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三田 誠

「case. 魔眼蒐集列車（下）」

イラスト 坂本みねぢ

レール・シェッペリン

# 事件簿のメロディ





ロード・エルメロイⅡ世の事件簿

レール・ヴェッヘリン  
「case.魔眼蒐集列車(下)」

三田 誠

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グレイ…エルメロイⅡ世の内弟子  
ロード・エルメロイⅡ世…時計塔現代魔術科君主



Characters Lord El-Melloi Case Files



悲鳴をこらえるので精一杯だった。

ロード 時計塔は君主の一族に生まれ、この列車でも従者の殺人などという事件に遭ったばかりの彼女にしてからが、それは想像もしなかった光景だったからだ。

「なんなのよこれ……！ おかしい、おかしいわよ！ どうなってるのよ！ どういうことなのよトリシャ！」

——2章より

# The Case Files of Lord El-Melloi II



“Mystic Eyes Collection Train (Lower)”

TYPE-MOON BOOKS  
サA-05



Lord El-Melloi  
W  
Case Files

# The Case Files of Lord El-Melloi II

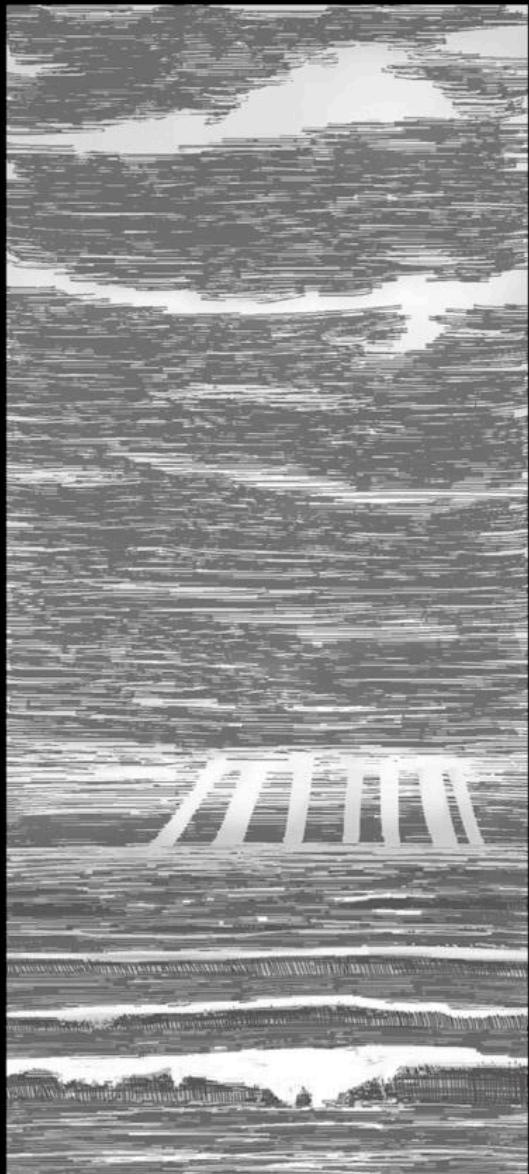
case. Mystic Eyes Collection Train (Lower)

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◆序章◆

-Prologue-



I knew this wasn't real. There was no way this scene would happen in real life.

It appeared to be some sort of shore. But rather than the calm, gentle feeling that word would imply, the tremendous amounts of spray from the sea drowned out my vision. The avalanche of seawater, stretching out even to the horizon, made even the word "tremendous" seem somehow insufficient. The echoing sound of falling water hurt my ears to the point I thought they might break.

There were no clouds in the sky, nor was there wind on the land. The falling seawater was all there was.

A place at the very edge of the world, so far removed from the lives of ordinary people.

In short,

"...the sea at the end of the world," I murmured.

Was the fact that spear also bore the name of "at the end of the world" really just a coincidence?

Did this place, as well as that spear, not act as some sort of regulation for the concept of the Far side, where humans couldn't reach? As ridiculous as it may have been, those kinds of thoughts dominated my mind. Reaching for it precisely because it's unreachable- "Glory lies beyond the horizon" - this place seemed like it was shaped by the remnants of an era that held to those words.

The remnants of a dream.

A place one should reach.

"-no," a voice denied the thought. A voice so cold it made my breath catch. "No one ever reached this place."

The freezing over of those words was not just a metaphor. Before those words, the world instantly lost its character.

As I watched, the waves turned white, and time came to a halt. The cascading sea water froze in place, and waves of ice all began to shatter. The spray that filled my vision became a cloud of icy dust, and in that singular moment, the world took on a different form.

Turning to look, I saw a single figure standing on what was once a beach. Though I couldn't make out her face as she hung her head, hatred seemed to drip from her long black hair, as if it was seeking to overtake the surging waves.

Oh sea, become ice.

Oh world, become still.

Before my will, bring everything into disgrace.

"My king," the figure spoke.

"My king," even though there was no one there to hear.

Yet still the roar echoed, as if the one who those words were meant for absolutely should have been there.

"Why did you seek after such a thing? Why could you not let this go? You must have known it was just a dream. Why couldn't you let it stay a dream?!"

Overflowing with ferocity, the accusations nevertheless were mixed with both love and anger. Hearing those screams boil up, even I felt myself grow dizzy.

Unable to stand, at the same time a new thought crossed my mind.

-whose dream was this?

-who am I, watching this dream?

With that woman standing tall before me, my mind was filled with those questions.

That's right, that woman's name was...

(...Hephaestion...?)

As my splintered consciousness spat out that name, another roar rocked the world.

◆ 第一章 ◆  
-Chapter 1-



**~Part 1~**

My eyes snapped open.

Staring around at the luxurious room inside the gently shaking train car, it took a short time before I realized I was back in reality.

I had lost consciousness, maybe for a few seconds, or perhaps a few minutes.

I felt like I had just seen some sort of dream, but I couldn't remember it at all. I just felt terrible. It was a fairly common occurrence back in my hometown. I must have been drawn in by something nearby. On somewhere as infamous as the Rail Zeppelin, it wouldn't be strange at all for there to be any sort of mystical presence.

Pulling the covers up to hide my feelings, I muttered.

"...it's getting colder, isn't it?"

"Yeah, it looks like the heating isn't doing much good anymore," Caules responded, looking over at the fireplace in our room.

It had been a while since the Rail Zeppelin had entered the blizzard. The raging storm had painted over the world outside the window in monochrome. The sky was grey, and everything else was white. The unnatural fury of the storm was plainly obvious from the fact that even the train running through a closed-off world had to come to a stop.

Slowly, ever so slowly, the cold outside had begun encroaching on the interior.

Had the announcement earlier telling us to fend for ourselves been referring to this?

"The professor is...."

"...for now, he seems fine, but..."

Following Caules' gaze, I looked at the bed.

As he lay on the bed, my master's breathing was becoming faintly harder. We had since been changing his bandages and keeping the water hot, doing everything in our power to help, but it was hard to imagine this situation was good for his wounded body. The cold air seeping into the train wasn't just a temperature difference. It was like the breath of a demon, stealing the energy of the people within it. So my intuition told me.

Every second that passed shaved off another sliver of life.

Like the flame of a candle wavering in the breeze, my master's life was quivering.

I couldn't stand it. It felt like there was a stone caught in the back of my throat. I couldn't breathe properly, and it felt like some otherworldly hand was gripping my stomach. If it was going to feel like this, I'd rather it just took my heart and got it over with.

Olga Marie had yet to return.

I'll handle this myself. I'm fine on my own. Rather, it'll be easier by myself. Trisha taught me so I could handle myself, after all.

Having said that, maybe she had no intention of returning.

After deciding to try and help her, having her leave of her own accord was undeniably disheartening. Seemingly unconcerned with her departure, however, Caules just continued to split his attention between the blizzard outside and my sleeping master, his expression serious.

(...perhaps that's just how magi are...)

In a way, he had the nature of a magus in a way that exceeded even my own master's. Unlike Flat or Svin, his ability in magecraft wasn't that of a genius. Maybe that's why one could see the true nature of a magus so plainly in him, I thought.

(But which is correct?)

Maybe because of the cold, my thoughts just spun in circles.

Talent. Bloodline. Family. Skill. Attribute. Disposition. Magic Circuits and Magic Crests.

There were plenty of components that made up a magus. All the first rate magi I came across in my time with my master had all of those elements. First on the list was of course the Grand Touko Aozaki, but Lord Valueleta and the Butterfly Magecraft user Orlocke Caesermund could both definitely be described as first rate. Even so, my master definitely hadn't fallen behind them. Simply because he was inferior as a Lord, even Reines had evaluated him as a mediocre magus.

If that was true, what was the most important factor for a magus?

What was the most correct way of living for a magus?

With those useless thoughts spinning around in my head, I suddenly lifted my head.

Another person was now standing in our room.

"Gray?" It seemed Caules couldn't see her.

But I could definitely see - a pale woman, wrapped in crimson roses. Rather than having just appeared, she stood as if she had been there the entire time, and I had only just noticed her.

I was vaguely aware that the wind coming from the gap in the window was causing her rose-clad hair to sway.

"Who are...?" The conductor had mentioned her.

The owner's representative. Once the owner had departed, she had begun protecting the Rail Zeppelin. A person even the staff of the train rarely saw.

By the time I thought to look at the entrance of the room, she had already disappeared. Just as the first time I saw her, she vanished just as quickly as she had appeared.

In her place,

"Excuse me~!" Someone knocked on the door.

The voice was filled with an unmistakable vigor. Completely out of place in this unnatural blizzard and on board this train - or perhaps so astoundingly over the top to be perfectly appropriate - there was only one person who it could be.

In my place, Caules nodded and made his way to the door.

As he nervously cracked the door open, just as I had expected, a set of pink twintails now blocked the doorway.

"Heheheheh! It's Yvette~! Are you guys doing okay?"

"Sorry, we're kind of in the middle of something."

"Hey, don't be so cold! And don't just shut the door on me!" Though he tried to shut the door immediately, she slipped her foot in the way at just the right time. Looking up at the bespectacled young man, Yvette tilted her head to the side.

"Hmmm?! Are you trying to hide something in here?!"

"Of course not..."

"Heheheh! I've got the perfect, the surprising, the Mystic Eye of Sympathy! You can't hide anything from me!" With a proud laugh, Yvette slid her eyepatch up.

Underneath shone a polished jewel - a refined green malachite. Even as unstudied as I was, the glow shining from that jewel was obviously magical enough to make me swallow nervously. With a confident sniff she continued.

"Even without Mystic Eyes, others like Svin are always saying you smell square, or irritated or something like that, right? Mixing synesthesia with Bestial Magecraft is kind of annoying in its own way, don't you think?"

"If you understand we've got something going on here, then could you at least leave it up to your imagination for now?" Along with his cold response, Caules attempted to kick Yvette's foot out of the doorway, prompting her to continue in a rush.

"Waitwaitwaitwaitwait! Wait a second, come on! I have something I need to talk about! See, I even brought him along-"

"...that's correct," I felt someone else nod from outside the door.

Karabo Frampton. The old man from the Holy Church, with the Mystic Eyes of Hindsight. It appeared Yvette had brought him along.

"From the Church," Caules said with a wince, expectedly hesitant.

For Caules, who was used to the conflicts between magi, he seemed more than aware of the difficulty that would be had in dealing with members of that institution, which sought to eliminate Mystery itself from the world.

"Or would you rather we just yelled at you from out here?!"

Though that just made me want to comment on how she already was yelling at us, it was hard to deny that the longer this took, the worse off we'd be. Reluctantly, Caules finally let the door swing open.

"...fine. Come on in."

As if giving up, he invited the two of them inside.

Waltzing into the room triumphantly, Yvette's eyes immediately went wide.

"Professor! What happened!" Waving her hands energetically, she rushed over to his bed.

Because my master was lying on his side. The fact he wasn't just sleeping was plainly obvious from his strained breathing. Though we wiped clear his sweat from time to time, there was no way he could look like he was in good condition.

"It was an accident, of sorts," Caules explained curtly.

"Was that...by the same person who killed Trisha?"

"We don't know," he answered truthfully. Perhaps because of her Mystic Eye of Sympathy, he had decided there was no point in trying to deceive her. That being said, hesitating to give her any unnecessary information like that they had been attacked by a Servant, he had decided it was better to just speak as little as possible.

"So, what do you want?"

"Hm, well, the train is stopped now, right?" As Caules tried to get to the point, Yvette pointed at the floor with a bitter smile.

Returning our attention to the unmoving train, she continued.

"At this rate, the Mystic Eye Auction will be significantly delayed - or depending on circumstances, this year's auction might be cancelled altogether. So we're collecting people."

"The auction?" Now that she mentioned it, I remembered there was one time when the auction was cancelled.

Apparently it had something to do with Touko Aozaki and her familiar. It was probably the same incident that caused the original owner to disappear. -if it happened once, it could happen again. At least, thinking like that was perfectly normal.

"...for me, this auction is a matter of life and death," Karabo spoke up in a dry voice.

"As I mentioned earlier, my intention is to sell my Mystic Eyes. I can't wait until next year. Of course, even without the auction, there is still a possibility of having them removed, but there are too many uncertainties in that. I can't afford to sit around and do nothing."

"But wouldn't the staff here be willing to just buy them from you for now?" I asked, to which he gently shook his head.

"...the staff here are, for the most part, entirely uninterested in Mystic Eyes."

"What?" I instinctively blurted out.

"But, this is the Rail Zeppelin, right? The Mystic Eye Collecting Train? Even if the original owner is no longer here, they plan on continuing the auction, right?" On top of that, from what I had heard, they even went so far as to forcibly take the Mystic Eyes they were interested in from those who were unwilling to part with them. How could a staff that was willing to go that far not be interested in Mystic Eyes?

"To put it simply, the staff here are only interested in continuing the work," Yvette added.

"Though it was originally an auction set up so their master could show off her collection of Mystic Eyes, with that master gone, they are just continuing the auction without any underlying purpose. As such, it wouldn't be that surprising if they called it off if things went even a little wrong, right? Rather, it would be more natural that they wouldn't want to continue the auction at all unless conditions were perfect, in memory of their old master."

I listened, dumbfounded. Their objective and their methods were completely opposite. The fact their master had begun the auctions just to show off her collection was surprising enough, but the idea that the staff were continuing it without any meaning was even more astounding. It was like a computer running a program. Like the gears of an ancient clock, marking time in perpetuity. Falsely similar to the life of a magus, it was an entirely hollow existence.

No.

To avoid any misunderstandings, it was something they had to do. I wasn't at a loss for words because it was so hard to believe. It was the opposite. I understood it all too well.

(...just like my home...)

Even though the meaning was lost, the act was continued to the present day - in a way, I was the result of that behavior.

"We talked to Jeanmario earlier," Yvette said, crossing her arms with a frown.

He didn't seem to care, taking an "if it's late, then it's late" attitude.

Depending on the situation aboard the Rail Zeppelin, the expectations and relationships between the participants of the auction would change over time. For someone like me who was somewhat antisocial, those kinds of relationships already seemed like some sort of mysterious magecraft, but for someone like Yvette who was comfortable calling herself a spy within the complicated network of power and authority within the Clock Tower, it must have been like second nature to her.

"Alright, I understand. The train being stopped is also an issue for us," Caules spoke, almost bored.

"But what do you plan to do about it?" In response to the boy's question, old man in a priest's robes nodded slowly.

"I know a little bit about this forest. ...within the Holy Church, it's a topic that comes up now and again."

"In the Holy Church?"

"Yes. The main body of this forest - Ainnash is said to be controlled by a certain Dead Apostle."

"...a Dead Apostle," Caules repeated.

"Ainnash. An independently thinking, predatory creature, it is speculated to be a Reality Marble controlled by a high level Dead Apostle of the same name. Appearing once every fifty years or so, it attacks groups of people, using a huge amount of magical energy in order to nourish the fruit at its center."

Dead Apostle. A name repeated a number of times on this train, one of the bloodsucking species.

It was only natural the Holy Church would have some knowledge of them. They were an organization that opposed the Dead Apostles even more severely than they opposed the Magic Association. They saw Dead Apostles as an existence opposed to Humanity itself.

(...ah.)

And there was one more fact I finally recognized.

Even more than the magi on board, the staff of this auction run by a Dead Apostle must have been even more nervous about the intentions of a person from the Holy Church joining the auction.

"You said it nourished a fruit with magical energy?"

"How magus-like of you. You understand what that means?" With a bitter smile, Karabo explained.

"That fruit is the reason this demonic forest gathers people. There's also the fake legend that whoever eats it becomes immortal."

At Karabo's words, Caules and I both caught our breath.

Even more absurd than the idea of magecraft - to that phenomenon like one might see in a child's fairy tale, we had no response.

(...it's almost like...)

It was an illusion almost like that Heroic Spirit we happened to meet yesterday.

At the same time, when put in the same breath as the words Dead Apostle, it was impossible to deny the possibility no matter how absurd it was. On top of that, if it was also spoken of within the Holy Church, there must have been some truth to it.

Karabo continued.

"I said it was fake, but no one has ever eaten that fruit. However, apparently when the fruit becomes fully mature, it begins to drip blood. Even though no one has ever eaten it, that alone was enough to start a rumor about immortality. Some of those drops become seeds, and after a period of time, they evolve into a different form than that of their parent. -the Children of Ainnash are the end result of that. It seems this Child has chosen ice and snow," he finished, looking out the window.

Finally, the story came together. In short, as a result of this fight between Dead Apostles, this frozen forest had attacked us.

"...normally, Dead Apostles rarely interfere with each other's territory, but it appears the owner of the Rail Zeppelin has been missing for some time. And it's not like the Child of Ainnash is being managed by someone either. It's not particularly strange that they would eventually butt heads."

"I see..."

If that was the case, then was that pale woman's appearance - the appearance of the Manager's Representative so that we might hear this information?

(...I wonder...)

As my thoughts started to stray into wild delusions, I decided to put a stop to them for now.

As I had learned in the previous incidents, when I overthought things, I just made the situation worse. Rather than getting lost in the labyrinth of my own thoughts, I was better off just accomplishing the small things I was capable of doing one at a time.

After a long period of silence, Caules spoke up again.

"So in the end, how do you plan on getting out of this forest?"

"According to the conductor, if we can find a leyline, we'll be able to start moving right away."

The last time the train had stopped, I had been told that the Rail Zeppelin ran over leylines. It appeared as if the train coming to a stop here was because of that same rule.

A black blade suddenly extended from Karabo's fist.

It was the same Black Key that he had used to knock out Olga Marie when she had grown hysterical after Trisha's death.

"The train's inability to follow the leylines is a result of the forest's magical meddling. So, if we go ahead on foot to find that main leyline and lay out markings to guide the train forward, escaping the forest shouldn't be that difficult."

It sounded logical to me.

But that meant we would have to go out into that blizzard, into the forest itself. If what Karabo said was correct, then the entire land here was a thinking creature, a demonic forest intent on devouring people.

"So? Will you help us?" Yvette said, her lone eye shining.

I couldn't respond right away.

My body was trembling right down to its core. Images of Trisha's body continued to flicker in the back of my mind. Her head completely removed. A truly merciless way to die.

These two were no doubt still suspects.

Even so, would we help them to explore this frozen forest? This was a situation that had long since lost any semblance of sanity. Rather than talking about shouldering the risk, it felt more like acting suicidal. If my master was awake, he would no doubt tell us we should stay here, safe in our room.

But,

"...okay," I nodded.

"Gray?"

"If we don't do something about this cold, our master won't make it," I answered Caules without turning to look at him. To be honest, I had no idea what kind of expression I was wearing. All I knew was that my teeth were rattling.

A deep sigh. Was he that surprised? For some who was, unlike me, a true student of my master, my agreeing to cooperate with them may have looked incredibly foolish to Caules. For a magus, maybe it was better to be as heartless as possible.

But instead, Caules just replied with an indifferent air.

"Got it. In that case, I'll focus on treating the Professor. Just give me five minutes to check if I have anything that might help you out."

Opening his bag, he began to pull out all sorts of Talismans and catalysts.

Only able to stare dumbly, I blinked repeatedly.

"Caules?"

"I don't know what that expression is for, but being generous to your allies is also the mark of a magus. At least, up until the last minute."

As Caules spoke with an awkward laugh, I finally noticed a slight tremble in his hand.

I finally realized I wasn't the only one here struggling to keep on top of their fear. Relaxing my stiffened body, I let out a long breath.

"Ihihihi! Looks like you found something you can do after all, huh?!"

Though Add spoke softly enough that only I could hear it, I pressed down on my right shoulder to shut him up by force just in case. While I was a little happy to have a friend by my side to watch over me, it was too annoying to let him speak.

"...actually," Caules suddenly spoke up.

"When Animusphere's servant - when Trisha Fellows' body was found, was there anyone that seemed somewhat flustered?"

"Hm? Well, I was never actually there, I suppose," Yvette replied, tilting her head to the side. Combined with her appearance, that behavior made it seem like she was messing with us, but for now we had no choice but to trust her. Because regardless, with my master unconscious, there were only so many options left available to us.

"Let's go. To the Child of Ainnash."

"Answer me, Iskandar!"

**~Part 2~**

Ultimately, our first foray into the forest lasted about five minutes.

Before we could set up the first marker, we found a person collapsed in the forest, in a dense thicket near the train.

Under a thick layer of ferns, the figure had a healthy pile of snow on top. At Karabo's suspicious touch, the layer of snow slid off, revealing the person underneath.

"...and this is?" Karabo said in a calm baritone.

It wasn't someone I recognized. His hair and eyebrows were white enough to blend into the snow. His tall frame and slender limbs gave the impression of someone in their late twenties. He had a face that would probably make nine out of every ten passersby turn and look.

But there was a different reason we were staring at him.

Clasped in his slim fingers was a violin case...and a crumpled envelope.

"Is this an invitation? So, he was invited to the Rail Zeppelin?"

"Uh, umm..." Yvette frowned. As her gaze wandered over to me,

"Bleaerhg!" The snow covered young man vomited blood.

The pure white snow was suddenly dyed red, a colour that was rapidly spreading. I reflexively cried out at the sudden vivid red spreading right before my eyes. Since I had met my master, I had come across all sorts of incidents, but it was the first time I had seen blood spew out like this.

"Is, is he dying?"

"...no no, I'm fine. I'm quite used to his. I've got my medicine, don't worry."

The pale faced young man raised his face with a bright smile.

"Huh? What? What?!"

"...sorry,ahaha. Just as I was thinking that it was getting kind of cold, suddenly I couldn't move my body anymore. If you are all guests on the Rail Zeppelin, could you do me a favour and carry me over there?" Despite the young man appearing to be on death's door, he spoke incredibly casually.

It was like being spoken to by a corpse. Despite his terribly pale face and purpling lips as he lay collapsed in the snow, his expression alone was like that of a man relaxing in a summer resort. The encounter being completely unexpected, both Yvette and Karabo were frozen in place.

As if in a daze, the beautiful young man continued to murmur dreamily.

"...yeah, yeah. That was dangerous, I was about to freeze to death. I need to tell Mom, then find some women to warm me up. ...yeah, this time a Hispanic girl sounds nice. Well, it would be hard to say no to a Russian girl for times like this, either. Actually, if I want to get warmed up, maybe a passionate Latina would be best? Women are all angels, but they all bring different kinds of happiness, don't they?"

"Oh, he's just a scumbag, then."

"Yes, just a scumbag."

With barely the space for a comma in between, Yvette and I shared our opinion. Just as I was thinking over whether we could get away with just leaving him here in the snow, his bright blue eyes looked up at me.

"Hmmm, you wouldn't happen to be that disciple Waver is always taking with him, would you?" My shoulders jumped.

"...you know me?"

"Hahaha, of course I do. I'm Waver's closest friend, after all!"

"Waver?" Wasn't that my master's real name? The actual identity behind Lord El-Melloi II, before that title had been branded on him by Reines.

"Umm, who are you?"

"Ah, right. My name is Melvibvrueaofrugbaiyog!" Once again, a huge amount of blood spewed from his mouth.



In the end, we ended up taking him back to the train.

Returning to the lobby car, after putting a cup of hot coffee in his hands, finally some semblance of human consciousness seemed to return to him.

"Ahahaha. Man, thank you. I appreciate you making the coffee for me, even after dragging me all the way here."

"...if you're an acquaintance of my master, I couldn't just leave you be."

Despite my emphasis, whether he heard me or not, he just kept sipping his coffee.

Looking at him like he was some sort of third rate conman, Yvette finally spoke.

"You're Melvin Weins?"

"Ah, you know me!" he snapped his fingers with a bright smile.

He then put a finger to his cheek as he closed one eye, in a way that was terribly annoying.

Yvette continued her questioning, not bothering to hide the suspicion in her voice in the slightest.

"For being a Tuner rumored to never step outside your Workshop, what brought you all the way here?"

"Ahahahaha, well. Recently I've been feeling pretty good. I heard Waver got invited to the Rail Zeppelin, so I wanted to come see it for myself. By the way, I invited Reines to come with me, but she just called me an idiot for trying to get her to leave while her brother was gone. So anyways, I tried to make it to the meetup point for the Rail Zeppelin, when suddenly a forest popped up out of the ground."

There was a small part of that I couldn't let go.

"You invited Reines? No, before that, a forest sprung up out of the ground?"

"Yeah! The wasteland just suddenly changed into a forest, like I was in a video game or something. Actually, it was quite the sight to behold."

Raising a finger gingerly, the young man - Melvin continued.

"In the end, some tentacle-like branches or something shot out from the forest and grabbed my helicopter. Ahaha, with the way they ripped apart the rotor blades and tore through the hull like it was paper, I fully expected I was going to die. But I managed to get out just before it crashed, and managed to scuttle my way out. Partway through that I happened to pass out, but luckily you all found me."

Watching him laugh brightly while clutching his blanket around himself, I felt my throat tighten. In short, this bizarre forest even had the ability to knock a helicopter out of the sky.

For magi, flight was incredibly difficult, so there shouldn't be anyone able to catch up to this train...so my master had said. But the fact a magus would pursue the train with a helicopter, and that it would be knocked out of the sky by a forest was no doubt something he had never even imagined.

As if an icicle had been dropped down my back, a chill ran up my spine.

Though I had heard similar things from Karabo, coming face to face with someone who had personally experienced it gave birth to a whole new kind of fear.

Turning away from the nonchalantly laughing young man, I whispered to Yvette.

"...who is this person?"

"He's from a family attached to the Three Great Aristocratic Families. But, since his body is weak, he switched over to being a Fes-ranked Tuner. I heard he was an old friend of the Professor, but..." Yvette replied, clearly annoyed.

For such a response from the girl who had happily declared herself as Meluastea's spy, he must have been a person that couldn't be taken lightly.

(A Tuner is...)

Someone who tunes Magic Crests, if I remembered correctly. Though they couldn't do such magnificent restorations as what we were told were possible at the Castle of Separation, they could apparently intervene in the natural process of transplanting Magic Crests to reduce the side effects on the recipient. Though I of course didn't know the details about any magecraft, I understood to some degree that it was a somewhat rare specialty within the Clock Tower.

"He's certified as the best Tuner in all of Great Britain. As far as conventional methods are concerned, there's barely anyone that can hold a candle to him when it comes to the recovery of Magic Crests."

"Unfortunately, that's a 'barely' not a 'no one,'" Melvin interjected, scratching his cheek with a bitter smile.

After that, with a restless look around the gorgeous train car, he tilted his head to the side.

"So, where's Waver?"

"...I'll take you to him." Standing up, I guided him from the lobby to our private room.

Though shocked at our much earlier than expected return, after giving a rough explanation of the circumstances, he nodded and pointed to my master, still on his side.

"...what an idiot," Melvin spoke calmly as he looked over my master, sweat beading on his sleeping forehead.

"Just like always, not a single thing has changed with this idiot. There are so many easier ways you could live your life, you know."

Why?

Even though he was such a suspicious person, those words sunk right through me. You could say because I completely agreed. It made me feel like this young Crest Tuner felt the same way I did.

Maybe that was naive of me, but I wanted to think so.

A cough sounded out from behind us.

"May I?" Karabo called out to us from behind.

"It seems he is not in any danger, so I feel as though we should return to our original goal. Considering he had crawled this close from his downed helicopter, the possibility that the exit to this forest is rather close."

"That's right."

Of course, there was also the possibility he was struck down because he came so close to the center of the forest, but there was no way of knowing either way from within the train.

"Hm. Since the Rail Zeppelin has stopped, you are trying to set up markers to guide it out," Melvin said, turning to us. His expression was, as always, a gentle smile that hid everything beneath it. "In that case, would you mind if I joined you?"

### ~Part 3~

Moving through the frozen forest was more difficult than I had anticipated.

With each step, I sunk into the snow up to my ankles. With our vision completely obscured by white, we would regularly come across bushes and branches sticking out at unexpected angles, blocking our progress. Thanks to cold resistant charm Caules had given me, the cold wasn't so bad, but it still felt like my feet would freeze in place if I stopped moving.

Yvette, Karabo, and Melvin.

The four of us pressed on into the forest. Karabo held a Black Key in his hands, using it as a dowsing instrument. Though it was a practice still used today to find sources of water and veins of ore, when used by an Executor of the Church, I imagined the degree of precision was likely much higher.

One after another, our footsteps crunched through the snow.

It felt like each step took ten times as much energy as normal. Feeling like the scenery around us differed from that I had seen from the train window, I tilted my head to the side.

"Did it really look like this before?"

"The landscape itself is likely being manipulated," Karabo said with a heavy voice.

"As I mentioned before, the original Ainnash was something that appeared once every fifty years, lasting only for a few days, manifesting as something similar to a Reality Marble. The Children of Ainnash are similar, but the currently accepted theory is that no two of them manifest in the same way. Most likely, each one persists until it has completely exhausted its supply of magical energy."

"...the Children only appear once..."

Something about that had a sad ring to it. Normally, aren't children supposed to outlive their parents? But the Children of Ainnash appeared only once, before disappearing forever.

"Apparently it is fairly common for them to only appear for a short period of time. Though that depends greatly on the individual Child."

"Even so, it's not like we can just sit around and wait it out." At my reply, Karabo gave a small nod.

At the very least, we were all aware of that.

"You seem to be quite concerned about Waver," Melvin spoke up from beside me.

"...he is my master, after all."

"I guess that's true, but..." he replied with a bitter smile, not slowing his walking.

Unlike when we first found him, he was now wearing appropriate clothing for dealing with the cold, but he still seemed unexpectedly energetic. Even walking through this much snow, he was barely breathing any harder than normal. My master would certainly be gasping for breath at this point. That said, he had spat up blood twice already.

"...you are quite different from my master, aren't you?" "Hm? Ahh, yeah, he's not very good at Strengthening, is he? For something like this, you just need to let your Magic Circuits take over for your nerves, so if it just comes down to moving, it's nothing special. Unfortunately that doesn't work so well for your other internal organs, but as long as your heart doesn't stop, walking should be no problem."

It sounded like he had just said something incredibly dangerous, but I supposed magi were generally like that.

Spinning his wrists, Melvin frowned faintly.

"But, the Mana here is hard to use. Is the forest affecting the air here as well?"

"According to our previous investigation, that seems likely. However, it's not quite as bad as the original Ainnash. According to the Church's records, Mana is entirely unusable within the main body. Using any sort of large scale magecraft becomes quite difficult there."

"...I guess you could call it a magus slayer, couldn't you? Even just using Mystic Eyes for investigating is pretty tiring~" In response to Karabo's words, Yvette put a finger beside her eye, taking her usual pose. Even among all this ice and snow, her character seemed unbowed. To be honest, I was jealous of that strength. Maybe that was a bit strange for me, but I just couldn't find that quality in myself.

Melvin lifted up his violin case with a wink.

"Okay. If that's the case, then there's no problem. There should be something I can do about that. Yvette L Lehrman, would you permit me to take a look at your Magic Crest?" In response to his offer, Yvette frowned.

"And you're going to charge me the usual Weins family fee?"

"Well, these are kind of extenuating circumstances, so for now let's call it free."

"Well in that case, please do!" Flipping up her pink twintails as if it was payment in and of itself, Yvette revealed the nape of her neck. Though I couldn't tell just by looking, it seemed like that was where the Lehrman family transplanted their Magic Crest.

Taking a tuning fork out of his violin case, Melvin concentrated for a while.

Striking the tuning fork lightly against the case, a booming sound echoed throughout the blizzard. As the sound made the nape of Yvette's neck start to move, Melvin began to mutter.

"Living things all have their own wavelength. Whether it's an ant, a bird, or a human, they all have their own. While it is similar to that of one's blood relatives, it's never quite the same. ...as such, the problem with Magic Crests, being living things on their own, is that they have different wavelengths from that of their hosts." As he spoke, he took a number of vials of medicine from his violin case.

"As such, if these wavelengths can be made closer, the effectiveness of the Crest will grow considerably." With swift motions, he mixed the contents of the vials into another and mixed them.

After doing so, he struck the tuning fork once more, before using a finger to apply the medicine to, the back of Yvette's neck, as if drawing a magic circle there.

"Activate."

The incantation was short.

I felt like I heard the sound of something exploding. It was probably just an illusion. Phenomena of Mystery that didn't completely reach the realm of reality were perceived only innately within the human consciousness - I felt like I had heard something like that in my Clock Tower lectures.

Rubbing the back of her neck, Yvette's eyes widened slightly.

"What's this? Suddenly my whole body is feeling warmer..."

"As I just said, I've stimulated your Crest temporarily. I've only increased the circulation of magical energy by about twenty percent, but that should feel pretty good physically, no?"

"As expected of a Tuner," she said with a shrug, as if trying to hide how impressed she was.

"Okay. I feel like I should have no problems at least until we fine the leyline."

"Hahaha, I'm glad to hear it. Mr. Karabo isn't a magus, so there's nothing to be done there, but what about you, Gray?"

"Oh, umm, I'm not a magus either, so..."

"But your right hand is....ah, well, if you say so," he said, shaking his head lightly.

"Anyways, back to the previous topic. About you and Waver," he said, swinging the conversation back around.

Though I was taken off guard by the sudden change in topic, Melvin seemed completely unbothered by my inability to keep up with his pace.

"Though it was just a rumor, I heard he took you on as a student for reasons other than you being a magus, right? But you still came to a place as dangerous as the Rail Zeppelin, and are even willing to step foot into a Child of Ainnash. That's not something that can be described as just a student-teacher relationship, I don't think."

"Doesn't that go the same for you though?"

Instinctively, I responded to his question with one of my own.

Though I thought that was a little rude of me, he didn't seem to mind as he nodded.

"Of course, that's because I'm Waver's closest friend!" So now he was not just a friend, but his closest friend?

"Though I've been funding his adventures since ten years ago, this was my first chance to experience them myself. And after coming this far, in for a penny, in for a pound, right?"

"Even then, you're still willing to risk your life?"

"Haha, well at any rate, I don't have a Magic Crest. As long as there's someone ready to take over my work, it's not like anyone would be terribly sad if I died. Oh, that's not a jab at the previous Lord El-Melloi or anything," he said, stepping energetically onto what others might consider a land mine. Of course, the reason my master and Reines were suffering so much was because the previous Lord El-Melloi hadn't prepared even in the slightest for the possibility of his own death, but listening to Melvin so nonchalantly poke that hornet's nest was somewhat refreshing.

The snow-laden wind swirled around his fingers, soon disappearing back into the raging blizzard. With his pure white hair framing his face, he looked like a character pulled out of a television commercial. Besides the faint blue of his eyes, he seemed far removed from any and all colour.

Almost like a spirit of Winter.

"Um, I heard you were a friend of my master's, but what sort of relationship do you two have?"

"Hmm. I suppose the most relevant would be as debtor and lender?" he answered, tilting his head to the side.

"He owes you money as well?"

"Actually, I was the first person to lend him money," he narrowed his eyes with a proud snort. As if recounting a fond memory, he continued with a bright voice.

"The first time we met was when I was bragging in class. I had a maid with me, carrying around a collection of jewel Talismans my Mom had put together for me. Apparently upset at all my bragging, he ended up punching me."

"You sound awfully cheerful for sharing such a terrible story about yourself," I said reflexively.

It was hard to put in words, but the fact he wasn't nearly as openly terrible as someone like Atram Galiasta made his own grossness stand out even more. And why did he always have to bring his mother up all the time? The one thing that surprised me about the story was that I couldn't imagine my master as he was now punching someone out of anger. Sure, when he was bringing Flat to task, he would muster up some physical strength when it was appropriate to the problem at hand, but that always seemed to be a nuisance to him.

"Well, back then, anything and everything made Waver angry. He was unapproachable, and was always writing some thesis or other, so he probably thought everyone else in the Clock Tower was an idiot. At any rate, he was a rather prickly character," Melvin continued to speak as we walked.

"Eventually, after one of our classes - was it Evocation or Transformation? Anyways - he came up to me and said 'you said you'd be willing to give money or whatever in exchange for an interesting story, right? Well I'm going to flip the whole Clock Tower on its head, so give me the money for a plane ticket.' Whether it was something I actually said or not, it sounded like something I would say at the time, so I bought him the ticket after all."

It was a version of my master beyond what I could imagine.

A master I didn't know. A time I didn't know. But a past that certainly occurred.

"Oh, I didn't expect all that much from him. Maybe he was finally planning on running away, and was going to return home? But even then, I figured I'd see something interesting if I had my maid tail him for a year, so I figured he'd keep up his end of the deal. Did you know? Watching someone break and fall after trying their best is a rather delicious sight." Melvin's soft words dripped through the blowing snow like rain.

The line he had just spoken seemed far too well matched for his pale lips, giving the impression of some sort of demon. Right after saying they liked people in an exaggerated tone, he immediately whispered about his own corruption and betrayal. Indeed, the difference between them seemed slight at best.

"When he returned to the Clock Tower, he paid back all the money I had lent him with some crumpled up bills. I don't know whether he made that money while he was abroad, or if he borrowed from someone else to pay me back. All he did was apologize, saying something like 'sorry, I couldn't show you an interesting story like I promised.' So this is my apology. I was just a powerless idiot. But there is something I definitely have to do, so please lend me some money again. I want to buy the El-Melloi Classroom that our professor left behind.' That was, of course, far too amusing.

I ended up getting interested as well, so I told him I'd lend him the money, so why don't we become friends? Best friends have the greatest right to ask for things from each other, right? Well, in the end, Reines ended up buying up all his debt, so she holds all of it now," Melvin said with a strange laugh.

I didn't even need to stop and think as to what event caused my master to change so much. The Fourth Holy Grail War. After that, he travelled around the world, teaching magecraft to a number of students.

But there was one more thing that caught my interest, that I wanted to ask about.

"Why...why did you take such an interest in my master?"

"Hmm? Ah, that. People are surprisingly able to grow, you know? In short, life travels only in one direction, so if you leave it up to itself, its abilities and skills will continue to develop. It's actually a lot harder to stay in one place. In a place like the Clock Tower, it's common enough to see people develop tremendous skills in magecraft. -but, very few people can ever change the entire direction their life is going. After all, that's like having one's truth, the foundation of one's own soul, be reborn as something new. At the very least, I don't know anyone else who was able to face their own uselessness like that. Don't you think that's interesting enough in itself?" Melvin's words somehow reminded me of what my master said to me, back in my hometown.

Can people really grow? And now, as proof of that, Melvin spoke of the person named Waver who had changed his entire way of life. Though the words they spoke were totally opposite, they somehow felt painfully close.

Though I couldn't really put into words why I felt so.

"Though I can't say I ever expected him to take El-Melloi's title of Lord and take over the Faculty of Modern Magecraft. After the resignation of the previous head, the seat had been open for a while, so maybe they were just that desperate."

"The previous head?"

"Yeah. Though he was a pretty skilled person in his own right, soon after Waver returned to the Clock Tower he disappeared. The Faculty of Modern Magecraft is typically looked down on by other magi, so even though it was a main Faculty of the Clock Tower, none of the other Lords seemed interested in taking it over. And so when the family now at the bottom of the Twelve Great Families, the El-Melloi family, was in a position that no one knew what to do with them, it seemed like a perfect match."

"Ah, I see."

I had been wondering who had been in control of the Faculty of Modern Magecraft up until the fall of the El-Melloi family, but if it had been vacant until that point, everything made sense. Maybe that was common knowledge to the people of the Clock Tower, but since I had only been there for a few months, everything was new to me.

"Can I ask you something as well?" Melvin spoke up.

"Who was it that hurt Waver so badly? There was someone other than me, right?" My heart jumped into my throat.

Though his expression was as innocent as ever, I felt like he was peering straight into my heart.

"...well, umm..."

As I opened my mouth to answer,

"-this looks like it," Yvette suddenly spoke.

"Right there." Pressing down on her eyepatch, she pointed forward.

I don't know if that exaggerated pose, one finger in her hair and half her face covered was necessary or if it was just some sort of appeal, but either way Karabo drove the first marker - one of his Black Keys into the ground.

Standing alone amidst the white snow, it looked to me like a small, lonely grave marker.

"That should be good. I was told we need at least two more. Miss Yvette, could I ask you to guide us to the next spot?"

"Of course~" Yvette replied with a carefree nod, setting out into the forest again.

Just as I was beginning to think that things might go smoothly after all, Karabo stopped in his tracks.

"...it seems that marker was enough to signal us as intruders," he said, glaring into the distance. Among the densely packed trees of the forest, some of the branches began to move.

Not due to the weight of the snow, but entirely on their own.

Like a whip, the branches arced towards us. Though they seemed easily strong enough to punch through a human being like they were no more than paper, the unnatural branches were cut down with a single flash of Karabo's Black Key.

"So these are the branches that brought down your helicopter?" Staring down at the branches now writhing on the ground, Karabo spoke in a cold voice.

Neither his gaze nor his earlier strike belied any agitation at the sudden surprise attack. Was that a sign of what kind of conflict he had overcome in his life within the Holy Church?

From within the blizzard, another branch began reaching toward us, prompting me to take a combat ready stance.

"Add!"

"Ihihihihi! Looks like it's our turn after all!"

Releasing the hook that held Add in place, he immediately slipped into my hand in the form of a scythe. Though I didn't really want to reveal him to everyone, this wasn't a situation where I could afford to think like that.

"Ooh, how dynamic!"

Blowing straight past Melvin's wide-eyed face, the scythe cut down the approaching branch.

"Please step back," I said, bringing the scythe around to bear again.

But at that point, I noticed another point of concern.

(...this is...)

My body felt heavy.

Just like Melvin had said, the air in this frozen forest was wrong. I couldn't even absorb half the magical energy I should have been able to in an instant. I'd have to sharpen my senses to compensate. Adjusting the flow of magical energy to allow for a sufficient amount of instantaneous output, I scaled back on stamina and physical strength.

With a sharp breath, I swung the scythe again together with the magical energy.

The branches rushing towards me were once again severed cleanly. Bringing the scythe to bear again, as I looked to the tree that was the source of the branches, my eyes wavered.

The branches I had cut down earlier were now moving at my feet.

The fallen branches reached for my throat once again.

At a timing I couldn't match. At an angle I couldn't protect from. Just as I was sure it would punch straight through my throat, a shadow passed through.

Karabo's Black Key struck the branches down again.

"Be careful. As an entity related to Dead Apostles, you can't assume they follow the same rules as other forms of life."

The old man from the Church's gaze flitted about, ready for anything.

There was one more of us whose gaze had changed.

Having removed her eyepatch, Yvette's eyes were sparkling. No, the eye beneath her eyepatch wasn't an eyeball at all, but a ruby giving off a vibrant scarlet light.

"Tadah! Yvette's Artificial Mystic Eye - Incineration Version!" With a roar, the empty space in front of us burst into flame.

The cluster of branches reaching toward us were consumed by the blaze along with the blowing snow. Following Yvette's eyes, the swirling inferno vaporized the snow and incinerated the branches all around us.

"...I see. I had heard that Mystic Eyes made from jewels could reproduce the effects of Noble Colours."

"I can't keep it up that long, though!"

"Understood."

Like a gale force wind, the Black Keys responded to Yvette's shout and flames.

The figure that stepped in to cut down the remaining branches looked like a dark storm, only borrowing the shape of a person. Completely defying all outward signs of his advanced age, he moved with a ferocity beyond that of even a wild beast.

In the spray of white snow, the black blades danced.

Like the scar marking the side of his face, it created a striking scene.

(...this is the strength of Mystic Eyes...of the Holy Church...)

In a way, I was moved. Though Heine, who I had met at the Castle of Separation had also been a member for a time, this was my first time seeing their true strength in person. Rather than taking a single Mystery to its limit, like a magus - this was a person who devoted his all to denying those Mysteries.



But there was still beauty in that.

At this uttermost extreme, Karabo's movements were refined to the point of perfection.

Not just Karabo alone, this was likely the fruit of the hundreds that had come before him, polishing their skills, their art, and handing them down to him.

"Alright, time to switch!" Without hesitation, Yvette reached into her own eye socket.

Once again, she replaced the jeweled eye that was held there. This time, it was an iolite. From my lectures in Mineralogy, I had heard it was a stone that strengthened one's spiritual perception, and that there were tales of it being used in place of a compass on ships in the Scandinavian sagas.

"Owowowow....okay, this way!" Without missing a step, the black-robed priest turned, following Yvette's instructions.

Preparing to take his place against the attacking branches, I took a position beside Karabo as he ran.

As I did, the ground collapsed out from under me.

Just as it seemed I would fall into the dark hole opening up below me, Karabo grabbed my arms and pulled me to safety.

"T-thank you..."

"That hole was just covered with snow a little while ago."

Hindsight.

Could he use his Mystic Eyes like that too? Moreover, he must have trained extensively to be able to use his ability to observe and make use of information from the past while concentrating completely on the present battle. After rushing forward for some hundreds of meters, Karabo wasn't even slowing down. The fact he was able to move at this pace while covering all of my movements from attack spoke of the long years he must have spent fighting as a team.

"W-wow, this is..."

Struggling valiantly to keep up, Melvin's eyes were spinning.

After a few minutes of running, a steep cliff suddenly appeared from within the depths of the blizzard.

"Whoa!"

"Don't stop!" the old man shouted.

The reason for his cry was clear. Behind us, the rush of branches hadn't stopped. Weaving together through each other, kicking up snow as they surged forward, the attacking branches seemed like some sort of enormous snake.

"We're going down!" Reaching the edge of the cliff, Karabo kicked off the ground. Watching him leap down the steep hill, Yvette blinked repeatedly before shaking her head in disbelief.

"Geez! This is why they call you guys from the Church savages!" Holding her skirt down, Yvette slid down the hill.

Turning around, I saw Melvin standing, out of breath behind me. Without hesitation, I pushed him down the hill.

"Sorry, Melvin!" "Aaaaaah! This feels just like a roller coaster!! Bleahruovuagu!" As he slid down the hill, without slowing, Melvin managed to skillfully eject the blood he was vomiting.

It appeared he actually was using his Magic Circuits to stand in for his nerves. That was certainly something an ordinary person would never be able to do. I wasn't sure that was really something to praise him for, though.

With as much force as I could manage, I also threw myself down the hill, turning my eyes to the bottom of the hill.

Immediately below me, Yvette was pointing.

"There!"

"Got it!" Karabo threw a Black Key to mark the spot Yvette indicated.

I felt some sort of power run through the ground.

Two down.

"Just one more!" As he continued speeding down the hill, Karabo's eyes snapped down.

At the bottom - at the edge of a steep cliff, another wave of branches of death was rising towards us. The forest was anticipating our actions, and moving to intercept us. It also seemed like after placing the second marker, the forest's hostility toward us was doubled.

They were acting as if to protect something.

As if to say it wouldn't allow us to progress any further.

Or possibly...

(...it won't let the Rail Zeppelin go?)

Such a thought flitted through my mind.

Slicing through a particularly large branch as he was still sliding, the old man shouted.

"Miss Gray!"

"Okay!" Even without saying it, I knew what to do.

As if to stop myself from sliding down the hill, I sank the blade of my scythe into the side of the hill. Using the reaction from that movement, I polevaulted myself up into the air. Throwing the weight of the scythe into a spinning spiral, I drew a black half moon through the pure white world.

Slicing through the entirety of the branches attacking us, I grabbed one of the severed limbs. As the branch struggled to pull back, I used it to force my forward movement into another direction. I launched myself towards the tree that was the source of the branches.

It was like a glacier built up over a tremendous number of years, that had taken the form of a tree.

Immediately beside the cliff, the tree of ice sprouted more and more branches.

Reminding me of a spiderweb, the countless branches spread out in every direction. On top of that, each of the branches began to sprout thorns of ice as they filled the empty air. Most likely if I were pierced by a single one of those branches, my entire body would freeze over.

That being said, with my full force attack already in motion, there was no way for me to stop from falling to the other side of the cliff.

(-like, I care!)

I expelled the fear from my mind.

Paying attention only to my position in the air and in keeping my own balance, in a way that would make even my body collide with it, I brought the scythe down at an angle. Ignore the splintering branches, the shattered icicles, the pain of impact. Since long ago, I was always good at ignoring my own pain. Be it physical or not.

For an instant, the wind calmed.

The glacial tree, cut diagonally straight through, fell. As I watched the severed tree fall away from me, I was suddenly struck by a sense of weightlessness as the cliff face began to rush by me.

"Ihihihihi! Try not to go splat at the bottom!" Ignoring Add's commentary, I extended the scythe out as much as I could as I fell.

Just barely, I was able to snag the edge of the cliff face. Sliding down a number of meters, my desperate effort finally brought me to a stop about halfway down.

At the same time, there was movement above me.

Considerably behind me, I heard Yvette shout..

"There!"

"-three!" I heard the sound of Karabo's Black Key punching into the ground where Yvette had indicated.

Many times stronger than before, I felt a torrent of power surge through the ground. It felt almost like some enormous creature was struggling beneath the earth. Called a dragon in some places, or a god in others. Along the line of that distortion was what was called a leyline, the same as what supposedly ran through the classrooms in the Clock Tower.

(...did we do it...?)

At the very least, it seemed like no one else fell down like I did. It seemed the battle at the top of the cliff had come to an end. The magical branches that had pressed down on us like storm clouds had vanished, not a single one remaining. As had the formless animosity the forest had turned on us.

Looking down for the first time, I felt a flush of fear grip my stomach as I realized the bottom of the cliff was still some dozens of meters below me.

"Gray!" Though I couldn't see him through the blizzard, Melvin's shout barely reached me.

"I'm okay! I'll meet up with you later!" Recognizing that it would be difficult to ascend at this point, I answered him as I turned my sights to the bottom of the cliff.

Finding a handhold to support myself on the cliff face, I returned Add to the hook on my right shoulder. While I naturally had no experience free climbing, even if it was incomplete, I was able to compensate for my inexperience with my Strengthened body.

(If only I could use magecraft that would help me float down...)

As I recalled the conversation I had had the night before with my master about Flight Magecraft, I made my way down one handhold at a time.

Before too long, I had made it to the bottom. Now at the lowest point, my eyes were immediately drawn to a single point.

"This is...?" Buried in the snow was what looked like a silver seed.

Though it seemed to be no more than an empty, dried out shell, it still possessed a lingering scent that told of a tremendous amount of magical energy. If the cast-off shell held this much, how much more would the actual seed have held? The thought alone made me shudder.

I suddenly remembered Karabo's words.

It seems that once they have grown mature, the fruit begins to drip blood.

Some of those drops become seeds, and after a period of time, they evolve into a different form than that of their parent.

(...this is, that seed?)

Something like this just happened to be along the path of the Rail Zeppelin? It just happened to sprout at the moment we were passing through?

Really?

"Looks like you've found something interesting," a voice called out to me.

With just that, my thoughts froze over completely.

I felt my whole body, down to each of my individual fingers, go stiff. How much of that could I blame on the cold? As if to prevent me from fooling myself in that way, the figure in front of me had a terribly severe air. With just a single battle, even my soul itself had become spellbound.

Awkwardly, I raised my eyes.

"W-why-"

"I figured you'd probaby come here. But it seems I was wrong. My objective was that scowl, but... Perhaps I've lost a bit of my intuition from being away from the battlefield for so long."

Within the calm air of the forest, that voice had a majestic echo. As if her words were the only thing this forest couldn't suppress.

(...oh...)

The reason the branches had receded was no doubt because they were afraid of her.

Even if they were an existence born of a Dead Apostle. No, specifically because they were, they couldn't come close to this Heroic Spirit.

"Unfortunately, it seems that surly guy isn't here."

The crimson-armored Heroic Spirit - Hephaestion spoke, as if bored.

**~Part 4~**

Approaching the edge of the cliff, Melvin shouted.

"Gray!" Despite Strengthening his own eyes, he couldn't quite make out what was going on below through the darkness. It felt like she was facing off against someone, but the bizarrely thick magical energy made his perception in the area hazy.

"It looks like something is happening down there - Karabo?" Looking up, he saw the priest go stiff.

"...this is bad," Karabo muttered as he turned around, his voice hard..

"The Rail Zeppelin has already begun moving. Towards us."



I felt every nerve in my body strain.

My knees began to shake, and my breathing became shallow. Just standing before that, my soul was being crushed.

My opponent was a Ghost Liner. A reflection of a Heroic Spirit that had engraved its name on human history - a Servant. Even if magi were described as super human, they weren't even comparable to the Mystery inherent in her body.

As she walked towards me, I could see her as nothing less than an angel of death.

"Now then,' the warrior spoke clearly. "It seems you haven't given up your will to fight. I'm not particularly interested in playing with you, though."

Holding my breath, I released the hook holding Add in place yet again, pulling him into my hands.

As he took the shape of a scythe once more, I forced my brain into desperate motion. I felt like if I let my guard down for even a moment, I would pass out. Wouldn't that be so much easier? Even so, there was something I still had to do. I couldn't afford to be knocked out here.

"...why did you attack my master?"

"I already said, because I couldn't stand him."

"Even so, there must have been a different reason you called him out. You said you were the vassal of the one who stole his relic when we first met. On top of that, being a Servant, that must mean you have a Master."

"So you have a basic knowledge of Servants?" the warrior - Hephaestion said with a small smile.

It felt like that smile would freeze my heart solid. I had stood against terrifying opponents any number of times. The beast targeting Magic Crests, and the monster hidden within the body of that Grand magus. But this was the first time I had ever felt this kind of pressure. Even more than being a Heroic Spirit, she was a creature specialized purely for combat, a person whose abilities were refined specifically for battle.

"If that's the case, let that blade ask the questions. That is how I - that is how we were."

"...that's not how I do things," I answered, forcing the wavering tip of my weapon still.

I felt like there was a snake writhing in my gut, that I might throw it up at any time.

Withstanding the urge to let my knees collapse, a different sound reached my ears.

The sound of a raging steam engine. Though it ran almost entirely on magical energy, that old fashioned sound was truly fitting for that train.

(...the Rail Zeppelin...?)

Now that I thought about it, it wasn't that strange.

The reason the train had stopped in the first place was because of the Child of Ainnash causing it to lose its way. Now that we had marked out the path for it, it was hardly surprising that it had started moving already. Most likely, it would run close by here. But considering it's speed, it would still be a few minutes.

As I thought that, the unforeseen events continued to unfold.

A large crack opened up in the ground below us, suddenly expanding to rob us of our footing.

"The ground...!"

"Ha, I'd expect nothing less from a fragment of a monster. Now that it's lost control of the leyline, it's already falling apart," Hephaestion's lips curled. As if to say it didn't matter either way to her. In reality, she had her Gordius Wheel, so the forest collapsing around us was no issue for her.

I, however, had no such ability.

In short-

(-I just have to settle this with one strike...)

At any rate, there was no way the same technique would work on a warrior like this more than once. What I could do remained unchanged. I just had to put everything into a single instant.

For a moment, the sound and destruction around me seemed to stop.

Time seemed to stretch, freezing around the two of us. Though I could hear the distant sound of snow falling from above the collapsing cliff, I couldn't see any movement.

(An avalanche...?)

Most likely that was because of the changing landscape.

Though I was aware of the changing battlefield, it was irrelevant. All that mattered was myself, and the warrior naming herself Hephaestion.

-you possess a body that reflects that Hero.

The words I was given in my home town. Now I had to forget even that. Maybe this was the first time.

For my own life, it was now or never. Being pushed up against a wall like now, I understood that past and future were mere accessories to life. If this woman was a warrior of Macedonia, then it went without saying that was how she lived as well. 'Glory lies beyond the horizon' - the words that connected hope to a land yet unseen, it made sense they came from an era where life was ever-changing.

"...ah, not bad," she smiled again. "I had thought warriors had died out in this era, but it looks like you're built pretty well. Stranded in the gap between life and death, I can see that shine in you, of trying to grasp life in your hands."

"I know...the suffering my master is going through is more important," I replied.

"Well said," Hephaestion laughed derisively.

The snow exploded. As I kicked off the ground, the snow around me was blasted into the air.

Run.

As fast as physically possible.

Focusing to the point I couldn't see the colour in the world around me, I compressed every ounce of strength I had into these few seconds.

The match would be decided in a single strike.

If that was the case, then the strike I should choose was-

"Add, Limit Release Level One!"

"Ihihiihii! I guess there's nothing else we can do, ihihiihiihiihii!"

In my hands, the scythe dismantled itself, taking a form like a spinning Rubik's Cube. The raging magical energy within it took on a new form.

A battering ram.

Aside from Rhongomyniad itself, it was the form with the most destructive power.

As I brought the battering ram to bear, magical flames poured out from it. Translating into the terms used to describe the skills of Servants, my master had told me it reached a level similar to a D Rank in Mana Burst. Now, I slammed that full power down on Hephaestion.

As she blocked the strike, Hephaestion's sword groaned in protest.

"This, is-!" Her eyes were open wide. Even Hephaestion couldn't completely stop the power of the battering ram. Thus, it followed as a matter of course. The source giving birth to this Mana Burst was like a true Noble Phantasm.

I poured more magical energy into my body.

Even as the Magic Circuits throughout my body screamed, I pushed them to their full capacity. My body would become as a cog in that machine. With the battering ram still between us, I poured even more magical energy into it. Firing out the back of it like a jet engine, I used the exponentially greater force to drive it into her.

The recoil of the strike blew me back up into the air.

"Yes!"

That recoil was exactly what I was counting on.

Running up the walls of the collapsing gorge, I saw the pitch black train come into view.

(The Rail Zeppelin-!)

"Miss Gray!" I heard a voice from far off. Maybe it was Melvin's voice.

"Gray!" On top of that, another young man's voice called out.

Caules Forvedge. Really, he should have been looking after my master, not looking out for me.

Holding the door open wide, Caules stood, hand outstretched. Along with the train, I noticed something else.

The avalanche I had heard earlier.

As if pursuing the train, an avalanche of enormous proportions was bearing down on it.

Even so, I couldn't stop. With nowhere else to run, all I could do was try and get back on the train that was now outspeeding it. Judging by its current speed, it should barely have been able to outrun the avalanche.

Kicking off of the collapsing cliff face, I put my full strength into one last step.

(Make it-!)

I reached out my hand.

Desperately, I stretched as far as I could.

Caules' hand reaching towards me drew closer and closer. Behind him, I could see Karabo and Yvette. It seemed everyone else had managed to get on the train safely. It didn't seem like the train had stopped for them, but since they were all magi or members of the Church, that was likely not a significant obstacle for them.

(---make it---!)

My fingertips brushed against Caules'.

For an instant, wind whipped up around us. With its last dying efforts, the Child of Ainnash reached its branches toward me, grabbing and pulling me away from the train. Though they weren't especially sharp in their movements, with my focus entirely directed forwards, that touch was fatal.

Even as I swung my scythe down, it was too late.

In the time it took me to blink, I saw the Rail Zeppelin leave me behind as I fell back into the snow. As that pure white enveloped me, overwhelming all else, I had the disturbing premonition of being completely absorbed by it.

"....Gray...!" Far away, so painfully far away, I could hear Caules shouting.

-and then everything went dark.

◆ 第二章 ◆  
-Chapter 2-



**~Part 1~**

Let's rewind time just a little.

The air itself seemed to be moving nervously.

Because, though painfully slowly, the frozen breath of the forest was seeping in. The heater was on, of course, but naturally it couldn't do much against the overwhelming cold of the forest outside. Not just this one room, it was like the Rail Zeppelin itself was gradually being frozen solid.

Within that room sat a single silver-haired girl.

Olga Marie Asmleit Animusphere. Daughter of the Lord of Astrology.

Her surroundings had an inhuman degree of orderliness to them. There was no way another person would be able to tell this was once the scene of a murder. Aside from the obvious bed and carpet changes, even the rest of the furniture had been swapped out. The headless body of Trisha Fellows, after receiving some magecraft to preserve her Magic Crest, had been moved away to the freight cars.

"...no, something's wrong...something is definitely wrong," the girl whispered.

She had been investigating this room for a while.

Of course, only since the room had been cleaned. And with the way the room had been cleaned, there was almost no where left that could hide anything. If investigated using the methods of modern science, it was hard to believe even a single useful clue could be gleaned. Even so, the young girl diligently continued her investigation of that half of the train car, going over it again and again.

She had no particularly reason for doing so.

Nothing but the slightest hunch. After separating from El-Melloi II and the others, with no where else to go, she returned to her room. The moment she arrived, she felt the slightest sense of unease, hung over the room like a down blanket.

But to continue investigating this room that had been cleaned to such a degree that not even a drop of blood remained smacked of obsession. A tenacity born of more than persistence. The mental fatigue had begun to grow dark shadows under her eyes. Though one's first instinct might have been to lament the marring of such a beautiful face, her faintly worn out expression gave her another kind of indescribable charm. Rarely, misfortune served to refine the better qualities of a person, so perhaps she was someone like that.

One could say that was her greatest quality as a magus. No matter how it appeared as madness to others, the ability to pursue one's own beliefs with no regard to the thoughts of the masses for thousands of years was the proper way for the inhuman  
a magus

.

As the member of a Lord's family, she was simply pursuing that feeling of unease-

"Ah!" Suddenly, the train lurched into motion.

Surprised by the sudden movement, she winced as she stumbled.

"...ow..." she said, holding her hands close. "The train is moving again? Did something happen? No, more importantly..."

The girl's expression turned to the empty air.

There was nothing there. Only the faint flow of cold air. But, as she timidly reached out, she felt a bizarre ache in her hand, and she began to work her fingers through the empty space.

"There's a spell here? Not on the floor or ceiling, but set on coordinates relative to the train car? But if that was the case, that creepy Lord should have found it..."

As she said it out loud, she was faced with another fact.

"...it's reacting to my Magic Crest?" The moment she stumbled, she unconsciously activated her Magic Crest to Strengthen herself. Though it was only a portion of it, she did bear part of the Animusphere family Crest. Reacting to the activation of that Magic Crest, the hidden spell revealed itself.

Otherwise, she would probably never have found it.

(This is, probably...)

If Trisha had been sitting on a chair, this position would have been exactly at her chest height.

Touching the invisible Magic Circle hanging in the air, Olga Marie's eyes narrowed.

"I remember this spell..." Again and again, she traced the figure in the air. As if her fingers remembered better than her head, it was like she was trying to dredge that memory up.

(The Fellows family is...a branch family of the Animusphere family, right?)

It was about the Magic Crest.

Stronger families within the Clock Tower would divide their Magic Crests in order to expand their own influence. There were a number of ways this was accomplished, but in the case of the Fellows family, they had received the highest grade of division - in short, a portion of the Animusphere Source Crest had been directly implanted in them.

That was proof of the Animusphere's unfailing trust in the Fellows family, and explained why Olga Marie's father had appointed Trisha to such an important post. Though it couldn't be said that, as her personal tutor, her relationship with Olga Marie had been a perfectly harmonious one, and she never spared Olga Marie the whip when she failed to make the progress she was supposed to, there was still no room to doubt her loyalty to the Animusphere family.

Olga Marie's fingers froze in the air.

Trisha's elemental affinity was for Imaginary Numbers, she remembered. Imaginary Numbers space, where "nothingness" existed as an actual thing, was something like a dimensional pocket, a place where objects would be freed from interaction with the flow of space and time.

The only thing that could interact with this dimensional pocket was the original spell. Primarily that meant only someone with the same affinity for Imaginary Numbers could access it, but in certain cases there were other methods. Or so she had heard from Trisha.

"...if it's set up to only react to her Magic Crest, then since our Magic Crests are from the same line, it reacts to the Animusphere crest as well?"

It was like a lock. Of course, like any lock, it prevented anyone else from opening it, but by "weakening" the restrictions of the lock, it could be used to hand something over to someone else. Was it possible Trisha had set up this Imaginary Numbers space for something in particular?

Carefully, Olga Marie began moving her fingers again.

After tracing halfway around the circle, her fingers stopped again.

"Stuck. I probably need some sort of password then. What would Trisha choose, thinking I would be able to guess it...?"

Remembering that phrase Trisha most commonly leveled at her, her expression came close to tears.

After a while, she finally repeated the  
spell  
password.

"You fool, Marie. Get it together."

Pouring magical energy into her curled fingers, she twisted them like a key in a lock. As if the air itself had spun, the object contained within the dimensional pocket was spit out, landing with a heavy thud on the floor.

Olga Marie's eyes went wide.

"W-what...?"

It was all she could do to keep from screaming.

As a member of the family of a Lord, and as someone who had experienced her own attendant being murdered, it was still a sight she couldn't have imagined.

"What is this...! This is...this is too strange! What's going on?! What were you doing, Trisha?!" Unable to keep it in any further, she began to shout.

As she did, a sound caught her attention behind her.

Turning to look, a dark figure moved in the corner of the room. After a brief moment, she realized that figure was a writhing swarm of spiders. Of course, she realized they weren't ordinary spiders, but the familiar of some magus at basically the same time.

(-I was being watched?)

As that shock struck her, the door to the room swung open.

The door was supposed to be locked, but with the spiders in front of her, it wasn't hard to believe they had opened it. The locks on each of the guest rooms were simple, mechanical locks. For a magus of any actual ability, opening such a lock was far from difficult.

"Sorry, kid," the gentleman stepping into the room apologized in words only.

Jeanmario Spinerra. He was the one who said he had a stupid-sounding TV show called Jeanmario's Zombie Cooking or something. So, these spiders were his familiar?

"I think you get it already, but I've been watching you since a little while ago. My goodness, I couldn't find anything at all, but it seems like your attendant has left you quite the parting gift here."

Speaking in an amazed voice, the man in the white suit shrugged.

Behind him,

"Ah, good," she felt someone else nodding.

That second person was someone Olga Marie had been afraid of from the beginning.

"You found it for us. As expected of the heir of the Animusphere name."

Magus of the Faculty of Law - Hishiri Adashino smiled happily.

## ~Part 2~

When I awoke, I was lying down. I could feel my back pressed against a rocky surface. Somewhere nearby was the sound of water dripping. My mind followed that sound as the water splashed against stone.

(....a cave...?)

On the edge of my dim vision, I noticed an indistinct figure that made every nerve in my body go wild. I tried to stand, but couldn't put any strength into my legs. It must have been because of the Mana Burst I used earlier. With how difficult it was to absorb the mana in the atmosphere in that frozen forest, I had entirely exhausted the Od present in my body, so naturally I was feeling the consequences of that now.

Even so, I still had the energy to shout my enemy's name. "Hephaestion!"

The Macedonian warrior was crouched down in front of a small fire. As if she hadn't noticed me calling out to her, she casually threw another stick on the fire. "Looks like you're awake," she said, eyes still locked on the fire before her.

Checking myself briefly, I was completely dry. Someone must have cleaned the snow off of me while I was unconscious. Naturally even I could figure out who that was.

"Why did you help me?"

"Because you're a warrior," Hephaestion answered, staring deep into the flames. Short and sharp. She gave me the same words she had the first time we met.

"It would be unacceptable for you to die in an accident like that. A warrior should die on the battlefield. I have no intention of hurting you here, so don't worry."

She spoke as if it was obvious. It was like she had been asked a simple addition question. In an era where a single moment's hesitation could spell your own death, perhaps that simple and straightforward way of thinking was valuable. Despite my nervous anxiety, she made no move to attack me.

Slowly, I rose to a seated position. Catching my breath, I forced my brain to work. If I had just collapsed due to the exhaustion of my Od, then I probably hadn't been

unconscious for that long. Probably a few dozen minutes at most. I had no idea how far the train had gone. Would it be possible to catch up to it? Even if I couldn't, how could I let everyone know I was okay? I couldn't help but feel anxious.

My mind raced around in circles. My blood was terribly cold, and I couldn't stop myself from sweating uncomfortably.

(If my master was here, then...)

Even if it was Flat or Svin, it would be so much easier. I wondered how Caules was doing on the train. Melvin had been the last one to make it back, so I wondered if he was okay too. And I wondered how my master's condition was.

But no matter how much I thought about these things, it wouldn't help. Rather than think of what others would do, I had to figure out what I could do in this situation. I was the one in this mess, so I had to think what the best course of action was for myself.

(But what can I do...?)

I glanced at the soldier by the fire. Even with her just sitting staring at the flames, her presence was suffocating. I wondered if all Heroic Spirits were like that, or if she was special. At any rate, there was one thing I wanted to get from her...

After thinking long and hard, I chose my words carefully.

"...what is your connection to the Heroic Spirit my master summoned?" I didn't say the name Iskandar. I was afraid to say it out loud. For a short while, the only thing that answered my nervous question was my own voice echoing back at me. Once that echo died down, the Heroic Spirit finally answered.

"Of all the things to ask," she replied with a grunt. "What was our connection? How were we connected? Yes, it's a question I got often. To think even in this situation I'd get asked that." Hephaestion shrugged with a smile. Her expression seemed somehow happy as the fire threw shadows across her face. That was my guess, though I didn't have much experience in reading people with how few friends I had. Narrowing her eyes, she spoke slowly, as if speaking to the darkness of the cave itself. "Originally, I was told to watch over him by the mother."

"The mother?" I was taken a bit aback by the sudden introduction of a new character. Perhaps asking about her past life meant that names of people I didn't know would come up, but I hadn't expected it to be anyone's mother. After asking about Iskandar, the man who had come closest to conquering the entire world in human history, I hadn't expected the story to start there.

"Hmph. With the way I followed him from battlefield to battlefield, many people mistook me as his lover. That caused me no shortage of problems. But with the way he bellowed about the blessings of Zeus and with how hairy he became, there was nothing left of his old cuteness by the end."

"...I see."

I didn't know why, but I found those words strangely relieving. It was like the feeling of a rolling stone coming to rest in the place it belonged, a kind of meaningless feeling.

But the Heroic Spirit continued. "But there was really no king like him," she said, voice heated. As if she drew them from the flames in front of her, Hephaestion's words were intense. It was as if the person she was speaking to had turned into those flames. Burning since more than two thousand years ago, an unquenchable flame in the form of a person. A will of fire.

"The great expedition, the invasion of Egypt, the battle against Darius III, the war in the Indian Jungle...all of these things made his heart dance. Even when crossing the Ganges, his excitement didn't abate in the slightest. Even when he had collapsed due to illness, he drove us endlessly to pursue that sea at the edge of the world. How intense had those words been? How much had they shone to us? How much did they torture us? Even the sun's heat was as nothing before them. Like those words were boiling each cell of our bodies, they drove us to run ever forward. As we screamed from that pain, we covered thousands of miles. Burning as brightly as we could, even when his flame was extinguished, we never turned back."

Even now it seemed like the fire in Hephaestion's heart was growing. It felt like it was enough to incinerate everything in this tiny cave. It was enough to fill this cramped space with the memory of great armies long past. And then she spoke with an intensity far greater than that heat.

"I was his closest friend. I won't let anyone deny that."

And yet I wanted to. Whether directly or indirectly, I had heard my master speak of that Heroic Spirit numerous times. Those gentle yet distant words, as if he was calling out to someone in the far distance, had been locked up like treasure in my heart. But the emotion that charged his words was entirely different than Hephaestion's. It was the same thing I had felt when she first met my master the night before. The same emotion that had repudiated my master, trampling him down with no room for argument. It felt like her words weren't aimed at anyone in particular. Not at all. To put it in words, it was like she was talking about an absolute concept. Like a believer speaking of their god...

Was that the truth of it? If the king stood as a symbol for the people to pile their envy on, perhaps it was normal for his subordinates to worship him like that. I felt that was close. If I said that was it, most people would likely agree with me. But somehow, I felt a small, prickling sense of unease. A sensation in the middle of my chest that I just couldn't ignore.

"But, you..." The feeling made itself into a question. I remembered the dream that I saw. It wasn't reality, but an even greater truth, a distorted fragment beyond what I could imagine on my own. The figure of a woman, standing at the edge of the world, voice trembling as she shouted at the endless sea before her.

Answer me, Iskandar...!

"...why were you alone, condemning Iskandar?"

It was almost like I could physically feel the silence overtake the cavern. A heavy pressure covered the cave. A powerful feeling I couldn't put words to erupted from her, punching straight through my heart. It felt like my heart and lungs were suddenly in a vice.

"Umm...Hephaestion...?"

"What did you see?" Her voice reminded me of a snake. The voice that squeezed itself out of her throat was terribly cold. Her twin-coloured eyes were locked on me, shining as if to deny any effort I might have made to evade the question. The moment I realized what was happening, before I could avert my eyes, she gave me an order with those Mystic Eyes.

"Answer me. What did you see?"

A Noble Colour of Compulsion.

"...in my dream...you were..." The magical energy in those eyes forced my mouth to move, and I spoke. "...a distant sea...you were alone...and you asked...is this what you wanted?...why didn't you let this go?..." With no regard to my will, those words spilled out. Unlike the time on the roof of the train, I didn't have Add in my hands to help purge her magical energy from my circuits. "And you said....'Answer me, Iskandar'..."

After saying that much, I was finally released from the curse. Her instructions had been fulfilled.

"I should have noticed. You're something like a priestess. You're pretty susceptible to possession." Hephaestion spoke, her voice like ice scraping against iron. A weaker person might have given up on life just hearing that. The enmity dripping from the depths of her voice was that venomous. "But I said I wouldn't hurt you. A warrior of Macedonia would never go back on their word."

As she spoke, Hephaestion slowly stood up. She turned away. The sound of her leather boots on the stone floor of the cave sounded like a blade. The scent of something like flint filled the air.

"Once you can move, leave. Though I don't know if you'll be able to catch that train."

With that, she left the cave behind. It took almost a minute before I felt the pressure on me relax. Forcing my still trembling body still, after a few more minutes, I managed to push myself to my feet. As much as I wanted to rest, there was no way I could reunite with my master if I did that. When I made my way out of the cave, I noticed the landscape had changed completely. As if the landscape of snow and ice had been a lie, it had been entirely replaced with the dense forest from before. Though the sun was still high in the sky, only a dim light reached through to the forest floor, and there was no way to tell which direction the Rail Zeppelin had gone.

"What do I do now...?" I mumbled to myself, clenching a hand in front of my chest. As I did, my fingers brushed against something inside my cloak.



"We made it through..."

The conductor sighed softly from the control room of the train. For those who knew him, seeing such a brazen display of relief from him would have been a shock. He had dedicated his entire existence to making the train run like a well oiled machine. "I had feared there was a chance it was the main body of Ainnash itself, but I suppose that was an absurd fear..."

"Thank goodness," the auctioneer gave a small nod.

The main body of Ainnash was a being on the same level as their own master. They would have had no choice but to put their lives on the line in defense of the Rail Zeppelin. For those of them left behind, that was their only mission.

After a while, like a tree leaving its roots, the conductor stood up. "Though it has put us behind schedule, let us wait for our other guests."

Normally, their usual customers would have sent a familiar by now. Even if they weren't able to place a winning bid, the information of what Mystic Eyes went to who was vital for those living in the world of magi. But they had only just broke free from the Child of Ainnash. It was hard to say whether even half of the regular customers would show up.

Perhaps having guessed the situation, the auctioneer nodded. "Apparently there is also one guest who has yet to return from the Child of Ainnash."

"If there was only one casualty, we should be thankful. Whether to that which they believe in, or something else," the conductor spoke in a dignified tone. That was the conclusion of the one responsible for running the Rail Zeppelin.

### ~Part 3~

"...well, that's the Rail Zeppelin for you. Once it's got the leyline, even a Child of Ainnash isn't an obstacle. Wow, how exciting! To think I'd get to witness something so exciting with my own eyes!" Melvin Weins stared up at the sky, overflowing with emotion.

They were in a grassy field. Despite being the middle of winter, the field was rich with green grasses, broken here and there by the sight of withered heath. There were traces of the area being developed somewhat, but perhaps that development was still in its earliest stages, as there were no signs of other people or buildings. Standing at the back of the stopped train, the white-haired young man shook as he held up his violin case. The train had run for about ten minutes after breaking through the Child of Ainnash before coming to a stop. Apparently, as Melvin had surmised, they didn't consider it to be a threat anymore.

In contrast to Melvin, Caules was sitting beside him at the back of the caboose, restlessly watching the tracks behind them. Realizing his point of concern, Melvin suddenly became flustered.

"Oh, uh, of course I also feel bad about Miss Gray! But she looked pretty tough, right? I find it hard to believe she'd be done in by an avalanche or two, even if it would make it hard for her to meet up with us!"

"Don't worry about the excuses," Caules sighed. "I know that you're a real magus at heart."

He had already figured out in their short time together how much Melvin enjoyed watching others fail. He was the same as El-Melloi II's stepsister - though she was only his sister thanks to the results of the factional warfare in the Clock Tower. There was something that seemed a bit different, though. For example, his objectives and methods. In Reines' case, she seemed to enjoy others' suffering, which led her to interact with them in the first place. In contrast, Melvin seemed more like he just wanted to observe people, and through that observation he came to love seeing tragedy.

Caules shook the thoughts from his mind after a few seconds. The crimson stain on the handkerchief at Melvin's chest was proof he had been vomiting blood again. After breaking free from the Child of Ainnash, he had been out of commission for a bit while

he took his hematopoietic medicine, but after only a few minutes he seemed to have fully recovered.

"It looks like the tracks have been there the entire time, but the fact that the train lost them when it lost sight of the leyline must mean that they weren't here before. Were they built just now? Or do they only appear from the back side of the world when the Rail Zeppelin approaches? How interesting! I feel like mom would be proud of me if I wrote a thesis on it!" Melvin continued to speak as he looked down at the tracks.

A number of shadow-like figures that appeared to be familiars had visited the train, but they were probably just from the other invitees that Yvette had mentioned earlier. Apparently they weren't especially serious about joining the auction, as unlike Melvin they only sent familiars in their stead. Most of them had gathered in the third train car, a place Caules had yet to visit. Apparently that was a waiting place for the familiars of the guests.

"...so the auction will be tonight then," Melvin said, his voice overlapping with the sounding of a steam whistle.

"My apologies for the wait. As we have reached the scheduled time, we will now be departing."

As the announcement played from a nearby speaker, the train began spewing black smoke into the air again. The locomotive lurched into motion, slowly but surely picking up speed. In truth, rather than an actual steam engine, the train likely moved from some sort of magecraft or other Mystery.

As the train gradually pulled away from the scenery Caules was looking out over, his face twisted in an unpleasant expression.

"Gray..." Caules murmured, his voice broken.

As if to trample over the boy's wishes and prayers, the train only continued to accelerate.

But in the next moment,

"...there she is!" Caules' face lit up.

Gray was sliding down the face of one of the distant hills, pursuing the train as it began to pull away.



I realized that the Rail Zeppelin was beginning to move. Having already Strengthened my body to the limit, I lowered myself to reduce the air resistance. Thanks to being out of that frozen forest, the Strengthening was going much better than before, but even so I could tell I wasn't going to make it in time.

So,

"Add! Release the first stage!"

As I ran, I unleashed Add. He took on the form of a large shield. Mounting the shield like a sled, I had it shoot a burst of flame all at once. With an apology to the grass being incinerated by the sudden burst of magical fire, I huddled down at the sudden acceleration.

The shield leapt through the air. Flying in an arc, I came up to the side of the train.

"Gray!" Caules shouted, along with some sort of incantation. A moment before I collided with the train, a strong crosswind picked up around me. As I struck the train car, I managed to remain conscious. Thanks to Caules' quick wind magecraft, the impact had been significantly weakened. Clinging to the side of the train car, I lowered my head weakly.

"T-thank you."

"Thank goodness..." Caules responded with a bright smile, leaning out over the metal railing. "Thank goodness...you made it..."

"...yes, somehow."

Returning Add to his sealed form and putting him back on the hook under my cloak, I carefully made my way across the side of the train car to the deck at the back of the caboose where Caules was waiting. I then noticed another person standing there, totally stunned, and yet with a faint smile.

"Hello, Melvin."

"...ah, Miss Gray. I'm glad to see you're okay. Or rather, I'm impressed you managed to find the train."

At his look of shock, I reached a hand into my cloak, pulling out a crumpled piece of paper. "This is...your invitation, Melvin. Sorry, I forgot to give it back to you." The invitation was giving off a faint light, indicating the position of the train. It was likely a function included to guide those who planned on boarding the train partway through the auction. Having found it when we retrieved Melvin from the forest, it had guided me to the train all the way from the cave.

"Haha, how fortunate!" Melvin said, scratching his head.

"Umm, what about my master?!" I couldn't help but blurt out.

"Don't worry. Once we got out of that forest, his condition stabilized," Caules calmly responded to my worries. "He hasn't woken up yet, but he should any minute now."

"I...see..." I dropped to the floor, energy suddenly leaving my legs. Having run the entire way from that cave, Strengthened the entire time, the moment my anxiety was relieved I had reached my limit. Rather than just fatigue though, it felt more like a bone piercing my heart had been removed.

"Ihihihi! What are you falling over for? And what were you thinking, turning me into a shield and riding me like that? That's not how you're supposed to!"

"Uhh, who's voice was that?"

"...d-don't worry about it." Shaking my head at Melvin's confused look, I secretly reached my right hand under my cloak. Of course, I ignored the muffled scream that resulted.

It seemed I needed a bit more time before I'd have the energy to stand again. As I thought that, I felt something warm slip into my free hand.

"Welcome back," Caules said, pulling me back to my feet.

"...thank you. I'm back."

"Shall we go see how the professor is doing?"

"Okay," I said, supporting myself with the shoulder he offered.

As we slowly made our way back to the freight cars, someone appeared from the darkness. "Ah, I noticed someone had boarded the train, so I came to check if things were okay, but I'm glad I did."

Standing in front of us was a woman in brilliantly coloured Japanese clothing. Her long, smooth hair was the colour of night, broken by the faint red of her lips. Her steps were graceful and elegant, yet entirely silent. Even the way she stood held a dignity more imposing than any Mystery or magecraft.

Hishiri Adashino gave a beautiful smile.

"What is it?"

"I would like to ask everyone to gather in the lobby car." She spoke as if she was inviting them to tea. But there was no way there would be such an innocuous invitation from a woman like her.

"...what do you mean? What are you planning?"

"Well, we don't really have a choice. The usual guy is still snoozing away, so it looks like I have to step up and play detective for now," the magus of the Faculty of Law, Hishiri Adashino, declared with a sweet smile. "I can't just reveal the culprit if we don't have everyone gathered, can I?"

## ~Part 4~

The magus of the Department of Law, Hishiri Adashino, twisted her lips in a false smile and declared. "We can't find out who did it unless you're all here."

Our arrival appeared to be the last.

Yvette L. Lehmann—the girl with a single Mystic Eye.

Karabo Frampton—a priest of the Holy Church.

Olga Marie Asmleit Animusphere—Successor to the Celestial Family Animusphere.

Melvin Weins—Tuner.

Jean-Mario Supinerra—the former TV show magus.

Hishiri Adashino—The magus of the Department of Law.

Next, the main staff of the Rail Zeppelin.

Conductor Rodin.

Auctioneer Leandra.

Including myself, there were a total of nine members. If Melvin was removed from the list and then the trio of Trisha, who had passed away, Master, and Caules were added to the group, it would be the same group of people who had initially boarded the Rail Zeppelin.

(...)

The carpet was so soft that it seemed to sink down to my ankles. There are elegant baked goods and tea on the table, and I realize now that it is still late afternoon. My senses have been completely deranged, having been knocked out, albeit for a short time. The events of only half a day since this morning were so compressed in time.

At one of those tables, with a hum, a white hand waved. "Welcome back, Gray!" Yvette, her pink twin-tail hair swinging from side to side so much it hurt my eyes, was calling out to me. "I knew you would come back!"

"...Oh? Were you not saying something about whether there would now be a slot available to become the instructor's apprentice due to the vacancy?"

"No, I didn't say... that- Father?!"

Yvette became rigid as she turned around to see Karabo sitting next to her. I blinked to myself at the thought of this square-faced priest making a joke or two. I was surprised to see the unexpected side of this man I have lived and died beside for hardly an hour.

After a laugh at the priest, who cleared his throat, Yvette spoke to us again. "Still, I don't know how you survived that avalanche."

"A little... luck came to help me..."

As you can imagine, it's hard to say that you were saved by a Heroic Spirit. And if I were to say that it was someone with whom I had engaged in life or death battle only yesterday, then an entire night would not be enough to explain it with my poor communication skills.

The priest moves his eyes and asks. "What happened to the other disciple of El-Melloi?"

"If you speak of Caules, he is watching over my master. He said I should come over here."

On the way here, I stopped by the carriage room once. As Caules had said, Master had not regained consciousness yet, but he was looking much better. That much gave me peace of mind. It was satisfying enough to know that the battle in the frozen forest had not been in vain.

"Thank you for your help with the Child of Einnashe."

"As I said in the beginning, I approached for my own sake. There is no need to thank me. ...Still, I hope your master gets better soon."

"Thank you." After thanking him, I turn around. There was another person I had to talk to in the lobby car. I take one deep breath and then walk over to her. "Olga Marie... Miss. ...?"

"..."

The silver-haired girl didn't look up.

She remained slumped all the way down, a box the size of a travel bag at her feet. It was an oddly intriguing box, but right now, I was more concerned with her.

"Olga Marie."

"I don't know you. Don't talk to me." And so, the girl turned away. When I hesitated, unable to get to the heart of the matter, she added one more comment. "...Your master, how is he?"

"Thanks to receiving so much help, he has stabilized. Caules is looking after him now." I said roughly the same thing as I did to Karabo earlier.

I wonder if it is a characteristic unique to Master that she is so concerned about him, even though I don't think she had much contact with him. It is because my master is such a person that I am able to avoid falling down. It is difficult to keep standing up for myself, but if it could lead to even the slightest support for that grumpy person — if I could think such an arrogant thing, I felt that I could keep myself from cowering just a little longer.

"I see." Olga Marie muttered.

The conversation stopped after that, but I didn't feel bad about it. I was tempted to ask about the box under my feet, but something unusual happened first. Words arose from the previous table.

"So, what is this business we're gathered here for, miss Department of Law?"

When Karabo tried to fish for information, uh... Hishiri slapped his hand.

"Didn't I tell you? Since a certain someone seems to be sleeping peacefully, I thought I would play detective. It would be beneficial for the Rail Zeppelin to have all of its cases settled before the auction."

"...I see." Suddenly sounding more awake, the dark-skinned priest rose from his chair.

"What's the matter?"

"I'm retiring," Karabo says concisely.

"I'll do the same." Yvette stood up too.

"Oh, even you?"

"Isn't it obvious? I don't care if your guess is right or wrong, whether one of us is really the murderer or not. It's better to stay in my room until the auction."

"...I'm right there with you. In addition, I belong to the Holy Church. I do not need to be restricted by the Department of Law."

Their words were very much like a magus and very much like an agent.

Truth and human life do not carry much weight. It is always possible to kill or be killed. That is why they say it is natural to avoid unnecessary risks. As magi, no one would have the words to deny them.

However. "... I think it's a good idea! A mystery drama!" Melvin raised his hand. The young albino who had come to the lobby car with me stood proudly in the midst of the gazes of the magi and Rail Zeppelin staff. "I'll stand by your guess. Isn't it nice, a mystery play? I've always wanted to experience it, not once, but two or three times!"

"Melvin Weins... The Tuner of Trambelio." Once more, Olga Marie whispers.

Trambelio was another name I'd heard glimpsed. As I recall, it was one of the three Great Families that Yvette had mentioned. Along with Valualeta and Bartholomeloi, they were the most prestigious of the prestigious in the Clock Tower.

Perhaps it was the power of the name, but Yvette also mouthed an. "...Oh'

(...Ah) Somehow, I can see why the master did not mention this friend.

After all, Melvin is a friend of interesting things. If there is pleasure in it, he will not hesitate to open it, even if it is Pandora's box. He knows the meaning and effect of his family name, and he behaves thoughtlessly nonetheless.

Then, the conductor stepped forward. "The Rail Zeppelin has also decided to support mistress Hishiri in this matter. I apologize for this, but I would like to ask everyone to please bear with it for a while." The conductor's face was as emotionless as when we first met him. It was not an expressionless face, but rather a face that had no such thing from the beginning - or perhaps a look that was far removed from that of a magus.

I wonder if Hishiri was laying this groundwork while we were fighting in the frozen forest.

"...I understand."

"..."

As if giving up, Yvette and Carabo returned to their seats. With the addition of one of the three Great Families to the Department of Law, and even the endorsement of the Rail Zeppelin, they thought it would be a waste of effort to resist any further.

After making sure everyone was back in their chairs, "thank you very much." Hishiri bowed like a flower. "Now, I would like to advise you on this case from the standpoint of the Department of Law-"

"Hello, detective!" Artificial to the situation, Melvin loudly claps.

If you think about it, this would be an extremely selfish act, since he is the only one who is a later participant, and he has no damage to suffer from this reasoning act.

"First, I'd like to present some preliminary information." With that, Hishiri smiled. The white nape of her neck swayed in the light from the window. Her shadow swayed with it. At the same time, everyone in the room may have felt an unpleasant sensation. It was as if this woman, who resembled a beautiful snake, was manipulating everything. "A familiar returned from the Clock Tower just now."

“A familiar?” Melvin asked back, and Hishiri gave a small nod.

“Yes, I had the Department of Law provide me with information about an incident seven years ago.”

“Hey, hey, you! You said the Department of Law isn't so lax to easily view cases outside your direct charge! What was that all about?” It was Jean-Mario Supinerra.

Hishiri's response to the TV station magus, who protested with exaggerated gestures, was nonchalant. “It's not easy, but it's clear enough by how you spoke that this is relevant.”

“...Tch, you just whatever you want.”

“Eh, seven years ago? What do you mean?” Melvin poked his head out with interest. Of all of them, only the strange tuner seems to be unafraid of the name of the Department of Law.

“Yes. Shall I take a small moment to explain?” Hishiri asks, her head slowly turning around. Something is not right, I thought. But before I could utter a word, the woman from the Department of Law continued to speak. “Seven years ago, there was a string of murders where the M.O. was the same. A case where several bodies were found with their heads removed.”

I felt my blood freeze for a moment at those words. A headless corpse, which was gruesome even among magi, must have seemed so abhorrent to the general public.

In contrast, Melvin hmmed and tilted his head. “If there had been such an incident, I would have remembered it.”

“There was information control. The Department of Law controlled the matter.” Hishiri, on the other hand, lifted up the sleeves of her elegant folk dress and casually confessed it.

Information control. For the Department of Law, it's their core business. The Enforcement Bureau of the First Principle carries out the Clock Tower's foremost task of concealing Mystery.

"...Hey, that's supposed to be my line." Despite Jean-Mario's dissatisfied lips, the female magus continues.

"However, The information I've received tells me other things as well."

"U-huh. What else?"

"There was another organization that intervened in that matter. Namely, the Holy Church."

"...!"

A hint of unrest floats over the train for a moment.

It was Karabo's, of course. Turning her wet obsidian-like eyes slowly, Hishiri spoke to the dark-skinned old man.

"The agent at the time was Karabo Frampton. It was you, correct?"

"...Correct."

Karabo conceded it concisely. His lips were quivering and tight. An agitation that had not been seen even when he had run through the Child of Einnashe was now gripping the old man of the Church.

"Why didn't you tell us before?"

"It would be a breach of confidentiality to leak information about past cases needlessly. It's only natural." In a hard voice, the dark-skinned priest states so.

But there is no way that everyone will agree with that explanation. Hishiri continued to ask the obvious question. "Is that all?"

"..."

She stared at the silent Karabo for a moment and then, "Let us proceed to the next stage of this discussion," Hishiri declared.

She passed between the tables in the lobby car and looked down at a single spot. It was only after a few seconds or so that I realized this was the carriage where Trisha had died.

"In this case, despite Master Karabo's vision of the past, he could not see the scene of the crime. Despite Trisha's vision of the future, she was unable to protect herself. In short, neither the past nor the future could see the moment of the crime." Hishiri raised both her hands as if singing.

The fingers of one of her hands bend down from above, and the other lifts up from below. Does it represent looking at the past and the future? She stopped at a point where the two sets of fingers overlapped, then continued her speech.

"If so, the answer is straightforward. It's very simple — the crime scene wasn't 'here' at all."

"Ah..." Yvette clapped her hands at that opinion. "I see. That's right. That must be it."

"As expected of a Mystic Eyes specialist. You seem to understand quickly. Hindsight and Foresight only transcend the time axis. If that is so, then no matter how much you try to envision it, you can't see it if you are not at the real 'scene' of the crime. It is a matter of course. It's different if it's a type of Clairvoyance that can also see into the distance, but it's not like that, is it?"

In shock, I find myself staring wide-eyed.

The surrounding magi seemed to be ruminating and verifying her reasoning. Even if one can see through time in a particular direction, space cannot be transcended. In that case, they wondered what kind of phenomena could have occurred.

Only one person, Melvin, was nodding his head, idly rubbing his chin. "Hmm. Well then, who on earth killed Trisha?"

"Yes, perhaps it has come to that." Hishiri gently shifted her gaze to the natural question. "Now, let's bring forth another witness, shall we? ...Miss Olga Marie."

The girl's shoulders shook with a startle. The heir to the Celestial Animusphere, who had been silent until then, stifled a low moan at the sound of the woman's voice.

"That bag, please lift it for all to see."

At that command, the girl who had been depressed bit her trembling lip. It was as if she was ashamed of her fear. After taking a few deep breaths, she reached for the travel-bag-sized box at her feet.

The first thing that peeked out from within was long blonde hair. Of course, it is not a huge box that a person could fit into exactly like a person. However, the blonde hair, followed by the forehead, eyebrows, closed eyes, and nose, revealed a familiar face.

Only the face.

"T-Trisha's..." Groaning to myself, Hishiri nodded slowly.

"Yes. The missing, freshly severed head of Trisha Fellows."



With elegance, Hishiri lifted the severed head amidst everyone's gazes. Like Salome, the seductress who had craved John the Baptist's head, the female magus of the Department of Law was terrifyingly captivating.

"...What is this?"

She replied calmly to Karabo's hoarse voice. "Her head was concealed by Imaginary Numbers Magecraft. In all likelihood, I believe that she sealed it herself."

"Trisha, on her own... to her own head?"



It just doesn't make sense.

How could such a circumstance occur?

Trisha's head, which was supposed to have been stolen after her death, was concealed by Trisha herself. If that is the case, then who cut off her head? No, how could she hide her own head? Maybe it's possible with an illusionary decapitation, but this is a real severed head, right?

This was too incomprehensible, and as I was simply dazed, Hishiri resumed speaking slowly.

“Most likely, Trisha Fellows realized she was going to die by decapitation. In advance of that, It seems that she created an imaginary pocket for her head to fall into.”

It was too much; Hishiri's statement was ridiculous. And yet it can not be denied. You can't interrupt her and say that she's crazy. I sense nothing except truth in the idea. I can't help but feel anxiety wrap softly around my heart.

Karabo's words when he saw the crime scene were the following.

"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."

Alternatively, he was able to see the situation when Trisha entered this room.

However, the head that was cut off disappeared just as it fell. Then, as it was vague, he misinterpreted that as not being able to see? No, if that is the case, shouldn't he be seeing the shape of the killer?

Not caring for his confused self, Jean-Mario wrung his own neck.

"Hmm, what do you mean? Even if she sensed she was going to die..."

"That would be Foresight."

Yvette interrupted.

"I don't know the exact timing — perhaps just after she sat down in the chair — but she saw a future where her head would fall off, and she would die. So at the very least, there was something necessary she could still do. Possibly, the magic to create the imaginary pocket was a one bar, one count incantation or something like that?"

"... Yes."

Olga Marie nods.

Her beautiful silver hair swayed sadly.

"For Trisha, it was little more than a minor telepathic spell."

"I envy her. Magic attributes are irreplaceable."

After stretching, Yvette pouted. I think my teacher once said something similar. Magic Attributes that depend on the individual are basically something that cannot be interfered with, even by the greatest of Mysteries. That is why those with dual attributes, such as the previous Lord El-Melloi, are so highly regarded.

Thus, Hishiri opens her mouth once more.

"Ah, yes, yes. Trisha's head was not yet dead when Olga Marie took it out of the pocket of the void. After all, time stands still within the Imaginary Numbers space. Yes, with not enough time to even write a single word, I can say that she opted for the perfect dying message. With her final breath left in her throat, what do you think was her final word?"

She asked the question and laughed in the lobby car, where naturally, no one dared to answer.

"'Karabo,' is what she whispered." It was too decisive.

A stiff tension swirled among the magi. The hostility of monsters who can kill with - or in some cases without - a single word of incantation.

The enchanting magus of the Department of Law manipulates words as if she were waving a conductor's baton. "Karabo Frampton." And so, she called out his name again. "Your Retrocognition— no, strictly speaking, it can not be distinguished as such, granted that it's more Calculation than Prediction, correct?"

Karabo held one of his eyes.

Prediction and Calculation. That's what Caules was talked about earlier. There are two types of Precognition and Retrocognition, known as Prediction and Calculation, the former is an extension of the normal human imaginative capacity, while the latter is a kind of strange power that anchors the time axis to one's actions.

"It is often said that, for the past, there is no such thing as Prediction or Calculation. Unlike the future, the past cannot be changed, so it doesn't matter how you look at it. But that's just under normal circumstances. —Yes, I heard someone talking about the Mystic Eyes of Death Perception yesterday. The "Rainbow" ranked Mystic Eyes that can impose death to those it sees equally."

Suddenly, the subject changed in mid-sentence.

The Mystic Eyes of Death Perception. The one that Olga Marie had mentioned in her lecture before the auction. If the explanation at that time was correct, they are Rainbow Rank Mystic Eyes, which are the top of the line, surpassing even the Gold and Jewel ranks.

"I have never seen such Mystic Eyes. However, with some attempts at imagination, I can infer what they might be like. Yes, they must be the highest form of Foresight. At the very least, it is one such ability that can glimpse the strings of fate."

"...Are you saying that these Mystic Eyes of Death Perception, or whatever, are truly the ultimate form of Foresight?"

As Karabo groans, Hishiri nods. "I hear that is the case. Everyone will die someday. As everything is flawed, there is a hidden desire in all of us to destroy all that is fair, so we can start it anew. If you can see that ending and could bring it into the present, then what would it be called if not the highest form of Foresight?"

"..."

Hishiri's words started making a little more sense.

As I am imperfect, I want to change. I want to destroy that imperfection. If one day, my personality and unknown future will come to an end, then I would rather have my neck strangled right now. Surely everyone thinks about it. A terribly simple and grim desire. As it was so simple, that one description at the end made uncanny sense.

"If that is so, then the reverse is also true. Everyone was born at some point. As we are born imperfect, we may resent that beginning at all is a mistake. If you can see and bring that beginning into the present, then how can it not be known as the highest form of Hindsight? Ah, moreover, if that is so, then the world might even look like a bubble."

(...Bubble?)

"By any chance, would that be a reference to space-time bubbles?" It was Melvin who interrupted.

"Are you aware of it?"

"What I do know is that it is a scientific concept. It is said that at an extremely small scale, an object may be like a collection of bubbles. I do not think he is looking at such a scientifically accurate image, but would you also say it's a similar concept?"

"Roughly, you are correct," Hishiri affirms it.

I feel a pang of irritation rising in the back of my throat.

Seeing the world as a bubble. I don't know why, but that idea made me feel terribly uneasy. People, animals, trees, fish, flowers, earth, stone, water, light: what would it feel like to see all of it as mere bubbles? What sort of life is it to spend every day confronted by the fact that everything and anything appears the same?

Wouldn't that make you feel like you were squeezing your own eyeballs?

"...Ah, unfortunately, unlike the rumored Mystic Eyes of Death Perception, these Mystic Eyes are unlikely to have reached the end of all things. It also falls short of glimpsing the beginning. At the most, these Mystic Eyes recognize and evoke events that have happened in the — past It seems that they are that sort of Mystic Eyes, don't you think?"

The more polite Hishiri's words were, the more dreadful they became.

It's like being traced on the back of your neck with the tip of a knife. The blade is coated with poison, and though it doesn't leave a scratch, it seems to rot even one's core.

"Foresight fixes the future as it will be." As if singing, she says so. "If that is so, then it is only natural that Hindsight should establish the past. Yes, if the end of things is 'to die', it is natural that the beginning of things is the 'to live'. Those Mystic Eyes can resurrect past truths in the present."

Like a detective in a mystery novel, Hishiri carefully arranges everything one by one. She moves to expose. She moves to eviscerate.

This is the kind of person she was, I think.

From the first time I met her at Castle Adra, she had been this sort of person. It was as if that were all a lie that I had forgotten until this moment, but now Hishiri had regained that initial impression.

The Department of Law. A magus who presides over magi.

“... So you're saying that these Mystic Eyes recreate events that happened in the past?”

Yvette spoke.

Hishiri nodded as if she had been waiting for someone to say so.

“Yes. It is likely that the actions that can be reproduced from the past are limited. In this case, it may be used in advance to record and retrieve past slashes with specific timing — that would be one such use. Yes... like this, for example.”

Hishiri casually takes a knife and an apple from a table.

First, she moved the knife vertically. “I'll record these slashes, then leave it for you.”

Thus, she moved to the same spot as the apple. Similar to something she did earlier, Hishiri swung the knife and scratched the surface of the apple. “After that, as long as the holder of these Mystic Eyes observes it, the target can be severed with the recorded slash at any time. That is the purpose of these Mystic Eyes I have been talking about. ...Say, this is you, isn't it?

With that, she looked back at the old man once more. “This is you, isn't it? Karabo Frampton.”

“...I am, that is...” The dark-skinned old man was trembling as if he were having a fit. Between the female magus and the older man, it seemed like there was a terrible curse sneering.

“In this situation, the Rail Zeppelin was probably the easiest gimmick for you to use. After all, the train runs on rails.”

She moves her index finger. The movement was as if tracing the railway. Along the way, the knife swung, cutting through the invisible line. “If you cut the void with a leading

train car, Trisha's head would eventually come to those coordinates. It would have been easy enough to see where the chairs were located in the room. It wouldn't even matter if you cut a slightly larger range or not."

She took the apple from earlier and placed it at the point where the knife flew through the air.

"The train had been stopped in the forest when Trisha's body was found, and you, Karabo, were also found outside, weren't you? It must have been good enough for you to take a short peek from the outside window. After that, the empty air was rented for a second time, pulled into the present by your Hindsight. The air was cut, together with the head of Trisha Fellows. And so, her head was sealed in a dimensional pocket by her own Imaginary Number Magecraft."

"..."

With the knife, she cuts the apple apart.

With a 'shin', silence fell. Once more, it was like a confirmation of what she was saying. As long as it is at the hands of a magus, there is no such thing as an impossible crime in the first place. But even so, her argument was too outlandish for even the magi gathered here to swallow immediately.

Roughly scratching his head, Jean-Mario opens his mouth. "Hey, hey. Wait a minute. Does that mean the serial murders seven years ago were also...?"

Several gazes focused on the old man.

The series of murders seven years ago. It was obvious to everyone that Hishiri had spoken of the case underlining the fact that a number of heads were lost and that Karabo had been the Church agent at the time.

And yet she deliberately shakes her head. "I'm not saying you're the killer of seven years ago, and I'm not saying you're the killer of this time. We certainly don't have that kind of evidence. But with all these circumstances, don't we have reason to take certain measures?" The beautiful smile now held terrible meaning. "Can you not show us? I wonder if you — with your Mystic Eyes, long after the beheading, could use this location to bring forth a result."

“Such a thing, my Hindsight is-” An upset Karabo was about to say something.

“...I want you to wait for a moment.” But, I heard a voice.

The doors of the lobby car open.

It started with wheels treading on the carpet, as if emerging from the depths of darkness. Next, a pair of fine leather shoes appeared, and a figure in a wheelchair looked gloomily around the room. The wheelchair was being pushed by a bespectacled, curly-haired boy named Caules Forvedge, and it should not be necessary to name who was in the wheelchair.

“Master...!”

“Waver...!”

Even Melvin, who had been happily watching, stood up.

“So, you are finally awake. Lord El-Melloi II.”

Hishiri narrows her eyes and moves her gaze from the Master's head to the wheelchair.

In contrast, the master only touched his glasses.

“I had somewhat of an accident. I still can not walk properly, so I asked my apprentice to get me a wheelchair from the staff of the Rail Zeppelin ...Though, I didn't expect Melvin to be here as well.”

“Yup! It's only natural that you would run into your best friend when you are in trouble!”

“This is none of your business. You're the only one who calls me best friend in the first place.”

“Friends aren't decided on some sort of mutual contract! It's a meeting of the minds! It's about unconscious approval! Maybe we should be more open and confident with this friendship! Oh, and by the way, you can give me a hug!”

“Please shut up already,” Master says so as if spitting.

From the faintly raspy breaths, it is likely that he has only just regained consciousness. In fact, even I had not dreamt that the master would appear at this time. It was also beyond the scope of my imagination that he would come in a wheelchair.

Instinctively, I rushed over to him.

For this one moment, the incident and everything else were so far away.

“Master, your body...”

“Is not a problem. ...Not necessarily a problem. I wouldn’t have bothered to come out here if it was.”

Master stroked my head from the top of my hood when I ran up to him. It was more painful for me to see my master, who was usually so prickly, show such kindness to me, and I felt helpless.

“Caules told me what happened. He said you’ve been through a lot.”

“... Yes.” I nod.

It took so much effort just to keep the tears from falling. I know I’m not the one who is really in pain, but the words to convey that did not exist inside of me.

“Truly... Truly so many things happened. But, you could have... much better... than the likes of clumsy me...”

How powerless words can be. No, how incompetent I really am.

I should have been more prepared. I knew Master was recovering; I should have been ready for this moment. My thoughts are spinning, and I can’t formulate any words. I had planned to speak with him when he woke up, but all that would come out of the back of my throat were sobs.

"Hah, and as for that servant?" Master grimaced and said that in a whisper, so as not to be heard by any of the others arround us.

The grimace betrayed his pain. It wasn't just physical pain. In meeting with the Heroic Spirit who called herself Hephaestion, Master's spirit was imbued with extraordinary sorrow.

"After all, in all that time, there was the Child of Einnashe, Imaginary Numbers Magecraft, and even the results of looking into this Hindsight. That's a lot to pack into just half a day or so."

"...Oh my, how much have you heard?" Hishiri tilts her head.

"I heard from words, 'the empty air was rented for a second time, pulled into the present by your Hindsight.' But hearing that much, I can roughly guess your conjecture. ...Gray, we'll talk about that Servant later." Whispering the last part in my ear, Master slowly turned his wheelchair. He regarded Hishiri directly and lifted three fingers.  
"Miss Adashino. On three points, I have issues with what you said."

"It seems that sleep has given back your spirits, so please allow us to hear your renowned reasoning without any delay."

"First, we do not know whether or not Mr. Karabo's Mystic Eyes are capable of such a thing. Second, even if he did have such an ability, who is to say that a different magus could not have also been able to kill Trisha?" Unconcerned with Hishiri's words, the master spoke in quick succession. "Third, there is no motive in your current reasoning." With that, he pressed her for an answer.

"Karabo Frampton killed Trisha Fellows; there is no need for a rational motive knowing that. Investigating any other person would be faulty then, correct?"

"I see. Is that your specialty, the whodunit?"

With a single nod, Hishiri's smile deepens.

"As you say, none of us know why. And possibly, there are magi who could do something similar. However, how do you explain Trisha's dying message? Besides, we do not follow the rules of modern society, and I do not represent a state-sanctioned police force. In

dubio pro reo (to be innocent until proven guilty). There is not a shred of a need to adhere to such legal principles."

Was the Latin that Hishiri murmured a remnant of the time of Roman law? She says readily that no such thing like that was needed. Thus, within this train, that would make her words the only truth necessary.

And so, with a pop, she slaps her hands together.

"Ah, if there really needs to be a reason, then why not look back with your Mystic Eyes while identifying yourself as the killer? Perhaps by gazing too long at the murders of seven years ago, you started confusing yourself as the killer? If you started losing control of your Mystic Eyes, then it is not so unlikely, is it?"

"...You can't be serious."

"Does it matter if I am serious? It won't make much difference if we're serious or just playing around. We are magi, after all." Shrugging, Hishiri shakes her head.

I can't tell whether she is joking or serious. Though, I think that there are more examples of such in the history of the Clock Tower than one might think. As if to resemble the story of 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, is there such a case that could be etched into the very history of the Clock Tower?"

"As magi of the Clock tower, is this not enough material to detain Karabo for the time being?" Once more, she stared at the priest. "Besides, if the subject is his ability, then all we need is his testimony."

"...I... that is something I can not talk about."

Karabo says, his voice strained as if it was being squeezed.

"Oh, you say you can't speak with us? Even so, that is perfectly fine!" And so, Hishri laughed, becoming even more repulsive. "As for your Mystic Eyes, why not put them to auction? If that is the case, then the side of the Rail Zeppelin should be able to explain just how well these Mystic Eye perform."

"...Yes, these Mystic Eyes are Transient." Suddenly, I heard a voice. No, it wasn't a voice. Strictly speaking, it was not even a thought. It was as if the notion itself had suddenly seeped into all of our brains.

Just like that notion, the Rose Woman appeared. I was told that she was the Deputy Manager of the Rail Zeppelin — I myself had seen her many times.

For once, it seemed I wasn't the only one who could perceive her.

The magi gathered in the lobby car all held their breath slightly and focused their attention on her. "As it has become the appointed time, the collection will proceed before the auction."

"Appointed... time...?"

"The staff has already informed you. Half a day before the auction, Mystic Eyes are to be extracted and stored." Mystic Eyes extraction for the purpose of auction.

Of all the moments, for the timing to be this moment — no, that's not it either. It is precisely because of this timing that Hishiri had engaged in such an act as a public detective demonstration.

(It had... all been a reversal...)

I shuddered as I realized that fact.

Hishiri naturally knew that the evidence was too incomplete to convince the magi around her. Aside from Trisha's dying message and the fact that Karabo was present at the incident seven years ago, there was no way she could convince all the magi on board with a method that assumed an arbitrary ability to interfere with the past.

However, no matter how outlandish or ridiculous, she was confident that the Rail Zeppelin would confirm her theory. The normal procedure of tracking down the culprit with witnesses and evidence was impossible, but this was a turning of the tables that could only be achieved in this place and by a magus. A detective of inversion.

No.

From the very beginning, she never wanted to be a detective. This is not a mystery drama for her. It's a political drama. Hishiri is dealing with this incident as if it were one of the many power struggles swirling around the Clock Tower. It implicitly demonstrates to all the magi here that this is the method of the Department of Law.

Recoiling, Karabo took several steps back. "B-but wait! Not now..."

The old man tried to resist the invasion of his personal space, but as if drawn in, the rose woman broke through. He, who had shown such brilliant physical skills with the Child of Einnashe, was so easily approached either because of his constant shaking, or because of the superior Mystery of the Rose Woman.

Her fingers sank into half of Karabo's face.

It was unusually natural as if she was sinking into mud or something. Not a drop of blood was spilled, which could have been a technique similar to psychic surgery. The index, middle finger, and thumb pushed in all the way to the second joint, then slid out in just a few seconds. At the same time, perhaps unconscious, Karabo collapsed.

Deputy Manager.

With that, the auctioneer held up a glass cylinder filled with a solution. When the Deputy Manager waved her hand, two eyeballs fell with a clatter into the tube. During the extraction, no one could even flinch.

"That concludes the removal of the Mystic Eyes." The auctioneer told us, her voice trembling as if she had seen the work of God.

Their voices were trembling. Ours were too. Maybe that's what happens to all of us when we see something so far removed from the rest of the world. From the viewpoint of magecraft, I had no clue how superior of a Mystery that extraction was, so even I couldn't catch a single breath.

Even the fact that the Deputy Manager had disappeared again was not immediately noticed.

"We can handle the transplantation, but only the Deputy Manager can do the removal. This is the reason why she is always asleep. Once she's done it, she will probably fall

asleep again for a while." The auctioneer caressed the glass cylinder. Much gentler than patting a baby, much prouder than feeling fine art. "Ahh ... Ahh, how magnificent." She raised her voice once more towards the eyeballs in the glass cylinder.

Genuine emotion. Genuine impulse. It was a tone of voice that seemed to come from the depths of the mind and even further down. Yvette and Karabo had said that the staff of the Rail Zeppelin were not necessarily obsessed with Mystic Eyes, but at least this auctioneer seemed to be an exception.

What is it that she saw from behind her tightly wound eyepatch that covered both eyes?

Surely, it was a distinct sense from sight, right? She continued by rubbing her face against the inside of the tube, as if she were smelling it, and as if she were listening to a voice inside of it. Then, she said. "It reaches the rank of "Jewel", although I don't think Karabo was aware of this. It is worthy of being the centerpiece of our auction, the eye-catcher. It makes the shadows of the past, which should have ended long ago, appear like bubbles in the present — shall we call them the Mystic Eyes of Transience?"

The Mystic Eyes of Transience.

As soon as that name was announced, Hishiri Adashino turned around at once. "Well, it looks like we have sorted everything out for now." She looked down at Karabo, who was still lying on the ground, and gently pulled on the sleeves of her kimono. "I am very sorry to have taken up so much of your valuable time. Please, may you resume your comfortable journey on the Rail Zeppelin."

◆ 第三章 ◆  
-Chapter 3-



**~Part 1~**

Karabo was to be confined to a private room.

With the collaboration with the Rail Zeppelin, there was no room for defiance as long as the Department of Law was in charge of the situation. No, excluding Karabo, for the magi of the Clock Tower, this was a splendid resolution to a small trifle.

His eyes are wrapped in bandages provided by Rail Zeppelin, and his legs are bound with chains. The restraints were also reinforced by magic to prevent them from escaping.

Master and I were now standing together in that room.

We were able to have our proposal to speak a little more to Karabo when he wakes accepted. In the meantime, they seem to trust us enough not to release him without permission, but we don't know that for a fact. For the time being, the room was to be monitored by the Rail Zeppelin staff outside the room.

Looking at Karabo, who was unconscious with his Mystic Eyes gone, Master took a short breath. "So, why are you following me?"

"Of course I would follow you! I'm your best friend! If you say anything too distant, I'm gonna cry uncontrollably and flood this car with bloody vomit and bitter tears, but that's okay!"

Master flatly ignores Melvin, who starts crying really annoying crocodile tears.

By the way, Caules was watching Olga Marie at the request of Master. He decided that the boy who had escorted Olga Marie yesterday, when Trisha had just died, might be a bit better at making her acquaintance.

"...Your body... are you really feeling okay?"

"For now, as long as it is just talking like this." With a faintly bitter chuckle, Master curved his lips.

By no means did his complexion look fine. There was no way he could be expected to be fine. Even though it was not a direct hit, and he had prepared defensive magecraft, his flesh was on the receiving end of that servant's Noble Phantasm. The smell of lightning-burned flesh still wouldn't leave my nostrils.

Nevertheless, even if it was not in Master's character to breathe out complaints, it was painful for him.

"...For the time being, until Karabo wakes up, let's get this situation sorted, shall we," Master spoke as he put his glasses back on.

To sort out a situation. Since boarding the Rail Zepplin, there have been many events in need of sorting. Sequenced in order.

For instance, the stolen relic.

For instance, the leftover invitations.

For instance, Trisha's death.

For instance, the Servant's attack.

For instance, the emergence and hunt of the Child of Einnashe.

For instance, the almost nefarious mystery drama by the magus from the Department of Law.

But, right now, I divided each event with a short question, then I thought of what the first question should be.

"Master, do you really think that Karabo killed Trisha? Like what Hishiri and the others said — with the Mystic Eyes of Transience?"

"...Only the latter half is for sure," Master shook his head. "It is probably true because the Rail Zeppelin staff has named them the Mystic Eyes of Transience and declared that the crime was possible. However, there is a big gap between saying something is possible and actually doing it. Miss Adashino was forcing a connection there, and I'm sure she understands that it came off as quite the show of force. Most likely, though,

that's enough for her. There's no real need for the Department of Law to look for the true culprit."

"The Department of Law Department only wants to keep the Clock Tower running smoothly, eh?" Melvin chimes in as if to give his assent.

I would imagine that for a magus who has been at the Clock Tower for a long time, the disposition of the Department of Law would be familiar. It is a different kind of corruption of power, an existence that is fully committed to its role. I swallow deeply, realizing the fact that both the people running management and the people being run regard one another as nothing more than cogs in a wheel.

"In the first place, I only just saw the Deputy Manager for the first time. ...Have you been seeing her before now, Gray?"

"...Yes. But only... periodically."

"If you can see her, then it's a matter of spiritual sensitivity." It was just a little, but Master's words sounded like they were imbued with something akin to envy.

"M-maybe so. Even for the other magi, it seemed like she was invisible." With those words, I bite my lips tightly.

I wondered if I should then ask that one question. I was torn, but I couldn't just keep it locked away in my chest any longer, so I spoke frankly.

"Master, what do you think about that Servant?" I glance at Melvin as I speak.

Incidentally, the handkerchief on the young man's chest is stained red because he is vomiting blood for the umpteenth time today. To be honest, I think that the amount of blood lost is enough to require a transfusion, but I do not know what sort of body structure he has.

"Servant? Hmm, what do you mean?"

As expected, Melvin reacted.

“Are you talking about a Ghost Liner — the duplication of a Heroic Spirit that appeared in the Holy Grail War that Waver participated in? I had been wondering who hurt Waver; could it be a Servant by any chance?! No, why would there be a Servant in England? And on the Rail Zeppelin of all places?”

“I want to hear about it.”

After answering a brief barrage of questions, Master leans against the back of his wheelchair wearily.

“Master, you... really should still be sleeping...”

“I’m fine. It’s for this that I have a wheelchair.”

Even so, his breaths were terribly labored.

Nevertheless, he lifts his gaze languidly and responds with a question at Melvin.

“Just to be sure, you are not the culprit, are you?”

“Ugh, Waver. I’m wounded. Since the olden days, you have constantly been unfairly accusing me of marriage fraud and selling illegal drugs!”

“That is because you’re a known offender who has done those things many times over. ...Though, if it were you, you’d be here bragging and confessing. Gray, you can speak here without hesitation. Did you have contact with that Servant while I was in a coma?”

“...Um, yes.” I nod.

The trust between them was a bit of an enigma, but if Master still said it was fine, then there was no reason for me to argue with him.

“When I was escaping the Child of Einnashe, I was saved by the Servant when I was hit by an avalanche. She said that... I was a warrior, so I should not die outside the battlefield.”

“Indeed, that would be the reasoning of an ancient warrior.” Master laughed nostalgically. And a little after that, “...Ah, I am no such warrior,” he muttered.

That alone was enough to feel that Master was more shocked than injured by the encounter with that Servant. It was only natural. The warrior woman had spoken to him in such a way as to deny his entire personality.

- '...What an unpleasant face.'
- 'I wondered what kind of magus you were, but all I see is a good-for-nothing.'
- 'Man, what a complete waste of time. I never thought you could have been so disappointing.'

I felt a tight chill in my chest.

I hold my heart, which feels like stone under my clothes, and take one breath at a time. I can't help but wonder how Master feels. For the person who chases after someone like an ideal — how heartbreaking is it to be denied head-on by the one known as the closest companion to that ideal?

Even still.

Even still, I have to ask.

“Um...” I call out to him.

Shaking off the slight hesitation, I look up and ask. “What sort of Heroic Spirit... is that Servant?

“...”

In response to my question, Master was silent for a short time. Normally I would have been speechless, but this time I kept asking questions. “Olga Marie said that... Hephaestion was the most famous friend of Iskander...”

“Hah. There is no mistaking that Hephaestion was Iskander’s most trusted retainer. Numerous legends testify to this. There may have been many heroes and great warriors under his command, but Hephaestion was the foremost among them.”

Master also confirmed it.

“That's why I'm bewildered.”

“Eh?”

As I blink to myself, he deliberated on his words as if to instruct. “I... did not witness her within the Ionioi Hetairoi.”

“...Ionioi Hetairoi?”

It was the first time I had heard the name, but I had an inkling as to what it meant.

Master's eyes narrowed as if he had sensed that from my expression.

“I see. Did you hear about it from Reines?”

“...Um, yes. One of the Noble Phantasms used by Iskandar - the Heroic Spirit who served you in the Fourth Holy Grail War?”

“I was the one who was serving.”

With a strained smile, Master scratched his face.

“The outline is correct, though. The 'Ionioi Hetairoi' is an extraordinary Noble Phantasm that summons the supreme army of Iskandar, the army that laid waste to the world, in the form of Reality Marble. When I saw it for the first time, I was stunned. Each one was unmistakably a Heroic Spirit, a great army that has traveled from Macedonia to faraway Asia. Great warriors, Maharajas, founders of dynasties, brave men with a single bond and landscape burned into the hearts of all.”

Master's tone was more like he was reciting a book rather than speaking to anyone. A book that he had read dozens or hundreds of times, one he had no need to open as he kept it close to him at all times.

I could almost see the scene for myself.

A mighty ancient army roaring across a wasteland. Cavalry and spearmen mixed together, clad in their favored armor, raising their proud weapons, while their eyes hold unyielding longing and curiosity. And then - the one and only king who leads all the armies.

It was probably because of this Noble Phantasm that Iskandar was singled out for special mention among the Heroic Spirits. Even if separated by death, even if more than two thousand years had passed, even if their souls had been called away by the world, they would come back again when their king called to them with magical energy, a mighty and unbreakable bond.

"There were tens of thousands in that army, and I didn't speak to each and every one of the generals. But I am sure that there was no woman like her amongst them. As I said, there couldn't have been a Hephaestion, who was the greatest retainer."

"..."

A Heroic spirit that should be there is not.

It seemed that precisely because it was an unbelievable horde of Heroic Spirits that the absence would be more apparent. In an army numbering tens of thousands, the generals who commanded each of those thousands would also have to hold a presence that could command their subordinates. It was hard to believe that Master would overlook the brilliance of such a great man that would stand above the rest, a man referred to as having a remarkable aura and charisma since ancient times.

If that is the case, then what does that mean for the warrior woman?

"Despite all that, it is difficult to say she is not Hephaestion. She was able to use Iskandar's Noble Phantasm, the 'Gordian Wheel'. That's right, the only other Heroic Spirit who could use it, apart from Iskandar himself, would be Hephaestion, as they were described by Aristotle as having the bond of 'one soul abiding in two bodies.' Naturally, Master was apparently aware of that anecdote. There had also been an episode in which Iskandar laughed when Darius III's mother mistook Hephaestion for the conquering king. He leaned back in his wheelchair and held his temple with one hand. "Still... I would be much more convinced that she would be Olympias."

"Oh yes, Olympias is Alexander's.... Iskandar's mother. The princess of a powerful state allied with Macedonia."

Melvin's words accompanied Master's.

I was told in detail later that Olympias was renowned as more than just Iskandar's mother, but also as a fearsome figure.

According to legend, at every festival, she was possessed by spirits and manipulated a number of serpents to crawl among the people.

According to legend, on the eve of the wedding, she dreamt that lightning struck her in the womb, and thus Iskandar was the son of Zeus.

It is said that Iskandar's father, Philippus II, was suspected of trying to assassinate her because he attempted to take another wife... or something like that. She was prophetic of the later heroic journey of Iskandar and held a tremendously stern disposition.

"As I recall, Macedonia did not have a specialized priestly class, so Olympias was in charge of all the important rituals in the country. The religiosity of the people at that time - and the power of Mystery - made her extremely important to Iskandar and to Macedonia. You can't label her as a mere adherent to some new religion."

Melvin's words suddenly reminded me of the words of the female warrior herself.

"...Come to think of it, she mentioned she was the overseer for his mother."

"Hmm. Originally, such a relationship would not be so strange." After a pause, Master closed his eyes.

When I closed my mouth to avoid interrupting his thoughts, Melvin whispered in my ear. "I'm not sure what's going on; do you mean to say that Hephaistion showed up here?"

"At least, if she is as she claims to be."

"Hohoho...!" Unpleasantly, the young man's thin pale eyes light up.

“...Be quiet.”

Suddenly, Master's index finger came against his lips, and his gaze drifted to the side.

With a small delay, the old man, lying near the bed, stirred. “Karabo.”

Apparently, the priest was also now awake. Perhaps startled by the sudden blindness that had come upon him, he touched his face several times and then pulled at the chains that were wrapped around his legs.

“My apologies. By the words of Miss Adashino, you are being detained.”

“...I see. That voice is... Lord El-Melloi, correct?”

“There is also my apprentice, Gray, and my somewhat friend Melvin Weins, in case you're interested. Also, if possible, could you could put on a II after my name?”

The priest's lips smiled just a little at the calm correction.

“Ah, so the stories are true. I'd heard that a new Lord of the present generation is going around asking people to give them a II out of respect for their predecessor.”

“...Well. As a magus, he certainly wasn't just footnote to me or anyone else.” Master passed over the story, neither denying nor confirming it.

Even though I had only heard a little about it, I could understand that the relationship between Master and his predecessor must have been extremely complicated. They fought and tried to kill each other in the Fourth Holy Grail War in the past, but both were unable to see it through to its conclusion. I don't know how Master feels about his predecessor now, but there was no doubt that he is obsessed with the title of II.

“Is it fine if I validate something?” Master calmly cuts in. “Were you, Father Karabo, really involved in the incident seven years ago?”

“...I do not know.” The old man held his head down. His wrinkled fingers were now intensely sorrowful. The fingers were creaking and shaking repeatedly. “I truly had forgotten that I had anything to do with that case until a short time ago.”

“...You did not... remember?”

The words were eye-opening. The content of the words seemed so out-of-character with the old man. Because of that, I was also convinced by the words that followed. "It wasn't just that incident. Lately, I've been finding holes here and there about my past, like worms eating my memory..." To my astonishment, I hear him say that.

Master also remained stiff-faced and listened closely to the old man's revelations.

“The past that I could see... It could seep into me even when it was horrible. Whether my eyes were open or closed, the past would come crashing down on me with an avalanche, mocking me as if it were all futile. But with even greater vigor, my own memories were breaking down. That is the sort of Mystic Eyes they are.”

Was that the reason why he wanted to give away his Mystic Eyes?

Surely, that would also be the same reason why he refused to stop the Mystic Eyes Auction even when confronted by the horrifying Child of Einnashe. He came on this train because he refused to be broken down any further.

But it also reveals another fact. “...That means that you really were unable to control your Mystic Eyes.” Master gave truth to that fact. In a sense, these were the words that rather proved Hishiri's reasoning.

“...It seems that was... so.” Karabo's head hangs like a rotting branch.

His fingers are wrapped in bandages. There is no blood. The eye surgery performed by the Deputy Manager apparently did not leave the subject in pain. It was probably just a precautionary measure against touching his eye sockets.

“...Aah,” the old man groaned as if his despair was overflowing. “Even still... even still, I could at least have figured out what happened seven years ago, if only I had those Mystic Eyes now...” Karabo's voice crawled across the floor.

He says that the Mystic Eyes, which he had so abhorred, were now needed.

The result was so ironic that I can think of no words of comfort. As usual, all I can do is stand on the sidelines. I can only stand there choked up at such a cruel result and feeling helpless, as if I were being slowly tortured.

“Someone has to...” He started muttering to himself. “If someone bids on those Mystic Eyes, then we'll know about the incident seven years ago, won't we? No, even this incident...!”

“Maybe so. But it won't be any amount that I can bid for.” Master shakes his head.

That is true. There is also the possibility of asking the magus who buys them, but the chance of that person cooperating is minuscule. It's clear that Hishri and the Department of Law have no interest in investigating any alternative truths. So, no matter who obtains those Mystic Eyes, it will no longer be possible to look into Karabo's past or the events of seven years ago.

“...Haha, do I need to buy them back for you then?” A relaxed voice responded.

“Melvin-”

“No, no, no, all these words have been worrying me for a while now. Talk of Servants and decapitated corpses. Granted, this is the most expensive thing for sale, so I'm not saying it's a sure thing, but it's interesting to try and see this challenge through to the end. I've come all this way for a Mystic Eyes auction, after all.” With a satisfied smile, his eyes were fixed on Master. “Naturally, there is some fun to be had with this. How about it, Waver?”

“I will not sell my soul to the devil.” Master cuts through his gaze curtly.

In contrast, Melvin just shrugged his shoulders and turned to me.

“By the way, Gray. I'm afraid to say that I never met the victim — Trisha Fellows — is there anything at all you can recall?”

“Trisha...?”

When asked, I find myself pondering.

Unfortunately, I didn't have much contact with her. Almost all of the situations we talked about were also with Master, so I don't think I would be the one to notice something.

"Uh, well, I remember when we first met..." A sudden flashback to that memory made me get all embarrassed. I remembered what she was carrying when I first met her.

"What is it?"

"Ah, no... When I first met Trisha, I saw the inside of her clothes... there was, um... I saw... something...obscene."

"I beg your pardon?"

In asking that, Master made me feel even redder in the face.

Furthermore, Master, whose eyebrows were furrowed, did not pay any attention to my flushed face and once more asked the question.

"Can you say it once more? What is that you saw?"

"Um, uhhhh! That is...!"

As if he didn't hear any protests, Master rides his wheelchair out towards me. "What is it, that you saw?"

"Ah, um...that is..."

Naturally, I did not want to say it twice. But there is no way I have a strong enough will to stubbornly defy him. I give up, turn my head down and mutter in a whisper. "L-like I said... there was an... obscene item... under Trisha's clothes."

I felt like hanging myself. I even felt Add stifling a laugh on my right shoulder in amusement, and I hated it. God, if you're there, please destroy this cruel-abuse-type Mystic Code Seal at once.

However, Master's response was not anything like that. He kept his hand over his mouth, and his eyes were wide open. Eventually, his fingers touched his temples, and

out spilled a whisper, like a prophet struck by a revelation. "Bringing something like that with oneself is no mystery. Even I have some defenses in place. But that object was on the scene. Even if it was a defensive measure, it was by no means as reliable as Mystic Eye Killers. ...If that is the case, then the answer is—" Everyone was quiet. "It means that there was, and is a different use for it."

"Master?" He did not respond to being called upon.

He continued his words in a supremely calm manner, staring out into the void. "This is not reasoning. It can hardly be called a deduction. But I can affirm one truth if my guess here is true. I can say this for certain. The culprit is my adversary." He was startled.

I have witnessed complex and bizarre cases at the side of Master on several occasions. However, for every one of those cases, Master was only in a position to react — and solve — the case at hand. That is how a detective in a mystery novel should be. Yet, what kind of change of heart is it to declare that the culprit is your adversary?

"If that is the case, then we need to look into one more thing. If we are to complete this ritual, we need the necessary catalyst."

"Master?"

After wheeling himself around and approaching the door, Master turned around. "Later, at some point, I'll come back to see you. Mister Karabo."

"I-I am sorry. Excuse me!" With those words, I hurriedly chased after his wheelchair as it moved away from the room.

**~Part 2~**

A few minutes or so later, "...oh, instructor!" In the corridor, Caules looked back at us. His unruly hair was swaying over his glasses.

Master told him to check on Olga Marie over here.... but from the way he was standing in the corridor of the train, it seemed that there was a problem.

The only two people here were Master and me, as I was pushing Master's wheelchair. Melvin was on a separate mission at Master's request.

"I'm truly sorry. I went in once, but I was kicked out."

"No, it's quite alright," Master raised his hand.

Then, he said this to the boy. "Caules. Do me a favor and keep an eye on the corridor to make sure no one can come to this room for a while."

"You want me to stand guard? Of course, I don't mind."

"If it's a staff member or something like that, then it can't be helped, but if anyone approaches, I want you to let me know in advance. I'll put up a Bounded Field, but to be honest, I don't trust my own skills."

Caules bowed his head straight down at Master's words, which were tinged with bitterness.

"I understand. But please don't strain yourself, Instructor. You really shouldn't be moving around so much."

"Thank you," After thanking him, Master turned to the door.

"The door's unlocked. Let's go in." With a jerk, he pulled back the door to reveal what was behind.

As expected, Olga Marie was sitting in a chair in the middle of the private room.

"...What, you again?" The silver-haired girl glared sideways.

She had apparently been holed up in this room since she kicked Caules out after Hishiri's detective drama was over. Her expression was hard and cold as if she had no intention of moving a single step more.

"Leave immediately! I already kicked your student out." In the face of rejection, Master calmly touched the edge of the door.

It was like he used some kind of magic; perhaps it was the Bounded Field he mentioned earlier.

"Gray."

"...Um, yes."

With those quick words, he advanced his wheelchair right up to Olga Marie.

He advanced right in front of her eyes, a distance where they could feel the other's breath, and then Master slowly began to talk.

"There is a question I wish to ask of you."

Olga Marie opened her mouth with a look of disgust, but she also knew that she could not simply reject him in this situation.

"What is it now? Hasn't the Department of Law thrown the case to the side?" She does not say that it has been resolved. She seemed to be fully aware that the Department of Law was only using it as a performance in some political play. "They just stepped in and took Trisha's head off on their own. Not to say that I particularly care for you either."

Her words may mean that she is no longer of any use to Hishiri. She only used evidence such as Olga Marie's and Trisha's head to deal with the incident at Rail Zeppelin. She held no interest in her beyond that.

(...Truly?)

Somehow, that thought felt strange. There was no reason or logic behind it, but it felt like there were a few noticeable artificial feathers mixed in a feather pillow that I buried my face into.

Before I could verbalize that feeling, Master spoke up. "My lady, I believe I am vexed."

"Vexed?"

"Yes. This time the culprit is clearly my adversary."

"Again, Master used the word 'adversary'. The culprit of this case, the details of which are still unclear, is someone incompatible with Lord El-Melloi II."

"So I would like to ask a question. Did Trisha Fellows leave anything else behind? Did anything fall out of the Imaginary Numbers pocket dimension other than her head?"

The girl did not immediately give him an answer. Instead of one, "...no," she whispered softly. "Why would I tell you such a thing?"

"Olga Marie?" The girl did not even look at him when he called her name.

"I detest you people." She tightly holds her skirt and scowls up at him. Her thin lips tremble in a frown, and tears well up in the corners of her eyes, but she still says it. "I hate those who look like they've worked hard and been recognized! I hate those who look so self-contained that they don't need others' recognition! You both seem to have such looks, so I hate you as the worst of the worst!"

"Master is not... such a thing..."

"That's what I'm saying! Because you're trying to stand up for yourselves! You're still trying to do something after all that Department of Law detective theater, and you're not giving up! If I were the one who saw all that, then I would be miserable!" With a firm shake of her head, the girl shouted.

The words were too emotional, too unreasonable, and therefore contained a pressure that was hard to deny. She clenched her little fists as hard as she could, her nose was twitching, and she was biting back her humiliation as she stared at us.

“I hate above all else the fact that... I can’t reject you right now.” Her voice trembled, and she became entangled in the carpet.

“...”

Master was silent for a short time, then took some distance away. Instead, there was a clinking sound.

It was the sound of a cigar being removed from the cigar case in his breast pocket. Striking a match, he lit the tip of the cigar, and Master tucked it into the corner of his lips. The aroma of the cigar seemed terribly nostalgic. Considering his condition, he probably should have been stopped, but I still wanted to stay with the aroma for a while.

So as not to choke Olga Marie, he turned his head to the side and let the smoke puff out slowly.

“I did not win, my lady,” Master spat those words out.

“...What are you talking about?”

“You should be aware. If you’ve done your research on the Fourth Holy Grail War, you know how I fared in that battle. Oh, sure, I survived. But that’s all. I did not win. Not only that, no one won that war.”

(...Ah,) I blinked at myself.

It was the first time that I heard that no one had won the Fourth Holy Grail War. Although I only knew the result that Master had survived the challenge of a number of magi and Heroic Spirits, I had not heard of the overall outcome.

(...If that is the case,) is it because there was no winner that the Fifth Holy Grail War will soon take place?

If there is no winner at the end of the war between magi and the Heroic Spirits, in a ritual that is supposed to result in the fulfillment of a wish by the Holy Grail, is that not too cruel of a string of deaths?

Thus, Master, who had survived that...

"I didn't stand up. ...Simply said, it was too harsh not to cower. That does not means I gave up. ...Simply said, I was never able to stop thinking. I do not regret that battle. But there is not a night that I don't think back on it. I can't even remember how many times I simulated acting just a little bit differently and the completely different outcome that would result. Hah, it's easy to see why I wanted to go to the Fifth Holy Grail War. My lady, I am sure I just wanted to prove myself. I just wanted to prove that it was only the Master (me) who was inferior back then and that the Servant had the ability to attain certain victory."



(Ah... hah.)

At the sound of his voice, I bit down on my back teeth.

Likely, I already knew that this was how it was, but when it came in the form of words, my heart still clamored. My throat ached. This was why he tried to participate in the Fifth Holy Grail War. On the Rail Zeppelin, which operated in the space between what is real and imaginary, Master finally confessed his innermost feelings. To the daughter of a Lord, who had lost just like him.

“Olga Marie Asmleit Animusphere,” once more, he called out slowly. He holds his cigar between his fingers and addresses her. “This time I want to win. Now that I know that the perpetrator of this case is my adversary, there is no way I can let myself lose here.”

His words were like a prayer.

By no means was it beautiful. It was not the purity of a nun kneeling in a serene church, but the passion in him burned with the sort of zeal that causes one's teeth to grind endlessly as their knuckles bleed. Perhaps this was the true meaning of faith. Not a sacred bond that binds people together, but rather something that could imbue anyone with overwhelming ferocity.

With a 'kii', the chair in which Olga Marie was sitting creaked. It was the sound of a girl faintly shifting her weight, pressured by Master.

"Are you..." A groan spilled out of her. "Are you saying that the Holy Church is not the culprit in this case? Are you saying there's another real culprit, and you and your partner are the only ones who can learn who it is?"

"We can't track them down with just the present evidence. But with a little more evidence, the chance may come." There was a blazing light inside the following words. "Wouldn't you like to win, Olga Marie?"

Addressing her by name, Lord El-Melloi II asks such a question.

Like an innocent devil. Like a devious angel. Terribly contradictory concepts seemed to coexist inside him as he tried to bring the girl to our side.

"Possibly, I will wound Trisha's honor even more. Possibly, I will end up only reinforcing Miss Adashino's constructed logic. Possibly, your image will be besmirched, and you will leave this train miserable. ...Yet, even still..." Master shouted even more. "Don't you want proof? Proof to the world that you are not one to meekly accept the murder of your servant?" At that, the words came to an end.

Master, who had been speaking so passionately, leaned back into his wheelchair. It seemed that he had finally become unable to bear the pain of his wounds due to the repercussions of his impassioned talking.

I rush over and wipe his forehead, which is sweating profusely.

After a short time, the girl opened her mouth with a long sigh. "You called me Olga Marie. Not Animusphere, nor of the daughter of a lord."

“...Yes. We need you. We cannot win without your answers.” Master could only weakly affirm her gaze.

“Do not forget. This is a transaction. Lord-El Melloi II.”

“Naturally.”

“If that is the case...” Master nodded as Olga Marie stood up. She spun around on her heel and took an item from the desk drawer behind her. “...This is what fell out with Trisha’s head.”

“...As I thought,” Master muttered as he received it. He rolled it in his palms and muttered with conviction. “Even if I were to assume that the fox from the Department of Law would fail to notice this, it seems unlikely. And moreover, it’s impossible that she wouldn’t know the purpose of this Mystic Code. The puzzle would not fit, so she deliberately left it out of her reasoning. Hmm, It’s no wonder if the one who sees suddenly would become the one who is seen, right?”

I don’t understand it myself, but it seemed to be an indispensable item for Master’s reasoning.

(...But this item is... different from the one I saw before.)

It is not the item that made me blush when I met Trisha. This item looked like a bizarre accessory. It was made of blue glass with an eyeball-like pattern in the center as if it were staring at you.

Once he had placed the accessory back on the desk, Master had a query. “Now, may I ask you one more question? ...You know too much about the Holy Grail War for the Aninusphere to have only done a little research. If possible, could you explain why that is?”

“It’s not a big deal.”

“Any trivial detail is fine.”

"This is not about the case, is it? This is merely your pathetic weakness when it comes to that Holy Grail War, is it not?" She waves her hands as if to signify that the question is not worth her time.

It was clear that she was provoking him. Nevertheless, Master's expression did not change.

"Perhaps. It would be hard to say I have accepted it even now. Still, I don't want to stop putting the pieces together one by one. It is only when I stop doing that do I feel stagnant. Maybe it is a trivial obsession, but there's only so little that I can do in the end."

"..."

"You claimed earlier that it is a suspicious Holy Grail and that it is hard to believe that it was ever even the genuine article at all. You know enough to be aware of the summoning of a Heroic Spirit by the Sealing Designation Bureau, so tell me, why are you so critical of the Holy Grail?"

Again, for a few moments, Olga Marie went silent. Her gaze became somewhat distant, but eventually, she slowly spoke. "...Back then, my father, Marisbury Animusphere, told me as such." Her shapely lips betrayed some kind of feeling. Olga Marie's father is none other than the current Lord of the Animusphere. He is the third Lord in order after Master and that spirited old woman, Lord Valualeta. One of the twelve Lords who presides over the Clock Tower. "...The Greater Holy Grail of Fuyuki is worthless."

"The Greater Holy Grail is worthless?" He repeated back at her and raised an eyebrow.

(...Greater Holy Grail?) I, too, ruminate over the words.

The Holy Grail War was a magical ritual in which seven chosen Masters fought each other alongside seven Heroic Spirits, like Iskandar, and then the surviving pair would obtain the Holy Grail, which would grant any wish... or something like that, it was supposed to be that type of ritual. But how can the Greater Grail be useless?

Having arrived at the same thought, Master asked the question. "What do you mean by that?"

"I don't know. My father had been fervently researching the Holy Grail War that had killed the previous Lord El-Melloi, but he eventually stopped with that conclusion. ...Therefore, I think that this Holy Grail War is a fake. It seems to be some kind of fraud with a different purpose that still makes it possible to summon Heroic Spirits, but is not a high-level wish-fulfillment device. I think that must be what he meant." Olga Marie looked up and punctuated her words. "Do you know what that different purpose is? You who fought to the bitter end in Fourth Holy Grail War?"

"...No, I also do not know," slowly, Master shook his head. "I did not see the Greater Holy Grail in person. I have made a number of hypotheses since then, but I have never been able to confirm them. Or maybe I thought that if I took part in the Fifth Holy Grail War, I would find the answers to those mysteries."

Those short words took me an inversely long time to fathom.

Ten years have passed since the Fourth Holy Grail War. Considering the nature of Master, how much time has he spent brooding about the Holy Grail War? Perhaps it is comparable to the degree to which I agonize over my appearance.

Maybe that is why. It's not as if there's much resemblance between my dim-witted self and Master, yet I sometimes feel a selfish affinity with him. It's just that I think that he and I share in those moments where the despair is unbearable, and we just want to scream.

The silver-haired girl wandered her swaying gaze, then suddenly muttered. "It's as if it is an afterimage."

"The Holy Grail War?"

"Everything. Everything I've experienced on this train ride is as if it is an afterimage." Olga Marie replied.

Her eyes narrowed, and her gaze shifted to the late afternoon scenery streaming past the window.

The winter sunlight was weak, and the passing shadows held only a faint hue. After escaping from the Child of Einnashe, the train was running in mostly open wilderness, wading through seas of green.

“Your Holy Grail War, the Child of Einnashe, and the Rail Zeppelin are like afterimages of things that have been left behind. The original owner has long since gone, leaving only an image behind in the present time. Why is everyone clinging on so hard when they know there is nothing left but an illusion? It's truly ridiculous and shameful.”

The girl's words made me feel as if I, too, were such an illusion.

The main form of Einnashe.

The first Manager of the Rail Zepplin.

Both are spoken of but leave only reflections on the current case. No, even the Mystic Eyes of Transience are similar in that they bring forth images of the past. Everyone is bound by the past, kept away from the real thing as it dances in unseen shadow.

“...Afterimage?” Once more, Master muttered in a pensive tone. His thin back trembled. My heart jumped, thinking that his body, which had been injured by the Servant's Noble Phantasm, had finally reached its limit.

“Master...?”

“...Ah, that's it. That is the second part, the decisive cog in this machine.” With a grunt, Master looked up at the ceiling. Placing his hand on his own forehead. He slowly stroked down his face and chuckled lowly. “Just as I should expect... You are indeed the successor to Animusphere. Even if it is not with rationality, your perspective lets you look at the world objectively.”

“Wh...at? Don't just start complimenting me suddenly!”

“But, this answer can only be verified with... ah, shit, at least a map from the Clock Tower.” He puts his hand on the armrest of his wheelchair and bites his lip briefly.

After condemning him for his words, a blushing Olga Marie asks, “do you need a map?”

“Well... I need a map that includes the situation of the Spiritual Lands. I can manage with the latest satellite photos, but if we think about the Rail Zeppelin, the relevant astral world data should be-”

“I can prepare it,” the girl said curtly.

“What?”

“I said I can prepare it. I mean, all you need is the texture of this planet and the coordinate information of the inner world overlapping that texture, right?” Having said this, Olga Marie took from a nearby bag a device with a palm-sized mesh of lenses and gears.

Apparently, it was a Mystic Code similar to a projector. “Shine bright,” With a whisper, light came from the lens.

With a low hum, a globe-like image emerged in the middle of the room. A number of pale lights ran across the surface of the illusion, and when Olga Marie held up her hand to magnify one, it showed the area in the UK where we were apparently located.

“...That... is...”

“It is one of many experimental pseudo-environmental models created by the Animusphere. It's an image that can only be used to check Ley Lines and Spiritual Lands, but it should be useful to the extent that you mentioned. What? It's nothing surprising. Even the Department of Law has something similar. Otherwise, they wouldn't be able to check the frequency of use of patented magic.”

While Master groans slowly, Olga Marie holds back a smile and puffs out her chest in pride.

Master keenly looks into the image, then nods. “...Ah, I can understand the theory behind it. However, I didn't think the Animusphere clan was interested in Earth as well.”

“Earth is one of the planets, isn't it? Our aim is not the celestial bodies themselves. If you want to be more deeply aware of this planet, the shortest way possible is to remove all the obstacles in the sky, and if that is so, then using reenactment as a process can...”

“...Olga Marie?”

“...It’s nothing! More importantly, if you don’t have a problem with this, get it over with.”

“I understand.”

Having said this, Master looked closely at the magnified surface again.

Long fingers traced the white light flowing through the sphere and stopped at the point where they seemed to be. Taking notes in his notebook, Master nodded a few times and ticked off the numbers as if he had a checklist.

“Ah, there’s no doubt about it. At least the reason is clear. The killer’s goal is impossibly clear. If this is the case...” Master’s voice echoes across the room.

No matter how much I want to help, there is no way I would have answers to these sorts of questions. I bite my lip and look away, escaping to the scenery streaming by outside the window. The frozen forest is nowhere to be seen, and the tranquil countryside shifts from one scene to the next as Master’s thoughts settle deeper and deeper.

Eventually, a hollow laugh came out. “...Haha...”

“Master?”

“I see. It is a question of order, is it?”

The nature of the smile on his face was completely different from usual. My heart skipped a beat for a moment as I saw his white teeth exposed like fangs as if they were about to bite my throat.

“Ah, I’ve got you this time. ...Haha, how could I not have noticed? This is no mystery. It should have been so obvious from the start. When did my brain get filled with sawdust? The personal shock was so strong that I completely missed the point. Ah, yes. If Hephaestion is summoned as a woman, I would inevitably consider why. But the important thought is not why Hephaestion is a woman. Nor why Hephaestion was not in the Ionioi Hetairoi. It was more than two thousand years ago. Any circumstance or historical error can be the source of a legend. So there was more to think about than that.” After a clap, he murmured as if considering how to respond to himself. “...Why would she introduce herself as Hephaestion?”

Whydunnit. Why did she do it?

It was the source of his thoughts, and everything looped back to it. But this time, what kind of whydunnit could he give as the cause of all this?

“Oh, it is everything. This is not a case. This is only the afterimage of what once was a case. No, this is an even greater hopeless disaster than that.”

“What are you talking about?” Olga Marie's eyebrows raised questioningly, but Master shook his head.

“I'll save the explanation for later. Unfortunately, it's not a topic that can be believed without evidence. ...But I don't know whether or not that will come in time.”

Master, with a cigar in his mouth and his lips twisted bitterly, suddenly glanced towards the door.

Suddenly, a presence stirred outside the room. It seemed that Master had done something to the room, but it was not the kind of thing that would shield the sound from the outside, and it was here that the voices of the two men reached us.

“P-please wait for a moment, Melvin! The instructor said that no one is allowed to enter-”

“Hmhm! I told you already; I'm here because I've finished the favor that Waver begged me to do for him!”

Master's expression relaxed slightly at the exchange. “Ah, here he comes. Gray, could you open the door?”

“Ah, yes.”

When I opened the door, two figures entered as if entangled with each other.

One was Caules, and the other was Melvin. The white-haired young man was more proud with his striking white suit, and he puffed his chest out as he entered. “Haha. I've had the auction postponed, as you insisted!”

"How did it go?"

"Haha, leave it to me to make a fuss about this sort of thing. After some time spent complaining about inadequate catalogs, train delays, clumsy directions for late customers, and anything else that I could think of, the auctioneer was forced to postpone the start of the auction as long as possible in order to gather the necessary funds to address my concerns. It was going to be an evening start, but now it will be starting later into the night."

The word 'whiner' crossed my mind, but I dared not to say it. For sure, this was one of the young man's fields of expertise. It's easy to imagine him in a high-class London store airing his grievances in exactly the same tone. Even worse was the fact that, in the end, he seemed to be one of the better customers.

"Excellent," Master nodded. He takes out his silver-chained pocket watch and checks the time. "From ten to just after midnight...? It may only just be in time."

"What do you mean to do, instructor?" Caules asked, naturally anxious.

In contrast to that anxiety, Master only laughed awkwardly. "There is no need to be in a hurry. I should restore my energy before anything else. ...By the way, Caules, can I ask you for one favor?"

\* \* \* \* \*

After that, the situation did not change.

Master quietly went back to bed to rest, and I did not leave his side.

Caules also did not leave the room, as he had to rebandage Master's back and reapply the Panacea that we had received from Olga Marie. Dinner was announced, but Master said it was unneeded, so we decided to stay.

Melvin was the only one having fun as he came and went, and at least as far as he could recognize, there was no trouble elsewhere. However, we all had a certain premonition.

The short but terrifying journey of the Rail Zeppelin is about to enter its final stage.

Thus, later into the night, a certain broadcast echoed through the train.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said the voice of Rodin, the conductor. The now familiar baritone voice harshly invaded my earlobes. “Ladies and gentlemen — we would now like to begin the Mystic Eye Auction. We invite you to come to the second carriage, also known as the Pandemonium Room.”

◆ 第四章 ◆  
-Chapter 4-



## ~Part 1~

"Welcome, ladies and gentlemen. I am proud to receive you in the Rail Zeppelin's Pandemonium Room."

The conductor's greeting echoed through the train like a grave musical instrument.

It was a breathtakingly strange place.

The inner walls of the Pandemonium Room (the vault of 10000 Mystic Eyeballs), as one would expect, are crammed with glass cylinders containing eyeballs. The eyeballs lined up in a row had a strangeness that intimidated even me, who had met many odd magi. If all of them are Mystic Eyes, each one must contain an unimaginable number of mysteries and stories.

At the same time, another aberration had to be recognized.

(...The size is... strange.) No matter how you look at it, these were not the proportions of a single train carriage.

Setting aside height, it seemed to be twice as wide as it was long. It seemed that some kind of space-distorting magic or something was being used, although it was only the bare minimum required. At the back of the train was a raised level where the conductor and auctioneer were waiting. Are the other staff members driving this train now? Or is the train itself operating itself?

"Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for your great patience." Again, the conductor spoke up.

The figure and voice seemed to stand there for thousands of years, assimilated with the darkness. As long as the Rail Zeppelin exists, its presence will not be extinguished, but should the Rail Zeppelin disappear, it seemed as if it would also fade away.

Including myself and Master, roughly all the invited guests have assembled here.

In addition, Melvin.

Olga Marie.

Yvette.

Jean-Mario.

Adashino Hishiri.

The only ones who were not there were Caules, who was busy with something, and Karabo, who had been locked up.

The ravens and other familiars who had boarded after escaping from the Child of Einnashe were also divided into two groups and distributed near the ceiling.

"This auction is for the sale of a total of five Mystic Eyes. Please refer to the catalogue in your possession for information on the performance and terms and conditions of the individual Mystic Eyes, as well as the estimated bidding price and the rules of the auction."

Five in total.

Two were new to us, but were probably introduced at the dinner we did not attend. We have no reason to be angry because it was up to us not to attend.

"Also, as we have already informed you, the currency used in this auction will be the US dollar. We understand that this trip is within the United Kingdom, so we realize that some of you may have questions, but please be patient and understand the circumstances of the Rail Zeppelin, which operates all over Europe. We can convert national currencies into US dollars, and we have secured external communications so that we can confirm loans and so on. Feel free to use our services."

After the briefing, the conductor stepped back.

A fur coat slid into the gap. "Now we will begin the magic eye auction," auctioneer Leandra declared somberly.

A small mallet swings out from inside her fur coat. Why does that very tiny piece of wood look so terrifying to my eyes?

“...Master?”

“...It’s vexing, but the evidence has yet to arrive,’ replied to Master in a hushed voice.

Has Melvin’s efforts to delay been in vain?

“Neither Olga Marie nor Yvette would look at us any longer. They may have their own relationship to the case, but at the same time, they were helplessly magi when it came down to it. So much so that when it came to the auction of these Mystic Eyes, they dismissed all other interests.”

At the same time, the unusual intensity in the room is not solely due to the invited guests.

I could feel the countless gazes of the familiars from earlier pouring down on the stage.

“I shall now open the sale for the first Mystic Eyes.” As the auctioneer bowed her head, another member of staff emerged next to her.

They were holding an elegantly made glass cylinder, different from the ones lining the walls. The contents, of course, were a pair of eyeballs. When the cylinder was placed beside her, the auctioneer nodded her head in satisfaction and murmured in a husky voice: “The first selection is one of a Noble Color, the Mystic Eyes of ‘Flame’. As it is a basic level Noble Color, the minimum price starts at 1 million dollars. The auction begins now.”

The wooden hammer strikes down. Before its echo even died, the bidding began.

“One million dollars.”

“One million two hundred thousand.”

“One million three hundred thousand.”

The familiars continued to chirp out.

At large auctions, the auctioneer is said to offer the bid price, but since Rail Zeppelin has no more than 20 bidders, including familiars, the participants are asked to declare their numbers directly.

However, it was a terribly eerie sight, as most of the familiars were birds, such as owls and ravens. Even if a parrot imitates a voice, it is only an imitation. There is no will in their voices, and they can't possibly possess intelligence. However, the voices of these familiars were not only intelligent but were also clinging to a bizarre obsession with the evil eye and money.

"One and a half million."

"One million seven hundred thousand."

"One million nine hundred thousand."

And the voices continued. It was like an incantation that went on for many counts.

Together with the intense obsession latent in the sound of the voices, the auction itself seemed to my eyes to be some kind of grand ritual. Every time a new value was shouted, my chair seemed to echo and moan, further distorting this twisted room. No, it might actually be magecraft. I remember Master telling me that money is a joint illusion created by people, a kind of magecraft. If so, an auction would be the best example of that. Especially when it comes to the auction of Mystic Eyes."

When the familiars had declared all their bids, the first bid paddle went up.

"Five million dollars." It was Yvette.

All at once, it went up almost threefold. I remember her saying that she wouldn't leave it to the familiars if the guests were serious about attending. The performance up to this point was just a prelude. It was as if she had declared that the real show would begin from here, and the air in the train became even tenser.

Another paddle went up.

This time "five million three hundred thousand" was Jean-Mario. I can't help but be amazed at him. He said he made his money from his media career, but does that mean he can afford that much? Or was it money made in a different way?

"Five million five hundred and fifty thousand."

"Six million," again, Yvette and Jean-Mario went on.

A sickening feeling runs down my spine. The amount of money that could have probably paid for a person's entire life is thrown around this train like it is nothing. It evaporates so easily. It is almost like magecraft, invading our nerves.

"Six million one hundred and twenty thousand."

"Six million two hundred thousand."

"Six million three hundred thousand."

Yvette, Jean-Mario, and Yvette again.

Carefully they were approaching the final moves. Their voices, which raised the bid in 100,000 increments, sounded as if they were accompanied by a particular rhythm. The heat of the carriage was stirred up even more by the occasional interruption of the auctioneer's count.

Both anticipation and excitement combine to construct this auction.

In this case, are the target Mystic Eyes being seen? Or are they seeing?

"Six million three hundred and thirty thousand. Are there any others?"

The auctioneer looked around the room for confirmation.

Jean-Mario gnashed his teeth in frustration, and there was no further rise, yet when the auctioneer lifted the gavel, a new voice was heard.

"Ten million," the young man with bright white hair raised his paddle.

(Melvin...) My breath stops in my throat.

Melvin, who had spoken an eight-digit number, was as calm and collected as ever.

As expected, neither Yvette nor Jean-Mario could resist the figure, so this time, when all voices had ceased, the auctioneer brought down the gavel. The hammer price. A hard thud clearly indicated who was the winning bidder.

With that sound, there was a palpable sense of motion among the swarming familiars.

(Who gets which magic eye will be the next point of interest at the Clock Tower....)

Yvette had told me something like that before. She said that high-ranking Mystic eyes were something that had such power. Melvin Waynes just acquired some sort of Noble Colour on Rail Zeppelin. ...That information alone is probably enough for some lives to be lost.

The first Mystic Eyes were lowered, and a new one was distributed on the platform.

"Next, we have the Mystic Eyes of the Looting. I would like to reiterate that you should check the catalogue for the Limitation of Liability. These Mystic Eyes are of the 'Golden' rank, so the minimum amount is five million dollars." I recall the Limitation of Liability with these eyes.

Previously the auctioneer said that these Mystic Eyes had turned on their original owner. 'Golden' rank eyes said to steal away the life force of others just by looking at them.

When the rank of 'Gold' was mentioned, a loud roar spilled out from among the messengers. Even though they had seen it in the catalogue, they were still deeply impressed when it actually appeared. It is because they are magi who live alongside Mystery that they can understand the value of this Mystery. I wonder how much of an impact these Gold rank Mystic Eyes have on them.

This time, Jean-Mario did not take part. Perhaps he saw the amount of money contested earlier and thought this was no match for him. After a skirmish between the familiars, it was now a one-on-one battle between Yvette and Melvin, but this time Yvette won the bidding for 40 million.

"As one would expect from the expert of Mystic Eyes, she does not retreat when it comes to these ones," Master says, stroking his chin.

For Yvette, it was one act that she would definitely not miss.

The next two magic eyes were not Noble Colors and, as a result, were auctioned off to the familiars. In such cases, the implantation operation was supposed to be carried out after the Rail Zeppelin ended with the winning bidder negotiating the date and place of the operation.



And so the moment arrived. The fifth item, a cylinder containing two eyes, finally went up on the platform.

"Now, to conclude — the main event of this evening. The Jewel-ranked Mystic Eyes of Transience." The auctioneer bowed.

It was as if she were paying tribute, not to the invited guests, but to the Mystic Eyes.

Not a single person disapproved of that attitude; in fact, the already raging atmosphere in the train was simmering dozens more than that. A mixture of desire, obsession, and other passions, swept through the Pandemonium Room like an inexplicable whirlpool.

"Even on this train, we have likely never handled Jewel Mystic Eyes. I have to say that everyone here, including myself, is supremely lucky to be here."

Faintly, the auctioneer's voice sounded almost shrill and excited.

The enthusiasm that filled the Pandemonium Room was not just on the part of the bidders. It appeared that most of the train staff were merely following in the footsteps of their form Manager, but when it came to these Jewel Mystic Eyes, a new side of them was revealed.

"The minimum is 30 million dollars." It was off the scale from the start.

At this level, it seems that the magi participating in the race with their familiars were not willing to participate unskillfully. None of them showed any sign of speaking out, and the race was only for invited guests who were participating in the flesh.

“...Seventy million,” Melvin started it off.

Even at this amount, the albino man did not change his expression at all. He simply gave a single nod of his head, nonchalantly doubling the minimum amount.

“Eighty million,” Olga Marie follows suit and raises her paddle.

I stifle the voice I was about to raise for the first time since I came here.

“...Olga Marie...”

“It's only natural, I suppose. Even though she had the trouble of her servant's death, she was originally aiming for these Mystic Eyes. Even if they are not 'rainbow', the rank of 'jewel' is sufficient for her goal. She has no reason to hesitate.” Master whispers.

Although we made a deal with her, this would mean that the auction is another matter entirely.

That is true. Olga Marie's participation would not be an obstacle to Master's search for the culprit. However, the fact that someone with whom I had exchanged even the slightest of words was taking part in such a grueling competition was in itself enough to shake my timid heart.

“85 million.”

“90 million.”

Sparks seem to fly between the two.

The blades being exchanged were neither real nor magical, but I could clearly feel the blood spurting and the intensity of the pain being inflicted. The collective human illusion of money has that much meaning.

“95 million.”

“100 million.”

A third person came into the grand stage. Yvette joined in with a lavish move. But, as if to shout, “So what?” the voices continue.

“One hundred and ten million.”

“One hundred and twenty million.”

Melvin and Olga Marie's paddles do not go down.

My heart is racing, painfully so. My mind, which is merely watching from the sidelines, is caught up in the whirlwind of numbers.

“Yes, even a Picasso is worth this much. So when it comes to Jewel-ranked Mystic Eyes, there will be no stopping them just yet.” Master whispered, and sure enough, within seconds, a new price was quoted.

“One hundred and thirteen million,” a voice said, almost inaudible.

Hishiri Adashino, who had been watching from the sidelines until now, raised her paddle. The fourth person to join. The staff and magi all gulped at the sight of her elegantly holding up the sleeves of her kimono.

“...No, no, no, you have to be joking here, Miss Department of Law?”

Even Yvette blinked, perhaps to cover up her shock, and she muttered lightly. At a normal auction, this might be considered bad manners, but on this train, no one seemed to be paying any attention.

“Of course I’m serious. This is not something you jokingly can join,” Hishiri’s words were stubbornly calm.

Both Melvin and Olga Marie were speechless at her smile.

“Please go ahead and continue with the auction without further delay.” The auctioneer gently urged them on and brought down her gavel lightly.

With that, the bidding resumed.

"140 million."

"150 million."

"160 million."

Melvin, Olga-Marie, then Hishiri continued.

With four invited guests in the bid, the auction inexorably accelerates. It reminded me of a spinning spiral helix. Performed by the magi participating in the auction and using the 'energy' of money as the intermediary, this was a grand magic ritual invoking a spiral. The four paddles did not drop in spite of the whirlpool.

"200 million," Yvette said. It was a new milestone.

As expected, a murmur broke out. A hint of unrest certainly spread among the familiars who were watching. From them, this information would flow further outwards. How strong will the world of magi shake from this ripple effect?

"It's a tricky juncture," whispered Master.

"If this were an auction at the Clock Tower, where there would be no direct invitations, and if these were the rank of 'Rainbow' as Trisha said — The Mystic Eyes of Death Perception — the price would be several dozen times more. If there were Mystic Eyes that could inflict the result of death, transcending both logic and cause and effect, then everyone would jump at them. However, the Mystic Eyes of Transcience is not decisive to the same degree. Jewel-ranked Mystic Eyes are so rare that only a few of the Lords may possess them, but the ability to bring the past to life in the present is itself a power that is valued differently among magi. Thus, this auction is about how much of a price rarity on its own has."

(...Ahh,) somehow I understand now.

Price is by no means absolute. This is especially true of Mysteries. Since so few magi know their value and significance, there will inevitably be extreme fluctuations.

"The price tag at the Rail Zeppelin is, in a sense, cheap. After all, Mystic Eyes are not something you can put a price on. Nevertheless, as long as the number of invited guests is limited, the sky's the limit here."

Indeed, there was movement.

Olga Marie bit her lip in frustration and lowered her paddle.

No, not only her, but Melvin had also put down his paddle. It would finally come to an end. The endpoint that comes to every festival. Into whose hands will these Mystic Eyes fall? Who will be allowed to see the world in a new light?

Only Hishiri and Yvette remained.

Hishiri raised her voice anew.

"210 million."

"220 million," Yvette immediately responds.

However, even her best bid was met by Hishiri, who remained smiling.

"230 million," Hishiri's crystal clear voice echoed through the train.

In the end, no response came from Yvette's mouth. Olga Marie and Melvin, who had followed her earlier, showed no sign of raising their paddles either.

Once again, the auctioneer looked over the Pandemonium room.

"Two hundred and thirty million, going once?" The noise in the room remained constant, so she had to make sure. "Going twice?"

The hammer is lifted, confirming to everyone. The Hammer Price. The Mystic Eyes that had been taken from Karabo — and also possibly saw through the whole case — were now in the hands of the Department of Law-

"...240 million," a paddle was raised.

Everyone's eyes went wide open at the one who did it. Not only Yvette and Olga Marie, but even Hishiri, who had been the highest bidder until now, went stiff.

“Master!”

It was Master... who brought up the paddle.

Several of the familiars shrieked at the participation of the unexpected magus. Even the auctioneer, who was not surprised by Hishori's participation, was so taken aback this time that she had no idea what to do with the mallet she had lifted.

“What's wrong? I said 240 million. Auctioneer, I would ask you to proceed.”

In a remarkably calm voice, Master urged her to move on. However, as I sat next to him, I could see in my peripheral vision that his left fist, which was still down on his knee, was trembling ever so softly.

“Well...” The auctioneer nodded and lowered the mallet.

“Wait!” Melvin raised his hand. “It is a bit too hot in here. I am sorry, but can we take a short break?”

The fact that there were no protests from the other magi at these seemingly selfish words was probably due to the fact that Master's participation was so unexpected.

With slight confusion, the auctioneer spoke. “I accept your proposal. Let's take a break for fifteen minutes,” she said with a long shudder as if she were being shaken.

**~Part 2~**

“...What are you trying to do, Waver...?” For once, Melvin spoke in a serious tone.

It was a private room. As soon as the young man left the Pandemonium Room, he came over to the room where Master was and questioned him with an intensity that had not been seen before.

“There's no way the El-Melloi could have come up with that kind of money at the moment! I mean, even your personal debts must be totally insolvent! Do you think the auctioneer of the Rail Zeppelin will allow you to dishonor your purchase?”

“Certainly, I can not afford it.” Nodding, Master squinted his eyes slightly. “But you were going to back out there.”

“Well... you know I'm living a rather extravagant lifestyle, and in the end, all my money is just leftovers from the main family. I don't have enough to bid any more than I did. I can't delay it any further.”

The young man exaggeratedly lifts his hands.

As someone who has only touched money from a part-time job, this is beyond my comprehension, and I have no idea what is enough or not enough to live on. I can't even imagine how I would spend 10,000, let alone 100 million.

“That being said, Yvette was very suspicious. Two hundred million dollars is too big a stretch, no matter how you put it. The main family of Archelot and Barthomeloi might pay that, but that is far from pocket money. Even though she is of a family that has specialized in Mystic Eyes for generations, I find it hard to believe that they have that kind of money.”

“...Does that mean that Yvette is concerned with the case?”

“Well. I'm no detective. I'm simply telling you the limits of her assets.”

In other words, it is a basic skill for those embedded in the power structure of the Clock Tower to estimate the asset limits of powerful families. This is why the Clock Tower is not only a place for the study of magic but also a crucible for all kinds of intrigue.

The auction just a short time ago is a microcosm of the war in the Clock Tower.

As I felt myself breaking out in a profuse sweat, I had one more question.

“Then perhaps she wanted to see how much Hishiri and the Department of Law would be willing to give?”

“...That way, in a way, it wouldn’t matter how much she bid, right?”

“Eh?”

Master gives a small sigh as he looks back at me.

“Think about where all the money from this auction is going to go.”

“Uh, Uhhum...”

When I didn't immediately grasp the meaning, Melvin raised his index finger and continued the explanation.

“You see, unique to the Mystic Eyes of Transience is the fact that they are Karabo's, right? The Rail Zeppelin might try to force people to give up the Mystic Eyes they want, but that is based on the belief that all Mystic Eyes should be handled on this train rather than a scheme to make money. They pay the seller everything except for a fair commission fee.”

“Ah, then most of that 200 million-plus will go to Karabo.”

“Yes. However, if Karabo is imprisoned, his property will be confiscated at the Clock Tower, won't it? The price of these Mystic Eyes, which went up as high as it did, will eventually come back to the Clock Tower anyway.”

“Oh...” Involuntarily, I let my voice come out.

I finally realized what Melvin meant, and now Master took over the rest of the story.

"Inevitably, the Department of Law, which also has a grip over the policies and operations at the Clock Tower, will acquire those assets. According to Hishiri's judgment, there will be no problem no matter how much money she spends. The most important thing to understand is that the money she bids at the auction will be returned exactly as she paid for it, except for the commission."

While I was simply basking in the excitement of the auction, a conspiracy was hatched behind the scenes. Or at least a part of one. From her perspective, is this just a matter of transferring money back from one wallet to the other?

"If so, how far is the range of her judgement?" I think it's close enough to the limit. I mean, even the commission, however small a percentage it may be, is nothing to scoff at. Not to mention the fact that Karabo belongs to the Holy Church; it's war if this goes badly."

Melvin fiddles with his own white hair with a twirl.

In contrast, Master asks, with a deeper-than-usual furrowing of his brow. "Melvin. How far can you push it? Can you stick with it?"

"Hmm. I don't think you want these Mystic Eyes. What's your goal here?"

"It is likely that that other party didn't anticipate this steep price jump either. They will have to concentrate during the auction. We'll use that gap to deliver our trump card."

(...Other party?) Who on earth was he talking about?

Could it have something to do with what he entrusted to Caules?

"That's a very expensive gap." Cheerfully, Melvin laughed. And then, "Say, Waver," he said in a rather gentle tone. "Let me ask you one more thing. Can you promise me that this will be fun? Can you guarantee that for me? Can you guarantee that this one act is worth risking your friend's ruin for?"

The young man's eyes were fixed squarely on Master. Perhaps he had looked at him the same way when Master asked him for money to travel to the Far East just before the

Fourth Holy Grail War. The atmosphere between the two of them was so tense that it was like a convergence of time I could never possibly understand.

Master responded with a small nod.

"I promise you. You will surely love it."

"Great, then what are we waiting for?"

Immediately, Melvin pulled out his mobile phone. Before the auction began, he easily connected with whomever he was talking to as he told us that communication to the outside world had been secured, and then the young man immediately cut to the chase.

"Oh, it's me. This is the tuner you asked for before. No, I can't get that for you right now. But if I put it up with some collateral, how much can I get upfront? Thirty million dollars? Now surely you can push that to seventy million. Well, I don't have much time, so let's compromise on fifty million. Great, that's it then."

"Hey, it's me. I'm thinking of mortgaging the house a little... No, I want to do it secretly without Mum hearing about it. How soon can you get it done?"

"Yeah, it's Melvin. Aghaaaaah! No, sorry. That was just the usual vomiting blood. Incidentally, I'm thinking of mortgaging a bunch of Mystic Codes I've been using for a while, but I'm not sure how much I can finance right now..."

After reaching three loan agreements in rapid succession, the young man turned to us with a nod of his head.

"Yes. That's an additional 130 million. Can we go fight now?"

My mouth gaped because I understood the significance of what he had done. It was done as if he was offering to buy us a cup of coffee or something, but I understood, whether I wanted to or not, that he was handing over everything to us.

After nodding to his words, Master turned around to face me.

"By the way, Gray. I was wondering if Reines gave you her card?"

"Uh? Ah... y-yes!"

Master pointed out something that I had forgotten, and I rushed to search my pocket.

"Um, this is the card Reines gave me!"

I had received it from Reines before I boarded Rail Zeppelin. It was thrust into my hands with almost threatening force, as I was told that I would need a real cache of money for the auction, but here it really is coming in handy.

Master glances down at the card and closes one eye in disgust.

"Ah shit, this can pull maybe 30 million. She would want to build up my debt in this place, so I knew she'd let me have it."

"Well, add it up, and you get 160 million extra. That'll get us to 360 million."

Melvin, having done the calculations, suddenly turned his head to look behind him.

"Instructor."

"Caules," I called his name myself. Caules, who had been ordered by Master to do something, came back into the room with a large bag.

My gaze bored into the item peeping out of the inside of the bag.

"...Ah."

"Well done," Master whispered, and Caules nodded with an expression that was still not quite relaxed.

"Yes. It was left in Hishiri's room, so I took it. As you said, it wasn't locked or defended at all."

"Trisha's... head." I can't help but gaze at it with a serious gaze.

The bag that Caules was carrying contained Trisha's head, which had been discovered by Olga Marie - who said that it had been hidden by Imaginary Numbers Magecraft.

Apparently, Caules had taken the head while Hishiri was taking part in the auction and went into hiding. The reason there was a pause between the auction and his arrival in this room was probably that he was anxious that Hishiri might come back to her room and make a fuss.

As it turned out, Hishiri remained on standby in the Pandemonium Room, and the scheme was never discovered.

"For her, she probably doesn't see the point in locking her door, since even the staff of the Rail Zeppelin can't be trusted. Even if someone did break in, it would be difficult to get anything out of the Rail Zeppelin. Moreover, Trisha's head has no evidentiary value at this point. There is also the matter of the Mystic Eyes, and it seems that magic has been applied to prevent them from corroding, but that's it. ...However, they have significant meaning."

Master laughed with a satisfied smile.

"By the way, um, what happened to the auction? I looked into the Pandemonium Room and saw that you weren't there, so I rushed back over here."

"Ah, we got a break at 240 million. Incidentally, I'm the highest bidder right now."

"Eeeeeh?!"

Master gently took the bag from Caules, who jumped up and down in astonishment.

He places the bag on his lap and dexterously turns his wheelchair.

"Let's get ready now, Caules."

"Uh, yes!"

The boy rushes after Master as he leaves the room.

Melvin and I were left behind.

I shake my head loosely and sigh heavily, overwhelmed by the sheer intensity of time. Months seemed to be condensed into mere minutes. Even during this break, the other camps might also be looking left and right for loans and whatnot.

So, what will it be?

Although there wasn't a proper reason, I turn around and asked a question to Melvin.

"Why... are you doing so much?"

I was about to ask him why he was so loyal to Master, but the words failed to come out.

Nevertheless, the young man was able to guess the unspoken question.

"That's easy," He laughed and nodded. "You see. I am a rather depraved person who takes pleasure in the degradation and downfall of other people. Just ask anyone who knows me in the Clock Tower, and they would nod their heads instantly. I live my life in such a way that I have no choice but to keep on beating the drum that that reputation is extremely true." After saying this, Melvin wiped his mouth with a handkerchief.

It was also stained with blood.

"I was like this long before they realized that my body was incapable of being a normal magus. So it's not like I was distorted by my family environment. I was probably inhuman from the start, and the cold treatment at home after they found out about my constitution didn't have any effect on me. Yeah, it was just a couple of times or dozens of times that I almost died, but that's the kind of thing that any magus has experienced."

A situation that can be found in every corner world. I can only attempt to imagine what it is like, as I am not a magus. Still, I could tell that this young man was speaking with great sincerity.

I could tell that Melvin, who had always seemed to be joking around since we first met, was at least serious about this.

"However, there is a pride in being inhuman. If you think something looks fun, even if it is your parents or yourself, you ought to put a bet on it right up to the bitter end.

Anyone who stays in the safe zone without putting a bet down, is no longer a bastard, but just a coward." After speaking quietly, the albino man turned and followed after Master.

The Pandemonium Room — the field of battle — was waiting for him.

**~Part 3~**

“...Well then, we will resume at 240 million.” The auctioneer’s voice was now calm.

Although unexpected about the last participant, it seems that she will not be confused any further if only due to the amount of money involved. Confirming that everyone from earlier, including myself and Caules, has returned, she announces the resumption of the auction with the clanging of the mallet.

“250 million.”

“260 million.”

Immediately, outlandish numbers began to echo around the train.

First was Hishiri, then Melvin. Once she put down her paddle, Hishiri narrowed her eyes at Melvin’s return to the stage. For the time being, Master can at least be relieved that he has been spared from being saddled with yet more astronomical debts.

Not only that, but another has returned to the front of the auction.

“280 million,” It was Yvette.

During the break, had she received additional loans like Melvin? Perhaps seeing that a raise of 10 million each would not be enough, the twin-tailed girl put 20 million on the table in one go. A smile of satisfaction appeared on her dainty lips as she raised the paddle.

However, “300 million.”

“320 million.”

Both Hishiri and Melvin followed after her.

An additional 20 million each. With the price tag past 300 million, the magi in the room could no longer even groan. The auction had entered a world that even regular customers had never seen before.

“330 million.”

“340 million.”

“350 million.”

The raises then returned to ten million increments. It was Yvette, Hishiri, and Melvin, in that order.

It seems as if every word is cutting into my lifespan. It is said that equivalent exchange is a principle of all magic, but how can one tell how to value magic with a monetary number? How many people have to devote their entire lives to reach 10 million, which is now being thrown away every second in this room?

“360 million.” Finally - after only a few minutes - they arrived at that amount.

The maximum amount of new funding Melvin was been able to secure.

For a moment, all was still.

However, after a few seconds, there was more, “370 million.” Hishiri declared this while raising her paddle.

I felt Master next to me clenching his fist. Although Master is careful with his facial expressions so as not to let his agitation leak out, I now know that this is a poor poker face. Master's nature is irrepressibly passionate, impulsive, and impatient. No matter how much training he puts himself through, it doesn't change his core character.

Master is now desperately trying to hold back his trembling.

Glancing over, I feel Melvin's gaze move toward me. As if to ask if this is enough, but Master does not react. He doesn't because if he acknowledges it, then he will be forced to admit that this is the end of the line.

Is that why? Is that why Melvin looks up and bids?

“400 million.”

“410 million.”

I nearly unconsciously gasp out.

Hishiri lowered her paddle in response to Yvette's 410 million, who continued to bid. The auction, which had been driven up between the three of them, finally broke one corner, leaving it to a two-person race between Yvette and Melvin.

(Yvette...?)

Frankly, it was an unexpected situation. I had somehow thought that no matter who was going to get off, the one who would surely stay would be Hishiri of the Department of Law.

I did not think that the two of them would now be fighting over the Jewel-ranked Mystic Eyes.

For only a moment, all movement stopped.

“410 million, going once?”

Once again, the auctioneer asked for confirmation.

Without her having to say it twice, Melvin raises his paddle to declare his new bid. He has long since passed his limit, but he does not stop bidding even when he is supposed to.

“420 million.”

“430 million.”

Instantly, Yvette responded.

It was nearly double the amount she had lowered her paddle for earlier.

(Does the Lehrman family really have that money...?)

Considering that she was a regular at Rail Zeppelin, it was hard to believe that this was a reckless window-shopper. That said, I never heard that she was wealthy enough to compete with the Department of Law and one of the three Great Families. Of course, I am not as familiar with the inner workings of the Clock Tower as I would like to be, so it wouldn't be surprising if that was actually the case, but it doesn't quite match the reactions of the people around me towards her. If that is so... then what in the world is going on?

(...Is there someone financing her?)

— “Likely, that financer would not have expected this extreme price either.”

Master's words came to mind.

Was Yvette the other party he had spoken about?

Or is it those who are financing her...

“440 million.”

“450 million.”

“460 million.”

Melvin, Yvette, then Melvin again.

“500 million.”

This was it. Is this milestone the deciding factor? With Yvette's major bid... Melvin's paddle... goes down. This is the end.

(...Eh?)

Was it my imagination? For a moment, it was as if the train was shaking.

A moment later, right next to me, Master's expression regained its color. With sudden pride, his hand rose.

“I would ask you all to wait for a moment,” Master said to the entire auction.



“Two breaks are not permitted,” The auctioneer shook her head.

Her stern attitude conveyed that the first time was also an irregularity.

However, “This is not a break. This is a motion that concerns the Rail Zeppelin itself.”

Master's words cause the auctioneer to waver.

And before she could give any kind of response, one woman stood up from the participants' seats.

“Oh, how can I help you, Lord El-Melloi II? Are you dissatisfied with my reasoning?”

Why would she stand?

Tilting her head, the fox from the Department of Law looks just a bit happy. As if her much-delayed dance partner had finally turned up.

“Hah, I wish I was,” Master shakes his head. “Even if your logic is full of holes, there is no fault in your reasoning itself. As far as the facts of what happened on the Rail Zeppelin are concerned, you are generally correct. For this reason, I would like to start with the previously given evidence.”

Master started to talk.

Some familiars were whispering to each other about something. To begin with, the incident itself was new to them. The auction was abruptly interrupted, and Master was suddenly talking about deductions and reasoning with the Department of Law, which was incomprehensible to them.

“Caules, can you bring it out?”

“...Ah, Yes!”

Caules, with a large gulp, stepped out into the middle of the vehicle with the bag in question.

It was, of course, Trisha's severed head that was now unashamedly exposed in the Pandemonium Room. The familiars, who had now been made to understand what had happened on the train whether they wanted to or not, began to make a commotion in unison, and Olga Marie stood up, stunned.

Hishiri's eyes, which were at the bottom of her glasses, went cold.

“You...”

“I needed it to help resolve the situation. I took the liberty of bringing it out. It's not your property, so it's not a problem, is it? Oh, and please give me a break on the trespassing part.”

Saying this, Master raised his gaze to the familiars above.

“I ask that those of you who are not familiar with this incident also allow me some time. I ask you as the current Lord of the Department of Modern Magecraft.” When he said it, it was like the familiars' existence rippled for a moment.

However, no one protested. It was probably thought that any situation between a Lord and the Department of Law deserved a listen, even if he was an upstart. The staff of the Rail Zeppelin also seemed to have lost the will to firmly refute the situation.

“Thank you. Thank you, Ladies and gentlemen, for your valuable time.” Master nodded.

“Now, let me start with an incident from seven years ago. It was very similar to the murder of Trisha Fellows on the Rail Zeppelin - a series of murders that the Department of Law has admitted to covering up.”

The brief review was seemingly also intended to explain the situation to the outside magi who were seeing and hearing this through their familiars.

“There are several aspects of those cases that are shrouded in mystery... but the one thing that they all have in common is that the victims were all beheaded, and their heads were missing. Now, what could explain such a circumstance?”

“Uh...”

With all eyes in the vehicle focused on him, Master slowly came to his conclusion.

“To show that they were dead.”

A gust of air flowed through the train.

A brief silence, one that could only be described as awkward.

“Oi, oi, mister Lord, why are you stating the obvious? What the hell are you on about? Or are you some kind of mother goose with an old wive’s tale?” From the sidelines, Jean-Mario raised his shoulders with his usual exaggerated gesture.

However, Hishiri’s reaction was different. She covered her mouth with her sleeve and responded only briefly. “The problem was with modern society then.”

“Indeed. In the modern world, when a human is missing, society inevitably reacts. We are not so indifferent that we leave a missing person alone. In the past, the disappearance of one person could be explained away as a prank by fairies. However, in the modern world, there is no such thing. Regardless of whether that person will be found, there will be an extensive search. After all, information technology is thorough and will only continue to improve by leaps and bounds. Everyone is able to transmit information. There may be times when there is no one around the person who disappears who cares enough to report it, but that is just a small chance. However, once the victim’s body has been found so conclusively, would anyone even think of searching for anyone but the killer?”

“Ah...”

Finally, I understood what Master was saying.

But, again, what is the point of this?

When I tilt my head back, Master continues to speak further.

"Before she was killed, I spoke to Trisha Fellows, and I suspected that she was too familiar with a certain Far Eastern ritual."

He deliberately withheld naming the Holy Grail War.

Some of the familiars showed signs of doubt, as they were not too intrigued by the Far East. As Master once said, the Holy Grail War is an awfully minor ritual.

"Now that I think about it, this was probably a hint to her death. If nothing came of it, it would be mere small talk. But if an incident happened, it would be a clue, if not the motive itself. Her foresight was focused on prediction. Unlike with calculation, a tragic future is avoidable, but she would have also known the likelihood of avoiding it." Looking at the reaction of the audience, he continued, "At the same time she was beheaded, she concealed her head for two reasons." Master holds up two fingers.

First, he bends his middle finger. "One is the dying message that her death is connected to the case from seven years ago. In the Imaginary Numbers dimension, time is meaningless. She had enough presence of mind left to say a few words."

This was a straightforward reason. After all, it was the fact that Karabo was named in her dying message that made him the likely culprit.

Master swallowed, then bent his index finger.

"The second reason was to prevent any others from using her Mystic Eyes."

"To prevent the use of her... Mystic Eyes?" Olga Marie reiterated as if she had suddenly realized something. "...So you mean to say that... with the incidents of seven years ago...."

"Yes, the victims of the incident seven years ago — I don't know if it was all of them or not, but they must have been bearers of Mystic Eyes."

At Master's conclusion, the train once again stirred with the same kind of heat as the auction. The interest of all the magi was stirred strongly when the horrifying history of the serial murder of Mystic Eye bearers was unveiled.

In contrast, Olga Marie came in from a different viewpoint.

"But the Rail Zeppelin is probably the only one who can remove Mystic Eyes and implant them in another person. It is not impossible elsewhere, but the chances of success are far too low. If you say they took the Mystic Eyes, are you implying that this train has been complicit for seven years?"

"By no means," Master shook his head. "Accordingly, that is why the killer took not just the Mystic Eyes, but the head itself."

The meaning of this was not immediately understood.

Bewilderment and suspicion swirled around the carriage, finally turning into a low grunt from Olga Marie a few moments later.

"No way...you are saying...the head is..."

"That's correct. The head was taken from the victim's alive."

Alive...?

Master uttered these unbelievable words.

"It's not that difficult. As long as the pathway between the brain and the eyeball is secured, the Mystic Eyes can be activated. After all, Mystic Eyes have an independent magic circuit. It would not need limbs, organs or nerves. Of course, you would need some Mystic Codes and magic to secure blood, etcetera; but even science a few decades ago could detach the head of a dog or monkey and keep it alive with an artificial heart-lung machine. A good magus could do it even more easily."

Everyone accepted the explanation, which continued nonchalantly, with a look of disbelief on their faces.

I felt as if the countless Mystic Eyes on the walls of the Pandemonium Room - all of them - suddenly started laughing at me. That's how much fierceness was contained in the current line of reasoning. I wanted to sit down and throw up right now.

"In other words, with just the victim's head kept alive, the Mystic Eyes can be used. This way, they can't escape, and they are unlikely to rebel. There is no need to use the Rail

Zeppelin, and you can use multiple Mystic Eyes as you wish. It's an inhumane trick, even for a magus. Yes, with all these Mystic Eyes, it would have been a piece of cake to investigate that ritual of the Far East."

"..."

Everyone was silent.

Who could have come up with such an idea, no matter how much of a magus he is? Who could have come up with such an idea that the beheading was to make people think they were dead so that the culprit could use the head alone?

And what's more, how did he know it had all been with the purpose of investigating the

"Wait," Olga Marie stopped him. "You are saying that Trisha was..."

"Yes. Trisha Fellows was involved in a case seven years ago. And on the side of the perpetrator." Horrified, Olga Marie was left speechless.

Even I, who was listening next to him, could not escape the shock. Because, yes, this was a shock. How could I believe that the person I thought was simply a victim of a crime had been involved on the side of the perpetrator in the gruesome case from the past?

Weakly, Olga Marie sits down in her chair. "Then, why is...Trisha..."

The girl did not deny it. The knowledge of the Holy Grail War that her father had told her about prevented her from doing so. Otherwise, she wondered how her father had gathered information such as the Great Grail being useless.

But then, "there seems to be a misconception." Master said gently.

"She was involved on the killer's side, but I never said that Trisha or your father was the killer themselves. Rather, she probably knew who the killer was seven years ago."

"What... do you mean?"

Master speaks as if admonishing Olga Marie, who looks up at him.

"The Animusphere probably commissioned an external collaborator to investigate the ritual. But I don't think they were informed of the means. Your father, the Lord, may have been aware of it, but if he had been informed of the details, I don't think Trisha would have thought of contacting Karabo at this late stage."

"Karabo...?" Hishiri repeated the name. "Earlier, you said that my theory was approximately correct. So are you saying that Karabo Frampton was responsible for the incident seven years ago? If you're saying that an agent from the Holy Church was the culprit, then it leaves much unanswered."

"In a sense, it was him. I fear that it was a similar type of Mystic Code to these," Master touched his glasses.

"Mystic Eye Killers...?"

"Traditionally, Mystic Eyes are extremely primitive when thought of as a form of magecraft. After all, they are the oldest form of magic known to mankind. Hence, although they are a powerful Mystery, a number of counter-measures have been developed around the world. For example, this is also one of them." He said that and produced a small item from his pocket.

It was the eye-catching accessory thing found at Olga Marie's place. It was the same item with an eyeball-like pattern in the center of the blue glass.

"It's a type of Turkish amulet called a Nazar Boncuğu. Trisha hid it, along with her own head, with her Imaginary Numbers magecraft." Master looked back at Hishiri.

It was something she did not make public during her own deduction.

"An Evil Eye that looks back at a Mystic Eye. This is probably the most obvious measure. In a similar vein, the study of this type of magic has arisen in India and the Far East. ...According to these theories, all things hold the power to be seen."

"The power to be seen...?" I didn't get it, so I just had to interject.

"Yes, the thought is that people can see things because those things have the power to be seen. Scientifically speaking, we could say that this is the ability to reflect light. This

concept is the reason why angels and Buddha statues have a halo. Because they hold the power of being seen far stronger than anyone else, they can be guiding beings for mankind. It could also be more simply known as aura or charisma. The ability to attract the gaze of others, even if forcefully."

To see and to be seen.

The power of seeing and the power of being seen.

What was taken for granted is inverted in the name of magecraft. Twisted.

"In this case, the power to be seen is inferior in terms of the simple defensive effect compared to a Mystic Code that can directly block Mystic Eyes, such as Mystic Eye Killer Lens. However, the power to be seen is still the natural enemy of Mystic Eyes. After all, information that is not intended to be seen can be fired back without the user even being aware of it. This information has many applications."

With the Nazar Boncuğu from earlier in his hand, Master started rotating it with a steady rhythm.

I start... feeling dizzy.

Nodding to himself and holding his forehead, Master adds a few words.

"...For example, hypnosis. Subliminal effects are only one such effect. It is a subject that is often dismissed in modern science, but in the field of magecraft, even basic mesmerism is effective. The use of pendulums in front of the eyes is another application of the power of being seen."

Mesmerism was, I believe, a technique that has its roots in the modern hypnosis movement.

I had heard about it in lectures at the Department of Modern Magecraft. The occultists were giving dubious explanations, saying that 'fluids' emitted from celestial bodies were the source of all illnesses and so animal magnetism could be used to treat any patient, but in reality, they were using hypnosis to control the mind of the person being treated.

"The stronger the power of one's sight, the more it will be unconsciously induced by the power of being seen. Suggestion is often seen as elementary magecraft, but in combining its effects, it cannot be dismissed as such. For an owner of strong Mystic Eyes, it is difficult to resist the power of being seen. Moreover, if that person is not fully aware of his or her own power of sight, it is surprisingly easy to trap them with the technique."

"Are you suggesting that Karabo was hypnotized and manipulated?" Hishiri asked, skeptical.

"I think that also fits in with your reasoning, doesn't it? When I told you that there was no motive, you told me that his Mystic Eyes might have gone out of control. You were rather positive about the possibility that Karabo had been rendered unaware by some factor."

Hishiri's words at that time were not quite as positive for us, but now it was a strange coincidence that he was making the same point as her.

Master looks arround.

He must carefully spin the rest of the story, checking how his words are landing.

"Perhaps Trisha Fellows knew that she would meet Karabo on the Rail Zeppelin. It was not difficult to predict that she would meet him through her Foresight."

However, she could not see a future in which she would meet directly with the person who set up the incident seven years ago. That is why she was thinking of using Karabo to investigate. Taking into account the possibility that he was manipulated by suggestion, she had prepared certain Mystic Codes, such as the Nazar Bonjou mentioned earlier, and was preparing to infiltrate his subconscious."

Terribly slowly, Master explained.

A sad sigh escaped from his wheelchair, "that is precisely her failure," he concludes.

"Perhaps, the real culprit believed, Trisha would be able to do so. But they also knew that it would be difficult to deal with her directly. After all, the other party has Foresight.

Most attacks are predictable. ...Except for a blade coming from the past, which is the only blind spot for Foresight." The time axis was distorted, causing her beheading.

He affirms that attacks coming from the past are unavoidable, even with Foresight. Somehow I understand the logic behind this. Foresight sees forwards from the present. The shadow of death rising like a bubble from the past is definitely out of its scope.

"So they manipulated Karabo before Trisha could interrogate him. Ah, in fact, it seems that Trisha Fellows had brought in more Mystic Codes to counter Mystic Eyes, but the only one we could find was this Nazar Boncuğu, which was concealed in her Imaginary Numbers world, probably because it would have been disposed of by the culprit with great care. Though somewhat unusual in its use, it is not difficult for a magus with her kind of knowledge to connect it to the idea of the power of being seen."

(Ah...)

Was the obscene item that I saw when I first met Trisha that kind of Mystic Code?

For example, I think I have heard that one way to deal with Mystic Eyes is to show it something ugly. Perhaps this is also a way of preventing curses, using unpleasant information to counter the power of sight.

"Yet, Trisha was able to realize her death a second before it happened. Even though she couldn't see the blade from the past, she likely knew the fact that she would die. Even if she only had enough time to invoke a one bar one count Imaginary Numbers spell. Even if she could not avoid losing her life, she gave a hint to those who would be left behind. That's because, surely, she didn't want to leave the incident of seven years ago unsolved. ...Olga Marie, if she had adjusted the dimensional pocket to allow you to unlock it, then surely she wanted you to be the one to know the truth. A truth that might put you in danger just by knowing it, but I'm sure she trusted you to do something about it."

Master whispered to her earnestly.

For another brief moment, a heavy silence hung over the Pandemonium Room. With her fists clenched on her chest, Olga Marie's shoulders were shaking. The thoughts and choices of the servant were now being delivered to the oblivious girl that was her master.

“...Stupid Marie. Get yourself together...” The girl whispered to herself.

Why such words come out now, I do not know. However, it seemed to me that these must have been important words between Trisha and Olga Marie.

And then, “Can you get this over with, please? The auction was about to end.” Yvette pursed her lips.

The reason for her discontent was probably because she was confident that she was the one who would gain the Jewel-ranked Mystic Eyes. In fact, judging from the auction earlier, it was certain that she was on the verge of winning the bid.

(Could it be...)

For a moment, a doubt flashed through my mind.

(Is it that... could it be that Yvette is...)

The thought makes my heart race.

A horrible sweat breaks out and does not stop. Even when I sit down, my inner ears seem to be getting stirred in a circular motion, giving me extreme vertigo. I even feel the illusion that this train is twisting and turning.

Regardless of such circumstances, Yvette still insists.

“What's your point, good sir? You brought and have shown Trisha's head, but what does it have to do with your theory?”

“...Ah, if it's time for that, then here is its purpose.”

“Huh?” Yvette's eyebrows rise.

A white light shot through the train.

A whirlwind of light suddenly shot out from the fresh head Caules was holding, binding the boy's limbs like chains and severing the outer world of light from the inner one.

“In...structor...?!”

“Your skill in Binding Magic is great, Miss Adashino. I could never have pulled this off.”

The words made me peel my eyes open.

Not only that, “thank you very much,” Hishiri also thanked him for the compliment.

The two, who should have been at odds with each other due to their opposite reasoning, were looking at each other in a strikingly similar way.

“Did you also seal the senses of the familiars? I didn’t ask for that.”

“I do not enjoy their gossiping so much,” Hishiri replied.

The familiars who were watching near the ceiling were now stiffened under the white light. The familiars, unlike magi, do not have developed magic circuits. So they seemed to have been sufficiently sealed even with this level of magic.

Caules, bound in chains of light, gasps. “Instructor, what is the meaning of this?”

“As you can see. I conspired with Miss Adashino to bind you.” With great ease, Master confessed. To his own apprentice - Caules Forvedge - he puts down his verdict, “you are the real culprit behind the murder of Trisha Fellows through the manipulation of Karabo Frampton.”



**~Part 4~**

Master's accusation clearly resonated in the Pandemonium Room.

The magi participating in the auction were flustered by the sudden accusation by a Lord against his apprentice, while the staff on the train side had no idea what was going on and could only watch what was going on. Deprived of their senses, the familiars remained as rigid as stone statues.

“That... is... Master...?” I couldn't accept it and tried to stand up.

It was then that someone else, walking stealthily, tugged on my arm from behind.

“You must not interfere, Gray.”

(Huh?)

I was stunned. I did not notice them when I entered the Pandemonium Room. The only time I lost my awareness was when the spell was triggered earlier, so their entry was probably timed right around when... my attention was engrossed in something else.

Because the person who grabbed my hand was...



“Instructor, what are you...” Caules, bound in chains of light, laughed freely.

Caules was trying to make this all out to be a joke, but Master's words and the bounded field remained firm to confirm that this was serious, and so Caules shook his head as if hopeless and in denial.

“U-um... Are you serious about this?”

“Of course.”

"You really want to make it out that I'm the culprit, but that won't just be accepted here. You know that too, don't you?"

"Exactly. If this were a place for magi only, the iron authority of the Department of Law would be enough to force acceptance, but the Rail Zeppelin is the domain of a Dead Apostle. Hence, it was necessary to have enough physical evidence to convince the train side with more than just speculation. For example, just as Miss Adashino had to wait for a dying message from a living head or a statement from the Deputy Manager to see what Karabo's Mystic Eyes were capable of."

In recognition, Master turns around behind him.

"So I was waiting for him too," he said to the one behind me. The person who pulled on my arm and stopped me. "You are just in time."

"It was indeed a struggle, Instructor." The boy chuckled as he shook his habitual hair and fixed his misaligned glasses.

Even the shape of his smile was a living replica of the one who was restrained. My brain could not quite grasp why this was happening.

"Now that I'm here, at least it's the end to your deception." He says to the detained evil twin.

That's right. After sitting around for a long time, Olga Marie finally called him by his name. "...Caules Forvedge." Yes, the new boy was Caules himself.

From somewhere, applause erupted. Somehow someone was still high-spirited and joyful in these circumstances. "Bravo, Waver!" Melvin shouted, still clapping.

Laughing cheerfully, the albino man turned his hearty compliments to Master. The tuner, who had been fighting at the auction until the very last minute, was freed from that stressful curse, and gave a joyous sigh of joy for his freedom.

"Well, this is delightful! And exhilarating! It's like I don't even know what is happening! It was well worth almost losing my entire fortune, but really, what the hell is going on?! What kind of magic did you use to do this?!"

"Even if you are a magus, don't call everything magic so casually." Master's lips twisted bitterly in the face of the strange scene, which just added to the mystery. "It was actually a close call. I knew that if we were in the middle of the auction, then no one would be aware of Reines' approach, but also, at the same time, we were forced to race against time. The auction of the Rail Zeppelin is absolute. Once the winning bid is decided, the deal is sealed, no matter what violations may later be exposed. I would be shaming Karabo and Trisha if that were to happen. Above all, my pride would not allow it."

He pulls out a cigar and puts it to his lips.

Normally, he would have used a match to slowly sear the fire, but this time he was striking his fingers to light the fire. Master said before that this was more like using flint than simple ignition, but perhaps this was because he had lost the presence of mind to use a match as usual.

Sitting deep in his wheelchair, exhaling smoke, Master pointed out, "You're the one who was financing Yvette."

"Shall I admit it?" The other Caules- no, the person who was in the form of Caules says freely. "No, Instead, I would like to ask you that question as well. How did you get the real Caules here? Honestly, I thought that even if I was exposed at the last second, then I could still deceive everyone with fake phone calls or communication magic..."

"It's because I didn't stop trying," and with a jerk, the doors of the Pandemonium Room were open once again.

What appeared was a familiar girl. Between her blonde hair, her eyes were burning brightly. She probably doesn't even feel the need to use eye drops to disguise the color of her Mystic Eyes at the moment.

"I would love for my big brother to tell everyone about the beautiful fact that he begged his adopted little sister to fly all the way over here with flying magic. Hello, my brother." Reines raises her shoulder with an old broom in her hand.

However, dark circles were under her eyes. With fatigue that couldn't be hidden, she rubbed her cheeks and tried to strengthen her voice with an aristocratic tone. "I'm a

magus too, you know. If I have a broom and a witch's salve ready, I can fly out without any fuss."

"Flight magic? But isn't that... extremely difficult?" I remember my teacher saying as much.

He said that, no matter one's ability in magic, it is next to impossible to fly without certain conditions being met. It is relatively easy if the magus does meet these conditions such as putting themselves in a trance, but conversely, it must be almost impossible to find the Rail Zeppelin if you are stuck in a trance.

When the Caules impostor heard this, he replied with certain words.

"You took the Touko Travel method, then?"

"Touko... travel?"

When I was puzzled by these words, which I had heard from somewhere before, Master closed one eye.

"It's a pretty dubious way of doing it. You set the destination in advance, and then you prepare the magical formula as if you are pulling on a rubber band over a great distance. In any case, you're being pulled continuously to the destination, so whether you're in a trance or not, as long as you stabilize the magic, you're sure to succeed. However, flying is far from the longing and freedom that comes to mind from human fantasies. Ah, it's the kind of trick that the Crown-ranked magus, Aozaki Touko, would come up with."

"..." I never thought I would hear the name of that female magus again, in a situation like this.

So perhaps the faint tremor felt towards the end of the auction was the impact of her and Caules crashing into the Rail Zeppelin?

"Um. I was in charge of the directional configuration!" Melvin raised his hand in a jovial, light-hearted voice. "Well, I did wonder if little Reines would come running after me, you know? The invitation says I'm allowed up to two companions, so I really don't mind; it's fine right?"

The mischievous young man looked around at the staff, but for the moment, no one seemed to complain even about the fact that she had collided with the Rail Zeppelin.

After confirming this, Master spoke.

"The Rail Zeppelin has said it is going through this land of mist for four days and three nights, and then back to London. Despite the incidents, it stands to reason that by the third day of the auction, we'd be a half a day's distance from London. Especially if the auction was stalled until the last minute."

"Well, it was a surprise when I heard it." Reines huffed in her usual tone. "Suddenly, I received a call on my mobile phone, telling me that the real Caules needed to come over here and that I should look for him. I sent Svin to go and look for him. He's got a good nose, as you can imagine, so it didn't take him more than an hour to find Caules sleeping in some abandoned building."

"From my point of view, I thought I was sleeping at home, but without even knowing it, I was really lying down in some kind of abandoned building; it must have been some kind of illusion. Besides, how was it possible that I missed multiple days while I thought I was sleeping?"

Caules grinds his teeth and glares at the imposter.

After listening to the story, I finally began to vaguely understand the situation. The fact that Caules and the impostor had switched places even before the train journey. Master had realized this and had hastily summoned the real Caules through Reines.

Yet it was all too dizzying.

All I could do was try to make sense of the information being crammed in one after the other.

"...I see, so Svin found you," from inside his restraining wards, the imposter scratched his cheek.

"He was the only one I was wary of. I had assumed that the master-disciple relationship between Caules Forvedge and Lord El-Melloi II was only a few weeks or so old, so I

could probably fool him, but Svin's nose was the one thing too difficult to deceive. He said he was taking time off for a while for a special lecture at the Department of General Fundamentals, so I thought this was my chance."

Quite calmly, the impostor confessed.

"So, you joined forces with Miss Adashino when you found out I was an imposter, correct?

"Yes. When I got in touch with Reines and found out you were an impostor, I did not yet have the ability to safely eliminate you. If I had told Gray or Melvin, you would have known by their attitudes. No one could have fooled you smoothly except Miss Adashino. Trisha's head was the best place to conceal a Binding formula. Although, since she also told me that she had no intention of cooperating in the auction, I was quite nervous about how it was going to go."

I'm sure it was when we had that discussion with Karabo that he realized what was going on.

When he had muttered that there was another use for the head and left the room, Master said told me to wait for him and went off by himself. He returned a few minutes later and went to Olga Marie's room, but I had no idea that he had put together such an alliance in that short time.

'Ahhhh,' the impostor exhales to the ceiling before asking one more question.

"By the way, when did you notice it? I thought I had traced a roughly perfect imitation of the real Caules Forvedge."

"It was a brilliant imitation. Likely an application of Spiritual Evocation. I was struck by your skill and experience with possession. As far as I am aware, almost word for word, the real Caules Forvedge would have uttered the same words and taken the same actions. ...Except for one thing."

Raising his index finger, Master sat in his wheelchair and lightly pressed his chest.

"My medical treatment."

"Hmm. I was confident I could match Caules Forvedge's skills by now."

The fake boy's lips twitched in dissatisfaction, but Master nodded in his usual lecture-like manner.

"It was perfect with regard to the Primeval Batteries. The treatment even identified with some of my teaching habits. But Caules is still inexperienced in the herbal arts. Even though it's a secret medicine, the Panacea is still a plant. If it is electrified, it will be transformed. But from his skill level, both the Panacea and Primeval Batteries were utilized to a degree that was a tad too skillful."

"...Oops." In an exaggerated manner, the boy slumped over. "Ah well, I was in a hurry indeed. I didn't plan for you to die here. I didn't think that Servant would go that far. No matter how much it costs, if the Lord of a faction disappears, it would be too much of a hindrance in the future. Well. Caules's technique was about 80% of what I did, but I see now that 20% is too big of a probability to ignore, isn't it?"

At the mention of the word 'Servant', I saw a faint tremor in Master's breath. Swallowing this agitation, Master continued in an unwavering tone.

"Was it you who asked to join me on this trip?"

"Well, since the person in question is here, you can confirm it over there, but it's true that Caules wanted to come to the Rail Zeppelin. If I hadn't interfered, he probably would have said the same thing. Otherwise, even you wouldn't have been fooled, would you? Well, It was too convenient to replace Caules since if I tried to act as one of your long-time disciples, then I would have been easily exposed. Well, I had a plan in place in the event of that."

The imposter smiles wryly.

It looked like a different smile, even though it was as if it was the same as before his true identity was revealed. I couldn't tolerate that smile, and I couldn't help but interject myself.

"What did you mean when... you were talking about your- his sister?"

"Oh, that was all true. When you take on someone else's character, you piece together bits and pieces of information from facial expressions, past experiences, interactions, and so on, and you imagine, 'Oh, so that's why he's the way he is.' With all that information, it's hard for people to suspect that I'm not Caules."

He's right. I didn't doubt his story about his sister, and he had a genuine motive to want to board the Rail Zeppelin.

The real Caules Forvedge is now trembling at the admission of the impostor.

He seemed to have reacted to the idea that it was a story about his sister. I was terribly ashamed. I had violated the privacy that was so important to him, the reason why he had come to the Clock Tower without even hearing it from him. If possible, I would have apologized immediately and then shut my ears and eyes and withdrawn.

Master's gaze then shifts to his other student.

"You have been leaking information about us, Yvette."

"Leaking?" The girl's eyes rose because she knew she was in trouble. "I... have a job as a spy for the Meluastea clan, and they are very good to me. This time they said that they would survey the Mystic Eyes I won before implanting them..."

I don't know if this counts as being a double agent.

Though come to think of it, Yvette's Mystic Eyes should be able to see emotions. If she had not been an accomplice, she would have easily revealed that Caules was a fake.

Whatever the case, we have identified the person who had given Yvette the loan.

Surely she was the other person whom Master said was the enemy. But I was still in a state of dread. I was scared of this person who was still smiling thinly when they were exposed as an imposter.

Once more, Caules asks something of the fake Caules.

"Who... are you?"

"I think you already have an inkling, don't you?" The impostor, who inclined his head, neither affirmed nor denied.

"It's not a deduction or anything. It's just a hunch. It's nothing worth mentioning."

"But, you do have a hunch. That's plenty for us, right? It's not like you're a detective. Don't be afraid to say it. If you want, I can promise that I'll reveal myself to you if you're wrong." The impostor said the most outrageous thing.

He was too brazen to use his identity as a bargaining chip. What good would such a proposal do, when he was already caught in Binding Bounded Field?

"..."

For a moment, Master kept his mouth shut.

His eyelids closed, and only the smoke from his cigar flickered and when his lips eventually opened, "I have enough hints," he whispered softly.

"Seven years ago, you had a relationship with the Lord of the Animusphere to the extent that you were asked to investigate something for him, and even when he was made aware that you were involved in a serial murder case, he would not interfere. You are also someone who can win Yvette over to your side, and can get her to invest an enormous amount of money to bid for Mystic Eyes. You are a person who has enough info on the Department of Modern Magecraft that you can impersonate Caules, who is just one of my students... and you are one who has the magical ability to open the Mystic Lock on the safe that held the relic."

The impostor nods to the factors listed one by one.

Master lifted his cigar to his mouth. It was like a key. A single key that can solve a complex and intertwined mystery.

With a flickering fire at the tip, Master gave his answer.

"It is quite natural that you are able to open the safe, because you created it in the first place. You are the previous dean of the Department of Modern Magecraft."

I felt like I had been punched in the back of the head with the entirety of someone's strength.

Yes. I should have realized. It's not just about the safe. This time the opponent knew too much about the Department of Modern Magecraft. And even though suggestive magic is elementary, mesmerism is a modern variant - in other words, it's in the category of Modern Magecraft.

"You are correct. I was never a Lord." The imposter replied. "Since before you came, there has been a Department of Modern Magecraft. However, although it was counted as one of the 12 main departments of the Clock Tower, there was no Lord in charge of it. Norwich was only created as a decoration in response to the demands of the times. None of the Twelve Families were serious about it. It was only a matter of thinking that the small number of New-Age magi who would come could be an easily controlled workforce. Ah, yes, so when I heard that it was the El-Melloi that was going to take over the Department of Modern Magecraft, my heart just fluttered. I wondered if something might change."

The boy laughed beautifully like a cold flower. It was a laugh that he never had when acting as Caules.

"So I just wanted to get up close and personal. To see how the new dean does things."

◆ 第五章 ◆  
-Chapter 5-



## ~Part 1~

The impostor blinked and kept laughing.

He blinked twice, three times... and by the fifth time, the boy I knew was gone.

“Excuse me. It took me a little while to finish the procedure.” The person who spoke was a complete stranger.

He was tall and sleek, with a combination of fiery red hair and pale white skin. Even the clothes he wore had been transformed into a suit as blue as the sea. I can't tell his age, but he is somewhere between his mid-twenties to mid-forties. But the only thing I could think of was how his lips smiled as if it was a flower coming to bloom; it was something I don't think I'll be able to forget for a long time.

I am terrified of that soft, gentle smile. I do not know why.

“...”

Caules, whose appearance had been stolen until now, was overwhelmed with bewilderment at the sight.

Reines, who had been pushing through her fatigue, held her mouth shut and watched the situation unfold.

Even Olga Marie, who was expected to finally confront the culprit, could not point her finger.

Yvette pressed down on her head with an 'uh-oh', Jean-Mario grunted briefly - and Hishiri, the fox of the Department of Law, lost her visage.

"It's advanced shapeshifting magecraft. Even the suit is no exception. Although originally that is the domain of the Department of Zoology, you dabbled in quite a lot of different magic, didn't you, Former Dean of Norwich?" Master said.

Shapeshifting, in other words, is the kind of thing that witches in fairy tales use to turn their victims into frogs. Depending on the technique, it is said to be a powerful curse or

an old and advanced magic, but I don't know the details. The former dean of the Department of Modern Magecraft, our opponent, is able to use such magic.

Within the Bounded field, the former dean gives a small nod.

"Old acquaintances call me Doctor Heartless. Feel free to call me that as well."

"Heartless..." I can't help but mutter at the man who keeps smiling.

Then, "...I've heard he is called that because a fairy stole his heart."

This was whispered in my ear by Melvin.

Apparently, the name had reached him, even though he was one step removed from the power struggles of the Clock Tower.

(...Stolen, by Faires?"

I remembered that a Fairy Circle was left at the place where the Rail Zeppelin stopped. I heard that there are several types of fairies, including familiars and Phantasmal species, and that there are several other Mysteries that have yet to be found by the Clock Tower.

When innocent, they switch shoes or clean a house without permission.

When serious, they replace children with changelings and spirit people away.

It is said that many of the humans kidnapped by fairies can never return to the common sense and texture of the modern day.

A distant, heavenly shore, unreachable even by magic. Perhaps they are always looking for the perfect child from the abyss.

"According to some, the previous dean of Norwich was once kidnapped by fairies, and his heart was stolen. Hence the nickname Heartless. He was the only one of the 12 departments who was not a lord, but his mystery should not be underestimated. ...It was nearly ten years ago; I'd forgotten all about it." Melvin's words made me bite my lip.

He was feared even in the Clock Tower, and he was the head of one of the faculties - most importantly, I felt a twinge in my throat at the fact that he had ruled over Norwich before Master, the Department of Modern Magecraft.

Somberly, Master speaks. "I never thought we'd meet in a place like this."

"I wasn't there when you took over as dean. That was after I had already given up on the Clock Tower." Smiling, Heartless responds.

He seemed to be truly delighted with this encounter. Or it might be that he didn't really care. The two could be the same thing.

"By the way, don't you still have some reasoning to do? This is the part that you are most obsessed with, right? Yes, what will you say about the whydunnit?"

Why did he do it?

Why was it a crime that had to be committed?

This time, Master obediently opened his mouth. Perhaps he thought it was too bothersome to refute him.

"This is just a ruin of a case," Master declares. "Because you have long since achieved your original goal."

"What are you saying!?" Jean-Mario shouted hysterically, holding his temples. "This guy's goal is to get the Jewel-ranked Mystic Eyes of Transience! Isn't that why he was bidding so much money!?"

"The Mystic Eyes are just an extra. You would have liked to have gotten them, but you wouldn't care if you didn't. I had to cross a lot of dangerous bridges just to prevent that bonus."

Bitterly, the master grasps his cigar.

Then, "The Far Eastern ritual that the Lord of Animusphere asked you to investigate was the Holy Grail War," he spoke.

This time the name of the Holy Grail War was mentioned, probably because there was no longer any need to conceal anything as the familiars had their senses sealed.

"The Holy Grail War is a magical ritual in which seven magi summon seven Servants and fight for the Holy Grail that will fulfil their wish. Yes, it would be more familiar to most magi to call it the ritual in which my predecessor, Lord El-Melloi, died. Considering the time of year, the death of my predecessor may have been the reason why the Lord of the Celestial Department Animusphere was inspired to look into it."

His lips were twisted sarcastically.

"Anyway, as a result of the investigation, the Lord of the Animusphere apparently thought that the Great Holy Grail was useless in this case. I don't know the basis for this, but since the lord was so convinced, the report must have been indisputable. In fact, it is not hard to imagine that the accuracy of the report was outstanding since the investigation was carried out using several Mystic Eyes. In the first place, the majority of people in the Clock Tower are of the opinion that there is no way that a proper wish-granting device could possibly be established in that ritual of the Far East."

Master's words took my breath away.

Although their heads were cut off, the owners of those Mystic Eyes were used like slaves. In direct proportion to their regret, their Mystic Eyes must have seen through to the truth of the Holy Grail War.

"At the same time, that investigation would have given you other information. Information that is linked to the current case."

"Good. Very good. I would have liked to have had a student like you while I was dean.'

Heartless nods slowly.

Yet this confrontation is the opposite of that. The format is that Heartless, disguised as the student Caules, asks the questions and Master, the lecturer, answers.

"You have yet to make a single mistake. Please continue."

"...I'm not doing this for your pleasure."

"But you do want to know the truth. If there is a mystery, it is an instinct for a race like ours anymore to want to dismantle it. There is no need to hesitate. Expose it to your heart's content. In exchange, I swear to you that I will answer you whether it is right or wrong. I think you need that validation now, don't you?"

The red-haired man presses for Master's reasoning like a demon.

Alternatively, he looked like a child begging for the continuation of play. Perhaps it was the same concept.

"With the same information, the Aminusphere gave up, so this case must be for a different purpose. As stated before, The Lord of the Aminusphere gave up because the Holy Grail was useless to him. Then it is clear that it is also not your objective. Ah, even if I don't know your ultimate goal, I know what you were aiming for with this case. After all, I saw the results with my own eyes."

Master took one deep breath.

He inhaled the cigar and then exhaled his answer with the smoke.

"It is the Heroic Spirit," he confronted. "You wanted to summon a Heroic Spirit as a Servant."

"Excellent!"

Heartless held the chest of his suit and looked up at the ceiling with emotion.

However, the words generated whispers in other directions.

"Wait a minute. A Heroic Spirit, as in a Ghost Liner? Did you really summon such a thing?"

Jean-Mario, by the side, did not hide his dismay.

Of course, Hishiri and Melvin already knew.

Olga Marie shivered faintly, and though Caules and Reines were also informed, they had grim expressions on their faces.

The train staff did not appear outwardly surprised.

Master did not speak.

This is because it is now a confirmed fact that Heartless summoned the Servant. The one we met and fought on the roof of the train, and who forced him into a wheelchair.

"While I was unconscious, Gray said she found a strange seed inside the Child of Ainnashe."

Before my startled self could say anything, Master attacked with more questions.

"You didn't plant that seed, did you?"

"Hmm? And why would I do that?"

"Rail Zeppelin and the Child of Ainnashe - if you place these two on the same spiritual ley line, there will inevitably be a distortion. Take a sheet of paper, for example. What happens if you put two dots on the top and bottom of a sheet of paper and bring them closer together?"

I imagine it.

The shape obtained by bending two dots on a piece of paper together. This produces two convexes, and at the same time, there is also a concave with the same depth.

For instance, the shape is almost like a cup.

"Yes. A cup is created. The distortion is not actually formed in the middle, but rather at the point where the two powerful magical are in most conflict with one another. The more equal the quality and quantity of the opposing magical forces, the greater the outcome. For example, it would be ideal if the two were leftovers from beings such as senior-level Dead Apostles. This alone, of course, may be enough to be called a cup or a cauldron, but not the Holy Grail War. It could be adapted to become that Great Magic if it was crafted with the appropriate formula, but to make it the sort of grail that can

summon Servants, it would need one or two more tweaks. For instance, to induce the kind of distortion that could allow the summoning of a servant, you could embed a ritual device that would act as a minor Grail, or you could try to form a connection to the Great Holy Grail that exists in Japan."

Connection, Master says.

His fingers drew with the cigar. Inside the Pandemonium Room, the red flame of the cigar formed an illusionary line.

"Ley lines circulate all over the planet, even as far away as the Far East. Ah, perhaps you bought and developed a plot of land in this area. All in order to align to the ley lines."

"...!"

I just remembered.

This was when we escaped from the Child of Einnashe, and I made it back to the Rail Zeppelin. The land around us then was strangely developed - and yet there was no sign of any new buildings being built. I didn't even have the time to question it at that time, so I never realised its meaning.

"It is not unusual to tend to the lands in the real world to align with the ley lines. Every country in every era has done so naturally when setting up a capital city. In the East, it is still popular in the form of ground-breaking ceremonies and feng shui. If such a technique were applied to the Rail Zeppelin, which does not have a fixed railway line but runs along the spiritual ley line, it would be possible to ensure the land on which it operates in advance. You could even prepare the Child of Einnashe for where it goes. At the same time, you might also connect to the Great Grail of faraway Japan."

"Amazing. Are these expert eyes what made the El-Melloi classroom a household name in the Clock Tower in such a short time?" Heartless was sincerely impressed. Inside the field of light, the man made a humorous frown. "It took me the whole year to reach that conclusion. I'm losing my confidence."

"This is just an answer to your question. I have been given a disgusting amount of hints, and no matter how much I can realize from that, I never reach the achievements of the

discoverers and inventors. Oh, and I might add, you must have summoned your Servant on the first night."

"And your evidence is?"

Master answers Heartless' question in a matter-of-fact manner.

"That Servant said she had a letter sent out to summon me. The one you brought to me right after the second day's demonstration of the Mystic Eyes. That means that you had summoned her before that. The only time you were free for that long when you were disguised as Caules was on the first night."

(The evening... of the first day...!)

When I remembered that time, I nearly gasped.

After a short conversation with Caules - an imposter - he said goodnight to me, and I went to sleep. That night I slept oddly better than usual because Master's cigar was so comforting. Alternatively, Master had a strange difficulty getting out of bed that morning; I had assumed that it was his usual fatigue.

"That is... impossible..."

"It wasn't poison or anything. It was just to make your sleep a little deeper."

Heartless smiled.

When he said that fact, I felt a storm swirling inside my own heart. Piece by piece, things were coming together in the worst possible way. I had never thought it would come to this, not even in my nightmares.

That night, Heartless, wearing the face of Caules, summoned Hephaestion.

If that is so, then where was the summoning?

Perhaps he had gotten off of the Rail Zeppelin. Because even if he had, it would be easy to come back using the Gordius Wheel. He would only have to get back on the train while everyone was distracted by Hephaestion.

(That is... not everything, though.)

When we fought Hepaestion, Caules said he came because he felt the magical energy of the lightning. I convinced myself that such a thing was possible, as he had been training in Primeval Batteries. However, that was completely false. A fraud.

How did Heartless, who was disguised as Caules at the time, feel about aiding Master with healing magecraft?

Burying all of these thoughts, Master continued.

"In other words, in this case, Trisha's murder and the Mystic Eyes auction were extras for you. As soon as you were able to summon the Servant, you had already succeeded."

"You have keen insight. I give you one hundred points," Heartless said with a broad smile.

Ignoring his smile, Master continued with a question.

"Since you succeeded, you could have just walked away; why didn't you?"

"I told you earlier. Because I wanted to watch you."

His expression was extremely subdued.

"Why did you impersonate Caules?"

"Because I wanted to get to know you," Heartless sang like a little bird.

Master had declared that the culprit of this case was his adversary.

Yet this adversary spoke in a terribly friendly manner.

"The more I looked into it, the more interesting the Holy Grail War became. Everyone was breathing. Myths and legends were recreated in the present day as they were. Even for magi, it's an impossible fairy tale, and that's why I was fascinated by it. I wished

from the bottom of my heart that I could chase it forever and ever, like the sunsets I saw as a child."

The word 'sunset', for some reason, struck a chord.

A scarlet scene that gradually fades into darkness. A time when you could watch the changing light forever. This man still felt like he was standing in that red light. Like Rip Van Winkle, the sleeping man who stared at the sunset for so long that he suddenly realised that decades had passed.

Then, a shadow interrupted.

It was the conductor of the Rail Zeppelin.

"Are you the one who summoned the Child of Einnashe?"

"That's right."

"Disputes between magi are acceptable, but if you are deemed to have caused harm to our train, you forfeit your right to participate in this auction." This time, it was the auctioneer's voice that echoed. "The same goes for Yvette L. Lehrman, who was conspiring with you to obtain the unclaimed Mystic Eyes of Transience."

"Ehhhhh! Me too?! Oh, no!"

When Yvette screamed out in a wild and crazy manner, a snake coiled itself around her from behind. The snake, which had wrapped itself around her eyes, was instantly transformed into a sealing cloth as if to prevent her from using her Mystic Eye, which was the girl's speciality.

It was the magic of Hishiri.

The female magus of the Department of Law seemed to use snakes in accordance with her own image.

"The two of you will be taken into custody by the Department of Law."

"Oh, dear. I knew it would come to this," Heartless shrugged.

Inside the powerful Bounded Field, he softly placed Trisha's head at his feet.

"...However, this is not quite enough," said Heartless, lifting his right hand straight up.

My own eyes were fixed on the strange patterns engraved on the back of his hands. Its obvious magical power made me understand, undeniably, that it was an unusual mystery.

"You know it well, Lord El-Melloi II. It's a Command Seal. It is the proof of a contract with a Servant and grants only three absolute commands. It has several applications beyond just making them obey your commands.'

"Miss Adashino! Cast a Bounded Field—" Master shouts.

But sooner than that, Heartless called out loudly.

"I command you! Come—"

The radiant white Bounded Field is counteracted by an even more intense light.

I quickly 'reinforced' my eyes, but by the time my sight returned in less than a few tenths of one second, the anomaly had already ended. Inside the field, which had shattered without a trace, a lone woman had appeared next to Heartless.

She is the exact ideal of what a warrior should be.

Of her gently wavy hair, there was only a single tuft of braided hair that reached awfully far down to her ankles. One of her eyes was as clear and blue as the sea, and the other as black as a raven's wing. Her armour, crafted from leather and metal, was antiquated, but alone she stood majestic, easily dominating this age.

In the face of this heroic figure, Hishiri's breathing faltered for the first time.

"A Heroic Spirit..."

"Seriously, you're using ghost liners as your familiar!"

Jean-Mario exclaimed. Perhaps 'Ghost Liner' was the more formal name among magi. In any case, the only certain thing was that this was an existential threat to even the most seasoned magus.

The warrior maiden leisurely looks back at Heartless.

"You finally for called me, Master."

"Hahaha, it was just too interesting to talk with the Lord. I couldn't stay long enough."

"Nonsense," spat Hephaestion.

Despite it being just an exchange of words, the magi around them were frozen.

"What, in the world... this is..."

It was Olga Marie who nearly stumbled.

As the daughter of a Lord, she has seen many strong Mysteries, so she knows what she is talking about.

This is an order of magnitude beyond what she had ever seen before. This is the embodiment of the mighty, the immense, the violent, and the absurd.

Even I couldn't help but feel my knees trembling even now. I had become disgustingly aware in the previous battle of how much strength the opponent in front of me held. My limbs were bound by the memory of having been so utterly beaten.

"...Ihihihi, here I come! Oi, oi, Gray, pull yourself together!"

In a whisper, Add scolded me.

Still, just trying not to run away is all I can do. This is like claiming to have repaired a heart that has long since been broken, using only adhesive tape.

"Did you survive?" The Heroic Spirit looked at my master.

The cold, stern eyes seemed to freeze even my soul, even if they were not staring directly at me.

"I have been thinking about you a lot," Master responded curtly.

By no means does this mean he is unafraid. That's natural. He had almost been killed on this train. The wounds are not only unhealed; they are so serious that he is forced to use a wheelchair.

Yet even still, Master suppresses a shudder and speaks.

"I wondered who you were, so I reflected on it. Servant."

"I have already introduced myself as Hephaestion"

"Your Class, that is the question."

The Holy Grail War is said to facilitate the summoning of Heroic Spirits by restricting them to certain aspects of their lives and legend.

For example, the Saber Class could be derived from the aspect of a hero holding a holy or magic sword, while the Caster Class could be derived from the aspect of a hero wielding powerful magic. These classes are said to be also used as temporary pseudonyms in place of true names, which are supposed to be hidden from adversaries.

Therefore, my master has been wondering about this Heroic Spirit who revealed her True Name but not her class for some time now.

"Only now do I understand the meaning behind this," Master took an envelope out from his pocket.

This was the invitation letter that had been placed in the safe in the room of the dean of Norwich.

"You summoned me to Rail Zeppelin, even going so far as to leave an invitation in the vault, because you wanted your subspecies Holy Grail to misidentify me," he continued, holding the invitation to his chest.

"You certainly did create a subspecies Grail. Although it may not function as a vessel to grant wishes, you at least managed to make it strong enough to summon Servants. Then, to make it even more of a sure case, you called me into the train. As I was once recognised as a Master in the Fourth Holy Grail War ten years ago, it would be easy for the Grail to misidentify me. Furthermore, in order to prevent me from possibly becoming the Master, you disguised your Command Seals in such a way," Master spoke, pointing to the Seal engraved on Heartless' hand - one stroke of which had now been lost.

"But even that was not quite enough. This is because there is a fixed number of classes used in the real Holy Grail wars. Even if you could mimic some of the functions of the Greater Grail by connecting it to your Holy Grail, you wouldn't have been able to hack the Greater Grail itself. Since you can't call upon the same framework for Heroic Spirits, you were forced to create an entirely new extra class."

Extra Class.

Separate from the original seven classes, which manifest in the Holy Grail wars.

"You intended to go through all of this as an impostor, didn't you?"

Suddenly, I remembered something Olga Marie had said.

— "Everything. Everything I've experienced on this train journey is as if it is an afterimage."

Struck by his words, Master added his own part after that. He had said that it was the decisive cog in the wheel that was his theory.

"The Grail is a fake. The Master is a fake. The Command seal is a fake. Usually, this kind of nonsensical magical formula would fail. However, what if the class itself embodies being fake? Well, it's a play on words, after all. You could call it a trick. Yet, magic was originally born from wordplay and tricks. If not, no one would even be allowed to manipulate the Tarot, if I may use that as a symbol of the world."

Indeed, that would be a fraud.

Master says that if everything here is fake, then the basis of the magic here is the essence of being fake itself. Although it was fundamentally absurd logic, I also felt that it fit awfully well. Every nerve in my body was telling me that what my master was saying was right.

"In other words... Who is this Heroic Spirit...?"

"Well, a Heroic Spirit of Imitation could probably be known as Faker or something like that."

"Apparently, we have the same taste in naming things," Heartless chuckled.

Holding the area around the breast pocket of his blue suit, he affirms my master's words.

"Exactly so, I have named this new class Faker."

Faker.

Heroic Spirit of Imitation.

A new Extra Class.

"A Class meant to call out the side of a Heroic Spirit that was an imposter or body double. You wanted to keep that hidden. That is why she never mentioned her class and only called herself Hephaestion. I suppose that's also why she didn't release the true name of her Noble Phantasm."

Saying that, Master looked at the female warrior once again.

"...Then, who would you say I am?"

Gravely, the Heroic Spirit asked.

Neither the train staff nor the magi would normally leave such a question unanswered. Yet unlike before, Heartless and the Servant were not confined by the wards of the Bounded Field. Their power was simply too great to carelessly instigate. A single person's Mystery was enough to cover the entire Rail Zeppelin in hostility.

Master was biting down on his back teeth.

For what it's worth, it seemed that he was holding back his teeth from the meeting. His fists, hidden behind his wheelchair, clenched so tight that they turned white, and he finally managed to let out a few words.

"I once summoned Iskandar in the Holy Grail War," Master said.

"However, his appearance was nothing like the Iskandar of legend. In fact, his body, which was said to be small in stature, actually exceeded two meters in height, and he was a muscular giant of a man. Perhaps in his younger days, he was different, but even so, the colour of his hair and eyes was a magnificent vermillion, far too different from what had been handed down from generation to generation. If we follow the legends, Iskandar's hair colour was either gold or black. It was even said that Iskandar was a heterochromia with one eye for the darkness of the night and one eye for the blue of the sky."

"...That is," I grunted to myself.

Because, the way that he just spoke, it was almost as if—

"...Yes, this very woman," Master's words caused the heroine to shiver slightly.

Perhaps Olga Marie was aware of this possibility. Even now, trembling like a fawn, her amber eyes were watching the conversation.

"You are not Hephaestion," Master declares.

"I suppose Iskandar was called as a summon. Yes, that's right. If that relic had been used, no other Heroic Spirit could have been summoned. However, due to the class of the summoning, an existence similar yet different from the original Iskandar was summoned. For ancient royalty, where assassinations and wars were commonplace, there naturally had to be such an existence."

Similar but different.

An existence that is only natural.

Master then clarifies what he means.

"You are an afterimage of the king, the body double of Iskandar."

## ~Part 2~

"B-but isn't that strange? She doesn't look anything like the genuine article, yet she's a body double."

I couldn't help but interject.

I just couldn't accept what Master said. I couldn't understand how she could be a body double when her appearance and gender did not even match.

However, in a calm voice, Master continued his explanation.

The term 'body double' refers not only to a person's physical appearance. In ancient times, when there were no photographs, it was a rather imprecise term. After all, If Iskandar's true appearance was never known to the masses, there was no need for her to look like him.

"...That is true, but still..."

"Besides, in her case, it probably has a different meaning than that of the ordinary body double. Possibly there is an example from ancient Mesopotamia..."

"...You are roughly 80% correct."

Interrupting Master's words, the female Heroic Spirit affirmed.

She admitted that she was Iskandar's body double.

Impostors. Substitutes. "Faker" is the class associated with such people.

"However, the remaining 20% is wrong. That is the limitation of whodunit. As a deduction brought about by motive, it is correct. Yet it doesn't arrive at the truth itself. The name of Hephaestion belongs to my brother, but I have borrowed it from him on occasion."

"Brother?"

"I do not wish to listen to any more of this nonsense. Is that alright, Master?"

Faker's expression showed that there would be no more questions and answers.

"Oh dear," Heartless waves his red hair.

Then he slowly looked around.

"Hmm, as far as I'm concerned, I'm fine with fighting here."

He turns to face the Ral Zeppelin conductor.

"However, it would cost numerous Mystic Eyes. Even though I have long since retired from the Clock Tower, I cannot bear such a tragedy as a magus. Therefore, shall we move out from the Pandemonium Room?"

It's a selfish argument.

When you consider that this is the same person who killed Trisha because he didn't want the incident of seven years ago to be investigated and also brought all of us into danger by summoning a Servant and the Child of Einnashe, it's clear how outrageous his words are.

However, with a Servant as support, there is tremendous power behind his outrageousness.

Wherever one looks in the Pandemonium room, there are Mystic Eyes.

Each and every one of them was of value, as the auction had just proven. I didn't even want to imagine how disastrous it would be to fight in this environment.

"...That would be good," the conductor nodded, and there was immediate movement.

The ceiling of the Pandemonium Room swung wide open. Perhaps it was a doorway to transport large cargo. Several twinkling stars could be seen across the night sky.

After saying thank you, Heartless called out to one girl in particular.

"Yvette. What are you going to do? Are you coming with me?"

"I'm fine here."

Yvette, who was still bound by Hishiri's magic, swung her pink twin tails to the side.

"Our agreement was only to work together for the loan, wasn't it? From now on, you will be judged by the Department of Law, and I think I'll just tell them everything without complaint. Regardless of the fact that you are the former dean, I will not be a part of your fugitive lifestyle."

"Ahh, I've been dumped."

Faker took hold of his hand, and as he raised one eyebrow, she jumped all the way to the rooftop lightly.

"Let's go..."

Master squeezes the armrests of his wheelchair.

Master, who had been confined to the wheelchair, finally stood up.

Of course, his wounds were not healed. He must have replaced his nerves with Magic Circuits, just as Melvin had done. Master was concentrating so hard that he was dripping with thick sweat.

"Caules, Gray. Let's chase them."

"Instructor, but..."

"I understand."

I nodded, which was in contrast to Caules, who hesitated.

Perhaps that made him more determined as Caules stepped forward as well. Together, we both put our hands around Master's waist and then he jumped up by 'reinforcing' himself.

On the roof of the train, we landed.

Right in front of me, an exasperated Heartless looked back at us.

"Good grief, I really do think it would be wise for us to part ways at this juncture. As I told you earlier, I don't intend to kill a Lord here."

"I can't let that happen."

Master said, casting his head down in pain.

Although I tried to land on the ground with as little impact as possible, just standing like this was a definite burden on Master's injured body.

"You never gave back the relic you took from me."

"Ah, I see. I see. That's quite right. Certainly, it is of no use to me now that the summoning is over."

Then, the man took out an old vermilion rag.

He let go of it, and it blew right up to Master with the wind, and he took it.

Master's lips pursed as he checked the relic that had returned to his hand. He took out another handkerchief and folded it carefully inside before putting it away in his pocket.

"I have one more thing I'd like to discuss."

"I'd love to talk to have a leisurely talk with you, but I'm afraid I don't have the time..."

"I'm not talking to you," Master shook his head firmly. "You, Faker."

By class, he called out to her.

Faker, not Hephaestion.

"I told you I'm not going to listen to your nonsense."

Master continued undeterred in the face of the female Servant, who made no attempt to hide her hostility.

"You said that about 20% of what I said was wrong. You also said that you sometimes borrowed the name of your brother. ...So, you are his twin."

"..."

With a twitch, Faker's fingers stirred.

Not missing her agitation, Master spun some more words.

"In those days, it was not unusual for one twin to be raised with decency while the other was left in the care of dark magic. Especially since Iskandar's mother, Olympias, was an ardent follower of the Dionysian cult."

— "Originally, I was put to work as the chaperone of that man's mother."

I remembered what she had said in the cave.

Moreover, Melvin had also talked about it. Iskandar's mother was in charge of the religious ceremonies in Macedonia. If that was the case, then what was the significance of a child being raised and chaperoned by his mother?

"For some time now, I have thought that the name Hephaestion seems strange. Traditionally in Greece, a normal man would be named Hephaistos. The moment someone goes to the trouble of making a derivation with the name Hephaestion, both gender and origin become unclear. In fact, there was even a queen of the Amazons by the same name. —According to one theory, the name 'Hephaestion' means 'one that makes an offering to the gods.'"

He must have been looking into it for a long time.

Whenever it concerns the Heroic Spirit of Iskandar. Regarding the years that Iskandar has lived. Master always casts a faraway look when he contemplates the history of

Iskandar. As he faces the far-off ancient era that has long since passed, he also reverts to the spirit of his youth.

That's why I know for sure.

"A king needs subordinates who will never betray him in order to wield his power. It is no wonder that Olympias, who had been working all along to make Iskandar the one and only king, would try to raise a loyal subject from an early age. I think it was that kind of name that was given to your brother."

"—Shut up!"

The furious female heroine draws her sword.

Before her thunderous slash, she was interrupted.

"Add!"

"Hihihih! I'm here!"

Absorbing the surrounding magic, Add unfolds in my hands.

The first stage of the practical limitation seal.

A great barrier.

Just as I narrowly protected Master, a tremendous shock struck my shield. The blow was so heavy that it seemed as if the anger of the Heroic Spirit was directly applied to the shield, and it was like my whole body might melt.

"...I'm sorry, Gray."

"I'm fine."

Holding my shield poised, I made it clear.

"This much is fine. So please, Master, say whatever you want to say."

I somehow understood what my master was trying to do.

Heartless said that the command seal is one that can only be used three times. Only three times. One of the three times was just used to summon Faker. Therefore, he would want to continue on without using it again as much as possible.

This is why Faker, provoked by Master, is difficult to control here.

This is because Heroic Spirits are not mere familiars and have their own personalities, making them difficult to control. But at the same time, Master knows better than anyone just how to deal with Heroic Spirits.

"...When I said that Faker was probably Iskandar's body double, I was not referring to physical appearance."

Again, Master brought back the earlier topic.

"Even though that period was already drawing to a close, it was still a time when magecraft was at its peak, also known as the Age of Gods. Magecraft was more powerful then, and much of it was considered magic. Powerful kings always had priests and wizards available to protect them from curses. Going back as far as ancient Mesopotamia, there was even a ritual to bring in a substitute king. Apparently, in order to escape a bad omen, an unrelated farmer was appointed king, and once the calamity had passed, the substitute was killed."

A substitute king.

A ritual, to avoid calamity.

"...Then, what you are saying, Master is-"

"She is not simply a body double. She is some kind of magical substitute," Master declares.

"That's enough...!" Faker's movements accelerate.

Dodging my large shield, she swung herself around the outside of the train, which was still in motion. Her outstanding mobility allowed her to manoeuvre with almost no

regard for the laws of physics. Her speed was so overwhelming that even my own reinforced eyesight could not keep up with her.

(I can't get there in time...)

Yet, in an instant, a lightning net ensnared her body.

"——Ah?!"

"...Haha, I guess I was able to do it one way or another."

Caules had been ahead of the train and set up a trap.

A thin electric current was running between his fingers. The thread of electric current stretched like a spider's web across the roof of the train, entangling the entire body of Heroic Spirit.

"Combining my own body's magical energy with the Primeval Battery, I intensified my power over galvanism. I've been practising this with the instructor for some time now."

It was like Galvani's battery experiments which also inspired the novel, Frankenstein, to be written. It was from the perspective of bioelectricity that led to the development of several magical arts between Master and Caules. In that sense, it was a technique that was appropriate to be known as Modern Magecraft.

Full of tension and his own characteristic fastidiousness and pride, Caules spoke.

"Perhaps I shall name it the Crafted Tree (Electric Death By Hanging)."

"...Wa," Faker gasped.

The lips of the smiling spirit were about to murmur something.

"Gray, she's consuming the magic!"

His voice pushed me forwards.

Swiftly, I transformed from the great shield and swung my Grim Reaper at an oblique angle.

Exactly as he said, she was focusing on consuming the magic around her, rather than attacking her opponents. Inevitably, the magic of the Primeval Battery was also unleashed, but a completely different kind of magic - the kind of magic that was concentrated inside a Heroic Spirit of the world, also came out and hit back at his energy, which formed around her sword held high that clashed with my attack.

In the aftermath of the collision, a tornado blast of wind blew around.

However, more than just its power, I was more horrified by the sheer amount of magical power I had just been hit with.

“Right now, that was...”

“Very, dangerous,” Master finished.

“Gray. Caules. She’s a magus!”

With a pop, Caules blinked.

He looked incredulous. His eyes widened as if to say that he had been prepared to fight a Heroic Spirit, but those words were a complete surprise.

"A magus from the time of Iskandar... I-Instructor that is..."

Caules said in a muffled voice.

"A magus from, the Age of the Gods...!"

"If you want to be a magical substitute, the shortcut would be to be a magus yourself. A magus from a time when magic was far more versatile than it is today."

Without pausing, Master lifted his eyes at Faker.

"Ah, Olympias, who had wished for her son to be king for some time, must have wondered at the sight of those young twins. 'If one of them is a general and the other is

a magus, then he would have the loyal servants he will need.' It is only logical to think that she wanted to provide a reliable magus for her son as early as possible, as well as a general. It is no wonder why they would be so valued. He and she would be the best general and magus for him. Thus, they would be prepared, educated, and trained to serve the king."

I was deceived.

"Or, perhaps I should say, I was mistaken. I had simply thought that she was a general who had fought alongside Iskandar, wielding a sword, because of the previous battle. The fact is, among the tens of thousands of Iskandar's men, Hephaestion is the one general whose name shines brightest. However, if her true identity was not Hephaestion, but the double of the king—"

"—I said shut up!"

"Add, consume!"

Breathlessly, I slash at her with the Grim Reaper. If Faker is a magus from the Age of the Gods, then she will be able to use it without fail. That would be like reducing the chances of us winning, which is already near nil, to begin with, down to a complete zero.

Thankfully, it seemed that as long as she continued to absorb magic power, she would not be able to use her magic.

But instead, the velocity towards me was increasing more than ever.

"Yippeeeeeee! This is amazing! I don't care about the quantity, but this quality of magic power is rarely seen in the modern world!"

I can see that Master's words have made her go into a state of rage.

Otherwise, she would not have used the same move a second or third time when her magic had been nullified the first time. However, even so, there would be no fourth time. Having given up on magic, she returned to her sword and struck back at twice the speed of ours.

The core of my body was hot and tingly.

My Magic Circuits, running at a higher level than usual, have boosted my muscular strength, agility, and senses to a whole new level. No, surely there is more to it than that. The warrior spirit of the hero before me was blowing me away, making me realize that I couldn't afford to be frightened by my own strangeness.

Behind me, I heard the voice of Master.

"You would have continuously spread false information about what Iskandar looked like in order to avoid curses. No, in fact, you probably even acted in Iskandar's name. Therefore, the image of Iskandar passed down to posterity was mixed with a lot of what was really you."

Black hair.

Gold and silver Heterochromia.

A small body for a man.

Suppose they were entirely due to intelligence operations at the time?

No wonder Iskandar took her with him on his many battles. Whether on an expedition against the ancient magic of Egypt or against the hereditary magic of India, she was the conqueror's trump card for protection.

And, because it was a trump card, her true identity was concealed.

Master is now exposing the secret that Faker had kept until his death, or rather, even after her death. It could even be called an incision. I realized that I was barely able to withstand the onslaught of this Heroic Spirit only because of the cruelty of his words.

"...It's a real dismantling, eh?"

Heartless, who was watching, suddenly muttered.

Master's words dismantle her mystery. Upon observing the scene, Heartless gave it that name. Master's method was to dismantle.

Suddenly, Faker took a big step back.

She tried to catch up with him but spun back with something that was not a spell.

“...I must correct you.”

A brooding voice broke out from the female Heroic Spirit.

"If only for an impression, we used to really look alike. At least enough to be his representative. The fact that I was made to be a substitute was only an extension of that. ...It was my brother who was mistaken by the mother of Darius."

Faker says, baring her teeth like fangs.

Her eyes were filled with intense hatred. Eyes that were a mixture of murderous intent and hostility blended into a black ball that absorbed all light.

"Ah, this no longer makes any sense. If you want to hear it so badly, I'll tell you. I didn't have a name to begin with," she confessed.

“...No, name?”

"I was made to be a body double of the king, but I had no unique name, for, without a unique name, I would be a complete body double of the king. I could be a flawless shield against any and all curses that might befall king Iskandar. Hahaha, Olympias raised my brother to be a general while drugging the young me to prevent my useless ego from being born."

In magic, it is a taboo for private information to be divulged. In certain magical systems, it is said that the accuracy of curses increases dozens of times just by knowing a person's name.

If so, then simply don't name someone.

She only needs to be an object that takes on the name of Iskandar when she is needed.

A shiver ran down my spine. It was something similar to fear, but a little different. Perhaps it was something close to that wish that I would become King Arthur, who had died so long ago.

"The king nevertheless tried many times to give me a name, but each time I strongly refused. When I needed a name other than that of the king, I borrowed the name of my brother Hephaestion. That is all there is to it. That's all there is to it, magus."

"Well, that leaves one last question."

Without missing a beat, Master interjected.

"Why didn't you appear in the Ionioi Hetairoi?"

Faker's visage becomes dyed with fury.

Her blade accelerates into a seething murderous rage.

Realising that my Grim Reaper could not deal with this, I returned Add to being a Great Shield.

A thunderous roar resounded as the Great Shield crashed with her sword. The sound, which became a series of echoes due to the sheer velocity, resembled some kind of orchestra. A powerful blast struck to the core of my 'reinforced' body, making me grit down on my back teeth in order to hold my whole body together.

"You said that the king wanted to give you a name!"

Master shouted as he spat out blood.

Although he was protected, the many reverberations over the entire rooftop were enough to open his wounds. I could faintly smell the scent of blood.

"If that is so, then he couldn't have accepted your situation! He could not tolerate the fact that you were treated as a nameless thing! not be able to take his place if you did. No doubt, you were one of the few truly loyal subjects of King Iskandar. As such, the reason you were not in the 'Ionioi Hetairoi' is-"

“Shut up!”

With a roar, almost as if an oversized bell had been rung, my body was blown away.

“(T-that was... too fast...!)

The moment I thought of falling off the train, I felt pressure on my back. Caules, who had been 'reinforced' in advance, had been able to catch me. However, this meant that there was no one left to protect Master.

“Master!”

With my entire strength, I jumped.

Faker's blade swung down towards Master's brain.

"It is because you yourself hate the 'Ionioi Hetairoi'...!"

Possibly, those words momentarily slowed the sword of the female Heroic Spirit.

To seize that one moment, I threw Add in the Great Shield form. The crash of lightning explodes the entire rooftop. A ricocheting Add flies back to me, drawn by my magical energy. Master was thrown back from the other side of the rising dust, and his body stopped halfway across the train.

His glasses, which had fallen from his eyes, fell from the train.

There was so much sticky blood that it looked like a puddle.

I watched with bewilderment as my master slowly picked himself up, clutching his knees.

And then, “You have stood proudly,” Heartless murmured, impressed.

"But I see now. Despite knowing the same Holy Grail War, there is a big difference between a spectator who has only witnessed its aftermath and a survivor who has actually experienced it. You certainly know how to deal with Heroic Spirits. It seems

you know how to face them as they are, which is a strength that cannot be measured by modern wisdom."

"I've been through many things."

The master laughed bitterly, exuding pain.

I can't say whether it was emotional or physical pain.

Heartless nodded a few times, then scratched his cheek.

"Unless I do something about you, Faker won't let me leave this place. As you can imagine, I can't just use another Command Seal here because if I do, our relationship will become irreparably damaged. Making an enemy of you has become quite a pain."

Even at this stage, the red-haired man laughed softly.

"So it can't be helped. Any more of this is an obstacle, so allow me to put up a fight as well."

"You as well?"

"Yes, just like this."

Heartless's hands gently pressed against where his heart should be.

"Turn around, my heart," he sang a melody.

Suddenly, I felt something turn inside out. Not me, but outside of me. I felt nauseous for a moment, as though the world had inverted its skin.

I could sense its direction, too.

In the darkness of the night, in the path of a travelling train, something was born.

"Now, what?"

"It's not quite an imaginary element, but I can bring out something similar to that. Instead of a heart."

Quietly, Heartless murmured.

In place of what was lost, there was also something gained. It is likely something different from normal magic. Invoked by means of incantation and gesture, and with the driving force of a spell or magic foundation, it calls forth a falsely similar series of phenomena.

An irreplaceable perk acquired in exchange for being kidnapped by fairies.

"Incidentally, did you really think that the Child of Einnashe had vanished so easily? Even if the child is no match for the main body, it is still a Great Mystery that won't be destroyed so easily."

The magic that swelled up at the end of the track gave me a sense of *déjà vu*.

It was a feeling I had experienced only half a day before.

"Heartless...!"

"I secretly retrieved the damaged nucleus of the Child of Einnashe and sealed it up in an imaginary pocket. Just a few moments ago, I liberated it in front of this train. After all, they're tough to kill, to begin with. So the more they are hurt, the more they will charge after their enemies."

With these words, a strange noise echoed.

Coming from the other side of the tracks were tendril-like tree branches. Its icy exterior was unchanged, yet its bark was clearly visible, pulsating with blood-red vermillion, it was as if the wounded Child of Einnashe was morphing into a new form under the extreme conditions it was under.

"It has changed from before. Under these circumstances, it has become starved more than ever. Now, what is the thing that has the most magical power in the vicinity?"

Such a thing was obvious.

The Rail Zeppelin was now being devoured by the Child of Einnashe as it was wrapped tightly in the icy branches.



Hishiri quietly put her glasses back on.

The deadly struggle taking place on the roof of the train was reaching her with a terrific roar. However, apart from that, she also felt the emergence of a formidable magical force.

She moved closer to the elegantly decorated window and opened it briskly.

On the other side of the track, she sees a strange, tentacle-like branch stirring.

"Well, well!"

Hishiri shakes her head in dismay.

"Yes. I knew he must be up to something, but I didn't think he was planning to reuse the Child of Einnashe. As expected of the former dean, I should say."

"You mean, the Child of Einnashe...?! It got out?!"

The bound Yvette reacted to her words.

Her eyes were sealed shut, so she had no way of checking, but it seemed that she had not forgotten the horror she had experienced in the previous breakout.

"—By no means are you calling the Department of Law inept, are you?"

Reines teased in amusement.

After having exercised flight magic from London to here, Reines had almost no reserves of magical power left. That is why she had given up on helping her step-brother, Lord El-Melloi II, but that was also why she felt a strong sense... to at least do something about this situation.

In contrast, Hishiri turned to one magus.

"In the meantime, we will need your help, Jean-Mario."

"Um, me?!"

Jean-Mario held his hands up as high as he could and made a hold-up-like motion with his head. His expression was not as carefree as his gestures, but rather he looked so gaunt that he looked as if he might die at any moment.

"Your familiar would be great for checking the situation. I mean, you've likely already done that anyway."

"...Well, at least about eighty-seven of them anyway."

Small jet-black particles spilt from his sleeve.

Minuscule spiders were slipping outwards through gaps in the train. He had observed many things with these familiars before the auction, so this kind of preparation would have been natural for him.

"Then, first of all, we need to deploy as many wards as possible outside the train—"

"...That serves no purpose, Miss Department of Law."

And then, a voice crept across the carpet in a low tone.

Hishiri looks back.

The silver-haired girl had spoken with a depressed look on her face.

"Is there a problem?"

"I have been looking through the Ley Lines before you. This is the most effective technique. I can do this best if it is the Child of Einnashe we're dealing with."

"I see, so you can see from the sky using the Ley Lines. I'll leave it to you then. Is that fine with you?"

The girl nodded, "...I'll be fine."

Her gaze was fixed on the head of Trisha Fellows, which was still on the carpet after the disappearance of Heartless and his Servant. Having picked up the head and gently placed it on a chair, Olga Marie faced it for a moment.

"...Yeah. I... surely, want to do this."

She whispered to herself.

Hishiri then went on to question the conductor.

"What are you going to do about this?"

"We will not interfere with a quarrel between magi."

The conductor spoke in his usual emotionless voice.

"However, we cannot allow Rail Zeppelin to be disgraced any further. Particularly if it is a bastard child of the Dead, who is the same as us. We shall deal with this one in our own way."

He answered firmly and spun on his heel. They probably have their own ideals. A fight based on their own beliefs, different from those of the magi, yet equal in their own way.

Once he was seen off,

"...Hey, Mr Hishiri, can I do a plea bargain?"

Yvette cut in.

She was tied up behind her back, and her tone was very light. It was as if to say, 'Yesterday I ate your lunch without your permission, so today I'm going to share mine with you.'

"A plea bargain, is it?"

"Yes. To begin with, I wasn't involved in the summoning of Heartless' Servant, was I? I didn't go along with him when he asked me, and I don't really think it would be that much of a problem from the Clock Tower's perspective if I just score some points here, do you?"

"...Fine."

Hishiri shifted her palm as if to look up.

At the touch of a gentle breeze, the fabric that had sealed Yvette was untied and lay at her feet.

"Fufufufu. You foolish sorceress, you have freed my seal! ...Wait, don't leave me in the dark! Don't look so serious and leave without me! You'll miss me! Oh, God, she can be so flippant. Ah, yes, Melvin, I helped you with the Child of Einnashe before, so you can let me go, right? Please!"

"I have no choice. I'll help you. It seems you're involved with Waver too."

Having been forced into the conversation, Melvin shrugged his shoulders.

However, the young man felt that he had no choice but to agree with her.

Melvin opened the violin case he had been carrying all along.

The contents appeared to be a nondescript violin, just as one might imagine. With the violin poised on his shoulder, the pure white young man spoke in a very condescending manner.

"I very rarely use tuning devices for free unless my mum asks me to. So I urge you to listen now with an open mind."

The magi looked at their roles and were about to make their move.

However.

Another figure took advantage of the opportunity and came running in.

It ran with astonishing speed into the Pandemonium Room and ripped the transparent tube that had been left on the platform next to the auctioneer, who was still standing.

"The Mystic Eyes of, Transience....!"

A mournful voice echoed through the carriage.

**~Part 3~**

I found myself staring in a stupor at the sight of the Child of Einnashe's approach.

It was like a tsunami of earth. Branches of icy trees writhed and slithered, transforming into a swarm of fearsome serpents that surged toward the Rail Zeppelin. Nothing could compare to the sheer volume of branches that attacked us now, even compared to earlier in the forest of ice and snow when we tried to escape using Black Keys. The deadly Child of Einnashe was using up its entire existence just to try and devour the train.

(Then...)

My throat becomes dry.

I can't help it. Even if I were to release the treasure hidden in Add, burning all of it away would be impossible. I could feel despair robbing the strength out of all five of my senses.

"That's enough, Faker," Heartless called out.

Even at this late hour, his smile was still soft.

"Leave the rest to the Child of Einnashe. Otherwise, as you are unmatched here in magical power, you will be targeted first. It's somewhat regrettable, but if the Child of Einnashe simply devours the train, then even the death of a Lord can be disguised for a while as an accident."

"...Fine."

The female Heroic Spirit turned on her heel.

“Wait, Faker,” Master called out to her once again. “I’m not done talking.”

“How much more is your tongue going to wag? You are going to be swallowed up by the forest anyway. Why don’t you desperately try to hold onto your life until the very end?”

“That’s not going to happen. Not as long as you claim to hate the king’s army.”

Faker glanced at him, and Master’s lips lifted in a scowl with a pale face.

“After all, I am also a vassal of that king.”

“You dare to say that still!”

Her words spat out like flames.

Giri, the sound of teeth gnashing was surprisingly loud. Her bewitching gold and silver heterochromatic Mystic Eyes looked upon Master with what looked like a shark’s murderous intent.

“Ah, how I loathe that army of the king!”

Her human form roared like a raging fire.

“I hate those fools that destroyed everything the king built. As well as any who seek to join their ranks! And Olympias, who taught me magic and tried to manipulate the king! And my brother, who knows how it ended, yet still lines up with those fools!”

“...Ah, that explains it.”

Master squinted at Faker’s indignation.

"The reason you did not show up in the 'Ionioi Hetairoi' is because you ignored the call."

It was a terribly simple conclusion.

It was not a mystery, but rather an obvious reason.

"The earth is round, and there is no such thing as an endless ocean of wonder. When they find that out, I wonder what kind of bitter thing they mutter. The king and his subordinates alike. Since the world gives you the knowledge you need when you are summoned, it is no surprise that there are some vassals that are transformed by this knowledge. I don't believe any of us wanted to know about the Wars of the Diadochi that broke out to succeed the king."

Yes, even I know this.

If you look at history, the end of Iskandar is clear.

When his expedition had finally ended in disaster, and he was on the verge of dying from fever, the king made a last will and testament that 'the mightiest of the mighty shall reign over the empire.' Although I do not know his exact intentions, it was obvious from the outset what would happen next.

That was the Successor Diadochoi War.

The empire, which boasted an area of territory outstanding even in the full history of mankind, was quickly divided, with influential generals fighting amongst each other. Among them was even his mother, Olympias, and war raged for decades. Those who had once aimed for the most beautiful ocean in the world forgot about such foolish fantasies and fought each other to the death, causing massacre after massacre, leading to a war that would last until their children and grandchildren's generation.

What could be a more cruel end to a dream than this?

"If you were the king's substitute, then you must have died before he did. You would never have known of the Wars of the Diadochi before you died. When we first met, you rubbed me the wrong way by comparing me to Eumenes, Aristotle, and so forth. So you hated all of them."

"That's exactly right."

Faker promptly states.

Even if the king approves, she does not approve.

Even if the king forgave it, she does not forgive..

One could say that this great anger was aimed at all of the king's men, who numbered in the tens of thousands. No, perhaps even the king himself, who allowed them to cause such an end.

Then, something odd happened. One of the eyebrows of the female heroine furrowed in interest.

"Fu, fu... fufufufu... fufufufufufufu....."

His voice spilt out into the cold air.

A pause passed over the rooftop for a brief moment, as it seemed so out of place. My wounded master had started shaking his shoulders in a funny way.

"What's so funny?"

"No, I just thought it was odd. How could a great king, who led such a huge expedition and held the loyalty of tens of thousands of soldiers, cause his own body double to become so pissed off that she would turn her back on him? Ah, for whatever reason, he never did have an endgame. Honestly, he might have actually had no talent."

With a cough, he cleared his throat.

He frowned faintly, as if in pain, then continued with, "thank you."

That response caused Faker to stop breathing.

"...W-what..."

"I've been pondering it all my life. There has not been a day in the last ten years that I have not been thinking about this. When I thought about going forward to where I needed to go to follow his back, I didn't know what I should do. After all, I was a talentless person and not a Heroic Spirit. All I can do is watch in a hapless manner as the talents of my disciples developed and flew past me."

Master said slowly as if piling each word on top of the last.

A decade that has been awfully difficult and compressed.

"But I can say this with pride. Wherever and whenever I meet him, I can definitely boast about all this. I think I can be forgiven for repeating this story a few times. And if my rational mind doesn't allow me to tell the same story, then a little help from alcohol would be nice. Ah, I never dreamt that an opportunity like this would ever present itself. How can I not thank you profusely?"

"What are you, talking about?"

"Hm? Ah, what I mean to say is," Nodding in a natural way, Master continued. "I bet he wouldn't be able to contain hearty laughter if I told him that I gave his favourite body double a good beating.."

"..."

Everybody went silent.

The bold statement made even Heartless, not to mention myself and Caules, stop breathing.

Faker, too, stiffened as if mesmerised by Mystic Eyes. As if the words of Master just now were a lost great magic that no modern magus could ever hope to match.

Eventually.

"You can never win against me."

As if grinding her teeth, Faker let her voice out.

Master did not respond directly to these words but rather turned towards me.

"Gray, could you help me for a second?"

"...Yes!"

I couldn't help but be impressed.

How strong-minded he is. How stubborn. How can this man, who smiles unyieldingly and tries to stand up, be so...

(This is so... beautiful.)

I wanted him to be seen. I wanted to go and tell him. To the 'king' that this man looks up to so much - to Iskandar, the Heroic Spirit who is etched in history, I wanted to show him what this man looks like now.

I felt a surge of strength in my body, which I had thought had long since burned out.

"If you would let me, Master," Faker readjusted her sword.

"I had intended to be loyal to you in this world, but I cannot overlook such provocations."

"Ah~hah," The red-haired magus sighed exaggeratedly.

His blue suit fluttered in the blowing rooftop wind, scattering his lamentations into the darkness.

"I knew this was going to happen; that's why I tried to stop it. However, it can't be helped. So let's get on—"

As he was mid-sentence, something black suddenly stabbed him in the foot.

The blade, with its unique form, made me stare wide-eyed.

"A Black Key...!"

A new figure appeared on that rooftop.

An old man with a jet-black coat and a large scar on his face. He had his eyes tightly closed and was clasping three black keys in each of his hands.

"How can you come after me if you are blind?"

"No," the old man said in refutation.

His grey hair blew until it, too, came to rest on the cheeks of the man holding his black keys.

"I got back what the auction took from me."

His eyes suddenly opened.

The Mystic Eyes had been forced back into Karabo's eye sockets. It was not a very careful transplant, as shown by each eye facing different directions.

Obviously, they could not function as eyes in that way. However-

"—Essentially, the removal and implantation of Mystic Eyes require the linking of the transplanter and recipient spiritually."

Speaking lowly, Master spoke.

"A kind of psychosurgery. It's the removal and transplant of the link between the eyes and the body. Therefore, the original owner of the Mystic Eyes, even more so when it is less than a day since the operation, can still make use of those Mystic Eyes."

Even if they can not be used for vision, they still function as Mystic Eyes...!

Karabo's Black Keys shot through the air.

His combat skills were in a realm that I could never imitate. In terms of pure physical manipulation, it greatly surpassed even Faker's, who had lived in ancient times.

“Don’t block it!”

Faker dutifully followed Heartless' words.

Certainly, their blades never crossed paths. Karabo and Faker's bodies intersected for just a moment and then separated again.

Yet, it was just a fraction of a second too late, as Faker's sword was severed.

“Oh, I see. So this is how it looks.”

Karabo laughed.

Now, that's not to say that his Karabo's Black Key was so sharp that it delayed the cutting. Evidently, the sword was cut in half at different times. It worked out like a film with dropped frames, jumping over the time axis.

“It’s bubbles,” the old priest’s voice rumbled.

Without giving Faker a chance, his body glided up to her. It was a smooth approach as if he had seized a gap in time. The Black Key that Karabo held with both hands roared with a speed that the Servant, who should be far superior in terms of simple physical ability, could not handle.

The Servant was not his only foe.

The branches of the Child of Einnashe that had reached the train were also cut down by the blade, which should not have reached it.

"Ah, yes. That's right. This world, is certainly made of bubbles."

His voice and tone were drastically different from Karabo's usual one.

(...When he was being manipulated, Karabo...)

It is likely different from a simple dual personality.

It is likely that this is the repressed desires and emotions of Karabo.

"Before the auction, I requested something from Miss Adashino. I asked if she could keep Karabo informed of every step of the auction, as well as what happened after."

Master interjected.

Then, I suppose that's the same reason why Karabo was freed from his restraints. When Karabo learned what had been going on, he realized that he had been manipulated for the past seven years, and he decided to fight. He retrieved his own Mystic Eyes and came to this rooftop.

"I see. So there can be such a situation as this."

Heartless said while laughing.

"You have lost your normal sight, so you have become even more specialized in your Mystic Eyes. Now you can see things you normally could not with your normal personality, can't you?"

"Heartless...!"

Karabo shot across the rooftop, his blade aimed at that smile.



“The form of stars. The form of the sky. The form of gods. The form of me. Celestial bodies take hollow forms. Hollow forms from the void. The void forms gods.”

A girl's chant echoes audibly throughout the train.

Magecraft is, after all, the practice of rewriting the world.

However, the rule is that the longer the bar count, the greater the depth of that rewriting, it is said that the human soul can only endure a ten-bar count. It is for this reason that it is sometimes referred to as the ten-count instantaneous agreement.

Of course, prolonged rituals can greatly increase the scale and stability of magecraft, yet in terms of quality, this is where it hits its plateau. One could say that this is the limit of modern magecraft.

Normally, this would be a large-scale ritual that would take several days to complete, involving the use of the ritual hall of the Aninusphere.

At the moment, with the help of Melvin's tuning, it was taking shape at last. This was proof that the young blood-vomiting man's skills were outstanding.

He was helped by Yvette as an assistant.

She carefully focused her magic by scrutinising the general situation seen through Jean-Mario's familiars by means of her Mystic Eye. Although the thought was that she was just a specialist in Mystic Eyes, her support turned out to be down to the most minute detail.

(Is it because of the El-Melloi classroom...?)

Does the training of the Lord not only develop the characteristics of the students, but also influence this aspect of teamwork? Even so, betrayal is an inevitable part of the Clock Tower, yet his teachings must somehow be connected to this.

In addition, Melvin's music helped.

Melvin's music had the added benefit of augmenting the workings of his magic engraving with its tonal tuning. According to some, this is the form of tuning that is most effective for magic performed by more than one person at once.

Essentially, the use of many magic engravings and magic circuits is wasteful, even for train magi. This is true even for a single magus, so the waste is even greater when multiple magi work together on a single formula. Melvin's work seems to align the wavelength of each person, if only temporarily.

She decides to surrender herself to the beautiful music, "...right. I see. I understand now." In the middle of chanting, Olga Marie suddenly whispered to herself.

Trisha's head was placed on a chair. She spoke surreptitiously to it with her eyes closed, keeping a high level of concentration.

"I am allowed to be angry when it is natural to be, right?"

The spell seemed to dance.

Her activated magic circuits were even physically hot now, having received power from both her Od and the Mana in the air. The heat was so intense that an inexperienced magus would likely burn out their nerves.

"Were you waiting for me to get angry one day? Trisha."

There was no answer. There shouldn't be.

Although it may be possible, for example, to make the dead speak through necromancy, it could only be information from one who has already died, so it would be different than the thoughts when they were alive. Even if the girl's current thoughts are selfish and self-serving, she would not be able to verify them unless she were a magician.

But, now she spins.

She spins the magic she must perform.

"Stars. Cosmos. Gods. Animus. Antrum. Universe. Anima, Animusphere—!"

The magic—comes to fruition.

## ~Part 4~

Faker stumbled back.

The female Heroic Spirit's armour had been torn at an angle, and blood was dripping from her shoulders.

"Are those Mystic Eyes... comparable to a first-class Conceptual Weapon?"

Faker's groan is understandable.

Of course, Add is no slouch, either. The Grim Reaper, the scythe that holds a great treasure within it, is also powerful enough to kill a servant. However, the old man's Mystic Eyes could work miracles with even an ordinary knife.

Furthermore, the old man's target was neither the servant nor the Child of Einnashe.

"You...! You manipulated me! Heartless!"

Realizing that she was facing a blade wielded with fury, Faker knew that she could not run away.

It was the opposite of what had happened to Master and me earlier. If the Master is attacked, the Servant must protect him. The blade swung carried not only the force of the user, but also the power that came from the past. Since the train is running, slashes placed in front of the train are immediately left behind, so in other words, the slashes keep changing location over and over again, attacking from each direction.

Once in the range of the slash, neither spirit nor matter can defend against it, as it was an attack that came from the past. Even though Faker's fighting power far exceeds that of humans, she could not dodge the attacks, which were a kind of two-fold doppelganger phenomenon, forever.

However, even if that was enough to keep the Faker at bay it was not enough to beat back the Child of Einnashe. Perhaps having learned from previous attacks from Karabo, it was now circling around and closing in on the train from a difficult angle.

That is when it happened.

“...All of you, get back!”

The cry, probably transmitted through a familiar, was that of Olga Marie.

At once, the night sky became bright with stars.

Corresponding to the magical energy of the train tracks, heaven and earth drew together and combined in power. If there had been a poet who could have seen this, they would describe it as two star-crossed gods kissing each other.

Ten or so spears of light fell down from there.

It was truly a magic bullet of starlight.

As if in a circular dance, the light gathered in groups and struck all at once. The branches of the Child of Einnashe were instantly broken against the ground and shattered with a wailing cry.

“...Hahaha, that truly was Great Magecraft.”

Master smiled bitterly.

The Great Magecraft of the Aminusphere clan was potent enough to blow away even the Child of Einnashe.

At the same time, a change in the battle situation also occurred.

Amidst the huge amount of dust that had been thrown up that covered even the night sky, Faker, while flying away, was uttering a few words from her lips.

“I pray. I pray.”

As her voice flowed, my entire nervous system yelled out in warning.

“Nereide...”

"-I won't let you!"

Again, Karabo lunged from her side.

My Grim Reaper sucks in as much magical energy as it can to nullify the magic.

No.

Override would be more accurate.

The magic from the Age of the Gods is a decoy. Faker would not repeat the foolishness of magic, which had already been nullified several times by my Grim Reaper. Possibly, what she was repeating several times, even though it appeared to be in a rage, was a preparation for setting up the final trap.

She had a smile on her face as she played her trick on Karabo and even herself, yet Karabo charged in any way.

"Behold!"

The female Heroic Spirit's eyes flashed with a spectral light.

Gold and silver heterochromatic Mystic Eyes. The timing was too deadly. Not only to Karabo, but also to my master, whose Mystic Eye killing glasses had fallen and smashed earlier. Faker, a great warrior, must have naturally included this in her calculations.

Immediately, Karabo's movements stopped awkwardly. When it comes to Noble Colour Mystic Eyes, the effect is not greatly diminished, even if the target has lost their sight. A kick unleashed in that moment gouged his chest and sent him flying several meters.

The old man's body, which crashed and bounced several times onto the rooftop, was like a skipping stone.

With that, her Mystic Eyes had caught us.

(Not, good....!"

I felt my hands letting go of my scythe as my control over the cells in my body was directly eroded by those beautiful Mystic Eyes.



There was still no end in sight to the attacks of the Child of Einnashe.

Even with Karabo's cutting it to pieces, and Olga Marie's Great Magic, it was only the first wave that had been burned away. The nucleus of the tree was still to come, and as long as it remained alive and well, the assault would continue.

Of course, the crew of the Rail Zeppelin were aware of this. Since both sides were the creations of senior Dead Apostles, they knew each other's situation to some extent. Although they did not imagine that they would fight each other like this, they had already guessed each other's moves.

Rodin, the conductor, however, was rigid in the driver's cab.

For there was a white woman standing there.

"Acting Manager....."

Her voice was empty.

After that psychic surgery, he didn't expect her to appear again so soon. That is how ephemeral she is. A phantom left behind by the former manager. A shadow allowed to exist only in this Rail Zeppelin. Indeed, the translucent woman's figure seemed to be about to vanish in a puff of smoke, which must have meant she was being strained beyond her original limits.

Not only that, “—I give permission for the use of a great Mystic Eye projection,” she also spoke.

“With all due respect, Mistress, that is-”

“It would be a great shame for Rozay-en and, for that matter, myself, for the train to be damaged any further,” Rodin was left with no choice but to think about it.

Eventually, his eyes opened with determination.

"I understand. I will follow the instructions of the Deputy Manager. Leandra, I see that you have returned."

"...Yes, sir."

The auctioneer nodded as she returned from the Pandemonium Room.

After witnessing Karabo's outrageous act of twisting the stolen Mystic Eyes of Transience into his own eye socket, she was once more surprised. She did not expect the Deputy Manager to reappear, as she was not yet recovered enough to implant the Mystic Eyes. If she had, then she would have appeared there too, so knowing this, Karabo screwed in his own Mystic Eyes without any hesitation.

In less than a second, the auctioneer's fingers drifted to the wall.

There, she picked out one of the tubes lined up containing a new Mystic Eye and inserted it into a concave in the driver's seat. The inserted tube was quickly swallowed inside and disappeared completely.

"Mystic Eye loaded," the conductor muttered.

With the instruments at hand, he watches the reactions between the Mystic Eyes and the train's instruments. The conductor's fingers moved delicately as he watched the needles on a number of gauges oscillate and took in their meanings. They were instruments that he had never handled. He thought they would perish without being able to use them until just now. The Deputy Manager disappeared from the scene.

"Commence Mystic Eyes projection sequence. Connection with the Mystic Eyes has been completed. There are three characteristics more to analyze. 3.....2.....1..... finished. Stretchability of the characteristics of the connected Mystic Eyes is secured. The Spiritual Regression Lens, Rose Eye is deployed."

Along with his words, the engine in the driver's cab made a strange noise.

The sound of gears grinding against each other was more like a scream... than an engine. It seemed to make such a cry that would only be heard if the skin and flesh of a person were peeled off slowly until only the bones were left to rub together.

"Great Mystic Eyes projection!" He pulled the lever with a jerk.

The train opened its eyelids.

**~Part 5~**

—The train opened its eyelids.

It was a sight that could only be described as such. A giant eye appeared at the front of the Rail Zeppelin, which was supposed to seem normal on the outside, even if the inside was strange.

No, it was Mystic Eyes.

The Mystic Eyes that were inserted were the Noble Colour of "Flame."

Emitting a power a hundred times greater than that of the Mystic Eyes, the mystery emitted from the giant eyes burned away the branches of the ice tree as far as one could see.

When compared to the "Flame" Mystic Eye that Yvette used in that ice and snow forest, it was clear that it surpassed that by an order of magnitude. Both its terrifying firepower and range exceed Yvette's counterfeit magic eye, which should be comparable to the Noble Color, by a ridiculous margin. It is like fireworks and missiles. This rail zeppelin possessed such immense mystery that it is foolish to even compare them.

Another anomaly, then, was happening on the rooftop.

"Ah... Ah..."

A low moan spilt out in front of me.

Even I couldn't believe it. It seemed as if Faker's magical eye - the Noble Color of "compulsion" - had once again overpowered us. However, I had been ready this time and I broke free as fast as I could.

"This, is,"

Karabo shook his head as well from the place where he was blown away. This was definitely the moment that she would overwhelm us with her evil eye. As a warrior, Faker was definitely far above both of us.

Then, why is this the result?

For some reason, the female Heroic Spirit was bleeding profusely.

"...You..."

The edge of her lips erupted with bubbles of blood as she held a rip in her armor.

It was my own scythe that did it. The full force of the blow was still resonating in my arm. The blow that ripped through her body diagonally would not spare her from serious injury, no matter how servant she was, and yet this female Heroic Spirit stared at her master sternly without even kneeling down on one knee.

"You've been waiting for this moment, haven't you? You were waiting for the moment when I would turn to my Mystic Eyes."

"...Hah, I knew you would turn to your Mystic Eyes."

My master whispered behind my back while holding that Mystic Code in his hand.

Nazar Boncugu.

A talisman with an eyeball motif that protects against Mystic Eyes.

Master had spoken of the power to see. He said that what manipulated Karabo seven years ago and in this incident was hypnotic mesmerism using the power of seeing, and that the stronger the power of the Mystic Eyes, the more irresistible that hypnosis would be. Now Master had used it in reverse and had briefly incapacitated Faker.

"Of course, it is not my magic, but rather Miss Adashino's."

Master spoke with the shattered Nazar Boncugu in his hand.

The eyeball amulet broke, as if it could not withstand the intensity of the magical power.

Heartless was motionless.

Karabo, whose sternum was likely broken, was falling back.

Master spoke on a rooftop which was temporarily scoured by the Mystic Eye projection of the Rail Zeppelin against the Child of Einnashe.

"Let me ask you one thing. ...One thing rubbed me the wrong way, did you, perchance, develop doubts before you died?"

"...Tch."

Suddenly, I remember.

At that time, Faker told Master that all of Iskandars's subordinates had only ever put their own interests first. That was back at the back of the train, the first time she called out Master to do battle.

"If I follow your thinking, it would not surprise me in the least if you came to a disagreement with the other followers of Iskandar while he was still alive. It would be more natural, given your proclivities. In fact, it's quite conceivable that you could have challenged all of them, testing if they truly wished to be his followers. If that is the case, then perhaps he would have wanted you, as well as your brother Hephaestion, to meet me."

"...Fuck, you,"

The woman said in a hoarse voice while Master smiled faintly and bitterly.

"Don't you dare speak of my lost king, you fool who merely played soldier for half of a month!"

Master's voice now sounded terribly earnest.

"It can't be lost. The shadow of that king. Even if the kingdom built by the great king is shattered, even if the generals kill each other, even if it is forgotten by all, and even if he is erased from history, its meaning will not be lost. That is why I am here now!"

"Sophistry!"

Faker shouts.

Her broken sword roared.

I should have been alert enough to catch it, but my own body had started to grow lethargic.

This was fearsome endurance. What kind of a heroic spirit is this? Even though she had received wounds that would have killed even a non-human, Faker was still alive and well. This was the resilience of the body double of a man who had conquered the known world.

"The magus has sealed my sword. Your disciple has sealed my magic. And you sealed my Mystic Eyes. Yes, I admit that. Each one of them, though not all your acts, show some kind of talent as a leader of man."

One by one, as if breaking off of them, she spoke.

"Then, let me see you survive from this point on."

When she swung her broken sword, the sky was torn apart into the void.

The majestic figure that appeared with black clouds from within that void was the Gordian Wheel.

At last, the female heroine had invoked her Noble Phantasm. Shooting through the void, were hoofed hooves of lightning. The chariot-drawn bone dragon raged, ready to destroy any enemy.

"This dragon species is a result of the serpent worship of Dionysus."

"When the king entrusted me with his chariot, I controlled it by magic, just as he controlled his chariot by the divine authority of Zeus."

Master would tell me this later.

It is said to be a relatively widespread myth within the Greek culture of the Age of the Gods, as, for example, the witch Media of Colchis vanished on a dragon chariot after killing the treacherous Jason. That is why Master must have been able to discern that this Heroic Spirit was a sorceress.

“Is this fine, Master?”

“Haha, it is your choice,” smiling innocently, Heartless jumped into the chariot.

As soon as Faker swung the reins, the chariot arced wide, running alongside the rail zeppelin. Once they had gained distance, a pause was the only thing between now and death. This was the true value of a Heroic Spirit that could crush the entire train, let alone us.

“That... what do we...?” I looked up and groaned to myself.

Karabo's black keys would not be able to reach them. And as long as it is located above the flank of the Rail Zeppelin, it would be out of range of the great Mystic Eye projection seen earlier, and moreover, it is unlikely that Olga Marie's Great Magecraft would be able to be fired again.

“...Gray, it is all up to you.”

Master said that and sat down on the rooftop.

“Master?!”

“I leave it to you. I leave my entire life to you.”

Master nodded his head to affirm that again.



The great Mystic Eye projection dealt a severe blow to the Child of Einnashe.

Nevertheless, the staff watching on had not the slightest sense of superiority that they had struck a blow.

That was to be expected.

"Expelling the Mystic Eye,"

with a thud, a transparent tube was ejected. Inside the tube, a Mystic Eye which had just used its Mystery, was cruelly transformed into a black eye.

"..."

Neither the conductor nor the auctioneer lets a word slip. However, the meaning was clear.

In just one use, the Mystic Eye had been burned out.

How many magi would scream at the sight? Even if some of them would have a stroke, it would not be a surprise. A rare Mystic Eye, which is comparable to a bag of precious stones, was used up in a single shot of the projection.

The conductor bit his back teeth, and cold red blood dripped down to his chin.

It is no wonder that he hesitated to follow the Deputy Manager's instructions. Although he was trying to protect his former master's train, he had to use up the collection to do that. If he could have just died right now, then he would have chosen that end for all of them.

However, the mission does not allow it.

However, the mission was to protect this train, which was the last mission entrusted to them. Even if the former manager had nothing more to say.

"Continue, I'll load the Mystic Eye,"

The auctioneer whispered and inserted a new Mystic Eye tube into the recess.

The conductor no longer let out even a single grunt.

From beyond the burnt-out tips, new branches of death could be seen avalanching in. The Child of Einnashe has not given up yet. Just as they have not given up on themselves. Then, they knew what they had to do.

"Confirmation of the completion of Mystic Eyes. Start the second projection sequence. Connection with the Mystic Eye is complete. Analysis to be completed in 3...2...1..."

The reason why he does not exude sadness in his voice is that he is a professional.

Again, he pulls the lever he does not want to pull.

"Great Mystic Eye Projection!"

The Great Mystic Eye, glowing eerily, quickly killed the Icy tree branches that surged towards it.



Together with the train's Mystic Eye releasing once more, the chariot drew a beautiful arc across the night sky.

It was like a rainbow, I thought. If magic were visible to the eye, I am sure a brilliant light would have been reflected on my retinas. My ears, which had been 'Reinforced' beyond their limits, even heard a voice from the chariot.

"If I... hadn't died when I did... that schism wouldn't have happened...!"

It was a scream.

It was a lamentation.

It was the inescapable stigma that was carved into the souls of so many Heroic Spirits.

I suddenly remembered a dream I had yesterday.

— "Why did you seek this? Why did you not let go of it? You knew it was a dream, so why didn't you let it go?"

—"Answer me, Iskandar!"

I wonder which Iskandar that was a cry to.

Was it to the real Iskandar or Faker herself? I felt it was both and yet neither.

And then, as if to forget such vectors, her beautiful lips began to weave a mouthful of words.

"My allegiance is to the King! In this moment, lend me the name of Thunder!"

The release of the true name. The quintessence of the treasure that Faker had never ultimately used in previous battles.

If so, there is only one thing that can counter it.

"...I am going to have to break through," I muttered to myself.

Cool the mind. Stop all unnecessary functions. I am but a cog in one Great Mystery. I become part of this mechanism and I sharpen my precision. I reach a place far away from fear and hesitation and I emerge into a trance-like state of consciousness.

Ah, if that is so, then this must be the sound that starts my operation.

"Gray... Rave... Crave...Deprave..."

The incantation overflows. My self-suggestion brings me even deeper.

There is enough mana. Being on a leyline, together with the presence of the Rail Zeppelin and the relentlessly approaching Child of Einnashe, provides more than enough energy for me to take in. In this environment, there is no doubt that my Noble Phantasm can be deployed.

(But... will it reach?)

Can I defeat that chariot?

No matter how well I can wield the shining spear Rhongomyniad, and even if Faker is in a class that represents fakes, the true power of my opponent remains the same. Can I overcome such a monster?

Despite these doubts, my lips, which have become automatic, speak the predetermined words.

"Grave carve... for me..."

"Please calm down," then, a voice spoke up.

Supported by Caules, the blood-stained old man walked towards me. The blow received from the Faker seemed to have been more serious than expected, and his open wound revealed the whiteness of his fractured sternum inside.

(Karabo...)

I cannot speak.

I'm already in a trance, and the Add deployment process has disassembled the scythe into a pillar of light. On the other hand, Karabo's eyes were clouded white, yet they were still shining as if dazzling.

"...Oh, I'm surprised. That is a noble phantasm. To think that it could be wielded by a human."

Has the impulsive personality from when he was fighting the Faker already disappeared, or was it because of my self-hypnosis that Karabo's tone of voice had returned to the soft one I knew?

And now Karabou is advising me gently and quietly.

"It seems that this spear is filled with prayers. Thirteen condensed forms of prayer."

Is that a sight seen with his Mystic Eyes?

I don't understand it myself.

But the old man smiles kindly and speaks.

"Listen closely to the voice of the spear. Listen to the way someone prayed a long time ago. You should be good with that."

(The way someone prayed a long time ago...)

What is this? This is...

What is this? Why...

Why is it that Add's voice can be heard from within the pillar of light?

"Yihihih! The way that things ought to be has come! Hey, Gray! All this time you have been slumped up in the corner of a room hiding behind your hands! You have never really thought about what you wanted to be, have you?"

(Add...)

Karabo blinked several times at the sound of the raspy voice.

Regardless, Add continued.

"But hey, it's time for you to ask yourself! What do you want?! Ah, if you want to do something here, you need to say it! If there is something you want to protect and want help with that, no one will know unless you say it!"

(Add... you...)

I felt pain in my heart for some reason, as this person was terribly talkative.

The only friend I had back in my hometown asked me that question. I remember that when I was a child, I was often called something like "stupid gray," which made me cry. The longer I was there, the less I was called that, and it completely disappeared after I decided to follow my mentor to London.

"I..." My voice spilt out.

I'm in a trance, so I'm terribly awkward. I don't know what my true feelings are.

Even so, I will do my best to put this into words.

"I want to protect my master and everyone else. I want to be able to protect myself."

"Hiiiiiiii, I hear you loud and clear, stupid Gray..."

"—Suspension of pseudo-personality. Magical power collection rate has exceeded threshold value. Initiating second stage of limited release."

Add's voice switched back to his usual automated voice.

The automated voice then moved on to something I was hearing for the first time.

"Seal Thirteen - Round Table Decision Start!"

"..."

His words reminded me of a legend I was told long ago.

Originally, it is said that the holy spear was not a weapon.

It is also said that the original Mystery was brought about when humanity took over as the spiritual leader of the world. The planet was then covered in a texture of human-focused 'physical laws', and several anchors were thrust into the earth to maintain that thin texture.

Rhongomyniad, the spear that shines to the farthest reaches of the world, is one such anchor.

This anchor, created to sustain the world, was placed in the hands of a knight-king who sealed it in the image of the king and his knights.

In other words, the seals restrict the 'power' of the Holy Lance. Thirteen seals.

The true Holy Lance can only be released in a situation where multiple prides and missions can be accomplished.

The number of votes required for a complete release is seven.

Now, inside the Holy Spear, a round table vote is declared.

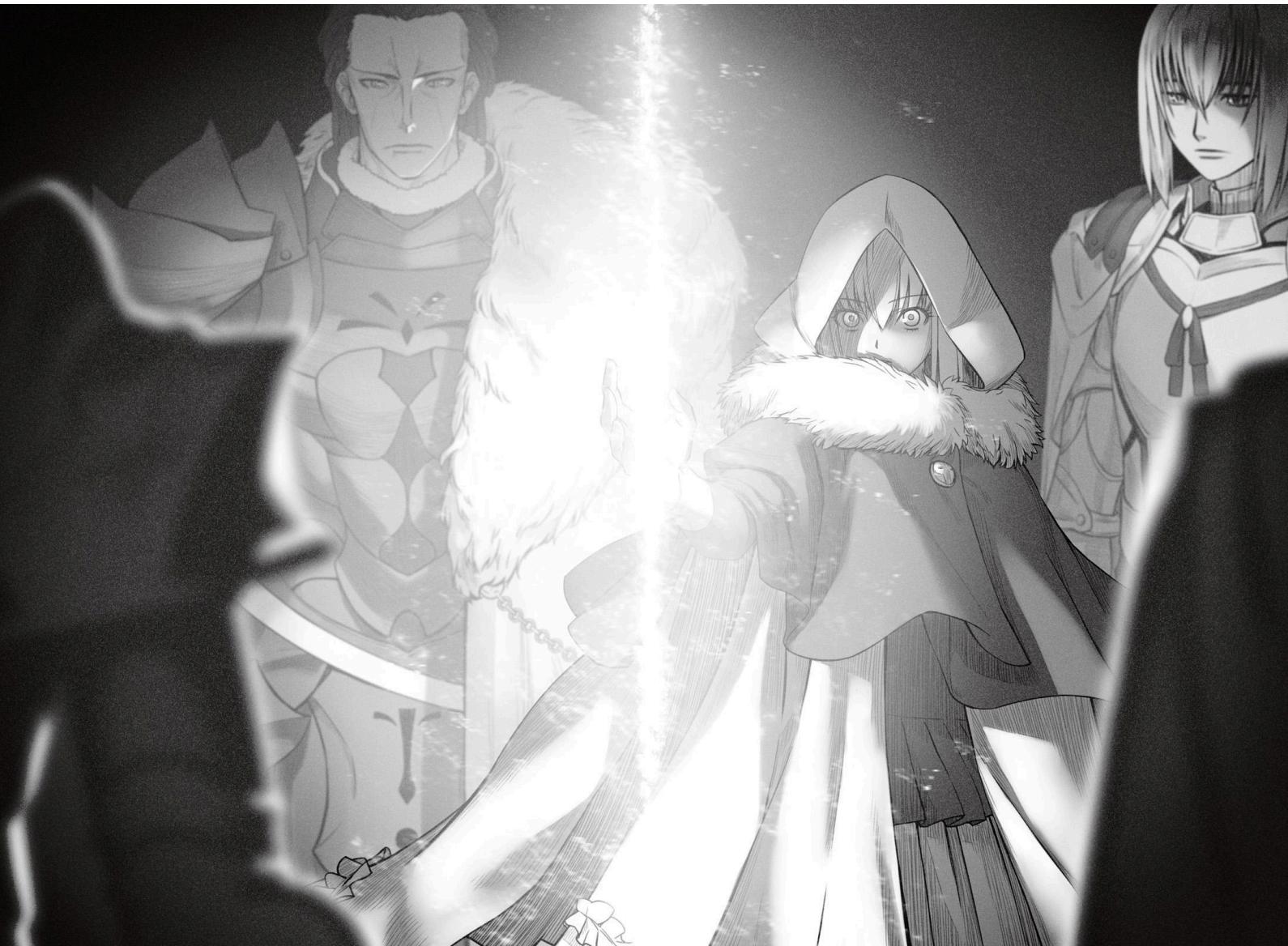
"This is the battle for life." —Approved, Kay.

"This is the battle against a stronger foe." —Approved, Bedivere.

"This is a battle for humanity." —Approved, Gaheris.

"This is a battle for truth." —Approved, Agravain.

"This is not a battle against spirits." —Approved Lancelot.



By no means was it all of them.

Only five, not even half.

However, the five seals that had just been unleashed were now gushing out from the spear with a light I had never seen before. More than anything else, the fact that so many prayers were being acknowledged and encouraged supported my heart.

(—This, this means.)

I make up my mind.

"Phase III limited release is now in effect."

Along with the new automated voice, I, in a trance, had moved on to the last sentence.

"Grave... for you..."

Sing. Praise. Compose.

Ancient Mystery, may you now perish.

Sweet mystery, may you return to nothingness.

In the distance, I saw Faker swinging the reins.

"Ride forth, Hecatic Wheel!"

The chariot turned into a shooting star with the moon behind it.

What an intense and beautiful star overtaking the Earth. It goes without saying that the amount of magical power that gushed out was enormous. Should the assault of the Anti-Army Noble Phantasm hit the earth, it would have easily created a crater or two.

A fierce star, clad in lightning.

With that, I slowly raised my spear.

“Holy Spear, release.”

As I looked up at my own spear, it occurred to me.

How dazzling this light is!

How my heart is boiling!

Did every knight in the old days have such a burning heart?

The chariot was now right in front of me. The lightning was so fierce that I thought my eyeballs were being burned out of my head. As if in response, the holy spear in my hand converged into a purer light. Converged to the extreme, the light pulsated and seemed to be about to break out into a frenzy.

Come on, scream.

Let loose with a roar.

“From the farthest ends, Rhongomyniad...!”

A twisting light rushes through the air.

The scorching heat and the lightning was lukewarm compared to this. A torrent of light shot out in a straight line from the roof of the Rail Zeppelin into the night sky, annihilating all matter. Wherever you are, heavenly country. Wherever you are, my light will shoot you down.

Inside the light, the Hecatic Wheel had also disappeared.

The light that shoots down even stars is soon absorbed into the arms of the night, as if it were destined to be.



“How did... this...?”

I whispered to myself, stunned, as I unpacked everything.

Normally, I would have been comatose. In fact, I think I was unconscious for a few seconds. Perhaps I had been unconscious for tens of minutes or hours without realizing it. If I could, I would have fallen down and slept like a log. It wasn't only my body that was screaming, but also my magic circuits that had been overworked. Exhaustion was settling in my brain and nerves, and I felt like I was sinking into mud up to the top of my head.

But I couldn't collapse just now.

I was convinced that if I collapsed here, I would not be able to get up for several days. There were many things that needed to be done before then.

“Turn inside out.”

It was just before I released the Noble Phantasm that I thought I heard such a voice.

That is why I could not by any means fall down until I confirmed that my surroundings were safe.

I moved my whole body. My five limbs, which had been lighter than feathers a moment before, seemed to have had their blood vessels replaced with lead. Still, I crawled awkwardly and miserably across the rooftop.

“Ms. Gray!”

On the other side, Caules was there waiting for me.

In the arms of the bespectacled boy, limp and helpless, the old man had lost his strength.

“...Karabo...”

I didn't need to hear the rest of the boy's trembling voice. No matter how well-trained the agent's body was, there was no way that this old man could survive having his breastbone crushed. No, perhaps he may have exceeded the limits of his brain and body when he put his magical eye back into his eye socket. I wonder if he was even able to see the appearance of the spear Rhongomyniad activating.

Was the last view he saw the past or the present?

A voice called out from beside him.

"He helped us until the very end. ...Even though, I could do nothing for him."

"...Master"

What am I going to do?

I had never felt something like this before, and yet I couldn't stop the hot sensation from running down my cheeks. I had received something very precious, and now I would never see the person who gave it to me again. It was the first time for me to face such a fact, and I did not know what to do. I wanted to turn to my master's side, but I just couldn't do it.

Apparently, the train had passed beyond the range of the Child of Einnashe.

The train did not open a new Mystic Eye, and instead, the horizon was gradually changing color.

Master took a small breath.

"We have dragged out the auction for so long. It's about time now."

"Ah, hah..."

I am sure.

I will remember this color for the rest of my life.

Whenever I see similar colours in the rest of my life, I will remember the memory of having received something precious at that time. Whenever the past comes to the surface like a bubble, I will feel the bitter warmth of the past.

As if it were an ephemeral dream.

The sun had yet to show itself, but the faint scarlet of the morning glow was faintly blotched across the tracks.

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- Epilogue -



What followed can be divided into several episodes.

The first thing to talk about would be Caules Forvedge.

I returned and both myself and my master ended up being admitted to a hospital that the Clock Tower operates for about a week. It's a place that combines modern medicine with magic, and it seems to be mostly used by magicians. Due to the confidentiality issue and the need for specialized knowledge to suppress side effects, it was said that it was inaccessible to ordinary people anyway.

Thanks to that, I recovered quite a bit in just a few days.

The hospital was clean and modern, but the treatment of serving boiling green medicinal liquid contrasted that. Nevertheless, the effect was undeniable.

During my visit, Caules appeared.

He brought fragrant fruits and told me about how the incident was deemed an internal dispute among the Dead Apostles, and since the regulars of the Magic Eye Auction had their familiars sealed at a crucial moment, unnecessary information never spread. However, it seems that the clash between the Rail Zeppelin and the Child of Einnashe had been widely detected which did end up causing a stir between magi across the world.

Sometimes, when I struggled to find words in our conversation, he would casually look at flowers or scenery to avoid awkwardness, making it very comfortable for me even though I'm not good at socializing. It was somewhat mysterious that there were magi like him.

In the middle of that, he suddenly brought up a topic.

"Ah, um, I heard that Doctor Heartless told you about my sister?"

In the white hospital room, Caulis scratched his nose, looking embarrassed.

"Ah, w-well, I'm sorry."

"No, it's fine. I'm not hiding anything."

He smiled and put on his glasses, his eyes looking distant.

"My sister had much more talent as a magician than me. Everyone who knows the Forvedge family acknowledges that. Even after I have become a little better now that I have met the professor, I still wonder what would have happened if she had been the one who met him... things like that are what I worry about,"

His words were similar to the disguised Heartless.

Heartless called it possession. It was the type of transformation where the person themselves enters another body. However, I felt that there was something different about it. Maybe it is the desire to be different.

"But I liked being Caules," he had said.

Slur. The district operated by the Department of Modern Magecraft.

In reality, it was more of a barely cobbled-together street than a district, but Caules seemed delighted to mention its name.

"I never expected an imposter of me to appear, but I'm glad I came here anyway. I'm glad I got to meet the professor and I'm glad I got to see everyone. I'm glad that it was me, and not someone else."

He pats his chest confidently.

Lying down on the bed, he looks at me with kind eyes and says,

"Everyone, including Flat and Reines, are waiting for your return. Especially Svin, upon hearing that you were injured, he was so agitated that he almost abandoned the rest of his special lectures at Mystile. We all had to desperately stop him from charging into this hospital as a half-transformed beast."

"...Was he trying to finish me off?"

“Hahaha,” the boy laughed cheerfully.

He picked up an apple slice that he cut himself and then left with the following words.

“Thus, you must get well soon.”



A few days later, I was discharged.

There were still places that hurt, but apparently, all the treatment that could be done in the hospital had been completed and I was asked to vacate the bed as soon as possible. It feels harsh, but it's more like me to be active than to lie in bed, so it was fine.

Once the paperwork was done, there was a familiar figure in a coat standing at the entrance of the hospital.

“master.

“Compared to you, I was only slightly injured, but we ended up being discharged on the same day.”

“That's not true at all,” I say but he shakes his head and stands next to me.

He didn't seem to need a wheelchair, but he was still using a cane. He seemed to be struggling to walk, but I didn't offer to help him. He probably wouldn't appreciate it.

The bitter smell of a now familiar medicine was still faintly lingering.

“It's time to return to Slur.”

“Yes,” I found myself nodding eagerly at my master's words.

We took a bus to Slur Street.

Master told me that since the Mystic Eye Killing glasses were so expensive, we needed to save some money. I followed him obediently because it felt like I was experiencing his usual demeanour again. However, I had to make an effort not to hum thoughtlessly.

We turned a few corners, passed through the barrier that keeps out the general public, and turned into the patchwork-like street.

However, something else made me stop.

A far eastern native dress was fluttering as it came from one end of the street.

The outfit was called kimono, and it depicted a crane. I remember hearing in the master's lecture that in Japan, because the voice of the crane carries far and wide, it is said to be a messenger from heaven. I believe the lecture continued to talk about how in contrast, in Europe, birds symbolize "awakening", and that there are several allegorical stories and coats of arms featuring a crane holding a white stone.

It was Adashino Hishiri.

"Ah, I heard you were being discharged today, I'm glad we could meet."

"Don't play dumb. There's no way this is a coincidence."

"Ara, you're still using a cane?"

Hishiri ignores the reply and pointed that out.

Perhaps Master had fully anticipated this, as he just snorted lightly and tapped the ground with the cane.

"I'll probably need it for about another week."

"I see. Take care of yourself. ...Today, I came to give you evidence I have had in my care."

With that, Hishiri handed over a small box.

After Master confirmed what was in the box, I felt like crying once again.

Inside was the holy relic that the master had paid such a huge sacrifice to recover - a faded, crimson piece of cloth

He carefully put the lid back on and placed it in his suit pocket.

"Thank you."

"The incident from seven years ago has ultimately gone unpunished," Hishiri continued.

"The Church too, at this point, would not want to rehash that incident and admit that the person they put in charge of the investigation was manipulated by the culprit. It would damage their reputation."

That would certainly seem to be the case. It seemed that a major reason Heartless, who was a former dean, was not being held accountable by the Magic Association was that he no longer held any position in the Clock Tower. Let alone for the ordinary police, it would be impossible to investigate an incident which was vested so deeply in the magical side of the world.

From darkness to darkness.

Once more, another incident goes by.

"Once all the verifications were over, it seems that Yvette L. Lehman was also released," Hishiri softly surveyed the old and new street mixed with brick and concrete.

Hishiri quietly looked around at the street, which was a mixture of old and new, brick and concrete.

Then,

"There's something I wanted to ask you,"

She broached a question to my master.

"What is it?"

"In terms of the incident. You would know best about the holes in your own deductions, wouldn't you?"

"Why did he summon the Servant?"

When Master responded immediately, Hishiri smiled.

"Indeed. A Ghost Liner is certainly a valuable thing. For a magus, it's not surprising to think about summoning one, even if it costs their life. However, it's not like there aren't other valuable things to obtain. Mystic Eyes are one of them. To put it simply, the risk is too high for the return. Also, if your reasoning is correct, Heartless was manipulating Karabo during the incident. If so, he should have been able to foresee that a nameless body double would appear if he summoned Faker using Iskandar's artefact."

The logic made sense to me, too.

Karabo was able to read the thirteen restraints of Rhongomyniad. If that were the case, it is hard to believe that the relic of Iskandar would not also reveal the body double to him. Heartless, who had planned so ingeniously, would naturally confirm at least that much.

"There's more to this incident, isn't there?"

Master nodded slightly.

"You said that the reason you were so desperate to save me was because a Lord dying would be an inconvenience. If that is so, then you have plans for me in the future. Ah, we will meet again then, surely."

After all, Master was also convinced that Heartless and Faker had survived. They may have suffered some wounds as they backed down there, but that last spell I heard would have kept them alive.

After saying that much, Master suddenly asked back.

"I wanted to ask you one question, too."

"Go ahead. It would be rude to expect you to answer alone."

Hishiri urged, and after clearing his throat, Master continued.

"I don't think you missed the importance of the Nazar Boncuğu. However, if you wanted to keep it from evidence to support your theory, then it would have been safer to seize it and claim that there was no such thing. At first, I thought you were encouraging someone else to deduce correctly, but that is too roundabout. Besides, I was in a coma at the time, if I was the one you were testing."

"...I see. I assume you already have a hypothesis then?"

"More or less,"

Master whispered, looking across Slur Street.

The sky was pleasantly clear today. Although it was winter now, the sun was shining and it felt warm for the first time in a while. It was not an appropriate description for the two magi nor for the content of the conversation, but it seemed close enough if one thought of it as a temporary temperature that would be lost sooner or later.

"At first you said that your trip on the Rail Zeppelin, was for your own personal reasons. What if we consider that to be... only half of a lie? What if you had wanted to draw out someone in particular by deliberately opening with a false theory?"

"The incident was very unexpected for me."

She said, as if to just make it clear.

Roughly speaking, though, your hypothesis is correct. That is why, when you offered to cooperate, I immediately accepted, and did I not cast a spell on Miss Trisha head as well as on the Nazar Boncuğu?"

"Yes. I'm grateful. Otherwise, I would have suffered greatly. It may very well have cost me my life."

"I saved your life, did I?"

"Hindsight is 20/20."

Curly, Master's lips twisted.

The look on his face was amusing, or so I thought, after he let out a little laugh, "to answer your question, it is a very similar situation to yours and Miss Reines'," Hishiri responded.

Her kimono waved in London's winter, as she smiled as she always did.

"...Dr. Heartless is my brother-in-law. We were both adopted into Norwich."



"Oh, my. If you are looking for my brother and his apprentice, they have already left the hospital."

Reines looked up with a wry smile.

The hallway was made of linoleum, with a faint scent of disinfectant.

Her eyes were glowing red with amusement. Since this hospital is a magic hospital, they don't even use eye drops. Nobody, whether a doctor or a nurse, is bothered with that level of care.

"You, I wonder if anyone has ever told you that you have bad timing?"

"I-I am not here to see either of them!"

"I'm sorry. Since I came here as a follow-up, I misunderstood the situation. In any case, there was someone who provided me with an extra supply of valuable secret medicines, just as the hospital was about to confiscate the remainder."

Almost laughing, the girl's shoulders trembled.

"It seems that your help in the case was also very helpful."

"The Animusphere do not wish to owe you anything."

Olga Marie Asmleit Animusphere, a girl of about 11 years old, combed her smooth silver hair with her fingers as she answered.

Then she turned around and quickly bowed her head.

"I am grateful to Trisha for what she did for me. Or at least, to what Lord El-Melloi was trying to convey on her behalf."

"My brother would have asked you to put on a II," closing one eye, Reines spoke her mind.

After gazing away for a few seconds, Olga Marie switched the subject.

"I was actually going to ask him about seven years ago, but my father wouldn't even see me."

"Ah,"

Blinking at the unexpected change of subject, the girl from the Department of Astronomy continued.

"My father had high hopes for the Grail war, yet ended up giving up on it. I believe that If the Grail War had been what he expected, things might have turned out differently.  
...It's a time I don't know, a world I don't know."

"You're more of a poet than I thought."

Olga Marie's cheeks flushed.

She turned my gaze away and looked out the window and saw something unexpected reflected in the glass.

"I don't mind it. So, it's all fair and square now, right?"

Reines was reaching straight for her hand.

We are both the heirs of a Lord, after all. Since we are both aristocrats, I don't think it's a bad idea to take this opportunity to deepen our relationship.

"You are very different from your older brother."

“Well, that's because we're not blood-related.”

Olga Marie took a small breath as the older girl twisted her lips in amusement.

Then she shook the outstretched hand.

“Yeah. I think you and I would get along well, regardless of your brother.”

“By all means, as long as we're of use to each other.”

At these words, Olga Marie also smiled confidently.

\* \* \* \* \*

After parting ways with Hishiri Adashino, there was a considerable commotion inside the main academic building of the Department of Modern Magecraft.

The reason was that the students of the El-Melloi classroom, upon spotting their professor, greeted him with great excitement. I was also happy to see that Master's popularity was clearly visible. However, he dismissed the attention of the students with a grim disposition, saying that he was now physically impaired.

The revelry continued until we finally entered his private room, up the stairs from the hall.

After confirming that we had successfully locked the door behind us, Master sat deeply in his chair, keeping his cane nearby. At the same time, I heard Master groan loudly as he checked to see if any students were trying to force their way through the windows or ceiling.

“This is Reines' fault...”

Apparently, in the name of the flight magic and reimbursement for work done while she was in the hospital, plenty of paperwork was forced upon him. The bitterness on Master's face is probably due to the fact that she is aiming for the very edge, where his wounds will not worsen.

“Um, if there's anything I can do to help-”

"No, it is fine. This is the work of a Lord. I'll take care of one thing at a time."

He said stiffly and picked up a fountain pen with a griffon design.

The scratching sound of a brush coming over paper continued for a while. I decided to clean the room for the first time in a while. Unlike my apartment, this room is basically tidy, but if I am away for more than a week, dust will accumulate.

While lightly patting here and there with a feather duster, I suddenly spoke up.

"What does it mean to be 'adopted' by Norwich?"

Of course, it is about Hishiri.

After a long time at his desk, Master spoke up as he signed his name.

"Norwich has always been known as the 'daddy long-leg' house, as they would support gifted children. Usually, they simply help to fund tuition, but there has also been a pattern of outright adoption. In the Clock Tower, there are a good number of people with the Norwich surname, and usually for this reason."

With his eyes downcast, he continued.

"It was Norwich that was the driving force behind the establishment of the Department of Modern Magecraft. That is why the department's second name is Norwich."

"Ah..."

Thus, I finally got it.

"Then that is why Heartless was the former dean of the School of Modern Magecraft..."

"That is likely so. Thus, Miss Adashino must have been the one who ended her association with Norwich once she became a registered member of the Department of Law. I have heard of that happening many times before, since there is constant factional disputes within the Clock Tower. Norwich generally doesn't chase after those who leave."

Putting down his fountain pen, Master folded his hands across his neck.

He stretched them out, then pulled out the small box Hishiri had given him earlier. Putting it in his desk drawer, he locked it with a click and chanted a short incantation.

“The lock is completely useless, but it's better than being locked with a strong key made by a thief. It would have been best if it had been left in this private office, as it usually is.”

The words were spoken with a wry smile, mixed with the lament that if he had kept it safe, there would never have been an incident in the first place.

Then, he takes out his cigar case in short order.

“Master. Even more cigars...”

“I have only had this one today. After all, they didn't let me smoke in the hospital,” with that, he closed one eye.

“Promise?”

“Yeah, I'm a man of my word.”

I used a cigar cutter to cut one off, then lit it by slowly searing the tip with a match. I knew that method suited Master.

He takes his time to inhale and fully enjoy the smoke, and then he puffs it out.

Perhaps because he had said he would have only one case, he was able to take more time than usual savouring it, before cutting another cigar.

“I went through the process while I was in the hospital. I officially withdrew my place in the Fifth Holy Grail War.”

At last, I heard those words. They were words I had been wanting to avoid for a long time.

Thus, I said something unnecessary.

“Why...!?”

“Originally, it was my way of settling the score,” Master replied.

“Iskandar was the Servant who should have won the Holy Grail War, and I wanted to prove it. I wanted to prove that Iskandar was the Servant who should have won the Holy Grail War, and that the only reason he lost the Fourth Holy Grail War was because he was an inferior Master.”

The cigar smoke felt terribly bitter.

Master's words sounded just like the ones I had heard on that train. Thoughts that he had surely been thinking about for a very long time. Thoughts that have been the groundwork of Lord El-Melloi II's existence for the past ten years.

“But I have had enough of this. This is my own personal reckoning, not Iskandar's. It's a regret, but it's not one that I should cling to. As someone who has been touched by him, and as a Lord of the Clock Tower, this is something I must settle with. ...Besides,”

‘besides’, he added after a breath.

“To be able to take a shot at that other guy is something I'll be proud of for a long time to come.”

It wasn't the usual, troubled smile.

It wasn't the fearless, scowling one he turns on his enemies.

The master had a clear, almost too pure, joyful smile on his face.

I was too dazzled by his words and his smile. I felt that this person deserved so much more, but when I saw that smile, I couldn't say anything.

“Gray,” once more, Master spoke to me.

“I'm sorry, but I'm sure I can't do this all on my own. I want you to fight with me.”

Right then, I could not respond.

I rubbed my face, scratching it. I wanted to look the way I thought I should look, just for this one moment. Even though my body was not doing exactly what I wanted, I tried my best to keep the corners of my lips tight.

“...If, I am good enough...”

I ended up with a face that looked like a tearful smile and said that.

At that moment, the door, which was supposed to be locked, opened, and two small figures fell down in a flurry.

"Yes! Me too, me too!"

"Hey, Flat! Don't get ahead of me!"

I don't need to tell you who the two entangled students were.

"Flat, Svin."

"I just finished doing all sorts of things in my hometown of Monaco! Why, the dealers at Van-Fem's Casa casino were a formidable foe!"

"And I finished my special lecture at the First Department! Oh, and welcome back, little Gray! There is a sweet, spicy, gray aroma that throbs within my chest!"

Both of them stood up with great vigor and snapped to their feet as if in reverence.

Perhaps realizing this, Master did not reproach them and instead offered them the same thing.

"Can I ask you both to do the same?"

"By your leave, Professor!"

“Of course, Instructor!”

Flat and Svin were the first to insist.

Then, I looked at the other person on the other side of the door.

“...Yvette.”

“Haha. You may have heard by now, but I've been released by the Department of Law, and I'm ashamed to admit that I've only just returned home! Well, then, since you're talking about something important, as both a spy and an aspiring paramour, would it be wrong for me to want to ask you about it? How important is what you are talking about? You see, the Mystic Eye that I was supposed to have won at the auction was cancelled because it was used in the Great Mystic Eye Projection.”

The girl quietly comes out and fiddles with her pink twin-tail hair.

“Normally, I feel that she would have been subject to total denunciation, but since she had already admitted to being a spy for the Meluastea faction anyway, it was no surprise for Master. Flat and Svin must have heard about what was going on, as they did not show any signs of denouncing her either.”

Maybe this is just another day in the life of a Clock Tower magus.

“Ihihihihihihi, this is going to get noisier still!”

Ad's voice struck at my earlobe.

Then,

“Ah, that's right,”

Master turned to the students.

“Flat, I'll ask you to write a remorseful letter regarding how you secretly planted a wiretap function in Caules' primitive battery. Also, I am tripling your homework during your trip home so that you can finish it before your next class.”

"Are you a demon, Professor? It is rather cool to be called a demon god, isn't it? Oh, and how about the new Japanese Oni deck for the upcoming Heroic History War card game, there are so many kinds of demons to choose from, including Ibaraki-douji, Shuten-dōji, Hoshikuma-douji, wind demons, water demons, and even invisible demons! Next time, I'll have my Japanese friend import the latest cards for me..."

"...You're right. I understand your remorse now. Shut up for a minute."

"No, Professor! Don't come near me! Don't come near me with your fingers wagging!"

Immediately, Ad's prediction came true.

With a real racket, Master's 'reinforced' right hand lifted Flat's face just barely off the ground.



— This story goes on for a little while longer.

Another week or so later, it was night.

It was the middle of December. The city was already in the Christmas mood, and I could always hear jingle bells somewhere. I used to find the sight of so many people crowded together terribly eerie when I first arrived in London. The crowds of people who got into the gray buildings every day at the same time looked like a line of the dead on their way to the graveyard.

Now... at least, I don't feel as bad.

Plush balloons float by, cheerful music plays, and people on the street seem a little happier than usual. I've come to accept it that way. I will probably never be able to completely fit in, but I have come to the point where I can look at the unfamiliar scene with a sense of calm, knowing that I don't have to reject it.

Suddenly, a particularly lively tune caught my ear.

It was a particularly vivid scene in London before Christmas.

It was apparently a parade. People in costumes and fancy dresses were parading in a procession, and they danced beautifully against the backdrop of an orchestra-like band. Behind the slow procession, beautiful fireworks were often shot off, and the crowd cheered.

(.....New department store?)

The grand parade was apparently to celebrate the opening of the department store.

The graceful white building was now revealed in a space that had been under construction for quite some time. I was in the mood for yet another London landmark, and thought vaguely that this must be a great success as an opening.

But the parade was not the only reason I stopped.

It was because a figure with a violin case was waving at me at the entrance of the department store.

".....Mr. Melvin."

"Hi," with that, the young man with pure white hair laughed.

Since he is a noticeable person by any means, people around him turn to look at him simply because he is on a public street. I needlessly worry that this is not good for a magi, for whom concealment is a virtue.

"Um, why are you here?"

"Ha-ha-ha. This is my mother's business."

Melvin's cupped his chin at the building behind him.

"The department store, sir?"

"Yes. Tonight is the inauguration party, and I was feeling well enough to go out, so I just wanted to say hello. Even magi need to have a public profile, you know."

It was on a different scale than that of a magus, which made me gulp in surprise. I should have already learned enough at the Mystic Eyes auction, but when it was an event that took place in public, it was a different sort of surprise.

"I am just about finished, would you like to join me for some tea?"

"No, sorry... I'm going to do a big cleaning of my master's room today."

In my hands were the tools for the job.

In particular, I bought shoeshine brushes and a cloth with the money I made from my part-time job.

This is the first time I picked out and purchased my own products, so I was very nervous and bit my tongue when I made the purchase. It's okay, though, because I'm going to use it for my own boots too. I was also thinking of getting a little help from Master, since he finally got rid of his cane the day before yesterday.

"If that is so, then we must go now then."

"....I-I understand."

The forcefulness of the situation pushed me over the edge and I was forced to nod my head.

Melvin, who had quickly stepped in beside me, walked down the busy Christmas street for a while, and then, in a tone as if he were beginning to hum, he cut in.

"Yeah, I just wanted to talk to you for a minute."

"Talk to me? I don't think I am interesting,"

I was honest.

The boy cleared his throat as if to say, 'That's what I like about you,' a comment that made me feel like my teeth had fallen down my throat.

"By the way," the young man said.

For some reason, the look on his face made me think of those demons I had read about in picture books.

"I wonder if you have ever heard of our relationship with the El-Melloi faction?"

"No. We don't talk about that sort of thing."

Although there must be plenty of debt, I had never heard of the detailed contents of it.

"I see. Well, then, that's just great. Originally, we have been working on a fifty-year plan to rebuild the damaged source Crest of the El-Melloi line. I should mention that the expected regeneration rate of 50 years is too high of an expectation for anyone other than my family. However, in addition to that, I also have Weaver Velvet's collateral - the Velvet family's Magic Crest - in my custody."

Magic Crest

An indispensable element for a magus, which has played a large part in past cases.

"Why would you have that?"

"It's quite simple. When he was made Lord of El-Melloi by Mistress Reines, his Magic Crest was taken as collateral. And who better to take care of it than me, the tuner?"

Ah, I almost shouted.

I had heard something along those lines several times before. It had come up in conversation before that Reines had taken something important as collateral from Master.

But the details were new to me.

"Is that a valuable ..... Master's Crest?"

"No? To put it bluntly, it has almost no value as a Magic Crest. The Velvet family has only been around for three generations, and the original is not very good. It's the type of Crest that doesn't have many side effects, but also doesn't have much magic engraved

on it. However, this is the only Crest that corresponds to the Weaver Velvet in this world. In terms of not letting a magus betray you, it's the best collateral. It's like taking away their reason for living right from the start."

It would be, given the nature of the Magic Crest.

A symbol of that magus, passed down from generation to generation from their ancestors. It is another organ. The reason why they are so particular about lineage is because only their own descendants can pass on the Magic Crest. The Crest is an indispensable component for Master to become a true magus.

And no matter how much that man despairs of his own talent, he has not given up.

Reines must have absolute faith in her brother.

From her point of view, she knows that Master would never betray her.

(.....Maybe,)

maybe, I think.

I guess that's how it all began.

“...”

Strangely enough, there was no stirring in my heart.

Even if that was the beginning, it didn't change the master and Lainez that I know now, or their relationship, because it seemed so natural to me.

"Hmmm. It doesn't shock you too much?"

"I guess."

I said to myself, as if somehow it was someone else's problem.

The young man who had been peering at me hummed. He sounded an equal mixture of very bored and very interested.

I remained silent and continued to walk for a bit.

At some point, the number of people on the street had dwindled. It was because we were approaching Slur. Soon it will be a place of magi. It is a buffer zone, a place where reality and magic meet.

There was a somewhat lonely Coke vending machine.

Potted flowers lined up in the window of an old-fashioned apartment.

Contradictory yet harmonious, the smell of life melted in the dark yet temple-like night.

Suddenly, I asked a question.

"Mr. Melvin, why do you call him Waver?"

"Yeah? Why not?"

Melvin tilted his head, as if it was rather strange to be asked.

"He will pass the name of Lord El-Melloi to someone else one day. They won't be the II, or even the III, but rather the true Lord El-Melloi. Then, won't it be lonely with no one to call him by his true name?"

I blinked at him as he said this in the most serious manner.

The young man spoke to me in a polite manner, as if he were teaching me addition.

"The Fourth Holy Grail War had a profound effect on Waver. It's the reason I even took notice of him."

Melvin says passionately under the winter night sky.

"However, even the previous nineteen years must have been an important time for Waver, for without that time, he would not have been able to become the man he is today. Likewise, if he had not been able to change, he would not have been able to become the man he was today. Likewise, if he should lose the title of Lord, then it would

be as important a time for him as ever. Or at least, that's how I see it, and isn't that enough?"

The time leading up to, and during, the Fourth Holy Grail War.

And the time when he will cease to be a Lord.

Ah, that's it.

That's right.

Something I had lost sight of because the influence of the Holy Grail War was too great. Something I had forgotten because I took it for granted that he was a lord. Even though this self-proclaimed brute is a bastard - perhaps because he is a bastard - he seems to arrive at the obvious things that everyone else overlooks with ease.

I was a little frustrated.

But there are things that even I can say.

I took a breath, "Even so, to me, he is my Master," and replied.

"For Mr. Flat, he's a professor, and for Ms. Caules, Ms. Luvia, and Mr. Svin, he's a teacher. For other students, too, I think it's the same. I'm sure that will never change."

I hoped that I was able to stand up to him, if even a little.

Melvin looked at me with a mysterious expression on his face.

"You are absolutely right. Yeah, I knew you had a slightly different angle on him than I did. Perhaps, though, we are saying the same thing."

"Isn't that a contradiction?"

"Of course not. A person's number of faces increases as the number of people who see them increases, doesn't it? Conversely, if no one sees you, you have no face at all."

I didn't mind the peculiar logic.

"It was a pleasure to meet you. Here we are."

With a wave of his hand, Melvin spun around. Soon his back was covered in darkness, and even my eyes couldn't see him anymore.

Suddenly, I looked up at the night sky.

Before I knew it, snow had begun to fall.

The white crystals, which were gradually gaining momentum, made me anticipate that there would be a significant pile-up in the morning.

I wanted to see Master as soon as possible.

I couldn't resist wishing upon the snowflakes that were falling - and the moon that was shining faintly amongst the clouds. I walked a little faster, but eventually, my legs slowed down as I headed directly for the street of Slur.

Please.

Please, may he have a future that will reward him as much as possible—.



As if it were the deep sea, drown in this world!

## -Explanation-

Yuuichirou Higashide

*\*There are spoilers for this volume here, so those who have not read it should promptly read it to the end.*

...You have read this book, breathed a sigh of wonder, and are now reading the commentary. Alternatively, for those of you who are reading from the commentaries without reading, this is your last warning.

Weaver Velvet, aka Lord El-Melloi II, is a resident of the "Fate" world (i.e., TYPE-MOON's world, or Nasuverse in foreign parlance).

His Initial appearance was in the book "Character Material" released by TYPE-MOON. Along with several other characters who had yet to be seen, the book featured a mysterious magus that none of us had any idea about, and that we could only tilt our heads at.

A few months later, he appeared in "Fate/Zero" as Waver Velvet, a bratty little kid.

If you read "Fate/Zero," you will understand his story easily enough. However, if you just follow his character in "The Case Files of Lord El-Melloi II," you will find a few places that will make you scratch your head.

In the first place, what is a magus? What is magic? Exactly what is magic and what is not?

Why is it that Lord El-Melloi II tolerates magi, even though they are horribly inhuman?

This is because of the great river (not Fujimura-san) that flows through this world, which comes from the place of the Type-Moon world known as the root. (Translation note: Taiga can mean great river in Japanese.)

Servants hardly appear in the story. Combat itself is not even given much importance.

The key emphasis is on "magic" and "mystery".

If any reader twists his/her head and says, "I don't get it," try playing "Mahoutsukai no Yoru" (PC game), for example, or reading "Kara no Kyoukai" (The Garden of the Sinners). If that is not enough, recall the various magical descriptions in the "Fate" works, ask your friends, and then twist your head.

Of course, you could also do a quick search on your phone or computer in front of you. You'll find out that an endless number of such idle stories are being told by fans (including me).

If you go that far, you are already as good as lost in the depths of the ocean.

You should be able to understand how the text of "Fate/Grand Order" that you casually passed by, or even a small word said in an interview in a magazine, is firmly connected to the world of TYPE-MOON.

Of course, you can enjoy most of the "Fate" series without seeing or knowing about it. You can enjoy the dynamic action of the mythological heroes, the back-and-forth banter, and the fascinating characters to the fullest.

However.

To paraphrase a misleading metaphor, it is akin to swimming in the ocean. If you dive a little deeper, you will witness colourful fishes swimming leisurely and beautiful coral reefs.

But even in the deep sea, where light does not reach, there is beauty in the darkness.

The Case Files of Lord Elmelloi II is a work in which one has the pleasure of peering into the beauty of darkness.

Most of the characters in the book are irrepressibly inhuman, irrepressibly mad, and sometimes even treacherous and murderous in the pursuit of their goals, and yet there is a mad sincerity about magic.

And since the world of TYPE-MOON is not free from magic at any time, as long as you read this work carefully, you will be able to enjoy the works that will continue to appear in the future 70% more than others.

Incidentally, Caules Forvedge, who is a character from "Fate/Apocrypha", has made a full appearance in this volume and has achieved great success (from his point of view), but of course, the Holy Grail War that broke out in "Fate/Apocrypha" is not taking place in this world.

Nevertheless, Caules joined the classroom with the idea that "if something similar happens, it will most likely end the same way".

....Well, so far, this was something I had predicted to some extent when I created the character of Caules.

I did not expect that even the relatives and children of the Red Masters - who were treated as though they were "invincible men like Camba and Quino from Desperado" - would come into the classroom. .....

Even though they had a small part in the comic version of 'Fate/strange Fake' (Original story: Ryohgo Narita/TYPE-MOON, manga: Shizuki Morii), I never thought I would get to see their faces at all...

Anyway, I'm sure Makoto-san is fine. I'm sure Makoto-san will make good use of them!

(TYPE-MOON's speciality: "When in trouble, turn to Makoto-san.)

## -Afterword-

Makoto Sanda

—The train journey comes to an end.

The Mystic Eyes fall asleep and close their eyelids once more.

But this is not the end.

It is only a brief respite until the eye opens again to gaze upon a new mystery.

We apologize for the long wait. Here we are with the fifth volume, "The Magic Eye Collecting Train (2)".

I recall that we were under a lot of pressure to deliver the book during the winter because of the content of the first volume. Furthermore, the amount of foreshadowing in the first volume grew beyond my expectations, and even though I divided the book into upper and lower volumes, the text volume of the second part alone was more than a whole volume. This book was an all-out effort for me, just as it was for El-Melloi II.

It has been a long four months, especially for the fans who have loved El-Melloi II over the years. I hope you have enjoyed it.



Now, let me start with a few words about the contents.

As the title says, the story this time is about the intricacies of mortals, servants, agents, and magi, with a focus on Mystic Eyes, one of the most important tools in the world of TYPE-MOON.

I really wanted to depict the extent to which servants and vampires are superhuman in the eyes of ordinary people, as well as the extent to which it is possible for human Mystic Eyes, magic, and martial arts to resist them. The result is a case with a large number of factors, but I would be happy if you think that by reading "The Case Files of Lord El-Melloi II," you will find that not only Fate, but other TYPE-MOON works will become more interesting (of course, I would be happy the other way around too!). I hope you will enjoy the book as much as I enjoyed writing it!

In addition, in the first volume, I wrote that "from this point forward is the latter half of the entire series". Those of you who have read this book will have a rough idea of what I mean. The case that El-Melloi II has to tackle and those who are deeply involved with him have been unveiled. Even though only a part of it has been revealed, it is clear that the same problem will come back to haunt him.

Therefore, this last volume is a fierce battle worthy of the opening of the second half of the series.

The word whodunit is both an element of mystery and a blade that is pointed at all characters. Once that blade is pointed at you, everyone is hurt, everyone is conflicted, and everyone is forced to think about their own values. That is how it is.

Perhaps my values are reflected in answering the following words.

When is a person most beautiful?

I think, at least about one of them. I think that people are most beautiful when they are wounded, when they fall down, when they get covered in mud, and when they get back up again.

So who was it that really fell down this time?

Who was covered in mud?

Who was the one who still got up?

As the author, I would be more than happy if you, after reading this book, suddenly think of such a thing.



Last but not least, I would like to thank Mineji Sakamoto for his beautiful illustrations (especially the young Olga Marie, my favourite), Kiyomune Miwa for the research that formed the basis of the work, Yuichiro Higashide for reviewing Caules and even for his gracious commentary, I would like to thank Hikaru Sakurai and Ryogo Narita for their

help with the setting, as well as Kinoko Nasu, OKSG, and the rest of the TYPE-MOON staff.

I hope to see you again in the summer.

November, 2016

I'm currently reading Susan Greenwood's "Witchcraft: A History: The study of magic and necromancy through the ages".