

“STOP,” said Belgemine. “That is enough.”

Isaaru dismissed the aeon and lowered his staff, sneaking a glance at his brothers, who grinned at him from where they sat behind her; Maroda flashed a brief thumbs-up, while Pacce bounced up and down with glee.

Belgemine continued. “You’re good; you bested me fairly.”

Isaaru couldn’t help but frown at her typically evasive phrasing. True, he had beaten Belgemine in this contest, but what could that really tell him about his progress as a summoner? She had already informed him that she wasn’t able to defeat Sin herself, for reasons that remained unclear. And her expression, as usual, betrayed nothing: she would have looked just as severe had he lost the battle, he was sure of it.

“Excuse me,” he said, “but – you train other summoners like this, don’t you? I just wondered if you might tell me –”

It was embarrassing to be asking, and still more so to be speaking so hesitantly, like a little boy. Despite his clumsy way of putting it, though, she seemed to understand what he was getting at. “You *are* good,” she assured him. “Most summoners fail to meet my challenge. But, I must say, there is one on the road at the moment who quite clearly outshines the rest of you.”

“Yuna,” he guessed, thinking back to the young woman he had met at Djose Temple.

Belgemine inclined her head. “That is correct. But don’t

be discouraged; she has the blood of the High Summoner, after all. If I were you, I would see it as motivation.”

“Yes,” said Isaaru, smiling to himself; he already did.