notification, and strides away. Sergei shakes his head and then looks at Makoto.

SERGEI  
Good luck. You'll need it.

MAKOTO  
I don't believe in luck, but thanks  
anyway.

Prashasti shrugs at Sergei as Makoto turns away.

MAKOTO  
Okay, Prashasti. What's next?

PRASHASTI  
Well, it's getting late, so we  
might as well head to the hotel and  
catch up with your teammates in the  
food court. Want to come?

Makoto's stomach gurgles, and she places her hand on it with a sheepish smile. Prashasti nods.

INT. STARLIGHT RISE HOTEL - FOOD COURT - EVENING

Makoto and Prashasti enter and make their way into the densely crowded food court. Stalls of various cuisines from around the world line the far wall. Amidst the tables, Prashasti spots Gil Dong sitting by himself and walks toward him.

PRASHASTI  
Gil Dong!

She and Makoto sit at the table with Gil Dong...

(CONTINUED)

GIL DONG  
Glad you could make it. I was  
beginning to think...

...who only now notices Makoto.

GIL DONG  
(sarcastic)  
You again?

MAKOTO  
(sarcastic)  
And good evening to you too, Gil  
Dong.

Prashasti looks between Makoto and Gil Dong...

GIL DONG  
You know, I was going easy on you.

MAKOTO  
Oh, really? I saw your moves coming  
a mile away.

GIL DONG  
I was just trying to work the  
crowd. If I had gone all out, you'd  
be down before the first minute  
passed.

MAKOTO  
(sarcastic)  
Oh, sure I would.

...and waves her hands between them.

PRASHASTI  
All right, you two. Save the energy  
for your opponents.

MAKOTO  
Prashasti, with all due respect,  
we're only teammates for the pools  
phase. After that, it's all  
thirty-two top players for  
themselves.

PRASHASTI  
And you two stand the best chance  
of being among those thirty-two by  
sticking with me and sticking  
together.

(CONTINUED)

GIL DONG

Yeah, yeah. I heard that bit already. Makoto's got a point, though. Only one of us can wear the Crown of Blades, and that's gonna be me.

Makoto rolls her eyes at Gil Dong.

PRASHASTI

But for now, you're teammates, and I'm your coach. Got it?

Makoto and Gil Dong look first at each other, then Prashasti, and then at each other again.

MAKOTO

All right.

GIL DONG

Okay.

Prashasti looks around the food court, her eyes roving between the stands.

PRASHASTI

Say, where's Tulio?

GIL DONG

Oh, he's back at the room.

PRASHASTI

(amused)

Of course.

An alarm sounds from Prashasti's N-patch, and Prashasti taps it to see a calendar notification.

PRASHASTI

Well, I have to go.

GIL DONG

You're not eating with us?

Prashasti pushes her chair back and stands up.

PRASHASTI

I have a previous engagement. I'll meet you upstairs later.

GIL DONG

See you around.

(CONTINUED)

MAKOTO

Take care.

As Prashasti leaves, Makoto glimpses Gil Dong's meal ticket. Gil Dong, meanwhile, taps his finger on the table and looks at a nearby clock. A closer look at the ticket reveals the name of the Japanese fusion stand at the top.

Gil Dong jolts his head to Makoto, looks down at his ticket...

GIL DONG

Hey, get your own dinner!

...and slaps his hand over it. Makoto shrugs.

EXT. TREE OF LIFE MONUMENT - EVENING

Prashasti arrives at the Tree of Life Monument with a half-eaten skewer of assorted meat and vegetables in her hand. Taking a bite of this skewer, she enters the elevator and rides up to the balcony, where Sergei is already standing alone.

PRASHASTI

I might've guessed you'd be here too, Sergei.

Sergei turns to Prashasti as she sidles up beside him and takes another bite of the skewer. The two stare across the city, taking in the vibrant lights and sounds from all about, including from the Milky Way Stadium.

PRASHASTI

To think that it began as a way to settle international conflicts.

SERGEI

What?

PRASHASTI

You know. Children of the Earth.

Sergei nods, but then starts drooping.

SERGEI

If only it could have stayed that way, but no.

PRASHASTI

What do you mean? It made the world better, didn't it?

(CONTINUED)

SERGEI

Not by enough, if you ask me. As long as there are humans, there will be conflict.

PRASHASTI

It doesn't all have to be violent, though. You remember the founder's words, right?

Prashasti puts the skewer to her lip as if a mustache.

PRASHASTI

(poorly imitating a man)

"Violence unites us all, but here, we can fight to the death without fear of dying. We can channel otherwise evil tendencies to good use. To entertain the masses. To remind us that we are all children of the Earth, hence the name."

Sergei cannot help but crack a smile as Prashasti lowers the skewer and takes another bite from it.

SERGEI

And here I am, going along with that little play.

PRASHASTI

(swallowing)

A role you're more than suited to.

Sergei pauses.

SERGEI

Perhaps more so than your role as a coach. No rookie has ever won the Crown of Blades before, and no rookie will win this year.

PRASHASTI

Like I said, first time for everything.

Prashasti takes her last bite of the skewer and then taps her hand-mounted N-patch to check the holographic display clock. Seeing the time, she dismisses the display and steps back from the railing.

PRASHASTI

Well, I'd better head back to the hotel. My team probably needs me.

(CONTINUED)

SERGEI

Very well, but before you go, take these.

Sergei taps his forearm-mounted N-patch, beaming a stream of pixels to Prashasti's. Seeing this, Prashasti glimpses the notification that follows.

PRASHASTI

(amused)

You sly dog.

INT. RED SUN WING - HALLWAY - EVENING

The elevator doors open, and Makoto and Gil Dong step out together, the latter of whom holding a to-go bag by his side. Gil Dong pauses to tap his toe twice on the floor and then continues beside Makoto. They pass many hotel room doors, each with a bold room number engraved and colored to stand out. Finally, they reach a door at the end of the hallway.

MAKOTO

This is our room?

GIL DONG

Yeah.

Makoto opens the door...

INT. TEAM SUITE - HUB CHAMBER - EVENING

...and a small explosion fills her and Gil Dong's vision with smoke and ash. The two sputter and wave it away. TULIO (18) pops his head out from around a corner leading out of the cozy hub chamber. He has prismatic-lensed swim goggles over his eyes.

TULIO

Oh, sorry!

He rushes up to Makoto and Gil Dong, scans the former from head to toe, stoops down, and picks up a charcoal briquette that used to be a potato with an oven mitt. Makoto and Gil Dong shake their heads clear and straighten themselves while Tulio sniffs the potato and winces.

MAKOTO

You must be Tulio.

Tulio nods.

(CONTINUED)

TULIO  
Who's this, Gil Dong? Your  
girlfriend or something?

GIL DONG  
(flat)  
No.

MAKOTO  
I'm another one of your...uh,  
teammates. My name's Makoto.

TULIO  
Ah, nice to meet you.

He stretches his leg to the kitchen nearby and snaps into place, trying to mimic cartoon physics. He then opens the cupboard below the sink, dunks the burnt potato into the trash can, and closes the cupboard.

TULIO  
Before you ask, that was my latest  
attempt to teleport a potato. It's  
not ready for human testing yet.

MAKOTO  
Obviously.

As Makoto and Gil Dong take off their shoes and step inside the room, Makoto spots a stack of papers on the central hub room table. Gil Dong watches her approach these papers and scan them. Among the few legible papers are a newspaper clipping, a blueprint, and a rejection notice from the train company.

MAKOTO  
What are these--?

Tulio scrambles to the table...

TULIO  
Mine!

...and snatches them off of it.

MAKOTO  
...for...?

Then, he shuffles through them and straightens them out. Makoto turns to Gil Dong, who is stowing his leftovers in the refrigerator.

(CONTINUED)

GIL DONG  
Something about quantum physics and  
train crash reports.

Makoto winces...

GIL DONG  
All kinds of stuff linked to his  
teleporter somehow. I don't know.  
Just humor him.

TULIO  
Those train crash reports are  
especially important, I'll have you  
know, Gil Dong.

GIL DONG  
(dismissive)  
Uh-uh. Sure.

TULIO  
Twenty-eight crashes in the Global  
Atmospheric Railway Network's  
twenty-five-year operating history.  
That's twenty-eight too many. No  
fatalities yet, but that's beside  
the point.

...then looks down at the floor and sighs.

GIL DONG  
Do you have to keep mentioning  
that?

TULIO  
To be fair, we just met earlier  
today...

Then, she walks toward the hallway leading to the bedrooms.  
Gil Dong and Tulio keep talking in the background, although  
Gil Dong can't help but notice Makoto leaving.

INT. GIRLS' BEDROOM - EVENING

As Makoto turns on the lights, she first notices the bunk  
beds in the far corner, then the mini fridge and  
dresser-mounted spherical hologram projector opposite them.  
Then, she sees two suitcases by the door: one her own, the  
other hot pink and adorned with stickers and shoulder  
straps.

She reaches for her suitcase but then looks at the camera  
and puts her hand over it, blacking it out.

INT. GIRLS' BEDROOM - MORNING

Makoto blinks her eyes to see four eyes looking down at her. Blinking her eyes wider open, she sees Yukiko and Natsumi with their respective arms and legs braced to either side of her.

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI  
(singsong)  
Guess who!

They hop off of the bed as Makoto kicks at them...

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI  
(singsong)  
Ha ha! Missed us again!

...and hauls herself upright.

MAKOTO  
(groggy)  
Ungh...Yukiko and Natsumi. Figures  
you'd be the last members of our  
team.

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI  
How did you know?

Makoto points to the twins' suitcase by the door. Their eyes track to it...

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI  
Oh, yeah. That.

...and then snap back to Makoto as she slumps out of bed.

YUKIKO  
We were on the train after yours.

NATSUMI  
We got assigned to your room.

MAKOTO  
I can see that. Now, if you don't  
mind...

Yukiko and Natsumi stop in front of Makoto.

YUKIKO  
What's the matter? You're not happy  
to see us?

(CONTINUED)

MAKOTO

Oh, I'm quite happy to see you here, but this is still a competition, and I have a pressing engagement related to that.

NATSUMI

That doesn't mean you can't catch up with your best friends, right?

MAKOTO

I'll talk with you later.

Makoto scoots past them and reaches for her suitcase.

YUKIKO

(trying to stay cheerful)  
No worries. We'll meet you downstairs for breakfast with Prashasti.

NATSUMI

(trying to stay cheerful)  
Good luck with whatever it is you're up to.

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI

See ya.

The twins bump into the door. Giggling at themselves, they then open it and leave the room. Makoto cracks a smile, but then taps her N-patch and sees a notification reminding her that her match against Joshua is today.

She shakes her head but takes a deep breath and steels herself.

INT. MILKY WAY STADIUM - ARENA SIMULATOR - FOREST - MORNING

Lightning flashes overhead, and the pouring rain obscures Makoto's view of Joshua in the dense forest. Throughout, Makoto tries to avoid the puddles scattered around the ground while Joshua simply marches forward. His montante swats away her katana repeatedly.

JUNIPER (V.O.)

If she wants to stand any chance at all, she's going to have to figure out how to use the water to her advantage.

(CONTINUED)

HAROLD (V.O.)  
 Considering Strada's wealth of  
 experience compared to Yamasaki's  
 lack thereof, that's a tall order.

In the end, Makoto is slashed across her throat with a swipe  
 of Joshua's montante.

KIERAN (V.O.)  
 Ooh, and with that big swipe of  
 Strada's montante, it's all over  
 now!

A lightning bolt strikes a nearby tree as Joshua walks up to  
 the downed Makoto, dangles his sword over her face...

JOSHUA  
 (barely audible amidst the  
 thunder)  
 Goodbye, pale shadow.

...and drives it into her mouth, pinning her to the ground.

EXT. MOONPHASE - FRONT COUNTER - MORNING

Makoto and Sergei stand opposite each other at Moonphase's  
 front counter. Something vanishes into Makoto's N-patch when  
 Sergei sees Prashasti and the team walking towards the shop.  
 Yukiko and Natsumi arrive first...

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI  
 There you are, Makoto.

...followed by Gil Dong, Tulio, and Prashasti.

YUKIKO  
 What's the big idea, running off on  
 us like that?

The twins mount their hands on their hips and pout.

NATSUMI  
 We think you owe us an apology.

MAKOTO  
 Okay. To be fair, I never agreed to  
 meet you for breakfast with  
 Prashasti--who, I might add,  
 should've told you what I was  
 doing.

Tulio spots a trail of ants crawling along the ground...

(CONTINUED)

PRASHASTI

I tried to tell you that what you were doing was a bad idea.

...gets on his hands and knees, and crawls beside them...

MAKOTO

It wasn't all bad. I mean, you all saw my match, right? Think of it as a scouting mission.

GIL DONG

(scoffing)

Yeah, we all saw him feed you his sword. What were you trying to scout out? That he doesn't take you seriously?

...and bumps his head on a nearby building. Prashasti shoots a glance at Gil Dong, who shrugs. Makoto clenches her fist at her side, but then unclenches it and sighs...

MAKOTO

(reluctant)

You've got a point there.

...and then straightens herself. Tulio, meanwhile, kicks the building but screams in pain...

MAKOTO

Anyway, Prashasti, what do you have planned for the rest of today?

...hopping on one foot while holding the other. Yukiko and Natsumi see this and snicker to each other.

PRASHASTI

I figured that before we officially start training together...eh, consider this a little icebreaker.

Prashasti taps her N-patch and summons a call for six tickets to the water park.

PRASHASTI

(tacky)

Presto!

Makoto and Gil Dong examine first Prashasti's tacky smile, and then the tickets. Tulio stops hopping, looks between Makoto and Gil Dong, cracks an enlightened smile, and nods to himself.

(CONTINUED)

MAKOTO

That's something you just happened  
to have lying around, isn't it?

PRASHASTI

Actually, Sergei gave them to me.

Makoto glances at Gil Dong, and they both shrug.

INT. RIVER OF HEAVEN WATER PARK - DAY

The six of them are now dressed in various swimsuits. Gil Dong is revealed to have a prosthetic lower right leg. He, Tulio, Yukiko, Natsumi, and Prashasti race ahead amidst the other park visitors.

Makoto puts her hand above her eyes as if a visor, watching the others take to the water. Then, she paces off to sit on a bench by herself.

INT. SPLASH ZONE - DAY

Prashasti plays with several kids at a splash zone, using a pool noodle as if a spear.

PRASHASTI

(playful, between thrusts)  
Ha ha! Take that! And this! And  
some of these!

The kids scatter to avoid her until she stops chasing them. She looks down at the pool noodle in her hand, frowns, and drops it.

INT. FOOD STALL - DAY

Tulio stands in line, eyeing the spinning spiral disk on the signboard. Yukiko and Natsumi walk up to him with their hands behind their back.

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI

Say, Tulio.

He turns to them, seeing them pointing at themselves with big, cheesy grins on their faces.

YUKIKO

Bet you were surprised...

(CONTINUED)

NATSUMI

To meet the likes of us, huh?

He shrugs.

TULIO

Uh, not really.

The twins cringe...

TULIO

But welcome to the team, anyway.

...droop, and pout.

INT. POOLSIDE - DAY

Gil Dong crouches down, glimpses his prosthetic leg, and then launches himself into the pool, swimming back and forth as hard as he can. Tulio arrives at the poolside and peers down at Gil Dong as he touches the wall, breaches the surface, and grabs the ledge.

TULIO

Gil Dong.

Gil Dong looks up...

TULIO

Can I confide in you for a bit?

...and rests his crossed arms.

GIL DONG

What for?

TULIO

I know that you know how much I drone on and on about my teleporter and stuff, yeah?

GIL DONG

It does get annoying.

TULIO

You're not the first person to say that, and you won't be the last. I mean, it's such a great idea but nobody wants me to bring it up.

Prashasti, overhearing Tulio talk, walks over...

(CONTINUED)

TULIO

I must've submitted it to the G.A.R.N. about a zillion times by now. Well, actually, more like six, but the point still stands.

...and squats down beside him.

PRASHASTI

Let me guess. They turned you down every time.

Tulio nods.

TULIO

I just feel like...I don't know, like nobody takes me seriously.

GIL DONG

Is that why you're competing?

He nods again.

PRASHASTI

Well, I can see that being the case. King of Blades equals great publicity. After all, Children of the Earth is the biggest sporting event since the Olympics. And I should know; I've competed before.

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI

Really?

PRASHASTI

How do you think they let me be your coach?

GIL DONG

Nobody else wanted to train us? Because we're rookies?

Prashasti's arms droop by her side.

PRASHASTI

(embarrassed)

Uh...yes. That too.

GIL DONG

Oh, and didn't you get your ass kicked in the quarterfinals last year?

(CONTINUED)

PRASHASTI

(more embarrassed)

I mean, in my defense, I was up  
against Joshua.

The twins giggle together.

GIL DONG

Somebody with whom, I'd say, Makoto  
is pretty well-acquainted.

Yukiko and Natsumi glimpse Makoto's absence.

YUKIKO

Hey. Where is Makoto, anyway?

NATSUMI

Last I checked, she was right next  
to us.

Gil Dong rolls his eyes and points to Makoto sitting at the  
edge of the deep end of the pool. With a grin, he heaves  
himself out of the water.

Unaware, Makoto splashes her feet in the water, reaching for  
her N-patch. She stops her hand and sighs, when suddenly,  
Gil Dong heaves her off the ledge and into the water. He  
puffs his chest and clenches his fist at his heart...

GIL DONG

(proud)

Ha ha! That's what you get for...!

...but his eyes widen and his mouth opens as Makoto does not  
breach the surface of the water.

GIL DONG

(horrified)

Oh, shit...

INT. UNDERWATER - DAY

The sinking Makoto claws and scratches for the surface, only  
to sink deeper, until at last, she opens her mouth and  
swallows water while trying to gasp for air. The last thing  
she sees is a silhouette diving into the pool and swimming  
to her rescue.

BLACK

PRASHASTI (V.O.)  
Okay. Is she breathing?

GIL DONG (V.O.)  
I don't know. I'm not trained in  
CPR.

TULIO (V.O.)  
Uh, don't you mean artificial  
respiration? CPR is for when your  
heart stops.

INT. NEAR THE BENCHES - DAY

Makoto coughs up some pool water...

TULIO (V.O.)  
Oh, look. She's coming to.

...and opens her eyes to face first the ceiling, and then  
Gil Dong kneeling over her.

GIL DONG  
Huh?

Gil Dong snaps his head to Makoto, who, upon seeing that his  
hand is squishing into her chest, punches him in the jaw.  
She sits up on the floor, her arms crossed at her chest, and  
glares at the recovering Gil Dong.

Cracking his jaw into place, Gil Dong returns Makoto's  
glare.

GIL DONG  
(agonized)  
Hey, I saved your life!

MAKOTO  
Right after pushing me into the  
water?

GIL DONG  
Not my fault; you never told me you  
couldn't swim.

Makoto opens her mouth to object, but then looks down and  
closes her mouth. Yukiko and Natsumi put their hands on  
their hips and leer at Gil Dong.

(CONTINUED)

YUKIKO

Well, since you're the one who pushed her in...

NATSUMI

Why not teach her?

TULIO

They're right.

Makoto shoots a dumbfounded look at Yukiko and Natsumi. Gil Dong roves his eyes between Makoto and their audience, and then lowers his shoulders.

GIL DONG

Okay, I'll do it.

Tulio mock salutes, at which Gil Dong can't help but snicker. But as he turns back to Makoto, he sees her trying to ease into the water.

GIL DONG

Makoto!

Makoto hops out, almost bumping into Gil Dong...

GIL DONG

What are you doing? You know you can't swim!

...and then steps into the water again, caught by Gil Dong's hand clamped on her wrist.

GIL DONG

Look. Last time, I had to fish you out.

She tenses up, but then eases off.

MAKOTO

(reluctant)

Okay. You win.

Gil Dong nods.

SERIES OF SHOTS - GIL DONG TEACHES MAKOTO HOW TO SWIM -  
THROUGHOUT THE DAY

- Gil Dong stands in a shallow pool, holding Makoto's hands while she lies horizontal along the water's surface.

(CONTINUED)

GIL DONG

All right. I'm gonna let go of your hands now.

He lets go, and Makoto sinks but jolts to her feet.

GIL DONG

No, no...look. You can't just fight the water. You have to let it carry you.

- Yukiko and Natsumi slide down a closed water slide, screaming and laughing until they reach the bottom.

- Again, Gil Dong holds Makoto's hands while she lies along the water's surface.

MAKOTO

Let go.

GIL DONG

Are you sure?

MAKOTO

Just do it.

He complies, and this time, Makoto stays afloat, albeit roughly.

- Tulio floats on an inner tube in the lazy river and sticks his head in to try to see underwater.

- Makoto swims toward a nearby wall, where Gil Dong awaits her. She soon touches the wall and stands up in the water.

MAKOTO

How was that?

GIL DONG

Much better.

- Prashasti, Tulio, Yukiko, and Natsumi "sunbathe" together.

- Again, Makoto swims toward the wall where Gil Dong stands, her strokes more refined and efficient. She touches the wall and stands up in the water. Gil Dong nods, and Makoto smiles.

EXT. STARLIGHT RISE HOTEL - ENTRANCE - EVENING

Makoto, Gil Dong, Tulio, Yukiko, Natsumi, and Prashasti arrive at the hotel. Prashasti looks down at Makoto and Gil Dong's hands--not quite touching but still close--and then glances back to their faces.

PRASHASTI

I think I'll leave you two alone for now. Come up to the hotel rooms when you can.

MAKOTO

All right.

PRASHASTI

And don't forget about the training session tomorrow after breakfast.

MAKOTO

I won't.

Prashasti approaches Tulio and the twins...

PRASHASTI

Come on. Let's go.

...and leads them into the hotel. Makoto raises an eyebrow at Gil Dong, who stares back at her...

GIL DONG

Oh, now, what? You want an apology?

...and then sighs.

GIL DONG

Okay. I'm sorry for pushing you into the water.

MAKOTO

Well, you did save me immediately afterward and teach me how to swim, so...I forgive you.

He sits down on a nearby bench...

GIL DONG

You know, I'll admit. For a girl who can't swim, you sure are good at it.

...and Makoto sits beside him.

(CONTINUED)

MAKOTO

Eh, what can I say? I'm a fast learner.

GIL DONG

It also helps that you had a great teacher.

Makoto cracks a faint smile.

MAKOTO

You never shut up about how great you are, do you?

GIL DONG

If I did, then who would know who I am? Why would I even be here, competing in Children of the Earth?

She stands up, her eyes falling on Gil Dong's leg. Gil Dong notices this and sighs again.

GIL DONG

All right. You got me. I'm really here because I've got something to prove.

MAKOTO

Something to prove?

GIL DONG

Yeah.

He turns his foot from side to side.

GIL DONG

All my life, people have been picking on me because I was born with only one good leg.

MAKOTO

You must be proud of what you've accomplished despite that. Showing all those people that they were wrong to pick on you.

GIL DONG

That's right.

Makoto smiles...

(CONTINUED)

MAKOTO

Just be careful not to choke on  
that pride of yours.

GIL DONG

(backhanded)

Sure, whatever.

...and starts walking away...

GIL DONG

And what about you? Why are you  
competing?

...but halts and glances back at Gil Dong.

GIL DONG

Makoto?

Gil Dong watches Makoto enter the hotel alone.

INT. STARLIGHT RISE HOTEL - LOBBY - EVENING

Makoto stops, taps her N-patch, and summons her contact list, showing the words, "Mom" and "Dad", therein. She reaches for a waveform icon near the bottom of the display but stays her hand and sighs.

MAKOTO

(under her breath)

I'm sorry, Dad.

She dismisses the contact list and summons her in-competition scorecard display, which shows her 0-1 win/loss record, current score, and inventory. Therein is the katana with the red-veined blade.

Then, she dismisses the scorecard and walks to the elevators, where she pushes the button to go up. Soon after, one of the elevator doors opens up, and she walks inside and lets the door close behind her.

INT. TEAM SUITE - GIRLS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Inside, she lies in her bed, her arms splayed to either side of her. She struggles to drift to sleep as she gleans the star-speckled ceiling.

In the bed below hers, Yukiko and Natsumi lie together, their hands beneath their shared pillow.

(CONTINUED)

YUKIKO  
Hey, Makoto?

MAKOTO  
What is it?

YUKIKO  
You're probably wondering how we  
got in, huh?

MAKOTO  
Not really. You beat the drone  
thing just like everybody else,  
didn't you?

YUKIKO  
How about why?

MAKOTO  
Why else? You want the crown as  
much as anybody else in this  
competition, don't you?

Yukiko and Natsumi pause.

NATSUMI  
To be honest, we just thought it'd  
be kind of fun.

MAKOTO  
Really? I seem to recall my having  
to "get past you".

NATSUMI  
Oh, don't worry about it. It's just  
a game after all.

MAKOTO  
Say you.

Makoto pauses, and then turns over in her bed.

MAKOTO  
Never mind. Just don't get ahead of  
yourselves and you'll do fine.  
Okay?

Yukiko and Natsumi pause...

NATSUMI  
Don't get ahead of...?

...and then grin at each other.

(CONTINUED)

Suddenly, Yukiko jams her fingers into Natsumi's ribs and starts tickling her. Natsumi immediately returns the favor, and they laugh in sync and writhe out of sync.

YUKIKO  
(laughing)  
Stop it!

NATSUMI  
(laughing)  
You stop it!

Makoto's pillow claps down on the twins' faces.

MAKOTO (V.O.)  
(cranky)  
Both of you stop it!

The twins sit up, letting Makoto's pillow tumble off their faces.

MAKOTO  
(calming down)  
Please. I'm trying to sleep.

Makoto snatches her pillow back, tosses it up to her bunk, climbs up after it, and resumes trying to sleep. Yukiko and Natsumi gawk for a moment, then glimpse each other and lie back in their bed, struggling to go to sleep.

INT. GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

Joshua walks alone through the gym, glimpsing the equipment placed throughout until he stands in front of the domed arena simulator in the middle. He walks over to the control panel nearby, enters his choice of battlefield and time limit, and steps into the simulator as the door opens.

INT. GYMNASIUM SIMULATOR - NIGHT

He stands in the middle of the whitewashed, domed interior as lights glow around the rim. As the door closes behind him, his familiar dark plate armor materializes around his body in a cloud of pixels, and the arena simulator dematerializes around him.

## INT. GYMNASIUM SIMULATOR - GRAVEYARD - NIGHT

Aging tombstones stand all around him in neat rows amidst the dead trees.

He uproots his montante from nearby and swings it all around himself in a savage dance in the middle of the graveyard. Among the feats he shows are stabbing the wick of a candle, cutting four thick ropes in one swing, and flipping over a broken tombstone with an overhand chop.

## MONTAGE - JOSHUA'S DESCENT INTO MADNESS - OVER THE PAST 10 YEARS

- Joshua reads the news of the train crash that paralyzed Yoshihiro and therefore of Yoshihiro's retirement. He clenches his fists on the table and lets a twisted smile creep across his face.
- He pins an opponent to a cactus with a stab to the gut in a simulated desert at the Milky Way Stadium.
- Sergei approaches Joshua and offers to shake his hand, but Joshua slaps his hand away.
- Joshua holds an opponent's face in a puddle of mud in a simulated swamp at the Milky Way Stadium.
- In a hotel team suite, he shoves another person by her face to the floor. Sergei jumps to his feet.
- In a simulated flower garden at the Milky Way Stadium, Joshua stabs an opponent through the throat with their own dagger and then smashes the head with the guard of his montante.
- He throws a trophy at Sergei's head but misses.
- On a simulated mountainside at the Milky Way Stadium, Joshua hacks at Prashasti's spear with his montante until it breaks in half.

JOSHUA (V.O.)  
Yoshihiro Yamasaki...

As Prashasti tries to counter with a bash from her shield, Joshua trips her with a kick to her shin and drives his montante into her back as she falls.

JOSHUA (V.O.)  
(anguished)  
Face me!

END OF MONTAGE

Joshua stands before a tombstone full of fresh gashes and dents from his sword, fists, and feet.

INT. GYMNASIUM SIMULATOR - AMPHITHEATER - MORNING

Makoto, Gil Dong, Tulio, and the Itous engage in a free-for-all within the crumbling amphitheater. The simulator's structure seems to rattle with every blow they land on each other.

Gil Dong, in his light brigandine, wields his short sword and spiked gloves.

Makoto, in her composite plate armor, wields her katana.

Tulio, clad in a regal flowing purple robe and gilded breastplate, wields a rapier and main-gauche.

And Yukiko and Natsumi, together in their heavy plate armor, wield a long war hammer between them.

At some point, Gil Dong kicks at Makoto's head, but Makoto parries the kick and lashes at him. As Gil Dong blocks Makoto's attacks, Makoto jumps to the side, sheathes her standard katana, winces as she grabs another katana, and swings out at Gil Dong with it.

Gil Dong ducks underneath the strike, losing a small lock of his hair. He stands up to find Makoto gawking at the cleanly cloven pillar behind him, turns around to see it, and also gawks, along with Tulio, Yukiko, and Natsumi.

Black sparks course through the katana's red-veined blade.

The amphitheater dematerializes, and all the combatants' weapons and armor vanish into clouds of pixels.

INT. GYMNASIUM - OUTSIDE THE SIMULATOR - MORNING

As they leave the simulator, they see Prashasti at the controls. A clock on the control panel shows the time and a later date. Prashasti steps away and forms a T with her hands.

PRASHASTI

Okay! Time out! Time! Out!

Then, she lowers her hands and snaps to...

(CONTINUED)

PRASHASTI  
(worried)  
Makoto, where did you get that  
sword?

Makoto tilts her head...

MAKOTO  
...Is that supposed to be a  
rhetorical question?

PRASHASTI  
Answer me!

...and then raises her hands.

MAKOTO  
All right. I got it from Sergei  
after I fought Joshua.

PRASHASTI  
(suspicious)  
What did the flavor text say?

MAKOTO  
Something about Muramasa and how  
his swords were supposedly cursed.

PRASHASTI  
(alarmed)  
I knew it!

Prashasti grabs Makoto's hand and tries to drag her out of  
the gym.

MAKOTO  
Hey! Knock it off!

Makoto snatches her hand away.

MAKOTO  
Why are you so hysterical?

Tulio scoots away.

PRASHASTI  
Because that sword is a noob trap.  
That's why. Everybody who's ever  
used it has ended up in the  
hospital.

(CONTINUED)

MAKOTO

Yeah, yeah. I read the disclaimer too. But I need every advantage I can get if I'm to get past Joshua.

YUKIKO

She's got a point.

NATSUMI

Did you see what she did to that pillar?

Makoto snaps to Yukiko and Natsumi...

MAKOTO

You stay out of this.

PRASHASTI

(to Yukiko and Natsumi)

No, by all means, stay in this.

...and then back to Prashasti. Yukiko and Natsumi step back.

PRASHASTI

(to Makoto)

Let me put it this way. It's like a lightsaber with you as the power source, and you can't turn it off unless you get rid of it. Now.

MAKOTO

I'll just finish my fights more quickly, then.

PRASHASTI

No. I can't and won't let you use it anymore. It's for your own good.

Gil Dong steps forward...

GIL DONG

Prashasti, wait.

...and waves his hand to Makoto before she can object.

GIL DONG

With all due respect, it's her decision to risk getting herself killed, rookie or not.

Makoto scowls at him as he turns to her.

(CONTINUED)

GIL DONG

(to Makoto)

However, you're still part of this team, so we do need to keep an eye on you.

Makoto pauses and then nods assent.

MAKOTO

Tell you what. You let me keep the cursed katana as a last resort and I'll fall in line. Deal?

Prashasti sighs...

PRASHASTI

(reluctant)

Okay, but be careful.

MAKOTO

Don't worry. I will.

...and then, after a pause, claps her hands together.

PRASHASTI

(abruptly cheery)

So...anybody have anything planned tonight?

GIL DONG

Nope. I'm free.

MAKOTO

...I'm available.

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI

Us too.

TULIO

I was planning to test my latest teleporter prototype, but that can wait.

PRASHASTI

Very good. Once you're done with your matches for today, meet me back here. We'll resume training.

She leaves the gym, and the five teens glance between each other. Makoto taps her N-patch again, checking her schedule to still find it open besides another fight.

(CONTINUED)

TULIO

You know what? I have a better idea.

GIL DONG

One that doesn't have to do with your teleporter for once?

Makoto shrugs.

INT. YAMASAKI HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Eri sits on the couch, staring at her N-patch's display as she receives no response from Makoto. She soon dismisses the display and turns to Yoshihiro as he floats into the living room.

YOSHIHIRO

It's Makoto, isn't it?

Eri turns to Yoshihiro and sighs.

ERI

Yoshihiro, I know it hasn't been that long, but I'm still worried.

YOSHIHIRO

Eri, we've been over this. She knows what she's doing.

ERI

Yeah, but...she agreed to stay in touch, and...

She reaches for her N-patch again but stays her hand.

YOSHIHIRO

Now that you mention it, she hasn't contacted me either.

ERI

Precisely. And yes, we've seen some of her matches, so she should be fine, but...I just have a bad feeling.

Yoshihiro gazes into Eri's eyes...

ERI

If this keeps up, you'll have to go see her yourself.

...and nods assent.

EXT. ARCADIA STREETS - NIGHT

Makoto, Gil Dong, Tulio, Yukiko, and Natsumi walk past many people and buildings, finally stopping near the Tree of Life Monument.

EXT. INTO THE NIGHT - ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Rounding the corner to an alley, they meet the GUARD stationed at the entrance to Into the Night, what appears to be a run-down brick nightclub.

GUARD  
Identification, please.

Tulio taps his N-patch and shows his being old enough to enter the club.

TULIO  
Don't worry about the others.  
They're with me.

The guard nods.

GUARD  
All right.

INT. INTO THE NIGHT - LOBBY - NIGHT

Muted technopop beats and strobing dance lights fill the air, and assorted customers and staff chatter, drink, and dance the night away throughout the club.

The five teens walk through the almost glassy lobby to the arced bar at their left...

INT. EAST WING BAR - NIGHT

...and sidle up to the counter. The bartender there wears a hat embroidered with the letters "C.o.E."

BARTENDER  
What can I get for you?

PRASHASTI (V.O.)  
(to the bartender)  
A Jade Dawn, please.

Tulio snaps his eyes to see Prashasti leaning on the other end of the counter.

(CONTINUED)

BARTENDER  
(hesitant)  
Really?

PRASHASTI  
With a little umbrella.

BARTENDER  
...Coming right up.

The bartender disappears behind the counter, and Prashasti lets a wry grin creep across her face.

PRASHASTI  
I might've guessed you guys would try to sneak away from training today.

TULIO  
It was my idea. Sorry.

PRASHASTI  
No, no, I understand. Two weeks of training and fighting nonstop would make anybody tired, so you wanted a break, right?

NATSUMI  
Pretty much.

MAKOTO  
You have been running us all pretty ragged lately.

YUKIKO  
Yeah. Haven't we earned the rest by now?

PRASHASTI  
That depends. How'd you do in your matches today?

The five teens summon their scorecards, each showing a victory scored for the day. Prashasti nods in approval.

The bartender reappears with a shimmering green drink. Prashasti twirls the paper umbrella, which sifts little of its fluorescent glow. Makoto, Gil Dong, Tulio, Yukiko, and Natsumi shield their faces as Prashasti downs her drink.

GIL DONG  
(half gagging)  
You must really want to do your liver in.

(CONTINUED)

PRASHASTI

You're not the first person to say  
that, and you won't be the last.

Prashasti exhales an electric half-belch and rests her cup.

PRASHASTI

So, go ahead. Knock yourselves out,  
but stay away from the booze.

GIL DONG

Yeah, we know. None of us are old  
enough to drink, which begs the  
question...

(to Tulio)

...why did you bring us here?

TULIO

I don't know. I guess I just wanted  
to see the nightlife in the city  
and thought I'd show you around  
too. I mean, Prashasti's here, so  
that worked out. Besides, what  
better way for you and your  
girlfriend to get better  
acquainted?

Gil Dong leers at Tulio...

GIL DONG

(half exasperated)

For the last time, she's not my--

...and then snaps his head from side to side to see Makoto  
suddenly absent.

GIL DONG

(surprised)

Wait. Where is she this time?

Yukiko and Natsumi shrug.

The music changes, and Tulio squints between Gil Dong and  
the now enlivened dance crowd nearby. He then grabs Gil  
Dong's arm...

GIL DONG

(surprised)

Hey, what are you--?

...and yanks him through the sound wall to the dance floor.

INT. MAIN DANCE FLOOR - NIGHT

The crowd jumps in time to the beat of the music, waving their glowsticks and chanting...

CLUBBERS  
(chanting)  
Go! Go! Go! Go!

Tulio shuffles through the crowd, dragging Gil Dong behind him until they see Makoto dancing center stage. Amidst the crowd, Tulio pushes Gil Dong onto the stage, where Makoto catches him.

MAKOTO  
You didn't tell me you could dance.

GIL DONG  
(awkward)  
Not really. I kind of got forced into this.

MAKOTO  
Then just follow my lead.

After a glimpse of the crowd, Gil Dong follows Makoto's dancing. Though clumsy at first, he adjusts to her movements until the two are well synchronized.

MAKOTO  
You catch on quick.

GIL DONG  
What can I say? I'm a fast learner.

Makoto and Gil Dong smile at each other.

MONTAGE - THE COMPETITION PROGRESSES

- Makoto, Gil Dong, Tulio, Yukiko, and Natsumi train together in the gym's arena simulator.
- Prashasti signals Makoto, Yukiko, and Natsumi for a quick talk in the food court.
- Makoto trains alone in a simulated temple ruin in the gym.
- Prashasti stands atop the balcony of the Tree of Life Monument, seeing Makoto and Gil Dong talking below.
- Yukiko and Natsumi hoist a barbell over their heads in the gym.

(CONTINUED)

- Tulio repairs and modifies his teleporter while a smoking potato sits nearby. He glimpses another rejection letter beside him.

- Gil Dong kicks away an incoming foam ball, ducks under another, and jumps over a third while kicking a fourth.

- On her way to the gym, Makoto watches a video on how to fight with polearms on her N-patch. Prashasti looks on.

- Yukiko and Natsumi defeat an opponent at the mouth of a simulated cavern at the Milky Way Stadium.

- Kieran, Juniper, and Harold watch the updated list of competitors and their points in their office.

- Makoto and Gil Dong eat together in the food court. Gil Dong laughs at something Makoto says.

- Tulio defeats an opponent in a simulated forest clearing at the Milky Way Stadium.

- Makoto, Gil Dong, Tulio, Yukiko, and Natsumi train together again in the gym's arena simulator. Prashasti coaches them.

- Outside the gym, Makoto watches a video about dual wielding swords on her N-patch.

- Gil Dong defeats an opponent atop a simulated plateau at the Milky Way Stadium.

- Sergei sends off another competitor from Moonphase, and then watches Makoto approach him.

- Makoto defeats an opponent in front of a simulated palace gate at the Milky Way Stadium.

- Gil Dong lies awake in his bed at night, twitching his prosthetic foot.

- Makoto lies awake in her bed that same night, her hand creeping to her heart as she breathes a sigh. Her hand then begins to twitch, and she grips her wrist in response.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. MILKY WAY STADIUM - COMMENTARY BOOTH - DAY

Kieran, Harold, and Juniper sit together at the announce table, greeting the cheering crowd.

KIERAN

Ladies and gentlemen, Children of the Earth is steadily reaching its climax!

(scolding but jovial)

And for those of you with dirty minds, please, get your heads out of the gutter.

Some of the people in the crowd chuckle, and Juniper smirks.

INT. ARENA STANDS - DAY

Onscreen at the arena stage center, the crowd sees highlights from the competition thus far.

KIERAN (V.O.)

Anyway, as you're all aware, the next phase of the competition is very, very close: the tournament phase!

The crowd shouts out in accord with Kieran.

KIERAN (V.O.)

Over four hundred fighters entered this competition from all around the world, and now, we're down to thirty-two, but only one can win this shiny hat right here!

The highlight footage gives way to the light of...

KIERAN (V.O.)

The Crown of Blades!

...and then to Joshua's visage. His stats read:

(CONTINUED)

*Joshua Strada*  
*Alias: The Demon of the Blood Moon*  
*Age: 41*  
*Height: 2.03 m.*  
*Weight: 126 kg.*  
*Reach: 2.03 m.*  
*Fighting out of: Rome, Italy*  
*Fighter class: Knight*  
*Primary weapon: Montante*  
*Pools record: 56 wins, 0 losses*  
*Seed: 1*

KIERAN (V.O.)

The fighter to beat appears to be none other than Joshua "the Demon of the Blood Moon" Strada, who has remained undefeated all season long.

INT. STARLIGHT RISE HOTEL - TEAM SUITE - HUB CHAMBER - DAY

Makoto, Gil Dong, Tulio, Yukiko, Natsumi, and Prashasti sit and watch the glimmering hologram projected from the projector on the floor.

KIERAN (V.O.)

Victory seems to be a given for this man, but let's not lose faith in all else who have come this far.

Kieran's commentary continues into the background, and Gil Dong scoffs at Joshua's visage.

GIL DONG

Heh. I'd sure like to take him on.

Tulio smiles.

TULIO

You don't say.

GIL DONG

Sure. If I can get past you guys, I can topple Joshua no problem.

MAKOTO

That makes any of us.

PRASHASTI

Yeah, and if you kids remember your training, you'll do just fine.

(CONTINUED)

Makoto clenches her fists atop her knees and glances downward. Prashasti stretches back in her seat and folds her hands behind her head.

PRASHASTI

(under her breath)

Who'd have thought that a bunch of first year rookies would be this close to winning the Crown of Blades?

MAKOTO

(sarcastic)

Anybody.

Makoto looks back to the hologram, now showing clips from Joshua's earlier bouts. A spasm wracks her arm and lurches to her head, Gil Dong and the twins the first to notice.

GIL DONG

(thinly concerned)

Is something wrong?

Makoto shakes her head clear and brushes aside the pain.

MAKOTO

It's nothing.

GIL DONG

(trying to play along)

Very well.

Makoto rolls her shoulder and Yukiko and Natsumi scoot towards her.

YUKIKO

You sure it's nothing?

NATSUMI

Because it doesn't look like nothing to us.

She brushes them back.

MAKOTO

Of course I'm sure. Just worry about your next opponent or whatever.

YUKIKO

Who's our next opponent?

(CONTINUED)

MAKOTO

Take a wild guess.

Makoto taps her N-patch and shows the tournament bracket, with Yukiko and Natsumi up against Joshua.

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI (V.O.)

Ooooooh...

The twins turn their eyes to each other and grin.

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI

Wish us luck!

They stand up and walk toward the door. Makoto dismisses the tournament display and frowns to herself. Unnoticed by her, Gil Dong signals Tulio to sidle up to him.

INT. MILKY WAY STADIUM - ARENA SIMULATOR - FORTRESS - MORNING

Yukiko and Natsumi stand opposite Joshua along the battlements while snow falls all around them. A snowflake falls on Natsumi's nose, urging Yukiko to brush it off.

NATSUMI

Thanks, sis.

YUKIKO

(joking)

No problem, sis. If you ever need anything, you know where to find me.

NATSUMI

(playing along)

That goes for me too.

The computer sounds its signal...

ARENA COMPUTER (V.O.)

Fight!

...and with a dual grin, the twins launch themselves at Joshua as he stands his ground.

KIERAN (V.O.)

And here we go!

They fight, the twins evenly matched with Joshua as they clash repeatedly.

(CONTINUED)

JUNIPER (V.O.)

The twins are certainly holding up well, Kieran.

KIERAN (V.O.)

Well, you did say so yourself that they were confident that they could take him.

JUNIPER (V.O.)

Oh, yeah. I forgot.

HAROLD (V.O.)

(blunt)

Would you two pay attention to the match?

KIERAN (V.O.)

Ah, right, and speaking of the match...

The twins continue their wild, reckless assault...

KIERAN (V.O.)

(excited)

The Itous just aren't giving Strada an inch!

JUNIPER (V.O.)

We could see the end of the champion's reign right here and now.

...and send Joshua sliding across the floor in a heap with a mighty blow to the helmet.

JUNIPER (V.O.)

Ooh! And one right in the kisser!

Yukiko and Natsumi cheer as Joshua's seemingly lifeless body bowls over an oil beacon and vanishes into the fire.

YUKIKO

Mess with the best--!

NATSUMI

Lose like the rest!

YUKIKO

(half joking, half irritated)

Hey! I wanted to say that part!

(CONTINUED)

NATSUMI  
(half joking, half irritated)  
Well...you said the part I wanted  
to say...so there!

JUNIPER (V.O.)  
That ought to send him packing!

HAROLD (V.O.)  
Don't be so sure, Juniper. It looks  
like the worst is yet to come.

Their playful bickering fades into alarmed stares as the still-burning Joshua hauls himself to his feet, slumps by the wall...

JUNIPER (V.O.)  
What do you mean, Harold? Look at  
him slouching there, burning,  
suffocating, and...

...and starts...

JUNIPER (V.O.)  
(confused and disturbed)  
Laughing...like a maniac...?

His laughter rises to a fever pitch as his head bends backwards.

JUNIPER (V.O.)  
You know, now that I think of  
it...has he been holding back this  
whole match?

He picks up his montante...

KIERAN (V.O.)  
(audibly worried)  
Something tells me we're going to  
find out really soon...

...and brandishes it at his side. Yukiko and Natsumi clench their hammer and shudder.

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI  
Uh-oh...

Joshua lunges forth and lays into the twins, cackling as they crumble before his blood-crazed onslaught. Several times, he disconnects parts of the twins' armor from each other.

(CONTINUED)

KIERAN (V.O.)

Oh, my god! Strada's gone berserk!

JUNIPER (V.O.)

Worse than that; he's lost it!

He disarms the twins, kicks them in the groin, grabs the blade of his montante, and gores the twins' now unarmored torso. He then tears his montante up the twins' middle, steps back, and beheads them both.

INT. STARLIGHT RISE HOTEL - FOOD COURT - MORNING

Makoto douses her N-patch, seats her head in her hands, and watches Yukiko and Natsumi sulk, their heads bowed over their untouched breakfast.

MAKOTO

You were reliving your loss to  
Joshua, weren't you?

A sluggish dual nod later, the twins try to force themselves to smile, but droop again.

YUKIKO

What are we?

Yukiko drapes her hand over Natsumi's.

MAKOTO

Huh?

YUKIKO

I...

Natsumi's eyes meet Yukiko's, and the twins dual nod.

YUKIKO

Makoto, our losing to Joshua the  
way we did, it got us thinking.  
What do we have that you guys don't  
have?

MAKOTO

Well, I mean...look at you.

NATSUMI

Besides that.

Makoto does not answer.

(CONTINUED)

NATSUMI

Exactly. All of you have something special. We don't.

MAKOTO

What are you talking about?

YUKIKO

You're the daughter of an ex-champion, Tulio's the inventor-type guy, and Gil Dong...well, he's Gil Dong. But what are we? The girl with two heads. That's it.

Yukiko and Natsumi fold their hands over each other and wrinkle their noses, trying to hold back their tears.

NATSUMI

And Joshua...he just...took it from us...

MAKOTO

Why's that so important? I thought you entered the competition for fun.

YUKIKO

We lied. The truth is, we just...we just wanted to be special.

NATSUMI

We wanted something to call our own besides being some...cheap gimmick. That's the real reason we entered Children of the Earth.

Makoto pauses, but then gets up...

MAKOTO

Girls, you do have something special. You're my best friends.

...and sidles beside Yukiko and Natsumi...

MAKOTO

(awkward)

And yes, as cliché as that may be, it's still applicable, because nothing Joshua or anyone else can do can take that away from you.

...who squeeze each other's hands...

(CONTINUED)

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI  
(muttering)  
No, we're not.

MAKOTO  
What?

...glare at Makoto...

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI  
(raising their voices)  
We said, "No, we're not!"

...and jump to their feet, causing Makoto to step back.

YUKIKO  
You don't consider us your friends!  
You consider us a pair of  
headaches!

MAKOTO  
(astonished)  
Girls, that's not true!

NATSUMI  
Yes, it is! That's why you never  
told us about what Joshua could do  
before we went up against him!

YUKIKO  
And it's not just us, either! Your  
parents, Gil Dong, Prashasti...

NATSUMI  
You don't care about anyone but  
yourself!

MAKOTO  
That's not true! You two know  
better than anyone that despite my  
preferring to do things myself, I  
do, in fact, care about you!

Yukiko raises her fist to her and Natsumi's chins.

YUKIKO  
Then why do you keep running off on  
your own, huh? Why do you keep  
pushing everybody who cares about  
you away?

(CONTINUED)

NATSUMI

Do you really think you got this  
far all by yourself? That you don't  
need anybody else?

The twins pause...

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI

(on the verge of tears)  
Some friend you are!

...and run off, crying into Natsumi's arm. Makoto sits back  
down, closes her eyes, and clenches her fist at her side.

INT. MILKY WAY STADIUM - ARENA SIMULATOR - CATHEDRAL  
SANCTUARY - DAY

Makoto opens her eyes at the entrance to the cathedral  
sanctuary, empty of people but illuminated through the stain  
glass window at the altar. Rain gently falls outside the  
doorway.

She walks toward the altar, where a smiling Tulio awaits  
her, his rapier and main-gauche drawn. Her eyes narrow as  
she accelerates towards him, and his smile gives way to wide  
eyes.

The computer sounds its signal...

ARENA COMPUTER (V.O.)

Fight!

...and Makoto immediately lashes at Tulio with the cursed  
katana, its black sparking more erratic than ever before. A  
candle pole falls apart nearby.

KIERAN (V.O.)

And Yamasaki immediately strikes at  
Hernandez with her cursed katana!

Makoto, grimacing through the cursed katana's energy, lunges  
at Tulio again and sunders the altar as he dodges.

HAROLD (V.O.)

As powerful as that sword is,  
she'll have to end the fight  
quickly, or else, she'll pass out  
from its curse.

Tulio jabs at her face, but she turns her head and lets his  
rapier glance off her helmet.

(CONTINUED)

JUNIPER (V.O.)

Luckily, with that much power, she only needs one good hit.

HAROLD (V.O.)

That depends on where she hits him.

JUNIPER (V.O.)

If that thing can chop a church altar in half, it can more than easily go through a person, armor and all.

HAROLD (V.O.)

But she has to land the blow first.

Makoto and Tulio engage in fierce combat, climbing over benches, knocking over candle poles, and hitting walls and pillars along the way.

TULIO

Hey, Makoto, I know how badly you want to win, but look at what's happening to you!

Suddenly, Makoto doubles over, clutching her forearm and almost dropping the cursed katana. Tulio thrusts at her throat, but she slaps his rapier away and follows up with a downward stroke, breaking the rapier.

KIERAN (V.O.)

Ooh! Good parry by Yamasaki, fighting through the pain of the sword's feedback there. And now that his rapier is broken, Hernandez is left with just his main-gauche.

HAROLD (V.O.)

Not necessarily.

Tulio discards his broken rapier, sheathes his main-gauche, and picks up a fallen candle pole. Makoto stands ready to engage him again, her right eye closed as the cursed katana crackles with more black sparks.

TULIO

(worried)

You can't keep this up! You have to--!

(CONTINUED)

MAKOTO  
 (agonized)  
 Just shut up and fight!

Tulio sighs, then narrows his eyes, and tightens his grip on the candle pole. Another exchange of blows later, Makoto cuts through the pole, forcing Tulio to draw his main-gauche.

JUNIPER (V.O.)  
 Okay. Now, Hernandez is down to his main-gauche.

Tulio parries another strike and rushes in to stab Makoto, but she turns her katana around in her hand, hits Tulio in the face with its pommel, spins around, and stabs him in the waist with a half-sword thrust.

She draws her katana out and lets him crumple at his feet.

ARENA COMPUTER (V.O.)  
 Finish!

INT. STARLIGHT RISE HOTEL - GYMNASIUM - DAY

Tulio and Gil Dong face each other outside the simulator. Gil Dong wipes his forehead with a hand towel.

TULIO  
 I did my best, but she wouldn't listen to me. She just kept going like I wasn't there.

Gil Dong shakes his head.

GIL DONG  
 (resigned)  
 I knew she wouldn't listen to you. Nobody listens to you, right?

TULIO  
 Huh? I mean, to be fair, we were in the middle of a match, but--

GIL DONG  
 Let me guess. You have all these great ideas, all these warnings, blah, blah, blah. You know what? Your problem's not that you're not prestigious enough or good enough at fighting or whatever.

(CONTINUED)

TULIO

Then what is it?

GIL DONG

You dream too much. And do too little. You spend so much time lost in your own ideas that you don't ever act on them. You want people to accept that teleporter of yours? You want people to listen to you when you tell them to stop killing themselves with cursed weapons? Then start acting on that. Stop thinking and start doing.

Tulio puts his finger to his chin and stares at the ceiling.

GIL DONG

What are you thinking now?

TULIO

Just tracing which vents go where in the ceiling.

Gil Dong facepalms...

TULIO

Also, you're right. I do dream too much. But that's irrelevant. What is relevant is Makoto. The twins can't get her to listen, Prashasti and I can't get her to listen...it's up to you now.

...and walks out of the gym.

TULIO

Gil Dong? Where are you going?

GIL DONG

To get ready for my next match.  
Duh.

Tulio resumes staring at the ceiling.

EXT. MILKY WAY STADIUM - ENTRANCE - DAY

Makoto trudges past the arena, clutching the side of her head. She lowers her hand, turns her wrist, and glimpses her N-patch, skimming first her inventory slots and then the tournament bracket. There, she sees Gil Dong and Joshua as potential opponents.

(CONTINUED)

She looks forward to see Gil Dong approaching.

GIL DONG  
Hey, Makoto.

MAKOTO  
Hi, Gil Dong. Are you ready for  
your match? It starts in about  
twenty minutes.

Gil Dong nods...

GIL DONG  
(confident)  
I was born ready.

...but then glimpses Makoto's twitching arm.

GIL DONG  
Well, except for the fact that  
something's clearly wrong with you.

MAKOTO  
What do you mean?

GIL DONG  
I was in the gym, so I didn't see  
your last few matches, but Tulio  
told me. That cursed sword is  
killing you. For real.

MAKOTO  
For the last time, Gil Dong, I've  
got it under control.

Makoto winces and clenches her forearm, trying to steady its rattling.

GIL DONG  
Obviously not. You have to get rid  
of it. Now.

She lowers her hands and smiles, though her eyes stay dim.

MAKOTO  
I'll be fine, Gil Dong. Don't  
worry. I just need it for one more  
match. To beat Joshua.

GIL DONG  
You have me, you know. I can help.

Makoto shakes her head...

(CONTINUED)

GIL DONG

Look, I know we're not teammates anymore and I know we might face each other in the finals, but just--

...and leers at Gil Dong.

MAKOTO

Get. Back.

Gil Dong steps back.

GIL DONG

What's your problem?

Makoto pauses.

GIL DONG

I know it's not nothing. Just spit it out.

MAKOTO

You are my problem! Okay? You and everybody else who keeps trying to help me when I don't need help!

GIL DONG

Of course you need help!

MAKOTO

Not from you, I don't. Not anymore.

She clenches her fist at her side...

MAKOTO

Just get ready for your match and stay out of my way.

(wavering)

Please. For your own sake.

...and walks past Gil Dong, who sighs.

INT. ARENA SIMULATOR - VOLCANO BANK - EVENING

He flinches from a surge of heat as he and Joshua now stand at opposite ends of a burning field of blackened rock and sulfuric smoke at dusk. A river of lava runs from the volcanic peak nearby.

The computer sounds its signal...

(CONTINUED)

ARENA COMPUTER (V.O.)

Fight!

...and Joshua lunges at Gil Dong, ready to slam his montante on his head.

KIERAN (V.O.)

And here we go!

The two combatants engage in mortal combat, but they lag in the smoke and ash and tire more quickly than usual.

KIERAN (V.O.)

Rhee, the red and black gladiator, versus Strada, the charcoal and midnight...well, knight.

HAROLD (V.O.)

The first key advantages Strada has in this matchup are his sturdy armor and massive range and attack strength with his montante. Rhee is faster, more agile, and more mobile, but none of his attacks can do well against Strada's armor.

JUNIPER (V.O.)

Rhee does still have the terrain on his side, and since his armor's lighter, he's probably not cooking alive nearly as much as Strada is.

KIERAN (V.O.)

Well, they'll both be cooked if this fight doesn't end soon.

Gil Dong tosses a clump of ash at the knight's helmet and flees up the nearby slope.

KIERAN (V.O.)

Ah. It looks like Rhee has some plan in mind.

Joshua recovers and charges after him.

JUNIPER (V.O.)

It had better be a good one.

Gil Dong climbs ever higher, coughing and kicking loose rocks as Joshua tries to pursue. A stray lava bubble bursts from the crater below and splashes beside Gil Dong.

(CONTINUED)

Joshua reaches him and prepares to strike, but Gil Dong throws another fistful of ash at his helmet. He then rushes at him and tackles him to the slope, aiming at the volcano's edge...

KIERAN (V.O.)  
Oh, and a tackle from Rhee!

...but falling short as Joshua heaves him away and slams him into a boulder.

KIERAN (V.O.)  
And oh! Counter by Strada!

HAROLD (V.O.)  
He must be trying to make Strada fall into the lava below.

JUNIPER (V.O.)  
But clearly, that strategy's not going to work much longer.

Gil Dong struggles to his feet as Joshua leaps to his...

GIL DONG  
(coughing)  
What's the matter, "Demon of the Blood Moon?" Afraid to face me like a man?

...and swats Gil Dong's short sword away with the tip of his montante. The sword tumbles into the volcanic crater below and melts into pixels.

GIL DONG  
(ruffled, coughing)  
Okay. I'll admit you're good.

Gil Dong retaliates with a sweeping kick and a jump to his feet...

GIL DONG  
(trying to maintain bravado)  
But you're still nothing compared to me...

...and then throws a haymaker at the knight's helmet...

GIL DONG  
(wheezing)  
Because no one can take my pride!

(CONTINUED)

...which instead lands square in Joshua's palm. Joshua crushes Gil Dong's fist in his hand, sinking him to his knees as he grimaces and tries to wrench it free.

Joshua whips Gil Dong like a ragdoll and plasters him flat at his feet, stomping on his throat as he falls. Joshua aims his montante at the downed Gil Dong's heart...

JOSHUA  
(mocking, wheezing)  
You mean...

...but instead gores Gil Dong's thigh, yielding a strangulated yowl of agony.

JOSHUA  
...that pride?

From there, Joshua rips off Gil Dong's prosthetic leg and uses it to hit him over the edge. He eases his grip on the severed leg as Gil Dong burns on his way down to the lava below, where he splatters into pixels.

INT. STARLIGHT RISE HOTEL - FOOD COURT - EVENING

Makoto sits alone, watching Gil Dong's loss on her N-patch's holographic display. With a sigh, she douses the N-patch and glimpses her half-eaten bowl of curry udon. She reaches for her chopsticks but stops her hand, closing it and opening it again before she picks up the chopsticks.

Suddenly, another spasm wracks her arm and lurches to her head, and she fumbles her chopsticks and knocks over the curry udon bowl. Gasping and wincing, she clutches her forearm and staggers to her feet, almost falling over.

She opens and closes her hand several times, takes a deep breath, and trudges to the elevator.

EXT. RAILWAY TO EARTH - ARCADIA STATION - EVENING

Yukiko and Natsumi carry their suitcase on their back, gripping each strap with their respective hands and looking around.

NATSUMI  
Hey, sis?

YUKIKO  
Hmm?

(CONTINUED)

NATSUMI

Do you think we were too hard on Makoto?

YUKIKO

If anything, I don't think we were hard enough on her. If she wants to go it all alone, then fine by me.

Natsumi nods assent, and she and Yukiko watch a train arriving.

NATSUMI

That's our train.

YUKIKO

Yeah. Let's go.

Its doors open to let Yoshihiro float out.

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI

Mr. Yamasaki?

Yoshihiro turns to see Yukiko and Natsumi approaching him.

YOSHIHIRO

Ah, Yukiko. Natsumi. Good to see you again.

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI

What are you doing here?

YOSHIHIRO

I just thought I'd pay you two and Makoto a visit. How have things been?

YUKIKO

We lost to Joshua in the first round of the tournament phase.

NATSUMI

We were about to board the next train home.

YOSHIHIRO

What about Makoto? I haven't heard from her since she left home for the competition.

Yukiko and Natsumi tighten their grips on the straps.

(CONTINUED)

YOSHIHIRO

Let me guess. She pushed you away too?

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI

How did you know?

YOSHIHIRO

I'm her father. I know her better than anybody.

YUKIKO

Then maybe you should know by now that she won't listen to anybody anymore.

NATSUMI

All she cares about is winning the crown now, and she thinks that she can do it all by herself.

YOSHIHIRO

I wouldn't be so sure about that being all she cares about.

YUKIKO

Why not?

YOSHIHIRO

Remember the time you got locked out of your own house and your parents weren't home? And your N-patch battery was dead?

Yukiko lets go of her strap.

YUKIKO

Oh, yeah. We saw you beat Joshua that day.

NATSUMI

Makoto let us spend the night at her place.

YOSHIHIRO

That's right. And when you fell out of the climbing tree and broke three of your ribs, who called the ambulance?

Natsumi lets go of her strap.

(CONTINUED)

NATSUMI

Makoto.

YOSHIHIRO

Right again.

Yoshihiro pauses.

YOSHIHIRO

And need I remind you of the apple  
pie incident?Yukiko and Natsumi widen their eyes and shake their heads as  
hard as they can without hitting each other.

YOSHIHIRO

I didn't think so.

They stop shaking their heads.

YUKIKO

But that's all in the past. Makoto  
has changed since then.

YOSHIHIRO

Perhaps, but at heart, she's still  
the same girl you call friend.

Yukiko and Natsumi look between Yoshihiro and each other.

YOSHIHIRO

It may be naive of me to think  
this, but I don't think that she  
means any malice. It's more like...

Yoshihiro pauses.

NATSUMI

Like what?

YOSHIHIRO

Like she thinks that she has to go  
it alone. I wouldn't be surprised  
if that extended to you as  
well...but given the opportunity,  
she's sure to apologize and make  
amends.

The twins nod...

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI

She'd better.

...and start walking away from the station.

(CONTINUED)

NATSUMI

Do you still know your way around  
this city?

YOSHIHIRO

Not where Makoto is staying.

YUKIKO

Then follow us.

Yoshihiro complies.

INT. STARLIGHT RISE HOTEL - FOOD COURT - EVENING

Gil Dong arrives and scans the bustling crowd but finds no sign of Makoto. He taps his N-patch and tries to call her but receives no answer. He then walks to the elevator nearby and rides it up.

INT. RED SUN WING - HALLWAY - EVENING

The elevator door opens, and Gil Dong walks down the hallway. Finally, he sees Makoto lying unconscious in front of the door to the team suite and hurries to her side. He then kneels down and shakes her but gets no response.

GIL DONG

(alarmed)

Makoto! Makoto!

He feels her pulse and listens for her breath, then jumps to his feet and bangs on the door.

GIL DONG

(urgent)

Tulio, open up! I know you're in  
there!

The door opens, and Tulio peeks out, his goggles over his eyes.

TULIO

Oh, hey, Gil Dong. How did your  
match--?

GIL DONG

No time for small talk. Look.

Gil Dong points down, and Tulio looks down and sees the unconscious Makoto.

(CONTINUED)

TULIO  
(panicky)  
Oh, my god! Quick, call the hospital!

GIL DONG  
There's no time. You have to use your teleporter to send her there.

TULIO  
What? But I haven't tested it on people yet.

GIL DONG  
Then test it now!

Tulio nods and darts back inside the room. Gil Dong kneels down beside Makoto.

GIL DONG  
(under his breath)  
Hold on, Makoto.

Tulio reappears with his collapsed teleporter gate in his arms. He sets it on the floor, unfolds it, and revs it up.

GIL DONG  
(under his breath)  
Hold on.

BLACK

First, a brief silence, and then, the faint beeping of a heart monitor is heard.

INT. SECOND STAR HOSPITAL - MAKOTO'S HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

At last, Makoto opens her eyes. She raises her hand to clear them and focus on a sleeping Gil Dong beside her. A glimpse to her other side shows a heart monitor beeping away. She stretches her hand toward his head, stops, and then resumes reaching for him. Gil Dong snatches Makoto's hand in his and jolts upright, his eyes wide open.

They stare at each other for a moment, each faintly blushing. Then, Gil Dong lets go of Makoto's hand, and they both sit upright.

MAKOTO  
Let me guess. You saved my life.  
Again.

(CONTINUED)

GIL DONG

Nah. I just got help.

Makoto looks first at the heart monitor, and then Gil Dong, at whom she smiles.

MAKOTO

Thanks, Gil Dong.

GIL DONG

You're welcome.

She sighs.

MAKOTO

I watched Joshua beat you.

Gil Dong nods.

MAKOTO

I'm sorry for snapping at you back there. I just...wanted you to focus on yourself for the time being. But I guess we're past that now.

GIL DONG

It's all right. I did want to tell you off about what you said, but then...

Makoto turns her hand and flexes it, seeing smoother, steadier movement than before.

MAKOTO

It was the cursed sword, wasn't it?

GIL DONG

Yeah. I told you to get rid of it. We all did.

MAKOTO

And you were right, but I didn't listen. I know. I'm sorry for that too.

She scoots upright in the hospital bed.

GIL DONG

What?

MAKOTO

I just remembered something you said. After you taught me how to

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MAKOTO (cont'd)  
swim. About you asking why I'm  
here.

GIL DONG  
What about it?

MAKOTO  
Well, now that I think of it, I  
guess that...

Gil Dong tilts his head.

GIL DONG  
That what?

MAKOTO  
You see, the day of that crash, my  
dad thanked me for his support,  
even though I didn't do anything,  
but...seeing him in that chair...it  
made me feel...helpless. Guilty.

Makoto sighs.

MAKOTO  
I guess...at the end of the day, I  
wanted to prove something. Just  
like you.

GIL DONG  
What did you want to prove?

MAKOTO  
That I could make it on my own.  
That way, others wouldn't have to  
get hurt because of me.

She glimpses Gil Dong's leg...

MAKOTO  
Because what good am I if I can't?

GIL DONG  
Nobody can. Not you, not me, not  
even your dad.

...and then looks up at his face.

GIL DONG  
And nobody said you had to. I mean,  
come on. What do you think we were  
all together for?

(CONTINUED)

She pauses...

MAKOTO

To give each of us the best chance  
of winning. By sticking together.

GIL DONG

Yeah, and it doesn't hurt as much  
when others are there with you.

...and nods.

MAKOTO

Yeah, I guess you're right.

YOSHIHIRO (V.O.)

I should hope so.

Yoshihiro floats in through the doorway.

MAKOTO

Dad? What brings you here?

YOSHIHIRO

You promised your mother and me  
that you'd keep in touch when you  
left home. You never did, so we  
figured that I'd come visit you in  
person.

MAKOTO

Oh, right. I'm sorry.

YOSHIHIRO

It's all right. I understand. But  
about what you said earlier...it's  
not your fault I'm in this chair.  
It's not anybody's.

Makoto nods and smiles briefly but then clenches her hands  
together.

MAKOTO

Still, I do need to apologize to  
you for pushing you away.

Yoshihiro smiles and nods, and then, Yukiko and Natsumi pop  
out from behind him.

YUKIKO

He's not the only one...

(CONTINUED)

NATSUMI

You need to apologize to.

MAKOTO

(to Yukiko and Natsumi)

Yeah, you're right, and I'm sorry  
for pushing you away too.

NATSUMI

We forgive you.

They put their hands on their hips.

YUKIKO

But don't ever push us away again.

Makoto smiles.

MAKOTO

All right. That's a promise to my  
two best friends.

Yukiko and Natsumi hop onto the hospital bed, throw their  
arms around Makoto, and sandwich her head between theirs.

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI

And this is so you remember it.

Then, they release Makoto and hop off the hospital bed.

The five of them hear slow clapping coming from the doorway,  
and they all look to see a smiling Prashasti walking in.

PRASHASTI

Look who finally decided to accept  
help from her teammates.

Gil Dong and the twins scoot over.

MAKOTO

I wondered when you'd show up too.

PRASHASTI

Well, here I am, and before you  
ask, Tulio couldn't make it.

GIL DONG

The teleporter again.

PRASHASTI

Yeah. He sent you here, in fact.

(CONTINUED)

GIL DONG

I helped.

MAKOTO

(joking)

Sure, you did.

GIL DONG

(playing along)

Showing him your unconscious body  
by the front door still counts.

Prashasti grins and nods assent.

PRASHASTI

Anyway, the doctor said that you  
should fully recover in three days.  
As long as you don't push yourself  
too hard, of course.

GIL DONG

Kind of hard for her to push  
herself, since she's bedridden  
right now.

MAKOTO

Oh, it's not that serious.

GIL DONG

Sure, but you should stay the full  
three days, just to be safe.

Makoto nods.

MAKOTO

Of course.

Prashasti glances back at the doorway, seeing a nurse  
standing there. She, Gil Dong, Yoshihiro, Yukiko, and  
Natsumi back away from Makoto.

PRASHASTI

Oh, by the way, Yoshihiro?

YOSHIHIRO

Yes?

Prashasti taps her N-patch and summons a blank notepad  
display.

PRASHASTI

Can I have your autograph?

EXT. ARCADIA STREETS - VARIOUS - DAY

Makoto walks by herself, watching the dense crowd of people passing her by. Some people casually speak with each other. Others enter and exit nearby buildings. One person spots Makoto and waves to her as she passes. She returns his greeting with a thin but warm smile.

Eventually, she spots Moonphase at the corner of the street.

EXT. MOONPHASE - FRONT COUNTER - DAY

Sergei sends off another customer and spots Makoto approaching.

SERGEI

Hello, Makoto. What can I do for you today?

MAKOTO

Hi, Sergei. I'm here to return this.

Makoto taps her N-patch and displays the cursed katana.

SERGEI

Are you sure?

MAKOTO

Yes. I'm sure Prashasti would be happy to hear the news.

SERGEI

Your...former teammates too, I imagine.

Sergei taps an icon on the counter, and the cursed katana dematerializes from Makoto's N-patch.

MAKOTO

I'll be back later, once I've spoken with them.

Makoto spots Gil Dong, Yukiko, and Natsumi heading her way...

MAKOTO

Oh, never mind.

...and waves at them until they arrive.

(CONTINUED)

GIL DONG

I knew we'd find you here.

MAKOTO

Gil Dong, Yukiko, Natsumi, I was about to head back to the hotel. And before you ask, yes, I got rid of the cursed katana.

YUKIKO

That's great, but I'm kind of going to miss you cutting through pillars with it.

NATSUMI

Me too. How are you going to beat Joshua without it?

MAKOTO

I've spent the last three days in the hospital. I've had time to think about that.

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI

And...?

Suddenly, Tulio appears in a blur of pixels and stumbles forward, shaking his head clear and feeling himself up and down. He then notices Makoto, Gil Dong, and Sergei.

TULIO

Hey, guys. Is my head on straight?

MAKOTO

Tulio, perfect timing. We were just about to talk strategy.

SERGEI

Oh, don't spoil it.

Makoto taps her N-patch.

INT. MILKY WAY STADIUM - ARENA STANDS - DAY

The crowd roars with a mix of cheers, jeers, songs, and taunts. The arena lights fill the stadium.

JUNIPER (V.O.)

We're minutes away from the start of the final bout! I'm so excited, I could explode!

(CONTINUED)

KIERAN (V.O.)  
 (chuckling)  
 And you probably would if not for  
 us.

Yoshihiro, Gil Dong, Tulio, and Prashasti sit together as  
 Yukiko and Natsumi scamper to their place amidst them with  
 two armfuls of snacks.

JUNIPER (V.O.)  
 Good thing I took out that life  
 insurance policy, then.

HAROLD (V.O.)  
 Will you two pay attention? This is  
 the last match of the event, after  
 all.

Makoto and Joshua enter from opposite ends of the arena  
 field below.

KIERAN (V.O.)  
 Right you are, Harold, and each of  
 these fighters is one win away from  
 Children of the Earth immortality,  
 but only one can be crowned King or  
 Queen of Blades.

JUNIPER (V.O.)  
 Will Makoto Yamasaki be the first  
 rookie to win the crown or will  
 Joshua Strada win his tenth, and  
 therefore have the most of any  
 fighter in Children of the Earth  
 history?

Someone in the crowd tries to get an airhorn to blare, and  
 is soon met with an earful of said airhorn.

INT. ARENA - DAY

The uproar dies down as Francis arrives.

KIERAN (V.O.)  
 Well, to introduce the fighters,  
 here's Francis Teague.

He stands tall center stage...

FRANCIS  
 Ladies and gentlemen, this is the  
 main event of the day! Presented by  
 (MORE)

(CONTINUED)



FRANCIS (V.O.)  
And now, introducing her opponent!  
Fighting out of the red corner!

Joshua takes his place at the opposite end of the ring.

FRANCIS (V.O.)  
A knight, holding an event record  
of fifty-nine wins, no losses. He  
stands two hundred three  
centimeters tall, weighing in at  
one hundred twenty-six kilos.  
Fighting out of Rome, Italy!  
Presenting the reigning! Defending!  
Undisputed King of Blades! Of the  
Children of the Earth...!

Pixels swarm his body and then just as quickly vanish to  
reveal his familiar armor and sword...

FRANCIS (V.O.)  
Joshua "the Demon of the Blood  
Moon" Strada!

...while another wave of applause greets him.

FRANCIS (V.O.)  
And when the action begins, the  
battlefield will be as follows!

The holographic display materializes high above Francis'  
head, forming the image of a beach on a starlit night.

JUNIPER (V.O.)  
Ah, the beach at night, a perfect  
place for the final battle. The  
bioluminescent algae really sells  
it.

Francis signals Makoto and Joshua to march to two circular  
lights to either side of him...

KIERAN (V.O.)  
So, which new legend will be born  
here today?

HAROLD (V.O.)  
We're about to find out...

...which they do. Makoto spots her friends and parents in  
the crowd and smiles at them.

(CONTINUED)

HAROLD (V.O.)  
...in three...two...one...

The two combatants bathe in cybernetic blips and lights, and then vanish into the battle simulator.

INT. ARENA SIMULATOR - BEACH - NIGHT

Makoto and Joshua stand opposite each other across the beach on a clear night. Bioluminescent algae flash brilliant blue in the waves as they wash against the shoreline, as if amplifying the light from the moon and stars above.

The computer sounds its signal...

ARENA COMPUTER (V.O.)  
Fight!

...and Joshua uproots his montante and lunges at Makoto.

KIERAN (V.O.)  
And Strada makes the first move  
already!

Makoto dodges the sweep and counters with a swing of the Itous' hammer.

KIERAN (V.O.)  
And would you look at that?

She and Joshua continue to exchange blows.

JUNIPER (V.O.)  
Look at what? Yamasaki's inventory?  
She's got quite a change of gear  
since last time. I mean...is that a  
hammer?

HAROLD (V.O.)  
Evidently. She has also  
incorporated a more solid cuirass  
into her armor. That should work  
better against Strada's sword than  
her usual armor.

In one exchange, Joshua's montante grazes Makoto's nose, but Makoto strikes Joshua's gauntlet, denting it.

HAROLD (V.O.)  
Now, I have a question.

(CONTINUED)

KIERAN (V.O.)  
That's a first.

HAROLD (V.O.)  
Indeed. Why would she replace her  
helmet with a cloth headband?

In another, she parries a thrust and etches a long scratch  
in Joshua's breastplate, but Joshua retaliates with a sword  
slap to her pauldron.

JUNIPER (V.O.)  
The only reason I can think of is  
that it's a good luck charm.

HAROLD (V.O.)  
A good luck charm?

JUNIPER (V.O.)  
Yeah. You know, like from a guy she  
likes.

KIERAN (V.O.)  
Let's see if that luck holds out.

The two continue to exchange blows, and the commentary  
follows along. All the while, Makoto lures Joshua closer to  
the water, which slows down his movements more than hers.

Eventually, however, Joshua knocks Makoto into the water  
with a sweeping blow to the back. Makoto loses the Itous'  
hammer as she falls.

KIERAN (V.O.)  
Ooh! And a devastating strike to  
the back there!

JUNIPER (V.O.)  
Good thing she's wearing armor.

She swims away from a wild overhand swing, braces her feet  
against the sand...

KIERAN (V.O.)  
But now that she's lost that  
hammer, she'll have to think of  
something quick.

...bursts out of the water, and lashes out with her katana  
and a matching wakizashi.

(CONTINUED)

KIERAN (V.O.)  
Yamasaki just pulled out her  
katana! And a wakizashi to match!

A fleeting glimpse of Joshua reveals the hammer's head  
lodged in his helmet.

HAROLD (V.O.)  
Good idea, carrying backup weapons,  
but now, she has to close the  
distance on Strada...

Joshua, unable to dislodge the hammer, peels his helmet  
off...

HAROLD (V.O.)  
...and the reach of that montante's  
still not going to make it easy.

...and shakes his head, now blinded in his left eye, but  
pauses as he sees Yoshihiro in the same stance as Makoto.

JOSHUA  
(elated)  
Yoshihiro Yamasaki.

Joshua swings his montante to his side and crouches down.

JOSHUA  
(excited)  
We meet again at last.

Makoto smiles and charges at Joshua.

JUNIPER (V.O.)  
And off she goes!

They resume fighting. Makoto is now much more aggressive but  
still patient and calculating, while Joshua still tries to  
match her, blow for blow. The commentary follows along.

KIERAN (V.O.)  
It's anybody's fight!

JUNIPER (V.O.)  
I'm on the edge of my seat! For  
real!

INT. ARENA STANDS - DAY

Yukiko and Natsumi clench their fists on their respective knees, glean each other out the corners of their eyes, and jump to their feet.

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI  
(chanting)  
Makoto! Makoto! Makoto! Makoto!

The twins' chanting bids Tulio and Prashasti to join them.

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI/TULIO/PRASHASTI  
(chanting)  
Makoto! Makoto! Makoto!

TULIO  
(under his breath)  
Hey, this is kind of fun.

PRASHASTI  
Less chatting, more chanting!

The chant ripples through part of the crowd...

JUNIPER (V.O.)  
What's this? It looks like the crowd's cheering for Makoto.

HAROLD (V.O.)  
It doesn't look like it at all.

...and sweeps up Gil Dong.

GIL DONG  
(chanting)  
Makoto! Makoto!

HAROLD (V.O.)  
They're really doing it.

FANS  
(chanting)  
Makoto! Makoto! Makoto! Makoto!

Yoshihiro simply watches with a smile on his face.

JUNIPER (V.O.)  
Can the fighters hear the fans?

INT. ARENA SIMULATOR - BEACH - NIGHT

Joshua stumbles backwards into the water and brandishes his montante in front of him. Makoto stands on the compacted sand, her katana and wakizashi pointed forward.

KIERAN (V.O.)

No, but there's certainly no harm  
in cheering for your favorites, is  
there?

As the water recedes, Joshua thrusts at Makoto's legs, but Makoto parries the thrust, swings her katana over Joshua's head, dives beneath his upward counterattack, and thrusts the katana and wakizashi upwards, shutting her eyes against the impact.

When she opens her eyes, she sees the katana and wakizashi's crossed tips skewering Joshua's throat.

After a glimpse of his defeated but surprisingly warm grin, she draws her swords out of his neck and kicks him backwards into the incoming water. She closes her eyes and sighs with a smile, her arms hanging by her sides.

ARENA COMPUTER (V.O.)

Finish!

INT. COMMENTARY BOOTH - DAY

Juniper leaps out of her seat and dances and fumbles all around the booth. Kieran grins.

JUNIPER

(ecstatic)

Oh, my god! She did it! I can't  
believe it! My eyeballs are  
asploding from all the action! I  
just...I...I just don't believe it!

KIERAN

You'd better believe it, June! For  
the first time in Children of the  
Earth history...

INT. ARENA - DAY

Makoto and Joshua materialize in the arena and step away from the simulator.

(CONTINUED)

KIERAN (V.O.)  
A rookie! Has won! The Crown of  
Blades!

The highlights of their duel play on the display above,  
including Makoto and Joshua's final exchange of blows. The  
commentators discuss these highlights...

YOSHIHIRO (V.O.)  
(under his breath)  
That's not just any rookie. That's  
my daughter.

...until Francis appears at the edge of the arena.

HAROLD (V.O.)  
And now, to make it official,  
here's Francis Teague.

Joshua quietly salutes Makoto while Francis approaches the  
center of the arena. A floating sentry carries the Crown of  
Blades beside him.

FRANCIS  
Ladies and gentlemen, this contest  
has come to an end at six minutes,  
one second. Declared the winner by  
knockout...

The sentry hovers above Makoto...

FRANCIS  
...aaaaaaaaaaaaand new! Undisputed  
Queen of Blades of the Children of  
the Earth...!

...and places the crown on her head to the sound of  
thunderous applause.

FRANCIS (V.O.)  
Makoto "Angel Blue"...

EXT. STADIUM ENTRANCE - DAY

A fourteenth placard materializes beside Joshua's,  
commemorating Makoto...

FRANCIS (V.O.)  
Yamasaki!

EXT. RAILWAY TO EARTH - ARCADIA STATION - DAY

Makoto stands beside Yoshihiro, Prashasti, Gil Dong, Tulio, Yukiko, and Natsumi, her newly won Crown of Blades looped around her suitcase's handle. A sentry smiles...

SENTRY 1  
Come back soon.

...and floats off.

YUKIKO  
Congratulations, Makoto.

NATSUMI  
We knew you could do it.

MAKOTO  
Thanks, everybody.

Makoto glances into the crowd, and then turns to the others...

MAKOTO  
Dad, Yukiko, Natsumi, Prashasti,  
Tulio...

...and pauses as she fixates on...

MAKOTO  
Gil Dong...

Tulio backs off to give her and Gil Dong space.

GIL DONG  
Uh, you're welcome. I mean, I think  
I can understand...

Gil Dong clears his throat as Makoto tilts her head.

GIL DONG  
Uh, what I mean to say is that...

MAKOTO  
I know. If you ever want me to come  
and visit you, I'd...I'd like that.

GIL DONG  
Yeah, I'd like that too.

He scans the crowd of people flowing by...

(CONTINUED)

MAKOTO

Uh...thanks, but for now...

GIL DONG

I know. I know. You have to go home.

...looks back at Makoto...

GIL DONG

(awkward)

It won't be too long, right?

MAKOTO

No, I mean, we'll keep in touch...I...

...and eases his arms around her.

MAKOTO

...hope.

She slips her arms beneath his.

GIL DONG

Yeah. We will.

Together, they close their eyes, pull each other in, and kiss.

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI

Um, Makoto...?

The couple breaks away.

MAKOTO

(startled)

Oh, Yukiko! Natsumi! Sorry!

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI

(through a beaming giggle)

What's there to be sorry for this time?

Yukiko and Natsumi clutch their suitcase on their back and dash to their train. Gil Dong heads off to another train, and Makoto starts after the twins, but then turns to Tulio.

MAKOTO

Hey, Tulio. Do you still have your teleporter?

(CONTINUED)

TULIO  
I always have it. Why do you ask?

MAKOTO  
I'd like you to send me down to  
Earth, please.

TULIO  
(worried)  
What? I-I've never done that  
before.

MAKOTO  
Well, you've already had two  
successful tests on people. Let's  
make it three.

Tulio twirls his fingers, but Makoto nods and turns back to  
Yukiko and Natsumi, who are about to board the next train...

MAKOTO  
...or four.

...but stop and turn to her.

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI  
Come on, Makoto. You're going to  
miss the train.

MAKOTO  
We don't need a train.

Makoto beckons the twins to come to her. Tulio takes the  
teleporter gate out of his backpack, sets it down on the  
ground, unfolds it, and revs it up. Makoto points to the  
teleporter gate and beckons the twins to come to her, which  
they do.

MAKOTO  
How about you, Dad?

Yoshihiro hesitates.

TULIO  
Let's try this one body at a time,  
just to be safe. You first, Makoto.

Makoto steps on the gate, her suitcase parked at her feet.

MAKOTO  
I'll send you a message once I get  
to Earth.

(CONTINUED)

TULIO

Noted.

EXT. JAPANESE SUBURB - YAMASAKI HOUSE - DAY

Makoto finds herself across the street from her house. Feeling herself down, she finds herself and her luggage all there. She then taps her N-patch, scrolls to Tulio's name in her contact list, and types a message on the keypad.

*It worked.*

Then, she dismisses the contact list. Seconds later, Yukiko and Natsumi appear beside her in a flash of light. They stagger for a moment and then shake their heads clear.

YUKIKO

Hey, Makoto. Did we make it?

NATSUMI

Are we all in one piece?

Makoto scans the twins' body.

MAKOTO

Yeah, girls. You are.

Yukiko and Natsumi look further down the street, and then back to Makoto.

YUKIKO

Well, it's been fun...

NATSUMI

But we'll head home now.

YUKIKO AND NATSUMI

See ya.

MAKOTO

All right. Later.

They head off down the street and disappear around the corner. Another flash of light later, Yoshihiro appears beside Makoto.

YOSHIHIRO

You've made good friends, Makoto.

MAKOTO

Thanks, Dad. Now, let's go home.

(CONTINUED)

YOSHIHIRO

After you.

Yoshihiro floats off to the side, letting Makoto walk to their house and knock on the door. Eri opens it.

ERI

(joking)

Welcome back, your majesties.

MAKOTO

(bashful)

Mom.

YOSHIHIRO

It's good to see you too, Eri.

ERI

Indeed.

INT. YAMASAKI HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Eri steps aside and lets Makoto and Yoshihiro enter. She spots the Crown of Blades on Makoto's suitcase as Makoto takes off her shoes.

ERI

(joking)

That crown would look better on your head.

MAKOTO

Yeah, maybe.

ERI

But seriously, I'm so proud of you, and I never thought I'd be happy to be proven wrong, but here I am.

MAKOTO

I had help.

Makoto smiles between Yoshihiro and Eri...

ERI

Of course, you did.

EXT. YAMASAKI HOUSE - DAY

...the latter of whom closes the door behind her.