

## Chapter 3: The Queen Returns

Though no wind blew on his face, Crono felt as though he was moving very quickly, whether forward or backward, as he traveled through a brilliant display of wavy energy bands all around. The abyss seemed like a boundless field of flowing colors that eventually converged at an approaching point of blackness and suddenly stopped as Crono opened his eyes very slowly to sunlight.

He quickly noticed that he was in a small, grassless field. It was certainly nothing like the pod he had been standing on just moments before.

Without moving a muscle, his eyes rolled from side to side as he tried to identify where he had landed. “Truce Canyon...,” he muttered softly, following it with a drawn-out groan as he sat up. Though he hadn’t been there for months, Crono was quite familiar with the locale. He used to wander up there with Lucca to frolic around in the winter snow or to gaze upon Truce from up high, a view that was particularly breathtaking on clear nights when the lights of the town cut through the darkness like an ensemble of countless soft-glowing lanterns.

Come to think of it, he had just earlier that day invited Marle to share in that same view. Little did he expect it might happen so soon, if at all.

Finally, he took a step forward, continuing to glance around in the small clearing. “I wonder how the Telepod got me up here,” he said, pondering the strangeness of the situation and staring blankly at a nearby canyon wall. The situation didn’t seem so bad after all. As far as he could tell, Lucca’s new invention had simply sent them farther away from the square as opposed to a colorful plane of nonexistence or, even worse, nothing.

*That ride sure seemed strange compared to the first teleportation,* he thought for a moment. He began turning his head in every direction, hoping that Marle was still wondering about nearby.

Then he perked into awareness as the orange-leaved bushes around him began to rustle. “Marle?” he called gently. Instead, three small creatures with blue skin, pointy ears, and large creases down the middle of their heads hopped out and surrounded him.

Though unsure of the creatures’ intent, he quickly laid a hand on the grip of his sword. They were much smaller than him, peering up through mischievous eyes.

“Imps...,” he muttered, referring to the known creatures among the Mystics. Of course, he hadn’t actually seen one in years; and that was only once, when a small band of them escaped from a Medina-bound convoy and wreaked havoc in the streets of Truce.

Suddenly, one of the imps ran up and kicked him in the shin. “Hey!” he shouted, drawing his sword. Before the imp could scatter away, he brought the sword around, cutting the repugnant creature. It ran off into the bushes as Crono heaved his foot into another, knocking it flat to the ground. “Get out of here, you stupid pests!” The third sized up the situation and ran off with the others.

Sheathing his sword, he looked around him, puzzled. It was extremely unusual for any Mystic to be in the vicinity of Truce, but, then again, perhaps even some Mystics could be drawn by the Millennial Fair, if even just to watch from the canyon.

He left the small clearing, climbing up an unfamiliar rope ladder and crossing over a cliff by way of a short, wobbly rope bridge with wooden planks. After going down another ladder, he followed a small path to a little patch of woodland. Recognizing this area of the canyon, he expected to see Leene Square just yards away.

It was then that the eerie reality hit him: The square wasn't there. "*What...?*" he gasped, squinting at the vacant site. Nothing but a grassy expanse led to the downward hill he knew as the route into town.

Then he took a look down the hill, seeing what had to be Truce. He breathed a sigh of relief at the knowledge that something was there. However, the buildings were arranged and styled differently. They were red on the top and brown everywhere else—seemingly bleaker and of lesser quality workmanship than the buildings Crono knew.

"That...can't be Truce..." He slowly started towards the hill leading to the town below, trying to keep his mind focused on his mission. "I've got to find Marle. I just hope she's safe." Now, the situation was obviously somewhat worse than he had thought.

His legs suddenly feebler than usual and his stomach uncommonly tight, Crono continued down the hill to the village he knew as home yet had never seen in his life.



A zombie-like trance struck Crono as he stepped onto the cobblestone street of the rustic village settled into the hill's end. The lingering fog of the hill dissipated once in the vicinity of the town, granting him a clearer view of the wooden buildings and the bustling commoners as they walked about briskly between destinations. He glanced upward, noticing the contrast between the sun-drenched day he had awakened to and the overcast sky that now loomed above.

Touching his boots to the lumpy street confirmed that there was indeed a town here, albeit an imposter town. As he walked perplexedly forward, he soon wondered what else could be different between this town and his. Perhaps if he could find a familiar face, someone whom he would recognize and trust, then such questions could be answered.

As Crono moved down the northern-most streets with an unnerving and curious face, he noticed the scores of villagers, mostly dressed in drab tunics and breeches in various shades of brown, burgundy, and green, walking casually about and merchants tugging on carts of fruit or bread for sale. Blankly, Crono continued to walk until he found himself looking beyond the town to the cliff up high and beyond Guardia Forest.

There was a major parallel between this world and his: Guardia Castle stood gallantly on high, as it always had. Feeling only slightly relieved, Crono stopped to ponder these observances. "This is impossible..." he muttered. "It's like I'm standing in an alternate universe." His theory seemed plausible. After all, he hadn't seen his house on the way into town, the inn wasn't where he remembered, the town sundial was nowhere to be found, and he had yet to see a familiar face.

Dazed and confused, Crono soon found himself under a wooden sign bearing the words “Truce Inn.” Now he at least could confirm that he was in a town called Truce. In hopes of organizing his thoughts and finding clues as to the whereabouts of Marle, he pushed through the door and entered the wooden building.

A dulled fragrance of evergreen lumber welcomed Crono inside the inn, a scent that he inhaled delightfully. As Crono fully expected, it was much different than the Truce Inn he knew. The bar counter was off to the right and stretched all the way down to the wall. To the left and past the check-in counter was a stairway leading up to the inn’s rooms. Several men were sitting in the dark wooden chairs before the bar, some waiting for the busy bartender to bring them a drink. Sounds of talking, clinking glasses, and scooting chairs blended together to form the classic chorus of the pub.

Crono stood at the doorway and observed the unfamiliar ambiance, gyrating his head slowly in every direction. He counted a total of three soldiers, judging their occupation by the armor they wore. Two sat at the counter completely engaged in their drinks, and the other stood by the check-in counter, watching Crono glaring around as though unaware of his own existence.

After several moments of irritation, the soldier called out to him. “You got a problem, son?”

Crono’s head shot forward indiscreetly. “Who, me? No, of course not...,” he replied, slightly stuck on the fact that fully armed soldiers were hanging about the rest of the crowd.

“Well quit standing in front of the door, then!”

“Door?” He looked back and sidestepped left. “Oh...sorry. Say, can you help me out? I think I’m a little lost...” He gulped slightly and hesitated, trying not to sound overly absurd. “Where exactly am I?”

The soldier eyed him strangely. “That’s an easy one. You’re in the inn.”

“No, I mean, *where* am I? What land am I in?”

“*Where am I?*” he looked at the others in the room, mocking Crono with hearty laughter. “Are you stupid? *This* is the Kingdom of Guardia! We’re battling Magus’s army. You did know that, right?”

“*Guardia?* Uh...of course I knew that. I just...”

“Then shut your pie hole!” interrupted the soldier as he turned to the checkout lady unobtrusively. “Lovely—we *need* more ignorant strangers around here!” He then stomped out of the inn.

Crono quickly slipped into an empty seat cattycornered from a large man gulping down mugs of some sort of tasteful liquid and besides a soldier chatting with his comrade. While seated, he stared into the horizontal wood grains shooting down the counter and attempted to put his thoughts together. Clearly, he was in Guardia, and in the town of Truce. Still, Leene Square, his house, and everything else he knew were nowhere to be found. As Crono pondered, he looked up to see the bartender eyeing him suspiciously. After a moment, he turned away, silently rinsing off some mugs.

Crono decided upon a brave move, the impression of his sanity at hand, and leaned towards the large man. “How ‘bout that Millennial Fair? Quite a trip, huh?”

He sat his mug down roughly. “Millennial Fair? What? Are you crazy?! The only ‘millennial’ fair *I’ll* be at is the one with one thousand Mystics on the barbeque! What nonsense!”

Silenced, Crono slithered back with nonchalant embarrassment. The two soldiers were now talking openly to his right and had gained the bartender’s involvement, as well.

“What a relief!” said one of the soldiers. “They finally found Queen Leene wandering up in the mountains!”

“Queen *Leene*?” whispered Crono to himself.

“Did they, now?! What great news!” replied the bartender. “Perhaps I can now work in peace.”

“She must be glad to be home! I heard she was quite shaken,” replied the other soldier as his hand and mug lifted from the counter.

“The queen has been through a lot! She’s been babbling about the oddest things.” The soldier who had started the conversation removed his helmet for a breather, pushing back his matted hair.

“Everyone was worried! King Malcolm freaked when the queen took off. We all thought Magus had grabbed her. Apparently a small band of Mystics decided to just dump her in the canyon. Thank goodness she’s safe!”

The topic at hand had gathered the attention of all in earshot, including that of another young man, who blurted out his own thoughts. “It’s too bad how Magus’s army destroyed Zenan Bridge! Now I can’t leave the northern continent!”

“They destroyed the bridge?” asked Crono, unsure of how they would reply.

“Didn’t you see it?” answered the nearest soldier. “Its entire middle section is gone!”

“Wow...” Crono turned around, only to be startled by a lanky man in tatty traveler’s clothes, a white bandana, and a brown mustache.

“Are you a stranger here, too?” Crono nodded. “I’m Toma, the explorer.” He extended his hand warmly. “If you’re buying, I’ll tell you a story.”

“If I’m *buying*...?” He stood there silently, his facial expression compressing into a slightly less welcoming glance. On the verge of refusing, he realized that news from the traveler could yield some clues to Marle’s location. So, he took out a 5 gil piece and slapped it on the counter. Trained by the sound of money, the bartender rushed to meet them. “Sure, why not?”

“Cider, please!” called Toma. The mug appeared instantly. “Thanks! It’s about the missing queen. She disappeared while visiting the cathedral to the west, and...”

“The queen?” Crono interrupted. “These soldiers say that she’s been found.”

“Beg your pardon?”

“I said they found the queen.”

“*What*?! They *found* her? Never mind...” He smiled with a small chuckle and took a gulp from his mug.

“Wait a minute! I just paid for information, and *that’s* all you’ve got?!” Crono was about to demand his money back, but Toma had already gulped most of the cider with unmatched voracity and was standing to leave.

Toma turned back to him. “That you did, friend. It’s just that there isn’t anything I could tell you now that would be worth your money. The cider was great, though!” With a wink and a smile, he continued out the door.

With a sigh, Crono turned to leave, but stopped short of the door. “I wonder...” Suddenly, he dashed up the stairs, where the sleeping quarters were located, and stopped in front of one of the rooms.

“This should be the one,” he whispered.

He cracked open the door with controlled speed and gazed around the room—and then he saw it: the black box! He nearly cursed all that was good, but settled down and looked back towards the smooth, impenetrable object. “Well, here’s one thing that’s still the same...and I still wish I could open it.” On the brink of laughter, he realized that the only thing that hadn’t changed at all was something he had never figured out in the first place. Just as confused as before, he left the inn and walked onto the street.

“This is crazy!” he said, speaking indiscriminately to himself. “The castle’s here, the canyon’s here, the forest is here...but where’s everything else? It’s like everything has been thrown into a cauldron and mixed around!” In search for more answers, he ran down the teeming street, dodging people left and right until finally slowing near a residence, where loud clanging noises were resounding from within.

He cautiously squeezed his head into the small building, which he soon realized was a metalworking shop. A husky man knelt before a beautiful bell, hammering in the final touches. His form, stature, and even facial features distinctly reminded Crono of Lucca’s father, Taban.

Then his eyes landed on the bell, which itself was unmistakably familiar.

“That bell...it can’t be...*Leene’s* Bell...?”

Just then, the blacksmith turned his head and smiled warmly. “Good day to you, lad! I’m Banta, the blacksmith, and this is my wife, Rala.” He motioned to the thin lady perched in a chair in the back of the shop. “What can I do for ya?”

“I’m looking for a lost friend. She’s about my age with very pretty blond hair, beautiful green eyes, and white clothes....”

“Heh...Your friend sounds more like an angel. In fact, she sounds a lot like Queen Leene, doesn’t she?” He smiled again, noticing Crono’s perplexed stare. “I’m sorry, son, but I haven’t seen her.”

Crono appeared disappointed, though not surprised. Banta decided to try his hand at comforting him. “Well, have you heard about the queen? They found her, safe and sound! In fact, I’m forging this bell for the king to present to his beloved Queen Leene! I lost it when she disappeared. I just couldn’t keep working on the bell. But now it’s business as usual!” Pausing, he relished in his relief. “Anyway, I’m sure you’ll find your friend.”

Crono’s face blanched, realizing that his suspicion was true. “Queen Leene?” All that he had heard and seen so far suddenly pieced together, and a new suspicion arose in his mind. “So, that’s *Leene’s* bell?”

“Sure is!”

In his excitement, he backed clumsily into the doorframe, staggered a bit, and quickly straightened himself up. “Thank you! Good day to you both!” He dashed out,

almost for fresh air, stumbling in front of a woman and her young son as they passed by. His thoughts were now increasingly restless. *How can that be Leene's Bell...? Unless....*

Several scenarios suddenly flooded his mind in that moment. Could it be possible that Marle was the queen? Despite the dawn of an immense headache, he remembered the way in which Leene's Bell rang when they met at the fair and of how she had felt out of place, especially the night before. Suddenly he began to understand the strange way she had acted.

Then he thought, *But Leene was a queen from the distant past, which could only mean....*

Desperately, Crono turned to a woman and her husband, who were walking together along the street. "Excuse me, can you tell me the way to the Millennial Fair? You know, the celebration for the new millennium. The one that kicked off the morning after King Guardia XXXIII's speech...!"

They returned him expressions that revealed his apparent insanity. She replied, "A Millennial Fair? Here? What *are* you talking about? It's the year 600, as of today, and the twenty-first King of Guardia reigns."

"*Twenty-first?! 600?!!*" The couple left him rather swiftly as Crono fell against the side of the blacksmith shop tensely, his hands on his head as he muttered to himself and appeared quite the imbecile to those passing by. "Then this isn't an alternate universe. I've traveled back in time! That *was* Leene's Bell and that *is* Guardia Castle! This is unbelievable!"

He looked up into the sky. "If this is all true, then Marle must be...." His eyes remained focused on the distant castle as he began to run through the many sayings of the townsfolk. "They said that the queen had been missing, but then they suddenly found her in the mountains. Now things are making more sense, but there's only one way to be sure."

As he stood and headed for Guardia Forest just outside of town, he began to think about Lucca. *If Lucca follows the portal here, I wonder how she plans to get us home. If she can't find a way, we could be stuck in this time....* He shook his head dismissively. *No, I need to remain optimistic.*

Within minutes, the town was behind him and the path through Guardia Forest to the castle was drawing near.

Then he stopped, quickly reaching into his pouch and pulling out Marle's pendant. He felt his heart sink to his knees as he stared at it in horror, knowing that the pendant had been the key to opening the portal. "Oh, Lucca," he muttered. "I hope you can pull *this* one off...."

Finally, he reached the edge of the forest, where he paused to view the castle as it towered high overhead. "I wonder how different the castle looks inside. Seems the same from here," he said, stepping onto the trail. "I just hope they'll help me out."



The path through the forest, just like in his time, was a short, winding path passing by a myriad of trees, themselves so lofty that many considered them royalty

among flora. Just as Crono reached the top of the sharp uphill incline leading to the castle's massive wooden entrance doors, he stopped. Looking up, he felt utterly dwarfed as the stone walls stretched into oblivion. The air rolling off of the castle was dry and dull in fragrance in comparison to the more moist air near the sea.

Crono did not even turn to see the gorgeous view below—not wanting to see the town that he would no longer recognize—but continued to look up. He looked up beyond the castle, the highest point in the kingdom, and moved his mouth, whispering a common prayer from his home. “May my way be guided and my fate secure.” Then he heaved open the door and stepped inside.

He had only stepped onto the soft, purple carpet and shut the door with a noisy reverberation when two javelins suddenly pointed toward his chest, crisscrossing together from opposite directions.

“Halt! Who goes there?!” Two soldiers were standing at the bottom of a flight of stairs that narrowed in width as they ascended to the balcony and the throne room doors above. Crono knew, because of a memory of the castle in his own time, that the thrones of the king and queen were behind those two heavy wooden doors.

After seeing Crono's startled glance, the soldiers lowered their weapons and stepped closer to him. “Check out that hair! Where're you from, son? Are you one of Magus's troopers?”

Crono opened his mouth to reject the accusation, but they did not allow him to respond.

“Hardly!” interjected the other soldier. “This kid would never have made the cut! Show us your stamp collection, son!”

“Stamp collection...?”

“Look at 'im! He doesn't have a clue what we're talking about.” He turned to the other soldier. “This weakling couldn't be a spy.”

“Har, har! Now beat it, shrimp!”

“Now wait a minute...!” Crono protested. The sound of the throne room door shutting, followed by the sound of an authoritative female voice, cut him short.

“Stop that at once!” Both soldiers performed a hasty about face and knelt at the foot of the staircase.

“Queen Leene!” they gasped in tandem.

A true picture of elegance, the queen came through the doors dressed in a classy, light green hoopskirt, stopping midway down the staircase. Her face was pale with white powder and her hair had been raised into a large mass atop her head. Regardless, her eminent beauty showed through. Crono looked up, a glimmer of confusion in his eyes.

“Show your manners! This is a friend of mine!” She looked directly at Crono, saying, “I am indebted to him.”

“But there's something odd about him!”

She looked them over challengingly from under shiny, golden hair. Crono watched her with fascination, focusing primarily on her face. He knew that the queen of his era had long passed away, and, though he still couldn't be sure, he began to reason that his theory was correct: Marle was actually Queen Leene from the distant past, though she wasn't acting like Marle at all.

“You refuse to obey my orders?!” she barked in light of the soldiers’ immobility.

“Forgive me, Milady! Please enter, sir!” said the rightmost soldier as he stood and took Crono’s arm to tug him forward.

Crono thought he heard her giggle as she turned and walked out of the entrance hall. The soldiers addressed him apologetically. “I envy you, whom the queen calls friend!”

“Please pardon us! We revere our queen’s guests!”

“Uh...no problem, guys. At ease, carry on, and all that.”

He started up the steps in pursuit of the queen, thinking, in his head, of the remarkable though growingly disappointing chain of events taking place. He recognized the identity of the queen right off by the delicate and lovely features of her face, and he found it quite distressful that, if his theory proved true, she was a *married* queen in a completely different era. He shook his head and approached the doors.

Two more soldiers stood on either side of the doors into the throne room, waiting for him. As they moved to let him in, one bellowed, “Mind your manners!” Crono promptly raised an eyebrow to him and entered.

Much to Crono’s disappointment, Queen Leene had already vanished from the throne room. Instead, King Malcolm sat in the left of two thrones. “*Wow, I’ve never gotten any kind of royal treatment before,*” he said in his mind as he tried to subdue his apprehension. His eyes wandered high overhead, where two large shields of red and gold hung on the wall behind both thrones, Guardia’s royal crest painted gallantly on their glossy surfaces. At this level of detail, he could make out the serpentine body of a left-facing dragon, its wings spread-eagled and its tail curved so that the spaded end pointed at an upward angle.

The king was fully decorated in regal robes of red, purple, and trims of gold, all of the finest quality. Under a brown beard, he beckoned, “Ah! You’re the brave soul known as Crono, correct?”

Crono, amidst his surprise at the king knowing his name, stopped a fair distance before him and knelt respectfully. He did, of course, realize that the queen must have already mentioned him. “Yes, Your Majesty. I am Crono.”

“Come nearer, sir!” Crono stood before him and knelt respectfully. “Sir! I understand that you are the one who saved my dear wife, the queen!”

“Me, *saved*...? No, Your Highness, I...” He began to hesitate in thinking of a proper and adequate explanation.

King Malcolm chuckled lightly. “You’re quite the modest one, aren’t you? No need for that, Crono! Leene told me all about how you rescued her from Magus’s trap in the canyon.” He paused, his face changing from a look of jovial contentment to one of furrowed concern. “But can you tell me what happened? Leene’s acting rather odd, and she seems to have lost her coral pin, which is something she guarded with her life. I’ve been meaning to ask her about it, but with all of this chaos going on with the bridge, I’m afraid I haven’t had the chance to meet with her.”

Crono thought intensively about his place in this discussion. “Your Majesty...I’m sorry, but I...”

“Stand, my good man. There’s no need to grovel! Forgive me! You must be tired, and hungry! We can talk about this later. Please rest in the Knights’ quarters,

which are downstairs and down the hall on the right. You'll find the dining hall down the opposite hall." Crono nodded respectfully and stood as the king motioned for him to leave and turned to a few of his advisors.

A rather stocky little man with white hair stretching to his knees from both neck and beard, undoubtedly the king's chancellor, was motionless except for his watchful eyes. Crono saw him moan to himself before suddenly dashing off to the left. He went around the corner, through a short hallway, and into a spiral staircase going up one of the castle's four soaring towers.

Crono remembered those stairs leading to the king's room from a tour of the castle in his time. He was, after all, in search for answers and reasoned that the chancellor would be a well calculated start. Glancing at King Malcolm, who was still speaking with his other advisors, he followed the chancellor up the stairs, passing several small storage rooms along the way.

He saw the long white hair from the back of the Chancellor's head as the old man stared at a wall pensively. Crono approached him with a purpose.

"Excuse me."

The chancellor jumped in having his thoughts interrupted, snapping, "What do you want? Get out of my face!"

Two Knights, clad in full suits of silver armor, appeared in the hallway leading from the end of the room to the king's chamber. "What's happening over here?"

"Nothing! Get back to your posts!" The chancellor turned, mumbling to himself as he left the area.

Crono approached the two Knights. "I was just going to ask him a question."

"Don't worry about it," said one Knight as they walked down the short hall to the king's chamber doors. "Chancellor Clarus is a good man, but sometimes he likes to keep to himself."

"I'm sorry to interrupt, but is there anyone in the king's room right now?" asked Crono.

"Just a maid. What do you need?"

"I'm inquiring on a...missing friend."

"Feel free to enter," he replied, returning to his post.

He watched the two Knights walking back to the other end of the hall and approached the king's chamber doors. He barely heard one of the Knights as he laid his hand upon the baroque drop handle.

"Speaking of nutcases, I haven't seen the queen's guard, that frog-thing, recently."

Shrugging off the comment as an odd conversation piece, he entered the room quietly. Inside was a single maid in a simple, purplish gown making the bed. "Excuse me, miss." She jolted upright, startled. "Would you know where I could find the queen? I've tried asking the chancellor, but he blew me off."

"Oh! I'm sorry—people don't walk in here often. I'm afraid not. He wouldn't help you? He's probably just having a rough time. People say the chancellor has gone crazy, but I don't believe it. Clarus is a great man. Why, he goes to the cathedral in the west everyday."

"The cathedral in the west?" In Crono's time, there was no such structure west of the castle. All of the cathedrals and sanctuaries he knew of were in the heart of Truce.

“Yes,” she answered. “Surely you’ve seen Manoria Abbey?”

“Yes, of course,” he replied, still with no knowledge of the location. “As for the queen, have you been told anything about how she was rescued?”

“Well, same as everyone else, I suppose,” she replied with a grin. “She was in the canyon, and a strange yet dashing young man.... Wait a minute! *You’re* the one everyone’s talking about, aren’t you? *You* saved Her Majesty!”

Shrugging, he simpered sheepishly. “There’s clearly no hiding from you.”

“Oh, terrific! Well, I’m sure she’s somewhere nearby—thanks to you, of course! I’m so glad I got to meet you!”

He nodded respectfully. “Thank you, miss.” Then he left, pondering his next approach as he jogged down the stairs.

At this point, he reasoned that, in the interest of averting suspicion, he should follow King Malcolm’s suggestion to stop by the Knights’ quarters and dining hall. He had no plans to stop and rest, however, for he was interested in all he could find out about this era, Chancellor Clarus, and, of course, the queen.

So, he continued through the throne room rather casually and made his way down the steps of the entrance all. From there, he turned to the right, and went around a corner to a hallway brazened with many coats of arms.

He gazed at the displays on the wall, knowing that each contained a life code for every brave Knight in the kingdom. Several, to his fascination, were still on display in his time.

Soon, he approached two soldiers posted by a stairwell with steps going to the left and down. One of them nodded cordially, “The Knights’ quarters is downstairs.”

“Thank you. That’s what I was looking for.” He needed answers, for he wanted to know as much about the queen, whom he had known for a short time as “Marle,” as he possibly could. Though it was apparent that she was acknowledged as the queen, despite her remarkably young age, he still had to be certain that his theory was either correct or completely inaccurate.

He hurried down the stairs, knowing that at least *one* of the Knights would have to know about Marle, or Leene, if anyone in the whole blasted kingdom did.



“Lucca, this is insane! How can we possibly get them back?”

“Don’t worry so much, Dad. I’m almost finished with this!” Lucca sat at the worktable in their home’s living room, tinkering with a small, jeweled wand. It was by far the most spacious room in the balau-timbered house, overlooked by balconies from the upstairs bedrooms and stretching the entire width of the dwelling.

“What are you working on?” He stepped over several piles of books and tools in an attempt to get a closer look. “Lucca, we don’t have time for any new inventions....”

She stopped and turned to face him. “Alright...then tell me exactly how we’re going to get them back.”

Taban stood without anything to say in response. “...What do you have there?”

“This...” She held up a colorful little device perceivably akin to the bloomed end of a sunflower, its center a large blue gem with a green, starburst middle and its surrounding petals made up of five circular emeralds. “...is the Gate Key. The gems were key components in the Telepod that should allow us to trigger the portal that Crono and that girl disappeared into. There’s really no time to explain right now. We just need to get to the Telepod.”

“What?” he gasped at the thought of returning to that infernal device. “What are you going to do, Lucca?”

“I’m going to get them back.”

“Now wait a minute! How are you planning to return? I’m not going to let you get yourself stuck in that thing, too!”

“Look—if what I *think* has happened really has happened, then I should be able to get back using the Gate Key.”

Taban’s features grew into a desperate panic, for he knew the stubbornness of his daughter. “How?! Do you *know* what this is?”

She breathed a hurried sigh of hopelessness. “I believe it’s a breach in time. I’ve studied this phenomenon before, and all of the properties are there.”

“You’ve studied temporal phenomena? Why ever did you do that?”

“*Why?* I don’t know. I just felt like it, I guess—compelled to, just like almost everything else I’ve ever studied. Anyway, once it’s been opened, the breach should remain in the form of a Time Gate, which can be opened with the Key.” She grabbed her pouch and strapped it around her neck like a purse. Then she placed a small sort of gun in the holster on her belt. Taban’s eyes were following her nervously.

“I don’t see how you could possibly know this. It’s practically impossible! How can a breach in time just *open* out of nowhere?”

“Something in that girl’s pendant reacted with the teleporting aspects of the Telepod. That girl—she seems so familiar. I just wonder.... No, that’s probably not true. Never mind.” She shook her head at the loss of thought. “Anyway, I’m not sure what could have caused such a reaction, but it doesn’t seem to make any scientific sense.” She started for the door, hopping over the debris of other ambitious inventions scattered about the floor. “In any case, I have to go in.”

“Why not let me go?”

“That’s very thoughtful of you, Dad.” She opened the door and he followed her out, talking as they walked. “But you don’t fully understand how this works, and I don’t have time to teach you.” She stuffed the Gate Key into her pouch.

“Well, if it’s a Time Gate, then don’t we have all the time we need?” They crossed the bridge leading from their insular home to the mainland.

“Not necessarily. It’s quite possible that they traveled to the same location and time of year and day as what we’re in now. That’s a general property of these Gates.” They neared the southernmost street of Truce Village, which was relatively tranquil with the fair now in full swing. “They will be moving through the day just as we are, progressing in conjunction with this era. It’s the first day of a new year here, as it is there. Traveling through Gates is like traveling into an already-evolving alternate universe. I just wish I knew *when* they had ended up!”

Of course, Lucca knew that none of what she had said had ever really been tested and was all purely theory, but she wasn't about to mention that to her father.

"Come on," she said, shifting to a jog. "We have to hurry!"

\* \* \*

Acting purely off of the king's suggestion, Crono had managed to find his way down the stairwell to the Knights' quarters, where the Knights of the Royal Squadron gathered to rest and discuss military strategy around what was deemed as the infamous Square Table.

Crono stepped towards the Knights around the Square Table cautiously in fear of disturbing what appeared to be an important meeting. The Knight Captain, clad in gold armor with faceplate raised, stood at the end of the table, addressing four other Knights.

"Zenan Bridge is our last line of defense! We *must* guard it with our lives! Company Three, I want a report every hour on the progress of the bridge's reconstruction. Companies Two and Four, stand your posts by the shorelines, and keep a sharp eye on the San Dorino coast."

Before he could finish, he saw a couple of the Knights watching Crono, himself turning to see who was coming. Under jet-black hair that lingered just out of his helmet, he had the sort of face that seemed permanently fixed with a scowl; even so, he wore an expression resembling valor as opposed to malice.

"So you're the one who helped the queen," he said, sizing Crono up with his eyes. "I'm Aron, Knight Captain of the Royal Squadron. And you're...?"

"Crono," he replied. "Pleasure to meet you."

"Frankly, our search was about to take us elsewhere, so we are especially grateful for your timely assistance. Pray tell, how was it you came across her?"

"Well, it was nothing, really. I guess it was just the right place at the right time," he replied.

Aron's face was unmoving and revealed a lack of impression by Crono's explanation. "I see. Please, talk to the maid if you need to rest." He motioned towards several beds that were further down the long hall, several containing soldiers who had been wounded in battle.

"This is madness!" shouted one of the flustered Knights, shifting back to the subject of the war. "They've destroyed the bridge to scatter our defenses! Soon they'll be raiding the shorelines of Truce!"

"Oh!" gasped the Knight across from him. "If only Sir Cyrus were here!"

"Cyrus?" muttered Crono, almost by accident. He inwardly rebuked himself for speaking at this point, suddenly realizing the likelihood that he was intruding.

"You don't know of Sir Cyrus?!" Every Knight looked at Crono accusingly. "From which land do you come? Or are you simply a fool? Sir Cyrus was the Commander of the Knights. His mission was to protect the king and queen. He and a friend left on a journey ten years ago. No one has heard from them since."

He nodded dumbly. "I certainly hope that he can be found. Speaking of which, I'm looking for someone myself. Do you know where the chancellor has gone?"

“Not sure. You should check at Manoria Abbey in the western forest.”

“That place has quite a history!” added another. “Long ago, a beast named Yakra lurked in the western forest. It was responsible for the deaths of many innocent citizens and soldiers. But after the cathedral was built, Yakra disappeared. We’re thankful for that.”

“And what a relief that the queen has been found. Now we can concentrate on the war...,” added another Knight with mock enthusiasm.

Aron grunted deeply to snatch their attention. “Excuse me if I’m interrupting, but we have business to attend to.”

Crono began to back away, adding, “Thank you all, and Godspeed in your war!” Journeying back up into the main level, he quickly made his way to the other side of the castle.

Before going down another set of stairs, two soldiers greeted him as in his previous encounter. “The dining room’s below.”

“Chef Cal’s got a nasty temper, so don’t get in his way!” After these words, Crono went down into the kitchen to continue his investigation.



Completely immersed in the scenery, Lucca wandered through the town of Truce, A.D. 600, in search of Crono and Marle. The time travel had been successful, though Taban had many regrets for letting her go. Still, he had come to realize that his daughter was the only hope for Crono and the girl he had brought along, and he was proud of her passion to rescue them.

“How ironic that I ended up in this time,” she mused to herself. “This is during the Mystic Wars, when Queen Leene was rescued from her capture. I wonder if they’ve done that yet...” She made her way into the café, where the two soldiers with whom Crono had spoken were still sitting.

“Good afternoon,” she said, sitting at the bar. “So...how’s the queen doing?” They looked at her as though her very existence offended them.

The nearest soldier surveyed her garments before replying, “You haven’t heard? They found her up in the canyon, and she’s safe in the castle. I’ve heard she’s been acting a bit strange, but that’s the least of things.”

Lucca nodded and rested her chin in her hand in thought. “They found her where?”

“In the canyon.”

“And you said she was acting strange. How do you mean?”

He slammed down his glass irately. “I don’t know! What business have you with the queen, anyway?”

“No business—I’m a part of this kingdom, just like you! I’ve every right to be concerned!”

Toma, whom Crono had purchased cider for, had returned to the inn and was sitting back in the same chair as before. “Excuse me. I couldn’t help but overhear your

conversation. I had thought that Leene had disappeared into the cathedral. I mean, I *saw* her go in, but she never came out....”

The soldier heatedly leaned towards the man. “Is my voice gone? I said they found her! I saw them escorting her into the castle before I came here!”

“Hmmm...guess I missed her.”

The irascible soldier mashed a coin onto the counter impatiently. “How many buffoons are to pass through this place before the day is done?! Bartender, another drink!”

The man’s words did not reach Lucca’s ears. Her eyes locked into a forward stare, and her body became rigid. Several tense moments passed as a gut-wrenching sense of foreboding dawned on her, and the utterance of the name on her mind escaped from her lips.

“Marle....”

Without another word to the bar-dwellers, she got up and ran out of the inn, making her way towards Guardia Forest and gasping, “I’ve got to find Crono!”



Guardia Castle’s dining room contained two massive though simple rectangular tables, one already occupied by several soldiers waiting impatiently for their food. Straight ahead from the stairwell and past the chairs was a small passage to the kitchen, where chaos had broken loose. In the dining area, only one lone maid was trying to tend to everyone with clear difficulty.

Without much thought given to his presence, Crono made his way into the kitchen, picking up several conversations from the Knights about the battle over the bridge.

“Did you see me hack that beast’s arm from his fat chest?”

“What carnage! It’s terrible how many we lost when that bridge fell—terrible!”

“Heaven forgive us all, lads, for our time could come soon.”

“Those Mystics’ll get theirs. I’ll fill the river with `em, I will!”

“I’ve lost my appetite.”

Crono had difficulty deciphering every conversation, but the content was far more gruesome than he cared to hear. Then again, exposure to the battlefield seemed unavoidable as he stepped into the kitchen, where two exasperated maids and the chef, a podgy, wide-faced, and broad-shouldered man were running around as if their very minds had fallen into the cauldron. A maid turned to him, her eyeballs scaling him frantically.

“So!” she said, short-winded. “*You* must be the stranger who saved Queen Leene!”

“Uh...,” responded Crono, and sighed as she ran off.

“This is a mini war zone!” screamed the other maid.

“This is no place for kids!” bellowed Cal from under a large, white chef’s hat.

“Wait! Maybe you’d know! What’s this ‘eyes cream’ stuff that Queen Leene wants so badly?”

“You mean ice cream?” he answered, scowling.

“Whatever! Get out of the kitchen! You’re no help!”

Just as told, he left the kitchen area and made for the stairs. However, as he turned to go up, Knight Captain Aron and two other Knights were coming down, so he was forced to step aside.

“Where’s supper?” demanded Aron curtly.

A waitress hesitantly came forward. “Oh, Captain Abelcain! I’m sorry....”

They sat at the nearest table by Aron’s leave. “We’re fighting a war out there! Can’t you even keep us fed?”

Crono watched as Cal appeared from the kitchen. “What are you fussing about? You’re not the only one who’s fighting out there!”

“Hey, I don’t have time for this.” He stood, saying, “Just feed my men, okay?” Then he marched up the stairs, his red cape billowing behind him.

“Shut your trap! I’ll decide who’s going to get fed, and when! That fool, he thinks he’s the boss!” The chef ran back to the kitchen with a grunt. With that, Crono knew that the soldier upstairs had been right: Cal certainly had a terrible temper.

The waitress stood by Crono and, noticing his expression of fascination, explained, “Those two are brothers. You’ve heard the expression, ‘sibling rivalry,’ right?”

“I see,” he responded with a nod.

The two Knights who had entered with the Captain spoke as they removed parts of their armor, placing them on the floor. “Captain Aron is trying to fill the shoes of his predecessor, Sir Cyrus, Commander of the Knights.”

“He’s normally very kind. Cal just rubs him the wrong way.” Crono nodded attentively after hearing the second Knight speak. They were apparently concerned that he have his facts about the Abelcain brothers in order.

“Yes, I know,” he replied. “I’ve had the pleasure of meeting him once already.”

Though fascinating, the whole fiasco offered nothing in the line of clues about Marle. After having collected as much information as he could, he decided that it was finally time to visit the queen’s chamber. Surely confronting her face-to-face about everything would yield some answers. With this plan, he left the dining hall and ventured back towards the throne room. Once in the royal hall, he went around to the right of the throne chairs, where he saw a single armored sentry looking his direction.

“The queen seems to be waiting for you upstairs in her room,” he said brusquely.

Crono stopped short of the guard and stood still, his eyeballs still wandering around the room. His confusion ended upon realizing that the man had spoken to him.

“Oh! Thanks, I was just going that way.”

This side of the castle was almost unjustly similar to the side where Crono and the chancellor had encountered one another with a less than gratifying outcome. At the top of the long flight of steps coming from the tower, he met another Knight standing in the open archway leading to a hall, which itself ended at the queen’s chamber doors.

“The queen awaits,” the Knight reported, backing away and granting Crono passage through the ogive.

Crono entered the room, where two maids and the queen were standing apart from each other. The queen was facing the wall at the end of the room, standing next to her bed, while the maids were busy cleaning and tidying up the area. As he stepped further

inside, the nearest maid looked him over, saying, “*You saved our Queen? You don’t look that tough.*”

Just then, the queen turned, and Crono squinted at her face suspiciously, forgetting about the maid. “Ah! There you are.” She then spoke to the maids, “Please leave us. I need to talk to this individual.” That sweet yet commanding voice struck Crono in the midst of his heartbreak. Now he knew for certain that this queen was indeed Marle.

“Certainly, Your Highness.” They bowed and brushed past Crono toward the door. He could hear them whispering between themselves as they left.

“How does she stay so youthful?”

“I know! In fact, she looks even younger now than on her wedding day!”

Crono smiled somewhat dismissively as they closed the doors behind them, for he really didn’t care. *I hate gossip*, he thought.

“Come nearer, sir,” said the queen. She smiled as he obeyed and continued glaring at her face, drawing a response from him.

He leaned in very close, paying rigorous attention to the details of her face. “Your Highness, I...”

“Fooled you, didn’t I, Crono?” she said, stopping him cold. “It’s me, Marle! But everyone calls me Leene!”

His head suddenly jolted back, his previous thoughts now coming back into question. “Fooled me...?” Again, he shook his head in an attempt to clear the chaotic stream of thoughts. “Yes...they do call you Leene.”

She smiled at his response. “The soldiers came to me after I appeared in the mountains. I know about Leene. She...she was the Queen of Guardia during the war with the Mystics.” She turned, silently approaching the other wall.

At this point, Crono felt great relief and happiness swelling within him. She wasn’t the queen after all! Apparently, she had looked so much like the queen of this era that she was mistaken as such. Despite his inner joy, he couldn’t help but consider how unhumorous it was for her to have acted like the real Queen Leene up to this point.

Suddenly, she became quite emotional, and Crono saw her eyes begin to glisten with tears. “I’m so relieved you’re here!” she said, momentarily breaking into a sob.

“You don’t know how glad I am that I found you!”

“We barely know each other, but somehow, I knew you’d come for me...” She turned and came a few steps closer to him, her tears now subdued. “Thank you, Crono!”

The sentimental moment that Crono had momentarily relished stopped there. Darkness fell upon them as though a cloud had loomed into the room. A green illumination suddenly appeared behind Marle, an ominous premonition dawning within the realm.

“S-something’s wrong...,” whispered Marle with an instant quiver of fear.

“Marle? What’s happening? Are you okay?”

Her panic began to escalate as she fell to her knees. “W, what’s happening?!”

“I don’t know what’s happening...!” All he could do was watch her in agony as her head tilted forward and tears began to glint in her frightened eyes.

“It feels like...I’m being torn apart!” she shrieked, crouching over and clutching her stomach.

Crono came closer, but was startled and thrown back as Marle faded into a ghostly image of glowing white.

“*Marle!*” he bellowed, reaching out for her.

“Help me, Crono! I’m scared!” Again, he lunged for her, but it was impossible for him to reach her. She cried out to him again, her words beginning to fade with her presence. “Please...Crono...h, help me!”

A blinding light grew from her body as though devouring her very existence. He jumped for her once more, falling into nothing but tiny, fading points of light and colliding against the unoccupied hard floor of solid stone with only the purple carpet in his arms.

“*Marle...!*” He raised his head, his eyes flicking to every corner of the room.

But she was gone.

He allowed his head to slump to the floor as he lay there in utter disbelief, burrowing his face into the carpet. “What is this? How can this be?! Why does she disappear every time I see her?!” Finally, he got up and ran out, shutting the chamber doors behind him.

The two maids and the Knight were waiting at the hall’s end. “Did you notice anything odd about the queen?” asked a maid.

“Odd? What kind of a question is that?” he replied with ostensible indignation. “Of course not! She did, however, ask to be left alone. Excuse me.” He tried to leave, but they continued talking.

“Has she dismissed you already? You were polite, of course?”

“This is the Queen of Guardia. Of course I was polite! Now, excuse....”

“You didn’t do anything...funny, did you?”

“Funny? Do I look like a jester to you? No, of course not! Please....”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure! *Get out of the way!*”

The Knight chimed in, visibly frustrated. “Leave the man alone! Just because a person goes to speak to the queen in private doesn’t give the two of *you* the right to gab about it. I grow so tired of the gossip around here!” With that, Crono pushed through and ran out.

\* \* \*

Pallid and nonplussed, Crono’s mind was racing as he heaved himself down the steps of the tower. From his perspective, the situation couldn’t have become any worse. Now Marle was vanishing without the aid of the Telepod or her pendant, and completely at random. As he neared the bottom of the stairwell, he had no idea where he was going. He needed to find a place to think, somewhere to gather his thoughts.

He rounded the corner at the bottom quickly, receiving another yet stunningly more pleasant shock as he stared at the wiry figure bounding toward him.

“Lucca!” Crono gasped as he stopped at the foot of the tower stairs, watching as his friend fell to her knees just in front of him, huffing and puffing.

“...You’re okay! Did you find the girl?”

“Oh yeah!” he returned a wide grin of sarcasm. “Finding her was no problem. *Keeping* her around, on the other hand....”

“Keeping her?” She looked up at him, now breathing more normally. “What happened?”

“Frankly, I don’t know. Bright glowing, shrieking, and suddenly she’s gone!”

“*Gone?! Whadd’ya mean she’s gone?!*”

“She’s gone! She just vanished into nothing—*nothing!*”

She stood from her knees, facing the floor with her arms crossed. “Hmm...it’s just as I thought.”

“What? What did you think?”

“I knew I recognized her!”

“Recognized her...?”

“And this castle looks identical to the castle in our time!”

“So, what? What does that mean?”

“I’ll bet they mistook that girl for her ancestor. You see, she’s a member of the royal family in *our* time!”

“Huh?” His eyes grew wide and his ears pricked.

Lucca turned to look directly at him. “She’s Princess Nadia!”

“Whoa! Are you sure?”

“Yes, positive.... Marle, that is, Princess Nadia, is a descendant of Queen Leene! Queen Leene has been kidnapped.”

“Kidnapped?” He stopped to ponder all that he had seen and heard. “Yes, you’re right. She was kidnapped, but they found her in the.... Oh, boy....” He stopped, suddenly realizing the situation. “I may know where this is going.” He sat down on the last step in trepidation.

“As I recall,” Lucca continued with a nod, “someone was supposed to have saved her. But history has been changed! Marle looks so much like Leene that they probably called off their search when she appeared here.”

“Yes, that makes sense with what everyone has been saying. And all this time I thought that she actually *was* the queen of this time.”

“But if the real Queen is killed, Marle will simply disappear. Something must have happened to the queen in this era. As a result, Princess Nadia ceases to exist!”

“Then...we’re too late. Marle has already disappeared.” He rested his head in the palms of his hands, unable to grasp all that was happening before them. Then he began to think harder about everything, focusing on his memory of Marle at the fair and Lucca’s recollection of Leene being rescued in history.

“Let me get this straight: The real Queen of this era has been killed because of this mix-up...which would mean that Marle was never born?” He watched Lucca to be sure she was with him. “Well, shouldn’t that mean that I never met her and followed her into the portal? Shouldn’t that mean that you have no knowledge of Leene being saved because it was never written in history?”

She thought for a moment. “It could mean that we’ve simply been unaffected by the changes in the timeline...or it could mean that there might still be time! If we can save Leene, history as we know it should remain unchanged!”

“How much time do we have?”

“I’m not sure, but the records indicate that she was rescued about the time I arrived here. That’s where history changed and is now yet to be decided.”

Crono perked at this glimmer of hope. “Then we have to hurry and find the real Queen!”

“Think—have you heard anything about where the queen could be or who could be responsible?”

He thought and said, “Well...I remember a man in the café mumbling something about the cathedral.”

“Yes! That’s it! I just saw him, too! That rough bumpkin was right after all!”

“In fact, I think the chancellor goes there a lot, too! I’ll bet he’s involved!”

“Perhaps. C’mon, let’s go save the queen! We haven’t any time to lose!”