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case. 魔眼蒐集列車(上)
イラスト 坂本みねぢ
レール・ツェッペリン

三田 誠

事件簿 三世のメドロス



ロード・エルメロイⅡ世の事件簿

◆4◆

レール・ツェッペリン
「case.魔眼蒐集列車(上)」

三田 誠

イラスト 坂本みねぢ

Translated by *TwilightsCall* (Beast's Lair)
Compiled and Edited by PeriExe (Protoform X)







「……あ、あなた、は?」

「んつふふふ! 訊かれて語るもおこがましいが、近頃流行の魔眼女子!
はやり
エルメロイ教室に咲く花一輪、
イヴェット・L・レーマンちゃんとはあたしのことですよ!」

The Case Files of Lord El-Melloi II



“Mystic Eyes Collection Train (Upper)”



TYPE-MOON BOOKS

サA-04



Lord El-Melloi
W

The Case Files of Lord El-Melloi II

case. Mystic Eyes Collection Train (Upper)

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◆序章◆

-Prologue-



"-that was back when I was traveling around the world."

My master was in uncharacteristically good spirits that night, holding a silver glass. Supposedly the drink inside was a vintage home to Macedonia, one he only unstoppered for special occasions. At least, so I heard from an old student.

We were in my master's apartment.

As usual, garbage, books, and game consoles littered the room. On a sofa that had some small relief from the surrounding mess, my master sat drinking. He was celebrating the promotion of one of his students - Svin Glascheit - being raised to the rank of Pride.

The El-Melloi classroom was famous even within the Clock Tower for putting out excellent students one after another. Whenever the conversation turned that way, however, my master would always respond with a confused mix of happiness, sadness, frustration, and bitterness.

As if he was watching small birds leap up to a place he could never reach.

But this time, my master's grief was unusually faint. Perhaps because the achievement of the rank of Pride was rare for those under twenty years old, even within the El-Melloi classroom. Or perhaps because it was his longest serving student, one who he had trained from the very beginning, who had been honoured. Or maybe there was still some other reason we didn't know.

For whatever reason, after returning to his apartment off Druid Street, he once again took out his glass and alcohol.

And even rarer, he began to tell me a story of his past of his own volition.

"After all that had happened in Japan, I wasn't so keen on returning to the Clock Tower straight away, you see. Using the little money I had left, I wandered for a bit. The main push of my trip was through India and Persia, eventually ending up in Macedonia. Since Japan aside, it had been my first time outside of England, everything I saw and

heard was novel. ...well, even my time in Japan was rather busy, so it was really my first time traveling by myself as well."

My master continued to speak, his face beginning to faintly flush.

As I saw his long dark hair occasionally cover the flush in his skin, a question suddenly occurred to me.

"Umm...if you were traveling alone, how did you deal with your hair? Did you brush it everyday yourself?"

"Haha, back then my hair was much shorter."

My master gave a faint smile. Gently, he swirled the drink in his cup.

I could even smell the mellow aroma it gave off from where I was. It made me think of the colour of the far off Mediterranean Sea. Depending on the season, it shifted in colour from a sapphire blue to a wine red.

"Well, for my journey, it was better that way. Every country I passed through was blistering hot, after all." With a nod, my master narrowed his eyes. "At the beginning I was terrified of everything, though. At one point my bag was stolen, and I just broke down crying. I also ended up getting in a fight with some gang, and had to use some otherwise useless magecraft just to escape. In the end, maybe what gave me the confidence I could survive back at the Clock Tower was feeling so close to death there."

What was he like back then?

I couldn't even imagine my master with short hair, let alone with tears in his eyes. But if you were to tell me that he was always like he was now, I would certainly think that was wrong.

I was sure that the master I saw now was a product of great hardship and conflict. Something that could never be wiped away, no matter how many achievements he piled up as a Lord. Regardless of his humiliation and sense of inferiority, of how he envied the inborn talents of others, some of those others in turn offered him support.

It was like someone who had made a terrible mistake in the first move of a game of Jenga.

Even though the tower was constantly swaying, ready to topple at any moment, by sticking blocks in at just the right time and place, he was able to maintain a miraculous balance.

"Greece wasn't bad either. The weather there is always dry. Many parts of their culture, like this drink that is fondly reminiscent of the sea, is built around longing after something. Not just because the Mediterranean was so close, they loved the water itself."

The aroma of liquor drifted lazily out from the sofa. The contrast from the usual smell of cigar smoke made the whole scene feel completely out of the ordinary.

"What was I talking about again? Right, about Greece. That was the first time I got into the mess of teaching. While I was visiting some sites around there, I went ahead and introduced myself to the Second Owner. Apparently, it was quite rare for someone from the Clock Tower to show up around there, so I ended up teaching a few of his sons for a bit. Not that we had a good enough room, or any decent textbooks to work from."

"Then you became a lecturer at the clock Tower?"

In response to my question, my master gave a soft sigh.

"For some reason, I thought that wouldn't be so bad. Actually, I had expected to end up as a lecturer, much farther down the line. But when I returned to the Clock Tower, I got wrapped up in all kinds of things, and I ended up starting right away to start chipping away at a few debts."

He took another long drink from his glass.

From the smell, it seemed to be quite a strong drink, but that didn't stop him from refilling the glass the moment it was empty.

"...aren't you drinking a little too much?"

"Come on, Gray. I may not be that good with alcohol, but I can handle this much. At the party earlier, Reines drank ten times as much as this, didn't she?"

"I think Miss Reines is a bit too strong for her own good, though..."

In Britain, it was acceptable for children to drink after five years old if accompanied by a guardian, but even then she was much stronger than was reasonable. According to her, being able to hold one's liquor was an important factor when mingling in high society. But the way she knocked out every challenger from the El-Melloi classroom, and still was able to stand over them laughing at the end...maybe she had been a bit drunk, after all.

At any rate, it was time for me to relieve my master of the bottle.

"...hmph."

"...you're going to start regretting this come tomorrow, so this is your last one."

"Bah."

Though his expression was that of a petulant child, he settled with guarding the last glass he still held.

And then, he suddenly spoke out again.

"Apparently, my predecessor also reached the rank of Pride in his teens."

My breath caught.

If talking about his predecessor, there was only one person he could be referring to.

The Fourth Holy Grail War - a battle between seven magi and their summoned Heroic Spirits, to win the wish-granting Holy Grail. In that conflict, the previous Lord El-Melloi had stood against my master.

Kayneth El-Melloi Archibald.

"That was why he was so firmly regarded as a prodigy. The El-Melloi faction at that time had powerful families aside from the Archibalds, but once he had swept aside the competition and received the Source Crest, anyone would have had to admit that he was in the ideal place for a magus."

Once, my master had said this about his predecessor.

'-the fact such talent had been wasted for nothing, that we were never able to see things in the same way...it was just sad.'

Their relationship couldn't have been a good one.

As with many other excellent magi, he was not a particularly amicable person. Someone as mediocre as my master was at that time wouldn't have even entered his notice. That he would someday rise to the name of Lord El-Melloi II was a thought that never would have occurred to either of them...so Reines said with a mischievous laugh.

Even so.

I'm sure the image of his predecessor was still burned into his eyelids. So much so that when someone mentioned the ideal for magi, he was the first thing that came up.

"Ahh...finally..."

As his speech began to slur, my master let a long, drunk breath out into the room.

"Finally...one of my students...made it there..."

His words cut off.

Dropping his head, he fell asleep right on the sofa. Maybe I should have praised him for at least putting down the cup without spilling any.

For a while, I didn't move.

Watching his sleeping face, I poked him in the cheek.

Maybe because he was never getting enough sleep, it seemed a bit thin. Not just for his students or his classroom, he never failed to keep up the lessons for himself as well. Even though he knew he had neither the bloodline nor the talent to succeed, he hadn't given up on a single thing.

"Ihihihi! He's completely defenceless now! Why don't you try going for the lips?!"

As Add started saying stupid things as usual, I decided to shut him up using force for now.

Placing a blanket over my master, I sat down on the floor nearby. I was supposed to head back to the dorm, but I decided today was a special occasion. After all, if I went back now, by the time I arrived in the morning and got his hair all untangled, we would be late.

Wrapping myself in my own blanket, somewhat annoyed at the scent of tobacco still clinging to it, I stared at my master.

The wrinkles in his brow were still there, so I ended up poking him again. No matter how much I tried to straighten them out, those deep wrinkles just wouldn't completely disappear.

At this rate, he would just keep building them up. Not running from the pain, not running from his own inferiority. With that straightforwardness...with that foolishness, he would still raise his head. That resolve and frustration would just carve those wrinkles deeper and deeper.

"...even so, do you still want to meet him?"

I ended up saying something I could never say to his face.

I remembered the sight of my master holding the relic after the conclusion of the previous incident. What did it feel like, to spend one's whole life thinking about one single person?

(...at least...)

I thought, even as sleep was fast approaching.
I hope I can be of at least some help.

If I could help someone who was so dedicated in some way, maybe then I could feel proud of myself for the first time in my life.

-Probably.

I had a premonition.

Since I had come to London, a little more than four months had passed.

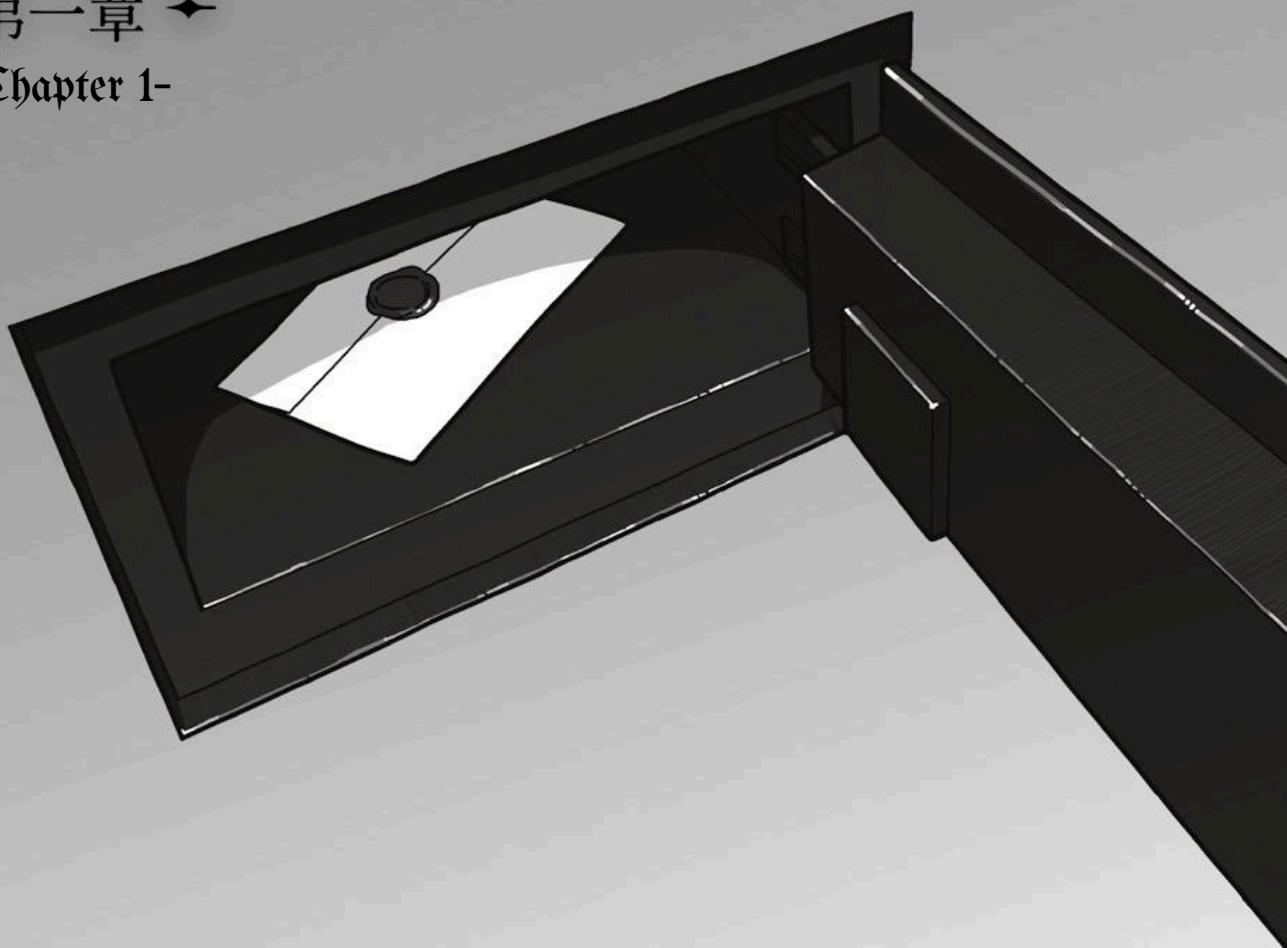
The reason my master had called me here.

The Fifth Holy Grail War, in which someone from the Clock Tower would be elected to participate.

While making all sorts of preparations, he was trying to bring about that one future.

At that time, I understood very clearly - or maybe, I realised for the first time - it was that kind of incident.

◆ 第一章 ◆
-Chapter 1-



~Part 1~

Winter is here - so I thought the moment I stepped out of the dormitory.

It was already nearing the end of November. Maybe I was a bit late in noticing it, but these past few months were really the first time I had lived outside my home town for any length of time. The coming and going through the cold made me feel like I had come to rest in one place, like I had finally settled into this town of stone and brick.

I could see my breath misting in front of my face.

I had heard that the Museum of Natural History had set up a kind of Ice Skating Rink. I was a little intrigued by the idea, but naturally I didn't have the kind of time to go visit it. Putting on the gloves that the dorm advisor Krishna had pressed on me, I left the entrance of the dormitory behind.

Stepping out onto the asphalt, I made my way to the bus stop.

The famous, all-red double decker bus.

Though I had taken a liking to the cute new linked buses that reminded me of a mother and child kangaroo, even the older models had a certain charm to them. They didn't really run enough buses to keep up with the demand for them, so depending on the time of day it was often very crowded, but I had since become used to that.

Though the idea of so many living people still struck me as a little unnerving.

I thought maybe, just a little, I might have changed.

Before, I definitely would have run away from a crowded bus.

When I first arrived in London, the sheer number of people was beyond my ability to bear, so I woke up early every morning to have time to walk where I needed to go. At the time, that had made my schedule offset from my master's, meaning I had to rely on others if I needed help with anything. Even now, thinking back on it made my face flush.

Whether it was Flat who was always running wild, or Svin whose nose would go into a terrifying frenzy the moment he saw me, I had no doubt caused all sorts of trouble for them. So if I had become a bit braver, it was probably because of them.

Outside the school, I got off the bus.

As I made my way along the street, my nose caught a cold smell.

That was one of the Bounded Fields, set up by magi and imperceptible to normal people. I now understood that. In my master's lectures I had learned that there were all sorts of Bounded Fields. From the obvious ones that altered sight, there were those that could prevent hearing and smell, and even those capable of inducing touch and taste sensations.

I also learned that the way to break a Bounded Field was meditation.

The fundamental trick was to get a firm grasp on your own location and posture, allowing you to avoid being led astray by the elements constructing the Field. Recalling that lecture, I steadied my breathing, making my way down the street with hardly any awareness of my surroundings.

Before long, my field of vision opened up.

With modern looking Mirror-buildings and nostalgic, old fashioned ones lined up with each other, the cityscape had a very patchwork feel to it. Though its impact was far from that of the Golden Lane of Prague, it was certainly a quiet street, where one could feel magecraft's influence.

In short, it was the city of Norwich, the Faculty of Modern Magecraft, the main headquarters of the El-Melloi Classroom - Slur Street.

(Though calling it a city may be too modest...)

Unconsciously, I began to smile.

The four day overnight intensive course I had just spent here made that impression stronger in my mind. Just on the other side was the immovable heart of the Clock

Tower - the First Faculty of Mystile, governed by one of the three Great Families of the Clock Tower, Trambelio. Being so close was kind of unfortunate for us.

(...master, did you remember to brush your hair? Did you sleep in this morning too?)

As I approached, I suddenly had an uneasy feeling in my chest.

Though he must have been able to do it himself at one point, the one who treated it like a hassle was the man himself. Or rather, maybe having someone to do it for him was what made him fall into laziness. Maybe as his disciple, it would have been more proper for me to leave it to him, acting as if he was capable of doing anything he needed on his own.

So thinking, I pressed straight through the intersection on the ivy-covered road, entering the main building.

Passing through the hall that seemed singularly charged with a strange energy, I went up the stairs and turned down a hallway, where I immediately met an acquaintance.

"Miss Reines?"

"-oh, if it isn't Gray," the blonde-haired, blue-capped girl looked back. Staring fixedly at me, her red eyes shone as if at some private joke. "Yes, yes. You look good, today. In this season, just like a fairy out of the kingdom of winter."

"U-umm..."

Not knowing how to answer, I just hung my head.

Was it just my imagination that she seemed so much happier to see me flustered?

Though she watched me with that smile for a while, she eventually made a sudden turn to the window at her side.

"My apologies, but could I ask you to wait for a bit?"

Through the window, she was watching my master in the middle of one of his lectures.

The classroom was right beside us. Though it was a lecture on magecraft, the setup looked like any other university. I had heard they were constructed extra sturdily, in the case of experiments gone wrong or altercations between magi, and that they were built over top of leylines, but as someone who wasn't a magus myself, all I noticed was a strange chill from time to time.

It seemed the lecture was just coming to an end.

From those who quickly gathered into noisy crowds to those who descended into silent review of the lesson just finished, the students all did as they pleased. After reluctantly answering a few questions from some students who seemed just a bit too eager for his tastes, my master made his way to the exit where we were standing.

"...Reines," he said, stopping immediately as his brow furrowed.

He was wearing the same suit and red necktie as always. His hair was well brushed. Having just finished his lecture, he hadn't had the time yet to get a cigar. That displeased posture was a state I had long grown familiar to seeing in him.

But,

(...huh?)

For some reason, I found myself stunned.

Was it unease? More than just the faint sign of dark circles under his eyes, something seemed wrong much deeper down.

"A pleasure to meet you, dearest brother."

"What do you want now?"

"Am I only allowed to see you when I have business? I'm your sweet, adorable little sister, after all."

"Of course I don't want to see you if you don't have any business with me."

"How cruel. I may just have to charge you for all the pillows I'll ruin with my tears."

Without any impression that her feelings had been hurt at all, she answered back.

As if afraid of drawing her attention, even the other students in the classroom were covering their mouths as they whispered to each other. All of them knew that Reines El-Melloi Archisorte was the true power behind the El-Melloi Faction, the puppet master holding the strings of the glorious Lord El-Melloi II. Whether they greeted her with glares or kindness, they all knew they could easily be dragged into the power games of the Clock Tower and could guarantee an end to their everyday life. Those who knew all this yet chose to ignore it were Flat, Svin, and precious few others.

Reines dropped her voice low, jerking her chin toward one of the students in the classroom.

"Anyways, I do have a question...what's going on here, dearest brother?"

"Hmm? He's a new student who joined the class last month. His name is Caules Forvedge."

I looked to the person Reines was indicating - an unassuming boy wearing glasses.

While most of the students admitted to the El-Melloi classroom were problem children in one way or another, he didn't seem especially like he matched that description.

Playing with some sort of ceramic pot, he seemed to be trying something. Though he didn't seem especially skilled, his earnestness was plain to see. I imagined there were some people who might find that kind of person endearing.

However,

"That's not what I mean," Reines immediately countered. Her finger moved a little.

"Why does this new student have one of Atram's Primeval Batteries?"

"Ah..."

I blurted out, my eyes opening wide.

Looking again, the ceramic pot Caules was toying with certainly did seem reminiscent of the Primeval Batteries used by Atram Galiasta, the magus we fought at the Twin Towers of Iselma.

"There's no 'why' even if you ask," my master answered, shaking his head. "Flat completely analysed that spell during the previous incident. And asking around the Clock Tower, there was no evidence he had ever made a patent for it, so I helped develop a theory for it. Then, I came across a student who happened to have a good affinity for it, so I figured I'd try teaching it to him. See, nothing strange about it at all, right?"

"What part of that isn't strange?!"

Even I could understand the frustration behind Reines' muted shout.

For a magus, the secrets behind one's magecraft were like their own life. When someone hadn't claimed a patent for something, it wasn't because it was a trifling piece of magecraft, but because it was too important to risk putting in the hands of other magi. In short, rather than worrying about the problem of rights and patents, the need to conceal it took precedence.

...once again, I understood why normal magi so thoroughly rejected my master.

Of course, as far as magi were concerned, my master was nothing special.

If Flat hadn't coincidentally managed to analyse the spell, there was no threat at all of my master being able to reproduce it. From the start, it was something no one would have even considered. But, once certain conditions were met, my master could suddenly obtain a blasphemous level of results.

The reproduction of another's magecraft was, in a way, the destruction of that magecraft.

"Sometimes, you act so much like a Lord," Reines sighed, closing one eye. "At any rate, what made that oil baron so interested in you that he's come by once a week to visit you?"

"I'm not entirely sure what he's thinking, but he's always coming in bragging about some Talisman he's bought, or some Mystic Code he's made. Well, he's bragging, but only about things he wouldn't bother to keep a secret about."

One time when I had met him, I had also come dangerously close to showing Add off in front of him.

In short, the Middle-Eastern magus had, in his typically overbearing and shameless way, said 'Your master has his own tastes, right? Hopefully it's something I can use to bribe him with.' Maybe when he had come to take an interest in my master, he had begun to become aware of the things his friends had. I'd heard that long ago, noble families regarded those who weren't nobles as less than human. Maybe this was similar.

With a cough, my master cleared his throat.

"At any rate, I'm being careful too, so it's not like I'm being used by someone outside of Norwich."

"As if I'd let that happen!" Her second shout had a ring of sincerity to it.

Being that their positions were more often than not reversed made the scene all that much more serious.

"...even I don't know when the knife is coming for your back, after all."

A chill ran down my spine.

Having already experienced many incidents in which people lost their lives first hand, that scene was too easy to imagine. Without thinking, I spoke out.

"When that time comes...I'll keep him safe."

"Oh?"

Reines and my master turned to me.

When they looked at me, I realised what I had said, and my face and ears turned beet red. My began to shake down to my fingertips, with a feeling like I was about to throw up my own heart.

Seeing that, Reines just shrugged.

"How noble for someone who is only a disciple. Please, share some of that with my brother, if you would."

"...thank you, Gray,"

I heard a curt response.

There was no way I could meet his eyes. The only thing I could think of was how glad I was that no one had laughed at my overly conceited claim.

"Anyways, to the matter at hand-"

As Reines tried to change the subject, a new voice called out.

"Oh, what's this? If it isn't Reines!"

(...huh?)

For a moment, my thoughts were occupied solely by a question mark.

As far as I knew, the only one who referred to Reines so flippantly was Flat. But this time, the voice was definitely a girl's.

When I turned, I saw a flashy looking, star-shaped eye patch.

She appeared to be around 16. With hair so pink it must have been dyed, her clothes evoked what I guess was called lolita fashion. With her frilly, snow white dress, she looked less like a magus and more like some sort of idol.

"Ah, the rumoured disciple too! This is the first time we've met, right?" the eye-patched girl said, energetically grabbing my hand.

Facing down the overwhelming tension between us, she just nodded over and over.

"...um, you are...?"

"Heheheh! Maybe it's presumptuous of me to say so myself, but I'm the always fashionable Mystic Eye Girl! The lone flower blooming in the El-Melloi Classroom, I am Yvette L Lehrman!"

As she spoke, she threw a sideways peace sign over her eye patch.

"Though I originally belonged to the Faculty of Mineralogy (*Kischur*), my application was finally accepted, and I've moved to the El-Melloi Classroom! A pleasure to meet you!"

"I...I see... I'm...Gray. Nice to meet you."

"Oho! A name that perfectly matches your atmosphere! I had heard he had a personal disciple, but man, between me and Reines and you, our professor is building quite the harem, isn't he? At this rate, he'll be the number one most sought after guy in the Clock Tower in no time! Ah, if you're curious, he's only at number four right now!"

"...and who exactly did that survey?" my master muttered, the wrinkles on his brow growing deeper and deeper.

"Oh no, that is definitely a girls' secret! Even if you're my professor, I can't just spill the beans, can I? Though, if you feel like going on an Aventure Lesson with me now, I might let that rule slide a bit?"

"Sorry, I've got another lesson to prepare for. Reines, I'll talk to you later as well. Gray, let's go."

Turning his back on them, my master quickly left us all behind.

With a quick goodbye to Yvette and Reines, I hurried after him.

~Part 2~

Entering my master's private room, I shut the door behind me as I stared on in surprise.

Compared to his apartment, it was terrifyingly well ordered. I had been here any number of times before, as evidenced by the shoe rack and tools for polishing them. The tools themselves were new, bought with money I had made at my part time job cleaning the dormitory.

But...

There was definitely something off.

Compared to my memory from a few days earlier, the position of a few books and game devices seemed a little off, and the usual dust seemed strangely disturbed. It was common for my master to turn his apartment upside down looking for some document or other that he had lost track of, but for it to happen in here was quite rare.

On top of that, while each book on his bookshelf was put away neatly, it seemed almost as if someone had done so just to hide the fact they were searching through them...

(...nevermind)

Putting a stop to that line of thinking for now, I decided to try and soften the atmosphere.

"She's quite a strong character, isn't she?" I smiled a little, recalling Yvette.

Though in a different way than Flat, she certainly had a very overwhelming personality. Of course, the El-Melloi classroom had more than enough eccentric characters, but I couldn't help but feel like she was getting close to the top of that list.

My master just gave a light snort in response.

"Powerful indeed. The first time I met her, she introduced herself as a spy for Meluastea, just plain as day."

My breath caught.

I had heard there were a number of different factions within the Clock Tower. The Aristocratic Faction headed by Barthomelloi, and the Democratic Faction headed by Trambelio. Beyond those two was the Neutralist faction. Wasn't Meluastea the family that served as the faction's head?

"Uh, if she's a spy, then..."

"Yes. In short, she's there to keep us in check. There's nothing we have that particularly needs to be kept hidden from them, but there's meaning in them going through the motions. And even without her, it seems Meluastea is trying to establish a connection with Norwich.

"...I see."

I remembered what happened at Iselma.

The head of one of the three great families of the Clock Tower, the old lady Lord Valueleta, came to regard my master rather highly. At the same time, it appeared as if she was trying to find some way to pull the El-Melloi family out of its native Aristocratic faction, according to Reines.

If that was the case, it only made sense that Meluastea was trying to do the same.

"Not that they have any intention of trying to move us. For better or for worse, as opportunistic as Meluastea is, they don't have the guts to try a move like that. That's why they were so brazen about placing a spy here."

"...now that you mention it, we ran into a magus that called himself a spy at Iselma too, didn't we?"

"It's pretty common practice for one to just admit it themselves and try for a straightforward exchange of information, rather than try to play covert and risk having their cover blown later. Though in this case, diplomat is probably a better word than

spy. Maybe announcing herself was all Yvette's idea, but I'm sure even Lord Meluastea wouldn't be especially bothered by being found out.

In any case, the Faculty of Mineralogy that she came from used to be managed by El-Melloi anyways. In the confusion following my predecessor's death, Meluastea swooped in and took control. No doubt at the time they expected us to be extinguished without trouble, but now that we've somehow managed to pull through the mess alive, they want to play friendly enough to avoid it devolving into an all out war."

"...is that how it is..." I nodded, pretending to understand.

Actually, I probably got less than half of it. The political games of the Clock Tower were just too complicated for my head. I knew that before the Faculty of Modern Magecraft, the El-Melloi faction had been in charge of something else, but...

...at this point, there was something I was more interested in.

As fast as I could, I finished the usual work like getting the schedule in order, before finally resolving myself to ask.

"...Master, did something happen?"

"What do you mean?" he replied, looking over some documents.

Though he gave off an unapproachable air, this time I forced myself to press the issue.

"It looks like you're worried about something."

I just said what I honestly thought.

When he was explaining about Atram's Primeval Battery earlier, I felt like he normally would have had a much more composed response. The way he seemed to snap like that...though it was just a little, it felt like a response that wouldn't come from the master I knew.

Though maybe that was just me being presumptuous.

"You've completely stopped giving lectures at the main building of the Clock Tower, and even your hours here are getting reduced. Is something wrong?"

There was no reply.

With virtually no sound reaching us from outside the room, the silence within was almost painful.

"...does it have something to do with the Fifth Holy Grail War?"

"No!"

I jumped in surprise at his sudden shout. However, I don't think that surprise registered on my face. I was more than prepared to keep my expression under control against something like plain surprise.

For a while, I felt a burning in my throat that made it hard to speak, but I dropped my head and did my best to push past it.

"...I'm sorry."

I had gone too far after all.

I knew I should have been more careful, but I just spoke the first thing that came to mind.

Thinking that for some reason, maybe there was something I could do to help.

"I'll be back at sundown." Turning around, I reached to open the door.

"...please wait," my master called out just before I could open the door.

"Master...?"

There was no response.

More than being told to stop, or his anger earlier, his silence now was the most intimidating.

My master was the same as always - the same as always, but somehow more gloomy.

Even if it was just because of the numerous incidents I had also been involved in, it looked like someone had been chipping away at the usual facade he wore in a way I had never seen before.

"I'm sorry. I'll tell you," my master said.

I somehow managed to resist the sudden urge to cover my ears. I knew that whatever was troubling him was going to be too heavy for me to handle, but even so, even if for no one else, I wanted to be a person he could rely on.

Before those scales measuring those two impulses could settle, he started to speak again.

"The most precious thing I have was stolen from me."

It felt like a sharp blade had been run through my heart.

Even though he hadn't explained the details at all, unwillingly my mind filled in the blanks. I could feel the part of me that wanted to cover my ears and run adopt a devilish smile.

"That, is..."

"A relic of a certain Heroic Spirit."

I didn't even have to ask what he meant.

One of the irreplaceable parts that made him who he was. During the Iselma incident, he had offered it up in a gamble to rescue his students Flat and Svin.

I felt like my legs were going to collapse out from under me.

But, thinking of how much more it must have hurt my master, I managed to stay standing.

"B-but...why...?"

Standing, my master turned to face the wall.

"Originally it was being held at the main headquarters of the Clock Tower in London, but after the incident at Iselma last month, it was moved here. While it's true that the Fifth Holy Grail War is getting closer, I was more interested in just being able to watch over it myself."

Clearing away a number of books on one of his shelves, my master tapped his palm against the back of it and uttered a short incantation.

A click sounded.

The back of the shelf opened up, along with the wall behind it, to reveal a hidden safe.

Even being his personal disciple, it was a mechanism I was surprised to learn about.

"A hidden safe that came with Norwich. I wouldn't be able to rest easy if it was just my magecraft keeping it locked away, after all. ...at any rate, its strength is unreasonably high. Even if it was another Lord, it would require a considerable amount of work for them to open it."

With one more incantation, he used a key from his chest pocket to open the lock.

No doubt it was a twofold lock, using both mundane technology and magecraft in concert.

Inside the safe was a single envelope.

"...but, a few days ago, the relic was missing. In its place was this envelope."

Without saying any more, he held it out.

Taking it from his hand, it looked like some sort of invitation.

From a first glance, it looked to be a formal thank you of some sort.

On the thin, crystalline paper, a deep crimson wax seal had been pressed. The image on the seal had an eye and wheel motif, reminding me of the angels my master once told me about. This time, however, it didn't seem to have any relation to angels. It was most likely a historical symbol in magecraft, one that just happened to look similar.

Looking up at my master to see if it was okay for me to look inside, he gave me a small nod.

For the most part, the contents were as I expected.

'You are invited to attend our banquet, so by all means please make arrangements to do so.' Written in a flowing, cursive script, a signature was placed at the end.

Representative of the Manager of the Mystic Eye Collecting Train.

"This, is..."

Seeing such an ominous name for the first time, I swallowed nervously as my master whispered.

"The Mystic Eye Collecting Train - Rail Zeppelin. As its name implies, it's a train that runs through the forests of Europe, collecting any and all Mystic Eyes. Once a year, they put their collections on display and hold an auction for them."

"An auction?"

At the familiarity of that word, my brow furrowed.

"You mean...there are people out there interested enough in collecting Mystic Eyes, that they would go to such a thing?"

"Of course, there are those who are interested in them for purely academic reasons. But the Rail Zeppelin has a special meaning to it."

Slowly, my master lowered himself back into his seat.

He made no effort to hide the overwhelming fatigue radiating from him.

"What special meaning is that?"

"Transplanting," he said, putting a hand to his own eyes.

Even then, it took me a moment to understand.

After blinking a few times, it finally sunk in.

"...transplanting?!"

I blurted out.

"Yes, exactly like it sounds. Originally, Mystic Eyes are something developed and rooted within your own body, so even removing them is incredibly difficult. But the Rail Zeppelin is an exception to that. Ignoring all problems of physical rejection and the like, not just extracting them, they are capable of transplanting Mystic Eyes directly into a new host without risk of failure."

Stunned, I stood silent.

Just how out of this world was this place?

Of course, the idea of getting their hands on Mystic Eyes likely made most magi water at the mouth. Even as incomplete as her control of them was, I recalled just how envious my master had been of Reines' own. In short, just like Magic Circuits - weren't Mystic Eyes a talent one had to be born with?

My master took a deep breath.

Pulling a cigar out from the case in his coat, he cut the tip with the cigar cutter on his desk. Extraordinarily slowly, he struck a match, lit the tip, and raised it to his lips.

A heavy, thick smoke filled the air.

"...allow me to explain one thing," he whispered softly.

As if the scent of smoke had reclaimed his former self, his voice returned to its usual calm.

Maybe for my master, the cigar was something like a mask to him. Wrapping himself in that scent and smoke to hide his true self.

"Sight is the first magecraft in human history. Among the five senses, sight is the one that provides the most information. As such, many cultures across the world came to fear the Evil Eye, and many mysteries of the natural world were explained through eyes."

"Natural phenomena, you mean?"

"For example, the Sun and Moon," my master nodded, pointing at the ceiling. "Both are often described as the eyes of Heaven. The Eye of Horus from Egypt is a particularly famous example, but his right eye was the Sun and his left was the Moon, according to tradition. Because the eyes of Heaven were always looking on, people believed that if one committed sin, they would be punished for it. That's why the God of the Sun often has the role of upholding justice. As such, though the Sun is thought of as the source of numerous blessings, it is also thought of as the bringer of many disasters, such as droughts.

Later, the Trinitarian doctrine of Christianity tied into the same idea - the eyes of the omnipotent God became connected to his providence over all things. Even the conspiracy theories of the Free Masons are all caught up in this same theory."

As my master's lecture ventured into the territory of the occult, he strangely seemed to relax. His tendency of giving lectures seemed to be a thing I was getting sucked into as a daily occurrence.

"From these natural phenomena, things like the eye of a hurricane are also common. Ah, you should know that the clouds surrounding the eye of a storm like that are called the Eyewall, right?"

"Ah...yes,"

I nodded.

"In short, the storm itself is considered a single eye. From there, the association of wind and storms with divinity creates a connection to the eye as well. Balor, the king of the Fomorians in Celtic Myth, and Odin from Norse Mythology are the archetypal examples there."

Both were of course famous enough that even I knew their names.

The King of the Evil Eye Balor, and the one-eyed God of Magic Odin. One, with a single eye whose gaze could annihilate entire armies. The other, who gave up one of his eyes in exchange for omniscient knowledge of all things.

"On top of that, the earth itself has eyes too," my master continued, pointing at the ground.

"The earth?"

"Think of the mouth of a volcano. The image of a bright red eye piercing through the darkness of night is strongly connected to the image of the evil eye. Though not as numerous as gods of the storm, there are cases where these symbols were granted to goddesses of the earth. A famous example of this would be the Gorgon - Medusa, from Greek mythology."

He blew a cloud of smoke.

The room filled with gray smoke reminiscent of a volcano's. Smelling the sulfur of volcanic gasses and seeing the bright red glow of lava, was it any wonder ancient people came to fear them as magical eyes of the land?

Heaven, Storms, and the Earth.

Each one had its own magic eyes.

If that's the case, then there was no doubt that we were always being watched.

"In a manner of speaking, the black holes discovered by modern science could also be said to be eyes born of natural phenomena. Though there was no way the ancient storytellers could have known, there is a conceptual similarity between them and

Mahakala (*The Great Void*), a manifestation of Shiva in Hindu mythology. The European Organization for Nuclear Research CERN also uses Nataraja, another aspect of Shiva, in one of their decorative statues. The dance of Nataraja is supposed to represent the behaviour of the elementary particles, but you can also look at it as one aspect of Shiva showing the movement of Magical Energy on a micro level, while black holes symbolise the magical eye aspect of Shiva on a macro level."

"I...see..."

Though I understood less than half of what was said, I could understand the importance of it.

An eye in the far off cosmos.

Far beyond what we could ever hope to reach, there existed someone watching us. Both magecraft and science sought to draw closer to that observer, even if only a little.

"...now, beyond that discussion, within the Clock Tower Mystic Eyes have their own system of ranking. There are even those who can create Mystic Eyes of lower quality. Of course it goes without saying, they fetch a high price for their work, and it's not like their success rate is a hundred percent."

Leaning back in his chair, my master continued.

"But for true Mystic Eyes - those that occur naturally, and especially those of Noble colours, there is no option to acquire a transplant except the Rail Zeppelin. Considering their scarcity and success rate, even Barthomelloi and Trambelio would hesitate to cross them. Ah, you should understand now after all that. Transplanting powerful Mystic Eyes into someone is like cutting off a piece of a storm, or a flow of magma, and sealing it within a person."

Though somewhat circuitous, we finally found our way back to the topic at hand.

But thanks to that, I now fully understood just how abnormal it was to talk about transplanting Mystic Eyes. Much more than just an impressive feat, it was a terrifying proposition, one that filled my body with an icy terror.

"Apparently, only one time in its history, that auction was thrown off course. Apparently, that Touko Aozaki and her familiar caused a bit of a ruckus. Since then, rather than confining itself to Scandinavia, it's been showing up repeatedly all over Europe."

I was taken aback by the sudden mention of that name.

The magus we met at the Twin Towers of Iselma - in a way, connected directly to the culprit - a Grand class magus whose behaviour could only be described as heretical.

"...well, if it was her, then..."

"True enough," my master echoed my feelings, a bitter expression on his face.

"On the other hand, that means the only one who was able to throw them off track was a Grand. How many magi of the Clock Tower have even seen one of these invitations in person? ...and why did one appear here, in place of that thing?"

I could hear the sound of teeth grinding.

A sound with an ominous strength, making me worry about the health of his teeth. And within his eyes, a fiercely burning flame. Where on earth had that kind of passion been hiding itself?

"It seems there's nothing to do but go. I don't seem to have any other options," he said, as if to steel his own resolve.

"Gray," he spoke curtly.

My master - Lord El-Melloi II, turned to me with his request.

"Would you accompany me to the Rail Zeppelin?"

~Part 3~

"-Hmm, I see," Reines nodded, picking up a small piece of chocolate.

Her golden hair swayed beneath the gentle, indirect light.

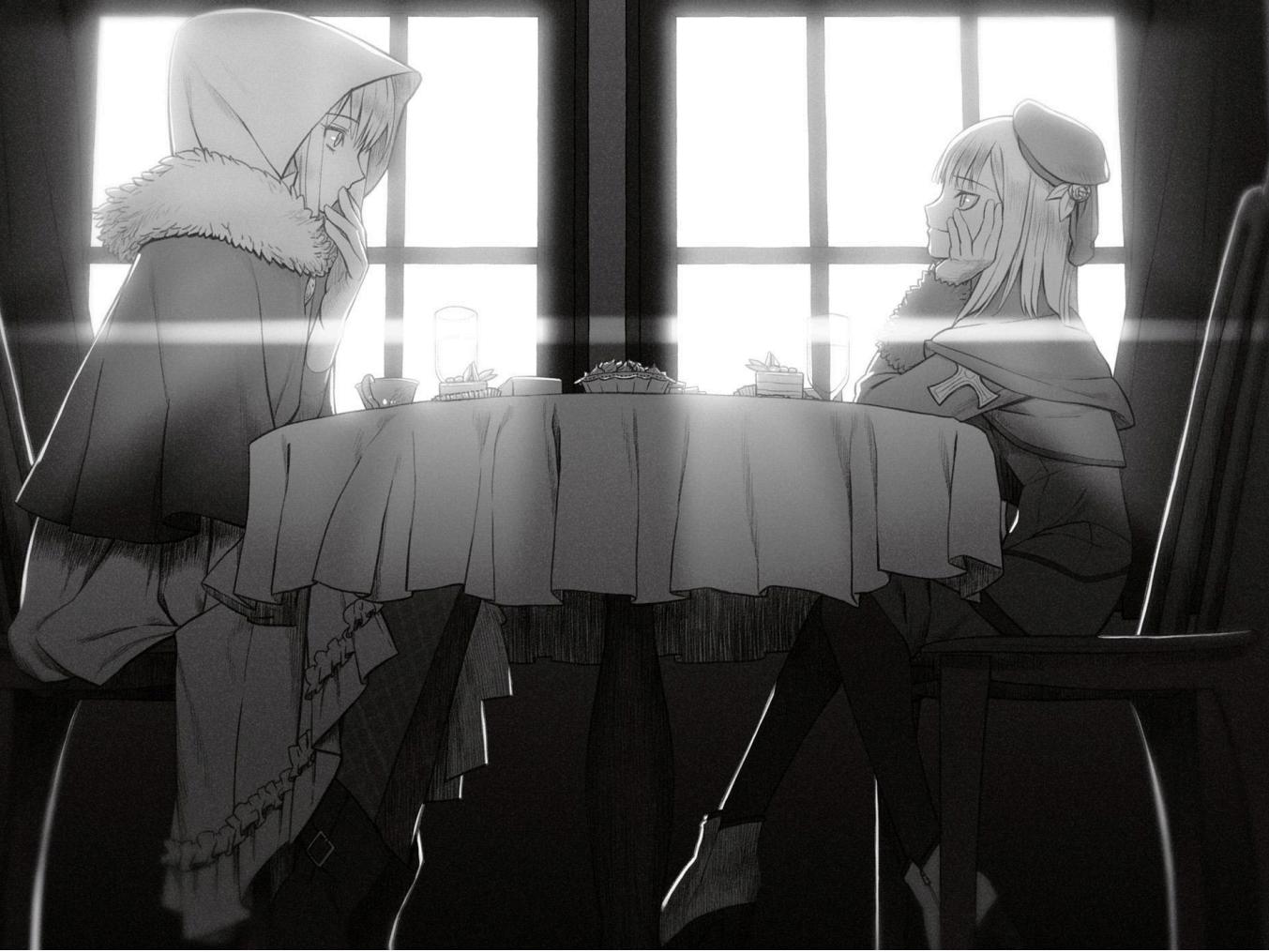
The next day, we were visiting a sweets shop that was a particular favourite of hers.

While it was a shop that had a public eat-in area for all of its customers, the private room she was in was apparently one set aside for regulars. After asking if I could get some advice about my master, she had led me to this place. The luxurious furniture and expensive silverware had me ill at ease, but that probably went without saying.

Though I hadn't divulged what exactly had been stolen, I was now asking for her thoughts about my master's request.

However, avoiding the main issue yet, Reines reached her fork out for the cake on the table.

Each one of the candies in front of us looked like shining jewels. Sugary crafts that imitated the elegant shapes of flowers and crystals. Shimmering strawberries over lightly browned meringue, mousse layered in seven colours. Mixed together with its sweet aroma, I imagine there were people out there that would consider a scene like this heaven on earth.



"Right. In the end, a soft génoise is best. The batter was well done, so the fresh peach confiture can be really appreciated. With the aroma of Nuwara Eliya tea on the side, their ability to keep them distinct is infuriating."

After taking a sip of tea, Reines sat for a while with eyes closed, enraptured by her experience. Then they opened again, turning my way.

"Are you not going to eat anything, Gray?"

"O-of course, I'd love to."

Suddenly flustered, I reached for one of the comparatively boring looking option near me, popping it into my mouth.

Just like the chocolate I had been given before, the taste was so good as to be shocking.

Though normally my nerves in a situation like this precluded me from tasting much of anything, the soft, delicate sweetness of the confection was impossible to ignore. The sensation of it melting on my tongue was like a piece of luxurious silk coming undone, and the unrelenting sweetness was never so much as to exceed tastefulness.

"...ah..."

"Is something wrong?"

"N-no... It was delicious. Almost, too delicious."

Suddenly, my body began to tremble.

It was the first time I had ever grown antsy just from pure flavour. It was all I could do to keep my feet from tapping. Hearing the tips of my toes hit the floor two or three times, Reines faced my blush with a mischievous smile.

"That honesty is a real selling point for you, you know. It's almost more fun just to watch you enjoy it than to eat it myself. No really, if you could just add a few humiliated tears, it'd be perfect. Come on, a few tears is par for the course for girls. So why don't you taste a few more?" she said with a chuckle.

The way she spoke really reminded me how at home she was in the Clock Tower. That being said, I didn't find it especially unpleasant. A fact which I found a little bizarre.

One more, then one more, before taking a break to sample a scone with jam and have some tea. In the sigh that followed, Reines interjected again.

"The Rail Zeppelin is something most magi of the Clock Tower only know about through rumours."

"...right," I nodded.

Despite being drunk on the sweetness of the foods in front of me, that name was more than enough to snap me out of it.

"If you and my brother have been invited, then I'll give you this one warning. There are two types of invitations given out for the Rail Zeppelin, so pay attention to the difference."

"Two types?"

"Among those invited to the Rail Zeppelin, there are those who are invited to come buy, and those invited to come sell."

"Ahh-"

The fact that an auction required someone to have goods to sell finally occurred to me.

"If you are talking about the transplanting of Mystic Eyes, that necessitates an extraction of them as well. For those who lack the ability to control their own Mystic Eyes, the Rail Zeppelin is like a saviour. After all, Mystic Eyes are such a complicated organ that using them effectively is beyond the skill of most magi,"

Reines said, touching a finger to her own eyelids.

After all, she had Mystic Eyes of her own.

"Please excuse me."

Taking eye drops out from her bag, she administered a few before pressing her hands over her eyes.

Perhaps because of the stressed expression on her face, I felt pressed to ask.

"Have you ever felt that your eyes were a bother, Reines?"

"Not at all. For someone like me with few redeeming qualities, these have become a precious weapon. Even if using them effectively is a challenge, I have no desire to be rid of them. If nothing else, they are more than adequate just for eliciting that envious expression from my brother," she replied, her shoulders shaking with another chuckle.

After blinking two or three times, she turned back to me with her eyes blue once again.

"-so, who is going to be your third?"

"Third?"

"Yes. An invitation to the Rail Zeppelin comes with permission to bring two companions. One is, of course, you. But who else is my brother considering taking along, I wonder?"

"...it will probably be one of the El-Melloi Classroom students, won't it?"

As an aside, Flat was currently dealing with issues with his family, so he had temporarily returned to Monaco. And Svin, who had just finished his promotion, would be undergoing all sorts of ceremonies in Mystile. Of course, there were plenty of other students in the El-Melloi classroom that adored my master, but those two were naturally the first to come to mind.

"Hmm. With those two out of the picture, I would expect the Pentel sisters, or maybe Rolan Perjinsky. But we all know how much he hates getting his students involved in his personal affairs."

Lazily popping another chocolate into her mouth, Reines rattled off a list of names.

I was familiar with those three.

They were students at the higher end of the class, and had won fame across the Clock Tower already. The Pentel sisters especially were a rather eccentric pair of twins, whose ability to harmonise their magical energy with each other set them apart in the Classroom - the trouble they had caused my master also had left a strong impression.

"Well...that's something for my master to decide."

"I guess that's true. So, is there something you're still concerned about?"

"...umm..."

Despite being pressed for more, I felt myself clam up.

This time, however, Reines pushed on.

"The thing you're trying to hide from me is the news of that relic, right?"

My eyes widened in surprise.

"That's it after all, isn't it? After all, the invitation showed up wherever the relic was stolen from, right?"

"...how...?"

Showed how meaningless it was to try and keep it from her so plainly, I felt my cheeks start to burn. It made me want to dig a hole and hide in it.

In contrast, Reines was the picture of coolness, calmly sipping her tea as she continued.

"Just by watching my brother, I could tell something must have happened. We've been working together for seven years now, so we know each other pretty well whether we like it or not. On top of that, it had to be something serious enough that it would drive him into such a corner, yet he would still keep it secret from me, so I figured it couldn't be much else."

Reines shrugged, as if the line of logic had been too simple to follow.

And then, she added one more thing.

"...and your concern is that perhaps, Meluastea's spy is the one who stole it, right?"

"Miss Reines..."

My reaction earned a snort from her as she crossed her arms.

"It's Yvette, right? I was standing right beside her when she declared herself to be a spy, after all."

Now that she mentioned it, if Meluastea's goal was to put a check on my master, it didn't mean much if it wasn't clear to the secret power behind the name of Lord as well. I felt like such a fool for trying to keep it hidden.

"Well, together with the Lehrman family she comes from, she isn't exactly someone that uses such ordinary means. I think we can rule her out as a suspect."

"Is that so..."

"Even I have only seen that relic a single time. Aside from purely academic pursuits, for a magus, unless they have intentions on joining the Holy Grail War, it isn't an item of particular value. It's not like it can be compared to Siegfried's relic from before, which was a first-class Talisman in its own right due to its being soaked in dragon's blood."

Catalysts used to summon Heroic Spirits were almost always objects that were connected to that Heroic Spirit during their lifetime.

And while such artifacts sometimes had magical properties that made them powerful Talismans, they were often just things that happened to be old. The relic possessed by my master appeared to be one of the latter.

"On top of that, Meluastea has no reason to pick a fight with my brother like that. After all, among the three factions, they are the weakest. Carelessly upsetting the balance of powers puts them at the biggest disadvantage."

"...I see."

I felt exhausted. It was unfortunate to lose a lead, but I also didn't want to believe one of my master's students could betray him like that. If I had to choose, I'd say I was closer to feeling relieved.

Narrowing her eyes at me, Reines continued.

"You really aren't suited to the Clock Tower, are you?"

"Huh?"

"Nevermind. ...I would just be happier if you were to stay the way you are. It'd be a great comfort to my brother and his daily stomach pains, after all. Yes, the pleasure is in neither letting them live nor letting them die. It would be a problem if he gave up and

keeled over now. Oh hey, this new item is pretty good! Is that cheese seasoned with lemon?"

While saying something particularly disturbing, her fork moved merrily around the table.

"Um, you had something you needed from my master, right?"

"Yes. But my business is something similar...I see. My brother, huh?"

With an energetic murmur, she ate another piece of cake.

With the way she closed one eye as she chewed, it was like she was chewing over our previous conversation as well.

"I'll have to solve some puzzles first. My business comes from a Tuner."

"Tuner?"

"Yes. One of my brothers few old friends. At this point, he's the only one left that calls my brother by name."

"Huh?"

My master's name.

Not Lord El-Melloi II, but his original one.

But my master never let anyone call him by that name.

"That's just because he refuses to change, of course. He's just stubborn when it comes to changing how he calls people, I guess. Well, when I talked to him a bit ago, he warned me that something was wrong with him, and so I needed to be careful. Something about the wrinkles in his forehead being off is similar to a violin being out of tune. Apparently, when my brother was traipsing around the Far East, he was the one that lent him the money or something."

"He did..."

"I only figured it out when Value poked their heads out in that last incident. Geez, he could have just said something himself. That's why men are hopeless."

But the thing I wanted to ask about most was something else.

"I wonder, what Heroic Spirit was it?"

"Hmm?"

As Reines raised an eyebrow at me, I pushed the question.

"I never asked before, but...when my master was fighting in the Fourth Holy Grail War, do you know what Heroic Spirit was his partner?"

Her response was immediate.

"Iskandar."

Also known as Alexander the Great.

Of course, I knew who that name referred to. As far as those whose names had survived to be famous even in modern Europe, Alexander the Great and Charlemagne were the yardstick by which all other heroes were measured.

He was born in Macedonia.

Educated by the scholar Aristotle, he received the title of king at the age of twenty and, following his father's dying wish, set out to the east, toward Persia. With his overwhelming charisma and military might, he smashed the forces of Darius III numbering in the hundreds of thousands, and trampled forward despite the offerings of peace set before him.

After that, the journey they undertook was like a dream.

Conquering the desert kingdom of Egypt, he was recognized as Pharaoh. Then further East.

Clashing once more with his rival Darius III, he conquered Babylon and Persepolis. Then further East.

Subduing all kinds of soldiers, kings, heroes of war, and even Maharaja, he pushed ever onward, ever eastward.

What was he seeking?

What did he hope to gain?

There was no way I could hope to understand the mind of a man who had come so close to achieving the ever distant dream of world conquest.

I knew the Holy Grail War was a ritual that involved calling forth heroes from humanity's past, but to think my master's partner had been him...

(Ahhh...)

Was that why my master's prized alcohol came from Macedonia?

"But seriously, even fairy tales have their limits. The idea of a ritual where seven Heroic Spirits are called forth to fight, and the winners would be given the wish-granting Holy Grail is absurd enough as it is, but to add Iskandar on top of all of that..."

Reines spoke as if in wonder.

"At any rate, it seemed among the Heroic Spirits arrayed for that war, his power was something else. ...he was said to have two Noble Phantasms. One, the chariot dedicated to the Gordion Shrine, the Gordius Wheel (*Heaven's Wheel*). Or perhaps we should say, the style of using that chariot to trample his enemies underfoot was the Noble Phantasm?" she said, as if to confess that the Clock Tower's investigation hadn't turned up the actual statistics of the Heroic Spirits involved. No doubt, when my master had risen to the seat of Lord, Reines herself had grilled him for every possible piece of information she could.

"And the second was something truly incredible. Apparently, Iskandar was able to summon his subordinates from back when he was alive. Yes, that legendary army that had come so close to actually conquering the known world. Analysing the remains of

the previous Lord El-Melloi, along with other documents submitted to the Clock Tower, we could determine he was able to bring forth an army to the tune of tens of thousands of men within his Reality Marble."

To be honest, that far exceeded my ability to imagine it.

I had Add - a seal containing Rhongomyniad, the spear once wielded by King Arthur. Its power was something that was beyond comparison to the Mysteries wielded by the magi of the modern day. Even I, as inexperienced as I was, had been able to demolish a full half of the Castle Adra with a single blow.

But what kind of Heroic Spirit, what kind of Noble Phantasm could stand up against that sheer force of numbers?

"...even then, it wasn't like my master won the Fourth Holy Grail War, was it?"

"Apparently in that Holy Grail War, there was a monster of an even higher level. Man, the world is a crazy place. Though I could hardly understand the desire of his predecessor to participate either, my brother's intention to participate a second time baffles me."

As if reading my thoughts, Reines pushed the conversation ever forward with a bitter smile.

Having finished the cakes in front of her, she finished the last of her tea before standing up.

"While you two are dealing with the Rail Zeppelin, I'll do what I can to look into the missing relic. Besides that, please take this."

I blinked in surprise.

On the table in front of her, Reines put down a black credit card and a cell phone.

"If the only way to get back that relic is to participate in the auction, you'll need some real firepower, right? I'm sure my brother will resist the help until the very last moment. It seems he went through quite a bit of trouble to get some money without me

finding out. Though judging from his behaviour recently, it seems that soft-hearted old Lord Norwich has put out for him."

"Miss Reines....!"

My voice suddenly jumped.

In contrast, she just tapped her chin with a finger, whispering mischievously.

"Heheheh. It seems we've found a way to suddenly increase that debt he's been slowly paying back. As much as possible, please wait until the last moment to hand it over to him. Oh, and the cell is a gift for you. Please feel free to use it to your heart's content. At the very least, you should be able to make contact with the outside world before and after the auction itself."

Was she being reliable, or just being predatory?

Those eyes, turned blue by her medicine, sparkled as Reines El-Melloi Archisort gave a wide, elegant smile.

◆ 第二章 ◆

-Chapter 2-



~Part 1~

That night, the fog was especially thick.

Silvery light from a slightly less than full moon was the only thing attempting to penetrate it. This late at night there was no sign of others coming and going, lending a kind of frozen calm to the night air.

Three days had passed.

The invitation had led us to an old station in the suburbs.

Thanks to a number of routing changes, it had long ago lost its function as a train station. And while it had obviously been shut down to the outside, it still maintained the 'form' of a station. My master had paid no mind to the blockade shutting the station out from the outside, stepping over it without hesitation.

I, however, had come to a stop.

Though it was nothing more than an abandoned station, this night alone it seemed like a gateway into purgatory itself, like it was the maw of a great beast, waiting to devour anyone who carelessly stepped inside.

"Master..."

"It's alright," he responded shortly.

Steeling myself with his words, I also jumped over the fence.

"Umm..."

One more person called out behind us.

In the darkness of the night, was a boy wearing glasses, working himself up over something.

"Thank you! For bringing me along with you!"

Caules Forvedge.

The student my master had taught about Atram's Primeval Battery. Though he was supposedly 18, perhaps because of his freckled face, he seemed oddly childlike.

"Bringing you along? You're the one who demanded we take you," my master replied with a cold sigh.

Caules, in turn, dropped his shoulders despondently

"...I'm sorry for eavesdropping."

"It's not like I'm mad at you. After all, it's technically Flat's fault anyways."

When my master had worked together with Flat to recreate the Primeval Battery, apparently Flat had taken the opportunity to set up a spell for spying. Since Flat forgot to dismantle it, Caules happened to come across it, and thus happened to hear the conversation between my master and myself.

To have set something like that up and then forget about it and return to his homeland with it still in place, it really lent credit to his title of "Idiot Genius."

"Whether he's around or not, he's always causing some sort of trouble, isn't he?" my master said with a bitter scowl.

That alone reminded me of the master I knew. It felt like there was a bit more bitterness in those words than normal, but I decided to let that slide.

"I'm sorry. But I definitely heard something about the Rail Zeppelin," Caules said, apologetic. Usually the apologies I heard were done with chests puffed out proudly and not a shred of contrition to be seen, so in a way this was a fresh sight.

"...why, though?" I suddenly felt the need to ask.

In response, Caules scratched his cheek, troubled.

"I always thought, there was no way I could become a magus."

"Really?"

"My sister was always just too good. I was never anything more than a spare. Since she had health problems, I was a spare for that one in a million chance something happened to her."

His words rang with self-derision.

But, as much as his words dripped with bitterness, so too did his eyes shine with something like pride.

"But in the end, my sister couldn't continue the family line. Though she definitely would have succeeded if she came to the Clock Tower, she threw it all away and ran...and in the end, I'm the one who ended up with the Magic Crest. Haha, though I say that, even without my sister's refusal, the Forvedge family is already well on its way into decline." He shrugged with a bitter smile. "So no matter how small it is, I want to learn whatever I can. I don't have the kind of money it would take for a Mystic Eye transplant, but if the Rail Zeppelin really exists, I want to see it for myself."

He spoke without hesitation.

Just because it's there, I want to learn about it.

(...unexpectedly magus-like...)

So I thought.

I'm sure the reason my master was unable to refuse him was that overflowing enthusiasm. Or perhaps, the underlying sense of inferiority he had was something my master couldn't bear to throw away.

...that was a feeling I could understand, too.

"Are you done introducing yourselves?" my master called out.

Apparently he had at some point pulled out a cigar, waiting for our conversation to end. He was truly conscientious in a way I found hard to understand.

"By the way," I continued with more questions. "Why are you wearing glasses, Master?"

"These are Mystic Eye Killers. I had to get them at a moment's notice, so I paid far more than I should have for them, though," he said in a miserable voice, lifting the glasses up to look at them.

If I recalled correctly, Mystic Eye Killers were a specialised Mystic Code for defending against Mystic Eyes.

"There's no way I can go somewhere like the Rail Zeppelin without at least this much preparation though. Even having my heart stopped at a single glance is one of the better possible outcomes. If I were hit by something like a Compulsion or Contract spell, I wouldn't even be able to cry if I wanted to."

When it came to Mystic Eyes, regardless of what mechanism they used, it seemed they could ignore the preparation required for other spells and just deliver their effects directly. It appeared my master's glasses were a countermeasure for that.

At any rate, the sight of my master wearing glasses was out of place enough that I found it hard not to stare.

Regardless of my staring, however, he quickly made his way into the station.

On the dimly lit platform inside, a number of other figures were scattered about.

(Were they all invited too...?)

Somehow, a couple lights were set up within the station that should have been completely abandoned.

Under a cloak of dense fog, the ghostly lights illuminated a series of stone arches, and the figures of people standing around them. It gave off the impression of a scene one might see a hundred years ago. I wonder what those people thought back then, laying eyes on those enormous steam engines?

As we entered the platform, one of the figures took notice of us, and immediately began walking over.

"It's been a while, Lord El-Melloi II."

"...you are...!"

Without realising it, my breath caught.

Brightly drawn flowers decorated the plainly eastern style of clothing - there was no mistaking the characteristic long-sleeved kimono she wore. The bespectacled beauty greeted us with a bright, gentle smile.

"...I had a feeling we'd cross paths again sooner or later," my master replied.

"If you're here, does that mean the Faculty of Law has taken an interest in the Rail Zeppelin auction?"

"Faculty of Law...!"

Behind us, I could feel Caules going stiff.

It was hard to fault him for it. Among the twelve research divisions of the Clock Tower, they were the Faculty that belonged to none of them. From the outside, they monitored and managed the Magic Association as their primary purpose. The First Principle Enforcement Division - the Faculty of Law. Different from the magi that pursued Mystery, they existed to manage and regulate them.

And she was one of them - Hishiri Adashino.

The woman we had met at the Castle Adra was before us again.

"No, today I'm here for entirely personal reasons," she said with a shake of her head.

Not that we could trust her. In the previous incident, in a way it could be said she was the mastermind on a level even above that of the culprit. And even if that wasn't the case, the Faculty of Law operated with a completely different set of goals and principles than other magi. It felt like she was the kind of person that could slip poison into your drink at any time.

However, we had no time to pry into that now.

Another clear voice echoed down the abandoned platform.

"-not just a rat from Law, but a Lord too. And who would have thought it would be the famous Lord of Norwich?"

Turning around, I dropped my gaze a little.

She looked eleven, maybe twelve years old. With an impudent set to her jaw, the silver haired, amber eyed girl was quite pretty, despite her glare.

"Well well," my master seemed surprised. Returning his cigar to its case, he politely bowed his head. "It's been a while, Miss."

"Hmph. Even the trophy husband of Norwich remembers me, huh?" she spoke, a venom to her voice surprising coming from one her age.

Though she was entirely correct, I had never seen someone speak with such blunt offence to my master before.

"...who is she?"

As if offended at my whispered question, the silver-haired girl put a hand to her chest.

"Olga Marie. Olga Marie Asmleit Animusphere."

It sounded like a somewhat familiar name.

My master added to her introduction.

"Animusphere. She's the daughter of the Lord of the Faculty of Astrology."

"The daughter of....!"

Keeping from shouting in surprise was surprisingly difficult.

The Faculty of Law, and now the daughter of another Lord.

Just with these two, it felt like we had entered another world. The one thing that kept me from feeling dizzy from the shock was seeing how much worse Caules had taken it. No matter how infamous the Rail Zeppelin was, I had never expected such a list of visitors.

"I know, by the way. That you're just a scapegoat that's wormed his way into the El-Melloi faction to replace the previous Lord - Kayneth El-Melloi Archibald."

Despite her spontaneously biting comments, my master didn't respond in kind.

"You're awfully straightforward, aren't you? Not like the Clock Tower at all. I'm also surprised. It's pretty rare to see someone so young from the Animusphere family coming down from the mountains."

"Not really. Just like you, even if this is all a waste of time, we can't avoid coming. So, are you here after some set of Mystic Eyes too?"

With a sharp gaze, Olga Marie pressed for answers.

In response to her thoughtlessly wilful interruption, Hishiri was content to watch from the sidelines, not cutting in at all.

My master, however, was not so straightforward with his answers.

"...I wonder."

"Hmph. You wouldn't tell me even if you were, anyways. No way you'd give up information right before an auction."

"That's not necessarily true. If we're aiming after a different target, sharing that reduces the stress on both of us, doesn't it? You thought the same thing, didn't you?"

My master's response was thoroughly composed.

It felt a little strange. Normally, though my master didn't pick fights, his responses were always coloured with bitterness and cynicism. This time, however, his words seemed somehow softer.

As I tilted my head to the side in confusion,

"-Miss Olga Marie," another tall figure stepped toward us.

This time it was a woman in her mid twenties, wrapped in a purple coat with her hair tied up. The leather teacher's cane at her hip gave the impression she was a personal tutor of some sort. The classic styled, tortoise shell glasses she wore looked good on her.

(...are those also Mystic Eye Killers?)

There was no way to tell just by looking at them.

At that point, I also finally realised that Hishiri's glasses could also be the same. While I was sitting around dumbly, the magi had all been working hard in preparation. From their perspective, the battle began the moment they saw their opponent's face - or perhaps, the battle ended then.

That's how they had survived for so long, no doubt.

"Lord El-Melloi II. And Hishiri Adashino, I presume? I am Trisha Fellows, Miss Olga Marie's attendant. -now please, Miss."

"What? What do you want, Trisha?"

"My apologies. Please allow us to introduce ourselves again later."

With that, the two of them hurriedly departed.

Some kind of accessory slipping down from the hem of Trisha's coat had caught my attention.

(Huh?)

I blinked.

Though it may have just been the odd angle I saw it from, it kind of looked like...

(Something...kind of inappropriate...)

Feeling my cheeks start to burn under my hood, I shook my head from side to side.

It must have been my imagination. And at any rate, it was none of my business. As I choked on some saliva I had failed to swallow, I somehow managed to keep a straight face.

Beside me, Caules' mouth was agape.

"Aren't you angry, Professor?"

"Angry about what?"

"Even if she's the daughter of a Lord, that behaviour seems a bit much, don't you think?"

"Ahh. If I got angry at that much, I'd be angry forever. No, someone who wears their hostility so plainly on their sleeve is actually preferable to deal with, in my opinion. It's much harder dealing with magi that approach you with a friendly face."

"Oh? And who would that be referring to?"

Ignoring Hishiri's smile, my master continued.

"Besides, the fact I'm basically just a decoration is true. Soon enough, both she or Reines will transfer to the Faculty of Law, and that small correction will be entirely in Reines' hands."

"...I...see."

Surprised, I also was at a loss for words.

"Yes, most Lords end up in the Faculty of Law for a while. That's where they learn how to rule the Clock Tower. In that way, I still want to get along with them."

"Of course,"

At Hishiri's nod, my master grudgingly acknowledged her.

In a way, maybe you could say they worked together well.

"But just like you said, it's rare for those Animusphere shut-ins to come all the way down here. I wonder if they've found some Mystic Eyes that have caught their interest?"

"Who knows. If it's them, they could probably just throw money until they got what they wanted," he muttered softly.

My master then glanced across the crowd of people gathered on the platform.

It was impossible to see clearly. The thick fog dyed the air of the platform white, making it hard to see anything much beyond your own eyes.

"It's getting thicker, isn't it?" Hishiri whispered.

London was often called the City of Fog.

While it was true that it was often quite foggy in the winter, the reason came from something else.

Smog. Since the 19th Century, the enormous amount of fossil fuels consumed by the Industrial Revolution had given off smoke and soot that had mixed with the city's natural fog, enclosing the capital of the British Empire in a thick smog that bound one's vision to only a few metres in front of them.

But what surrounded us now was different.

The thick blanket blocking our vision had no traces of pollution. Nothing but a pure white mist. It gave me the fairy tale-like impression I could reach out and weave it into silk.

And finally, we heard it.

A loud noise that shook the fog hanging around us.

"A steam whistle...?" I muttered.

An old, nostalgic sound that matched well the scenery of this abandoned station. A sound that reached down into the depths of me, and made me forget what I knew about modern trains.

Light pierced through the fog.

Elegant wheels rolled in over the tracks.

The main engine soon followed, billowing smoke into the air, and then the rest of it rolled into view. The dark grey, dignified hull made it look like a warship ready to sail through the sea of fog. It reminded me of the legend of the Flying Dutchman, a ship cursed to wander the seas forever.

It seemed so out of place.

It seemed so absurd.

Yet, that's what made it such a fitting stage.

The gathered magi no doubt looked at it with those same thoughts.

"...the Mystic Eye Collecting Train, Rail Zeppelin....!"



~Part 2~

The steam engine came to a gentle stop, and the ornately decorated door opened.

Perhaps to match the aesthetic tastes of the owner, it gave the impression of a line of knights standing and saluting. Without the slightest hesitation, my master headed for that door. Caules, Hishiri, and I soon followed suit.

The scent of fresh fruit wafted out.

Within the train car, a large table was placed in the centre of the room, stacked high with various colourful fruits. Seated nearby was a man with a white hat. Taking a glossy apple from the table, he took a bite out of it.

After chewing for a while, he turned to look at us.

"Ah, more guests have arrived!"

"...you're not a staff member here, are you?" To my master's authoritative tone, the man gave a deep nod.

"Of course not! Could you not tell just by looking at me?!"

Patting a hand to his stylish white jacket, he spoke smoothly as he rose from his seat.

Seeing the man strike a hand to his own chest, Caules tilted his head to the side.

"I feel like I've seen that before...something about zombies..."

"Yes!"

At Caules' muttering, the man stuck his hand into his own jacket.

Drawing a handgun, he spun it in the air. With a sidelong look at our dumbfounded expressions, he crossed the guns over, threw them in the air, and caught them behind his back. Finally, he snapped into a firing pose.

"Jeeeeanmario! Spinerra's!! Zombie Cooking!!! Let's enjoy cooking some zombie's to a crisp together today!"

Sharing the well-practised line with cheer, he seemed like a well-seasoned performer.

Unfortunately, neither I nor my master had any idea who he was.

"Huh? You don't know me? You don't know Jeanmario's Zombie Cooking?"

"...sorry, I'm not much of a fan of variety TV."

My master's television was reserved exclusively for video games, after all.

And within my room, the television was mostly just an ornament. The only times I turned it on was to check the weather, or when Flat had lent me another one of his strange movies.

Caules, however, had quite the air of excitement.

"It's a pretty popular program from the London Minor Broadcasting Office. He's always using his twin pistols to gun down zombies while cooking, and the special effects are great! His special technique is using a frying pan to split a zombie's head in two, then frying a three-pound steak with it! The Jeanmario Buster!"

Though I couldn't figure out why on earth there needed to be zombies involved in a cooking show, I felt like it was in poor taste to bring that up now. Beyond that, my weakness was more for ghosts or spirits, so zombies weren't something that particularly bothered me.

At any rate, as I tried my best to absorb this new information, I couldn't help but mutter.

"A magus, on television...?"

"It's not like it's impossible. The Faculty of Botany (*Yumina*)'s Archelot has been playing with the TV Media for a while now, after all."

As I stared blankly, my master added his own comments.

Though that seemed to me to be something more fitting for the Faculty of Law, I suppose they didn't have a monopoly on it or anything. Within many different factions, there was a desire to control information with their own hands - and though other magi might consider it only a mundane affair, what resulted was a situation where magi struggled against each other right near the surface of society.

That aside, for a magus to be in charge of such a popular program was certainly out of the ordinary.

"...and, you are?"

My master's gaze went to the other end of the table, where another silent individual sat.

Easily into his seventies, he was an old man with extraordinarily dark skin. With an old scar between around his eyebrows, he gave a very mafia-esque impression.

Taking a couple of grapes from the bunch in his hand and popping them into his mouth, he whispered.

"Karabo Frampton. From the Holy Church."

Aside from Jeanmario, everyone immediately tensed up.

As the name implied, the Holy Church was an organisation of believers that spanned the entire world, using that religion which could be considered universal as its foundation. In many respects, it stood as an enemy to the Magic Association. While the Magic Association strove to control and manage Mystery as a whole, the Church aimed to annihilate all Mystery that existed outside of its own. Therein lay the conflict.

As Caules put a hand within his own jacket, Hishiri stepped back with a smile.

The old man clenched his fingers into a light fist.

It felt like the history of countless killings between the two groups was swirling in the air between them. Even my master, who usually avoided fights involving magecraft, had a stiff expression.

That nervous air was immediately shattered by a new voice.

"-Whoa! How amazing! Even Professor El-Melloi II is here!"

As if unaware of the tension in the room, the girl with her lolita attire clapped her hands.

Of course, it wasn't the first time we had met her.

"Tadah! It's me, your prospective lover from the El-Melloi Classroom!"

"...Yvette..."

This time, my master held a hand to his stomach with a pained expression, as if he just couldn't handle it anymore.

"You were also invited...?"

"Correct! Heheheh, as you know, the Lehrman family is renowned for their Mystic Eyes! Of course we'd be regulars on the Rail Zeppelin!"

Even going so far as to speak aloud her own sound effects, she struck a pose with a sideways peace sign.

Though I wasn't sure where exactly to start complaining, the truth was the mounting pressure within the car had been cleanly dispersed.

Karabo relaxed his fist, and Caules slowly lowered his hands. With a small whistle, Jeanmario returned to his seat.

"Oh! Caules is here too?!" Why? You've become one of his flunkies now, too?"

"...er, no, though I did ask him to take me with him."

"Aha, I see! There's no cheating allowed here, professor! Oh, wait, does it not count if it's gay? Sorry, I'm not sure I'll be so good in a three-way..."

"...fuck."

In a way I couldn't even pretend not to hear it, my master cursed as he put a hand to his face.

"When did we become prospective lovers anyway?"

"Of course, from this moment! From the depths of my own humbly adorable chest! Oh, did you want to touch? I don't mind at all, you lolicon you!"

"Alright, shut up. And get off this train. Through the window, if at all possible."

As the girl just puffed up her chest proudly at his remonstration, my master shifted his gaze.

Not to avoid her, though.

At some point, a bone-thin man had appeared.

Wearing a black uniform that must have belonged to the staff of the Rail Zeppelin, he looked down at a silver pocket watch.

"Yes. We shall proceed tonight according to schedule. We would be most grateful for everyone's cooperation."

Seeing the noisy magi gathered in the room fall to silence, he nodded in satisfaction.

Behind us, the door swung closed.

Together with the whistle we heard earlier, the sound of the steam engine lumbering into motion filled the room.

Though slowly, the train began to pick up speed, whisking away the tiny world we now occupied.

As if rocked by the growing speed of the train, the staff member lowered his head.

"My name is Rodin. I will be your conductor this evening. My apologies for interrupting your conversation."

The man introduced himself, offering the same name as that famous sculptor.

Not just us, but it seemed even those who had boarded the train at the other end like Olga Marie had also failed to notice his appearance. It was as if he had just appeared out of thin air.

With a cough to clear his throat, he continued.

"This locomotive intends a three night, four day journey around the Country of Fog, returning to London at the end. During that time, you will all be permitted to view our collection of Mystic Eyes, and on the third day an auction will be held for them. Should you offer the winning bid, you may either accept custody of the Eyes in question, or receive them transplanted immediately. Yes, please rest assured. All transplants will be completed quickly, so there is no need to worry. For those who wish to offer Mystic Eyes for sale, please approach me sometime before the day after tomorrow. If you need assistance, please feel free to ask for me directly."

"-or ask me. My name is Leandra, and I will endeavour to be your auctioneer for this event."

Appearing beside him, a woman in a fur coat spoke, giving a short bow.

Her appearance stood out so much I had to wonder why I hadn't noticed her until now.

With her hair cut short, she had the figure of a model. Though a strip of leather was wrapped tightly around her eyes, she seemed to function as if she could see just fine. Though, considering how well the Princess of Silver coped with her blindness at Iselma, that fact probably wasn't something especially surprising.

But, even then.

Within the moving train, I felt a sense of terror take hold of me.

For a place called the Mystic Eye Collecting Train, being guided by someone who chose to seal their own vision seemed hard to stomach.

"At this point, we would like to guide each of you to your private rooms. Please, follow me."

With that, the conductor Rodin bowed once more to us.



The room we were led to seemed unexpectedly pleasant.

It appeared that for each passenger car, only two or three passenger rooms were created, giving each a sense of luxury. Though the width of each room was rather limited, the simplistic accommodations offered no sense of claustrophobia. Apparently the rooms were divided so that each invitation came with one room, as three beds were prepared, but I didn't mind that so much.

The interior of the room was lit by a gas lamp.

Sitting down on the all-too-luxurious sofa, I pressed my hands to the side of my head.

Caules immediately spoke out.

"Are you okay, Gray?"

"...ah, yes. Just...we met so many people, my head is spinning a bit."

In truth, I felt more like I wanted to scream.

Magus from the Faculty of Law - Hishiri Adashino.

Daughter of a Lord - Olga Marie Asmleit Animusphere, and her attendant Trisha Fellows.

The television star magus, and a bit of a joker - Jeanmario Spinerra.

A man working for the Holy Church - Karabo Frampton.

Added to the conductor and auctioneer of the Rail Zeppelin, and the El-Melloi Classroom's own Yvette, I was well past the capacity my head could handle. I suppose if

just talking about the number of people, there were more at the party in Iselma, but so many of them here had direct connections to my master and I. Despite being totally unable to remember everything, there was no way I could ignore any of them either.

Massaging my temples, I looked out the window.

The scenery outside was blanketed in a thick fog. Occasionally, the lights of the distant city would peak through, before being washed away as quickly as they appeared.

Despite the archaic appearance, there was little in the way of vibrations within the car, and the sound of the powerful steam engine was somewhat comforting.

Mixed in with those sounds,

"...thinking about it now, I guess it should have been obvious that Yvette would be here."

Hanging his suit jacket on the wall, my master muttered.

"Is her eye patch related to Mystic Eyes too, then?"

"Half correct. There isn't an actual eye under that patch, actually."

At my master's words, I was suddenly struck speechless.

Though I didn't know how to respond to that, Caules came to the rescue.

"Yvette has a jewel there in place of a Mystic Eye."

"A jewel?"

I had the feeling I had heard about something like this from my master before.

"The reproduction of Mystic Eyes only really works for lower level Eyes, but that doesn't apply to gems. Yvette's family is specialised in their creation. Though it still has its limits, they are able to even reproduce Noble coloured Mystic Eyes to a degree. ...they probably are regular customers of the Rail Zeppelin to acquire more accurate models for their creation."

"...ah, I see."

Put that way, I could understand.

It seemed like a much more direct approach for a magi than just a simple transplant.

"Well, that's how it is. By doing things like offering up one of their own eyes in the process, or relying on jewels with mystical properties, they are able to overcome the limits of reproducing Mystic Eyes. Of course, implanting a foreign object into the human body will trigger all sorts of rejection responses, so there must have been generations of bodily modification in order to allow Yvette to handle it so well. Numerically speaking, she would be one of the rare examples of someone interested in the Rail Zeppelin with no desire for a transplant."

My master added to Caules' explanation.

Her random self introduction as the Mystic Eye Girl seemed to be fairly accurate. At any rate, it was all part of a world that was hard to wrap my head around.

After thinking on it for a while,

"But the Manager's Representative never made an appearance, did they?" my master muttered.

That was the signature on the invitation.

When thinking of plausible suspects for the theft of the relic, they were the most likely.

"Then, that person is..."

"Perhaps they intend on showing up later. After all, we don't even know the reason why we received the invitation in the first place. There's no benefit to getting worked up about it now."

Despite his words, the wrinkle in my master's brow was deeper than ever.

He had likely spent the day categorising everyone he came across, trying to determine what relation they may have had to the culprit. As someone who was unable to wield magecraft of superior quality, his only option was to work his brain to a brutal degree.

My master's ability wasn't as some sort of super detective, tuned in to the supernatural.

Really, it was the exact opposite - combining plain, mundane methods with his tremendous base of knowledge, he used them as a foundation to exercise his extraordinary power of insight. So in an incident like this one, his brain wouldn't be given even a single moment's rest.

Saying not to worry was almost just a bad joke.

Though I wanted to say something, I couldn't think of a single thing I could offer him in consolation.

"Anyways, let's rest now that we have the chance." Taking off the Mystic Eye Killing glasses, my master lay down on the bed just as he was.

Surprisingly quickly, his breathing fell into the steady rhythm of sleep, which I found a little relieving. He must have been exhausted. Even if not, he must have still been feeling the stress of having his relic stolen.

I, however, was not able to fall asleep so easily, so I just sat on my bed.

Normally if I wasn't able to sleep I'd consider bringing out Add, but I was in no mood to listen to his rowdy self at the moment.

At that point,

"-you're really amazing, Gray." Caules suddenly spoke out.

"What makes you say that?"

"I've just been really anxious, ready to run at a moment's notice. Ever since coming to the Clock Tower from the back country of Germany, everything has just been coming at me non-stop. I mean, I even ended up on the legendary Rail Zeppelin, coming down to London all the way from Scandinavia."

Apparently, the Rail Zeppelin mainly travelled around the forests of Northern Europe. Being from Germany, Caules was probably much more familiar with the legends surrounding it.

The fact he had asked to come along after hearing about it by chance was likely in part because of that.

"You seem awfully well composed, though. ...back then, before Yvette had come out, you seemed ready to fight and everything."

When Karabo had introduced himself as a member of the Holy Church, though Hishiri was of course prepared, I hadn't failed to notice Caules readying himself for combat as well. That wasn't something one picked up just by practising magecraft. It was something that needed a much more complete level of preparedness.

In response to that, Caules scratched his head awkwardly.

"Haha. I wasn't composed at all. -but, what would you call it? When my sister decided to give up her life as a magus, things became rather violent. I guess I collected a bit of experience from that."

"Is that what you were talking about before we got on the train?"

"Yes," he nodded. "Despite being evaluated as the magus of utmost talent in the history of our family, despite all the expectations that she had been saddled with, she suddenly decided to abandon magecraft altogether, even going so far as to abandon her Magic Crest. The family was in an uproar from top to bottom."

Recalling that memory, Caules' eyes narrowed faintly.

"Even though I was extraordinarily average, I ended up becoming the successor, and even ended up taking the place in the Clock Tower that had been prepared for her. It was only natural that I was rejected and earned a lot of unjustified anger - no, I guess it was pretty justified. Regardless, there were even attempts on my life because of it. No doubt they thought that if I died, my sister would have no choice but to return."

I imagine he wasn't exaggerating when he said there were attempts on his life.

I had learned time and again that magi were that kind of creature in the past few months. In the face of the hopes and dreams of numerous generations, the value of a single human life was less than dirt.

Seeing my tensed up posture, Caules' expression suddenly broke.

"...sorry. Maybe that was a bit heavy."

"No," I answered, shaking my head vigorously. "No, no. ...I understand that kind of situation well."

The pain of having everyone around you get whipped up into a frenzy with no regard to your own thoughts or feelings was something I understood quite well.

As well as the frustration of being unable to meet those expectations. How much easier would it have been to just discard my own pathetic self, and completely become that hero of old? No matter how inexperienced or worthless I even considered myself, why was it so hard to throw that self away?

Caules tilted his head to the side, confused.

"You're the professor's closest disciple, aren't you?"

"But, I'm not a magus."

"I see."

He didn't push any further.

With the conversation coming to an end, the sounds of the train cars jostling were the only thing left in the room.

Strangely, the silence wasn't so awkward. Rocked by the sounds of the car, I vaguely wondered why that was.

(...ah, I see)

Because Caules is a lot like my master. Despite his overwhelming mediocrity, despite always being compared to someone that was nothing less than a genius and all the pain that brought, he hadn't given up a single thing. That way of being struck me right to my core. More than seeing a genius who could take to the sky from the start, my heart cried out much stronger for those kinds of people.

That was probably why.

"It's okay. You will become strong. Even more than your sister, I'm sure."

As if it was more natural than anything, those words spilled out of my mouth.

"After all, my master is the one who picked you out."

Caules looked back at me with a surprised expression.

"Is something wrong?"

"...no. Just, you really trust the professor, don't you?"

Speaking with a small smile, Caules' words made my breath catch.

I had never really thought about that.

"I guess so..."

"So," he nodded, looking around the room. "...the Rail Zeppelin was real after all. I wonder what my sister would have done."

Those last words drifted through the dim light of the room.

It seemed he had no intention of continuing the conversation beyond that. Pulling up the blanket on his own bed, Caules turned off the lamp at his bedside.

"Good night, Gray."

"...good night."

At that, I also pulled up my own blanket.

The regular movements of the train seemed to shake loose something within me. The leftover scent of my master's cigar also seemed to calm me down. At last, my thoughts drifted off into the darkness of the room.

Surprisingly, I was able to pass the night comfortably.

~Part 3~

As morning came, a faint light shone through the windows of the train car.

Though the train was enclosed in fog as usual, it seemed it wasn't so thick as to completely block out the sun. Using the sink in the room, I washed my face. As I then spent a little time getting my clothing in order, I heard a rustling come from the bed beside me.

"Master..."

"...five more minutes."

With that, he turned right over.

As I thought, he was exhausted after all. I'm sure he was going to have difficulty sleeping well here for a while too.

For now, while he slept, I propped him up against Caules and got to work putting his hair in order. I probably wouldn't have minded if it was the other way around, but I wasn't particularly fond of other people doing my hair. ...maybe because it had been so long, but I felt strangely relaxed by having the chance to do his hair again.

"Master, it's almost time for breakfast."

"...oh. Sorry, Gray. Can you go ahead without me?"

"Without you? Are you not having any breakfast?"

"Right now, most people will be at the breakfast hall. I want to do some investigating while everyone is there, but it'll look bad if none of us show up."

I see.

Even as he was half asleep in bed, his brain was still working hard.

"Okay. In that case, I'll go ahead. I'll leave the rest to you then, Caules."

"Uh, right. Got it!"

Leaving things here to Caules, I finished up with my master's hair before setting out.

Stepping out of our private room, I headed in the direction of the main engine.

As expected, with only a single straight line to travel, there was no way to get lost. It was a nice contrast to places like Adra and Iselma, estates with huge, sprawling complexes.

Outside the windows, the view was dominated by a thick fog interspersed with conifer trees.

(Fog, and a forest...)

I thought idly.

How long had this train run through these places?

Maybe since before humans even settled this country? Entertaining such ridiculous thoughts, I passed through the lobby and into the dining hall on the other side.

The carpet in the hallways was so thick and luxurious it felt like I might sink into them up to my ankles. Thanks to that, I couldn't even feel the movement of the train under it.

At last, the aroma of fresh toast on the air snuck into my nose, awakening my appetite.

As if pulled forward by that impulse, I opened the door to the dining car,

"Oh, the disciple! Over here, over here!"

And was immediately waved down by Yvette, signalling to the open seat beside her.

Every once in a while, I couldn't help but feel like she was very similar to Flat. It seemed my master collected all sorts of people like that.

"The Professor always sleeps in, doesn't he? I bet you woke him up and he was just like, 'five more minutes, please!'"

"...you understand him well, don't you?"

"It's my job as his prospective lover, after all. Oh, or because I'm a spy. That reason is fine too!"

Unsure of how serious she was being, all I could do was give a vague smile.

Regardless of that, something far more disturbing had been set up here. Within the centre of the dining room, a transparent tube filled with some sort of liquid was set. Floating in that solution was a pair of eyes.

"These are the Noble coloured Mystic Eyes of Incineration," The auctioneer, Leandra, explained.

Standing beside the tube was the woman, her eyes still wrapped in leather.

"I imagine you know already, but anything that enters the vision of these Mystic Eyes undergoes Spontaneous Combustion. They are still in good condition, and the quality of Magic Circuits inside them is quite high as well. It seems there is a bit of a trick to keeping them under control, as usual. The details and price estimates are recorded in your catalogues."

On the table along with the toast and jam that was set up for our breakfast, a number of hardcover books were also laid out. They must have been a preview of what was to come.

I strangely started to feel like this was a real auction after all.

Though being watched by a pair of disembodied eyes floating in a tank while we ate breakfast was a bit off-putting, I was pretty okay with such grotesque sights if I was just looking at them. It actually caused somewhat of a problem when I went to see a horror movie with Reines. I felt kind of bad, since I didn't know exactly how I was supposed to react.

A bit uneasy about sitting directly beside Yvette, I elected to sit across from her instead. The moment I sat down, a member of the staff immediately brought me some food.

They were so perfectly expressionless, it made me wonder if they weren't homunculi like we saw at the Twin Towers of Iselma.

At a relaxed pace, the auctioneer continued her explanation.

"Among our offerings for this event, we will present two sets of Mystic Eyes today, and two tomorrow, for a total of four being auctioned off. Please keep that in mind."

"Same as always, then?" Yvette muttered.

Seeing I didn't quite understand, she explained further, stroking her eye patch.

"Originally, this auction was just an excuse for the previous Manager to show off their collection of Mystic Eyes. The real, heh, 'Eye Catchers' will be shown tomorrow."

"They held an auction just to show off?" I echoed.

"Yep. It was all just a pastime for some Dead Apostle. What was their name, Rosian?"

A chill ran up my spine.

Dead Apostle.

A person living while dead. A person dead while living.

A creature that had twisted the very core nature of what it meant to be a flesh and blood being. A blood-sucking species, commonly referred to as a "vampire." Dead Apostle was a name used to refer to those people. Different from spirits of the dead - but, though the method was different, they were still those who spat on the concept of death.

As if avoiding poking fun at my obvious discomfort, Yvette continued.

"I only started coming to this auction long after the Manager's representative took over, so I don't know all the details. Not poking too deep into someone's private life is the secret to a long term relationship, right? Especially in the business world."

Surprisingly, that might have been true.

Unlike in the Clock Tower, where you would often come across people rather frequently whether you liked it or not, a customer of the Rail Zeppelin would likely only see it once a year - no, even for a regular customer like Yvette, it might have only been once every few years.

"Well, after coming here a few times, you learn to get a read on the different customers. For example, he's probably here as a seller."

Yvette dropped her voice to a whisper.

As she spoke, her gaze shifted over to the silent old man in the room.

"You mean Mr. Karabo?"

The old man from the Holy Church.

Even more than the numerous scars decorating his hands, I was more curious about the darkness behind his half-closed eyes.

"There are those in the Church that use magecraft, but being the Church and all, they aren't exactly fond of using anything but the Baptismal Rites. And anyways, at that age, he won't have the time or energy to learn to use a new set of Mystic Eyes. It's far more likely he's here to get rid of a set of Eyes he can't use."

"Does age make a difference?"

"Oh boy," Yvette responded to my question with surprise. "I'd heard the disciple wasn't even a magus, but you really know nothing about magecraft, do you?"

"S-sorry..."

"No no, it's not like that's a bad thing. Actually, that might be more appropriate for someone who's the closest disciple. Hm, maybe my approach was all wrong..."

Crossing her arms, Yvette nodded to herself.

After a moment, she started speaking again.

"Mystic Eyes are a bit different. While they are an organ attached to a magus, they have their own independent Magic Circuits. That's why you can even talk about extracting or transplanting them. Mmm, thinking about them as having their own unique abilities, you could think of it like a Magic Crest that can be passed down without regard to the bloodline of the bearer."

Hearing that, it became clear why Mystic Eyes were so valuable.

Magic Circuits, I recalled, were an organ magi were born with that functioned to produce magical energy. The difference in quality and number differed wildly between magi, so the results they could produce did too. As such, families of magi went to great lengths to improve the quality of their bloodline, in hopes of getting even a single circuit more in their children.

Even if it was only a temporary or fake Circuit, most magi would gladly pay any price.

"Then, when you say they can't control them, then..."

"Right. Since they have their own Magic Circuits, Mystic Eyes are able to produce magical energy and cast spells all on their own. 'A Noble colour is like the movement of the stars compared to normal Magic Circuits.' That saying comes from the same reasoning. So, whether it's a magus or a normal person, though extraordinarily rare, sometimes Mystic Eyes just spontaneously develop in them. But, there's no guarantee those Mystic Eyes come balanced in terms of magical energy output, or the spells they produce. In the worst case, they can activate all on their own, forcefully drawing the Od from the magus' Magic Circuits against their will. In that case, you're basically better off dead."

Yvette shrugged with a bitter look.

"If it's just an issue of not having enough magical energy, younger people have more vitality and energy, so they might come out the other side with little more than feeling tired. But once you're older, that changes. The Rail Zeppelin also offers particularly low level Mystic Eyes, as well as completely normal eyeballs, so there's value in selling."

"...then..."

With a small nod, Yvette spun her index finger in the air.

"It's hard to say what the buyers are prepared to deal with. If you have really strong control of magical energy, it's possible to do the opposite, where you take control of the Magic Circuits within the Eyes and basically add them to your own. I imagine most of the magi on this train think they represent that exception. Heh, even if it's only possible once, I'm sure the prospect of getting new Magic Circuits is rather tempting."

This time, Yvette's eyes were drawn to a table on the far side of the room.

To a girl with silver hair, no more than about eleven years old.

Olga Marie.

Flipping through the catalogue in front of her, she was talking with her attendant, Trisha Fellows. Being the daughter of a Lord, I imagined it was safe to assume she would have no difficulty controlling Mystic Eyes.

But what about the person sitting at the opposite table, Hishiri Adashino?

Or the television star Jeanmario Spinerra, enjoying spinning his own hat in his hand?

(...ah, that's why)

Each of these gathered magi had their own expectations for this auction, I realised with a sinking feeling.

"...I think I understand now."

"Good. Though, maybe this isn't even all of the customers. There are an awful lot of people who don't show up until the day of the auction, after all. But those who are really serious about buying something tend to show up at the start. Even the Eye Catchers I was talking about before are often invited directly by the Rail Zeppelin".

"Huh?" You mean, an invitation to come sell their eyes?"

"As if they'd be so polite," Yvette laughed. "Magi with strong Mystic Eyes are pretty famous. If they ignore the invitation, it's not uncommon to find their dead bodies with

eyes ripped out soon after. Yeah, it's more like a message saying 'if you value your life, hand over the eyes.' They really act like all the Mystic Eyes in the world belong to them."

For a moment, my mind wandered.

Did they think they were some sort of king? What kind of thinking led to someone saying 'your body belongs to me, so give it here'?

"Of course, to the people who can't control their own Mystic Eyes, the Rail Zeppelin is like a saviour. There's no place in the world that will fetch a better price for Mystic Eyes, after all."

Taking a bite out of her toast, Yvette's gaze wandered back to the door of the dining car.

In an instant, her expression lit up.

"Welcome, Professor!" she immediately called out the moment my master entered the car.

"...Yvette."

"There are seats for four, so please have a seat! Please, please, don't be shy! Your cute little disciple is here too, after all!"

Oh.

She had invited me to sit with her as bait to lure in my master, hadn't she?

Though he had seen through her ploy, he sat down beside me with a sigh anyway. Though I felt sorry for him, sitting alone here would have been much worse for me, so I'd have to just ask for forgiveness later.

"Did the Lehrman family not send anyone to keep an eye on you?"

"Hahaha. Though there is someone for that at home. It's a bit too stifling for me, though. A spy needs to be more carefree, don't you think?"

Shaking her arms back and forth, Yvette made her appeal.

In response, my master only pressed a hand to his forehead over top of his glasses.

"How was it?"

"To start, I asked the staff about who sent the invitation to me."

Keeping his voice low, he showed me the envelope that had been in his safe.

"Apparently, it's in the style of a kind given out to a number of people. Invitations like this are occasionally made to give out to people who are new invitees. As such, even the staff don't know who gave it out. ...anyways, I left Caules to take care of the room."

He then gave me a look, as if to say we'd continue the conversation later.

Then, there was some movement.

"Allow me to show you one more," the auctioneer said.

As she did, an expressionless staff member brought out another transparent tank.

"Mystic Eyes of Plunder," the auctioneer named the eyes floating inside the tank.

At the same time, a new page suddenly appeared in the catalogue in front of us. As a photo of the eyes and a detailed description appeared on the page, the auctioneer continued.

"As the name implies, they are Mystic Eyes that steal the life force of those it sees. They're ranked Gold. Unfortunately, due to their age, we must apologise for their current condition. However, due to their nature, there is a possibility they will strike back against their owner. In previous auctions, the past two individuals who received these Eyes were brought to the point of death within three years, and our staff were forced to extract them. If you intend to bid on them, please review the limits of liability stated within the contract."

In contrast to the almost bored tone with which the auctioneer spoke, a ripple of unease passed through the magi gathered in the dining car.

Even my master was covering his mouth with a suspicious look in his eyes.

"...perhaps that should be expected of the Rail Zeppelin."

"Are they that impressive?"

"Even the Mystic Eyes of Incineration they had up before were quite the find."

Yvette's lone eye was sparkling. Seeing my face, which must have looked all sorts of confused, she moved a finger as she explained.

"See, even Miss Olga Marie over there is starting to look a little pale, don't you think? Because among the Noble colours, Gold is ranked pretty highly."

"Higher than the normal Noble colours?"

"The kind of thing that will earn a Sealing Designation with one wrong step," my master added.

Hearing that familiar word, I blurted out again.

"Sealing Designation? Like Miss Touko's?"

"Yes. With the Clock Tower's tools and techniques, you can't guarantee they'll stop at just removing the Mystic Eyes. It's far easier for them just to seal away the whole person. For a person with Mystic Eyes that will never be reproduced again, they don't belong to just them, but to the entire Magic Association. Or so the reasoning goes," my master explained, closing one eye. No doubt, the hardness in his voice was a sign of his distaste with that particular policy.

And with a terribly serious expression, he added one more thing.

"Above that is the 'Jewel' level of Mystic Eyes, but at that point you're getting into the territory of things whose existence can't even be verified. Though it's said one of the Lords at the top of their faction may be hiding some away. I guess the Rail Zeppelin is trying to drum up some notoriety for itself!"

"No no, Professor. Even I would never have expected a Gold-ranked set of Eyes to come out second. They must have something really impressive to follow this. At this rate, they may even have a Jewel rank set of Eyes to show off..."

At that point, Yvette was cut off.

"What about Rainbow rank?" a voice called out.

Olga Marie Asmleit Animusphere stood up. Despite her young age, her dignified figure was filled with an ambition that made the other magi's seem pale in comparison.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said," she snapped.

Despite the confident glare she levelled at the auctioneer, her words came out calm and composed.

"If this is the Rail Zeppelin, you should have the highest rank of Rainbow Eyes here, right? For example...the Mystic Eyes of Death Perception that were found in the Far East."

This time, calling it a ripple of unease wouldn't even begin to cover it.

The sharp sound of a chair crashing to the floor filled the room as someone jumped from their seat.

And of all people, it was the magus from the Faculty of Law - Hishiri Adashino.

(Mystic Eyes of Death Perception?)

It was an unfamiliar name. But I did understand that the interest of the gathered magi had been snared well before that - at the mention of Rainbow ranked Eyes. The highest rank. In short, not just the Noble colours, not just the rank of Jewel whose existence itself was in doubt, but even higher.

Gold.

Jewel.

And then, Rainbow.

The highest rank of Mystic Eyes, whose name alone could inspire fear in ordinary magi.

"Unfortunately, I cannot answer that question today," the auctioneer responded.

She didn't say they didn't have them, though. Just that they wouldn't be displayed here, today.

As one, as if gazed upon by the Medusa itself, the gathered magi stiffened.
-surprisingly, even Hishiri Adashino was no exception, returning to her seat clumsily.

In the strange atmosphere now filling the dining car,

"I see, I see," Yvette muttered to herself.

Her lone eye had an unusual shine to it.

"This is the first time I've seen Animusphere here. I guess they are after something in particular? Things seem to be getting interesting."

Finally, she whispered.

"...but, are there really such things as the Mystic Eyes of Death Perception? And even if there were, would that even still be considered Mystic Eyes? I wonder."

~Part 4~

That event marked the end of the breakfast preview.

The gathered people in the dining car split off into their small groups and left, no discussion of what had just occurred forthcoming. After gathering a few pieces of food for Caules into a basket, my master and I also left the dining car.

Between the dining car and the guest rooms was an entire car reserved for the lobby.

Though the soft carpet and leather sofas had not changed in the slightest, a bizarre sense of dread made my skin crawl. It wasn't magical energy, nor was it a sense of hostility. But after seeing those Mystic Eyes floating in their tanks, the entire train had gained a sinister feel.

Even breathing caused a pain in my chest.

Following my master's footsteps, I raised my gaze.

"Caules?"

Caules was standing in the middle of the hallway.

"Professor. Gray. ...you look pale. Is something wrong?"

"Uh, no, not at all. I'm just not feeling that great."

Seeing his kind expression, I immediately felt relieved.

But at the same time, it made me feel like he wasn't well suited to the environment of the Clock Tower. Perhaps he had the mind of a magus, but I couldn't help but feel like there was a better place out there for him.

"No problem then, I guess," his expression softened after hearing my answer.

"Professor. Someone slipped this in through the door," he said, holding out a white envelope.

"A letter?"

"Yes. I opened the door immediately, but there was already no one in sight. Sorry."

"No, that's fine. If that's how they were making contact, they were probably using a temporary familiar or something similar to deliver it anyways. I doubt they cared if it got caught."

So saying, he tore open the envelope.

Reading the contents, his hands went stiff.

'We are most honoured that you heeded our invitation,' it began.

With an opening like that, it was hard to imagine that it came from just a single person.

"...master."

"Yes. It's probably from the thief," he nodded, a frigid expression on his face. It looked like he was trying to freeze solid the roiling, uncontrollable emotions inside.

"First of all, let's analyse this thoroughly-

"-Lord El-Melloi II."

A bright voice stopped us before we could leave.

When we turned, the one who had gathered the attention of all the magi earlier was standing there.

"Miss Olga Marie."

The silver haired daughter of Lord Animusphere gazed back at us.

She reminded me somewhat of a cat, for some reason. Though they were both children of the same high society, she had a much different air than Luvia gelita Edelfelt. If Luvia was like a jewel found deep within the earth, extracted and polished with great effort to

perfection, this girl was like an Abyssinian cat, sitting by and watching the history of the nobles unfold together with them.

"I have something to discuss with you," she said, no mask to her pride.

"Unfortunately, I'm not sure I'm capable of discussing things on your level. Besides, I believe you told me there would be no exchange of information?"

"The situation has changed. Besides, you are the most capable person in the Clock Tower in this regard."

"Oh?"

Though he made an effort to relax his hands as he dropped them to his side, it wasn't long before they started trembling again.

As if reciting some ancient spell, Olga Marie continued.

"After all, it's about the Holy Grail War."



Hishiri Adashino was a magus belonging to the Faculty of Law.

The Clock Tower was made up of twelve primary faculties, but the Faculty of Law was separate from all of them. That was of course because the Faculty of Law didn't pursue academic study at all. Rather, it was an institution made to manage and control the Clock Tower as a whole.

To be precise, that management could be divided into three strains.

In short, these were the preservation of the world of magecraft, control over the magi contained within it, and mediation between them and the mundane world.

At any rate, the Faculty of Law was both in name and in practice, the 'magi who existed to control other magi.' Many Lords in the Clock Tower freely sent their children to study

under the Faculty of Law, and the Faculty in turn freely taught the ways of leadership relevant to the Clock Tower. That was why, despite not necessarily connected to the Twelve Families or Three Great Noble Families of the Clock Tower, mentioning the Faculty of Law would elicit a nervous reaction.

And now.

"Rainbow rank Mystic Eyes...really?"

Still contemplating the words of Animusphere's daughter, Hishiri was frowning.

As one might expect, the kimono-clad woman was still half in disbelief - no, it would be better to say she was ninety percent sure it was impossible. Even for her within the Faculty of Law, Mystic Eyes of the Rainbow rank existed only in rumour.

But that was just all the more reason she had to make sure.

If they could be proven to exist, that could be shock enough to disrupt the balance of the entire Clock Tower.

"...no," she shook her head.

(The real problem is what kind of magecraft operates within them, right?)

Noble colours.

In general, the extent of their abilities was characterised by their long list of titles: Restraint, Compulsion, Contract, Incineration, Illusion, Jinx. These specialties of Mystic Eyes all, in some way or another, intervened in the fates of others.

However, Eyes ranked Gold or higher often held great magics that had long since been lost to the modern era. For Jewel and Rainbow ranks, it could be assumed that they didn't just possess powerful magecraft, but instead could actualize Mysteries that were otherwise entirely impossible to replicate in any era.

They could be said to be an exercise of the Authority of the Divine.

(If Mystic Eyes of Death Perception actually exist, maybe as the authority of Balor...)

Though Hishiri herself had no idea if such Eyes actually existed.

However, if the rumours she had overheard had any truth to them, then conjecture was possible.

In short, the ability to invoke death with a single glance. All things had their individual flaws. Nothing in the world could be said to be a perfect creation. Each thing tended toward its own destruction, in hopes it could be remade with such perfection. Drawing those flaws to the surface was the symbol of that absurd power, possessed by the god Balor of Celtic Myth.

The gathered Source Crests and powerful Mystic Codes owned by the Twelve Families of the Clock Tower couldn't compare.

"To think you'd get caught up in something like this again," she gave a small sigh.

"Is your plan to cut down all the remaining Mystery in the world, Lord El-Melloi II...?"



Closing the door of the room, my master led his two guests to the sofa.

Of course, that meant there was no room left for Caules or myself, so we sat down on the bed nearby. Originally the room was only designed to accommodate three people, so even though half the train car was reserved for our room, with five people inside it began to feel a little cramped.

After seating his guests, my master lowered himself into an armchair before speaking.

"-what interest do you have in the Holy Grail War?"

Though he tried to keep things smooth, there was a hardness to his voice.

In response, Olga Marie's attendant, Trisha Fellows, reset her glasses.

"When the previous Lord El-Melloi became a topic of discussion, the Animusphere family also collected its share of information."

Ten years ago. The Fourth Holy Grail War.

The previous Lord El-Melloi - Kayneth El-Melloi Archibald lost his life in that battle. Or in other words, the battle in which the current Lord El-Melloi II - the battle in which my master came out alive.

Has the Animusphere family been watching my master since then? Or perhaps, since even earlier? It was to be expected as a fellow Lord that they would be watching Mr. Kayneth's activities, but even then I couldn't suppress the shiver running down my spine.

I felt like, in a small way, I had come into contact with the true nature of the Clock Tower.

"Hmm. And here I thought that the Animuspheres had no interest in anything besides the movements of the stars they watched from their mountain."

"This is yet another one of those stars,"

Olga Marie responded to my master's words.

Her sharp amber eyes glared up at him. Rather than an appraising look, it was more like a challenging one.

"And anyways, that kind of news was big enough to reach us even on our mountain. That the successor of the El-Melloi name intends on participating in the fight that killed his predecessor. The Fifth Holy Grail War is only two months away. You must have requested to the Clock Tower to be sent, right?"

"Though it seems my application has been rejected. Though the Clock Tower was given two places in this Holy Grail War, it seems they have been taken by Galiasta and the Sealing Designation Office."

Of course, I knew Atram Galiasta.

The Sealing Designation Office must have been the organisation of magi responsible for capturing those who had earned a Sealing Designation. Since they were chosen not for their ability in magecraft, but for their ability in combat to hunt down renegade magi, something like the Holy Grail War must have been perfect for them.

"Even so, you still applied. It seems you're obsessed with this suspicious looking wish granter."

"...I wonder."

"That's not right, is it? It seems they've found some way of making fake Heroic Spirits, but this is still the Far East we're talking about. There's no way a magical backwater like them made such a super-high-class ritual,"

Olga Marie said, folding one of her arms as her finger bounced.

Her eyes then narrowed as she folded her second arm.

"In that case, it makes more sense if your objective is the ritual itself. After all, that ritual managed to turn a third rate New Ager like you into the head of the El-Melloi Classroom somehow. And on top of that, you managed to push yourself into the seat of Lord while the El-Melloi faction was still in a state of total chaos. Were you answering some favour for the previous Lord El-Melloi or something?"

"Unfortunately, I wasn't present for Professor Kayneth's last moments. Right up until the end, he thought I was a hopeless fool, I'm afraid."

It was all I could do to keep my mouth shut.

To think they had kept such a detailed eye on my master.

Thinking back to what Atram Galiasta said as well, it seemed the Clock Tower had determined he was more than an ordinary person in their investigation. It wasn't all that surprising, since Reines had said as much earlier, but despite his philosophical view of things, it seemed he didn't think of himself in that way at all.

"Anyways, you want to participate in the Holy Grail War again. Are you that desperate to make up for your loss last time?"

"...if that's the way you want to look at it, that's fine with me, but is that what you really wanted to talk about?"

"No, just making sure I have the situation right. If you don't like it, you can pretend I'm just talking to myself."

Waving a hand around, Olga Marie continued. "If my speculation is mostly correct, then the reason you came to the Rail Zeppelin was to gather resources for another Holy Grail War, right? If you can't get one of the Clock Tower spots you'll just have to go as a free agent. If that's the case, there's no way you can just barge in with some powerful Mystic Code like the previous Lord El-Melloi did. I'm kind of amazed at how he went in guns blazing, throwing the El-Melloi family's assets around like they were nothing.

An appropriately huge number of jewels and minerals for a member of Kischur, a careless number of evil spirits even for a member of Eulyphis, and even three Mystic Furnaces made specifically for Lords. And he lost all of it when someone just destroyed the whole building. Just hearing about it made me shudder. Even as strong as the El-Melloi faction was at that time, it seemed they were on the way to their end already."

All I could do was watch them dumbly.

The cautious way she proceeded seemed somehow familiar to me.

(...Reines is like that, too)

Or perhaps, that was the way Reines used to live in the Clock Tower.

I didn't meet her until after she had had a long relationship with my master...or maybe it was better to say after she had pushed herself on him.

(...is that why Reines doesn't want to let him go?)

I still held the card and cell phone Reines had given to me in secret. Though we had lost reception since the train departed, if things went as planned, I should have reception again once the auction actually started.

I felt a little bit relieved.

Because if she wasn't willing to let him go yet, that meant things were still alright.

I felt like if that wasn't the case, then my master would end up disappearing somewhere.

"...you seem to know an awful lot. I never would have thought Animusphere was so interested in the outside world."

"Looking outside the planet and looking at the surface follows the same underlying principle. But, if my speculation is correct, I thought it might not be impossible for us to cooperate."

"Cooperate. At the very least, it sounds nice."

"Doesn't it? After all, we Animusphere are members of the Aristocratic Faction, just like you are."

"Aristocratic..." my master's lips turned slightly.

I'm sure he must have had his own feelings about the factional warfare within the Clock Tower. For starters, even if the El-Melloi family itself was aligned with the Aristocratic Faction, my master's own birth and methods felt much more in line with the principles of the Democratic Faction. That was likely why Valueleta felt it was possible to pull him to their side.

Once again, Olga Marie glared at my master.

"At the very least, if your goal is just to collect weapons, you probably aren't much interested in Rainbow eyes, are you? If that's the case, our goals here don't conflict.***"

"...what makes you say that? We're talking about Mystic Eyes of a legendary calibre. Something that even the other Lords of the Clock Tower probably don't possess. Even if we don't know their specific abilities, anyone would be interested in acquiring them, don't you think?"

"As such, even without knowing what they do, being Rainbow rank puts them at a suitably legendary price. I can't imagine the El-Melloi family as it is now can hope to compete on that level financially."

"How blunt," my master shrugged with a bitter smile.

But there was no sense of displeasure to his demeanour. It seemed he really did prefer dealing with people like this. At the very least, it may have just been easier not having to worry about hidden meanings being each and every word.

"In short, you actually believe that Rainbow eyes are going to be put on display here. Do you have some information that led to that conclusion? I can't imagine a leak from the Rail Zeppelin itself."

For a while, Olga Marie was silent.

After exchanging a look with her attendant, she spoke again.

"Okay, Trisha. This whole thing will go smoother if we at least share this much."

"Understood." Nodding to her master's words, Trisha Fellows raised her hand. "The truth is, I saw them myself."

Removing her glasses, she bared her beautiful eyes.

No, perhaps it was just the lively glimmer from deep within them that drew our attention. Seeing that bizarre shine, I couldn't help but feel like I'd seen something similar not long ago...but as I thought that, she began to speak extremely slowly.

"Ah, perfect. Mr. El-Melloi II, would you raise your right hand for me?"

"Like this?"

Without any hesitation, my master raised his right hand from where he was seated.

"Yes, for eight more seconds, if you would. Seven, six, five, four-

"-whoa!"

Beside me, Caules suddenly collapsed.

As if overwhelmed by what he was watching, he slipped and fell off the bed. As he fell, one of his flailing hands struck an empty kettle near his pillow, causing it to fly through the air. As if part of some choreographed experiment, the kettle drew a perfect arc in the empty space of the room, coming to rest perfectly against my master's raised hand.

After staring at the kettle in silence for a while, my master finally spoke again.

"Mystic Eyes, I see."

"In a broad sense, yes. My eyes have the ability to predict the future."

"...the future?"

As I sat awestruck, my master whispered to me.

"Just like it sounds. Eyes of Foresight. Just as Trisha explained, in a broad sense, they can be considered Mystic Eyes."

Mystic Eyes.

In a narrow sense, they projected a spell outwards, as was the case of eyes of Incineration or Charm. Receptive types of Mystic Eyes, like those of Foresight or Hindsight, were not always included in that definition...though he continued explaining, most of it was lost on me.

The only thing I could think of, as I felt like I was swallowing a stone, was that there was one more.

Someone who could see that which should not be seen.

In a way, a person whose senses were connected to a different world.

Something completely different than the abilities long bought and sold at the Rail Zeppelin.

"About three months ago, I saw Mystic Eyes of the Rainbow rank being put on display at the Rail Zeppelin's current auction."

"You saw," my master muttered.

"Reaching a result before reason is taken into account. That sounds very much like Foresight. But, predictive Foresight is rather unstable. At most, it tells us no more than that such a thing is possible."

"That's why I tried to confirm it earlier," Olga Marie said, puffing out her chest haughtily. "And even an absurd claim like that wasn't denied by the auctioneer. Everyone is probably thinking about that now."

This time, my master went quiet.

Remembering back when she asked us if we were aiming after any particular set of Mystic Eyes before we got on the train, it seemed this straightforward method of questioning was a habit of hers. Though it seemed careless to me, it may have been unexpectedly effective in a place like the Clock Tower, usually so wrapped up in its own intrigue. At the very least, it would make it easy to divide one's friends from their foes.

"I see. And so, you came here to make contact once more. If you can be sure our goals don't conflict, both of our burdens will be eased. ...so, what kind of cooperation were you looking for?"

"If the Rainbow eyes really come out for auction, and some other idiot puts a bid in for them, I want you to bid as well."

"Oh? Even though you were so sure we had no such money?"

"Even so, there aren't many idiots out there that would pit themselves against two families of Lords, are there? Once the others drop out, if you drop out right away, the damage will be minimal."

In other words, she didn't care about his money, just his authority.

I could understand that line of reasoning. Though in my master's case it wasn't so clear cut, the title of Lord in the Clock Tower was not just a showy crown. Though one would

normally be enough, the thought of earning the ire of two such families at once is something anyone, fool or not, would want to avoid.

"If possible, I'd also like you to bid aggressively on the other Mystic Eyes to try and exhaust the others' resources, but that's probably asking too much. From the El-Melloi's perspective, this is a good way to put us in your debt without spending a penny, don't you think?"

Though her words seemed to be the height of arrogance, my master responded without showing a hint of emotion.

"I can't promise anything, but at the very least, I understand your request."

No promises.

But, even with just that, it seemed the Animuspheres were satisfied.

As Olga Marie nodded and made to take her leave, she was stopped.

"What is it, Trisha?"

"I have something to discuss with Mr. El-Melloi II. Is that okay?"

"Hmph. Fine, I guess. I'll wait for you in our room."

With a flip of her silver hair, Olga Marie left the room.

After waiting for the door to close completely, Trisha turned to my master.

"I would like to ask you one thing, if possible."

"And what would that be?"

"My master believes you are intending to join the Fifth Holy Grail War just to redeem your honour, but I believe that's not quite right."

"...oh? What makes you think that?"

At my master's prodding, Trisha gave a faint smile as she whispered.

"It is hardly uncommon for someone who overcomes a life or death battle to have a complete change of personality. But even for that, a chance is needed. If the previous Lord El-Melloi didn't provide that for you, it must have been someone else. I looked over the results of the survey on the Holy Grail War...and I know of the Heroic Spirit you fought alongside in the Fourth Holy Grail War, ten years ago."

My master's fingers jerked as if surprised.

Caules and I both held our breath. Because Trisha so perfectly described the real reason we had come to the Rail Zeppelin.

The attendant continued to speak softly.

"Yes...a Heroic Spirit that had carved their mark into human history would be more than enough to spark that sort of complete change in someone."

It was like ice stabbing me in the back.

Mystic Eyes of Foresight, she claimed. And she showed us that power.

But I felt like there was an even greater power of discernment hidden behind those eyes.

"An interesting piece of conjecture, Miss," my master responded. "But in the end, it's just conjecture."

It doesn't seem like you have any evidence to back that up."

"Of course not," she admitted. "So please accept this question for the conjecture that it is."

With that preface, she continued.

"Should you summon that Heroic Spirit - that Servant once more, what if that Servant had no memories of the time spent with you?"

"Huh?"

The dumb-sounding voice blurting out was mine.

Though I had tried to keep it in the entire time, I couldn't help but let that one slip out.

With a short glance toward me, Trisha continued.

"Due to my study into Necromancy, I have a small amount of knowledge regarding Heroic Spirits. Of course, the true Heroic Spirit engraved on the Throne of Heroes certainly has knowledge of the time spent with you. Neither time nor space exists at the Throne, so the records of Heroic Spirits recorded there must be immense. ...however, for that reason, when Servants are summoned into this world, those records are not summoned with them. The knowledge Servants possess consists only of their memories of life, plus knowledge granted to them by the World required to operate in the present era. Beyond that are only a few small modifications. As the Throne of Heroes records all things regardless of time, if that knowledge wasn't stripped from them, any number of paradoxes could result."

Of course, that's all just a theory, she stipulated with the smile of a shark.

"Theory...?"

My feet suddenly felt unstable.

It felt like trying to build something, only to find out you were wrong from the very first step. I felt like the carpet might split open, dropping me straight into hell. If I didn't keep a tight rein on my feelings now, I was sure I'd collapse.

"Yes. It's just a theory. But, what if there were exceptions to it?"

Trisha continued.

"For example, memories from within a Singularity completely split off from every and all timelines, or from within Reality Marbles completely isolated from the rest of the world. Unless such conditions could be met...wouldn't your dream be impossible?"

My master said nothing.

He just narrowed his eyes, as if staring into a strong wind.

"Or perhaps, you intend to entirely change the summoning formula? If so, you would need to create an entirely new Greater Grail, on which the whole process is based. Certainly an undertaking fitting for the title of Lord. No, it would be easier just to steal Fuyuki's. Doesn't that sound just like what a magus would do?"

"...it surprises me that Animusphere is interested in this at all."

My master's voice was quiet.

That made it all the more painful to listen to.

I wanted him to be surprised. I wanted him to be hurt. I wanted him to scream and shout that something like that was impossible. But my master just sat calmly, as if he had known everything Trisha had just said since long ago, whether he liked it or not.

"Allow me to ask one more question. The words 'Rainbow Mystic Eyes' can include any number of possibilities. What kind of Rainbow Mystic Eyes did you see, exactly?"

For a moment, Trisha narrowed her eyes behind her glasses.

Then, she shook her head.

"I don't think there is any need for me to explain that much. Even if it's the Rail Zeppelin, I can't imagine them selling two sets of Rainbow ranked Mystic Eyes at once, after all."

"I see. That sounds reasonable."

With a bitter smile, my master let off.

His usual smile, as if he was still troubled by something. Though it seems she may have seen something in that expression.

"-Mr. El-Melloi II," she spoke.

"Humans are creatures that depend on information to live, yet are bound by that information until they die. Vision is the sense that acquires the greatest amount of information. As such, possessing Mystic Eyes means accepting being bound by them. Should you seek to acquire Mystic Eyes besides the ones we are after, I would implore you to think deeply on that."

"I appreciate your warning," my master nodded politely.

With that, the attendant left us.

Once the door shut, I immediately spoke.

"...master."

In response to my shaking voice, my master paused before turning to me.

Though I did my best to hide it, he may have still seen the tears in my eyes. The words she had left behind had left such scars.

Facing that, my master spoke with an incredibly complicated expression.

"Did Reines tell you something about me and the Holy Grail War?"

"No," I answered, shaking my head vigorously. "No, no. But, that..."

"That Servants don't remember their previous summonings?" he said, as if reciting a poem. "I am a Lord, you know. I've been researching the Holy Grail War for quite some time. All of that was something I learned long ago. There's no need for you to be worried about it."

"But..."

For the first time, I protested more than once. No, perhaps it wasn't the first time. But it couldn't have been so desperate before.

I just wanted to say, at the very least, you can't just accept that.

"Geez," my master took out a cigar.

With a small, bitter smile, he took out his knife, cut the tip, and struck a match to light it, just like always. Though it was the normal ritual, this time alone it didn't help me calm down at all. Even with the characteristic scent of cigar smoke filling the room, I still felt like I was on the edge of tears.

"-um, Professor..."

"Yes?"

He stepped over to Caules, who had been silent up until now.

"I don't know much about this Holy Grail War. And I don't understand the situation that well, so maybe I'm completely wrong in this," he prefaced his own words.

"If there's someone who is important to you, isn't it obvious that you would want them to remember you? At the very least, I would think that's how everyone else feels."

Caules struck straight to the heart of it.

In response, my master faintly smiled.

"That's right. It's not like I'm happy that I've been forgotten or anything." The smoke from his cigar wavered, drawing his eyes up to the ceiling. "But even then, there is someone I want to meet even if he's forgotten. There's something I want to confirm. Something I need to see finished, so I can move on from these past ten years. ...yes, at the very least, the Holy Grail War is just a small thing to me. To share those memories and bond over them is just too happy an ending to be realistic, no matter how much of a price I've paid. There's no way I can afford such an ending with just my life."

Holding the cigar in his mouth, the lingering scent of smoke hanging in the room seemed like nothing.

I just wanted to shake my head.

To deny what he said.

But with the way he made that troubled smile, I just couldn't put it into words.

"What do you think?" Caules asked again.

"Do you think that invitation was left by Miss Olga Marie?"

"Who knows. Normally, it seems like a tactic that's outside her style though. There would be no point in dragging up a whole conversation about the relic only to pretend like she didn't know it was stolen."

When it came to magi though, a method being too roundabout or meaningless was something you couldn't really count on. Even if the possibility was low, that alone could serve as a part of some sort of magecraft.

"First of all, we have this letter," he said, lifting up the letter Caules had found earlier.

Eyeing it over once more, he stated his conclusion.

"Come to the caboose at night, " it says.

"...then..."

"Yes," my master nodded.

"We've come this far. Why not answer it?"

~Part 5~

-However.

Before evening could come around, another bizarre occurrence took place.

As the three of us spoke and prepared for the evening, suddenly, the Rail Zeppelin came to a stop.

"The train...?"

As we looked around in confusion, an announcement came on over the rooms speakers.

"This is your conductor, Rodin. The train will remain at this location for the next two hours. Afterwards, it will depart once more. All guests are welcome to remain in their rooms or leave the train as you wish."

"...it seems like it's a scheduled stop," my master said.

Perhaps that was all part of the auction's schedule.

"Shall we go take a look outside then?"

"Ah, okay!"

"I guess I'll come, too."

At my master's words, we all left the room, leaving the train behind us.

There was no way we could call this place a station.

We were deep in the forest, at a place that made it strange to think tracks were running here at all. The only place missing densely packed trees were the areas directly in front of and behind the train. The red, rusted over tracks were covered in bushes that made them seem like they had been assimilated by the forest around them.

A refreshing breeze caressed my face.

Though we couldn't see beyond the forest at all, a cool wind still reached us, giving me a refreshed feeling.

"Aha!" Nice, fresh air!"

The man that had left the train shortly before us stood in the forest, arms wide as he breathed in the atmosphere.

"Jeanmario, you said your name was?"

"Yes. I'm honoured a Lord of the Clock Tower would remember me!"

Spinning his white hat in his hand, he took a bow.

Perhaps because he was used to performing on TV, everything he did seemed unnaturally exaggerated. Though his smug expression was much brighter and more cheerful than my master's ever was, it was something distinctly unfamiliar to me.

"Man, this is my first time on the Rail Zeppelin, but the service is great, isn't it? I was just getting bored of seeing nothing but fog outside my window. Having a chance to step off the train isn't bad at all. Though, perhaps I would have preferred somewhere a bit more flowery."

His loud voice seemed half serious, and half like he was trying to insinuate something.

Though I was more than comfortable in such undeveloped areas, I could understand someone feeling the opposite.

"Well, anyways, the sandwiches here are just what you would expect."

Sitting down in a chair that had been set up, Jeanmario took a bite of his fruit sandwich.

A number of other magi had disembarked from the train as well. Nearby, a number of tables had been set up, covered with sandwiches and other light foods.

"It seems the fox from the Faculty of Law isn't interested. And Animusphere's daughter only poked her head outside before returning."

As if trying to pique my master's interest, Jeanmario kept speaking. Perhaps because of his experience as a television performer, his ability to read the atmosphere was excellent.

One more person came out.

The old man from the Holy Church - Karabo Frampton stood apart from everyone else, drinking tea.

If it hadn't been for the incident earlier, I would have thought his manner of ignoring everyone else and going at his own pace was very magus-like.

Suddenly, I turned.

"...Master?"

My master had started walking into the forest on the other side of the tables.

Using his hands to push aside the thickly growing branches, the thick scent of the forest filled the air. In a small open space beyond the trees, a circle of mushrooms was growing in a neat circle.

"A Fairy Circle?"

"-ah, just like always!"

Yvette said, suddenly popping her head in. It seemed she had also decided to leave the train for a bit.

The pink-haired, eye-patched classmate drew Caules' attention.

"You know about these, Yvette?"

"The rails for this train are apparently built following Leylines. Probably something to do with maintaining their supply of magical energy. So when they stop, it tends to be at

some kind of power spot. Heheheh, a fairy journal sounds pretty cool, doesn't it? How about doing that for our honeymoon, Professor?"

"...ah, I see. If you follow the Leylines of England, you'll end up on a path tied up with fairies. That's only natural, I guess. So rather than sightseeing, this is more like restocking."

Almost too naturally, my master gave his opinion, completely ignoring Yvette's closing comment.

He then glanced back at the stopped train.

"I guess it's obvious, but this train follows its own rules, after all."

For some reason, my master's words gave me a sinking feeling.

Though the Castle Adra and Towers of Iselma were the same, being built by a Dead Apostle, the Rail Zeppelin was in a different class. Even so, it still had its own set of rules.

Maybe, everything in this world had its own set of rules that it had to follow.

People followed the rules of people. Magi followed the rules of magi.

The dead followed the rules of the dead.

As I shook my head, trying to cut off that line of thought, my eye caught something.

"Gray?"

"...it's nothing. I just thought I saw something," I said, narrowing my eyes.

It was beyond the trees.

Standing within the fog was the figure of a woman clad in white, someone I hadn't seen at all on the train earlier. Around her was a cloud of vibrant flower petals, as if she was being decorated in another world.

Rose petals.

Around where the woman stood, dozens of bright red roses bloomed proudly. Not just around her, but the brilliantly coloured flowers also wove through her hair like a crown, making her look like a personification of the flowers themselves.

The woman raised her face.

Her sharp, scarlet eyes met mine...

(...huh?)

And in the next moment, she was gone.

At that point,

"Uhh, little disciple?"

"Is something wrong?"

Both Yvette and my master were standing beside me, frowning.

I immediately became flustered, thinking of how hard to miss that person must have been.

"What? But, now, there was a white woman, with red roses..."

"That would be the Manager's representative of the Rail Zeppelin," an unexpected voice came to the rescue as I pointed helplessly at where I saw her.

It was the conductor that had introduced himself when we first boarded the train. His name was Rodin, if I remembered correctly.

"The Manager's representative?"

With a sudden intensity, my master turned around.

That's right. On that first invitation we had received, that was the name that had been written. That's who my master had been looking for the moment he had got on the train.

"Yes. Since the owner of the Rail Zeppelin retired, she has been looking after it," the conductor calmly explained.

"Even we meet her only rarely, but it seems you have a sensitivity beyond that of any ordinary magus."

Sensitivity. I understood that, in some way.

For example, the ability to perceive the faint, lingering thoughts that stained the depths of the earth was something magi couldn't do. That was the reason I left my home.

"...the owner retired?" my master said, cutting off my question.

"Originally, this auction was an idea proposed by the owner, but there was some trouble in the past. Since then, the owner has stayed apart from the train, leaving a representative to act in their place."

"Trouble?"

(Was that the story about Touko I heard about...?)

As my master's expression became heated, that thought idly crossed my mind.

But before I could follow it any further, in the gentle atmosphere of the forest, a girl's scream tore the calm.



My master responded instantly to the sound.

"Gray."

"...understood!"

With a firm response, I took off at full speed.

Jumping off the ground, I sailed three seconds through the air before reaching the door, turning the bar halfway. Doing what I could to slow myself down in the air, I immediately started running through the train.

I immediately understood the source of the scream.

With my ears, I could easily tell that from where we were standing.

But even then, the moment I opened the door, I went stiff.

"Oh dear."

"...hey, come on..."

Behind me, I could hear Yvette and Jeanmario groaning.

As other magi arrived one by one, they all caught their breath. The scene before us was so gruesome, even those with the sensibilities of a magus would be taken aback at the first glance.

Drip, drip.

Drip, drip.

The sound of water dripping filled the otherwise quiet air.

A red stain was spreading on the luxurious carpet of the Rail Zeppelin.

In the middle of that stain was a single tipped over chair, and a single human body.

Trisha Fellows.

Just looking at the amount of blood, it was hard to imagine her being alive. But more than that, something was missing.

Her head was nowhere to be seen.

Even so, we could recognize her from the purple coat she was wearing. The coat that matched her so well was now being quickly dyed red.

"Trisha...!"

Immediately beside her, Olga Marie was on her knees.

The scream earlier had been hers. After all, with the way Trisha was now, there was no way she could scream herself.

"I...I left the train...to clear my head...in the forest..." her hollow voice filled the room.

"T-then I went to the lobby, to get some tea...and when I came back...Trisha...Trisha was..."

No one could answer her mutterings.

All the while, the sound of blood dripping from her body continued.

♦ 第三章 ♦

-Chapter 3-



~Part 1~

The world looked like bubbles.

People, things, nothing ever changed. Masses of bubbles piled up and up, and somehow made themselves into a shape like that. That was the way his eyes saw the world. Burst as they disappeared, born as they burst, in the end the world as a whole never changed.

In some sense, maybe that was eternity.

If the world is just a collection of transient bubbles, that chain of transience is like to infinity. No matter how you split it apart, no matter how thin it grew, it never disappeared. An instant (*The Planck Time*) was a lifetime, and an equal number of universes burst and disappeared.

So.

He didn't know when it started.

But, since they were just bubbles anyway, you could pop them just by touching them. You could split them off just by tracing the boundaries between them. Large or small had no relevance. Living or not had even less. In those eyes, they had no meaning at all.

He only learned of the name Mystic Eyes much later.

Yes.

They must have been at the very end of what could be considered Mystic Eyes.

In short, Mystic Eyes with the rank of Rainbow-



Olga Marie's face had long since lost its colour.

With trembling fingers, she reached out to the corpse's coat. Ignoring the blood sticking to her hands, she shook the headless body as she spoke.

"...Trisha?"

Once more, she tried.

"Trisha? Trisha? This is a joke, right? Why...?"

As that last word came out, her voice choked.

A single choked sob. As if a broken lung was doing its best to perform at least the bare minimum necessary.

"...you're always so full of yourself. Whenever I can't solve a problem, you're always too happy to encourage me. So why, why are you sleeping in a place like this?! Come on, yell at someone like you always do!"

"Miss Olga Marie..."

Without thinking, I started speaking.

But when she turned to me, her expression held a violent hatred.

"You people did this, didn't you?!" she screamed.

Taken aback by the sudden attack, we couldn't even string together two words in answer.

"What is wrong with you?! Give back Trisha!"

Her bitter cries echoed within the train car.

Even if she was the daughter of a Lord, she was only about eleven years old. Faced with a scene like this, it was hard to imagine anyone would be able to keep their cool. Even more so if it was someone who had been a teacher to you since you were young.

But.

The words that followed caused the tension in the room to explode.

"Y-you! It was you, wasn't it?! From the Church!" she screamed, facing the silent old man - Karabo Frampton.

A number of people turned to look at him,

"...sorry, but it wasn't," he shook his head slowly.

He then asked for something else.

"Would you allow me to perform an autopsy?"

"Autopsy?"

"Yes. It's not my specialty, but these hands are well used to death. I may be able to find something out. Is that acceptable, Mr. Conductor?" he asked the conductor, who had arrived at the scene shortly after us.

Even witnessing this scene, the bone-thin conductor's expression was unchanging. Did that mean events like this were common on the Rail Zeppelin? Was it so normal to kill your rivals even before the auction had started here?

Taking a look at the silver pocket watch he pulled from his chest pocket, he gave a small nod.

"...I do not mind. But the room will need cleaning. Taking into account our scheduled time of departure, I would ask you to finish within the hour."

He said it as if it was obvious. With an earnestness that made no room for doubting his ability as a first class staff member, he spoke as if nothing more than food had been spilled.

Maybe that's why I found the girl's response so relieving.

"What is wrong with you?!"

Olga Marie stretched out her hand, and an invisible something shot out.

A magical bullet. A pure bundle of magical energy - even to a complete novice like me, I could tell it had a much higher density than the one Reines had fired earlier. Even in its simplicity, I couldn't help but feel its power was appropriate for a future Lord.

In an instant, the blade in Karabo's hand deflected the bolt.

With a handle that was too short to call a sword, I was informed later by my master that it was something commonly referred to as a Black Key, a tool that had become popular with a number of Executors of the Holy Church.

(...but...)

I didn't even notice him pulling out that weapon. I felt like if he wanted to, he could stab someone straight through the heart, all while having a friendly conversation with them. Without even understanding why their chest hurt, they would be dead.

"Y-you-!"

"Apologies."

The old man's hand flicked to the side.

As the handle of the Black Key struck lightly against the side of her head, Olga Marie collapsed unconscious. Grabbing her as she fell, he gently laid her out on a sofa outside of the growing bloodstain.

"Could I ask you to look after her? I imagine it will be quite a shock to her if she wakes up in this room again. If possible, I'd like her taken to the lobby," he said, looking our way.

"Ah, right! I'll take care of it!"

As I stood still unmoving in shock, Caules volunteered. Even in this situation, he was still unexpectedly calm. Was the time when his sister gave up magecraft so difficult for him? He had said that his own family had been trying to kill him. That experience must have tempered his mind well.

As Caules took the unconscious girl from the room, Karabo began inspecting around the body. Soon after, another person entered the car.

"Another incident like this?" she said from the entrance.

"You seem to attract these scuffles between magi a lot, don't you?"

"You're one to talk," my master said, turning to face her.

Without even turning to see, it seemed he could tell it was Hishiri Adashino.

"I wasn't in the mood, so I didn't leave the train when we stopped earlier, but now it seems I'm missing an alibi, aren't I?"

"An alibi means nothing for a magi in the first place. You of all people should be well aware of that."

"No problem then, I guess," she said with a forced laugh.

Hishiri, too, showed no sign of discomfort at the sight of the corpse. Maybe it was me that was strange. Whether it was at my old home, or in Adra or Iselma, I had witnessed all sorts of bizarre incidents. Maybe it was me who was strange for getting paralyzed by fear like this.

...at any rate, I didn't want to think about it now.

As I hung my head, trying to distract myself from the swirling nausea in my stomach, the conversation continued.

"...time of death must be within the past ten or twenty minutes. I believe we can accept the cause of death is removal of the head. There are no signs of struggle, so the death must have been instant." Karabo explained.

In the outside world, they would have started with taking pictures of the scene, but it seemed that was unnecessary. After all, detailed records could be made directly using Magic Circuits, and the evidence used by modern science could easily be fabricated by a magus, so there was little trust in such strategies.

"...but why did the culprit take the head? Are they intending to use it as some sort of catalyst?"

"It appears she had Mystic Eyes of Foresight."

"Oh?" The wrinkles on the old man's face deepened.

Taking another look at the body, my master continued.

"I wonder if the culprit took the entire head for the sake of retrieving the eyes from them."

I felt a shiver run through me.

With just that, my master's terrifying thoughts punched through. It was just too magus-like. It was just too appropriate for something happening on the Rail Zeppelin.

Whydunnit.

"The whole head, just to get at the eyes," Karabo said, stroking his chin.

"Is such a thing possible? Removing the eyes from the head after removing it from the body."

"Perhaps we should ask the staff of the Rail Zeppelin," my master said, turning to face the other staff member present behind him - the blindfolded auctioneer, Leandra.

With a small nod in greeting, she confirmed my master's words.

"If using the same techniques that we do, if the head is well preserved, removing the Mystic Eyes would be simple," she explained, her voice cold.

"And to be clear, even outside the Rail Zeppelin, Mystic Eye transplants are not impossible. Though we would expect a striking difference in the success rate."

Was that last comment just the pride of a family specialised in Mystic Eyes?

In response to her statement, my master made his own declaration.

"In that case, I would like to continue the autopsy. And I would also like to discuss something with you, Mr. Karabo."



The remaining magi left without much complaint.

It seemed to them, it was nothing more than a simple servant being killed.

Perhaps they also felt it was to their advantage that one of their potential competitors at the auction had been removed. I felt a strange sensation, totally unlike that of the previous incidents. Mixed together with the scent of blood permeating the room, my unease continued to grow.

I pressed a hand tightly to my chest.

"First, may I ask you something?" my master said to the older man.

Kneeling on the carpet, he had his usual magnifying glass out as he inspected various parts of the scene. Pouring various substances on the bloodstains and taking memos of their reactions, he seemed more like a detective from a century prior than a magus. Seeing him like that, for some reason, helped me to calm down a little.

Sitting on a chair across from him, Karabo responded.

"What would that be?"

"Do you not hate magi?"

The Holy Church and the Magic Association were always in perpetual conflict. That wasn't just because of some power struggle, or historical disagreement, but because of a fundamental ideological difference. An uncrossable divide between those who attempted to conceal and protect Mystery, and those who sought to deny and destroy the Mystery of all those outside themselves.

The old man clicked his tongue.

"Yes. If I were honest, I would love nothing more than to offer up a prayer for your salvation, and send the lot of you on your way to Purgatory."

Perhaps the only priest-like thing about what he said was the mention of Purgatory.

Because that was the place where those who couldn't enter Heaven would have their souls purified. Though it was a place of suffering, it wasn't a place like Hell, where true sinners were sent.

"But that is a different matter. These Black Keys were not made to slay children mourning over their dead companions."

Though brief, I felt a deep conviction in his words.

Chewing over those words, my master slowly spoke again.

"Karabo Frampton. Do you possess a receptive type of Mystic Eyes?"

The old man was quiet for a time.

Slowly lifting his gaze, his voice sounded like the scraping of rusted iron.

"...why do you ask?"

"Thinking of your age, it seems more likely you would come here to sell Mystic Eyes, rather than buy them. Besides, the Holy Church isn't generally interested in any magecraft beyond the Baptismal Rites. I wondered if the reason you volunteered to do the autopsy was because you had Mystic Eyes that would help in some way."

That's right. Yvette had said something similar. Though my master had arrived at that conversation after Yvette's explanation was done, it seemed he had come to the same conclusion.

After another pause,

"...it appears I can't hide it, Lord," he whispered, his voice heavy.

Tracing a finger over the scar on his brow, he continued.

"My eyes are Mystic Eyes of Hindsight."

"Hindsight."

The opposite of Foresight.

I wondered if these were what Olga Marie had meant by Rainbow ranked Mystic Eyes.

"Yes. They aren't all that impressive. Perhaps they would reach the rank of a Noble colour, as you magi put it, but it certainly would fall short of the Gold rank. But, let's see...this young girl did your hair this morning, didn't she?"

"...ah, yes..."

"You seem quite used to it. Even though the Lord here asked for five more minutes, you just propped him up on Caules and kept going. Hm, it seems you were investigating something, but it's not related to this incident."

For a moment, I held my breath.

No doubt he was referring to our investigation over the stolen relic.

Even though the exchange between my master and I was something I had already mostly forgotten, the fact he could see that much confirmed the authenticity of those Mystic Eyes.

"That's about what I can see. Unfortunately, they are not so useful as to be able to see something of any time or place that I wish."

"So basically, the Eyes are in more control than you are. Is that correct?"

"I can control their activation to a degree. And they are more often drawn to times where magecraft and Mystery are thick, so they have their uses. But at my age, they

seem to be getting pulled around a lot more than usual. My intention, as I mentioned to the auctioneer, was to sell them. I believe you'll find them in the catalogue tomorrow."

In short, Yvette had been right. As expected of a regular of the Rail Zeppelin.

His hands stopped, as if he was thinking something over, my master finally continued.

"Then, did you see the culprit?"

"...no, I didn't," he confessed.

"You can't?"

"Perhaps they had some kind of protection against clairvoyance. I can see up until the point she sat down on this chair, but the time immediately before and after her head was removed is unclear."

After another pause, my master spoke again.

"In that case, they may have had some protection against Trisha Fellows as well."

"...what?"

The old man's eyes widened.

In the middle of the bloodstained room, my master's voice resounded gently.

"If she had seen it coming, she likely would have taken some measures against it. At the very least, she should have mentioned something to her master, Olga Marie. In short, her death and the culprit were guarded against Foresight and Hindsight - they couldn't be seen from the past, or the future."

Karabo went silent.

My master whispered at last, as if uttering his conclusion.

"It's like they are a person invisible to time."

Though it sounded rather poetic, it seemed to fit the situation. Invisible from both the past and the future, her death was something that existed only in the present moment of its occurrence.

"...but of course, you have no evidence to support that I am telling the truth. My whole spiel about Mystic Eyes of Hindsight could be entirely false. Even that story of what you did this morning could have been something I heard from someone else."

"True," my master nodded. "But for someone like you, who is trying to protect someone...I want to trust you."

For a moment, the old man was at a loss for words.

He then slowly shook his head.

"Never would have expected that from a Lord of the Clock Tower."

"I'm not all that experienced, but I have faith in my ability to gauge people. Above all, Mystic Eyes are not the result of some spell, but of the body's own nature. They are the oldest magecraft known to humans, deriving from neither ritual nor study, yet nonetheless continue to shake up the brain. If that's the case, that should also be reflected in the way someone lives."

"...have you met someone with Mystic Eyes before?"

"I spoke to Trisha while she was still alive. She told me, having Mystic Eyes means being bound by them."

For a moment, he glanced at the headless body.

"But that's not all. As a Lord, of course I've met any number of magi with Mystic Eyes...its something they always take very seriously."

At the last part, he gave a bitter smile.

It was the first time I had seen the otherwise entirely formal old man smile.

"My Mystic Eyes of Hindsight are much more violent things," he said.

"For example, using them is like extracting my brain, and throwing it in a vat with some black and white film. Even without eyeballs, they always aggressively take in whatever information they can. Maybe that's it. Like a feeling of the characters of a film being transferred. Like there are two versions of myself existing at once - the one receiving all the information from that point of view, and another looking at the film from the outside. Maybe it doesn't make any sense, but that's how it feels.

Humans are captivated by whatever they see. The brain is designed to not be able to focus on two things at once, after all. Even if I exist in both the past and present, I can only see one thing at a time. Another way of putting it is, if you are looking at the past, you can't live in the present. Ever since I became aware of these eyes, I've never once been able to do that."

Those words struck me hard.

Trisha had said something similar. That they see a different world from that of ordinary people. I wondered if people who possessed receptive Mystic Eyes were destined for a fate like that.

Just like, for example, since ten years ago, I was doomed to live in a body that wasn't my own.

Karabo turned to face the entrance.

A moment later, Caules opened the door.

"Professor. Olga Marie is awake."

"...anyways, I've done what I can," the old man turned to leave.

"Please give my regards to the Animusphere girl."

So saying, Karabo left the scene.

~Part 2~

A quiet stillness lay over the lobby car.

It looked entirely untouched since the time we were last there, except that the fruit had been replenished. Apparently the staff of the Lobby were permanently stationed there, as even now they were at Olga Marie's side, serving her tea. At a nod from my master as he entered the room, they departed.

Once they had left, we were alone in the room with Olga Marie.

Though Caules looked particularly uncomfortable taking care of her, Olga Marie herself was the first to speak.

"...it's nothing," she said with a snort.

Sitting on the sofa, she lifted her arms as if stretching.

"Hmph. This is the Rail Zeppelin, I guess. I had expected this kind of thing to happen."

She was obviously faking it. That was easy enough to see from the faint tremble in her knees, and her bloodshot eyes. Even as a daughter of a Lord of the Clock Tower, there was no way she was used to being so suddenly alone.

(...Reines, too...)

I wondered if Reines had also had a similar experience. Apparently, until she had managed to consolidate control over the El-Melloi faction, she had to carry around her own emergency rations in constant fear of being poisoned. Even if that were the case though, it's not like it would help Olga Marie here at all.

My master continued to speak in his usual, composed voice.

"Even so, if you hope to return from this auction with the results you wanted, you should rest a little more. I asked the staff, and apparently they've prepared another room for you somewhere else."

"I don't need it. They'll clean it up, right?"

She firmly shook her head.

Did that mean she would sleep in a room tonight where her attendant since so long ago was killed? Would she be able to sleep at all?

"In the first place, this is all just a ruse to earn a favour from Animusphere, right? Well, as a fellow Aristocrat, I can't exactly say I'm ungrateful," she spoke quickly, glaring at my master.

My master, however, just shook his head.

"No, that's not my intention at all. Call it a whim if you like. Besides, I can't imagine the Clock Tower taking any incident aboard the Rail Zeppelin very seriously."

"Are you actually a Lord?"

Her question was sharp, heavy with anger.

"You should be more than happy to take advantage of this situation. No matter how much the Animusphere family holes themselves away up in their mountain and stays out of politics, a Lord is still a Lord. As the dead last in rank among the Twelve Families, shouldn't you be scrabbling for every favour you can get?"

"I appreciate your advice," he replied with a polite bow. There was no air of sarcasm about it. As if seriously taking her words into consideration, he continued slowly. "But this is something of a personal principle of mine."

"Principle?"

"Back when I was still inexperienced, there was someone who told me that that inexperience itself was a sign of the ability to rule. That because I always yearned for that which was beyond me, I was able to keep struggling. That belief that 'Glory Lies Beyond the Horizon' was a foundational part of his lifestyle, so he was always saying stupid things like that."

Taking an apple from a nearby table, he lifted it up.

For some reason, that apple looked to me like a globe. Without knowing the Earth itself was round, the kings of old always pursued what lay in the distance. Without realising they were just going around in circles, they truly believed that the value of a person's life was in how far they could go.

It made me think of an Olympic Long-jumper for some reason.

Running as hard as they could, exhausting everything they had in the process, to soar through the sky in those last few moments. And the value of their life would be found in where they landed.

"Someday, whether I liked it or not, I would find my own course. That's what he told me. For that reason, the time would surely come when I would have to fight for it. So, throwing away the life of a person who has yet to find their own course...to me, that's unforgivable. That belief is something much more important to me than the power games of the Clock Tower."

"...a sign of the ability to rule?"

Staring fixedly at him, Olga Marie echoed back his words.

"You were told something like that in the Holy Grail War? Was that by the Servant you summoned?"

"Yes."

"How idiotic," she spat back.

"A Servant is just a fake copy of a Heroic Spirit. Like a shadow erased in an instant. Sure, you can argue that they were important figures that carved their names into history, but a magus that can be so easily influenced by them is getting things backwards."

"What...!"

I couldn't help but protest. Those memories of my master were something I couldn't let be violated. No one had the right to call them idiotic.

But,

"Maybe so," my master said with a smile, putting the apple back on the table. As if to say what was important lay within his heart, and that alone was good enough. "For now, I'll tell the staff you plan to change rooms. Thankfully, I believe the room next to ours is empty. If there's anything you need, please feel free to ask us. Caules."

"Uh, right! Umm...what is it?"

Caules jumped slightly at suddenly being called on..

"Would you mind keeping her company until she feels like returning to her room?"

"Of course. I couldn't just leave her alone in a situation like this."

As Caules nodded in consent, Olga Marie bared her teeth as if to protest. But as if recognizing no protest she gave now would be listened to, she looked away, biting her thumbnail in frustration.

My master then turned to leave, and I followed him back to the passenger car.

Behind us,

"What a weirdo,"

I heard her voice.

Though she sounded angry, at the same time there was an air of sadness to her voice.

"...what a weirdo..."



After the incident, the train was strangely quiet.

Most of the invitees locked themselves in their room, making preparations for their own defence. Because of the way magi worked, they were typically more skilled at defense than offense, so in the off-chance that the killings were going to continue, they would be better served by retreating to their own rooms and fortifying their positions there.

So it wasn't like everyone was just hiding scared in their rooms.

One of them was Jeanmario Spinerra, checking himself in a mirror. Brushing the dust from his felt hat, tightening his necktie, straightening the wrinkles in his suit. All of this he did in good spirits, humming a tune.

The reason for his care was soon apparent.

Slowly, the door to his room swung open.

"Good afternoon."

"Ah, good! I was starting to get flustered, worrying over whether you were still coming!"

"Jeanmario Spinerra," Hishiri Adashino spoke his name.

"Earlier, you said you had a clue as to the incident earlier, correct?"

"Ah, yes! Yes!" he clapped his hands together.

"But no need to rush! First, would you like a glass of wine? As expected of the Rail Zeppelin, the vintage provided is top notch. I've always wanted to give this Margaux a try. It's a rare chance to meet in a place like this, so why don't we enjoy ourselves for a bit?"

"Well then, I'll be on my way."

"Wait! Don't be so hasty!"

In response to Jeanmario's exaggerated protests, Hishiri's smile was unmoving. No matter how refined his ability to push through situations was by the media, in the face of her absolute refusal to negotiate, there was little he could do but capitulate.

"Fine, fine, I get it! Let's talk then!" he lifted his hands.

Pouring the red wine into a glass for himself only, he whispered as the drink gently swirled.

"What if I told you, I had seen that way of killing before?"

For a moment, Hishiri's eyes narrowed.

"Could you give me a brief summary?"

"About seven years ago, it became a rather popular talking point. A serial killer that never took anything of value, only the victims' heads."

It seemed every bit a crime for the crime's sake.

With a small frown, Hishiri asked the most obvious question.

"If such an incident occurred, I couldn't imagine the media letting it go."

"Well, that would be because of the Clock Tower's Information Control," he said with a shrug.

"Though perhaps, as they'd say in the East, I'm lecturing the Buddha here? Of course, the influence the Faculty of Law has on the public face of society is enormous. The fact they were interested at all in Information Control in this incident leaves one to believe it is related to Mystery, does it not? That Mystery must be concealed, after all. That's the first, unwavering principle of the Clock Tower. If that was an incident tied up in Mystery back then, wouldn't it make sense that it's closely related to what we saw today?"

"-so you think that serial killer from seven years ago is here, on the Rail Zeppelin?" Hishiri said, her voice cold.

Something like that was barely more than an urban legend. The fact they just happened to show up on the same train sounded like the script to some awful B grade horror movie. But in the same way, wasn't the Rail Zeppelin, and even magi themselves, just a fairy tale as well?

"I figured if anyone, you might know something about it. The Faculty of Law is also called the First Principle Enforcement Division, right?"

A sharp light shone from Jeanmario's eyes.

But Hishiri shook her head without a moment's hesitation.

"Unfortunately, seven years ago was before I joined the Faculty of Law. I don't know what you think of us, but we aren't so lax as to let people unrelated to a case browse its files."

"Well, that's unfortunate," Jeanmario said, looking up at the ceiling.

Without moving his gaze, he took a sip from his wine glass before continuing.

"Let me be frank with you. The one who took the biggest beating from that drive to hide information was an announcer I knew well. I was hoping you'd be able to tell me all about what had happened back then."

"To what end? It can't just be curiosity," she struck straight to the heart. Maybe that was typical of the Faculty of Law. As one responsible for keeping magi in check by limiting information, any unrelated information was totally unnecessary.

"Hahaha, maybe about thirty percent curiosity."

That's why Jeanmario, despite his flippant manner, was straight with his words.

"Television, you know, is unexpectedly fun. It's good money, too. We're talking ten thousand dollars for a single zombie. My family is only second rate when it comes to magecraft, but thanks to the media, we've been able to obtain any number of Talismans and catalysts without ever having to worry about the cost. I owe them a great debt."

His eyes seemed to moisten, like he was watching a dream.

With a tilt from his hand, he allowed a single thread of red wine to spill out from his glass over his own wrist. From his sleeve, a shadow reached out to claim the dripping wine.

Spiders.

Swarming over his hands were countless little spiders.

But Hishiri showed no signs of being disturbed. It seemed she was more than comfortable with familiars like that. Those who used Black Magic to turn insects or small animals into familiars were all too common. Jeanmario must have just been another one of those.

"But, it's okay," he said. Crawling out from his sleeve, the spiders didn't let a single drop of wine stain the sleeve of his suit.

"I want to be a magus," he confessed.

"The reason I've gathered so many accomplishments on television and in society at large is because it's something other magi would be unlikely to do. If someone with the same talent does the same thing, the results will all be the same too, right? In that case, it's best to use what you've got to the best of your ability."

His way of thinking was similar to a line of thought common in the New Agers. Against magi who relied on the Magic Circuits and Magic Crests built up by their ancestors, a magus of middling talents couldn't hope to reach very far. In that case, if the old families were going to remain set in their ways, there was an advantage to be gained by doing something new - like appealing to modern science, or the media.

Of course, there was no certainty in that.

After all, even the head of Archelot, one of the twelve Lords, was famous among those who were into the modern trends. And like they discussed before, the Faculty of Law had plenty of influence through royalty and governmental bodies to manage the media.

With that preamble, Jeanmario swirled the wine in his glass once more before finishing it.

"Create a connection with the Faculty of Law, in preparation for the debut of Gold, or even Jewel rank Mystic Eyes. It's a rather perfect plan, don't you think?"

"Not a bad one,"

Finally in a quiet voice, Hishiri replied.

And then, as if a con artist before the easiest mark, a wide smile rose to his face.

"So how about it? Shall we work together for this auction?"

~Part 3~

Within the misty forest, I could see the sky beyond the fog was a deep red.

The colour of twilight. Passing through the gaps in the branches and trees, the evening light cutting through the fog brought to mind the similar colour of blood I had seen a few hours earlier. Holding my hands to my chest, I felt the pounding of my own heart help to draw me a little bit closer to reality.

Caules was still with Olga Marie.

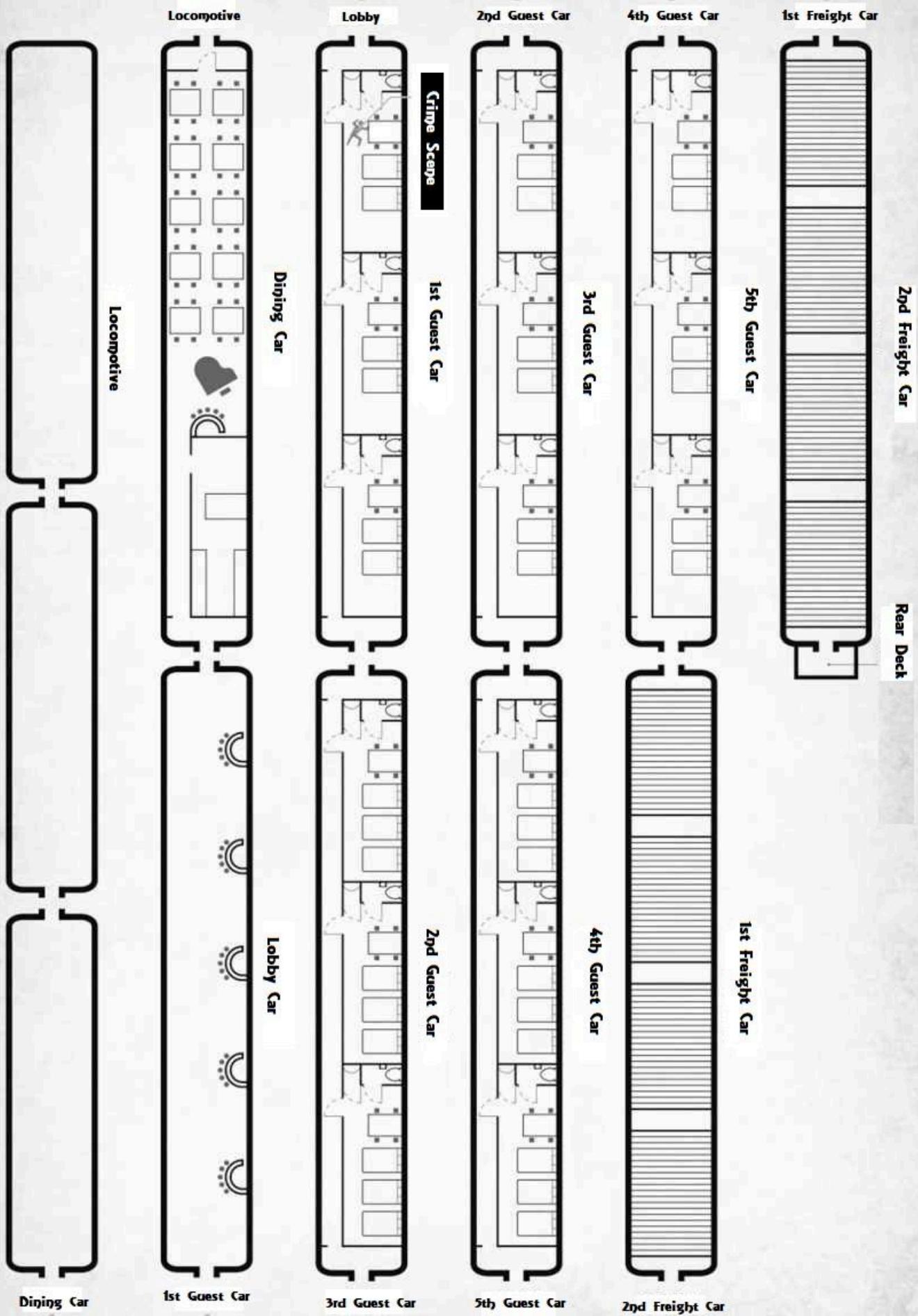
My master and I had come alone to the deck of the train's final car.

"This is where they wanted to meet us?" I said, looking around.

Behind the locomotive of the Rail Zeppelin were two more cars, followed by the Dining Car and the Lobby. After that were five guest cars, with the end of the train consisting of two more freight cars.

We decided to pass through the freight cars as well.

Map of the ¹³⁸ Rail Zeppelin



The cars themselves were mostly empty, only housing a few wooden boxes and bags. Compared to the other cars, it was surprisingly plain, but that was probably because guests weren't supposed to enter them in the first place. Or perhaps the Manager of the Rail Zeppelin just felt like adding a section that seemed more third-class.

This was the place the letter indicated.

Standing on the deck, the cool breeze washed over us as my master watched the tracks behind us disappear into the distance. At this point, there was no impression that anyone was coming to meet us. Though keeping my attention focused on the surroundings, I quietly spoke again.

"Will Olga Marie be okay?"

"Murder is a common occurrence within the Clock Tower. Even more so if you are associated with the Lords. But even then, I doubted she expected fate to come for her like this," he said, his voice bitter.

"Even if we can give her the time she needs, whether she processes it well comes down to her."

Most magi hearing my master talk like that would probably think him too soft.

Just like Olga Marie said, this was a prime opportunity to rack up debts. The risk wasn't particularly large, but the price one would pay for that sense of security couldn't be underestimated. My master must have understood that, so the reason why he didn't take advantage of it...though he said it was an issue of principles, I felt like it was connected to something much deeper than that.

My master was one who well understood the ethics and morals of both magi and ordinary people.

Holding both of those ethical standards and ideals, he always sniffed out the culprit, resolving the case.

But of course, my master had his own rules that he followed. Whydunnit. Why did the incident occur? Probably, the core of his personality had been formed in the Fourth Holy Grail War.

But.

I felt like there had to be something more to it.

I felt like the rules he operated under, his own whydunnit, had a depth that I had yet to understand. Though if I had to explain it out loud, I couldn't give any more than that vague summary.

"...with this, I guess we can't escape outside," my master suddenly muttered.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm talking about this place," he said, pointing at the mist-clad forest around us.

"It was the same when we stopped before. Within this fog is like a different world. Both getting out of it and infiltrating into it would be rather difficult. Trying to board the train or get off of it outside of the ordinary times permitted for proper guests would be a challenge even for a magus."

"You mean, we wouldn't be able to escape even if we jumped off and flew away?"

"I wouldn't say it's impossible. But flying away as a single person is already difficult on its own."

At my master's words, my brow furrowed slightly.

Though I wasn't a magus, I still took lectures at the Clock Tower. One particular memory of those lectures stood out.

"...but, isn't something like floating through the air simple enough? They teach it in Basic Fundamentals, after all."

"Hmm. Your lecture was with Professor Craig, right? He must have left something out, thinking it was obvious enough it didn't need repeating. Certainly, the spell itself is simple enough. That presumes a constant flow of magical energy though."

"Magical energy?"

"If you wanted to suspend a small stone, for instance, that spell would work fine. But, as the size and mass of the object increases, the amount of magical energy required increases exponentially. Floating something like a human body would be a much different task. Of course there are exceptions out there, but in general it's pretty uncommon in magecraft."

"Exceptions?"

My master nodded.

"Of course, you must have heard of witches flying around on brooms, right? That stems from an old form of Magic Foundation, a kind of Black Magic. By rubbing a witch's ointment on someone, you could make it so a person's feet would never reach the ground."

A Foundation is usually engraved into the land itself by the faith and logic of the people.

Within that territory, certain kinds of magecraft would become more powerful, or possibly weaker. I remembered learning that in my lectures.

"So, umm, that means a female magus would be able to fly?"

"In a way. But even in that situation, keeping one's mind clear while doing so is a challenge. After all, a witch's ointment is a kind of narcotic. I'm not sure about under normal circumstances, but trying an extended flight in this kind of closed world would be effectively suicide."

"...I see. That's why it's impossible here..."

To escape from this fog, one would likely have to go a considerable distance.

I was starting to understand what my master was saying. It was like I also heard in my lectures at the Clock Tower. Even if magecraft is omnipotent, the people using it are still limited.

"There are Mystic Codes that allow floating like that for extremely limited amounts of time. And there are low level spirits that could be summoned to help one glide. But in

the end, long distance flight is something that's basically impossible in the modern era. If you try to push it anyways, it would take the equivalent magical energy of a Brand-level magus using the entire supply of their own territory to sustain it. And even if you attempt to follow a leyline as you do it, they aren't built in a way that is easy for people to draw energy from. It isn't reasonable to try and draw that much magical energy out of them on the fly."

...well, that's why things like Touko Travel are considered cheating, he said with a mutter. His lack of forthcoming explanation must have been because there was no need to discuss it here. With such a broad range of things that magecraft was capable of, just flooding me with that information would do little more than make my head spin.

With a bitter smile at my master's kind restraint, I looked up at the sky.

"...it seems the clouds are moving in."

Though it was difficult to see through the mist, the sky above was filling with dark clouds.

The bright red sky from before was being dyed black. The change in colour didn't help the memories of blood. Though it was certainly a bright colour while within the human body, once it was spilled, the oxygen in the air quickly began to change the blood to black. As if the fragments of remaining life were melting away, the bright red sky gradually turned dark.

-no way, I felt like saying.

As I was just looking casually at the scenery going by, a light met my eyes.

"...what, is...?"

"Gray?"

"Master, something is coming...!"

Likely, if one wasn't on the rearmost car of the train, they wouldn't notice it.

It was still far away. I couldn't see it well from where we were. As I looked around for a better vantage point, a roaring sound filled the air.

"-lightning?!"

There was no way natural lightning could appear so suddenly.

I remembered Atram Galiasta's Weather Manipulation that I witnessed at Iselma. But even his magecraft took dozens of people working for a long time to prepare, and all it did was create slightly better conditions for a storm. No matter how skilled a magus, creating lightning like that in what my master said was a closed off world shouldn't have been possible.

"Here!"

Jumping up to catch the ladder, I climbed to the top of the train car.

My master followed soon after. No doubt his ability to stay stable on the swaying train car was due to some sort of Strengthening magecraft he was using on his legs.

Lightning struck again.

It was so close as to completely blind us. The impact stunned me completely. Standing between the strike and my master to cover him, I instinctively covered my ears.

My master had said before.

Even for a magus, a person flying through the air would be difficult. With his explanation, I had come to agree.



If that was the case though, then where did this person come from?

After a short pause, they lifted their head.

"-ah, you actually came."

A dignified voice reached my ears, just now regaining their sense of hearing.

It was a beautiful woman.

She looked to be around twenty years old.

And rather tall. Not just her height, but the way she stood so effortlessly on the roof of the moving train car made her look larger. Her black hair fluttered in soft waves in the wind of the moving train, and her eyes were each a different colour. Her slim figure wore plain looking leather underneath metal armour, and she had a simple, easy to use short sword on her hip.

"Should I look down on you for coming here, even knowing it might be a trap? Or should I praise you for having the fortitude to come even with so little strength? Which do you think?" she said, looking at us.

Though the way she spoke gave no impression of hostility, the way her strange eyes peered into the depths of me had me stuck firmly in place.

More than anything, more than any of the dozens of magi I had met, she seemed entirely out of place in this era.

(Almost like...)

Almost like, she had jumped out of a fairy tale...

"Hm? What's wrong? You should be able to understand me. Did I use some archaic phrase or something?"

Shaking my head, I drove the unnecessary thoughts out of my head.

Right now, I didn't need that kind of thinking at all. What I needed was a straight, clear shot at the problem.

"...are you the one who stole from my master?"

I said nothing of the relic. If she was the culprit, she would understand. And if she wasn't, she had no need to know. Whether she understood my thinking or not, her face broke out into a wide smile.

"Hahaha, yes, that's correct. I am a follower of said thief," she laughed cheerfully.

When a beautiful woman laughed, people often likened them to flowers, or jewels. Some might prefer a comparison to art, or fruit.

But for this woman, I saw only iron. Iron, rusted over with blood. A woman clad in the scent of iron was a rare thing. Whether it was by sword or armour or shield, it was the scent of someone who vied for supremacy on the battlefield.

"Then, give it back-!"

Stepping forward, my right shoulder tensed. Ready at any moment to draw my weapon.

"Gray."

But before I could, my master called out to stop me.

Normally, my master always looked deeply to discern the strengths and weaknesses of our opponent. No matter how berserk I had gone, he would always act as the stopper, pulling me back when it was necessary.

But this time, something was wrong.

His voice was a little higher than usual, his breathing rough.

Since he saw that woman. For a moment I wondered if it was a familiar face, but his next words put that idea to rest.

"Who, are you?" he asked.

The armoured woman sighed.

"...what an unpleasant face."

She raised a finger. Her tanned leather gauntlets seemed designed not to impede the movement of her individual fingers, allowing her to raise them one after another.

"Shabby. Fussy. Dark, obstinate. Bad at waking up. Someone who only reads mouldy old books. Proud despite his own menial nature. And despite wearing the face of someone who's suffering from their circumstances, you're the one causing all of those circumstances. How about that? It's all true, isn't it?"

I was at a loss for words. It was like she was listing off each and every tiny detail about his life.

Though she was right about everything, she clicked her tongue as if she was the most troubled by it all.

"I don't like it. I don't like it at all. I was sick enough of seeing a face like that on Eumenes, but it's followed me all the way to this era, too?"

"Eumenes?" my master repeated the name.

No, at this point it would be more accurate to say he had gone stiff.

"They said he had served under you for a time, so I wondered what kind of magus you were. But this? No, comparing you to Eumenes doesn't do it justice. Not even a bit. Of course I didn't expect anything like Ammon's priest or Aristotle, but at this rate it would be better to scoop out what little brains you have and feed them to the wolves."

My master stood in shock.

His face looked like he would have preferred to have been struck by that lightning earlier. As if he had just come to realise some truth that would single-handedly take away his happiness.

I swallowed.

"You...!"

"You finally noticed? Even if you've lost your ability to see their abilities that you had as a Master, are you sure your intuition hasn't gone dull? The reason I called you forth was just a whim of mine. But I guess it wasn't worth the effort. Man, what a complete waste of time. I never thought you could have been so disappointing," She continued to rail against him.

But before I could give voice to my anger at that, she acted.

"So die."

With that, she kicked off the roof of the train car.

With a single step, she had reached my master standing behind me. I was shocked - her physical ability exceeded even mine after I had collected the surrounding magical energy. Closing the distance between them in an instant, she drew her sword.

"Master!"

Turning around, I also stepped toward him, throwing out my right hand.

"Ihihihihihi! This is just too much of a development, isn't it?!"

In an instant, the hook on my right shoulder released, and Add expanded. His Rubix Cube-like exterior span rapidly, settling into the shape of a scythe in my hands.

A hard sound filled the air.

The scythe caught her sword.

"Oh?" the woman said with another smile.

"Impressive. You blocked it head on, did you? It seems you're better than the soldiers of Persia."

"Who, are you....?!"

A grinding sound filled the air as her blade pressed down on my scythe.

Though her weapon was sharp, it didn't seem to have any special properties as a Noble Phantasm or Conceptual Weapon. But as she swung the blade around, it was clear it was no ordinary blade.

"Remember this. Having skill in combat does not make one a soldier. Such a becoming is a question of body, mind, and spirit."

I had forgotten that we were on top of a moving train.

This woman seemed so out of place, so separated from the present, it made me feel like I was standing on some ancient battlefield. As if being surrounded by magi on the Mystic Eye Collecting Train wasn't outlandish enough, this woman had an overwhelming sense of the supernatural that set her completely apart.

(What, is this-?!)

Inside my head, the warning signals were blaring.

Don't touch. Don't approach. Don't associate. Even showing interest will be the end of you. Even when confronting the Grand ranked magus, Touko Aozaki, that warning had only been a soft insistence. Now, it was a violent scream, pleading with me to run away.

But retreat wasn't an option.

Once again, the woman's sword came down on my scythe.

(So, strong...!)

Her speed and accuracy were terrifying. But more than that, the weight of her repeated strikes was simply unnatural. The shock of the impact travelled straight through the scythe to the bones in my arms. Each and every swing came with the intention of killing.

Soldier, she had said.

Not just an issue of skill, but of body, mind, and spirit.

Then, she must have been...

"...a Servant!"

The answer came from behind me.

That pained shout came, as if he had to wrench out his insides to do it.

"Gray! That woman is a Ghost Liner - the manifestation of a Heroic Spirit from Humanity's history!"

"Haha, a little late, isn't he?" the woman laughed.

As she laughed, she threw her sword into a horizontal slash.

This time, collecting as much magical energy from the area as I could, I kicked off the roof. Matching my timing to the swaying of the train, I slipped through the gap made by her ever so slightly slowed blade, flipping backwards.

As I landed, I stumbled backwards.

Even with that, her blade still grazed my legs.

"Well now. That's an interesting trick. You absorbed a bit of my magical energy just now, didn't you?"

Looking down at her blade, the armoured woman lifted her shoulders, amused.

"A perfect technique to use against me as I am now. Too bad, though, the scope is just too small. Even if you're a cat, you can't catch a mouse a hundred times your size. I imagine it would be good enough to wipe out a ghost outright, too."

As soon as she mentioned ghosts, a chill ran up my spine.

But for the first time, my fear of the person in front of me took precedence. Gritting my teeth, trying to ignore the cold sweat breaking out, I put power into my legs again. If I hadn't, I would certainly have collapsed. By dropping my focus just a bit, I could feel a sensation like my insides flipping upside down.

With that sword, she would have no problem cutting me cleanly in two.

"Ah, the master seems hopeless, but the disciple isn't so bad. You seem the type to stay in the kitchen even when you can't handle the heat, but you're holding up quite well. If we hadn't met like this, I might have enjoyed training you myself, but I guess that's that."

The woman's lips curled.

"As a reward, I'll show you something interesting."

She didn't move.

All she did was look at me.

Heterochromia. Her right eye was as dark as night, while her left was as blue as the daytime sky. As I noticed that, I felt my mind being sucked in by that brilliant blue light.

No unnecessary movement. Single Action.

My body clumsily turned to the side. I could only watch dumbfounded as I saw my arms lift my scythe in the air, pointed toward my own master.

"Mystic...Eyes...?!"

"I guess you people would call it a Noble colour of Compulsion. A fitting end to a fight on this stage, don't you think?"

Her shimmering blue eye seemed to laugh.

"My god prizes madness. The comedies and tragedies caused by intoxication and drunkenness are to be enjoyed. I had thought watching the master and student slay each other would be entertaining, but...looks like one of you has some irritating equipment. It seems the magi of this era are well prepared."

"...you..."

Pressing his glasses to his face, my master stumbled.

It seemed the Mystic Code he had prepared for the Rail Zeppelin was enough to defend against this woman's Compulsion.

But that was no reason to feel relieved. My body was still being perfectly controlled. My previously clumsy movements were gradually becoming smoother, and the distance between my master and I was shrinking.

"Hey, hey, hey, hey Gray! Are you serious?! What are you doing?!"

The scythe came down.

On the roof of the train car, red filled the night air.

Slicing through only a single layer of leather on my master's shoulder, the scythe spun in an arc aiming for the woman's throat.

"-well, that scythe is quite versatile," she said, seeing right through me as her sword intercepted the blade coming for her.

With the magical energy expelled by the scythe forcibly running through my magic circuits, it flushed the effects of the Mystic Eyes from my system. Even then, it was a desperate maneuver, and had it been even a few moments late, I would have taken my master's head right off his shoulders.

"I guess there's nothing else to do, then. I had hoped to let you two settle things yourselves, but I guess not."

Taking a large step back, the woman gave a small sigh.

She then raised her sword to the dark clouds above. Though it seemed like she acted so arrogant as to think she could cut the sky with her own weapon, the unusual magical energy flooding the blade was impossible to ignore.

I jumped forward.

"I won't let you-!"

"Too late," she said, bringing down the sword with its enormous amount of magical energy.

From the empty space before her, something expanded.

It looked like she had cut open space itself. Though it seemed that way, it was probably more like materialising a spiritual entity, or some similar phenomenon. Whichever the case, the appearance of the object pushed aside the air in its place, creating a powerful shock wave that threw me backwards.

A stinging pain covered my skin.

It was the first time I had felt that. My body was starting to reject the enormous amount of magical energy I had absorbed.

"Ihihihihi! No, no, no, no, no! That's not allowed, Gray! Anything but that! Even if it's us, this isn't an opponent we can beat!" Add shouted.

Lightning struck once again.

Lightning from the dark clouds overhead repeatedly struck around the armoured woman, as if in blessing.

The lightning-clad form was that of a two-horse chariot. It wasn't a weapon of the modern age. It was an ancient symbol, a vehicle pulled by horses or something similar, running across the battlefield trampling all underfoot.

"-what?!"

I heard a stunned voice.

Of course, that was to be expected. The creatures pulling the chariot were made entirely of bone. And though they were only skeletons, the lizards had powerful looking wings. Were they small dragons? With no forelimbs, they looked like the long extinct Wyvern, a phantasmal species.

Watching that chariot drawn by dragons of bone, my master's expression continued to twist.

"...but, that..."

"Master?"

But I understood.

This was a Noble Phantasm. The same as the holy spear hidden within Add. A weapon that surpassed human intellect. But thanks to its terrible nature, I could predict what type of Noble Phantasm it would be.

Before coming to the Rail Zeppelin, Reines had told me.

'...he was said to have two Noble Phantasms.'

'-One, the chariot dedicated to the Gordion Shrine, the Gordius Wheel (*Heaven's Wheel*).'

"My name is Hephaestion!" the woman roared. "The closest friend of the greatest King of Conquerors in history, Iskandar!"

The woman - Hephaestion leapt up onto the chariot, took the reins, and the chariot lifted into the air.

With a figure that seemed taken straight out of myth, she brought the chariot around in an arc, charging directly toward us. With each step of the skeletal dragons pulling it, lightning boomed. Each strike was as powerful as the lightning that had struck before. A human struck once would, without a shadow of a doubt, be killed instantly.

"Master!"

Grabbing a hold of him, I jumped.

As we fell to the roof of the train car, I felt a burst of energy pass over my back. The storm trampled down the world. After passing us by, that manifestation of destruction plowed through the forest, throwing trees this way and that as if they were no more than pencils.

(It's not stopping-!)

There was no way it could be stopped.

If there was a way, there was only one.

As the chariot came around in a wide arc, I slowly lifted Add up from where I was sitting on my knees. The numerous eyes adorning the scythe opened. The magical energy in the atmosphere was enough. Full throttle. The time to activate its true function was now.

"Gray (*Dark*)... Rave (*Unsteady*)... Crave (*Wish*)... Deprave (*Fallen*)..."

"No, Gray!" my master shouted.

"If you use it in such an unstable place, we won't make it out either! And she hasn't even released its True Name yet!"

"But...!"

The chariot gradually gained speed, heading toward us.

I could no longer - no, at this rate, I wouldn't have made it in time anyways.

Slowly, my master stood. He drew out the knife he always used to cut his cigars. I couldn't imagine he hoped to fight a Heroic Spirit using something like that, but either way I went stiff as I watched him.

"Hahaha, suicide is it?!"

"...no way..."

As my master stepped forward, the small blade glimmered.

His thin frame was drowned out in the chariot and its lightning. The bright lightning was enough to cast out the night. And as powerful as the roaring thunder, a battle cry.

"AAAALaLaLaLaie!!!!"

Fate was decided.

The lightning pouring out to the sides of the chariot was unstoppable. Trampled down by dragons of bone, torn apart by the chariot that followed, not a shred of his original form would remain. The force it brought to bear wasn't just an Anti-Personnel weapon, but was in the range of an Anti-Army Noble Phantasm. Even a fully equipped modern army would be annihilated by a single strike.

A deafening roar. Like the rampage of a god, the word 'destruction' seemed insufficient to describe it.

And in the next moment, that attack blew us away.

With my vision narrowed down to focus on one single point, everything seemed to move in slow motion.

The door to the freight car opened. At last, I realised we had been knocked down to the side of the freight car.

"Professor! Gray!"

"Caules...!"

From that open door, Caules reached out to us.

As we fell, my master and I reached desperately for that hand. As his Strengthened hand caught my weight for a single moment, I threw myself into my master. A moment later, I did a half spin, jumping into the freight car.

My eyes immediately snapped to the window, where I saw the woman and her chariot flying off into the distance.

"...she's not...chasing...?"

"...if she hit us here, that would be a declaration of war against the Rail Zeppelin itself, after all... I don't know why, but...I guess at the least, her Master isn't interested in doing that. That must have been why they picked such a place," my master muttered weakly as he leaned against the wall, sliding to the floor.

He then raised his head with a small smile.

"Good timing, Caules."

"I was worried. I felt some sort of magical lightning earlier, and when I came to check, you were facing down some sort of monster chariot."

"Ah," I suddenly realised at that moment.

Thanks to his research into Primeval Batteries, Caules must have become sensitive to the flow of electricity. Though I'm sure even my master never would have assumed such a thing would happen.

"...thanks, you really saved us," my master said with a ragged sigh.

A small ceramic jar was lying at his feet. Already laced with cracks, as it rolled across the floor, the cracks spread throughout until it fell apart.

"...I wonder...if it hadn't been a direct hit, would the Primeval Battery have survived?" he gave another deep sigh.

At that, Caules blinked in surprise.

"Did you cut your hair?"

Though it was just a single lock, it seemed some of my master's hair was missing.

Finally I realised the knife earlier hadn't been for fighting the enemy, but for cutting his own hair.

"...it's a trump card normally used by female magi. If you fill your hair with magical energy, it functions well as a catalyst. After all, I don't have many advantages with this body. There's no point in decking myself out with Mystic Codes, but I figured one or two secret weapons would help."

Hold on.

Was that the reason he had grown his hair out so long?

Amplifying the magecraft of the Primeval Battery, he misdirected the force of the lightning. But no matter how much lightning he was able to redirect, the difference between him and that chariot was just too much. We had been blown away just by the wind coming off it, before it even hit us.

The fact we survived that could be nothing less than a miracle. If those skeletal dragons had struck us with a single step, we both would have died.

"...it seems she took it easy on us. If she had really intended on killing us, something small like this wouldn't have made a difference. ...but how did she summon that thing...? Why...was there a friend of the king...I had never seen...?"

"Professor-?"

Trying to help my master to his feet, Caules' breath caught.

The back of his coat had been thoroughly scorched. That was probably a result of us being blown away. My master must have Strengthened his entire body as I had, but there was an insurmountable gap between our capabilities to do so. And if he had been using his magecraft to redirect the lightning, there was no way his arms or Magic Circuits could have been fully operational for that.

"Please keep it quiet...from the staff..."

With a faint moan, he began to sway.

"Master!"

"Professor!"

Our shouts didn't reach him.

Just like that, his swaying body collapsed, falling forward.

◆ 第四章 ◆
-Chapter 4-



~Part 1~

As we rushed back to our guest room, luckily we didn't come across anyone else.

Thanks to the previous murder incident, the other magi must have been staying inside their rooms. As we opened the door to our room, a silver-haired girl turned to look at us.

"W-what is wrong with you, leaving me alone right after saying you couldn't leave me alone?!" Turning teary eyes on us as she complained, Olga Marie went stiff as she noticed us carrying my master. "W-what?! What's going on?!"

"I'm sorry. Please, get out of the way!"

Getting to the bed as fast as possible, we laid my master down.

As we stripped off his coat and shirt, the smell of burnt flesh filled the room. Resisting the urge to vomit, we used a knife to separate the areas where his clothes had stuck to his skin. While ordinarily we would have called on the staff to get some medical supplies, due to my master's request to keep them uninvolved, our hands were tied.

"...Caules..."

"I know. My skill in healing magecraft is pretty bad, though."

I immediately passed him off to Caules.

Caules immediately laid him on his side, so his back wouldn't touch the bed. Putting his hand on a ceramic pot lying near the bed, a faint electricity began to run through him.

"That is..."

"One application of Primeval Batteries. We had just started researching it in class, though," Caules said, biting his lip.

"By using electricity, we stimulate the professor's body's natural healing ability, and replenish his Od as much as possible. Though I don't know how much of a difference this will actually make. If he had a powerful Magic Crest then it would be completely different."

For those with powerful Magic Crests, no matter what kind of serious injuries they sustained, the Crest would forcibly keep its host alive as long as possible. Unfortunately, it was clear my master had no such thing.

His breathing was rough and shallow.

We could understand just how powerful an attack he had taken just from the way he breathed. Sitting there completely unable to do anything, I felt like my heart was being crushed under the pressure.

"...was he attacked by the culprit?" Olga Marie asked.

"I don't know."

"What do you mean, you don't know?"

"Of course we were attacked. But that seems to be related to our own circumstances. We can't know for sure if they were involved with the attack on Trisha too."

At my straight response, Olga Marie's brow furrowed slightly.

Caules alone continued focusing all his efforts on the healing. Within the dark room, the sporadic flashes of electricity felt like images of my master's life slipping away.

I dropped to my knees beside him.

My heart was beating so loud, I felt the others might be able to hear it. The cold sweat wouldn't stop.

Like my heart had been struck directly, I couldn't stop the tears from pouring out. I didn't even remember when they had started.

"Is he such an important person to you? I thought you weren't even a magus," Olga Marie spoke again.

Perhaps Caules had explained to her that I wasn't a magus.

"I'm his disciple," I said without lifting my head.

"Even if I'm not a magus, I'm his disciple."

"...hmph."

Whether she accepted that answer or not, she stepped away.

After a little while, she pulled something from the bag she had left on the floor.

"Then why not try this?"

She held out a small, beautiful looking bottle. Even without the elegant design, I could feel an old magical power coming from within it.

"What is...?"

"Druidic Medicine. It was given to Trisha just in case, but I have no use for it. After all, it's not like it'll make her head grow back. It seems able to cure almost anything, so why not give it a shot?"

As she spoke without any sense of urgency, Caules spun around.

"Druidic medicine?! You mean, the perfect Panacea, spoken of by Pliny the Elder?!"

"You get it, right? With this, Animusphere's debt to El-Melloi is paid in full. If he makes it through this, I expect you to tell him that."

Pushing the bottle on us, she stepped away.

Then, with a yawn,

"Good night, then."

With a wave, she lay down on one of the beds.

Though she gave no signs of actually having fallen asleep, we were too absorbed in the bottle she had handed us to notice. Timidly, I emptied the medicine into my hand and spread it on my master's back. I then tore a section from some sheets nearby, and after boiling them to disinfect them, I wrapped them around his injury.

I didn't know how useful it would be.

But after waiting for a while, it seemed his breathing had become more stable.

"Caules..."

"...I don't know. But I feel like the magecraft is working easier, now."

Caules' face was gradually turning pale.

Having focused on the magecraft for so long, it wasn't just his mental focus, but his physical strength was also under strain. Though I didn't know what that felt like, I knew that the cost would be severe.

(...please, God...)

When had I begun praying like that?

The sorrowful face of my master when he had heard the Heroic Spirit herself as Hephaestion was stuck in my head. What had he felt, then? To be so ruthlessly attacked by the dear friend of the person he so badly wanted to meet?

So,

(...please don't let my master die...in such a sad way...)

I prayed with my whole heart.

~Part 2~

Sunlight shone in through the window.

Piercing through the fog outside, the bright, refreshing morning light finally made me notice the blanket laid over my shoulders.

"-Master!"

"He's still asleep," Caules said with a weak smile.

Apparently having woken up before me, he rubbed his eyes sleepily.

"But, we seem to be past the difficult part. As expected, Druidic Medicine is really impressive stuff. For now, we're done with the treatment. His condition is still serious though, so best not to wake him up yet."

"...t-thank you...!" Instinctively, I bowed my head.

Caules' harrowed face seemed to me like that of an angel.

Soon after,

"Morning," Olga Marie greeted us, stretching as she sat up in bed.

After a brief glance at my master and a muttered 'guess he didn't die after all,' she put her hair roughly in order before turning to Caules.

"I figured it was pointless to give that medicine to you since he seemed well past helping, but it looks like you're pretty good. Is healing magecraft your field or something?"

"Not at all. The Professor had just taught me that Electric Magecraft a few weeks ago, actually."

"What?! A few weeks ago?!" she blurted out.

"What are you, some kind of genius disguised as an idiot?"

"Well, actually, even the magecraft I've studied for years didn't sit with me as well. I was learning Spiritual Evocation before, but I just couldn't get a handle on it."

"Pft. I'd heard rumours of the El-Melloi Classroom before, but..."

Narrowing her eyes, she made a difficult expression.

With a sigh, she reluctantly turned to us.

"Would you tell me more about what happened?"

"Well..."

Seeing I wasn't sure what to say, Caules spoke up.

"It's fine, isn't it, Gray?"

"...is it?"

"She's already involved with this after all...and as an Animusphere, she has information about the Holy Grail War, right? Considering the current situation on the Rail Zeppelin, we should really be working together. Once the Professor wakes up, I'm sure he'll say the same thing."

Caules gave me a serious look as he spoke.

Earlier, I had thought he was out of place at the Clock Tower, but perhaps I had been wrong about that. Rather, perhaps his ability to completely switch his personality as he was pressed on by the situation at hand was ideal for a magus. Though his sister, who he had replaced as the successor to his family, was supposed to be much more talented than he was, I couldn't imagine her surpassing him in this respect.

"Yeah, you owe me for that medicine, too."

"I thought you said that made us even?"

At my composed rebuttal, Olga Marie's breath caught.

But by that point, I had already made up my mind. Except for the existence of my master's relic, I explained the situation up until now.

"A Servant?" her voice jumped.

"Really? Summoning a Heroic Spirit that maintains its personality from its lifetime should be impossible outside of the Holy Grail War of Fuyuki. There's no way one would show up in England. Even if there was a method, without that Greater Grail, that spell wouldn't work."

Borrowing the powers, at least in part, of Heroic and Divine Spirits was certainly a possibility. The Faculty of Spiritual Evocation (*Eulyphis*) taught magecraft along those lines, I had been told in a lecture.

But a ritual to bring forth a Heroic Spirit in its entirety was normally impossible.

"...well, putting aside whether the spell exists or not, is summoning outside of Fuyuki possible? If it were, it would require authority on the level of the Three Families."

Closing an eye, Olga Marie muttered to herself.

As a habit my master also took part in from time to time, maybe talking to oneself out loud while thinking something through was common among magi. Perhaps because the first principle of the Clock Tower was to keep Mystery hidden? In detective novels, it was often used with the excuse of them not wanting to share their theories with others while still formulating them, but I felt it was a little different in this case.

Once again, Olga Marie asked us.

"Was it really a Servant? Are you sure?"

"Um, well, her Noble Phantasm was definitely the real thing. My master seemed to recognize it as the same one used by Iskandar...and anyways, it was something well beyond what a human should be able to muster."

That's right. For a human magus, replicating a Noble Phantasm was impossible.

Last month, my master had shown us Projection Magecraft, but that was only able to reproduce the outward appearance, and even then only for an extremely limited time. To completely reproduce an entire Noble Phantasm...at the very least, from my lectures in the Clock Tower, it seemed to be something entirely outside of the scope of possibility.

After watching us for some time,

"In that case, we can't say it's definitely unrelated to me," she declared.

"What do you mean?"

"If there's a Servant, that means somewhere there's a Master. With the Rail Zeppelin traveling through this Closed Space, that Servant must have used its Noble Phantasm to track us down. In that case, the chances of that Servant's Master being on the train itself is extremely high."

At that, I swallowed. Of course, considering we were here pursuing the one who had stolen the relic, it should have been an obvious possibility.

"Man, things have gotten rather annoying. ...so, what kind of Servant was it?"

"...she said her name was Hephaestion."

"Hm, Iskandar's subordinate?"

"Do you know her?"

"There's no way I wouldn't. Hephaestion is the most famous of all of Iskandar's followers," she answered with a snort.

"As a close friend, he's right at the top. They studied together at Mieza, were both taught by Aristotle, visited the grave of Achilles and Patroclus together, and in the end they both took a daughter of Darius III as wife."

"They took his daughters as wives?"

Feeling like I had heard something strange, I couldn't help but repeat it back.

"That's right. It's pretty indisputable stuff.

"But, umm...the Hephaestion we met was a woman..."

"A woman? Well, wouldn't it have been a problem if a woman was set up as a leader in the army? It would have been easier for Iskandar if he had just lied about her gender to the generals. Maybe it was something like that. Though it's hard to imagine her climbing the ladder so well just because she was old friends with him, it's possible her exploits just weren't in the records that survived until today," she explained, waving a hand around.

Of course I knew basic information about Iskandar's life, but knowledge about his subordinates or anecdotes of their lives was something well beyond my knowledge. Though, even if she was a magus, being outclassed by an eleven year old like this stung a little.

At the same time, the idea that he let her into the army, lying about her gender, and somehow pulled the whole thing off without getting caught - it made me wonder exactly what kind of person this Iskandar had been.

"At any rate, if that was really Hephaestion, then it goes without saying she'd be able to use the same Noble Phantasms as Iskandar."

"Really...?"

"-he was another Iskandar, after all," she said.

"This is another famous story. At one time, when Iskandar and Hephaestion visited them, the mother of Darius III didn't know which of the two was king. So, she mistakenly bowed before Hephaestion. At that time, such an affront to the king was more than worthy of punishment, but Iskandar just laughed it off, saying 'He's another Iskandar!'

If Hephaestion was really a woman, it's hard to believe that it was just a mistake, so there was probably something else at play, but that anecdote likely sublimated into a Noble Phantasm itself - for example, letting Hephaestion use the Noble Phantasms of Iskandar - so it's not that strange to think it possible."

I was speechless.

A Noble Phantasm was the 'power' that served as the symbol of a Heroic Spirit. Not just a simple weapon or tool, but a legend of what made that Hero who they were, manifested as a Concept. In a way, it was something engraved even deeper than a Heroic Spirit's own name. To be able to use another Heroic Spirit's Noble Phantasm without limit, didn't that mean they were truly one and the same person?

The fact that someone like that had said she "didn't like my master at all" caused a sting in my chest.

What did my master feel as he heard those words?

"So, I'd also like to ask, then," Olga Marie said.

"Did someone steal the relic for Iskandar from you guys?"

Once again, I couldn't help going stiff.

As if she saw it in my expression, Olga Marie crossed her arms with a sigh.

"Of course I'd figure it out," she said in a bored voice.

"In the Fourth Holy Grail War, he summoned Iskandar, right? I don't know what kind of relic he had to do so, but anything that had a strong connection to Iskandar would almost certainly have a strong connection to Hephaestion as well. Rather than someone just happening by chance to summon Hephaestion, it's much more natural to think someone used the same relic."

The girl's conjecture punched right through our negligence.

Perhaps that was only ordinary for someone from the family of a Lord. I could understand a little better now how Reines had gotten that way. It wasn't just that Reines

was born with that kind of talent, but it was a talent that was refined and polished by that environment.

"So in short, the person who stole the relic summoned Hephaestion...and that Master is now aboard the Rail Zeppelin?"

"The possibility is high. Though I don't know why they summoned Hephaestion instead of Iskandar, or what brought them to the Rail Zeppelin in the first place."

After saying that,

"But, things seem a bit backwards with Hephaestion, don't they?" she muttered.

"What is backwards?"

"I told you we researched the Holy Grail War before, right? Normally, in order to hide a Servant's weak points, they do their best to keep their true names hidden. Instead, they call themselves by names based on the Class they were summoned into, like Saber or Lancer."

As she descended into thought, she put a finger to her chin.

"But, this time we know the Servant's true name, but not their class. Though judging from the fact she uses Iskandar's Noble Phantasms, and from her abilities in general, Rider seems like the safest bet."

"You think they are the same?"

"No idea," she shook her head.

"It's not like I can trust everything you told me wholesale anyways. But if we assume what you've said is true, then that part alone is strange. ...which leaves a single problem."

Letting herself be swayed by the movements of the train, she raised a finger.

Caules took up on that problem right away.

"Whether the culprit of our murder case is Hephaestion's Master or not?"

"Oh, I'm surprised you get it."

"We just don't have enough information to tell. The only clue we have is that they took away her entire head."

At Caules' words, the two of them fell silent.

That seemed to be the limit of what we could conclude. Even just following along, my head was overflowing with new information, so I was desperate to get rid of as much of it as possible.

-the stolen relic of Iskandar.

-the Servant, Hephaestion.

-the murder incident on the Rail Zeppelin.

-the missing head of the murder victim.

-Rainbow Mystic Eyes.

I felt like I should have asked more about Iskandar. I should have asked more, without regretting going behind my master's back to do so. I couldn't imagine it being necessary information at this time, but there should have been something we were able to do.

I looked back at my master, lying on his side.

I wondered what he would have thought. What connection was there between that Servant and the murder? How would he analyse them, how would he dissect those situations?

(For example...)

I struggled to reach back into my memory.

'-Sight is the first magecraft in human history.'

'-Among the five senses, sight is the one that provides the most information.'

Before we had come here, I had had such a discussion with my master.

What place did Mystic Eyes have in the history of magecraft?

Normally I'm sure my master would start from there in his search for a resolution. There was no way I was smart enough to figure it out on my own, but with Caules and Olga Marie beside me, I felt like maybe I could at least find the start of the path.

Around and around, around and around.

Around and around, around and around.

I dove into my memories, forcing my head to work. Before I noticed that the conversation between the other two had started again, a certain scene began to play in my head.

Before I knew it, a question slipped out of my mouth.

"...I wonder...what does Prediction mean?"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, umm...just, Miss Trisha said her Foresight was Predictive."

I answered Caules' question as I sifted through that memory.

'-It's like they are a person invisible to time.'

The words Karabo and my master had shared when they were inspecting Trisha's body stuck out like a thorn.

After my vague explanation, Caules closed his eyes for a while.

"...hmmm. Because they are limited by the functions of the human body, Foresight and Hindsight both come in two forms, those being Predictive and Determinative," he said, raising two fingers.

"Predictive is exactly like it sounds. Like if we saw a ball on a hill, we could predict that it would roll down it. It's an extension of that basic principle. It's a phenomenon possible when the person using the ability has a tremendous ability to remember and calculate. But because that process would be greatly hindered by the personality of the person using it, it mostly happens entirely unconsciously."

"...umm...in other words, it's like normal imagination?"

"The logic is the same. But in this case, the amount of memory and number of calculations taking place unconsciously are far beyond what an ordinary human can handle. Fundamentally, our bodies have been optimised by the process of Evolution. Even if magi are humans with a tendency toward the past, their bodies are still the same format as every other human. So even if the logic is the same, the amount of memory and calculative ability required creates a process that far exceeds what humans can handle.

For example, I have a decent grasp of the 'impression' of this place. I know the three people's names, and their faces. I know we're in a luxurious private room aboard a train. I can grasp things in a wider scope, like the positions of beds and tables, or the periodic movements of the train. But when it comes to Predictive Foresight, fine details like the colour of light, the individual intonation of each sound in our voices, the second to second movements of our eyes, the gradual changes in our body odours or the shade and colour of the fog outside are all recorded, and the calculations are made together with the knowledge of the environment and the people within them to create an image of a single world...even unconsciously, that level of information is enough to fry your brain."

"...memory, and calculations..."

I thought through what Caules said.

Though the amount of information was more than someone like I could handle, it still gave me a bad feeling. After thinking about it for a while, I realised what was bothering me.

"But, then...isn't that more something for the brain to do, rather than the eyes?"

"It varies from case to case, but from the perspective of magecraft, eyes have their own kind of Magic Circuits. Those are capable of holding that kind of memory and performing those kinds of calculations on their own."

Now that he mentioned it, I remembered hearing that Magic Circuits could be used like a kind of computer for recording and storing information. Perhaps Mystic Eyes operating under Predictive Foresight used the same principle.

"In contrast, Determinative Foresight is much stranger. The same kind of memory and calculative power is required, but while Predictive Foresight is a passive, defensive process, Determinative Foresight is an assertive - in a way, an offensive one."

"Assertive?"

"Yes. Assertive, in that it makes the future work for it. Basically..."

Thinking for a bit, Caules looked around the room.

Taking a notebook from the table nearby, he drew a shape on the paper.

"What's this?"

"It's a diagram of time. It's easy enough to understand that the future is made up of a wide spread, right?"

As Caules drew on the page, I gave a small nod.

In short, they were choices. Whether to take the cup in front of you with your left hand or your right hand, the uncountable number of choices like that made up what we conceptually referred to as the future. In the same way, from the single point on Caules' diagram that represented the present, countless lines stretched forward to represent the future.

"Before, I told you that Predictive Foresight used as much data as possible from the past and present to predict what was possible in the future. In comparison,

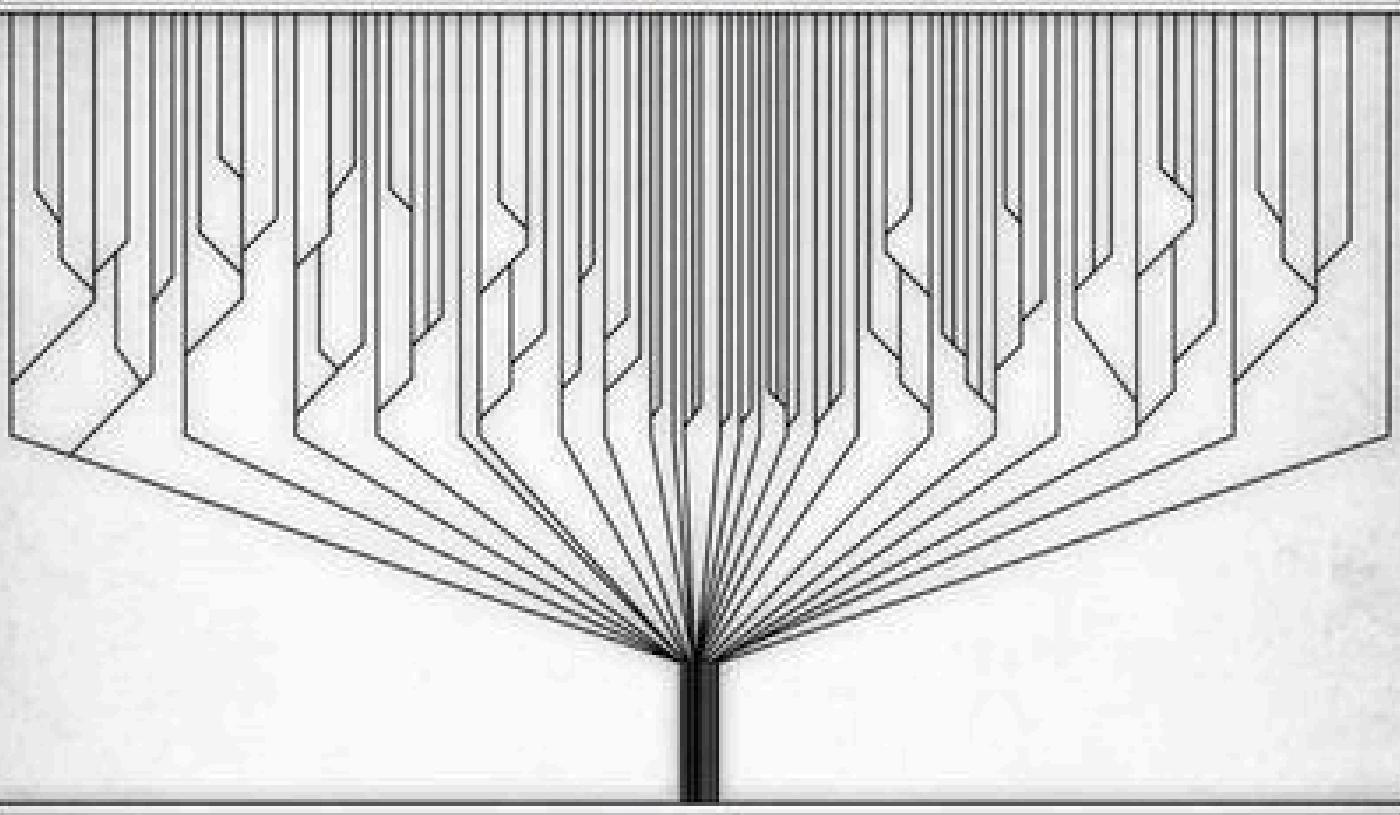
Determinative Foresight seeks to determine which of those possible futures will occur, or even is used to decide which one will come to pass. In order to do that, the user attempts to limit the choices of others."

Deciding yourself whether to take the cup with your left hand or right hand.

As a result, restricting the responses and actions of the world around you. So the meaning of Determinative Foresight was acting yourself to determine which future would come about - in short, calculating how one would do so. As he explained, it was completely different from Predictive Foresight. Even though they were both called Foresight, they were as different as fire and water.

"This difference in logic means that Determinative Foresight is many times more accurate than Predictive Foresight. Though it seems like you can only see the future of the place you happen to be in at that moment, once it's been decided, that future is completely fixed. You could say their ability to restrict the future in that regard is absolute."

The Future



The Present

The Past

Deciding the future.

I felt a definite sense of dread hiding within those words.

If someone had eyes like that, I wondered what kind of life they would lead. Passing each day, just blindly acting along a script they already knew. Completely bereft of free will. A slave to the future they've already seen.

Who was it that decided on that future - the eyes, or the one who bore them?

As those thoughts ran through my imagination, I nodded again.

"...I understand, I think. And Hindsight is the same?"

"Yes," he answered. "Though when it comes to Hindsight, the distinction between Predictive and Determinative is basically irrelevant. Most people who use them don't seem to make the distinction, either."

"I see."

"Let me draw that, too." ...compared to the infinitely expanding future, the past is like a mountain of sand."

Below the countless lines that depicted the future, Caules drew a mountain made of tiny grains of sand.

From a distance, it looked sort of like a funnel. Countless paths from the future stretched toward the present, where a single path was chosen. Pressed down into a single grain, it then fell onto the mountain of grains beneath it, called the past.

Is that what time is like?

"One at a time, the grains of the future slip through the present, before falling onto the mountain that is the past. With a diagram like this, in the same way entropy works in a three dimensional space, the idea of time following its own vector should be easy to understand."

The flow of time. Entropy.

Almost like an hourglass, moment by moment, the future became the present, and the present became the past. Unstoppable by anyone, uncontested by anyone, the single direction chosen by the universe.

"Whether predicting the past based on the results evident in the present, or calculating it based on one's own current perspective, the process is more or less the same. If I were to guess, I'd say calculating it based on your current perspective would narrow the scope, and thus improve the accuracy."

Though Determinative Foresight held the dreaded implication of determining a fixed future, since the past was already fixed, its equivalent in Hindsight wasn't nearly as menacing.

After saying all that, Caules added one more thing as if apologising.

"That said, neither of them are able to actually see the past, so according to both Modern Magecraft and Quantum Theory, the past itself is also uncertain...some people make that argument. What we imagine as the past is nothing more than memory and records, they would say. ...sorry, my classes haven't gone any farther than that..."

"N-no, that's enough."

For a moment, it felt like I was getting another lecture from my master.

I glanced over to where my master was lying. Even if he were gone, the things he's cultivated wouldn't disappear. Thinking that, I felt a little better.

Seeing that our conversation was finally over, the abandoned and bored Olga Marie snorted.

"So, what of it?"

"Just, my master said something about that. That the culprit was invisible to both Foresight and Hindsight - like he was invisible to time."

Now that I thought about it, that conversation happened while she was unconscious.

"Invisible, to time..." she muttered, lifting her head.

"Is there someone who understands that a bit better?"

"Umm, if it's about Mystic Eyes, Yvette might know about it more in detail..." Caules offered.

As he spoke, an announcement echoed throughout the Rail Zeppelin.

An announcement like ice stabbing into my brain.

~Part 3~

"-Rodin, sir," the auctioneer spoke.

A low sound reverberated, filling the entire car. Beyond numerous pressure gauges and valves, breaking levers and water levers, came the dull sound of iron and burning coal.

This was the one place that guests were not permitted - the control room of the Rail Zeppelin.

In reality, the majority of the train was run on magical energy, but this imagery of an old-fashioned steam locomotive was common throughout the vehicle. The previous owner had taken quite a liking to the aesthetic.

Alternatively, perhaps it was the Dead Apostle.

Though they had long since surpassed the limits of humanity in their abilities and magecraft, the Dead Apostle known by the auctioneer still had an affection for vestiges of humanity.

"Are the preparations complete, Leandra?" Without turning from the gauges he was watching, the conductor spoke.

"Yes. The Mystic Eye Depository's (*Pandemorium's*) contents have been confirmed. We will be able to continue without delay."

"Excellent. What is the main attraction, this time?"

"I don't know," she replied.

"As always, the Manager's Representative alone knows which is which."

Just as when the previous owner was in charge, the details of the Eye Catchers of the auction weren't told to the staff.

The only exception was when the bearer of those eyes refused to come forth - or, after receiving an invitation, refused to board the train. In those situations alone the owner's Representative would inform them of their identity. The fact they hadn't been told anything meant that the bearer was already aboard the Rail Zeppelin. Or, possibly, that they would be boarding later today.

While it was a bizarre custom, it was one Rodin and Leandra had grown used to.

The only concern that remained for them was to make sure the previous owner's Mystic Eye Auction continued unabated. For those who took pride in running that system, the prospect of doubting it never would have crossed their minds.

Even now, the owner's memory lingered in their hearts. That memory would surely remain as an unfading rose until the last of them died out, until the last gear of the Rail Zeppelin wore down to dust.

That was the kind of person they stood in support of.

The auctioneer spoke again.

"What do you make of the murder?"

"While it is unfortunate for the guests, it's hardly abnormal."

"I guess so. About once every five years, now," she admitted.

For those who weren't confident in their financial strength for the auction, the removal of troubling opponents by force was hardly an uncommon tactic. If one thought of the incident as another one of those, it wasn't out of the ordinary in the least. As far as the bizarre method of killing, by removing the entire head, when it came to the Rail Zeppelin that too wasn't especially surprising.

"Apparently the victim possessed Mystic Eyes of Foresight. Should someone come forward requesting they be transplanted, what do you plan to do?"

"Of course, if it's one of our guests, we will provide whatever care is necessary."

"The same as always, then."

"The same as always," Rodin nodded.

Life or death, he received all of them the same way. It was an auction started for the pleasure of the previous owner. If the owner didn't tell them to stop, they had no place to force the morals of human society into the mix.

As if it was nothing more than she expected, the auctioneer nodded before changing the subject.

"By the way, it seems things got rather heated last night."

"That uninvited guest?"

It went without saying that the conductor could tell the lightning they had witnessed the night before was not a natural phenomenon. Even while within the Closed Space of the Rail Zeppelin, or rather because they were in it, such coincidental occurrences should have been prevented.

"However, it appears they did not have hostile intentions toward us. As long as it does not hinder the operation of this train, I have no intention in getting involved with the personal affairs of the guests. ...of course, that all changes should we receive instructions from the Representative."

"...of course."

At Rodin's declaration, the auctioneer gave her affirmation as well.

As they had mentioned to Gray earlier, they had hardly ever met their current employer. And even those meetings had been like viewing a mirage on the horizon over the sea. Though they had run the system that was the Rail Zeppelin alone for all this time, that made their sense of loneliness all the more severe.

For a time, the sound of steam was the only thing heard in the control room.

Eventually, the auctioneer spoke again.

"What's wrong, sir?"

"There is an anomaly on the tracks," Rodin spoke indifferently.

But having worked with him for so long, the auctioneer could tell. The bone-thin conductor's face was drawn with a distress she never would have imagined on him in the worst situation.

"It's difficult to believe, but, someone has done something to the tracks. ...it seems we will be grazing against a Child of Ainnash."

Staring hard at the pressure gauges before him, the conductor took the microphone in hand.



Electing to avoid the dining car, Hishiri Adashino had requested room service.

She had confirmed that the viewing of today's selection of Mystic Eyes would happen after the new guests had boarded. With the murder incident earlier, there was no need to spend any more time with the others than absolutely necessary.

While eating the bare minimum of hors d'oeuvres to stay healthy,

"...really, the previous owner was a terrible person," she said.

As an auction meant just to show off their collection of Mystic Eyes, trapping the magi in a secretive Closed Space was going too far. Beyond just avoiding boarding the train until the day before the auction, murdering the opponents you couldn't outbid was expected of magi.

In short, in addition to showing off their collection, it seemed the auction was also set up to enjoy the mortal conflict among the magi bidding on it. Hishiri could well feel how the ideals of the gathered magi had been condensed together in this crucible of greed.

"In that respect, maybe the killing of Animusphere's servant is reasonable?"

Even if they were in a Closed Space, and it would be difficult to pinpoint the culprit once that space had been opened, going so far as to kill the blood relative of a Lord - and the successor, no less - was a step too far. Killing the servant would be enough intimidation for an eleven year old girl. The culprit may have thought so.

Whydunnit.

From the beginning, Hishiri had no interest in pursuing the culprit, so any more speculation than that was unnecessary. It was simply a reflexive response to try and put the situation in order, drilled into her by her daily life. It was little more than instinctively calculating the answer when one saw a simple addition formula. That was just how members of the Faculty of Law operated.

Hishiri traced a finger down her own neck.

The entire head removed. A future that Trisha couldn't see, even with her Foresight. Though she didn't know which she possessed, if her Foresight was Predictive, then it wouldn't see through an abrupt occurrence. But...

For a time, Hishiri stared up at the ceiling.

"-We have an announcement to make for our guests," the broadcast came over the speakers.



"Special! Jeeeeeanmario! Spinerra's!! Zombie Cooking on a Train!!! Let's enjoy cooking some zombies to a crisp together today!"

His narration echoed through the dining car.

With his white hat fluttering in the air, he danced beneath it in his stylish white suit. Just as he did when he was doing a performance, he projected the image of a shotgun he couldn't possibly have hidden into the brains of his viewers, and began blasting haphazardly around the room.

"This time, all we have to do is eat, no cooking required! How relaxing! First of all is this phenomenal looking Carpaccio! Mmm, these anchovies in balsamic vinegar have quite the punch! Oho, that looks like quite the rose wine! We'll have to shotgun that! Go ahead and scream for me, audience!"

With a smooth turn, he scooped up some of the beef carpaccio, shivering at the flavour.

While the preparation was fairly simple, the ingredients were superb. The rose wine itself had a freshness, a mellowness that made one feel like they were ascending to heaven.

"Hey, AD! Hurry up and send out more zombies! If it's one star, I'll bash in their head! Three stars, and I'll blow out their heart with my shotgun! And if it tastes bad, I'll mash it into the chef and kill them both!"

"Okay, Mr. Jeanmario! Here you go!"

From the side, a zombie puppet suddenly appeared.

Using one hand to plant a chop directly into the zombie puppet's head, he used the other to catch his falling hat on a finger gun, all in one smooth motion.

"Crush the brain, sever the head, and as a bonus, serve the heart! Zombie Cooking Train Edition has concluded!"

With a short tap dance on top of his chair, he brought the show to a close.

The applause from his audience of one filled the train car.

"Wow, what an honour! To see Zombie Cooking live like that!"

"Hahaha, I'll send you an invitation to our live recording some time, so please come again! I'll be waiting for you, my eye-patched pink-haired zombie assistant!"

With a wink that looked like it needed a sound effect, Jeanmario offered his own praises to the eye-patched girl sitting across from him.

Yvette L Lehrman.

"I'll be waiting for that big fat check at the end!"

"As long as you use that Mystic Eye on our idiot producers!"

The girl chuckled.

Sitting at the table, she began piling breakfast foods onto her plate as she changed the subject.

"So, are you looking for any Mystic Eyes in particular, Jeanmario? The ones we saw yesterday seemed pretty impressive."

That's right.

In the end, they were headed toward an auction. The killing of a single servant would hardly throw that off course. With new guests arriving today, she wanted to get a grasp on the intentions of the serious bidders that had arrived on day one.

"What if I told you? Aren't we opponents in this auction? It's not like we can split our winnings."

"No no, I'm not interested in getting Mystic Eyes transplanted at all. After all, I've already got something like this. Tadah! Lehrman's Artificial Mystic Eye~!"

From behind the eye patch that she lifted, a glittering jewel peaked out.

Not an eye with the rank of Jewel, but the actual thing. Manufacturing jewels into high ranking Mystic Eyes was the secret art of the Lehrman family.

"Hmm."

"I'm only interested in Mystic Eyes for research. The Rail Zeppelin offers after care as well, so once you've bought what you want, even if you want to wait for a bit, coming to our place so we can study it after the transplant is more than enough for us. I think there's plenty of room for us to work together."

This was different than the conversation he had had with Hishiri.

As a deal between individual magi, for someone like her who was likely working at the behest of the Faculty of Law, there wasn't really any room to negotiate.

"That Animusphere girl is still technically wielding the authority of a Lord. She might try and just scoop up everything herself..."

"Haha, exactly!"

Though they couldn't expect much from the struggling El-Melloi family, both Animusphere and the Faculty of Law had ample funds to attempt for a clean sweep. If that was the case, they would need to be able to spin on a dime, maneuvering together to secure any sort of powerful Mystic Eyes that they were looking for. That was the tactic of Yvette, whose only interest was in a subject to study, not in any particular set of Mystic Eyes.

"Not a bad idea," Jeanmario scratched his chin.

"And what about you, old man? If you're selling, is there anyone you're hoping will buy?"

"...not particularly. I'm not that interested in the money, anyways."

Waving a hand at the old man sitting apart from them, Karabo answered with a taciturn shake of his head.

At that moment,

"Hm?"

"-what?"

The announcement played through the room's speakers.

~Part 4~

"-We have an announcement to make for our guests," the broadcast came over the speakers.

"The Rail Zeppelin has been diverted from its intended course. At current estimates, we will be entering a Child of Ainnash in approximately thirty minutes."

The conductor's composed voice rang in the air.

The meaning of that announcement was then made clear.

"With our sincerest apologies, we must ask that each guest take measures to assure their own safety until the time of the auction."

"...wha-" I blurted out.

In short, 'we're going somewhere terribly dangerous, good luck.' 'You probably won't be safe even in the train, just so you know.'

Not just me, but both Caules and Olga Marie wore shocked expressions.

It was an entirely impossible to predict scenario. Even just to think that the Rail Zeppelin itself would suffer such a diversion.

"Is this the culprit's work? Or something to do with Hephaestion?"

"I don't know. For all we know, they are the same person," Caules' voice grated.

"But...it seems this isn't just a murder incident anymore..."

With a clunk, the train lurched to the side.

Clinging to the headboard of her bed, Olga Marie's expression changed as she pointed outside.

"Look-"

As we followed her finger, Caules and I both caught our breath.

"It's...snowing..."

Mixed with the fog from before, it had begun to snow.

In moments, the gently falling snow became a violent blizzard. Like the silvered breath of God, the intensity continued to mount. Was this a result of the Child of Ainnash the announcement had mentioned? With the entire situation suddenly turned on its head, it was clear this was no case of a simple false report.

A grinding sound filled the room.

The sound of teeth.

"...so according to that announcement, we just need to survive until the auction."

"Miss Olga Marie..."

"Just so you know, I'm not your ally or anything. Animusphere's debt to you has already been repaid," she bit off.

Standing up, she began to leave. With a wave of her silver hair,

"I'll do it myself. I'm fine on my own. No...it'll be easier if I'm alone. Trisha taught me how to fend for myself well enough. But more importantly..."

Turning around, she settled her gaze on the bed.

"Can you really keep him safe through this?"

I couldn't answer. All I could do was watch as she left the room.

It was just like she said. The murder incident, the auction, even the attack from that Servant all seemed suddenly distant. If the announcement was correct, we would be

barrelling straight into hell - and my master, Lord El-Melloi II, was still so injured as to be unconscious.

All I could do was stand there in shock.

◆ 幕間 ◆
-Interlude-

-let us turn the clock back slightly.

The day before.

The second day Gray and her companions spent on the Rail Zeppelin.

In the lobby of Norwich's main building on Slur Street, a furious voice rang out.

"Whatever, just get out of my way! The only one I need to speak to is Reines El-Melloi Archisorte-"

(Whew, that's a lot of blood) Reines thought with a scowl as the guest began to vomit.

That was someone who would vomit blood from only a little exertion. Stand? Vomit. Walk? Vomit. Run? They'd look like a bloodstained zombie. While it looked fine enough from the outside, without hematopoietics, he'd be dead within a day.

To be honest, at this point she just wanted to pretend she wasn't around, but it seemed that wouldn't work.

After a while, the young man burst through her door, violin case in hand.

"Miss! What is going on here-" he tried to say, before being interrupted by more vomiting.

"First of all, sir, please clean that up."

Offering only a cold reception, Reines tidied up the documents she had been looking over.

About a third of the work of the Lord came to her like this. When her brother wasn't around, that number jumped to basically one hundred percent, so it typically left her in

a desperate situation. And even though she technically had the time for this, this was someone she didn't want to give even a second to.

"I'm afraid my brother is absent. If you would like to leave a message, I would be happy to take it for you."

"No, not that! Why did my good friend Waver not tell me he was going to the Rail Zeppelin?!"

"Because it's none of your business, probably."

"No! As the person responsible for your Source Crest, and since you're using his body as collateral - no, just because I'm his friend, you have an obligation to tell me that much! That's why I told you that Waver was acting strange!"

Puffing himself up, he struck his chest with a fist...apparently too hard, as it sent him into a coughing fit.

So you're the one who gave him the money to make it to Japan for the Fourth Holy Grail War, she thought, though she didn't say anything. For someone as inexperienced and friendless as her brother had been at that time, it was impressive how much that decision had changed the course of the entire Clock Tower's history. To think that the history of magecraft was completely changed over the decision of whether to buy a ticket or not was enough to make one laugh, but the rest of history was like that too, wasn't it?

That's right.

At this point, this was the only person who called him Waver. The reason he hadn't been completely crushed when he took over the El-Melloi Classroom back then was this man alone.

His name was Melvin Weins. He was the same age as her brother at around thirty. His colourless white hair and eyelashes gave the impression of an albino. With his pale blue eyes and frustratingly well put together features, he likely would have stood out even as a movie star. And on top of all of that, he belonged to a branch family of one of the Three Great Aristocratic families. If it hadn't been for his naturally weak body, who

knows how far above his current position of a Fes ranked Tuner he would have reached?

With a sigh, Reines shook her head.

"Unfortunately, even I was only informed he was attending the Rail Zeppelin a few days ago. At any rate, a single invitation to that train only permits two attendants. Apparently he selected two of his students this time, so as you can see I've been quite busy with paperwork."

"In that case, it can't be helped. I'll just have to go alone," the man said.

In response, Reines tilted her head.

"You? Alone? ...oh, you are!"

"Yes! While I couldn't go for the Holy Grail War or those other recent incidents due to my condition, I've been feeling better recently. I should have no problem going out for a few days!"

He flashed his brilliant white teeth.

At the same time, he showed off a white envelope proudly.

"Of course, my family went to all extremes to acquire an invitation to the Rail Zeppelin! Even by myself, I must go see Waver's sobbing face for myself!"

That's right.

This man was certainly Waver's "friend." But that didn't necessarily mean he was Waver's "ally." If that were the case, he never would have sent her brother off to participate in something as dangerous as the Holy Grail War. In a way, he was a greater intellectual criminal than even Reines, and a greater prankster than even Flat.

"So, let's hurry! The sooner the better! The starting bell has already rung!"

With a bright voice, the young man - Melvin made his grand declaration.

Outside the window, a helicopter he must have called, whipping up a powerful wind, floated into view.



-Afterword-

Makoto Sanda

-a single look was like a poisoned arrow.

That circulating poison was the essence of night.

The love of heroes, the death of a great god, all as those eyes wished.

Mystic Eyes.

That alluring gadget starred in the opening work of the world of Type Moon.

'As long as it lives, even if its God Himself, I can kill it.' Those Mystic Eyes of Death Perception, born by the main characters of *Tsukihime* and *Kara no Kyoukai*, fascinated many a reader.

That was the rebirth of a myth, wasn't it?

It would be no exaggeration to say the Evil Eye was the oldest magic humanity, and in that moment it gained new life. Even after ten years with my own work "Rental Magica," the lure of Mystic Eyes still pulls me strongly.

That's why the setting of the Mystic Eye Collecting Train (*Rail Zeppelin*) was always one I quietly hoped would make it into the "Lord El-Melloi II's Case Files." Fortunately, since I had no plans to write it in another work should it fail to make it into this one, I was able to make it happen. ...huh? In Volume 1, I had said no one else planned on writing anything about Lord El-Melloi II, but didn't he show up as the main character in some FGO event? Adults don't lie. They are just, ever so rarely, wrong. After that, all I can say is that there are no plans.

From here on out, there will be a few spoilers.

-----Spoilers-----

From the beginning, I had hoped these Case Files would serve as a way to connect the old Type Moon with the new, but I feel like that came across stronger in this work.

The Rail Zeppelin itself was also the same, but the "woman" that showed up in the latter half was someone modelled after the Fourth Holy Grail War Kinoko Nasu had vaguely drawn up even before giving the task of writing it to Gen Urobuchi. Beyond her gender, the idea of her chariot being drawn by a species of dragon was also part of the original idea. Of course, there are some necessary changes that will have to happen...from now on, I will have to do that myself.

With Caules and Olga Marie, and even Waver's close friend that Reines alluded to a few times coming in at the end, with how much weight has been built up behind the scenes with the setting of the Clock Tower, I feel like I've barely been able to put a tenth of it on the page.

-----End of Spoilers-----

Keeping pace with a unique character like Lord El-Melloi II feels like carefully examining a terribly old, terrifyingly thick magic tome page by page. No man is an island, but especially in his case, he is wrapped up in so much thanks to the position of Lord being forced on him.

If we just lined up the things he should know, and the people he should recognize by virtue of him being a Lord, I wonder how far that spider web would stretch? My wish is that this novel will help unravel that mystery, while maintaining an enchanting tale.

The series has sort of reached a turning point here.

With this, the second half of "Lord El-Melloi II's Case Files" will begin. Please look forward to watching as Lord El-Melloi II, along with Gray, Flat, and the rest of the El-Melloi Classroom, come to terms with the new incidents they will be facing.

Finally, I would like to share my appreciation for Mineji Sakamoto, for coming up with so many new character designs for me, Kiyomune Miwa for courteously investigating and explaining the complicated matters of magecraft for me, Yuuichiro Higashide and

Hikaru Sakurai for working with me on the minor adjustments to the characters of Caules and Olga Marie that appeared in their many works, Ryogo Narita, and finally Kinoko Nasu, OK SG, and the rest of the staff at Type Moon.

I hope to see you again this winter.

June, 2016

While playing "Witch on the Holy Night."

PS: Some particularly avid fans of Type Moon may have noticed a 'typo' in the Kanji for the name Mystic Eye Collecting Train. This change was an intentional, stylistic choice. Please think of it as just a weird Japanese translation.