Character Lock

by Pastel Comma (Regina_Hark)

Summary

Takafumi Watanabe was your ordinary MMORPG player until something (a glitch, a goddess, who knows) has him trapped into the world of Aurelia Online. The real one. He’ll have to keep his wits about him.

Sprites like him are always on the breeding menu.
Prologue of a Price

Chapter Summary

In which Takafumi logs in at the wrong time and at the wrong place.

Takafumi sighs late in the long night, popping his VR headset off for a moment of peace. The after-images of neon visuals cling to his eyelids. He blinks and blinks again, banishing it all away. Gone is the vistas of generic fantasy cites. Gone is the swear-slinging spam-filled chatrooms. Once again, he’d dropped unceremoniously back into his ordinary world. An absolute reality he couldn’t log off with a simple click.

He reaches for his can of beer resting on the desk and takes a swig, the can near empty. He hasn’t changed at all these last seven years. It’s always the same. He’ll do better tomorrow, then that tomorrow and the tomorrow after that. He’s moved around. He’s dated. It’s always the same. Twenty-eight and in his prime as a single man and he’s celebrating it alone with the cracks on his walls. Shit. The glare of his computer monitors hits his gangly, noodle-like form.

Takafumi scowls, rubs at the scruff growing around his chin. His skin paler than the desktop’s obnoxious white. Awkward and scrawny, he wonders where his experience points have gone. Takafumi snorts. He’s doing it again. Assigning game logic to the real world. Madness. But thinking this way makes his scattered thoughts form into a straight line.

This world, this reality, wasn’t built with a friendly UI in mind.

Takafumi finishes the can and goes for the pack of six he has waiting for him under his computer chair. All the while, the VR headset sits snug around his neck. The clear visor relaying messages and item effects and all other useless data that ran together into digital gibberish. Cracking the new beer open, he glances around his apartment. A simple one-room flat with nothing of value in it. Himself included.

Outside the black desk holding his three monitors and hard drive, he has no real furniture. And you know, doing this shit, day in and day out, was starting to get to him. The fun just wasn’t there anymore. He couldn’t summon a drop of passion for living the dream. Getting paid to play video games. Funny, right? How many losers could say they kept to that childish wish right to the end.


And to keep all that shit, they had to become suit-wearing slaves. Corporate peons.

Sometimes, Takafumi thinks he’s better off than them. He is, isn’t he? No girl to please for. No job to beg for. No kid to care for. Unlike the rest in the rat race, he picks his hours, clients and quality of life unbeknownst to anything or anyone. Sometimes, he didn’t believe it. It would explain how he’s become a NEET. No friends. No family. No options. Shit, the only people who knew of his existence was his on-paper landlord and the delivery girl who brings him groceries.
But to pay for his dream, Takafumi’s occupation revolved around being a leech on VR tech.

You name it, he’s paid for it. Hacker. Modder. Troll. Griefer. Professional Corpse-Camper. And now Takafumi is on the less illegal but ban-able offense of power-leveling character accounts for the rich and lazy. How else could he put zeroes into his bank account: Get a real job? Having computer smarts was fine and dandy as long as you had actual references to back them up. His resume would have him thrown in jail or placed under heavy surveillance. You are who you work with, after all. The scum of the internet. And honestly, no matter how clever he was, he’d just get shoved into being a company slave.

Simply put, there’s no way for Takafumi to level from this situation. It was a [Dead End].

He snorts. Thinking that negatively could only lead to depression. Sure, his situation could be called a [Dead End] to anyone else but thinking of it gaming terms, he’s reached his final class. A true rarity. From [Nerd] to [Shut-In] to [Neet] to [Independent Neet]. Or if he has to think of it as a monster class, [Nerd] to [Greater Nerd] to [Lessor Neet] to [Greater Neet] to [NEET Absolute]. As a nerdy twerp who grew into a hardcore shut-in, such an ending could not be considered a bad one.

Why not think of it as [Job Class Complete]?

Takafumi finishes the latest can and sits it on the dashboard. Break time’s over. He reaches for his VR headset and sits onto his head, bracing himself for the virtual synchronization to kick in. He’s been playing fast and loose with the general rules a player should be using their VR headset. Don’t play for more than six hours. Take breaks. Don’t take the headset off without going through the un-sync protocol. Takafumi purses his lips. VR tech companies overestimate their headsets all the time.

The start screen of Aurelia Online loads and Takafumi eyes the chat board glitching out on left screen.

Looks like he’s found what he’s looking for. Aurelia Online was the newest MMO this side of the ocean and it was your usual unimaginative RPG hack-and-slash dreck that had been pushed out this decade. Make a character. Level him up. Unlock the ability to make another character and so on. That’s why power-leveling was so lucrative on here. You just spam character accounts until you get the high-level job class and character traits you can pawn off on an overpowered new account.

But Aurelia Online had an internal problem that made their game into a buggy mess.

It was the sort of stuff you’d expect from a new developer. Some of their own decided to pick a fight with the production company bankrolling the game’s servers for a petty reason or whatever. Apparently, this core group didn’t like how they had to push out their chosen artists and designers for the company’s chosen few. They left ticking time bombs right into the game’s source code that went off at random.

Log in at just the right time and you got to be apart off the code-fucked madness.

But rumor has it that Aurelia Online had a shit-load of unwanted content they were attempting to pull from the source code anyway. Shit that the production company shoveled in themselves and was attempting to use as an excuse to ax the MMO entirely. In between monthly serve updates, a lucky player could be spawned into a glitched area and reap the rewards of limited loot, titles, and job classes when in the right place at the right time.

Having something so rare that the site admins would pay real-life money to hush away…

Takafumi has been logging in and out all night and now he’s got in. The game sputters, loading in as
a glitchy spammy lines of code that take a moment to initialize. The graphic engine fails and everything looks half rendered and bugged-out.

When it does, the whole game world is at war.

Everything is killable. Everything can be equipped and sold on the in-game auction house.

Takafumi brings up his UI chat screen and rolls down the message boards. People are selling rooftop pieces from the endgame city hub and NPC corpses that could be equipped as axes. It’s beautiful. Takafumi brings his attention to the fucked-up mess that is his player character. If it wasn’t for his username and in-game screen name, Helarix, he’d never be able tell that this is his character.

A level 53 rune knight, Helarix looks more like an unholy humanoid spawn.

The armor he wears usually became that of a shifting, void-like cloak. The skin around his tanned face flickers in and out, revealing the model’s rigging and a purple flame he thinks is the internal indication key. The shade of it matches that of his UI and the color he picked for the character account. Making Helarix do the standard fighting animations is like an exercise in frustration. His player character does only one move. A special action that the in-game notifications refer as [Devour]. His cloak opens and alien-like tentacles pulls in the surrounding earth, damaging the land and mutating it into more of that shifting void texture.

Wow. What an excellent game design. His all-powerful knight now an ugly tentacle monster.

As a rune knight, he worked hard to level this class because in the late game, the real competition was in the pvp stages. Some equipment and skill could only be unlocked from killing the exact opposite of your chosen job class. And honestly, only a rune knight with their elemental resistance grinded to hell and back could hope to go toe-to-toe with war mages, hell knights, celestial paladins and the rest of those spell-spamming AOE blowhards.

His class of rune knight is basically the red mage of the game, a master of none.

Takafumi tries Helarix’s special attacks and passives.

They’ve been renamed. [Sword Slash] is now [Soul Sever]. It’s not even the same animation. The cloak peels back and there’s this singular ray of dark light cuts across the ground. Takafumi supposes it’s for one-on-one battles. The element attribute is something called [Null]. This [Null] has replaced the other attributes of the rest of his elemental skills. [Flame Slash]. [Frost Slash]. [Quake Slash]. Weird. And they’ve been changed too. [Flame Soul]. [Frost Soul]. [Earth Soul].

Just what is the obsession with the word, ‘soul’?

Even the more basic stuff has been altered. [Quick Heal]. [Mana Recovery]. [HP/MP Reversal]. They’re now all creepy versions of themselves. [Bleed]. [Sap]. [Drain]. Did someone program this in with a thesaurus on hand? The animations that come with them didn’t need to be so detailed. His player character reforming into a mass of black death, his targeting system shit because Takafumi was pretty sure that trees and plants didn’t count as targets, and drains the pixels from the landscape.

The earth becoming a gray metal mesh that melts into soupy, sickening unspace.

Takafumi sighs and brings up his quick travel menu. The map is unrecognizable and none of the warp points work. Takafumi goes to his item menu and scrolls down to find a warp scroll and the shit freezes on him. The world bugs out and his character falls through game maps over and over. The game maps are quickly blackened out and all that is left is a million of little lights that the notification crowding his visor is calling souls. Then the screen blackens out all together.
A message appears. One from an admin whose name is glitched out.

To User_Name Helarix

Collect 1 [Soul], win a prize.
Collect 10 [Soul], win a prize.
Collect 100 [Soul], win a prize.
Collect 1000 [Soul], win a prize.

Prizes include: R Job Classes. SR Job Classes. UR Job Classes. Your Life.

1 [Soul] uncollected, win a punishment
10 [Soul] uncollected, win a punishment
100 [Soul] uncollected, win a punishment
1000 [Soul] uncollected, win a punishment

Punishments include: N Job Classes. D Job Classes. W Job Classes. Your Soul.

Continue Playing? Abide By These Rules.
No? Then Leave, Coward.
Character used to Log In shall be Devoured as Compensation.
Sign with Soul: Takafumi Watanabe

All of that sounds a little weird, doesn’t it? And hot the hell did the site admin get his real name. This account is a dummy one, rerouted through all sorts of software and hardware he has set up in his apartment. Must be one of the bugs that did it. Or could it have randomly assumed a name for him out of a name generator, just so lucky to hit it in one. He can’t imagine he’s the only Takafumi Watanabe in Tokyo neither mind the entirely of Japan. There’s no way they could be talking about the actual him sitting here.

Takafumi’s eye hone in on that one line.

“Characters used to Log In shall be Devoured as Compensation.”

Now what could that mean? Was the site admin saying that his character would be killed or was it an outright threat to his character account. Be deleted for logging on during a glitch event? The message deletes itself and a new message forms in front of him with a timer.

Time to Choose
Takafumi Watanabe, God of User_Name Helarix,
Coward or Calamity?
Serve Us in This and We shall Reward Greatly.
Fail Us in This and We shall Punish Greatly.

Greatly We Are!
Inferior You Are!
Know Your Place.
Serve or Sin, Godless Soul!

Coward or Calamity!
What?

Takafumi glances around his screen. There’s a little log-off button flying around and hiding from his mouse. The words, “Clinging to Your Pitiful Existence Requires More Effort than That!” form as it flees. Just what is this cheesy shit? Takafumi tries to delete the message but the text box only moves to the side of the screen. The seconds counting down. 43. 42. 41. This must be some player deterrent to keep morons out. There’s no way he’s going to fall for some ominous shit like this!

More words appear under the haywire log-out button.

“How Heartless: Shall You Watch Him Die? What Little Affection Lies Between God and Vessel?”

Helarix. His player character, the normal one, is in the middle of the screen. He’s drowning in the dark sea, the void-mush lapping at his struggling form and untextured waves fall over his helm. Takafumi takes over. He activates a couple of his special skills. The void is just as much solid as it is void. A mix of unexplainable physics and water dynamics gone mad.

“Know This, Godless Soul. Faith Powers A God. His Faith in You wavers. Your Fate and His Shared.”

The skills aren’t working anymore. The commands aren’t getting through. And that noise… Was Helarix screaming? That shouldn’t be in the game. He doesn’t make any more sounds than the usual voice-acted grunts. Takafumi gives up on the controls and goes to change the volume. Damn it, his whole computer is fucking him over. The volume isn’t lowering. It gets louder and louder.

The gurgles of a dying man.

Helarix is overwhelmed by the void-mush. It drowns him and Takafumi clutches his throat, an odd pressure pushing into his lungs. There’s nothing there. There is literally nothing there so why…?

“But Had You Other Followers Such Pain Could Be Avoided. Worthless God You Are. Suffer.”

Takafumi is on his last ten seconds.

“Again We ask you: Coward or Calamity?”

“Sin or Serve?”

“Food or Follower?”

“Simple Question. Simple Answer. Simpler Question: Live or Die? Answer now.”

Takafumi moves his mouse and clicks on Helarix. That’s it. That’s the site admin wanted, right? His VR headset shudders around him. Mechanical failure? Overheating? He doesn’t know but it’s not staying on his head a second longer. Takafumi moves to take it off, knowing he’d be forcibly logged out anyway. Fuck them. His headset latches itself tighter around his skull and he can hear the sound of a whirring motor against the back of his neck.

Takafumi grips the metal and pulls. It won’t budge.

No. This can’t be-

To Takafumi Watanabe, God of User_Name Helarix,
We are pleased in your choice in accepting a higher power.
Apes like yourself have come a long way.
But let it be known We reside on a different plane of existence,
There must be slight modifications made to bring you fully under Our Purvey.

As Compensation for Our Efforts, We Shall Be Taking the Following:
1 Human Body
1 Human Soul
1 Human Memory
1 Human Total Funds
1 Human Total Possessions
1 Human Dwelling and Occupation
1 Character Account
1 Player Character
1 Life

Depending on your Soul Count, All Shall Be Returned Greater Than Ever!
Depending on your Soul Count, All Shall Be Devoured Within Our Maw!
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Welcome to the Calamity Lottery.
Your Betters are Betting on You!

In-Game Spawn in:
10, 9, 8, 7

Something sharp pushes against the back of his neck. “You can’t do this! Lemme out!”

In-Game Spawn in:
3, 2, 1
Takafumi spawns in and finds himself landing in a sea of glitching chaos. And fuck, there’s more just like him. Other players with their morphed avatars charge forward around him, spawning from a corrupted warp gate, surging in on the nearby kingdom. He and Helarix stumble forward, Helarix still refusing to listen to his input commands and Takafumi attempting to private message any of the others. The system isn’t working. He resorts to using in-site emocons, the images distorted into a runic language. Damn it. Does anyone know what is going? Or are were they like him, just dumped here without a single clue.

The gamer tries to use the in-game camera to get an idea of where he is.

He can’t recognize anything. What is this place? An unused game map that the developers decided to scrap. None of this makes sense. He and the others are gathered in the mountains overlooking a walled modern-looking kingdom. Everything is fantasy-styled but he can clearly see flying cars and futuristic arrays weaving in and out of the kingdom’s tallest structures. Well… What used to be the tallest structures. Everything coming apart as the AO players pour into the burning kingdom. The silvery towers of chrome and glass tilt and snap under the influx of destruction and mass panic.

Further beyond the kingdom, Takafumi can see people flee in droves to the farms and hillside.

They can’t see what he sees. Another warp gate forming at the outskirts to catch them off at the pass. More Aurelia players leap out and that’s it, they’re cut down and devoured. Unlike with their game world, or rather, what’s Takafumi’s come to expect from the glitch event, their game world isn’t turning into a metal mesh. It’s just destroyed. Rubble and wreck but nothing as freaky like theirs.

It calms him, a little. Fantasy violence always did.

Maybe he’s just being fucked with by the developers?

All that spooky crap from earlier, fucking flavor text meant to boil his blood a little.

Helarix manages to amble forward with or without him. The former rune knight stomps down the mound, joining a shambling horde with the other identical faceless humanoids robed in absolute white, a speck-less shade of un-space. Different than the darkness of the un-space of Aurelia Online.
Takafumi leans in and finds himself bombarded with overlaying data and pure physical response careening straight into his skull. Helarix finally stills, obeying him, and Takafumi startles, his in-game camera shifting into that of a first-person perspective. The output is too much. The fuck is this?!

Why can he feel the soil under his boots? Why can he taste the chill in the air?

He and Helarix gawk and stare in unison. There’s too much work put into this game work, too much detail. His brain can’t handle it. A migraine races across his skull and Takafumi goes to grab his head, his real head, and feels Helarix’s hands and yellow tentacles touch Helarix’s head. But for some reason, a strange, impossible, improbable, irrational reason, Takafumi can feel, genuinely feel, Helarix’s hands (and tentacles) as if the player character is touching his own head and vice versa.

The vertigo whips through right after.

Takafumi is thrown out of Helarix’s form and his player character shakes his head before returning to the others, mindlessly moving forward. Takafumi goes to touch his own head and skull. It had to still be there. He hadn’t died in an accident or fell into a coma or ended up in a car accident?! He reaches to touch himself and the only response physically is Helarix somehow mimicking his motions.

The former rune knight touching his neck and head and hands, checking for a pulse.

His mind is quick to supply a terrible answer

“I’m alive!” Takafumi shouts, “I’m not dreaming! That thing in my headset did not kill me. I’d remember it! I’m not dead. Listen, I’m not dead! You can’t do this to me. You can do this to people!”

This shit can’t be real.

Helarix gurgles out his words, starry void sludge falling from the morphed form’s eye sockets. Takafumi goes quiet and tries to put that little bit of evidence that he’s dead and somehow trapped inside of a fucking glitched game avatar into the corner of his mind. Why not do what the site admin asked him to do? Grab some souls. That would be a far more productive way to his spend his time than scream in anguish about his horrifying form and his existence as a virtual ghost. But he still screams. Loudly.

Takafumi thinks he’s allowed that much considering the circumstances.

Helarix makes it to the start of the kingdom’s overran gate and begins rooting out the people who hid in the shattered wreck of most of their city’s center. The former rune knight’s senses are sharper than they’ve ever been. Through the wood and glass that make up most of the kingdom’s structures, Helarix can still pinpoint the outlines of the citizens huddled forms. Their bodies lit with light and their cores bright with soul. Helarix marches to a basement hidden under rubble and digs his way inside.

Why did this game map have to look so realistic?

They almost look like actual people. But he and Helarix know better. This is nothing data and polygons and pixel. Who cares if they can bleed? It’s just graphics at work. Therefore, nothing he does here matters. He needs souls to end this and souls he’ll get. Even if they scream, it’s fake. Even if they bleed, it can’t be real. These are the things Takafumi repeats to himself as the first human falls.

A notification appears.

On his UI, a new counter has been added. Soul Count and a corner-hugging Reward List. It’s the
same stuff from that first message. Collect this X amount of souls and win a prize. The prizes being everything he had before he rescued his player character.

Takafumi snorts.

What a fucking con.

Real or not, he can’t feel his actual body.

Success!
1 Soul Obtained!
Title Earned: Enemy of Humanity!
Prize Earned: 1 Human Memory

Once the group is dead, 11 of them, another notification appears.

Success!
10 Souls Obtained!
Title Earned: Bloodspiller!
Prize Earned: 1 SR Job Class

The titles sound cool but he literally has no idea what they do. Takafumi tries to toggle on his quick tips and the stupid thing freezes on him. Whatever. Helarix and the others mow down the remaining few in the city. It’s painfully too easy. The players who would intentionally log on a glitch event were the same battle-hungry manics he takes on in PVP. Sure, their skill sets are all the same. Devour and drain and bleed the digital people in front of them but every player had their own unique style of doing it. Case in point, the jackasses that took the time blow up the castle wall to write their names.

Only war mages would be that showy and he knew that one too. Princess Noobkiller. Complete prick.

Though they all look identical, Princess Noobkiller does an unmistakable magical girl pose while swinging around a man’s decapitated head. War mages. No respect for the dead. Takafumi ghosts inside of Helarix and swings a severed spine as a sword in response. Princess Noobkiller scoffs and they fight as reasonably as a morphed rune knight and war mage can. Nobody wins. They collide and form into a rolling ball of limbs and tentacles. The others take their lead and smashing the last groups of survivors is easier than ever.

They clear out the kingdom and swarm into the next one, a mass warp spell delivering them from location to location. Anywhere that had a sizable population. They kill and clear out the location, driving through anyone that tries to fight back. An endless mob of muscle and might. This shouldn’t take much longer, Takafumi thinks.

Hell, had he been told about this sooner, he would have used a bot in his place.

The numbers keep rising.

Success!
100 Souls Obtained!
Title Earned: Mass Murderer!
Prize Earned: 1 Free Attribute!

Going faster and faster.
He’s at 750 souls when the game switches it up a bit. Helarix and the others carve their way into twenty more kingdoms until it becomes apparent that those in front, the early birds, they’ve long passed their soul quota. They shift into even stranger forms, growing into massive beasts and abominations towering high into the heavens. And more importantly, hogging all the action. The horde falls apart and they all head into their separate ways.

He and Helarix find themselves warped to another continent altogether. He and fifty others. They charge their way into the kingdom sitting on the coastline but it wasn’t as easy before. The souls here. The people here. They had clerics and holy knights suited up and ready to meet them at the gate. Time in this world moves faster than his own and Aurelia Online. The men with their helms and horses are shouting out oaths to end the hundred year blight that devours the land. A hundred years? Could it really have been that long? The time scale is ridiculous. Even so, the resistance doesn’t break easily.

Somehow, these digital people have adapted to the play style of the online players.

The knights attempt to round their numbers together for the clerics to begin a mass exorcising. Something they call a [Purge], an ultimate skill. Takafuli, mage-killer, does not care. His rune knight’s element resistance carries over to this new character build. He takes their purge magic head on and rips the clerics apart. With their main method of getting rid of them gone, the city falls quickly.

He and the others roam the seaside, destroying the sister cities that were nearby. They leave the villages and towns alone. With the time scale being so ramped up, it’s more efficient to rest in a cave for ten minutes and come out to see a new kingdom built along the high cliffs. The original fifty one soon drops to thirty. The few who didn’t wait for Helarix’s signal, hell knights probably, tried their luck on the clerics with the purge spell. Helarix and a couple of curious AO players waited around their warp gate to see anyone from their group would pop back out. They didn’t.

And so, the group moves on.

They head inward. It seems like the smartest thing to do. The seaside is getting boring after setting it ablaze for a few hours or rather, a few decades incinerating the survivors of an underground city until they sacrificed everyone they had to keep the AO players at bay. So they move, pillaging and destroying the forts and magical defenses built to keep them from encroaching on high forests and mountains that held their upmost highest cities. They fall within a fortnight or, in this world’s terms, in a century drowned in blood and teeth.

Whole armies throw themselves at them and little of them remain after.

A couple of the AO players with their group morph into greater forms and depart. Size concerns, mostly. The people of this continent have gotten clever this century. They’ve created these invisible walls that make it downright impossible to breach their cities. So he and the others have to outsmart
them. They hunker down in a place where a city is likely to form. Doesn’t matter where. It’ll happen eventually. Once enough people live there, they put up the walls but if one of their own is on the inside, all of them are allowed in. They have to take down the city without a single survivor or rumor. Let the people think that other things wiped out the place. A natural disaster. A plague. Anything mundane because those people will come to investigate and he and the other AO players will hop on the ride to the next city. Unknowingly allowed in.

Rinse and repeat.

AO players of too big a size would mess up the charade and with their new skill, they could break those walls down without them and be selfish with the body count. From the words they’ve exchanged on sand and rock, the change seems to happen once they reach 10000 souls. Those who leave promise to return if they reach 50,000 souls and nothing else happens.

With that number in mind, Helarix can finally get to work accelerating the process.

He and Takafumi leave the others. Reaching his late 7000, waiting for cities and kingdoms to form is less efficient than searching for bands of heroic humans to eat. There’s a change in the air. The clerics and holy knights of three hundred years ago have formed a religious order, rounding up all the men and women of age to join the fight. They couldn’t defeat the [Elder Wraiths] as they come to refer to Helarix and the others of their strange form. Instead, they willingly send armies and elite squads to fend the wraiths off so that others can evacuate.

Because of this, this world’s people have a strong emphasis on breeding the future.

Helarix thinks he can use this. He makes himself a hole in a mountain and waits, knowing the strange habits of humans. They seem drawn to places where elder wraiths sleep and build their most valuable cities upon his chosen earth. Humans were truly stupid and prone to acting like food should. They gather around him, just begging to be fed to Takafumi and begin his species evolution but Helarix is patient. Three great cities are built upon the mountain. Humans rushing to the safest place on the continent at the time. Helarix allows them to keep their children, their children-children’s and onward.

He considers all humans on the mountain his property and they know it too.

It is here on this mountain, this lone sanctuary among the millions lost and the millions more soon to go, that they thrive. Women find it safe to bear children. Men safe to live and raise them. Children safe to live long lives and go on to sire more of their own. He considers the farms that rest at the foot of the mountain a generous bribe to any other elder wraiths to leave his cities alone. It usually works. If not, he has to climb out personally to deal with them and he’s been mistaken as a guardian. Idiots.

His people stupidly begin to keep count of their numbers.

1000. 5,000. 10,000. 15,000. 20,000. 25,000-

It is all he ever wanted.

50,000. 150,000. 250,000. 350,000. 450,000-

Helarix doesn’t really remember being human anymore. He doesn’t even really remember why is his name is Helarix. He simply knows he’s been gathering souls to bring about a calamity on the world.

The humans he presides over make offerings to him. They’ve somehow associated him with fertility and speak to him as 'she' and 'her'. It sticks.

Utter nonsense on their part. And yet, on the tallest peak of her mountain, the humans have created a temple that reaches into the deepest depths, reaching even her own den. They come down and make the earth she has always knew into something to be worshiped and revered. It is maddening but she can’t blame them for tying themselves so close to where she sleeps.

She is the reason why they can persist against the other horrors of the world.

They lay with men. They lay with women. They lay with spirits. They lay with monsters.

And she marvels at it.

They make life. They make souls and there is something precious about that. Soul-making, a true marvel.

Helarix quietly evolves from [Elder Wraith] to [Ancient Wraith] to [Primordial Phantasm]. She remembers distant memories with others of her race and their thoughts of consuming enough souls might bring about a change in their appearance. It seems they were wrong. It is merely a waiting game. She can grow bigger and massive, losing all illusion of ever bearing the marking of a typical mortal. Four limbs and a head upon the frame. But as a phantasm, she keeps a simpler appearance to not spook those who come to pray in her personal domain. They kneel and ask for favor and Helarix gives it.

The humans are simple to please.

Her days become slow and idle and his three cities become an empire. They reclaim the continent and make war with the others. They bring back prisoners and knowing his tastes, they throw them in. She does so love those who belong to the Holy Kingdoms of Aulra, they who call themselves missionaries to god. Their souls make the sweetest sounds within the maw of his many jaws and teeth.

Helarix no longer goes by Helarix.

She is now known as Luxuria, the Eternal Guardian of the Karnat Empire.

It is a perfect game of patience until a strange letter appears to her. A message that comes with a sound. They were called notas kations, right?

To Takafumi Watanabe, Soul of Luxuria and Heart of the Karnat Empire,
We bring good tidings to our little Godless Soul.
What numbers you’ve raised!
What souls you’ve fostered under your wing!
We have watched your work and know your intentions and write to sway your heart.

Our orders are the same as they always have: Collect Souls.
And yet We wish to give you a new charge. A ‘bonus round’ in your native tongue.
The game is coming to an end.
The souls to be counted and calamities to be made anew.
We ask you of this, an impossible charge.

Create a Soul and We shall guarantee you a place in the new game.

Luxuria isn’t sure what to think of this order given from those of the beyond. She can’t comprehend
most of those words, the text written in that of god-tongue and odd phrasings. But those thoughts are soon sent to the wayside the second she feels Takafumi squirm inside her chest, attempting to escape and abandon her for the heavenly domain all gods come from. They’ve been together for so long that she can hardly see any good to come with the phantasm’s true purpose soon to come pass.

They must persist after that. They must make a calamity to end all calamities.

And for that purpose, Luxuria needs to keep Takafumi with her. Her first soul. Her precious soul that gave her motion and breath back in the ancient realm of Aurelia. Who was she back then? H-something? It’s a shame she can no longer remember the name her god once gave her. But that is not important. If Luxuria must temporary place the god soul into a mortal vessel to retain her presence, then the phantasm will do so.

Now all she needs is a fertile womb to serve her in that endeavor.
Tutorial 1: Sexual Impulse

Chapter Summary

In which Takafumi reforms and meets a unusual human.

Chapter Notes

C-C-Contains sex! And has some slight dub-con at the start before easing into the consensual goodness.


Something in front of him spills forward and Takafumi is dragged into the undercurrent, the stirring slime around him forming and knitting sinew and pulse into the goo husk melding around him. Layers of transparent slime and goo-turned-flesh rise to the top of the flesh-forming pit, the surface hardening to prevent his escape. “Fuck!” Takafumi flings himself at the filmy covering. He hasn’t been a physical object in such a large time that the sensation of tar-thick slime sloshing around him is downright a bubble bath against his sprite form.

He pierces through the stewing mold right before a human hand ushers him right back down. The hell? Takafumi lashes out, throwing himself at the surface again and again. Liquid claps take over the air in his mad struggle. He can feel the hand when it touches him. Warm and slender, it can’t cup all of him. He’s too well-fed of a sprite for that. How many souls has he collected: 2 million. 3? But the hands does well with its fingers and soft palm. It strokes and squeezes him when he’s caught, his mental form long since lost and he can only project himself now as a little ball of light and essence.

He has some defense qualities but they were meant to take on the undead, not the living.

Takafumi shifts his physical shape and becomes a ball of holy fire. He hopes something might happen. Boil the slime. Fend away the hand. Only another wraith or a undead creature might have stolen him from Helarix. His energy is wavering and the slime is draining him ever so slowly. The holy magic does nothing to either the goo and the strange person hell-bent on drowning him in snot. Takafumi switches it off and releases a honing screech. Where is he? Where is Helarix? “Come!” he signals.

The hand rubs the top of his head and Takafumi shuts up, hushed into warbling.

It lifts him out of the slime and another hand is upon him. Takafumi squirms, his light growing strong under stimulation and direct touch. He’s so sensitive and touch-starved he can’t put much of a mental fight. The slime still sticks to him and his little wings refuses to budge out of his shell. Even so, he
could probably leap from the pair of hands around him. That’s what he should- Oh. Oh god. The fingers caress his small orb-like form, coaxing more light and weak-kneed quivering.

Well, he’d be weak in the knees if he still had them or some legs or most of a body beyond this.

Currently, he’s become something of a [Soul Sprite]. A divine spirit that collects souls and sins. Despite the interesting name, Takafumi basically the battery inside of an elder wraith. There’s nothing much to it and there’s nothing much to do about it except in the rare occasion he’s somehow separated from Helarix. Like now. Takafumi throws his essence out and shoots out smaller balls of light to find Helarix. They don’t get far. The stupid things fly in a circle before flying right back into him. Useless.

What do these hands want? They breach his sprite form, pushing into him and making him moan.

Takafumi blushes straight down to his core, his bright light turning a ravished pink, with the fingers literally fingering him as if he is a female sprite. They’re so gentle about it too. One finger. Two. Humiliating. A couple of days stuck in Aurelia Online and he’s fallen to this, a fantasy fleshlight. The fingers push deeper and he clenches around them. He’s being violated, damn it! They stroke his insides and he can feel the resistance fade around the fingers. Takafumi relaxes and they push inward.

The pleasure mounts inside him and he feels ready to explode.

Memories of sex and masturbating and climaxing rush to the forefront of Takafumi’s concerns. Ah, he hasn’t thought of that in a long, long time! Cumming. Oh how could he forget about cumming? He needs it. He needs it badly. His orb expands, the memories and the pressure bloating him into that of a beach ball. There has to be something he can do to get from point A to point Cumstation. HE tries to wiggle or form or sprout a cock on him. That’s not working. Fine. What about a release valve? Eh?! He can’t do that either! Fuck it all. Realizing that this spirit form is too overwhelmed by his earthly desires, Takafumi takes a breath and forces himself to shrink back down.

He repeats a mantra in his head: He’s a sprite! Not a human. He’s a sexless fucking sprite!

Something licks against him and he knows the sensation. A tongue! There’s an actual flesh-and-blood tongue licking him! Takafumi mentally melt and drinks up the motion of being licked back and forth like a soft-serve cone. Soon after, the hands squish and mold him into a familiar phallic-like shape. Takafumi snickers. Who can blame him? He’s now literally a dick. He feels warm plush lips press against the start of his makeshift cock-head. Alright, he’s on board. He’s driving the ship.

There doesn’t need to be any more foreplay. He wants in. Now.

Look, he’s in hell.

How on Earth could it get any worse than this?

Takafumi presses right back and nudges those sweet lips to open wide for him. The mouth lets him in. Gaps muffled by Mr. Thick and Fit, yours truly, and he pushes into the warmest wet place imaginable. You know for a soul sprite. Talk about that size difference. The lips make themselves comfy around Takafumi and he’s being sucked down like a milkshake. The suction is unbelievable. He can feel a tongue underneath rubbing the underside of his shuddering cock and the curve of this perfect mouth, teeth and more careful not to chomp down on his shameless self.

Pleasure rising, the soul sprite can feel his shaft bloat and spread.

Instead of simply stuffing the mouth like a jackass, Takafumi shifts his new growth and girth to his
other end. That part of him hanging out the snug orifice sags from the new weight. It falls onto a pair of soft and squishy mound and that, ladies and gentlemen, is what makes him shift into action. He forcibly turns that other end of him into a tentacle and wraps around her large breasts -because shit, a woman- pulling whatever fabric blocking him from touching that sweet skin.

Ha, the fondler becomes the fondled.

His tentacle moves onto her shoulders and slip the straps around her down. He brushes against her long, elegant neck and the slightness of her frame. She’s built strongly but some soft fat remains. Tight in places while jiggly in others. It’s rather cute in his mind. His tentacle returns to her exposed, dangling breasts and swipes against her nipples in a single whip. They bobble despite their size. Full and thick and heavenly to the touch.

Unable to make up his mind about which breast to grope first, Takafumi sprouts another one.

His two tentacles wrap around the base of each fat mound and pulls it outward, teaching each titty a thorough lesson on groping random soul sprites. God, the feel of them. Her breasts give so easily. He can feel them swell under his stimulation and her breath quickening in her throat. Her nipples perk and he makes them regret it. Forming feelers under each tentacle, Takafumi makes them twist and suck the blooming nubs. They stiffen and stiffen but the soul sprite refuses to let them go. Rigid, her nipples actually begin to leak. He’s somehow inducing a woman’s breasts into leaking like a faucet.

Takafumi wishes he can taste stuff. He can’t. No mouth. No memory of a mouth. Weird, right?

He milks her all the same. Her titties damp and hot under his firm touch. The milk runs down her sensual form and he can’t help but think what a waste it is. Could he make her move? Sometimes, it worked with Helarix. Sometimes, it didn’t. For some reason, the woman feels compatible so he tries his luck.

“Move,” Takafumi intones.

It’s more of a mental order but he can’t help but act it out. Former human, he thinks.

The woman comes to. He more or less had her in a sexual daze. Takafumi is a damn good cock tentacle and he’s gotten Helarix out of some bad situations in the early hours/days/centuries (game time is weird). “Move,” he repeats and tugs on her breasts to lead him in the direction she wants him to. It doesn’t matter where she goes. It only matters if she goes. If she is genuinely compatible as host spirit/human/monster/undead. Ugh, technical thoughts go away. Ruining the mood here.

She… listens?

Though it feels like she’s humoring -god, does it feel like she’s humoring him- she gets onto her feet and heads where Takafumi said to go: A, uh, wall. Look, new hosts requires some time to learn how to maneuver. He doesn’t have eyes or anything like that. Usually, he takes a gander through Helarix’s funky ones. The soul sprite expands his area of perception and finds out where they are. A creepy underground chamber.

He can see the outline of others in the halls. Their souls bright in their chests and skulls.

Humans. Should he hunt them now or wait? No. He has a better idea. Humans can be useful.

Takafumi leads her to the nearest door and feels the woman stop in her tracks, an arm coming over to shield her breasts. Her skin is heating up. She’s embarrassed. An unfamiliar word emerges from his core. Moe. They haven’t even gone out yet and she’s flustered.
Fine.

He can be considerate.

Takafumi has her rest against the door and shamelessly induces her to orgasm on the spot.

The woman’s cries coming out muffled, he sprouts another tentacle to handle the door. He opens it an inch and brings her breasts into the hall, displaying her milky jugs to the closest human to the door. A soldier or maybe a guard. Instead of running for the hills or calling for back up on the cock tentacles winding around the woman’s frame, the soldier makes a religious gesture and bows to the woman.

Takafumi gestures to her breasts and the woman speaks around his cock.

“‘Yes. Yes. My appointments are indeed still canceled today. I am in the middle of rearing a troublesome fairy sprite and he’s gone and done this to my body. So naughty. I think he wants me to empty my breasts so if I can trouble you as the sprite has troubled me...?’”

Her voice is much more clearer than the breathy groans she’d been making previously.

“If I may be permitted?”

The guard can actually understand her!

“You may.”

The guard moves around the woman and Takafumi coils his tentacles around the undersides of her breasts. He wants to feel the milk leave them. The two humans strangely head back to the chamber and they place a large bowl on the floor. Ah, a container for the human milk. He thinks and hopes that the guard might drink from her breasts like Takafumi might have had he been born human but the two get his hopes up for nothing.

And what did she mean by calling him a [Fairy Sprite]?!?

The guard cups her breasts and begins to milk her, using the whole of his palm to lure the milk out. The woman keeps quiet. Just who is she, anyway? A sorceress? A high lady who dabbles in the mystic arts? The woman falls against the guard, knees shaking, Takafumi thrusts himself into her mouth. She’s a bit of a moaner and if she wants to keep her dignity around her servants, she should have thought twice about capturing Takafumi.

“Floor,” he orders and her legs, buckling from the pleasure, obeys.

Takafumi uses a tentacle to tap the man’s shoulder and order him down as well. Now on the floor, the woman writhes against the guard and his tentacles move to spread her legs. She’s wet. Sweet juices running down her slender thighs. She weakly fights him. Her legs coming to shut the moment his tentacles wander away. Eventually, he coils a pair around her knees and has them stay open.

“Have I created a monster?” the woman murmurs and she still sounds amused with herself.

The guard’s breath catches and Takafumi knows he’s getting a hell of sight. Takafumi lifts up the dressings that adorn the woman’s legs and lifts the seat of her panties up and out of the way.

“Do you wish me to leave? I see that this may be a private moment for you two.”

“Argent, the sprite is merely testing his boundaries. If he needs to learn physically that he may have
me in any way he wants, then I will allow him to do so. How else can I teach him sexual impulse?"

She rubs up against the guard and Taka-fumi is quick to study the tent in his pants.

Something in him doesn’t like it. The guard is a man. A fellow creature of the same species. What if she decides that he’s more a match to her. They could link bodies and he’d be forced out of the way. Until Helarix comes for him, this woman is his and he will not share with a creature not even a sprite.

Takafumi lowers his tentacle over the guard’s head and sucks the soul out his skull. The body collapses.

“Give it back.”

Takafumi ignores her and crosses his tentacles.

“Give it back. Argent did not deserve that. Give his soul back to him.”

Fine. Whatever. His soul isn’t even that good. It’s plain and bland and boring and ugly.

Takafumi releases the soul and it flows back into the man on the floor. The soul sprite pauses for a minute. Wait, how did he know how to give a soul back? He doesn’t? Souls go in. Souls do not get to go back out and return to their original human shell. Who is this woman?!

The woman rests her hands over the guard and the man is teleported elsewhere.

“We must work on your impulse. I can’t have you eating the mates I have waiting for you. When you are with someone, all of your focus should be on you and your partner’s orgasm. Adding more people in can be interesting but not if you will turn the cheeks so fiercely. Remember this, my little sprite.”

He’ll remember what he pleases. Then he realizes the woman has been speaking to him mentally.

“Yes, and you’re an obstinate one.”

Takafumi feels the woman moan around his shaft and she adjusts herself in a kneeling position. He realizes that she has given him more leverage to move. Her head tilted back, Takafumi is free to let gravity and motion do the rest. He thrusts into her willing mouth, his pleasure visibly glowing white liquid that dribbles down the back of her throat. The sounds they’re making is absolutely filthy. The muffled gasps she gives with him filling her right up. Saliva and song being fucked right out of her open maw. This is bliss. This is heaven! Her mouth is so wet around him. Drooling in pleasure.

The woman shakes and her stance changes, hips spreading.

Takafumi idly wonders why and brings his tentacle to explore the source of the change. Eyeless, the soul sprite relies on his area of perception that searches out souls for an elder wraith to eat (something that is failing him right now because this woman should be a bright outline) and physical touch. Her skin is both cold and hot and it jiggles as he presses into it. Ah, it would. He did press into her belly button. He continues further and worms into the space between her legs.

Her hand is there, nothing unusual about that, and rubbing against her pussy. Takafumi’s in love.

The soul sprite tickles her hand away and goes to settle the matter himself. He rubs his tentacle across her lower folds, revealing in the shudders of her sensual frame and slickness of her mound. Takafumi can’t believe he forgot that humans have more than one wet and warm place on them. They’ve been keeping them all to themselves, the bastards! He lathers his affection against those flesh things.
The women spreads herself even further and Takafumi hones on the stiffening nub, wanting more.

His tentacle coil around her clit, twisting it gently until he has her singing his praises. She’s not literally doing that. Cock in the mouth. But he imagines that’s how she would sound if she wasn’t drowning under the girth of his form. His tentacle moves forward and he finds himself drawn to where the liquid is slowly trickling out. Takafumi rings around the entrance, dragging his tip and flicking across her nub to keep the feminine fluid flowing out so tantalizingly. He moves closer. The heat dazzles him and he goes with the first instinct as a soul sprite can and will have when separated with from their wraith.

Takafumi pushes in.

The hot space nearly intoxicates him as the inner walls pulse and pull him in. It’s just the tip but he’s already close to popping all he has. Takafumi goes a little slower. He fills that space inside her with coils of his length, unsatisfied to think of stopping until there’s no space left, and there’s so much inside of her. A tight dark space like this should be filled with his essence. He knows not where his elder wraith is and right now, he doesn’t care. Takafumi brush against her and oozes liquid light. Her outline is so dark. She need light. So much light.

He can feel her belly beginning to fill, a pleasant pudge that he thinks should be bigger and brighter and his.

Her orgasms shake the vessel he’s chosen. Her body now a pliable thing for him to rest in. The woman loses her posture and falls into an ungraceful pile of limbs and wordless cries. Knowing his place as a soul sprite, he sprouts more tentacles and rearranges her on the ground. She needs to remain accessible during the transfer. He lifts up her hips and thighs for an angle that might allow him to enter her more smoothly and crawls the base of himself from her mouth. It wouldn’t do to block a breathing passage.

Recalling what little he remembers from human anatomy, Takafumi decides to settle himself in her-

“Wait,” the woman coughs, “If you return to me, it will end my [Mass Multiplication] skill.”

Takafumi stills. Her what-?

The soul sprite decides to hear the woman out. He leaves one tentacle inside her but returns to his orb shape, resting between her large and soothing breasts. Takafumi rubs against them and then a thought comes to him. This woman doesn’t have a heartbeat. He presses himself against one mound and then the other one. No heartbeat. None.

Wouldn’t that mean… this woman is dead?

The woman attempts to sit up but his thick tentacle finds only another good angle inside of her. Her hips buck into him and her slickness gushes around her stuffed hole. She tries again, laughing, and sinks a finger into him, the sudden motion forcing his tentacle to retract right back into his form.

“I thought I would have to teach you sexual desire.”

She flicks him and has another laugh.

“But it seems that you already are aware of it, my little sprite. It has been an eon since we last communicate. The stronger I became, the more I lost the ability to hear you. Do not think I forgot you. I could never. But with my species evolution and the charge to consume souls, it was not necessary for us to speak. You were to observe and sanctify my path, my sprite.”
Ah, more flavor text by the admins. Great.

“To speak with you, I needed a method to strike myself down without ending my presence on this earth. For that effort-” the woman pauses. “I devised a skill known as [Mass Multiplication] and split myself into two. You came out but you will need a body for my next effort. That is why you must merge with my biomass that I have shed in that pool. It is very necessary to secure our purpose.”

“What purpose?”

Takafumi tries to say and remembers he didn’t have a mouth.

“What purpose!?”

He signals in a blinking light and morse code.

“Hello World,” the soul sprite tries out. “I’m in a digital nightmare.”

“What purpose indeed. I know life outside of being a calamity and I am afraid of life after it. I’m glad to see you understand my predicament.” he didn’t understand. “Now that you understand aware of the dangers of sexual impulse, I will teach you how to act out sexual desire. Don’t be cross but you have to go back inside of the pool. It must be a bit unpleasant but I will be with you, waiting.”

Wait!

The woman drops him back into the pool. Now nothing more but a ball of light, Takafumi flails around the edges of this nightmarish bath he’s been encased in. He doesn’t like this. He doesn’t like this at all. His nose itches. But he has no hand to scratch it. His skin is sore and stretching. There’s nothing but void vomit as far as his area of perception can see.

This is hell. There’s no other way to think of it. True hell.

Millennia of adjusting to his soul sprite form have now gone down the drain. He can’t maintain it anymore. His consciousness is siphoned away now that he’s being fed to this starry mulch. The slime won’t let him rest. It throws out stringy tendrils to pull him into itself. His soul sprite crystallizing and sinking like a stone in snot.

His energy leaves him and Takafumi is consumed.

He wakes enveloped in darkness and void so dense he can’t ever see himself ever swimming his way out. This is the end. His consciousness shall surely fade away and so too will his memories and all else that defines him. Thinking of all the ways he could have died on Earth, dying like this isn’t so bad. Heart-attack. Cancer. Murder. Arson. Not that many people can pick their deaths and to die in a game world surrounded by the pixels and polygons he loved as a kid, that is sort of a dream too.

Yes, this end couldn’t be considered a bad one.

It is his [True End].

And then, the soul sprite feels the need to have a breath for the first time in- What!
Tutorial 2: Sexual Desire

Chapter Summary

In which Takafumi learns, tentacle-dick or not, he has a lot to learn about sex.

Chapter Notes

Teaser piece.

Takafumi throws himself forward and the slime sealing around him gives. He sees with eyes. He feels with skin and hands and fingers. The soul sprites coughs and rattles out his first physical breath. The goo exits from his lungs with enough willed force. He’s alive. He’s- Takafumi studies himself. He’s not as human as he thinks he should be. Dark tentacles make up much of his body and frame but with enough concentration, he binds them into solidifying into a proper humanoid shell. Turning into his actual self is impossible.

His brain won’t work with him in supplying the image of his original form. So he settles for what he remembers of Helarix and it will do for now.

The process takes a while. He’s always forgetting an organ or two and has to start over. In the end, the new vessel he makes for himself is a near disaster. It has Helarix’s height, a looming 6’8 with a solid frame and slim shoulders that are more than a little crooked with the tentacles hoisting the shoulder blades up. The flesh texture won’t stay the same. It goes slimy, sticky, then melts. All in that order. He’s made feet that are literal boots. Hands that are literal muffle-hands. Hair that is half human and mostly metal from a helm he’s mis-remembering. Sue him. The soul sprite hasn’t been making it a priority to remember what the elder sprite looks like.

Non-tentacle limbs are harder than they appear. Takafumi forgetting to support something and it snaps.

Reluctantly, he lets the tentacles serve as supports for his knees and elbows. He just fattens them up and the almost look like human skin and muscle. You know the sort you’d fine on a liquefying corpse. Who is he kidding? He looks just as bad as that distorted version of Helarix from long, long ago.

Takafumi sighs and goes with that form instead. It’s much more familiar.

He weaves the tentacles to expand and merges them to create a layer of skin. The shade mutating to that of the un-space’s absolute white. A void cloak unfurls around his neck, spilling down, and Takafumi learns that it is actually apart of his body, a weird hide meant for protection and evasion.

Satisfied, Takafumi goes to sigh and realizes he’s forgot to remake his facial features yet again.

“Interesting, you’ve taken the form of a hatching of my kind. It’s nice to see I have your favor.”
Takafumi startles, he’s forgotten that the woman is here, and looks around, everything still an outline of shapes and objects. He’s in a chamber of sorts, somewhere deeply underground. It’s dark but not overbearingly so. A ring of candles surround the ground tub he’s been born in. Soft and weak, the candle light helps him adjust to the darker black that paints the chamber. Torches in the shadowed distance illuminate stone stairs and archways that lead further up the curved walls.

“You’ve forgotten to adjust your perception, my little sprite. Allow me.”

He feels a touch on his face and the skin reform around his eye slits, a sensation rewriting the nerves in his pupils. Somehow, it adds color and weight to his perception’s ability. Takafumi blinks, his eyes itching, and Takafumi blinks again, finding that they are falling on the woman resting against the slime pool. He stares at her. Confused.

What could she possibly gain from him in a body?

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