Heartdimension Neptunia I: To Kingdom Come (Kingdom Hearts x Neptunia Crossover)

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by Kaz_149

Summary

Neptune was an amnesiac who woke up in a dark place. However, through the guidance of a Heavenly Voice, she was granted a chance to explore the outside world, and as she crosses paths with a boy wielding a mysterious key, their adventure of friendship, mystery and faith shall test their resolve!

All Chapters are done and will be posted over time! (Also available on FFN and Ao3...once it comes back)

Chapter 1: Chapter 0 – Dive (Connect) to the Heart

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

???

"It's dark...Pitch black..."

A young girl looked around the pitch of blackness she found herself in. She is a bright young girl with purple hair, wearing an oversized white parka, two white clips on opposing sides of her short hair and a scrunched furrow to show her confusion.

"Where even am I anyway? And why do I look like I've been splashed with fluorescent light?"

She looked around her surroundings and then at herself, seeing her features glowing brightly in the void.

"Did the power go off? No, I'd remember if a power outage went off. Maybe someone cast an End of the World spell? You know, Control-Alt-Delete? No, not that either."

Eventually, the girl became frustrated and started to tap her right foot impatiently.

"Well, whatever. Hello! Is anyone here? Can I walk around? Don't blame me if I started to collect rings floating by the ground..."

Her face then scrunched up as she thought of something disgusting...

"But ewwwwww, who knows what I could step in?" the girl said in a panic "It could be something like, ABC Gum. Ugghhhhhh, should I just wait for more text lines to pop up?"

And so, the girl waited...

And she waited...

And she kept waiting...

Until thirteen seconds passed, she eventually lost her patience.

"Geez, I am BO-RED! Who was I supposed to be waiting for, anyway!?"

"Ah! I found someone! Have you been waiting long?"

The girl looked around in surprise. At last, someone else deigned to speak in this featureless void!

"A voice! I totally heard a voice!" the girl then shouted out in the open. "Where are youuuuuuu~? Can you hear meeeeeee~?"

"I hear you loud and clear." the second voice, carrying a mature vibe in her speech, responded. "Thank goodness I managed to find someone here..."

The girl raised an eyebrow at that. Find someone?

"So, um...Ms. Heavenly Voice. Mind telling me where we are, exactly?"

"Oh, well..." the second voice cleared her throat, wherever she is. "this could take three hours to explain..."

Oh, the girl did not like that! Three hours of exposition? No thanks! She'd fall asleep in seven minutes without company or food here!

"Okay, skip that then! Just tell me what do ya want? You came here because of something, right?"

"Very well! I implore you, please lend me your strength!"

And now, the voice is asking for help? This has been a strange encounter, that's for sure.

"Help you? With what, exactly?"

"The worlds are in grave danger! If one does not act, the darkness shall consume all! I implore you, Neptune. Please stop the coming darkness!"

So, the voice is basically asking her to go save the world, er, worlds, right?

"Sounds like the average plot of an RPG to me! Nothing wrong about it, just, never thought we'd touch upon this to begin our story, I guess..."

But one detail bugged the girl...

"Hold up. Neptune?" Is that supposed to be her name?

"Yes. That is your name. Do you not know it?"

The girl shook her head furiously.

"Nuh-uh. Actually, I just woke up, in a way, just a while ago. I dunno a lot about myself, really."

"I see..."

There was only silence for approximately three seconds, before...

"Very well. Since you do not know about yourself, I can tell you."

The girl, Neptune, looked in surprise. Her eyes are practically shining like stars!

"Really!?"

"Yes. Really. But in exchange, you must free me from the clutches of an evil witch."

"Ooooohhhhh, now we're getting into the RPG train ride here!" the girl cheerily said, clapping her hands. "Alright, Ms. Heavenly Voice, you got a deal!"

The voice sighed in relief.

"Thank you, Neptune! Simply knowing that you will help me is a great relief..."

"Sure, but, uhhhhh...One question."

"Yes?"

"How do I get out of here?"

Right. Neptune is still stuck in the empty void of...whatever this is...

"Is there a hidden door around here?" the girl thought aloud, pacing back and forth as she lightly pounded her own head. "Do I need to look up a guide or something? Wait, how I can even do that here? Hrgggggggg..."

"Please calm down. I can guide you through and help you get started, but I cannot maintain this link indefinitely."

"Oh" the girl intoned. "So...are you on dial-up or something? Need more quarters for that payphone?"

"No, I-" the second voice groaned. "Anyway, I am trapped in the clutches of an evil witch. If she notices that I am communicating with you, or anyone for that matter, she will cut our link and it will be difficult to re-establish it."

"So, like, if that ever happens..." the girl wondered. "...we can't talk like this anymore?"

"No"

The response was simple and terse.

"Alright-y then!" the girl, apparently named Neptune, cheered, rolling her right arm. "That means we gotta hustle, so lay it on me, Ms. Heavenly Voice! What do I do?"

"Okay, first, try to feel a presence here."

This instruction only confused the girl further.

"Uh, there's only us here, you know."

"Yes, but...hmmmm, how to put this..."

Another three seconds have passed...

"Try feeling with your heart, Neptune."

"My...heart?"

As if on instinct, Neptune closed her eyes and stretched out hand...

"...!"

And she felt something, snapping her eyes open in surprise! Even in this empty void, the girl managed to feel a presence.

"Ms. Heavenly Voice, I feel something!" Neptune shouted in joy. "I definitely felt something!"

"That's great, Neptune! What is it?"

The girl's eyebrows furrowed, trying to get a feel of...whatever she felt.

"It feels like...someone's hurt. No, they're...sinking?"

"Ah! It must be the heart of someone whose lost their world recently..."

"Wow, so their world came crashing down on them, huh?" Neptune said, feeling bad for whoever she felt just now. "I dunno how to deal with heartbreak..."

The heavenly voice groaned again. "No, I mean, literally. Their world must have been consumed by darkness and now their existence is hanging on by a thread. Please, Neptune, connect with that person's heart! It may provide you with a way out of here."

The girl pondered a bit, never letting go of the connection.

"Well, anyplace is better than here." Neptune shrugged. "There's literally nothing around these parts, anyway."

"Good, now reach out to them. Do as you did before."

Neptune focused, feeling the connection getting stronger...

And stronger...

And stronger...

Until a bright light shined in front of her.

"Woah! What's happening!?"

It glew brighter and brighter...

Until it dimmed and faded, leaving no one behind in the empty void...

??? ????? ????? - Dive to the Heart – Station of Purple Progress

Opening her eyes, Neptune surveyed the area.

"Hmmmm...still not much around here"

She looked around and saw nothing but nothingness, but when she looked up, she noticed a light shining down on her.

"Huh, that light wasn't there before..."

She then looked down...

"What the nep!?"

And sees what appears to be a large stained purple glass painting of herself, sleeping in front of a few circles. Seven circles to be exact.

"Okay. This is weird. I don't recall having something commissioned in my image recently..."

"It appears you made it..."

Neptune looked around again. It was the other voice!

"Ooohhh! Ms. Heavenly Voice!" Neptune cheered as she waved her left hand. "Thanks for the advice earlier! Now, we're somewhere else!"

"Indeed. I surmise that this must be some sort of trial you must undertake before your journey can truly begin."

Hearing this got the young girl excited, shown by her light clapping of hands.

"Hoo boy! The obligatory tutorial level! So, what'ya got for me?"

As if to answer her question, three marble pedestals spawned across the area, each holding different weapons.

"Methinks that I should go get my preferred weapon of choice here, right?"

"Yes. Feel free to pick one at your leisure!"

"No need. I know what I want."

With a spring to her step, she hopped onto the pedestal holding a sword.

The Dream Sword

A weapon of incredible power.

Holds raw strength that can defeat any foe.

Is this your choice?

"Absolutely! A hero ALWAYS has a sword to start off. It's RPG Protagonist 101."

Upon her declaration, the sword vanished from her hand.

"Now choose which one to give up."

It seems her trial is not done yet.

"Give up? You mean, I gotta make myself weaker on one stat in exchange for excelling in the other one I chose? Man, this design's so early 2000's."

Hopping down, she walked a bit while she thought of her choice. Eventually, she hopped up to the pedestal containing the staff.

The Dream Staff

A weapon of indistinguishable magic.

Holds spellbinding might of incredible power.

Do you wish to give this up?

"Well, I've never been the most intelligent gal out there..."

"You've never been out of anywhere until recently..."

"Eh, details."

Sensing that her answer is confirmatory, the staff vanished from Neptune in a flash of light.

You have chosen the path of the warrior.

You have surrendered the path of the sage.

Is this your final answer?

"Heck yes, it is!"

With her answer given, the pedestals tumbled and the ground began to shake.

"W-what's happening?" Neptune asked in a panic, signified by her eyes turning in white circles.

"You have cleared your first trial." the heavenly voice responded calmly. "Now you are on your way to the second trial."

"T-This is a rocky way to start your game, don't you think!?"

And yet, the only sounds that could be heard are those of the girl's screams and the dissolution of the glass platform...

Dive to the Heart – Station of Black Regality

"I'M FALLING!"

And fell she did. A great tumble onto the next station, a dark blue one, which contained the image of a girl with black, twin-tailed hair.

"Uhhhh...I wish the person in this image is real. She would've made for a nice landing pillow..."

"Please don't say that about real people, Neptune." the heavenly voice scolded. "Anyway, you are now on your next trial."

Getting up in a single hop, Neptune steels herself for her next trial.

"Alright! Bring it on!"

In a flash, the Dream Sword spawned in her hand!

"Okay, can you do a few swings with that?"

"No problem-o!"

Down slash!

Thrust!

Leap and strike!

"A classic three-hit combo! You like that, Ms. Heavenly Voice?"

"Splendid! Now then..."

Suddenly, a dark...ant-like creature spawned in front of her.

"Oooohhhh! Is this gonna be my enemy from this point forward?"

"Yes. These dark creatures are but small spawns of the darkness. Go and defeat it."

Charging forth, Neptune executed her three-hit combo and defeated the creature with ease.

"Easy peasy!"

"Well done! But be wary. Weak though that creature is, it has a special ability."

"Special ability?"

Another one spawned in front of her, but it was sunken on the ground. It then crept behind her and rose up from the ground!

"...! From behind!"

Looking back, Neptune could only brace herself for impact.

"Owie! It scratched me!"

Feeling a little hurt from the sneak attack, Neptune struck down the creature just as easily as she did the first one.

"That's for scratching the hood, you...weird, ant-thing!" Neptune shouted, shaking her free fist in anger.

"Never underestimate your enemies, Neptune. Each of these creatures carry their own strengths and weaknesses. Adaptability is the key to victory against them."

And then, three of the creatures rose from the ground in front of her.

"Take what you have learned and triumph, for it is the way forward."

"Wise words! Alright, time to nep 'em all up!"

Since this is just a mob battle in a tutorial segment, Neptune easily defeated these trash mobs with ease. A mistake here or there was probably overlooked.

"Good work. Now you cleared the second trial!"

"Cool beans! But wait, if I'm done here, that means..."

Just as she suspected, the platform began to be swallowed in a dark void.

"Why does this have to be the only way forwaaaaaardddddd~?"

Her complaints were muffled as she was swallowed in the dark void.

Dive to the Heart – Station of Green Pastures

"No! Anything but that! Anything but the eggplants!"

Neptune was thrashing around on the ground, as if she had a terrible nightmare. One involving...eggplants of all things...

"Neptune! Please get up!"

The girl's eyes shot wide open upon hearing that familiar voice.

"I'm awake!"

She stood up immediately, snapping awake as she now looked at her surroundings.

This time, the glass painting, this time green, she's standing on is that of a tall, blonde woman in a green dress.

"Okay...so, what's the sitch, Ms. Heavenly Voice?"

"Please, I am Histoire."

"His-to-ire? That your name?"

"Yes. I figured I may as well tell you now before I forget."

"Cool, but I think I may botch the name, so can I call you Histy?"

"Sure. Anyway, you are now at the next trial, Neptune."

The girl got excited.

"Awesome-sauce! So, what do I do?"

"This may come as...out-of-sequence as you would expect, but let's test your other capabilities."

Neptune raised an eyebrow at that.

"Such as?"

A large crate spawned a good few meters from her.

"Try moving that crate, Neptune."

"Okay, but where?"

"Anywhere's fine."

Seeing a crate this large, lifting it with her arms is out of the question. Push it, it is.

"Hrrrrrkkkk!"

She pushed it forwards a few meters forward, then she pulled it a few more meters back.

"Good. Good."

The sound of a flashing light was heard. To Neptune's right, a barrel spawned.

"That barrel looks lighter than this crate."

"Indeed. Do you mind lifting it?"

Without another word, Neptune left the crate and approached the barrel, carrying it over her head with her two hands!

"Oooooohhhh, this thing's kinda light."

"So it is. Now, then..."

"I'mma throw it!"

And threw it she did. Goodbye, crate and barrel. Your purpose in this tutorial has been fulfilled.

"Well, that" Histoire said with surprise. "...takes care of that, then!"

As Neptune grinned at her small victory, she noticed a small red box where the objects were last seen.

"What's that?"

She approached it, and opened it, revealing a glass jar with a green star on it.

"Is this an item?"

"It appears to a Potion, Neptune."

"Items are always important for an RPG Adventure!"

She then pocketed the item. As she did, a flash of light spawned a medium red chest to her right.

The girl's eyes lit up like stars in the night upon the sight. "Oooohhhh, treasure!"

"You seem to know what to do with this one, don't you?"

"Well, duh! I'mma open it!"

Approaching it, she gave the chest two light taps with her sword, which caused it to open, revealing...

"Hey...is this...?"

Neptune picked up the yellow orbs from within the chest.

"Pocket change?"

"It appears so."

"Well, money IS important to buy items and stuff! It's RPG 101."

Keeping the 100 munny in her pocket, another flash of light appeared, spawning a peculiar pink door at the edge of the area.

"A door?"

"This must lead to the next trial. Let's go, Neptune."

Seeing nothing else left in the area, the girl approached the door.

As she did, the door slowly opened. Neptune approached closer as the light shone brighter...

Dive to the Heart – Image of Home

"Okay, where am I now?"

She looked around to see a peculiar town. No, city may be more accurate.

"Histy, are you there? Hello!"

No response.

"Guess I'm all by my lonesome here...Better go look around then..."

She walked around the city. As she crossed the streets, she came across another person.

It was a girl, nearly the same height as her, with short, iris hair, red eyes and wearing a white blouse with bear slippers.

Is she in her pajamas or something?

"Hey there, stranger! Do you know where we are?"

"What are you so afraid of?"

"Huh?"

Neptune looked bewildered. The other person answered her question with another question!

And it doesn't even relate to what she asked earlier!

She must be an NPC!

"What am I afraid of?"

"Growing old? Nah, that's just part of life."

"Being indecisive? I mean, decisions are hard to make at times, but I can just shelve it for later. Besides, acting is better than thinking for me."

"I guess being different than who I am used to. I mean, if you see me not acting like the same old Nep, would you feel weird about it?"

Upon answering the question, the other girl vanished.

"Woah! That...was weird...Am I in some sort of ghost town?"

With nothing else to go on, Neptune continued walking around.

"That giant tower over there looks pretty suspicious, though."

Decided on her destination, the girl sallied forth to the center of the city where the tower stood.

Making a detour around a park, she comes across another person. A little girl wearing a yellow bee jacket and matching yellow hair to boot!

"Another stranger! Though, if my gaming sense is telling me something, you must be another NPC with a life-changing question."

"Hey! What's the thing you want over anything else?"

And there's the question. If it works like the others, then the girl will fade upon answering it.

"What I want most, huh?"

"My belongings? Well, that would matter if I had anything other than the clothes in my back."

"Being the winner? When it comes to games, it's all about having fun, right? Who's top dog or not is a matter of opinion, in my opinion."

So that leaves...

"Meeting and befriending new pals! Games and life are more fun if you can share it with others, you know?"

And just like the first girl, the little girl faded away, her question answered.

"Geez, this is surely one weird way to assess someone, huh? Whoever came up with this must have had a strange therapy session or wanted one like this..."

Nonetheless, Neptune kept moving. She has a tower to get to!

Eventually, as she neared the tower, she came across another girl. This time, she was wearing a white shirt with an orange tie and a dark green skirt and had red hair tied into short twintails. She also had an...oversized watch(?) on her right wrist.

"Another NPC. What question do you have for me, o hot-blooded stranger?"

"What is the one thing you wish for in your whole life?"

"What I wish for, huh?"

"Seeing rare sights? I mean, there are tons of that, depending on the person. Beauty's in the ear of the beholder and all that."

"Being strong? Nah, a bit too straightforward. Besides, it'd be weird to see me with incredibly buff muscles and all that."

"How about broadening my horizons? It ain't just about seeing new things, but learning more about ourselves and the world around us and all that? I'd take that over formal classes any day of the week!"

With her question answered, the other girl vanished, just like the others.

"...?"

Sensing something strange, Neptune approached the tower, seeing a glowing tome in the middle of the entrance.

You are afraid of being different, of becoming someone you are not.

You desired friendship, companionship to share life's bounties with.

You wish to broaden your horizons in order to better learn about yourself and the world around you.

Thus, your journey begins in midday...

"Oh, so I'm the 'go with the flow' kind of gal, huh? Seems...pretty strange, yet insightful..."

Is this your decision?

"Like it wouldn't be anything else!"

Satisfied with the answer, the tome glew brighter and brighter, as the next and final trial began...

Dive to the Heart – Station of White Serenity

Arriving at the next glass painting, colored white, consisting of a short, brown-haired girl wearing a white coat, with a white hat to boot, Neptune took a few steps forward.

Before she could properly assess her situation, several more of the dark creatures from earlier appeared and surrounded her!

"I was wondering if we're gonna get more mob fights! Come and get nepped!"

It was a fierce battle. Between Neptune's aggressive approach and the creatures' wave tactics, neither side gave an inch.

And yet...

"Hiyah!" Slashed one down!

"Hoo!" Struck two with a thrust!

"Take...this!" And a downward swing to the right against three!

...Neptune handled the tiny creatures with ease.

"Phew, that was a bit of a workout, huh?" the girl said, wiping the sweat from her forehead.

"-eptune! Neptune!"

The girl looked around in surprise as a familiar voice rang in her head.

"Heya, Histy! Where've you been?"

"My apologies." Histoire apologized. "For some reason, I lost the connection between us. Thankfully, I was able to find you, as the link wasn't cut yet..."

"That's cool." Neptune reassured, looking around. "So, what do I got to do now?"

"Hmmmm. It appears you are close to the end of this trial. Once you clear it, you will finally be out in the world."

The girl's face lit with excitement.

"So, we're at the end of this tutorial segment? Awesome! This has got to be one of the more elaborate ones, for sure!"

"Indeed. Now then, do you see the path before you?"

She sees it, alright. The light that moved revealed several smaller steps leading to another Station ahead.

"Yup. Straight to the finish line, then?"

"Yes. Let us see the end of this path!"

Taking a moment to center herself, Neptune jogs through the revealed 'staircase' leading her to the place of the final battle.

Dive to the Heart – Station of Awakening

As she arrives at the bright blue station, which strangely did not depict anyone, but had numerous objects such as rafts, stars and the like painted in small circles on the top center, Neptune approaches closer to the light at the other side.

"Be wary, Neptune. For the closer you get to the light, the greater your shadow becomes..."

Wondering what Histy meant by that, Neptune turned around, to see her own shadow growing larger as she neared the light...

And then, it stood!

"Nep-wha!?"

As the giant shadow loomed over the young girl, who was stepping back in awe and fear, she could only think of one thing...

"RUN AWAY!"

She turned around and ran, only to stop herself the moment she remembered one important thing...

These Stations...have no physical exit!

With no way out, the girl made one other choice.

She drew out her sword and readies herself to fight!

The shadow had long changed shape. It was huge, having a giant heart-shaped hole in it's chest, it's hands and feet are stubby and tiny, and it's head has only two yellow eyes and messy hair.

It was a **Darkside**.

"A giant for a tutorial boss! Bring it on!"

She charged forth as the giant brought it's right hand, filled with dark energy, down to the ground, leaving a pool of darkness around it.

Seeing an opening, Neptune unleashed attack after attack at it. As she does so, the ant-like creatures from earlier spawned across the pool, ready to attack.

But Neptune was not fooled by the same tactic twice! She diverted her swings against the smaller creatures, eliminating them before they could land a meaningful blow against her!

Seeing the giant's arm still stretched out, she got a brilliant idea.

She immediately hopped on it's elbow, then to it's shoulder and launched a strong jump attack on it's head, dealing big damage.

"How's that, giant!?"

But the giant wasn't done yet! It knelt on the ground and protruded it's chest, causing it's heart-shaped hole to produce dark energy!

"Incoming!"

It shot out bolts of dark fire against it's tiny opponent. She responded by running behind the giant's left arm and started hacking it apart!

During her assault, one of the shots nearly got to her, but in her frenzy, she ended up deflecting it against the Darkside, hitting it square on the head.

"Woah! Didn't know I could do that..."

However, it barely felt the hit, and thus continued sending dark bolts at her. Seeing this interaction, Neptune stopped her attack and instead timed her hits with the dark bolts, deflecting each back at it while damaging her source of cover. Eventually, enough hit it that it reeled back!

"Hah! How's that!?" The girl cheered as she hopped back to inspect her work,

However, as if to show the cruelty of fate, Neptune's sword vanished from her hand!

"Oh! Why now!?"

The Darkside, in it's anger, pinned Neptune down in it's dark pool, threatening to drown her in the darkest abyss.

"Ack...I can't...I'm the protagonist of this...story...I haven't even...got to see the outside world yet..."

She weakly reached out her hand...

"Histy...help me..."

"Do not fear, Neptune..."

A bright light appeared before her.

"...For even in the deepest darkness..."

A floating object slowly descended down upon her.

"...The light within you will guide you to your chosen path..."

The object then slowly floated towards the sinking girl, causing her to glow abright.

"...Believe in that light...in yourself...and in those who believe in you..."

In a flash, the Darkside was struck down and a figure stood in the opposite side of the Station.

"...For that belies your true strength...And the truth about yourself, Neptune."

Feeling lightheaded, the figure was surrounded in a bright light and in her place, Neptune fell down, fainting after a hard battle.

The Station then glew as it changed design. From it's previous iteration, it now features a boy with brown spiky hair, wearing a white jacket and red shorts and yellow shoes. In front of

him are seven circles, three of which are filled by another boy and two girls, one the boy knew and the other girl being...

Heartdimension Neptunia I: To Kingdom Come

Chapter End Notes

Whooey, we're off to a fine start, huh? This is something that has been bugging on my mind lately, and I wanted to get to get this out of the way. I'll talk a little more about this in the first proper chapter, which should be out around the same time as this one, so I'll see you there!

Chapter 2: Chapter 1 – Night of Fate (Beginnings)

Chapter Summary

> Neptune wakes up in a cozy town and meet some people who tell her about the world she's in.
>
> Meanwhile, other parties are also here, unaware of the destined meeting that is to come...

???????? ???? - Second District

It was evening in this world. The streets are empty and the houses are alight. Despite the seemingly peaceful setting, wariness filled the two young girls who walked out of the streets.

"You sure you got everything?"

"Yessy! All the supplies and rations that we need are right here!"

A sigh. "Hopefully, they'll last us for the next of couple weeks..."

One of the two girls, a girl with short, peach hair wearing a C-Clip and headband on her head, wearing a peach sweater and a black skirt, stopped to look up at the night sky.

"Look!"

The other girl, who has medium length brown hair and a leaf hairclip, wearing an oversized blue coat with a belt filled with numerous square shapes of differing colors, covering her black undershirt and black shorts, looked up to see a star twinkling and then fading out of existence.

"A star faded out. And if what they said is true..."

The first girl began to cry.

"That means another world has been consumed..."

The second girl groaned.

"That means if anyone's lucky, they'll find their way here. In this Refuge World."

"Where would they be, though?" the first girl wondered, wiping her eyes of any lingering tears.

The second girl closed her eyes, pinching her nose.

"I don't know, but right now, we have to worry about ourselves first. Especially since we have no idea WHAT our world even was..."

"Will we be okay, though? What about those creepy monsters?"

"Don't worry about them. She's out on patrol right now, so let's head back already."

The second girl began to pick up her pace, causing her friend to panic.

"Ah! Wait up! I don't wanna get picked on again by the scary Mr. Monsters here!"

Little did the two girls knew that their being here has set them on a collision course with another who will remain by their side for most of their days...

???????? ???? - Third District

"Ughhhhhh..."

Neptune slowly woke up to see herself in a dark alley. In front of her is an orange cartoon dog with a red collar.

"Nighty-night, doggy..."

But the dog wasn't having it, and pounced the girl awake!

"I'm awake! I'm awake now!"

The girl stood up and looked around, noticing she was in a dark alleyway. A very small dark alleyway.

"Hey, boy. Do you know where we are?"

The dog raised his head, turned around and ran off in the span of a few seconds.

"So much for a definitive answer..."

She walked after him as she took note of her surroundings. To her right, she noticed a door with a flame symbol on it. To her left is an open square, with a large wooden door and a lock before it.

"Hmmmm..."

She tried to budge the door open, but it wouldn't move!

"That way's a no go..."

"Heya stranger. Fancy meeting someone new in these parts."

Neptune turned around to see a tall woman with red hair, green eyes and a horn headband wearing a white cloak around her.

"Oh, yay! First contact!" The young girl cheered, clapping her hands. "So, can you tell me where we are right now?"

"Sure thing" the woman nodded. "First off, this is Traverse Town, a Refuge World where those who lost their worlds Drifted to. People have been getting by here thanks to rations provided by the Moogles and another nearby world."

She folded her arms as she closely inspects the young girl. "So, what about you? What's your story?"

"Well, let's just say I'm on a quest to save someone from the clutches of an evil witch and leave it at that" Neptune answered with confidence, placing a hand on her chest.

The woman hummed. "You sure didn't hit your head before you came here? You seem a bit too young to go on adventuring..."

"Don't let my cuteness fool you, for I am plenty tough!" Neptune boasted as she puts her hands on her hips.

"You sure seem confident" the woman chuckled. "Far be it from me to stop you, but be sure to come back to rest every now and then, okay? This may be a Refuge World, but there are no shortage of supplies and beds here, got that?"

The girl beamed at the offer. "Thanks for the hospitality, nice lady!"

"Sure thing. By the way, what's your name?"

"It's Neptune! What's yours?" the young girl introduced herself, extending her right hand out.

"Nep-tune, huh? Mine's Artisan." the woman introduced herself, extending her left hand in greeting. "Pleasure to meet you"

The two shook hands.

"Okay, I better get back on patrol. Be careful around here. There are monsters around here, even if the streets look clear."

"I'll be alright, Arty. I can defend myself!"

The woman chuckled. "Well, don't say I didn't warn you."

She then turned around and left the district.

"Time for me to pick up the pace, too!"

Neptune decided to leave the district, using the gate located up the stairs she just saw earlier.

Traverse Town – Second District

As Neptune walked out of the Third District, she came across a haunting sight.

A woman tripped as she screamed. Eventually, darkness corroded her very being until she vanished, leaving only a heart behind. That heart was then consumed by darkness, spawning a small armored creature in the woman's place. About five seconds later, the creature vanished.

Only to be replaced by more of the ant-like creatures from before!

"Those tiny things from the tutorial segment!"

Neptune braced herself for a fight, but completely forgot about one thing...

"I AM COMPLETELY UNARMED!"

Panicking, she looked around frantically.

"Oh please, let there be something. Anything will do!"

And her eyes beheld her salvation!

"Yes!"

Leaping to her left, she grabbed a cypress stick that was lying on the ground.

"Alright, you fiends! Time for you all to face the power of Neptune!" the young girl declared, sighing afterwards. "Wow, that was really generic..."

Invigorated by the acquisition of a weapon(?), she proceeded to attack the creatures with her usual attacks and combos.

"Hyah!" Upward slash!

"Toh!" Downward strike!

"Come on!" Downward area strike!

Only to find her attacks are barely damaging them! If only she had a better weapon...

"Okay, I may need a better plan here..."

The creatures aren't giving her time for that, though, and pounced on her!

"Ah!"

As she braced for impact, a bright light shone on her hand. More specifically, the hand that was holding onto the cypress stick.

"Wha-"

As the light faded, the stick was nowhere to be seen. In it's place was a...key shaped sword-thingy. It was colored black, is of medium length, yet quite slick with it's design, with purple lines glowing around it. The guard is shaped like an oversized N, with a purple crystal holding a near-whole circle with a small line drawn on it's opening on top for a keychain.

Wasting no time, the creatures attempt to strike again. Sensing hostile intent, Neptune wielded the weapon and stroke down the creatures in a two clean strikes.

"Dude, this is one strange weapon. Almost thought it was a chainsaw for a second there."

As she relaxed from the lack of hostile presences, the weapon she was wielding earlier vanished from her hand.

"Awwwww, you're gonna take this weapon away, too?" the girl moaned in mild annoyance. "Or is it one of those weapons that come at the flick of a wrist or something?"

She tried flicking her right wrist, and sure enough, the key-shaped weapon respawned onto her hand.

"Nep-wow! I didn't think that'd work!"

She flicked her wrist again, and the weapon disappeared again. At least she knows she can call it out again.

"Okay, so to recap, I woke up in a Refuge World, found creepy monsters lurking about, I have a massive key-sword thingy to fight them off and I gotta save Histy from an evil witch."

She clapped her own face three times to perk herself up. "Okay! First rule of exploration. Run around and keep track of everything!"

With her spirit invigorated, Neptune sallied forth once more, fully intent on learning where she is and what is going on out there.

Traverse Town – Red Room

"I'm back!"

Artisan opened the door into the room, seeing the two girls from earlier settling in with their bought supplies.

"Welcome back, Arty!" the girl in the sweater greeted.

"Hey, Artisan." the girl in the blue coat said. "How's the patrol?"

"It's fine, IF" Artisan replied to the second girl. "How's shopping with Compa?"

IF, the second girl, sighed. "Could've been better. It's not easy to purchase the needed goods, especially when we're short on munny and it's getting harder to haggle with these darned moogles for lower prices..."

"Now, Iffy..." Compa scolded her friend. "We can't be too careful when it comes to our survival. Like my grandpa said 'It's better to overprepare than to never prepare at all'"

"Yeah, but..." IF countered. "I fail to see how purchasing all those dessert ingredients was considered necessary!"

"You'll never know, Iffy! Sweets can really get the brain going!"

And so, the two devolved into another silly argument. Artisan could only sigh at the sight.

"Geez, they're off in their own little world again...it's like they don't remember I was even here"

Traverse Town – Accessory Shop

"So, to recap again. I've Drifted(?) into this world, found out I can wield this key-shaped sword, wandered around town, fought a bunch of those monsters, bumping into a manor with a literal couple of dogs missing their 99 kiddos, and now I'm here after shopping with three little duckies over next door. You with me so far, old man?"

Neptune, meanwhile, was busy summarizing her tale to the dirty-blonde old man wearing an engineer's garb on the counter.

"I hear ya, lassy. Believe me, yer story's pretty wacky, too. But it ain't the only one I heard so far in this town."

Neptune seemed offended, summoning her weapon.

"Hey, since when do these type of weapons pop out of nowhere nowadays?"

"Not very often, I'm afraid" the old man said, inspecting the weapon. "You ain't the first one here that has that kinda weapon."

"Wait, seriously?"

Now this had the girl's attention.

"Well, the thing about your weapon is, it's supposed to be pretty rare. Only few people can actually wield the darn things even!"

"And you met someone who can also wield something like this?"

"Yup. A kid just like you, actually. Drifted here like you did. He's probably exploring the town as we speak."

Suddenly, they heard sounds of weapons clashing outside.

"What the nep?"

"Ah, darn. What's up with the racket outside!?"

"Hold it, old man!" Neptune declared. "Since I got a rare weapon, why don't I go check your problem out?"

The old man chuckled. "You seem pretty confident, much like the kiddo from earlier. You know what? Go ahead. Knock yourself out. Just don't go dying on me, ya hear?"

Neptune gave the old man a peace sign. "Just leave it to Neptune, old man!"

As she left, the old man shouted. "Name's Cid, by the way!"

Traverse Town – First District

"Alright, Neptune's here to save the day!"

As she stormed out of the Accessory Shop, she sees two figures, one man and one woman, looking at her. In the middle of them is an unconscious boy.

"Aha! So, you decided to prey on the innocent, have you!?"

"Uh, what's this broad's deal?" the woman, wearing what appears to be ninja garb, asked.

"Beats me." the man, wearing a black jacket and black pants, answered. "However..."

His gaze turns to the young girl's weapon.

"She's got one too."

The ninja's eyes widened. "Wait! There's two Keyblade Wielders here!?"

The man sighed, pinching his nose. "This just got more complicated..."

"Hey! What's the big idea!?" Neptune shouted to the two figures. "You done hatching your vile schemes, evildoers!?"

"I better go calm her down before she misunderstands the situation further..."

Before the man could do so, Neptune was already on the attack, leaping long for a heavy strike.

"...!"

Acting on reflex, the man brought out his weapon, a sword with a gun trigger for a pommel, and parried the blow, sending Neptune tumbling back.

"What's the big ide-AAAHHH!" Neptune suddenly yelled, pointing her shaky finger at the man's gun-shaped sword. "What's with that weapon and why does it look cooler than mine!?"

"She's not quite in there, huh?" the woman said, carrying the unconscious boy on her back. "I'll take him in. Will you be okay?"

"This is hardly my first rodeo." the man said cooly. "Now get going, Yuffie."

The woman, Yuffie, saluted. "You got it, Squall. Try not to lose like you did with the last kid!"

As she left, the man could only pinch his nose in annoyance. "I told you, it's Leon"

"Hey, if you are done talking to the imaginary wall, then let's get this fight going!"

Neptune recovered and readied her battle stance. "Don't worry, kiddo. Once I nep this guy up, he'll tell me where that ninja lady took ya and Neptune'll save ya like the heroine I am!"

Leon huffed. "Fine, if that's how you want it..."

Neptune struck first, launching a slash to the right, which he blocked.

She then aimed for a thrust, but her opponent parried the blow.

Hopping back, she leapt forward for a spinning jump slash, which pushed Leon back a bit.

"So, she relies on power swings. She actually hits harder than the last kid did. In that case..."

Leon then channeled magic energy onto his hand and launched a fireball at his opponent.

"A telegraphed fireball move! Bad call!"

Neptune, seeing the fireball coming, she batted the fireball away.

"Now where did he go?"

She looked around, and in about two seconds, she looked up to see Leon bearing down at her with a downward strike!

"Woah!"

She hopped away, barely dodging in time, and she kept on dodging his blows, a quick downward slash and a heavy horizontal slash, before Leon launched another fireball at Neptune!

"Ack!"

The fireball hit it's mark, pushing her back and dealing some damage.

"Despite her spirited demeanor, she's been able to adapt to most of my attacks. In a way, the boy from earlier held on in the same manner."

As the dust settles, Neptune coughed out the smoke blocking her sight, her parka slightly charred from the last attack.

"Sheesh, you've ruined the parka! Now, I'm mad!"

Rushing forward, she stroke against Leon...

"Here she comes!"

...and launched a furious combo at him!

Two diagonal slashes!

Then a power thrust!

And then a downward slash, followed by a heaving attack that sends her opponent into the air!

"What is this strength!?"

She then jumped up and performs one more slash, sending Leon down, damaging him upon impact!

"Guh! This is what I get for holding back against two Keyblade Wielders..."

"Like that? That's my first special move! I call it...**Cross Combination**! Eat that!"

Despite her small victory, Neptune is running out of breath. Her vision's also getting hazy from fighting all night without rest.

"Wanna...keep going? I can...do this all...night~"

And just like that, she passed out like a light.

"And she passed out, just like the last kid did..."

Leon got up and inspected his opponent.

"Things really did get worse, huh?"

He then carried the girl like a princess and brought her out of the district.

Traverse Town – Alleyway

"Uhhh, Donald, are you sure about this place? It seems kinda spooky..."

"Oh, what's the big idea, Goofy? I'm not scared!"

Currently, Donald Duck and Goofy, two of Disney World's Royal Guard, are in this world in search of the 'key', in order to find their missing king. In order to find that, they first need to search for a man named Leon, who can guide them on the proper direction.

"Excuse me"

Donald immediately jumped in terror from the sudden touch of a finger, causing him to hug his friend in a panic.

"Are you two the King's Guard?"

A woman with green eyes, a pink dress and a matching pink ribbon approached them with a playful smile.

"Seems pretty gallant for the so-called Royal Guard, eh?"

The first woman giggled. "Come now, Artisan. Anyone would freak out in a cold, dark place like these sewers!"

Hearing this got the hot-blooded duck all angered. "What's the big idea!? You want a piece of me!?"

Artisan chuckled. "Don't get your feathers ruffled up, ducky!"

"That's right, we're here to help you."

The two andromorphic animals looked at each other for a bit. Can these two women be trusted?

Traverse Town – Green Room

"Come on, lazy bum. Wake up!"

The boy shook his head as he gets up from the bed.

"Where...am I?"

He looked up to see a girl with red hair, wearing a white shirt and a purple skirt looking at him.

"Those creatures will keep coming after you...so long as you wield the Keyblade."

The boy only felt confused by the words the girl mentioned. Those didn't seem like the kind of words she would usually say, he thought.

Still...

"I'm just glad you're okay, Kairi"

The girl laughed.

"Kairi? Who are you talking about? I'm the Great Ninja Yuffie Kisaragi!"

Hearing the name, the boy shook his head again, and sure enough, a different girl, one with black hair and ninja garb stood in front of him.

"I think you overdid it, Squall!"

She turned to the man who was leaning near the door to other room nearby.

"That's Leon"

The boy turned his attention to the weapons hanging by the door. His weapon, a simple short-length Keyblade with a yellow guard and a silver mouse head for a keychain, stood there with another that is black and purple.

"The Keyblade..."

"We have to get that off of you to shake off those creatures." the ninja explained. "Turns out that's how they were tracking you."

"Granted, it won't work for long" the man continued as he grabbed the boy's weapons. "Still, hard to believe someone like you is one of the chosen ones..."

He then took a left swing with it, causing it to disappear...and then reappeared at the boy's hand.

"Well, I suppose beggars can't be choosers..." Leon remarked, approaching the boy.

"How about you start making sense?" the boy asked frustratingly. "What's going on here?"

"Woah, slow down there, kiddo" the ninja exclaimed. "You're not the only one here who needs to hear what we have to say."

The boy only looked confused, so the girl points towards the sofa.

More specifically, the girl with purple hair and white parka that's snoozing peacefully on said sofa.

"zzzzz...Nepnepnepnepnep...zzzzz"

"Who's she?" the boy asked.

"Believe it or not, that girl over there's the wielder of the other Keyblade." the man answered.

"He can tell! He nearly got thrashed by her after you went to town with him." the ninja guffawed.

"So, you were watching me, then..." Leon pinched his nose in annoyance.

"Hey, Great Ninja, remember?" Yuffie boasted. "Getting back and forth in familiar territory is no biggie for one like me!"

"She can wield this too?" the boy wondered, raising his weapon while looking at the sleeping girl.

"It's a fact" Leon answered. "It'll take some time for her to wake up though..."

???

"-eptune? Neptune? Please, wake up!"

Neptune groaned. "Five more minutes, please."

"For the love of...JUST WAKE UP ALREADY!"

The loud shout was enough to snap the young lady awake.

"I'm wide awake now!"

When she came to, she noticed that she was in a familar place...

A familiar, empty place...

"Back here again..." Neptune said, casting her head down. "So much for the taste of freedom, I guess..."

"No, this is only a dream." a familiar voice answered. "It is the only way I can freely communicate with you, Neptune"

"Oh, hey Histy! Short time, no hear! How've you been?"

"About as well as my current predicament allows me. I see you have awoken to your power."

"My power?" Neptune said, scrunching her face. "Wait, you mean that...key-weapon I have?"

"Yes! The power of the Keyblade."

"Key-blade? That's a...pretty simple name. What is it?"

"It is a powerful weapon. Despite it's shape and size, it is capable of destroying those dark creatures you've been encountering. And other feats as well, both benevolent and malevolent."

"Woah!" Neptune gasped in amazement. "Seems like this weapon's quite a big deal, huh?"

"It is a weapon thought lost to time." Histoire continued. "Only legends speak of it's existence, even now."

"I see. Know anything else about this, Histy?"

"I'm sorry, but my knowledge on such a weapon is quite limited. You may need to seek other sources of information if you wish to know more about it."

"Eh, it's fine." Neptune shrugged, placing her hands on her back. "I'll probably learn more about it on the way to you, Histy. Still, how am I gonna go about freeing you?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I promised I'd free you and I'm gonna do it." Neptune declared with a pumped fist. "But if I'm going out there to beat that evil witch you've talked about, I'm gonna need some help." The girl continued, placing her hands on her hips. "A hero always has a party to accompany them on their journey, after all!"

"I see." the heavenly voice answered. "In that case, I sense several presences near you that can aid you on your journey."

"Ooooohhhhh." Neptune cheered, clapping her hands. "That's neat!"

"In addition, you may encounter people like yourself. People who feel lost as they do not know anything about themselves."

Neptune gasped. "So, they're fellow amnesiacs just like me, huh?"

"Indeed. You will know them when you feel them. Ask your heart, and it shall guide you to them."

"My heart, huh..."

Silence filled the area for a good three seconds.

"...By the way, Histy, I've been meaning to ask." Neptune said as she crossed her arms in thought.

"Sure. Ask away."

"Lately, my heart's feeling...I dunno...heavier? More filled? Like, I feel stronger than I was when I woke up in that Refuge World."

"Ah, that must be the connection you made before." Histoire answered. "You are likely close to the one you have connected to right now."

"Oh, so...like my soulmate?"

"I cannot say for sure, but I'm sure your heart will not lead you astray."

"All this talk about the heart is making methinks that they got a lot of power in this story." Neptune wondered in her usual whimsy.

"Meta talk aside, you are correct." Histoire confirmed. "Belief and faith in one's heart is the key to surmounting the trials ahead, but you need not fight alone."

"Yup." The girl chirped. "A good hero always got a reliable party with them, and you said there are good choices near me, right?"

"Yes. I wish I could tell you more about the dangers ahead, but I cannot maintain this link for long." the voice bemoaned. "You would have to get those answers from others."

"Alright-y! Just hang in there, Histy! Ol' Neptune's gotta bust you out good! It's a promise"

A chuckle is heard. "I look forward to it. Be careful, Neptune"

Traverse Town – Green Room

Neptune fluttered her eyes open, waking to see...

"An...unfamiliar ceiling?" She looked to her left to see three people staring at her. A man, a woman and a boy.

"Look who's awake!" the woman exclaimed.

Getting up, Neptune stretched as she clutched her stomach. "Oooohhhh, my body feels sore and my tank's running on empty. You guys got any grub?"

The three looked among themselves.

"I think I have some crackers on me."

The woman pulled out some unopened crackers from her pocket.

"Here you go! It's not much, but hey, at least your stomach won't be empty!"

Neptune clapped her hands in celebration.

"The blessings of a good samaritan! Thank you!"

She took the crackers with gusto and started chowing down on them.

"See what I mean?" the man complained.

"You weren't kidding" the boy said. "She looks like she's got a one-track mind"

The girl stopped for a bit to stare at the two males in the room.

"Anyway, you two are owed an explanation over what's been going on lately." the ninja lady inferred.

"Ooooooohhhh, is it exposition time!?" Neptune said with stars in her eyes.

"Yep. You two need to know what's going on if you want to survive out there" the ninja woman said.

Traverse Town – Red Room

"Ooooooohhhhh, fluffy ducky!"

"Wak! Lemme go! LET ME GO!"

Compa is busy glomping Donald. Apparently, walking, talking animals are a rare sight for her.

"Come on, Compa. Drop the duck. They've got some explaining to do." IF urged, which cause the other girl to sadly stop glomping.

Once the other two women stopped giggling at the sight of a ruffled Donald, they began their exposition dump.

"Okay, so you four know that there are other worlds besides this town, right?" the woman in pink started.

"Yep." Donald agreed.

"That's what you told us, yeah" IF followed.

"But they're supposed to be a secret..." Goofy said, covering his mouth.

"Are they?" Compa asked.

"Yep." Artisan nodded. "The reason why their existence is kept mum is because the worlds aren't connected."

Aerith continued, closing her eyes in recollection... "But when the Heartless came, everything changed..."

Traverse Town – Green Room

"Heartless?" the boy asked.

"The one that attacked you both." Yuffie answered.

"You mean those ant-like creatures?" Neptune asked, to which the ninja nodded.

"Those without hearts" Leon explained. "They seek out the darkness in people's hearts..."

He paused for a second.

"And there is darkness in every heart..."

Neptune took the chance to sniff herself.

"I don't emit any stinkin' darkness. Besides, girls like me only emit rainbows and marshmallows!"

This got both the ninja and boy laughing at her remark. The man, on the other hand, facepalmed.

"Wow, you're such a hoot!" Yuffie said, regaining her composure. "Anywho, you two ever heard of a man named Ansem?"

Traverse Town – Red Room

"Ansem?" Goofy asked, sensing something familiar with the name.

"If I recall, he's the ruler from your home world, right Aerith?" IF asked.

Aerith nodded. "He, along with his apprentices studied the Heartless. He had kept his research in a detailed report"

"Oooohhhh" Compa said. "Can we see them, please?"

"We would...if we had them..." Artisan cringed.

"So, what? Are they lost?" IF asked.

"It's pages are scattered everywhere..." Aerith replied, shaking her head.

"Scattered?" Donald repeated.

"To many worlds." the woman in pink answered.

"That will take a lot of time to find them..." IF wondered.

"Oh, maybe your king went around to find them!" Compa believed.

"Yeah!" Donald agreed.

"Yes. Our thoughts exactly" Aerith nodded.

"Oh yeah!" Goofy suddenly shouted. "Ansem!"

"What were you thinking about?" Donald demanded.

"Well, the King mentioned to us that he befriended a guy named Ansem when he was looking into what's been going on in the worlds." Goofy explained.

"So, your King knows who he is?" IF asked.

The dog-man nodded. "Yup. He said that he is a wise ruler and an avid researcher with a love for ice cream."

"Wise, huh..." Aerith mumbled bitterly.

"He used to be called Ansem the Wise, back when he ruled that world" Artisan narrated in the woman in pink's place. "Of course, that's before we heard the rumors regarding him."

"Rumors?" Compa repeated.

The hooded woman nodded. "Supposedly, Ansem's been leading forbidden research, ones involving the hearts of people. There are even rumors that he has kidnapped children for experiments without anyone's knowledge. And before the world fell into darkness, he had left to continue his research alone, leaving his apprentices alone."

"That's terrible..." IF said with anger.

"How sad..." Compa wept. Donald followed suit with a small cry.

Aerith sighed as she shook her head. "Whatever the case may be, it is undeniable fact that our world was lost to the Heartless and now they are running rampant across other worlds. Anyone lucky to survive ends up in Refuge Worlds like this one."

"That's why we gotta find the King quick!" Goofy urged. "He'd know how to handle this!"

"Wait a minute!" Donald reminded as he dragged the camera down to his face (since when can he do that?) "First, we need that 'key'!"

"'Key'?" the other two girls asked, tilting their heads.

Aerith answered their question. "That's right, the Keyblade..."

Traverse Town – Green Room

"So, this is the key..." the boy said, holding up his Keyblade.

"That's right." Yuffie nodded.

"An ancient weapon from times past, said to be able to unlock any lock and bring forth either everlasting peace or all-consuming catastrophe." Leon explained. "The Heartless have great fear of the Keyblade. That's why they'll keep coming after the both of you, no matter what"

"So, these things can attract those Heartless and are the only ones who can destroy them completely?" Neptune asked. "Did I get all that right?"

"Yup" the ninja agreed.

"What about you guys?" the boy asked. "Leon there was pretty tough in our fight..."

"That's the thing. We could only..." Yuffie tries to explain. "...what's that word, Leon?"

"Disperse"

The ninja nodded in gratitude. "Yeah. That's about as much as we can do by ourselves."

Traverse Town – Red Room

"Without something like the Keyblade, we can only do so much damage to the Heartless before they reform themselves and attack again." Artisan explained.

"I see" IF nodded. "No wonder we couldn't do so much ourselves."

Compa looked down in shame as well. "We tried fighting them off ourselves, but they just came back moments later, so we just ran away..."

Traverse Town – Green Room

"Well, I didn't ask for this!" the boy complained.

"I didn't ask for this either" Neptune said cheerily as she now held her Keyblade that came back thanks to Leon. "But hey, I'm not complaining either!"

"The Keyblades choose their wielders" Yuffie explained. "And they chose the two of you!"

"So, tough luck" Leon brushed off, leaning back near the door to the other room.

"Still, how did all this happen?" the boy tried to recall. "I recall being in my room, then a storm hit the island...and then..."

He then stood up in shock. "What happened to my home!? My island?"

The boy then hung his head in sadness "Riku. Kairi..."

"Poor kid..." Neptune could only say in empathy. Despite not having a home of her own, she could sympathize with the feeling of being lost in an unknown world.

"You know what...?" Leon started. "I don't really know..."

"You should be lucky, kiddo" Yuffie said, lying down on the bed. "Not every Drifter's lucky enough to wash up in a Refuge World like this one."

Traverse Town – Red Room

"Drifter?" the duck repeated.

"Those who were casted out of their home worlds." Aerith explained, motioning her hand to Artisan. "In a way, everyone living in here is a Drifter, but Artisan here is a special case."

"How?" the dog asked.

"Well, you see, before I arrived at this town, my own home world's been gone long." the woman in white answered. "The first world I Drifted to was in fact, Leon's home world. Then once that world started to fall, we all packed up and ran here."

Traverse Town – Green Room

"Drifters, huh?" Neptune repeated. "Didn't know that nice lady was one..."

"Yup. People like Artisan lost their home world then ended up in ours." Yuffie explained. "But the funny thing is, some Drifters like her can't recall much about their home world."

"They can't!?" the girl exclaimed.

"They can't" Leon answered. "No matter how much they can recall, they can't remember a lot of details. They can remember certain things in their lives before, but anything down to their world's name, or important events and cities, they can't recall."

"Didn't we agree that those cases are considered special though?" the ninja asked. "I mean, you and me and Aerith and old Cid can recall our home just fine and I'm sure the kiddo over here can recall his home island, right?"

The boy nodded slowly, still feeling sad.

Traverse Town – Red Room

"So, you girls can't recall much about your home either?" Goofy asked the two girls beside them, having been told as an aside that IF and Compa are also Drifters.

"Yessy!" Compa said rather happily. "I can remember living with my grandpa and signing up for nursing classes. Other than that, I can't remember much about where I live."

"I remember being a member of a guild" IF recalled. "Which one, I don't remember."

"And I remember being the leader of a group" Artisan mentioned. "What group it was, well, you can take a guess."

"Have you figured anything out?" Donald asked.

"We've been trying to survey out through the Lanes Between." Aerith answered. "But so far, nothing has hit her yet..."

Traverse Town – Green Room

"..."

Seeing the boy in a fit of depression, Neptune gets up and walks up to him.

"Hey buck-o. You listenin'?"

No response. He's definitely not a corpse, anyhow.

"Listen, I get that you miss your closest pals. Believe me, if I had pals like yours, I'd feel the same, but that's all the more reason we gotta hustle! They ain't gotta wait for us forever, you know?"

The boy looked at the girl.

"How would you know?"

The girl flashed a grin.

"I don't. But if you kept moving around, I bet you they're doing the same! That's why you can't stop now! Because I won't either."

Neptune then scratched her cheek.

"I mean, sure, I don't know where my home is, what my life was before I came here and all that, but...!"

She raised her Keyblade.

"I made a promise to help someone out, so come heck or high water, I'll keep on going. So, what say you, kiddo? You in?"

The boy stared at the girl.

Then he smiled, raising his Keyblade to intersect with hers.

"That's Sora. Just Sora."

Neptune chuckled. "Okay, Just Sora. You can call me Neptune, or whatever nickname you want."

Sora chuckled back. "Okay then. Nice to meet you, Neptune"

"Still, how'd you get that and still got beat up by Mr. Emo over there?" the girl asked, putting her Keyblade down as she pointed to Leon.

"Actually, Sora won that round. He just passed out after running around all day." the ninja clarified rather cheekily.

"Oooohhhh, so same as me, then! Awesome-sauce!" She raised her right hand. "High-five!"

Sora laughed as he met Neptune's hand in a high-five.

Leon sighed. "Anyway, just tell me when the two of you are ready. We'll meet up with some guests over and-"

"Leon!"

Yuffie's cry interruped them as two of the armored Heartless ambushed them in the room.

"Yuffie, go!"

The ninja ran to the door, leading to the other room. Some could swear they heard a duck yelling for a second there.

"Sora, Neptune, let's go!"

The three pursued the Heartless, who fled by crashing out of the nearby window, all the while the other party stood in confusion...

At the sight of Donald Duck, being perfectly flattened to the wall by the nearby door...

"Oooooohhhhh" Compa cheered at the sight. "Flatty ducky!"

Traverse Town – Third District

"Think we lost them?" Sora asked his companion.

"Methinks that these creeps are setting up an ambush here..." Neptune declares.

"So, they're getting smart now..." the boy complained.

"Hmmm...My Nep Senses are tingling..." the girl said, poking the sides of her forehead with her fingers. "They're sensing an important, live-changing event is about to occur around our corner..."

Meanwhile, above near the watchtower, the party of four braced themselves as the armored creatures from earlier surround them.

"Geez, are these the Heartless guys?" Goofy asked, ducking behind his shield.

"They don't look very cute..." Compa said, wielding a comically large syringe. "Or intimidating..."

"Don't let your guard down, guys" IF warned, brandishing her twin qatars. "They have strength in numbers..."

Donald snickered. "In that case, I've got the spell for them!"

As soon as he fired it off, the spell sent their whole group flying...

"What the...?"

...and tumbling down towards the two figures in the square!

"WOAH!"

"WAAAAAHHH!"

OOMPH!

"Geez, why do I get the feeling this kind of thing should happen to black-haired tsunderes?" Neptune complained as she felt the weight on her back. "You doin' okay, Sora?"

"I...think so..." the boy managed to say.

However, the duck and dog that landed on them managed to see the boy's weapon.

"Oh, the key!"

"Look, Iffy!" Compa exclaimed as she looked at the tiny girl's weapon. "We found it!"

"Yeah..." IF replied, sweat dropping from her head. "Two of them, in fact..."

The ground then started to shake, and after a while, the area they are in is sealed off by pillars. The armored Heartless then appeared and surrounded the group.

"Aw-right!" Neptune taunted them. "Time for them to get nepped!"

Two of the Heartless began to gang up on IF, who deftly dodged their slow and clumsy attacks, and launched swift slices of her own.

"You're too slow!"

Taking one out, she proceeded to dodge the attack of the second enemy, which caused it to trip. Slow and clumsy, remember?

"I got it!"

Compa rushed up and planted her giant syringe on the Heartless' behind, and with a press down on the top of her weapon(?), she takes out her prey.

"Nice one!" IF cheered.

"Thank you!" Compa returned.

Meanwhile, Goofy was trading blows with another of the Heartless. Thanks to their slow and clumsy nature, the knight was able to parry it's attacks and...

"Here I go!"

...with a heavy **Charge**, he took out his attacker and his two reinforcements soon after!

Meanwhile, Donald was busy staring down at two of the armored Heartless, daring the other to make a move.

They tried to pounce on the duck, but he leapt forward, right between the openings the two Heartless made.

When the two Heartless were left in a pile, the wizard prepared a **Fire** spell and roasted the Heartless but good.

"Too easy!"

Neptune was busy clashing with one of the armored Heartless. They certainly fought a little better than the ant-like ones, that's for sure.

But nothing a good ol' Nep combo can't solve.

"Hah!" Downward slash!

"Hey!" Diagonal slash to the right!

"Hi-yah!" Leaping strike finisher!

"All over!" Neptune cheered with a spin for her victory. "You doin' good, buck-o?"

"I got this!"

Sora was busy clashing with one of the armored Heartless as well. Not wanting to lag behind, he launched his strike.

"Huh!" Downward slash!

"Hah!" Forward thrust!

"Hoh!" Downward horizontal finisher!

"Take that!" the boy spun his Keyblade in celebration.

"Phew" Neptune sighed in relief, wiping the sweat from her forehead. "Nice work, team!"

IF, however, remained wary. "Don't drop your guard yet!"

As soon as she said so, large pieces of purple armor suddenly dropped to the ground and started to assemble itself. With giant metallic boots for feet, giant claws for hands, a large cylindrical torso for a body and a silver faceplate for it's head, the Guard Armor faces down it's foes.

"So, this is the boss of the world, huh?" Neptune said in excitement.

"Looks kinda tough" Goofy said, raising his defenses.

"Stay sharp, guys!" Donald rallied the group as they charged against the boss.

The Guard Armor is a tough customer. With its detached body parts, it can handle the party of six with ease.

Neptune, Donald and Compa tried to attack the feet first, but their constant stomping proved fierce resistance.

"Ack! Stop stomping around!" the duck complained.

"You're hurt!" Compa cried. "Let me heal you guys!"

With swift actions, the aspiring nurse patched up Neptune and Donald's wounds.

"Wow! That was nifty work!" the girl in the parka praised.

"I feel all better now!" the duck cheered.

The nurse giggled. "Thanks so much!"

Meanwhile, Sora, Goofy and IF are busy jumping up to deal with the hands, but their scratches and spinning assaults made it difficult to concentrate.

"Won't these things stay put!?" the guild member complained.

"Why don't we try tiring them out?" the boy with the key suggested.

"In that case, I have an idea!"

The dog with the shield bid his time until the claws were about to start their spinning attack. Just as it did, Goofy charged with his shield and parried the attack, causing the hands to recoil!

"I got it! Go!"

Wasting no time, Sora and IF jumped up and slashed down the hands, wiping them out from the fight!

"Nice going!" the boy cheered with a thumbs up.

"Pretty clever of you!" the guild girl praised.

Goofy could only give out his signature chuckle.

"Goofy! Get back!"

Hearing his friend's call, the knight leapt to the left, allowing his fellow guard's charged Fire spell to hit the Armor's feet, eliminating them from the game.

"The limbs are gone!" Neptune cheered.

"Now it's just the torso!" IF exclaimed.

However, the Armored Torso started to move erratically...

"Guys...I think Mr. Heartless' pretty mad..." Compa whimpered, not liking what's happening.

...by spinning around and around until it was charging around the arena like an uncontrollable twister!

"IT'S SPINNING LIKE CRAZZZYYYY!" Neptune yelled as she braced for cover.

"RUN FOR IT!" the guild agent yelled.

And so, the group immediately ran around like headless chickens against the Guard Armor's wrath.

"HELP ME, IFFY!"

Which somehow got Compa hanging on to it for dear life!

"Compa!"

"I got her!"

"I'll help!"

Goofy and Sora immediately stepped in front of the Armor and began to impede it's charge with all their might!

"Grrrrrr!"

"Hrrrrkkkk!"

The two felt their legs giving out, their feet being pushed back, but they did not relent. They stood their ground as the Armor's spinning began to slow.

"It's working!" Neptune cheered. "Go, guys, go!"

After a couple of seconds of guarding, the Armor was stopped and Compa was thrown off to the side...

"WAAAAAKKK"

...and right unto Donald.

"Oooohhhhh, I'm seeing stars..." the nurse managed to say as she felt soothing energy healing her.

As Compa regained her composure, she looked to see a staff held by a duck that she is currently sitting upon.

"Eeep! Sorry, ducky!" the nurse apologized as she tried to help the duck up.

"At least you're safe..." Donald managed to say as he was helped up.

"The thing's about to charge up again!" IF shouted. "Let's finish it off now!"

"Count me in!" Neptune rallied.

"O souls of the Netherworld, burn my foes" the gulld member chanted as flames surround the Heartless. "**Demon Flames**!"

The ensuring fire attack damaged the armor enough that it's concentration broke, leaving it open to one more attack!

"I'll finish this! **Cross Combination**!"

Two diagonal slashes!

Then a power thrust!

And then a downward slash, followed by a heaving attack that sends her opponent into the air!

Just as she jumped up, she was joined by Sora.

Seeing each other in the air, they nodded and performed one last attack on the Guard Armor...

"HAAAAAH!"

...sending it convulsing to the ground. As it floated around in desperation, it stopped after a while and as its inanimate remains faded away, a giant floating heart flew away, now freed from its captor.

A Few Seconds Later...

"So, you guys are looking for us?"

Donald and Goofy nodded at Sora's questions as the boy points to himself and Neptune.

"More like looking for the weapons they're holding..." IF murmured.

"But those Keyblades are very picky with their wielders, so they're pretty much a package deal!" Compa said.

"That's true"

The two turned around to see Artisan, Leon and Yuffie, regrouping with the party.

"They too have been seeking the wielder of the Keyblade" Leon said as Yuffie nodded.

"Hey, why don't you both come with us?" the walking, talking dog suggested. "We can go to other worlds on our vessel."

"Vessel? Like...a SPACESHIP!?" Neptune asked with stars in her eyes.

"Yup!" Goofy confirmed.

The girl squealed in delight. "You hear that, Sora? SPACE TRAVEL! We're going to outer space and into other WORLDS!? This is like, the awesom-est of awesome-sauces! Doesn't that excite you!?"

Sora tried to put a smile. "Y-Yeah..."

Neptune, however, can see the strain on his face. "Come on, these guys are offering to give us a ride around. We can go find your BFF's out there."

"Can we?" Sora asked, still not convinced. "Can we really find Riku and Kairi out there?"

"Of course!" Donald answered.

This got the boy's face lit up.

"Are you sure?" Goofy whispered to his companion.

"Who knows?" Donald replied, pointing to the two Keyblade Wielders. "But we need them to come with us to help us find the King."

"Sora, Neptune, go with them." Leon urged. "Especially if you want to go find your friends."

"He's right. They're not gonna wait around for us, so less moping, more moving, or something" Neptune said with her 'sagely' advice.

"But!"

Donald suddenly said.

"You can't come looking like that."

His companion looked at him.

"No frowning. No sad face, okay?" the duck said with a calm a tone he could muster.

"Yeah!" Goofy said with a big smile. "Ya gotta look funny like us!"

As Donald pushed the A-hyucking Goofy off, he gives his smile. "This boat runs on happy faces!"

"Happy?" Sora repeated.

"Yeah. Come on, buck-o! Give us your toothiest grin! Lesse those pearly whites, Sora! Are you man or ARE YOU MAN!?" Neptune roared.

"Are they trying to cheer him up or forcing him to smile?" IF wondered.

"They say you shouldn't keep smiling for too long" Compa advised, touching her cheek bones. "It will stretch your cheek bones too much and your face will hurt."

"Good thing I don't smile a lot, then" the girl in the blue coat said offhandly.

The nurse-in-training could only shake her head. "You lead a sad life, Iffy..."

Meanwhile, Sora was out there, giving his 'best' smile yet. Well, more like stretching his own to force the biggest smile he could give, but hey, effort.

But judging from the loud laughter given out by Neptune, Donald and Goofy, it cheered them up at least.

"That's one funny face!" Goofy said.

"Ahahahaha! Oh man! Way to force yourself, dude! That...was...hilarious." Neptune guffawed.

"Very funny, guys" Sora sighed. "Okay. Why not? I'll go with you guys."

"And I will be going too." Neptune declared. "Where he goes, I go. Where I go, he goes!"

"Think you guys got room for two more?"

The group looked to see IF and Compa approaching them.

"We want to go with you all!" Compa requested.

"Sure!" Goofy accepted. "The more, the merrier!"

"Wait a sec!" Donald interrupted. "Our ship can handle up to three passengers! We need time to adjust for four, let alone six!"

"Oh, that won't be an issue." Artisan declared as she approached the group. "I've already requested Cid to modify the cockpit of your ship. It should be big enough for all six of you."

"WHAT!?" the duck screamed in protest. "Since when!?"

"Several hours ago" the woman in white said nonchalantly. "I figured this is how things will go, so I placed a request in advance."

"But..."

"Now, ducky. Remember that your King already approves of any meaningful changes to your ship as part of our deal." she then looked to Leon. "Right?"

Leon hmph'ed in response. A confirmatory answer.

"There you have it!" Artisan said. "Don't worry. They're also doing something for me, so think of them as tag-alongs, if it worries your feathers so much."

Donald could channel his frustration one way, by wiping his face so hard that his beak recoiled like a cartoon character would.

"Fine" the duck said, wagging his finger at the two. "But you two better do your part here! This is no pleasure cruise!"

"That won't be an issue." IF said confidently. "When it comes to information gathering and keeping you dunderheads straight, I am you gal."

"And if you need your booboo's treated or a nice meal prepped, Compa's your girl!" the nurse pitched in.

"Well, this is turning out to be quite the gathering, huh?" Neptune chirped, putting her hands on her hips. "Don't you think so, Sora?"

He chuckled, rubbing his nose. "Yeah. We're gonna have a great time. I know it!"

"Oh well, let's do this!" Donald declared as he puts his hand forward. "Donald Duck."

Goofy followed suit. "Name's Goofy"

"Compa's my name!" the nurse placed her hand on top of theirs.

"Call me IF." the guild agent followed as well.

"I'm Sora." the boy raised his hand as he looks at his fellow Keyblade Wielder.

"And I...am...Neptune!" the girl proudly declared as she and Sora placed their hands on the pile.

"All for one and one for all!"

And thus, the party of six was formed. These heroes and heroines would go on to many worlds in search of their friends while aiding others along the way.

This...is their story.

?????? ??????? - ??????

In the middle of a dark room, a green circle showing the party of six is displayed. Surrounding this circle is a group of dastardly villains. Who could have the charisma(=underhanded deals) to gather these vile figures in one place?

"Those little squirts took down that Heartless!" a man with the voice of a snaky oil-salesman said in frustration. "Who'd have thought it?"

"Such is the power of the Keyblade" another man wielding a snake staff said smugly. "The children's strength are not their own."

"Why don't we turn them into Heartless?" a woman laughed evilly, her tentacles keeping her afloat. "That'll settle things quick enough."

"And those blasted animals are the King's lackeys" a pirate said, pointing his hook at the duck and dog talking in the group. "Swoggle me eyes, they're all bilge rates by the look of them."

"Personally, I'm eyeing those two Drifters over there" the first man smoothly said, pointing to the two other girls. "Those two are quite the special case. I know I got my fair share of them back home. I tell ya, those gals will become trouble down the line, ugh."

"Better claim them fast!" the woman with tentacles dared. "Those two would surely have delectable souls for my chamber!"

"Would you two focus here!?" the pirate scolded the two. "These brats are gonna cause trouble on all our decks, ya hear!?"

"Why worry so much? Not knowing what happens next is part of the fun!" another man, or rather, an oversized bag, boasted. "Then again, you are no prize yourself."

This, along with the bag's mocking laughter, set the pirate off. "Shut up!"

"Enough!"

The villains looked to the source of the voice, an evil fairy with green skin, a black robe draped around her, black horns and a staff with an evil green orb.

"The Keyblade has chosen them." the witch said. "Will it be they who conquers the darkness? Or will the darkness swallow them? Either way, they could be quite useful..."

"I agree"

The gathering of villains about-faced to see another witch, one with an oversized black hat and purple skin and goth makeup on her face. On her side is a peculiarly large tome.

She is definitely an old lady.

"The Keyblade is said to bring forth untold catastrophe at the wrong hands. Without the proper guidance, they will surely bring more trouble than their worth."

"What, you think you can do better, Ms. Latecomer, eh?" the first man asked rudely.

She only placed a finger of her lip. "Wait and see."

Traverse Town – First District

"And this is from all of us"

Aerith handed the group a bag of 1000 munny.

"Be sure to spend wisely!" Yuffie warned them. "The wrong purchase could mean your doom down the line!"

"I wouldn't worry about that" IF boasted. "Between me and Compa, we'll make sure that our shopping lists are well-organized."

"Speaking of Compa..." Sora wondered. "Where are she and Neptune?"

"She said she's going to treat her wounds from the last fight" Donald recalled.

Goofy hummed. "I wonder what's taking them so long..."

"HELP!"

The party looked past Leon's group, seeing a familiar someone running down to them.

The sight made Donald and Goofy shield Sora's eyes immediately, while the boy did the same for them with his own two hands.

"Someone, save me from this torture!" Neptune, who is mostly wrapped around in bandages like a mummy, pleaded.

"Nep-Nep! Stay still!" Compa called out, holding an entire spool of bandages. "Your booboos won't heal if you don't rest!"

Neptune gasped. "She's coming back! Sora, hide me!"

"HEY!" IF shouted to the girl with the key. "There are guys here! At least dress up first!"

As the scene before them devolved into chaos, Leon's group could only think one thing.

"Will they really be okay?" Yuffie voiced out their thoughts.

"I'm sure they'll do fine..." Aerith said. "I hope..."

Leon sighed, closing his eyes as he pinched his nose. "This will be a long journey for them, won't it?"

Artisan chuckled. "Maybe. But it won't be a boring one, that's for sure..."

And there we go! Now our story can truly begin! Anyway, the main reason I thought up of this story is because of the common points between the two trios. You have the happy hero (Sora & Neptune), the dopey, well-meaning one (Goofy & Compa) and the one trying to keep the group straight wearing blue (Donald & IF).

With that out of the way, there's one more thing I need to present. Since this story is based on a numbered title, these segments will show up as well! That's right, Neptunia fans, it's time for...

NEPSTATION

Neptune: You're watching Nepstation! Hah! It's feel so good to say that after so many years. How long has it been since we last did this skit? Hm? Ten years!? Get out!

Histoire: Neptune, you're still live on air...

Neptune: *clears throat* Sorry 'bout that! Anywho, since we're here now, lemme introduce you to today's co-host, my new travel buddy Sora! Say hi to everyone, buck-o!

Sora: H-Hi there...

Neptune: *giggles* C'mon, kiddo. Don't tell you get nervous when we're in live television or something?

Sora: I-I can't help it! So many people are out there, watching us. What would they think about me? About us?

Neptune: Well, here's my piece of wisdom for ya. Just try imagining them as a vegetable garden or something. That usually works.

Sora: Okay...*deep breath* Okay! I think I got it!

Neptune: Right. Now then, since we got started, let's actually get down to the news!

---

an image of three Shadows with the Heartless Emblem appeared onscreen

Neptune: Warning! Strange monsters called Heartless have been appearing throughout numerous worlds! If you see any of these creepy crawlies about, do not panic and calmly find a good spot to hide. If you can go contact help, please do so, or you'll become Heartless Chow, and believe us, it is not good chow...

Sora: Have you...actually tried that?

Neptune: ...Anyway, onto the next topic.

Sora: Don't cut me off!

---

an image of a certain guild agent, whose eyes were crossed out, dealing with two moogles appeared onscreen. The guild agent's hand was emptied out of her munny

Neptune: Moogle deals are rising throughout the stock market. You'd think with all this Heartless hub-a-dub, they'd at least hand out some products for charity, right? But nope, they're doubling down their business deals and are developing haggling countermeasures to, I quote, 'prevent exploitation from unsavory parties in the midst of a crisis'.

Sora: Recently, we got a complaint from one of their usual customers regarding this. She said 'These darn moogles are too cautious and greedy! These should really start decreasing prices if they don't want to lose customers at this rate!' She must be really having a hard time, huh?

Neptune: Yup, yup! Which serves as another reminder to all our viewers in times of crisis. Ration your belongings, be they food, clothes, munny, your consoles, whatever you deem

precious like a goblin! Save them and keep them safe and close like a teddy bear! You'll thank me later!

Sora: Okay! Now, onto the last news segment!

---

an image of three little ducklings, wearing a red, blue, and green shirt and cap, appeared onscreen, holding their hands out in joy. Their eyes are however, blocked out with black cross marks

Sora: Recently, a small shop has opened up, ran by the Three Little Duckling, Huey, Dewey, and Louie. Funded and invested by the rising Scrooge International Trading Enterprises, this store has all your basic needs at affordable prices.

Neptune: That's right! From food ingredients, to well-made potions and ethers, these little duckies have it all!

Sora: Come over and purchase your needs today, and they promise that your purchase will be made worth it!

Sora ...How did we turn from complaining about sales to promoting another here?

Neptune: Hey, if people are desperate for alternatives, we'll be sure as heck provide one to them! You know what they say about desperation and all that, right?

Sora: I don't know. Anyway! That's all the news we got for you today!

Neptune: But we couldn't just end our broadcast like this!

Histoire: Wait! But...

Neptune: That's why we're doing something a little special for all you readers!

Sora: We are!?

Neptune: Hm-hm! If you leave a comment down below, the author will reply to that comment as soon as he’s able! Sometimes he could go lightning fast. Sometimes he could be as slow as a snail. But rest assured, he WILL react and reply as soon as he can.

Sora: Communication is a two-way street, or so Compa’s grandfather would say.

Neptune: So, leave your thoughts out there and we’ll be happy to hear them...most of them anyway.

Sora: So, what will we do for added segments for the actual show then?

Neptune: Hmmmmmm...how about some topics? Y'know, stuff that some people wouldn't get about our franchises. We talk about them here and stuff.

Sora: Sounds good. So, are we good now?

Neptune: Yup-yup! So, without further ado...

Neptune and Sora: See you next time!

Chapter 3: Chapter 2: To Our Surprise (Bewilderment)

Chapter Summary

> Our party's journey begins in the mystical yet estranged Wonderland. It's twists and turns will surely be a world to remember, especially for the team's own guild agent...

Ocean Between – Gummi Ship Highwind

"And so, Neptune and her friends blast off on their epic world-touring adventure!...Anytime now..."

Neptune deflated as she fell back to her seat. Within the Gummi Ship's cockpit are six seats, one for each of the party members. In front contains a large screen used to see further outside the ship and communicate with the ship engineers, a pair of chipmunks called Chip and Dale. Below them contains three rooms, a kitchen for food and meals, a bathroom for hygiene and a clinic for treatments.

"Calm down, Nep" IF called out. "We need to verify our surroundings first. Not to mention our hero here needs a rundown on how to operate this thing."

"Oooohhhhh, but I'm too excited to sit still, Iffy!" the girl in the parka complained. "I want action now!"

"How about this?" Compa came in with a plate of dessert on her hand. "I know you've been hungry since we left, Nep-Nep, so I made this."

"Oh?" Neptune could only gaze at the yellow jelly in front of her. "Well, this is certainly bigger than a pack of crackers, that's for sure..."

Taking a spoon, she took a bite and...

"...!"

...felt as if her whole world began to spin round and round a billion times in joy!

"WHAT...IS...THIS...WONDROUS...THING!?"

"It's pudding, Nep-Nep!" Compa answered happily. "Egg pudding, to be precise."

Neptune slumped down again. "In all my short(?) life, I've never had the pleasure to experience something wonderful...And to think, it was sitting right here before me..."

She then took the rest of the pudding and cradled it like a newborn baby. "Oh, sweet pudding, I will never be ignorant to your kind ever again. I will feast and consume upon you as you desire me to!"

The guild agent could only sweatdrop at the scene in front of her. "She's gone nuts..."

"At least she will be a bit distracted before we get to our destination" Compa commented.

"That was your aim for this?" IF said worryingly.

"Hey guys!"

Goofy called over as Donald went to his seat.

"I think Sora's got a handle of the controls now."

"Great" IF said, in a not-so-reassuring tone. "Just don't crash into any asteroids on the way, got it?"

"Relax!" Sora said confidently as he got to his seat and his hands on the steering wheel. "I've got this. Besides, I've always wanted to steer a boat!"

"Enthusiasm and actual skill don't always go hand in hand, just so you know" the guild agent commented. "Not to mention, we're in outer space, not above the sea, y'know?"

"Now, now, Iffy" the nurse scolded. "Let Sora have his chance here. Who knows, he may actually get really good at this sort of thing!"

"Yeah, you gotta have faith!" Neptune mumbled with her pudding-filled mouth.

"Hey, don't eat the whole darn thing at once!" IF scolded the female Keyblade Wielder. "And don't speak with your mouth full!"

Donald sighed as he shook his head. "This will be a long journey..."

Goofy could only chuckle. Indeed, it will be a long journey, but it's not without their moments of levity, that's for sure...

Ocean Between – Approaching Wonderland

"...And here we are!" Sora called out to the party. "We made it to our first world, guys!"

Neptune woke up from her power nap. "Already!? Wow, the author sure doesn't know how to write space travel sequences, huh?"

"Nep's weird talk aside, what world is this?" IF wondered as she looked to the screen, showing the image of the world they arrived at.

"It looks...kinda weird." Goofy answered.

"How weird are we talking?" Compa dared to ask.

"Well, we won't know until we get in" Sora said with a raised fist.

"Yeah! Let's go!" Donald urged as he pressed some buttons.

"Wait! I need a moment to..."

And in pillars of light, our heroes are warped in their first world...

Wonderland – Rabbit Hole

And what an entrance they made! As soon as they arrived into the world's atmosphere, they are already falling slowly into the ground.

"Well, at least we're falling slowly this time..." Neptune commented as she laid down mid-air.

"Geez, you sure can read the atmosphere, huh?" IF commented as she is falling down like a skydiver.

Compa moaned as she kept a hand on her skirt. "I knew I should've packed different clothes for the travel!"

"Compa, you're wearing what I bought for you and Nep, right?"

The nurse remembered in a jolt. "Oh yeah!"

The guild agent sighed. "Be thankful that the guys are above us, at least"

Sure enough, the boys are falling right above them, with Goofy also laying down mid-air.

The girl with the key giggled. "At least we won't have to worry about flashing the guys in our little adventure, huh?"

"Alley-oop!"

Neptune did a flip as she landed coolly. IF followed by rolling on the ground to stabilize her landing. Compa, thankfully, landed safely, only having a slight tumble.

Sora and Donald followed suit, landing square on their feet. Goofy, however, fell asleep on the way down and tumbled right down as he landed.

"You are way too relaxed for this..." the guild agent complained as she facepalmed. Her nurse friend could only force a laugh.

Meanwhile, a tiny rabbit in a red coat with a pocket watch ran past them frantically.

"Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear! I'm here, I should be there! I'm late. I'm late, I'm late! The queen, she'll have my head for sure!"

Seeing the rabbit running past them, the group now has one option.

"Welp, second rule of exploring, ask the nearby locals!" Goofy declared.

"So, let's go go go!" Neptune cheered and the party sallied forth.

Wonderland – Bizarre Room

"Why did there have to be so many doors for one room?" IF complained as they arrived in the next room.

The party then sees the rabbit from earlier entering a small door, which then closed itself.

"You think we could fit in that?" Neptune asked as they approached the small door.

"I don't think we can, Nep-Nep" Compa said. "Do you know any shrinking spells, Donald?"

The court wizard shook his head in shame. "I tried to master it. All it did was shrink everything down to be smaller than ants, and they never grew back..."

"Still, how did he get so small?" Sora wondered.

"No, you're simply too big."

Everyone gasped back in shock.

"It talked!" Donald shouted.

"The doorknob just talked!" Compa panicked. "Guys, the doorknob just talked!"

"We heard you all loud and clear, Compa" IF calmed her nurse friend down.

"Oh, great and noble doorknob!" Neptune pleaded in her hammiest voice possible. "Grant us your wisdom!"

The doorbell yawned. "Must you be so loud? You woke me up."

"Good morning" Goofy greeted.

"Good night" the doorbell yawned again. "I need a bit more sleep."

"Wait, what do we have to do to get small?" Sora pleaded.

"Why don't you try the bottle?"

The doorknob pointed behind him. "Over there"

Sure enough, a once-flattened table set with two bottles suddenly grew, hitting Neptune who ended up behind the rest of the group.

"Ouch!" Neptune reeled back as she rubbed her behind. "My poor butt..."

"That was quite sudden..." Compa commented as she checked on her friend's behind. She's a nurse in training, remember? "You okay?"

The party gathered around the raised table. On top, two bottles, one red, one blue stood near the upper right edge.

"Hmmmmmm..." Goofy inspected the two bottles. "This blue one here's the shrinking bottle, and the red one here's the growing bottle."

"To shrink or to grow..." the girl in the parka loudly wondered. "That is the question!"

"The answer's obvious!"

Donald impatiently took the blue bottle and took a swig at it.

"Hey!" IF scolded the duck. "Don't just drink it out of the blue!"

"I feel...funny..."

And in mere seconds, the duck shrank and shrank, until he is but a smidge on the floor.

"Waaaaaakkkk!"

"Oh hey, it worked" Neptune said plainly.

"Ooooohhhh, tiny ducky!"

Compa picked up the tiny Donald and started cradling him like a doll.

"This again!? Put me down!"

IF sighed. "Well, at least we know this thing actually works."

"So, what's the plan?" Goofy asked.

Sora looked around the room. "Why don't I go look around for a passageway here? Then we can all go from there."

"Sounds like a plan!" Neptune agreed.

"I'll go look with you." IF suggested. "There might be other things around here that could be useful later."

Sora nodded in agreement.

"All right!" Neptune grabbed the blue bottle. "Down the hatch!"

After shrinking, Goofy and Compa followed suit, joining Donald down on the ground.

"Still..." the guild agent looked around the room. "This is one of the weirdest rooms I've seen. A lethargic doorknob. A table with two potions on it. A flat clocktower next to a bed, a stove near a fireplace and a faucet with a flattened jar below."

IF dared to look above, seeing more of what the room has to offer. "And that's not getting into the stuff above us too..."

She then heard a thumping sound. IF turned to see Sora near the bed that is now flattened to the wall, revealing a passageway near the doorknob.

"Huh..." IF said. "Didn't know you could do that?"

"I didn't" Sora replied. "I remembered being scared to sleep along at night because a monster might jump me below the bed or behind my closet when I was younger."

"And you thought they'd come from a door near the wall?" the guild agent asked in an incredulous tone.

The boy could only laugh nervously at the remark.

"Oh well. Good find, nonetheless, Sora" IF praised.

The boy rubbed his cheek. "Thanks. What about you, IF?"

"I found out a lot just from this room, actually" the guild agent sighed. "Why don't we shrink down to the others so I can tell them too?"

A few minutes later, the party was debriefed regarding IF's findings.

"A whole topsy-turvy room!?" Neptune managed to condense into one question.

"That's just underselling it, Nep" IF sighed. "Still, there's a lot to cover in this room alone, but I don't think we can do that right now"

"Let's go chase that rabbit!" Donald declared as the party ran towards the open pathway

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Wonderland – Queen's Castle

The party arrives into an open courtroom guarded by living cards acting as soldiers. In the middle of the room stood a young girl in a blue dress and in front of her, where the podium is, stood a haughty woman wearing a red and black robe and holding a small scepter with a heart.

Running up near the podium was the rabbit from before. Sounding the trumpet, he makes his announcement. "Court is now in session!"

"I'm on trial?" the girl asked. "But why!?"

"Oooooohhhh, a court trial?" Neptune said in excitement. "The outside worlds' getting more and more varied each day, huh?"

"Something about this court trial smells..." IF guessed with scorn. "And I'm not referring to a kind of stench or anything..."

"What's makes you say that, Iffy?" Compa asked.

Goofy chose to answer instead. "Well, that girl over there doesn't seem to have a lawyer and the lady who's actin' as the judge is definitely the queen here."

The rabbit, catching his breath, continues his announcement. "Her Majesty, the Queen of Hearts, presiding!"

"See?" Goofy said.

"Wow, you seem quite smart, Goofy!" Compa praised the dog.

"Color me surprised..." IF managed to say.

The queen opened her eyes and casted her judgement. "This girl here is the culprit. There's no doubt about it! And the reason is...because I say so, that's why!"

"Wow" the nurse said dully, disappointed at the queen's declaration. "Ms. Queen doesn't waste any time, does she?"

"That is not fair!" the girl in the middle complained.

"Well, have you anything to say in your defense?" the queen dared.

"Of course! I've doing absolutely nothing wrong!" the girl defended with her arms crossed. "You may be queen, but I'm afraid that doesn't give you the right to be so...so mean!"

"Ho boy..." IF facepalmed. "She set herself up for that one...innocent or not."

Sure enough, the queen fumed with anger. "Silence! You dare defy me!?"

"Hey guys, shouldn't we go help her?" Sora asked the party.

"Yeah!" Neptune supported. "That girl's clearly losing the trial case here, and my Nep Senses tell me she's completely innocent about her innocence!"

"Well yeah, but the-" Donald started.

"We're outsiders, so wouldn't that be muddling?" Goofy continued.

"You mean meddling!" Compa corrected.

"Yeah, and that's against the rules!" the dog finished.

"Oh yeah." IF was reminded. "You guys talked about the **World Order** and all that stuff, right?"

"Well, yeah, but..." Sora complained.

"Unless we got a good defense case for her, I don't think we can do much for her..." IF stated her logic. "And I doubt we'd want to go around toppling rulers off their high horses, no matter how insane they are..."

"Hence, the World Order!" Donald said proudly.

"The court finds the defendant..." the queen proclaimed. "...guilty as charged!"

The girl could only reel back in shock. This can't be happening to her! She was just a curious girl chasing after a rabbit in this Wonderland and now this happened!?

"For the crimes of assault and attempted theft of my heart..."

This got Sora's attention. Now he knows for certain the girl's innocent.

"Off with her head!"

The card soldiers turned to the defendant, ready to execute her!

"No! No! Oh, please!"

"OBJECTION!"

"Hold it right there!"

Despite their talk of world order, Neptune and Sora barged into the court in the girl's defense.

"Who are you!?" the queen demanded. "How dare you interfere with my court!?"

"Because this trial is bogus!" the female Keyblade wielder declared, pointing a finger at the queen. "Why? Because we say so, that's why!"

"How dare you-"

Sora cleared his throat before the situation escalates.

"Excuse us, but we know who the real culprit is!" the boy declared.

"Uh-huh. It's the Heartle-" Goofy managed to stop and seal his mouth shut before he finished his sentence.

"Good call" IF whispered. "There's a chance the Queen hasn't seen the Heartless yet. Had he continued, the queen would've accused US as the Heartless."

"That's a huge leap in logic, isn't it?" Compa complained quietly.

Sora continued. "Anyway, she's not the one you're looking for-"

"That's nonsense. Have you any proof?" the queen interrupted, impatiently tapping her fingers at the table.

"Uhhh..."

Neptune immediately ran to IF. "Do we have anything, Iffy?"

The guild agent sighed. "This is why we shouldn't be running around in court trials like this..."

And just like that, the girl was locked up in a golden cage.

"Bring me evidence of Alice's innocence!" the queen declared. "Fail and it's off with all your heads!"

"How much do we need?" IF asked.

"Gather as little or as much as you please" the queen said offhandly. "Report back here in three hours or the trial proceeds without you! Now, off my court!"

The party looked to themselves, wondering what to do.

IF, however, breathed a heavy sigh. "This will be quite the conundrum, would it?"

"So, how did you end up in this...bizarre place?" IF asked the caged girl.

"Well, it was a curious afternoon, and I happen to see a rabbit in a suit." Alice answered. "And then, I fell down a great hole and wandered around this...so-called Wonderland ever since"

"Have you met anyone else while you were here?" Goofy asked this time.

"Quite a few, yes" Alice nodded. "There was this sleepy Doorknob..."

"Ah, the great master of our time!" Neptune commented.

"...then this intelligent Caterpillar, and of course, there's the Mad Hatter and the March Hare in their unhappy Tea Party."

"Unhappy?" Donald raised an eyebrow.

"Yet the strangest of them all was the Cheshire Cat" the captive girl finished. "Thanks to his directions, I ended up in this place, and stood on trial for a crime I clearly did not, and could not, do!"

IF gathered her thoughts. "And then you got caught up in a court trial and now locked in a cage."

Alice nodded. "Yes! Although, I have seen some...strange creatures around and about..."

"Do those creatures look like black blob-like ants?" Compa asked.

"Quite so!" the captive girl nodded. "I saw a few around here, yet...something inside me told me to avoid them like the plague."

"That's good to hear" Sora said. "Those creatures are dangerous. Better steer clear of them as much as possible"

"I will take that under advisement!" Alice happily replied.

"What's the holdup!?" the Queen of Hearts interrupted. "Need I remind you that you are all on a time limit!? Or perhaps you wish to take the trial now?"

IF groaned. "Sorry, we need more clues first." She then turned to Alice. "Just stay put, okay? We'll get you out of there, I promise."

Alice nodded in thanks. "Thank you all so much, kind strangers!"

Wonderland – Lotus Forest

"Okay, so we got a little girl named Alice to rescue" Neptune recapped. "But we need evidence to prove she didn't commit heart theft like a phantom thief."

"Right" IF nodded. "She said she doesn't need much evidence, but if we can gather definitive proof, we should be able to free Alice and prove her innocence"

"But..." Sora wondered. "How do we find the evidence we need?"

Neptune hummed, crossing her arms. "Maybe we should go catch a Heartless and cage them up!"

"But we don't have cages, Nep-Nep" Goofy pointed out.

Donald hummed. "What to do..."

Suddenly, Compa yelled, pointing towards a floating...cat head appearing and disappearing around the premise.

The cat head eventually settled near the tree trunk beside them, with it's main body appearing to pick the head up and attach it to his body!

"And here I thought I've seen everything..." IF complained again.

"Who are you!?" Donald demanded.

"Who, indeed?" the cat deflected. "Poor Alice. Soon to lose her head, and she's not guilty of a thing!"

"Yeah, we kinda got that, stripey kitty!" Neptune complained.

"Hey, if you know who the culprit really is, tell us!" Sora demanded.

"The Cheshire Cat has all the answers-but doesn't always tell." the cat answered. "The answer, the culprit, the cat all lie in darkness."

"Wait!"

However, the Cheshire Cat vanished from their sights.

"Where'd he go!?" Compa looked around frantically for any sign of the disappearing cat.

"They've already left this Lotus Forest." the cat's voice reverbed throughout the area. "I won't tell which exit."

"There are four pieces of evidence in all. Three are a cinch to find. The fourth is tricky. Big reward if you find them all."

There are waiting for any more of the cat's riddling advice, but none came.

"Should we trust him?" Donald asked around.

Only for the cat to suddenly reappear! "To trust, or not to trust? I trust you'll decide!"

And then disappeared again...

"I don't do riddle speak, so I can't really say..." IF said in doubt.

Compa shivered. "I'm kinda creeped out by his sudden appearances..."

"But guys" Neptune pleaded. "Think of the reward! It could totally help us on our journey."

"Nep, you shouldn't trust shady folks like that." the guild agent scolded.

"I, for one, definitely don't!" Donald chimed in.

"You guys..." Nep turned to Sora. "Help me, Sora! You're my only hope!"

"Uhhh, well..." Sora scratched the back of his head. "I mean, we could look for more stuff on the way. Not to mention, we still have some time, so..."

"I get ya" the royal knight nodded. "Rule number three of exploration. Leave no stone or chest unturned, a-hyuck!"

"See! See!" Neptune grabbed Sora and Goofy in a double neck brace. "These two get it! We gotta explore every nook and cranny of this dungeon!"

IF sighed. "I suppose. Anyway, we need more evidence if we're gonna do this. Just be prepared for anything, be it from the Heartless or from that snobby queen."

The group in agreement, decided to search around for the pieces of evidence they needed.

The first piece of evidence was located in the nearby meadow. Luckily, it was nearby and only guarded by Shadows and Soldiers (the ant-like creatures and the armored creatures from before), so it was a cinch to deal with them.

"This appears to be some footprints" Compa wondered, lifting a yellow circle with footprints marked on it.

"Certainly tinier than any of us could make" Sora said.

"This will come in handy." IF agreed. "We better hang on to it."

The second piece of evidence is located on a lily pad, near some mushrooms. Jumping up the mushrooms, the party obtained the next piece.

"A pair of antennae..." IF mentioned, lifting the yellow circle that has the aforementioned antennae attached to.

"No way any of us have that as an accessory!" Neptune boasted.

"Looks like we got another one!" Donald declared.

Moving further ahead, they entered through an entryway on top of the giant tree, which caused the group to fall back into the Bizarre Room.

Wonderland – Bizarre Room

More specifically, on top of the currently inactive stove near the fireplace.

"Hey guys, there's the next piece of evidence!" Compa pointed towards the pink box located near the stove.

Opening the box, they saw a small yellow circle.

"A circle?" Sora wondered.

"Not just any circle" IF took a quick sniff. "It has their scent!"

"Wait, those Heartless have scents?" Neptune asked incredulously.

"I don't think we need to know more than that" the guild agent insisted. "No one is insane enough to be a Heartless Biologist."

"Definitely not me!" the nurse shouted for some reason.

"Well, we got three pieces of evidence!" Donald cheered.

"But uh" Goofy started. "how do we get to the fourth piece?"

"It's way up there!" Sora shouted, pointing to the box on top of the shelf near the faucet.

Neptune groaned. "But I don't see a way there!"

"I think I know how to get there..."

The group turned to IF.

Wonderland – Lotus Forest

After trekking back to the Lotus Forest, fighting Heartless, such as Red Nocturnes, floating red moving bells capable of casting fire magic and Large Bodies, bulky soldiers capable of deflecting any frontal assault, they reached back near the giant tree.

"See that opening up there?" IF pointed to an open passage on top, one accessible through some lily pads.

"Oooohhhh, I smell hidden treasure~" Neptune cheered with clapped hands.

"Let's get up there!" Sora declared.

And as they crossed the passageway...

Wonderland – Bizarre Room

"We're falling again!"

Compa and Neptune landed on top of the faucet of the Bizarre Room.

"Nep! Compa, jump to the shelf!" IF warned as she was falling.

Acting fast, the two girls leapt to the nearby shelf. IF and Sora followed suit, leaving Donald and Goofy behind on the faucet due to lack of space.

"Time to nab the last piece of the puzzle!" Neptune approached the pink box.

"What's inside, Nep-Nep?" Compa asked as they inspect the insides.

"It appears to be claw marks." IF noticed.

"Not just that..." Sora lifted the piece of evidence. "Notice this?"

"What, the yellow circle?" Neptune noticed. "What's the deal with all those?"

However, before they contemplate further, Donald and Goofy's loud cries signaled one thing.

"Well, look what you've found. Nice going"

The return of the Cheshire Cat!

"Look-it here, kitty! We got all four treasures!" the female Keyblade wielder boasted. "Even the tricky fourth one! Eat that!"

"Now we can save Alice!" Sora said confidently.

"Don't be so sure!" the cat warned. "She may be innocent, but what about you?"

"What do you mean?" Compa asked worriedly.

"I won't tell. But I'll give you something"

The cat tossed them a peculiar orb. One with the image of a snowflake on it.

"It's a Spell Orb!" Donald cried.

"Oh yeah!" Neptune recalled. "Didn't you give me and Sora one of these before we left?"

"Yup." Donald nodded. "With the ones I gave you, you two can use the Fire spell. That one has the Blizzard spell."

"Oh, one more thing"

Everyone turned to the cat.

"You may have gathered all that is not necessary. However, there within lies one who has lost their home. One who...Drifted here, you can say."

IF and Compa gasped at the mention.

"A Drifter!? Who was it?" the guild agent demanded.

"Why not find out yourselves? It may be worth it or it may not..." But the cat vanished before he could give a clear answer...

"Vanished again..." the nurse complained.

"I'd like to find more about the Drifter..." IF said. "But right now, we need to get back to the court room. We're running out of time."

"Yeah!" Sora agreed.

"Let's go save ourselves a damsel, ladies and gentlemen!"

And with Neptune's declaration, the party rushed to the courtroom, with only three minutes to spare...

Wonderland – Queen's Castle

"Now, show me what you have found."

The party laid their pieces of evidence on the floor in front of them. They then took their place in the jury's podium while IF stood in the defendant's podium.

"Well, that's certainly a lot of evidence, but I'm still not impressed." the Queen of Hearts said haughtily.

"No one asked you..." IF mumbled under her breath.

"Cards! Bring forth my evidence!"

One of the card soldiers brought a pink box of evidence and placed it near the others.

"W-What the...!?" the guild agent mumbled her surprise.

Suddenly, the boxes all compressed into one and after a good five seconds, returned to five boxes standing in a row.

"What was that?" Compa asked with worry.

"Hmm, checking all five would only be a waste of time." the queen complained. "All right, then. Choose the one you wish to present."

"What!? Why?" Neptune asked.

"Because I'll decide who's guilty based on that evidence" the queen said simply.

"What!? After all the trouble we went to collect it!?" the boy complained.

"You know what?" Donald said. "I'm starting to agree with Neptune here. This whole trial stinks!"

Goofy nodded furiously.

"See!" the female Keyblade wielder shouted. "Mr. World Order agrees with me!"

"Keep it down, you!" the duck scolded the female Keyblade Wielder.

"Silence from the jury!" the queen shouted back and then pointed her scepter at the trembling IF. "Now, choose! One box!"

"Hey..." Goofy noticed something odd. "Isn't Iffy...sweatin' a bunch?"

"Don't tell me..." Donald started.

"*Drat! Drat! DRAT!*" IF internally complained. "*I was so caught up in their pace that I didn't think of what to do about this! Any wrong move and I could risk either Alice's life or the World Order! Why is it I slip up when things matter the most here!?*"

"Iffy looks like she needs help!" Compa scrambled through her kit and got a water bottle. "Here, I got some water!"

Tuning out the noises around her, the guild agent went down to the boxes...

"*What do I do? Which do I pick?*" IF thought to herself as she neared the first box on the left. "*This one? No? This one?" She then approached the middle one. "No, what could it be? If I try to check what's inside, then that snob will assume that's the one I picked.*"

"AGGGGHHHH!" the guild agent shouted in frustration. "WHAT DO I DO!?"

Hearing her scream got the party worried...

"IF..." Sora said in sadness.

"Iffy..." Neptune followed.

The queen however, huffed in annoyance. "Would you quit it with the theatrics? We're still in my court here, you know!?"

Meanwhile, Alice looked on the trial, trembling with fear and sadness.

"They're going this far for me..." Alice said silently. "A stranger they never even knew. Compared to the wild residents of this land, they were willing to risk life and limb for one they don't know. I must repay their kindness somehow..."

As IF continued to pace around in frustration, the captive girl took a look of the trial and noticed something odd.

More specifically, at one of the boxes.

"Is that...?"

Thinking fast, she whistled for the jury.

Neptune heard her cry and looked at the captive damsel, who was holding four fingers up.

"Huh?"

Alice then moved her hand down and pointed her four fingers to her right.

She then raised her hand up and down, hoping they would get the message.

"Four...on the right?"

"What's up, Neptune?" Sora asked his fellow Keyblade wielder.

Neptune then whispered what Alice tried to tell them.

"Four...right?"

He then looked at the boxes again. There are five boxes lined up in a row, and if what Alice told Neptune is right...

"Wait, I think I got it! IF!"

The panicked guild agent looked to the jury.

She noticed Sora and Neptune moving their mouths, but they're not making a sound.

"What are they...?"

"What's the holdup?" the queen demanded. "Hurry up and open one already!"

She ignored the ruler's demands and kept looking at the two Keyblade wielders, who kept speaking with their mouths, but not making a sound.

"*They're saying something, but they're not making a sound.* Four...?"

Eventually, the guild agent realized what they're doing!

"They're mouthing a hint..." the guild agent murmured. "Four...to the right?"

She looked at the row of boxes. Starting from the left, she counted and moved to the fourth box on the right, near Alice and the jury.

"This one?" She looked and see everyone nodding at her.

"Are you certain?" the queen asked. "No second chances!"

"*This is what everyone's saying. Better hope this is right...*" IF then took a deep breath. "Yeah. I'm sure of it."

"Now we shall see who the real culprit is." the queen ordered. "Open it!"

Doing as she ordered, the guild agent opened the box, and in a flash of light and confetti, out came...

"Whew! That took way too long, nyu."

...a girl smaller than Neptune wearing a white sailor uniform with a large yelllow...balloon(?) with a face plastered on it to her side.

"Wha...?" Donald said, his beak opened wide.

"The culprit has been revealed!" Neptune shouted out as loud as her white circular eyes was wide.

"She's...the one I sensed?" Alice questioned.

"What is the meaning of this!?" the queen demanded. "I don't recall seeing that one before!"

"That's because you didn't, nyu." the smaller girl answered. "I was having some nice tea with some rude folks when dark creatures decided to prey on poor me, nyu. Feeling danger everywhere, I hid myself in my Gema here and waited for the creatures to go away, but they ripped it up and scattered it across the place, nyu. Thanks for merging all those pieces up, by the way."

"So that's why there are yellow circles in those boxes..." Compa said, pounding her fist on her hand.

Goofy got to thinking. "Do ya fellers think she might'a been the Drifter that cat was talkin' about?"

"Maybe..." Donald replied.

"Okay, but..." Sora started. "What about Alice? Doesn't this at least prove she had nothing to do with this?"

"Alice?" the smaller girl questioned.

"That would be me!" Alice shouted from her cage. "It's a pleasure to meet you, stranger!"

"Greetings to you. I'm Broccoli, nyu" the smaller girl introduced herself.

"Broccoli?" the talking dog asked. "Like the vegetable?"

"Ooooooohhhh, that's cute~" Neptune cooed. "I'mma call her Puchiko!"

"That's a stretch for a nickname, nyu" Broccoli complained, judging by her narrowing eyes.

The queen, however, became more incensed. "You dare bring discord to my court!? Your presence here proves that you have taken my heart!"

"Now that's a leap of logic!" Sora shouted.

"That's what I said earlier!" Compa commented.

Broccoli groaned. "I heard bad rumors about the Queen of Hearts, but to think they are actually true, nyu. This will be a real pain to deal with."

IF sighed. "You tell me..."

"Enough!" the queen yelled. "This conversation proves that you are all in cahoots with the thief. The same goes for Alice as well!"

"Hey!" Goofy shouted.

"This isn't what we agreed on!" Donald followed.

IF groaned. "We didn't even agree on anything. Why did we end up going through this?"

Slamming her fist on the table, the tyrannical queen gave her order. "Guards! OFF WITH THEIR HEADS!"

The entire court suddenly flattened, and a tower with three wooden gears erected in the middle of the room, which one of the guards turned over, causing Alice's cage to ascend high and the red blinds folding around her!

"Alice!" Compa yelled.

"We gotta get her down there!" Sora shouted, summoning his Keyblade.

"Okay!" Neptune followed suit with her own Keyblade. "Donald, Goofy! Let's nep these guards up!"

"Okay!"

"Coming right up!"

The dog and the duck followed the girl into battle.

"IF, mind helping me out here?" Sora asked the guild agent.

"Huh?" IF asked, feeling down.

Goofy blocked an incoming advance from three troopers, allowing Neptune to unleash combo after combo against them.

Compa looked at the guild agent, feeling worried. "Iffy, are you okay?"

Meanwhile, Donald set one of the guards on fire, causing it to spread to some of his compatriots.

IF barely nodded. "Y-Yeah. I-I'll be fine."

"Loosen your shoulders, nyu" Broccoli said, hopping up to her Gema as she massaged the guild agent's shoulders. "If they're too stiff, you'll freeze up a lot, nyu."

IF chuckled. "I'll keep that in mind. Come on, let's get Alice out!"

At the guild agent's urging, the four proceeded to the tower and tried to move the gears down, but they wouldn't budge.

"This...is quite hard..." Compa groaned as she strained her arms to move the wheel.

"Come on..." IF groaned as struggled just as bad.

The queen, however, took notice!

"What are they...GUARDS! Those fools are freeing the prisoner! SEIZE THE-"

However, a stray chunk of ice hit the queen's face hard, causing her to tumble on her stand, and, well...

"W-Woah!" Goofy immediately shielded his eyes from the sight.

"It wasn't me!" Donald pleaded, covering his eyes too.

"Hey hey hey, isn't this supposed to be rated E for EVERYONE?" Neptune complained at the sight. "Why is THIS a viable interaction, developers!? You're setting a bad precedent there, you know?"

"Why do I feel like that's hypocritical coming from her, nyu?" Broccoli wondered.

"Nep...just shut up...and help us already!" IF complained.

Compa looked around to see the guards flailing around at the queen's state of being. "At least the Card Soldiers are distracted!"

"But...I don't think we can move this..." Sora gave up on moving the wheels.

"Then why not just smash it, nyu?" the tiny Drifter suggested.

Sora, Neptune and IF looked at each other, wondering what to do.

"Not the most elegant solution, but..." the guild agent started.

"...We've got no other options now..." the boy with the key readied his weapon.

"...so let's smack this thing good and save our damsel!" the girl with the key followed suit.

Unleashing all their strength into their attacks, they broke the wheels of the tower, causing it to crumble!

"They got it!" Compa cheered.

"Guys! The cage!"

At Goofy's cry, everyone looked to the cage that descended. As it reached the ground, the red blinds unveiled...

"What the nep!?"

...and the prisoner was gone!

"Alice!?" Donald shouted.

"Did she vanish, nyu?" Broccoli wondered.

"What is the meaning of this!?" the queen slammed her fist again. "Guards, find the prisoner or it's off with all your heads!"

The card soldiers immediately scrambled about to fulfill their queen's orders.

"Looks like she's distracted" IF noticed. "Quick, to the forests!"

The party, with Broccoli in tow, ran before the Queen of Hearts noticed or even remembered what they were doing a moment ago.

Wonderland – Lotus Forest

"That...was a close one, guys..." Compa breathed out.

"No kiddin'" Goofy was all tuckered out.

"Hey" Sora started. "Where do guys think...Alice went?"

"Maybe she got kidnapped..." Donald answered with heavy breath. "While we were fighting..."

"How does..." Neptune started. "That work? That cage was too small!"

Suddenly, one of the nearby flowers bloomed, releasing a giant rock that was flung to the borders of the nearby lake(?)

And on top of that rock, the Cheshire Cat appeared once more!

"Oooohhhh, the creepy kitty..." Compa groaned.

"Have you seen Alice?" Sora asked the cat.

"Alice, no" the cat answered. "Shadows, yes!"

"Where did they go?" Goofy asked.

"This way? That way?" the cat said as he swayed his head. "Does it matter? Left, right, up, down! All mixed up thanks to the shadows!"

"Step deeper into the forest to the deserted garden." the cat advised. "You might find shadows in the upside-down room!"

And thus, the cat vanished again.

"Again with his roundabout riddles..." Neptune complained as she scratched her head. "What do you guys think?"

Sora thought for a moment, but then turned to the guild agent. "Hey, IF, didn't you say you saw something back at that tea room?"

"H-Huh?" IF snapped back in attention.

"Are you sure you're okay?" the boy asked. "You've been kinda out of it since the court trial"

"Y-Yeah. Don't worry about me" IF tried to reassure the party. "Anyway, Sora's on to something. That strange room has to house a strong Heartless, and likely Alice's captor"

"But what did he mean by deserted garden?" the court wizard wondered.

"He means the Tea House, nyu" Broccoli answered. "There's a passageway to the Tea House just over this forest, nyu. Let's go through there"

"All right! Our destination is set!" Neptune declared. "Lead the way, Puchiko!"

"Again, it's Broccoli, nyu"

Little do they know that they were being watched, and not by the shadows...

"...Is she really the one?"

Wonderland – Bizarre Room (Past the Tea House)

"Woah, you weren't kidding, Iffy" the girl with the key said in amazement as she gazed to the top. "I could see Mr. Sleepy Knob from here!"

"Still, how do we get Mr. Heartless to come out?" Compa wondered.

"Those"

IF pointed to two lanterns placed on separate tiny tables ahead.

"Oh! We can light those lanterns up!" Goofy exclaimed.

"That will get the shadow to come out for sure!" Donald cheered.

"That should be simple enough..." Sora hoped.

"Really? Such carelessness from a bunch of dunderheads like you." a cocky female voice taunted.

Everyone looked around to find the source of the mysterious voice.

"Uh, Sora, we should talk about jinxes" Neptune said with furrowed eyes. "It's a pretty important topic you need to know"

"What did I do!?" Sora complained, his eyes turning into white circles.

The duck looked up to see something descended upon them. "Look!"

A figure with long white hair, teal eyes and a black battle suit slowly descended to the nearby lantern. She was gazing upon them with a stern look, gripping her large blade on her right hand.

"Woah, who's the lovely Newtype?" the girl with the key asked. "Anyone you guys know?"

"We've never seen her before" the nurse declared.

"Not me..." Goofy thought aloud.

"Nor I, nyu" the girl with the Gema followed.

The woman flipper her hair. "Of course, you all wouldn't know me. This is the first time we've met."

She then turned to the lanterns behind her. "So, you believe you could draw out the Heartless you're after with these? How clever."

"You know something we don't?" IF interrogated the newcomer.

"Not something you need to know now. However..."

The woman turned her gaze to Neptune.

"I wish to confirm something with you." the woman spoke.

"Oh? Do you want to take me out on a date?" Neptune sputtered.

"Huh?" the woman tilted her head.

"Well, I mean, it's not everyday I get asked out, you know. But hey, you're a really pretty gal, so I'll take my chances and go for it!"

"Wha-That's not what I'm asking you!" the woman shouted, annoyed.

"Oh really? Wow, I mean I offered and all, yet you want to remain a lone wolf. So sad..." Neptune deflated.

"Since when did you get that idea!?" the woman shouted again. "And you didn't offer anything!"

Neptune snickered. "Wow, you are so fun to mess with! Your reactions are just a blast to hear!"

"Yeesh. Get a better hobby, would ya?" IF commented.

"This must be how Nep-Nep expresses her love!" Compa said with a smile. "I think"

"Really?" Sora wondered.

"Don't get caught up in their pace, nyu" Broccoli warned the boy.

The newcomer growled. This is so not her day. "I came here to probe your strength, but it seems you think I'm not much of a threat to you, aren't you?"

Everyone looked at her with confused wariness.

"In that case, I'll have to teach you how to treat people like me with respect!"

She readies her blade, and lunges straight at Neptune.

"Nep-whoa!"

She immediately drew her Keyblade and met the stranger's attack head-on.

"Nep-Nep!" Goofy and Compa yelled.

"Woah!" the girl struggled with the newcomer's attack. "She's...really tough!"

"Good thing we took a small break at the Tea House, nyu..." Broccoli commented. "Otherwise, Nep would have buckled already with all that running around you've been

doing."

"Count your blessings, I guess" Donald said, bringing out his staff.

"We should get going while she's distracted." IF suggested. "Compa, make sure Nep's patched up."

"Leave it to me!" Compa saluted as the rest of the group moved to the lanterns.

Neptune repelled the attack and started unleashing combos against the stranger.

"Hiyah!" Upward slash!

"Hah!" Mid-air thrust!

"Is this the best you got?" the white-haired stranger mocked. "Surely you can do better!"

"Hey, I just got started on my journey here, so bear with me on this one, 'kay?"

"Rah!" Rolling mid-air slash!

The attacks barely fazed her!

"You done now?" the woman readied her attack. "Then taste my **Lacy Dance**!"

Rushing up to Neptune, she launches the girl into the air, attacked her with two spinning kicks and ended it with a spinning slash from her sword!

"Ouch!" Neptune cried in pain. "This Newtype's on a whole different level!"

"Hang in there!" Compa immediately got to work patching up her wounds.

"Hmph" the woman looked at her opponent with contempt. "Getting aid from humans. I suppose this is what happens when you don't remember what you're supposed to be."

"Hey, don't look down upon us!" Compa yelled at the stranger.

"I'm not insulting you, I'm stating a fact." the woman spoke dismissively. "So long as you are bound by weaker beings, you will never defeat me."

The nurse growled. She can't stand being insulted! She can't stand her friends being insulted even more!

"Welp, I don't have to!" Neptune got up after the nurse bandaged her wounds. "I just had to make sure you don't get in our way!"

"Bold words from...hm?"

She looked around and noticed that her opponent and the nurse were the only presences she could see.

"Woahahahahahoooo!"

The three looked up to see Goofy locked in battle against three Red Nocturnes. IF and Donald and currently dealing with a Large Body in the lead.

"I got you all, nyu!"

Broccoli threw some healing tea around to keep everyone topped off, but...

"Sora!" Donald called. "You got the lanterns?"

"Almost!" Sora called from one of the lantern stools.

"No, you don't!"

The woman attempts to charge at Sora...

"Sora!"

"Look out!"

"Huh?"

...but something was coming her way.

"**Mekara Beam**!"

It was Broccoli, and she shot laser beams (from her eyes!?) straight at the stranger, pushing her back.

"What even was that!?" the woman complained.

"We got you now! **Cross Combination**!"

Neptune took the opening and slammed the newcomer down hard!

"Now I'll show you! Time for your injection!"

Seeing a chance, Compa brought out her syringe and applied something to the stranger.

"Hrk! I can't...feel my arms..."

The Newtype tried to stand, but tumbled down, losing the feeling in her body.

"What..." the stranger lashed out. "What did you do!?"

"Oh, I just used my **Paralysis Agent** on you. You wouldn't be able to walk right for a bit." the nurse cheekily explained as she chuckled. "How's that for a weakling!?"

Seeing an opening, Sora took the chance and lit up the second lantern.

"All right!" the boy cheered. "I got them!"

"Nice!" IF gave a thumbs up, just as the rest of the group finished up the Heartless near them. "Good work, everyone."

"Not bad..."

The woman who attacked them slowly got up with her legs, the agent wearing off faster than anticipated. "...Distracting me while your comrades got to work. I didn't take you to be sneaky."

"This is called team effort!" Donald boasted. "Learn it!"

"There's only so much you could do by yourself, nyu" Broccoli said sagely.

The woman huffed as she floated up. "I'll take that under advisement. But, I'm afraid that this little skirmish ends now"

"She's going to try something..." IF warned everyone. "Guards up, everyone!"

With such dazzling speed and grace, the Newtype darted across the area, striking down each and every Heartless in the room!

"HAH!" There goes the Soldiers!

"Take this!" Down goes the **Green Requiem** Support (these green floating bells heal others, by the way)

"Away you go!" Goodbye, flock of Red Nocturnes.

"And now..." Her eyes are now set against a group of three Large Bodies that just spawned. "...your end!"

She then slashes through the big-bodied Heartless, but when it seemed like nothing happened, the Newtype snapped her fingers, causing several slashes to hit them, wiping them out for good.

"Holy..." Compa started.

"...Smokes!" Neptune finished.

"Wow" Sora could only gasp in amazement at the destruction the Newtype unleashed.

"See that? That's a glimpse of my true power." the Newtype, who retrieved her blade, boasted as she began to float away. "Now if you realize what's good for you, I advise you to take this matter seriously when next we meet. Otherwise, you will not live our next encounter..."

"Okay~" Neptune waved back at the white-haired woman. "I'll have some pudding ready for you!"

"I can't tell if you are teasing her for the fun of it or are you really...you know..." IF wondered.

"Know what?" the girl with the key asked, tilting her head.

"Nothing" the guild agent shook her head. "Anyway, we'd better get moving. Let's see if that Heartless will spawn right now"

As the Newtype saw the party leave, she had one more thought. "*She didn't seem completely fazed by the threat of my **Infinite Slash**. On the other hand, she said that she just 'started out'. Does that mean she really doesn't recognize that's she's...*"

She shook her head. "*No matter. She's not good enough. If she doesn't even exude an iota of power comparable to our kind, then she's not the one. But...*"

The Newtype placed a hand onto her heart. "*Why does my heart begin to beat so fast whenever I was near her?*"

Wonderland – Bizarre Room (Outside the Queen's Castle)

As the party returns to the part of the room with the table and the doorknob, the Cheshire Cat reappeared on top of the table.

"I see you figured a way to light the way, I see" the cat spoke in his usual roundabout manner.

"That's right, kitty!" Neptune boasted. "Now the boss will definitely appear for sure!"

"Oh yes, the shadows should be here soon" the cat danced as he points his finger up. "Are you prepared? Because if not, too bad."

The cat and the nearby bottles vanished, and something dropped down near the table and jumped over to the other side, revealing it's shape.

With long, black paper arms held on by two short shoulders, four long bony legs and a head with faces, the **Trickmaster** makes it's entrance.

"Who ordered a clown for a boss here?" IF complained.

"I'd hire a whole circus if I could!" Neptune replied.

"Can we save the witty jokes for later!?" Donald complained. "Here it comes!"

Spawning two batons, the Trickmaster began it's attack. It's baton swings were fast, but dodgeable. However, the uneven height gives it an unprecedented advantage.

"I've got this!"

Neptune unleashes an air combo at it...

"Take that!" A downward slash, then an upward slash and then a vertical spin slash!

...only to fall down to the ground.

"Ugh, I can see the problem now..."

"Come on, Nep-Nep!" Compa urged her friend from above the table.

Broccoli is trying to gain some distance, when she noticed the stove emitting smoke.

"Hey, ducky"

Donald looked to the tiny girl.

"Think you can put this stove out of commission, nyu?"

"Why?" the duck wondered.

"Call it my intuition, nyu"

The court wizard nodded, blasting the stove thrice with his newly-acquired **Blizzara** magic to stop the nearby stove.

"Okay, got it!"

"Good, now keep that thing busy, nyu!"

As Broccoli ran off, Goofy and IF are trying to launch fruitless attacks against the tall Heartless, but due to it's height advantage, damage has been sporadic.

IF groaned. "My magic can't reach to him from this height..."

"Gawrsh. We can only hold it back for so long!" Goofy kept his shield up to block incoming attacks.

"Then we gotta come up with a plan!" Sora said as he blasted the Trickmaster with Blizzard spells.

After a while, the Heartless began to converge on the stove, and placed its batons on top of it...

"What's it doing?" Compa wondered.

"Is it trying to..." IF started, then an idea hit her. "I see now! Sora, Nep, Goof! Hit it now!"

Sora nodded. "Gotcha! Come on, guys!"

"Oh yeah!"

"Let's get 'im!"

With focused strikes and critical combos, the trio hit the distracted Heartless from the spot under his legs and brought it down.

"It's down!" Compa called.

"Time for an All-Out Attack!" Neptune rallied everyone around her.

The party of six converged and launched their best attack at it!

"Take that!" Goofy launched himself up in the air, charging at the head like a **Rocket**.

"Here's your treatment!" Compa blasted the Heartless at range with a **Paralysis Agent**, further stunning the enemy.

"Feel the icy chill!" IF chanted, unleashing a pillar of ice against it. "**BLISTERING COLD**!"

"Ready, Sora?" Donald asked the young Keyblade wielder, who nodded.

"**FREEZE**!"

The two unleashed a combined Blizzard attack at it!

"And the finisher! **CROSS COMBINATION**!"

After Neptune unleashed her six-plus-one combo at it, the Heartless managed to get up and in a fit of anger, swung their baton erratically.

"Dodge! Dodge! DODGE!"

In the chaos, the Trickmaster managed to stomp out the table and the chair, leaving the group without any place to get up.

"This is bad!" Donald complained.

"It's going to be way harder to hit it now!" Compa complained too.

"There's gotta be some way to get a hit on it!"

IF looked around frantically, when she found her solution.

"Everyone! I got something special for it!"

Or more precisely, it found her.

"You mean..."

Realizing what it meant, she immediately turned to the group in a panic...

"EVERYONE, DUCK!"

...and pushed everyone down. Anyone who hasn't immediately ducked for cover.

"**MEKARA...BEAM!**"

Broccoli unleashed her mightiest beam attack yet against the Heartless. Unable to bear it's assault, it ends up dizzy and completely weakened.

"It needs one last keystroke, nyu!"

Hearing the tiny girl's cry, IF turned to Sora.

"Hey, mind finishing this off?" the guild agent asked.

Sora gave a thumbs up. "Gladly."

He then ran to IF and jumped!

IF used her hands as an improvised jumping pad, giving Sora extra room to jump higher.

"Goooooooo!"

With Neptune's loudest cheer, the boy landed one last strike against the Trickmaster, sending it spiraling down to it's defeat. As a large heart exits it's body, the tall Heartless is now vanquished.

A loud yawn was then heard behind them.

"What a racket..." It was the sleepy Doorknob.

"How did he sleep through all that fighting?" Compa wondered.

"I wish I could be as half as good as our mighty Doorknob!" Neptune said, praising the Doorknob for it's sleeping abilities.

"How's a doorknob to get any sleep?"

As he let out a mighty yawn, opening it's mouth wide, a light in the shape of a Keyhole appeared in his mouth.

"What is that?" Donald wondered.

"Seems like some sort of keyhole" IF answered. "But to what, exactly?"

As the group pondered about it, the tip of both Keyblades lit up and in swift motion, aimed themselves on the magical Keyhole, emitting beams of light against it. As the growing light that emerged from the Keyhole faded, a loud locking sound was heard as the Doorknob closed his mouth and went back to sleep.

"What was that just now, nyu?" Broccoli asked as she approached the group.

"You hear that too?" Sora asked. "Sounded like something closed."

"Yeah, but..." Neptune crossed her arms in thought. "What did we close, exactly?"

Suddenly, a piece of green fell near them.

"Hey, isn't that one of your gummi ship parts?" Compa asked as she grabbed the fallen piece.

"Welp, this gummi ain't like the others" Goofy answered. "No, sir."

"We'd better hold on to it" IF suggested. "Maybe Cid might know what to do with it."

"Splendid. You're quite the heroes and heroines!"

The Cheshire Cat took the chance to reappear once more on top of the reformed table.

"If you're looking for Alice, she's not here. Off with the shadows, into darkness."

And then the cat faded once more...

"No..." Sora bemoaned.

"Does that mean Alice is not in this world anymore?" Compa asked.

"Doesn't seem like it..." Goofy answered sadly.

"..." IF had a downcast expression on her face.

"Come on, guys!" Neptune rallied the group. "We ain't done on our adventure! If my meta-knowledge is correct, damsels like Alice would usually be taken right at the enemy's stronghold. So, let's keep on going until we get there!"

"Neptune..." Sora's face lit up, his determination restored. "Yeah!"

"Then let's go back to our gummi ship, everyone!" Donald urged.

"Sounds good!" Compa then turned to Broccoli. "What about you, Miss Broccoli?"

"I'm planning to stick around, nyu."

Everyone stopped for a moment.

"Huh? Why?" Neptune asked rapidly.

"There's still quite more to this place that I haven't seen yet, nyu." the tiny girl answered. "Besides, I want to show Alice more of this place as a way to thank her for helping out."

"Oh, Broccoli..." Goofy shed a tear at the act of kindness.

But then, her eyes narrowed as a sinister aura emanated from her.

"...That, and to sabotage that stupid Queen at every opportunity I can, nyu..."

Everyone sweatdropped at her not-so-silent mumble.

"...So much for a pure motive..." Donald mumbled. Compa could only mutter a laugh.

The tiny girl approached IF and gave her a piece of paper.

"Huh?" IF, in her stupor, noticed the paper on her hand.

"It's my contact info." Broccoli stated. "I can't go with you, but I can at least keep in touch. It's what you asked of me back there at the tea party, right?"

IF thought for a moment, but then she remembers. "Oh, right. You even took one of my phones for that..."

"You were complaining so much about it, but your nurse friend here made you relent. Remember?" the tiny girl reminded.

The guild agent sighed, eyeing her now-empty belt. "Yeah, just now. I'm really going to part with these babies, huh?"

"At least for now. Drifters have to stick together, even if we're apart, right nyu?" Broccoli reassured the guild agent. "So, don't worry about me. I can handle myself now that I am familiar with the Heartless, nyu."

IF gave a sad nod. "Sure. Thanks..."

"And don't forget to loosen up, okay?"

The guild agent chuckled. "Yeah, yeah. I hear you"

"Don't forget to write, Puchiko!" Neptune waved their new friend goodbye.

"For the last time, it's Broccoli, nyu!" the tiny girl complained once more.

Wonderland – Rabbit Hole

As the group returned to their first landing zone, Compa groaned in relief. "Good thing we're leaving! I don't think I can stand getting jump scared by that freaky kitty for another second!"

"Hey, this world ain't too bad!" Neptune said optimistically. "Sure, it felt like a werid acid trip here, but we had fun!"

"This is no pleasure cruise, Neptune!" Donald scolded the girl.

"Calm down, Donald..." Goofy tried to calm his friend down.

"..."

IF's pace was slow as the group returned, something Sora and Neptune noticed.

"Hey...IF?"

The guild agent turned to see her two friends, looking at her with worry.

"You doin' okay, Iffy? Got a stomach ache or something?"

She shook her head. "No, it's..."

The rest stopped and went to the sad guild agent.

"Are you okay, Iffy?" Compa asked softly.

"You feelin' alright?" Donald asked.

"It's just..." IF started. "I just..."

She then bowed her head in shame. "I'M SO SORRY!"

"Huh!?"

Everyone else gasped in shock.

"Sorry?" Goofy started.

"For what?" Sora continued.

"For messing up..." the guild agent cried, tears starting to leak out of her eyes. "If I wasn't so careful around the snotty queen, I could've come up with a better plan to save Alice! Instead, all I did was getting pranced around in this weird world with all it's weirdness and I couldn't adapt fast enough! If I were faster, calmer, maybe we could've sprung Alice out without smashing that tower in the first place..."

"IF..." Donald bemoaned.

Neptune sighed. "Iffy, look at us"

She did as instructed, looking at the friends in front of her in spite of her watery eyes.

"I get it. You messed up. We could've done things better. But in my point of view, things could've gotten a lot worse." the girl in the parka started. "Besides, if you haven't figured out what we were saying back at the court, we wouldn't have gotten Puchiko's help. And you trusted me and Compa to keep that Newtype busy while you got Sora to light those lanterns. Face it, if we haven't done that, that Heartless boss wouldn't spawn and that Newtype would've wiped the floor with us."

"Yeah." Sora agreed, scratching his cheek. "Besides, you stuck with me and learned about that weird room more than I did. And without your advice, I don't think we would've gotten all those four boxes. And we definitely would've made things worse for Alice if you haven't reeled us back in."

IF sniffed. "You guys..."

"So, what we're basically saying is, you don't need to apologize to us, Iffy! We're friends, after all! We win or lose together!" Neptune said happily.

"Yeah" Sora nodded. "Friends rely on each other. There's no need for favors or anything like that."

"What they said!" Goofy agreed.

"We rely on you, IF" Donald stated. "So, learn to rely on us too!"

"We're a party, Iffy!" Compa reminded her close friend. "All for one and one for all, right?"

"Everyone..."

IF let the tears and snot flow out of her face, allowing Compa to wipe them off with her handkerchief.

"Look at me. Crying out over something like that. I must look so pathetic."

"Yeah!" Neptune said, putting her hands on the back of her head. "Really pathetic."

"Neptune..." Donald scolded.

"But you were willing to share your troubles with us." the girl continued. "Nothing wrong with that!"

Sora nodded. "So, watch over us, IF. We'll watch each other's backs. It's what friends do!"

"And if you still feel bad about yourself" Compa said, placing a comforting hand on IF's own. "Strive to be better. We'll help each other get better, too!"

IF sniffed, wiping the last snot coming out of her nose. "Yeah. Thanks, guys. Thanks a lot"

As the party headed back, the guild agent felt her chest feeling lighter, as the value of trust enriched her own heart. For a person like her, who kept her feet firmly on the ground, she felt that she has become like the wind for the first time.

A gust of wind that blows the way forward for her friends...

NEPSTATION

Neptune: You're watching Nepstation, the first and only stop for the latest world buzz! Today, we're here with a different guest! Say hello to everyone!

Broccoli: Hello, nyu! My name is Broccoli! Remember, Broccoli! Not Puchiko!

Neptune: Oh, Puchiko! You're such a kidder!

Broccoli: I'm not, nyu!

Neptune: Anyway, since we're live, let's give you the latest news!

Broccoli: Why is she the hostess again, nyu?

---

an image of a castle appeared, with numerous holes appearing in front of it's yard

Neptune: First up, mysterious holes have appeared around a certain castle garden! Latest reports said that the residing family's little girl was last seen around said garden diving into one of said holes.

the image changes to that of a blonde girl with her face obscured by blurs

Neptune: Wherever she may be, we here at Nepstation pray for the swift recovery of said girl.

Broccoli: And an advisory to everyone. If you see something mysterious, do not interact with them without proper advisement, nyu! Curiosity is said to kill cats, you know?

Neptune: Hm-hm! Speaking of cats...

---

an image of a pink striped cat and a scared woman wearing a peach sweater appeared. Her eyes were crossed out

Neptune: There have been recent reports of mysterious talking cats lingering across a strange forest. One is said to be a disembodied head, speaking riddles that drove people mad.

Broccoli: We have an insider from a certain nurse who was walking around the area, nyu. She said 'NO TO FREAKY KITTYS! I NEVER WANTED TO ENTER THIS FOREST AGAIN!'

Neptune: Oof. That weird kitty head sure spooked her something fierce, huh?

Broccoli: That was not even the worst of it, nyu.

Neptune: It wasn't!?

---

a blurred image of a black cat appeared

Broccoli: Nope. There was a case from Witness AK, who said 'This black cat keeps telling me to go to bed early. It's really obnoxious! Also, he insists that he's not a cat, but I really doubt it.'

Neptune: Man, I'd hate to have my late-night gaming sessions be interrupted by something called sleep!

Broccoli: That is terrible for your health, nyu. Just be sure to take a cat nap every now and again, okay?

Neptune: Okay, okay. Enough about kitties. Let's head to our last headline!

---

an image of a messy table, filled with ruined delicacies, appeared onscreen

Broccoli: We have recent reports that a party was recently raided by mysterious card soldiers. When we interviewed the partygoers, they go to say things like 'The Queen is a selfish witch!' and 'We were just having an unhappy time! What did we do wrong?'

Neptune: Wow, are we really discussing about a turf war in this show?

Broccoli: Maybe, but no matter the case, always remember to party moderately, lest all your happiness in the future will all go down the drain, nyu!

Neptune: Uh, I think we're getting off-topic now.

Broccoli: Whatever do you mean, nyu? This show is chaotic, so I may as well lend to the vibe, nyu.

Neptune: Hey, hey, hey! We're a news show, Puchiko! We provide the latest buzz to all the worlds out there! We are trusted and fair!

Histoire: Neptune, we're running out of time. Please wrap it up!

Neptune: Oh, what is this!? A mismanaged award show!?

Histoire: Neptune, please calm do-

WE ARE EXPERIENCING TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES, PLEASE STAND BY

Sora: Okay, so since the host is out, I'll close us out. Let's read some of your reviews first.

Sora: Wait, this script’s for the other site! What am I supposed to read for this one!?

Neptune: I got you, buck-o!

Sora: Gah! Neptune!? Are you okay now?

Neptune: *sighs* Yeah. Sorry for the outburst. Couldn’t help it back there. Anyway, let’s talk about something here.

Sora: What will we talk about?

Neptune: Anything! How about...oh, the **World Order** our royal duck's talking about?

the words World Order appears onscreen

Sora: Okay then, what's so important about that?

Neptune: Well, basically, the Worlds out there have been living in relative peace, each with their set of rules and regulations. Since we're all outsiders, we can't mess around too much in their worlds, be it who rules in it, what laws they established, all that kinda stuff.

Sora: I see...

Neptune: Though as this chapter showed, sometimes you gotta step up the plate, especially when the bad guys like the Heartless show up and start wrecking the place. These guys don't care about the World Order one whit and that's bad!

Sora: *nods* I'm starting to get it.

Neptune: Oh yeah, according to the duck, sometimes it means that we gotta blend in the world so they won't notice we're outsiders at first glance. That's not gonna happen in every world, but it's something to keep in mind.

Sora: So...we're gonna look different in some worlds?

Neptune: Yup, yup! Ooooohhhh, just thinking about how we're gonna look in some worlds is getting me excited~!

Sora: Good to know you're keeping up!

Neptune: I gotta be in this world-touring adventure! It's not everyday I get to travel to places based on Disney films, you know?

Sora: Haha! So, you say! Anyway, that's all from us here at Nepstation.

Neptune: So, from all of us here at Nepstation...

Neptune and Sora: See you next time!

Chapter 4: Chapter 3: Road (Trial) to a Hero

Chapter Summary

> The party's next stop is at the majestic Olympus Coliseum, where dreams of heroism and glory are realized, from wandering Drifters to aspiring adventurers!

Traverse Town – First District

"So, you found yourself a gummi piece, huh?" Cid said, inspecting the green gummi piece Sora and his party found in Wonderland. "Lookin' at a glance, this is no doubt a special thing."

"Think you can get it to work?" Sora asked.

"Could take a while" the engineer answered. "Need to study the thing, check for compatibility, all that techy stuff you won't really get."

"Hey!" the boy felt offended! He's not dumb!

"Well, you got me on that!" Neptune, on the other hand, has little to no shame in admitting her flaws.

"C'mon, Neptune" Sora deflated.

Cid laughed. "Alright, I'll get started on this thing, ASAP. I'll call your guild pal up once I'm done."

"You got it!" Neptune nodded as the engineer went off to work.

"We're back!"

The rest of the party came back. Donald and Compa, in particular carry bags of supplies with them.

"Welcome back" Sora greeted the party. "How'd it go?"

"We got all the supplies we need!" Compa said proudly. "We're good to go!"

"We just got back from Artisan" IF reported. "She handed me more of my old phones she modified in case we run into other Drifters"

"Findin' other Drifters, hmmm" Goofy wondered. "Was that the favor that Artisan asked from you?"

The guild agent nodded. "That's right. She only got one modified before we left last time, and it was a test run of sorts. Once we called up Broccoli, Artisan felt confident that the rest of the modified phones will work."

"You got more than one of them!?" Donald shouted.

IF snickered, turning back to show her belt filled with numerous phones of differing colors. "Behold! My innumerable companions who remained with me even as I Drifted here into the unknown!"

The boys looked in awe at the numerous devices kept nicely tucked around her belt.

"All of those..." Sora started.

"Are yours!?" Donald finished.

"That sure is a lot of 'em..." Goofy commented.

Compa, for her part, just giggled at the sight.

"Look at that!" Neptune guffawed. "Iffy's cellphone addiction is actually helping us big time!"

"Don't call it like that, Nep-Nep..." the nurse scolded the female Keyblade wielder.

"So, what about the gummi part?" the royal wizard asked the two.

"Oh, Cid said he'll examine it" the boy with the key informed them. "It'll take a while though"

"In that case, why don't we head off to another world in the meantime?" Neptune suggested. "It'll be better than waiting around all day."

"Making good use of our time, eh?" IF said, tucking herself into her coat. "Never thought a good idea came from your brain, Nep"

The girl looked proud though. "Hey, I can be smart and think of cool plans if I want to. It's just easier to just swing at things first, y'know?"

"That's an unhealthy line of thought..." Donald murmured as he shook his head.

"But, sure" the guild agent agreed. "Besides, Cid also knows my cell number, so he'll hit me up for updates."

"Yeah. That's what he said" Sora agreed.

"No more complaints?" Neptune pointed forward. "Then let's sally forth, my friends!"

Olympus Coliseum – Entrance

Upon entry, the party took a deep breath as they bore witness to the majestic arena entrance graced by the Greek Pantheon, greeted by the sounds of triumphant horns. The two giant golden statues of gladiators crossing swords gazed down upon the giant door, beheld by painted lightning from above.

"Wow!" Compa said in awe. "This looks like a place above the clouds!"

"It definitely feels like we're up in the clouds" Goofy thought aloud as he looked to the clouds forming just out of the windows.

"An arena constructed above the heavens..." Neptune suddenly started to narrate. "A battlefield where warriors across the land clash for the prestige and favor of the gods themselves! This is the truth of the Coliseum!"

Everyone around her sweatdropped.

"Well, that would be really cool" Sora said, scratching his cheek. "Why don't we go check it out then?"

"Not like there's anything else to do here..." Donald said as the party continued forward.

Olympus Coliseum – Foyer

As they enter the small lobby, they are greeted by the sight of a tiny man with small red horns and a small tail to boot, tidying up a board near the entrance to the arena.

"Um..." Sora attempted to approach the tiny man...

"Good timing" the man said without looking back. "Give me a hand, will ya?"

He pointed to the large square pedestal on the side. "Move that pedestal over there for me. I gotta spruce this place up for the gaaaaaames!"

"What's he on about?" Neptune wondered.

"Dunno, but we may as well help him out" Goofy suggested.

And so, the party tried to move the pedestal out...

"Hrkkkk..." Sora struggled.

And they tried...

"Grrrrr...Move!" Neptune complained.

And they tried...

"Hrrrrrr!" Goofy tried to push

"This thing won't budge..." Donald murmured.

And they kept trying...

"Ooooohhhh!" IF exclaimed.

"Move...please!" Compa whimpered.

But they could not even budge the pedestal!

"It's way too heavy!" Sora reported back to the tiny goat man.

"What!? Too heavy?" the goat man shouted. "Since when have you been such a little-"

But as he turned to speak to his requested, he deflated.

"Oh. Wrong guy. What're you doing here?" the tiny man demanded as he jumped down where he was standing on. "This here's the world-famous Olympus Coliseum-heroes only!"

He ends up power-walking straight up to Donald, scaring the duck back. "And I got my hands full preparing for the games. So run along, pip-squeaks."

His demands were not that well met, judging by Sora and Neptune's pouting faces.

The goatman placed his hands to his sides. "Look, it's like this."

"Heroes come from all over to fight ferocious monsters right here in the Coliseum" the tiny man began his pitch, walking around.

"You got heroes standing right in front of you!" Donald complained as he crossed his arms.

"Yup!" Goofy played along, putting each of his hands on Sora and Neptune's shoulders. "These two are real heroes chosen by the Keyblade!"

"And we're real heroes, too!" Compa chimed along.

"More like heroes in the making, but hey..." IF shrugged.

"Heroes?" said goatman pointed at the two Keyblade wielders. "Those runts!?"

He eventually started laughing out loud, as if he was told a cosmic level joke.

"What's so funny?" Sora boasted. "We've fought a bunch of monsters!"

"Yeah!" Neptune gasped in annoyance. "Besides, have you even seen our stats, goatman!? We're probably WAY stronger than you!"

But he kept on laughing. As he stopped, however, he tries to push the pedestal from before.

"Hey, if you can't even move this..."

And he tried...

"...you can't call yourself..."

And he kept trying, even as Sora and Neptune crossed their arms under the gaze of their companions...

"...a hero!"

Eventually, he got tuckered out from moving the pedestal.

"Okay, so it takes more than brawn." he relented as he got up. "Well, well, let's see what you can do."

Olympus Coliseum – Arena

"The rules are simple, kiddos." the goatman, who introduced himself as Phil, trainer of heroes, stated. "Break all the barrels I placed over there. I'll decide if you've got what it takes based on how fast and how well you runts do!"

"Hoo boy!" Neptune cheered as she rubbed her hands. "This is going to be great!"

"What's gotten you so excited?" IF wondered.

"Don't you know, Iffy?" the girl said. "Training montages are one of the key to success for heroes!"

The guild agent shrugged. "If you say so..."

And so, the training trials began...

Phil's Assessment – Sora

First off, is that kid with the giant key. He seemed to perform well enough. Got the muscle and brains to be clever in a fight and has that competitive spirit, but he's clearly not been out enough to know real danger. And if he has, then he hasn't known enough. He could benefit a lot from my coaching, though.

Phil's Assessment – Neptune

Next up is the other kid in the parka. Unlike the last kid with the key, she's all about muscle and being a big show-off. Despite that, she's actually quite tough as nails. Makes me wonder if she's actually one of the goddesses who fell from Olympus and lost her memory...Nah, that'd be impossible.

Phil's Assessment – Donald

As for the duck, well, he's got the magic know-how for sure. But you'd expect mages to be disciplined and focused. Him? He's a hot-head, plain and simple. He keeps this up, he's gonna roast himself well-done before he regains control, but hey, I don't train wizards, so what do I know?

Phil's Assessment – Goofy

The walking dog...Hoo boy, where do I begin? He's pretty much the personification of clumsy luck. He sets up a plan to knock out six barrels with one, he ends up dealing with ten, along with the crates set on the side. Honestly, I wonder how his party lasted that long with him in their party...or how much shorter they would've lasted without him on it...

Phil's Assessment – IF

Now for the girl in blue. She's pretty much what you call the reliably average package. Decent magic. Good physical prowess. Decent head on her shoulders. You name it. She's got it. Although, those weird chants for her spells can be a bit of a turn off for some people, but if you've got the taste for them, more power to you.

Phil's Assessment – Compa

Last up is the nurse lady...Okay, why does the nurse have to get out to the field!? Shouldn't they normally be staying behind the lines so they can treat the wounded then? And what type of healer goes out there fighting with a large syringe!? Is her head okay? Did she suffer brain damage as a baby? I honestly worry about her state of mind more than her fighting capabilities...

Olympus Coliseum – Foyer

Eventually, the trials ended, and the results...

"Well, you runts ain't half bad..." Phil admitted.

"See!" Neptune boasted.

"Looks like we're headed for the games!" Sora said excitedly.

"Afraid not!"

But they were turned down!

"What!?" Donald said in shock.

"W-Why not!?" Compa demanded.

"We cleared through those training trials, didn't we!?" IF similarly demanded.

"Two words!" Phil even raised two fingers for that. "You guys ain't heroes!"

"Come on!" Sora complained as Donald deflated.

"Yeah!" Neptune also complained. "That wasn't even two words!"

"He said four" Goofy counted the words.

"Five, actually" IF corrected. "Ain't means are not"

"Do we really need to point that out?" Compa said playing the straight man this time.

"Wanna become a real hero?" Phil produced something from his pocket. "Start by mastering this spell."

He then handed it to Sora, the sight of which is familiar to the party.

It was another Spell Orb!

"A lightning bolt?" the nurse noticed.

"Looks like a Thunder spell this time" the guild agent said.

"Okay, enough gawking here!" Phil shooed the party away. "Now beat it! I got games to prepare!"

Olympus Coliseum – Entrance

"Stupid Phil and his stupid games and his stupid standards and his stupid-"

"Nep, complaining isn't going to change things, y'know." IF chided the complaining girl.

"But it one of my DREAMS to become a hero!" Neptune complained to Iffy. "To save people's lives and see their happy faces! To be rewarded with copious amounts of pudding and cheers! Doesn't that sound wonderful?"

"I totally agree!" Sora cheered. "Beating up tough monsters, helping folks out and seeing them happy in thanks! That's what heroes are all about, right!?"

"Those two are completely gung-ho about this, huh?" the guild agent sighed.

"It is good to have dreams and aspirations like that!" Compa said with a smile.

"That's great and all..." Donald started. "But we can't even sign up for the games thanks to that..."

"Stubborn old goat, I got that right?"

Everyone turned around to see a pale blue man in a black rob with a...blue flame for hair approaching them.

"Who are you?" Donald pointed a finger at him.

"What do you want with us?" IF crossed her arms, prepping her qatars silently.

"Whoa, hold your blue balls for a moment there." the strange man spoke rather quickly. "Wait, let me guess. You want to enter the games, right?"

Approaching the pair of Keyblade wielders...

"Well, I got a little something for you!"

...the man produced a ticket on his hand.

"A pass?" Sora skimmed through the ticket.

"Entry to the Pantheon Foundation Preliminary Tournament." Neptune read through the pass. "Up to Seven Entrants Allowed."

"Hey!" Donald jumped in joy. "We can sign up now!"

"Now we can show that goat who isn't hero material!" Compa cheered.

"Guys, I don't think we should just accept gifts from strangers..." IF tried to be the voice of reason. "That guy clearly screams 'suspicious'"

The man in question just shrugged at the remark.

"Aw, don't be such a debby downer, Iffy!" Neptune complained.

"I'm just saying..." IF tried to dissuade them...

"Not listening! Lalalalala!"

But Neptune was having none of it, blocking her own ears in protest.

"C'mon!" Sora rallied. "Let's go sign up for the games!"

"Yeah!" Donald and Compa followed along as the four of them ran back to the Foyer.

The guild agent groaned. "It's like handling a bunch of rowdy children..."

"I know how that feels..." Goofy patted IF on her shoulder. "Times like these, you gotta be patient with 'em and guide 'em through their mistakes."

IF raised an eyebrow. "Speaking from experience?"

"You could say that!" Goofy said cheerily. "Now let's go after them."

The guild agent could only sigh. "Dealing with that girl in particular is going to be grating on my nerves..."

He and IF followed along the rest of the group while the pale blue man watched.

"Sheesh. Couldn't believe I encountered more yutzes' with those keys" he complained. "Not to mention those Drifters too." he sighed. "Well, this would make for a good laugh at least..."

Olympus Coliseum – Foyer

"Hey, how'd you get this?" Phil asked, inspecting the pass.

"Well, you see..." Neptune started but IF slammed her mouth shut.

"Why are you shutting her mouth like that, Iffy?" Compa wondered.

"This deal is shady enough as it is" IF whispered. "If we don't want to leave with these two crying, we gotta play along."

"Can we enter the games now?" Donald asked impatiently.

"Well...I guess so" Phil said. "Nep Team Epic, right?"

"That's right!" Neptune affirmed with gusto.

"Wait!" IF complained. "Are we really going in with that name!?"

"Alright!" Phil ignored her. "We start with the preliminaries!"

"Sweet!"

"Awesome!"

Neptune and Sora high-fived each other.

"Welp" Donald sighed. "That's that"

Goofy just chuckled.

"But first!" Phil suddenly said. "We gotta clean up after the exhibition match coming up. After that, we can proceed with the preliminary tournament!"

"Exhibition match?" Compa asked.

"It was shown on the board outside" IF answered, pointing her thumb behind her. "Rena Bright vs. Cloud Strife, right?"

"Yeah." Phil said. "One of the gods in Olympus organized that match for some reason. Now come on."

Oly*mpus Coliseum – Arena (Exhibition Match)*

"This is Nep Commentaries, coming to you live from Olympus Coliseum!" Neptune announced on the open cone she's holding on, sitting with a table draped in white cloth in front of her. "Today, a fierce exhibition match will be held, requested by the gods of Olympus themselves. I, Neptune, will be commentating on the match today."

She then introduced her fellow commentator. "Right beside me is our super nurse, Compa. Be a dear and say hi to our audience!"

"Hello, everyone!" Compa waved. "I am Compa. I'm training to be a nurse, but please try not to get hurt too bad. I'm not a full-fledged nurse after all."

Elsewhere, on the podium, the rest of the party simply sat as they waited for the match to begin.

"What are those two doing?" Donald asked.

"Nep-Nep did mention she wanted to 'liven up' the match today..." Goofy asnwered.

"Makes you wonder where she got all that stuff..." Sora commented.

IF just sighed. "I just hope those two still have enough energy for our match later today..."

"Now, let's get to our contestants..."

To the left of the arena, a girl with red hair tied to a ponytail by a white ribbon, bright brown eyes, wearing a white tank top draped by a short red jacket and a cyan scarf, and matching short pants and boots as well. On one of her fingerless gloves, she holds a simple longsword.

"On the left, we have a girl ready for her next adventure, a young soul who shines as brightly as the sun. She and her sword are here to deliver some de-licious ul-tra-vio-lence! Give it up for Renaaaaaa BRIGHT!"

The female contestant felt sweat dropping from her head. "I'm not that violent a person, but I will do my best for this match!"

To the right of the arena, a man with spiky blonde hair, blue eyes, wearing a red cape draped all over his person, with black boots and pants as well. Hanging on his back is a bandaged broadsword, larger than the usual variant.

"On the right, we have a man draped in mystery, a soldier who doesn't seem interested in many things. With a Buster Sword that was passed down and an outfit that looks better fit for a coffin-sleeping vampire, he is ready to show his stuff! Say hello to Clooouuuuuuud STRIFE!"

The man looked around the area with general disinterest, bringing out his giant sword. "Let's just get this over with..."

"Let's have a fair match!" the girl bowed in courtesy.

"Alright! Our contestants have exchanged words!" Neptune announced.

"It is almost time for the match to begin!" Compa turned to the goatman on the scene. "Phil, if you would?"

The trainer stepped up inbetween the contestants. "Alright. Remember, this may be an exhibition match, but the winner of this round will participate in the finals of the preliminaries coming up in a while, so do your best out there, ya hear!?"

"Wak!" Donald yelled. "We're fighting the winner after this!?"

"I didn't hear anything about this!" Sora complained. "Did that board say anything about that, IF?"

"It did" the guild agent nodded. "It was a small print there, but it said so."

"Then that means we gotta watch 'em closely, huh?" Goofy wondered.

IF nodded. "If nothing else, we can study who our potential opponent will be and how they will fare against us. Depending on how strong they are, even the six of us could get overwhelmed."

Sora then stared at the arena with great interest. "Then we gotta watch closely, right?"

Donald and Goofy nodded.

"Okay! Ready your weapons, contestants..."

The two contestants readied their weapons as Phil raised his hand...

"...FIGHT!"

The two then charged in, sword clashing against sword.

"And they're off! The match is starting to heat up, folks! Don't walk away from your seats because this may shape up to be the match of the eons!" Neptune said.

After their clash, the two combatants backed off. Rena used the chance to light her longsword with flames.

"Try this on for size! **CRIMSON GALE**!"

"And Rena unleashes her blazing hot attack!" Neptune commentated as the female combatant spun around and unleashed a wave of fire against Cloud.

Bracing himself, he blocks the incoming attack and his sword thrums with energy.

"Here I go..."

Making a short leap, he spun vertically and launched a **Braver** attack against his defenseless opponent!

"Urk!"

"Oof! And she is Staggered!" Neptune felt that one. "Cloud took the brunt of her attack and countered with one of his own! How is she feeling, Compa?"

"She's feeling that one, but she ain't out of the fight yet!"

Just as the nurse said, Rena got up, keeping a tight grip on her weapon.

"Not bad..." the girl praised her opponent. "You are quite tough."

"Hmph" Cloud deflected.

"But I'm not done!"

Rena charged and launched a barrage of slashes, forcing Cloud to parry her attacks.

"And now, this!"

With swift movements, Rena unleashes attacks so swift that Cloud could barely see her!

"**SHADOW STRIKE**!"

"Rena with the comeback!" Neptune yelled. "She's striking her foe with such ferocious speed out there! This must be her fabled sword style!"

"That's right" Compa brought out a piece of paper. "It is her Eight Leaves, One Blade Style, a swordstyle that was being taught here since a decade ago."

Finishing her attack, Rena then launched four rapid strikes at her foe.

"Feel my **AXLE RUSH**!"

"That the best you can do?"

Charging up his sword, Cloud slams it down, unleashing three blue beams in front of him, forcing the female contestant to immediately guard the attack.

"Oh! That's his **Blade Beam** attack!" Neptune shouted as the two contestants continued their fight. "Cloud is giving her no chances to recover!"

"This match is heating up!" Compa commentated. "Will our victor be decided soon!?"

After a series of sword clashes, Cloud looked at his opponent, who is started to feel out of breath.

"..."

"I...still...got one more ace up my sleeve..."

Standing up, Rena took a deep breath, and then, an aura of flame erupted around her.

"**BURNING HEART**!"

"Oh!? Rena is unleashing a powerful aura!" Neptune said. "Could she be prepping her ultimate move!?"

"This is all I could muster now..." the longsword user then wreathes her sword in flames. "This may not compare to my predecessor, but I won't throw in the towel here!"

Cloud readies himself for her last attack.

"**Fifth Form...FLAME SLASH**!"

Unleashing two powerful strikes, Rena steps back and...

"STRIKE!"

...slashes through her opponent, leaving a burst of flame in her wake.

"That was one hot attack!" Compa shouted. "But will Cloud be able to answer back!?"

Rena looked back to see the flames receding, and her opponent's clothes looking a little singed. Even his spiky hair has some ash spots on it!

"That all?"

She looked at him with bewilderment! Even though he took very noticeable damage, Cloud is still able to stand unflinching.

"All right then."

Spinning his sword, he readies his last attack.

"Let's dance!"

Cloud then charges at the defenseless Rena, striking with several slashes, and then ending it with an upward slash towards the sky, throwing his opponent back!

"Ahhhhhhhhhh!"

After a few seconds of not getting up, the match has ended.

"Aaaaaaaandddd that's game!" Neptune announced as the crowd's cheering intensified. "With a powerful **Ascension**, he has taken the title of Exhibition Match Winner! Three cheers for Clouuuuuuuuuuuddddddd STRIFE!"

Compa, on the other hand, has left the table and proceeded to lift the defeated Rena out of the arena to get her wounds treated.

Neptune took the chance to approach Cloud. "So, Mr. Strife. Any comments from our winner today?"

"Not interested."

Flipping his spiky hair, he turned around and left without another word.

"Dude, that was just rude!" Neptune complained. "Oh well, that'll be it from Nep Commentaries, but stay tuned, because the Olympic Preliminary Tournament is about to begin later today, and yours truly will be there with her cool friends to dominate the competition. Toodles!"

Olympus Coliseum – Foyer

"Here you go" Compa finished bandaging the injured Rena. "Try not to move too much or you'll open your wounds again."

"Sorry about that." the bandaged girl scratched her head with her bandaged left hand. "I was so caught up in the fight that I ended up exerting myself a bit too much."

She sighed. "Guess I'm not signing up for those Prelims like this..."

"Hey there!" Neptune chimed in as she and the rest of the party enters. "You doin' alright?"

"You're the commentator from earlier, right?" the injured girl asked.

"Oh, that was just a side gig" Neptune deflected. "It just sprung up to me in a sec."

"Why does her mind have to be so..." Donald facepalmed. "...random?"

IF sighed. "I've been trying to figure that out myself..."

"Why are you all here?" Rena's eyes bugged out from all the sudden visitors.

"We're here to prepare for the tournament!" Donald answered.

"There is no other place left to prepare but here" Goofy remarked.

"Well, they didn't think to put an infirmary here..." Compa said. "So, I brought her to this room instead."

"Well, all that aside" Neptune turned to the Eight Leaves user. "You were really awesome out there! You didn't give an inch even when your back was to the wall!"

"Haha" Rena chuckled. "I mean, I haven't even finished my training before I got the invitation for the exhibition match, so that wasn't my full strength, I assure you."

"Really!?" Sora asked, surprised. "But you were quite tough out there..."

She chuckled again. "You think so? That other guy's attacks were quite painful..."

"Hey!"

Phil stepped into the room.

"You rookies got five minutes before the prelims start!" he announced in the room. "Better make it hasty. Those weird entrants ain't gonna wait forever."

And then he left to finish arena cleanup.

"Looks like we're up" IF beckoned the party. "Let's not mess this up."

"Uh, we gotta fight that Cloud feller at the finals, right?" Goofy asked.

Neptune nodded. "If what the goat said is true, then yep."

"He's gonna be real tough..." Compa said with worry.

"Aw, phooey!" Donald said. "We're heroes, guys. We can do this!"

Sora pumped his fist. "Yeah! We got this!"

"I'll cheer you guys on from the stands!" Rena said. "You all can do it!"

Olympus Coliseum – Arena

"Okay, what the heck!?"

As the group rested near the stands, IF was raising her voice in complaints.

"No kidding!" Neptune was mad too! "The author skipped our preliminary mob fights! C'mon!"

"I mean..." Compa said. "Those are just mob fights. Unless it's a boss fight, I don't think Mr. Author's gonna write a lot of those..."

"Not that!" IF screamed. "The Heartless! Why are Heartless signed up for this tournament!?"

"Don't look at me!" Phil shook his head. "I check the lists, sure, but the gods above got the final say, and what they say goes."

The guild agent facepalmed. "So, what? They're just gonna let these freaks run amok around here? People could end up getting their hearts consumed by them, for crying out loud!"

"Hey, we get weird monsters like them all the time here in Olympus, like the ogres, the mighty Cerberus, even the bloodthirsty Hydra!" Phil reassured her. "Why, ten years ago, we got a bunch of weird creatures like them signed up for tournaments too. They vanished afterwards, though..."

The guild agent sighed. "That's still way too careless of you..."

"It's how things have been here in Ancient Greece" Phil shrugged. "Sure, people still panic when monsters like those show up, but we're under the protection of the Pantheon led by the almighty Zeus and the gods of Olympus. Not to mention there's other folks who protect us like Hercules, the up and coming hero!"

"There's other heroes like him around here too!" Rena chirped. "Like the legendary adventurer Falcom!"

"Legendary?" Goofy started.

"Adventurer?" Donald continued.

"Falcom?" Compa finished.

"That chick?" Phil's eyes bugged out. "I heard she's been making rounds all throughout Greece before she left beyond the sea. Practically nobody around HASN'T heard about her!"

"That's right!" Rena said proudly. "A proud adventurer who aided those who needed help and has defeated several foes, from monsters to evil warlocks and the like with her own unique sword style! She was a real legend in the making!"

"Wow!" Sora said in amazement. "She sounds so cool!"

"And I'm guessing that the sword style she uses is the one you're practicing right now, right?" IF guessed.

"Haha. Yup!" the girl in the ponytail chuckled. "I heard that the style was taught from a once-impoverished training ground that was about to be closed down. But then she came and offered aid to them. Next she knew, she was teaching aspiring pupils the Eight Leaves One Blade Style. Or so I heard."

"So, she must still be teachin' there, right?" Goofy asked.

Rena shook her head. "She only stayed for a while before she left again. From what I heard, she said that she can't stay in one place for too long. Said she was more comfortable walking around the world as she goes."

"Man" Neptune said. "This Falcom lady's got quite the wanderlust, huh?"

Rena nodded. "That's why I want to get stronger, so I can go around the world like she does!"

"Woah!" Neptune gasped. "The wanderlust sure is strong in this lady too..."

She scratched her cheek. "I sure hope so. Maybe, one day, I'll bump into her and we can tell each other all the adventures we've been through!"

"That's a fantabulous idea!" Neptune cheered. "We're rooting for ya, Falcom Jr.!"

His party nodded.

"Falcom Jr.?" Rena laughed. "Haha! C'mon, I haven't finished my training yet. Still, thanks for the vote of confidence! For that, I'll give you all mine as well! You can win this tournament! I know it!"

Goofy laughed. "With support like that, we can't let her down now, huh?"

Donald nodded. "You bet! We'll be heroes for sure!"

Sora chuckled. "Yeah! Let's win this, guys!"

"YEAH!"

Meanwhile, Cloud looked at his competition as they prepared for the next round.

"They've got quite big hopes, huh..." he muttered to himself. "I'd hate for those to be dashed down..."

He turned around and left the space he was in...

Olympus Coliseum – Arena (Preliminary Finals)

"And now, the final round!"

The party braced themselves as their opponent enters the arena.

"It's all come to this, huh?" IF said, her qatars at the ready.

"We've combed through all the Mr. Heartless' like butter!" Compa boasted, her syringe primed.

"We win this, and we'll become heroes!" Donald cheered, his grip on his staff unloosened.

"One step closer, anyway!" Goofy a-hyucked, his shield still in good condition.

"With everything riding on this, we can't afford to lose now!" Neptune boasted, her Keyblade firm in her hands. "You ready, Sora?"

Sora nodded, his Keyblade at the ready. "Ready as I'll ever be."

Their opponent, the enigmatic Cloud, stopped to stare at his competition for a bit.

"The last round of the prelims is about to begin!" Phil announced as he raised his hand...

"On your marks..."

"Get set..."

"...FIGHT!"

As soon as the match began, Cloud opted to launch dash attacks against the party's two backline members!

"He's aiming for us, Donald!" Compa warned with whitened eyes.

"Just keep running!" Donald yelled as he casts **Fira** spells against Cloud. "Cover us, guys!"

"I gotcha!"

Goofy attempted to charge straight at the caped warrior, but he deftly dodged to the side, causing the dog to stumble and fall.

"Not one more step!" Neptune took the chance to charge. "**CROSS COMBI-**"

But Cloud raised his stance, and deflected her incoming attack with a heavy swing of his own, countering Neptune out of her combo before she could land a hit!

"Hey!" the girl complained. "You can't just block me out of my combos!"

"Then go get help"

Not listening to her complaining, Cloud launches a **Braver** straight at the female Keyblade wielder.

"Aw, crud!"

"Neptune!" Rena cried. "Watch out!"

Before Cloud could land his blow, something shot him from behind. Neptune rolled out of the way as the caped man tried to get up.

"...What the...?"

Cloud could barely try to move.

"I got him **Paralyzed**!" Compa cried out with some yellow liquid leaking out of her syringe. "Hit him now!"

"I got this!"

Sora charged in, unleashing combo after combo as Cloud could barely parry the boy's attacks.

"Now eat this!" the boy then charged his Keyblade with **Fire** magic. "**FLAMES**!"

"Ghhhh!"

"INCOMING!"

Cloud looked to his right and suddenly found himself heavily pushed by a charging dog with a shield!

As he is backed into a corner, he finds himself surrounded by Sora, Neptune and IF, all attempting to attack him.

"I'm not done!"

He then charged up with an aura of red electricity, sending his attackers back!

"Uh-oh!"

"Not good!"

"Everyone, brace yourselves!"

Cloud's assault was relentless. Thanks to the power boost, he floated around like a bat searching for prey, striking against anyone unlucky to be in his path.

"This is not good..." Rena commented gravely, as she saw the party being mowed down one by one by the empowered warrior.

Phil's own nervous nail-biting isn't really helping either...

"This is bad..." IF muttered, keeping her guard up as she sees Compa being chased around, and Donald is already KO'ed. Sora and Neptune are already running out of breath from all the running and dodging as well. "He's going to pick us off at this rate..."

As she was busy contemplating, her opponent flew to her back, ready to strike.

"Shoot!"

"Time to go"

However, someone came in and blocked the hit, sending the both of them back.

"You okay?" It was Goofy, his shield looking all scratched up.

"Barely..." IF said, looking all beat up. "Sorry about that..."

Eventually, the caped man landed, seeing his competition on varying states of duress. This fight is just about over...

"Is that all?" Cloud charges up his Buster Sword, determined to end this fight. "Then allow me to put the **Finishing Touch**..."

"Not yet..."

Sora, using his Keyblade as an improvised stand, slowly gets up. "A hero...never gives up...not even 'till the end..."

Hearing this struck a small chord within the lost soldier.

"*Embrace your dreams*!"

"He's...right." Neptune, following his lead, stood up, tumbling a bit. "Heroes...ain't quitters. So...I'm not quitting now..."

"*You better not cry again, got it?*"

Eventually, one by one, the rest of the party gets up, ready to fight him again.

"Why...?" Cloud asked vainly. "Why do you keep standing? You're beat!"

"That's...because..." Compa started.

"...We're gonna be..." Goofy continued.

"...True Heroes!" Donald finished.

"...And heroes..." IF declared. "Would never...leave others alone..."

"*You'll come and save me, right?*"

Cloud shook his head, putting his all into his attack...

"Grrrrr..."

...But his moment was interrupted when a giant black paw stomped him into the ground.

"What the...!?" Rena shouted, noticing the giant monster on the arena.

The beast, with three heads, large teeth and menacing red eyes, let out a loud roar, ready to feast on it's prey.

"The Cerberus!?" Phil cried. "What's it doing all the way out here?"

Elsewhere, the man with blue flame snickered. "Well, them's the brakes, kiddos. Enjoy the little slaughter show, cuz I know I will!"

The three-headed beast attempted to lunge straight at the exhausted party...

"N-Nice Mr. Doggy..." Compa panicked.

...but their assault was stopped when a large, muscular man arrived at the scene, holding it back with sheer muscular strength.

"Herc!"

It was Hercules, the reigning champion, himself!

"Phil, get them out of here!"

"You heard him, kiddos!" the trainer urged the exhausted party.

"Let's go!" Rena shouted at them.

The party turned around and ran away, but as Sora neared the foyer...

"Where's Neptune?"

He then turned around and saw her running back for the unconscious Cloud!

"What are you doing?" Hercules asked the girl, still holding back the giant dog.

"Getting this guy out, duh!" Neptune attempted to lift the downed soldier on her shoulder. "Urk! If only he wasn't so big..."

However, she felt her shoulder lighten a bit. She turned to her left to notice Sora coming back to help her by lifting the unconscious Cloud on the other end.

"Need some help?" Sora grinned.

Neptune returned the grin. "Right back at ya!"

Walking fast, the two fled the scene with their competitor in tow.

"Those two..." Herc shook his head. "That was reckless of them...but still..."

The resident hero readied his stance, determined to defeat the terror in front of him.

"Least I don't have to hold back!"

Olympus Coliseum – Foyer

"Who was that?" Goofy asked Phil

"That was Hercules" the trainer managed to answer.

"The legendary hero himself?" Rena muttered. "What brings him here?"

"He wanted to go watch the matches, but he got called by his father Zeus over at Mount Olympus..." Phil answered.

"So, guy went over to see his pops, huh?" Neptune barely said, gasping for air.

"Wait, but Zeus is supposed to be the ruling god of this world, right?" Compa asked, treating Cloud's wounds.

"That's right" Donald answered.

"Which means that Herc over there's a..." IF thought aloud.

The boys bugged their eyes out over this revelation. "A GOD!?"

"Wouldn't you all believe it? Guy was as tough as a twig when I first met him..." Phil reminisced. "But now, he's gone the distance and became a local celebrity by beating up monsters like that on the regular."

"Wow!" Sora's eyes bugged out in amazement. "Now that's awesome-sauce!"

"Right!?" Neptune's own eyes were starry.

The guild agent sighed. "Nep's influence on Sora is starting to show now..."

Neptune did a couple of stretches before heading for the arena. Sora followed suit.

"Hey!" Phil shouted. "Where are you two twerps going?"

"Helping the hero out, obviously!" Sora said with a pumped fist.

"If we're gonna be heroes, we better learn from the best in the field, right?" Neptune grinned.

"So, let's go!"

And thus, the two ran off to the arena.

Donald sighed. "One of these days, those two will be the end of us..."

Goofy chuckled, getting his shield ready while the court wizard has his staff primed.

"Still, we can't let them any more injured than they already are!" Compa declared, her syringe ready for action.

"Agreed" IF sighed again, readying her qatars. "Besides, our match was interrupted. I don't think those two appreciate that little fact."

Phil could only feel a migraine coming as the rest of the party nonchalantly left for the arena.

"Why are they going out there like that!?"

Rena, however, chuckled as she thought back to the words they said. "A hero never gives up, no matter the odds, huh?"

She looked to the unconscious soldier. "I wonder if those words sparked something in you too..."

Olympus Coliseum – Arena

"Geez, is it me or this boy a lot tougher than last time?"

Hercules gazed upon the mighty Cerberus, readying a mighty dark breath attack, when...

"Stop right there!"

"We're taking you down!"

Sora and Neptune returned to the arena, their friends in tow.

"You guys!?" Hercules' eyes bugged out in surprise. "What are you all doing here?"

"What?" Neptune tilted her head. "We thought we could help you out a bit."

"A hero always extends a helping hand, right?" Sora said.

Hercules could only smile at the aid. "Appreciate it!"

Phil joined from the stands. "Alright, kiddos! I got only two words for ya! ATTACK!"

The Cerberus roared, advancing at the group slowly as it's three heads unleashed fireballs.

"He's shooting fire at us!" Compa shouted.

"Start bouncing them back at him!" IF instructed.

"You got it!" Neptune answered, wielding her Keyblade like a baseball player. "Time to batter up!"

One of the fireballs made it's way to the female Keyblade wielder, but she was primed and ready...

"FORE!"

...to deflect it back at the right head.

Sora and Goofy followed suit, deflecting it's fireballs back at the right and middle heads respectively.

"It's working!" Compa cheered.

But the celebrations stopped short as the Cerberus opted to bite in a frenzy.

"Eeeep!" the nurse screamed. "Mr. Doggy is getting angry!"

"Tch!" IF muttered. "Compa, get a shot ready! Goof, Nep, Herc, keep us safe. Donald, Sora, with me!"

The party got into formation, with three of them at the vanguard, and the rest of them at the rear. The rear guard readied their combined attack.

"Ready?"

With two nods, the rear guard unleashed a powerful lightning attack.

"O great gods, unleash thine anger from above...!"

"**THUNDER**!"

"**FURIOUS LIGHTNING**!"

The continuous roars of both thunder and beast rang throughout the arena. In the chaos, Cerberus stopped its biting frenzy as their mouths were filled with darkness.

"Oh no!" Hercules panicked. "It's going for a dark breath attack!"

He then charged forward to the beast!

"Herc!"

The legendary hero then jumped and grabbed the middle head, jamming it's mouth shut.

This, however, gave the beast an opening, as the other two heads stopped channeling darkness and attempted to attack Herc!

"No, you don't!"

Just as their bites are about to hit the hero, the Cerberus' attack was stopped by two swords-wielding fighters!

"Rena!"

"Cloud!"

"What are you waiting for!?" the caped soldier shouted.

"We got them! Attack now!" the young adventurer-to-be urged.

"You heard them!" Sora called his party. "Let's get him!"

"RIGHT!"

Compa leads the charge this time, firing off a powerful shot from her syringe.

"Mr. Hercules, please move!"

Hearing the nurse's request, he complied, but not without leaving a bruise on the giant dog's middle head.

"You should cool off, Mr. Doggy!"

The middle head is hit by the nurse's **Frozen Treats**, reeling from the coldness dealt to it.

"Time to get serious!" IF charged at the right head, held back by Cloud.

"Go for it!"

The blonde soldier hopped away, letting the guild agent unleash her fury right at the dog's right head!

"**HEAVEN DEMON**!"

A fury of ten quick slashes performed mid-air was unleashed by IF, bringing the right head reeling back as well.

"Let's get him, Goofy!" Donald shouted, mounted on the royal knight's shoulders.

"Full speed ahead!" Goofy charged forward with his shield, aiming for the left head.

"All yours!"

Seeing the incoming assault, Rena moved away, allowing the royal knight to bash the left head hard!

So hard, that he ended up knocking off Donald off of him...

"Gotcha!"

...But this was all according to their improvised plan, as the court wizard unleashed another **Thundara** spell straight against all three heads!

"It's down!" Cloud called as the beast fell down from the combined assault.

"Finish it, guys!" Rena cheered on.

Hercules looked to the two Keyblade wielders beside him. A young boy to his right and a young girl to his left.

It almost felt nostalgic for him, when he trained alongside a Keyblade Wielder and a once-fledgling adventurer a decade ago.

If only they could see him now...

"You guys ready?" Herc asked the two on his flanks.

"Ready!" Sora nodded.

"Whenever you are!" Neptune cheered.

Without another word, the three charged against the downed beast and unleashed their mightiest hits against it, defeating it once and for all.

"..."

The beast's three pairs of eyes closed as it fell into unconscious, signalling the heroes' victory!

"We did it!"

"Shalalala-lalala!"

"Now that's how it's done!"

Elsewhere, the man with blue flame is seen holding in his anger.

"I can't believe those louts could still stand up and beat that mutt!" he shouted. "Okay, Hades, calm down. You just need another plan. A better plan. One that will tip Zeus' little boy down his high pegasus for good. You just need to think better. Yeah, that's it."

His voice reverbed around the dark passageway as he retreated to the Underworld.

Olympus Coliseum – Foyer

"And thus, by the royal decree of Zeus, The God of Olympus, I dub thee junior heroes and confer upon thee full rights and privileges to participate in the games. Further-"

"Woahwoahwoah!" Neptune suddenly shouted, interrupting Phil's declaration. "What's the meaning of this!?"

"Yeah, what do you mean 'junior heroes'!?" Donald followed, similarly upset.

"You rookies still don't understand what it takes to be a true hero" the trainer snapped back.

"Even though we nearly won the prelims AND took down Mr. Doggy?" Compa asked sadly.

"Well, we are still exhausted from all that" Sora answered sheepishly.

"Not to mention, the prelim finals was technically interrupted" IF followed.

"Still, I don't get why Cloud decided to throw the match like that" Rena wondered. "He went to them, told Phil the match was theirs and when I asked the reason why, he just up and left."

"So, uhhhh" Goofy started. "What does it take to be a hero?"

"Well" Herc answered. "That's just something you'll have to find for yourselves. Just the way that I did"

"So, do we have to take journeys of self-discovery to find the answer or what?" Neptune wondered.

"No problems!" Sora exclaimed with a pumped fist. "We'll just start by proving ourselves in the games! We'll worry about that afterwards!"

"'Cept there ain't gonna be any games for a while" Phil rained on their parade. "Gotta clean up the mess that Underworld Hound left behind first."

"Well, poo!" the girl in the parka complained.

"That's alright" the boy, on the other hand, didn't mind. "We need to take a break anyway. We'll just come back once the mess is all cleaned up"

The party all left as the hero waved them goodbye.

"So, Herc" Phil asked his ward. "Think those runts will make hero material?"

He chuckled. "I'm sure. They just gotta go the distance and not lose their way."

"It ain't gonna be that easy, that's for sure" the trainer shook his head.

"Hey, it wasn't for me either" Herc boasted. "And look where I am now"

"Yeah, yeah, I know"

Olympus Coliseum - Entrance

"So, you sure that you'll stay behind, Rena?" IF asked the young adventurer, to which she nodded.

"Yeah. I told myself that I'm not going anywhere until I'm strong enough to leave and face the outside world" Rena answered. "Sorry about that."

The guild agent sighed. "No worries. We kinda expected you'd say that."

She then lent her a phone, an orange one.

"What's this?" Rena wondered, staring at the phone on her hands.

"It's a communication device" IF answered. "You can use that to keep in touch with us, even off-world."

"Really!?" Rena exclaimed. "That's really convenient."

"We're only to give these to fellow Drifters" Compa said. "Since we're trying to establish a communication network."

"So don't show that thing off to everyone else, got it!?" Donald said in a scolding tone. "Or else, the World Order will be compromised!"

The adventurer-to-be sweatdropped. World Order? "Um, sure. Whatever you say."

"He's serious about that." the guild agent rubbed her forehead. "Not to mention, we can't have other people steal or study our way of communication, so take extra care of that thing, got it?"

"Of course!" Rena raised her right hand. "I swear, on my pride as an adventurer-to-be!"

"Awwwwww, you can trust her, Iffy!" Neptune elbowed IF lightly. "She won't break your precious phone by accident!"

"Hey, accidents happen and it is REALLY hard to part with my babies, you know!?" IF complained.

"C-Calm down, Iffy" Compa tried to calm her guild friend down.

As the two began their usual tirade and the poor nurse stuck playing mediator, Sora noticed someone sitting near the entrance.

"Hey, Cloud" the boy called out to the brooding soldier. "Are you doing all right?"

"You don't look too good..." Rena said. "Should I call Compa?"

Cloud raised a hand. "It's fine. I'm just..."

The two tilted their heads in confusion.

"Say, I've been wondering" Sora asked. "Why did you go along with that weird fella anyway?"

"The one with blue flaming head you guys mentioned?" Rena asked, to which Sora nodded. "That guy seems like bad news though..."

"You don't have to remind us..." Sora deflated. "IF's been on our case about that ever since..."

Rena could only manage a laugh at that.

"I'm looking for someone" Cloud answered Sora's question. "Hades promised to help"

"Hades?" Goofy wondered.

"Must be the weirdo who gave us the pass" Donald answered.

"I tried to exploit the power of darkness" Cloud continued as he stood up. "But it backfired."

He looked up to the Olympian skies.

"I fell into darkness and I couldn't find the light."

"*Let him go!*"

"*I can't believe it...*"

"*We looked up to you, man!*"

"*What happened to your honor!?*"

"*You'll...be fine...Cloud...Tell Aerith and Tifa...I'm sorry...*"

"You'll find it"

Sora's words snapped Cloud out of his reverie.

"I'm searching too"

"For your light?" Cloud asked. Sora nodded.

"And not just me" the boy turned to Neptune, who is currently being chased around by IF after teasing her one too many times.

"You too, huh?" Rena mumbled.

The caped soldier then tossed an orb to the young Keyblade wielder, one with a red sword symbol on it.

"Don't lose sight of it"

He then made for the door and opened it...

"Hey, how about a rematch sometime?" Sora asked as he waved Cloud goodbye. "Fair and square, no dark powers involved!"

"I want one too!" Rena declared. "I'll get stronger and beat you too! To reach for my light! So please get stronger so you don't lose your way too!"

"Hmph" Cloud flipped his hair. "I'll think about it."

He then left the premises, continuing on his path.

"Hey! What's up over there?" Neptune approached the group, seeing the orb Sora has on his hands. "Woah, is that a free gift? Do I get one too!?"

"C'mon on, Nep" IF sighed. "Besides, that orb looks like a Skill Orb. I think only Sora can use that one though."

"No fair!" the female Keyblade wielder whined. "I want one too!"

"There, there, Nep-Nep" Compa patted Neptune's head.

As the party continued to talk among themselves, Rena could only smile as she looked up to the sky.

"Everyone's heading out on their own adventure..."

She then closed her eyes as she recalled something. Something someone once said to her when she was young.

"*Embrace your dreams. No matter what happens, protect your honor as a hero. That's something a fellow once said.*"

"Embrace your dreams...and never lose sight of yourself in pursuit of that dream, right Adele?"

NEPSTATION

Neptune: You’re watching Nepstation, the one stop shop for all your tournament needs! That’s right! We, at Neptstation, was there, LIVE, as we witnessed the Preliminary Rounds for the Pantheon Foundation Tournament, and for today, we have an aspiring contestant as our guest!

Rena: H-Hi there! My name is Rena Bright! I’m honored to be here today!

Neptune: *chuckles* At least you handled your nervousness better than my co-host from two shows ago!

Sora: Hey! I’m improving!

Neptune: Shush! You’re not onscreen! Anyway, let’s get the load down on the upcoming tournament, shall we?

Rena: Oh! Okay!

---

a logo saying Pantheon Foundation Tournament appeared onscreen

Neptune: See, this here tournament’s made in celebration of the Greek Pantheon, said to have freed the world of the grip of the tyrannical Titans who once ruled with an iron fist

Rena: Indeed. It’s said that the humans who lived in that time have suffered much under the reign of the Titans. However, the gods, led by Zeus, rebelled with many of his fellow gods and goddesses and brought down the Titans, leading an era of relative peace and prosperity.

Neptune: And what a time it is! The world’s been relatively peaceful as I’ve heard from several witnesses!

Rena: True, but the threat of giant monsters and such continue to plague the commonfolk. The gods, unfortunately, cannot do much themselves in the world, lest they destroy it unintentionally or end up becoming the next Titans.

Neptune: Which is where we go to our next topic. Heroes!

---

an image of a certain hero flexing his muscles appears onscreen, although it is blurred

Rena: That’s right. Recently, there has been a surge of potential humans who have gone out of their way to improve the livelihoods of their fellows, but none more so than the likes of monster-slaying heroes!

Neptune: That’s right. One in particular, said to be the son of Zeus himself, shocker, has been making lots of headlights. His trainer P the Goat, has this to say.

P the Goat: What can I say? The champ’s made the distance and is now a bona-fide hero now! Zeus even made the stars shape like him to prove it! Though, of course, I’m not gonna slack off and let him rest on his laurels. So long as the monsters continue to roam across Greece, the champ’s gonna keep fighting.

Rena: Striking words from the goat himself! I gotta keep up if I wanna be as good!

Neptune: And we at Nepstation will be rooting for you, dear guest!

Rena: Haha! Thanks a lot!

Neptune: And now, a word from our sponsors!

---

an image of several products, from sneakers to cup holders with the image of Greece’s hero, is then shown onscreen

Neptune: Have you ever unsafe? Ever wished to have your hero watch your back as you roam the streets? Well now, you can! With these Air Hercs, you will feel as if you are the hero himself! In addition, we are throwing in Herc Holders to hold your drinks and these Herc Action Figures so you too can flex your muscular might! Get this package deal for 7777 Munny today!

Rena: Limited offers are only available until the end of the Pantheon Foundation Tournament, so purchase now or you will be smite down by Zeus himself!

Neptune: Woah! Laying it thick on the threats there!

Rena: Sorry! That is what the prompt says!

Neptune: *sighs* Anyway, that’s all for the news today! Now for our closing segment!

Sora: So, what’s our topic for today, Neptune?

Neptune: Hmmmmm, what about our own party, Sora?

Sora: Us?

Neptune: Yup!

an image of the party with the words Nep Team Epic appears onscreen

Neptune: As you can see, we are a party of six that’s going around the worlds, busting Heartless while we go looking for missing people in our lives, or in my case, my missing identity.

Sora: Your identity?

Neptune: Hm-hm! I am a certified amnesiac, meaning I don’t know a lot about myself other than my name.

Sora: Wow...I didn’t know that.

Neptune: Hey, it’s nothing to feel pity for. You’ll never know. Maybe my old life (if I had one) was probably miserable or terrible that I’d rather forget about it. But hey, I gotta at least know what I was and all that stuff.

Sora: I see...

Neptune: Anywho, we’re getting off-course a bit. So, basically, Donald and the Goofster there are trying to find their best pal, the King, while Compa and Iffy are findin’ Drifters to establish a network while diggin’ up clues in regards to their shared amnesia.

Sora: And I’m here to find my best friends Riku and Kairi! If you two are there, please hit us up here so I’ll know where you are!

Neptune: Wow! Way to use the program right, buck-o!

Sora: I mean, we can say what we want! I may as well say it!

Neptune: Careful, Sora. I nearly got censured last time, remember?

Sora: Gack! I’ll...be more careful next time.

alarm bell rang

Neptune: And, oops! We’ve ran out of time today! We’ll continue this topic tomorrow with the roles and strengths of our party next!

Sora: Alright. This has been Nepstation, and from everyone here...

Neptune and Sora: See you next time!

Chapter 5: Chapter 4: Having a Wild (Monkey) Time

Chapter Summary

> Our party's trek takes them to a world filled with lush greenery. However, an argument and a reckless attempt at breaking it caused the party to crash-land into the world. As tensions rise among the party, a certain nurse-to-be deliberates her role in the worlds and her hopes for the party...

Ocean Between – Approaching Deep Jungle

"World ahoy!" Neptune yelled as the party approached the next world, a vast jungle surrounded by the bounties of nature.

"It's so green!" Compa said in awe.

"Hey, do you guys think the King might be down there?" Goofy wondered.

"Nope" Donald answered impatiently. "Let's head for the next world!"

"Wait!" Sora stopped for a moment. "Riku and Kairi could be down there!"

"I don't care!" the duck replied. "Let's just go!"

"Oh, come on!"

"No means no!"

"Would you two give it a rest?" IF sighed, pinching her nose. "I get that you're impatient, but arguing's not gonna find who we're looking for faster!"

"Let's land here already!"

"I already said no, Sora!"

"Guys, please..." Compa tried to break the fight.

"Ooooooohhhh!" Neptune said in amazement as she neared a flashing red button. "What does this button do?"

Impulsively, she pressed the button, causing the ship to veer out of control.

"W-What in the?" the nurse said worriedly as she tumbled.

"NEP, WHAT DID YOU DO!?" the guild agent yelled.

"I dunno!" Neptune shrugged. "We weren't getting anywhere, so I just started pressing that shiny button!"

"I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU, NEP!"

"This isn't good!" the royal knight exclaimed.

"This is why we shouldn't have gone here!" the court wizard yelled.

Thankfully, the Gummi Ship was equipped with an emergency evacuation protocol, which forcefully ejects it's passengers in cases of sabotage, intentional or not.

Which leads them to...

Deep Jungle – Treehouse

"WOAH!"

"WE'RE FAAAAAAAALLLLLLLLLLLLING!"

"Brace for impact!"

Loud thuds and smacks were heard at the seemingly empty treehouse. Thankfully, the wood on the ground was sturdy, so the trio who fell into it managed to survive their fall.

"Ow man, that hurt..." Sora muttered, feeling pain on his behind. "Everyone okay?"

Compa groaned. "Yessy. Though I think my butt would say otherwise..."

"That stupid Nep..." IF shook her head in frustration. "There are better ways to break up an argument..."

"So...where are we?" the nurse wondered as she stood up and looked around. "Looks like some kind of abandoned treehouse..."

"I'd like to get our bearings around first" the guild agent stated. "It'd be pretty upsetting if we ended up in a place without an exit..."

Sora huffed. "Man, if Donald hadn't gotten angry, then we would've..."

IF felt a tick go off in her head. "THAT'S IT! Listen here, young man!"

The Keyblade wielder immediately yelped as the angered guild agent loomed over him like an angry mother.

"I get that you're impatient and worried about your best friends! But you didn't have to throw a fit like that, you know!?"

Sora tried to plead. "B-But..."

"NO BUTS, MISTER!" But IF was having none of it! "Thanks to you and that duck and that...Nep, we're now separated in the middle of the freakin' jungle and I'm about to be at my wit's end here! So, save your excuses!"

"Iffy..."

The guild agent let out a big sigh. "Let's just look around first, okay? Once we meet up with the others, we'll figure out where we all stand on this."

She then began to walk away as Sora attempts to reach out to the guild agent in vain.

"Everything's falling apart now..." Compa mumbled to herself. "Will our party stay together after all is said and done?"

Deep Jungle – Clearing

Meanwhile, Neptune was sitting on top of a flat rock, while Donald and Goofy are resting on the ground nearby.

"Gawrsh, I hope Sora and the others are okay..." Goofy said worriedly.

Donald, on the other hand, is having none of it. "Ah, who needs Sora!? We can find the King on our own!"

"Hey! No more of that talk, ducky!" Neptune said angrily. "If you're not taking Sora, then you can count me out too!"

"What's the big idea!?" the court wizard complained.

"Didn't your King say you need us Keyblade wielders to help find him?" the girl reminded. "Well, if you're not taking him, you're not taking me either!"

"What's with you!?" Donald shouted in anger.

The girl sighed.

"Listen, I get that you're worried about your King and all that" Neptune started. "But, right now, we are travelling to many unknown worlds. We don't know who to expect and how bad the Heartless are in each of 'em. Do you think they could fight them off all by themselves!?"

"W-Well..." Donald tried to fight back, but couldn't give an answer.

"Basically, what I'm saying is, we should all stick together! Remember, we're all a party here! A party that sticks together, wins together, or something like that!"

The duck was caught speechless. Never in his whole life did he expect something meaningful to come out of Neptune's mouth like she did, but here she is.

"Okay, I'mma scout out a little." the female Keyblade wielder hopped off the flat rock. "Stay put now, you hear?"

As she headed off, Donald was left to his thoughts, unaware that a small gorilla left an orange block by his side.

Deep Jungle – Climbing Trees

"IF..." Sora sighed. "I messed up, didn't I?"

Compa gathered her thoughts for a bit. "Honestly, I think we've all been anxious. Ever since their King vanished and your islands disappeared, we really wanted to see if everyone's doing okay."

"Yeah, but..." the boy with the key said.

"I'm sure they'll turn up somewhere" Compa tried to reassure the young boy. "Even if they're not here, we can still keep this world safe from the Heartless."

"Right..." the boy didn't really feel reassured, that's for sure.

"If anything, I think Iffy's the one with the most to worry about here"

Sora raised an eyebrow. "Oh?"

"Yeah. You know that Iffy and I are Drifters, right? Well, we are kind of a special kind..."

The boy crossed his arms. "Special? Like with Artisan?"

"Yessy...For one, we don't remember what our home world even is."

"Really?"

Compa shook her head. "Worse yet, we can't even recall anything else in our lives before we Drifted. Only a few details."

"Oh...Like?"

The nurse thought for a moment. "Like simple wants and stuff. Even things like who our families are. I do remember having a grandpa and I was studying in nursing school."

"Yeah, and IF remembers being a member of a guild."

The nurse nodded. "But the thing is, we can't remember things like which guild she belonged to, what nursing school I've been studying in or even what the name of our home was in our world. Things like that."

"Then...does that mean..."

Compa nodded. "Yessy. Arty, Broccoli and Rena don't remember much either. Believe me, Iffy and I asked them. And I think...Iffy's been agonizing about it ever since."

The two then looked to the guild agent, who is looking around the greenery for another passageway.

"She does...?" Sora asked.

The nurse nodded again. "She does. At least when she thinks I'm not looking at her. I could imagine her thinking how awful it was for one like me who still remembers who her family was, or how people like you still have friends you can recall and find out there, or even Nep-Nep, who's looking for Histy. Compared to us, I think Iffy had no one like that for most of her life."

"Even though she was in a guild?"

"She probably treats them like good workmates. Not exactly friends, but good company nonetheless."

"..." The boy crossed his arms in thought for a moment.

The two looked ahead to see the guild agent, still scouting ahead admist the leafy environment.

"You see, that's a big part of why I decided to come." Compa admitted. "Sure, Nep-Nep is really adorable and I want to help her, and I want to help you find your friends and Donald and Goofy their King. But most of all, I want to be there for Iffy since she's been by my side for as far as I can remember. I want her to see that I cherish her and want to help out with her problems, no matter how small they are."

"Compa..." Sora chuckled, scratching his cheek. "You really are a good person, huh?"

"Oh, shucks" Compa feels a bit embarrassed. "If anything, you're just as good, Sora."

"Come on" Now it was the boy's turn to feel embarrassed. "I'm not that good."

"Yes, you are!" the nurse cheered. "I know that if, by some chance, we find your friends first, you'd stick around and help us find ours. It's just in your nature, Sora."

"That so?" Sora teasingly said, only to have an epiphany. "Oh!"

"Hm?" Compa suddenly said. "You look like a lightbulb lit up above your head."

"I think I get why Donald's mad at me now!"

"Really? What is it?"

"HEY! What's the holdup!?"

Their conversation was interrupted by IF, who called them over. "C'mon, I found another exit! Let's go!"

"Mind shelving this conversation for later?" Compa asked the young boy, who nodded.

"Sure!"

As the two ran over to the guild agent, a man suddenly swung in between them and landed right at the middle of them.

"Ah!"

"Woah!"

"Who are you!?"

The guild agent raised her qatars in defense. The man, sporting wavy brown hair and wearing nothing but a brown loincloth, eyed both parties while maintaining a defensive stance with his spear.

"You."

"Huh?" Sora muttered. "You mean us?"

"Why on home ground? Hunter?"

"Hunter?" IF wondered. "What's he on about?"

"Um, we're not enemies, for sure" Compa attempted to negotiate.

"He's right. We're friends here" Sora nodded.

"Friends?"

The strange man looked between both parties for a while, before he relaxed his stance.

"Here be sacred ground. Home to gorilla tribe."

"Gorilla tribe?" IF raised an eyebrow.

The man nodded. "Tarzan. Raised by gorillas. Tarzan home."

"Sure..." the guild agent just nodded along. "So, you're Tarzan, and you're raised by the gorillas here. Did I get all that right?"

Tarzan nodded again.

"Hey, if Tarzan lives here, that means he knows the lay of the land here, right?" Compa said with starry eyes.

"He could, but judging by how's he's raised, I'm not sure he could articulate it for us." IF scratched her head.

"Maybe he knows where our friends are?" Sora wondered.

"Friends?" Tarzan asked.

The boy nodded. "First off, there's Riku. He's wearing yellow and blue and has silver hair. Then there's Kairi, she's wearing white and purple and has red hair."

"Then there's King Mickey!" Compa chimed in. "He's bigger than your average mouse, from what I hear."

IF sighed. "C'mon guys, are you sure he could answer those questions? Besides, shouldn't we ask him about our immediate companions."

"They'll be fine!" Sora said confidently. "Neptune is tough. And Donald and Goofy are no slouches either!"

"Are you sure you're not being deflective there?" the guild agent raised an eyebrow.

The boy shook his head. "Besides, I've...come to realize some things and...I wanna clear the air with everyone too."

"Sora..."

IF looked at Compa, who only nodded with a big smile.

Tarzan started to mumble something. "Friends here"

"What did he say?" IF said, confused.

"Do you know where they are!?" Compa asked.

The ape-man nodded. "Come. Tarzan take you to Jane and then, to home ground."

He then grabbed a nearby vine and swung away.

"Is he expecting us to swing after him?" IF wondered.

"I don't know..." Compa whined. "I can be quite clumsy. The vines will likely break before I could jump over."

"Then I'll go after him!" Sora took a nearby vine and begun swinging. "You two find another way to catch up!"

"Way to make this hard for us..." IF mumbled. "Alright! But you better not fool around, ya hear?"

"I won't!"

Deep Jungle – Cliffside

Neptune, in the meantime, took to exploring the nearby area.

"Hmmmmmm, no one or nothing interesting in sight..." she said, scanning around the area. "Should we call this a bust? Hm?"

"...goo..."

Her attention then turned to see a small blue blob with a dog face on it hopping up and down.

"...goo"

"What's this? It looks cute...and rare, too..."

"Dogoo!"

When the blob noticed the girl, it started to hop away!

"Hey, come back!"

She pursued it to the edge of the nearby cliffs, where it stopped on something...unusual.

"Dogoo..."

"Don't worry, little guy. I won't hurt you..."

"Goo!"

The strange blob however, began to hop away in a flash.

"Aw man, am I not friendly enough? What was the little guy looking at, anyway?"

She approached the thing near the cliffs, which on closer inspection turned out to be...

"W-Wha...?"

Covering her mouth, she saw a spotted leopard lying on the ground, seemingly dead with it's mouth exhibiting an unusual purple glow.

"Oh no...Is it...?"

As she wondered about the state of the animal, she suddenly felt something piercing her left hip!

"AH!"

As she felt sharp pain through her hip, she tumbled and coughed loudly.

"What in the..." Her vision began to blur and her balance was loosening by the second. "Ah!"

She then fell to the ground, clutching her wounded hip as she writhed in pain.

"Haa-hahahaha!" a loud villainous laughter rang through the area. "I cannot believe you fell for a simple bait like that! How far has your kind fallen!"

Neptune tried to look up, her blurry eyesight noticing a tall, purple...something looking down upon her. "Who...are..."

"Well, you won't need to worry about a thing anymore"

The figure raised her weapon against her, ready to deal the decisive blow!

"Once you're out, I'll take what's mine and once I take her's too, I will achieve what I desired! Farewell, C-!"

Only to be interrupted by sudden gunfire, forcing the witch to pull back from the gunfire!

"Neptune!"

"Nep-Nep!"

Donald and Goofy raced to the downed Keyblade wielder, with the latter carrying her and the former readying his staff against the purple lady.

"Tch! The King's lackeys..."

Her gaze turned to the sole entrance, where a man with a hunting shotgun, no doubt the one who made a shot at her, was primed against her. Below him, is the strange blue blob from earlier.

"A dogoo? I thought they have gone extinct with the fall of..." the witch shook her head as she took three steps back. "Well, it doesn't matter. If she's this weak, that means she's not ready yet. I can take my time until then. Savor this moment while you can, fools!"

She then vanished in a haze of purple smoke, her vile laughter ringing across the area.

"Haa-hahahaha!"

"Blasted witch..." Donald bemoaned. He then looked to the female Keyblade Wielder. "How is she?"

"Nep-Nep's not looking too good..." Goofy said with worry. "We gotta help her, and fast!"

"Then let us take her to Ms. Foster" the man who accompanied them suggested. "The girl looks poisoned. Maybe she has some medicine with her that can help."

"Sure thing!" Goofy agreed, and then whistled to the blue blob. "Come on, boy!"

With no other option, the Disney Duo, carrying the unconscious Neptune, followed the hunter back to his camp. The blue blob hopped after them as well.

"H-His...ty... "

Deep Jungle – Camp

Meanwhile, Sora and Tarzan arrived at a peculiar camp.

"Hey!"

IF and Compa managed to catch up with them as well, albeit a bit out of breath.

"Guess we should...challenge someone...to a round of...Hoppin' Hippos, huh?"

"I'm sure a game like that...doesn't really exist..."

Tarzan guided the trio to the nearby tent, where a woman wearing explorer's gear is busy setting up a camera.

"Oh, Tarzan, you came back!" the woman noticed.

"Excuse us, but are you Jane?" IF asked.

"Yes, that is who I am" the explorer nodded. "DId Tarzan tell you that?"

"Yessy!" Compa exclaimed.

"That's good." Jane nodded in relief. "That means he's getting better at speaking more humanely."

"Does this have to do with him raised by gorillas?" Sora asked.

"Indeed" Jane nodded. "When my father, a fellow explorer, and I first met him, we couldn't really believe it. In time, we got him to soften up to us, and we helped him in learning our ways again. In turn, he helped us in our research of the local wildlife here."

"That's interesting..." IF muttered. "Does this have to do with the gorillas he was talking about..."

"Why, yes!" the researcher answered excitedly. "For you see..."

"Move it! Move it!"

However, they were interrupted by the arrival of newcomers.

"Injured incoming!"

Compa's face tensed up at the last part. "Where's the patient!?"

Bursting into the tent are two familiar figures, along with a poisoned girl and a strange blue blob.

"Donald?"

"Goofy?"

Compa, however, gasped loudly at the poisoned girl. "NEP-NEP!? What happened to her!?"

"We dunno!" Goofy exclaimed. "Some witch came in and attacked her!"

"Set her down here!"

With Jane's guidance, Neptune was set down in a makeshift bed within the camp tent, the sick girl breathing heavily as poison filled her system.

"This fever..." Compa checked her patient's sweating head. "She's burning up fast."

She then immediately zipped down Neptune's parka, causing the guys in the party to look away quickly.

"Hey!"

"We're still here!"

...Thankfully, she's still clothed underneath the parka. Still...

"We'll just be waiting outside!"

The guys and IF, along with the blob, immediately retreated to the outside while Compa continued her diagnosis.

"Nothing wrong on this end..."

Seeing where the likely problem is, Compa slowly turned Neptune around, causing the sick girl to lay down facing the bed itself.

She then slowly lifter her patient's clutching right hand out of her hip...

"This stab wound...!"

Inspecting the wound, she noticed an unusual purple hue around it.

"No doubt about it, this is poison."

"Perhaps an ointment and some medicine might be just the thing she needs." Jane suggested.

"Yes, that would be best" Compa produced her handy first aid kit. "I'll treat the wound with what I have for now. Can you tell Iffy and the others what we need?"

"Of course! My father is familiar with this type of poisoning. I'll check his notes right now!"

As Jane left the tent, the aspiring nurse looked at her poisoned friend.

"But...can I really save her? Me, a person who can't even remember if she passed nursing school or not?"

"I..." Neptune struggled to say. "...It...hurts..."

"Nep-Nep..." she clenched her fists. "Please hang in there..."

Deep Jungle - Camp

Back outside the tent, Sora and the others are waiting for Compa to finish her diagnosis, when Jane exited the tent.

"How is she?" Sora asked.

"Not well, I'm afraid." Jane answered. "Your nurse friend is treating her wound for now, but she needs ointment and medicine to fully cure the poison. And right now, we don't have the necessary ingredients for them."

"What can we do?" Goofy asked in a panic.

"What do you think?" IF nearly exclaimed. "Go find the ingredients needed for the ointment, of course!"

"But where do we even look for those?" Donald wondered.

"I can give you a list of ingredients to search for." Jane informed. "Thankfully, our time here in the jungle has given us a good look at what ingredients we can find here."

"Then please get to it!" IF said as the explorer returned to the tent. "We can't let Nep die here!"

"Tarzan help too" the ape-man offered. "Convince gorillas to search"

"That would be great!" Sora sighed in relief. "But we hate to impose."

Tarzan shook his head. "Friend, in danger. Tarzan want help friend"

The guild agent smiled. "Then we'll take you up on that offer. Thank you, Tarzan."

Jane exited the tent with a piece of paper on hand. "Here's the list of things we need! Tarzan, can you make out some of the words here?"

The ape-man looked at the list for a while, then nodded.

"Tarzan memorize. Will ask gorilla to help"

"Good" Jane then lent him a pencil. "Can you cross out what you and the gorillas can find? That way, the others here can narrow their search better."

Nodding, Tarzan took the pencil and neatly crossed out some of the ingredients on the list.

"Woah."

"He crossed out a lot of 'em!"

"Well, there's still one thing we can search for, though."

"Tarzan go!"

The ape-man then left for the gorilla's home grounds for aid.

"Then it's up to us to find the last ingredient, then!" Sora declared. "Honey Sap, right?"

"Yup!" Goofy nodded. "Let's get goin'!"

"Y-Yeah" Donald said awkwardly.

"Good luck, guys." IF said. "I'll stay behind and keep the camp safe from the Heartless. Goofy, watch over those two."

"Aw, I think they'll do fine!" the royal knight said in confidence. "Right, fellas?"

"Uh, yeah" Sora said, awkwardly rubbing his head.

"Sure..." Donald looked away in shame.

IF sighed, grabbing the impatiently hopping blue blob. "Just be sure to get back with the honey sap in one piece, okay? We all have a lot to talk about"

"Right..." Sora and Donald said in shame.

Deep Jungle – Climbing Trees

"This must be the place..."

Sora, Donald and Goofy arrive at the closed area near the treehouse, which is where the Honey Sap can be found.

However, it has recently become a den for two new breeds of Heartless. The **Powerwilds** and the **Bouncywilds**, two monkey Heartless each specializing in their own modes of attack, the former melee, and the latter ranged.

"Sora, was this place filled with monkeys the last time you came here?" Donald asked.

The boy shook his head. "Nope. We just met Tarzan here and that's that."

"Welp, there's tons of them now" Goofy said.

One of the monkeys overheard them and alerted his comrades of potential danger.

"Looks like we got a fight" the court wizard said, priming his staff.

"No time like the present" the royal knight raised his shield.

The Keyblade wielder summoned his weapon. "Let's get rid of them and grab that honey sap!"

"Right!/Right..."

Charging forth, the trio split up to deal with the numerous monkey Heartless monkeying around.

"Get back here!"

Goofy charged after a group of three Powerwilds, only to slip on a banana peel left behind by a Bouncywild.

"Ouch! Gawrsh, that hurt..."

"Goofy!"

Donald immediately diverted a **Thundara** spell against the four monkeys, saving his friend.

"Thanks, Donald!" Goofy gave his fellow companion a thumbs up in thanks.

Donald followed suit and then, returned to the fight.

He pursued a Powerwild, who is being supported by four Bouncywilds above with their slingshots out and ready.

"Outta way!"

And so, he started blasting them with **Fira** magic, taking them out in quick succession.

"That'll teach them!"

His jubilations were cut short when he felt a nut hit his head.

He turned around to see three Powerwilds, one of which taunted him by spanking his behind.

"Why you!"

His temper taking hold of his decisions, Donald Duck charged at them, only to slip on another banana peel! Are those monkeys careless or what!?

"Ack! Not good..."

The three Powerwilds, backed by a Bouncywild now surrounded the duck!

"Could we really find the King without them? Or am I just over my head?"

Just as the monkeys are ready for their combined assault...

"No, you don't!"

...Only for their hopes to be dashed through, literally, thanks to a Keyblade wielder and his newly acquired **Sonic Blade** technique.

As for the Bouncywild? Well, she said her last prayers when a shield was thrown at her like a boomerang.

"Donald!"

"You okay?"

"Goofy, Sora..."

He looked to see his two friends, relief evident in their faces.

"C'mere. I'll help you up."

The sight of Sora extended a hand to him caused the duck to have a flashback to a simpler time when he and two others were vying to be the best musketeers they can be.

"*No need to be so scared, Donald! C'mere. I'll help ya up*."

Accepting the aid, Donald managed to stand up.

"Is that all the Heartless?"

"Yeah." Sora answered as he points to the tree in the middle of the area. "Turns out they were gathering around this weird purple fruit thing attached to that tree over there."

"Really?"

"Yup. Once Sora and I took care of it, it started raining some honey sap, so I gathered some up while Sora rushed over to save you."

"Oh..."

The duck looked to the boy, who only smiled.

"Why, Sora?"

The boy raised an eyebrow.

"Why did you save me there? We had a fight, remember?"

Sora chuckled a bit. "We were, huh? Listen, about that..."

He then bowed his head in apology. "I'm sorry!"

"Huh!?"

The duck couldn't hold back his surprise. Why would he apologize for that?

"Listen, I miss my best friends. I really do. But...that doesn't I'm leaving you two out to dry!"

"W-What do you mean?" Donald managed to say.

Sora hung his head down. "You guys said you need my help to find your King, right?"

The duck nodded.

"And you are worried that, if we found Riku and Kairi first, I wouldn't be around to help you guys, right?"

"Huh!?" Donald blanched at that.

"Sora..." Goofy muttered.

Sora shook his head, waving his hand off. "That's ridiculous!"

Both cartoon animals yelped at the Keyblade wielder's sudden shout.

"Look, I know I have the Keyblade and all, but I don't have all the answers, and neither does the Keyblade, really. But that's why we're on this journey together, aren't we? And you know what I think? I think we should be helping each other out. Way I see it, you're helping me find Riku and Kairi and I'm helping you two find your King. Even if we managed to find my friends first, I'd still be out here helping you two find your King."

He then looked to his two friends, his smile never fading. "Isn't' that what friends do? Helping each other out?"

"Sora..."

Sora let out a goofy smile, placing his hands behind his back. "I'm still learning the ropes about all this, and I'm still not sure about many things, so, mind helping me out too?"

Donald sniffed. He was actually holding back some tears, brought upon by the boy's heartfelt pleas.

"I'm sorry! I'm so sorry! I was so worried about King Mickey that I'd do anything to bring him back! I'm sorry for doubting you, Sora! I'm so sorry!"

Sora then hugged the duck as he cried. Goofy, in turn, hugged both of his friends as well.

"Yeah. I'm sorry, too. I guess we're all worried, huh?" the boy remarked.

"Don't feel bad, guys." the royal captain reassured. "We're all pals here! All for one and one for all, remember!"

The three friends looked at each other, their resolve renewed.

"Yeah! Let's save our friends together!" Sora declared.

"Yeah!" Donald agreed.

"Together!" Goofy affirmed.

The trio jumped up and clapped their hands together, their bond renewed and strengthened.

Deep Jungle – Camp Tent

IF returned to the tent to see Compa still watching over Neptune, who managed to sleep a bit soundly, if a bit noisy with her snoring. The blob is also close to her, keeping watch.

"How is she?" the guild agent asked her friend.

"She's just sleeping for now" the nurse replied, never taking her face off her patient. "I patched the wound a bit, but we really need the ointment and the medicine so she can get better."

"I see..."

IF took a seat on the floor as she sighed.

"This has been a mess, huh..." she muttered.

"No kidding" Compa entertained, turning around to face her friend. "Who would've thought we'd arrive in a gorilla jungle of all places?"

IF let out a small laugh. "Certainly not us. Then again, compared to the topsy-turvy room and the coliseum managed by literal gods, this world seems pretty regular by comparison."

"You think so?" Compa tilted her head, letting the hopping blob on her as the nurse pats its head.

"I think you're just used to all the weirdness we've been having lately" the guild agent shook her head.

"Aren't you?" the nurse asked.

"I mean, someone here has to keep everyone grounded" IF remarked. "I doubt even the duck could keep the weirdness out forever."

It was silent for a while, as the guild agent let out another sigh.

"That stupid Nep..." IF looked to the now-asleep Keyblade wielder. "Why does she have to be so like...that?"

"Like, how?" Compa dared to ask.

The guild agent sighed again. "Like, we could've broken the argument like regular people, but no, Nep had to start pushing buttons out of nowhere to get our attention, and now, we're down here and until those two reconcile, I doubt we'd ever leave here!"

The nurse thought for a moment. "Maybe she felt that was the only way to get their attention?"

"You think?" IF raised an eyebrow. "It makes me think she's a big brained player in a game of chess, and that, to me, does NOT describe Nep at all."

"She could be smart or dumb" Compa started. "But Nep-Nep will always be Nep-Nep to me"

"And how would you describe her, exactly?"

"Well...she's super adorable and irresistible!"

"Okay, what else?"

"What else?"

"Like..." IF sighed. "...how would you put her in one word?"

"Well...if I could describe her in one word, aside from pudding, that would be happiness!" Compa replied.

"Happiness?"

"Like, she tries her best to keep everyone around her happy. The way she says the silliest things, does the most absurd things, she wants people to laugh and smile even in dark times like these."

"..." IF hummed at the answer. Could she really be anything but that?

"...Don't...fight..."

The two, plus the blob, looked at the struggling girl, seemingly talking in her sleep.

"Nep!"

Compa shushed the panicking guild agent. "She's still sleeping. She must be having a dream."

"...Sora...Donald...please stop...fighting..." Neptune managed to say in her delirious state.

"Is she talking about their feud?"

"...If you two fight...you won't be...happy...Goofy will stop...smiling...Compa...will keep worrying...Your friends...will stop being happy..."

"Nep-Nep..."

"...If...fy..."

IF stood up and rushed to Neptune's side.

"I'm here, Nep!"

The girl slowly turned her head to her friend, her eyes half-opened.

"...I'm...sorry...I...don't know...how to break...them up...I just..."

"Just...what?"

"I...just want to...see everyone smiling...I don't...like it when...people get sad...or in trouble..."

The guild agent tried to fight back her tears. "Then why...why did you do what you did? Answer me, Nep!"

"...When...people get sad...I get sad...I don't like...sadness..."

The sick girl's lips curled into a smile. "But...when everyone smiles...I smile too...People are...at their brightest...when they smile...that's why I..."

Silence took over the tent again, as the sick Neptune went back to snoring.

IF sighed once more. "...That dummy...She had to go and do that...for such a childish reason..."

She then felt something wet touching her cheek.

"Huh!?"

She immediately looked to her left, seeing the blue blob gazing at her while panting.

"Trying to comfort me, huh? Sorry about that"

Compa tapped her friend on the shoulder, offering a handkerchief.

Taking it, she wiped the tears that were beginning to flow out of her eyes. "I guess you're right on the munny, Compa. That girl really does everything for our happiness, huh?"

The nurse nodded.

"That was still too reckless of her...but I guess I got some stuff to rethink over now." the guild agent said, looking up. "About myself, about Nep...about all of us, really."

"May I give some advice?" Compa said.

"Let me guess, from your grandfather?"

The nurse nodded again.

"There are certain things in this world that you simply cannot understand. If you can't, then just simply accept it. Accept that the fact exists. Accept that there are things in this gosh-

darned world that we could never comprehend, no matter how hard we think about it."

IF chuckled. "Don't overthink things, then. I guess you have a point. I have been overthinking a lot of things lately."

Compa nodded. "Good to hear..." She then turned her gaze at Neptune, with a forlorn expression.

One IF clearly noticed. "So, what about you?"

"Hm?"

"Something's clearly eating up at you, judging by your face" the guild agent observed.

The nurse chuckled sadly. "So, you noticed?"

"C'mon, Compa" IF said. "How long have we already known each other?"

"As far as I can remember" Compa answered. "Which isn't really much..."

"Right" IF nodded. "So, talk to me. What's ailing you, Ms. Nurse?"

Compa had to chuckle at that remark.

"Well, it's just...I wonder if I'm good enough at...anything else, really"

IF raised an eyebrow at that. "What brought this on?"

"I mean, look at you all!" Compa started to speak. "Nep-Nep and Sora are Keyblade Wielders. Donald and Goofy are Royal Guards. And you, Iffy, are a Guild Member. All of you out there are cool and amazing and everything!"

She sighed. "And then there's me. Poor, lovable Compa who can only keep everyone patched up, and nothing else. Just somebody someone watches over and holds everyone else back to keep her safe like a damsel..."

"Hey..." IF tried to answer as softly as possible. "Is she worried about the fact that she keeps getting targeted in battle? That does seem to happen a lot to her...Don't put yourself down like that. You are more than that, Compa."

"And what is it!?" Compa yelled as she stood up in anger, tears fell from her eyes. "Sure, cooking and nursing people is what I can do, but what if I fail? What if one day, I ended up cooking up a really bad dish and everyone stopped looking forward to my food next time? What if, one day, something like this happened and I couldn't find a cure in time? Will I be able to look myself in the eye and say you did the best you could, when you haven't even figured out what the problem or solution even is!? And what if, one day, something happens to me and I can't watch over you all anymore!? Tell me, Iffy! Tell me!"

IF was flabbergasted at her friend's response. "You've been holding this in for a while now, huh..."

The nurse sighed, sitting right back down. "Maybe...this is too much for me...Perhaps I should just..."

"...You can...do it...Compa..."

The two girls turned to Neptune, who started speaking again.

"...There's...no one else...out there...like you..."

"What do you mean, Nep-Nep?" Compa cried as she looked onto her sick friend's half-lidded eyes. "What else can I do here? Can I really do what I set out to do? Me, a failure who couldn't even remember if she passed nursing school or not?"

"...It's better...to try and fail...than to not do...and regret it...y'know?"

As soon as she said her piece, she fell asleep again.

"She's right" IF said. "Compa, you kept our whole group together as much as you are able. Sure, you kept us fed and patched up, but more than anything, you kept our hearts just as healthy just by being with us. Heck, I'm sure the reason Sora's able to meet Donald in the eye is because of something you told him, right?"

Compa tried to say something, but kept silent to let her friend finish.

"Sure, you can't remember much of your past as I do, but that didn't stop you from doing what you can. And this here might be way above your paygrade, but the fact that you were willing to take the first step to getting the stuff needed for the medicine is already proof enough that you want to do this, no matter what."

"Do...what?" Compa asked.

"Helping Nep get better, that's what."

Compa's eye widened in shock. "*She's right. When I heard Nep-Nep was poisoned, my body and mind moved on their own. No, it's more accurate to say my heart moved before I could fully consider the risks. Deep in my heart, I knew I wanted to save Nep-Nep. I knew I wanted to keep everyone fed and happy the only way I know how.*"

The nurse chuckled. "Maybe you're right. No, you're absolutely right. I know what I want to do and I'm going to do it! I will save Nep-Nep!"

IF smiled. "There we go. That's the Compa I know"

Compa giggled. "Thanks for that, Iffy. And...sorry for blowing up at you all of a sudden..."

The guild agent shrugged. "I'm guessing you have those problems locked up in you for a while, huh?"

The nurse nodded.

"Eh, don't worry about it." IF reassured. "I have stuff I wanted to let out too. So, if you're ever feeling down, even if it's something silly or serious, just tell us, okay? We're here for you, Compa."

The nurse looked to the guild agent, who sported a good smile.

"Just as you were there for me."

"Iffy-poo..."

Silence filled the tent for a while, until the blob licked Compa's cheek.

"Woah!" Compa giggled. "You wanted to cheer me up, too? Thank you very much!"

IF smiled at the sight of her nurse friend, looking like a butterfly that long grew out of it's cocoon.

A truly beautiful sight for her...

"Move it!"

"Why would you drag me here like this!?"

Suddenly, the two heard noises outside.

"What's with all the racket out there?"

Deep Jungle - Camp

IF went out of the tent to see Sora and Donald with their weapons out, poking a man with his hands tied by rope while Goofy is holding onto a pouch of honey sap.

"Keep moving, you!" Donald demanded.

"I swear to you, I did not mean to shoot at it!" the man pleaded

"What's going on here, boys?" the guild agent asked the returning party with folded arms.

"See this guy here?" Sora answered, poking the man with the tip of his Keyblade. "He tried to shoot a defenseless gorilla while we were out looking for the honey sap"

"It's here, by the way!" Goofy said, proudly showing the bag that contains it.

"That's good!" IF exhaled in relief. "Now we just need to wait for Tarzan..."

Suddenly, they heard rustling leaves coming to their direction, and then, Tarzan landed in the area, holding a large basket above his head.

"Speak of the ape and he appears..." the guild agent looked in surprise.

"Ingredients...here" the ape-man patted the basket on his head. "Tarzan heard. Clayton hunt gorilla?"

"I-It's not what you all think!" Clayton, the hunter, pleaded. "T-There was a snake coming close to that poor thing and I thought I could take it out and save it's life, but..."

"Quit lying!" Sora poked the hunter again. "You were clearly trying to shoot at them!"

"You big palooka!" Donald followed suit with his staff.

"Just let me say my story!" the hunter continued to plead.

"Enough!"

Jane rushed to see what the ruckus is all about. Needless to say, she's NOT happy at all.

"I have already have it to here with you, Clayton!" the woman said angrily. "You not only lost sight of my father, but now here you are, hunting these poor animals for sport when we're here for RESEARCH!"

"Ms. Foster, please!" Clayton pleaded...

But Jane has had it! "No! I will not have it! Leave!"

Clayton did as he was told and left to the nearby clearing, though not without silent anger.

The explorer sighed. "I swear, he's getting more erratic by the day..."

"I'm guessing he's been at that for a while now?" IF guessed.

"Unfortunately..." Jane confirmed. "Mr. Clayton has signed up to be our bodyguard, but it seems all he's ever thought of is hunting the wildlife here, especially the gorillas."

She sighed. "I wonder if my father made the wrong choice with this..."

"Jane?" Tarzan said, looking at the explorer.

She smiled, pointing to the open area at the tent's left. "Sorry about that, Tarzan. Can you set the ingredients over there? I'll get Compa and we can start making the antidote."

Tarzan nodded with a grunt. Goofy also followed suit with the bag of honey sap.

As Jane left to get Compa, the two went to work on making the antidote.

Meanwhile, Sora, Donald and IF rested in the tent as they watch over the still-sick Neptune. The blue blob danced around the trio as they sat down.

Deep Jungle - Tent

Eventually...

"It's done!" Compa cheered as she held the...medicine(?) in her hands.

"Compa, that's pudding..." IF pointed out.

Jane cleared her throat. "Well, we figured that Neptune may not accept the medicine in it's current state, so Compa here suggested we mix it in with her favorite food. That's why the pudding is like this."

"Like having your kid eat their veggies without seein' them, right?" Goofy exclaimed.

"That makes sense..." Donald muttered.

"And the ointment?" Sora asked.

Jane shows a black and green container. "It's right here. Please excuse us while we get her treated."

"Okay, sure." Sora said as he stood up and left.

"Come here, you!" Donald grabbed the dog-faced blob and left the tent with the others.

"Will this work?" Jane asked Compa one more time.

The nurse exhaled and then nodded. "It has to! I'm not a certified nurse yet, but I will save Nep-Nep! I must! I won't hide from my own heart anymore!"

Deep Jungle - Camp

Back outside, IF spoke to the boys.

"I see you boys are getting along better this time."

The trio looked to each other and then back at IF.

"Really?" the guys all asked.

"Really." the guild agent nodded, taking note of their shared response. "It's like, you guys work well now. I guess I got worried for nothing, huh?"

"Well, about that..." Donald started.

And then, Sora and Donald bowed to IF.

"We're sorry!"

"Huh!?" the guild agent was taken aback. "What brought this on?"

"Well..." the boy started.

"We didn't want to cause any more trouble with you guys..." the duck continued.

IF let out a happy sigh. "Geez. Didn't take that long for you guys, huh?"

"Well, we've been thinking about some things and..." Sora started.

"...figured out we were just anxious about some things..." Donald continued.

"...but we had it all cleared out at the end of the day!" Goofy finished with his signature chuckle.

"You're getting along alright if you're finishing each other's sentences right there." the guild agent pointed out.

"Come on!" Sora blushed.

"Did you have to point that out?" Donald covered his face in embarrassment.

Goofy simply laughed at the scene to show his happiness at his friends now getting along.

"Well, I got some stuff I want to clear out too..." IF mumbled.

"NEPTUNE'S BACK, BABY!"

Sure enough, they were interrupted when an energetic cry rang near the tent. One coming from a recently recovered girl wearing a parka.

"Nep-Nep, please don't move too fast! You're still recovering!" Compa cried from inside the tent.

"Come on, Compa. I'm as right as rain now! Besides, some sun is just what this Nep needs!"

As she stretched, her gaze fell upon the rest of her party members.

"Heya guys!" Neptune approached them. "Wazzup!?"

Yet her only answer was nothing but stares.

"Uh, guys, you in there? Hello?"

Suddenly, she was grabbed and hugged by the boys of their party.

"Neptune!" Sora shouted.

"You're okay!" Donald said in relief.

"Welcome back, Nep-Nep!" Goofy greeted.

"Woa-hoa!" the girl exclaimed. "Slow down, fellas! I'm still kickin' here. Haven't tripped any death flags, you know?"

"We've been worried sick about you, Nep" IF shook her head. "Of course they'd glomp at you first chance they get."

"Aw, thanks, you guys." Neptune thanked the boys. "What about you, Iffy?"

"Me?" IF raised an eyebrow.

"You look like you want to tell me something, so spill!"

The guild agent gulped and cleared her throat. "Well, you see...I've been thinking about stuff and..."

"Hm?"

"...I'm sorry...for blowing up on you..."

Now it's Neptune's turn to raise an eyebrow. "Huh? Sorry? For what?"

The guild agent became flustered. "What do you mean, for what!? Remember, back at the gummi ship?"

The female Keyblade wielder thought for a moment, then a lightbulb lit up in her head. "Oooooohhhhh, that!"

She gave a light chuckle as she placed her hands behind her head. "I mean, we were just having our usual barbs, right? The usual back and forth?"

"You...You...!" IF's face began to emit steam. "If you're going to do something stupid, at least tell us, got it!?"

"Woah!" Neptune yelped. "What's gotten into you, Iffy? Did you hit your head hard when you fell into this world?"

IF groaned. "I can't believe this! Was it just all in my head!? How can this girl be so...so...HER!?"

The boys could only laugh at the situation before them.

"I'm glad we can all hang out together like this again..." Compa muttered. "It makes all the pain my heart went through worth it. I'm happy we can all be together again..."

However, their moment of peace was interrupted when Tarzan rushed into camp in a panic.

"Tarzan?" Jane called out. "What's the matter?"

"Clayton!" Tarzan gasped. "Clayton hunt gorillas! Had help."

"Oh no!" Donald cried.

"What help?" IF asked.

Just as she did, several Heartless, mainly Powerwilds and **Blue Rhapsodies**, icy-blue variants of the Red Nocturnes, spawned across the camp!

"That help" the ape-man quipped, bringing out his spear.

"Since when can people call out Heartless!?" the guild agent wondered aloud.

"No time for that!" Sora repelled an incoming attack from a Powerwild. "We gotta get to the gorillas!"

"RIGHT!"

With the team reunited, they repelled the Heartless assault and rushed to the gorilla's aid.

Deep Jungle - Cliffside

The gorillas gathered in one place, as their home grounds were overrun by wild and unusually aggressive monkeys. Leading them is the foul human who tried to murder one of their young.

He pointed his shotgun at them, ready to take the shot.

"NO!"

"CLAYTON NO HUNTING!"

However, cries from two more humans, a boy and a girl stopped him. Yet all the hunter could do was stare at them without a word.

"Clayton!?" Sora called out.

"Not Clayton!" Tarzan then mumbled something incomprehensible. "Not Clayton!"

The hunter then raised his hand, and all of a sudden, the cliff behind the gorillas exploded, causing the simians to panic, running behind the party.

"Please get behind us!" Compa cried out to the panicking gorillas. "Don't worry! We won't hurt you! I'll even treat your wounds!"

As this happened, Clayton jumped up and hopped onto...something that seems to be moving...and unseen.

Tarzan, angered at the hunter's brazenness, attempted to charge at him, only to be knocked back. A loud unusual roar was heard as well.

"What did he just hop onto?" Sora wondered.

"It's likely something invisible..." IF pointed out. "Thankfully, Clayton himself isn't invisible, so it'll be easy to track their movements..."

"Then let's not waste anymore time!" Neptune shouted, raising her Keyblade. "C'mon, gang! We've got gorillas to save!"

"Says the girl who was out cold for almost the whole trip..." Donald complained.

"But she's got the right energy for the job." Goofy complimented.

Sensing prey, the invisible monster lunged at the party, causing them to move away.

"It's not just dumb, but also loud!" the guild agent noticed, channeling flames into her qatars. "Keep your eyes and ears open, people! And watch out for gunfire!"

Wasting no time, Clayton fired a round on the defenseless Compa.

"Eeep!"

Thankfully, Goofy came in and blocked the shot.

"Thanks!" the nurse thanked her friend.

The royal guard responded by raising his thumb. "No problem-o!"

Donald took the chance to channel ice into his staff.

"Time to freeze!"

He unleashed a mighty **Blizzara** attack at the creature, which dealt some damage to it.

"I'll follow up! **DEMON FLAMES**!"

A pillar of fire ignited below Clayton and the invisible creature, leaving it open to attack!

"My turn! **CROSS COMBINATION**!"

Neptune rushes in and performs her six-attack, seven-hit combo, sending the invisible beast flying up and back down to earth.

"All yours, Sora!"

"Here goes!"

Charging up, the boy unleashed his **Sonic Blade** attack, a rush of seven quick and powerful dashes against the enemy.

Under such combined assault, the invisible creature roared, revealing itself as an oversized green chameleon with two huge eyes.

It is called the **Stealth Sneak**.

"RAAAHHHH!"

Seeing an opening, the ape-man let out a loud bellow and charged at the hunter, bringing him down to earth and separated from the revealed lizard.

"Whoa!" Neptune shouted. "Look at the ape-man go!"

"Stay focused, Nep!" IF scolded the girl. "Now that those two are separated, we have to take them down fast!"

"Hey, Mr. Lizard!" Goofy taunted the Stealth Sneak, the oversized chameleon Heartless. "Over here!"

Rather than a physical assault, the giant lizard opted for a ranged attack, shooting slow beams from his eyes at the royal knight.

"All charged up?" Goofy asked the nurse behind him as he is busy deflecting the blasts back.

"*I can do this! I can do this!* Ready!"

Compa readies her shot and aims at the giant lizard.

"A little poisonous treat, from Nep-Nep to you!"

Firing her **Poison Agent** square at his mouth, the Stealth Sneak began to phase in and out of reality as the poison settles into him.

"How's that!?" Compa cheered. "Iffy! Nep-Nep! Mr. Lizard's all yours!"

"Nice job, Compa!" the guild agent charged up her blades. "Ready, Nep?"

Neptune flashed a V-sign with her fingers. "Ready as I'll ever be!"

"**HEAVENLY COMBINATION**!"

Neptune unleashes five slashes, with the fifth sending the poisoned chameleon up into the air.

"All yours, Iffy!"

"There's no escape for you!"

Jumping up, IF proceeds to slash the Heartless ten times in quick successions and followed that up with a heel kick, sending the lizard down!

"And now!"

"The finisher!"

Charging their weapons, the duo unleashed a mighty slash that pushed the creature back.

"We're so awesome!"

"You did great, Nep!"

Meanwhile, Sora and Clayton are clashing in melee combat. In the clash, it has become very clear that the hunter is no match for a human opponent, especially in close combat.

As the hunter tried to use his shotgun to hit the boy from a certain angle, Sora proceeded to block it. Anytime Clayton tried to shoot at him point-blank, Sora raised his Keyblade in defense, blocking the attack.

"Sora!"

Hearing the cries, Clayton pushed the boy back and attempted to take a shot at Donald.

"RAHHHHHHHH!"

But his shot never came, as Tarzan led a furious charge against the hunter, distracting him from his intended target.

"You okay?" Donald continued rushing to his friend, helping him up.

"Yeah"

As the two looked to the now distracted Clayton, they saw a golden opportunity.

"Ready, Sora?"

The boy flashed a grin.

"Yeah!"

The two charged at Clayton as Donald imbues his friend's Keyblade with Fire magic.

Sensing their attack, the ape-man grabbed Clayton and threw him to the side, right where Sora is charging in.

"Thanks, Tarzan!" Sora shouted. "Hah!"

He then launches Clayton up in the air with a blazing strike.

"Another one!"

"Hiyah!"

As Sora jumps up to deal the next blow, Donald switches to Blizzard magic, causing Sora's attack to hit with chilling precision.

"And one more!"

Now the court wizard switches to Thunder magic, giving Sora the strength he needs to sends Clayton down once and for all.

"You're through!"

This was their new Combination Skill, **Elemental Slam**!

Clayton attempts to get up, but finds himself near the tip of Tarzan's spear.

"Over"

But the hunter was having none of it, attempting to shoot the ape-man in front of him despite his weakened state.

But the Stealth Sneak from earlier fell down on top of him, leaving Clayton's panicked screams to resound through the cliffside.

Once the creature stopped moving for good, a large heart erupted out of the creature, and both it and it's former master faded away into nothingness.

"Farewell..."

Deep Jungle – Waterfalls

"Oooohhhh, why did Mr. Gorilla have to throw us up like that?"

As Compa complained while rubbing her sore behind, the party recalled the previous moment with clarity.

"Kerchak rough" Tarzan stated. "Give thanks."

"Meaning?" Neptune asked.

"It must be his way of thanking us" Jane explained. "As thanks for saving his kind from Clayton and whatever befell him."

"By allowing us in his home ground?" IF quipped. "Sure, that's one way to express your gratitude."

"Hm. Whatever could've happened to him to be able to summon that Heartless?" Goofy wondered.

Tarzan then said something again.

"What did he say?" Donald asked.

"Dunno" Sora confessed. "I heard him say something like that before we fought Clayton"

"Well, one thing's for sure" Neptune chirped as she puts her hands in her parka's pockets. "While we're having a rough time, Jane-y here got a safe and blissful ride from Mr. Ape-Man here."

This got the explorer blushing. "W-Whatever do you mean?"

The ape-man also looked away with a flushed face.

"Oh, if you know, you know." She then continued walking as she put her hands behind her head. "To usssss, one family~"

"Great..." IF facepalmed. "I guess that near-death experience gave Nep a knack for singing..."

Compa could only laugh at that remark.

Eventually, they arrived at their destination, a large green tree with a glowing blue center surrounded by blue butterflies.

Tarzan muttered something again, but no one understood it.

"This is your home?" Sora wondered. "But that means..."

The ape-man raised a hand, causing the boy to stop. He then placed the hand next to his ear, beckoning his companions to listen.

"Huh?" Goofy wondered as he did the same.

"What are we supposed to listen to?" Neptune asked.

"All I hear is the waterfalls, though" Compa remarked.

"Yes" Jane agreed as she let the excited blue blob down. "The sounds are echoing all the way here."

Tarzan mumbled again. "Friends here. See friends."

Jane slammed her fist against her palm. "Oh, now I get it. He's been trying to say 'heart'"

"Like, friends in our hearts?" Compa raised an eyebrow.

Neptune gasped. "Does that mean Histy's right inside me!? Can you hear me, Histy!?"

The guild agent sighed as she bopped Neptune up on the head. "She didn't mean that literally, you goofball."

"Heart..." Tarzan managed to say.

"Oh" Sora's expression became downcast. "So that's what it meant..."

"Friends, same heart" The ape-man said. "Clayton, lose heart. No heart, no see friends. No heart. No friends"

"So that explains what happened to him" the guild agent figured. "He lost his heart to darkness in his desire to hunt down gorillas. That's why he ended up attracting the Heartless like he did..."

"Well, don't give up!" Donald encouraged the crestfallen boy. "Our friends are still out there!"

"He's right" Compa nodded. "As long we believe in them, and keep going on, we will find them out there. Riku and Kairi. King Mickey. Histy. We have to keep believing in them and never lose heart. Or we will never see them again..."

"Man, that's deep, Compa..." Neptune said, feeling very impressed.

"Did your grandpa say that?" IF wondered.

The nurse shook her head. "But I know he would tell me something like that. I know that in my heart now. That's why I wanna keep going with you all. It's what my heart tells me to do, and I don't wanna back out on it now."

"Hear, hear!" Goofy cheered.

"You said it!" Neptune chirped.

Sora, Donald, and IF nodded.

"Dogoo!"

Even the blue blob bounced in agreement!

Soon, the blue spot began to glow brighter. Sensing something special, Sora and Neptune closed in on the spot, which revealed the world's Keyhole.

"Shall we?"

"Let's"

The duo summoned their Keyblades and locked the world's Keyhole, causing the blue butterflies to disperse as it did.

And it dropped another green object in the process!

"A gummi!" Donald exclaimed.

"But it's sure not the King's..." Goofy deflated.

"Maybe not, but this looks a bit like the last one we got." IF grabbed the gummi piece. "I'll call Cid and see if he's done analyzing the last piece we got."

"Good idea." Sora nodded, then turned to the King's companions. "Come on, guys! We still got other places to look into! We'll find the King, don't worry!"

Donald and Goofy looked at each other and then nodded at Sora.

"Yeah!"

"Riku and Kairi, too!"

"Hahaha! You said it!"

Neptune sighed in relief. "Isn't friendship great?"

Compa giggled. "It sure is, Nep-Nep. I'm happy for you, you guys..."

IF smiled. "You can say that again"

Tarzan closed his eyes. "Sora. Friends together strong."

Jane nodded. "You said it."

?????? ??????? - ??????

Meanwhile, Maleficent and four of her cohorts convened as they have witnessed the fall of Clayton and the Stealth Sneak, an event that took them by surprise.

"What drew the Heartless to that world?" the man with the snake staff questioned.

"The hunter lured them there" Maleficent answered. "It was his lust for power that lured them there, but it seems the bait was too tasty for his own good."

Her gaze turned to the purple hag to her left. "Isn't that right, Arfoire?"

The purple witch chuckled. "Indeed. He was so obsessed with hunting down those simians that he would stoop to leaving his charge to hunt them. Although, I have given him a little push."

"My, you're certainly a sneaky one, aren't you dear?" the tentacle lady teased.

"He had his desires set from the get-go." Arfoire shrugged. "All I did was accelerate the outcome"

She snickered as she recalled the look on Clayton's face when she revealed the gorilla's so-called hiding spot. The elation. The desire. The bloodlust...

The bag of bugs laughed. "Yeah. He got chomped instead!"

The man with the snake staff approached forward, the dim light illuminating his features. "A weak-hearted fool like him stood no chance against the Heartless. But the children are a problem. They found one of the Keyholes."

"Two, to be precise" Arfoire mentioned offhandly.

"Oh?" Maleficent said.

"Could this be the work of your little spy, Arfoire?" the man wondered.

"Indeed." the old lady nodded. "My...collaborator saw the Keyhole for herself in another world. Sure enough, it was sealed shut by them as well. Shouldn't you be concerned?"

Maleficent scoffed at that as she conjured an image of the party on the small table in front of her. "Fear not. It will take them ages to find the rest. Besides, they remain blissfully unaware of our other plan."

"Yes, the princesses..." the man with the snake staff mentioned.

"Those who are said to be pure of heart, untainted and unbeholden by darkness..." Arfoire said.

"Oh? Are you interested in them, dear?" the tentacle woman asked.

"Hardly" the purple witch scoffed. "I have a different aim, and that...so-called Neptune is one of them."

"Are you certain that leaving her be was a wise choice?" the man with the snake staff questioned. "In time, the girl will become too strong for you"

Yet the purple hag remained overconfident. "Unless she recalls what her true power is, she will never reach my level! I can take my time with her while I...do some research while aiding you all."

The bag of bugs laughed again. "I never knew you'd be quite the gambler yourself!"

"I have already obtained two of their powers by now. One is already close at hand and the remaining one is still too weak." Arfoire said, clenching her fist at the sight of her victory. "I need only wait for the right time before I can fulfill my ambitions!"

"Quite confident, aren't you?" Maleficent remarked. "But do be wary. Overconfidence in the darkness will destroy you"

"I'll keep that under advisement, as a fellow witch." Arfoire scoffed off. "Now, about those princesses..."

"Yes, they are falling into our hands, one by one..."

She then motioned to her right, revealing the kidnapped Alice!

"Speaking of which..."

NEPSTATION

Neptune: You’re tuned in live to Nepstation, where all shall know the discoveries of the world!

Donald: *sighs* So this is what we’re starting with, huh?

Neptune: Come on, my fine-feathered co-host! You gotta liven up the party here!

Donald: Why are we even doing this?

Neptune: Because we gotta give the readers something to look forward to before the next chapter comes out! You know our franchises are infamously known for LONG waits before

the next big game, right?

Donald: *scoffs* How should I know that!?

Neptune: Anyway, let’s get on to the news!

---

an image of a dogoo surrounded by three gorillas appear onscreen

Neptune: A new animal has been discovered in the vast jungles. Explorers are curious to know what type of animal this even is.

Donald: According to recent findings, this little blob is known as a dogoo. A slime creature with the face and mannerisms of a dog. So far, only one of these creatures were found, leaving explorers baffled as to their nature.

Neptune: Whatever the case may be, it’s pretty clear that this poor critter may be the last of it’s kind. It’s always sad to see animals get driven to extinction...

Donald: It is. We should always take great care of them, for they deserve to live just as much as people do!

Neptune: Agreed! Now that that’s done with, let’s move on to our next topic!

---

an image of an apeman sharing bananas with a gorilla is shown. The two figures however are blurred

Neptune: Man and apes. Do they have more in common than we first believed?

Donald: Well, it is said that the first humans evolved from apes...

Neptune: And yet, few of them are still living as apes while more and more humans dot the world. I wonder how that happened...

Donald: Civilization happened, Neptune. Civilization.

Neptune: Uh-huh, and for civilizations to thrive, they need a large number of residents, which leads to our next topic!

---

a blurred image of a duck and ape appeared, with a big heart on the background

Donald: WAK!

Neptune: Interspecies attraction!

Donald: What do you think you’re doing!?

Neptune: Hey! I've seen how that little one looked at that person. I'd say we're bound for a new type of species at this rate!

Donald: No, we are not! That is not happening!

Neptune: Can you say that for sure?

Donald: Yes! Daisy would kill me if she ever learns about this!

CRASH

Histoire: What is going on there!? Uh, madam duck! Please, calm down...

?????: DO-NALD!!!

Donald: WAK! I'm outta here! *runs away*

Neptune: Welp, I guess that answers that question. Guess the talks about forbidden romances will have to be settled another time! Anywho, get back in here, buck-o! We've got stuff to look over!

Neptune: Okay! Now that we're here, let's continue yesterday's topic!

---

an image of the party with the words Nep Team Epic is displayed onscreen

Sora: Last time, we talked a bit about us, right?

Neptune: Yup. We told everyone here about our goals and such. For today, let's talk about our roles in the party.

Sora: Roles?

Neptune: The things we mainly do in our party and such! Let's start with the star of this chapter, our lovely nurse-to-be, Compa!

---

an image of a chibi Compa is shown onscreen

Neptune: As our resident nurse, she takes good care of our group, be it with good meals, experienced first aid treatments and even financial management!

Sora: I was quite surprised to learn she's good with numbers. I'm...not good with those...

Neptune: You gotta keep up, buck-o! Numbers are pretty important in RPG's! Anyway, since she's our lifeline, her healing's top notch. Her medicines come quick and easy, and as we go on, she'll have more varied medicines.

Sora: Really?

Neptune: Hm-hm! Regen Medicines. Panacea Medicines. Medicines for your allergies. She's got a lot of 'em! So, please appreciate your caretakers, guys! They're literally the reason you haven't died yet!

Sora: Of course! Moving on, let's talk about IF!

---

an image of a chibi IF is shown onscreen

Neptune: Iffy here's a guild agent. That means she's quite experienced in all sorts of jobs before she joined up with us!

Sora: Those really came in handy for us. It was thanks to her directions that we haven't felt lost yet...

Neptune: Yup-yup! Iffy's the coordinator and negotiator of our group. With her instructions and cool tactical mind, she guides our party to victory!

Sora: No one here's more reliable than our IF. Now then...

---

an image of a tiny Donald and Goofy appears onscreen

Sora: Donald and Goofy here are sent from another world to look for their King. Donald here's the Court Magician while Goofy's actually the Royal Captain of their world's guard. Pretty cool, huh?

Neptune: Oh! Fun fact, did you know that Donald's actually quite the veteran back in the day?

Sora: Really?

Neptune: Yup! You wouldn't know it at a glance, but this duck's fought wars before he became a magician. So, when it comes to battlefield smarts, the ducky's got it all...

Sora: Wow...

Neptune: But...despite what it looks like here, while the duck's all about that 'World Order' and stuff, the Goofster there's actually pretty smart!

Sora: For real!?

Neptune: For real! I heard he even got straight A's in his college exams, or so some sources tell me. Our dog's not dumb, he just doesn't use his brain a lot.

Sora: That's interesting...

Neptune: Between the ducky's mystical magics and the Goofster's stalwart defenses, nothing can get past these two...

Donald: SOMEONE HELP ME!!!

Neptune: Except for matters of love. They're totally helpless against that.

Sora: Ahahahaha...

Neptune: And now, for the coup de grace of this presentation.

---

an image of a chibi Neptune and Sora appears onscreen

Neptune: That's right! It's us, the Keyblade-wielding hero and heroine of this tale! The front-line fighters of the group! The faces that define Nep Team Epic! That...is us!

Sora: Uhhhh, so, what else do we talk about regarding us?

Neptune: Well...for starters, I'm more of a physical fighter than a magic-type of gal.

Sora: You know what? I just noticed you never even used the magic we've been getting lately? Why's that?

Neptune: Well, that's because, unlike you, Mr. Jack-of-all-Trades, I...cannot use magic...

Sora: Huh!?

Neptune: For some reason, I cannot seem to shoot out a fireball or whatever. No sparks of lightning. No shards of ice. Nothing.

Sora: Hmmmm....

Neptune: But! I can use our newly-acquired **Cure** magic properly, at least!

Sora: That's good. As for your other magics...maybe you should try using magic in a different way...

Neptune: How?

---

alarm bells ring

Neptune: Ack! We're out of time again!

Sora: Don't worry! I'll tell you later. We can even have Donald and IF help us out!

Neptune: Whew! You sure saved my bacon there! Thanks, Sora!

Sora: Don't mention it!

Neptune: Remember, folks! Leave comments. Give kudos. Subscribe. Bookmark. All that good jazz and everything!

Sora: So, from all of us here at Nepstation...

Neptune and Sora: See you next time!

Donald: PLEASE! SOMEONE HELP ME!!!

?????: YOU’RE NOT GETTING AWAY!!!

Chapter 6: Chapter 5: Hand (Unity) in Hand

Chapter Summary

> As our party returns to Traverse Town and does odd job requests, they bumped into friends, old and new, but these friends hide more than what they seem...

Traverse Town – Waterway

"Ah, there he is!"

From the figure's sights, she sees a man dressed in black practicing swings with his Gunblade.

"Off training by yourself?"

Leon stopped for a moment to see Aerith, sporting her usual toothy smile.

"Obviously" Leon got back to swinging his blade. "News from the front?"

"Got to two more worlds" the woman in pink answered. "Met a Drifter in one and sealed a Keyhole while getting another gummi in the other."

The man stopped for a breather. "I see. They're making good progress."

"Well, when you got people like those and a drive like theirs, it seems nothing can get in their way" Aerith remarked, bringing out a water bottle. "The Keyblades can only get them so far. Catch."

Grabbing the water bottle, Leon takes a drink from it. "Even so, things will get more difficult for them as they proceed. From what we saw, the worlds ahead are closer to where the Realm of Darkness is. Or to be more precise..."

"Where our home was, huh?" Aerith's expression became forlorn.

Leon looked at her. "Are you still doing alright? I know we still haven't made any progress looking for them since they disappeared, but..."

The woman in pink shook her head. "Don't worry, I'm still..." She sighed. "Okay, I'm still worried, even though it's been years since I last saw them. What about you?"

Leon closed his eyes and sighed heavily at the remark.

"You too, huh?" Aerith winced in sympathy. "Last we heard, she was running back to evacuate some folks. Next we heard, the world's fallen to darkness and an evil fairy went and made it her lair of doom." She sighed. "Oh, joy."

"All the more reason we need to build up our strength." Leon said, getting back to training. "We can't let Sora and Neptune bear the burden on their own forever, especially in a matter that directly concerns us."

"Hear, hear." Aerith cheered, then a lightbulb lit up on top of her head. "Say, I got an idea. One of the worlds they traveled to has a Coliseum in it that hosts tournaments."

Leon stopped again. "I think I know what you're getting at."

"Think about it, Squall!" the woman in pink kept going. "A free-for-all tournament, no-holds-barred against trained warriors and mystical creatures. No better place to get stronger than there!"

"It's Leon" The man sighed again, pinching his nose. "I'll think about it. Last thing we need is getting in trouble with Merlin or Donald about 'World Order' again..."

Aerith brushed the complaint off. "It'll be fine! A little break here and there won't be TOO much trouble. Besides, the Heartless broke the Order when they swarmed into our home, so I say why can't we do the same, even if only a little?"

"Whatever" Before Leon got back to training, he had one last question. "Speaking of trouble..."

Aerith turned to Leon with a loud hum.

"What do you think about Neptune?"

The woman in pink thought for a moment. "That amnesiac girl wearing the parka, right?"

Leon nodded. "You've heard her story, right? Regarding this 'Histy' and her search for her. Neptune believes that she holds the answers to her identity"

"Well..." Aerith started. "To be honest, by itself, it sounded too good to be true, but then she mentioned that 'Histy' was being held by an evil witch."

"Think she's being held by the same one?"

"Maybe. Or she could have other witches in her employ" Aerith's head lit another lightbulb. "Actually, that may be the case"

Leon stopped his swinging. "How so?"

"Arty told me something when she was called by IF recently" the woman in pink replied. "Apparently, Neptune got poisoned by a purple hag"

The man groaned. "Another one of her cohorts, then"

"Most likely..."

Leon sighed as he facepalmed. "Just when things couldn't get more complicated..."

Traverse Town – Empty House

"Hello~?" Neptune cried out into the house.

"Who in the worlds would be living in a place like this?" IF wondered.

"But Cid said we had to deliver the book here" Goofy said, showing said book, which has no cover page on it.

"Well, what else are we supposed to do while waiting for him to finish modifying the gummi parts we found?" Donald questioned.

"Good question..." Compa wondered as she held the blue blob they found from the Deep Jungle. "I was wondering what we're going to do with this little one here..."

She gently poked it's cheeks, earning excited panting from the dog-faced creature.

"Well, take him to someone else!" the duck complained. "That's the last time I'm taking in a pet that isn't Pluto in our ship!"

"Oh, come on, ducky!" the nurse fought back. "Mr. Dogoo wasn't that bad! He only broke a couple of plates and glasses from the kitchen!"

"Tell that to our broken sink!" the royal wizard shouted.

Goofy is doing all he could to keep the angry duck restrained, lest he squash the dogoo for it's wild nature.

"That reminds me" the guild agent said, turning her attention to the blob. "That old hag called him a do-goo, right?"

The walking dog nodded. "She said something about their kind bein' extinct or somethin'..."

IF then stared at it further, as if inspecting it like a priceless artifact.

"Something the matter, Iffy?" the nurse asked her friend.

"Hmmm" IF thought aloud. "I feel like I've seen this type of creature before. Maybe it used to live in our world."

Compa started to think too. "Maybe we should ask Arty about it later. And if she's got space for a pet like this one."

"And fast!" Donald agreed. "What do you think, Sora?"

But Sora was busy staring at space...

"There's something about this musty place..."

Or at least, what everyone else believed to be empty space.

"Woah, who's the cutie pie over there, Sora?" Neptune asked, noticing the girl walking around the empty hut.

"It reminds me of the secret place back home, where we used to scribble on the walls. Remember?"

Sora reached out to the girl, with red hair, blue eyes, a white shirt and a purple skirt, talking to him.

"Kairi?"

"Huh?" Neptune stared at the girl in front of them. "This is one of your BFF's, Sora?"

"Sora?"

"Nep-Nep?"

The two Keyblade wielders turned to their companions (plus the dogoo), who looked at them with worried expressions, then they looked back again to find the girl gone, as if she vanished from plain sight.

"What were you two doing?" the duck asked.

"DId you see her?" Sora asked the group, still feeling stupefied.

"See who?" the nurse tilted her head.

"You know?" the girl in the parka raised her hands in protest. "That cute red-haired chick that was walking in here just now?"

IF raised an eyebrow. "There wasn't anyone else here. If there was, I would've heard them already."

The boy turned to Neptune with a worried expression. "But you saw her, right!?"

The girl nodded furiously. "Heard her too!"

"You sure you two didn't see a ghost or something?" IF wondered.

"She's not a ghost!" Sora protested quite loudly, causing the guild agent to yelp.

"I may joke a lot, but my eyes and ears don't lie" Neptune protested as well.

"Okay, okay. Sorry for assuming..." IF apologized.

"But, then, who was it they just saw?" Goofy wondered. "Was it really Kairi?"

"Who knows?" Donald shrugged. "But staying here won't find us our answers."

Sora sighed in exasperation, but then felt a hand on his shoulder.

"You heard them, buck-o! We gotta keep moving. Besides, if I was able to see her a bit too, that means she's still gotta be out there, right?"

The boy turned to Neptune again. "You really think so?"

She nodded. "You just gotta believe!"

He nodded with a chuckle. "Yeah. Just...believe..."

Traverse Town – Third District

"Man, when I heard the name 'Merlin', I thought I was gonna meet a flighty pretty boy who can grow a garden of flowers wherever he goes..." Neptune said aloud, walking with her hands behind her head.

"Geez, what brought that on?" IF quipped, earning a shrug from the girl with the key.

"Still, it's a relief that we have someone who we can seek magic advice to!" Compa said with a smile as the dogoo in her hands barked.

"Not to mention that new gem we just got!" Goofy declared. "Right, Sora?"

The boy nodded, bringing out the gem.

"Leon gave us that gem and now thanks to the Fairy Godmother, we can use it's power now!" Compa recalled.

"A powerful ally will come out if you call upon them..." Donald recalled. "I wonder who will come out of this one?"

The guild agent turned to the square. "One way to find out..."

Upon saying that, two Soldier Heartless spawned.

"Oh-ho!" Neptune cheered as she summoned her Keyblade. "Convenient enemy spawns!"

"Time to try out our new friend, Sora!" Compa cheered, allowing the dogoo to jump away while she brought out her syringe.

"Okay..." The boy began to channel energy into the gem "Give me stre-"

When all of a sudden, the Soldiers were wiped out in a single slash!

"Woah!" the girl with the key gasped. "I didn't know we get someone that OP!"

"Uh..." the boy with the key stopped channeling. "I didn't even get to finish yet..."

"Then who was that?" the nurse asked as the dogoo jumped back into her hands.

"There you are, Sora! What's going on?"

The attacker was a young boy with silver hair, wearing a yellow tank top and blue pants. He was wielding a strange sword with a bat's wing for a blade and a mysterious blue eye near the handle.

"Riku!"

Sora, overjoyed to see his best friend, goes and stretches his cheeks playfully.

"Hey, hey! Cut it out!" Riku lightly pushed his friend's arm away.

"I'm not dreaming this time, right?" Sora asked.

"Well, we're all seeing him right now, so..." Compa wondered as she stared at the newcomer.

"Yeah, he's definitely not a mirage this time" IF said.

"I hope not. Took forever to find you, you know?" Riku said, fixing his hair.

"Well, I'd say we're already making good progress!" Neptune chirped. "We found one of our pals and he's NOT a trick of the eyes this time!"

Riku then looked at the girl in the parka standing next to his best friend. "And you are?"

"I'm glad you asked, stranger! I am Neptune, a fellow Drifter like yourselves! I am here to help him reunite with you and the apple of both your eyes while searching for someone myself!"

Riku rolled his eyes. "Really?"

"It's true!" Sora nodded. "Neptune and these guys have been helping me look for you and Kairi. Have you seen her?"

Riku shook his head. "Haven't found her since we left the islands. Isn't she with you?"

Sora groaned. "No..."

"Well, don't worry" Riku said, trying to make him feel better. "I'm sure she made it off the island, too."

He then walked past the party and looked up with his arms raised. "We're finally free. Hey, she might even be looking for us now."

As Riku kept talking, a Shadow Heartless spawned behind them, ready to strike!

"We'll all be together again soon. Don't worry. Just leave everything to me. I know this-"

He stopped when he heard a strike behind him. Sora, with Keyblade in hand, has taken out the Shadow behind them.

"Leave it to who?" the boy with the key boasted, slinging his weapon to his shoulder.

"Sora, what did you-"

"I've been looking for you and Kairi, too. I wasn't gonna sit around and twiddle my thumbs while you guys were out there, too!"

Neptune nodded furiously.

"So then" Riku crossed his arms. "What have you been doing?"

Neptune cleared her throat. "If you'll allow me..."

"We've been visiting so many places and worlds, looking for you!"

Neptune deflated. "Hey! Don't steal my thunder, buck-o!"

IF sighed. "Just shut up, Nep"

Compa sweatdropped. "Though we haven't visited too many worlds as of yet..."

"Really? Well, what do you know? I never would've guessed..." Riku's reply came out...stilted, almost forced, really. Something IF took notice.

"Oh, and guess what? Sora and Neptune here are Keyblade wielders!" Goofy boasted, patting said wielders on their shoulders.

"Who would've thought it?" Donald stomped, crossing his arms.

"With someone like those two, definitely not me." the guild agent shook her head.

"Hey!" Neptune shouted in offense.

"What's that mean?" Sora followed suit.

"So, this is called a Keyblade?" Riku asked, somehow managing to snatch his best friend's Keyblade.

"Huh?" Sora checked to see that his Keyblade was indeed out of his hand! "Hey, give it back."

But Riku hopped back, causing Sora to stumble as he continued to inspect the weapon.

"Jealous, huh?" Neptune boasted. "That weapon is legendary. It's thanks to them we can fight off the Heartless as we did."

"Really?" Riku said offhandly, then tossed the weapon back to its owner. "Catch"

"Whoa" Sora caught it. "Okay, so you're coming with us, right? We've got this awesome rocket! Wait 'til you see it!"

Riku thought for a moment. But before he could give an answer, a loud sound resonated throughout the district.

"Nep-wha!?" Neptune yelped as she and everyone covered their ears.

"That sounded like a bell!" Goofy said as he ducked, feeling the ringing from his sensitive ears.

"Where did it come from!?" Donald looked around frantically for the source, but couldn't find it.

After a good ten seconds, the sounds stopped, and everyone recovered their bearings.

"It stopped..." Compa looked around as she unplugged her ears.

"I heard there was a bell tower in this town..." IF said. "But I didn't think it'd be THIS loud..."

"Riku!"

Upon hearing Sora call his best friend, they noticed that he was gone!

"Where'd he go?" Goofy wondered.

Neptune groaned. "Don't tell HE was a ghost too!?"

Donald shook his head. "Nuh-uh. We all saw him and he replied to us. Riku was real, all right."

"And we just met up with him too..." Compa said, the dogoo on her arms whined with her comment.

"Well, at least I know he's okay" Sora said, putting his hands on his back.

"Will he be alright against the Heartless, though?" Goofy asked.

"Did you see that slash he did?" Neptune said with confidence. "I'm pretty sure he's quite tough"

"Yup" Sora nodded. "Toughest among us in the islands."

IF was humming aloud, as if absorbed into her thoughts.

"What's the matter, IF?" Donald asked the guild agent.

She sighed. "It's nothing. I'm just wondering about the bell that just rung a while ago."

"Why don't we ask Arty?" Compa suggested as the dogoo jumped excitedly. "She might know something."

IF nodded. "Yeah. We were gonna ask her about this little guy here anyway. May as well. Besides, I need someone to confide to about Riku, more precisely the jitters I felt around him..."

And so, the group headed off to the nearby empty house where Artisan is sheltered. All the while, Riku hides in a nearby corner watching them leave.

"You've got some company there, Sora...And I thought the three of us were inseparable..."

Traverse Town – Second District

Meanwhile, in the ever dark streets of the Second District, a lone girl, wearing a blue dress, with red eyes and black hair tied in twintails, looked around the place.

"To think I lost him here..." she said to herself. "I worry about what that witch would tell him. Probably more lies of the sort"

She then paced back and forth as she expressed her thoughts aloud...

"Still, this Refuge World is thriving, far more than the others did. I heard that the people who used to live in..."

...Unaware of her growing audience of six approaching her...

"...Then there's the Keyholes that lead to the hearts of each world. If left open, the Heartless will enter them and consume the world, casting them to the darkness..."

"Um..."

"...But then there are the Drifters who arrived in other worlds, potentially upsetting the balance. This is troubling..."

"Hello?"

"...But THEN there's the fact that there are people like me out there, and the first one I found turned out to be such a complete buffoon! She doesn't even recognize her own power or mine! I thought for sure something must've sparked in her mind when she..."

"Should we...bug her?"

"...Anyway! At this rate, the worlds will be consumed, and I still don't know if gathering the..."

"I dunno. She seems busy..."

"...would even help return things back to the way they were. Should I take matters into my own hands, when I don't even know much about myself or the worlds around me?"

"I got just the thing..."

The black-haired girl sighed. "Perhaps I should just keep a low profile for now. Who knows if I'll ever bump into-"

"Gotcha!"

The girl yelped as she felt two hands hugging her from behind.

"Gotta catch 'em all!"

"What the!? How? I don't even...!"

"Geez, you were out here, chatting yourself up, you didn't even catch on that you have an audience here! Are you, by chance, a loner?"

Her eyes widened at that proclamation. "A loner!? Who are you to call strangers you just met a loner!?"

She turned to see the accused and noticed a purple-haired girl in a parka. The sight caused her no great deal of surprise...

"N-N-N-N-"

"Hi there, beautiful!"

She jumped back at the sight of the small girl. "What are you doing here!?"

The other girl flashed a smile, pointing to the area above the gizmo shop. "Well, we're here to go check out that fancy bell tower up over yonder. You heard the bell rang a while ago, right?"

"O-Oh, yes! Absolutely!" The black-haired girl nodded furiously. "My ears were still ringing after the noises stopped. It was disorienting..."

Another girl, wearing a sweater, approached them. "Do you need some medicine for that?"

The black-haired girl shook her head. "Oh no! That won't be necessary. I'll live"

The sweater girl hummed. "If you're sure..."

"C'mon, guys!" the duck, who can talk, apparently, shouted. "What's the holdup?"

"That bell's not waiting for us, y'know?" the human boy in the group followed.

"Wait!" the girl in the parka said. "I got me a brilliant idea!"

The girl in the blue coat sighed, already knowing her idea is going to be dumb. "Well, get on with it."

"You gotta have faith, my friend!" she then turned to the black-haired girl. "Why don't you come with us, stranger? You'll be much safer with us!"

Needless to say, this threw the black-haired girl out of a loop. "Huh?"

"Are you sure that's a good idea, Nep?" the girl in the blue coat complained. "There's bound to be dangerous Heartless on the way, and we can't afford to bring a defenseless civilian with us"

"Oh, you don't have to worry about that"

The black-haired girl revealed a rapier sheathed on her left hip.

"I know how to defend myself. Besides, I am curious about this world I ended up in."

The parka girl nodded approvingly. "See? Ms. Loner here can defend herself."

"And would you stop calling me a loner!? I get the feeling that's what you're gonna keep calling me from now on..." the black-haired girl complained.

"Okay, then" the parka girl chirped, looking at her with her hands behind her back. "What's your name, then? Mine's Neptune, by the way!"

"Couldn't we just have the introductions instead of this banter?" the black-haired girl sighed, before introducing herself in earnest. "Call me Noire."

"Hi there!" the sweater girl greeted. "I am Compa. I can tend to your injuries!"

"Are we really going through with this?" the girl in the blue coat complained, and then sighed. "Fine. Call me IF"

"I'm Sora!" the boy called himself.

"Donald Duck" the duck in blue introduced himself.

"And I'm Goofy!" the walking...dog(?) chuckled.

"Neptune. Compa. IF. Sora. Donald. Goofy" Noire went through each of their names. "A pleasure to meet you all!"

"Same here!" Sora cheered. "Now let's get going!"

"YEAH!"

As the group headed out, IF tapped Neptune's shoulder.

"What's up?" the female Keyblade wielder asked.

The guild agent shushed her. "Are you sure it's a good idea to bring her with us? We don't know a lot about her..."

Neptune chuckled. "It'll be fine, Iffy! Besides, my Nep Senses are telling me that this gal's someone special. I just know it!"

"Special, how?"

Nep just shrugged. "I dunno, but I can feel it in my heart, y'know?"

The two looked to the newcomer, seeing her mingling with their party members.

"Besides, she looks fun to tease!"

IF sighed. "You better not let her hear that. Fine, just make sure she's well-adjusted with our group, okay?"

Neptune bounced. "You got it! I'll train her, feed her, pet her and everything! Noire~"

As she bounced after her new friend, IF was left alone to her thoughts. "Still, the fact that Riku just...vanished out of thin air and now this lady who seems to recognize Nep somewhat, judging by the expressions she made when she saw her. Not to mention her specific choice of words..."

The guild agent looked to Noire, who is currently trying to get Neptune off her arm as she clings to her. "Still, she might know something we don't. It may be worth to prod her mind on something assuming she's not as defenseless as she says she is."

She then catches up with the rest of the party on their destination...

Traverse Town – Gizmo Shop

"Wow! Look at all the tech in this place!"

The group enters the Gizmo Shop within the bell tower in order to find the passageway onto the bell.

"The gears here are making my head swirl..." Compa said, trying to shake the dizziness off.

Noire hummed. "This place seems...how do you call it, retro?"

"Doesn't seem much different from our world's Gummi Garage" Goofy stated as he rubbed his nose.

"You guys mentioned a ladder leading to the bell tower here, right?" IF asked the Disney Royal Guard.

Donald nodded. "It's just at the other side of this place. We placed it down, so we just have to climb up there."

"Alright, but stay on your toes" the guild agent warned the group. "You'll never know when Heartless will show up"

"In a place this small?"

As if to answer Sora's question, a small group of Shadows appeared in front of him, causing the party to bring out their weapons.

"Dude!" Neptune shouted. "What did I say about jinxing!?"

"Uh..." Sora stammered, feeling stupid. "Sorry?"

"Never mind that!" Donald quacked. "Let's get them!"

Meanwhile, a group of Soldiers appeared behind Compa!

"There's more over here, too!"

"I got'em!" Goofy charged over, tackling the ambushing Soldiers.

"Get back, Compa!" IF urged the nurse, readying a spell.

While the party split into two to deal with the surrounding Heartless...

"Of course, leave the defenseless civilian all by her lonesome here..."

...Noire is left in the middle of the shop to deal with an emerging Large Body, who is readying to jump!

"Noire, jump!"

The girl smirked. Despite Neptune's declarations, Noire already thought ahead and leapt up to avoid the Large Body's shockwave...

"Woah..."

"Heh"

...and landed right behind the bulking Heartless, taking a few stabs at its exposed back with her rapier.

"Now for the coup de grace..."

The twin-tailed girl wreathed her rapier in a purplish-glow and readied her killing blow...

"**POISON FENCER**! HA!"

...and stabbed the Large Body with her technique, leaving it disoriented as it's life slowly ebbed away.

"Heh" Noire smirked. "Told you I can handle myself!"

"That's great!" Donald shouted. "We're just about done here!"

"Same here!" IF called. "Someone, take it out!"

"I got it!"

Sora rushed to the downed Large Body...

"HAAAAAAAHHH!"

...and took it down with a leaping strike!

"Alright!" Sora cheered. "Nice work, Noire!"

Noire flipped her hair in thanks. "Naturally."

Her attention is then turned to the girl in the parka, who is just...gawking at her in suspense...

"...!"

...which caused her to respond by dashing towards...

"Nep-wha!?"

...the group of Soldiers that were about to attack her from behind!

"What are you doing!?" Noire scolded the girl. "Stop gawking and fight, Neptune!"

Neptune only laughed as she rubbed her head. "Sorry. I...uh...just couldn't help but gawk at how cool you were back there, y'know?"

The twin-tailed girl's cheeks flushed at the girl's remark, keeping her face in front of her foes'. "J-Just stay focused, won't you!?"

"Oki-doki!"

And look at that! A group of Blue Rhapsodies and **Yellow Operas** (yellow bell Heartless that produces lightning) appeared right behind Noire!

"In fact, watch this!"

Noire turned around to see Neptune charging against the appearing Heartless with her Keyblade wreathed in flames!

"**BLAZE BREAK**!"

Down goes the Blue Rhapsodies! "And now, for another!"

She unleashed a slash of frost against the Yellow Operas!

"**FROST CRUSHER**!"

And then, a group of Red Nocturnes appeared!

"**THUNDER BLITZ**!"

And Neptune fried them with a Thunder-enhanced attack!

"He-he!" She snickered. "How's that? I can be creative with my magic too!"

Noire snorted with a smile. "So, you can pay attention after all..."

Neptune turned her attention to the group of Shadows emerging in front of her.

"C'mon!" Noire urged her new companion. "Let's take it to 'em!"

The girl with the key nodded. "Okay!"

"Will those two be okay?" Sora wondered.

"I admit I'm a little worried..." IF said. "But with skills like that, I think they'll be just fine"

"If anything, Noire seems more reliable than Neptune in a fight" Donald snarked.

"Now, now, Donald..."

Before Compa could scold the duck for his comment, more Heartless surrounded the party.

"Let's make this quick" IF ordered. "We still got a bell to get to!"

"Right!"

Once the party made short work of the Heartless, they proceeded forward to the bell tower...

Traverse Town – Second District (Gizmo Shop Bell Tower)

"Say, Noire" IF approached the newcomer.

"Oh, IF, right?" Noire asked. "What is it?"

"I need to ask you something. Do you remember anything about your home world?"

"My...home world?" Noire thought for a moment, but it seems nothing came to her mind. "No, I don't think so"

"Nothing faint?" the guild agent pressed her for answers. "Like an image or what life you had there or anything?"

The black-haired girl shook her head. "Not a thing."

IF sighed, facepalming. "So that makes you the same as us, then"

"The same?" Noire raised an eyebrow.

"She means that we might share the same home world." Compa cut in the conversation. "There are Drifters out there who don't remember a lot of their home world."

"Drifters?" Noire asked.

"Basically, people who lost their home worlds and washed up elsewhere" IF summed up. "Me and Compa and even Nep there are Drifters"

The three looked to the aforementioned girl, who was cheering the boys on as they formed up a line to smash through the wooden barrier in front of the bell tower.

"What makes you three different from other Drifters?" the black-haired girl asked.

"The common thread being that we don't remember anything about our home world" the guild agent answered. "Sora over there remembers his home world well enough, but us? Not much"

"So that's why you're asking me about my home world..." Noire muttered. "Does that make me a similar case to the three of you?"

IF and Compa looked at each other for a while, and then the bell rang again.

"Gah!" IF groaned.

"Owie!" Compa protested.

"Sheesh!" Noire turned her attention to the four remaining party members, one of them in particular has her hands on a string. "Warn us when you're going to do that!"

"Sorry!" Sora yelled at them. "We're gonna ring again in a bit!"

"How long is a bit?" IF wondered as she regained her bearings. "Anyway, that makes you the same as us and a couple of others, Noire."

"You think so?" Noire asked, bracing herself for another bell ringing. "Just because we all don't remember our home world doesn't exactly mean we share the same one."

The bell rung a second as Noire finished her sentence.

"True" IF nodded as the bell finished ringing. "But a collective case of amnesia like that is clearly uncommon. I can understand forgetting due to trauma, but this is clearly out of the ordinary."

Compa nodded. "We've met some Drifters around the worlds just like us. They seem fine for the most part, but if you ask them about where they once lived, they cannot recall a thing."

"Really?" Noire raised both her eyebrows.

The nurse nodded. "Really"

"That's part of the reason why we're travelling with Nep there" the guild agent continued. "Artisan, a fellow Drifter like us, confided to us that the person she's looking for may have some answers for our dilemma too."

"Neptune's looking for someone?" Noire said a bit aloud.

"Yesiree!" Neptune answered suddenly, causing the twin-tailed girl to yelp. "I'm on a quest to look for the one who saved me, somewhat"

"Somewhat?" Noire raised an eyebrow at that.

"You see, when I first woke up, I was in a vast void of blackness, with nothing and nowhere found in every corner of my eye. As I wandered around, wondering what I should do, a heavenly voice called out to me and guided me out of that empty place!"

Noire continued to be doubtful towards Neptune's narration.

"However, she told me that she was held captive by an evil witch, and so, to repay her for letting me experience the world outside, I promised I'd save her. That's why I'm here travelling across worlds with Sora and the others."

"Hmmmmm..." Noire took the time to process everything the parka girl said. "...I see"

"What about you, my twin-tailed friend?" Neptune looked to her new companion. "What's your story?"

"Honestly, not much" Noire answered curtly. "I don't think it's worth telling you..."

"C'mon, what's the harm?" the parka girl brushed off. "If we're going to know each other, we'd at least learn a bit of each other's background, y'know?"

"Huh..." Noire looked at Neptune with a bit of surprise. "That's unusually smart, coming from you."

"D'awwwwww, you talk as if you know me so well!" Neptune said cheerily despite the choice of words. "That's rather adorbs of you!"

"Sheesh, you're going to be the end of me one day..." Noire sighed, letting her flushed cheeks settle down.

"*She's only spilling as much as she claims as she knows*" IF thought to herself. "*But judging by her words earlier and the way she fought a while ago, she's clearly a lot more than she presents herself. If my theory about her is right, then...*"

"*Dealing with her is quite excruciating...*" Noire thought to herself. "*Still, getting to know them and assessing how much they know is quite the experience. I'm surprised they prodded me with less questions than I thought. Maybe they didn't hear me, or are they just playing dumb like I am? No, that can't be, but I can feel that IF's eyes on me like she's waiting for me to do something. Ugh, why did I have to do this?*"

However, the bell rung a third time before Noire gets to entertain Neptune's question or finish her train of thought.

"...That makes three, huh?" IF said, opening her ears.

"Wonder what changed?" Compa wondered.

"Look there!"

Noire pointed to the fountain located below the district. As it turned, it revealed the world's Keyhole!

"Hey, isn't that..." Neptune started.

"Yep. No mistaking it" IF nodded.

"It's the Keyhole!" Compa cheered.

"Well, yeah..." Noire said. "That's what it looks like. Is there something different about this keyhole?"

Neptune chuckled. "Quite special, my not-so-lonely friend. For you see, that there leads to the heart of this very world!"

"The heart?" Noire asked. "Worlds have hearts?"

"Apparently, they do" IF answered. "According to Leon, these Keyholes are a passageway into a world's core."

"And because they are left open and exposed, the Heartless can get in there and destroy it!" Compa continued.

"Which is why Sora and I have to lock these holes shut to keep the worlds safe from further harm or something!" Neptune finished.

"...Interesting" was all Noire was able to say. "And how do you two do it?"

Neptune chuckled. "Watch and see!"

"*Still not croaking, huh?*" the guild agent thought to herself, keeping her eyes on their new party member. "*I'm surprised the others haven't even caught onto the fact that she knows more than she lets on. Still, they wouldn't be this trusting of someone like me if they weren't.*"

As the party headed back down to the Keyhole, IF finished up her line of thought.

"*Better just let her reveal her secrets when she's ready. I'd rather not destroy what little trust we're building up with her already. Besides, if I'm right, she may be a good source of intel on the other side...*"

Traverse Town – Second District (Near the Keyhole)

"Keyhole AHOY!" Neptune yelled happily as the party nears the aforementioned Keyhole.

"Oh boy!" Donald exclaimed excitedly.

"Let's get this thing locked up!" Goofy looked to the two Keyblade wielders. "You two ready?"

Neptune brought out her Keyblade. "Ready as we'll ever be!"

"Hopefully, this will be done quick and easy..." Noire hoped.

"Um, Noire..." Sora scratched his cheek. "I don't think you should say that..."

The black-haired girl raised her eyebrow. "And why is that?"

"Because..."

Before he could finish, a familiar set of purple armor suddenly dropped in unannounced in between the party and the Keyhole!

"...that tends to happen..." the boy finished.

"Darn it, Noire!" Neptune yelled at the newcomer. "Did'ya have to jinx us!?"

"H-How is this my fault!?" Noire panicked, drawing out her rapier.

"Worry about that later!" IF drew her qatars. "Get ready!"

"Hold on!" Sora brought out a familiar gem. "I got an idea!"

Seeing the gem, Neptune's eye glinted. "Oooooohhhh! Is it finally time!?"

"Time for what?" Noire asked.

"Summon it! Summon it!" Compa cheered.

"You can do it!" Donald also cheered.

"Summon what?" Noire asked.

IF sighed. "Just keep your guard up while you watch, okay?"

Sora then channeled his magic into the gem. "Give me strength!"

As he twirls his Keyblade around and released a stream of energy, a proud lion was summoned forth to his side. His name is **Simba**.

"A lion?" Neptune deflated a bit. "Really?"

"Oooooohhhhhh~" Compa, on the other hand, cooed at the majestic sight. "Isn't he so fluflly?"

"Hold on!" the court wizard exclaimed. "He seems to be empowered by the gem. Sora, help him out!"

Sora nodded. "Got it!"

Channeling his energy into his Keyblade, the lion also readied himself, hunching back slightly as he readies an attack.

"TOGETHER!"

Just as the familiar Guard Armor finished assembling itself, Sora released the stored energy, which along with Simba's **Proud Roar,** dealt monstrous damage to the Heartless and caused all its parts to disassemble immediately.

"Woah!" Neptune was now amazed. "That's one powerful roar! Are lion howls usually this strong?"

"Dunno" Goofy shrugged. "But it sure helped out a lot there!"

"Should we charge now?" Compa asked her guild friend.

IF furrowed her eyes at their prey, noticing something unusual. "Hold on..."

The downed Guard Armor immediately got up and reassembled itself!

"Oh, come the nep on!" Neptune complained.

Suddenly, the Guard Armor started to shake again.

"It's going to attack again!" Noire warned. "Sora, can you do that thing again?"

"Uh..." Sora started. "About that..."

The party then noticed that the summoned lion is gone!

"Where did Mr. Lion go!?" Compa whined.

"Guess you couldn't keep him around for long after that big attack, huh?" Neptune guessed.

Noire groaned. "We'll just do this ourselves! Let's get him!"

"Wait!" IF urged everyone, halting everyone in their tracks.

The shaking armor began to shift. Its metallic feet folded their calves while they changed positions with the hands. At the same time, the torso inverted, causing its larger underside to hold the head, which now unveiled its armor, revealing a set of yellow eyes.

No longer were they facing the Guard Armor, now, they are facing the inverted and more powerful **Opposite Armor**!

"Geez!" the parka girl complained once more. "And I thought we left all the topsy-turvy stuff in Wonderland!"

"This thing's seems tougher than the last one. But if it's anything like the last one..." IF then warned everyone. "Remember, team! Aim for the hands and feet first! Isolate the torso and we got this in the bag!"

"But..." Compa moaned, recalling a bad memory. "What if the chest starts spinning crazily again? I don't want a repeat of what happened last time..."

"I could try to catch for cues. Just keep your distance in the meantime." the guild agent insisted. "Alright then, guys. Let's do this!"

Charging forth, the team of seven proceeded to do battle against the menacing armor.

"So, how tough is this thing?" Noire asked Donald and Compa, who are attacking the inverted hands.

"It was quite tough when we last fought it" Compa said as she blocked an incoming attack.

"Not to mention we just met each other back then..." Donald replied, channeling magic into his staff. "But now..."

Compa's syringe was now charged with powerful magic thanks to Donald. "We're an official party! That means our teamwork is better than ever!"

"**TREATMENT BLASTER**!"

Combining **Fire, Blizzard and Thunder** magic into the contents of the syringe, their Combination Skill allowed Compa to fire a huge blast of condensed magic power, taking out one of the feet and almost taking out the other one.

"I got it!"

Noire immediately rushed in and struck down the remaining foot with her own attack.

"**PARALYZE FENCER**!"

Not letting up, the twin-tailed girl launched a barrage of strikes against the torso, ending it with her technique, leaving the armor stunned.

"That should keep it busy for a bit..." Noire then looked to the rest of the party dealing with the hands. "How are you all doing?"

Neptune was flailing around as she keeps jumping up to attack one of the hands. "So-so, I think! How about you, buck-o?"

Sora, on the other hand, was busy blocking hits from the other hand. "Same here!"

"Then we better step things up a notch!" IF hopped back, charging up her magic. "**FURIOUS LIGHTNING**!"

The lightning spell jolted the hands, inflicting them with Stun!

"Now, boys!"

Hearing her call, Sora and Goofy jumped up and struck down the weakened hands, taking them out of the fight!

"Just one left! I got this!" Neptune then dashed for the exposed torso. "**CROSS COMBI-**"

But then, the Opposite Armor's remaining body part began to glow red, emitting a powerful aura that pushed the party back!

"What in the...!?" Sora cried, bracing himself.

"That's not nepping fair!" Neptune complained at her technique being interrupted again.

"It's definitely getting desperate now!" IF warned everyone.

"*This aura...*" Noire looked around and above. "*This must be her doing...But where is she!?*"

The Opposite Armor turned around vertically, aiming its larger end against the ground as a swell of energy was gathering on it.

"What's it doin'?" Goofy asked, covering behind his shield.

"Is Mr. Heartless charging up?" Compa wondered.

"This is bad!" Donald cried, covering his head. "Take cover!"

The Armor then started blasting several large blasts of energy around the whole area.

"How is that thing charging up so fast!?" IF wondered, taking cover behind the nearby staircase.

"Boss design like that should only exist in the end or post-game!" Neptune complained. "Hacks! I call hacks!"

"...That's pretty much her MO, alright..." Noire mumbled to herself. "But where is she?"

"Shouldn't we do somethin' about that?" Goofy shouted.

"And get blasted into oblivion?" IF argued back. "No frickin' thanks!"

"But if we don't get out there, Mr. Heartless will destroy the whole district!" Compa yelled, noticing the damage around the Second District, judging from the broken walls, shattered windows and the presence of debris.

Broken debris? Destroyed homes? As Sora heard these words, images of his island being overrun by Heartless and the last of his world being swallowed by darkness began to fill his mind, causing him to gasp heavily...

"But what do we do?" Donald cried.

No! No more! No more homes will be destroyed today! Not now! Not ever!

Sora tightened the grip of his Keyblade as he controlled his breathing. "I'll go"

"Huh?"

"I'll stop it!"

Before the rest of the party could respond, Sora already left and charged straight at the enraged Armor.

"Sora!" Goofy called out.

"That idiot!" IF shouted. "Shouldn't he wait until we have a plan!?"

"And he's all out MP, too!" Neptune screamed.

"So are we!" Compa bemoaned. "I knew we should have bought items beforehand!"

Two of the shots missed the Keyblade wielder, but a third shot was able to hit him square in the face.

"SORA!"

He was severely pushed back, but he got back up again, and readied another charge.

"No...Not yet..." Sora told himself loudly. "I can't let everyone down...I can't let this town be destroyed, just like with my island!"

He charged again, but another shot hit him again, causing him to fall.

"Sora..." Donald said, his face evident with worry over the reckless boy.

"Oh Sora..." Compa said, her face also filled with worry.

"This is too much..." Noire couldn't bare to keep waiting. "*I swear, when I get her, I will...*"

Despite being knocked back again, Sora, who was clearly beat from facing numerous blasts from the empowered Opposite Armor, got back up again.

"Gotta...keep fighting..."

As he got up, he was about to stumble down!

"Gotcha"

But he felt someone grabbing his arm and slung it over their shoulder.

"C'mon, buck-o! You don't have to fight this OP thing all alone, y'know?"

Sora looked up to see his fellow Keyblade wielder, with her ever-bright smile plastered over her features.

"Sorry about that, Neptune"

She then raised her Keyblade and casted a **Cure** on her fellow wielder, letting him stand up straight.

"Feeling better?"

Sora, however raised an eyebrow at her. "I thought you said you're out of MP?"

"That was Compa" Neptune corrected. "And...uh, I had enough for that one Cure. Got no more in the tank..."

However, their short moment of reprise was halted by the whirling sound of energy.

The Opposite Armor fired another blast straight at them!

"SHOOT!" IF screamed.

"SORA!" Donald shouted.

"NEP-NEP!" Goofy called out.

"GET OUTTA THERE!" Compa cried.

...but seconds before it hit them, it was slashed off, causing the projectile to split off into different directions.

"Giving up already?" a familiar voice said. "C'mon, Sora. I thought you were stronger than that!"

The duo couldn't believe their eyes! In front of them are two familiar figures, one who even came back at the last moment!

"Riku!?"

"Noire!"

Before they could celebrate this reunion, the enraged Armor prepares another shot.

"There's no time!" Noire beckoned them. "Neptune, are you with me?"

Neptune grinned. "Got a plan?"

Noire grinned back. "Only the best one! *As much as our broke selves are able to manage...*"

The girl with the key then stepped forward. "Then I'll follow your lead, Noire!"

The black-haired girl then turned to the boys. "You two follow up after us. Got it?"

The two boys nodded.

Sensing that the Armor is about to fire, Noire gave the signal.

"GO!"

The four of them charged right into the incoming blast!

"*Three...Two...One*! NOW!"

Just seconds away before the blast hits them, Neptune and Noire swung their blades against the shot...

"Time to taste...your own...MEDICINE!"

...and deflected it right back at it, disorienting it!

"YES!" Neptune cheered.

"Now, boys!" Noire shouted.

"Ready, Sora?" Riku called out.

"You bet!"

At Sora's response, the two boys jumped up...

"HAAAAAAAHHHH!"

...and sliced down the Heartless, causing it to fizzle out...

"Look out!"

...and explode in a blast of light, releasing it's captive heart in the process.

"The noises stopped..." Donald said.

"Is it over?" Compa wondered.

Goofy and IF peeked out to see Sora and Neptune, looking exhausted from the fighting.

"Yup! They're okay!" the royal captain cheered.

"Those two, I swear..." the guild agent sighed in relief.

Meanwhile, Neptune approached Sora, who was holding on to a Spell Orb with a twister etched onto it. It was an Aero Spell Orb.

"Man!" the girl shouted. "That was totally awesome! Nice job, No-"

But upon looking around, she noticed two people missing from their little group.

"Oh c'mon!" Neptune grumbled. "Not only did Riku show up and vanished at the last second, but now Noire's gone too!"

Despite the situation, Sora smiled. "They'll be alright. Like I said, Riku's tough, and I'm sure Noire's tough too"

Neptune noticed that Sora's smile was strained. Still, she responded. "Just gotta believe, right?"

Sora nodded, and together, they sealed away the world's Keyhole.

"We did great today, right buck-o?" Neptune asked the boy.

"Yeah..." Sora said as his sight began to blur. "We did...great..."

And then, after the fierce battle had ended, he passed out...

Traverse Town – Third District – Vacant House

"...Ugh..."

Slowly opening his eyes, Sora found himself lying in a lone bed in a strange house.

"...Where am i?"

"Look who's awake!"

He turned to see Yuffie waiting by his bedside.

"Yuffie?" Sora asked the ninja. "What are you doing here?"

"Watching over you, duh!" the ninja responded. "Leon and Arty are here too!"

She jerked her thumb to the two, the latter holding on to the stray dogoo, who were near the door.

"You're awake" Leon said as he and Artisan approached him.

"That fight must've taken a lot out of you, huh?" Artisan wondered, letting the dogoo out as it bounced to Sora.

"Guess it did" Sora chuckled. "Where's the others?"

"Off shopping for supplies" the woman with horns answered. "No doubt buying food to celebrate your brave victory today!"

"More like this kid's being a reckless idiot" Yuffie shook her head. "He literally went all 'YAAAAAAAHHH' against that armor and keep getting blown back like a moron. If those guys haven't shown up, you might not be even BE here right now..."

Sora chuckled weakly, petting the dogoo. "Sorry about that. I just...didn't know what to do. I just knew I had to do something to defend the town."

"And we're grateful for that" Aerith said as she entered the house. "But that doesn't mean you have to be so reckless like that."

"Yeah! What she said!" Yuffie nodded. "Besides, who's gonna save your friends if you're gone?"

"My friends..." Sora's eyes widened. "That's right! Riku! Where is he?"

"Gone" Yuffie replied curtly.

"What do you mean, gone!?" Sora replied vehemently. "He was right there with me!"

"Precisely that" Artisan tried to smooth over. "According to Yuffie, your friend indeed showed up and helped you. Then, while the Heartless was exploding, he took that twin-tailed girl with her and vanished."

The ninja nodded furiously.

"Gone again..."

Sora laid down again, covering his eyes with his arm.

"Wasn't he just peachy a while ago?" Yuffie wondered.

Leon hmph'ed in response. "Guess he must have held it in for a while now..."

"Hey..." Aerith approached the boy. "...I know what's it's like, losing friends out there. I had three friends back in my childhood. Two guys and a girl. One day, we were out and about, doing business as usual, when suddenly, one of my guy friends found something weird and wanted to check it out, bringing the other guy friend along. When they didn't come back for the night, me and the other friend got worried, so we went around looking for them. Next thing I knew, I woke up, and they told me that other friend of mine have disappeared too."

"Aerith..." Yuffie said with a sad expression. Artisan closed her eyes as well.

"And of course, shortly after that, the Heartless came to our world and terrorized it. We then fled in Cid's Gummi Ship and landed in this town, where we stayed for almost a decade." the flower girl sighed. "And the rest is history..."

Sora looked up to the ribbon-wearing woman. "Did you ever find them?"

Aerith shook her head. "We tried and tried, but there have been no sightings of them, so far. Still, I don't want to give up. I want to believe that they're still out there, Drifted into other worlds, waiting for someone they know to come pick them up."

"For that long?" the boy muttered. "You must really believe in them, huh?"

Aerith giggled. "Someone's gotta do it. Though among the four of us, one of the guys was always the optimist. I try to be that too among us here."

"Hey!" Yuffie complained. "What does that make me!?"

"You're...more of a greedy fingers kind of gal" the flower girl responded, waving her fingers. "Always keeping an ear out for rare treasures and the like."

"T-That doesn't explain everything!" Yuffie complained as her cheeks reddened, which caught the dogoo's attention. "Ahhhhh! Down, boy, down!"

"You get what's she trying to say, don't you?" Artisan asked the Keyblade wielder, who nodded.

"Yeah. Riku and Kairi are still out there. I know Riku will be alright. But now, I just need to find out about Kairi and Donald and Goofy's King and Histy too. If they're okay, then they'll be out there in another world or two. I just gotta believe that they'll do fine before I get to them, right?"

"That's the spirit!" Aerith cheered, drowning out the noises of the ninja and the dogoo.

Traverse Town – Third District (Outside)

"Look at him, my dear..." Maleficent spoke to Riku. "Surrounded and cared for by strangers he just met. Your 'friend' certainly has found better company these days, hasn't he?"

She then loomed closer to the silver-haired boy. "You see now, plain as day. He cares for that new company far more than you..."

Riku scoffed off at that. "Why do I care about this?"

"You need confirmation, do you not?" the evil witch asked. "It's rather fortunate that Arfoire requested a favor from you, allowing you to probe further into his state of being. Mutual benefits, no?"

Riku scoffed again. "He can keep that company. As far as I know now, Kairi's the only one I can rely on now"

"And we're looking into her state of being right now" Maleficent reminded. "Remember, we're doing something for you in exchange for doing some favors for us as well."

"And I prefer to keep the distance between us that way" he said coolly. "Last thing I need is someone to betray me like he did..."

The evil witch chuckled sinisterly. "Did Arfoire's little spy approach you one day? I'm certain that is something she would say, though given that I have yet to actually meet her, I could be wrong."

For a third time, the silver-haired boy scoffed.

"I don't care"

Traverse Town – Third District – Vacant House

"Don't forget about the Keyholes" Leon reminded the boy. "The more Keyholes you seal, the less worlds the Heartless will take. That, in turn will ensure that Maleficent's web of influence won't spread further than it already did."

Sora rubbed his head. "No pressure there"

"Hey, if it helps" Artisan suddenly said. "It may even lead you closer to that witch who poisoned Neptune"

"Witch?" Sora asked.

"Oh yeah!" Yuffie, who now has the dogoo held in her arms, suddenly remembered. "You mentioned a purple witch before, right?"

"Yeah" the woman in the white cloak nodded. "IF told me about that over the phone."

"I think I saw someone like her in the Second District a while ago!"

Everyone looked at the ninja in surprise.

"When was that!?" Sora demanded.

"That was when you were fighting that Heartless protecting the Keyhole" Yuffie answered. "Purple lady? Big hat? Large tome? Very old? Yup, definitely looks like a witch!"

"Then I guess she's gone after the fight, huh?" Sora said, crossing his arms in thought.

The Great Ninja sighed. "Unfortunately..."

"Wonder where she went..." Aerith wondered. "And what her aim even is with all this?"

"Considering that she targeted Neptune before" Artisan thought aloud. "I can guess nothing good..."

"Regardless" Leon smoothed over. "Just keep looking around and do what you do best, Sora. You will find what you seek as you go."

Sora slapped his fist in agreement. "Yeah. We got this!"

Traverse Town – Third District (Watch Tower)

"What is the meaning of this!?" Noire shouted to the old lady in front of her. "Why did you make that Heartless go berserk like that!?"

"Whatever do you mean, Noire?" Arfoire looked away with nary a shame. "And I even made sure that boy of Maleficent's would stick around a bit more to bail you out, too..."

"And guess what? He bailed on us after the fact! Besides, I noticed the aura around it." the black-haired girl said with a growl. "Heartless usually never gives out auras like that. I knew for myself since I defeat them around the castle for training."

"And at one point, I ended 'upgrading' one of them during your patrols, which caused you to unleash your true power, the Hard Drive Divinity, isn't that right?" the old witch sneered.

The girl furrowed her eyes at her. "So that's your game, then? You were hoping to make me transform in front of them."

Arfoire chuckled. "Not quite. It is your own fault for concealing your power from them."

"Shut up!"

Noire pointed her weapon, which transformed from a rapier to a black-and-blue Keyblade with medium-length blade and a logo named 'LS' as it's edge. It's keychain is similar to that of Neptune's Keyblade, except the crystal's color is black.

Sensing the empty threat, the witch chuckled again. "To be quite frank, I was hoping to draw Neptune to the edge with this stunt, but those buffoons accompanying her would prove quite the problem. Not to mention, that dull boy whom the Keyblade has chosen..."

"You're still gauging if she's a CPU!?" Noire yelled at her. "I already tested her before. She's too weak to be a CPU!"

"That's what you think" Arfoire replied back. "But tell me this. Why would she be able to wield a Keyblade just like yours?"

"Like...mine?" She looked to her Keyblade.

"You noticed the keychain attached to it, right?" the witch pointed to the tiny power symbol on her Keyblade. "It is a symbol of a Keyblade's identity. In your case, it is the proof of your identity as one of the CPU's of the lost world of Gamindustri"

"And...Neptune has something like it, too..." Noire pondered on it. "Still, that doesn't prove that she's one like me, too!"

"Feel free not to believe me on that, if you so please" Arfoire waved off. "If you want, you can probe her strength some more. I care not how you proceed with your life. Just remember that you still owe me for allowing you sanctuary in Maleficent's charge. Otherwise, she would have left you to the Heartless."

As the witch left in a puff of smoke, Noire looked to her own Keyblade again. "My proof as a CPU...Is Neptune really one, too?"

She shook her head, groaning in frustration. "How could I trust that witch on her word when she has repeatedly toyed with me for her own sick amusement since then? How can I face Neptune after how welcoming she and her friends were of me? Not to mention, this...tugging feeling in my heart when I'm near her."

She slapped her own face with her hands. "Calm down, Noire. Remember, in this vast space, you can only rely on yourself. You must keep everyone at a distance. That way, your heart will never falter..."

A bright light erupted around her, transforming her into the Newtype that the party encountered in Wonderland!

"It won't...It won't"

NEPSTATION

Neptune: We're back in Nepstation, and this time, we're bringing another guest. Say hello to them!

Artisan: Hello, everyone. It's great to be here!

Neptune: Man, imagine my surprise that this is the first time you showed up in a Neptunia fanfic, and it's in a crossover of all things!

Artisan: I admit, I really didn't do much to stand out in my only game. Not to mention, it's so different some people got turned off by it!

Neptune: Psh! Don't listen to those nay-sayers! There's nothing wrong with the classics! I mean, look! Indie games are pretty much rising in popularity nowadays since the gaming scene is changing! In this time and age, us classic gamers gotta stand together and support these indie developers to enrich their talents and opportunities.

Artisan: True. I did have fun making that game, so there's that. If you all have the time to see it, give Super Neptunia RPG a try! You might like it!

Neptune: Alright, now that self-promotion is out of the way, let's get to the news!

---

an image of the Gizmo Shop appears onscreen

Artisan: Recently, the town has seen an increase in their productivity thanks to the reactivation of the local Gizmo Shop, said to be inactive for a few years.

Neptune: Really? How bad was it?

Artisan: Well, some of the houses has reported electric cuts for a good number of hours before the lights went back on. Nowadays, the lights have always been on for as long as the people want it to.

Neptune: That must be quite the load off of people’s back, huh?

---

an image of a certain engineer shows onscreen, but his eyes are crossed out

Artisan: Hm-hm! Even Engineer C here states that he can go back into his old work and has been working non-stop ever since. He must be really beside himself now that the power’s here to stay!

Neptune: A hero’s work is never done, right?

Artisan: Indeed. Now, let’s move to the next article.

---

an image of a dogoo chasing after a ninja girl appears onscreen. The ninja’s eyes are crossed out

Neptune: A recent report stated that a new animal has been sighted around town, causing a ruckus and disturbance to the general public. Great Ninja YK had this to say.

Ninja YK: This thing is just too excited! Someone, please neuter this thing before it goes too wild! AH! Please don’t lick me! I’ll get rabies!

Artisan: Authorities are already handling the situation as we speak. Rest assured that the wild animal will be tamed and caged before the day is over.

Neptune: And another remind that you should train your pets and keep them tamed! We wouldn’t wanna cause a lot of ruckus in this quiet neighborhood, ya hear?

Artisan: Quite, and now for the last segment...

---

an image of a black-twintailed haired girl being hugged from behind is shown onscreen. The girl’s eyes are crossed out

Neptune: This is actually a sponsor! Have you ever wanted to talk to that new friend of yours but find their expressions hard to read? Do they look like they are always angry for whatever reason or not? Well, look no further, because this Nep’s got the solution!

---

an image saying School of Transcribing Tsunderes with a chibi Neptune on the left raising her arm to the logo appears onscreen

Neptune: Starting today, you can sign up to the School of Transcribing Tsunderes. Ever wanted to get closer to that hard-to-approach gal or guy? Ever wanted to understand what they’re saying or trying to say? Well, worry no longer! With my lessons, you’ll be getting that Rank 10 Bond Level with that tsundere in no time! In fact, I have a student who’s already excelling pretty well in our test run!

Artisan: Really now? How is their progress?

Neptune: Why don’t we ask him? Student S?

---

an image of a spiky-haired boy appeared onscreen

Student S: The lessons are going well! I feel like I can understand these people now! You should give these a try!

Neptune: Well?

Artisan: *chuckles* Alright, you’ve piqued my interest! I may consider signing up myself!

Neptune: He-he-he! That’s the spirit!

the previous image of the School of Transcribing Tsunderes reappeared

Neptune: So, what are you all waiting for!? Sign up for the School of Transcribing Tsunderes today and become better friends (or even more) with that hard to approach person in no time, guaranteed! It’s Nep-tastic!

Artisan: And that’s all for the news corner today!

Neptune: Which means it’s topic time! Since my usual co-host is doing some homework today, why don’t you pick one for us today, Arty?

Artisan: Certainly! For today’s topic, let’s discuss...

the word Drifter appears onscreen

Neptune: Aha. A quite obvious topic for you to pick!

Artisan: Hahaha! Can’t go wrong with something obvious. Now then...**Drifters**, as coined in this story, are people who have lost their worlds to the darkness and have landed on others as a result. These people tend to be out of place compared to the usual residents of a world, which makes them distinct and easy to spot with a trained eye.

an image of Traverse Town appears onscreen

Artisan: In certain cases, Drifters can end up in **Refuge Worlds** such as our own Traverse Town. Here, Drifters can settle in and stay for a while until their world can be restored.

Neptune: How will that work? Aren’t worlds that are gone...just gone?

Artisan: Not quite. Since worlds fall into darkness, they can be restored, but how that can be achieved, I don’t know, but we’re looking into it with what we have.

Neptune: I sure hope we find a way.

Artisan: You and me both. Continuing on the topic of Drifters...

an image of IF, Compa, Broccoli and Rena appears onscreen

Artisan: While some Drifters can clearly recall their lives and world of origin, some are special cases. They cannot recall their home, whatever lives they had before. All they can remember are the names they have, whatever skills they acquired and a few other things, depending on the Drifter.

Neptune: And get this! We believe that all these Drifters likely came from the same world! What that world is, oh boy we wish we knew!

Artisan: Just one of many mysteries to solve on your journey ahead, right?

Neptune: Yup! I get the feeling we'll find our answers soon enough.

Artisan: And we'll await whatever information you can give us!

Neptune: You got it! So, from us all here at Nepstation...

Neptune and Artisan: See you next time!

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