



「case. 剥離城アドラ」

三田 誠
イラスト 坂本みねち

ロード・ルメロイ Ⅱ世の 事件簿



Lord El-Melloi II's Case Files ~ (01) case. Adra Castle Separation

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TYPE-MOON BOOKS

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ロード・エルメロイⅡ世の事件簿

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TYPE-MOON BOOKS

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Lord El-Melloi
W
Case Files

ロード・ エルメロイ II世の 事件簿

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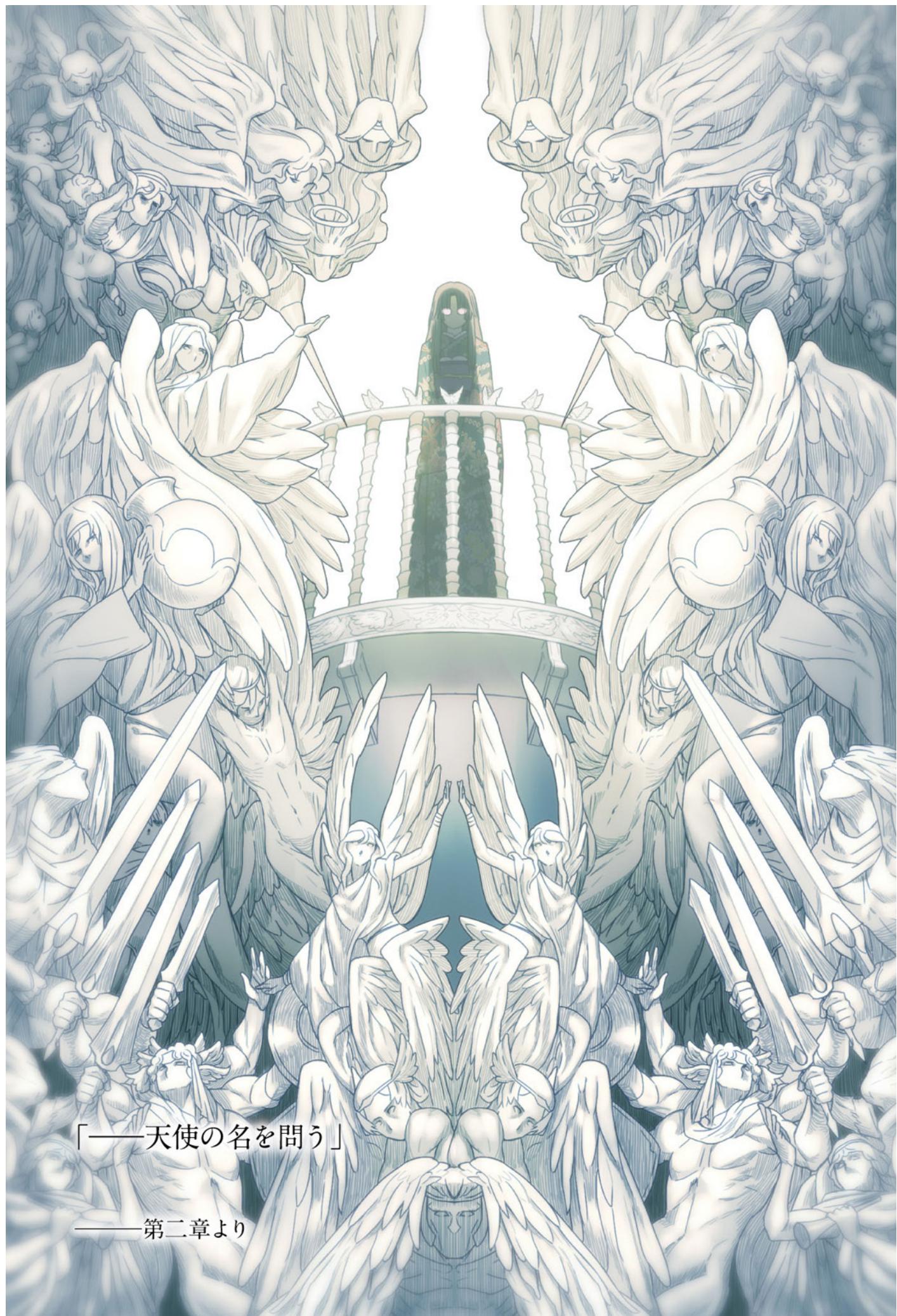
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Lord El-Mello Case Files



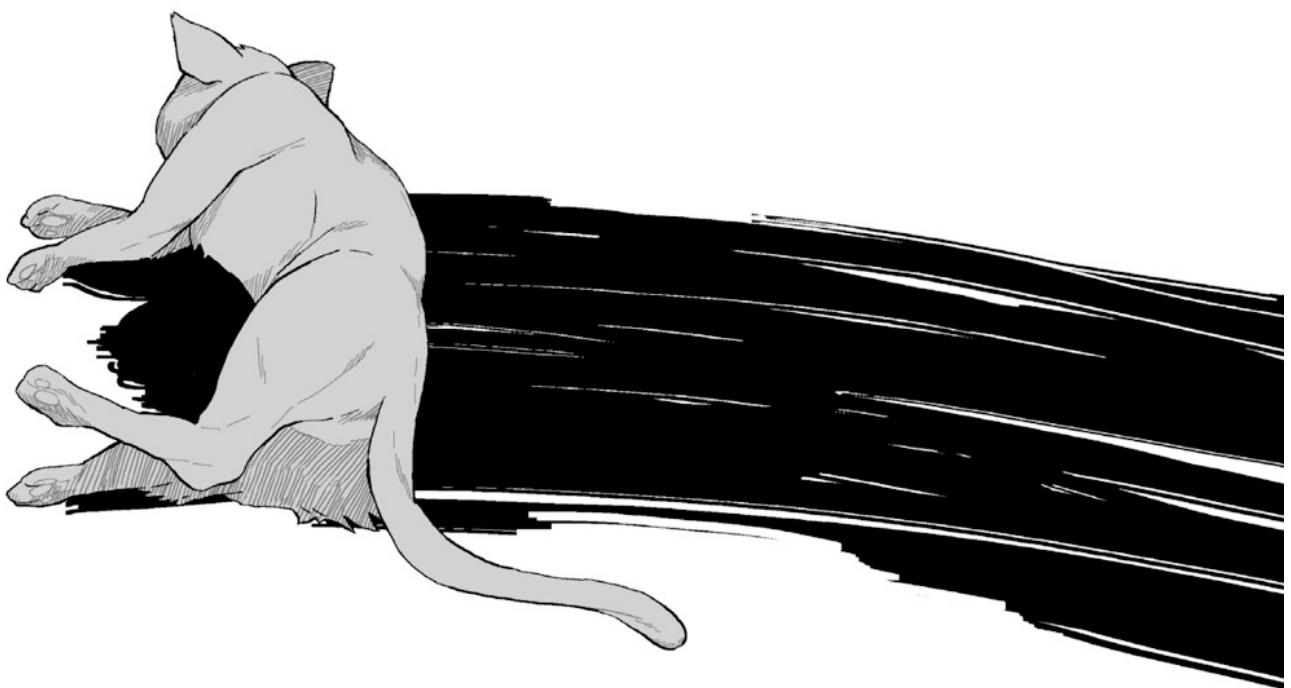




「——天使の名を問う」

——第二章より

◆序章◆



Prologue

“Your master is truly the worst kind of Magus.”

In a manner that was excessively spiteful and agitated, Luvia gelita Edelfelt spat out those words.

Thinking it was a rather obvious assessment, it didn’t occur to me to argue. Even if it had, I probably wouldn’t have been able to say anything to refute the claim. That level of hostility filled the girl’s voice, and prana far beyond hostility coursed through her arm. It flowed as if tracing a kind of pattern, and even now was howling with fangs bared.

Ah, of course, even I understood. It was a pattern called a Magic Crest. Bestowed upon a Magus, it was like an artificial organ, or so I had been taught. Passed down in old Magus Lineages like hers, in a sense it was the greatest heirloom, and the greatest curse. A fixated Mystery, passed down like a secret art.

On top of that, it was a form of magic that she was particularly skilled in, a spell known as the Gandr shot. Originally it was a weak curse that shot from the finger and caused only mild illness. In this case, where she was activating it through her Magic Crest, it could stop the heart, causing instant death, a technique known as a *Finn Shot*. With just a leisurely movement of her hand, someone like me with no resistance to magecraft would undoubtedly be easily annihilated.

Even so, strangely, I felt no fear.

“Your master is truly the worst kind of person.”

Once more, as if to emphasize her point, the girl called out. I couldn’t agree more. I would simply raise my hands in complete and utter agreement if I could. But, if I did so in a place like this, this beautiful girl would not approve. Instead, even if it was just quietly fanning the flames, I would use even this short meeting to try and make her understand.

“... I won’t deny it.”

Deciding to avoid the issue with ambiguity...

“Then why do you quietly follow someone like him?”

... I was immediately pressed for an answer.

It seemed if I gave another careless response, then the Gandr would come flying. With her magical ability, it would easily penetrate something even as solid as a

brick.

“My master...”

As I spoke, a certain memory floated up in the back of my mind. I didn’t know if it would qualify as an answer, but I started giving voice to it as it was anyway.

“... Once, my master got in a fight with a cat.”

“A cat? Is this supposed to be a good story?”

“Perhaps. Taking up residence near a walking path, it was a stray cat that, by its bad behaviour, came to be hated by passers-by. At one point it attacked and bit my master’s favourite boots, which bothered him to the point that he began to investigate a way to get revenge using magecraft. One day, that stray cat was hit by a vehicle of some sort.”

It was probably hit some time in the middle of the night, and was discovered the next morning.

“Its face had been half smashed, and one of each of its fore- and hind-legs were torn to pieces. It was already unpleasant enough to look at before, but now it looked like nothing but a blood stained lump of meat.”

“Though those who walked by wouldn’t come close to it, when my master arrived, he repeatedly started saying things like ‘don’t get run over here, you idiot.’ Berating the cat that was thought to cause problems for people even as it died, the people around who saw him only frowned and scowled.”

“What’s his problem?”

The girl’s presence began to be mixed with anger.

For someone like me, who hadn’t yet become used to living in London, I hadn’t been sure how normal the response of those passers-by was. I knew my master was a bad person, but I had no idea as to what degree of bad he was.

“Nevertheless, my master then took the cat up, and held it in his arms thereafter.”

“.....”

“Feeding it some painkilling herbs, he took it back to his study, and spent close to half a day just holding it. Normally, he was very sensitive to even just getting his clothes dirty. At that time alone, with a mood similar to as if he had just spilled his soup, he held the cat until it breathed its last, and didn’t leave its side until it was

properly buried. Foregoing even his customary cigar, while covered in dirt and mud, he watched over its grave with a bored expression.”

“... As expected, it wasn’t a good story at all.”

Pursing her cute lips, I heard her gentle whisper, but let it pass. Really, I didn’t consider it a good story either. As someone who had been associated with death for an extended time, I found my master’s behaviour to be far too sentimental. Walking on top of the earth or sleeping under it, there wasn’t all that much of a difference anyway.

If there was, it was just that there were those who were supposed to be sleeping that were instead walking around.

Yes.

‘I don’t understand,’ I said to my master.

“And my master replied, ‘You don’t need to understand.’”

“‘You don’t need to understand?’”

“Yes.”

A small nod.

“Accordingly—‘such is just a trap of the mind. If you wish to follow the path of magecraft, you don’t have time to get caught up in these kinds of things.’ If you ask any student, you will probably get the same answer. For starters, if I had been a skilled Magus, healing those kinds of injuries should have been possible. For not getting there in time, the one who didn’t have the necessary power was me, after all.”

There was something wrong with that, as if it was giving up.

Of course there was something wrong with that, just accepting things the way they were.

How someone like my master became so sidetracked, even I didn’t know. Somewhere in the space between a discerning heart and blind acceptance, something had become core to him. That much was clear, but what that something was, I could never figure out.

As a Magus, that could indeed be something terrible.

As someone beyond human, that could indeed be something logically unacceptable.

“Generally speaking, the feeling of satisfaction gained from saving something is simply a misrecognition of the heart. Even if you help someone, it’s not like that helps you. And if it saves yourself, you can’t know whether you really helped that person. Misunderstandings, miscommunications, disagreements, false understandings. This laughable repetition is what makes up the world we live in.”

That’s just a misunderstanding, my master had stated at the time. It was no more than self-satisfaction—a defect of the human body.

“But even so, we live in that world of misunderstanding.”

The eyebrows of the girl standing before me twitched.

In her light violet eyes, my own figure was being reflected.

My own eyes likely reflected her figure as well.

Yet, it was most definitely a different reflection than as one would see in the mirror. Because our hearts were not completely identical, even if the information received was the same, the understanding it produced would be different. Even if we saw the same thing, saw the same colour, had the same conversation, I couldn’t say we would feel the same way.

Things in this world were all like that.

It wasn’t limited to magecraft. It wasn’t limited to ^{those beyond monsters} humans. In a world of common ^{the} _{obvious} sense, it was something everyone understood.

If you said that misunderstandings, miscommunications, disagreements, and false understandings are what connected them, then...

“We are misrecognition. Our world itself is misunderstanding. We can experience a multitude of truths, not just one single reality. No matter how wise you are, or how much time you are given, you will never reach something like a single truth. Magi may just be those who continually reject that fact.”

Speaking as if in self-deprecation, my master had pursed his lips at that.

He had finally realized that his words and the objective that all Magi pursued, known as the “Spiral of Origin,” were in contradiction.

At the same time... after having parroted my master’s words to this extent, I finally understood my reason for recalling those words.

“If you forget that, and recklessly pursue a lone truth—My Lady, it would do you well to remember that that itself may truly be what makes the worst kind of person.”

Whether his words were correct or not, I still did not know. To make that judgment, I was too close to my master, and the ordinary was too far separate from a Magus.

But, that was surely also true of that castle.

Misrecognition and misunderstanding.

Disagreement and false understanding.

Such a laughable repetition is what tied them to that castle.

Since long, long ago, to make what ought to be into a reality, they combined themselves into a single form. Like asking if non-existent clothes suited them, with an existence like nonsensical fables, they compelled all people.

-So.

At least, let us tell this story.

For example, in a manner similar to the case files of a certain detective that lived on London's Baker Street.

I am not my master, nor am I a novelist, so it likely would not go all that well.

Even so, that was the only way I could resist the events unfolding within that castle.

◆ 第一章 ◆



1.1

On an early Autumn morning, my master called for me.

It was the first time he had called for me since I came to London two months ago, so I was a little surprised. Informing the dorm supervisor Krishna, I left the dormitory behind. I expected him, who was obsessed with helping people, to come along, but in the end he declined with an apology.

Leaving the grounds, I was suddenly beset by dizziness.

Crowds of people, walking on the pavement outside. Or maybe it was the greasy smell of fish and chips, or even the exhaust of the famous double-decker busses. Gentlemen, walking by garbed in trench coats, Women, wrapped up in scarves and shawls, Children, noisily chatting as they got on the bus... There was just too many people.

The population of London was about eight million, but I already had problems understanding what it meant to have more than a hundred. Trying to comprehend that unimaginable number of people just depressed me. If I had to make the comparison, I'd say it reminded me of a cemetery.

Rows and rows of the dead, collected since the distant past... in some small way, I made this heavy comparison. (... No.) I rethink. This city itself is like a cemetery, isn't it?

It's not that it made me think of death. But with the great crowds of people, all gathering in and spending the majority of their time in the brown and grey coloured buildings, it was like they were all heading to their final destination. With what I learned from theology about Hell and Purgatory, it somehow reminded me of the Hades of myth.

—Ah, of course. This is what they called the sentiment of a “country bumpkin.” In any place where many people gathered, this is the obvious scenery one would expect. Even if I understood the theory, I still felt a little sad that the decades spent living in the countryside still shackled my way of thinking.

The past and present mind can't be so easily divided, so even now when I let my mind wander, I would worry about the chicken coop, or who was going to clean the church, and I would become restless. If it weren't for my master's call, I likely would have spent the rest of my days in that place. Whether that would be considered happiness or not is another story, though.

Despite thinking deeply on these things, my feet still moved. Looking down at the River Thames, I stepped onto London Bridge.

Crossing to the southern side of the current Bridge, built by Queen Elizabeth II, the atmosphere of the city changed drastically. The number of sight-seers seemed to decrease, and in their place people of all races mixed together to create a distinct downtown feel—to say it like that makes it sound good, but to sum it up, it was more like the public order began to break down. Like the well known anecdote of Bermondsey Market being a place for thieves to sell their goods.

But, that was a thing of the past.

From under the arches built of dirty bricks, I turned on to Druid Street, and after turning down a nearby side road, the presence of other people abruptly vanished. A Bounded Field, my master had called it. According to my master, magecraft wasn't needed to set up a Bounded Field. A place that naturally repelled people, without the need for external, mysterious powers, functioned best as a Bounded Field, or something like that. Well, the term originally came from Buddhism anyway, and the Concept that repels people is something much more basic than magecraft, a fundamental function of the brain, and many other related things came out in the discussion, but I don't remember much more than that.

(It's probably something really important to remember, though.)

Unfortunately, I'm not that smart of a person. This is another thing that I had become painfully aware of since I arrived in London two months ago. Thanks to my master's recommendation, I was able to enter as a student into the Clock Tower, but I couldn't understand anything from well over half of the classes there. In the very heart of that place of study, if someone were to look at me, I'm sure I'd have a stupid expression like I had just had a mountain of gold dumped on me.

It was a little frustrating, but if I was to add one more comment, I would say that my master wasn't all that skilled to begin with. If he tried to just make a Bounded Field using his own ability, he would be capable of only the lowest of the lowest grade of results, so he probably picked this place specifically so that he wouldn't have to. Or at least so I secretly thought.

As I thought this, the reddish brown building that was home to my master's apartment came into view. On this Autumn morning, it stood there, looking just as unhappy as always.

* * *

For the most part, living spaces like this were called Flats in England. I called it an apartment anyway, out of simply copying my master's habit, but I have no idea why he called it as such. Anyway, my master's apartment building was as awful as always. The ivy coiling around the building, and the weeds poking up through the cracks gave a kind of pleasant charm, but the reddish brown brick walls and chimney were so riddled with cracks, that even small gusts of wind would send chips and pieces raining down. There were a lot of very old homes in Europe, but this place was on a different level. A quick estimate would put it at easily over a hundred years old. To the point that, if one were to say it had been built during the Industrial Revolution it would sound believable.

Because of that, it looked weak enough that if you were to just push on the side of the building a little, it would start a chain reaction that would cause the whole thing to collapse. Unable to suppress these thoughts, I gave a small prayer in hopes of preventing such an event from occurring as I gingerly pushed open the front door.

Entering into the comparatively spacious lobby, my shoulders instinctively tensed up at the echoes of someone shouting angrily.

“Don’t screw with me!”

The voice resounded throughout the lobby.

The middle of the lobby was dominated by a large, spiral staircase. Reaching up three levels, doors leading to differing apartments were visible. They were close enough that the owners of these apartments should easily have been able to hear the angry voice, but not one of them seemed to be about to react to it. It seemed unlikely that they had sound-proofed their rooms, so did that mean they were already accustomed to this kind of noise? Beside the lobby was a small space for the building manager, but through the small window I could only see a lone old woman, nodding off in her rocking chair.

“... Nyaah.”

The cat sitting on the old woman’s lap gave a small meow before once again closing its eyes and returning to sleep. Seeing this, I suddenly wanted to do the same.

But, it would not be acceptable for me to ignore my master’s orders, so instead I made my way to the second floor.

As I continued up the stairs, the voices speaking became clearer and clearer.

“You know as well as I how much of a nuisance that castle is! And as a Testament? Why would you volunteer for something like that?!”

The irritated voice was blunt and confrontational. More and more, my desire to avoid it was increasing. Thinking of my master's complaints, all I wanted to do was take a right turn and run away.

But.

"That was also the result of considering it seriously," his companion said. The voice was that of a young woman. Though it was a gentle voice, it had an undeniable air of mischief to it. She seemed unable to hide the fact that she was enjoying the situation, or maybe she had no intention to hide it in the first place.

"If you thought about it seriously, how on Earth did you get to that conclusion?"

"Naturally, it was in response to my great brother's wishes."

"My wishes?"

In response to my master's suspicious-sounding voice, I could sense a mischievously grinning presence. If this door hadn't been there, for sure I would have seen a victor's self-satisfied smile.

"For example. If you are able to clean up this incident nicely, then if you were to suddenly say something like 'I want to go to the Far East,' you might still make it in time, don't you think? The Clock Tower has yet to decide who's going to participate in that War or whatever, right? If you want to do something to put yourself in the running, there isn't much time left."

As if he had received a brilliant counter, the man's voice turned into a groan. With the sound of grinding teeth, something like a curse slipped out.

"What kind of demon are you?"

"Oh, just your beloved, beloved little sister."
step-sister

It was as if I could see the voice of an expert storyteller. I sensed a nod, and as if consoling her opponent, the girl dropped her tone and whispered.

"Now now, my esteemed brother. I've tried to take your feelings into consideration here, too."

"And how is that?"

"For instance, how I've overlooked the fact that you've decided to live here in an apartment of your own instead of at the El-Melloi mansion. The very fact you are here paying rent at a building owned by our own family is absurd in and of itself."

“It’s the opposite of absurd. The rent I pay goes into paying off my debt to the El-Melloi family. There is no more efficient way of handling it.”

In response to his immediate reply, the girl’s gave a sarcastic laugh.

“Hah. That’s a nice thought, but if you do nothing but take a handful of sand out of the desert each month, isn’t saying you’re trying to get rid of the desert a bit of an overstatement?”

“That’s just an issue of feelings. Either way, I have no desire to rely on the assets of the El-Melloi family.”

“For not having any interest in the El-Melloi’s fortune, isn’t trying paying back your debt to said fortune a bit contrarian?”

Something in the banter that came across through the closed door seemed cheerful. It reminded me of a mean-spirited owner taking pleasure in watching their pet cat bristling and glaring. It seemed undeniable that the determining factor in the hierarchy of this relationship was not the age of its participants, but something that they had been born with.

Sure enough, after a long groan, the conversation continued.

“I have conditions.”

“Oh?”

“For starters, I will take care of this case entirely myself. My Lady, I will not permit you to have a hand in it.”

With a resolve like there was nothing more he could pray for, his obstinate voice laid out that declaration.

“Is that a problem?”

His companion gave a bitter laugh. As if acknowledging she had outstayed her welcome, I could sense the girl stand up.

“Alright, alright. Well then, dearest brother, I’ll leave the rest to you.”

“... Oh.”

I quickly distanced myself from the door, so I could at least avoid the appearance of eavesdropping. In truth, I wanted to find somewhere to hide, but the approaching presence from beyond the door wasn’t moving so leisurely as to allow that.

A few seconds later, the door opened to reveal brilliant blonde hair. Shortly after, pale white skin reminiscent of a Bisque Doll, and both clothes and grace that were similarly picturesque. But, the most impressive feature about her was definitely her eyes—blazing like fire, overflowing with strength and determination. As they turned to me, they remained unchanged. I couldn't help but wonder, for a girl who seemed no older than fifteen, what kind of life had she lead to have eyes like that?

Reines El-Melloi Archisorte.

My master's step-sister, and the girl who sealed his place as a Lord. Behind her, a somewhat strange looking maid followed her.

What was strange was the colour of her skin. She was not Caucasian, nor black, nor East Asian in appearance. No, her skin was a colour completely unsuited to human beings—a shining silver. The maid, given the name Trimmau I had been told, was apparently the leading design in the field of Automata. It's been said that even though the field of magecraft which deals with creating artificial humans has already started its decline, this particular Automata was of a completely different essence, and so avoided the problem, but that was something a person like me couldn't really get their head around.

Reines' gaze quickly snapped in my direction.

“Oh? So you are here as well?”

“... yes.”

Troubled about how I should respond, I dropped my gaze, prompting a cute little laugh from her. With a teasing smile, the golden-haired girl opened her mouth again.

“How is life as an apprentice? Has your wily master been picking on you at all?”

“... umm... compared to living in the countryside, it's much more comfortable.”

As if she was peering inside me, the girl nodded several times.

“Well, that is certainly good to hear. After all, for someone like my brother to take in a disciple, it's not for something simple like taking care of the housework. In a way, you are like the last line of defence. Do you understand? It's an important responsibility, you know?”

“... I'll do my best.”

Not knowing how to respond, I meekly lowered my gaze. As I did so, Reines extended a single white finger.

“You’d be much cuter if you just took that hood off, you know.”

With a swift clap on my hooded cloak, she made her way past me and began descending the spiral staircase. In truth, I kind of admired her. They weren’t connected by blood, but they were still siblings, so I couldn’t help but think that it would be nice if my master inherited some of the same character.

But, the real world is a heartless thing.

Breathing a sigh in my heart, I steeled myself,

“... Excuse me.”

... and opened the door.

A sudden cloud of dust sent me straight into a coughing fit.

The interior was exactly what one would expect of a cheap apartment. As far as size, it was nothing spectacular, but as if ignoring the restrictions on space, things were scattered about haphazardly. Without any sense of order, things ranging from an inordinate amount of books, to an antique-looking desk, various pieces of mouldy bread, and for some reason even a number of well-worn family game consoles were all packed into the tight space of the apartment.

If asked, he would say that all of them were very important things, but he was truly a master with no sense of his own state of affairs. Though from the way that he struggled looking for things, always complaining about “not being able to find this” or “not being able to find that,” it may be less that he didn’t understand his situation, and more that he was just incapable of keeping it clean. Previously, I had offered to help clean the place up a bit, but my offer had been instantly rejected. He had said that he wanted to be left alone on his holidays, but truth be told I couldn’t really see what he would do alone in a room like this, even on a holiday.

Careful not to step on the bits of bread and books scattered across the floor—while simultaneously wondering how Reines and her maid had managed to navigate the place—I made my way to a large table in the centre of the room, near to the sofa that my master was now lying on.

“Excuse me, Master.”

... No response.

Lying on the sofa as if unconscious, his closed eyelids hinted at his current mood of trying to reject reality. If his pride had allowed it, I feel like he would have been covering his ears and shouting too. He may have been my master, but he was still pretty easily upset when it came to these things.

“It’s your apprentice, Gray.”

Just to be sure, I spoke up once again, but as expected there was no response. Giving up, I shifted my gaze to the table. In the middle of the various bits of clutter was a single space that looked like it had been cleared up. Sitting there was a cup of lukewarm tea, in addition to a handful of photographs. I didn’t have much desire to look into them, but even so one of the photographs caught my attention.

It just looked too... strange.

It looked like a part of some sort of religious painting. The picture, depicting a scene in the sky, overflowed with a sense of holiness and austerity. The point the picture focused on seemed far too out of place—a blazing wheel. Floating imposingly in mid-air, it was like a gatekeeper of the heavens, the wheel’s outer rim lined with eyes whose gazes all seemed to fixate on me.

“... some sort of wheel monster...?”

“... I won’t ask you to try and be poetic or anything, but isn’t there maybe a slightly more suitable description?”

As I inspected the picture with head tilted to the side, a voice ripe with exhaustion called out to me.

“Ah, Master.”

As if it was a nuisance to bother doing so, my master lifted the upper half of his body off the sofa, scratching his head. From outward appearances, he seemed to be around 30 years old. How he managed to keep his long hair with his lifestyle was a mystery, but it was kept nicely enough that his eccentricity wouldn’t seem like shabbiness. Likely, that was thanks to his being brought up in a well-off family.

“It may just be on a temporary basis, but even so, as a Magus’ apprentice, please don’t throw around the word ‘monster’ so cheaply. This is one of the Angels of Law.”

Speaking up again, my master tapped on the photograph on the table.

“An angel? What about this is like an angel?”

“The image of angels as human-like with wings has become pretty popular, but it was really influenced primarily by the images of the goddess of victory, Nike, of 4th Century Greek mythology. Angels can actually be divided into a number of lineages. In this case, it might best serve to start with an explanation of what angels really are.”

Stroking his chin, my master continued to speak in a grumbling tone.

“The first are those living things which exist above and beyond myths, which have been reclassified as angels. The second are beings born from the authority of a previous master, that became angels in the process of becoming independent. There are any number of hypotheses, but the Seated Angel Throne you are looking at is probably closer to the former. Taking its master’s Power into itself, it is an angel whose primary purpose is just to carry it.”

“So it’s a wheel, because it’s being used to carry that Power?”

“The current interpretation is the opposite, actually. It seems likely that this angel is used to carry Power because it’s a wheel. Take a look at the Bible. In the writings of the prophet Ezekiel, where there is a description of his ‘eyes captured by the face of a wheel shining like beryl.’ To digress a little, there are even theories that these are what people are seeing when they claim to see UFOs.”

“Angel’s are...UFOs?”

The astoundingly abrupt change in conversation left me blinking in confusion. Seeing this, my master began to laugh. Considering how suddenly his mood had improved, it seemed we had struck upon a topic of particular interest to him.

“There was a group in the 20th century that called anything and everything a UFO, I suppose. Everything from the baptism of Christ to the frescoes of Egypt was all, ‘without a doubt,’ caused by UFOs. There isn’t any particularly deep meaning to it, but wheels flying through the sky do seem to stir up the imagination. For starters, a lot of those reports were caused by hippies, who were just using drugs to the point it was their own minds that were flying away... what’s with that look all of a sudden?”

“Oh, I was just thinking, there sure are a lot of people like Master in the world, aren’t there?”

“Don’t group me together with people like that. Sometimes rather overbearing reasoning is required, but magecraft can’t proceed just from cobbling together a bunch of subjective, personal theories. Besides, that’s not a problem for a disciple of magecraft, it’s a matter of general education.”

Despite saying something like “even if you’re a temporary disciple” earlier, he cleanly retracted his previous words while laughing through his nose. Somewhere in his face that looked somehow triumphant, childishness and mean-spiritedness made their unhappy peace with each other.

His name, El-Melloi II.

Of the 12 Great Families in the Clock Tower, conferred upon him was the title of Lord of the Noble House of El-Melloi.

1.2

It might be a bit late, but my master is actually a Magus.

Magecraft is the art of appealing to the foundations of the World, through the use of

Small Source

Large Source

Od and Mana, to enact phenomena of change within the scope of what is already realistically possible...or something like that. I was told Od is the life force present in every human being, while Mana is magical energy that fills the world around us, but my understanding of the subject is still pretty shaky.

One thing I do know for certain is that to be a Magus means to turn your back on the world, and to devote yourself entirely to nothing but yourself and your craft. I was told once that the very act of keeping Magecraft hidden from the public eye was important, but secretly I sometimes thought that Magi were just people that liked to lock themselves up in their rooms and neglect the outside world.

So...

“... I understand the story about Angels.”

Trying to restrain my facial expression from clearly showing my feelings, I bowed my head.

Yes, this was my master.

Perhaps in contemporary society things are different, but at least where I lived previously, it was common to pay your superiors their due respect. So even if my master was unlikeable, I still had to take a proper attitude.

“... On another topic, do you not intend to live in the mansion with Reines?”

“You think I could survive together with that devil? My stomach would be broken in three days. It already feels broken now...”

Lying on the sofa and rubbing his abdomen, my master made a sullen face. After a short while, he gave a tired sigh.

“Anyway, I said I’d take on the request, so I need to take at least the bare minimum of measures.”

“... I see.”

Since I didn’t really know the details of their discussion, there was nothing for me to do but give a seemingly appropriate yet effectively meaningless response. As if he

had realized something, my master closed one eye and gave a short hum.

“Speaking of which, what do you think of Angels?”

“... this again?”

I’m sure my distaste for the topic was written clearly on my face. Whether it was in relation to Magecraft or not, I was pretty weak when it came to long conversations. Considering how straight-forward reality tended to be, it seemed to me that living people talked far too much. Especially those in the city.

“... err, they are messengers of the Lord who bring his blessings to humans, right? A long time ago, the priest near my home used to speak about them a lot.”

“I’m not asking about them in the general sense. I mean, what do you think about them as far as Magecraft is concerned?”

“Ehheheheheheh! Even if you say it like that, there’s no way she’ll understand! She’s pretty stupid, after all!”

Suddenly, a cheerful voice sprung up.

Naturally, the only people in the room were my master and me. So, this must have been a third, formless person’s voice. Both my master and I knew the true identity of that voice’s owner, so it didn’t particularly surprise either of us. Rather, knowing it was a waste of time to engage them, we simply did our best to ignore it and continued with the explanation.

“... though I am not all that smart, to be honest.”

“That’s not the problem. Even beyond the fact that you are my disciple, I won’t sit idly by and let one of my own be insulted in front of my very eyes. Remember that.”

The sound of something slamming shut resounded.

Maybe because of the sudden change in tone from the previous conversation, the third voice abruptly retreated into silence.

With that settled, my master then extended his hand towards the table. Taking a cigar from his metal cigar case, he used a knife to cut a small piece off at the mouth. Striking a match, he lit the cigar and took a deep pull on it. With that done, he intertwined his fingers on his lap.

“Let’s begin a new lecture, then.”

In that lax fashion, he began to speak.

“First, let’s start with the Angels you spoke of, the messengers of God. That’s also correct. In fact, the Angels used in Magecraft draw their foundations from those. The abilities of these Angels who deliver the blessings of God are important to Magi in the modern era. Particularly, the use of Angels is currently in a state of being reinvented by modern Magi.”

Even though it was a similar explanation yet again, this time I was able to understand it properly. The difference was obvious. The previous explanation was that of a common person, whereas this one was one from a lecturer of the Clock Tower. Losing his languid facial expression from earlier, my master now looked at me from across the table with a sharp gaze.

... Yes.

My master was not all that skilled when it came to Magecraft.

This wasn’t humility, or modesty, or underestimation. It really was the case that, for better or for worse, he was just ordinary. Even if he was an authority within the Clock Tower at the moment, it was unheard of for such a figure to remain in the Fourth Order, or so I had overheard countless times from others in the two months I had been here. And yet, my master’s value was not low by any means.

As a lecturer, he had managed to cultivate astounding results, to the point where I who was in the position of his personal apprentice was getting rushed down by other students. To have the honour of being taught personally by that Lord El-Melloi II. Honestly, the envious stares hurt.

If I were to give an example, our relationship would be like that of a boxer and their second, or an athlete and their coach. Even if I had the perfect form in mind, I didn’t have the ability to actualize them. I didn’t know how my master truly felt about those circumstances. What I did know, however, were the various nicknames that had sprung up for him in the Clock Tower thanks to his odd situation.

For example, Professor Charisma. Or Master V.

There are a few more, but they are rather impolite, so I will refrain from repeating them.

In any case, I raised a question regarding the previous subject matter.

“What’s being reinvented, the Angels?”

“Yes. You know about the four classical elements, right?”

While savouring the flavour of his cigar, my master raised four fingers.

Earth, Water, Fire, Wind. Listing these, he lowered a finger for each. These, called the four classical elements, were a fundamental part of Magecraft, and were something even I knew about.

“In Ancient Greece, these were the four elements begotten by the Arche,” my master said.

Arche was Greek for the beginning of all things... or something along those lines, if I recalled correctly.

“According to Alchemy, the four elements and the Origin are one and the same. Even now, most people treat them that way. Things like the 12 Constellations, or the Five Elements of Oriental thought, are no different. They just serve as convenient systems to classify all of reality. Although those are the four elements used by places like the Clock Tower, we could actually add various elements, like Void, and the chemical elements. This tends them towards a more practical tint, but now I’m getting off track.”

“Uhh, I was told that I was Earth.”

“Right. In that kind of meaning, it’s used to generalize where your talents and weaknesses lie. There are also those with Double Elements, even some monsters with all Five Elements, but let’s get back to the original topic. In short, the system of Elements was used as a system of classification out of convenience, but starting with the rise of modern Magecraft at the end of the 19th century, that’s begun to change. With the addition of the Concept of Angels to the system, they have been given a new meaning.”

“A new meaning?”

“Correct.”

Watching me to gauge how well I was understanding what he was saying, he continued to speak.

“The ‘Vessels of Power’ that a great number of people now believe in.”

As if supporting a sacred cup over the table, he gave a small nod, and silence fell between us.

Smoke from my master’s cigar began to gather in his cupped hands. The image reminded me of sanctified water. Were Angels supposed to be that water? Or the shape he was making with his hands?

“Magecraft is something that must be kept secret, but in contrast, Concepts become stronger and more stabilized as more people have faith in them. Similarly influenced

by the thought process behind the Occult, poets like Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, and WB Yeats strongly influenced the process.”

My master’s voice echoed heavily in the confined space of his apartment.

Next, from the vessel created by my master, the illusion of some kind of wave began to spread out. No, that might have actually been what was happening. Maybe I was just not smart enough to understand these kinds of phenomenon, but manipulating this kind of invisible ‘power’ was supposed to be the fundamental function of Magi. The repeating waves extending from his hands reflected off the various mirrors and charms in the apartment and surrounded us.

It seemed almost as if the room itself had been transformed into a Shrine.

“Did you just think this seemed like a Shrine?”

“...”

“There’s no need to be surprised. I specifically made it to seem like that, so your judgment is dead on. Because I actually am turning this room into a Shrine right now.”

“Huh?”

Blinking in surprise, I had no idea what he meant.

Maybe my face looked a little strange, because my master began to chuckle. He seemed to be enjoying himself so much it felt like I had fallen for some sort of trap.

“You felt a strange change in the atmosphere, right? That’s a shrine. In Latin, it would be called ‘templum,’ but you can just think of it as a place where God is able to manifest temporarily.”

Maybe it was because the talk of Angels already implied a connection to the Church, but for some reason I easily understood his explanation.

“So basically, it’s not just a place where believers go to worship, but a place in which God is actually present, so we call it a Shrine, right?”

“Yes, exactly. Right now, it might seem like I’m using the symbolism of a holy cup and various things around the room to make it look like that, but in reality this is the real deal. It’s common for magecraft to require consecrated land, right? It’s a technique that might look similar to the Bounded Fields of Buddhism, but in this case Angels are at the core of the effect.”

“...”

As my master stopped speaking for a moment, I also descended into thought.

A Shrine is a place where God can manifest temporarily. And Angels are ‘Vessels of Power.’ So in this case, the relationship between the two is...

“So... does that mean the name Angel is just given to anything with an ambiguous magical nature, and are being used by magecraft?”

“Correct.”

Still on the sofa, my master picked up the now long-cold tea and put it to his lips.

“Before, I mentioned that as more people believe in them, Concepts become more stable. That being the case, it wouldn’t be strange for someone to think that they could use this widespread Concept of Angels to stabilize the existence of Magecraft. Actually, if you look at a number of different magical societies, you can find many who find this way of thinking exceedingly alluring.”

Putting the cup down, my master raised two fingers.

Using his fingers, he drew a pentagram in the air before him, whispering something like ‘Before me Raphael, Behind me Gabriel’ under his breath.

“That was what is called the Ritual of the Lesser Pentagram. It calls on the names of the Four Archangels, each representing one of the four elements, to consecrate an area or prepare for further various applications of Magecraft. Of course, something as simple as this prayer could be found easily in a magazine nowadays. Of course, rituals like this that flow throughout the world are almost all dummies, just observational, or just plain nonsense, so the Clock Tower just leaves them as they are.”

With a satisfied expression, he moved his gaze to the window. A thin stream of sunlight made its way through a gap in the curtains. The phrase ‘gap’ really seemed to be fitting for people like us. The distance between us and the world...places overflowing with light, in contrast to the space we occupied, and the tiny gap in which the two were able to interact.

The faint light, like an Angel.

“That being said, the changes of a Concept do have an effect on Magecraft,” my master murmured.

In the cup now left on the table, ripples were forming on the surface of the tea. It seemed like the ritual my master had performed was having an effect on it, even if a little late.

“Further, it may have simply all just been a part of someone’s plan. Rituals that use the name of the Lord to bind demons were in abundant supply in the past. Of course, being Magi, it’s not like everyone is a pious follower of Christianity. We simply made use of the universalized concept of the Name of the Lord, under which all things must submit. In recent times, it is similar to how an Internet Protocol works—well, I guess that explanation would just confuse you even more. With that line of reasoning, the use of Angels was an inevitable point on the road. Compared to using the Name of the Lord, it’s a much easier Concept to make use of after all.”

That I understood.

The Concept of God was one that had a distinct “colour” to it. You could also call it faith. In comparison to that, Angels came in many variations, like Guardian Angels and Fallen Angels. For this reason, the kinds of rituals that could be used exploiting Angels was far greater.

And that was why my master had called it a reinvention.

“Now, the development of new Magecraft in the West is almost entirely dominated by the influence of these Angels. No, it’s not actually limited to new Magecraft. It may be subtle, but the Concept of Angels almost certainly has an effect on all Magecraft. For the modern Magus, whether the goal is to make use of Angels or eliminate them, in some form they are conscious of any changes that occur regarding them.”

My master closed his eyes. Then slowly, as if sighing,

“In a way, it’s safe to say that the modern Magus is in the business of collecting Angels.”

“...”

Despite my insensitivity to matters of Magecraft, those words resounded even with me. They were somewhat poetic, but more than that, they seemed to cut straight to the heart of the truth. As if he was pausing to let the profoundness of those words sink in, the silence that followed was longer than previous ones.

“And so, the problem now is that castle,” he said, moving his finger.

He was pointing at one of the pictures spilling out of an envelope sitting on the table. In a place that looked like the far depths of the wilderness, with its curving spires and warped ramparts, stood a grey castle.

“Ah.”

Right.

Originally Reines had come here with a request for my master. I had become so engrossed in the lecture that I had completely forgotten. Hanging my head to hide the embarrassed expression on my face, I spoke.

“So, is there something with this castle?”

“I mentioned this earlier, but again, what I’m talking about is the public appearance of Magecraft—basically, the kind of magic that has become a household word. In reality, the Magecraft we use is something beyond that. It would be a mistake to say that the changes with the Angels have no effect here, but the details of that effect are unimportant. The real matter of importance is unrelated to that. Mysticism and Occultism act as if they are within the same domain as Magecraft, but they are not equal by any means.”

My master’s face became somewhat melancholic. He only ever received absurd requests from his step-sister, it was practically her calling card. Even so, he couldn’t refuse. Apparently there was something involving an enormous sum of money, but I didn’t know the details. The only thing I knew for sure was that it was directly related to the reason he received the title of Lord El-Melloi II. In a bitter voice, my master spoke again.

“But, as a Lord, there are Magi within my realm of influence who have become fascinated with these ideas. Of all things, they’ve become so obsessed with them that they want to remake the castle within their own territory. Take another look at that photograph.”

Looking closely, it became quite clear that the castle had a very strange shape to it. Maybe it was a result of the weather at the time the photograph was taken, but with the way the sunlight washed over the castle, it projected a shadow as if the castle itself had an enormous, magnificent pair of wings. It looked like a winged god that had lost its arms and head. It was a design that was very reminiscent of the images of Nike of Samothraces that my master had spoken of earlier. The degree of appropriateness that coincidence had was enough to send shivers up my spine.

It was almost as if the castle itself was a single living entity.

Yes.

... as if that castle itself were an Angel.

“The Castle of Separation, Adra,” my master declared.

“It’s previous master called it that, apparently. It seems that said master had some connections with the previous Lord El-Melloi. Honestly, if the previous Lord El-Melloi saw what was happening now, he’d be jumping for joy. I feel like he would

harass me for hours, saying something like ‘this is what you get for messing with things that don’t belong to you.’”

The previous Lord El-Melloi.

Like now, his name came up in conversation every now and then, but it was still a mystery what kind of person he had been. All I had heard was that compared to my master, he had been an unprecedented genius. Also, from gathering little scraps of conversations, it seemed like he was a bit pessimistic by nature, but I couldn’t tell for sure.

That, and one more thing.

It was something I didn’t realize until later. Likely fairly early in the morning, my master had decided to accept the request he received from Reines. Whether he was just making the necessary arrangements, or was just gathering information, I didn’t know, but whether he was being caught up in these developments against his will, or he had just plain given up and accepted it, it was sure to be something that hurt his stomach.

If you ask why, it would be because, after worrying about it for a while,

“... so, yes. I’m sorry, my Lady, but tomorrow I’m going to go take a look. Could I trouble you to join me?”

My master—Lord El-Melloi II, with an unpleasant expression and a bitter voice, asked me.

1.3

It is often said that vegetation is sparse in the United Kingdom. Not only was the northern edge of the country covered in ice, but many forests were wiped out due to deforestation during the Industrial Revolution. On top of that, with the highest mountain in the country being a mere 1344 meters, the natural environment was far from diverse.

That being said.

From what I had personally seen, the country was plenty spacious, and filled with all kinds of life.

Past the bushes of bracken at the foot of the mountain, layers upon layers of ash and oak trees surrounded the path cutting gently up the side of the hill. Though the path itself looked somewhat tiring, what was more so was the journey here. It had taken 14 hours by train, including countless transfers, to get into the general area. Then, after staying the night at a local inn, the journey continued with 3 hours on a bus, and another 5 hours of walking. In short, we were now in the middle of nowhere.

The cool September wind was refreshing, and brought with it a myriad of scents. The scent of wet earth, churned thoroughly by each step taken. The gentle scent of herbs, most likely wild heather. The mouldy smell of thick sap, the hesitantly gathering insects, the rotting of trees and the droppings of small animals. All of these were smells I was very familiar with.

There was so much life, it couldn't be thought of as dirty. Similarly in this case, there was so much death, it couldn't be thought of as beautiful. These two ideas always seemed to come as a set.

Thoughts about my life in London clouded my mind. Even though there were some few ten thousand times as many people there compared to my home, it was a place that made me feel most of the people there were in the service of "death." Even though it was a town built with such cleanliness in mind, it gave me goosebumps countless times. And, even if my two-month stay there were to become twenty years, I would never be able to accept that place, and I'm sure it would never be able to accept me either.

Even now, just thinking about it caused such feelings of dread-

"... w, wait...!"

"...!"

The hand that landed on my shoulder, shaking just like a zombie, made me flinch. As if I had been caught by Medusa's eyes, I stiffly turned as little as I could to see behind me.

“M-master...!”

Of course, the outstretched hand belonged to the deeply distressed, sweat-drenched form of my master.

“M-my lady, could we please slow down a bit?” he wheezed.

Luckily or not, it seemed he didn't notice my reaction. After all, if he had had the composure to do so, he most definitely would not have let it slide. Using my fingers to massage my stiffened face, I replied nonchalantly.

“But master, at this rate, we will be late to the invitation's designated meeting time.”

“... okay, then at least give me 10 minutes. No, 5 minutes. Just please let me sit down.”

Breathing heavily, he raised five fingers.

“... you have three minutes.”

Giving him that compromise, I leaned up against a nearby oak. To my slightly overheated body, the cool bark of the tree felt pleasant. Really, I preferred stone to trees, and even earth to stone, but this place didn't seem like it had any intention of indulging me. If I were to close my eyes here and sleep, I felt like everything so far could have been a dream. But if I were to wake up and find myself back in my hometown, what would happen?

Suddenly, I felt a sharp pain in my right hand.

“Ihihihihi! Just because you're a magus, you think that makes it okay for you to have a weak body?”

Again, it was neither my master nor I that spoke, but a third voice without a body. Strictly speaking, the voice came from my right hand, but even so, my master simply looked at the ground and complained in an exhausted voice about being brought up in the city.

This third voice never did anything but spout insults and abuse. Ever since I was able to recognize things around me, this third voice had always been with me, but I hadn't once seen it improve in any way. That being said, over the past few decades, it had only had the chance to speak to about five people, myself included.

(... Have I not changed much, either?)

I thought to myself idly.

Since two months ago, the number of people I have properly spoken to hadn't even doubled. My environment had changed to a bewildering degree, but I hadn't changed at all. It felt like I was just being left behind. Compared to the half-hearted way I was now, surely even the resolve I had mustered in leaving my hometown was better. It was like I alone was just floating aimlessly like a jellyfish.

My master, as he cursed while massaging his feet, and this thing at my right hand, and even if nothing else at least my own state of being, were all clearly spelled out for me. So why was I still so clumsy?

“... why am I still such an idiot?”

Like a curse, I whispered those words.

After that, following countless complaints and requests for breaks from my master, we came to a place where the forest opened up into a clearing.

“Hey hey, what's that?” the voice at my right hand gave an amazed moan. I also bunched my eyebrows.

It was a rock.

A rock so big that if three adult men were to work together, they might be able to lift it. On that rock was the figure of a person lying down. On top of the rock, with a surface reminiscent of a tortoise's shell, he skilfully rolled around as if half asleep, while still keeping his balance.

Even as it looked like he was about to fall, he never did. Like those water-drinking birds I used to watch when I was a child, when he looked like he was about to stop, he would keep moving. On the green surface of the rock, his burly figure continued to sway back and forth, and just when it seemed like the slightest of pushes would send him crashing to the ground—his eyes snapped open, and he looked directly at us.

“Ah, you're finally here!”

Calmly spinning himself into a cross-legged posture, he sat up and waved.

His filthy hands were thick and muscled. His face seemed as if it hadn't been shaved, or taken care of in any way, in months. Dust and dirt caked his skin to the point his natural skin tone was unreadable.

His clothes gave the feeling of something like a nomad, but even they couldn't hide his muscularity. His arms, legs, and even his neck were startlingly thick, the hard work gone into forging them evident. He may have been only slightly taller than my master, but I wouldn't be surprised if his weight was close to double.

"Well, you two look like an odd group. Well, you look odd enough on your own, but this young lady looks completely different. Wait, this isn't some kidnapping in progress, is it?"

His loud laughter revealed surprisingly white teeth. His dark eyes were also quite pretty. But, there was an unmistakable danger within them. They were eyes that held a feeling like a child's innocence mixed with an elder's cunning.

"... u-um"

"... who are you?"

In my place, my exhausted master spoke. His voice carried a tiredness that said even speaking was a chore.

"Flue," the man replied. "That's my name."

"... that's a pretty cute name, for someone looking like yourself."

"Well, my whole name is Flueger, but I don't like it that much. If you just stop at Flue, it's a much more pleasant name, like a gentle breeze," he said with a certain deepness.

Rather than a gentle breeze, I thought the harsh desert sun, or a brilliant spotlight like in a pro wrestling arena was more suitable to him, but he did have a mysteriously refreshing quality about him. My master, however, just seemed irritated. Even I was blinking in surprise at him. In our past incidents, we rarely came across people like him.

(—Hihi, if your master is a skinny fox, then I guess that makes this guy a half-asleep camel, doesn't it?)

Once again, a voice came from near my right hand. This time, it was a whisper low enough that only I could hear it.

"Hmmm?"

The man—Flue, snapped his gaze over to me. It was unthinkable that he had actually heard the voice. Even so, his cheerful yet scrutinizing gaze looked me up and down. His impolite, yet not quite vulgar gaze seemed to see right through me. With a bewildered air, he raised one finger.

“Why are you wearing that grey hood? You’re an awfully pretty girl, and it doesn’t look like you’re hiding any scars or anything...”

“That’s... because...”

“I’d appreciate if you left my apprentice alone, thank you very much.”

While I was struggling to find an answer, my master forced himself between the two of us.

“Ah, so you are a teacher and student! I thought you had the face of a teacher, but I wasn’t quite sure...”

“And what kind of face is that?”

“High strung and nervous, yet still looking like you are someone who takes care of others? Butlers from those old black and white movies made that face a lot, too.”

With an apologetic expression, Flue scratched his head.

“You seem a bit too straightforward to be a magus, don’t you think?”

Of course, neither I nor my master were under any illusion that our meeting with him this far in the wilderness was a simple coincidence. After taking another breath, my master spoke again.

“So you also received the invitation?”

“Ohh, yes!”

Flue jumped down from the rock on which he was still sitting. Reaching into his robes, he pulled out an envelope that, in contrast to the rest of his appearance, was in pristine condition. It was made of high grade paper, with a faint watermark. Even without looking, we could tell that the symbol pressed into the sealing wax and the watermark depicted an angel’s feather. Naturally, we carried that exact envelope with us.

“Why exactly were you having a nap in a place like this?”

“Well, I got a bit lonely walking all by myself,” he said something ridiculous. Waving his envelope in the air, he laughed affably. “I figured, if I got an invitation like this, then there must be someone else coming too. And look, bingo!”

“Did you ever consider the possibility that you might have been the last one to arrive?”

“I’d deal with it if it happened. I’d be on the verge of tears, but I’m pretty fast you know! I wouldn’t be late.”

He flexed his arms in what seemed to be some sort of poorly executed appeal. In some way, it reminded me of a lion trying its hardest to wag its tail. It seemed to match the sweat and dirt caked face, and his humorous impression.

In a way, maybe that was his personal virtue.

“... well, would you like to come with us, then?”

I asked suddenly, earning a chastising look from my master. In all honesty, I don’t know why I said it. Neither I nor my master liked travelling with any more companions than were necessary, to the point that I could feel my own face heating up from shyness just from offering the invitation.

“Really?!”

With sparkling eyes, the man laughed cheerfully. The smile he gave was as extravagant as a fine alcohol in a bar.

“Alright! You won’t have to ask me twice! But really, I’m glad you asked. Travelling alone is so boring.”

“...”

Despite the sour face he was making, he extended a hand to my master.

“The name’s Flue! Once again, it’s a pleasure!”

“... Lord El-Melloi II. This is my apprentice Gray.”

Though he didn’t accept the handshake, he reluctantly offered at least his name in a way of greeting, prompting an impressed whistle from Flue.

“El-Melloi. I see, I see. You’re the one from those rumours at the Clock Tower! You’re that Lord that jumped from Mineralogy to Modern Magecraft, huh?”

“Yeah, that’s right.” This time, he cleanly cut eye contact after speaking.

“Oh, right. You wouldn’t happen to have any alcohol on you, would you? I’m fresh out.”

“I’m not in the habit of carrying alcohol around with me. And you aren’t getting any of my cigars, either.”

“Bleh.”

After such a curt refusal, Flue proceeded to click his tongue repeatedly, as if he was close to tears.

“Let’s get going, Gray! If you’re slow we’re leaving you behind!”

After kicking some sand and adjusting his coat, my master continued his ascent of the mountain path. Of course, 30 minutes later, the one who was slowest and constantly moaning for respite, was just as everyone predicted, my master.

—At long last, the Castle of Separation showed itself.

* * *

I was unsure whether it was something that could really be called a castle. The tranquil lake that expanded behind it, and the rugged drawbridge before us certainly gave it that air. The interweaving of the forest, lake, and marble of the walls displayed a solemn beauty that would be hard to find in even in fairy tales. If comparing it to the many famous castles of Great Britain, it couldn’t be said to be inferior in any way.

But.

The great, leaning spire gave off the impression of a spine twisted in agony. The countless marble bricks were piled up in a way that seemed perfectly calculated to make people feel uneasy. Of course, they must have been built up, but they gave the distinct impression that they existed in that shape from the start, and that they had just been dug up from their sleeping place deep in the earth of the mountain. It was a place that gave off that kind of impossible illusion.

-The crumbling castle gate, like a broken rib cage.

-The warped castle walls, like arms embracing the earth.

-The main building on the other side of the castle, even now reminded me of a beating heart.

It was as if some giant had had its skin and muscle torn away, and had been turned inside out. That was the kind of impression it left deep in the observer’s mind.

“.... ah...”

My body suddenly began to tremble.

Compared to the photographs I had seen earlier, it looked far more ominous—far more sublime.

The Castle of Separation, Adra.

“... so the children of Angels were giants?” my master murmured with a frown.

“Angels’... children?”

“From the books of the Apocrypha. If we believe the description from the first book of Enoch, the children of Angels and humans were up to 3000 cubits tall. In today’s measurements, that would be about 1,300 meters. This castle would easily match that.”

“Well, aren’t we knowledgeable?”

Turning to face Flue, my master’s expression steadily grew worse and worse.

“If you’re a magus, you should at least know this much.”

“There’s a difference between just knowing something and being able to spit it out on a moment’s notice. Besides, you aren’t just reciting information blindly based on a single look, are you?”

“...”

“This is a place that would make you think of its creator, so shouldn’t we be talking about that?”

“Speaking of which, what would you know about that?”

My master threw a sharp look at Flue as he asked.

“The creator of this Castle of Separation, the one known as the Magus of Ashbourne...surely you didn’t come here without knowing at least that much?”

“Heheheh. Looks like I’ve really kicked the wrong hornet’s nest.”

In reply to Flue’s droll response, my master pressed him further.

“We haven’t asked you about who you really are yet, have we?”

Shrugging as if accepting the fact that this time there was no way to avoid the subject, Flue gathered the sleeves of his robes.

“I’m a mercenary. I work mostly in the Middle East, sticking my neck out whenever magic is involved. Every once in a while, the Clock Tower requests my services as well.”

“So, you’re a Spell Caster, huh?”

“Haha, sorry.” Flue rubbed his own head apologetically.

I’d heard of them, too.

A magus was one who pursued the Truth of magecraft—sometimes called the “Spiral of Origin”—with everything they had, generation after generation, investing all means and abilities towards that end. The abilities they gained as a result of that pursuit were just a byproduct, and were nothing more than a means to which they could reach that Truth.

In contrast, there were also those who had no interest in the Truth, and who saw magecraft as a convenient tool to be exploited. These people were called Spell Casters. Normal magi detested these kinds of people like they were poisonous snakes. Or at least that was what I had been told within the Clock Tower.

“So, I imagine it would probably bother you to be seen with me. Shall we split up and enter separately then?”

With a depressed air, Flue pointed a finger at the draw bridge to the castle.

A few seconds passed.

“... you ask that now?”

After spitting out those words, my master stepped onto the drawbridge. Giving me a shy smile, Flue fell in step with me.

Through the open castle gate was a simple, yet spacious front garden. Made in the style of an English garden—or maybe more appropriately, as if the owner had little interest in it, the natural scenery gave off the strong impression of being built to the bare minimum of appearances. Even so, as if something had captured his interest, my master threw his gaze two or three times to some rose bushes behind the castle gate.

The scent of roses was thick. Though I didn’t know all that much about flowers, so I didn’t know if they were actually roses. Just that there was a thick, clinging scent in the air.

Standing at the entrance to the keep was a man in a slim-fitted suit. He somewhat gave off the impression of a butler.

“My apologies for the wait. Lord El-Melloi II, along with Mr. Flueger.” With a courteous bow, he opened the door.

The lobby within was surprisingly large. And...

“... ahhh”

Unconsciously, I gulped.

It was a space overflowing with Angels.

Rows upon rows of Angel statues. They came in all different forms and materials, some wood, some iron, some even sculpted from what appeared to be crystal. In addition, stained-glass depictions of bow-wielding cupids, paintings of valiant, sword-wielding Archangels, and frescoes depicting Dominions bestowed with great authority adorned the space in abundance. Even the chandelier hanging from the ceiling bore the motif of an angel's wings and halo.

And they weren't just famous Angels either.

Angels like the ones my master had shown me—I had studied up on them a little before we left London—were far from the classical depictions of holy beings; even those appearing as little more than monsters were present. There were the bizarre, four-winged and four-faced Cherubs, and the six-winged serpents known as Seraphs.

With their various forms and styles, the number of angels placed around the keep easily exceeded a few hundred.

(...)

As I looked, a terribly pungent sensation welled up in my throat.

There was no way something like this could be considered just a simple collection. No, if it was just a collection of art, there was no explanation for the mysterious pressure it created, considering its age and strength. It was as if someone had lavishly indulged in an obsession of theirs, and we had walked into that person's Cabinet of Curiosities. Or maybe walked directly inside their mind.

If that was the case, that made this place-

(... like brain matter.)

The atmosphere of the room felt thick and sticky. I involuntarily stumbled, placing both my hands on the stone floor. It became incredibly difficult to breathe. The trembling I felt when I first saw the castle became worse and worse. I felt like I was sinking into a swamp. And in that swamp floated countless eyes, watching us as we drowned. Observation that couldn't be escaped. For what felt like an eternity, I felt nothing but the sensation of falling into an Angel's brain.

“It's an illusion.”

I heard a voice. I couldn't even tell where the voice came from.

“My Lady, this isn’t even Magecraft. The ‘colour’ of this place is just appealing to your innate sensitivity. You are just being run down by your own abilities. It doesn’t matter what, just create a new direction for it. You’ve learned the basics of Meditation, haven’t you?”

Meditation? I didn’t know anything about that. For that matter, I didn’t even know where I was.

... But. A peculiar smell entered my nose.

It was like the smell was scratching at the back of my head—and as I smelled that familiar scent, the stone floor under my feet returned. The atmosphere was just sticky, so of course there were no floating eyeballs. I could hear my own laboured breathing, and felt an unpleasant sweat on my skin.

Looking down at me, my master had apparently started smoking a cigar.

“What did you see?”

“... umm... a swamp of brain matter, and eyes watching me...”

“I see. Defensive Meditation training was supposed to be one of the first things we covered, but I see I’ll have to add it to your homework when we return.”

“Guh...”

It was frustrating, but I couldn’t argue.

Puffing out smoke from his cigar, my master turned his gaze to the centre of the lobby.

“Of course, the other humans gathered here wouldn’t lose to such hyperventilation, would they?”

Beside me, Flue also looked into the lobby. Immediately, he broke his gaze away. Following my master’s gaze, from close to the spiral staircase in the lobby, a single person was approaching us.

“Whoa!”

At the same time as Flue hurriedly jumped behind a nearby pillar and hid, the approaching person greeted my master.

Blonde hair and blue eyes.

From his personal appearance, he looked like an impressive young man. He still seemed to be in his mid-twenties, but he carried a sense of confidence and

experience that didn't match his age. From his unblemished white suit, to his necktie pin encrusted with precious stones, to his calm and collected demeanour, his manliness seemed to be on a different level.

“It has been a while, Lord El-Melloi.”

“Lord El-Melloi II, please. If you leave out the II, it is a name too heavy for my shoulders.”

“You are too humble. I have heard of your exploits as a Lord within the Clock Tower.”

Beyond just sounding like he was trying to be polite, his voice held a genuine sincerity that was pleasant on the ears. It was a voice that seemed to reveal the months and years he had lived. There was no doubt he faced all obstacles in life with the same straightforwardness.

“You praise me too much. With your reputation within the Clock Tower, The Knight Heine Istari is much more illustrious than I am.”

“I’m not the one who managed to get a title out of Her Excellency, though.”

The joking words of my master were deflected hard and fast.

As my composure had returned somewhat, and I was already a slightly separated from the two of them, I turned to the hidden Flue.

“... is he famous?”

“Oi, you really don’t know him? I thought you were El-Melloi’s follower.”

“... I only met him and entered the Clock Tower recently.”

After my honest admission, Flue breathed a sigh.

He had even gone through the trouble of hiding himself, so there wasn’t any reason for him to answer me, but the way he honestly responded to my inquiry reminded me that he was a good person in his own way.

“The Istari were a family well-noted for their alchemy, but Heine himself is an interesting case. At one point in the past, he had turned his back on the life of a magus and become a monk with the Church.”

“The Church?”

In this circumstance, “The Church” did not refer to the everyday religious institution. It was the underside of that organization, a group whose primary goal was to hunt

down “heretics.” It was one of the very few organizations that surpassed the Clock Tower in scale. Their stance on the usage of Mysteries was rather different from that of the Clock Tower, so the two organizations were often in conflict with each other. To magi, it was something they disliked even talking about.

For me, the Church was an organization I was much more familiar with than the Clock Tower.

“Uh, so, why did he return to being a magus then?

“They didn’t want his talent to go to waste, so his family pulled him back in.”

Seeing my blinking face, Flue’s mouth twisted slightly.

“Thanks to that, the relationship between the Church and the Clock Tower became even more problematic, and for a time things were actually rather dangerous. But I guess that just shows how much value he has. The Istari family must be so proud.”

Which must have meant that the one who fought his way out of the Church was Heine Istari himself.

In order to defend the providence of God, the combat strength of the Church was tempered to a state beyond common comprehension. If he had used his own magic to defeat the master assassins from the Church, it was no wonder he was famous in the Clock Tower as well. From just hearing this one thing about him, he seemed like an unbelievable person—not just the deeds of a genius, but an impression closer to that of a great catastrophe.

(... but, that...)

I also thought of something else.

The fact that the assassins he had defeated with his own hands may have been his previous comrades—what feelings did that leave in Heine Istari?

As I mulled this over,

“... Brother.”

A young girl, wearing a white one-piece dress, popped her head out from behind the spiral staircase where she had been hiding. With a timid behaviour that reminded me of a small bird, she couldn’t have been more than 8 years old. The young man gave her a gentle smile.

“It’s okay, Rosalind. Lord El-Melloi II is an honest person.”

“... o-okay.”

After pattering her way over to her brother, she bowed her head slightly.

“I’m his younger sister, Rosalind Istari. Pleased to meet you.”

With a shyness that seemed even now like she would break down any moment, she greeted him.

Seeing her begin coughing and immediately guessing it was the smoke, my master hastily pulled his cigar from his mouth and returned it to his cigar case, earning an apologetic nod from Heine.

“So, that is-”

Raising his head, he looked over towards me. It seems at that same point, Flue entered his field of vision for the first time. Seeing Flue cover his face with a hand at having been discovered, my master asked Heine.

“Do you know Flue? We met him on our way here, and he decided to walk with us.”

“... Yes.”

The young man nodded.

The refreshing demeanour he had held up until now vanished in an instant, his voice now holding a cruel, inhumane quality.

“... yes. If you mean the Master-slaying Astrologer Flueger, then yes, I’ve heard of him.”

1.4

The confrontation in the lobby lasted for only a matter of seconds.

“My apologies. This isn’t the place for bringing up personal feelings.”

The young man apologized and withdrew.

(-Heh! Looks like Mr. Knight isn’t just a big-headed oaf!)

The voice near my right hand spoke.

Flue, with a strained laugh, waved off the apology.

“I’m sorry, Rosalind. Did I scare you?”

“N-no...”

The young girl bravely shook her head. Of course, it was easy to see the bluff mixed into her expression, but as if to avoid pointing it out, Heine just stroked her hair. He seemed like a good older brother. What that meant in the world of magi wasn’t clear. I did get the feeling that the two of them had met more than just hostility for it, though.

“So it seems like you were also invited here.” Heine pointed his question toward my master.

“Yes, a bit of a social obligation. I keep myself pretty far detached from the families my predecessor kept ties with, but the lord of this castle is one of the few exceptions.”

“So it is about that, after all.”

“Yes,” my master nodded.

“A month ago, Geryon Ashbourne, the master of the Castle of Separation Adra, passed away.”

“...”

I felt a shiver run up my spine.

Reminded of the collection of angels that we had yet seen only a small portion of, that tenacious stickiness from before began to soak into the back of my skull again. The thought that the one who had collected them was now dead gave it an even

stronger likeness to a garden of Hades, overflowing with a beautiful yet sinister air that didn't feel like it belonged in the real world.

“You okay?”

“... Yes,” I barely managed to nod. “I... hadn’t known that.”

“I see.”

With a coldness as if he had lost interest, my master pulled out an envelope from a pocket inside his jacket. It was the same invitation Flue had showed us earlier.

“It reached us in the mail a week ago.”

“Yes, that sounds about right,” Heine nodded.

“Then, it also spoke of the inheritance?”

“Yes,” Heine nodded again.

“I heard the Last Will detailing the inheritance of the Castle of Separation was made public. Ashbourne didn’t have any blood relatives, so all Houses with a connection to him were invited. It seems rather odd that the number of magi who gathered is so small.”

“It seems he was pretty fond of old magi, wasn’t he?”

With a bored look, my master shook his head.

“He just had to turn even his own death into another game.”

“... Oh? Does that displease the brand-new lord?”

The voice this time came from deeper within the lobby. Besides the spiral staircase Heine and Rosalind had been standing near, another spiral staircase stood in the lobby. From this second staircase, a new presence approached us.

The sound of metal rubbing on metal filled the room. It took some time to realize that it was the sound of a wheelchair.

“Mister Orlocke.”

A nervousness that was very unlike him crossed my master’s face. A white-haired old man sat in the wheelchair. Behind him a young boy pushed the wheelchair for him, but otherwise avoided making eye contact with others in the room.

With his deep, layered wrinkles, he gave off less the impression of a magus and more that of a mummy. At the very least, any estimate of his age would easily pass the 80s. On each of his ten withered, wood-like fingers, were ten unique rings. The resplendence of the ten rings made the age of his withered body even more apparent.

He was something that looked too at home in this Castle of Separation. As if despite being a person, he was one step away from becoming something else-

“... who is this?”

“Orlocke Caesarmund. He is the leading authority on Papilio Magia. Sometimes he speaks at meetings within the Clock Tower.”

“Heh, heheheheheh”

Before I could ask for further explanation, the person in question gave a deep laugh. Though more than a laugh, it sounded like he was just squeezing the air from his lungs. It gave the impression of wind blowing through a dried-out cave.

Papilio Magia, my master had called it.

According to my master, it was a magecraft that attempted to harness the Mystery behind a caterpillar turning into a butterfly—by creating a chrysalis, completely dissolving the body, and reconstructing it into something new.

In contrast to the beautiful name of the magecraft, its user gave off only a sinister feeling. His presence was like a black mud, dripping over the stone floor.

“Lord El-Melloi II,” the old man whispered. “Lord El-Melloi II, Lord El-Melloi II, Lord El-Melloi II? Even as a joke, to have one of the Fes be inducted as a Lord... how dare you even show your face? Let alone in my friend Geryon’s castle, of all places.”

Fes, my master’s rank within the Clock Tower. The Fourth Order.

Laughing again, the old man began to stroke the leather of his wheelchair’s armrests. It seemed like that was a habit of his, as the old armrests were clearly discoloured where he was rubbing them.

My master didn’t say a word in response. From the start, he was well aware of how unskilled he was. Even so, having it pointed out by others would no doubt create an ill feeling in the pit of his stomach.

Putting a hand to his chest, he instead gave a small bow.

“I am fully aware of my lack of experience. Even if I only have this name temporarily, I would request your forgiveness, Sir Orlocke.”

“... hmph. A Lord shouldn’t lower his head so easily. You disgrace the history of your position.” Lifting his fingers from the armrests, he pointed this out with a bored sounding voice.

Then,

“I guess I should at least introduce him.”

With his gaze, he gestured behind himself.

“—Wow! What beauties!”

Saying so while looking at Rosalind and me, a young man wearing strange-looking clothes appeared. He looked to be a similar age to Heine, in his mid-twenties, and he wore an eyepatch over his right eye. What was strange though was not his eyepatch. More so was the small box fastened to his head, his pure-white hemp robes, and the conch hanging from his neck. Later, I was told that these were the robes of the Shugendou sect, a religion native to the Far East.

“Yamabushi, Tokitou Jiroubou Seigen, at your service!”

With thickly accented English, he introduced himself.

Despite the fact that his clothes looked very strange for the country he was now in, he seemed to fit in this place. Maybe it was because this was a place where magi belonged.

“That headdress is called a Tokin, right? If I remember correctly, it’s similar to the Teffilin of Jewish faith.”

“Heh, aren’t you well-learned? Maybe it’s more popular than the magecraft from the continent, but even in Japan these are pretty uncommon,” he said whistling in admiration. Even so, his gaze and posture were still directed towards Rosalind and me.

“So, how’d you like to grab some tea? The butler says they’ve got the best of teas prepared for us.”

“...”

Bending over and rubbing his hands together he made this invitation, but even so Rosalind silently clung to Heine’s back, giving off even more the impression of a French doll.

... even I, for more than one reason, slipped behind my master and used him as a shield. At times like this, I was a little grateful that he was so tall.

My master frowned slightly.

“Yamabushi are priests, bodies dedicated to the gods, right? On top of that, Shugendou treats women as unclean, doesn’t it?”

“Haha. My faith and my hobbies are different, yeah? Plus, it would be one thing if I was on the big mountain, but in a foreign country there’s no need to hold myself back. So, how about we get a bit more familiar, ladies?”

“... umm, actually...”

As I shyly withdrew even further,

“I’m afraid we’ll have to refuse. As you can see, you’ve upset my little sister considerably.”

Heine cut into the conversation. His voice overflowed with an obstinate determination, as if saying he wouldn’t let anyone bring harm to his sister.

“Mm, careful bro. If you keep your guard too tight, the little lady will hate you too, y’know?”

“Sorry, but there is no way Rosalind could ever come to dislike me.”

“Whaa, that’s some serious self-confidence!”

Hurriedly backing away, Seigen threw a hand behind his back. Suddenly, something jumped out from his hand. Following an impossible arc, it moved into Heine’s blind spot and attacked him from behind. It moved without a sound, and yet with a ferocity that could challenge a wild beast.

“Heine!”

At Rosalind’s scream, Heine raised a hand.

“—was that the Shugendou technique, ^{Flying Bowl} Hihatsuhou?”

Heine spoke while maintaining an expressionless face. Aside from the red dripping from his hand, he was also now holding a small metal disc about the size of his palm.

“Haha, you’re keen! It’s a technique that Taichou was pretty skilled at. Not quite as famous as En no Ozuno though. It was a trick he’d use during his Begging.”

I'd heard of this monk's "begging" as well. It was a practice that monks would do to gain offerings of money and food from other believers. In that case, that made that disc a charm belonging to Tokitou Jiroubou Seigen. Which would mean Hihatsuhou would be the supernatural power that allowed him to move that disc freely.

"Yes, you've shown me something nice."

Heine nodded at the Yamabushi, who was scratching his head while he laughed.

"Relax, relax. I was just playing around a bit."

"If we're just playing, then I definitely need to give you a response."

Heine touched a finger to the precious stone in his necktie pin.

"Convert."

He whispered while tapping the floor with the toes of one of his boots.

In an instant, countless blades rose from the stone floor. It wasn't that the blades were piercing through the floor, but instead that the floor itself was turning into blades. Like a wave passing out from where Heine's foot tapped the floor, the carpet of blades reoriented themselves and began pursuing Seigen.

"Whoa!"

Seigen jumped. As if ignoring gravity itself, his body soared unnaturally a few meters into the air.

My master told me this later, but apparently this was an example of a fairly well known Shugendou technique, a magecraft passed down in En no Ozuno's teachings, known as Raven Flight or Tengu Flight. If taken to the extreme, it could be said to be one step short of True Magic, an ability close to spacial teleportation. Using this, Seigen casually floated up to and landed on the chandelier.

"Bwahahaha, how's that?!"

The Yamabushi crossed his arms with a triumphant air, but Heine just pointed a finger at his chest.

"There it is. I don't have any belief in your god, but you showed me something nice, so it's the least I can do."

"Huh?"

Hurriedly lowering his gaze, stone blades fluttered around Seigen's folded arms.

The stone blades broke into fragments. No, they were flower petals. The countless stone blades became a hundred times as many stone flower petals, now decorating the Lobby. The spectacle, which would have left anyone dazzled, lasted for only a few seconds. In the next instant, placed on top of Seigen's folded arms, was the disc he had thrown earlier.

On top of the disc were a stone rose, and a ten pound note.

"Well, look at that."

"Oh?"

Orlocke and Flue both looked down at their hands. On both the old magician's armrest and at Flue's fingertips were beautiful stone roses.

"... ah."

On my master's jacket and my cloak as well, a stone rose was also fastened.

Rather than magecraft, it seemed more like a first-rate magician's trick. The delicate, glassy smooth stone rose looked as if touching it might bring it to life. The contradiction of something seeming alive while not brought back strong memories.

(...)

Something more dead than a dead body. Something more alive than a living person.

In my home town, it was a sight that I saw time and time again. Things that were absurdly, irrationally, neither alive nor dead.

- "That is the thing you must destroy. That. That. That alone."

Remembering the smell of stone and earth from another place, a sour feeling of rejection and revulsion filled my mouth. I was seized by a stiffness that reached down to my fingertips, and a feeling like being drunk assailed my mind. These memories have nothing to do with this place. Like a spell, I recited these words to myself over and over in my head.

"So, this is the alchemy of the Istari family?" my master whispered, taking one of the stone roses in his fingers, as I began taking deep breaths.

"Alchemy... from the Atlas Institute, right?"

In the world of magi, I had heard that if you were speaking about alchemy, you were speaking about the Atlas Institute. One of the three major organizations of magi outside the Clock Tower, it was an organization separate from the outside world that

was known as something like a “living hell.” Honestly, I didn’t really know what that meant, but,

“It’s a different lineage of alchemy than that of the Atlas Institute. Unlike them, the alchemy adopted by the Clock Tower was developed after the initial influx of alchemy in the West during the Middle Ages. The Istari’s trademark ‘Living Stone’ has been compared to a poor knock-off of arms used by Heroic Spirits, but it seems to actually be a considerable talent.”

My master’s eyes narrowed to a barely noticeable degree.

When speaking of talent, he would often do so with unmasked cynicism. It was definitely something unreachable. Yet, as if he was speaking of the stars in the sky, his feverish zeal would sometimes poke through.

Following that,

“—Whoa!”

Seigen cleanly slipped off of the chandelier.

With a considerable sound, he crashed into the floor. Luckily, the stone blades had already vanished, so he suffered little more than the physical blow.

“... o-oww.....”

Rubbing his behind with a moan, he raised a troubled hand.

“I give, I give! If we test each other like this, I don’t have a chance.” His facetious expression held no resentment.

With a gentle laugh, Heine offered him a hand.

“Rosalind is off-limits, but if it’s okay with you, I would be more than happy to take you up on your offer for tea.”

“I’m not particularly interested in guys, though. Ah well, a pretty boy like you will be fine I suppose.”

With a laugh, Seigen took the proffered hand.

Both of their voices had a peaceful tone to them, which was unexpected for me. It seemed they had developed a kind of friendship from their short fight. Well, I had never fought against an opponent with which I had an affinity for before, so maybe it was a given that I wouldn’t expect it.

(—Oi! Gray!)

Suddenly, the voice at my right hand spoke out. It was with a quietness that only I could have heard it, but it was filled with urgency.

I turned to face the direction we had come from, the entrance to the lobby.

“It seems like I’m the last to arrive.”

With a manservant in close behind, a new, elegant-sounding voice called out.

Her bright blue dress was reminiscent of the colour of the sky. A ribbon of the same colour kept her golden-blonde hair in ringlets, and in her hand was an ivory-handled parasol. The specific details of the parasol couldn’t be discerned from this distance, but just from a glance it looked like that parasol alone could probably pay for a car or two.

More than that, she had a beauty that seemed as if nature itself had poured its soul into creating it.

Seigen could be heard gasping in amazement. No, this time it wasn’t just Seigen. Leaving aside the likes of Heine and Flue, even Rosalind and I couldn’t help but be taken by the girl’s striking figure.

She couldn’t have been more than 17 or 18 years old, but she had still captured the eyes of the entire room.

“... so you did end up coming. Did the smell of dazzling treasures lure you inside?” the old man in the wheelchair spat out with an annoyed voice.

As if taking complaint with his words,

“Is that a problem, you old bag?” she countered with a flourish.

Her approaching figure carried itself as if she was already lord of this place.

From the old man’s throat, a laughter that sounded like lava boiling up from hell resounded.

“... oh ho, the problem is with your filthy blood, Luvia gelita Edelfelt.”

“You honour me.”

The girl in the blue dress—Luvia gelita, responded to those words with a smile.

◆ 第二章



2.1

—We were in a lot of trouble.

There was nothing we could do, no rescue in sight. We were hopelessly in trouble.

“W-w-w-w-w-why are you people in my room?!”

Because, with her usually porcelain-white cheeks dyed a deep crimson, none other than Luvia gelita Edelfelt stood before us.

To make things worse, my master had gone completely stiff while standing in the open, heavy copper doors. If it was possible, he surely would have wanted to just close the door and leave it at that, but with his arms as weak as his, that wasn't possible. Perhaps more importantly, his opponent's attitude didn't seem like one that would allow him to just run away either.

Perhaps she had been just about to go to bed, as she had changed into white negligee. Of course, it was also made of the finest silks, and its price would no doubt send eyes popping, but either way, it looked cute. Even with its bordering-obscene number of frills, the design in no way harmed the image of her slender figure.

... also, it may have just been my imagination, but it seemed as if the instant the door had opened, Luvia had hurriedly hidden some sort of dog plush behind a nearby pillow.

If I recalled correctly, it was a character from a kids' TV show that liked cooking, but when push came to shove, would become a knight in shining armour to protect his princess. It was truly a thing meant to make little girls' dreams come true. It was something I had seen on the TVs placed in the dorm after I came to London. Of course, I definitely didn't think at that moment that I wanted one of my own. And I most definitely did not leave space in my schedule every week specifically to watch it on TV either.

“Why are you here?! If you have an excuse, spit it out already!”

Her determination to keep her stuffed animal hidden was enough to bring one to tears... or rather, it was enough to bring her to tears. If she had just let it slide then my master probably wouldn't have even noticed, but it seemed like in doing so she might lose something even more important.

(... what should I do?)

My thoughts raced furiously. It was the first time I had thought this hard over something since I came to London. The girl before us now was too different from the

one we met in the lobby. She seemed like a completely different person.

Who exactly was it that had been arguing against that monster-like old magus just a few hours earlier?

“... err, please, uh, wait a second...”

Rubbing his forehead as if he had a headache, my master spoke up.

“Oh, I’ll wait. Indeed, let’s wait, Lord El-Melloi II! To think there was a Lord who would barge in uninvited to a maiden’s personal chambers! You are a disgrace to the entire Clock Tower!”

A terrifying magical power began to well up in the area around Luvia.

(... oh, that’s bad...)

My instincts went off.

Even if this was a completely different person, that magic was the real thing. Most likely it was at a level my master wouldn’t be able to resist. I understood the fact he was so second-rate he couldn’t be considered even at the level of a dropout. If he was struck by real, first-class magecraft, there was no guarantee there would even be cinders left of him.

“I’m saying, it’s not like that! I just went to the room bearing my Angelic Name like I was told!”

Pulling out his envelope, he desperately cried out. On the front of that envelope, the word ‘Mihael’ had appeared. Like the Castle of Separation itself, those faint, indistinct letters seemed somehow...unreliable.

“... I see.”

Luvia carefully examined the envelope my master was holding.

“But the Angelic Name for this room is ‘Michael,’ is it not?”

“What?”

My master once again inspected the plate near the door. As Luvia had mentioned, the word ‘Michael’ was inscribed on it—the C was certainly there. By the way, the one who had pointed out this particular room was myself.

“... that certainly seems to be the case.”

“S-sorry. It looks like I... made a mistake.”

I'm sorry, master. It looks like your life ends here. If at all possible, please don't hold it against me.

"Of course, that means you're prepared for the consequences, correct?"

The pressure around her arm continued to grow. Even the surrounding air began to spiral around it, at ever-increasing speeds. As that pressure was on the verge of being released, my master shouted.

"W-wait! This is a Shemhamphorae!"

"...?"

Hesitating for an instant, Luvia nodded.

"I see. I couldn't tell from just looking at my Angelic Name, but it was something like this after all. So the magecraft behind the Castle of Separation uses Kabbalah as its foundation."

(... shem ham foray?)

It seems they had come to some sort of understanding, but I had absolutely no idea what they were talking about.

Kabbalah of course was one of the more famous lineages of magecraft. Founded upon Judaism, it didn't necessarily denote the use of Mysteries as in magecraft, but when magi spoke of it they mostly spoke of the portion of it relating to magecraft. I had also heard that the Orders of the Clock Tower were fundamentally based on it.

However, whatever 'shem ham foray' meant, and how they had reached that conclusion from this conversation, was still a mystery to me.

"I know it doesn't really count as an apology, but is that enough information to let me escape for now?"

"..."

After thinking over what my master had said for a short period, Luvia opened her mouth.

"... I guess that's barely a passing grade."

"Barely passing is passing enough for me. Though I thought at this age I was done being graded."

Pulling out a handkerchief, my master wiped away his cold sweat while he spoke. Somewhat awkwardly, as if he was a marionette being controlled, he stepped out of

the room. After taking a single step, Luvia extended a single finger.

Awaken
“Call.”

I saw a light.

No, I only thought I saw it.

In the next instant, immediately beside the sleeve of my master’s jacket, a deep black hole opened up in the air. The effect of the accumulated curses had an effect similar to a heat ray.

“You understand, right? If an outrage like this happens again, assume that same curse will be roasting your heart,” Luvia said with a sweet smile.

Without a word, she slammed the door shut.

It seemed somehow that as far as brute strength, even this girl was one-up on my master. I was conflicted as to whether that meant I should praise her, or admonish my master.

Anyway, as the two of us were now alone in the hallway, my master spun to face me.

“What’s wrong, Gray?”

“... uh, I... just have a lot on my mind at the moment.”

“Friction between magi is an everyday occurrence. You can’t afford to get hung up on it every time it happens.”

I felt like what just transpired had a bit of a different nuance than a spat between magi, but I decided not to bring it up. I didn’t think he really understood what had happened either.

“Anyway, add that to your notes. On the rough map of the Castle, we can add Edelfelt’s Angelic Name.”

“Ah... right.”

Luckily for me, even if I wasn’t all that smart, I wasn’t so bad at getting a grasp of the terrain. Using the notebook my master had given me, I recorded the information as instructed. When I started to fumble around for the correct spelling of ‘shem ham foray,’

“—It’s Shemhamphorae.”

My master said as he pointed a finger at the space I was writing. After doing so, his eyes narrowed slightly.

“Let’s take this chance to organize the information that we have.”

Whatever he was thinking, that was what he said. Speaking up once again, he began to recount the events that had happened a few hours earlier in the lobby.

* * *

—Time is wound backwards.

“... oh ho, the problem is with your filthy blood, Luvia gelita Edelfelt.”

“You honour me.”

Orlocke and Luvia shared a smile.

In this case, those smiles resembled the tossing of a glove symbolizing a knight’s duel. Without the slightest blemish or imperfection, it was done specifically to definitively hurt only their opponent’s pride.

“...”

To be honest, my head felt a lot like a punctured tire. As I mentioned before, in the last two months, the number of people I had spoken to could be counted on my fingers. Suddenly being thrust into a situation where everyone was so strongly individual, it was kind of expected that it made my brain want to scream.

Flue.

Heine Istari.

Orlocke Caesarmund.

Seigen Tokitou Jiroubou.

All of them were magi with a character that would be hard to forget, but the girl who had just appeared seemed somehow even more striking.

“Luvia gelita Edelfelt. It seems another extraordinary person has shown up,” my master said with a moan.

“Do you know her?”

“She’s from a large family of gem-magic users who have taken up residence in Finland. I heard the previous master had retired early and his daughter was showing up here and there... I see this is what they were talking about.”

“Oh ho, even our inexperienced Lord knows her.”

The old magus in the wheelchair gave a happy laugh at having heard my master’s words.

“Of course. Known as the most elegant hyenas on Earth. They came into power in the Renaissance Era, and earned that nickname for their shamelessly intervening in conflicts unrelated to them around the world, picking and choosing the most prized examples of magecraft from the ruins for themselves.”

That being said.

The girl in question only glanced sparingly at the magi that were attempting to gauge her.

Nodding to the number of servants that followed her, she stepped deeper into the lobby of the Castle of Separation on her own.

“Caesarmund, you old bag,” she whispered.

Just the sound of her voice would surely drive an artist somewhere to trembling. Not just her looks, she was full of qualities a normal person would be hard-pressed to come across. Call it an aura, or the Holy Spirit. Those were the words countless critics had ascribed to art, attempting to name that quality that words can’t describe.

And she was only 17 or 18 years old.

She was still the same age as a high school student, so why did she possess such a quality?

“I appreciate your assessment. If I may say so in respect to the Edelfelt Lineage, we are a family who won’t be stopped by anyone or anything in the pursuit of the taste of good fruit. If I may be so bold, I would say that the word ‘Hunter’ has a more pleasant ring than hyena. Or even better, the French word Le Chasseur sounds nice, too.”

Her words, the epitome of arrogance, didn’t infringe on her gentle air at all. Rather, she spoke with a dignity and gravity that compelled one to simply nod in agreement. Even I, who had no knowledge of either the Edelfelts or the great magi families in general, could feel my skin tingling from just listening.

Like, even if a common person couldn’t even guess the true value, they could still feel the symbolic authority of a precious jewel.

“But if you’ve come all the way out here, is there some deficiency in your Magic Crest?”

“... Ha. What nonsense are you on about, corpse fisher?”

“Oh, you don’t know?” the girl inclined her head to the side. “Of course, it wouldn’t match someone like the Caesarmund family, but I had heard that especially old Magic Crests begin to mould, as it were. Indeed, it takes a great deal of time to cultivate a magus’ lineage, but once you’ve passed a thousand years, it starts to become problematic, no? Even the highest grades of wine can only last a little over a hundred years, you know.”

The girl’s lips turned into a smile as she chuckled.

Even among this group of magi, each individually well outside the laws of common sense, Orlocke was a monster on a whole different level. And despite this, Luvia stood up to this authority of the Clock Tower without conceding a single step.

“No doubt, that’s why you were relying on Geryuon Ashbourne, the Master of Restoration, no?”

A bizarre noise echoed throughout the lobby of the Castle.

Even Heine, who had displayed such brilliant magecraft earlier, raised an eyebrow revealing his sense of concern.

“... Master of Restoration?”

“That is the master of the Castle of Separation. Of course he was high ranking as a magus, but he also had a slightly different side.”

Responding to me mindlessly repeating the words I was hearing, my master whispered this to me.

“Another side?”

“Yes. You’ve heard about Magic Crests, correct?”

Of course I had.

Magecraft is, in essence, Mystery. However, since the beginning of the Common Era, human history has been in the process of systematically expelling Mysteries. To the same degree the light of science expands, the darkness of Mystery recedes. No matter how magi resist this fact, this law remains unbent. The Mysteries of the Age of Gods have become so distant, that even realizing them temporarily in the current world is next to impossible.

Magic Crests are the magus' answer to the problem posed by the flow of time, a "fixated Mystery."

"Generally speaking, a Magic Crest is distilled over the course of hundreds of years, and is similar to a new organ. Because it functions like an organ, it can only adapt to those of the same bloodline, and the interference possible from outsiders is extremely limited. The old magi families are able to throw their weight around largely based on the authority derived from these Magic Crests."

My master's words fell into a pleasant rhythm, similar to his lectures at the Clock Tower. Even in this high tension situation, it seemed that quality of him remained unchanged.

"However, there are exceptions," he added. "And one of those exceptions is the lord of this castle. Ashbourne was known to be able to restore a damaged Magic Crest, and so he came to be known as the Master of Restoration. As expected, the Edelfelts know even that much of his history."

Saying this, my master turned to watch the confrontation between the two before us.

In an aggravated manner, the old magus was picking at his armrest with a finger, as if he was trying to pry off the old leather. He then raised his gaze.

"... then what about you? If you came all the way out here to meddle with Ashbourne's will, then is there not some problem with yours as well?"

"My, how rude! Do I look so skilless as to bring damage to my own Magic Crest?"

Raising the corners of her mouth, the girl picked up the skirt of her dress. As expected, it looked less like a curtsy and more like a knight's salute.

"However, to let such a valuable skill be lost would be nothing short of cruel. As such, I have come here to give it the lowest seat in my collection."

She spoke from the height of arrogance. She never said that the skill was necessary for her, just that it was precious, so it was perfectly normal for her to put it in her warehouse. With the innocence of a small child she made such an absurd statement.

It was no wonder her family had been given the name of the most elegant hyenas on Earth.

If things continued like this, it seemed likely the two would break out into a full on duel. At the very least, Luvia seemed to have that intention, and the old magus was giving no indication he would turn her down. Of course, even I knew such altercations between magi were anything but rare.

But.

The number of people who were invited—or rather, the number of people who were going to arrive—did not end with Luvia.

“Oh?”

The first one to turn and look was Flue. Through the lobby, up on the second floor, pale fingers resting on the handrails made of English Oak, a woman looked down on the rest of us.

She was wearing glasses. Her hair, much longer than Luvia’s, was black as midnight, and stretched down to her ankles. Decorating the woman’s figure was a strange looking, long sleeved, vibrantly flower-patterned garment.

(... some sort of traditional clothing?)

“Yuzen sleeves, was it?” my master muttered, putting a hand on his chin.

It was a word that sounded as if it came from the Orient. As I learned later, apparently it was something that came from the same Japan that Seigen Tokitou Jiroubou came from. ‘It seems my fate is completely tied up with that country,’ my master complained later.

“I apologize for making you all wait.”

The woman spoke as she pushed her glasses back into place. The butler who had been tending the front entrance of the keep now also stood by the woman’s side.

“I am the designated executor of Geryuon Ashbourne’s will, from the Faculty of Law of the Clock Tower. My name is Hishiri Adashino.”

Once again, the magi in the lobby snapped to attention.

The words “Faculty of Law” had that much meaning to them. I could even feel my master’s presence become coloured by a uncharacteristic nervousness.

Looking down at them, Hishiri pulled out a single letter.

It looked very similar to the invitations given to my master and the others, but beside the seal of the Ashbourne family, the seal of the Clock Tower’s Faculty of Law was also present.

“Well then,” the woman spoke.

“Let us make public the will of Mr. Geryuon Ashbourne.”



Within the Clock Tower, there are twelve Faculties. Twelve abysses overseen by twelve Lords.

The majority of magi began their study of magic within the Faculty of General Fundamentals—a Faculty which dealt with the common ground between lineages of magecraft and basic study of the Earth's Pulse and Mana. From there, they would continue into the study of Individual Fundamentals, Spiritual Evocation, Mineralogy, Zoology, Anthropology, Botany, Astrology, Creation, Curses, Archaeology, or Modern Magecraft Theory. The forms and tendencies of these different Faculties all varied wildly, but fundamentally they all still pursued the study of Mysteries. According to my master, magi were living things that existed to seek after the "Spiral of Origin," so this structure was a natural result.

But.

Within the Clock Tower, there was one Faculty that didn't have any direct relation to the study of Mysteries. They were a group who used the Clock Tower's magecraft and authority to intervene in common society, or for the internal regulation of the Clock Tower itself. They were truly an indispensable group.

The Faculty of Law.

They weren't those who studied law and politics—they were a Faculty of governance. Ignoring the calling of all magi to pursue the "Spiral of Origin," they were a heretical faction that sought only to develop the stability of the Clock Tower itself.

My master liked to say they were like the shadow within the sun, or the sun within the shadow, as necessitated by the concept of the Ying Yang.

I had never seen a magus from the Faculty of Law, but now there was one staring down at us from the second floor of the lobby.

"... anyhow, if the Faculty of Law is involved, that makes any division made here absolute," my master whispered softly.

After all, that was exactly the purpose of the Faculty of Law. If Geryon Ashbourne, who had passed away a month ago, had named them to execute his will, that made his will absolute.

To say nothing of the woman herself. Just to look at her made all your blood try to rush backwards. Unlike the dripping sinister aura of Orlocke Caesarmund, or the ferocious beauty of Luviagelita Edelfelt, she had a smile that overflowed with a kindness and coldness that seemed to suck you in. She gave off an illusion like she was gently stroking your spine from the inside.

(... she's a snake.)

I intuitively thought that.

To look at her coldness and lustre, it seemed like one was looking at a reptile. Her strange looking, long-sleeved kimono added to the impression of a snake shedding its skin.

"... oh man, the Faculty of Law of all people..."

"... It would be those apostates..."

Flue and Orlocke both muttered to themselves.

While at first these two might have seemed like a rare pair to agree with each other, the "Heretics of the Clock Tower" known as the Faculty of Law seemed to have already lined up a fair number of enemies for themselves.

In comparison, Hishiri Adashino gave no indication of paying them any mind, and instead opened the envelope in her hands.

"Within the will are only three statements."

Continuing, she read those three statements.

“‘Ask for the Angel’s names.’”

Her tone faintly changed.

At that moment, the memory of the previous Lord of the Castle of Separation Adra, Geryon Ashbourne, was reawakened. I had never met him before, and had no way of knowing whether she had met him either, but even so the image of an old man nervously raising the upper half of his body from bed still arose before my eyes.

“‘Those who are asked and unable to answer shall, in all cases, be torn apart by Angels.’”

The words continued.

The sound of scratching began to permeate the lobby. Scratch scratch, scratch scratch, scratch scratch, the noise continued. It was as if the old master’s words were a spell, awakening the Angels he had gathered into this castle. The illusion of invisible Angels gathering like bubbles on the floor, walls, and even the ceiling wouldn’t go away.

“‘Those who can take hold of the Angels will be granted my inheritance.’”

With that, her voice stopped.

“... is that it?” Flue asked.

Stroking his stubbled chin with a filthy hand, he asked the kimono-clad Hishiri Adashino.

“Yes. No particular time limit has been established.”

With a nod, Hishiri closed the letter.

Combined with her garb, it was a scene reminiscent of a Far Eastern poem. I had the feeling I had read somewhere about the custom of writing a love letter as a poem and sending it, but I didn’t know if that was a custom which matched the nationality of her garb.

“In addition, one hint has been given to each of you. Please take a look at your invitations.”

My master lifted up the invitation we had received. In a space that was blank only moments earlier, gold lettering had appeared. It seemed a similar phenomenon was occurring with the invitations of the others present, which he confirmed covertly.

“That will be each of your ‘Angelic Names,’” she whispered.

“I see. The lettering surfaced in response to the natural wavelength of the magical energy in the area. Simple, but very effective,” my master said with admiration.

It seems his curiosity had been provoked. At times like this, his expression was like that of a cat’s with its favourite toy, but it was unclear whether he was aware of it or not. Tracing the letters on the envelope, he narrowed his eyes slightly.

“‘Angelic Name,’ huh? Is that something like a ^{Magic} ^{Name} **Magical Motto?**”

Some groups of magi would claim names to differentiate themselves from the common names of their ancestry. It seemed that in it was a matter of simplicity, making a personalized name that could then be associated to the specific magecraft they studied. It wasn’t always specifically a name to refer to themselves either, sometimes being a claim of their beliefs or a favourite motto.

It seemed these kinds of names were generally referred to as **Magical Mottos**. However, being that most magi lineages associated with the Clock Tower had long since decided to give themselves up to the pursuit of magecraft, it seemed there weren’t any common examples of it happening recently.

“There has been a room prepared for each of you which matches with your **Angelic Name**. A plate bearing the name has been affixed to each room, so please confirm the correct room yourselves. Also, it seems that the Ashbourne family’s personal servants shall be preparing meals and so forth for you for the duration of your stay.”

The butler from before gave a bow.

It seemed some of Mr. Geryuon’s servants had stayed behind after his death. I didn’t know whether they simply had that kind of loyalty, or they still had contractual obligations to uphold, but the thought of them remaining here after their master’s death sent chills down my spine.

“Until the successor has been decided, I also plan on staying within the castle. I look forward to working with you.”

* * *

—And so, time returns to the present.

Within our room.

The faint light of a candle lit the room that, as expected, was filled exhaustively with angels. From the paintings on the walls to the engravings on the closets, to the dolls

on the shelves and the glass covers on the lamps, angels were everywhere. It seems that the late Geryon Ashbourne's obsession with angels was quite thorough.

I was sitting on the bed. After walking around the castle for a few hours, and the incident with Luvia earlier, we finally managed to find the correct room—engraved with the Angelic Name Mihael—and were able to catch our breath.

“‘The one who takes hold of my angels will become my successor,’ huh?”

My master muttered while sitting on the sofa. Taking off his coat and jacket, he began to massage his exhausted legs. While doing so, he pulled a cigar from his cigar case and put it in his mouth. The smell of the smoke quickly permeated the room, saturating the valuable-looking furniture. It was probably something I should have got upset about, but I decided not to mention anything.

Because by smelling that scent, I felt like I was back in my master’s apartment like always.

Being careful to hide my inner thoughts, I took a deep breath and slapped my cheeks. At the sound, my master turned to look at me, so I spoke.

“… Master, do you understand the meaning of those words?”

“Well, it doesn’t seem to me that there are too many candidates. After all, this place is literally overflowing with angels.”

He was one hundred percent correct. The lobby, this room, the hallways and staircases… angels were lined up everywhere to the point it was claustrophobic. If you wanted to count them seriously, just the amount we saw would easily exceed a hundred. If you wanted to consider how many were in the entire castle, I wouldn’t even be able to imagine it.

“Even if that isn’t the case, as a general theme the history and types of angels in this castle is too wide. If you collect this many symbols in one place, the focus will begin to blur. For example, how do we tell where the angels related to magecraft end, and those that are here just out of his collecting hobby begin?”

“Ihihihihi! Once you have to leave behind your stockpile of book smarts, your incompetence really starts to show through doesn’t it!”

From around my right hand, a voice called out. This time, however, my master wasn’t going to let it slide.

“Gray, could you please bring out Add for me?”

“Certainly.”

At that, the third voice suddenly began to panic.

“W-wait, Gray! You’re not planning on selling me out, are you?”

Ignoring the complaints I flicked my hand, unfastening a hook within my cloak, causing a long, thin cage to fall to the ground. Inside that cage was a shape made up of numerous small cuboids. It looked similar to the Rubik’s Cubes I had seen since coming to London, but on top of being much more finely detailed and much more complex, it also had an engraving of eyes and a mouth on the front surface.

Those eyes rolled as if they were looking at me.

“Y-you! Even if it’s just temporary, I’ve been your friend for 10 years now! You don’t have any other friends, so you should protect me a bit, or at least hesitate! I deserve at least that much sympathy, don’t I?! Wait, it’s not too late! Please reconsider! Put me away! Hide me! HIDE ME!!”

The mouth spouted off busily.

This was the true nature of the third voice that was always interrupting us.

—Add.

A kind of Mystic Code I received when I was still in my home village. I hadn’t seen that many Mystic Codes, but it still seemed to me that one that talked was pretty outside the norm.

Rather than being alive, it was more like the 3D Animation I learned about after coming to London. For me, he had been there since the day I was born—it hurt to admit it, but he really was my first friend—so I didn’t realize the strangeness of it at all. However, when my master first saw him, he was incredibly surprised, to the point seemed likely to try and take him apart.

Now, it was like this.

Grabbing the front face of the cage, he put all his strength into shaking it up and down like a cocktail shaker.

“Agyagyagyagyagyagyagyaga!”

Add let out a scream. Knocking the box inside the cage all over the place, when he finally decided he had punished him enough, my master tossed the cage back to me.

“Good. Anyway, the two of us should work together to investigate the castle and plug the holes in our understanding.”

“... Um, me too?”

“If you don’t come, who’ll be my body guard? And just to be clear, if we get into a fight between us and the other magi, the only one that’ll die will be me.”

Puffing out his chest, he attempted to show off how powerless he was. Of course, his claim lined up perfectly with my previous assessments, but I wished he would try to hide it a bit more.

Maybe that feeling was showing on my face, because...

“I’ll leave the pretentious, false shows of force to my younger self, thank you,” my master said.

—his younger self.

What did he mean by that, exactly? I didn’t really have a good grasp of the concept of ‘youth,’ but I wondered if my master had had a time like that. Looking at my master as he was now, puffing out cigar smoke, I couldn’t imagine anything except him being born the way he was now. It was even a little vexing.

Maybe it was because of that, but I suddenly felt a desire to ask him about something.

“Why do you want the inheritance of the Castle of Separation, master? I heard you had quite a debt to the El-Melloi family, so is it just to repay that?”

“Aren’t we feeling straightforward today?”

With a wry smile, my master raised an eyebrow. Touching a finger to his now short cigar, he narrowed his eyes slightly.

“Of course, I do want to repay the debt. But if the rumours that the inheritance of this place has something to do with Magic Crests, then Reines and I have a much more important stake in this fight.”

“Miss Reines too?”

I hadn’t expected his step-sister’s name to come up in a place like this, so I spoke a little louder than I had intended. But, when I thought about it, it was thanks to Reines’ request that my master was here in the first place. After meeting all the other magi and learning about the inheritance, I had completely forgotten, so when the topic suddenly shifted back I was caught off guard.

“In short, it’s the reason I was granted the El-Melloi name,” he said, placing his cigar in the ashtray. The thin cigar, its purpose now fulfilled, gave off a small trail of smoke that quickly vanished. In the same way, it seemed that conversation had come to an end.

“—Well, let’s get some sleep. Today was a little exhausting.”

Rolling his shoulders, my master lay down on the sofa.

“Master?”

“You can go ahead and use the bed. It would be too much of a pain to go to the servant’s quarters, and I prefer the sofa anyway.”

Saying this, he closed his eyes without waiting for a reply. Without even so much as showering, he had done nothing to prepare for bed but take off his jacket. It was for things like this that Reines was always giving my master such murderous glares, but I raised my voice for a different reason.

“But, Master.”

I said this, and then stopped.

He was already asleep.

Unexpectedly, it seemed his comment about the sofa being more comfortable wasn’t a lie after all. It was quite common to see him sleeping on sofas in his apartment or laboratory. I had seen him enough times to get fed up with finding him asleep on the sofa with a game console in his hands.

But, now-

“...”

Keeping quiet, I looked down at his face. Maybe because he was always scowling, he had faint wrinkles between his eyebrows. They were this well-defined now, so in time they would surely become deep enough to seem like scars. Maybe that’s what they mean when they say that getting older scars you.

Both visibly, and invisibly.

Stretching out my hand, I stopped it just before my fingers touched his cheek. There were only centimetres between us now, but I still couldn’t touch him.

“Hihi! What’s wrong, Gray? Did you fall in love just by looking at his sleeping face?”

“...”

I felt no need to respond.

Grabbing the cage firmly with one hand, I begin swinging it around as hard as I could.

“Hagyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!”

After hearing his pitiful scream, I felt somehow refreshed.

“... thank you.”

Saying this, I bowed my head in the direction of the sofa.

I dove into the bed and pulled up the blankets, which smelled faintly of cigar smoke. It was far from unpleasant.

It took only a few minutes before my mind drifted into the warm darkness of sleep

2.2

The following morning, I awoke shortly before my master.

After changing, I threw back the curtains and soaked in the morning sunlight. I didn't particularly like the sun, but in an environment like this, the symbols of ordinary, everyday life were few enough as it was. After taking a deep breath, I retrieved Add from the top of the dresser.

Spinning around, I drew the cage to my right sleeve. Roughly halfway down my cloak, I fixed it in place between my shoulder and my elbow. Looking from the outside, though, it would be practically invisible. My master seemed impressed, mentioning it was something like a Derringer, but I didn't really understand what he meant.

Turning around, I steadied my breathing a bit before speaking.

“... Master, are you awake yet?”

An incomprehensible moan responded to my question.

“... I'll get your change of clothes ready.”

This, too, was our normal morning exchange. Though saying that, we didn't often sleep in the same place, so it was still a little awkward.

Placing the clothes I took from his suitcase near his blindly groping hand, he began changing, eyes still closed, and still lying on the sofa. He was probably still asleep. Trying not to worry too much about it, I turned to making other preparations. His cigars were the only things he was willing to take care of by himself, so at this point my job came down to bringing him things like handkerchiefs, and other small things. ‘What is he, an elementary school kid?’ was what Add liked to say. Honestly, I agreed with him.

Just as things were almost ready, he finally spoke.

“Good morning, my Lady.”

With that, it seemed he was finally awake. Sleepily he raised his upper body from the sofa, rubbing his eyes.

“... your collar is twisted.”

After fixing his collar and brushing his long hair, we left the room.

The guest room that we had been given was one of the central rooms on the second floor of the castle. The construction of the interior of the castle wasn't all that complex, but from the size of the rooms to the width of the hallways, it muddled my grasp of the castle's interior. Either way, the walls were lined with the usual frescos and sculptures of angels. Since coming to the castle, thanks to what my master spoke of as the gestalt collapse of the concept of Angels, I was perpetually subjected to the illusion we were trapped in an infinite loop.

As we approached one of the larger rooms on the second floor, Add began to shake.

“Ooh, what is that fantastic smell?!”

Last I checked boxes didn't have noses, so how did he smell anything?

Regardless, he was right. A smell so good it set my stomach rumbling reached us. And it wasn't just a single smell either, but a whole orchestra of fragrances in perfect harmony.

The instant we opened the door, the source of that smell became obvious.

“Good morning, Lord El-Melloi II.”

In the middle of the large room sat a large granite table, big enough to comfortably sit twenty people. Standing immediately beside it was Hishiri Adashino, and as she saw us enter she turned to greet us.

“I apologize I wasn't able to greet you more properly yesterday.”

“Please, don't worry about it. Good morning, Miss Adashino,” my master returned the greeting with an obvious show of anxiety, prompting Hishiri to smile broadly.

“You know I said you can just call me Hishiri.”

How many men would gladly offer up their souls just for that smile, I wondered. Her mysterious, oriental appearance would no doubt stir up interest from people of both genders. Her ornate garb, like brilliantly coloured, layered origami, seemed to hide an even deeper feminine sweetness. Looking closer, it seemed the intricate designs of her kimono were hand-woven, stirring up even more anxious feelings in my chest. My master had said that Japan was a weird country, where they made houses out of wood and paper, but maybe it had mysteries even greater than those of magecraft. Like ninjas, for example.

“Sorry, but I'm a coward. I'm pretty weak around beautiful women.”

“He says, standing beside the lovely follower he brought along,” she said, turning her gaze to me.

I shrank back unconsciously, retreating deeper into my hood. Of course, for me it wasn't that I was bad with beautiful women. I was bad with anyone I didn't know.

“Don't tell me the reason you wear that hood even indoors is to hide your beautiful face?”

“Exactly. I don't want to see it.”

Hishiri gave an awkward laugh, as if she had been taken off guard by the reply.

“You're really an interesting person. When we return to the Clock Tower, I'd love to talk to you more.”

“Please forgive me, but if I started getting along with the Faculty of Law, I wouldn't be able to bear the shame.”

“You wouldn't have anything to worry about, would you? With the New Egg's behind you, you're like the Clock Tower's favourite child.”

“That's just the Clock Tower trying to keep me out of their way. Otherwise, what possible reason would they have to leaving the Faculty of Modern Magecraft to me?”

My master cleared his throat.

My master's current standing in the Clock Tower was the product of a give-and-take exchange, in a lot of ways.

From there, we confirmed the table at which we would be seated. In front of Hishiri were a porcelain dish and a lacquered bowl, with a pair of chopsticks. On the dish was some kind of sauce-covered fish, and a bowl of plain white rice. In other words, a Japanese style breakfast.

“It seems our seat is over there,” my master said, looking at the far end of the dinner table.

Before a set of napkins embroidered with the El-Melloi family crest, toast, boiled eggs, blood sausage and baked beans were arranged among the silverware. Basically, a traditional English breakfast.

This was the source of the scents we detected earlier.

Around the table were set up a large variety of meals, each individually tailored to the tastes and backgrounds of those invited here.

The decline of the public opinion of English Cuisine began at the end of the 19th century, when the middle class began employing all-purpose maids. These young

girls were hired in from the country, with no regard to their cooking skill, resulting in the standards for cooking nationwide to drop significantly. It seemed the servants of the Ashbourne family were completely untouched by the trend, however.

“It seems they’ve done their research on us,” my master grumbled as he walked to his place at the table.

Of course, there was no way they could know the tastes and backgrounds of their guests without doing so. It made me wonder how much Geryuon Ashbourne had known of us before he died. What had he been thinking when he sent those invitations, gave us those Angelic Names?

As I was mulling over those thoughts,

“Well, doesn’t this look magnificent?”

“And they even have a vegetarian option! Even fried nameko tofu? I knew you could get Warabi around here, but Udo and bamboo shoots too?!”

One after another, the other guests arrived in the dining room.

“Yo Heine, let’s have a drink!”

Pulling out a bottle of his own personal Japanese sake was none other than Seigen Tokitou Jiroubou. Despite the eccentric combination of the eye patch and the far eastern priestly robes, from only the second meeting it no longer seemed out of place.

Speaking of which, it seemed that Heine and Rosalind were getting along well with him, if he was coming to breakfast with them.

“I appreciate the offer, but drinking from so early in the morning...”

“Man, I like you. Come on, have at least one!”

“... well, I did promise.”

With a faintly bitter smile, Heine took the glass. In one swift motion, he downed the entire glass in one gulp, setting the one-eyed Yamabushi’s face sparkling.

“Wow, that mouth is really something! Now, for the little sister... I guess alcohol is a no-go, huh? Excuse me, could you please get this girl some tea?” he called to one of the nearby servants.

“... thank you.” The girl took the cup of tea with a small nod in thanks.

Seeing her scrunch her eyebrows after sipping the tea, Heine gave a gentle laugh.

“Maybe you’re a bit young for black tea yet.”

“N-no! I can drink it!” she protested, gripping the teacup tightly.

“Alright alright, but why don’t you at least add some milk? It’s more ladylike to drink tea that way, after all.”

“... really?”

Rosalind tilted her head to the side, giving off the impression of a small, white bird. For some reason, while doing that, she turned toward us.

“Lord El-Melloi II, is that true?”

“?!!”

Taking off guard by the sudden question, my master struck his chest. After narrowly avoiding choking, he cleared his throat, corrected his posture, and then nodded.

“Very true, my lady. It’s just like your brother said. Milk tea is the drink of ladies and gentlemen, so you can add as much as you like.”

“Okay! Thank you!” With a bright smile, she took the cup now with added milk. This time, she gave an honest expression of enjoying the drink.

Seeing that, I casually remarked.

“... you really like children, don’t you, master?”

“... no comment,” he said, avoiding my gaze.

Just a little, I could see his ears turning red. Without drawing attention to his embarrassment, I turned toward the entrance.

“Oh, if it isn’t sake! And some pretty high grade stuff too!”

With nose wriggling, Flue entered the room.

“Back off! This is my treasure I brought all the way from Japan!”

“Don’t be like that! Here, I’ll tell your fortune, so give me some!”

As he removed the belt from around his waist, an air of surprise passed over the entire table. In that belt were lined up a dozen or so knives. The wooden grips were well-worn from constant use, but the blades were polished to a frightening degree of brightness.

“I suppose his speciality is astrology,” my master whispered, pointing out the astrological signs worked into the knives. Even I, who had barely studied anything at all, could recognize the twelve signs of the zodiac engraved on them.

“Exactly. Normally I charge a large sum of money over several months, but this time I’ll give a special discount just for you. Try not to cry when you thank me!”

Flue handled the knives like cards. Rather than a juggler, he gave off the impression of a fortune-teller spinning the Wheel of Fortune.

“Now, valued customer, please give us your name and birthday...well, as a magus, there’s no way you’d tell me that, huh? Well then, let’s leave everything up to the stars and the blades!”

Four of the knives sprang up. The knives span unnaturally in the air, almost as if their positions were mapping out a constellation, before they fell to the table. But before they could impact with the granite of the dinner table, they struck something else.

-A small disc.

The same discs that had attacked Heine the day before now acted to impede the action of Flue’s knives. With a grimace, the one-eyed Yamabushi reluctantly held out the bottle of sake.

“Don’t just tell people’s fortune’s without permission like that. If it’s sake you want, then fine, take some.”

“Heheh, thank you kindly.”

Accepting the bottle with a gesture of thanks, he took it back to his seat and filled his glass. The milky white liquid didn’t feel like it fit the wine glass, but the strong, mellow smell certainly excited the appetite. Flue happily downed the glass in one gulp, and after a satisfied sigh, poured himself another glass, earning him an unhappy look from Seigen.

“Hey! How much of that do you plan on drinking?”

“Don’t be so stingy. You’ll bald young you know.”

“Balding has nothing to do with it! Whatever, just give it back!”

Seeing the silly conflict breaking out between the two of them,

“... how uncivilized.”

An opinion was voiced from behind us.

Different from the bewitching voice that Hishiri had, this voice was one that held the sweetness and beauty of freshly blooming flowers. The first person to greet her was my master.

“Luvia gelita Edelfelt.”

“May I have the pleasure of sitting beside you?”

“... by all means.”

Despite his obvious reluctance, he nodded. There was no denying, after all, the Edelfelt family crest embroidered on the napkins beside us.

Standing behind her was a man sporting a mohawk I hadn’t seen before. He was close to two meters tall, with a shoulder breadth of almost half that. In contrast to the rather conspicuous hairstyle and sunglasses, he was bedecked in black formal wear from top to bottom. If he had had something like a machine gun, he would have looked like he had just jumped out of a mafia movie—he had that kind of intensity about him.

As if noticing my stare, Luvia introduced him.

“This is my man-servant, Clown. Unfortunately, I had to send the others home, so he is the only one attending me at present.”

“Clown? That doesn’t sound like a very fitting name.”

“It wasn’t a name he picked himself,” Luvia replied with a flip of her hair.

... well, curling her hair like that would probably be too difficult if she was by herself. Though, I would have expected a magus of Luvia’s caliber to be able to do something about that with her magecraft.

Following the introduction, my master turned his gaze to the entrance once more.

“It looks like Orlocke won’t be joining us.”

Orlocke Caesarmund and his young companion were the only ones who hadn’t come to the breakfast table yet. A place at the table hadn’t even been set for them. It seemed as if he had asked the servants of the Ashbourne family to bring his meal directly to his room.

Of course I didn’t do well with him, but even my master’s shoulders sagged a little in relief as he picked up his cutlery.

Partaking of the food myself, after taking my first bite I paused. Both the black sausage and the baked beans were cooked and seasoned to such perfection that I

almost let out a moan of pure pleasure. Krishna was pretty skilled when it came to cooking, but the difference in the ingredients was just too much for skill to cover. The texture of the sausage combined with the spice of the pepper, and the mingling of the flavours of the baked beans and the potatoes they were garnishing, was a phenomenal experience. As if to bless the combination of the crispy, toasted bread and its faintly sweet butter, I unconsciously reached my hand out towards them. Even the water in the glass was carbonated, stimulating the appetite even further. Among such euphoria, a smile arose to even my master's face.

But, that time would not even last ten minutes.

As we were proceeding with a meal that would satisfy anyone,

“—may I have your attention, please?”

Luvia suddenly spoke out.

The gazes of everyone in the room were drawn to her. Even in this room, full of exceedingly competent magi, she had a magnetism that could not be ignored.

“I was honoured to receive a hint about our Angelic Names from Lord El-Melloi last night.”

“!!!”

Giving my startled master an elegant smile, Luvia continued.

“He informed me that they are Shemhamphorae.”

Around the room, a few people could be seen to be startled by the announcement, while the rest seemed to be nodding as if their suspicions had been confirmed.

Her gaze shifted again to my master, as if to say ‘with that, we’re even.’

As covertly as possible, I asked my master a question.

“... um, master... what is a shemhamphorae anyway?”

“...”

After asking the question that had been bothering me for so long, someone other than my master responded.

“... it’s from Kabbalah. It means something like a Gathering of Names.” Stroking his unshaven face, the closely seated Flue answered in my master’s stead.

“A gathering of names?”

“In short, the names of 72 angels. Originally it came from the Book of Exodus, the book of the Old Testament that described Moses parting the sea. From the 19th verse, for about three verses, the original Hebrew consisted of 72 letters. Taking one letter from each of the three verses at a time, they made abbreviations for the names of 72 angels. It’s really nothing more than a play on words, but Kabbalah specialized in ^{Wo} _{rd Play} _{Number Play} tarikon and Gematria in the first place, and the passage describes Moses’ greatest miracle. It being used specially like this was kind of inevitable.”

“... 72 angels...”

It seemed even this much was common knowledge for a magus. After just hearing the word Shemhamphorae, they all understood this much.

“... the Archangel Michael is a very common name, that comes up in many traditions. But Mihael is much rarer. For those two to be part of the same set, there’s no possibility other than the Shemhamphorae.” My master added this in a whisper only I could hear.

“The angels mentioned in Ashbourne’s inheritance are likely hidden somewhere around this castle. If our Angelic Names are Shemhamphorae, then the possibility of them being a hint of some sort is high. The angels of the Shemhamphorae are linked to the twelve signs of the zodiac, and also to the 72 Demons of the Lesser Key of Solomon. Also, being a product of Kabbalah, it can probably be assumed that some sort of code or riddle is also involved.”

Seigen clicked his tongue. “So you’ve figured out that much already, huh?” he said, picking at his ear.

Had he actually come to the same conclusion? But before I could consider further, he continued.

“Well then, why don’t we share all our Angelic Names?”

The tension in the room spiked.

As if ignoring that tension, Seigen casually played with the conch hanging in front of his chest with a friendly smile.

“We already have too few hints, am I right? If we just help each other out a bit, everything will move a lot smoother. Besides, our Angelic Names are just printed in front of our bedroom doors, so there isn’t much point in hiding them is there?”

The silence that followed exemplified the conflict present in the room. Of course, Seigen was right. Everyone wanted information, and the Names were printed right on

the doors—thanks to which, my master and I had got into a lot of trouble. It wasn’t something anyone could expect to hide. However, the problem lay somewhere else.

It was the same with the information about the Shemhamphorae, but carelessly sharing information increased the chances that the inheritance would be taken out from in front of you. Of course, the chances of getting it yourself would also increase, but if you measured the benefits to the demerits, which way would the scales tip?

Currently, my master and I knew of two Angelic Names.

Lord El-Melloi II has Mihael.

Luvia Edelfelt has Michael.

So, the remaining magi were-

“—Sorry, but I will have to withdraw here.”

“Ah, Heine!”

As Heine stood to leave, Rosalind followed him out.

“Well, I guess that’s how it is.”

“I think I’ve contributed my fair share as well.”

Flue and Luvia both finished up the last of their breakfast and withdrew.

Covering his face and groaning in disappointment at everyone’s refusal, eventually Seigen also gave up and left the table. After he left, the only thing that lingered in the room with us was the frigid hostility they left behind, like we were surrounded by wolves with teeth bared.

Once more, my master sighed deeply.

“Looks like no one is interested in splitting the cake evenly like good kids.”

“My my, how unfortunate.”

Hishiri, the only one remaining in the room besides ourselves, was sporting a smile.

Maybe it was because as the overseer she didn’t have to worry about the conflict herself, but her smile seemed at once to express the serenity of a sage...and a comparably intense wickedness.

2.3

As the night wore on, he moved into action.

After the events of that morning, like most of the magi, he had his dinner brought to his room. At the same time, he laid a protective Boundary Field across the four corners of his room, keeping vigilant against possible intruders. After confirming that the Field was functional, he turned to leave.

“... Heine?”

A girl called out in a sleepy voice from the bed, rubbing her eyes.

“Ah, Rosalind. I’m sorry, did I wake you up?”

“... yeah.”

Approaching the faintly nodding girl, Heine gently stroked her hair with a gentleness that would make one question whether he was touching her at all. Seeing her close her eyes in satisfaction, he gave the girl a soft smile. Mustering up his resolve once again, he pulled away from her.

“I’m going out for a bit. Are you alright alone?”

“Okay.”

Nodding sleepily, she hesitantly opened her mouth.

“... umm.”

He turned and gave her a look that invited her question out from her.

“Are you going to fight the other magi after all? Even Lord El-Melloi II?”

At that, he gave a faint smile.

“You’ve grown fond of him, have you?”

“... t-though he’s nowhere near your level.” Pursing her lips, Rosalind avoided Heine’s gaze.

Seeing that, he couldn’t help but think she really was like a little bird. With her all too fragile looking limbs, as if they’d break in your hands, and the pure white dress that seemed like infantile wings. She seemed so...transient.

And that was why he loved his little sister more than anything else.

“Don’t worry. I’m just going to clear away some of the sparks that have shown up, and Lord El-Melloi II is a very wise gentleman. He won’t put himself in so risky a situation.”

Remaining calm and gentle to the last, Heine made his way out of the room.

The stone hallway was quiet.

Turning, Heine faced outside, from where an early autumn wind brought a harsh chill. More than just an issue of temperature, there was something mixed in with it that encroached on his very soul. Maybe it was the presence of magecraft.

“... ah,” Heine let out a faint whisper as he began walking.

The Castle of Separation was a two floor structure, its distorted structure built as if on its side. Looking down on it from above, it would look similar to the Magatama of the Orient...in a way it looked like a curled up fetus. As if to protect it, arm-like walls stretched out around it, and by those walls was a spacious front garden.

After exiting out into said front garden, Heine picked a new direction and continued walking.

His steps had no sense of hesitation, no sense of randomness.

He was following the directions provided by his Angelic Name.

The discussion at that morning’s breakfast table of the Shemhamphorae, which could be interpreted to mean a collection of the names of 72 angels, could be converted to reference the 12 signs of the Zodiac. Normally the Zodiac used the sun as its basis for determining direction, but by narrowing the scope down to one of the 72 angels, the direction could be pinpointed to within five degrees.

72 Angels of the Shemamphorae, and Their Respective Zodiac Signs

シェムハムフォラエ七十二天使、およびその支配宮

	No	天使名	支配宮	No	天使名	支配宮
Leo	01	ヴェヘイア - Vehuiah(VHV)	獅子宮	37	アニエル - Aniel(ANI)	宝瓶宮
	02	イエリエル - Jeliel(YLY)	獅子宮	38	ハアミア - Chaamiah(ChOM)	宝瓶宮
	03	シタエル - Sitael(SIT)	獅子宮	39	レハエル - Rechael(RHO)	宝瓶宮
	04	エレミア - Elemiah(OoLM)	獅子宮	40	イヒアゼル - Ihiazel(YYZ)	宝瓶宮
	05	マハシア - Mahasiah(MHSh)	獅子宮	41	ハハヘル - Hahael(HHH)	宝瓶宮
	06	レハヘル - Lelahel(LLH)	獅子宮	42	ミカエル - Michael(MIK)	宝瓶宮
Virgo	07	アカイア - Achaiah(AKA)	处女宮	43	ヴェヴァリア - Vevalieh(VVL)	双魚宮
	08	カヘテル - Cahetel(KHTh)	处女宮	44	イエラヒア - Ielahiah(YLH)	双魚宮
	09	ハジエル - Haziel(HZI)	处女宮	45	セアリア - Sealiah(SAL)	双魚宮
	10	アラディア - Aladiah(ALD)	处女宮	46	アリエル - Ariel(ORI)	双魚宮
	11	ラウヴィア - Laviah(LAV)	处女宮	47	アサリア - Asaliah(OShL)	双魚宮
	12	ハハイア - Hahaiah(HHO)	处女宮	48	ミハエル - Mihael(MIH)	双魚宮
Libra	13	イエイアゼル - Jeiazel(IZL)	天秤宮	49	ヴェフェル - Vehuel(VHV)	白羊宮
	14	メバヘル - Mebahel(MBH)	天秤宮	50	ダニエル - Daniel(DNY)	白羊宮
	15	ハリエル - Hariel(HRI)	天秤宮	51	ハハシア - Hachasiah(HChSh)	白羊宮
	16	ハカミア - Hakamiah(HQM)	天秤宮	52	イマミア - Imamiah(OMM)	白羊宮
	17	レヴィア - Leviah(LAV)	天秤宮	53	ナナエル - Nanael(NNA)	白羊宮
	18	カリエル - Calliel(KLI)	天秤宮	54	ニタエル - Nithael(NITH)	白羊宮
Scorpio	19	レウヴィア - Leuuiah(LVV)	天蝎宮	55	メハイア - Mebahiah(MBH)	金牛宮
	20	バハリア - Pahaliah(PHL)	天蝎宮	56	ポイエル - Poiel(PVI)	金牛宮
	21	ネルカエル - Nelchael(NLK)	天蝎宮	57	ネマミア - Nemamiah(NMM)	金牛宮
	22	イエイアイエル - Leiaiel(YYY)	天蝎宮	58	イエイアレル - Jeiael(YYL)	金牛宮
	23	メラヘル - Melahel(MLH)	天蝎宮	59	ハラヘル - Harachel(HRCh)	金牛宮
	24	ハフイア - Chahuiah(ChHV)	天蝎宮	60	ミズラエル - Mizrael(MTzR)	金牛宮
Sagittarius	25	ニライハ - Nithhhiah(NThH)	人馬宮	61	ウマベル - Umabel(VMK)	双児宮
	26	ハアイア - Haaiah(HAA)	人馬宮	62	イアヘル - Jahhel(IHH)	双児宮
	27	イエラテル - Jerathel(YLTh)	人馬宮	63	アナウエル - Anael(ONV)	双児宮
	28	セエヒア - Seehiah(AhAH)	人馬宮	64	メヘキエル - Mecheiel(MChI)	双児宮
	29	レイイエル - Reiel(RYY)	人馬宮	65	ダマビア - Damabiah(DMB)	双児宮
	30	オマエル - Omael(AUM)	人馬宮	66	マナケル - Menkiel(MNQ)	双児宮
Capricorn	31	レカヘル - Lecabel(LKB)	磨羯宮	67	エイアエル - Eiael(AIO)	巨蟹宮
	32	ヴァサリア - Vasariah(VShR)	磨羯宮	68	ハブイア - Chabuiah(ChBV)	巨蟹宮
	33	イエヒア - Jechujah(YChV)	磨羯宮	69	ロケル - Raehel(RAH)	巨蟹宮
	34	レハヒア - Lehachiah(LHCh)	磨羯宮	70	イアバミア - Jibamiah(IBM)	巨蟹宮
	35	カヴァキア - Chauakiah(KVQ)	磨羯宮	71	ハイアイエル - Haiaiel(HYY)	巨蟹宮
	36	メナテル - Monadel(MND)	磨羯宮	72	ムミア - Mumiah(MVM)	巨蟹宮

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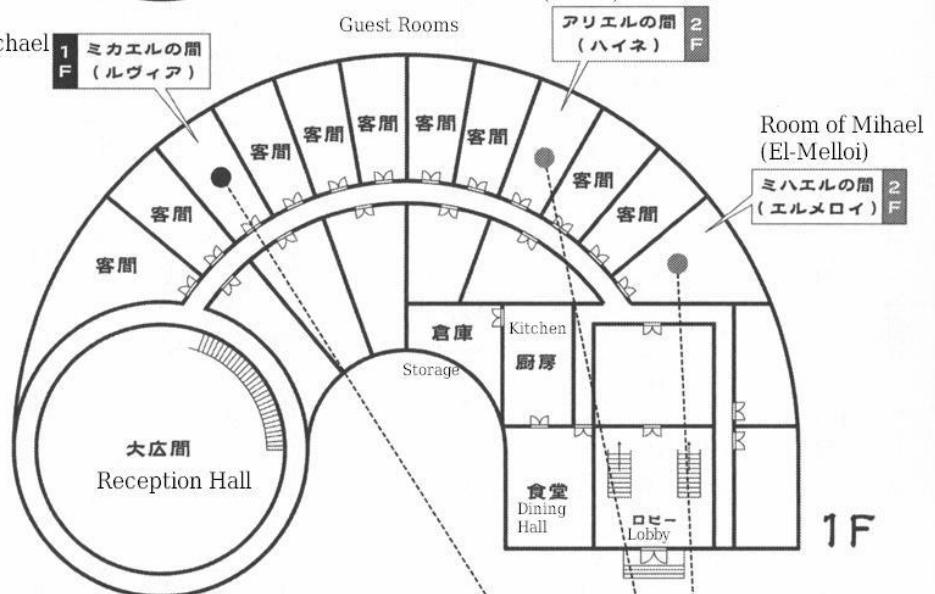
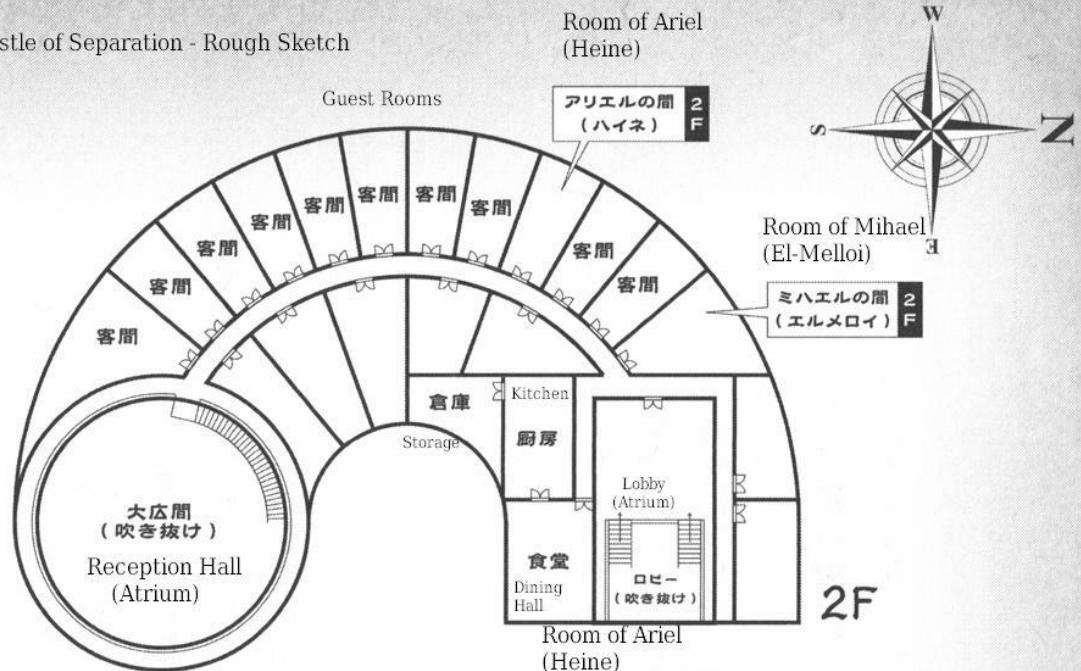
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剥離城アドラ見取り図

The Castle of Separation - Rough Sketch



城門へ→
To Castle Gate

森 Forest

Direction of Pisces
From Room of Mihael

ミハエルの間

Direction of Taurus
From Room of Michael

ミカエルの間か 宝瓶宮の玄角

双魚宮の方角
Direction of Pisces
From Room of Ariel

If he understood that much, all he had to do was walk in that direction from his room.

His Angelic Name was Ariel. Affiliated with the sign of Pisces, it was an angel who held the meaning of The Revealer. His existence was not limited to within Kabbalah, also making an appearance within Milton's "Paradise Lost," among other places. Comparatively speaking, he could be called one of the more famous angels. Not necessarily even limited to being an angel, the name also appeared in Shakespeare's "Tempest," denoting the name of the spirit of the storm. This meant that the actual meaning the name represented could be one of any number of possibilities, so without Lord El-Melloi II's mentioning of the Shemhamphorae, coming to the conclusion to find the direction would have taken a little longer.

"But the Angelic Name for this room is 'Michael,' is it not?"

Unfortunately for them, Heine had been listening to the conversation between Luviagelita and Lord El-Melloi II the night before. After learning the directions their Angelic Names converted into, it was only a matter of finding out where the lines all converged.

Outside, the moon was full.

Before long, the thick foliage of the trees blocked the moonlight, and the front garden became a forest.

Heine didn't stop walking. Paying no mind to the trees and branches, he cut a straight line through the woods. The specially treated suit developed by the Istari family wouldn't have any problem withstanding this degree of punishment.

After advancing another few dozen meters, Heine was met with a sudden shaking noise.

"It's here, is it?"

Stopping, Heine raised his gaze. Before him stood a pedestal.

Whether they were supposed to be angels or not, he couldn't tell. Scattered around him were a number of pedestals, broken apart in various ways. He could barely make out that they were once statues with vaguely human-like shapes, but they had been thoroughly destroyed, preventing him from learning any more.

"Hmm."

Heine reached into his suit jacket and pulled out the invitation that bore his Angelic Name, which was now glowing faintly. Similarly to how the Angelic Name had mysteriously appeared the day before, new letters had now taken shape.

An angel becomes a beast. Gazing at the western sky, it swallows the sun.

“... not quite the end of the road yet, huh?” Heine whispered upon seeing the new letters.

Rather, it was the beginning of the road. Of course anyone could get this far, he thought to himself with a laugh.

But the young man was not discouraged.

(A beast towards the west...that limits the candidates considerably.)

Among the 72 angels of the Shemhamphorae, there were those whose names were produced just as part of a word game mixed in with those with actual distinct legends. Finding out which of those had relationships with beasts and the west would no doubt be insufficient. He would have to combine that information with some other clue to be found about the Castle.

Heine cautiously touched the ground.

The front garden of the Castle was impeccably well-kept, but the same couldn’t be said about the forest. Within the damp earth and plant life, Heine could discern a faint ruggedness with his eyes.

“... footprints?”

Returning the invitation to its place, he pulled a new object out of his coat.

Now resting on his open palm was what looked like a small child’s toy. It was a small dog made of little metal cylinders. Placing the metallic dog replica in the ferns, he whispered one word.

“Convert”

For an instant, it seemed like his finger was glowing. In the next, it was brought to life.

Jumping down from Heine’s palm, the replica began sniffing around the plants as if it was a real dog. The production of human-like Automata was already an obsolete lineage of magecraft, but in contrast the other fields of autonomous dolls were just beginning to be developed.

In particular, this metallic dog was a special creation. It was one of the Mystic Codes of the Istari family that Heine had brought with him. It was a product of the Istari family’s alchemy, and was able to sniff out not just scents, but also wavelengths and lingering traces of magic.

After a few moments, the metallic dog picked a direction and began walking, and Heine followed close behind.

Breaking out of the cover of the forest, the young man was once again bathed in moonlight. Countless blooming flowers spread across the front garden shared the moonlight with him. It may have been the perfect night for those like poets and magi. The quiet sound of footsteps in the weeds was the only thing that signified the passing of the alchemical dog and its knight.



Before he knew it, they were back at the Castle. Walking parallel to the castle walls, Heine followed the spring-work dog while his mind wandered elsewhere.

(... I'm being watched?)

That was the kind of presence Heine could sense.

To be more accurate, it wasn't Heine himself who sensed it. Rather, it was a reaction from a number of gems, another one of the Mystic Codes Heine was carrying.

The Istari's trademark 'Living Stone' has been compared to a poor knock-off of arms used by Heroic Spirits, but it seems to actually be a considerable talent.

Heine recalled Lord El-Melloi II's words. Heine had of course been listening intently to every word that was said during his brief scuffle with Seigen Tokitou Jiroubou.

(... they've certainly done their research.)

It wasn't like the Istari family kept their "Living Stone" a secret, but the records that discussed it were few and far between. Knowing its name was one thing, but the number of magi who knew that it was a form of arms should have been next to none. Even if Heine didn't want to admit it, that man certainly had the knowledge fitting of a Lord.

(... Heroic Spirits, huh?)

Lord El-Melloi II certainly knew a lot about Heine, but Heine had done some research of his own as well. Roughly ten years ago, he had participated in a rather intense conflict between magi in the Far East. Such was the rumour among a certain group of magi even now.

The Fourth Holy Grail War.

Named something like that, it was a battle that took place in the Far East.

Apparently it was a battle between Heroic Spirits. The Holy Grail—almost definitely not the actual Holy Grail of Christian belief, but regardless—summoned a number of Heroic Spirits to fight against each other, and the last one standing would have their wish granted. Even as far as magi were concerned, it was an absurd ritual.

Not even Heine knew about the details of that battle, or how it unfolded.

But Lord El-Melloi II—at the time known only as Waver Velvet—was the sole survivor of the magi that participated under the banner of the Clock Tower, and there was no doubt that what he had overcome was a most brutal of battlefields.

(He isn't someone I can underestimate.)

So Heine decided.

Even if when it came to magecraft Heine was superior, Heine was sure that man had something else up his sleeve. In a case like this, it might even be something of value beyond that of magecraft itself.

On top of that, Lord El-Melloi II was not his only opponent. Both Seigen, who he had dealt with once already, and Flue, who he knew as the "Master-killer," were opponent's of fearsome proportions. Not to mention the Edelfelt princess and that recluse Caesarmund, who couldn't be described as anything but monsters.

Even so, Heine had to receive that inheritance by any means possible.

(... Rosalind)

As the face of his little sister floated into his mind, he became much more conscious of the “thing” inscribed on his leg.

A Magic Crest.

To begin with, Heine had no intentions of ever inheriting the Magic Crest of the Istari family. His cheerful and bright disposition just couldn’t mesh with the dark side of magecraft, so halfway through his training, he left his family behind and knocked on the doors of the Church. As a result, the Istari family, which had lost its heir, turned its eyes to its second child—and a tragedy occurred.

Rosalind’s body responded...abnormally to the Magic Crest.

Magic Crests were similar to a kind of internal organ. Overlooking a vanishingly small number of exceptions, it could only adapt to a person of the same bloodline, and even then the body would naturally reject it. For that reason, the crest would be transplanted in small parts at fixed intervals up until the new host had reached full puberty. This, combined with the administration of anti-rejection drugs and the assistance of a Tuner were fundamental principles behind adapting the Crest to a new body.

But, Heine’s father must have been impatient.

Or maybe, it was because at first, Rosalind’s adaptability to the crest had been phenomenal.

Strictly speaking, his sister’s case was different from that of rejection. It was probably better to say that she adapted too well. Within only one year, they had finished transplanting the Crest into her, and there seemed to be no evidence of rejection. The truth, however, was that the Crest had actually stolen the vast majority of her life force. After hearing of this from the family, Heine instantly discarded the laws of the Church and returned to have the Crest re-transplanted into him, but it was already too late.

The Magic Crest had been completely transformed when it was transplanted into Rosalind.

Even as Rosalind began to recover, the Magic Crest started gradually stealing Heine’s life force. Maybe because Heine had a much stronger sense of vitality to him, the Crest inscribed on his leg devoured its way into the core of his body. Removing it was no longer an option. After speaking to an old friend who was a Witch Doctor, he was told he likely only had a few years left to live.

... dying didn’t really bother him though.

Actually, if he did die, they would be able to extract the Magic Crest from him. Having his life cut short was unfortunate, but for a family of magi it was more than a common occurrence.

However.

Heine did not want to force his sister to live through the guilt of having been responsible for her own brother's death.

That alone was something Heine couldn't bear.

A faint, bitter smile rose to Heine's face.

A normal Tuner would have no way at all to save him from the Magic Crest now. That was why, no matter what the cost, Heine had to get his hands on the inheritance of Geryon Ashbourne—the Master of Restoration.

* * *

Heine's thoughts were interrupted.

As he reached the outer third of the Castle's surrounding area, Heine abruptly felt his body grow tense.

In the next instant, the dog walking on the ground in front of him was torn to pieces.

Of course, a Mystic Code of the Istari family wasn't designed to just fall apart so easily. As if to trample over its defeated prey, the darkness itself seemed to shake.

Within the shadow of the Castle, where the moonlight didn't reach, an even deeper blackness was lurking. Heine couldn't get a distinct look at its shape. With the quietness and stillness of Death itself, the thing that was definitely there had no discernable presence.

In the darkness, floating there was only a single pair of crimson eyes.

Heine heard a voice.

“—I ask you, the angel's name.”

To call its voice hoarse would be an understatement. It was more like the sound of the wind. In response to that voice, Heine opened his eyes wide.

“So you are the one who I need to tell?”

Heine immediately suppressed his excitement. The thing in front of him didn't appear to have any intention of answering his question. Seeing that, and after some careful consideration, Heine decided to say the word that had been given to him at the very beginning.

“Ariel.”

It was the name written on his invitation. Heine's own Angelic Name. In response, the beast simply repeated its own question.

“—I ask you, the angel's name.”

(So that wasn't it after all...)

Of course, he had expected as much. If it had just been as simple as saying his Angelic Name, there would have been no point to setting up this whole situation. Even if he didn't know the answer right now, there should have been some answer that satisfied only the old master of this castle's question. If that was the case, it should have something to do with the list of names he had found earlier, but there were still more than 10 candidates on that list.

So why don't I just take a chance and say one of those names?

But that would—

“—If you cannot answer, you shall be torn apart.”

The shadow began to rise.

It was a strange sensation, like watching a two-dimensional object rise up into three dimensions.

He couldn't see it very clearly, but he could at least tell that in its new form, it was standing on all fours. Seeing how fearsome the claws it raised were, there was no longer any doubt as to what happened to the metal dog from before. Even human flesh and bone would likely be no more than paper before them.

In response, Heine chanted a spell of his own.

But,

“Convert.”

Before the spell could take effect, the beast's claws tore through the young man.

That's what it looked like.

In reality, there had been no outward effect of the spell Heine had cast. But even so, the beast's claws were turned away with the sound of striking something solid.

If one were to look at the spot where Heine's clothes had been shredded, they would see not skin, but instead a violet glow.

“Magecraft is as strong as what occurs in the body... In the Istari family, that is the first principle we are taught.”

The young man's voice was overflowing with self-confidence.

The Istari family's prized Living Stone was buried deep within Heine's own body.

By infusing his own body with magical energy, he could change its construction with a single spell. A single one of those stones covered, by his calculations, about seven percent of his body. By activating only half of them, eighty-four percent of his body was now covered with violet armour.

On the Mohs Scale, it would be an armour of comparable hardness to sapphire.

“You said you were going to tear me apart, didn't you?”

Not forgetting his honour to the very end, Heine spoke.

Even his face had transformed to the same material as the rest of his body. The clothes he had been wearing before were originally an item created by Istari alchemy. The suit, which blended easily with the Living Stone, provided a stabilizing effect. The sleeves of the suit itself had transformed into gauntlets, and the boots into greaves.

Heine now bore the appearance of an ever-tenacious Knight.

“Unfortunately, it seems like your claws can't cut my body.”

His cool, clear voice echoed in the night air outside the castle. The moonlight scattered across the surface of his armour, as if over fragmented crystal.

“On the other hand, can you defend against my spear?”

At the same time as his armour, a spear appeared in his hand. It was a spear made of the same Living Stone. Using alchemy, it had been strengthened to the utmost, its tip more durable than even diamond. If combined with the mechanical horse of the Istari family, Heine was confident his charge would penetrate even through the armour of a tank.

That spear and that armour were, themselves, Heine's destiny.

A form that could even turn away the assassins of the Church.

At the same time, Heine's perception of the beast before him slowly became more distinct. Perhaps due to the result of some magic, he still couldn't distinguish the finer details, but he could now tell the beast had a form similar to that of a wolf. Like a wolf, or the tigers that lived in distant lands—no, it was even larger than that, Heine felt.

(A beast...)

Heine was reminded of the message of the constellation from earlier.

“In 18th Century France, there was a legend of the Beast of Gévaudan, wasn’t there? Alternatively, since it’s related to this castle, could it be the cherubim that guard paradise...or I guess cherub, since it’s singular?”

In the public records, in the year 1764, the first day of June, in the area of France known as Gévaudan, a mysterious beast appeared. After killing over a hundred people, with its true nature never being discovered, it transformed into a legend of a ^{Loup-Garou} Werewolf. Cherubim, on the other hand, were the guardians of the east edge of paradise, with four faces and four wings—unofficially, a half-human half-beast angel. The singular form would be cherub.

Being connected to the Castle of Separation, he couldn’t help but feel like there was some sort of connection here.

“...”

Leisurely, Heine brought his spear to bear. Shifting his weight forward, he very slowly began to shorten the distance between them. When he came within a distance where there was no hope of avoiding his strike, he would pierce through it regardless of what it was.

In the next instant, the beast howled.

As if it had been awakened by the beast’s howl, the air surrounding Heine suddenly transformed.

“?!!”

It was hot.

Surrounding Heine was a flow of air hotter than fire itself. It was a level of heat even his “Living Stone” armour couldn’t compete with.

(Not magecraft...a special ability of the beast’s?!)

Immediately, Heine's hand began to move. Retrieving a flask from within the sleeve that had transformed into armour, and released its contents. They instantly evaporated, combining with Heine's own Od, and brought about an entirely unscientific result.

With a low sound, the white flames began to swirl. While it seemed like the fire Heine had released in front of him would bring forth even more scorching heat, the opposite happened. Within moments, the flames transformed into a pillar of ice.

“Did you think alchemy could only affect minerals?”

Underneath his helmet, Heine gave a pleasant smile.

“Whether it is liquid or gas, or even a conceptual form that doesn't exist in this world, it's within the grasp of alchemy. Well, for me at least, this kind of thing is actually my speciality.”

There exists a concept of elements.

Lord El-Melloi II had spoken of it earlier, but Heine possessed a dual element of Fire and Water, rare even in the world of magi. While it might be common to think that a contradictory affinity, they weren't necessarily in conflict with each other. Of course, possessing them as a dual element was a rare ability in and of itself, but if you thought of a liquid that burns, it would be fairly easy to understand.

In this case, rather than functioning like gasoline, the liquid flames he produced stole the heat from the air in an instant.

Heine's hand moved, causing his spear to flash.

The blade surging forth in the darkness became seven. The fused Living Stone was not simply just a resilient armour. It also served to enhance his physical characteristics, bringing him far above the abilities of a normal human.

The beast reacted.

Using its claws, it managed to deflect the first spear, but the second two struck home. Without even flinching, however, the beast leapt away.

(It's fleeing?!)

Morphing his armour into a mode optimized for pursuit, Heine gave chase.

As expected of the kind of beast it appeared to be, its speed was beyond what Heine could muster. As it ran, it suddenly broke off, heading into one of the castle's corridors that opened to the outside.

The high-pitched sound of metal striking stone resounded. Due to the time of night, lighting within the castle had been all but extinguished, and with the interior closed off from the moonlight, the darkness within the castle was incomparable to that outside of it. Heine had no choice but to pursue the beast relying only on its lingering presence in the hallways.

“...”

For some reason, Heine couldn't overcome the uneasiness that began to well up in his chest. Before even his brain could comprehend it, the blood pounding in his veins and his skin rising into goosebumps seemed to understand the seriousness of the situation.

(No way...!)

As Heine continued his pursuit, he realized something.

Thinking, of the message that appeared on that invitation before he had gone out into the forest.

What if he hadn't been the first one to read that message?

What if he was actually the second person to have read the message on that envelope?

What if the one the beast had been asking questions to...wasn't him at all?

—His answer was before him shortly.

Moonlight poured in through the skylight.

He was standing within the atrium of the castle. It was the place exactly opposite to the lobby in which everyone had gathered when they first met. In this ancient-styled castle, where no expense had been spared in bedecking it with luxury and extravagance, it was the one place that resounded of quiet solemnity. A nearby piano and harp told of the music that must have filled the room at some point in the past.

The beast's presence was vanishing.

“...”

Heine's eyes were fixed onto the centre of the atrium. The reason this atrium had been built was no doubt to house the statue that stood at the middle of it.

Dominating the centre of the atrium was the massive statue of an angel, in one hand a sword, and in the other a pair of scales. No doubt taking influence from the statue of Michael in Mont Saint-Michel, it was a figure Heine was extremely familiar with.

Those scales were to measure the sins of the dead, and the sword was to drive away th

atan
e serpent. There was no doubt that the Archangel Michael was one of, if not the most famous of all angels.

“Ah!!”

Suddenly, Heine realized.

The thick scent permeating the air didn’t permit him to turn his eyes away.

Was this blasphemy? Or maybe, since this was the territory of magi, it was supposed to be a kind of blessing?

As if proclaiming the victory of faith, the angel raised its holy sword high in the air.

And that holy sword was piercing straight through—

* * *

My master and I were awoken before morning came. Even in his half asleep state, he seemed to understand there was some gravity to the situation, as he promptly fixed his dishevelled clothing and headed out.

As soon as we entered the atrium, we felt a presence.

As if he could barely contain his feelings, a small voice slipped out between his lips.

“Hishiri... Adashino...!”

The Castle of Separation was built in somewhat of a C-shape. On one end was the lobby, where everyone had gathered when they first met. The other end would be this open hall. Paintings and murals aside, the piano, harp, pillars, and even smaller furniture in the room were designed following the angelic theme of the rest of the castle, a vibrant display of the late master’s eccentricity.

But, for once, I paid it no mind.

Because she was there, in the centre of the room.

Her long-sleeved kimono was so beautiful, it looked like it had been made for this very moment. The oriental clothing gave an even stronger air of mystery than before as it lay up against the statue of an angel. Even the blood dripping down that angel’s sword didn’t impinge on that beauty. That is to say, even with the now blackening blood that surrounded her, the impaled woman’s beauty seemed the only thing that remained unchanged.

“...!”

I unconsciously covered my mouth. Because in addition to the smell of blood so thick it could make you choke, I noticed something else.

From her beautiful face, with its pale, smooth, exotic flavour, head tilted backwards, both of her eyes had been gouged out.

“This is...!”

My master trailed off after a few words. After a short while, he recollected his bearings and spoke again.

“Heine, could you please get her down?”

Heine flicked his gaze around the room. Before he had realized it, all the magi invited to the castle had gathered.

Seigen and Flue, Luvia gelita and her escort, as well as even Orlocke and the boy pushing his wheelchair were present. As expected, no one could ignore an event of this calibre. As if, being magi, they were all used to situations like this, despite the air of sharp tension in the room, none of those present had lost their composure. The only exception perhaps being the greatly unsettled Rosalind, but even she seemed capable of holding on while she had her brother to support her.

“Understood.”

Seeing no objections, Heine stretched an arm towards the statue. From his arm, a metal strand as thin as a hair reached out, sliced through the statue’s sword, and gently lowered Hishiri’s body into Heine’s arms. Paying no heed to the blood staining his clothes, Heine in turn gently lowered her down and laid her on the floor. My master moved up and crouched down at her side.

“My apologies.”

So saying, he reached out and touched her. Lifting the sleeves of her kimono out of the way, he quickly checked over her body. As if he was a trained doctor, he checked her body for external wounds with a cold efficiency.

“Heine mentioned it was some kind of beast. It certainly seems like her eyes were gouged out by something similar to a large claw. On top of that she has a large portion cut out of the middle of her back. Most likely that was where her Magic Crest was. I guess a magus of high standing can’t die without something like that happening.”

Of course all Magic Crests were unique, but they did have one function in common. Though the Crests of older families developed into something similar to a curse, it

was that Crest that permitted them to live, so everything the magus had was poured into it. For someone as far removed from humanity as a magus, there was no uncertainty to be found in their death. In a way, the individual magi within the family were little more than vessels used to carry on the Magic Crest.

Gently, a blood soaked envelope fell from the sleeves of her kimono. My master picked up the envelope that bore a striking resemblance to the ones given to us, and immediately inspected its contents.

“Oh? It seems she had an Angelic Name as well. This is...”

At that, his words stopped.

Hachasaiah.

Seeing the one word printed on that envelope, my master’s face quickly turned grim.

“Master?”

Pressing a single blood soaked finger to his chin, my master held his silence as he thought. At last, he spoke again, his voice shaking.

“... I think I’ve made a mistake.”

“A mistake?”

Despite my reply, he didn’t answer right away. With fingers shaking, he once again inspected the body of the cruelly slain Hishiri. He sifted through her hair, now covered in dried blood, and double-checked the area where her eyes had been gouged out.

“... the Angelic Names weren’t some sort of hint towards the inheritance.”

At that, all the magi in the room turned to look at him. The first to speak was the wheelchair-bound Orlocke.

“... if that is the case, then what are they?”

“It’s not a mystery at all.”

The root for the word ‘mystery’ was the Greek word for ‘to close.’ Shutting, concealing, self-completion, in short a mystery held meaning specifically because it was a mystery.

Secrets themselves were the bread and butter of magecraft. The fewer that can travel any individual path of magecraft, the greater things that can be accomplished on it. Before coming to the Castle of Separation, my master had mentioned that the more

well known a Concept was, the more stable it was, but this was the opposite—a truth anyone who called themselves a magus would know.

So, when they heard the message from the Castle's deceased lord, they took it at face value. In their world, ^{common sense} they had already become used to these kinds of habits, and also accepted it as a holy ritual to weed out those unworthy of the inheritance.

But.

What if it hadn't been a mystery at all?

"I already mentioned how the 72 angels of the Shemhamphorae could be translated into various signs of the zodiac. In the same way they can be translated to refer to different parts of the body. I'm sure there's no need to explain the correspondence between the macrocosm and the microcosm in our current company."

As he spoke, the other magi in the room showed tense expressions.

They already understood what my master was trying to say.

"Hachasaiah translates to the sign of Aries. Aries as a whole broadly translates to be divine protection of the human head..."

At that, my master paused. Speaking softly, as if to spare the squeamish,

"... in short, if you limit it to Hachasaiah, it covers the eyes."

Reflexively, I let out a loud gasp.

The proclamation Hishiri had given in the lobby resurfaced in the back of my mind.

Those who cannot answer shall be torn apart.

Is this what it means to be torn apart by an angel?

It wasn't some sort of riddle or metaphor. It was a simple, direct message to the magi seeking his inheritance. If you aren't able to answer, then you will be ripped to pieces, so prepare yourself. That's all it meant?

"In short, the Angelic Names are just advance notice of how we are to be killed."

His voice echoed throughout the room. It was almost like a spell. I felt the illusion of all the angels distributed across the large room suddenly changing from righteous beings to trained killers aiming for our lives.

But, after saying that, my master hung his head as if in shame.

“Master?”

“... this is bad,” he whispered.

It seemed as if my voice didn’t reach him at all. That’s how immersed he was in his own thoughts.

“Master?”

After calling out one more time, he finally turned to me.

The grief on his face was even more intense than when he had just found out about the true meaning of the Angelic Names.

“... this is really bad.”

“What is?”

“This result. Whoever the culprit behind this is, creating this situation was surely one of their objectives. Among all the people gathered in the Castle of Separation, she was the only one who knew of Ashbourne’s secret, and the only one with no need for it herself.”

He glanced behind himself.

Just by moving his gaze, his meaning came off clear. Aside from Rosalind who was still attached to Heine, not a single one of the magi in the room expressed fear. Rather, the atmosphere had actually become...excited.

They finally had proof that there was indeed something hidden here. In order to obtain that, there was no need to look down on the method of killing their competition. And with the overseer dead, there was no reason to avoid it either.

“Ha! So you are trying to say that after gouging out her eyes and ripping out her Magic Crest, the beast just politely threw her on that sword for us? Don’t make me laugh.”

“Are you trying to say that I’m lying, Mister Flueger?”

“No, no. I believe your story, Heine.”

“Then, are you proposing that the ghost of my friend Geryuon Ashbourne is creeping around the castle?”

“Are you trying to say you think the culprit is one of us, Old Bag Caesarmund?”

The voices of the magi resounded.

The voices echoing throughout the room, full of conceit, hostility, and curiosity, melded together into a night storm echoing the Wild Hunt.

Yes, that's right.

As my master had said, this was no longer just a simple treasure hunt.

But my impression differed slightly from that of my master. This incident didn't mean there was no longer a mystery to be solved. Rather, whether it was the riddle of the inheritance or the mystery of the culprit, a mystery remained at the heart of this case. In fact, its presence felt stronger than ever.

What we had been mistaken about was the nature of the puzzle.

It wasn't a puzzle meant to be solved.

As if drawn in by a sweet honey, the magi had been pulled in to this circuit of calamity and disaster. With the mystery being the driving force behind the production, the true story was about to take form.

The curtain of the Grand Guignol had risen.

◆ 第三章 ◆



3.1

After closing the door to our room, my master practically fell onto the sofa with a tremendous sigh. It was almost like he was trying to expel the massive weight on his mind with a breath.

For the first time, he seemed to forget about his usual cigar and just completely gave himself up to the sofa. Just like that, as if he was sinking away, his expression quickly darkened with fatigue.

I immediately prepared a glass of water and placed it on the table beside him, and he drank greedily. Drinking carelessly, he barely seemed to notice the water dripping down his chin and onto his shirt and long hair.

“... do we have any alcohol?”

“There’s the whiskey they left in the room for us.”

“That’s fine.”

Pushed on by his muffled voice, I retrieved the bottle of Scotch from the shelf and poured some into a glass. The alcohol content was fairly high, as I could feel just from the smell it gave off as I poured. I was pretty sure it was intended to be mixed with water or some other kind of beverage before drinking, but my master just grabbed the glass as if he thought he needed to steal it from me. Just like that, he tipped his head back and brought the glass to his lips.

Watching him do so, I opened my mouth to speak.

“... was it okay for us to leave without inspecting the scene further?”

“In a situation like that, there’s no way to tell when it’ll devolve into killing.”

Using the back of his hand, he wiped his chin. He then proceeded to quickly down the remainder of the whiskey. I suspected he drank it so fast he couldn’t even taste it, drinking just so that he could forget everything. I briefly wondered whether we should be thankful that at least the glass and the bottle had no angelic markings on them. Once he finished drinking, I asked again.

“Is no one else afraid that they could be killed? I mean, even that magus from the Faculty of Law was killed, right?”

“That’s what it means to be a magus.” My master smacked his lips as if annoyed.

“In the pursuit of honing their skills, the Clock Tower all but encourages magi to fight each other. If they didn’t, they would have no way to see other magi’s magecraft for themselves. There are even those who would see a situation like this as the best possible outcome. Of course, the Faculty of Law puts more emphasis on keeping order within the Clock Tower than with mystery, but even they probably wouldn’t consider this a failure. Ha, you can’t even call them police.”

“...”

“Pretty much everyone is thinking the same thing. ‘Even if it comes to a fight to the death, I will be the one who survives.’”

I had heard in my home village that there were conflicts where people fight each other by the thousands. That if you left people to their own devices, nothing but a murderous hell would develop. In order to prevent that from happening, society and order were created. It seems the Faculty of Law took it upon themselves to fulfill that role in the world of magi.

—But, what would happen if that order was lost?

That was exactly the situation here within Adra, the Castle of Separation.

Eventually, the magi gathered here would begin to kill each other by their own hands. Was this what the world of the Asuras told of in Buddhism was like? Or maybe it was more like the endlessly repeated feasts and combats of Valhalla?

“...”

Just imagining it, I could feel a chill run up my spine. No matter how I thought of it, we were just completely out of our element. As if we were live bait laid out by the spider. No matter how we struggled, the spider’s thread would only bind us tighter. The only thing left for us was to wait for the moment those venomous teeth would pierce our necks.

So, I spoke what immediately came to mind.

“Shall we escape now, then?”

“.....”

For a long while, my master remained silent. Gripping the glass in his hands tightly, his face showed a conflict even more difficult than the one born by seeing Hishiri’s corpse earlier.

At long last,

“... no.”

He weakly shook his head.

“Why not? You yourself said that you would die against any single one of them, didn’t you?”

“Correct. If something like a duel were to break out, I would without a doubt be the first casualty. Even after drinking, it’s such a scary thought I feel like my knees will give out on me if I’m not careful. Scary enough that if we had a rope, I’d even consider hanging myself just to get away from it.” With a bitter smile, he patted his knees.

Even that smile was plainly stiff.

“Even so, I can’t leave.”

“... why not?”

Once again, I asked. In response to my question, my master pulled out the invitation from within his jacket.

“It seems Geryuon Ashbourne put a considerable amount of effort into investigating about us.” Saying so, his lips twisted into another bitter smile.

It was only the second time I had ever seen him with such an expression. That unsightly, ugly, desperately clingy expression.

Seeing that expression, I couldn’t say anything further.

Looking at that invitation, my master narrowed his eyes as he spoke.

“There’s something I have to do here.”

Not something he wanted to do. Something he had to do. I of course had neither of those things. I didn’t even understand how the two were different.

But my master’s voice carried with it a resolve that seemed like even God himself would be unable to move. What kind of life was he leading? For me, who should have spent my entire life in my old home town—in that old graveyard, it was a world that just seemed too far away. Even though we were this close to each other, I couldn’t understand him at all.

And yet, from that horizon I couldn’t even begin to understand, my master called out to me.

“My lady. I apologize for bringing you into this. But I can’t run away from here.”

“Haha!”

From my right hand, a voice called out. Add was laughing.

“Look how manly the cowardly little magus acts! Though no doubt you plan on running away the moment things get dangerous for you!”

“Your trump card is fundamentally limited to a single use. Furthermore, there’s no guarantee we could even set up the conditions required to use it.”

My master spoke as if emphasizing his words. While his sighs spoke to the alcohol he had been drinking, his eyes were terribly serious.

“I have a reason I cannot leave. But I have no power to hold others here. If you want to depart now, I have no right to stop you.”

“...”

I couldn’t meet his eyes. Whatever was needed to meet that gaze head-on, it didn’t exist inside me.

So, I avoided his gaze. As I did so, I asked him another question.

“I asked this before, but you need this inheritance, right?”

“Yes.” He nodded.

He had the same expression as when he had come to pick me up from my home town. The same expression as when he decided to take me, who had only a handful of acquaintances, all the way to London. For some reason, I let out a sigh. I could feel an emotion I couldn’t name within my chest, driving me on to madness.

“... then, I will stay here for a little longer.”

“... thank you.”

Seeing my master bow his head so deeply in appreciation, I felt my face stiffen.

No.

Maybe it wasn’t just feeling stiff. Not understanding the emotion I was feeling myself, I brought my fingers up to my lips. As unexpected as it was, as if it was completely natural, my face was smiling broadly...

“My, my.”

A low voice called out from the room’s open door.

My master's face stiffened as he spun to face the visitor; even my breathing unconsciously froze.

"You two have a nice relationship here, don't you? Very good, very good."

The high pitch sound of tires on the floor filled the room.

Pushed by his young assistant, the wheelchair of Orlocke Caesarmund split the darkness as it entered the room. His face, buried in wrinkles, for some reason gave off the impression of a caterpillar, an inhuman smile clinging to his features.

* * *

In this private room, filled with all kinds of depictions of angels, this old man seemed even more out of place than usual. His withered body, seemingly no more than just skin and bones, strangely gave off the impression of glittering with life. In the environment created by the Castle of Separation, this old man alone seemed to stand in rivalry to its way of being. His small, aged body had something indistinguishable crammed into it, something that was enough to be comparable to the Castle itself. As unpleasant as it was, that was the kind of intuition birthed by his presence.

"... may I help you, Mister Orlocke?"

As much as was possible, my master spoke with a calm voice.

At my right hand, Add hurriedly hid himself as much as possible. It was possible that the old man had heard his voice earlier, but even if he had, there was no reason at all to show himself.

The old man gave a hollow laugh.

"No, my apologies for entering your room without asking permission. Your door was unlocked, so it just sort of happened."

"... please, come in." My master nodded him in with a sour look.

Of course, 'it just sort of happened' was a blatant lie. Even just a moment earlier he had been perfectly hiding his presence. Of course, my master and I were a little on edge thanks to the incident earlier, but that just made us all the more alert.

Orlocke's gaze found the glass my master was holding.

"Well, aren't you drinking something nice? Maybe I'll have some as well."

From the armrest of his wheelchair, something glowing faintly spilled out into the air in front of him.

They were butterflies.

Papilio Magia.

If I recalled correctly, that was the type of magecraft the old man used. In sharp contrast to his appearance, the beautiful butterflies of light took the bottle of whiskey from me, a glass from the shelf, and poured a glass for him.

His display left us speechless. Even before he would ask his assistant to help, he put his magecraft to work for him. From the way he just callously came through the door that should have been locked, and the way he tactlessly displayed his magecraft for us to see, I was beginning to understand how inadequate my impression of this old man was.

“Ahh. As expected, Geryuon left some great alcohol here for us. Even though he’d been keeping it for so long, he never let his guests touch it, you see.”

Smacking his lips, Orlocke closed his eyes and seemed to be fully enjoying the flavour. It was almost like he was just relaxing at home.

As if he couldn’t bear the wait any longer, my master finally spoke up.

“May I ask what exactly has brought you here tonight?”

“Ahh yes. You gave all of us a number of discerning judgements of the situation earlier. I thought I should come and give you a word of thanks.”

“... surely, that level of information would be no value to someone like yourself.”

“The information itself, sure.” Acknowledging my master’s point, the old man nodded slowly. “But your special qualities are another matter. Of course you must understand that yourself. Being needlessly humble will just make you more enemies, you know.”

“... and what kind of special quality would someone like me have?”

“Your opinion,” the old man said.

His eyes, already hidden behind wrinkles, narrowed further. Staring at my master straight-on, he spoke softly.

“Modern Magecraft is nothing but rubbish. It doesn’t understand the history or complex ways the depths of different magecrafts meld together; it just steals a taste

of everything and mashes together the parts that taste good. There's no necessity for legitimate magi like ourselves to concern ourselves with such garbage. So I thought."

According to my master's lectures, the most recent form of magecraft known to be made popular was Chaos Magic. It was a school of magecraft that began in West Yorkshire in the 1970s. It didn't limit itself to just magecraft, but Philosophy, Theoretical Science, and even Science Fiction were all drawn in. Its purpose was to allow the magus to access the "beyond," in order to bring about all sorts of paranormal phenomena.

In other words, chaos.

And this haphazard method was, according to my master, the most 'modern' of all magecraft. Of course if one were to try and use this type of magecraft it would no doubt be incredibly difficult, and the lessons he was giving were only crumbs from the outer edge of that research, but this old man seemed to understand that well himself.

"Of course, I would think one would be better off ignoring such trivialities," he continued.

"Learning itself is important."

The old man made a noise from his throat.

"So that you can despise it all the more after understanding it. But, it led me to realize that things like that can give birth to out-of-the-box viewpoints like yours."

"I'm honoured at your assessment of me." Speaking carefully, my master bowed his head. "But surely, you didn't come here to talk about this?"

"Naturally."

The man in the chair rolled his shoulders. In the room so full of tension, only the young boy pushing the wheelchair was expressionless.

"There is something I wanted to confirm with you," the old man said, leaning forward. "You are here because the El-Melloi crest is damaged, correct?"

Those words were like a bolt of lightning.

My master froze as if God himself had thrown calamity down upon him.

"Come now, you can't even call that deduction. If you know that Ashbourne was known as the Master of Restoration, it's the first possibility that comes to mind. On

top of that, if you include that event from ten years ago, it becomes all the more obvious.”

“... you know about that as well?”

“Fuyuki’s Fourth Holy Grail War,” the old man spoke carelessly. “Ten years ago, your master—Keyneth El-Melloi Archibald—joined in a battle in the Far East between Heroic Spirits, and lost his life. But, had his magic crest been performing optimally, there was no reason he should have fallen. Or to put it another way, even if you were able to retrieve his body, it is only natural that the Magic Crest would be terribly damaged.”

“...”

My master’s face was as stiff as a zombie’s. Without being able to say a single word, it was all he could do to hold the old man’s gaze.

“Out of curiosity, how much did you manage to retrieve? Half? A third? No, if there were Heroic Spirits involved, you probably weren’t even able to retrieve a full tenth, were you? Ah, come to think of it, you joined in that war as Keyneth’s enemy, didn’t you? Even though he was already there, you went as insurance in case he lost. Or wait, maybe it was your Heroic Spirit that killed him in the first place?”

Orlocke’s voice brought him back ten years into the past. Once again, my master keenly felt the sin he couldn’t run from.

(My master...killed his own master?)

I, too, was overcome with shock at something so beyond my expectations. Of course, as we had just been speaking about earlier, kill or be killed is the standard practice among magi. However, learning that that was something my master had experienced himself was like an impact directly to my brain.

After a long pause, my master retrieved the bottle of whiskey from beside Orlocke, poured himself another glass, and drank it in one gulp.

“... and why do you ask?”

The old man began to laugh. After a considerable bout of laughter,

“My Magic Crest is the same.”

In a low voice, he confessed.

“—!”

“What’s wrong? There’s no need for you to feign surprise. It’s just like that Edelfelt girl said. The Magic Crest of the Caesarmund family has reached its limit. It’s as decayed and senile as I am.”

That was simply fate.

If a Magic Crest was like an organ, then naturally it had a lifespan. Of course, it wasn’t on the same scale as other living things, lasting a few centuries, or in some cases apparently millennia, depending on the nature of the crest itself. A Crest that became too old would eventually begin to decay. Hearing that, my master’s face became gloomy.

“... and what do you hope to gain by telling me this?”

Even I, who was watching from the sidelines, couldn’t tell why he would decide to show his own weakness like that. As far as pure skill in magecraft was concerned, none of those gathered in the Castle of Separation were as fearsome as this man. No matter his estimation of him, what meaning could there be behind sharing such secret information with a second rate magus like my master?

But, before answering that question, the old man clapped his hands together.

“Would you consider entering into an alliance with me?” he said.

“An alliance?”

“Exactly.” The old man, as collected as ever, nodded from his wheelchair. “Even I don’t know how many people Ashbourne’s legacy can be divided between, or how much time it requires to be put to use. But, assuming it isn’t a single use for one person, surely you can see there is room for some cooperation.”

“... in that case, wouldn’t it be a better idea to make an alliance with anyone other than myself?” As expected, my master’s voice betrayed his cautiousness. This late into the game, my master was one of the most trivial pieces on the board. And that was his one lifeline to staying alive. “But still, you picked me. Is that not because I’d be the easiest to kill should the secret be indivisible, or take many years to use?”

In response to my master’s question, Orlocke smiled placidly. It seemed like the number of wrinkles on his face doubled with that simple gesture. The shadows playing over his complex features made him seem as if he had been transformed into some kind of monster.

“Oh, oh, scary, scary,” Orlocke raised his hands with his droll response. “Well, if it turns out that only one person can use Ashbourne’s secret, then there’s nothing to be done about it. Naturally I intend on taking it for myself. There’s no meaning in

hiding that. But if it's just a problem of time...as long as it's not waiting much more than a few decades, then by all means you are free to make use of it first."

"I can use it first?" My master's shoulders tensed up at the unexpected offer.

"Sure. Our Magic Crest won't have any serious issues for the next few decades, and I fully intend to live that long myself after all." Again, the old man laughed. But mixed in with that laughter were words that were the very picture of seriousness. Even though he had been the one to say his Magic Crest was decaying, he then declared openly that there would be no issues for the following months, or even years. I was forced to admit deep within me that Orlocke was not just far removed from human beings, but from living things in general.

—Like those things back at my home town.

"May I ask a small question first?" This time, my master spoke out.

"Oh? If I am able to answer it."

"When Heine was surveying the castle, what were you doing?"

"Ah!" The wrinkles that crowded his face came together, and his eyes opened wide. "So, is that what you want to ask about. An alibi, or whatever they're called! You, of all people, are asking me for an alibi!"

Orlocke struck the armrests on his wheelchair, not out of anger, but seemingly out of an expression of excessive happiness. His mouth, open wide with laughter, showed that only a few stained teeth remained within it. Around that smiling face, glowing butterflies fluttered softly into view.

"Even if you get one, does that mean anything? You saw these butterflies yourself earlier, didn't you? Everyone in the Castle of Separation right now is a magus. What is a common layman's alibi going to do for you here?"

"At the same time though, this is Ashbourne's Workshop," my master replied with an unconcerned air.

A Workshop was an 'alternate world' made by a magus for the sake of honing their own magecraft. No matter how powerful a magus you were, if you were to operate within the Workshop of another magus, the mysteries and magecraft you could utilize would be severely limited. Apparently.

My master spoke again.

"This isn't the kind of place you could use such remote magecraft without some considerable preparation beforehand. At the very least, something capable of fighting

face to face with Heine Istari should take tremendous amounts of preparation.”

“... I see. An interesting theory.” Nodding his head as if he was truly interested in my master’s analysis, the old man stroked his amber-coloured armrest. “But that is not at all how a magus should think. That line of thinking in a place so full of magic will drag you down in a heartbeat. That won’t be a good experience for you.”

“...”

My master didn’t argue. It seemed more like he had expected those words to come from the old man, and had already prepared himself for them. Maybe for that reason, the old man said nothing more. Instead,

“At that time, I was with the Astrologer Flue. We were playing chess. I don’t know if it will be sufficient for you, but shortly beforehand I also had one of Ashbourne’s servants bring me a drink and some smoked salmon. Please, feel free to confirm it with them.”

From behind him, the young boy nodded silently.

“Thank you,” my master said, bowing his head.

Orlocke continued. “... on top of that, I’ll tell you one more thing, young Lord.”

“One more?”

“Yes. This incident is the result of Geryuon Ashbourne’s curse.”

I clearly heard the sound of someone swallowing. I wondered briefly whether it was my master or myself.

“Curse?”

Of course, in the world of magi, curses were actual things that existed. Their exact nature varied widely based on the region and lineage, but in general they all functioned to bring misfortune and calamity. However, the thing that made both my master and I nervous was that curses that amplified in power after the caster’s death were fairly common. On top of that, if someone as renowned as Geryuon Ashbourne used his own life as fuel for the curse, I couldn’t even begin to imagine what kind of horrific result it might create.

For instance, it could be powerful enough to completely wipe out all the magi here—

“And why do you think it’s a curse?”

Orlocke laughed once again. It gave off the impression of a skull bouncing back and forth, broken teeth clattering.

“Geryuon had a son, you know.”

“A son? No such person was ever admitted to the Clock Tower...”

“Right. Before he left the countryside here, a fatal sickness took his life.”

My master’s brow furrowed as he took in the new information.

“Of course he did so as a magus, but he truly loved his son. Even I could see that. Maybe the fact that his wife died shortly after his son was born exacerbated the problem, and it must have hurt even more that they were both claimed by the same disease. It was like a karma that their lives shared—well, thanks to modern science we can now call it ‘genetic.’ Regardless, even secret medicines he received from a druid couldn’t help them. I can only imagine how it must have felt to watch his son waste away day by day, in exactly the same way as his wife.”

(...)

Fundamentally, magi loved their children. Not only did the goal they aimed for lie many generations into the future, but aside from some very specific exceptions a Magic Crest could only be passed on to a blood relative. But from the way Orlocke spoke, it seemed the old master of the Castle of Separation had an even deeper affection for his son.

That became very clear in what he said next.

“When his son died, he went mad.”

“Mad?”

“Right.”

Nodding, the old man in the wheelchair adopted a far off gaze. Perhaps he was recalling a far off place, a far off time- a time when even he might have believed there was value in a passionate heart, value in trusting others.

“You asked why I thought it was a curse.”

The old man’s wrinkled face twisted. Countless emotions passed over his face, born by those wrinkles. Just like how if you mixed every colour, you ended up with black, so did the countless thousands of wrinkles on his face appear.

“I understand better than anyone else,” he said. “Long ago, in Adra, this Castle of Separation, Geryuon was performing a certain kind of research.”

3.2

Meanwhile.

Once again, she tried looking at the incident from a different angle.

Sitting in an antique rolling chair, she spent dozens of minutes fiddling with the map and small tools arrayed on the table in front of her.

Of all the guest rooms in the castle, this room alone had been...renovated.

By simply hearing her say the words that it didn't have a good feeling, her servant had caught her intention and finished renovating the room within a matter of hours. Well, most of the materials were of course brought in by a cargo helicopter and a jet owned by the Edelfelt family, so the physical labour consisted mainly of just moving the bare minimum of furniture in. Thanks to that, however, Luvia herself was unfortunately awake to receive Lord El-Melloi II's call, and ended up being roped in to that incident.

“... for now, at least.” As she said this, a voice called out from her side.

“My Lady.”

“What is it, Clown?”

“Your tea is ready. Please relax for a little.” As much of a mismatch as it seemed, the Mohican, sunglasses-wearing butler offered her a cup of tea with a bow.

The cup of tea gave off a pleasant steam, showing it was heated to perfection—as was usual for Luvia—and as she brought it to her lips, her expression finally lost some of its harshness. The orange tea with a faint trace of green, hinting at its origins in Nuwara Eliya, and its refreshing fragrance were perfect for calming down her frayed state of mind. The slightly thick flavour matched perfectly with her mood.

After enjoying the tea for a few minutes,

“Is it to your liking?” her servant asked in a low voice. A voice carefully toned to avoid injuring her mood any further. His training had been endlessly thorough, to the point that while it was satisfying she felt a little melancholic about it.

Luvia lowered the teacup.

“Hmm. I suppose this is good enough, for now.” Saying that, she narrowed her eyes.

For Luvia gelita Edelfelt, the reason she had come to this castle was, in a manner of speaking, a business endeavour. Orlocke Caesarmund had said as much earlier, but gossipy families liked to refer to them as ‘the most elegant hyenas on Earth.’ Of course, protecting their family’s secrets was a common problem, but they were also rather skilled at managing and putting those secrets to use.

An incident like this was no more than everyday life for her.

At least, that’s how it was supposed to be.

“... I guess the only thing left is to just try.”

Once again, her gaze returned to the map on the table.

It was an old map that she had procured before arriving. Of course, it had no details of the Castle of Separation itself, instead showing some fake building meant to deceive public officials, but lying on top of it were also arrayed a variety of precious gemstones.

Ruby.

Sapphire.

Emerald.

Diamond.

Each and every one of them was a jewel that cheered her up just to look at. Naturally they were of splendid size and brightness, but the workmanship and cut of each gem was flawless. As if they were connected to Luvia by some sort of invisible string, they gave off a mysterious pressure.

Jewel Magic.

It was the speciality of the Edelfelt family. It was a branch of magecraft that took advantage of the natural properties of such gemstones that made them ideal for storing magical energy. Moving her eyes over each of the jewels again, Luvia renewed her focus and closed her eyes.

The image was of a heart.

Her own heart, now a precious stone in and of itself, cracked and shattered. The instant that illusory sound reached out to her fingertips, her body became nothing more than a cog in the machine that would produce a mystery. A number of nerves in her body, totalling one hundred, transformed themselves into magic circuits, and

connected themselves to the ritual she was performing. At the same time, Luvia's consciousness spread out into a more ethereal body.

As this sensation overtook her, Luvia opened her mouth.

^{Awaken}
“Call.”

As if pushed by a breath of wind, the jewels began to move. The gems, which were anything but spherical, began to waver faintly, and then in a way that seemed physically impossible, began rolling around the table.

What she was doing was using the gems for dowsing.

The technique of using dowsing to search for underground sources of water or ore veins was well known even to the common public. The image of a dowser walking around with two broken sticks was common to all kinds of books and television programs. Now, Luvia was using that traditional technique, while adding her own plans to the mix.

“Thou art Mars, blessed by the God of War.”

Blowing on the ruby, she activated it.

Depending on your school of study, which celestial body each type of jewel was aligned with varied widely. For example, rubies were often associated with the sun, or Venus.

(But in Kabbalah... Mars.)

Since they had been given names taken from the Shemhamphorae, it was most probable that the foundation of the Castle of Separation's magecraft was Kabbalah. Perfectly matching with its style would be impossible, but if she followed the same strain of logic, then the magic should still be more effective.

(The colour is red, the number is five, the metal is iron, the guardian angel is Kamael.)

Luvia carefully recited the Sephirah that rubies were associated with. As she spoke the last word, she ground her teeth. Even here there were angels.

Of course, since Kabbalah used the Bible as its foundation, it was to be expected that angels would appear fairly frequently, but it was difficult to suppress her irritation at the frequency they were doing so. Channelling that irritation into focus on her magecraft, she shifted her gaze to the sapphire.

“Thou art Jupiter, blessed by the Father.”

She continued, activating the emerald and diamond shortly after.

As she finished, the movement of the jewels became more energetic. As if each of them had their own sense of gravity, the spinning stones settled into a pattern that seemed to reflect the movements of the actual celestial bodies. Since they were originally parts of the Earth that had been dug up, from a magus' point of view, perhaps that was natural.

The stones continued to revolve around the old map, the centre of their movement being the mansion.

Luvia carefully tracked the movements of the stones. As the one who had, in a virtual sense, given birth to the microcosm before her, she wouldn't take her eyes off it for an instant.

However, as if an invisible hand had reached down and grabbed them, the movement of the stones suddenly stopped.

“... as expected, there’s interference,” she whispered.

Looking down at the way the jewels were arrayed on the table, Clown spoke in a reserved tone.

“The after-effects of Ashbourne’s Boundary are still lingering?”

“Even if it’s not the case any more, this was a magus’ workshop, so this kind of thing is to be expected. But that aside, there’s one thing left that still troubles me,” Luvia whispered while looking at the edges of the map before her.

“And what would that be, may I ask?”

“Of course, it’s the reason why someone went out of their way to announce how they were planning on killing us all.”

“... Hachasaiah, was it?”

Clown murmured the Angelic Name of the late Hishiri Adashino.

“Considering mine is Michael, I suppose that means their target is my right tibia.”

Even Luvia was well-read enough to know the connection between the 72 Angels and the parts of the human body. It was true that she hadn’t made the connection between the Angelic Names and the target of the corpse’s mutilation until that man brought it up, but that just served to make her more irritated. Similar to with the Shemhamphorae, the way that Lord took such an unnecessarily deep interest in the magecraft of others bothered her like a thorn in her side.

(... why does he care so much about others?)

Of course, using other magi's techniques as points of reference for your own was common. The Edelfelts themselves after all rose to prominence through the acquisition of arts and Mystic Codes developed by other lineages.

But that aside, there was no value in taking interest in others beyond using them to hone your own craft. Secret arts, inheritances, in the end such things existed only for the improvement of one's self. The fact that they believed their magecraft connected them to the Origin was all that allowed them to continue deluding themselves.

The method and the objective were already set from the beginning, so no matter what the differing situations of their birth—yes, even for those filthy Spellcasters, the techniques of others were nothing more than opportunities to refine your own craft.

That man seemed to have been turned around somewhere. No magus, indeed even no Spellcaster, thought like that. Even the Faculty of Law, which used magecraft as a tool for maintaining order within the Clock Tower, were different. That was what caused a feeling of unease and impatience to scratch at her chest from the inside.

“Could it be a result of some magecraft?”

At the voice of her butler, Luvia was able to calm down.

“My lady?”

“My apologies. I was distracted after picturing that corpse again.” After clearing her throat, she continued. “I’ve thought of that possibility. Not even just Necromancy, if we’re considering lineages that could benefit by taking a part of the body related to a specific sign of the zodiac, the list is plentiful. More than ten, at the very least...but really, what concerns me is that there was no need to announce it so brazenly.”

Luvia’s eyes took on a harsh coldness, giving the impression of a scientist examining an experiment with the utmost precision.

“At the very least, I hoped we could learn something of value from the Ashbourne family servants.”

Of course, they had asked the servants for anything they might have known. But, as was to be expected, they knew nothing. While it was possible that they were conspiring together to provide a consistent lie, the fact of the matter was that it was very common for even the household servants of a family of magi to be completely unaware of the existence of magecraft. Even if this was all some sort of plot of the late Geryon Ashbourne, it was far more normal to think the servants wouldn’t have been told anything.

“I’ve got the alibi’s figured out, at the very least.”

At the same time as she was interrogating the Ashbourne family servants, she also asked each of the magi present in the castle what they were doing at the time the incident had most likely occurred. Asking Orlocke directly what had happened was a bit much, but aside from him, the responses she got were as follows.

- ‘Well, I guess as the first witness, I don’t really have any evidence to support myself do I?’ - ‘I was waiting for my brother in our room. My brother isn’t as cruel as to hurt someone so badly though, let alone disgrace the body afterwards!’ - ‘If you’re asking me, Gray and I had both gone to bed.’ - ‘Hm? At that hour, I would have been playing chess with Orlocke. His skill level is pretty average, but his strategy has a pretty irritating tenacity to it.’ - ‘I was drinking in my room. If you don’t believe me, feel free to ask the Ashbourne servants that brought my drinks to me!’

Effectively, the alibis looked like this:

Heine: X Rosalind: X El-Melloi and Gray: Δ Flue: O Orlocke and his assistant: O
Seigen: O

The reason El-Melloi and Gray got a triangle was because they had no guarantors but themselves.

Of course, being magi, such an alibi didn’t really absolve them of suspicion in the murder case. While it was true that, being Geryuon Ashbourne’s castle, their use of magecraft would be severely limited, it obviously wasn’t limited enough to keep Hishiri alive.

“... but getting her body up onto that statue’s sword must have been quite difficult,” she appended to her thoughts.

While there was of course the all-too-famous telekinesis that could have got the job done, such a simple magecraft as lifting and moving physical objects was actually unexpectedly difficult. From the start, magecraft took a circuitous route to deceive the world into producing the desired result, so if you were aiming for such a straightforward result, it would be faster to just do it with your hands.

Even so, if magecraft was to be used for such an end, then the most plausible method would no doubt be using a familiar. Probably one with power similar to the beast that Heine had seen.

(Angels and beasts...)

On top of that, this repeating motif.

The most famous cherubs that guarded paradise had the same roots as creatures like the sphinxes, or the winged lion Anzu from Mesopotamian mythology. There were many lineages of these winged beasts, for example the symbol of Saint Mark, the patron saint of Venice, was a winged lion as well.

For this reason, she decided to halt her train of thought there, and return to a more immediate concern.

“So, why was it that the magus from the Faculty of Law was killed?”

“Maybe they were looking for Ashbourne’s inheritance, or barring that at least a clue towards it?”

“Judging from the fact that she had her own Angelic Name, that’s a reasonable thought. The fact that the supervisor would have a lead to the inheritance herself is a very real possibility. But that still doesn’t explain why they went through the effort of making a spectacle of it.”

Luvia placed a single finger on the ruby sitting on the table in front of her. With a gentleness like it was a much-loved companion, she carefully and thoughtfully watched as the scarlet jewel flickered with light. After thinking deeply for a few moments,

“Maybe... it was a message to someone?”

“A message?”

“Yes...”

Nodding, she put the still-surfacing idea into words.

“Among those who were gathered here, perhaps there is a meaningful message directed towards one of them. ‘From now on, I’m going to start killing people like this’...and now they could be waiting for their target’s response.”

“... I see,” her servant nodded lightly a few times, as if he was truly in awe of his master’s insight.

From there, he changed the subject.

“Have you taken an interest in that young Lord?”

“!!!”

At that unexpected question, Luvia momentarily faltered. Recovering quickly, as if nothing had happened, she responded with a question of her own.

“And why would you think that?”

“... my lady only takes the care of her stuffed animals into her own hands when she has something on her mind,” he said, glancing over his sunglasses to Luvia’s bed.

Her stuffed animal, in the form of an anthropomorphized dog, sat right beside her pillow, its fur brushed to perfection.

“... it had just become a little dirty, that’s all,” she asserted in a quiet voice. “That being said, it would be a lie to say I hadn’t taken any interest at all.”

Luvia’s brow bore a harsh expression. Of course, becoming a Lord at such an age was beyond exceptional. And while there were astounding exceptions to the rules here and there in the Clock Tower, there was no doubt he was the youngest Lord the Clock Tower had ever seen.

No.

The issue wasn’t just his personal youth. His family’s history was at such a level that no matter who he was, being invited to be a Lord was suspicious. She had already had Clown gather as much information as possible about the other guests at the castle. His family had only begun the study of magecraft a mere two generations past. The fact that the magi who had spent countless generations researching into their own Mysteries had let a mere third generation magus into their midst spoke volumes about his backer.

Reines El-Melloi Archisorte.

While in a way you could just say that the previous Lord El-Melloi’s death and following succession had ended in that result, depending on your point of view, one could say that it was her own devilish craftiness that had won them the prize that was the title of Lord.

(... though I really have no idea whether she is really that bad of a person.)

For now, she was reserving judgment on Lord El-Melloi II. She may have had an opinion of him as a person, but she wouldn’t let that get in the way of her professional opinion of him. She did, however, hold a certain conviction.

The two of them were definitely incompatible.

He was, at his core, twisted in some way.

At that thought, she suddenly raised her head. There was a knock at the door.

With just the movement of her eyes, Clown had his orders, and sprung into action. Placing himself in the blind spot of the door, he returned the knock with the back of his hand. The door opened, and a carefree silhouette emerged from behind it.

“Whoa!” the person shouted. Naturally, on the other side of the door, the visitor found Luvia’s servant, fists in a combat-ready stance.

“Hey hey, please! I don’t need such a violent reception!” Raising both his hands in the air, the visitor swallowed nervously. The Mohican’s stance showed an intent to kill without a hint of hesitation. Being nearly two meters tall gave him plenty of pressure, but being in a combat-ready stance made it even more fierce. While it was a mystery whether he was a magus or not, the fact that the ever-proud Edelfelt family felt he alone was sufficient as an escort meant that he was anything but a normal bodyguard.

Luvia called the name of the visitor.

“Flue the Astrologer.”

Matching the look she had when gazing at her magic, her eyes showed a sense of exultation and a contradictory coldness.

“Walking into another’s room so nonchalantly meant you were prepared for this sort of welcome, no? I don’t particularly mind if Clown gives you a good punch. Besides, I’m in a fairly bad mood right now. Maybe cutting out your heart will improve it a little.”

“Haha, as expected of the Edelfelt’s princess!” Rubbing his unshaven face, the astrologer laughed happily.

* * *

Glancing over to the table where Luvia’s map was resting, Flue let out a whistle of admiration.

“I see you were trying some divination as well. Though no matter how good you are, I doubt it went very well.”

“... hmm, I wonder.”

“Please, no need for bluffs,” the astrologer laughed, watching Luvia with one eye closed. “I may look like a mess, but I really am an astrologer. Sure, the Edelfelt’s Jewel Magic is beyond my field of expertise, but if I walk in to an astrological ritual halfway there’s no way I wouldn’t recognize it. Oh, and don’t bother being flustered

about it either; this is another magus' workshop. The land and the air themselves are against us. I guess it figures that Geryuon Ashbourne wouldn't set this up where it could all be solved in an instant with fortune-telling. Though I suppose we're still not sure if that killing was brought on by Geryuon himself."

With his long speech, it felt like he was clowning around more than Clown himself. Even now Luvia's servant was still on guard. If he made one mistake, those fists would come flying, and even if he somehow managed to dodge those, Luvia's magecraft was scarier in the first place. Even knowing that, Flue kept up his light-hearted chatter.

Luvia reached out and touched the gems lying on the table. When it came to Jewel Magic, the jewels themselves were the source of all their magecraft. So for Luvia, that simple action was similar to toying with a revolver in front of her hostage. Well, considering her abilities as a member of the Edelfelt family, it might be more accurate to describe it as a Gatling gun or a grenade launcher.

With a pressure overflowing with elegance, Luvia whispered.

"And it's any different for you?"

"... I'm an astrologer, you know? It's kind of what I do."

Flue patted a dirty hand over his waist, where his nomad-like clothing concealed his belt of knives. The twelve knives held there, each representing one sign of the zodiac, were the same as the ones he had put on display for everyone at the dinner table the previous day. If Luvia's magic was to manipulate the magic energy stored in jewels, then his was to manipulate these knives patterned after the planets.

"I guess I'll get right to the point. I'm not really all that interested in the inheritance or whatever. As long as it turns into money in the end." Flue's words were the perfect image of a filthy spellcaster. As far as he was concerned, magecraft was probably nothing more than a means to make money.

But, that kind of thinking was still less repulsive than that of that young Lord.

She could at least understand this way of thinking.

"In contrast, you would be willing to put pretty much any amount of money down if you got the inheritance, am I right?" Flue continued, a shady smile twisting his lips.

"Are you trying to ask me to hire you?"

"How observant," Flue said with a laugh, slapping his chest.

For some strange reason, he was the kind of person that could make that kind of expression without seeming vulgar for it. Maybe simply because of his overwhelming friendliness. Rather than a personal virtue, it just seemed like his nature.

“The first person I met here was that Lord El-Melloi II, but he’s poor as a beggar, right?” he said, raising an eyebrow while gesturing like his wallet was just too light.

But with that, the atmosphere in the room changed dramatically.

Luvia reached out and picked the ruby up off the table. While that was enough to heighten the tension in the room, Flue could tell just as well that the internal combustion engine hidden within her was roaring to life. Feeling all the hairs over his body stand on end, he raised his hands again with a expression like she was messing with him.

“Hey, hey, princess!”

“If I’m going to hire you, then I at the very least need to test your skills, no? So here, at the very least, please survive this. Clown, move.”

The bullet Luvia had fired previously at Lord El-Melloi II was nothing more than a threat, a bundle of her built-up irritation. Right now, Luvia gelita Edelfelt was building up enough energy at the tip of her finger that she could likely obliterate even the likes of lower ranked phantasmal species.

With a gentle sound, the gems lying on the old map floated into the air of their own accord. In response to her magical energy, each of the gems began to give off a brilliant light, and soon began whirling around in a vortex of light.

“Behold, the Edelfelt’s Kaleidoscope.”

Was that whispered phrase the name of this spell? Magical energy brilliantly shining in countless colours, like a kaleidoscope. That in itself was the secret art that held up the pride of the Edelfelt family.

Awaken
“Call”

At Luvia’s voice, both the storm of magical energy and the jewels floating about the room collected at Luvia’s fingertip.

“W-w-w-whoaaaa!”

In the blink of an eye, Flue had drawn a knife. Throwing the knife in front of him, it floated in the air just as they had the day before. Unlike before, however, this time

the astrologer drew a magic circle in the empty air in front of him. As Clown leapt to the side to avoid the coming attack, Flue shouted at the top of his lungs.

“Lead Me!!”

The overwhelming light drowned out the world.

The blast fired by Luvia and her gems was truly a kaleidoscope. Pouring down on Flue like a beautiful angel of death, the thunderous roar and ensuing dust cloud filled every inch of the room. When the cloud of smoke from the explosion finally cleared, the destroyed wall and floor showed clearly where the explosion had occurred. Luvia looked down at the work she had wrought with unveiled satisfaction.

“Splendidly done.”

In the corner of the blast zone, the middle-aged astrologer sat rolled up like a turtle retreating into its shell. Coughing violently, Flue raised his voice angrily.

“... the hell is wrong with you. Were you actually trying to kill me?!”

“My my. An astrologer that can’t even predict his own death is worthless to me. Of course I was trying to kill you.” Luvia’s words felt as much as an attack as her previous spell had been.

Just by watching, Luvia could tell he avoided the attack by creating a super-short term zone in which cause and effect no longer applied. In short, it was the same as the common showings of fortune tellers declaring ‘directions of good luck.’ Magecraft that actively utilized zones of good and bad luck like Feng Shui, or its child art Onmyoudou, were not all that uncommon, but one that was powerful enough to successfully deal with her previous attack was pretty rare.

“Dammit, my clothes are all burnt now. And you destroyed one of my catalysts too! I hope you’re ready to pay for those!” Maybe because he had been so close to death, Flue’s words became noticeably more careless than before. In sharp contrast, Luvia took those words with the utmost coolness.

“I’ll give you a check, so by all means, fill in whatever number you like. Ahh, right. You’re an astrologer, but you’re also a hitman, correct?”

“I’m a mercenary.”

“Basically the same, are they not?”

“If you say that to an actual mercenary, don’t be surprised when you get hurt. Speaking of killing people, you wouldn’t happen to be the one who killed the girl

from the Faculty of Law, would you?” Flue spoke in an aggressive tone, dusting off his shoulders somewhat violently.

“Oh? And what if I am?”

“I don’t care that much. If you’re a magus in this kind of situation, you can’t complain if you get done in, right? Especially if you came here especially to try and keep order.”

“Of course. That’s what it is to be a magus,” Luvia replied with a faint smile.

Within that voice was just a sliver of self-deprecation. Even after encountering such a gruesome scene, their will remained unchanged. A way of life built up on countless generations, like a snake eating its own tail, their pride and values were slowly destroying themselves. No matter how absurd it seemed to her, that way of life became almost sacred—running away from that, that root which the concept of a magus was based on, was impossible.

Oh beautiful light, leave us be.

We wish only for the cruel darkness.

May stagnation and peace become the truth in the night.

“Well, if you want me to help you carry out something like that, that’s fine. Normally I’d charge extra for such an unconventional service, but as an Edelfelt I doubt that bothers you much. I’ll just say don’t bother asking me to deal with that Caesarmund. No matter how much money you give me, I’m not up for playing with him.”

“That’s acceptable. I wouldn’t ask you to anyway. Any opponent that has value is worth sending someone of value against them.” Luvia gave a small nod, her attitude making it clear that she herself was of course someone of such value. “If I was going to ask you, it would be for taking out someone who was utterly worthless...”

As she spoke, her words suddenly came to a stop. Gently, her smile changed. With a gentleness so severe as to look cruel, Luvia Edelfelt whispered.

“Would you do me the favour of putting an end to Lord El-Melloi II for me?”

3.3

—On the morning of the third day.

As if he held some sort of grudge against it, my master glared at the morning sun that had just begun to rise through the windows of the Castle as he walked through its hallways. I walked a short distance behind him, furtively glancing at the others that were keeping pace with him. Those people were, of course, Orlocke and his assistant.

“Oh? You plan on inspecting the scene again?” Once he realized the direction my master was walking, Orlocke spoke up.

And that was of course towards the central atrium, dominated by the statue of an angel, where Hishiri Adashino was killed.

As they approached the door to the room, we saw a nameplate on the door. We hadn’t noticed it before, but it seemed like even this room had a name.

“... ummm... Shamal?”

“Chamael. Not an angel of the Shemhamphorae, but still one that is fairly central to the Sephirot of Kabalah. In the same way, it’s aligned with Scorpio, Mars, and is sometimes even called the Guardian Angel of Tuesdays,” my master said, once again not hesitating to share his knowledge on the subject. I wasn’t sure if it was because this was something that would just be common knowledge to all magi, but I found it a little irritating how he just casually threw that kind of information out in the open every time.

“He is in charge of the angels of destruction, and is often said to have a lot of things in common with demons.” As if trying to follow his lead, Orlocke added after my master finished speaking.

Also, as a quick aside, I never once heard his assistant speak. There is a distinct possibility he is actually a homunculus.

“—Your footsteps really echo here, don’t they?” Orlocke mentioned as my master’s heels struck the floor. As my master slowly knelt down to the floor, Orlocke asked another question. “If you were planning on inspecting the room, wouldn’t it have been better to do so immediately after the body was found?”

“At that time, there was no telling when the situation would devolve into killing. In fact, the person I was most scared of at that point was you.”

“My, my,” Orlocke gave a dry laugh at my master’s response.

To an outsider, it may have looked like these two were an old man and his grandson, getting along splendidly. But in reality, it wouldn't be strange if at any point a life or death struggle would erupt between the two of them—no, considering the difference in their abilities, it would be nothing but a one-sided massacre. That was the kind of partnership they had.

While the body had already been removed by Ashbourne's servants, a few bloodstains still remained scattered across the room. Inspecting each one of them, my master's gaze and finger systematically appraised them one by one. Every once in a while, my master would take out a vial of some sort of liquid from his jacket. With one drop of that liquid, the colour of the bloodstain changed dramatically. Seeing this procedure, Orlocke stroked his chin as if absorbed in the process.

“I see. Rather than science, it's more like Medieval era Alchemy. Or maybe it would be more correct to call it a form of Witchcraft?”

“By analysing the concentration of magical energy remaining in the bloodstains, we can determine when Miss Adashino died. There's nothing this could be other than magecraft, right?”

“Of course, of course. Science and Magecraft sleep in the same bed, after all. Though maybe an expression like that is a bit too modern to be accurate. After all, if your methods are too direct, you're getting farther away from the Mystery, you know.” Orlocke spoke offhandedly, seeming to thoroughly be enjoying the conversation.

“Well, I've tried a number of methods, and it just turns out this is the one I'm best at,” my master replied politely, all the while continuing his investigation.

After applying a drop of the liquid to the bloodstain, he would watch carefully how its colour changed, and then move on to another. Writing down notes in a notepad as he went, he would also sometimes take a small vial of another liquid and use it instead, applying it to a place where he had already applied the previous liquid. This pattern repeated as he carried out his investigation. In all honesty, if it had been in any other situation, it was a plain enough process to be simply boring. Yet even so, Orlocke watched with undivided attention, his expression like a child that had found an insect for the first time.

“The Angelic Name I was given was Nanael,” Orlocke suddenly spoke.

“Ruling over the sign of Aries, representing the fall of pride.”

“Yes. And if your conjecture is correct, I'll be killed by having my tongue pulled out. Heh, that's kind of pleasant, in its own way.”

“...” Without saying a word, my master applied another drop of liquid to one of the bloodstains.

As the sun continued to steadily climb into the sky beyond the windows, I began to wonder what had happened with breakfast this morning. I could faintly smell something good earlier, so perhaps it had been prepared in the dining room as it had the day before. It was almost like Hishiri Adashino had never died.

Or maybe, that an event like that was just nothing out of the ordinary for a magus.

“... no, it’s just too strange.”

Suddenly, my master broke the silence, stroking his chin as he spoke.

“And what would that be?”

“... what happened to her glasses?” At that somewhat odd question, both Orlocke and I frowned.

“Oh?”

“She wasn’t wearing her glasses when we found her, right?”

“Well, naturally. It’s pretty difficult to gouge out someone’s eyes while they are wearing glasses.”

Orlocke replied with the seemingly obvious response. Because of how obvious it was, it was something that none of them had even taken note of when they found her before. Rather than her glasses or other accessories, their attention was held strongly by what had happened to her eyes.

“... right. But according to this, her time of death would have been...” Before he could say any more,

“Oh, so you two are working together now, are you?” Orlocke said as he turned to face the door.

Standing in the doorway they had entered through earlier, a new pair of figures could be seen. While my master and Orlocke were certainly the same, they really looked like an unfitting pair. A girl so beautiful she would be the centre of attention at any ball, with the astrologer, caked in filth, that looked like he had just been trekking through the desert.

Luvia and Flue.

Behind them was Luvia’s Mohican servant. Despite being almost two meters tall, he blended in to the scenery splendidly. Perhaps that was a skill learned as part of his profession as a servant.

“Oh yeah, sorry about that,” Flue said, scratching his cheek. In contrast to his words, his smile showed no sign of shyness or timidity. As he spoke, he motioned with the thumb and forefinger of one hand, as if mimicking the thickness of a stack of banknotes. “But I’ve been... ‘supplied.’ Looks like I’m playing for this team now.”

“Suit yourself,” my master replied unconcerned, still on his hands and knees. In addition to the test tubes from earlier, and had now taken out a magnifying glass, and was still keeping watch of the changing colour of the bloodstains.

“But if at all possible, please don’t bother me. I’m in the middle of an investigation.”

“And what do you think you’ll learn from something like that?”

(... huh?)

I frowned. Luvia’s voice had a sharpness that couldn’t quite be masked, as if she was upset at something. Whether they just had bad affinity, or their first meeting had damaged their relationship, there was an obvious danger in the air between them from the start, but this seemed like something more.

“Lots.”

“Lots? What do you think you can learn when you don’t even know the scope of your suspects’ abilities?” Once again, the girl asked the same question. It was an obvious declaration that she wouldn’t take any half-baked answers. In contrast, my master never even lifted his gaze, speaking as he continued to watch the floor.

“Well, yes, there’s no meaning in that. At least when it comes to the ‘howdunxit.’”

“Howdunxit?”

“Sorry, its some detective novel jargon. Basically, ‘how did the culprit commit the crime.’ Similarly, ‘whodunxit’ would refer to ‘who is the culprit.’ There’s no telling what kind of supernatural things magi are capable of, so without knowing the limits, those are meaningless questions. When it comes to Geryuon’s mystery, or even this incident, such straightforward deductive reasoning has no value.”

I somewhat understood what my master was saying. Even in my hometown, detective novels were plentiful. The famous detectives in them typically showed off their incredible minds by focusing on these two questions, but if magi were going to be part of the equation, there was little that such reasoning could offer. When you realize that some magi could do things like walk through walls, or fly through the air, the methods they could use to commit the crime would be next to limitless.

“But the ‘whydunxit’—why they committed the crime in the first place—that remains a possibility,” my master added, speaking slowly. “Even if their origin is

different, a person's elemental affinity will reflect their nature. Magecraft is no different. For magi, who have been steeped in the story of magecraft since before they were even born, whether they accept that fate or rebel against it, it will doubtlessly brand them down to their very core. In that way, no one is as incapable of lying as a magus."

Speaking softly, he kept his eyes locked on the floor. Sometimes cleaning dust away with a small brush, sometimes inspecting the floor through his magnifying glass, he was still locked in his battle with his mysterious liquid. Maybe as a result of how hard he was focusing, sweat begin to bead on his forehead, which he would wipe away with the back of his hand from time to time.

"So, I believe even if I can't solve the mystery, I can still find a way to get closer."

"In what way?" Luvia continued to press her question.

It wasn't that she didn't understand what my master was saying, but more like she was pressing him to prove it to her. Receiving her provocation, he finally lifted his eyes.

"For example, if it was the Edelfelt Jewel Magic..."

Luvia's expression visibly twitched.

"The relationship between magecraft and jewels dates back to Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt. So basically, it's about as old as human history itself, taking root in Gemcraft illusions. From the beginning, jewels were the symbol of royalty, and from the perspective of various forms of alchemy, they were used to preserve youth and health. 'Aristotle's Book of Minerals' is an obvious one, but Stone also features as one of the four fundamental elements, and one of the four fundamental natures in Hildegard's 'Physica.'"

The book mentioned by my master sounded familiar to me.

Of course, 'Aristotle's Book of Elements' had a huge significance even historically. It not only acted as a scientific catalogue of 72 minerals and their medicinal uses, but if I remembered correctly, also spoke about the source of Power Stones.

... 72, again.

I knew that it was a number with significance in magecraft, but with the degree to which it was appearing, it was starting to seem more like it was cursed.

"But, if we look at the Gandr you showed me earlier, your magecraft is clearly sourced closer to Northern Europe. That would mean it uses gems as a medium for magecraft, infusing them with magical energy by dyeing them with the user's own

blood or other bodily fluids. It's better to look at it like a form of specialized Rune magic. While the state of Rune Magic in general is in decline, the Edelfelt's brought jewels into the mix and cut open a new path for themselves. It's probably a similar situation as to why their Spells are in English. If we ask what we can learn from that information, we can see that as an Edelfelt, you probably take great pride in the tremendous value of your jewels, very different from some many other nobles or aristocrats."

"Shut up!"

Luvia's scream brought my master's explanation to an end. "Say any more and there won't even be dust of you to sweep up!"

It seemed like her anger up until now had been doubled—no, it really was beyond comparison. Her whole body gave off a murderous rage incomparable to anything before. Even I, who wasn't even the target of that anger, unconsciously recoiled from her outburst.

In sharp contrast,

"... might I be able to ask you not to threaten my good friend like that?" Orlocke Caesarmund, with a cheerful expression on his lips, spoke up.

Of course, there was no way that Luvia had forgotten about Orlocke being in the room. But, unable to ignore his words, her brow twitched.

"Friend?"

"Indeed. He really is an interesting young fellow. It would be quite a waste to have him blown to pieces here. Is there something wrong with that?" Orlocke couldn't help but give a dry chuckle as he asked.

Compared to when the two had first met in the lobby of the Castle of Separation, it was as if their positions had been completely reversed. While previously it had been Orlocke who had his secret dragged into the open, now it was her turn to have her facade stripped away.

Pressed back by that laugh that hollow, skull-like laugh, the blonde-haired girl could do nothing but return the jewels she had drawn to her pockets. As she did so, she turned back to my master.

"Of course. Certainly you do seem to be in love with magecraft. In a way you could even call yourself an investigator of magecraft." Luvia spoke, chest puffed out in anger. "But if you really knew magecraft, you would understand that all you are doing is destroying it."

Hearing that, my master adopted a terribly difficult expression. It was a mysterious look, like he had taken a bite of something nostalgically bitter.

“... my teacher once told me something similar, you know.”

“You must have had a rather brilliant teacher, then.”

“Of course. There was no one who could compare to him as a magus. He really is the only one suitable for the name El-Melloi...was, the only one suitable.” Seeing my master’s wry expression as he spoke, I unconsciously held my breath.

Kayneth El-Melloi Archibald.

My master’s own master.

And maybe... a man who my master killed with his own hands.

But without pressing for any more, Luvia turned her back on the room.

“Good day, then. I’ll be praying that you find even a fragment of a star while you’re crawling around there on the floor like an animal.”

“See you around,” Flue tossed in his own farewell with a wave as he left to chase after the departing blonde.

When the two had completely vanished from earshot,

“You were provoking her on purpose, weren’t you?” My master said, turning to face Orlocke.

“Mmm. I had the sudden inclination to get back at her for our first meeting. Thanks to you, I was able to enjoy myself thoroughly at her expense. Ha, that hyena’s unhappy expression was priceless. Seeing it refreshes me so much I feel like it added years to my life.” The old man spoke with a satisfied expression.

Maybe he was just acting childish, but one wrong step would have been an invitation to death.

“... master.”

As I called out, my master put a reassuring hand on my hooded head.

He didn’t so much as look at me, yet his hand patting my head had an unexpected gentleness to it.

“Thank you for protecting me,” my master said. “Thanks to you, I was able to learn something.”

“Oh?” Orlocke’s eyes narrowed, once again being lost in a sea of wrinkles.

“Could I ask you a question, Mister Caesarmund?”

◆ 第四章 ◆



4.1

—the image itself was a switch.

All magi had different methods.

Some people had an image of dropping a firing hammer, and others something more like piercing their own heart. An unexpectedly large number of magi relied on sexual excitement, and among them many were forced to rely on drugs. Regardless of the method, these images were switches to turn the nerves inside the magus' body into Magic Circuits.

By activating these Magic Circuits, the magus connected themselves to the Great Magic Formula that served as a foundation, and turned the magus themselves into a “system for realizing mysteries.”

For Flue, that switch was thirst.

Walking through the desert. A dryness in his throat he was helpless to do anything about. Long ago the sweat had stopped flowing, and even his eyes had withered up. Even if it was for a single drop of water, he would commit any crime—

—no, that thinking would only lead to death by dehydration.

By using a simple, pure thirst as his energy, his nerves flipped over.

Suddenly, he was beset by the sensation of a lid being blown off.

He turned.

Agony became ecstasy. Thirst became pleasure.

“Lead me!”

Along with those whispered words, the world changed along with him.

Throwing six knives into the air, they sank into the stone floor as if it was made of no more than butter, forming a magic circle.

But, three of those that had cut into the stone were still trembling.

They were being resisted. When two supernatural phenomena came into contact like this, the result was decided entirely by the skill of the individuals involved. That's why, as far as Flue was concerned, backing down was beyond unthinkable. Setting

the Od within his body aflame once more, he transformed it into magical energy and slammed it into the knives again.

Then, after striking the stone floor,

“Lead me, now!”

In response to Flue’s shout and the flood of magical energy, the knives were sent flying.

Removing themselves from the floor, they energetically embedded themselves in a nearby wall.

-Or so it seemed. As the knives stuck into it however, what was supposed to be a wall started to fade. As the knives slipped out of it and fell to the ground, it disappeared without a trace.

In other words, the wall they had perceived there was not real.

The rigorously established bounded field had, before the “guidance” of Flue’s astrology, been completely swept away.

“Well done.”

An elegant voice called out from beside him. Shortly afterwards, a pale hand reached out towards the darkness in front of them.

Awaken
“Call.”

In Luviaigelita Edelfelt’s hand, a purple flame ignited. Though it seemed like it would burn her pale white hand, it seemed it held no heat as it coloured her skin and flooded the darkness with light.

Flue dropped to the floor and sat down with a tired sigh.

“That was exhausting.”

As he spoke, he wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand.

In reality, what he had done had taken the utmost concentration, which was reflected in Flue’s complexion looking like he had just aged ten years. Naturally, this didn’t happen every time he used magecraft. It was just that the barrier in the Castle of Separation was that powerful.

After leaving the company of Lord El-Melloi II and his friends, the two of them began searching every corner of the Castle. Dragging him along in her rage, Luvia’s

pace was such that they didn't miss even the smallest amount of dust in their inspection. Their inspection was honestly so thorough that Flue felt like what they were doing wasn't all that different from Lord El-Melloi II's own inspection.

“—ow...”

Flue began to massage the area around his throat.

It must have been a reaction to his use of magecraft. On top of the fact that using magecraft at all in the Castle was incredibly difficult, the excessive use of it was causing him pain not from his body, but from his magic circuits directly. The agonizing sensation of bone scraping against bone was all the harder to bear knowing the pain itself wasn't real, but just an illusion created by his magic circuits.

“If you're a magus, that pain should be pleasure itself.”

Luvia spoke as if it went without saying. Then, while giving a small nod,

“Indeed, for one who has the qualifications, the door will be opened. Obviously the case for a magus.”

She spoke as if trying to insinuate something.

(Well, I guess she's not wrong...)

As far as magecraft was concerned, secrets themselves were life. Just as mysteries had meaning because they were mysteries, if they were understood, they lost that force. Of course, simply showing one's magecraft to another magus a single time wasn't enough to have an impact on it, but Lord El-Melloi II's discerning eye brought him frighteningly close.

If he was just interested in the history or origin of magecraft, that would be fine. But if he also delved into the thoughts and theories of those magi who regulated that magecraft...

Flue felt a shiver run up his spine.

(... I wonder if he realizes that?)

‘But if you really knew magecraft, you would understand that all you are doing is destroying it.’

Lord El-Melloi II had clearly understood the meaning behind Luvia's words.

Whether it was consciously or not, the fact that he understood that made Luvia all the more angry.

Compared to the Edelfelts, called the world's most elegant hyenas, Lord El-Melloi II was even more of a thief. If he could see through to the nature of future magi just by looking at the properties of their magecraft, in a way, it was like he was stealing the mysteries from their future.

(... and he's a Lord, huh?)

The highest position in the Clock Tower, held by only twelve individuals.

Or maybe they were those heretics that refused to stay within the frame of the Association: Destroyers.

With the violet flame in her hand lighting the way, Luvia carefully descended the steps that had been revealed in the darkness. Even this simple act was carried out with the elegance of a dance. In short order, they came up to a wooden door, and without hesitation, she opened it.

“... the hell?”

Flue hurriedly covered his mouth and nose. Built up within the room was a horrid stench. If he had to put words to it, he would say it smelled like someone had torn the guts out of some livestock, mashed the mess of organs and parts all together, and left it to rot for a few years. Even with his nose covered, it seeped into his throat and lungs, and Flue had to desperately resist the urge to vomit.

“Well, it certainly seems like we've found what we were looking for.”

Luvia, also with a hand in front of her nose, spoke with a frown.

Compared to the other rooms in the Castle, this one was much more cramped. The windowless room contained a bed, a desk, a silver pentagram and copper goblet. A variety of other small tools no doubt intended for use with magecraft lined the shelves. Aside from that, there were a number of bladed and spiked tools lying around the room that were covered in dark stains and rust.

(... torture devices?)

Flue was reminded of the various implements of torture he had seen in the past, like the Iron Maiden and the Brazen Bull. The most disturbing thing was that even the torture devices were engraved with and modelled after angels. The visage of the normally lovable Cupid, stained dark with dried blood, was unexpectedly repulsive.

It seemed this was Geryon Ashbourne's private room.

Whether it was the furniture or the tools or the torture devices, everything was awash in images of angels. Thanks to the small size of the room, it gave off the impression

of being trapped at the bottom of a deep bog.

“Is this where Geryon Ashbourne restored the Magic Crests?”

“Or maybe it’s where he tore them from their hosts,” Luvia replied.

Suddenly the image of torture devices being used to tear the skin off of victims of the witch hunts forced its way into Flue’s mind. Even the seasoned mercenary felt a chill from those words.

“... a picture?”

Flue’s eyes stopped over the out-of-place looking picture sitting on one of the shelves. It was a small painting, done in such fine detail that he had initially mistaken it for a photograph.

However, paying no mind to Flue, Luvia made her way straight to the desk placed in the room. On the dust-covered desk, numerous magic circles were drawn.

“... so, this is Ashbourne’s foundational formula, is it?”

“—wait a second!”

Even ignoring the location itself, the chance that these magic circles were dangerous was high. However, seemingly without a care in the world, Luvia slid a finger across one of the circles.

With a snap, the circle reacted with a bolt of lightning. As if being drawn in, the lightning arced upwards and struck a ring on Luvia’s finger before being swallowed by the jewel set there. As if nothing had happened at all, Luvia continued her inspection of the magic circles.

Seeing words written around them, Luvia read them aloud.

“Asmodeus, Belphegor, Baal, Adramelech, Lilith...”

Upon hearing the ominous names she read, Flue raised an eyebrow.

“Demons, or rather... fallen angels? Or maybe, members of the Qlippoth?”

“You catch on quick, don’t you? The dark side of the Sephirot that symbolized Kabbalah—instead of describing the virtues and angels sought after by people who desired heaven, it’s an arrangement of the vices and fallen angels that descended into Hell. It seems like this is the true nature of the foundation underlying the Castle of Separation.”

After a short pause, Luvia smiled like she had come across a beautiful flower.

“Yes... with this, we have all the information we need. Shall we show them the way the Edelfelts do things?”

* * *

Rosalind Istari had stayed in her room the entire time.

As her brother had instructed, she ate breakfast and lunch in their room, and hadn't so much as stepped beyond the door. Normally her young heart would be restless from being trapped in a single room for so long, but after the case with Hishiri Adashino, she was more than content where she was. Thanks to her brother's intervention, Rosalind had been spared having to see the scene itself, but the loss of the beautiful woman who had inspired admiration in her weighed heavily in Rosalind's chest.

(Who...?)

The question of who would do such a thing circled endlessly inside her head.

She didn't have to even think to realize that for magi, anyone could realistically be the culprit. Having grown up in a place where magecraft was weighted more heavily than human life, it wasn't even a question. On top of that, she couldn't even put her own brother outside the list of suspects. She knew full well that he would become any kind of monster or demon if it was for the sake of protecting her—a fact she admitted rather sorrowfully.

Even so, she did nothing other than wait quietly in her room.

She did nothing other than sit, eyes downcast at the frustration of how powerless she was.

“Something wrong? If you aren't feeling good, I can grab you some tea. Though the stuff I brought is all Green Tea.”

Her acting bodyguard in place of her brother spoke up with a friendly voice.

“I'm sorry... Mister Seigen.”

“Haha, don't mention it. Getting to spend time with a lovely lady such as yourself is about as happy as it gets!” Lightly striking his own chest, Seigen closed his eye.

As far as winks went, she couldn't really call it that... skilful. It was no wonder he added the gesture of beating his chest. Though it was the first time she had spent this much time in a room with a member of the opposite sex that wasn't related to her, for some reason the Yamabushi's presence put her at ease.

“Did your brother say something to you?”

“No. Just that I’d be safe as long as I was with you.”

“... I see.”

Seigen’s mouth twisted into a somewhat ironic smile.

Rosalind trusted her brother’s words with a simple-minded innocence.

After discovering the murder of Hishiri Adashino, the first one Heine had contacted had been Seigen. Even though Heine was out investigating the incident further, as long as this funny Yamabushi was with her, the world seemed a bit softer to Rosalind.

“Did something happen between you two?”

“... nope. Nothing. Not a thing.”

After a short pause, “... well, I guess being seen through by someone like Heine is fine.”

Shrugging, Seigen confessed.

“A while ago, I had given up on being a magus.”

“You... gave up?”

“Yep.” Seigen gently stroked the sleeve of his bizarre clothes.

“Magecraft is normally only taught to a single child in the family, right? Well, it turns out my father was pretty successful when it came to the art of love.” Seigen spoke with a frivolous laugh.

While it was pretty uncommon in the common era, if you look back far enough there are plenty of examples of kings or other powerful families to have children numbering in the hundreds.

“So he thought. Why not have them compete with each other?”

“Compete?” Rosalind’s expression moved.

“Right. Of course he was a Yamabushi, so it’s not like there was a shortage of places to put us while we trained to be ascetics. Though magecraft in general gets weaker as it’s spread between more people, Shugendou is a bit different. Since half of it is religion in the first place, having a lot of people learn the basics won’t really make all that much of a difference.”

Though he had many disciples, the real secret arts that made of his magecraft were taught only to a tiny portion of them.

Of course, that was the correct procedure, as far as magi were concerned. The most common pattern was families selecting one child, and then not teaching the other children even about the existence of magecraft. That being said, different regions and styles of magecraft had given birth to a variety of deviations from that pattern. It seemed Seigen's family was one of those deviations.

“Well, from the start, the systems of magecraft in the East are pretty different from those in the West. Our sect had taken to adopting more Western patterns in its practices, so there were even things like Magic Crests to pass down. And guess who that Magic Crest was passed on to? I failed early, so I didn’t care either way. While I liked magecraft in general, I wasn’t a big fan of the wide-eyed obsession everyone had over the Origin. Though I suppose more importantly than not having the interest, I didn’t have the talent for it. Of course my teacher, or father I guess, was heartbroken, but he understood the situation and knew he could do nothing about it. And that’s precisely why I had a brother.”

“You have a brother?” Rosalind’s voice became faintly excited. No wonder, since the situation Seigen was describing was starting to sound like her own.

“Yep. Couldn’t tell you whether he was on the same level as Heine. Those are awfully big shoes to fill, you know? At the very least, there was no question he was the most skilled out of all of my siblings. As frustrating as it was for some of them, it was a lot better than the alternative of a magus Poisoning.”

Poisoning.

In this case, it was a technical term related to magecraft. A magus would gather a number of creatures, typically poisonous snakes and spiders, and sometimes even things like giant centipedes and scorpions. They would put them all in a small pot and force them to kill and cannibalize each other. Whichever particular one managed to survive until the end would be used as a catalyst for Curse Magecraft. It was a pretty widespread practice in continental Asia, and it wasn’t limited to poisonous or venomous creatures either. There were even examples of people doing the same with cats, dogs, and even wolves.

In this case, Seigen was referring to having all the students of a particular teacher fight each other to the death, and then having the survivor become the successor. Among families that taught magecraft to more than one of their children, it was a relatively common practice. One could say that the fact their father hadn’t chosen to pursue that method was the one stroke of good luck Seigen and his siblings had had.

“But in this case, that ended up being a disaster.” Seigen laughed weakly. “Because he left the useless ones like me alive. Among those who were rejected, a number of

my siblings held a grudge. While none of them could measure up to my brother alone, when they worked together—stupid, isn't it? If they were planning on working together, they already had lost the requirements to be the successor in the first place—anyway, after the ritual for transferring the Magic Crest to my brother was complete, they launched a surprise attack."

Rosalind held her breath.

"The result was as tragic as you would expect. My brother was tenacious enough on his own, but when my master also got involved, the attackers were slaughtered to the man. Idiots. The only one who made it out alive was me, since I hadn't cared enough about the ceremony to go and had been playing hooky in town. In the end, the main temple went up in flames, and my brother and master were both burnt to a crisp along with it."

"..."

"Even through all that though, my brother managed to survive thanks to the Magic Crest he had received. Do you get it? It was fire made from Shugendou. It was normal for monks to perform various acts like firewalking, so we have a natural resistance to fire, but this was Tengu fire. He was honestly charred down to the bone. The Crest, though...it kept him alive. He was still moving when I found him. After hearing that much, you can probably guess what he asked me to do."

Seigen's voice had an uncharacteristic heat to it. It was as if he didn't want to talk about any of this at all, yet he couldn't stop himself from talking either.

"He asked me to... take the Magic Crest from him. Of course, my brother was virtually dead already, so you can probably guess what kind of condition the Crest was in. It's not like we were that much of a magus lineage anyway. Sure, we were more than ten generations old, but we were a branch family to begin with. So why not just leave everything to the head family and make our own lives? Apparently no one ever considered that. Preserve the magecraft, preserve the mystery, preserve the Crest, our goal is the Origin...like seriously, who cares?"

Seigen spoke as if spitting out his words.

"Bunch of morons. Every single one of them."

Once again massaging his sleeve, his face contorted. However, that twisted expression soon vanished, melting away into a gentle sigh.

"But even so, it was my brother who asked, so I couldn't just ignore it, right? I thought maybe there was something here that could help."

"You... wanted to do something?"

“Not really. But there was no other choice. Even after I had denied it so much, there was nothing else left for me. Even though I had given up, I had no talent and I had no guts to continue, with my brother and my father dead, there was nothing I could do except continue what they started. Funny, right?”

Seigen’s face turned to a grimace. Even if he hadn’t come to like the path of magecraft, the ascetic life wasn’t exactly hard on him. No matter how difficult life got, living in nature with the beasts of the wild, it filled his heart with a sense of fullness, a sense of enrichment. Originally Shugendou was a practice that was born from the merging of a peculiar religion and a bizarre magecraft, so it made sense that its practitioners wouldn’t be as obsessed with Mystery as the magi of the West.

Deep in the forest, the smell of earth. Or, watching the snow pile up while huddling with the wild animals for warmth.

The sky was always broad and open, and the stars were always shining. Even on the night where sickness took him to the brink of death, costing him one of his eyes, he had the natural medicine given to him by his brother. It was bitter enough to make his tongue go numb, but to Seigen it was the most delicious thing he had ever tasted.

“My brother really did like magecraft,” he said with a calm seriousness, stroking his eyepatch. “‘It’s fun to feel your awareness expand,’ or ‘I feel like I could even grab those clouds.’ Those were the kinds of things he was always saying. I didn’t really get it, but I figured if I took the Magic Crest, maybe someday my kids would feel the same way. And I thought, maybe if that happens...then maybe my brother’s death wouldn’t go to waste.”

Seigen’s actions all stemmed from that one motivation.

Knowing he himself wasn’t suitable, he was just waiting for...wishing for a true successor for the Crest.

Compared to Heine, who had once rejected the Crest and then been forced give up everything and take it thanks to Rosalind’s condition, the situation seemed very similar. At its core, however, they were more like polar opposites.

Maybe that was why he had been able to connect so deeply with Heine.

He was filling the gap in his heart from what he had lost long ago.

“... so it was something like that...” Rosalind dropped her gaze as she spoke.

“Hahaha. Heine really saw right through me, there. He was pretty convincing after that,” he said, scratching his nose.

—I know who you really are.

Heine suddenly had approached Seigen after the incident with Hishiri Adashino.

To the Yamabushi who had stood petrified, he continued.

—You really do hate that Magic Crest, don't you?

—Then, it looks like we're the same.

Those words had cut straight through to his heart.

To Seigen, whose heart had always felt empty and wounded, those words certainly awoke a dull ache in him. But in return, they also healed something much more painful. For that reason alone, for Tokitou Jiroubou Seigen, he felt there was meaning enough in him coming to this Castle.

“I'm sorry for asking about something so unpleasant.”

“Nah, not at all,” Seigen said with a wave of his hand.

After scrunching his face in a way that made Rosalind think of some kind of small animal, Seigen rubbed his palm on his robes before lightly bopping her on the head.

“Don't worry about it. It's all old news anyway. It's just a convenient dream for me now.”

A dream.

Because he decided entirely by himself to rely on others. For Seigen, the most selfish thing he could do was to pretend like he was a magus just like all the others.

That's why it was just a ‘convenient dream’ for him.

“Anyway, all we can do now is wait for Heine to come back, right?”

“... okay,” Rosalind replied, unable to keep herself from letting a little yawn slip.

As if she was embarrassed, she immediately brought her hands up to her mouth.

“... Seigen, who do you think killed Hishiri? Do you think it was Ashbourne's curse after all?”

“Hm, I wonder. A magus leaving a curse like that behind is pretty normal, after all. But if it's just something like that, there's no way Heine will lose, right?”

“... yes. Because Heine... is my...”

At that, her words stopped. Leaning sideways on the couch, her breathing settled into the steady pattern of sleep.

After putting a blanket over her, Seigen softly stroked the sleeping girl's head.

* * *

Heine Istari was once again wandering the front gardens of the Castle of Separation.

It was a forest.

The sound of the leaves rustling overhead gave the impression of a witch's laugh.

"... it seems I'm going the right way," he muttered, continuing through the path of fallen leaves.

Luvia had joined forces with the Astrologer Flue, and was looking for clues within the Castle itself. Heine had decided on a different approach.

'An angel becomes a beast. Gazing at the western sky, it swallows the sun.'

Heine was in a very different place than the one he had reached the night before, where this message had appeared on his invitation.

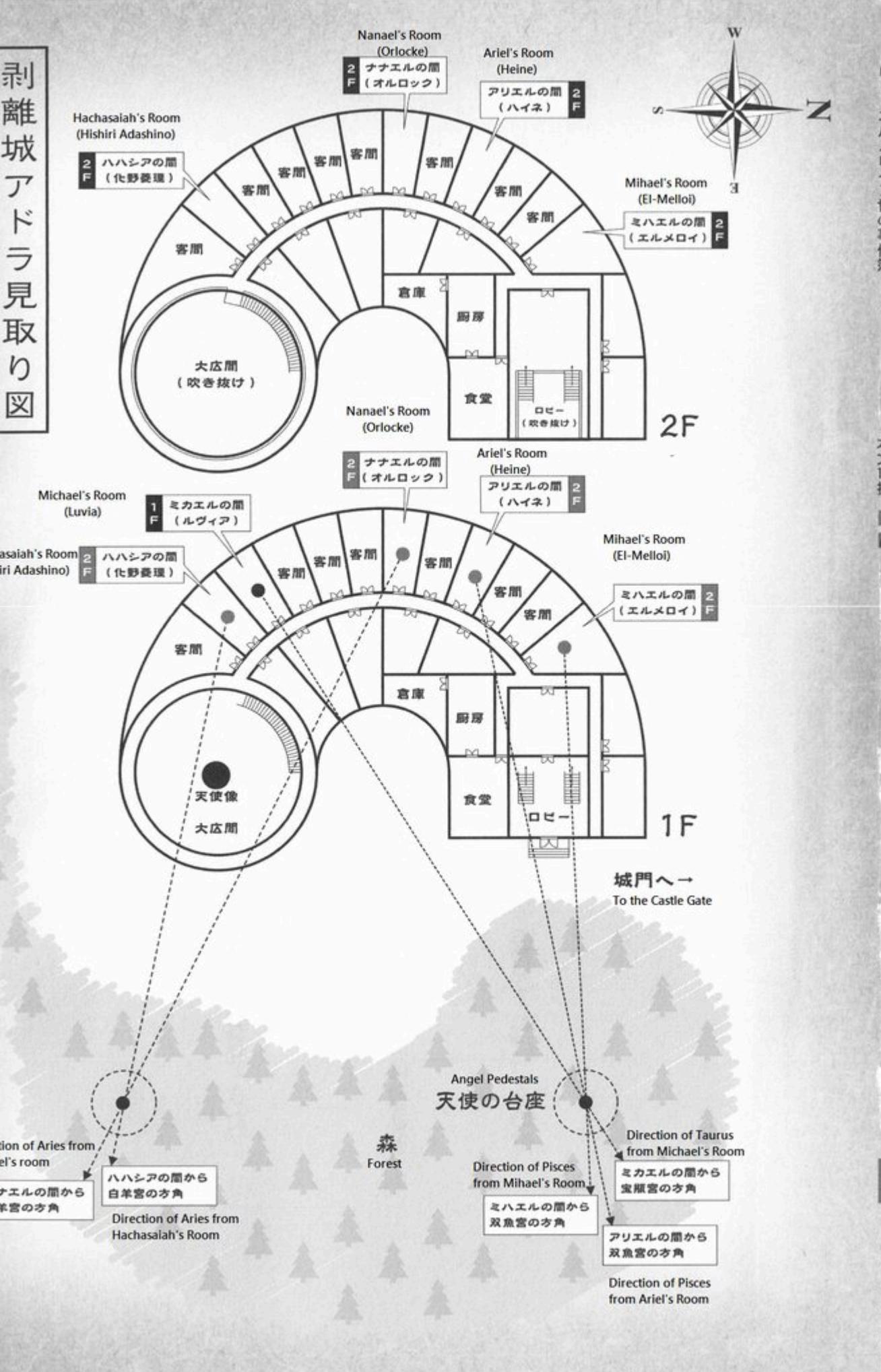
It seemed that Hishiri Adashino's Angelic Name pointed to a different place than the others.

Heine, Lord El-Melloi II, and Luvia's Angelic Names had all indicated zodiac signs from Aquarius to Pisces. From a simple astrological perspective, that indicated a position of 300 to 360 degrees. In short, if one were to divide the sky into the four seasons, they would point towards the end of winter. Knowing this, Heine was able to calculate a position based on drawing a line from each of their own rooms.

However, Hishiri's Hachasaiah and Orlocke's Nanael, which Heine had secretly investigated earlier, were attributed to the sign of Aries. That pointed them in the direction of 0 to 30 degrees, leading to a very different location.

After investigating where that direction lead, Heine found the same pedestals he had seen at the other location. As expected, the statues of angels that belonged there were nowhere to be found, but the same message appeared on his invitation.

剥離城アドラ見取り図



‘An angel becomes a beast. Gazing at the western sky, it swallows the sun.’

The message was exactly the same.

However, investigating the surroundings, there were traces on the ground as if something had been dragged across it.

After thinking for a while, Heine placed his hands on one of the nearby stone monuments, and pushed with all his might.

After a long effort, the pedestal finally moved, revealing a gap in the earth. From that gap blew a soft wind, travelling up a staircase that disappeared into the darkness below.

It wasn’t all that unusual for old castles in Europe to have secret underground passages, but what set this one apart was the extreme depth.

“... is this where that beast is hiding itself?”

After considering his options for a few seconds, Heine steeled himself. If it learned that its hiding place had been discovered, it might move somewhere else. It was now or never.

Slowly, Heine descended the staircase.

His footsteps echoed incredibly loudly.

(—Had Hishiri discovered this place as well?)

That possibility was highly likely.

That would mean she had got much closer to figuring out the secret of the Castle of Separation. As a result—or maybe, as punishment for that—had she been made an example of like that?

(Also, had Ashbourne intentionally given Mr Orlocke and Miss Hishiri different information...?)

If that was the case, what meaning was there in that?

Was she killed somewhere else, and then skewered on the sword afterwards?

Had she really been brought down by some sort of curse?

At long last, as he continued down the underground passageway, Heine felt a magical energy that was not his own.

(It seems this is the heart of his Workshop.)

He didn't exactly doubt that the entire Castle was an enormous Workshop set up by the magus, but the idea that it was the place where he created new magecraft was impossible. No, that place must have been hidden carefully away, and still working away even with its master's death. Or maybe it was part of the secret he left in his will.

“Convert.”

Heine whispered, and the Living Stone hidden throughout his body responded.

In an instant, his body was encased in a knight's armour, and a spear was in his hands. Despite how anachronistic the armour was, no other look suited him better. Heine thought that it was probably because he was the product a family trapped in the past. Magi were, more than anyone, a group that buried themselves in the darkness of history.

In that way, Seigen was much stronger than he was.

Not in his magecraft, but the opposite.

Because magecraft was, in its essence, pleasure.

The euphoria of wielding a power that transcended the common world. Even if it was a discipline trapped in the past, giving up that joy that was greater than anything else life had to offer was difficult. Before the pleasure magecraft brought, even the pain and suffering brought on by the learning process was as nothing.

Seigen, who had thrown that all away by his own volition, was strong. Or maybe it was better to say he had a purity that was normally only found in animals. Even Lord El-Melloi II couldn't escape his thirst for knowledge.

In a way, that was a strength Heine himself had never managed to obtain.

“...”

Footsteps echoed.

The steady echo was so much that it made him somewhat doubt whether the footsteps were his own. Crossed fates. Inverted phenomena. Reality deceived by magecraft.

As magi, they were born from the shadows.

In that case, it was inevitable that they would return to them.

After all, the desire of magi to reach the Root seemed to have stemmed from a similar thought, didn't it?

“Ahh.”

At last, his footsteps came to a stop.

To Heine's eyes, strengthened by magical energy, an even deeper shadow lurking within the darkness of the passage became visible.

That beast made of shadows, lurking almost invisibly in the passageway, gave no hints about its true form. As Heine recognized it, he gave a faint smile.

“We meet again.”

Dropping his hips, Heine lowered his spear at the beast.

Even if it was a beast, Heine had no idea what level of intelligence it possessed. It might have been no smarter than a wild animal, but if it was being controlled by a magus, the possibility they had taken precautions for fighting against Heine himself was real.

So Heine couldn't let down his guard for a moment.

Without putting any confidence in the strength of his armour, he carefully held his spear to create a wide gap between them. If the beast was faster than it had been before, as long as their weapons were only that spear and those claws, Heine could leverage his superior reach and win. If the beast had another trick up its sleeve...

... well, he could deal with that when it happened.

—The darkness ran.

As Heine struck with his spear, a sharp noise resounded.

There was no blood, nor was there even so much as a scratch on Heine's armour. He had certainly felt his spear strike something solid.

But.

“... looks like you got me.”

Heine clicked his tongue as he inspected the end of his spear.

It was gone. The beast's claws hadn't been aiming for Heine, they had struck out against the spear. The hardness of the spear was far beyond that of his armour. There

was no doubt that the abilities of the beast were far above what they were at their last meeting.

The shadow backed away, as if laughing.

How's that? That's how easily I can tear apart your armour.

“...”

Without a word, Heine waved his spear. The pure metal shaft became slightly shorter as a blade reformed on the tip.

But what was the point in doing that? The spear made by your alchemy already lost to my claws. Do you think it will end differently if you try again? The beast seemed to be positively trembling with excitement.

It jumped.

Zigzagging across the narrow corridor, it seemed like a human-sized billiard ball. It jumped five times, eight times, far beyond twenty times. No matter how much Heine had strengthened his eyes, there was no way a human could physically keep up with that kind of movement. The movements at more than 300 kilometres per hour were far beyond the physical limits of the human eye.

Lunging at Heine from his blind spot, the beast's claws shredded through Heine's armour as if it was nothing.

Really, like it was nothing—in the middle of its attack, the armour had suddenly reached out and grabbed the beast.

“I thought of that, too,” Heine spoke softly.

His armour could do a lot more than just ‘be hard.’

In this case, he had done just the opposite—softening it so that it could ensnare his opponent. When the beast had sliced through the spear, Heine had changed the quality of his armour. As wary as ever, he reshaped it into chains, and used them to further bind the beast.

“Now, shall we take a look at what you really are?”

Turning around slowly, Heine raised his spear once more.

Though there was no sound, the beast still howled.

4.2

It was the dawn of the fourth day.

We were just in the middle of our morning preparations. We had spent a great deal of time speaking with Orlocke the night before, so as usual my master was somewhat half asleep as I helped him get dressed properly. Just as we made to leave the room and go get some breakfast, one of Ashbourne's servants came to our room.

Once again, they brought news of tragedy.

It was that room again.

The sunlight streaming down through the skylight above seemed almost like a stairway for angels, an irony we didn't miss.

In that same place where we found Hishiri skewered on an angel's sword, at that same angel's feet, there was someone else.

It was a scene that really made one think of those old stories of knights from the Middle Ages. Lying at the angel's feet, clad in full armour, was Heine. His arms hung loosely, and his eyes were closed.

Even in death, his face looked exactly like one would expect from the tale of a knight. Maybe we should have been thankful, because unlike with Hishiri, his face hadn't been mutilated.

Thankful?

To whom?

With a click of his tongue, just by looking at the body, my master made his confirmation.

"... so Heine was Ariel," he said under his breath, looking at the body's missing left foot. There was no need for anyone here to specify that the left foot corresponded to the Angelic Name Ariel. Even though my master had been the one to mention that the Angelic Names were a method of predicting our deaths, seeing it come true in front of him felt like swallowing a stone. It was a helpless, hollow feeling.

On Heine's chest was a bloodstain of considerable size. With that much blood, it was more than likely that that wound was the cause of death. In contrast, even his missing left foot didn't show many signs of bleeding, meaning it had probably been removed after his death. With my emotions paralysed by the scene before me, I could only coldly list these kinds of facts one after another.

But...

“... why?!”

A scream laden with misery filled the room.

“Why, why him?!”

I couldn’t do anything but watch as the small girl broke down crying.

Standing beside her, Seigen stood with a downcast gaze, grinding his teeth.

“Heine...”

Both of them looked as if someone had stolen a piece of their hearts.

... no, it wasn’t just them. Even my master looked on the scene with a hardened expression. As one might expect, the scene didn’t seem to be as much of a shock as discovering Hishiri’s body had been, but even so his pale expression gave the impression that he just wanted to hurry up and get his own death over with.

From behind us, a voice called out.

“If Hishiri Adashino had represented the safety valve of authority, then Heine Istari would represent the safety valve of emotions, no? Hahaha, it almost seems like a game of Jenga, the pieces being pulled out one at a time.”

“—Orlocke.”

Turning around, my master spoke the name of the new arrival.

“But I already agreed to work together with you, no? In that respect, you’re even safer now than before, aren’t you?”

The old man smiled dangerously, showing briefly the demon that lurked underneath.

My master made no response. Instead, with a word of apology, he turned and made his way to the centre of the room.

Standing before the huddled Rosalind, his face had a bitter twist to it. His expression held a pain that was greater than any I had ever seen in him, no matter what terrible magi he had faced down before. But even so, will unwavering, he spoke.

“Miss Rosalind. May I take a look at your brother?”

“You!” Wracked by sobs, the girl turned to face him. Her defiant eyes showed clearly that she wouldn’t let anyone near her brother.

“You! You! Are you the one who killed him?! Or are you just happy that another rival is dead?! Are you just going to keep killing people until you’re the only one left?!!”

Rosalind’s accusation hung in the air between them. The same resolve that pushed my master to approach her in the first place was echoed in her eyes and voice. Her expression said clearly that if anyone laid a finger on her brother, she would tear that finger right off. Before her fierce defiance, it seemed even the angels that filled the Castle were hesitating to approach.

“... no, that’s not...” My master hesitated, clenching his fists at his side.

No matter what words they spun for her, to Rosalind they would surely be meaningless. Her truth had been stolen from her. The joints that kept her world together had been torn apart. The happiness that she deserved was gone, and in its place was a tragedy.

“It looks like he died some time after midnight,” Orlocke spoke. “Shall we take another stab at gathering alibis?”

“No, thank you,” Luvia replied sharply, turning to leave the room. “I more or less have a handle on what is going on in this farce. I’ve got my own preparations to make.” With a small curtsy out of formality, she left the room.

Without sparing Luvia so much as a look, my master once again gathered his resolve and spoke to Rosalind.

“Miss Rosalind...”

“No one can touch him!” The eight-year-old girl declared defiantly.

Not even an army of ten thousand men could overcome this one small girl’s feelings. That was the kind of impression she gave.

Seeing her resolute face, I stepped forward in the silence that followed her declaration.

“... Rosalind. Seigen.” As if it was only natural, I spoke. Standing beside my master, who was now watching me with a frown, I addressed the two of them.

“... would you let me hold a small memorial service for Heine?”

“... a memorial?”

Rosalind’s eyes wavered, for the first time showing something other than hostility. That wavering showed me that, even if it was as fragile as glass, that armour she had wrapped herself in was the last thing protecting the small girl’s heart.

“... I...”

I hadn't planned on doing so.

I had no right to do so.

So why did I end up saying that to her?

“I... I have a prayer, I'd like to say for him.”

* * *

There were only three attendees.

Leaving me aside, Rosalind, Seigen, and my master were the only ones who came.

In a clearing in the forest, far away from the gardens of the Castle, we buried the two of them. Without the slightest sense of unease, the Ashbourne family servants created the graves for them and placed them inside, as if they were handling no more than pieces of broken furniture.

“We really should have done something like this for Miss Adashino earlier, shouldn't we?” my master said, eyeing the mound of earth before him.

For now, Heine was buried immediately beside Hishiri. Considering the compatibility of the two, it wouldn't be strange if either of them complained at the way things turned out, but in this case we didn't really have the luxury of another choice.

By the time the preparations were complete, it was already early afternoon. The autumn sun seemed to shine down on us with a sense of loneliness.

Had it not been for the Castle of Separation being so close by, the dry scent of earth and fallen leaves would have created an almost poetic atmosphere.

“Gray.”

“... okay.”

In response to my master's voice, I nodded slightly.

First, I took a small censer and placed it forward, setting some incense burning. Luckily, the Castle was not lacking when it came to incense. In truth, I was also supposed to sprinkle some holy water as well, but on top of the fact we didn't really

have any, it didn't seem appropriate for a magus regardless of if he had once been aligned with the Church.

For that reason, we didn't bother with a fancy interment, or with the supplications of those left behind. So the only thing left was to offer a blessing for the departed.

I took a deep breath.

“Lord God, in whom all find refuge,”

The words came out smoothly. I thought idly as I spoke that this must be what it's like for your body to remember something. No matter how I thought and thought, I couldn't remember the words properly myself, but when I opened my mouth to speak, they glided out as if it was nothing.

“We appeal to your boundless mercy. Grant to the soul of your servant, Heine Istari, a kindly welcome...”

Words I had forgotten long ago poured out without ceasing.

But it really felt like a lie. I wasn't a priest, nor did I believe in God or in religion. Among all of us, the one who believed in God the most must have been Heine himself, and he had turned his back on the Church. He may have even objected to a prayer like this.

But.

Who was it that said, prayers for the deceased are for the sake of the living?

Who was it that said, if you can provide even a small consolation to a person driven mad by loss, then you can wait to question their faith until later?

“... cleansing of sin, release from the chains of death...”

Suddenly, my words stopped.

As my body stiffened, I turned to face the three attendees behind me.

“Gray?” Rosalind called out.

But I couldn't continue.

What came next? The first part had come so smoothly, so naturally, but now it was like it had disappeared completely from within me. As if it was no more than an illusion to start with, no matter how hard I tried to remember, not a single word came to me. I had heard the prayer countless times when I was younger, but it seemed like someone like me who didn't believe in God couldn't truly know it.

“Is everything okay?” Rosalind asked once again.

“... um, I...”

I needed to apologize.

I had disgraced her beloved brother’s final moments. I knew it was something that couldn’t be forgiven. But what could I do to even begin to apologize? What could I offer her that wouldn’t just further disgrace him?

I felt a hand land on my shoulder. Turning around, a low voice, carried on breath smelling like cigars, reached my ears.

“... and entry into everlasting life.”

Hearing the next words of the prayer, I gulped. After a short delay, I continued, speaking after my master.

“... and entry into everlasting life. We ask this through our Lord.”

Finishing the prayer, I made the symbol of the cross.

Amen.

Let it be so.

Blessings for the departed. Even if we don’t believe in eternal life after death, please be with us and our perishable souls.

For a while, no one said anything, and a quiet stillness settled over the area. In that silence, I replaced the lid on the censer, and fought the urge to sit down from the onset of fatigue. Just as I made to once again put the lid on my feelings as well,

“... thank you.”

Rosalind bowed her head towards me. It was as if she had been released from an evil spirit possessing her. She still looked as if she had lost a part of herself, but her heart no longer seemed chained to that loss.

“And... I’m sorry. I said some awful things earlier.”

“... umm, that’s...”

As I struggled to come up with something to say, I found myself speechless. Luckily, paying no mind to me, she continued.

“Why is it that you know that prayer, even though you’re a magus?”

“... because I’m not, really a magus...”

“She grew up in a cemetery, you know.” As if he couldn’t hold himself back any longer, my master spoke up.

Even he seemed to be exhausted. A series of murders. The constant glares of the other magi. It was enough stress to hurt your stomach even if you weren’t as prone to a sore stomach as my master was.

“A cemetery?”

“... it’s complicated,” I said, retreating further into my hood.

I hadn’t really come to terms with my old home yet. Even if I was asked to explain it to someone else, it wasn’t really something I had understood or accepted yet for myself. Well, whether it was something I’d ever be able to accept was questionable. After all, the idea of eternal life after death was for those who couldn’t accept their life as it was, wasn’t it?

Throwing me another look, my master spoke again.

“Seigen, would you mind taking Miss Rosalind back to her room?”

“Hm? Oh, uh. Yeah, sure.”

Taking my master’s request, Seigen urged Rosalind back to the castle. After watching them go, my master spoke again.

“With a ceremony like that, I’m sure he’ll make it to heaven no problem.”

“... um, thank you.”

Hearing my words of thanks, my master snorted lightly.

“So it seems like there are people out there who think magi shouldn’t have anything to do with prayers. Even that ‘amen’ is directly related to Kabbalah, you know.”

My eyes went wide with surprise.

“... really?”

“It’s a technique called Notarikon. The original phrase would be Adonai Melef Neman. It means something like ‘Our Lord, oh faithful King.’ Taking the initials of this phrase, they ended up with the word ‘amen.’ Well, today it’s more often translated as ‘so be it.’”

Maybe that was something that was common knowledge for magi, but for me it was surprising.

“Though it seems like little Rosalind hasn’t learned that much herself yet. When we get back to London, I’ll be sure to add a text on the subject to your homework.”

I let out a soft whimper as I hung my head, waiting for the lecture to be over.

But the fact that we were able to have an exchange like this at all made me a little happy. It reminded me of the time we spent in London before coming to the Castle of Separation.

My master shifted his gaze, looking in the direction opposite of where Rosalind and Seigen had disappeared.

“Do you have some business with me?”

“Oh, looks like they’re on to me!” With a joking air, Flue came out from his hiding place behind the castle wall.

After seeing the astrologer for no more than an instant, my master immediately adopted an exasperated look.

“Are you here to pray as well?”

“Ha, hardly. I was just wondering what kind of amusing prayer a magus would choose to offer. I came to watch around the time you started with the incense.”

Without pointing out that this simply meant he had been here the entire time, my master pulled his cigar case from his jacket. Clipping the end of a new cigar off with a knife, he spoke to Flue as if starting a new conversation.

“You have a light?”

“Sure.” Flue raised his hand, and I heard the sharp sound of a metal lid being opened.

My master made a faint scowl.

“Don’t you catch any flak for carrying a Zippo around as a magus?”

“In this situation? What do you want me to do, use alchemy to create fire from my own piss?”

“Hah.”

My master’s lips turned at the vulgar joke. From what I learned later, the phosphorus that was used to make old matches was discovered from an old alchemical

experiment involving evaporating urine. In any case, it was a joke that went well over my head.

After taking a long puff from his cigar, my master spoke again.

“Has Luviagelita Edelfelt not asked you to do me in?”

“Oh yeah, she did, didn’t she? Though her style is a bit funny.” Flue seemed to be enjoying himself, shrugging playfully.

Hearing this, I unconsciously began to hold my breath, but the two of them continued their conversation as if it was nothing at all.

“Her style?”

“Yeah. That little princess said she wants to bury you in a ‘business perspective.’ She wants to show the world how powerless and worthless you are. Rather amusingly straightforward, don’t you think?”

At that, my master’s eyes went wide. After blinking a few times,

“Well that’s certainly... original,” he said with a groan.

“Show her that face and she’d be ecstatic, I bet. I think she just hates the way you criticize and judge others from your high horse, that’s all.”

“I don’t particularly remember ever doing that,” my master replied dryly.

“Doesn’t matter if you remember, ’cause everyone else does. You should probably try to, though.”

In response to Flue’s words, my master wore a pained expression.

“Feels like it’s the other way around to me.”

“What is?”

“... Never mind.” Shaking his head, my master looked back at the mound where Heine and Hishiri were buried.

“Heine’s armour was smashed to pieces,” my master muttered as if he had just remembered. He had managed to sneak a look at the body before the burial.

Hearing that information, Flue stroked his unshaven face.

“Sounds like the famous Istari family’s Living Stone isn’t such a big deal after all.”

“It was my first time seeing the real thing, but if it was that solid after the user had died, then I imagine there would be very few magics that would be able to penetrate it while the user was alive. It seemed like there was some instability in the construction formula for the spell. At that weak point, there were signs something like claws had struck through and stabbed him in the chest. It looked very similar to the wounds Miss Adashino suffered. Also similar, there were signs his Magic Crest had been forcibly removed.”

“Is that right?” Flue leaned his head forward, as if showing deep interest.

“Once again similar to Miss Adashino’s case, it seemed like Heine’s body had been moved from the scene of the actual murder.”

“Right. There weren’t really any signs of struggle in that big room, were there?”

“In that case, whether we’re talking about Heine or Miss Adashino, we still don’t know where they were actually killed. Which means...the possibility the actual scene is related to Ashbourne’s secret is fairly high.”

“Oh?” Flue nodded ambiguously, making it hard to tell whether he actually agreed or not. “But in that case, why go through all the trouble of moving the bodies there? If you’re right, wouldn’t it be fine if they just ‘disappeared’?”

“... well...”

Before he continued, my master turned around.

Beside the mounds of earth where we had offered our prayers earlier, Orlocke now sat comfortably in his wheelchair.

“Well well, the old man enters the scene. You here to play bodyguard?”

“No, not at all. It seems that girl is planning on starting something. I thought I’d invite you to come watch with me.”

Hearing that, my master shot Flue a suspicious glare.

“You were just here to keep an eye on us, weren’t you?”

“Oh, was I?” Flue replied with an innocent whistle.

Ignoring Flue, my master gave me a quick nod before turning to Orlocke.

“Let’s go.”

4.3

My master and I immediately hurried to Luvia's room. At first glance, her room seemed to have been scrubbed clean of the presence of angels. It had been so well done that it felt like we had actually left the Castle of Separation.

Immediately upon entering, I blinked in surprise.

“Rosalind, Seigen.”

Because the two who had just barely left our company were already here.

“Ah, one of the butlers called us,” Rosalind spoke, glancing towards Luvia standing in the centre of the room.

Luvia's hair in ringlets looked as if it was spun gold. The deepness of her jewel-like eyes watching us reinforced the mystique of her character. Standing beside her was her Mohican butler, Clown.

“Lord El-Melloi II. I thought you would show up sooner or later.”

“And what exactly are you planning here?”

“I have decided to put an end to this farce. I've also called Mr. Orlocke here. Do you mind if I close the door on this incident now?” Her smile was backed by a peerless self-confidence.

According to my master, the Edelfelts didn't gain the title of Hyenas just for collecting dead bodies. They also tended to hover around conflicts to which they had no claim, swooping in and taking the choice bits for themselves when the opportunity arose.

In short, they were naturally adept at sniffing down the best fruit. Not through logic, but through some deeper sense.

“Put an end to it? There's no way you can-”

“Oh, but I can!” Luvia interrupted, cleanly denying my master's words. “I decided to sit back and just watch before, but that has ended in nothing but useless death.”

My master stiffened at the thinly veiled jab. Both he and I were painfully aware that those most hurt and angered by Hishiri and Heine's deaths were in the room with us right now.

“Both of them were people our world could not afford to do without. The path of magecraft they pursued may have differed from ours, but a single drop of a magi’s blood is as a single tiny jewel. On top of that, a magus of their level is a treasure that cannot be equalled by any earthly hoard. Even if stagnation and stability are the karmic destinies of our world, they were those who would have served as the foundation for overcoming that destiny and reaching beyond it. Am I mistaken?”

Her harsh words and tone coming from such a delicate-seeming body hit us like a slap in the face.

This girl was, beyond a doubt, nobility. Even while solemnly watching the countless occurring comedies and tragedies that filled the world, she was never satisfied, still rebelling like a warrior valiantly waving the flag of resistance.

I had heard from my master that, in the past, magi had been kings.

The land itself was important for magecraft, so it was common sense for magi, kings, and other kinds of nobility to attempt to acquire land for themselves. Now, with those sacred grounds held in the iron grip of the Magic Association and other similar organizations, nobility among magi had declined to simply old names carrying on old traditions. Even so, this girl alone demonstrated those virtues of old.

It was faint, but seeing it caused a small pain to well up in my chest.

She was completely ensnared by the past too, so why was she able to march forward so boldly?

Dry laughter rang out from the back of the room. It seemed like Orlocke had finally arrived.

It looked like her anger, and indeed the ritual she had prepared, were both endlessly interesting for him.

“Why don’t we let her give it a shot? Whether she succeeds or fails, it will still end up as a clue for us, no?”

My master’s silence was short. Adjusting his cigar with a finger, he raised his head and spoke.

“And how are you going to do it?”

“Flue and I found a hidden room.”

“A hidden room?” My master’s brow furrowed at the claim.

“Yes. Thanks to that, we were able to find the foundational formula the entire Castle of Separation was built on. Though confirming the contents and building our own answer to it took a considerable amount of time.”

“‘Build’ an answer?”

With a gentle smile, she opened her hand, revealing a single jewel.

“All the rooms, all the hallways...all the Magic Circuits running through the Castle are now buried in this jewel. It took me almost half a day to finish.”

My master’s eyes went wide at the realization of what that meant.

“Wait, you don’t mean...”

“Precisely.” Luvia’s face bloomed into a sweet smile. “I’ve decided to take the Workshop that is the Castle of Separation for myself.”

Just hearing her say it aloud left me speechless.

She was like a parasite.

Or maybe closer to the computer viruses I had heard about since coming to London.

Even I, who knew next to nothing about magecraft, could instinctively feel the dreadfulness of those words. A Workshop was something a magus created after years, decades, generations of labour. If a Magic Crest was an artificial organ, then a Workshop was like an artificial world.

It was a method of pure brute force. While my master attempted to break everything down and solve every mystery of the Castle, even if it was as a magus, Luvia had taken on the entire Castle at once in half a day.

It was like Don Quixote, taking up arms against a windmill.

No, in this case the old knight’s delusion would have been real. He would be fighting a giant with naught but a sword.

“Once I do this, revealing the culprit, or the curse, or whatever, will be as nothing with my jewels. Is there any simpler method than this?”

“You should know how high of a level this Workshop is. Even if you are an Edelfelt,”

“No.”

For the briefest instant, a look of faint fear passed over her features. The instant passed, and all that was left was the burning gaze of a challenger facing down her

greatest opponent.

“Behold the skill of the Edelfelt family.”

“Luvia gelita—”

Before he could stop her, she raised her right hand to her side.

^{Awaken}
“Call.”

Her beautiful lips whispered.

The sapphire at the tips of her fingers, held like a knight’s salute, began to glow, causing the other jewels to glow along with it. While it gave the impression of lighting the fuse of a bomb, it reminded me of the inside of one of the Royal British Museum’s Cabinets of Curiosity as the brilliant, multi-coloured light filled the surrounding space.

It was a magic circle made of jewels.

As if the activated spell was serving double duty as a barrier of some sort, my master’s extended hand was blown back with a noise like a thunderclap.

Smiling in satisfaction, Luvia whispered again.

^{Awaken}
“Call.”

The first step was the area around Luvia herself.

The magic circle slowly began to rotate.

As it span, the magical energy took the form of a spiral.

From a combination of my master’s explanation after the fact and my own intuitions, it seemed like what Luvia was trying to do was like a puzzle. For example, when given the equation ‘ $3+4=5$ ’ laid out in matches, and you have to make the equation correct by moving only a single match.

It was taking the original foundational formula underlying the Castle of Separation and, using jewels and her own magical energy, making the smallest possible change that would change the entire formula.

Of course, the scope and complexity of the task weren’t even comparable to that of the match puzzle.

The scope was the entire Castle of Separation, and the magic circles had to be precise enough that not even an ant could slip through unnoticed.

No matter how many jewels she used as boosters, it was like trying to use a fire hose to make a sculpture a few dozen feet in front of you.

But,

“Call. Connect Green 7 to Red 8. Excite Red 10, and circulate to Blue 4. Blue 6, connect with Blue 7, 9, 11, and Red 5, 6, 25 connect with Green and Red 11. Thou shalt be my guide.”

The incantation continued.

The second step was the entire room.

The spiralling magical energy raised its head as if it were a snake.

The jewels already embedded throughout the castle began to respond, and the magical energy suffusing the area began to whirl as if in a dance. Following the movements of the magical energy in the air, the entire Castle began to vibrate, growing to an easily recognizable trembling.

My master looked up at the ceiling.

“... the whole Castle?”

“Whoa whoa, don’t tell me you’re actually going to pull it off?” Even Flue, who had supposedly helped her, gave a whistle in disbelief.

Even to these men, who had already seen countless Mysteries, this was a scene that was hard to accept. Luviagelita Edelfelt’s magecraft was reaching for that impossible place that could only be described in the terms of ‘genius.’

Would she make it?

Orlocke, meanwhile, narrowed his eyes without a word.

Awaken, grace!
“Call grace!”

The third step immediately expanded to cover the entire castle.

Each glowing light expanded to connect to another, and the lights formed themselves into magic circles. Each of these circles continued to expand further, connecting with other circles, growing into ever larger, more complex forms. Without damaging the

magic circles that were already present, she was trying to rewrite them with new meanings.

Every time one was completed, the jewels around Luvia gained a rainbow-coloured light. Already, over eighty percent of them had changed colour, and when they had all finished changing, it would likely signify complete control of the Castle falling into Luvia's hands.

As if the Castle of Separation was accepting its new master, an enormous magic circle span down into the room, approaching Luvia. Even I, who wasn't a magus, could feel the flood of magical energy inundate the room on my skin.

“It is done!” Luvia’s eyes sparkled with the thrill of victory.

My master, however, groaned with a very different emotion.

“No... this isn’t the kind of reaction you should be getting...”

A single large tremor shook the castle.

At the same time, Luvia’s body began to sway and collapse. It wasn’t just her, either. Flue, Clown, and even Seigen crouched to the floor, as if trying to restrain their own bodies.

“Orlocke!”

Even the old magus was no exception. With a grunt of surprise, he was torn from his wheelchair and thrown to the ground.

No...

... even I was the same.

Overcome by an illusionary pain in my right hand as if it had been set on fire, it was like every nerve in my body had turned against me. Those nerves which had kept me alive my whole live were cut off from my body, and before I could even think of resisting, my vision rapidly began to dim.

“Gray!”

Even those words seemed to be coming from painfully far away.

Immediately to Luvia’s side, a deep darkness welled up in the air. As if to devour the girl who had fainted, the darkness opened its jaws.

“Dammit...!”

The last thing I saw was my master's hand reaching for the breast pocket in his jacket.

And after that, my consciousness snapped off, as my master, Luvia, and I were all pulled in to that darkness.

4.4

—Of course, it was in the Castle of Separation.

The scenery before my eyes was that familiar dining table, where all the magi invited to the castle shared breakfast that first morning. A number of figures were sitting at that table now, knives and forks in hand, laughing happily like they were a part of a shadow-puppet show.

“Ha. If you try and connect the magic circle like this, it won’t even last a year before it falls apart. You’re magecraft is as sloppy as ever, isn’t it?”

The one who spoke, shrugging his shoulders, was Orlocke Caesarmund. He wasn’t in a wheelchair. Despite the fact he was clearly an elderly man, there was no doubting that it was a younger Orlocke than the one I knew. Looks aside, his manner of speaking was certainly much more playful than what I was used to. Looking at him now, one wouldn’t be able to believe the profound wickedness I was used to seeing wrapped around him.

“Is that a problem?”

“Yes, it is. Just like your face.”

“Shut up, you deathless old bag.”

“—Is that really any way to talk to Mr. Orlocke, dear? He did come all the way out here just to help you.” A woman sitting with them spoke.

She was a beautiful woman with curly hair. The simple linen dress she wore suited her perfectly.

“Why thank you, miss.”

“Thank you for your help, Mr. Orlocke.”

—Something was wrong. —This wasn’t my memory at all. —The thing eating away at me was from someone else.

“Ah, so you finally figured it out.”

A voice called out. A voice mixed with white noise, enough to hurt the ears.

“That’s right. This is the only way. You knew that from the beginning. Why didn’t you realize?”

Who is this?

Who is this?

Who is this person?

“Your Magic Crest is now...”

A hand reached out.

And then, with a snap as if a reel of film had been cut, my memory shut off once more.

* * *

There was a warm sensation on my face.

Thinking about it, it felt like that warmth was the last thing keeping me secure. Returning the gaze from the dull, weary eyes that were watching me, I replied in a vacant whisper.

“... master?”

“Finally, you’re awake,” he replied with sigh, pulling back his hand. Fixing my hood back into place, he then smacked me on the forehead.

“Ow—!”

“Keep your hood up. I already told you I don’t want to see that face.”

“... o-okay.” With an apology, I held my hood tightly in place as I sat up.

“I feel like I saw... a dream. A dream about the Castle of Separation.”

“Oh? If you of all people saw it, then by all means I’d love to hear about it later. Unfortunately, we’re not quite in a position where we can relax like that,” he said, taking a look around us. “It seems we’re trapped. Probably thanks to some sort of defence mechanism of the Castle.”

Finally, I realized.

Everything within my field of vision was stained a thick black. The few meters around us retained the stone floor I was familiar with, but even that was slowly vanishing into the encroaching darkness.

“I created a boundary field at the last second, but in the end we were sucked in by an even bigger one.” My master sighed. “It’s not quite Spatial Partitioning, but the effect is similar I suppose. The area we were in was shifted ever so slightly towards the Astral Plane. If we had been completely taken in, we probably would have had a difficult time surviving, what with physical bodies and all. It would be similar to trying to survive after being dumped in the ocean.”

“Then, we...”

“Since it’s not a Spatial Partition, it should be fairly simple to shift us back into the correct plane. All it would take is to punch through with a large amount of magical energy. However...”

“That’s unfortunate, isn’t it?” A third voice called out.

It was Luvia.

“Is it? As a second-rate magus myself, I was hoping to put my hopes on the Edelfelt Magecraft.”

“See for yourself.” Luvia raised her right hand.

On her outstretched palm were arrayed a number of jewels. Each of them held a sombre darkness that even I could tell with a single glance meant they were completely empty of magical energy. As if frustrated, Luvia tossed the darkened gems to the floor.

“The result of that impact from before. My Magic Crest isn’t functioning yet.”

“Your Magic Crest?” As my master repeated back her words, Luvia averted her eyes as if embarrassed.

“I tried to fight back with my jewels and magecraft, but not even my Gandr had any effect on that darkness. I lost a number of jewels trying, too.” Her face twisted in frustration.

She wasn’t shaking because she was afraid for her life. It was simply her soul itself rejecting the shame she had earned from her failure. It seemed this girl was nobility right down to the bone.

“... why did you save me?” she muttered, lips quivering at the humiliation she couldn’t bear.

“Who knows?”

“The one who failed was me and me alone. How far must you insult me...”

Watching Luvia get worked up with rage, my master sighed and raised his index finger.

Then,

“I feel the same way you do,” my master spoke sullenly. “You lamented Heine Istari’s death earlier, didn’t you? I felt the same way. The loss... the waste of a talent like his is too much. Do you have any complaints about an answer like that?”

“You think that kind of excuse will pass?”

“If we’re talking about pure talent, then I could count on one hand the number of magi I’ve met who might be able to surpass you. If you believe there are people whose talent this world cannot do without, then surely you belong on that list yourself?”

Luvia’s mouth opened as if she wanted to say something, but in the end she just dropped her shoulders. “... I guess I can’t argue with that.”

Her face was like one who had finally been released from some sort of ghostly possession. Taking out a new jewel, she scrutinized it carefully on her palm.

“With the jewels I have left, I shall create a simple magic circle. We should be able to escape using that.”

“I guess that will take a little time, won’t it? In that case, I’ll take a short nap. Not like I can do anything to help anyway.”

“... excuse me?”

“I’ll leave the rest to you, then.”

With that, my master dropped down to sit cross-legged and closed his eyes. In a matter of seconds, his breathing fell into the steady rhythm of sleep.

Sure, meditation and sleep management were fundamental skills for magi, but why did he have to be so good at only these incredibly basic abilities? Now alone with a girl who seemed likely to explode at any instant, I could do nothing more than tremble in fear.

* * *

Meanwhile, in the guest room, another incident was occurring.

“... Lady Luvia...”

Luvia's faithful servant Clown lay on the carpet, gripping it tightly in an attempt to prevent his consciousness from slipping away.

He also had noticed that his Magic Crest had ceased to function. Clown himself was from a family that had supported the Edelfelts for generations, and as such had succeeded the family's Magic Crest as normal. However, with the loss of function in his Magic Crest, the nerves that served it were also shutting down, and threatened to take his consciousness with them.

Though his appearance of having fainted was somewhat of an act, he still couldn't move his body. Despite the current crisis, the stopped nerves in his body refused to carry any signals from his brain. His expertly tempered body and magecraft were of no use to him in this situation where his body refused to move. Even as his heart shivered with chagrin, his faintly remaining consciousness continued to struggle to mobilize his body, even if only one finger at a time.

In the midst of the lingering effects of the previous shockwave, a single shadow moved.

“What... was...”

Rosalind Istari hesitantly turned, looking around the room. If that was the case, then the reason they couldn't move...

(... the Magic Crests?)

If that impact had been targeting those with Magic Crests, then it was no wonder that Rosalind hadn't been affected, seeing as she didn't possess one.

But that didn't mean she was safe.

The glass window of the guest room shattered. From his position on the floor, Clown could see the shadow that entered into the room.

As if cloaked in some sort of magecraft, even in broad daylight its form was hidden in darkness. With frightening speed, the beast approached on all fours.

“... Ashbourne's... beast...!”

Paralysed as he was, Clown wasn't able to say anything further.

4.5

With a conspicuous sound, blood dripped to the floor.

Having cut her own finger, Luvia was rubbing jewels across the stone beneath her.

Even though it was only improvised, the magic circle she was drawing held a considerable amount of magical energy. According to a lecture my master had given earlier, a large portion of magecraft was divided into three categories. At the simpler end, simply passing magic energy through the magic circuits and releasing it, were Single Action spells. Above that, consisting of a simple incantation and realizing a single mystery was a One Count. The final designation, once the spell contained more than ten lines and functioned as a sort of pseudo-ritual, were Momentary Contracts Ten Counts.

So in short, since a Single Action spell had proved insufficient to break through the boundary field, she was making preparations for something bigger.

“...”

“...”

The strained atmosphere between us was almost painful.

The majority of the hostility was directed from Luvia towards my still-sleeping master, but with me sitting between them, I felt like I was resting on a bed of nails myself. While it was true that I was basically a professional shut-in, and I had given up trying to understand others a long time ago, even I was willing to completely sell out of that lifestyle if it meant relief from Luvia’s mounting fury.

Thinking there must be something that we could talk about, I decided to try my luck.

“... thinking about it now, what you were doing earlier was kind of like hacking, wasn’t it?”

“... hacking?”

Having the question turned back on me, I hurriedly replied.

“Uhh, it was something I only heard about from movies I saw after coming to London, but it was like...using tools with a computer...and there was a name that sounded like it came out of Greek Mythology?”

“... the Trojan Horse.” Eyes open slightly, my master woke up to throw me a lifeboat. “It’s a program used to infiltrate another person’s computer, and then as necessary steal control of the system.”

“Ah, I see. And it’s named after the Trojan Horse. The one used during the Battle for Troy to sneak soldiers into the enemy kingdom. Inside were Odysseus, Ajax the Lesser, Menelaus, Diomedes, all heroes of considerable renown. Thinking of Troy being destroyed from within like that, it makes one shudder.”

It seemed Luvia was more interested in the original myth.

The Trojan War.

Among all the Greek myths, it was the most often spoken of in literature.

In the past, the priest in my home village told me the story—that the deciding factor in the war had been the Trojan Horse. Hidden inside the enormous wooden horse were a number of veteran soldiers, and after it was carried into the kingdom, only the obvious could have happened.

“Well, speaking from that basic concept, the analogy is pretty accurate whether it’s talking about computers or magecraft. Past or present, in the end they’re just tools used by humans.”

“Don’t you think the reason no one respects you as a Lord is because you keep saying things like that?”

“... w-well...” In response to Luvia’s jab, my master fell silent.

That silence persisted for an unexpectedly long period of time. It was so oppressive it gave the feeling that maybe he had suddenly choked on something. Even I, who was normally rather bitter with my master, felt a little bad for him.

“Um, master? I don’t think you need to take it so personally...”

“... I see. That’s it. That was the piece that was missing!”

“... huh?”

Ignoring me, my master turned to Luvia.

“Luviaigelita Edelfelt. Is the magic circle ready yet?”

“W-what? I suppose the preparations are mostly complete, though there hasn’t been time to acclimatize yet.” Luvia looked up at my master’s sudden outburst, apparently taken completely off guard.

“We need to get out of here as soon as possible, by any means necessary.”

“What? What are you talking-” As Luvia gave my master a look like he had just gone mad, he continued to press her ruthlessly.

“If we don’t get out of here immediately, not only all of us, but everyone that was left behind in the castle will be killed.”

Just as he finished speaking, an uneasy noise arose from the surrounding darkness. As if the air itself was hardening, a repulsive pressure began to press in on our lungs.

“... this is...” Luvia spoke, looking around.

The boundary field deployed around us was beginning to lose to the pressure. Of course, the boundary field had been an improvised construction by my master, so it wasn’t that surprising that it only took a little effort to break through it.

“It seems to be responding to our actions,” my master gave his analysis. “Apparently it’s not interested in just leaving us here to do as we wish. And with a boundary like this, even physical force would likely have no difficulty pushing through.”

“This isn’t a joke!” Luvia shouted fiercely as she stood, raising a finger towards the darkness.

“Call blue, red, green for your queen!”

A One Count.

Like the wind of a raging storm, Luvia’s remaining jewels unleashed a Gatling torrent of Gandr. The rainbow-coloured light washed over the ground with a terrible beauty, driving out the darkness with pure force. As the light was briefly swallowed in darkness, it made me think of the first words left behind by God.

Let there be light.

... however, the blackness did not relent.

As if it was eagerly devouring the barrage of magical bullets Luvia was unleashing, the encroaching darkness began to accelerate towards us.

“Don’t mess with me!” Luvia screamed. Without pause, she tapped into her Od, and the magical bullets were fired once again. The multi-coloured display was breathtaking in its beauty, but it was clear to see that the resolve that backed it was more tragic than anything. Never mind ordinary magecraft, the level of output she was producing must have been like a blasting furnace in her nerves. As her magic circuits continued to burn, they screamed for rest. Normally, the magic crest would assist with magecraft like this, but Luvia hadn’t mentioned whether the crest had returned to working order yet.

Seeing her struggle on, my master spoke again.

“Luvia.”

“What? Do you plan on telling me you’d rather just die now?”

Even having reached this point, there wasn’t a speck of despair in her eyes. There was nothing there but a blazing fervour, like a scarlet jewel.

To this girl, facing down utter despair, my master spoke.

“Don’t think of them as stones, but as mud.”

“What?”

Luvia’s brow twisted with rage. Had he waited for another second, she likely would have turned her attack on him.

But he didn’t wait another second.

Instead, he reached out and grabbed her wrist.

“What do you think you’re-”

“I’m talking about the jewels.” Watching her out of the corner of his eye, he spoke softly. “I presume you can feel the pulse from within the ruby. But that’s only half of the power you should be using.”

“... what?”

Normally, those were the kind of words she would brush off with a laugh. Even if my master was a Lord, Luvia still bore the pride of generations of the Edelfelt family. The fact she was willing to lay that pride aside for even a moment signified a major change within her.

“We were talking about it before. The true nature of the Edelfelt magecraft is not in taking pride in value. It’s the circulation of that value. Wind already blows. Water already flows. While the jewel symbolizes your heart, it also symbolizes everything in the outside world. Even that darkness is just a part of that ‘everything.’ Water flows from high to low, electricity moves from high to low, that flow of power is the essence of your magecraft. Just as you draw out the power of the jewel with each beat of your heart, feel also the power of the depths within that darkness.”

It was like listening to a Sports Doctor give advice to a professional athlete. However, he didn’t stop at just giving her academic advice.

As Luvia realized what he had done after grabbing her wrist, her eyebrows shot upwards.

“Are you connecting to my magic circuits?!”

Even just hearing those words made me shudder. Meanwhile, my master's response was to shout.

"If you're going to reject it then reject it!"

The words my master was speaking showed a demonstrable lack of sanity.

Because when connecting to someone's magic circuits, the receiver of the connection had absolute control. For a magus of even middling ability, they would easily be able to manipulate, or even burn out, the connected magus' circuits. If the whim struck her, Luvia could destroy his magic circuits from the inside out with barely a thought. Considering how magic circuits connected to the nerves of the body, it was similar to putting his live heart in her hands.

But she didn't.

As magical energy flowed through my master's circuits into Luvia, even I could tell that her internal image had changed. Completely different from the Luvia that had been standing there just a moment before, this Luvia controlled the flow of magic with a natural gentleness.

Flow.

That was the true essence of her magecraft, my master had said.

"Do you understand? Your attempt to take control of the Castle of Separation didn't fail. Rather, because you succeeded, the security system was triggered. That being the case, there are magic circles you've created even outside this darkness. Be conscious of your self that is both within the barrier here and outside of it. And the you that is the barrier."

How much did Luvia hear his words? Maybe, with their circuits connected as they were, words were unnecessary between them from the start.

"Your affinity is Earth. From the four classifications in Physics, your starting point is cold and dry. From that point, flow to warm and dry fire, warm and wet wind, cold and wet water. Gather them together and take control. Taking that power in hand, through the lens of Modern Magecraft, call for the angel. The angels you should gather are already there."

Suddenly, the magic energy spinning around Luvia seemed to jump to another level.

Guided by my master's magic energy, a new spiral of magic energy began to wind around Luvia's body, and everything began to speed up.

At the end of the two's connected magic circuits, the jewel in Luvia's hand began to glow even brighter. Even the surrounding darkness began to glow from within, as if it

was yet another of her jewels. Just as lightning needed to break through the insulation in the air and create a path for itself before striking, the magic energy Luvia was controlling was attempting to break through the darkness and create a path before Luvia released her spell.

But, an instant before... I heard the unpleasant sound of liquid splattering on the floor.

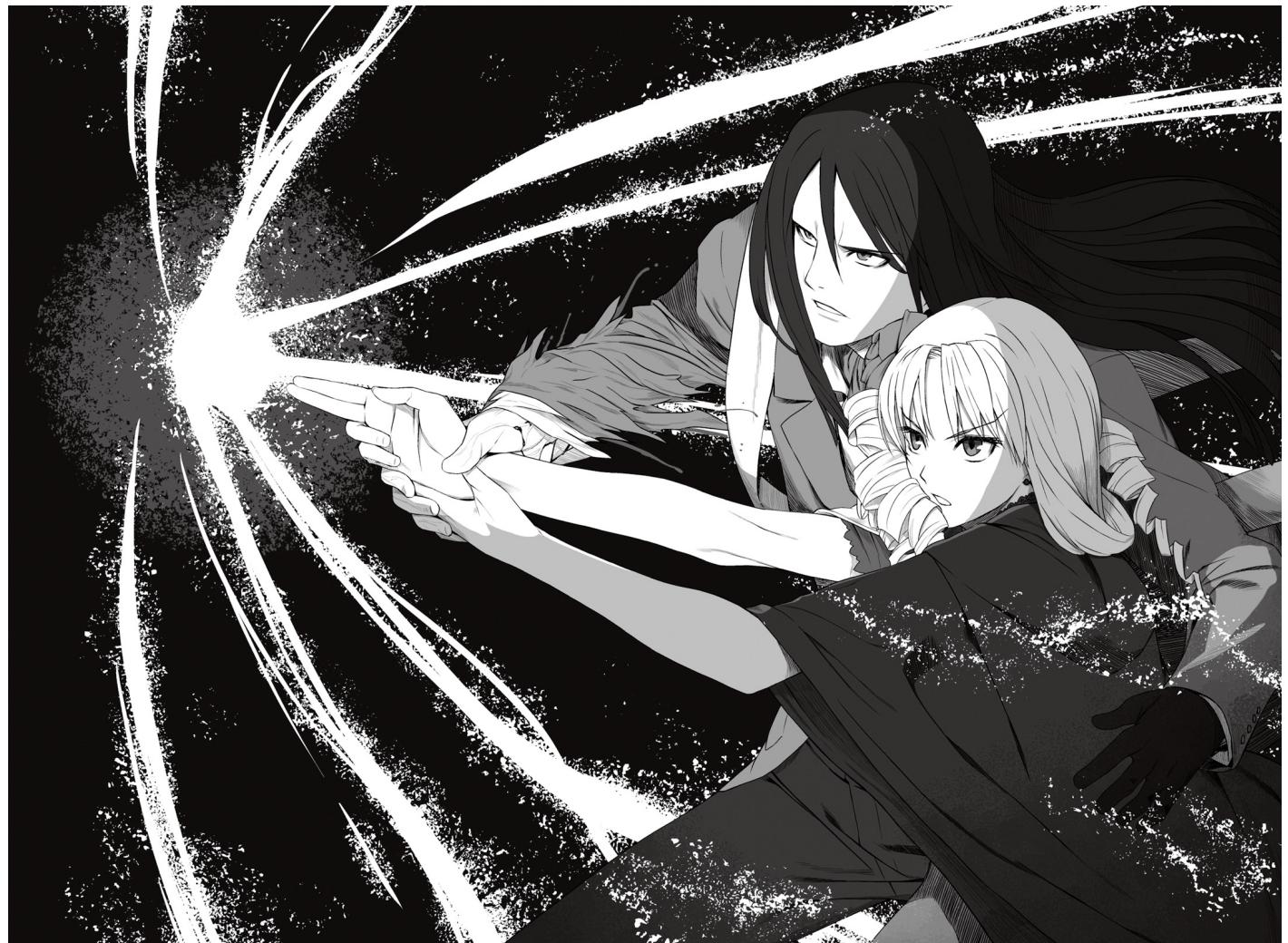
Matching with the glowing ruby, the back of my master's hand was died a deep red.

“Master—!”

“Are you—”

As Luvia and I called out,

“Don't worry about it. It's just some nerves and blood vessels failing from my circuits using magecraft I'm not accustomed to.” My master cut us off, his face expressionless.



Even as the unfamiliar magecraft tore apart his nerves and blood vessels, my master didn't so much as tremble. As his control of Luvia's magical energy became more

and more precise, he just continued to watch the encroaching darkness. To me, it felt like those eyes gave the impression of a smouldering ember.

“Fire!”

In response to his shout, Luvia responded with a spell.

^{Awaken}
“Call!”

With those words, the bullet was released. In an instant, the accumulated light surged forward, scouring away the darkness—it was like watching glass smash.

Suddenly, our vision was overwhelmed with colour.

“... did we make it?”

With a stagger, I stood up.

It seemed like we were in a hallway a little removed from the guest room. Streaming through a nearby window was the light of the early afternoon sun, filtered through the peaks of distant mountains.

“It seems like the attack which destroyed the boundary field also threw our coordinates off a little.” Luvia patted down her dress as she awkwardly rose from the floor. Even after using magecraft of that calibre, she didn’t seem even the slightest bit tired. She was clearly well beyond the level of even a first class magus when it came to the strength of her magic circuits.

Suddenly, my hair began to stand on end.

Nearby I could see my master standing up, but with the way he looked I had doubted for a moment that it was even him. Wiping the blood from his hand with a handkerchief, his figure seemed unusually full of emotion.

“... master?”

Ever since we had arrived at the Castle of Separation, Luvia had shown us at least some degree of animosity. But my master had never returned that hate—no, my master had never shown this level of murderous intent towards anyone before.

“You’re all cowards, you know that?” It was like those words had oozed up from the bottom of his stomach.

“It is the nature of a prodigy to soar above the heads of others. I am simply flying freely through the sky I imagined for myself.” She replied with heavy, painful words.

When it came to my master, magecraft was simply that important to him. Even if it was a secret he hid in his usual behaviour, how much must it have hurt to be shown such a level that he wouldn't be able to reach, even if he struggled to the end of time?

For a while, Luvia was silent.

“I have no intention of forgiving you either. Not even if the sky were to fall.”

An old European expression. Often used in Celtic or other northern European cultures when giving an oath, it was an expression I was already familiar with. However, coming from Luvia, it carried the weight of an act of mythic proportions.

Taking a small breath, Luvia looked at my master once again.

“That being said...may I ask you a question?”

“Do as you like,” my master replied listlessly.

“Ten years ago...when your teacher, Kayneth El-Melloi Archibald died, how did you feel?”

Hearing that question, I felt my heart jump.

She was asking about the Fourth Holy Grail War, when my master killed his own teacher. A time even I knew nothing about.

“You probably won't believe me anyway,” he said, “but the one who killed Kayneth wasn't me. His killers were a heroic spirit of the sword, and her master. I didn't even see how he died. But after I learned that he had died...well, I guess in the end I felt sad.”

“Sad?”

“Having lost someone of that incredible talent for no reason, never being able to see things from his perspective even once...I was sad. That's all there is to it. Sorry I don't have a more elegant way of putting it.”

“... I see.”

Beneath the sunlight, Luvia closed her eyes. After a few seconds, she opened her eyes again, and in a dignified voice made this proclamation.

“In that case, I shall have you become my tutor.”

“... what?” My master could do nothing but blink at the completely unexpected words. “Wait, hold on a second. You're the one who called me a destroyer of magecraft.”

“I did. And that thought hasn’t changed. However, I am willing to concede that there is more to you than just that.” With the utmost courtesy, Luvia explained herself. “Besides, you have become too familiar with the Edelfelt family’s magecraft. Having connected directly to my magic circuits is no different from having laid your hands on our family’s deepest secrets. Knowing this much about us, there is no way I can just leave you be. Of course, were you willing to become my tutor, I might just forget it ever happened. Yes, especially since I will be attending the Clock Tower from next year.”

“..... what?” Once again, my master was struck dumbfounded.

Luvia’s thinking was perfect for a magus. However, it was so correct, it served more to set her apart from other magi. In a world of magi who clung to the darkness and the night, a girl like her who relied on a full-frontal assault anyone in the world could understand was more like defective merchandise.

As I stood to the side, unable to do anything but dart my eyes back and forth in confusion, an unexpectedly pleasant sound split the air.

My master laughed. Even in this situation, he laughed like he had forgotten everything.

“You’re pretty honest, aren’t you?” my master said, rubbing his eyes.

“W-what?”

“The way you do things, you’re so straightforward.” My master’s words left Luvia speechless. It seemed to me like her ears were starting to turn red, but I wasn’t sure. Averting her gaze, she finally asked again.

“A-anyway, what is your response?”

“I’ll think about it. Regardless, if you were to just simply apply to the Faculty of Modern Magecraft, there wouldn’t be anything I could do to stop you. Though I can’t guarantee you’d get in.”

“Oh? You think there’s a possibility I might not?” Luvia spoke, the challenge evident in her voice.

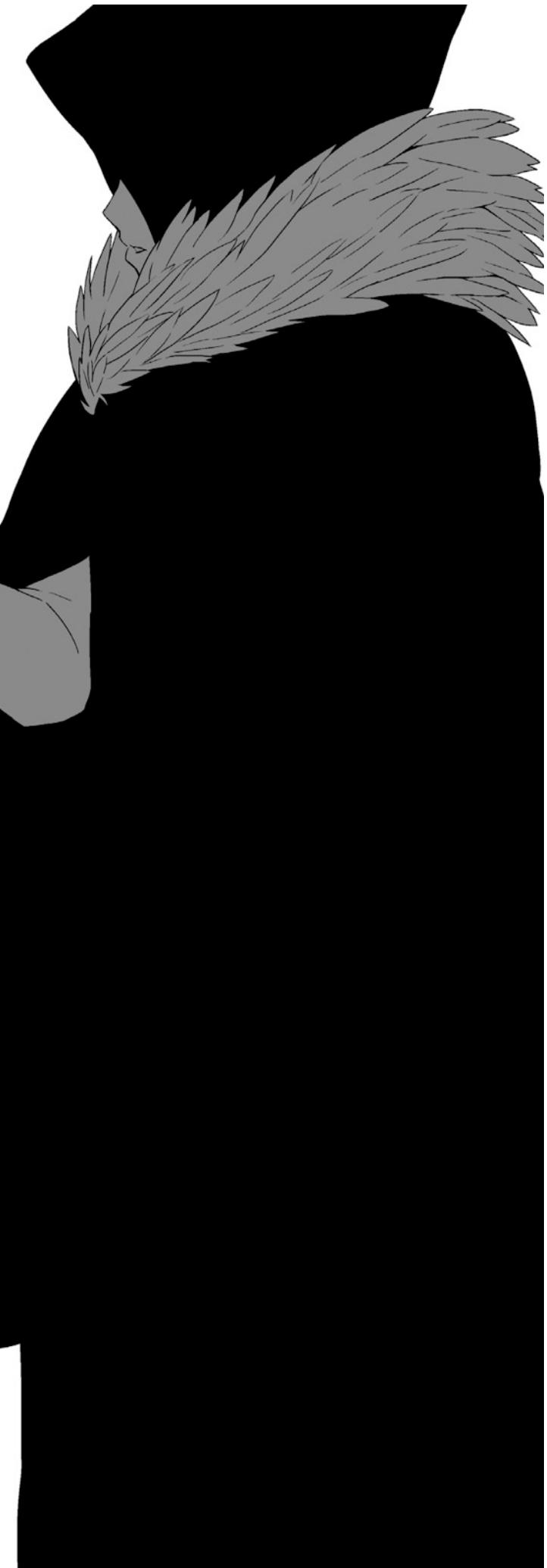
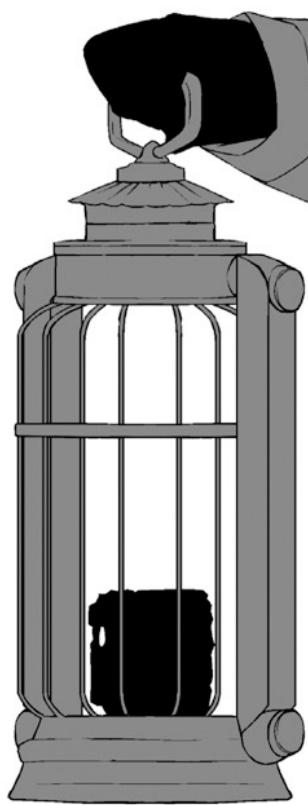
However, both of them had already turned their attention to a different matter.

“First, we must deal with this incident, I suppose.”

“Right. First we have to put an end to the Castle of Separation. Are you ready, Gray?”

“... y-yes!” Taken by surprise by suddenly being called on, I nodded repeatedly.

◆ 第五章 ◆



5.1

Returning to the guest room, the scene before us was appalling taken to the extreme.

The walls and furniture of the room were painted thickly with blood, and there were so many chunks of meat scattered across the floor it was difficult to find a place to stand.

Luvia covered her mouth for only an instant before dashing into the room.

“Clown!”

“... my lady...”

The manservant managed to rise to his knees. It seemed like even breathing was painful for him.

“... I’m sorry...” His words gave the impression of a rotten, long dead tree.

It seemed the shock that had disabled Luvia’s crest had had a similar effect on her body guard. No, if you compared them, Luvia’s condition was much less serious. Maybe he had somehow managed to protect her to some degree after all.

“What happened?”

“Immediately after you disappeared... a beast appeared... and took Miss Rosalind away. Seigen also went after them...”

“A beast? So there was actually something...” Luvia’s gaze moved as she spoke.

In another corner of the room, Flue sat on the floor, wheezing. It seemed he also had managed to survive the encounter. Looking at the knives scattered around, it appeared as if he had hidden himself within some kind of barrier. As if he was having difficulty focusing his eyes, he was repeatedly massaging the area around his eyebrows.

“That monster knew exactly what it was doing, too... Before we could even move properly, it aimed straight for the most dangerous one of us. I didn’t even get to see the thing...”

“Then, this is...”

In response to my master’s question, Flue nodded.

“Yeah. This is all old man Orlocke.” The astrologer named the completely unidentifiable corpse.

Literally torn limb from limb, it was so bad we couldn’t even identify which parts of his body each piece was from.

The third victim.

But this was no longer a crime scene. It was more like a natural disaster. Not even that old magus could escape from the rage of the Castle of Separation.

But,

“Orlocke Caesarmund.”

Standing in the middle of the guest room, my master called out. Confused by what my master thought he was accomplishing, I turned to face him.

“Master. What are you—”

“I’m not talking about the corpse.” Turning aside my question, my master continued. “I’m talking to you. Orlocke Caesarmund.”

In response to his words, another nearby figure began to slowly get up off the floor.

It was Orlocke’s assistant.

“You’re the real Orlocke Caesarmund, right?”

“W-what...?”

As I looked at Orlocke’s assistant with bewildered eyes, my mental picture of him collapsed.

Lifting the corners of his mouth still soaked in his master’s blood, the boy whose expression had never before changed smiled sweetly.

“Calling me the ‘real’ Orlocke is a bit off the mark, my young lord.”

I gulped unconsciously. Though his bearing and voice were completely different, there was no doubt that those words came from Orlocke Caesarmund. Their speech patterns weren’t just similar. They were exactly the same.

“I only transcribed my memory and personality. I suppose there was only about a tenth of me or so left in that body anyway.”

The boy—Orlocke laughed.

“So Papilio Magia is that sort of magecraft, is it?”

“I’d love to call you keen-eyed, but couldn’t you let that old body have the glory for a little longer?” the boy said, spinning his finger around.

Papilio Magia was a style of magecraft that imitated the process of a caterpillar turning into a chrysalis, and then after a series of changes, emerging as a butterfly. If that was the case, then this kind of revival wasn’t all that unexpected.

But hearing about it and seeing it happen before you were completely different things. In this case, the change was so unexpected I could do nothing but moan pitifully.

“This body is a homunculus made from my blood and sperm anyway. Originally the plan was to transfer my personality over with my Magic Crest little by little, but thanks to that process being interrupted, I lost a good tenth of it. From that strange attack earlier, about half of the remaining Crest was disabled, you see.” In an annoyed voice, the boy that was Orlocke spoke.

In reality, losing a tenth of a Magic Crest was nothing to take so lightly. For a Crest with a history such as his, losing that tenth was like losing decades of progress—progress that had cost his predecessors their entire lives. However, with Orlocke already being on the edge of senility, maybe the situation was different. The way he spoke, it was almost like he was relieved.

Meanwhile, my master finished biting his lip and spoke.

“I have a question I’d like to ask you about that.”

“Oh?” As the boy tilted his head to the side, Luvia cut in between them.

“El-Melloi II. Before that, we have the urgent matter of hunting down this beast.”

“That won’t be necessary. We can make a bet on it if you want, but that creature won’t lay a finger on Rosalind.”

Leisurely, my master brushed his bangs out of his eyes. His voice held a deep tiredness to it, but it seemed like I might have been the only one to notice it.

Squinting his eyes at the sunlight streaming through the broken window, my master spoke as if squeezing the words out from the bottom of his heart.

“So, let’s put an end to all of this.”

5.2

The sun dropped completely below the horizon, and the Castle of Separation was cloaked in darkness.

Being a castle nestled within the mountains, it wasn't really one that could be used for a traditional battle. The closest village was easily ten kilometres out, and the only way to reach it was to follow animal trails through the forest. No matter how much of a mountaineer you were, in this situation, there was no getting in or out.

Of course, that made no difference to 'it.'

Crawling up the walls of the castle like a spider, 'it' took a position near the top of the bell tower and listened carefully.

Its objective was a single person.

The flames of hatred that burned in its lungs wouldn't die as long as that person still lived. It understood that so much it was painful, but that pain only sharpened its resolve. No matter what happened here, the one thing it couldn't allow was for that person to escape. In order to prevent that possibility, it opened all its nerves and magic circuits wide.

The Castle of Separation itself was its ally.

Wherever there were angels, so were its hands and eyes.

Those eyes quickly discovered a familiar wandering near the walls of the castle.

A butterfly.

Several butterflies, shining with an ephemeral light, fluttered around the grounds of the castle. The castle gardens, the walls, even the keep entrance was surrounded with them. No doubt, they were attempting to secure an escape route. Either way, it seemed the familiars were just being used to look around, for now.

Those butterflies... there was no mistaking it.

The fact that that old magus was still alive was beyond its wildest expectations, but all it meant was that it would have to kill him again. The ritual could continue after that was accomplished.

So, it turned its ears toward finding the source of those butterflies.

The sound caused by the activation of magecraft was something that couldn't be avoided. On top of that, the magical energy used had unique effects on the sound waves themselves, and it knew from experience how to turn that knowledge into an advantage. If it could capture a single one of those butterflies, it could use it to find a path directly to its master. It didn't know how that master was hiding itself, but it would just have to drag him out anyway.

It began walking across the wall.

Its destination was the castle keep.

If there was one thing it had confidence in, it was its own agility. As far as it was concerned, getting from the wall to the keep was no more difficult than breathing.

Immediately beside the entrance to the keep, a butterfly fluttered upwards, completely unaware of its presence. Unable to suppress its glee, its lips curled into a smile as it reached a hand out towards the familiar.

An instant later, there was light.

Taken off guard by the unexpected brightness, it flinched. It was like a vampire suddenly thrust into the sunlight.

“... as expected, here it is,” a young boy spoke.

In the boy's hand was a rusted copper lantern. Apparently taken from somewhere within the castle, the scent of burning oil rapidly filled the air.

“Of course. I'm sure there is other valuable prey as well, but there was no way it would let its number one target escape, now is there?”

The sound of footsteps.

From behind the boy, several magi stepped forward. Not one of them attempted to hide the surprise on their faces.

“Wait, what's going on here?”

“It's exactly what it looks like.”

The boy lifted the lantern up.

The wavering light of the lantern clearly illuminated the figure of a man.

Even without his head wrap or his conch, his figure was unmistakeable. His face, which normally gave the impression of an idiot even with his eyepatch, was somehow softened by the darkness of the night.

If it had been anywhere else...

Lifting another old lantern up high, Lord El-Melloi II made his declaration.

“The culprit is you, Tokitou Jiroubou Seigen...or should I say, Geryuon Ashbourne’s son, Granide Ashbourne?”

* * *

From the darkness of the night, I slowly peaked my head out to watch.

There were already five magi gathered in the entrance of the Castle of Separation’s keep.

My master.

Luvia.

Flue.

Orlocke, now in the figure of a young boy.

And finally, Tokitou Jiroubou Seigen.

The first four had all been standing concealed within the forest of the front gardens by magic circles, as I was now. Clown alone was inside the keep, in case of an emergency situation.

The one who had set up the circles had been Flue. Though he complained that creating multiple copies of the same circle in a single area made them weaker, in the end he was the more skilled than any of us when it came to directional magecraft, so my master had been able to persuade him.

Flue’s eyes now were darting back and forth like mad.

“Whoa whoa, are you serious? Sure, I can buy that he’s the culprit, but you’re saying he’s Ashbourne’s son on top of that?”

“Y-yeah, what are you talking about?” Seigen waved his hands in denial in his typical over-exaggerated manner. Pointing to his head wrap and conch, and even pulling at his own cheek, he spoke again. “No matter how you look at it, I don’t really match the pattern, don’t you think?”

My master gave a small sigh. Lowering the lantern to his feet, he cleared his throat.

“Then, shall I explain everything from the beginning?”

The night wind blew, bringing with it the sound of the leaves rustling in the nearby trees. It was like listening to the voices of fairies. Or maybe, being the Castle of Separation, it would be more appropriate to call them the whispers of angels.

where are you going
Lord, quo vadis?

Where was he, who was fit to sit on the throne of judgment before us?

My master reached into his jacket and pulled out the invitation.

“First of all, what is this invitation?”

“What is it? It’s for the selection of Ashbourne’s heir, is it not?”

Cutting off Luvia, my master continued. “Let’s be more direct. Why were we gathered here at this castle? A riddle game, to determine who was suitable to inherit Ashbourne’s secrets? That’s way too far removed from the normal nature of a magus. Every one of you should be painfully aware of that.”

No, that was wrong.

The one who was painfully aware of that was none other than my master. That no matter how much he pursued magecraft from the avenue of knowledge, he would never get even a step closer to it. It was the opposite, really; the more you pursued knowledge of it, the more you would understand that it was a fruitless path to pursue.

‘Why do you think I was able to bear that pain?’

I have no idea.

Or maybe he knew that’s how it would be from the start.

With a groan, Flue addressed my master. “What was the point of all of us coming here then?”

“The whydunnit. Maybe nothing else, but at least the reason I understand. No, maybe it would be better to say I understood the whole time,” he replied with a nod.

“It was simply a magus passing on his inheritance to his child. Nothing more.”

Silence fell.

Everyone present could sympathize with that reality. As a magus, that was just the way things worked. But at the same time, in this case, it was a logic that just didn’t

seem to apply.

“Lord El-Melloi II, are you just crazy or something? First of all, this is the first time I’ve heard that I’m Geryuon Ashbourne’s kid,” Seigen, even having already been named the culprit, spoke as he poked a finger at his own temple.

“I was there for Ashbourne’s son’s funeral. There was zero doubt, he was definitely dead. Or are you saying that the corpse I saw was a fake?”

“Just like Orlocke said, that was no doubt Granide Ashbourne’s own dead body.”

“‘Orlocke’? Wait, are you telling me this kid is Orlocke? The hell?” Ignoring Seigen’s interruption, my master continued.

“The very fact that Geryuon Ashbourne’s son died is what set this whole incident in motion.”

“What are you talking about?”

“The Master of Restoration, who was capable of even restoring damaged Magic Crests.” Quietly, my master mentioned Ashbourne’s Second Name.

The Master of Restoration. Rare even among the world of magi, one who could restore a Magic Crest to its original state. An existence incomparable to that of an ordinary Tuner.

“Have you ever heard of the stories of people who displayed strange characteristics after receiving heart or liver transplants? Like, changes in personality or strange new memories that reflect the organ’s original owner.”

Transplant surgery. After receiving a serious transplant like a heart, the recipient would suddenly have a change in their tastes or personality. Or would suddenly develop a talent for the piano, despite never having even touched one before. Even I had heard of news like that from magazines I had read, though they sounded more like urban legends to me.

“Wait, when did we start talking about organ transplants? Ashbourne’s secret was supposed to be about restoring Magic Crests—”

“And what materials are necessary to do so?” My master deflected Luvia’s question with a question of his own. “What could possibly serve to fill the gaps in a damaged Magic Crest? What would be most suitable to replace a part of a Magic Crest that has been lost?”

“If you want me to say other Magic Crests, then you’ve got a fundamental misunderstanding. It’s specifically a Magic Crest because it isn’t compatible with

others, no?"

"... Papilio Magia."

It wasn't my master that had spoken.

... it was me.

Without noticing that the gathered magi had all turned their attention to me, I began to recall the important details.

—The Master of Restoration, who restores damaged Magic Crests.

—A Magic Crest, a thing similar to a person's organ.

—Papilio Magia, a mystery aimed at creating a cocoon like a caterpillar, only to emerge later as a butterfly—a completely different being.

If that was true...

If that was true, and Seigen was actually Granide Ashbourne...

"Orlocke Caesarmund. You said you had done research with the owner of this castle, did you not?" my master asked the now-young magus. "I guess we now know what kind of research that was."

Orlocke couldn't answer immediately. Instead, Seigen rose his voice with an angry yell.

"This is ridiculous!"

"Is that so? That's a pretty un-magus-like thing to say." My master turned his gaze on the shouting Seigen as if he was playing dumb. Then, he took out a leather-covered notebook. "This is something Miss Luvia discovered in one of Ashbourne's hidden rooms earlier. It seems like a list of people who had their Magic Crests restored. Tokitou Jiroubou Seigen...your name is listed right here."

"Wha—?!" Seigen's voice turned from anger to surprise. In contrast, my master continued his lecture without slowing.

"You've already had measures taken to restore your Magic Crest at this very castle."

Even in the dark, I could see Seigen's face turn pale. Like the falling of an executioner's axe, my master's words continued on unabated.

"It's almost like a resurrection. But even if the memories and emotions are transferred, it's still a different person. All you've done is written the same data to a

different hard disk. It comes close to the level of True Magic, but it doesn't quite reach. Anyone who uses a similar magecraft should be well aware of that."

"How embarrassing. Unfortunately, yes, the Third Magic is still quite a ways off."

"So it goes without saying that a magecraft that can't even reach the level of Papilio Magia has no chance of making it there."

Interspersed with Orlocke's commentary, my master's voice took a decidedly chilly tone.

"The result was that the deceased Granide Ashbourne was torn apart. Then, he was mixed in with the ingredients used to restore Magic Crests, and implanted in your body."

Like a hacker.

Or the Trojan Horse.

"... you're joking, right?" Seigen said, spreading his hands wide. "I'm Seigen, you know? Tokitou Jiroubou Seigen?"

"I've already explained that. There's no contradiction between what I've just said and you believing that anyway. If you want to deny it, you'll need better evidence than that. Also, I suppose I should add it removes the credibility of your alibi for Heine's murder, doesn't it? If you're Granide Ashbourne, then it's only a matter of course that the servants would gladly conspire to create an alibi for you." My master spoke sadly. "That also explains why we all weren't killed at once, right? After killing your victim, it probably takes about a full day to process and preserve the Crest that's removed from their body. The whole scenario of a ritual involving the Angelic Names was just to avoid casting suspicion on the fact that we were killed one by one. And to keep that illusion going, Hishiri and Heine's bodies were both presented in the same place."

"I didn't—"

At the same time as Seigen, who was beginning to waver, something else responded.

No one had noticed the presence of the thing that had jumped down from the keep of the Castle of Separation until the last moment. Landing on the ground, its impact kicked up a wave of dust that billowed out towards us.

"Master!"

"Ah..."

As if to protect Seigen, the monster stepped forward.

The torch, still on the floor, illuminated the creature from its feet upwards. It looked like some sort of enormous wolf or spider, with a height easily over two meters. Its skin, covered in mud and blood, looked like armour made of metal. What was more unsettling though were the bits and pieces of human remains stuck to it.

“... I ask you, the angel’s name.”

The creature growled.

* * *

Was that the same question Heine Istari had been given? What about Hishiri Adashino?

And now,

“... if you are unable to answer, you shall be torn apart.”

With a sigh, my master whispered.

“Aladiah.”

The monster suddenly tensed up. Seeing the creature’s reaction, my master took a single breath before picking up the lantern at his feet. Opening the window of the lantern, he stuck a cigar into the flame inside.

“This was nothing more than a game set up by Geryuon Ashbourne. Who knows if he actually planned on giving the inheritance to someone if they could find the answer. Though I would put money on the guess that he didn’t.”

Taking a drag on his cigar, he continued.

“The Castle of Separation, Adra. No doubt Adra is a truncated form of Adramelec, the fallen angel. I had considered it could be referring to Adrasteia, the Greek goddess, but as she has no connections with angels, I ruled it out fairly early.”

Luvia raised an eyebrow. Of course, she had considered the same thing. Before she had attempted to steal control of the Workshop, she had found the foundational formula written with the names of various fallen angels. Naturally, Adramelec was one of those used in the formula.

“But a fallen angel would be no good as an answer. If we are asked for the name of an angel, we have to get back to the holy variety.” As if bored, my master waved his

cigar around in the empty air in front of him. “So the next step is to use the three letters given by the Shemhamphorae to reconstruct the original name. So for example, my Angelic Name being Mihael, we would end up with the letters MIH. Luvia’s Michael would be MIK. Oh, right, because the names were originally in Hebrew, you have to take into account how they’ve changed in spelling. We’re not really interested here in the letters, but the sounds, so the CH turns to K.”

My master moved his cigar around to spell out the letters of the alphabet.

M.
N.
O.

After that, he spelled out the whole name, Mihael.

Reconstruction.

The opposite of Notarikon, the abridgement used in the Shemhamphorae.

For example, taking the word ‘amen,’ and reconstructing the phrase ‘Adonai Melech Ne’eman.’

“For Adramelec, we could come up with ADR, ADL, or ADM. So if you play with the order of the letters, and switch them for their base sounds...the matching angel from the Shemhamphorae is Aladiah. See? Simple enough a child could do it.”

My master gave a small sigh.

Now that he mentioned it, it was really just a code. Even if it was a technique important for magecraft, it was still far removed from magecraft itself. It was no wonder my master had said it was no more than a game set up by Geryuon Ashbourne.

“Oh, by the way, the message regarding the zodiac—‘The angel becomes a beast. Glaring at the western sky, it swallows the sun.’ How kind of him, to give confirmation that you were on the right track, connecting the angel’s names to the zodiac. But really, it was just a red herring, attempting to distract you from the real issue at hand.”

“Yeah... yeah, you’re right about that.” Behind the beast came a voice of confirmation.

A voice that I recognized, and yet still seemed unfamiliar.

It was the opposite of what happened with Orlocke. While the voice no doubt belonged to Tokitou Jiroubou Seigen, the manner of speaking was nothing like him.

“You...” my master began.

In response, he nodded. Forcefully he tore the Yamabushi robes from his right shoulder, exposing the faintly glowing Magic Crest on his unexpectedly burly upper arm. It took the form of two separate patterns, with one of the patterns having just finished receiving the meaning of the other.

“... I am Granide Ashbourne.”

Seigen...no, Granide laughed. At the same time, the beast cried out.

That howl, with the power to disable the Magic Crests of others, knocked us out once again.

5.3

The beast's howl came at them as a wave of pressure, blowing away the magi that it had struck.

But the one who seemed most effected was the one who had caused the shockwave, Granide himself.

“An Angel’s Song. Even against someone who has no Magic Crest, a direct hit seems to be fairly effective,” my master spoke, brushing his hair from his eyes. “Though it’s a bit strange that no one was knocked unconscious this time, don’t you think?”

My master struck the nearby wall of the Keep with a hand, which gave off a deep resounding noise. The noise echoed unnaturally, filling the night air around the Castle.

“—It’s almost like a kind of tuning fork. Or maybe calling it an amp would be more appropriate. No matter where you are in the Castle, that monster’s ‘song’ can still reach you. That’s probably how it was designed from the start, to make the most of your ‘song.’ That’s how, no matter who your opponent, you could always win as long as you were in this Castle. It’s a pretty safe assumption that a magus with any considerable degree of skill will start to rely on their Magic Crest, after all.”

Magecraft reliant on sound, only possible in this Castle which could amplify and multiply it, refined even further by Ashbourne’s secret.

Thinking about it after the fact, the hints were there.

The strangely echoing hall.

The sound of footsteps, causing my master to furrow his brow.

Maybe even Heine had figured all that out before he died.

“Thanks to Miss Luvigelita’s efforts, we were able to put a limit on that ability. That beast’s ‘song’ will no longer be amplified by the Castle.”

“Hmph. Honestly it had me a bit worried,” The boy that was now Orlocke spoke while stroking his chin.

The beast’s response was swift. Grabbing Granide in its mouth, it leapt to the top of the Keep.

“So you’re going to try and run away?”

As my master watched them bound away, the magi behind him spoke.

“After that first ambush and making those magic circles, I’ve got nothing left, you know. I’m completely dry.”

“I also will be unable to help as long as I am maintaining the spell to suppress the monster’s howl.”

Flue and Luvia both declared their lack of combat ability.

“Right. Sorry for pushing you two so hard. You can leave the rest to us, now.” Saying that, my master turned to me. “Can you do it?”

“Ihihihihi! Maybe I could, or maybe I can’t!” The reply came from my right hand.

“Then I’ll leave the rest to you, Gray.”

“... understood.”

I jumped.

With a single leap, I launched myself a few meters into the air, kicking off of the Keep’s wall in pursuit of the beast.

Probably because that jump had showed a strength even beyond what would be possible with magical reinforcement, I could faintly hear Luvia’s voice below me as I leapt away.

“Is she some sort of homunculus too?”

That was a reasonable assessment. A homunculus would be able to display feats like that without issue. According to rumour, many of the homunculi of the famous Einzbern family were able to boast strengths comparable to that of even phantasmal species.

“No. She’s as human as they come,” my master replied. Why was it that I was able to hear what they were saying so clearly, even from so far away?

“However, situations like this are kind of her speciality.”

* * *

For a brief moment, the distinction between Earth and Sky had lost its meaning.

Kicking off from the wall of the Castle, the beast and I clashed repeatedly in a world tilted 90 degrees. Dull sounds echoed out countless times as we struck each other. Having lost momentum from hitting each other so many times, we kicked off the wall one more time and rose up to the spire on top of the Castle.

Even there, there was an angel.

Bravely raising its sword, it looked the same as the statue where we had found Hishiri impaled.

Once again, the beast howled.

If the magecraft behind the Castle of Separation was based on sound, then it might be better to characterize its howl as a wave suffused with magical energy.

A wave of sound inaudible to humans. Even if it was filled with magical energy, it was still a completely unknowable existence to an ordinary human. By changing the magical energy and wavelength of the sound, it could be changed from a wave that disabled Magic Crests to a blast of darkness that destroyed the magus' opponent.



If that was the case,

“... Add!”

“Gotcha!”

How did it look to the beast, I wondered, when my blade sliced its attack right out of the air?

While Add had already begun his transformation, now the cage in which he was held opened even further. With a hazy glow like a Will’O’Wisp, their shape changed dramatically.

A form that anyone would recognize, of a tool used to harvest.

A shape to collect souls.

A Grim Reaper’s scythe.

“Ahahahahaha! What a great feeling! What a great night! It’s like an all-you-can-eat buffet!”

Slicing apart the wave of magical energy, the mouth engraved on the scythe laughed wildly.

In the night sky above, the moon was just short of being full. Below, the crescent moon of Add’s blade was beautiful, the image of it slicing apart the waves of illusion burning itself into my heart.

A voice beyond human hearing.

An angel’s song.

A beast’s song.

“... what are you?”

“... just Gray,” I replied. “Granide Ashbourne. I recommend you surrender now.”

“Nah. No way.”

Suddenly, his previous voice returned.

“... Seigen?”

“Gray, it’s me. It’s Seigen. Tokitou Jiroubou Seigen, y’know? It’s definitely me, but...my heart won’t stop. I just...I just want to kill everyone down there. I just can’t stop this feeling of wanting to tear everyone apart!” Still being held in the beast’s jaws, Seigen grabbed his own head.

His face looked like it was falling apart. Joy, anger, grief, desire, hatred. Though these were the five passions said to take over a human's heart, it was like all five had been sewn together into one expression. In a word, it was chaos. Like every possible emotion was fighting for control of him.

(... Ahh, I understand now.)

It wasn't that Seigen was being possessed. Rather, eighty or ninety percent of Seigen was actually still there.

For example, you could think of it like water in a test tube. While the test tube itself was 'Tokitou Jiroubou Seigen,' just a few drops of poisonous colour were added to the mixture. While that poison had completely changed his fundamental nature, the existence that was 'Seigen' still very much existed.

You could call those few drops of poison whatever you wanted. Call it just an impulse, or the 'whydunnit.' Either way, the corruption brought by a long dead magus was still alive and well.

It made me feel nauseous.

In a way, it was basically-

"Sorry, kid." Even as the tears poured down his face, Seigen spoke. The tears were dyed a distinctly red colour. It was the first time I had ever seen someone cry blood. "I really did like Heine. If only that guy hadn't noticed. If only he hadn't been the first one to find that monster. If only he hadn't made it so close to the heart of the workshop so fast...ah, dammit! There was no way I could ignore a Magic Crest that beautiful. I wanted it so badly. I needed it so badly. I was starving for it so badly. There was nothing else I could do, Gray."

No. As much as it was still Seigen, it was definitely someone else.

The hardware and software were still Tokitou Jiroubou Seigen, but they were completely corrupted by the virus that was Granide Ashbourne.

Then... if he wasn't Granide Ashbourne, who was he?

Whoever he was, he screamed.

"Castle of Separation, Adra! Open the gate!"

The door of the keep burst open. Without even seeing them, I could tell exactly what was pouring out from inside it.

And my whole body began to shake.

* * *

Suddenly, the doors of the keep burst open right in front of the magi still on the ground. From the lobby within, and from the statues in the front garden, something invisible came pouring out.

No, as magi, it was something the people gathered there could see. Spirits.

But they were different from simple souls belonging to ordinary people. It might have been better to describe them as the leftover energy, an old recording of a personality. For example, in Chinese Taoism, the ‘soul’ was divided into two parts: the ‘ethereal soul,’ which supported the mind and consciousness, and the ‘corporeal soul,’ which supported the body and its functions. The spirits now covering the grounds of the Castle could be completely described as the latter.

These spirits were almost entirely corporeal souls.

“Ahh, so that’s what they meant by angels,” Lord El-Melloi II muttered.

Ever since arriving at the Castle of Separation, all the magi had felt the sensation of being watched by the angels.

What if that was more than just their imaginations?

As the Master of Restoration, the owner of the castle had no doubt brought many magi here. Among them, how many had actually seen their Crests repaired, and how many had been harvested as raw materials? There were stories of many who requested Ashbourne’s services only for the procedure to fail; but even then, would one even need a full hand to count his successes?

Either way, the land on which this castle was built had drank in the blood and souls of countless magi. What if these spirits were all just the remains of those failures?

Before coming to the Castle of Separation, Lord El-Melloi II had mentioned it. Angels in Modern Magecraft were just a label given to vague and ambiguous magical energies. The concept of ‘Angels’ used by the Castle of Separation was bestowed on these spirits in their creation, and then they were used to fuel the construction of the workshop.

Each of those angels was thus a grave marker.

Before that onslaught of vengeful spirits, a single whisper carried through the air.

“Perform a dance.”

The words of a single spell.

As if conducting an orchestra, Orlocke waved a single finger in the air. As he did so, a storm of illusionary butterflies filled the darkness, and began entrapping the attacking spirits.

“From the beginning, Papilio Magia’s true purpose is the manipulation of things between the certain and uncertain, after all.”

“... thank you,” Lord El-Melloi II said, bowing his head lightly.

With Flue’s catalysts and energy exhausted and Luvia busy maintaining her own spell, the only one left to defend them was the old—well, now young magus.

With that crisis averted, that only left...

“... Gray.”

Looking up at the spire above the Keep, Lord El-Melloi II whispered the name of his attendant.

* * *

For a third time, the beast howled.

This time Add was unable to stop it, and I could feel the Magic Circuits in my body begin to short out. It was almost impossible to move my hands and feet. It would have been easier to move if I had been wearing clothes made of lead. As the spirits continued to pour out of the Castle, I could feel my mind beginning to crack.

“... ahahaha!”

Seigen laughed.

He had realized what was wrong.

“Really, Gray? You lived in a graveyard before, didn’t you? How could you possibly still be afraid of ghosts?”

I couldn’t even answer.

I was so afraid I could hear my own teeth chattering.

This was the result just from me feeling the presence of spirits. It was the same feeling as when I had first come to the Castle of Separation. Just by feeling their

presence, my body would start to shrink in fear, my legs would grow weak, and I wouldn't be able to move even a single finger freely. As if my guts had flipped themselves inside out, an unpleasant sweat poured out over my entire body.

I was scared.

I was so, so scared.

I was so scared I was going to throw up.

“What a joke. You’re afraid of ghosts, and you can’t even remember the words of a simple prayer. The hell kind of grave keeper are you? You’re turning out to be an awful lot like me at this rate!”

Seigen and Granide’s voices began to mix together as they mocked me.

I was a joke. That was exactly right. I was joke, full of uncertainty, and hopelessly broken.

So.

Like an avalanche, the spirits of the Castle of Separation surrounded me, crushing me from all sides.

* * *

Seeing the flow of the battle, Luvia looked up at Gray with chastisement in her eyes.

“What is that girl doing?!”

“Leave her alone.”

Even while maintaining her own spell, Luvia pulled out a jewel to force her way into the fight. Before she could, Lord El-Melloi II held her back.

He spoke the name of a certain graveyard.

“And what does that...?”

It was a name Luvia was familiar with. It was one of graveyards with the oldest traditions, unmatched in Britain.

“Really, she is a professional when it comes to dealing with Spiritual Entities. Actually, I was hoping for that, which is why I visited her home in the first place. But in her case, she has some...extenuating circumstances.”

“Circumstances?”

“She’s actually afraid of spirits.”

In response to Luvia’s narrowed eyebrows, he responded plainly. It was so plain, so straight, that it made it even harder to believe.

“... is that even possible? She was born there, wasn’t she?”

“Are all children born to magi fond of magecraft?” In response to that question, Luvia was at a loss for words. “If we’re just talking about ability, then even at that graveyard, she was without peer. But even putting her skill aside, her body is too susceptible to being influenced by spirits. A person can’t take that much from someone else, even if they were influences from living people.”

At the end of his sentence, his words began to falter.

Faltering at imagining, just for a moment, what that must be like. Being able to see and understand the true nature of any person you saw seemed like a curse enough—but on top of that, what if it was only for people who had already died?

Even magi needed to act with the utmost caution when it came to communing with departed spirits. If it was a corporeal soul that had just been removed from its ethereal counterpart, then all of its lusts and desires would be born out, plain to see. How young was Gray when she was first forced to see that?

“But you’re her master, aren’t you? Don’t you have an obligation to protect her?!”

“No, that’s mistaken,” Lord El-Melloi II spoke firmly.

“... you don’t want to get caught up in what happens next.”

* * *

The boiling torrent of spirits overwhelmed me.

It was terrifying.

I was so scared I couldn’t bear it.

I was so scared I couldn’t even breathe.

I was so scared that my mind and body began to shut down.

It was so scary, just... too... scary...

—Having given up on trying to invade my actual body, the spirits returned to their forms as angels, and began pulling on my hair, baring their teeth as if to devour my flesh.

I screamed.

It was scary it was disgusting it was a curse they were corrupted they were thirsty they were starving it was sharp there were too many of them I was going insane it hurt they screamed so much they wanted to throw up we were never buried we were torn apart we were torn to pieces we wanted to be buried we were left to rot we were angry we needed to be destroyed-

A mysterious sound reached my ears.

The sound of metal on metal, loud enough to make one cover their ears.

It was the sound of spirits being eaten. The mouth engraved on my scythe devoured the spirits around me in one fell swoop.

“Ihihiihihi! Delicious! This is too delicious! It’s been too long since I’ve got to eat like this! That El-Melloi guy was right again!”

Add's
My partner's voice sounded far away.

The only thing I could see was an immense sea of spirits.

Ah, I remembered.

Those who were more dead than the dead.

Those who were more alive than the living.

It was a scene I had seen countless times in my home town. The absurd, irrational, unnatural things that were neither alive nor dead. In my ears, those words I had heard countless times were revived.

—“That is what you must destroy. That. Only that.”

“Exactly.”

My lips moved.

My will, and a will that was not my own. That function, my true nature, awoke once more. Even that scythe which devoured evil spirits was no more than a stepping stone to reach that end.

“—So, I can’t let you exist!”

With a thud, my knees bent, and the surrounding scenery disappeared.

With sheer explosive power, the girl vanished.

Jumping from the spire to the roof of the Keep didn't even take a second. If that speed wasn't 'vanishing,' then what could you call it?

The girl danced.

The Grim Reaper's Scythe danced.

With the sound of her blade, the angels were sliced to pieces.

All of those who stood before her were shattered like glass.

The girl danced.

Closing in on the beast, her scythe cut halfway through its body.

With the speed they moved, the difference in their size had lost its meaning. Like two shooting stars crashing into each other over and over, the two drew a Möbius Strip in the night air. Every time they met, a tremor like an earthquake struck the Castle. Explosions filled the air as if they were aircraft locked in a dogfight.

* * *

“... the hell is going on up there?” Flue groaned in a low voice.

The magi on the ground had already turned their attention away from the spirits pouring out of the Castle. As if to protect their master, the entirety of them were rushing to attack Gray. Even so, the torrent of spirits before her was like frost before the morning sun.

“I told you, didn't I? This is her speciality.”

“That doesn't even begin to describe her!” In response to Luvia's shout, Lord El-Melloi II made a bitter expression.

“There is another reason, but it's a bit too far-fetched to accept, even for a magus, so I didn't think you'd believe me.”

“And what would that be?” Luvia stepped up to him. Even from the short few days he had known her, he understood that at this point, she wouldn't rest until she had her answer.

So, he gave in.

“...thur...”

“What?” Luvia’s reply came instantly.

She had heard what he said perfectly well, but the words he had spoken didn’t seem to have any connection to the current situation.

* * *

The Grim Reaper against a monster.

That one line was the perfect description of the scene occurring above the Castle.

After clashing numerous times, the girl blocked the claws of the beast, holding it still on the roof of the Keep. In a soft voice, she spoke.

“Did you use those claws to kill Heine Istari?”

The beast howled.

In the small space created by the howl, flames span into existence.

Earth! Water! Fire! Wind! Sky! Be complete!
“A vi ra hum kham svaha!”

Shugendou.

It was Seigen’s magecraft.

It was impossible to tell whether the personality behind it was Seigen’s or Granide’s, but at the very least he could still use the magecraft learned by Seigen. As long as he had the Castle of Separation as his backup, a long battle would tend toward his favour.

So,

The girl whispered.

Releasing the words that had been decided beforehand.

“Gray... Rave... Crave... Deprave...”

Suddenly, something changed.

Or maybe it would be better to say, something was blown away.

Just like the spirits from before, all the mana in the surrounding area was devoured. Being dragged into a space devoid of any magical energy, Ashbourne's monster screamed.

* * *

“Wait, hold on. What did you just say?”

“She’s King Arthur. The same one that was summoned in the Fourth Holy Grail War, the same one that killed my master—the Heroic Spirit that killed Professor Kayneth.” His voice was at the same time tense and bitter as he spoke.

“In the graveyard where she was born, there’s a grave to King Arthur. Didn’t you know? Well, I suppose it’s not as famous as Glastonbury, or even Brittany or Cornwall.” His lips twisted with irony, as if to say that he didn’t really want to say it either.

“Her face is an exact copy of the Servant Saber that I saw.”

* * *

“Engrave... in me...”

As I whispered, I hung my head. My own consciousness was dying.

It had really disappeared a long time ago. That’s why this voice wasn’t my own. It belonged to another me—one that was hidden deep inside my heart.

Another monster, created by the people in my home town.

“... a grave... for you...”

Oh ancient Mystery, die away.

Oh sweet enigma, return to nothing.

“Pseudo-intelligence disabled. Minimum magical energy levels and collection rate reached. Releasing second stage limiter.”

Add’s voice, sounding unbelievably mechanical, echoed in the darkness. Like a door flying open as its magical seal came undone, the Mystery in my hands opened.

The scythe that devoured spirits and magical energy alike, conferring inhuman strength on its wielder, was not Add's true form. No, the fake intelligence that was Add only existed as a temporary seal to stop the degradation of the weapon's Mystery in the first place.

A seal... for this spear.

In a way, I was the same way.

The beast howled again.

I had lost track of how many times it had howled like that.

But it didn't matter any more. Impacting into the wall of concentrated magical energy suffusing the surrounding air, the attack dissipated of its own accord.

It was basic logic that a Mystery would be erased by another Mystery of greater power. No matter how profound the magecraft that went into creating Ashbourne's monster, it had no way of standing against that spear.

Gray... Your weapon...
“You... That weapon...”

Seigen and Granide's overlapping voices sounded so distant.

“Holy Spear, activated.”

The Grim Reaper's Scythe had fully deployed.

In a way that didn't seem to be physically possible, the scythe had twisted and changed shape, taking its true form as a spear.

No, that wasn't quite right. The heroic, noble magical energy pouring off of it made it clear that this was not just a spear. It was on a completely different scale. It was like a tower standing at the end of the world, a crystallized Mystery proving that countless legends, countless myths, were true.

It was the end of the story.

The accursed yet divine spear, decorating the end of the legend of King Arthur.

Softly, the true name of that weapon left my lips.

The Spear Shining—
“Rhongo—”

The time had come.

The divine spear warped and shuddered.

Unable to resist the vortex of swirling magical energy, the Castle of Separation shook as if in fear. Though it was built only to respond to waves of sound, the sheer amount of magical energy was forcibly drawing a reaction out of it. The manifestation that drew in all mana from the surrounding environment was like disaster incarnate.

The Thirteen Promises hadn't been released yet, so it was still only a small fraction of its full power peeking through. Even so, that small fraction was on the level of Divine Spirits, something magecraft couldn't hope to match.

That level of magical energy, concentrated to the absolute limit, could be felt like an extreme heat. It felt like I was sticking my hand into a volcano.

Ashbourne's beast would not make it in time.

There was no way it could. The manifestation in my hands was a Noble Phantasm
The Sword of Promised Victory
exceeded only by Excalibur itself. The divine spear wielded by King Arthur against his mortal enemy, Mordred.

---At the End of the World!!!
“—myniad!!!”

Who could even see that spiralling light?

Even though it was night, it was as if the Sun had suddenly risen—as if a piece of the Sun had fallen down amongst them, a brilliant crimson spiral. The magical energy, and even the water vapour that hung in the air were burned and boiled away, the flash of light from the Age of Gods riding forth like a mounted tyrant.

Gouging out the spire above, the light pierced through the Castle of Separation's domed roof and castle wall, only stopping when it bit deep into the hillside beyond the castle.

Both Seigen and Ashbourne's monster vanished before that light.

5.4

With a violent climax, the battle came to a conclusion.

“King... Arthur...” Luvia muttered, dumbfounded by the spectacle.

In contrast, Lord El-Melloi II scratched his head as if the whole ordeal was just a nuisance. “Well, I suppose in reality it’s more like she’s a descendant of one of his distant relatives. That’s also why their graveyard happens to have King Arthur’s grave.”

“Then, that was a Heroic Spirit’s Noble Phantasm...?” At that, Luvia’s words trailed off.

Mysteries passed down since the Age of Gods came in a variety of forms. One of the most famous of those would be the ^{God's} Legend Carrier ^{Holder} of the Fraga family. But even Luvia knew that was a territory she could not step into lightly.

Though knowing he should head to retrieve his student, instead Lord El-Melloi II turned towards the ruins of the Castle she had destroyed. Seeing how the earth had been gouged out by the blast, he raised an eyebrow.

“What do we have here?”

In the middle of the crater, where steam was still rising, a small hole peaked through the rubble. It seemed that the Noble Phantasm had been so destructive, it had revealed a room that had been hidden beneath the ground.

“Mr. Orlocke.”

“Ah, yes. You have my thanks, young Lord.”

At Lord El-Melloi II’s urging, the two of them began walking towards the revealed secret room.

“What is this?! After all that, you still plan on keeping secrets from us?!”

“It’s complicated.” With a half-hearted excuse, the Lord pulled out a cigar as he descended carefully into the crater.

Thanks perhaps to the nature of the Noble Phantasm, or maybe to the defensive properties of the Castle itself, the heat from the attack had already mostly dissipated. The two were able to proceed to the centre of the crater without fear of their shoes melting.

Suddenly, a shape moved, covering the entry into that secret hole.

“Granide Ashbourne...”

“AaaaaaaAAAAAAAHHHHH!!!” With one arm torn off, and his clothes and hair burned to ash, it was no wonder his vocal cords didn’t function either. But even compared to him, the creature beside him was in much worse shape. The beast must have made a last ditch effort to knock Seigen out of the way of Rhongomyniad’s blast, but in doing so it had lost a full half of its body. Even if it was a creature made of magical energy, there was no other possible result when meeting a blast of magical energy so much greater than itself. The fact it was still struggling at all was beyond possibility even in the common sense world of magi.

The thing that made that miracle possible was...

“Mother!”

Granide screamed.

Orlocke’s words from earlier came unbidden to Lord El-Melloi II’s mind.

—‘Though it was as a magus, he really did love them. He even spoke quite fondly of me. The fact that his wife died so soon after his son’s birth was no doubt one of the reasons for all this...’

The beast’s jaw opened... facing Orlocke Caesarmund.

(... crap!)

Lord El-Melloi II moved instinctively.

Below the surface of the ground as they were, they were outside the range of Luvia’s suppression spell. On top of that, the beast in its death throes was not holding anything back. There was no way they would get off with only having their Magic Crest disabled.

So-

The beast howled.

“Lord?!!”

Orlocke shouted.

Covering for the Butterfly Magus, the attack struck Lord El-Melloi II head on.

* * *

As soon as he opened his eyes, he understood that he was alone.

The world was cloaked in fog. No matter how much he looked around, there was nothing to be seen except for that.

“I see. So this is what that ‘song’ actually does,” the young man spoke, rubbing his own shoulders.

A ‘song’ that attacked the Magic Crest directly. Since he had no Magic Crest, it seemed to be attacking his mind instead.

Muttering that there was no need to replicate his stiff shoulders if they were stuck inside his own mind, the youth looked around him once again. Unlike the darkness that he and Luvia had been trapped in earlier, this was just a simple fog, obscuring everything.

No doubt that fog was the true form of the song’s curse.

You’ve been trying so hard all this time, haven’t you?

Thought suddenly intruded directly into his brain. Before he realized it, he could see a shadow lurking deep within the fog.

But you should already know by now. No matter how hard you struggle, you will never catch up.

The shadow spoke.

The shadow laughed.

The boy pressed a hand to his chest.

For him, that was the most vulnerable part of his heart. Something he had accepted, something he had given up on without confessing it to a single person.

In the end, all you can do is walk along the rails laid down by true geniuses. Even if you can borrow their knowledge to identify and measure the talents of others, you yourself will never amount to anything. Everyone around you will always shine brighter. You will never have your turn in the spotlight.

That ‘voice’ spoke as if pulling out his own thoughts.

A curse.

It was a curse in the truest sense. It sneaked into a person's thoughts and twisted them right from the source. It was the most primitive, most basic of curses. It was something used not by just magi, but by everyday corporations, everyday men and women in their own bedrooms—the most powerful curse possible. What tens of thousands, what millions of people had tasted that bitterness and ended their lives? How many dynasties had that curse brought to their knees?

Just as it caused a Magic Crest to rot from the inside out-

—it was a curse that gouged out his true character.

Finally, he opened his mouth in reply.

“... you’re looking at it the wrong way.”

?

The curse wavered.

Not because it was a response that should have been impossible.

But because the boy had changed into something that reflected an even truer part of his nature.

“I’ve already received enough honour.”

In the distance, he heard the sound of something cracking.

Somewhere within this world, he felt like he could hear the song that was binding him. It was something he would never be able to reach, never be able to lay a finger on, but it still gave him the impression of an incredibly beautiful, incredibly transient song.

“It was an honour that I promised to pay back later.”

The boy whispered.

The figure of Lord El-Melloi II had reverted to that of a younger time. The form he had ten years prior, during the Fourth Holy Grail War. His hair was much shorter, his perpetually grumpy face was much more lively. With that form, he turned to speak to the fog.

“So that’s why I have to become someone who is worthy of that honour. The order was reversed, but now I have to prove that what you saw in me wasn’t a mistake.”

Even now, he could still hear that man’s words.

In response, he had spoken:

‘—You are my king. I will serve you. I will devote myself to you. So please, lead me. Please, let me see your dream, too.’

How selfish, how immature those words had been.

At one point, he had wished to die alongside him. The greatest ruler the world had ever seen. The one who had conquered half of the world in his own lifetime, the one who had come closest to complete world domination in human history. For a time, he had wished to die alongside him, just as his countless other subordinates were allowed to.

Faced with that wish, his king had given a light-hearted laugh.

Instead of granting that wish, he instead gave him a new mission.

“... ‘Live.’ That was all he commanded of me.”

Within that boy’s heart was a golden light. It was an oath that would never be forgotten, a light that would never fade.

“See it to the end, survive, and tell his story. It was really selfish, completely unreasonable. Thanks to him, I had been brought so close to the edge of death, and yet at the last minute he pressed that on me. Do you know how much trouble that put me through? I could complain all night and still not run out of things to say about that idiot.”

The current Lord El-Melloi II spoke.

As if saying goodbye to the boy named Waver Velvet, the man that had returned to his true form raised his head with pride.

“I already know what I want to do, what I can do.”

Of course, he was contradicting himself. Even as he accepted who he truly was, whenever he was confronted with those with true talent, his envy felt like burning alive. Heine Istari, Luviagelita Edelfelt...these young geniuses soared so effortlessly above him. His dream to fly along with them was ingrained in his very soul—but, it was just a dream.

It was okay to leave it as just a dream. That was what he thought.

It was okay to leave it as just a dream. That was all he could think.

“What do you think? Isn’t it a pleasant life? I have no reason to sit here and let people like you dictate what my life has to be.” He bit off his words with an

uncommon strength as he spoke. “...though it took me almost ten years to get to that conclusion myself, so I shouldn’t really talk so big,” he added with a bitter grin.

The fog shattered like glass.

* * *

Slowly, he opened his eyes.

The ‘song’ was over. If he was honest, he wouldn’t have minded listening to it a little longer.

At his feet was a pile of ashes from one of his cigars. The scent rising from those ashes was the anchor connecting him to reality. The time when he and Luvia had been trapped, it was these same cigars that had enabled him to create the bounded field that protected them so quickly. Each of his cigars was actually a disposable Mystic Code, each one laden with a simple magecraft. Even Gray, his closest disciple, was unaware of that fact.

“Well, you came back an awful lot faster than I expected. I had thought you would be trapped within your own mind for the rest of your life. I would have felt awful, what with you only getting hit because you were covering me.”

The young Orlocke met his return with a gentle smile. It seemed he had only been unconscious for a few seconds.

But even those few seconds were long enough for a tragedy to occur.

Orlocke’s body was hunched over.

Tokitou Jiroubou Seigen had rammed him with the full force of his body, clutching a sharpened Tokko in his hands. Originally from India, it was a ritual tool used for Buddhist ceremonies, but as if remembering an even older purpose, it was now embedded deep in Orlocke’s stomach.

“Don’t bother worrying about this. The boy’s already finished.”

His gaze drifted to the side.

It seemed that last howl, a final desperate effort, had been enough to put Ashbourne’s monster out of its misery as well.

He was too late. Faced with that reality, Lord El-Melloi II’s face twisted into a bitter expression.

“I figured out one more whydunnit just now.”

“Oh?”

“You’re the one who killed Geryuon Ashbourne, aren’t you?”

“—What?!” Having just arrived on the scene, Luvia exclaimed loudly with wide eyes.

In contrast, the boy gave a dry laugh. His face was already beginning to wither, slowly returning to the appearance of the old Orlocke. Being a homunculus, once the source of magical energy that was supporting his body dried up, it seemed to begin ageing all at once.

“Granide Ashbourne was obviously obsessed with you. Even the way the whole thing was set up like some sort of ritual all seemed like it was designed to scare you as well. I can’t think of any other motive for why he would be so fixated on you.”

“Revenge,” Orlocke replied. “... well, he probably knew that it was going to happen. After all, he had implanted Granide’s Magic Crest onto the Yamabushi beforehand. I’m sure he could have done with any other host, but he was probably chosen just because of his timing.” Keeping pressure on his stomach, Orlocke spoke with a faltering tone.

As gently as possible, he laid Seigen’s body on the ground. After helping him lower the body, Lord El-Melloi II spoke again.

“Why did you kill Geryuon?”

“That’s a story far too old now. Why don’t you see if you can guess? You’re the type that likes riddles, aren’t you?”

Without so much as a pause, he replied instantly. “Is it because you are Granide’s real father?”

Luvia stiffened. Turning to look at her disarrayed state, Orlocke spoke again.

“I guess I can’t hide anything from you can I, my young Lord?” Orlocke, who had returned almost entirely to his older state, paused to sigh deeply before giving a dry laugh.

In the end, who was he laughing at?

What was he laughing at?

“Though there was a considerable difference in age, Geryuon’s wife was an old friend of mine. When I began working with Geryuon, it was my first time meeting

her in decades...as improper as it was for someone my age, I had fallen in love.” His features now reminiscent of an empty skull, Orlocke dredged up his own past. “Thinking about it now, Geryuon must have known about it. The fact his wife lamented being unable to bear any children, the fact I took advantage of her, he must have known it all when we met.”

“So, that was when Granide was...?”

“It was a mistake, and it only happened once,” the old man replied. “After that, she became sick, and I was told she passed away shortly after giving birth. At the time, I had no idea whose child it was. The entire time I was working with Ashbourne, I could barely sleep from the fear of whether Ashbourne’s Magic Crest would be able to take root in him or not. Heh, though as I worried, he ended up getting sick and dying as well.”

As Orlocke had told them earlier, even the secret medicines borrowed from a druid had been no help.

“A while after the boy’s funeral, I suddenly received a message from Geryuon. ‘Thanks for everything. I’ve got something to show you.’ Hahaha, I don’t even have to tell you what he wanted to show me, do I?”

Orlocke’s gaze returned to the lifeless form of Ashbourne’s beast. Thinking of what Granide called it earlier, it was obvious what its true identity was.

A human become beast.

The wife suddenly dying after giving birth.

“‘What do you think?’ he asked me, full of pride. He had already conquered her illness. But even if she was useless to him as far as bearing children, he could always just turn her into a familiar. ‘I plan to turn her into a storehouse for Magic Crests. Thanks to what I learned from your Papilio Magia, she can now hold and preserve any kind of Magic Crest imaginable.’”

Lord El-Melloi II listened in silence.

Even Luvia could do nothing but listen quietly to the old magus’ confession.

“... thinking about it now, maybe he was being serious. Maybe he really did love her, really did love his son. Maybe turning her into that monster was just his way of expressing that love as a magus.”

A magus gives his life for his magecraft.

As long as it took you at least one step further into the depths of that magecraft, any sacrifice was warranted. Even though he was the one who had stepped furthest into that darkness, Orlocke had forgotten that fact for that one moment, and didn't remember it even after Geryuon's murder, even after leaving the scene of the crime.

“And then you received the invitation?”

“Right. Hahaha, I was wondering what on earth was going on, but I never would have guessed his dead son had already been turned into a Magic Crest and embedded into someone else.”

The wind blew.

Blowing over the now exposed pathway to the secret underground room, the wind sounded like a mournful cry.

Luvia spoke, facing Lord El-Melloi II.

“And how much did you know about these circumstances?”

“Only that there was someone here who wanted to save the Castle of Separation.”

“That’s it? What are you, some kind of romantic? Or are you just an idiot?”

Before Luvia’s small fit of anger, Orlocke laughed again.

Since the beginning of the incident at the Castle of Separation, it was the most innocent, guileless voice they had ever heard from him.

Orlocke’s body hunched forward.

“My son...” he said, stroking Seigen’s face.

From there, he began walking. Dragging his feet through the dirt, soaked in blood pouring from his open stomach, those few meters must have felt like a months-long journey to him. Though his face told how painful that journey was, he still smiled like a boy who had finally found his bluebird of happiness.

Reaching out, he touched Ashbourne’s beast, whose breath had long since stilled.

“My love...”

Embracing the beast that had once been his lover, he spoke.

Perform a dance.

Countless golden butterflies appeared, filling the world around them.

A spell to return the woman to her original form. Ashbourne's beast, which looked like a hybrid of a wolf and a spider, returned to its original form of a beautiful woman. Though the half of her body that had been blown away didn't return, the image of them embracing under the moonlight was truly beautiful.

The old magus' breath finally stopped.

Before long, voices called from behind them.

“—Mistress Luvia!”

“—What do you think you're doing? This is your student, you know.”

Having no knowledge of what had just happened there, Clown and Flue called out as they carried the unconscious Gray over.

◆ 終章 ◆



Epilogue

Squinting in the light of the autumn sun, I paid a visit to the Clock Tower for the first time in a while.

Different from the actual clock tower in the centre of London, this was placed in the midst of a scenery of interwoven brick and stone buildings that reminded me of my home town. The cityscape was an odd blend of contemporary and medieval architecture, some buildings dating back as far as the 12th Century. With over 40 student dormitories and over 100 school structures of various purposes, even the everyday lives of the people living there had been subsumed by the school. At the centre of this area, that first school built among the city buildings was referred to with reverence by magi everywhere as the Clock Tower.

Even within the city, the scenery changed considerably depending on which department of the school was responsible for it. The Department of Modern Magecraft, under the supervision of my master, was placed around a road named Slur Street. As recent as ten years ago, the area had been nothing but a neighbourhood coincidentally close to the Clock Tower, but as students from the Department of Modern Magecraft continued to flock to the area, the Magic Association had finally caved in to their need for a space of their own and bought up the whole area.

Of course, the cost of the endeavour was all forwarded to the Department of Modern Magecraft itself, so although a new neighbourhood purchased by the Magic Association sounded nice in theory, the end result was a scenery of cheap-looking buildings. Well, I kind of liked that cheapish look, at the very least.

In any case, as I entered the main building for the Department of Modern Magecraft, ... I immediately hid myself.

Not even ten seconds after I arrived, heavy footsteps sounded in the hall before me.

“Gray~~!”

Waving a hand was a handsome young boy with golden, curly hair.

“Wait, what? Gray? Where’d you go, Gray? Surely, the scent of my fair lady I haven’t met in two weeks was coming to me from the doorway!”

Looking around the area, the boy’s nose twitched like a dog, searching for a scent. As if that wasn’t enough, he then began running his nose along the walls and pillars in the room, sniffing as he went.

The number of his classmates that lamented his eccentricities paired with his good looks was not small. In fact, thanks to his looks and his bloodline, his popularity with the girls was actually quite high despite his bizarre behaviour. Apparently a fair number of parents were egging their children on to hurry up and ‘claim’ him as well. In many ways, he was a disruption to the peace of mind of many a magus.

Of all my master’s students, this boy who prided himself on being an “Idiot Genius” was without a doubt, the most difficult person for me to deal with.

Flat Escardos.

Half a year later, another intense pairing including none other than Luvia herself would make their debut in a Mineralogy course taught by my master, but at the current time, I had no idea that was coming.

Finally, the dog-boy gave up his chase, and after dropping his shoulders in disappointment he left the entranceway.

Just as I made to breathe a sigh of relief...

“... I can understand why you’d hide from him.”

A voice called out from the shadow of the pillar, causing me to jump in surprise.

“... ah, Master.”

“I’m glad to see you’ve recovered.”

“Ihihihi! I never thought you’d go so far as to pull out the ‘spear,’ but I did get to eat my fill after all!”

From the area near my right hand, Add once again laughed. Once he had said his piece, I continued.

“... yes, somehow. I heard about what happened afterwards from Miss Reines.”

“Thank you for your hard work. Unfortunately, with a method like that, there was no way it would restore her Magic Crest.”

I had heard about that as well.

Just as Orlocke had guessed, the reason my master had participated in the inheritance game was because of the damaged state of the El-Melloi family Crest. As it was now, the Crest was at no more than a fifth of its original strength. And that Crest had been transplanted to the true heir of the El-Melloi family, Reines El-Melloi Archisorte.

I could only guess at the conversation that had happened between Reines and my master.

But the contract that came out of those talks seemed to be predicated on two things: the restoration of the El-Melloi family Crest, and the repayment in full of his debt to the El-Melloi family. Putting aside the latter for the moment, the former seemed all but impossible right from the start. Using conventional methods, it was doubtful whether a Tuner spending their entire life on repairing it would be able to accomplish the task.

And yet it seemed my master had no intention of arguing the terms of that contract.

“For the record, I did manage to accomplish one thing while we were there. Whether it’s anything we can rely on or not is still a bit suspicious, however,” my master added with an unpleasant expression. No doubt he was speaking of the person who had managed to stay neck and neck with him throughout the investigation of the Castle of Separation. If at all possible, he probably wanted to avoid relying on her as much as he could.

“… you’re an awfully awkward person, aren’t you?”

“Did you say something?”

“… no.”

As I tried to think of an excuse, I went stiff.

As did my master.

He was the first to recover, though. Taking a deep breath, he turned and spoke to the newest arrival in the hallway.

“I see you managed to find your glasses.”

“I appreciate your concern. They are rather precious, after all.”

“Mystic Eye Killers are pretty hard to come by these days, right?” Saying that, my master turned his gaze directly towards her.

Somewhat out of place in the marble of the school building, she was wearing a hand-printed long sleeved kimono. Her hair was strangely long, reaching down to her ankles. Matched with those clothes and that hair, the rest of her body gave off the impression of a snake.

Dumbly, I muttered her name.

“… Hishiri Adashino…”

“My Lord doesn’t seem all that surprised though, does he?” Pushing up the frames of her glasses, Hishiri smiled sweetly.

My master replied with an annoyed tone.

“The Faculty of Law never concern themselves with the Mysteries of magecraft. Your goal is just the maintenance of the Clock Tower itself. As such, unlike other magi, your primary objective is simply finding ways to avoid death.”

With a calm sigh,

“It seems like you have a guess as to how I did it, as well.”

“I was discussing it with Orlocke earlier, you see. Whether it was the Faculty of Law or the Castle of Separation itself, finding a preserved corpse should have been child’s play for you.” He then placed his fore and middle fingers near his eyes.

“All you had to do was find a body with a build similar to yours. Once you got rid of the eyes, the whole face was effectively hidden. Even the news knows that, hiding just a person’s eyes to keep their identity secret. On top of that, with the shocking manner of death, others would be dissuaded from investigating any deeper than the surface. After seeing your body the way we did, no one would even consider whether that was actually *you* we had found.”

“My, how discerning!” she laughed with a bright smile. “I had been concerned that simply swapping a dead body in would be too simple, but it looks like the fact we were all magi allowed me to pass it off without suspicion. Of course, only thanks to you not sharing your thoughts.”

Watching her smile, my master kept silent for a while.

Then, as if he had needed to chew the words first, he spoke.

“Mister Seigen barely managed to survive the ordeal, but he’s still in rehabilitation. Cleanly separating the memories of Tokitou Jiroubou Seigen and Granide Ashbourne is proving quite difficult, and it seems that removing the Magic Crest didn’t have any substantial effect. Rosalind, who we found hidden in the middle of the Workshop, has also yet to get over the death of her brother. Heine’s Crest was able to be recovered, but that has just drawn Rosalind back into the conflict over who will succeed the Istari family.”

“How awful.” Hishiri’s face held an honest sadness to it as she spoke. Honest, as if she was sympathizing with the trials of a character from a novel she was reading.

As if he couldn’t blame her for her way of thinking, my master let it slide as he changed the topic of the conversation.

“The Faculty of Law has been working with the Ashbourne family for the past hundred or so years to help him with his ritual, haven’t they?”

“Oh? Why would you think that?”

“Even if one’s Magic Crest being damaged is a matter of some embarrassment, there is no way that every single magi that went to him for a Restoration disappeared without any rumours sprouting up. Especially considering how rare the services he offered were. If he wanted to erase those rumours, he would have needed the help of an organization that had eyes on the entire Magic Association. Like, the Faculty of Law, for instance.”

As the thought clicked in my head, I almost blurted my surprise out loud.

Hishiri’s smile was unfaltering. With the calm gentleness of the full moon, Hishiri’s smile didn’t so much as twitch as she listened.

“On top of that, everyone who was gathered at the Castle of Separation for Ashbourne’s inheritance was someone of considerable clout within the Clock Tower, and someone who the Faculty of Law would have difficulty keeping the reins on. That was the case for all of his rituals, wasn’t it? Ashbourne’s system for gathering materials for his Restoration was, at the same time, a system for the Faculty of Law to get rid of those magi who were in your way.”

“Lord El-Melloi II.” Hishiri cut in as my master was speaking. “Do you have any proof to back up these accusations?”

“Not a bit.”

“Then I thank you for your amusing fiction, but if you don’t have even an ounce of evidence, it’s a bit difficult to even call it detective work, no?”

“Naturally.”

My master turned to look out the window.

Even having seen through to the true scheme underneath would be no consolation to anyone. From the start, a magus’ consolation couldn’t come from anything outside of magecraft anyway. Even I felt the painful vacancy behind that drive, that impulse.

“Then, one last thing.” My master raised a finger. “You are the one who created the Angelic Names, aren’t you?”

“Oh my,” Hishiri said, raising a hand to her mouth, as if to say she had never considered that would have been figured out.

“Of course, Notarikon and Gematria are the specialities of Kabbalah, but you played with them just a little too much. It just didn’t match what little of Geryon’s nature we could understand from the rest of the Castle. A puzzle like this one could only have been made by someone who really didn’t care about magecraft all that much.”

“... I see. And magi who are capable of thinking like that are fairly limited, right?”

Whydunnit.

My master had said before that the ‘why’ was the only thing we could figure out. Trying to figure out what kind of magecraft had accomplished it, what kind of magecraft could accomplish it, was impossible. But by looking at the results, you could match the ‘why’ to a magus’ particular nature.

“For example, me,” Hishiri said, pointing to herself. “For example, you,” she said again, pointing at my master. “Being a magus is a dance with deception and Mystery. Everyone knows reaching the Root is impossible, yet still they chase it. Only people like us are able to extricate themselves from that foolish dance. Or at least, so I thought. Was I wrong?”

“You don’t pursue it because you lack the will. I don’t pursue it because I lack the talent. We’re different enough to make me feel nauseous.”

“Even if the result is the same? I didn’t think you’d be such a sentimentalist as to say the journey is what’s important.”

Hishiri extended a hand towards my master.

Even in a royal palace, no matter what the occasion, what man could refuse her offer?

“Won’t you dance with me?”

“Unfortunately, I’ll have to refuse. Now if you’ll excuse me.”

If anyone could, it was my master.

Suddenly taking my hand, he walked past Hishiri, pulling me along. As I stumbled from the unexpected force by which he pulled me forward, Hishiri called out from behind us.

“You haven’t given up yet?”

“Right.”

Without turning to face her, he answered.

“I’m going to meet him again.”

Him.

Of all the words I had heard my master speak, that one seemed to hold something special. As if anyone being able to hear ‘his’ words a single time would be able to live their whole life, chest puffed up with pride.

“Once my contract with Reines is concluded, I will return to being just an ordinary magus. And when that happens, I will return to that fight; I will return to fight in the Fifth Holy Grail War.”

Of course, from our position in the future, we know.

That vow would never be fulfilled. The prayers my master had built up for over ten years would not reach that far eastern land, or the battle that would rage there. The battle known as the Fifth Holy Grail War would come to an end before my master could so much as touch it.

But that was not a cause for despair.

“... Master.”

Once we had separated considerably from Hishiri, I spoke. I was nervous and scared, but hiding as much of my feelings as I could, I called out to him.

“What is it?”

“... I’ve decided on something.” Without raising my gaze, I whispered to the hand that was pulling mine.

My life was nothing but regret. Ever since I was aware of myself... no, even since the moment I was born, I had thought God had made some kind of mistake when he made me. Even now, that feeling grew ever stronger, and I had no delusions of it changing in the future.

But even so-

“... please, let me go with you to your battle.”

For the first time, I thought that this was one decision I would never regret.

Commentary

by Gen Urobuchi

I never thought I would meet Waver Velvet again in quite this manner.

Until now, I had been quite satisfied that I was able to see cameos from him as Lord El-Melloi II in “Fate/Strange Fake” and “Fate/Kaleid Liner - Prisma Illya.” To see him return after ascending to such a splendid seat of power, having his name raised to such heights...for me, there was nothing that would make me happier.

The prospect of seeing another author write about Waver as he was getting his footing as a magus, able to do nothing but sit back and watch as events unfolded around him, was honestly a point of unease for me. But in the end, that worry was for nothing. The character that came out on the other end of ten years had grown splendidly, crowned with the title of Lord, and a completely different man from the boy I had written. The gentleman who had polished his powers of analysis, bearing a cunning like an old man’s wisdom, while still hiding the distortion of his youth somewhere in his heart was truly an enchanting character!

It’s now been ten years since derivative works of the Fate franchise began being developed, and even now new printed works and anime adaptations are continuing to hit the shelves. It occurred to me that, with the influx of new fans to the series, this book may have been the first spinoff work some of them had ever actually read. In light of that, please allow me to give a brief explanation of this book’s main character, Lord El-Melloi II, and his history.

The original work all of this was based on, the visual novel *Fate/Stay Night*, debuted in January of 2004 (the world itself had even more history, dating back to works like “Mahoutsukai no Yoru,” “Kara no Kyoukai,” and “Tsukihime,” but I digress). And in October of the following year, alongside the release of the fandisc “Fate/Hollow Ataraxia,” work began on another spinoff that would become a prequel of sorts to *Stay Night*: “Fate/Zero.” In this work, the character of Waver Velvet, the boy that would one day rise to the position of Lord El-Melloi II, made his first appearance.

By the way, though the release of *Zero*’s first volume was slightly pre-empted by the release of “Character Material” in August 2006, Lord El-Melloi II was included along with the rest of the *Zero* cast in the book, making it his first appearance. At that point, the character traits of “famous Clock Tower lecturer” and “Japanese game otaku” were decided on, and began development in *Zero* volume 2 and onwards. In addition, Waver’s character design was also developed by attempting to create a younger version of the already known Lord El-Melloi II. The rest was just filling in the complex history of London’s star.

With that much in the way of preamble, I can now explain how the unworthy Gen Urobuchi came to be entrusted with writing the commentary of this book. The truth is, I am actually the author of *Fate/Zero*. I'm the one who raised little Waver.

Knowing that, I hope you can understand why I was so excited to be writing this commentary. In a way, it was a feeling like I had married off my beloved daughter, and after eight long years she had returned home with my grandson. It was profound happiness like this that has kept me continuing as an author for so long, and it made me fully realize just how lucky I am all over again.

By the way, as far as the plot of *Fate/Zero* was concerned, there was not much written about Waver's future other than "he survives." It was actually Nasu Kinoko who originally proposed in his "Side Material" that he would go on to achieve great success, becoming a lecturer at the Clock Tower and succeeding the name of El-Melloi. It was thanks to him that Waver's future became so bright. This kind of consideration for one's own characters was beyond me as a writer, so Waver really was quite a lucky boy to be blessed by such a kind original author.

Also in this book we see the appearance of one of the flowers of the *Fate* series, Luvia gelita Edelfelt, as one who undertakes great effort that no one could laugh at. This is also an important point. Though she didn't have an appearance in the original visual novel, she was mentioned in various supplementary materials, so she began to appear in several derivative works. In these works, her role was incredibly striking, but perhaps too much so, as each time she appeared she tended strongly towards serving as comic relief. In this story of the Castle Adra, continuing the legacy of "Mahoutsukai no Yoru's" view of the world, she very much carried the air of a heartless outsider, smelling of blood and playing by no one's rules but her own. It was like a professional comedian making a successful transition to a dramatic actor.

The one who accomplished that amazing feat, Makoto Sanda, is nothing short of incredible. Being able to accomplish that while perfectly illustrating the activities of Lord El-Melloi II off of nothing but the basic setting was nothing short of a master's work. From the veteran who had survived through the brutal light novel market, especially after moving himself to work in the world of Type Moon, was a work that mesmerized its readers with the dreadfulness akin to a naked blade.

When I heard that the Case Files series was going to continue, I couldn't help but start looking forward to the next instalment. Heroic Spirits that transcended time, and magi pursuing True Magic. For the writer, that world is like a mountainous vein of ore, and for the reader an even greater mountain of exciting things yet unknown. As one who was given the chance to explore that new continent myself, I can affirm this. Mr. Sanda's series will only pick up speed from here, and it will continue to drive you readers to wild excitement.

Afterword

by Makoto Sanda

—It was like a star to him.

Most people would have likely just called it simple admiration.

Reaching out towards that one rare person. At times following them as a guide. At times mustering courage from their image. At times jealous or envious, but always reaching towards that person to whom there was almost no connection.

He never thought to make the stars his own.

He never thought to become a star himself.

But.

If he couldn't give up, what could he do?

For the one who had been enchanted by that star more than anyone else, who longed for it more than anyone else, who understood its meaning and its beauty more than anyone else. He knew better than anyone else that it would be forever beyond his reach.

It would no doubt be easier on him if he just cut ties with it completely.

But even knowing that, what if he decided to spend his life trying to get even a little closer to that star?

What would he feel, looking up at the night sky?

* * *

It was about seven years ago that Mr. Nasu Kinoko first approached me about Type Moon Books.

On our way home from Shinjuku, at the light in front of Alta, he very passionately talked about how he wanted to release more books like Fate/Zero to broaden the Type Moon universe. Hearing that, I told him I definitely wanted to help, and so to contact me any time. And as I brainstormed ideas, the years passed.

That passion was reignited at the unforgettable Type Moon 10th Anniversary Festival. In the middle of that dazzlingly beautiful event, while sitting beside Mr. Kinoko after he invited me, I was hit with a shock that made me want to scream.

Both the novel and anime adaptation of *Fate/Zero* were fantastic works in their own right. But even so, watching on that huge screen, with that incredible sound, I was struck by that fatal impulse all over again.

I want to tell his story.

Of course, you probably know whose story I'm talking about.

Waver Velvet.

Known later as Lord El-Melloi II.

A few days later, when I asked if anyone had plans to write a story about Lord El-Melloi II, I was struck with the unforgettable counter: “Nope. Do you?”

Through all the ups and downs of planning, no matter how many times we had to rewrite the plot, I never felt like I was suffering. Reading and rereading the already printed works, and confirming details about the Clock Tower and various characters with the boss was indescribably fun.

Especially, when looking at Luvia gelita, who had popped up in various works as an almost parody character, I carefully interrogated him on everything from her spells to her speech as I reconstructed her character. Every time I consulted him he gave me even more fresh information, and it saddened me I wasn't even able to include half of what he had given me.

Now, this time the story's style ended up being, in a broad sense, a mystery.

For the subject, I used both real world and Type Moon magecraft.

Even in history, there are all kinds of ways magic has injected itself. Culture, race, custom, faith, art, and even lineage. In order to bring out the character of Lord El-Melloi II, I picked up as many of those aspects as I could.

A man who knew the stars better than anyone, yet would never be able to reach them. That was how I tried to portray him.

And I hope that his Watson, Gray and Add, as well as the other magi at the Castle of Separation, all caught your interest in some way.

Also, many of you have probably already guessed this from the “1” printed on the front cover, but the current plan is to release one book every year. I'm hoping to meet

again in this series every winter.

Lastly, I would like to thank Kiyomune Miwa for taking charge of the Magical Investigation (If we hadn't met, I doubt I ever could have written a story like this!), Mineji Sakamoto for the gorgeous illustrations, Gen Urobuchi who both gave birth to our Waver and was kind enough to write a commentary for this book, Ryougo Narita for giving me advice all throughout the writing process, and of course Nasu Kinoko and Takashi Takeuchi, along with the people from Type Moon with names starting with O K S G.

And, of course, to you as well, for taking the time to read this book. I hope that somehow this story has worked some magic in your life.

2014, November.

Reading Naoshi Arakawa's "Your Lie in April."