

9

三田 誠

イラスト 坂本みねち

「case. 冠位決議（中）」
グランド・ロール

ロイ・エルメロイ Ⅱ世の事件簿

9
「case. 冠位決議（中）」
三田 誠
グラント・ロール
イラスト 坂本みねち
原作 TYPE-MOON

工 Lord El-Melloi II's Case Files

Volume 9

Case. Grand Roll (Middle)

II 世の

事件簿
Written by Makoto Sanda
Illustrated by Mineji Sakamoto

TYPE-MOON BOOKS
KADOKAWA BUNKO

Translated by azwhoisverybored (u/Azii_snsphx)
proofread by fearboss

Formatted by ProtoformX



ロード・エルメロイⅡ世の事件簿



グランド・ロール
「case. 冠位決議（中）」

三田 誠
イラスト 坂本みねぢ



From left to right and bottom to top:

Touko Aozaki, a Grand-ranked mage of the Clock Tower

Svin Glascheit, a student of the Department of Modern Magecraft of the Clock Tower

Reines El-Melloi Archisorte, the next head of the El-Melloi family

Hephaestion, Servant: Faker

Dr. Heartless, the Master of Faker

Flat Escardos, a student of the Department of Modern Magecraft of the Clock Tower

Gray, the disciple of Lord El-Melloi II

Lord El-Melloi II, the Lord of the Department of Modern Magecraft of the Clock Tower.

(TN: Grand Roll Middle sounds so bad, but that's what I get for calling the last book Grand Roll Up. I have so many complaints about this cover, though. For one, it fails to depict both the titular character and the other protagonist, while it features Atrum Galliasta, who is dead. Luvia is a marble statue for some reason, I cannot comprehend the lighting, and– I should probably stop complaining about it. It's not like I can draw a better cover. But still. It annoys me much more than it should.)

◆序章◆

~Prologue~



The bright light of day was steadily fading away.

As winter neared, the weather in the suburbs of London became unstable, and storm clouds would cycle by many times a day. It would rain a little, pause, and then begin to rain again. While there never used to be any pedestrians with umbrellas, more than half of the people walking along the street were now holding one.

It didn't matter, though.

Either way, to the young man, rain was a memory from many years ago.

There was something like it in the Mining City as well, but it might be a bit inaccurate to call it "rain". He could see the cloud-covered sky, the sound of incessant raindrops striking the roofs of houses, and the smell of dirt which made his nose itch.

He recalled the black-and-white musical he had seen in the past, on a television so old it looked like it had fallen apart already. Once, when he was subconsciously humming that song, his teacher had pointed out that it was Singin' In The Rain. That was how he learned what it was called.

Learning the name had made him incredibly happy, because he felt like he had gotten close to something that he had thought that he could never approach.

"....."

As he thought of this, the young man ran down the street called Slur.

Near the sparsely populated dormitories, a sad-looking shadow extended out across the pavement.

The man had long, red hair. Because of his downward-pointing eyelashes, it was impossible to tell where he was looking. Though there was less than five minutes until class began, he looked as if he had stood here for several hours. Rather than saying he fit well with the rain, it was more like he was having a conversation with it.

Why did that person look so lonely as he stood there, almost melting into the downpour?

He was Dr. Heartless, the head of the Department of Modern Magecraft(Norwich).

“Sir?” The young man called out. He did not immediately receive a reply.

He didn’t call out a second time. Instead, he held out his umbrella, and Heartless looked down after blinking twice.

“Oh, sorry. I was thinking too much about a new formula I thought up on accident, and lost track of time.”

That meant that not only was he using his brain, but he was also using his Magic Circuits. Any mage that was at least somewhat capable didn’t just use their brain to think. Mages seemed to need to be ready to activate their Magic Circuits at any moment to challenge problems that came up. This was an area the young man lacked the talent to reach.

“Have you discovered anything new?”

“Yes. Just like the first time I met you,” Heartless said, looking at him and smiling softly.

The young man, who was a Survivor, was turning twenty years old soon. The fearlessness in his profile suggested the end of his boyhood, but his eyes had retained the purity that he had in the past. Perhaps because of the nutrition he received and the environment he was in, he was visibly healthier than he used to be.

“Speaking of which, has anything happened? You’re a bit later than usual,” Heartless asked, after checking his pocket watch.

“Nothing important. I just received a letter from Asheara telling me I could throw away the rest of the personal belongings.”

“I see.”

“And then I wanted to throw them out as I walked here, but... I got a little distracted thinking about how we’re all going our separate ways.”

“You have been together for years, after all.” Heartless said with a slight wry smile as he looked to the young man, who was nodding.

The young man was one of Heartless’ former students, and a Survivor of the labyrinth. The other members of his team who explored Spirit Tomb Albion along with him had now been scattered to the four winds. The young man would probably never meet another person who he would share his fate with again.

Yes.

Regardless if they became the adoptive children of famous mages or entered the Secret Autopsy Division to work, they would all achieve feats that the young man couldn’t even imagine. And now, as they were no longer with each other, he felt like there was a gaping hole in his chest.

“...It is in a mage’s nature to betray others,” Heartless said.

Long, red hair fluttered in the cold wind.

“It’s essentially a problem of selfishness. The bond between teacher and student exists, but it is never absolute. Teachers value their students because they wish for their magecraft to progress, and students value their teachers because there are things they still have to learn. If they are no longer of value to each other, it isn’t strange for the relationship to be discarded completely... that is what kind of creature mages are.”

Those words, which were almost like a lecture, flowed across the wet floor.

“However, they went to the trouble of sending in a request, and even asked for my advice before they officially became my students. I hardly ever see someone with such a sincere response.”

“Well.”

The young man, however, seemed to find something odd about this.

He had actually heard about this a long time ago. As they walked, they had discussed how things would turn out, and their dreams for the future. And then, in order to

achieve those dreams, according to what Heartless said, there wasn't anything that could make him feel dissatisfied.

At least, there shouldn't have been.

Seeing the young man's somewhat dissenting expression, Heartless continued to speak.

"First, you managed to survive in that giant labyrinth. This feat itself is already quite radiant," Heartless said. "For that reason, you might believe that all of your teammates will continue to collaborate like one harmonious team. However, this place is not the same as the labyrinth. As the battlefield changes, your technique must change along with it. However, you still live in the same world, so you'll get the chance to meet them again if you want to."

Hearing his teacher's words, he looked up at the sky.

That was something that did not exist in the labyrinth.

Regardless of rain or shine, the vast expanse of sky was breathtaking to behold. Learning that it was a view that could be seen anywhere on the surface had shaken him. Though he had been so grateful to see it, now, he had gotten used to it, and looked up at the sky less and less.

"Even if you don't want to, the Clock Tower is but a small corner of the world (*TN: Alternatively, the Clock Tower is a small world, after all*). You'll inevitably cross paths with them one day."

"Oh, okay."

His voice carried some uneasiness.

The surface(world) was too vast. Of course, he understood that only a small portion of all the people here knew of magecraft. This world ran on science(reality), and those ones still stuck in the past needed to huddle together to survive.

Even now, after he had already gotten used to it, the sky was still too vast. Under it, he felt so lonely, and then felt so selfish to think that.

“—Hm?”

A woman walked without an umbrella in the downpour.

Even though her expensive outfit was thoroughly soaked by the rain, she remained unmoved. Perhaps this was what Londoners were always like in the past. Or, maybe it was what Londoners do in the present.

The woman was old, and had white hair.

She smiled cheerfully, and raised her wrinkled hand.

“Hello, Dr. Heartless.”

“Good day to you, Lord Valualeta.”

Heartless bowed, and the young man hurriedly followed suit.

It was impossible to determine the old woman’s true age from her wrinkled face. Everyone in the Clock Tower knew that the appearances of mages were not to be trusted. It was even more so the case with Lords.

Lords would come by to visit once in a while. To the young man, the twelve rulers of the Clock Tower seemed like higher beings.

“I didn’t expect you to visit.”

“Oh, that’s alright, I was just passing by when I realized I haven’t talked to you in a while.”

Within Lord Valualeta’s eyes, there was a scale that measured how she would treat the person she spoke to. Right now, it swayed in a delicate balance. Though they were supposedly equal in rank, that was not actually the case.

“.....”

Dr. Heartless was not accepted by all the other heads of departments. He was the only one of the twelve main departments to not be a Lord, yet he was also required to converse with Lords as if they were his equals. For that reason, he had had to accept many requests that did not benefit him at all.

The young man had noticed this. When he first came up to the surface, he had thought that Heartless was one of the rulers. This assumption was incorrect.

Finally, Lord Valualeta shifted her gaze to somewhere else.

“Is this one of your students?”

“...Yes. I think you two have met before...”

Heartless gave his shoulder a light nudge, and the young man swallowed, standing as straight as possible.

“My name is Kurou.”

“Hm. What a strange-sounding name.”

After that, she lost interest in him and completely ignored the young man’s best attempt to seem dignified. Lord Valualeta looked back to the head of the department he belonged to.

“Since I’m here already, I want to make sure of something,” she said. “Have you heard about what happened to Lord El-Melloi?”

“He attended a combat-based ritual in the Far East, right?”

...Lord El-Melloi.

The young man recalled that name.

That family had a high status, even amongst the other Lords. That person was the Lord of the Department of Mineralogy(Kischur). He was still called a prodigy even though he was more than twenty years old because he had achieved great things ever since he was less than ten years old. Not only was he talented enough to take over the Department of

Mineralogy, he was also talented in the field of Spiritual Evocation and became a first-grade lecturer in that department as well.

The young man understood from his story how outstanding someone the Clock Tower heralded as a genius would have to be.

The story of how that person went to attend a magecraft ritual in the Far East was only passed around amongst the gossipy ones in the Clock Tower. Rumors like how the El-Mellois were tired of only having fame in the field of research, and wanted to display how powerful they were in combat as well. That also revealed who Lord El-Melloi was as a mage.

“It is the undefeated prodigy, Lord El-Melloi, after all. Even if the worst of luck befell him, there’s no way he would be defeated in a magecraft ritual in the Far East, would there?”, Heartless muttered.

“That would be for the best. But maybe he’ll lose to an ambush. Who knows?” The old woman said, speaking of something horrific in a lighthearted tone of voice. “Lord El-Melloi— Kayneth El-Melloi Archibald is engaged to the daughter of the Eulyphises. When they get married, the Aristocratic Faction will become even more united. It’s quite a headache for us here in the Democratic Faction. Well then, what do you think? Does the Department of Modern Magecraft want to officially become part of the Democratic Faction? That would make us owe you quite a large favor.”

“I’ll pretend I didn’t hear that,” Heartless said, calmly shaking his head.

Instantly, the atmosphere became tense.

“How unfortunate,” Lord Valualeta said, as a smile appeared on her lips. “But, if you ever decide to change your mind, please tell me. I’ve always been rather interested in the Department of Modern Magecraft. If you ended up going over to the Neutral Faction, I would be so sad I wouldn’t leave my house for days.”

“Please don’t joke around like that,” said Heartless, passing it off.

The Aristocratic, Democratic, and Neutral Factions.

The three ideologies that ran through the Clock Tower were just as Lord Valualeta had said. Presently, the Department of Modern Magecraft did not belong to any faction. Of course, that meant that Heartless had to walk a tightrope. Though that was the case, the only reason why the Department of Modern Magecraft could run independently was because it was independent from the three factions. If it aligned itself with one of them, it would immediately be bought out. As the only department head who wasn't a Lord, Heartless needed to act even more carefully than usual.

No. Besides that.

The young man silently tried to stop himself from trembling.

...What if...

What if this esteemed old woman already saw through the Department of Modern Magecraft's(our) secret?

“Anything wrong?”

“...No, nothing.”

“Please don't threaten my students.”

Heartless gently placed his hand on the young man's shoulder. He felt the trembling stop.

Looking to the young man, Lord Valualeta smiled again.

“Hahaha, I'm sorry. As an apology, could you please take this?”

She had taken out a movie ticket.

“Is this from the cinema you own, Lord Valualeta— Miss Inorai?”

“Yes. I bought one of the newest sort of cinema complex. One of the theaters is specially reserved for relatives. This ticket will cover any movie you want. Haha, I've wanted my own cinema for such a long time.”

“Wouldn’t it trouble Lord Trambelio if you spent money too flamboyantly in the surface world?”

“That McDonell boy will understand. Well then, see you later.”

Lord Valualeta walked away, waving. The tense atmosphere in the air left alongside her.

After a while, Heartless smiled warmly.

“Lord Valualeta prefers modern things, doesn’t she? And she even went all the effort to try and get someone like me to join her faction. It isn’t that she’s malicious... It’s just how the Clock Tower is.”

“So, does she just scheme out in the open? That’s hard to imagine.”

“Well, not really. When we think of scheming, we usually mean planning to create traps that make people fall to their deaths. She doesn’t actually want Lord El-Melloi to die. Lord Valualeta is just searching with her intuition for things she finds interesting that also benefit her. Ah, as a part of the Department of Creation(Valuay), maybe this process of discovery is her idea of beauty.”

So, in other words, searching for power.

Though she didn’t specifically try to hoard power, that was just what the old woman was used to. Turning up out of the blue and discussing topics like what they had just talked about seemed to be as natural as breathing to her.

However.

“Aren’t you angry?”

“Angry?”

“Because, wasn’t that—”

Wasn’t that just a threat, he wanted to say. But he couldn’t manage to finish his sentence.

If he wanted to ask whether she had ill intent, the answer was probably no. However, what she said just then was almost like she was reminding him that his life was in her hands. That was who Lord Valualeta was like, but whether or not he could be complacent about it was a different matter entirely.

However, as usual, Heartless accepted his speechlessness and responded with a wry smile.

“In this situation, I don’t have backup, so I have to concede,” he said. “After all, mages are relics from the past. Trying to incorporate modern ideas is always antithetical to our nature. We’ve never been equal.”

Heartless spoke of things that everyone in the Clock Tower accepted as an established truth.

Magic Crests could only be passed on to direct descendants, and the quality and quantity of Magic Circuits were decided at birth.

Since magecraft was the most important thing to mages, their way of existence could only be described as old-fashioned.

“But, the Department of Modern Magecraft(Norwich)—”

“Yes. Magecraft is in decline. For that reason, they can only start incorporating the New Ages who they used to dismiss into their organizations. This extremely controversial compromise created the Department of Modern Magecraft. That is to say, this street.”

Heartless looked to the street before him.

Just by looking down the street, there were hardly any people who would consider this place a center for quality education. It was far too small for that. It consisted of a single school building stuffed between two roads. In terms of funding, it had around the same as the Department of Archaeology(Meluastea), but they were vastly different.

That department was one of the most prestigious ones in the Clock Tower, backed up by hundreds of years of history. It was also the representative of the Neutral Faction. By contrast, the Department of Modern Magecraft was just a random building poorly

integrated to an area with a few existing workshops and relations. It gave the impression of being incredibly sloppily made.

Even so, for the New Agers in the Clock Tower, this was a good enough place to place their hopes in.

“You just said how mages would betray people, right?” The young man said, bringing up what Heartless had said before Lord Valualeta came. “What about you then, Sir?”

“Of course, I’m just an ordinary mage. I hope to attain the best results I can possibly achieve, regardless of what immoral methods I have to use in the process. Just like every other mage.”

Really, the young man thought.

It had been several years since the first time had met Heartless. In that time, he had never seemed that selfish, not when he escaped from Spirit Tomb Albion, when he enrolled in the Clock Tower, or when he listened to his lectures.

“But, don’t you have the fairies’—”

Heartless raised a finger and shushed the young man before he could finish his sentence.

“That has nothing to do with my nature as a mage. It just got mixed into my body by chance. Of course, there have been mages in the past who have attained exceptional ranks by using what they received from the fairies, but I didn’t go down that path.”

The young man had heard of something similar before.

For instance, someone who learned how to speak to everything in the world because they once touched a fairy.

However, the young man’s teacher had not become the department head this way.

“.....”

Without noticing it, the young man looked to his teacher.

He hadn't changed at all. He was still the exact same as when they had first met. Even when both the young man and his team had changed to be almost unrecognizable.

"...I don't think you need to change(*TN: Alternatively, I think that's alright*)," he said quietly.

He walked a few steps on the chipped cobblestone road.

Then, he turned to look back.

"I love this street just as it is."

Before he knew it, the rain had stopped. With the usual fickleness of London weather, half of the sky that had just been cloudy had already cleared up. Above them, a rainbow had appeared.

Under the bridge of colors, the young man spoke up again, somewhat timidly.

"I think that's because you're here, Sir."



—That all happened ten years ago, before the Fourth Holy Grail War had begun, and before the unconventional Lord named Lord El-Melloi II had come to the Department of Modern Magecraft.



"So please stay like this, Sir."

That moment was back when the star in a certain young man's eyes still shined in the street known as Slur.

◆ 第一章 ◆

~Chapter 1~



“The true Heroic Spirit... the Conqueror King Iskandar... Heartless and Faker want to summon him...”

Those words were like bullets fired by a demon.

It had been around ten years since the Fourth Holy Grail War.

In that case, it crossed ten years of time and struck straight into our hearts. No, it was even more impactful for my mentor. It was more like it had pierced through his skull and scattered his brain across the floor, and all I could do was stand there in bewilderment, for that bullet was made of pure despair and hate.

“.....”

We were still in Heartless' workshop.

Just the chokingly dense smell of the wine cellar alone was enough to make someone drunk. It was enough to cloud anyone's mind, immersing them in the gifts of the god of wine(Bacchus).

My mentor's gaze was still fixed on the wall of the workshop, which had been covered with an evidence board.

They had probably all been placed there by Heartless. The woven patchwork of threads and post-it notes looked like they came from a crime drama. Several of those papers contained information about Seal Designated spells, and my mentor was probably trying to deduce what they led to.

...But, why? I thought.

Why would they summon the Heroic Spirit Iskandar?

To my mentor, this conclusion was a fatal blow. Even the temptations of the snake(Satan) were not so enticing. The original sin that made them betray God and take

the fruit of knowledge was comparable to the sorrowful wish that bound my mentor now.

“.....”

I couldn't speak.

—“I hope you can meet him.”

I had thought this unsound(*TN: Alternatively, serious or painful*) thought just a few months ago.

No. I still held the same belief now. However, Heartless had made the same idea sound so terrifying. I felt for the first time how sickening it was when what I dreamed of did not bring the results that I had hoped.

“...But,”

I wanted to stop myself. However, a sound managed to escape my throat.

“...But why?” I asked.

There was a sudden loud sound, and the table shook.

It was the sound of my mentor slamming the table with his fist.

“That's what I want to know. It's the only logical conclusion to all of this...!” My mentor said in a low voice, through gritted teeth.

Though he was trying to suppress it, there seemed to be something that he could not hide.

What kind of inner conflict and anguish was he trying to hold back? He had attended the Fourth Holy Grail War ten years ago. And now, all of his last ten years of toil was about to be torn apart in front of his eyes.

“It looks like— No, this has to be it. What he learned in your hometown became the basis for this formula. By that, I mean the idea of resurrecting King Arthur by separating her into the body, the mind, and the soul.”

That was what we had just discussed.

Heartless had observed my hometown for a considerable amount of time. Thinking back, that was when the connection between Heartless, my mentor, and I had first been formed. Then, did that mean Heartless’s plan had first taken shape there? Or, had it originated much longer ago...?

“However... This is much more advanced than that,” my mentor said, placing a hand beside the strings and leaning in to study it in even more detail. “Using Faker as the core, he plans on exploring... something greater than the Heroic Spirit Iskandar? Such as...using Heroic Spirits as a medium to create a chain reaction...”

Similar mutterings continued as he continued to examine the evidence board.

“Oi, what’s up with you, puny mage?”

Even Add’s rude complaints could not reach my mentor.

“...Damn it!” He exclaimed, scratching at the wall with his fingers. “Why... I don’t understand...”

He was like a boxer who had lost after challenging a champion to a fight.

Even my mentor, who took apart other people’s magecraft almost instinctively, responded in this way.

I didn’t understand what I was to do.

Ever since I became his disciple, I believed that I was always protecting my mentor. The opponents I fought against with Add were gradually becoming stronger than I was, and it took more effort to face them. Even so, I could hold my own against them.

Why did we need to fight opponents like this?

I could not see, hear, or feel them.

Our opponents were magecraft theories that only existed within my mentor's mind.

"If that's the case, the whydunit can be explained..." My mentor gasped, looking as if he could cry at any moment. "The problem now lies in why Faker would obey Heartless so easily."

"But—"

"You might think that it's natural that Servants obey their Masters. That isn't actually the case. Only Command Spells can force a Servant to follow a command, but they cannot be used to force compliance over a long period of time. Command Spells are only temporary."

There was something else in my mentor's words beside what they meant at face value.

Perhaps it was because he had experienced this himself, ten years ago, in the Fourth Holy Grail War.

"So why... what wish does she have that makes her comply with Heartless?"

"Is that wish... for Iskandar to be summoned?"

Yes. The whydunit was clear.

If he really could summon the true Iskandar, Faker would assist him. I didn't know anyone else who was as devoted in following another person as she was. Even if he wanted to conquer the world, she would probably be happy to comply.

"...So what do you not understand?"

"There's evidently some kind of bait in this formula. That's why even I can find out that he plans on summoning Iskandar. At the same time, this would have taken too much time to just be a trick to misguide me."

My mentor's fingers, which had just been clawing at the wall, now pointed to the evidence board.

“A completed formula takes more than just a theory. Magecraft doesn’t always react well when combined with other types of magecraft. Instead, it is far more common to it to backfire and go out of control. The more complete or powerful a formula is, the harder it is to be tampered with.”

This suddenly reminded me of Flat.

He had the rare ability to create a new Magecraft Foundation whenever he wanted to by improvising and rearranging. My mentor had once said that because of that, it was difficult for him to use the exact same type of magecraft more than once.

In that case, the evidence board in front of my mentor was an intricate tapestry that had taken a truly staggering amount of time and effort, to the point where not even someone like Flat would be able to unravel it.

“It’s like threading a needle, as the saying goes. From the parts that I can decipher, the spell seems to be incredibly strange as well. Ah, it’s evident that this was the result of the careful work of someone who could undoubtedly be called a genius. Only someone with an unusual obsession and a knack for unconventional ideas would be able to create something like this. ...But then, even though it’s already reached this point— No, because it’s at this point, this spell is somewhat limited by time and place.”

“...Time and place?”

For instance, the positions of the stars, or Ley Lines.

Several elements affected magecraft. For that reason, the classrooms of the Clock Tower were all built in carefully selected location. It was also important to make sure that different spells are compatible when combined. The magecraft of spring cannot be used with that of winter.

If someone wanted to create a new formula, they would need to face these issues every time. For that reason, some mages made a living by obtaining a license from the Department of Law for every new formula created, so other people would have to pay to use them. (*TN: copyright royalties? Really?*)

“[He] is at the center of all of this.”

My mentor's fingers were trembling. What kind of complicated emotions were cycling through his mind?

"In that case," my mentor continued. "...What'll happen if I try and stop Heartless? (TN: Alternatively, what's the point in trying to stop Heartless?)"

"Sir..."

I didn't know if he heard me or not. His eyes did not meet mine, and his words fell to the cracked stone floor.

"If he really wants to summon Iskandar, maybe I should even help him. I don't need to be maintaining the order of the Clock Tower. Even if he doesn't have memories of the past, even if I'm not his Master, because all of these are trivial."

Of course.

To my mentor, the Clock Tower was only a distraction.

Though he loved the students of the El-Melloi Classroom, that could not compare to the King he had pledged his life to. Even though he had decided not to participate the Fifth Holy Grail War, that did not mean he had given up on meeting his king again. However, he had decided that he needed to witness what the king's shadow, Faker, planned.

Finally, my mentor had arrived at the answer.

That answer was to summon Iskandar.

...Then, should I help as well?

Should I, as someone who had witnessed my mentor's struggles, support him in this? Should I stand beside him and encourage him to help Heartless and Faker summon Iskandar?

"....."

I could not understand.

I couldn't even make myself speak.

I only needed to say a single sentence. Even though I desperately wished to reach out to help him, I could not think of anything to say. If only I had learned more poetry back at my hometown. Father Fernando had always encouraged me to.

“...Um,”

Finally, I had thought of something.

“Why does Heartless want to summon Iskandar?”

“That’s what I don’t understand.” A bitter expression appeared on my mentor’s face. “There’s no doubt that Faker will be the core of the summoning. However, Heartless has placed all kinds of extremely convoluted spells around it, including the Seal Designated magecraft created by Emiya that we talked about earlier.”

“Is this Seal Designation the same as the one from before—?”

It was supposedly an edict from the Clock Tower to protect extremely valuable mages, whose abilities could not be passed down to the next generation. Though “protection” made it sound nice, in reality, it involved stripping all of the Magic Circuits from the designated mage’s nervous system and preserving it forever.

This designation was also one of the main purposes of the Department of Law.

“Emiya’s magecraft creates a stream of time separate from the rest of the world,” my mentor said. “Originally, it seemed to be so he could reach the end of time and witness the Root. It was supposedly frequently discussed when the method was discovered, but that happened before I came to the Clock Tower. There are multiple paths to the root, but this was probably one of the more realistic ones. No wonder the Clock Tower jumped up to issue a Sealing Designation immediately. This is undoubtedly the work of a genius.”

“As a Lord, I know the basics of this formula. Depending on the situation, it can be combined with other types of magecraft to create a solution. However, using this in combination with a formula with so many variables and applying them to...”

At this, my mentor suddenly stopped.

“...No, it can’t be.”

He denied everything he had just been saying.

“If it was just complicated, there should still be a way. There are plenty of more structurally complex formulas in the Clock Tower. But there’s no trace of everything else Heartless has been developing up until this point. Even something complicated should have a core made of a type of magecraft he is used to. Even the habits of spellcasters will naturally seep from everything they do. What is Heartless trying to do? Why would he use(*TN: Alternatively, endorse*) this kind of magecraft? Or is this what the head of the Department of Modern Magecraft is supposed to be?”

Without fully realizing it, I had become aware of it.

My mentor’s discerning eye was probably more centered around people.

Just as how he managed to deduce the essence and future of Jewel Magecraft from Luvia gelita Edelfelt’s nature. Just as how he had seen through the secret behind the Twin Towers of Ilsema at a glance when he faced Mr. Byron.

Like my mentor had once said before, mages could not overcome the whydunit.

—“For mages who are immersed in the story of magecraft even before they are born, both resisting and accepting their nature will erode their inner selves. In this sense, no other group of people in the world are less capable of lying than mages are.”

Just as he had explained in Adra, the Castle of Separation, my mentor could approach the essence of a type of magecraft by seeing through to the essence of the mages themselves.

However, the tracks that Heartless left behind lacked this air. That was why my mentor had needed the support of Volumen Hydrargyrum when he was analyzing the spell we discovered at my hometown.

Rather than saying that he didn't feel like a mage, it was more like he lacked the basic ways of a human being.

Just like his name implied... (*TN: I don't know how he expected anyone to trust him with a name like Dr. Heartless. Also, where'd he get a PhD?*)

“...Is Heartless' goal to reach the Root?” I asked inadvertently.

It was the goal that most mages chased after, the origin and end of magecraft. The Clock Tower had also been built for the purpose of reaching it.

However, my mentor shook his head.

“I don't think so. This combination is needlessly complicated for that. Theoretically, the Root could be reached using Emiya's magecraft alone. That's why it was Seal Designated. It would be meaningless to add Iskandar or any other formula into the equation...”

Something else gradually seeped into his words.

The anger he had felt changed to become silent resignation.

“So, should I just ask for his explanation?”

He wasn't waiting for an answer. That question was directed at himself.

For a moment, everything in the workshop was silent.

Up until this point, no matter how strange the case was, my mentor's stance had always been clear.

Though he kept saying that he wasn't a detective, my mentor always solved the mysteries.

However, what would happen if a detective decided that a case should not be solved? Moreover, what if the detective considered helping the culprit—?

Like a puppet whose strings had been cut, my mentor's hand fell from the evidence board, and he pressed his temples.

“...What’s wrong?” I said in a quiet voice.

It seemed to be some kind of telepathic message. As long as there wasn’t a bounded field present, communication between mages was superior to modern technology. Even my mentor was capable of it.

The message lasted for around ten seconds.

Just as when he had examined Heartless’ evidence board, my mentor’s body tensed unnaturally.

“What happened?”

“—Slur Street was attacked—!”

His bewildered words rang out in the workroom, which was full of the scent of wine.



W-what was this—?

I froze, speechless.

I was at Slur Street.

Not long ago, I had been searching through the records of the Department of Modern Magecraft with Flat and Svin for information about Heartless and his students.

This was completely overturned in an instant.

What met us after we opened the door to the stack room was a haze of dust. The school building had been reduced to rubble, which had been scattered all over the place. Part of the destroyed pieces of stone had sank into the buildings around them, creating an incredibly surreal scene.

Of course, fights between mages were common occurrences. Despite the Clock Tower's concern with the concealment of mystery, they didn't try to prevent mages from fighting at all. Sometimes, it was even encouraged through training.

However, it was the first time I had seen such a flagrant attack.

It was undoubtedly the effects of some kind of Greater Magecraft. It had torn through the bounded field around Slur Street like it was made of wet tissue paper and destroyed the buildings, revealing how powerful the mystery behind it was.

“.....”

No.

This couldn't be right.

I looked away, and I saw the truth behind the destruction. I intuitively knew that the light that had streaked through the sky like a comet was the same as a certain Noble Phantasm I had witnessed before.

That was to say—

“—Wait, wait, what's going on, Reines-chan?!”

Of course, the first person to regain their senses and speak up was Flat.

Perhaps for someone like him, who lived outside of convention, something outside of the norm wasn't that strange. However, I reflexively responded with something that revealed my nature.

“...How surprising. I thought you would have said something like ‘wow, that's so cool!’ Or ‘it's the first time I've seen something like this!’”

“Well, that's because the El-Melloi Classroom is in serious trouble! How could I say that when people could have gotten hurt?” Flat answered seriously.

“...You're right. Sorry.”

A wry smile inadvertently appeared on my face.

He was this kind of person. He was so different from the norm, and wasn't a normal mage at all. That was why he cared so deeply about this place.

As I considered this, I felt my train of thought return to me.

“Flat, contact everyone and tell them to take shelter. If it’s possible, contact my brother as well. Svin, escort me along with Trimmau.”

“No! That’s unfair! I want to go with Le Chien-kun!”

“Do as the princess says.” Svin said, calling me by my nickname. “Since we can’t determine how many people have been hurt, you’re best suited to gathering people. You should be the best at applying magecraft in the El-Melloi Classroom. By contrast, I’m better at searching for the attacker or making sure Her Highness is safe(*TN: Her Highness? That feels weird*). This assignment is for the best.”

“No—!”

In response to Flat’s cries, I shrugged.

“If I don’t witness it with my own eyes, I won’t be able to report it. It would be such a loss of face if it got out that the successor of the Department of Modern Magecraft didn’t even confirm the situation after being humiliated like this. I need to avoid this before the Grand Roll, even if it kills me.”

“Oh, I understand now! Zombies in movies only ever rise from the dead when it’s inconvenient! I’ll come back right after I make sure everyone’s safe! Ah, that sounds so much like a death flag!” Flat said, running out as he waved.

Though he wasn’t a match for Svin, he was still very fast.

He said the right things to the students who gradually emerged into the hallway, guiding them out. This was what Mood Makers were good at. He had the talent to unintentionally convey exactly what he meant, even though he had not fully understood the situation, either.

Svin turned to face me.

“Are you really not going somewhere safe, princess?”

“It’s been quite a while since anyone called me that.”

There were people out there who called me the El-Melloi princess. However, that was not out of respect. That name had been given to me after I had been forced into the position of successor after the Archibald family fell from prominence.

Svin was the only person who would use it once in a while, for a completely different purpose.

“In an emergency like this, you’re the representative of the Department of Modern Magecraft, Your Highness.”

That was to say, he used it to establish a system of hierarchy. Changing what he called me was almost like selecting the boss of the group in a pack of dogs.

For that reason, I agreed with him.

“That makes sense. By the way, if you’re trying to persuade me to escape by prompting my self-awareness... Didn’t I just say that? Since my brother isn’t here to make me deal with all kinds of troublesome things, I have no choice but to do this.”

“I understand. But please be very careful.”

“Of course I will. Trimmau, activate automatic defenses.”

“Understood, Miss.”

After a slight nod, Trimmau melted behind me. In order to protect me at any time, she became a slime-shaped glob of silver.

We stepped forward slowly. I didn’t know if Svin was glaring at the cloud of dust or sniffing it, but his eyes instantly narrowed.

“The center of the impact seems to be the old school building... speaking of which, we’ve never really used that place, have we?”

“That place was already sealed off when we were handed the Department of Modern Magecraft. Of course, they did tell us that it was because of the distortion of the Magical Energy in that place. Using magecraft without being careful might create a giant flood of evil spirits, so my brother and I decided to just leave it be.”

As we talked, I lifted the corner of my dress and leaped over the remains of the wall. Though it wasn’t a graceful thing to do, exceptional times called for exceptional measures.

The person beside me took a step forward, and his body was immediately enveloped by Magical Energy.

The Magical Energy resembled pale fire, and was so strong that it was visible to mages. The magecraft of the Glascheit family took on the shape of beasts, with sharp claws and sensory enhancements many times more powerful than that of regular mages.

This was Bestial Magecraft.

Though it was derided by many for the madness that came along with it, this type of magecraft had come to fruition with Svin. I didn’t know how much my brother’s instruction had contributed to it, but the fact that he became the youngest person to reach the rank of Pride in the El-Melloi Classroom was enough to prove the extent of his abilities.

“There’s a strange smell,” the teenager said, walking with light steps and occasionally sweeping away large pieces of rubble with a single hand. Naturally, his sense of smell had been enhanced many times through the activation of his magecraft. The dust did not bother him in the slightest, and he wove nimbly through the chunks of scattered rock.

The old school building was even worse for the wear.

Even if a tornado had rampaged its way through this sealed-off building, it would not have been in such a terrible state. The windows had all been shattered, and the walls had been burned completely black.

“It’s completely... No, is this how powerful that was?”

Svin’s words made me swallow.

I forced down the same fear I had felt on the Rail Zeppelin. If I didn’t try to suppress it, both my brain and my body would stop functioning. Perhaps it was just part of a mage’s nature to instinctively yield in the face of a Heroic Spirit who was far more powerful.

“If we’re up against Heatless,” I said, raising my voice in defiance, “there are no bounds to what he could pull off, considering how he managed to infiltrate Slur Street by pretending to be Caules. However, if he intended on taking revenge on the Department of Modern Magecraft, there wouldn’t be a reason to go silent after the initial attack. It doesn’t make any sense to give Flat the time to gather everyone to safety, and Faker’s Noble Phantasm should be capable of continuous destruction. So what do you think?”

“I have a couple of ideas,” Svin muttered as he walked alongside me.

There was a trace amount of Magical Energy in his voice. A beast’s howl was a type of magecraft that was well-developed all across the world. Sometimes, it could be used to call upon evil. Other times, it could cleanse evil instead. My brother had once discussed in a lecture how sounds outside the range of human hearing could have uses like that, and have been regarded this way throughout history.

“One of them is that there isn’t enough Magical Energy. Using a Noble Phantasm requires large amounts of it, and according to my research on the Holy Grail War, Servants are somewhat reliant on the Holy Grail to sustain themselves. As an extra member, though, she doesn’t have that privilege.”

“He went through all this effort, only to run out of steam at the enemy camp? He is the former head of the Department of Modern Magecraft, after all. He shouldn’t be that stupid. If he was, that would make my life a whole lot easier.”

“True. So that idea isn’t worth exploring,” Svin said, as if he had originally intended on doing just that. “Then, it has to be another idea. His target isn’t Slur Street, but rather the old school building.”

“...Not bad,” I said, agreeing. “Unsealing the entire building would take quite a bit of time. Just blasting through it all using her Noble Phantasm is a reasonable idea. But this reasoning is still too shallow. When he was still the department head, he would have been able to do whatever he wanted with that seal. Is he regretting the choice he made back then?”

“...I can’t deduce these things like the professor, you know?”

“If you told my brother that, he’d say that line about how he isn’t a detective.”

A smile appeared on my lips as I thought of one of my mentor’s mantras.

“As one of the twin jewels of the El-Melloi Classroom, if the person who can find the same answer as my brother is Flat, the person who can calculate the same way as my brother would be you. Flat never writes his process on his test papers and keeps getting points deducted for it. You and my brother are the sort of good students who’ll always give the correct formula.”

“...Whydunit.” Svin muttered, tilting his head.

“Hm?”

“I think the professor has also noticed Heartless’ other Whydunit.”

Oh, really. I suppose I should have expected that from the only Pride-ranked student in the El-Melloi Classroom.

“And by that, you mean?”

“Heartless might want to keep this as secret as possible to the rest of the World of Magecraft.”

“Huh? Secret? Isn’t the serial disappearing case already pretty public? The murder at the Secret Autopsy Division wasn’t secret all, either.”

“I didn’t mean that he wants to keep the incident secret. I was talking about the cards he has.”

“...Oh.”

I finally understood.

“In other words, it doesn’t matter if it was revealed that his students have gone missing. But he needs to hide the fact that he has a Ghost Liner with an Anti-Army Noble Phantasm. Why though?”

“Even though there was a murder at the Secret Autopsy Division, it didn’t result in any excessive damage. Afterwards, we found out that it had been the result of Calugh’s attempt to make a stand. ...That is to say, Heartless wants to avoid the Clock Tower’s attention. And as long as Mystery is kept concealed, the Clock Tower leaves mages’ matters to themselves.”

Every sentence he spoke was clear and easy to understand.

Perhaps he might even be more suited to being a detective than my brother, who would always analyze complicated magecraft theories.

On second thought, it still feels more natural for a detective in a mystery novel to smoke and ramble on about vague theories.

“However, Heartless has decided to play his cards here. He probably decided on this a long time ago and planned it out so that the professor isn’t here, and that the Grand Roll is close at hand.”

“...I see,” I said, nodding.

It was just like negotiating with people. Every element of Heartless’ actions carried some kind of meaning.

“Since he played his card here, is this his final goal?”

“At least, it’s one of them. There should also be a reason why the old school building is important. So that’s why you’ve also come, right?”

“I guess you could say that. My brother isn’t here, so it would be humiliating if I just decided to lie down and admit defeat after being checkmated by the enemy,” I replied.

“My brother told me to retreat immediately if we encounter Heartless or Faker, but I can’t do that after he attacked Slur Street directly. Even if I won’t achieve anything, I still need to do all that I can. ...Speaking of which, you should try and apply those analytical abilities of yours to your daily life.”

Svin whirled around, shifting his gaze from the ruins of the old school building to me.

“Excuse me, what?”

“You know what I mean. If you used the same kind of analysis on Gray, maybe your relationship would progress faster.”

“Y-Your Highness?!”

Seeing Svin struggle to respond, I laughed.

Ah, youth. How wonderful it was to be discussing such a subject as people who fed on darkness. It was only an excuse to say that mages aren’t able to reach out for something as brilliant as that. We just cowered in fear at the purity of others, which we could never attain for ourselves.

Yes, I saw that kind of dream in him.

It must be because of that brother of mine. He was too much like a mage, yet too far from one. This was all because of my brother’s paradoxical existence.

We circled around the collapsed spiral staircase, and I walked forward with one hand on the wall, tensing my strengthened nerves.

Finally, we arrived there.

It used to be the lobby of the old school building. However, we could see something extraordinary there.

“The underground...?”

The marble floor had completely caved in, opening a window to a vast chasm of darkness.

“Well, your theory seems to have completely hit the mark.”

So that was why he needed to play his card here, at the old school building.

In that case, what does Heartless, the former head of the Department of Modern Magecraft, desire? And what was hiding beneath the old school building, in a part of the Department of Modern Magecraft that was completely unknown to me?

“Underground, underground... Why is it always underground! It was like this in Gray’s hometown as well. At this rate, I’m going to become a mouse. (*TN: I feel like this is Sanda complaining. Reines wasn’t in Wales*)”

“It’s probably because we’re not that familiar with this kind of place.”

“Well, we are mages, after all.”

“I’ll go first, then.”

Svin leaped into the chasm, landing without a sound. He stood there with the grace and stance of a cat and extended a hand to me.

Seeing that, I made up my mind and leaped down as well after strengthening my legs.

“There’s a place like this in Slur Street?” I said, looking around while trying to be as quiet as possible.

Though it was almost completely dark, mages didn’t require more than the tiniest bit of light to see properly.

I could not believe my eyes. Though I said that, it was impossible to deny the reality of what I saw in the darkness.

It was a giant object, in the shape of something that I felt like I had seen before.

A piece of rubble fell from the ceiling, and it bounced off of it.

“...What is that?”

I swallowed, reaching out. Though I still wanted to pretend it wasn't actually there, my fingers made contact with it. Though it was truly massive, its shell still felt like the chitin of a juvenile. That was to say—

“...Isn’t this the corpse of an insect?” Svin muttered quietly in a voice full of wonder.

Ah yes. I didn’t want to agree. But I had to.

What was in front of us was a the corpse of a giant insect.

It was probably a pill bug of some sort. However, it was far too large. It was at least three meters tall and ten meters long. On top of that, there was more than one corpse littered about the spacious underground cavern.

“No! This can’t be possible!” I exclaimed, shaking my head. “No matter how good the bounded field is, there’s no way nobody noticed that all this was buried down here for so many years. If that was the case, we must all be absolute dolts!”

Evidently, the cavern stretched further beyond the old school building. It was possibly even larger than Slur Street, extending all the way outside the bounded field. It was even more unlikely that a temple this large had evaded our notice for so many years as we attended and taught classes naively above it.

However, the only other alternative to that was even stranger.

...[It was almost as if this cavern had only been created several minutes ago.]

“.....”

Trying to stop my mind from wandering, I looked up, reaching a conclusion about the giant corpse before me.

“This is the corpse of a creature from Spirit Tomb Albion, isn’t it?”

“From Albion?”

“It couldn’t be from anywhere else. Maybe you’ll find traces of these animals hiding somewhere in an odd corner of the world, but it just isn’t possible for several of them to exist beneath London,” I said.

It isn’t possible for them to exist. Though mages shouldn’t go around saying things like that, it was hard for me to accept something as absurd as that.

...Damn it, I did guess that it had something to do with Albion, but I hadn’t thought it was anything more than smuggled goods.

I had suspected that the Department of Modern Magecraft under Heartless had had some kind of secret illicit monetary relationship. Usually, it was impossible to obtain artifacts from sources other than the Secret Autopsy Division, but since Heartless’ students were Survivors, they might know of some secret passageways or loopholes.

—“I’ve also heard of the possibility of smuggling going on there.”

My brother had brought this up himself during the conversation with Lord Trambelio—McDonell Trambelio Elrod.

Of course, my actions and further deductions were all based upon this.

If this fact was revealed during the Grand Roll, it would be fatal. If it became known that they had gone against the regulations and smuggled artifacts from Spirit Tomb Albion, getting completely obliterated would be on the lighter end of the range of possible consequences. If something really bad happened, we might even have to spend the next century being forced to serve as slaves.

...But what is this? I thought.

It was impossible to reach Albion by smashing a hole through the floor of the old school building. Even the uppermost floors were more than ten kilometers below the ground. In that case, what was going on here?

“Did a part of Albion that is unusually close to the surface connect to the Department of Modern Magecraft, completely by chance? Or is it the result of some kind of creature’s burrow? Even the possibility that Heartless built a nuclear power plant here is easier to accept than that.“

As I said that, I felt an agonizing pain and clutched my chest.

“Gah!”

“Your Highness!”

My eyeballs were searingly hot. I didn’t need a mirror to know that my eyes were now bright red. Shadows slowly began to creep in from the edges of my vision.

“...I’m fine. Svin, use your Bestial Magecraft to completely shield your respiratory system. Too much ether can damage your internal organs.”

“—Understood.”

Svin immediately adjusted the Magical Energy around him. Even the air itself was now rich in Mystery. It was an environment that could only belong to Spirit Tomb Albion. That was a truth that I had to accept, regardless of whether I wanted to or not.

...Still, the question remained. What on earth was going on?

Heartless wouldn’t have gone all the trouble of attacking Slur just to show us this.

In that case, what was his whydunit? And what was my brother doing at a time when he should be here?

Worries and frustrations cycled around my mind, making my heart pound furiously.

Svin’s nose twitched as he examined the corpse in front of him. Then, he looked behind it. The teenager had smelled something there, in the darkness too deep to see through with my strengthened eyes.

“Is [it] there?”

“Yes, but there’s still a little bit of distance between us.”

Without hesitation, Svin bent down on all fours.

“Please, Your Highness.”

“Can you promise me the same experience as a ride in an Aston Martin(*TN: A brand of luxury car*)?”

“It’d be more like a ride on a prancing horse.”

The teenager propelled himself forward with his legs as if I was as light as a feather.

Leaping up from the back of the giant isopod, he dove forward, sticking to the walls of the cavern. He was not walking on two feet. Rather, he had transformed his hands into giant, half-transparent claws made of Magical Energy. As I clung to his back, Svin strode from wall to ceiling, ignoring gravity.

“How handy,” I muttered, as I was being supported by Svin’s tail, which was also made of Magical Energy. As expected of an honors student, he had thought of everything. Trimmau also stretched out slightly, hiding her presence and tailing us.



The air was not completely stagnant. That was probably why Svin was able to smell something.

After a while, I also noticed something strange.

“That’s...”

The space had been distorted.

I wanted to call it the result of a heat haze, but it was the wrong season for that. Even though seasons didn’t exist underground, it was still as cold as the surface here.

For that reason, it was not the result of the warping of light.

It wasn’t darkness, either.

Instead, it was something we could not fully perceive with our limited vision.

“—A portal?” I muttered inadvertently.

There were only four portals that connected to Spirit Tomb Albion in London, and those still required you to go dozens of floors into the ground to truly arrive there. However, this mysterious entrance had opened up here.

Svin turned.

Beside the portal, [a giant chariot had approached].

It wasn’t a modern tank(*TN: tank and chariot are the same word in Japanese*), but rather, an ancient one. The sort that would be drawn by horses across a battlefield in ancient times.

However, this chariot was not pulled by horses. Instead, there were two skeletal dragons. Each one had a truly tremendous amount of Magical Energy radiating from it, and the streaks of lighting that covered its metal hooves wreathed the entire chariot in a terrifying aura of purple.

Hecatic Wheel.

I remembered that name.

Though it was originally the Noble Phantasm of Iskandar, she was also capable of controlling it.

The charioteer(Faker) held the reins of the chariot composedly.

“...So you’ve come.”

A fierce yet beautiful smile appeared on her lips.

Behind her, Heartless also stood on the chariot with a hand on his long, red hair.

They were Servant and Master.

They looked so natural standing there beside one another. Though they had only known each other for around two months, they looked as if they had fought countless battles together. I didn’t know because I had never attended a Holy Grail War, so was this how other Servants and Masters got along as well?

“Wonderful. I’ve already thanked my Master for providing me with a battlefield. If you didn’t come, wouldn’t that make me look like an idiot?”

...No.

She had already fought a battle.

More creatures like the ones from just then were lying on the ground in pools of their own blood. Some looked like mutated chimpanzees, others were like sharks that lived on land, and others still were like metamorphosing snails. Not a single one of these anomalous monsters remained alive.

I could not help but shiver in fear at the sight of those splintered shells. Those mystery-immersed shells were probably even stronger than steel.

Yes. The one that stood in the center of all of this was the true monster.

The strongest kind of familiar, who could even defeat the unknown beasts of Spirit Tomb Albion.

In other words, Ghost Liners, summoned from the Throne of Heroes that not even the secret art of Spiritual Evocation could explain. That was what we called beings like her.

“...My apologies, Your Highness,” Svin said, determined.

“—Wait,” I said as quietly as I could, stopping him. “I don’t think she’s talking to us.”

This time, I managed to sense it with my eyes.

The Mystic Eyes that were usually hard to control captured traces of Magical Energy that originated from the darkness behind Faker, manifesting as pain.

From behind Faker, Heartless smiled slowly.

“Ah, what terrible timing. Here I was thinking that the Lord wouldn’t be here. I never thought you would come. ...No, this can’t be a coincidence.”

...Wait, did that mean—

It took all of my strength to stop myself from crying out.

What kind of strange situation was all of this building up to? I felt like my already over-exerted brain was about to explode with the introduction of the person who had just appeared.

“Haha, I’m only here to get my cigarettes back,” came the new voice.

An orange aura emerged from the darkness.

The pair of glasses hanging from the chest pocket of a white shirt, and a crystal mayfly sitting atop her shoulder— Ah, my Mystic Eyes had probably sensed that familiar. Though I hadn’t met her in person, Gray, Flat, and Svin had seen her only two days ago.

Touko Aozaki appeared into the light, looking in amusement at the Servant and her Master.



I didn't know how I was meant to react.

One side of the conflict was a Ghost Liner.

A warrior from the past who had been recorded onto the Throne of Heroes.

The other side was the Grand Puppeteer.

The pinnacle of modern mages, who had been under a Seal Designation not long ago.

Both sides carried kinds of mystery that had already been cut off from the world, and it was a miracle that they even existed. Both were strong enough to shake the very foundations of the Clock Tower. Nobody could have predicted that they would end up facing off against each other in a cavern underneath the Department of Modern Magecraft.

Moreover, what would happen if a fight really broke out between them?

“I believe it’s the first time we’ve been properly introduced, Miss Aozaki.” Dr Heartless said, bowing from behind Faker.

Touko acknowledged the greeting, and then stopped at a certain distance from them.

“I’ve heard rumors about the famous Dr. Heartless ever since I was still a student. It’s a pity that I’ve never really gotten to know the Department of Modern Magecraft. ...Thank you for showing me something interesting, though.”

Seeing Touko eye the surrounding area, Heartless tilted his head.

“You mean, the Portal to Spirit Tomb Albion?”

“Oh, don’t play dumb, former department head. You’ve even gone the effort of charging in with a Noble Phantasm. The portal is only part of it. You should know more about the special properties of this place than I do, shouldn’t you? I’ve only just come here, after

all.” Touko said, slowly walking to the side. It seemed like she wanted to observe Faker and Heartless’ expressions from a different angle.

“Like the Wandering Sea(the Baldanders), for instance. Or the sea of no return(the Bermuda Triangle).”

I had heard of both of those.

One was the final Mages’ Association, along with the Clock Tower and the Atlas Institute, constituting of a group of mages who blindly revered the Age of the Gods. It only appeared once every year.

The other was a patch of ocean famous in the West for swallowing everything.

Touko’s footsteps echoed in the underground cavern.

“The two work differently, but the results are very similar to this. ...Ah, it’s like a bubble floating to the surface in a can of soda, disappearing as it appears, and appearing as it disappears. Speaking of which, my favorite type is still the slightly sweet kind in glass bottles. Do they still put marbles in them in Japan?” Touko said, closing her eyes as if she was reminiscing about the past. “The coordinates of Spirit Tomb Albion probably haven’t been precisely recorded on the Texture of Human Order. Therefore, it wanders about irregularly, changing coordinates in a way almost like the concept of quantum behavior in modern science. Because it does not need to depend on reality, it can appear almost anywhere. A part of Spirit Tomb Albion that was meant to be tens of kilometers below the earth could exist near the surface at the same time.

“In other words, though it sounds ludicrous, the isolated space itself is wandering about.”

The space... is wandering—?

Those words seemed weird no matter how I thought of them. However, they still made sense in an uncanny way.

I suddenly thought of the games my brother played.

Sometimes special stages would appear out of the blue. Sometimes there were bonus stages. Other times, they were extra stages with unusually strong enemies. Though they appeared in different ways, they were both spaces that appeared outside of the regular order.

And what if this place was like that as well?

“A bubble that was separated from Albion disappeared and reappeared, only to disappear again. Bubbles formed this way are connected to Albion, but they inevitably disappear after a while. Neither the mages of the Clock Tower, the Secret Autopsy Division, nor the Survivors have noticed this. However, as the former head of the Department of Modern Magecraft, you know that a bubble like this would appear underneath the old school building. ...And how is that?”

“Impressive, Grand Puppeteer.”

Heartless’s smile remained unchanged.

“...Your Highness...”

“...Yes. If that’s the case, we’ve found the person who smuggled artifacts in the Department of Modern Magecraft,” I said, quietly confirming it.

The source of Heartless’ money had always been unclear. He had used quite a great deal of money to fund Yvette’s bids on the Rail Zeppelin and to procure the linden leaf during the case at the Twin Towers of Ilsema. But a space like this that allowed him to take artifacts periodically from Albion would explain it all.

However, a question remained.

Why would Heartless want to go to Spirit Tomb Albion now?

Why would he go as far as to trample Slur Street with a Noble Phantasm, and why would he pick this time?

Just as these questions circled around my mind, Heartless tossed out a question of his own.

“And why might you be here, Miss Aozaki?”

“Oh, I accepted a commission to do some investigating. This kind of commission doesn’t usually suit me, but I suppose that’s just the way the world works. The commissioner was one of your students, you know?”

Touko’s gaze pierced straight through Heartless.

“I’ll get to the point. What did you do to your former students?”

...What did that mean?

I wasn’t even able to understand why Touko wanted to ask that.

However, a frown appeared between Heartless’ well-groomed eyebrows.

“Well, that’s a bothersome question,” Heartless said with the expression of a teacher whose student just found a mistake in his lesson.

After a moment, he responded calmly.

“I told them to dedicate their lives to the most radiant thing. In response to that, they went to search for the most radiant things in their lives, and that was that.”

“I see. That’s not a bad way for things to be settled. But why would you want to head to Albion? Why would you give up being the department head and plan this over the course of a decade?”

“The reason for that is incredibly boring,” Heartless said. This time, a faint smile appeared on his face. “No matter which other mage you asked, the answer would probably be the same. The reason was too boring, too trivial. Like getting pricked by thorns when you pick flowers.”

Heartless’ voice was as calm and even as usual.

It was just for something as simple as picking a flower, and getting pricked on the finger.

I felt furious. Had he hurt my Slur Street for something as petty as this?

In response to that, Touko brought up a new name.

“Do you remember the student named Kurou?”

As I expected, Heartless’s expression still remained the same.

“All of your other students are traceable, even the ones who have gone missing. This student is the only one of whom no one has records. The last mention of him was around ten years ago, before you resigned your position and left the Clock Tower.”

“.....”

Heartless was silent.

Invisible blades clashed between Heartless and Touko. It was the same as the atmosphere during the Power Lunch with Lord Trambelio. However, the fact that these two people were liable to start actually fighting with each other at any moment made it different.

“Either way, I didn’t expect you to be here,” the red-haired mage said, changing the topic. “Who commissioned you? Who would go all the effort of asking the Grand-ranked Puppeteer?”

“It’s not that big of a deal. I’ve been asked to do all sorts of things. Someone’s even asked me to put a personalized puppet in the corner of an exhibit. This is just another boring job. ...Ah, I’ve really gone a long way in the past couple of years.”

“With this timing, it must be someone related to the Grand Roll, isn’t it?”

“I won’t answer that question,” Touko said, smiling.

Heartless was careful to pause briefly before he spoke again.

“This is slightly troubling for me. I would prefer to avoid as much conflict as possible before the new department head comes... That was my plan, but I really didn’t expect to meet you here. If you won’t answer my question, I’ll have to play my cards.”

“Can’t we just have a nice conversation?” Touko said, shrugging. She turned to walk away, but stopped to ask something else. “Are you planning to let me go?”

“You must be joking. Besides, you’re a bit too smart. You pose around as much of a threat to me as the entire Clock Tower. If you don’t mind, I’d like to hear a little more of what you want to say.”

“Oh, let me try my hand with a modern mage,” Faker said, eyes ablaze.

Heartless hadn’t expected this, either. He gasped and looked to the side, where Faker stood, smiling.

“Oh dear. I’ve ignited the fighter’s spirit,” Touko said, looking up to the ceiling as if she had predicted this outcome but still wanted to avoid it. As if she knew she was playing with fire, but still wanted to stop it from burning a house down.

“In that case, I don’t have a choice.”

A noise sounded as she shook her head.

She did not even need to incant. That was why Faker and Heartless were caught off guard.

Suddenly, lines of text written with magecraft surrounded the two people. My eyes told me the runes shimmered exactly along the path Touko had taken to walk here.

Did that mean she carved out words with her feet!?

What monstrosity of a technique was this?

“I used a rune that creates runes, which I made a while ago. Since I’m back in London, I’ve decided to keep some on me.”

Rune Magecraft was a type of magecraft that had once been extinct.

It was impossible for mages to revive types of magecraft that went extinct along with their magecraft base. The families who believed that only a fragment of Rune Magecraft still existed gradually died out, still refusing to let go of said fragments.

The one who revived this extinct art was Touko Aozaki.

For that great accomplishment, the Clock Tower granted her the rank of Grand.

And now, the runes beneath her feet began to multiply. In the blink of an eye, it changed from hundreds to thousands, and a cloud of runes enveloped the Master-Servant pair.

“It is mass-produced, but I hope you don’t mind. Here, take the fire of Ansuz!”

Usually, the rune that represented fire was Kaunan. Ansuz was used in rituals to the Gods. Runes could sometimes be used as language. Other times, they represented the gods themselves, so the ones who cast them could channel everything that gods personified. Thinking of the thunder god invoked lightning. Thinking of the fire god invoked fire.

Fire in that scenario was more than just fire. It was a rune selected especially to burn the powerful mystery that this Servant held—!

“Faker!”

I thought I heard something in the cyclone of flame.

And then, something else.

“Aello.”

A gust of wind blew past us.

This mysterious wind extinguished the flames created by thousands of runes as soon as they made contact.

“Burning Heroic Spirits with the fire of the gods is a good idea. You’ve also created plenty of fire. But don’t you think directly invoking the fragments of gods works more in my favor than yours?”

Faker was different from modern mages, because she was a mage from the Age of the Gods who could directly utilize fragments of the power of the gods. Though all sorts of natural phenomena have lost their connection to divine power after the Age of the Gods, it was still possible to make use of their power. For example, if the person using it was a Servant from the Age of the Gods...!

She didn't even leave a pause for Touko to use more magecraft.

“Nereides!”

If the name from just then referred to a Harpy in Greek Mythology, this was the term that referred to the goddesses of water.

Immediately, the water in the air became solid and bound the arms and legs of the Grand-ranked mage.

“Haha, is this the high-speed incantation of the Age of the Gods?” Touko said, laughing. “All spells like that only require One Count regardless of how much Mystery they contain! It’s more like a bug than a cheat, even though they’re completely different.”

However, even though her movement had been restricted, that did not stop her.

A sharp whistle sounded throughout the space.

She had probably already finished her preparations for the next step when she summoned the fire. After the whistle, a crystal damselfly(*TN: made a mistake, damselflies, not mayflies*) landed on her shoulder. It was not just the first one, either. One after another, damselflies began to gather until it looked as if a tower of crystal had surrounded the orange mage.

Then, the crystal began to change shape, until it looked like the barrel of a cannon. The entire swarm transformed into these, and they aimed themselves toward Faker and Heartless.



あたかも、それは砲門だった。

蜉蝣の一匹ずつが部品となって寄り集まり、いくつかの巨大な砲門となって、
フェイカーとハートレスに牙を剥いたのである。

——第一章より

“You wouldn’t know it, mage from the Age of the Gods, but shape-shifting toys are very popular now. Do they sell them here in the UK as well?”

“I think there are Transformers toys. Those were first made in your country, weren’t they?” Heartless replied.

“Thank you for teaching me something new,” Touko said, closing one eye.

Then, Magical Energy gathered at the muzzle of the cannons and shot out in unison.

Those chunks of Magical Energy had been carefully controlled, and were powerful enough to affect Servants. Heartless went without saying, but even an excellent mage was still a human being. If they were hit with these bullets, death would be inevitable.

The wind was whispering.

The bullets fired, creating huge clouds of dust. As the cavern trembled due to the explosions, I saw something with my eyes.

Faker’s shadow dashed through the dust cloud like a gust of wind, and Heartless stood behind her, unharmed.

“—A Magic Resistance skill! No, is it a Passive Skill?” Touko exclaimed, immediately realizing the reason behind this incredible result.

Perhaps that skill was the crystallization of her entire life spent as the shadow of Iskandar, drawing all of the curses onto herself. All of the magecraft that had originally been intended for Heartless veered to one side and struck Faker.

As she ran, the talisman she was wearing shattered.

Perhaps that had been made when she was still alive to protect Iskandar. The bullet which would have been able to harm Servants became nothing more than a breeze that blew at her hair.

“Your precision is beautiful,” the Servant muttered. “Everything from your thought process to your readiness for battle is remarkable. Your spells are far more accurate than mine. You are a mage worthy of recommendation to my king.”

For someone like her, that was undoubtedly the greatest compliment possible.

“—But you’re still too fragile!”

Suddenly, the air in the cavern had been cleaved apart. However, Faker’s strike stopped a few inches before it could split Touko’s skull without making a sound. The blade quivered as it stayed there.

“—Well done, Svin.” I said in a low voice.

“Thank you, Your Highness,” he responded pithily.

Svin was the one who had stopped the Heroic Spirit’s sword. He had enveloped his body with Bestial Magecraft.

However, it wasn’t just Bestial Magecraft, the hand that had caught the sword was covered in silver armor that did not interfere with the Bestial Magecraft. That was to say, it was armor made from adjusting part of Trimmau. After seeing Faker absorb the ammunition shot out by the crystal damselflies that had turned into guns, I had ordered Svin to join the fight and manipulated Volumen Hydrargyrum.

“—You...”

“My apologies!”

The beast’s howl struck Faker directly in the face.

This was also one of the ways to use Bestial Magecraft. A single shout would have been enough to make a regular mage faint. Though it wasn’t enough to kill Faker, it was enough to make her lose her composure.

Touko, who had leaped backwards with Svin, waved her hand. The magecraft constraints summoned by Faker were dispelled in the space of a few seconds. As usual, she easily pulled off things impressive enough for anyone to be struck speechless.

Touko looked toward me and closed one of her eyes.

“I thought you would come in at some point, but I didn’t expect that just then.”

“Haha, I don’t think I could have missed that time,” I said, scratching my head with a wry smile. Though we had tried our best to hide it, the Grand-ranked puppeteer still saw through us.

“Thank you. By the way, can you help protect me from that scary-looking warrior over there?” Touko requested, looking up.

“Svin, get ready.”

“Understood.”

Svin stood in front of us, and we stood in the back. Touko and I were not suited to hand-to-hand combat. If Faker got close to us, we would lose our heads immediately. A tense atmosphere still permeated the space, and the smell of the earth that had been scorched by the shockwave from the bullets seemed to clasp at my heart.

“Can you help us?”

“Of course. I’ve already made preparations in case I don’t have enough runes, but mages from the Age of the Gods really are a different sort.”

Touko paused briefly to smile.

“Fragility is par for the course. I am a vulnerable woman, after all. I suppose that’s still better than being called old, though.”

“I’d wish you didn’t sound like you’re having so much fun.”

“I’m sorry, but it’s impossible not to sound happy,” Touko replied.

That was true. It was only natural for a regular mage to be so fascinated by the mysteries of the Age of the Gods that they were witnessing for the first time to the point where their own lives valued less than it.

That was how different mages from the Age of the Gods were from the ones in modern times.

The high-speed incantation from just then was an example. No matter what modern mages did, they would be bound by certain restrictions. The depth and power of magecraft was automatically determined by a Single Action of Magical Energy, and how many counts it demanded, from one to ten. Even Touko's Rune Magecraft required prior preparation, so it might even be more labor-intensive.

However, mages of the Age of the Gods could easily bypass these restrictions.

The depth of a spell that only needed a single word to activate could be enough to deceive the entire world. That was why Faker could break through the torrent of runes Touko had activated with a single word. Since the depth of the magecraft was different, there was no way to compare their accuracy and strength directly. That was how paradoxical phenomena could be completely overwritten.

When my brother and Gray had fought atop the Rail Zeppelin, she had not been able to showcase her true prowess as a mage—

“Are you one of Lord El-Melloi II’s students?” Heartless muttered from behind his Servant.

“Yes. I am the oldest and most accomplished one of them all, Svin Glascheit,” Svin said, emphasizing that he was the oldest and most accomplished.

There was only a slight difference between him and Flat, who was also in the old-and-accomplished group. However, between the two of them, this seemed to be an important distinction.

To match with his Bestial Magecraft, the mercury armor slowly flowed and changed, becoming thin silver hairs on his arms.

“—!”

Suddenly, the armored hand became hazy.

I had not noticed Faker approaching.

And then, there was the sound of two hard things crashing against each other. The sound happened twice, no, thrice. The continuously reverberating echo had probably been caused by a number of sounds many times greater than that.

Svin's reflexes, which were beyond the capabilities of the strengthening of regular mages, allowed him to meet all of Faker's attacks. *Volumen Hydrargyrum*, the Mystic Code created by the person who used to be my brother, Kayneth El-Melloi Archibald, was also enough to parry Faker's attacks.

Sparks flew and scattered all across the underground cavern.

Svin leaped up countless times. His speed gave him a slight advantage. I could only follow the shadow that zoomed around the cavern with dazzling speed. I felt Svin's rhythm and tried to make instantaneous adjustments to his armor. Both Svin and I understood that in order to win against a Servant, we needed to push Svin to the limit.

—I'm sorry, brother! I thought.

He had told us to retreat immediately if we met Heartless and Faker. However, we could no longer follow those instructions. Though meeting Touko Aozaki had been a complete coincidence, my instinct told me that there wouldn't be a better chance to fight Heartless.

At the same time, there wouldn't be a more intense crisis.

At the center of the whizzing shadow, Faker tossed down her sword. I could only assume that she had just tossed it down without a specific direction in mind.

In the instant that it was in the air, the blade drew forth a splatter of crimson.

It took me a few seconds to realize that the arc of red in the darkness was a sign that Svin's stomach had been grazed. The sword had slashed straight through the mercury armor.

“Svin!”

“Aaahhh!”

Realizing that he had been caught, Svin performed a counterattack, controlling his nerves and muscles to keep the bleeding at a minimum and slashing wildly with his claws of mercury. This was the supreme Mystic Code, created with Bestial Magecraft + the magecraft of the El-Mellois, with enough power and speed to slice apart steel and enough mystery to harm Spirits.

However, Faker was able to calmly parry the vicious attacks that came from every direction. It didn't look like it had taken her much effort, and it was as if a switch has been clicked in Svin's heart as his claws were deflected again and again.

It wasn't just that, either. Faker either dodged or destroyed with the supporting bullets fired from the crystal damselfly-guns around her with a single word of high-speed incantation.

“...!”

I inhaled sharply.

Faker was a mage from the Age of the Gods, as well as a proficient warrior. I knew all of this. However, I didn't know that she had tricks like this up her sleeve.

“What an interesting student,” Faker said as her blade continued to clash against Svin's claws. Her voice was powerful and piercing. That was probably an important ability to possess as a general on a battlefield in an age without communication technology.

“I've seen mages that use the power of beasts before in the East. The mages of the Indus were difficult to deal with, too. I would have had much more trouble if it wasn't for the boy that led the way for us. Haha, the wine he brought was delicious. Though it did get my king drunk, and the results were far from pleasant.”

“.....”

While I adjusted Volumen Hydrargyrum, I recalled a certain legend.

It was a story about Iskandar's eastward expeditions. When researching my brother, I inevitably had the opportunity to look up the Heroic Spirit he summoned, who should have had a story like this.

According to some sources, the young soldier who guided Iskandar on this expedition was Chandragupta himself, who later founded the Mauryan dynasty in ancient India. Historic characters like this were scattered all around the world, forming the basis for history. That was another proof that Iskandar was more than just a hero.

And the Ghost Liner in front of us was his shadow.

“This is what I did then.”

Magical Energy only flickered in the woman’s eyes for an instant. It wasn’t just a One Count spell, but a Single Action that could be activated with Magical Energy alone.

The Mystic Eyes of Compulsion. Though it didn’t reach the rank of Jewel or Gold, it was a Noble Color that could still be called a crystallization of mystery. Naturally, that wasn’t a level that pathetic Mystic Eyes like mine could reach. I froze, along with Svin, his Bestial Magecraft, and the mercury suit of armor.

“What a shame,” Faker muttered.

She wasn’t mocking us. Honest regret seeped from those words.

“If you had fought ten or maybe twenty more battles, you might be able to struggle. If you were in my brother’s army, half a year of training would have made you a formidable warrior.”

By “brother”, she was referring to the real Hephaestion.

Then, Faker also stopped as she was in the process of slashing down with her sword. She looked up, behind Svin and beside me.

“—This is a modern answer.”

Touko, who had bunched up her hair with one hand, was also looking at Faker. Realizing what had happened, I swallowed.

There was a light shining from one of Touko’s eyes.

“—That Mystic Eye is quite impressive,” Faker said in a small voice.

“But don’t you want to move right now?”

I couldn’t see Touko’s eyes, but I saw the Magical Energy there.

What was she trying to do—?

Could it be called an ultra-high-precision Mystic Eye?

If I wasn’t mistaken, there were lenses inside her Mystic Eye. There wasn’t just one or two of them either. There were roughly more than twenty lenses there, each performing its own role, increasing the precision of the Mystic Eyes exponentially. As a result, it was capable of overwhelming Faker’s Mystic Eyes and preventing her from moving.

“Modern cameras and projectors all use multiple lenses. Different groups of lenses take care of different things, like focus and correction. Combining them all creates a single lens that is more effective. I’ve built a system of virtual lenses inside my Mystic Eye. Ah, that’s exactly what they do to help patients with glaucoma or cataracts. Putting lenses inside people’s eyes is very popular in modern science.”

However—

“How bothersome. I didn’t manage to block it. I can’t manipulate Magical Energy properly this way.” Touko said, looking to her feet.

Faker wasn’t the only one whose movements had been restricted. Faker’s Mystic Eyes had also captured Touko, freezing her in place. Touko’s familiars also lost their ability to fly and dropped to the floor.

And then, behind Faker, another mage nodded casually in approval.

“...Wait—”

“It seems like the curse of the Mystic Eyes has also been absorbed by Faker.”

Even Mystic Eyes could be pulled off course by her skill.

The rare talent that allowed her to guard Iskandar in the past functioned exactly as well in the present. It had even protected her Master from the Grand-ranked puppeteer's trap, causing us to sink into despair.

Heartless touched Faker's shoulder, dispelling the effects of the Mystic Eyes.

“That scrawny mage also used a similar trick to dispel my Mystic Eyes, after all.”

In response to Faker's words, Touko frowned.

“I see. Then I'll have to complain to Lord El-Melloi II that he taught his tricks to an enemy already stronger than himself,” she said with a pout.

To that, Faker lightly tapped her sword.

“Well then, do you want a simple decapitation? Or do you want me to command you to kill yourself? I can force you to do plenty of things, but I feel like you'll set some kind of trap if I do something complicated like that.”

“I'm glad you think so highly of me. As a mage, I'm already satisfied, so I'd prefer it if you made it quick.”

“—Faker, don't kill her,” Heartless interjected. “It's a trap. Touko Aozaki has a trump card that only activates when she dies. If it gets activated here, we would all die. You, me, and maybe even everyone in the Department of Modern Magecraft.”

“Hm.”

Faker's sword stopped.

Touko sighed quietly.

“You've already seen everything at the Twin Towers of Ilsema, haven't you?”

“It was an honor to have witnessed the abilities of a Grand-ranked mage. Though it was a bit expensive to have spent so many artifacts, it was well worth it.”

We already knew that Heartless was the one who funded the purchase of the linden leaf that had sparked the incident at the Twin Towers of Ilsema.

Heartless had probably monitored all the events there somehow. Of course, he had probably also thought through how he would act in a fight.

“Your goal isn’t to destroy the Department of Modern Magecraft, is it?” Touko asked in her usual tone.

Though she had been completely cornered, there wasn’t a trace of concern in the mage’s attitude. It was more like they had met each other, said a polite hello, and then shared their magecraft. Now, it was time to wax philosophical and talk about things like the nature of arrogance and honesty.

“If that was the case, you would only need to trample the place with that chariot. It’s such a powerful Noble Phantasm. There are only an extremely small number of modern mages who would be able to counter something like that. After all, what are you meant to do with a speeding chariot from the Age of the Gods? But you didn’t do that. Instead, you want to head to Albion. Why is that?”

“What do you think?” Heartless answered a question with another question, smiling.

It was a smile so innocent that no one would expect from a man who had been the head of a major academic department at the Clock Tower and who had dealt with many Lords and nobles.

In response, Touko responded with an expression that was extremely typical of the Clock Tower.

“The same went for the fight just then. If you just found us bothersome, all you would have needed to do was trample us with that chariot. Though not having enough Magical Energy to do that is part of the reason... that’s not all, is it?”

After a brief pause, she continued.

“You still haven’t answered me about your students, either.”

“.....”

“I’m getting a little tired of this, to be honest. The Secret Autopsy Division will reveal the corpse today. That student was called Calugh, right? I have a question regarding that corpse.”

“Well, you’re as terrifying as I thought you would be, Touko Aozaki,” Heartless said.
“Faker, freeze and dispose of her.”

“Alright.”

She didn’t kill Touko, so that was how they would deal with her. What fragment of a god would she call on this time? Just as a word was about to escape her mouth—

“—Now!”

“Trimmau!”

In response to my cry, the mercury armor surrounding Svin began to move.

Volumen Hydrargyrum had no eyes, making it(*TN: her?*) immune to Faker’s Mystic Eyes. The mercury transformed into a blade that slashed toward Faker’s face. For an instant, the Servant was forced to blink.

Faker had only been disoriented for an instant. However, the instant was enough. The fallen damselflies awoke again, fluttering into the sky.

Those were Touko Aozaki’s familiars!

The familiars that had combined to form a cannon split apart again. This time, a strange light shot from them and created a giant image on the ground.

“You showed me something wonderful. I should return the gesture,” Touko said in a low voice.

A strange cry came from beside her feet.

Rather, it was a noise that our ears could only register as an unintelligible cry.

At the Twin Towers of Ilsema, Gray and I had witnessed Touko Aozaki's familiars. That had been the projection of a cat, created by a projector. In the months that had passed, this genius had already created a more advanced type of magecraft.

Now, there were multiple projector-like familiars that shot out beams of light. As if it had peeled away from the ground, a strange, three-dimensional shadow appeared.

"How will you fight back this time, mage from the Age of the Gods?" Touko said confidently with one eyebrow raised. Immediately, a strange force that affected all of us appeared.

"—It's shaking!"

It was an earthquake.

No, it was more than that. Earthquakes were rare in this country, and my eyes told me that this shaking was more than a physical phenomenon. Those eyes did not reach the level of Faker's Noble Colors or Touko Aozaki's crystallizations of modern technology, but they were barely able to notice changes in Magical Energy.

"Is it already time to move on?" Heartless said, as a faint flicker of disturbance appeared on his face. "Faker! This location is trying to return to Albion! If we stay here, we'll be trapped!"

"Hmph—!"

With a click of the Servant's tongue, the chariot moved in the darkness. She leaped onto the chariot that she had not used in the battle, possibly because of the size of the cavern. She pulled down on the reins of the skeletal dragons, and the chariot shot toward the portal. However, the Touko Aozaki's shadow familiar dashed forward as well.

I did not witness what that strange creation was capable of. However, those claws did manage to hurt the mage of the Age of the Gods.

"Touko Aozaki—!"

Something bounced off the ground. It reflected the light, and the faint sound of metal sounded beside my feet.

“...A coin?”

It was undoubtedly an antique.

Someone’s face had been carved onto its surface. But why would something like that be on a chariot?

Just as I thought about that, the change accelerated even further.

The ground itself was shaking, like someone waking from a nightmare, or floating up to the surface of water. I saw the world welcome dawn, converge, leap, collapse, reconstruct itself, burn, freeze, and then create everything that existed in the present.

“Ah...!”

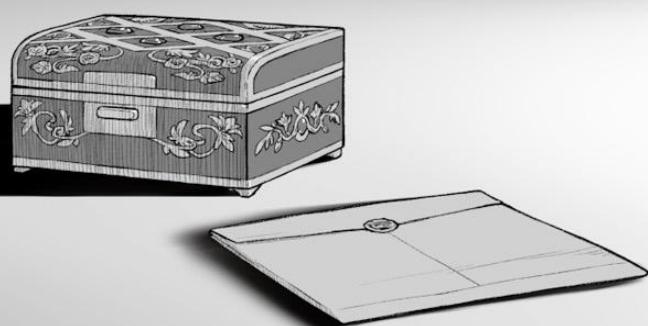
“Your Highness!”

Svin’s cries seemed so distant.

As the Servant and her Master dove into the portal, my world shattered into nothingness.

◆ 第二章 ◆

~Chapter 2~



My mentor and I stared blankly at the sight.

It was almost as if it had been bombed. The buildings had all been shattered, and huge pieces of rubble had pierced into the earth. It was obvious at a glance that this wasn't just the result of magecraft. In terms of destructive power alone, it could probably even rival Rhongomyniad.

How was I to believe that this was Slur Street?

Though I had only been here for about six months, I had studied and lived here. Now, it was almost all in ruins, like a battlefield that had been trampled over. The only thing it had in common with the Slur Street we knew was probably the damp wind of a London winter.

“—Did Faker do this?” My mentor uttered one word at a time, looking like someone who had already died. “Did Faker and Heartless, do, this?”

Seeing the staggering gait and the expression that looked like he wanted to crush every piece of broken rubble, I pressed a hand to my chest.

I suddenly got the strange thought that he might be made of glass. After all, he looked like he could shatter at any minute.

“Professor!” A voice called out from beside the road.

“Flat!”

Waving cheerfully, Flat hastily ran to my mentor.

Perhaps this was the first time my mentor greeted the teenager with this kind of expression, as Flat always brought trouble with him.

“What happened? Are the other students and teachers safe?” My mentor asked hurriedly, with a complicated mixture of emotions in his voice.

“Um, Reines told me to help the other students get to safety. I don't know where Svin and Reines are because they went to investigate, but all the others are alright.”

“Reines told you...?”

As he said that, someone else came to speak to him.

“...Oh, you’ve finally arrived, Lord El-Melloi II.” (*TN: He actually just calls him “the second”*)

It was Mr. Shardan, an old man who looked like someone’s grandfather, with sparse gray hair, an anchor styled beard, and a wrinkled shirt. He had been a second-grade lecturer in my mentor’s version of the El-Melloi Classroom since the very beginning.

“Are you alright as well?”

“Hahaha, you did tell us to strengthen Slur Street’s defenses, after all. Hardly anyone inside the buildings was hurt.”

I was dumbfounded by what Mr. Shardan said.

They had prepared for this beforehand?

My mentor had probably thought of every tactic he could to fight against Heartless. This one happened to be of use. However, my mentor’s expression did not clear up in the slightest.

“Flat, where did Svin and Reines go to investigate?” My mentor asked, after confirming once again with Mr. Shardan.

“Well... they followed the light in the sky to the old school building.”

Hearing his response, my mentor gazed toward the building with the same corpse-like expression. Then, he began to stumble his way there, and I hurried forward to stop him.

“Wait! Sir! We don’t know what happened yet!”

“How could I not go?! That’s my little sister and my student!”

Though his face was pale, he did not stop to rest. Despite the fact that he had just been confronted with the intolerable truth that Heartless wanted to summon Iskandar, my mentor still persisted. Although he was probably so overcome with fear, shock, and a

sense of duty to the point where he couldn't think of anything else, he continued in the only way he knew how to live.

At this, another voice called out to my mentor.

“...I didn’t think you cared so much about me. I’m so flattered I feel like I could spit fire. Unfortunately though, I’m not at the old school building.”

“Miss Reines!”

I felt like my heart skipped a beat as I saw the young woman appear from behind me.

“Hello, Gray.” Reines said, waving gently. “Hahaha, it was pretty dangerous, but with Svin protecting me, I managed to escape. Svin’s getting treated for his wounds right now, but we’re both okay. Don’t worry.”

Reines let out a light yelp after she finished speaking.

That was because I gave her a tight hug.

“G-Gray, what-”

“Thank God...”

With a sigh of relief, I rested my forehead on the young woman’s shoulder. The warmth I felt from her reassured me that it wasn’t a hallucination. I was really sorry that my tears dirtied her outfit, but at that moment, I didn’t think about that.

“Oh, um...” Reines said, suddenly at a loss for words. “...Sorry.”

It was the first time I had heard that word from Reines. The warm, gentle hand that was patting my back probably also belonged to her.

“There’s another visitor, too. Someone who’s met you before,” she said, gesturing with her chin.

My mentor and I stared at that person with widened eyes.

Touko Aozaki leaned against a wall that looked like it was about to collapse, wearing a dark blue jacket and slowly looking to us. Even in the shade of the building, her red hair stood out as much as ever.

“It seems like I need to thank you.” My mentor said, trying his best to hide his shock.

“I just happened to be there to help. I didn’t think I’d meet a Ghost Liner.” Touko sighed, shrugging.

She looked like she had just been in an intense battle. In that case, that meant she had just fought that Servant in an even fight. Though I knew she had an unimaginably large stash of tricks up her sleeve, I hadn’t thought that she would be capable of this.

“I’m just here to settle a score with you from back at Ilsema. Can you return what I lent you?”

“You mean, this?”

After a slight pause, my mentor took out a box of cigarettes from his jacket pocket.

I finally noticed what the box of cigarettes Touko had left with my mentor back then was for.

“You kept it on yourself the entire time?”

“I just didn’t know when I’d meet you again. ...The way we met last time was an exception.”

“How well-prepared of you,” Touko said, smiling and putting one of the cigarettes into her mouth.

My mentor handed her a match, and she exhaled a puff of smoke after savoring the taste.

“...Ah, it’s absolutely horrible.”

Though she was probably referring to the taste of the cigarette, I got the feeling that she was commenting on something else.

After a short while, purple smoke began to rise slowly from the ruins of Slur Street.

My mentor did not rush her, and only asked his next question after he saw her finish.

“What happened?”

“Oh, you mean under the old school building?” Touko said, tapping the ground gently with the tip of her boot. “There’s a piece of Spirit Tomb Albion down there.”

“What...?”

“It’s already gone. It’s a bit like a wandering space, the kind that’s irregular and brief. Dr. Heartless is really as talented as they claim if he managed to identify an irregular space like this. I planned on having him tell me everything, but he managed to escape in a flash. I can’t believe he managed to escape after making me go that far.”

I could only understand about a half of what Touko said.

However, Reines nodded reluctantly, as if she felt the same way. Was this irregularity so difficult to accept?

Then, what did Heartless want?

Did he trample Slur Street in order to get to Albion...? Maybe that was the case. Considering that Heartless used to be the head of the Department of Modern Magecraft, that would mean he wanted to reach the labyrinth even if it meant that he had to destroy a place that was almost like his hometown.

...I didn’t get it.

I could not help but feel that I still didn’t understand the thought process of mages.

“Either way, the only way to catch up with him would be to use one of the four documented entrances to Spirit Tomb Albion. That’s beyond my capabilities.”

As she said this, Touko picked up her suitcase and put on her glasses. Like before, her voice became gentler.

“So, what do you plan on doing?” She asked, narrowing her bespectacled eyes.

“I...” My mentor began. He covered his face with his hands and shook his head feebly.
“...I don’t know.”

“Sir...” I inadvertently interjected, surprised at how frail his voice sounded. It was almost like a flower that could wither any second.

“I don’t know what I should do anymore...” He confessed in that same, scarcely audible voice.

“What a disappointing answer,” Touko responded, after a pause. Her words were so cold I had trouble accepting that she had said them with her glasses on.

No. It made more sense this way.

Putting on glasses only charged her mannerism and attitude. Her nature remained the same. Even though her priorities were somewhat altered, the conclusions she made would not change. In other words, regardless of which Touko Aozaki this was, she would respond to my mentor’s attitude the same way.

My mentor was silent, so Touko continued.

“What did you see?”

“...I should probably tell you, as thanks for your help just then.”

After hearing my mentor summarize what we had seen, Touko nodded.

“I didn’t see that coming. I’ve also heard of that Seal Designated spell created by Emiya.”

Since it was under a Sealing Designation, it had probably shared the title with Touko for a while. For that reason, it would make sense for her to understand the spells of a mage who shared her fate.

“I see what you mean, and I understand why your answer might be lacking. You don’t know why Dr. Heartless wants to summon Iskandar, right?”

“...Yes,” my mentor said as he nodded, in a voice that was completely devoid of determination.

It had probably already taken all the energy left in him to muster the strength to go searching for Reines and Svin. It was almost as if he was a candle that had already been burnt up, but at least a spent candle could be replaced.

“Have you already decided not to go after Heartless?”

“.....”

My mentor did not respond. I could see him using all of his strength just to prevent himself from collapsing.

“I have something else I want to tell you,” Touko said, turning around as she was about to walk away. “I’d advise you to pay more attention to the corpse from the Secret Autopsy Division.”

There was probably some important meaning behind her words. The Touko Aozaki I knew wouldn’t toss out something like that if it was useless. Though I couldn’t comprehend it, my mentor probably did.

“.....”

However, he kept his head down and remained silent.

Without mercy or contempt, Touko left her whispered words behind her, in the shadow of the trampled buildings of Slur Street.

“Goodbye, Lord.”



—An entire day had passed.

Slur Street recovered much faster than I had thought it would.

The use of magecraft went without saying, but there were also regular vehicles used for construction. It really fit the name of the Department of Modern Magecraft. Apparently, this kind of work was sometimes given to companies backed by the Clock Tower to keep it secret.

However.

My mentor hardly left his office.

After he checked with all the students and teachers one by one to make sure they were safe, he shut himself inside his office. When other members of the Clock Tower rushed over to try and figure out what all the commotion was about, he only did the bare minimum of what was necessary to respond to their questions.

Even the students who usually tailed my mentor around the place kept their distance when they saw the haggard look on my mentor's face. No matter how much they admired him, there was no way to easily talk to him like this. ...That was what my mentor's expression was like.

After Svin had been treated, he and Flat busied themselves with dealing with those students. Along with the teachers, they cleaned up the classrooms, reorganized schedules, and evaluated the essays that had just been submitted. Even Flat was surprisingly trustworthy. That was probably part of the many unknowable things his intuition allowed for.

Reines was also constrained by the situation, and left my mentor's office after around ten minutes .

“.....”

And I hadn't even managed to enter my own room.

The dust from the attack had yet to be cleaned, so I sat in the hallway outside his office. Several students and teachers offered me coffee, chocolate, and words of consolation, though. This I was grateful for.

I had only managed to tell Reines about what happened to my mentor at Heartless' workshop.

“...Do you think Sir will be able to pull himself together?”

“Hm... No, not unless something unexpected happens,” Add replied from the hook at my right shoulder. “It’d be pretty normal to cry about something like that for an entire year. Think about it. Everything he’s based his life around has suddenly been turned upside down in the worst way possible. That guy doesn’t have the mental capacity left over to deal with this.”

What Add said was overly truthful.

I also thought that it made sense.

Considering how much my mentor had been hurt this time, I didn’t think there was much hope for him to recover.

—The Grand Roll centered around the redevelopment of Spirit Tomb Albion was about to begin.

—Heartless wanted to summon Iskandar.

—Heartless and Faker had suddenly attacked Slur.

—And finally, a part of Spirit Tomb Albion appeared below the Department of Modern Magecraft periodically. Using it, those two had slipped into Albion.

Just one of these four would already be impactful enough.

On top of that, Heartless’ students had gone missing, and one of them had been murdered in a locked room at the Secret Autopsy Division.

“Back then, that old guy, Lord Eulyphis, said that the Grand Roll was being held in three days. That’s February the second, which is... tomorrow. Well, it’s hopeless now. We’ll just have to make up our minds without him.”

“.....”

I couldn’t make myself reply to that.

Stones rolled around inside my heart, tumbling into my body and crushing my soft insides. I knew I needed to do something, but the pain made it so hard to stand up.

Though my mentor's office was right in front of me, I felt like it was thousands of meters away.

“.....”

I shouldn't go talk to him.

My mentor had the right to lock himself inside his room. Who could blame him, after everything he had worked so hard for shattered into nothing? Maybe the right thing to do would be to wait until he got himself together.

But what would I accomplish sitting here in this hallway?

This was just mere dependence. If I considered what would be best for my mentor, I should be preparing to help him as much as possible as soon as he got back on his feet. That was what Flat, Svin, and Reines were doing now. Even if I couldn't do what they could, I should still be of some help.

“...But...”

My words fell apart before they left my mouth.

I couldn't accept that, even if it seemed to make sense.

Though I had seen the look on my mentor's face, I could not ignore him, no matter how much he dismissed others.

“But... I...”

My voice trembled.

My feet were numb from sitting for too long. But I couldn't stay seated.

I stood up slowly, staring at the door that was across from me. I didn't have the courage I needed, but that didn't matter.

I just needed to walk forward.

I took one step, and then another, walking forward like I was praying.

My heart hurt so much.

This was terrifying. I would rather die a hundred times than be rejected. But my hand still moved upward and knocked on the door.

There wasn't a response, but he didn't tell me not to come in either.

“...Can I...?”

I turned the handle of the door to the office.



The ceiling was so high up.

No, that was basically a sky.

It blanketed the ceiling as far as the eye could see, glowing inconceivably in all sorts of colors. Everything, from the light, the colors, to the air, made her feel incredibly refreshed. Perhaps this was because of the fragments of Mystery that remained underground. No, like that Touko Aozaki said, if the coordinates were undetermined, it might not even be fitting to call this place underground. In the distant past, the underground was sometimes treated as the land of the dead, so it might be more reasonable to call this place another realm of sorts.

Spirit Tomb Albion.

Situated deep down in the earth, beneath the Clock Tower.

It was a world where physics could almost be ignored, which could only be reached by diving tens of kilometers downward.

...That said, was this another sky under the ground?

She had never seen something like this when she had served under her unrivaled king. If she brought these memories back with her, this would be another thing she could boast about.

...Did that mean she would talk to those bastards that betrayed the king?

A spark of dark fire suddenly flared up in her heart.

Of course not.

There was a tide of emotions inside her that she could not control. The passion that had once driven her to wish to conquer the world had become seething hate toward her former comrades.

After she had been summoned to this world, she learnt of the bloodbath that had ensued after those who used to serve the king fought to become his successor.

The Wars of the Diadochi.

Of course, there were people who Faker could never see eye-to-eye with, like the secretary Eumenes. But she couldn't understand why people like Olympias, the king's mother, or other great generals would massacre one another for something like this.

Even if it was all because the king himself had left the vague will of letting "the strongest" rule.

"...Is anything the matter, Faker?" A voice called out to her.

"Nothing you would care about, Master. I'm just thinking about something," Faker said, shaking her head and looking down.

They just happened to be resting. The Clock Tower might already be keeping a watch on them, so they didn't go through the Mining City. Instead, they moved according to Heartless' directions.

Twisting open the cap of the hip flask she was holding, Faker took a sip of wine and sighed.

“Good wine. Makes me feel like the gods are sitting right beside me.”

“Your gods are very generous, aren’t they.”

Hearing Heartless’ words, Faker smiled.

“Of course. Everything is a gift from the gods, from chaos to confusion. Being reasonable won’t take you to every corner of the world, so your only salvation can be found in getting dead drunk.”

“...I see. It still feels strange to hear that from a mage from the Age of the Gods.”

“Don’t say that. Modern spells aren’t that different from the ones I’m used to.”

“So the key lies elsewhere. You called the Grand-ranked Puppeteer fragile, didn’t you?”

“Yes,” Faker said. “It’s honestly shocking. Magecraft in this era hasn’t just fallen behind by a couple of steps. It’s already an entire dimension away. The only reason why they even managed to bother us is because they don’t have the same goals. I don’t have any idea how many more tricks that Aozaki has hidden up her sleeve.”

“...Indeed.” Heartless agreed.

The same went with the projected familiar she had wanted to use at the end. There was no knowing what she could do. Faker wouldn’t underestimate the mentality of someone who was from a remote place like Japan, rose to the rank of Grand, and challenged a mage from the Age of the Gods.

“That’s why I have more I want to ask her. I guess we should count ourselves lucky that we managed to escape before she could play all the cards she has.”

With a huff, Faker took another sip of wine.

“All we have to do now is blast through to the right place in this giant maze before the time comes, right?”

“Yes. But we spent more Magical Energy than I expected.” Heartless said, lowering his gaze with a somewhat embarrassed look.

What a strange Master, she thought.

Though the arrogance of a mage seeped from his seemingly polite words, there was also a fragment of boyish innocence there. He was different from the king she had served, and the brother she had trusted. That was why she didn’t think it was bad to temporarily pledge her allegiance to him, now that she was summoned to the present.

Of course, her soul was still with her king.

However, for the time being, she didn’t mind obeying this man’s words... That was because he interested her, in a way that she hadn’t seen in the army she had been part of.

Therefore, she offered him a few rare words of condolence.

“You’re the one who actually suffers from that. I’ve only received the bare minimum amount of support from the Holy Grail. Do you still have enough stored?”

“I still have plenty.”

“There’s nothing to worry about, then.” Faker said, nodding slightly. “From now on, it’ll be our battle, right?”

As she spoke, she looked to the door-like shape made from several twisted trees.

That was one of the few entrances to the Great Magic Circuit within Spirit Tomb Albion.

Ah, to be honest, she was quite happy.

Right now, she stood in front of the end of another world, which her king had not seen.

“What floor are we heading to again?”

“The one hundred and seventy-fifth floor of the Great Magic Circuit. There are some shortcuts, but the structure of Albion is constantly shifting. It’s very unlikely that the stabler shortcuts are still where they used to be.”

“Wonderful. That’s just the right amount of effort needed to motivate me. That’s why modern mages come to challenge this place, isn’t it?”

“Actually, when modern mages come here, only around twenty percent of the creatures will pursue a straight fight. The rest can’t really be considered opponents anymore. They’re here to explore the maze and excavate for artifacts, not to fight. Sometimes, they’ll even trap and capture them live.”

“Oh, we’re pretty different, then.”

Not having to act the same way modern mages did made her surprisingly happy.

“Just in time,” Faker said, smiling bloodthirstily. “Let’s go conquer Spirit Tomb Albion, Master!”



The door wasn’t locked.

I saw my mentor inside the office, sunk into the sofa.

He looked like he had suddenly become decades older. Not even a fatal disease would make him like this. It was as if something had drained all of my mentor’s life force away.

He sat there, unmoving. Occasionally, his eyes would turn to the window to observe the construction.

“...Sir?”

There was no reply.

I didn’t know what I expected from that, actually.

And so I waited. I'd done similar things before. Even if he didn't move or speak, I would continue to wait. Even if the world was going to end, and even if it actually disappeared, all I needed to do was wait.

Like Lord Eulyphis had said, there was only one day until the Grand Roll. What would happen then? Would the El-Melloi Faction be dismantled? What would even happen to the Clock Tower if Heartless reached his goal?

According to Reines, he described his own motive as boredom. But no one could deny that small motives can lead to terrible consequences.

Who knew kind of unexpected things a former department head who summoned an unconventional Servant who went to challenge Spirit Tomb Albion would achieve?

I felt like my heart was being gently squeezed.

I found it hard to stay still, but I could only wait.

No matter how long it took for this person to do something else, I needed to wait. Even if my heart ruptured into pieces. Even if I would never stand on my two feet again. That was because this person had given me so much.

“...The first whydunit was established long before we got to that workshop,” my mentor said as the sun began to shift in the sky.

He spoke in a hushed voice, like a broken tape recorder as he stroked the armrest of the sofa.

“Heartless wants to keep this case as hidden as possible.”

“Huh? But—”

It didn't make sense. The Department of Law had already been informed of Heartless' student's death. My mentor had also heard of it.

“That applies to his student's death, and the attack on Slur Street that followed. Even though what he did on the Rail Zeppelin was extreme, that's probably an exception. Ahh, maybe he really wanted to kill us back then. Beside that incident, though, Dr.

Heartless has always been extremely quiet. I originally thought it was just out of the instinct of a mage to conceal Mystery, but even after he summoned a Servant like that, he's still staying silent."

Just listening to the content, my mentor's words were as careful and thoughtful as usual.

However, none of his regular insight or perceptiveness could be found within them. The words seemed deflated and full of tension at the same time, and those paradoxical elements tangled into knots inside him. He spoke like he was only restating the results to something he had already calculated earlier.

Even so, I hurried to gather all the fragmented exclamations that nearly spilled from me and formed them into a coherent question.

"...Why would he want to do that?"

"That illustrates the scale of what he plans on doing to the World of Magecraft. If word got out, all of the factions in the Clock Tower would rush forward to stop him. If they didn't do that, everything they send can easily be blown away by his Servant. There is basically no one in the modern age capable of going against a Heroic Spirit."

"....."

Thinking back to our fight on the Rail Zeppelin, I inadvertently shivered. I knew full well that no one would be able to fight a Heroic Spirit.

Svin, Reines, and Touko Aozaki hadn't been able to stop them, either.

So what was left for us to do?

"...Can the Clock Tower stop a Servant, then?" I asked, after thinking for a moment.

"Yes, that would be possible," my mentor said. "For instance, Faker is a mage from the Age of the Gods, and she uses the chariot that once belonged to Iskandar as her Noble Phantasm. If you made it so that she could use it infinitely, it would be hard for the mages of the Clock Tower to stop her."

“Infinitely?”

“Generating infinite amounts of Magical Energy to activate the Noble Phantasm would be impossible.”

“...Oh.”

I stood there with my mouth open like an idiot as he pointed out an obvious fact.

“Beside that, the rules of the Holy Grail War mean that Servants must have Masters. It would be hard to fight the Clock Tower while simultaneously protecting him. Maybe a surprise attack would work once or twice, but she’s a mage from the Age of the Gods.”

At this, my mentor put a hand to his mouth. The wrinkles between his brows deepened. Even though he was just replaying theories he had already come up with, something must have come to him.

“However, Heartless chose to play his cards here,” he said, looking out the window in the direction of the old school building. “Perhaps he thought that the Clock Tower wouldn’t care if something minor happened at the Department of Modern Magecraft. Actually, other departments have already noticed this incident, but it doesn’t look like we’re being monitored. If Heartless decided to go as far as to use Faker’s Noble Phantasm, there must be some deeper meaning behind this.”

According to what Reines had told me, Svin had come to a similar conclusion about Heartless’ actions.

Maybe it was because students shared the same world as their teachers.

My brain couldn’t catch up with all this, so I could only envy this bond from the side.

“In other words, Spirit Tomb Albion is their final destination. Even if they play their trump card here, it doesn’t matter if the Clock Tower begins to pay attention. As long as they go past the Mining City, they’ll be outside the Clock Tower’s reach.”

“.....”

Their final destination.

They had snuck into their destination, to a place where the detective would not be able to follow, and where the answer they hoped for lay. They had basically won already.

Before we noticed, we had already reached the endgame.

When had that happened? And how?

Words spent, my mentor leaned back on the sofa again. He was already done talking about the conclusion he had reached at the workshop. What he said just then was not a sign of my mentor regaining his strength. To me, it just felt like he wanted to empty himself of all the strange things that he had not had the chance to expel.

Though he didn't seem sad, he looked... cold.

I wanted to pray for him.

I had come all this way alongside him.

I knew that mages didn't believe in God, but I still hoped for a miracle.

As I was digging up the forgotten words of prayer in my mind, I turned around.

There was a knock on the door.

My mentor did not tell the visitor not to enter. Instead, he slowly made his way to the door.

A worried Mr. Shardan stood there.

“...Is something the matter, Mr. Shardan?”

“Oh, I saw your disciple from the window just then,” the old man said, looking down and smiling kindly. “The construction's going as well as it possibly can. As per your instructions, we requested help from Mr. Norwich, and he obliged immediately. We've never used the old school building anyway. ...We've set up a Bounded Field to prevent people from going underground, and the only thing we can do is hand it to someone trustworthy. But there's more than just the ground down there.”

“Thank you.” My mentor said. Though his words themselves remained the same as usual, they didn’t carry any emotion.

However, the tightness in my heart still eased slightly.

“...I’m so glad.” Mr. Shardan said.

“...For what?”

“I’m glad you let your disciple into your office. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have dared to come in either. ...I actually thought that no one would be able to come into this room. But you didn’t tell her to leave. I’m glad that you two have cultivated a relationship like this.”

“.....”

I didn’t think I was that important to my mentor. But the old lecturer’s steady words were very convincing. They seemed to cover me with a blanket of warmth, and I felt tears prick my eyes. That must have really come from the bond that had formed between my mentor and I.

“...Yes, yes. Wonderful,” he reiterated, nodding. “In that case, I’ll leave this with you, too.”

Mr. Shardan placed a fancy-looking Dulles bag on the table, and slowly took out an incredibly thin envelope.

“This arrived this morning. It’s addressed to you.”

“A letter?”

Along with my mentor, I slowly turned to see the name written below the wax seal. It nearly made me let out a gasp of surprise.

“...Atrum Galliasta...”

It was the name of a mage who had already passed away.



“Sir...”

After Mr. Shardan left, my mentor asked me to open the envelope. There was a silver disc inside.

If I recalled correctly, this was a Compact Disc.

“It doesn’t seem to contain a virus,” My mentor said, checking its contents using the computer inside the office. Because it would be frowned upon by people from other departments, it was usually hidden away in the bookshelf.

“...Could someone have faked the letter? Is it a trap?” I inadvertently asked.

Atrum’s name coming up at a time like this really surprised me. There was definitely a reason to suspect that it was one of the innumerable traps that spanned the Clock Tower.

“I’m not a computer expert either. I just ran it through an antivirus software. If there are any subtle mechanisms beyond that level, I won’t be able to tell.”

“What if there’s some kind of magecraft that puts a curse on the computer?”

“That subject is currently being studied in the Department of Modern Magecraft. According to my knowledge, it’s still far from complete. Atrum Galliasta did enjoy collecting strange Mystic Codes, so he might know more than I do.”

After a moment of thought, my mentor clicked down on the mouse, and a person appeared on the screen.

It was the same tanned man that I remembered.

“I didn’t think that it would be a video.” My mentor muttered.

Of course, it was Atrum Galliasta, the mage who had fought Flat, Svin, and my mentor at the Twin Towers of Ilsema, and died a few days ago in the Holy Grail War in the Far East.

I never thought that I would see him again on a computer screen.

“Oi, is this thing on?” Atrum said, holding out his finger from inside the screen.

His voice made me jump, and I couldn’t help but grab onto my mentor’s sleeve.

The last time I had met him was around a week ago. In the screen, Atrum remained exactly as I remembered as he laughed and shrugged.

Interlacing his fingers, he continued.

“Wonderful, wonderful. ...Well then, if you’re seeing this, unfortunately, that means I lost. Hahaha, how embarrassing. I said I wouldn’t repeat Lord El-Melloi’s mistakes, but I still failed.”

His defeat had not been decided when he recorded this. However, there was a sense of truth that could not be ignored in his self-deprecating words. Atrum Galliasta probably had his own thoughts on the Holy Grail War. ...For example, he had already anticipated his own defeat.

Regardless, the Atrum in the screen continued to speak.

“I’ll still try my best, of course. I’ve already invested too much. You told me not to underestimate the Holy Grail War. I know what you mean, and I’ve already made preparations to lose. From now on, I’ll prepare even more thoroughly. But the situation’s becoming more and more difficult. First, I signed a contract with that untrustworthy Servant...”

With a troubled expression, Atrum cleared his throat.

“Got slightly off topic there,” he said, spreading his hands with a smile. “Either way, if I do end up losing, this letter will be sent to you. I have an obligation to do so. After all, it’s the duty of a nobleman to keep my affairs in order, even if I’m already dead by that point.”

For some reason, I understood his reasoning.

His personality wasn't admirable in any way, but as a mage and a nobleman, his character was beyond reproach. None of what he said about duty was untrue. His intentions for recording this recording were genuine. It would be less believable for someone like him to not do this.

At this, Atrum paused for a moment.

Then, he continued to speak again after looking at the camera with an indescribable expression.

"I enjoyed fighting you at Ilsema. So, as a nobleman, I naturally owe you a gift in return," he said, looking to the side. "I hope you can take this. Since you're the worst Lord in the world, it might be of some use."

Inside the screen, a servant of sorts handed him the same envelope that we received.

"Oh, right. If I do win, and this envelope still gets sent to you, prepare yourself. I'll come to destroy you with everything I have."

Typical of him to end off on a bravado-filled note.

Both my mentor and I remained silent and still.

It wasn't because of what Atrum said. No, actually, that was part of the reason, but it was mostly because of what he did.

My mentor took out the envelope again and examined it more closely.

"Should I just pass Magical Energy through this?"

As he said this, he concentrated on the envelope. I didn't know whether or not words appeared on it.

"...What is it?"

"....."

My mentor did not respond immediately.

Then, after a long pause, he finally spoke.

“He didn’t think it would be useful in the Holy Grail War, did he? I suppose that is true. But...”

He stopped.

“...But why would he give me this?”

His hollow voice quavered with something indescribable. But it was something that my mentor had been missing until just then.

Just before he was about to reveal what it was, there was another knock on the door.

“Mr. Shardan?”

“Um, my apologies, but there’s another guest. I should be the one receiving her, but she said she only wanted to talk to you...” the old man said.

“Who’s the visitor?”

To put it in a clichéd way, it was like the ringing of bells. By “it”, I was referring to the voice of a young woman in a cobalt blue dress, with long golden hair.

Luvia gelita Edelfelt was looking at us, with a gaze many times more arrogant than Atrum’s.



“...What a surprise,” my mentor said, lifting his teacup.

Of course, Luvia had her servant prepare tea for us. This time, it was the servant named Clown, who had a Mohican hairstyle. I hadn’t seen him for quite some time.

As expected of the tea that Luvia brought, it was especially rich and refreshing.

I sat next to my mentor on the sofa, also sipping tea. There was an inescapable tenseness in the air as Luvia and my mentor stared across at each other. Mr. Shardan had hurriedly left after leading Luvia here, so I didn't have anyone to rescue me from this situation.

After slowly taking a sip of tea, my mentor continued to speak.

“I was just thinking about how you haven’t come to listen in recently.”

“Yes. Temporarily living here is fine, but if I want to move here for several years, there are all sorts of preparations I need to make.”

Her words were very similar to what Atrum said just then.

Because they are more important than everyone else, they naturally need to make all kinds of preparations. That was how they operated. Nothing could be missed, not even if they died.

Maybe this was a peculiar way of thinking, but it was still a belief that was deeply rooted in them.

“I plan on renting a room in the Norwich dormitory. This time, I’m here to inspect it. I suppose I’ll rent the entire top floor for the time being.” Luvia said, also sipping at her tea.

I almost interjected that visiting briefly didn’t seem like a good reason to rent an entire floor, but I managed to hold my tongue.

It had been such a long time since I had heard her say something like this.

“It’s quite busy down there, isn’t it?” Luvia said, looking outside the window.

Of course, she had probably already done her research about the incident at Slur Street. However, she didn’t inquire deeper into the matter.

“I’ve heard about the Grand Roll, too.”

My mentor froze for a moment.

“...As expected of an Edelfelt.”

“Let me guess, you were just inclined to call me by my nickname now, weren’t you?”

“Think of it however you like.”

Perhaps because she was satisfied with my mentor’s complicated expression, Luvia spoke again as if she was reciting a piece of poetry she had already become bored of.

“Of course, the Edelfelt Family is quite famous, but we have little contact with the other noble families of the Clock Tower. Though we’re part of the Democratic Faction, no one forces us to take sides. I don’t believe prestige within the Clock Tower is that important, but that meeting will undoubtedly shape the future of the World of Magecraft.”

Her words left a deep impression in my heart.

It surprised me to hear her say that the Clock Tower wasn’t the only part of the World of Magecraft.

“It’s just that there’s a slightly vexing point of suspicion.”

The steam rising off of the surface of the tea obscured her long eyelashes.

“A point of suspicion?”

“It doesn’t make sense that the Democratic Faction would request a Grand Roll. The Democratic Faction shouldn’t have a means to create a decisive victory... yes?” The young woman asked, as if she was trying to confirm something obvious.

“...Yes.” My mentor replied reluctantly.

I could only watch as the two conversed. This young woman possessed the air of a queen, the gift of a leader that was rare even among excellent mages.

I never thought that she would already know so much about the Grand Roll.

“...Um, excuse me, but what does that mean?” I asked with my heart in my throat.

For an instant, Luvia appeared to be surprised. Then, she gracefully nodded to my mentor. It probably indicated that she allowed him to explain to me.

“As a premise, if the Aristocratic Faction decides to go all out in the Grand Roll, the Democratic Faction cannot contend with them.”

“R-really?”

I blinked in surprise.

Wasn’t the root of the schemes in the Clock Tower the fact that the two factions constantly resisted each other?

“That doesn’t mean the Aristocratic Faction has more power than the Democratic Faction. In terms of money, information, and influence, the Democratic Faction is possibly more powerful than the Aristocratic Faction. But in a place where only the twelve families who have supported the Clock Tower for centuries can vote, the Aristocratic Faction has a natural advantage.”

A natural advantage.

The Democratic Faction had swallowed up all the mages of the New Age. From Lord Trambelio’s words, I could tell that they had even greater ambitions.

However, as an emerging power, it had a disadvantage in the Grand Roll, where tradition prevailed above all else.

“For example, if the Barthomelois at the top of the Aristocratic Faction decide to make a move, the Gaiuslinks in charge of the Department of Zoology(Chimera) will have to follow, as they are essentially the Barthomeloi’s puppets. In that case, the Archelots of the Department of Botany(Yumina) will also follow,” my mentor said, listing out a few names that didn’t come up very often.

Gaiuslink, and Archelot.

Though I had heard them a couple of times before at the headquarters of the Clock Tower, I hadn't formed an impression of them. Like the El-Mellois, and the Barthomelois, they were members of the Twelve Great Families.

“On top of that, there’s the Department of Spiritual Evocation(Eulyphis) and the Department of Astromancy(Animusphere). All together, that gives the Aristocratic Faction five votes. If you include the El-Melloi Faction(us), there are six. In other words, half of the Twelve Great Families are members of the Aristocratic Faction. By contrast, the only unequivocal members of the Democratic Faction are the Department of General Fundamentals(Trambelio) and the Department of Creation(Valuay). That’s why it doesn’t make any sense for the Democratic Faction to instigate a Grand Roll.”

“...Ah, I see.”

Six against two.

If that was the case, I felt like everything I had thought about up until this point was stupid.

“However,” my mentor said. “This issue isn’t that simple. Even if the Aristocratic Faction— Or rather, because the Aristocratic Faction has such a long history, it isn’t as united as you might think.”

He picked up his cup of tea again.

“Take the Archelots, for example. Though they are part of the Aristocratic Faction, they have a strong influence on the media, and they’ve even been involved in the military in the past. The more members there are, the harder it is to distinguish the traitors. That is the Aristocratic Faction’s greatest weakness.”

“...Oh, okay.”

The Democratic Faction wasn’t even completely united, so the problems were even more severe with the Aristocratic Faction.

“Besides, the Barthomelois don’t act unless it’s strictly necessary. Their authority is absolute, and anything they do will send shockwaves through the entire Clock Tower. If they still somehow manage to lose, their extremities could be taken advantage of. Even

though the main branch of the family will not be affected, their peripheries will inevitably be chipped away at. Adding to this mess, the Neutral Faction never has a solid stance. And that is why the Aristocratic Faction is not always in a position to win.”

“.....”

I see. I finally understood the situation.

A united Aristocratic Faction would be unbeatable, but whether or not they could actually agree was unclear.

“Therefore, the Barthomeloi avoid most Grand Rolls. They operate believing that regardless of what the people beneath them fight about, the Barthomeloi still dominate the Clock Tower.”

“Exactly.” Luvia said, nodding.

It already took everything I had to understand this explanation. But to the two people in front of me, this seemed to be no more than the premise of a premise. It was like listening to the explanation of a chess match between two grandmasters. Their explanation was only the opening move.

“That is why I can’t help but find the Trambelios’ request for a Grand Roll suspicious,” Luvia said, after savoring a dessert handed to her by her servant, Clown.

Luvia looked up. Rather than a conversation between a tutor and a student, it seemed more like they were on the same level. Even though she had already decided to join the El-Melloi Classroom—no, perhaps I should say, for that very reason, it felt like she was judging my mentor with everything she did and said.

“Besides, there’s something else, isn’t there?”

“What do you mean?”

“Once the Holy Grail War begins, it will be over in less than a month, correct?” Luvia said slowly as my mentor frowned.

“Why are you bringing that up?”

Hearing what she had to say next, my mentor fell silent.

“The Edelfelts participated in the Third Holy Grail War as well.”

“.....!”

I never thought I would hear that from this person.

The Third Holy Grail War.

A battle that had happened before the one my mentor participated in. In that case, the participants were from her grandmother’s generation.

Seeing my mentor’s expression, Luvia smiled gracefully.

“Oh? So you didn’t know?”

“...I have done a limited amount of research into you and your family.”

“Well. I’d see why you wouldn’t know that. We didn’t manage to achieve anything remarkable in the Third Holy Grail War. That is a stain on our reputation, so it was not made public. There are still some insignificant rumors regarding it, though,” Luvia said nonchalantly.

I already knew how strong of a mage Luvia was. Her ancestors were probably the same. Even so, the Edelfelt Family had failed to achieve victory, which was an insight into the terrifying side of the Holy Grail War.

She stared silently at my mentor.

...What if, I thought.

She had always been particularly harsh toward my mentor. At first, I thought this was just her natural attitude towards everyone. But what if that was because she had complicated feelings toward him, because her predecessors had lost while he had survived?

“The Edelfelts sent two people to participate through special means, but only one person managed to return. However, you were alone and still remained unharmed. Yes, only someone who has achieved something that my family has not is worthy of becoming my tutor.”

“So you haven’t given up on making me your tutor.”

“I’ve never given up on anything until now, so I don’t know how to.”

As she said this, Luvia held up the bag beside her.

Inside, there was a small box, which was decorated lavishly with gems. Maybe because it was under some kind of magecraft, every gem glittered with an uncanny glow. I could only tell that it was more than just expensive.

“Please consider this as a lecture fee.”

“The Department of Modern Magecraft generally doesn’t charge individuals for listening to lectures.”

“Then take this as an exception.”

At Luvia’s urging, my mentor opened the box.

“...?!”

His eyes widened in shock.

“Why would you have this?”

“I am Luvia gelita Edelfelt. That is reason enough, isn’t it? Do whatever you like with it. Of course, I’m looking forward to having you as my tutor.” Luvia said, standing valiantly. “Like you said before, the Edelfelts’ Jewel Magecraft does not rely on the value itself, but rather how value can be exchanged.”

Those were my mentor’s words back from the Castle of Separation.

It was also why she asked him to become her tutor.

And now, Luvia based her declaration upon it.

“With this payment, value has been exchanged. I await your answer.”

With that, Luvia left without saying another word.

She didn’t look back, either. She had decided what she needed to do a long time ago, and now that it was done, she would leave without a fuss. Those were the duties of a noble who dedicated her time to something greater than herself.

The Clock Tower might see the Edelfelts as outsiders, but to Luvia, her last name embodied her aristocratic spirit. It was ironic in a way.

Following Luvia, Clown bowed and left as well. Only my mentor and I remained.

“...Sir?”

“.....”

The hand that placed the jewels box onto the table was still stiff.

Sitting on the sofa, my mentor took out Atrum’s envelope again and put it beside the box.

Finally, a hoarse voice swept across the table.

“I—”

Like drops of rain, he spoke syllable by syllable.

“I still can’t make myself stop Heartless. No matter what I do, my wishes will get in the way. Even though it isn’t in the way I hoped, I can’t find a reason to risk so much to stop him.”

Word by word, as if he was stopping to think about everything he said.

That must be Heartless' goal. He didn't defeat his enemies. Rather, he made them disappear. It was almost as if it was a quote from the Art of War.

This strategy had undoubtedly captured my mentor.

It was why my mentor hadn't left his office after he checked that Reines and the students were safe.

"And yet," my mentor said, looking at the jeweled box and the envelope.

He didn't have the overjoyed expression of someone who had risen back from the dead. It was more like the expression someone might have as a blade approached their neck.

"It was the same in the Holy Grail War as well." My mentor said. "I only survived because I was lucky. Lucky in the worst possible way. I had no intention of surviving."

He unclenched his hands.

Of course, there was nothing in the palms of his hands, just as the war had not left him with anything that could be seen.

"—You had no intention of surviving?"

"But I was ordered to," my mentor said, with an expression that looked as if he could cry at any moment. "I was ordered by my king. —Live, he said. And that's why I did! No matter how miserable and embarrassing it was, I lived! I journeyed the world, and then came all the way back here, to this tower! I bought the El-Melloi Classroom even though I knew I didn't have the means to maintain it! I even put myself into the shackles of being a Lord, even though I know I'm under-qualified!"

His voice shook the entire room.

Even though it wasn't loud, the emotion in my mentor's voice was too strong and tangible.

I suppose you could call it a mournful cry.

For ten years, my mentor had been tormented by this whirlpool of contradictions. Finally, the devil's hand had found my mentor to be a sacrifice.

"And now, for no reason other than luck, I've been given a choice."

"....."

Was it really just because he was lucky? Was that the only reason why my mentor had made it to this point?

"I should..." My mentor said, in a voice almost indistinguishable from a sigh.

His expression was twisted and his teeth were clenched as he tried his best to urge himself to action.

"I should get up. I have to get up. I have to, because it's what I've always done. Because everyone places their expectations on me. Because I've done something to make myself look worthy of it. Yes, that must be why."

Up until this point, many mages had commented on my mentor.

Some said he was blessed. Other, more skilled mages sometimes trusted him, and sometimes antagonized him. Either way, he managed to rise to a prestigious position in the World of Magecraft.

However.

Who wished for this?

This person had never wished to become Lord El-Melloi II. This person had never wished to hold this much power within the Clock Tower. All of this was only atonement for past crimes. He only inherited the El-Melloi classroom because of what he did in the Fourth Holy Grail War.

But now, my mentor felt like he needed to stand, even with all of this anguish and these contradictions. There must be something wrong with this.

Suddenly, there was a sound.

...Ah.



That was the sound of my hand gently hitting my mentor's face.

"I... don't think it's because you 'have to'."

My mentor stared at me, surprised. Though I hadn't managed to slap him, it should still have hurt a little. Maybe I didn't use the right amount of force. But I couldn't tell, because both my hands and face seemed to be burning.

Why?

I knew I was being unreasonable, but for some reason, I wanted to cry.

"I-I don't... think it's like that."

How should I organize my thoughts?

Simply opening my mouth and making sounds was a meaningless act. I needed to add meaning to it, because I had something to say. Even if it was merely according to my own will, I had something I had to tell my mentor.

That was probably why I had knocked on the door to this room.

“It- I- Um-”

My mentor still stared blankly at me.

That made sense. I had gotten angry and hit my mentor without permission. And now, I couldn’t even speak in full sentences.

My face still felt like it was on fire.

I probably still ended up crying. How embarrassing. I wanted to dive into a crack in the floor and beat myself over and over again for being so mindless.

However, there was something I needed to do.

“I don’t know anything, but... Ahh, t-this is such a mess...! Sir! You’re lazy, you never know what’s going on, and the only thing you do is play games all day! Every time, you only rush over when a case happens and you’re about to die, and all you do is talk about magecraft nonsense! And you start fights with mages all the time even though you’re weaker than all of them!”

“Um- Lady...”

My mentor’s confused voice gradually faded away.

I was already stupid, so just thinking of the right words already took everything I had. There was one thing carved into my heart. Even though I had thousands of things I wanted to say, all of them refused to become coherent sentences.

“But...” I said, desperately wracking my brain. “Sir...I don’t think... you were given anything just because you’re lucky. I don’t think so at all.”

Why couldn’t I think of what to say?

“...Mr. Atrum and Miss Luvia... only gave you things because of who you are. Because of the encounters that have taken place... because they, b-because, that’s why they’ve entrusted you with these things. ...It doesn’t make sense if it’s only because of luck.”

Those words were not meant for me to say.

I had only known my mentor for less than a year. We had met in my hometown, I had become his student in London, and we had experienced multiple incidents together. That was all.

Other than me being presumptuous, what else would this be? The title of disciple didn’t mean anything. It was just there to be more convenient. I was the only one who assumed it was more than that.

Though I knew all of this, I couldn’t stop.

“I-”

I needed to talk.

I needed to use words that could be understood by this person to tell him what I wanted to say.

“I... I want you to be happy, Sir.”

How terrifying.

It was the same kind of fear as the sort that would appear when I saw a spirit. I was terrified of hearing my mentor’s response, terrified of having him scold me. I was scared, so scared, so afraid. I wanted to disappear.

“.....”

He did not respond.

It was as if someone had thrown a bucket of cold water at me. Everything was suddenly ice cold. I didn’t have the courage to look up anymore. Even though I needed to take

responsibility for my own selfish actions, I couldn't make myself. But I also had no desire to run from this place anymore.

Had my mentor been battling these same insecurities all along?

“.....!”

I felt something.

My mentor's hand touched my shoulder. It was a gentle, shaky touch, and his hand shook, but I could still feel warmth and power in it.

“...You're right, Lady.”

“Sir?”

My mentor was whispering something, as if he was checking through a calculation.

“I'm still so immature. I haven't changed at all.”

A wry smile appeared on his tired face.

“You're right. I've forgotten the promise that I made.”

With a somewhat embarrassed expression, he sat back onto the sofa and put a hand to his stomach. From there, a strange noise rang out.

“...Apologies, but could you help me prepare some food? I don't think I can stand up like this.”

“Um...?”

“I forgot that I haven't eaten for an entire day.”

As he said this, my mentor smiled again.

“Ihihihihi! Is that really the first thing you say after your brain starts working again, useless Lord!”

“You don’t have to call me useless. I know that better than anyone else.”

“Hahaha, sorry then!”

Hearing Add’s voice come from the hook at my right shoulder made me so happy I almost wanted to cry again.

“I’ll get something right now!”

Wiping my tears, I turned around and ran through the corridors. My heart was thumping noisily. Everything I had just done was so embarrassing. My ears were probably still bright red. Even so, I was elated.

That was why I missed the hidden emotions in that voice.

“...That’s great, isn’t it, Idiot Gray?”

There was a shadow lurking inside those rare words of comfort.



“—Brother?!”

Upon opening the door, I heard Reines’ ecstatic voice.

We were in her private room at Slur Street.

Similar to my mentor’s office, the room was fancier than the rest of the buildings here. However, now was not a time to think about that.

“Have you done research for the Grand Roll?” My mentor said, eyeing the pile of documents on the table.

“Of course.”

Reines nodded, still surprised.

She had heard about what happened at Heartless' workshop, so her reaction was as expected. I was also in a state of confusion because I was happy about the change in events.

“I have something I want to discuss with you.” My mentor said sternly, with a mouthful of sandwich.

“Sure... but are you alright?” Reines asked, after blinking several times.

My mentor continued to eat his sandwich.

I stood behind my mentor with a platter of tea. I had borrowed the kitchen in the student cafeteria for a while and made a beef sandwich, even though it wasn’t a meal worthy of a Lord.

“Who knows. I still want to run away from everything, but I’ve thought that ever since you made me a Lord.” My mentor said, sighing unhappily.

“What a terrible way to greet your little sister,” Reines said shrugging with a genuine smile. “I see. I’m incredibly busy, but I’ll give priority to my dear brother’s request.”

Reines looked up at my mentor with her patronizing, flame-colored eyes.

“Are you sure you’re alright? I’ve already considered what would happen if you decided to retire here, or even side with Heartless. You’re not planning on doing the latter, are you?”

She wasn’t just asking because they were siblings.

As the heir, she was asking about my mentor’s plans for the future of the El-Melloi Faction, I thought without realizing it. Maybe I was being affected by all the scheming that had surrounded me in the past few days.

“Don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying that helping Heartless is wrong,” Reines said coldly. “Depending on the situation, we could still secure a victory even if we submitted to Heartless.”

Reines' opinions were no more than calculations. Otherwise, a teenager wouldn't have been able to sustain the El-Melloi Faction. No, before my mentor became a Lord, she was less than ten years old.

Only now did I begin to understand what it must have felt like to live in the constant fear of assassination and betrayal.

“...I don’t plan on doing that.” My mentor said, after pausing to take another bite of sandwich.

“Good.”

Reines smiled again. Then, she laced her fingers together as if she was going to pull a trick.

“In that case, what have you come here for, my Lord?”

“I want to talk about what Touko Aozaki said about the corpse from the Secret Autopsy Division(*TN: Arcane! Yes! That’s the word I was looking for! It feels like it fits better than secret but I’ve already called it the Secret Autopsy Division for an entire book. So I guess I’ll stick with the former*).” My mentor said, ignoring Reines’ quip.

“Hmm, okay,” Reines said, nodding gently.

“Three out of Heartless’ five students have gone missing,” my mentor said, raising three fingers. “One of the two left was found dead yesterday at the Secret Autopsy Division. The last person, Asheara, has gone into hiding. We met her at the Secret Autopsy Division, and she seems to agree with Calugh Ithred in thinking that the culprit is Heartless.”

“Yes, that makes sense.”

Asheara Mystras was the dark-skinned woman we had met at the Secret Autopsy Division.

“She didn’t say anything when we said that Heartless’ students had gone missing. Considering that Calugh was considering using monsters from Spirit Tomb Albion to

stop Heartless, she should also have prepared something. ...Of course, it's possible that she has already been captured by Heartless."

Heartless' students. They were my upperclassmen in the Department of Modern Magecraft, as well as Survivors of the labyrinth.

These were their names.

Calugh Ithred - Of the Management Branch of the Secret Autopsy Division.

Asheara Mystras - Of the Materials Branch of the Secret Autopsy Division.

Jorek Kurdice - Freelancer. Calugh's brother.

Gesell Tolman - Freelancer. Potions expert.

Kurou - Freelancer (probably).

“...My apologies.”

My mentor reached into his pocket and took out a cigar. He cut off its tip, and then slowly lit it with a match. After the fire was transferred to the tip of the cigar, my mentor put it in his mouth. His movements felt so familiar to me, and the smell was somewhat calming.

“I know a little about the magecraft side of things, but this is based upon the schemes that are commonplace in the Clock Tower. I'll need to borrow your knowledge for a moment.”

“Please don't put it as if your dear little sister is full of ill intent,” Reines said, shrugging and looking up.

My mentor noticed what she was implying(*TN: With what?*) and continued as he gazed up at the swirling puffs of smoke.

“Right now, we need to figure out why Touko Aozaki emphasized the importance of that corpse. In other words, the reason why Calugh Ithred died there.”

“The reason...?”

I was still confused.

I wasn't confused about Heartless suddenly going after his students. That, at least, I could understand.

Perhaps because he saw my perplexed expression, my mentor elaborated on his statement.

"He has a brother, doesn't he?"

"Yes, I think his name is Jorek Kurdice."

They had different last names because he had been adopted into a famous mage bloodline.

"Exactly. Calugh said his brother was adopted into a different family, and changed his last name as a result. But what if it was the other way around?"

"...The other way around?" I said, tilting my head.

"One brother went to the Secret Autopsy Division, while the other changed his last name after becoming the adoptive son of a local family. What if they separated out of necessity?"

"What?"

Even after he explained, I still didn't understand.

Seeing my increased confusion, my mentor tried to phrase it in a different way.

"Apparently, Jorek and Calugh were alike in both age and appearance. What if they routinely switched places?"

"Jorek and Calugh?"

I had no idea what my mentor was talking about.

However, I started to shiver as if someone had dunked a bucket of cold water over my head. I still couldn't understand anything, but I felt like my mentor was about to reach

something important. Maybe he hadn't stabbed a knife into the heart of the mystery yet, but the blade had struck a critical area.

"Why would they do that?"

"The Secret Autopsy Division has access to information that is not available elsewhere. They even have all sorts of safety measures in place to prevent its members from simply leaking it. For that reason, the two brothers decided to go excavate in Spirit Tomb Albion so they could create an opportunity for them to infiltrate the Secret Autopsy Division. It might seem like a roundabout method, but it's all because Survivors are most likely to be recruited."

My mentor said many things that I could only understand the superficial meaning of.

"That is also part of the reason why Jorek was adopted and changed his last name. That was so it wouldn't be as easy to discern their relationship. Even with the Clock Tower's safety measures in place, the brothers would be hard to differentiate if they used a similar type of magecraft. And even first-year New Agers know how to use magecraft to make two siblings' faces identical."

"Interesting. I see. It's the same technique that comes up in mystery novels, isn't it?" Reines said from beside us, nodding. "We've done something similar before as well."

"...Oh, at the Twin Towers of Ilsema." I added in a small voice.

During the incident at the Twin Towers of Ilsema, they had created confusion by transfiguring someone to look identical to the victim.

Of course, that degree of transfiguration magecraft could not be achieved by regular mages. For brothers, however, it was as easy as using magecraft to apply the tiniest bit of makeup.

"But, would that be worth the effort?"

"It would be worth an immeasurable amount of things. The Secret Autopsy Division has a very strict set of rules in place to prevent disclosure because smuggling is far too profitable. However, if someone prepared another identity and alibi, there are multiple ways to get away."

“.....”

A conspiracy from a decade ago was unraveled by my mentor’s hands. It was a dissection of mystery that was both similar and different from the detectives from mystery novels.

“Ah, that explains how Heartless was able to enter the building without being detected by any bounded fields. If the brothers switched places regularly, there must be some way to dodge the safety measures. Heartless knew how to exploit it because he had already captured the other brother. We have already witnessed how skilled Heartless is at disguising himself.”

On the Rail Zeppelin, Heartless had transformed himself into Caules. Though I hadn’t known Caules for a very long time, Heartless’ imitation was accurate enough to fool us for a period of time. Back then, Heartless had perfectly traced everything about Caules, from his appearance to his speaking and thinking style.

“Under those circumstances, Faker should be able to pass without incident as long as she shifts into Spirit Form. Of course, bounded fields react to spirit entities as well, but most modern mages won’t be prepared for dangerous familiars that can shift between multiple states of being. On top of that, Calugh has already found a way to bypass the rules, making it even easier for Heartless.

“Calugh also attempted to fight back using monsters from Spirit Tomb Albion, possibly because he was alerted of Heartless by his brother’s disappearance. Unfortunately, though, it wasn’t enough to defeat Faker.”

At this, my mentor paused for a moment before he continued in a disgusted voice.

“...Maybe it wasn’t Calugh, but Jorek.”

“...Huh?”

“The corpse we saw at the Secret Autopsy Division. What if they found out that it didn’t belong to Calugh?”

I thought back to that mutilated corpse. With Faker's magecraft, it must not have been hard to create something like that. It probably only took a word or two from her to make a human being look like they had been placed in a giant blender.

But why would they do that?

In other words, what was the whydunit?

"...What if the corpse wasn't Calugh's? So, does that mean it belonged to his brother, Mr. Jorek?" I asked clumsily.

To this, my mentor nodded. "If that is the case, the Secret Autopsy Division could have realized it long ago. Of course, a murder happening inside the facilities is a serious affair, but if they discover that the victim isn't one of their members, they will turn to finding the victim's true identity. What if Heartless considered that to be a grave mistake?"

"....."

His words gradually started becoming fuzzy in my mind.

What was my mentor trying to decipher? What was he trying to reveal?

"That is why Heartless chose to completely destroy the body. He wanted to conceal the identity of the corpse. It would be optimal to take the entire corpse away, but the security measures in the Secret Autopsy Division would not have allowed for that."

"W-wait a moment," I could not help but say. "I understand that it's possible that Mr. Calugh and Mr. Jorek secretly switched places. And that it's worthwhile to infiltrate the Secret Autopsy Division. But when did it start...?"

"...When did it start?"

The person who repeated what I said was not my mentor. Instead, it was Reines, narrowing her eyes and pressing her fingers to her temples.

"...Oh, now I get it. I understand why you came to ask me. So that's what it is."

“Exactly.”

The two of them seemed to understand something that I did not.

“It isn’t just Calugh and Jorek. Heartless’ five students might have had other goals from the very start,” Reines said, turning to explain to me. “In this case... They probably had these goals long before they became Heartless’ students.”

“Huh? Long before they became Heartless’ students...?” I said, frowning.

Seeing my confusion, Reines drank some tea from the cup beside her.

“But that’s... strange, isn’t it? Heartless’ students are all Survivors, right? I can understand it if it’s just Mr. Calugh and Mr. Jorek. But the others have all been trapped in Spirit Tomb Albion for years. How could they all have plans from before that?”

It didn’t make sense.

Of course, this seemed to make sense, with an emphasis on the word “seem”. Filling in one hole only made another one. Like my mentor had said, Calugh and Jorek may have gone into Albion because they conspired to infiltrate the Secret Autopsy Division. But that didn’t mean that everyone had a motive like that, did it?

“Exactly. I’ve done some research, too. Jorek and Calugh were down there for four years. Gesell was there for nine, while Asheara and Kurou were basically born there. Besides, that team has undergone multiple changes before it settled on its final state. Gray’s question makes perfect sense.” Reines said with a strange expression.

Her reply made me breathe a small sigh of relief.

I knew my thoughts were shallow, but I still wanted to understand their thoughts.

“However, Gray, the Clock Tower has already provided an incredibly simple answer. That’s why you came here to confirm this with me, right, brother dear? Even reasonable guesses are meaningless if they’re nothing more than unfounded theories. It’s not a question of whether the culprit is smart or what influenced his actions. Rather, it’s about whether or not the right environment is available,” Reines said with a sigh. “My brother was hinting at a possibility that is much worse than you think. It’s horrible— No,

worse than horrible. I suspect that you might become disillusioned once you realize the true nature of the Clock Tower. It's unfortunate, but it's the truth."

"W-what do you mean...?"

"It's wrong to assume that Calugh and Jorek are the only ones thinking of something like that. Who knows whether they really were freelancers before they went into Albion. Nothing is too much in order to obtain information from the Secret Autopsy Division. It's more natural to think that another organization that wants that kind of information ordered the brothers to spy on them.

"In that case, it's hard to imagine that Calugh and Jorek are the only ones up to something shifty. It takes a considerable amount of skill to survive there. It would be terrible if they died in Spirit Tomb Albion, even worse if they were discovered by the Secret Autopsy Division before they could provide anything useful."

Reines' voice slid over the floor of the office.

A hypothesis more terrifying than what I thought was gradually emerging.

"In other words. There were probably dozens— maybe even more spies sent to Spirit Tomb Albion by a faction in the Clock Tower."

"What...?" I couldn't help but say.

"It's more than just probable— I can almost make sure of it. Entering Albion the proper way requires permission from the Secret Autopsy Division. The range of their investigation will also be limited, so it's perfectly natural for them to send spies down there, isn't it? Even though it might take a decade or two. Maybe even a lifetime."

I couldn't immediately accept what was so "perfectly natural" about this.

Indeed, it might seem reasonable to Reines. If there was a low rate of success, all they needed to do was send dozens of spies. As long as one person managed to succeed, the results would be the same. The people who were thrown away in the process didn't matter.

However—

“Out of Heartless’ students, Calugh and Jorek were definitely spies. Maybe there were other students like them, too.”

I listened in shock.

I felt as if someone was holding a hand to my neck as I floundered about, gasping for air but failing to breathe.

“All of that is to say that the possibility exists, right, Reines?” My mentor said with a deeper frown than usual.

“Yes. It makes more sense that way. The El-Melloi Faction never cared much about Spirit Tomb Albion before our decline, so it’s an oversight on my part. Ah, I wish I’d paid more attention. I don’t know when this kind of infiltration started, and the scale is far larger than I could have imagined.”

“W-wait!” I interjected with a voice that was full of disbelief. “Did all of them just go along with their orders?! That’s more than just dangerous! If they don’t finish their tasks, they won’t be able to leave! That means they might be stuck there for their entire lives!”

What were these people thinking? What kind of tyrannical person would command others to do something that could take an entire lifetime?

“They would just accept it,” Reines said, closing one eye and picking up her teacup. “Mages always belong to families. These families could be in danger of disappearing if they didn’t do anything about it in this age. Branch families of the Three Great Families won’t hesitate to sell the children they don’t need if they see an opportunity like this. Otherwise, they wouldn’t be able to survive in the Clock Tower. It’s not strange at all for them to say things like ‘if you wait in Albion for a couple of decades, you might get to give orders to your younger relatives once they go as well.’ Branch families that have fallen into obscurity often devolve into this state.”

There was an undeniable truth inside the young woman’s words.

Maybe she was like that as well. Within the El-Melloi Faction, Reines came from an extremely insignificant branch family. However, she had been pressed into the role of the heir because she was compatible with the Magic Crest.

She didn't become who she was out of choice. No such freedom existed.

There was nothing Reines could do about the plots and schemes that surrounded her. In the end, she had survived because she was uniquely skilled at this, but she had never wished for it to be this way.

Was that how it usually was?

Did the Clock Tower really sacrifice human lives without a second thought? Or were images just that twisted?

“So... Is it the same for Ms. Asheara and Mr. Kurou?”

“As I said earlier, it’s very possible. Even though they were born in Albion, that doesn’t mean they were free from all the scheming.”

“That’s the...”

I stopped before I finished my sentence.

What I said next was a familiar word.

“...Whydunit.”

Hearing my words, my mentor nodded.

“And that’s how it happened. Now, the only thing we have left is to throw up our hands and surrender!” Reines said, raising her hands as if she was miming a rabbit. “So that’s why Touko Aozaki asked Heartless whose students his students were! (*TN: I don’t remember translating that, so I think I missed a sentence or two. How did I miss something this important?*) Damn it! I should’ve realized!”

Reines had told us that Touko had asked that question.

So that was the answer. It wasn't some kind of riddle. The question meant exactly what it seemed to mean.

"...In that case, the disappearances mean something completely different," Reines continued to say. She was a lot livelier than my mentor and spoke as if this web of schemes was her stage. "What if it wasn't a warning to the students themselves, but to the people behind them?"

"A warning?"

"...Heartless was operating secretly up until that murder." My mentor said, seeing my frown.

He had said something similar in his office.

Reines clicked her tongue and crossed her arms with an expression full of regret.

"Yes, precisely. This way, he was able to influence things without leaving any evidence behind. Making related people disappear is quite a clever strategy. It happens a lot in organized crime, doesn't it? ...No. Wait. If that's the case, what about this attack?"

"If he simply wanted to get to Albion, he would only have needed to take the elevator down after killing Calugh at the Secret Autopsy Division," my mentor said, agreeing with the young woman. "Of course, it's possible that the security measures would render that option unviable. He probably caused a series of incidents out of the same considerations. From Heartless' perspective, attacking Slur Street is almost too ideal. As a way of bringing an end to the serial disappearances, it simultaneously brings him to Albion and pressures the people behind the students."

I could understand this.

Considering that Heartless used to be the head of the Department of Modern Magecraft, he was probably accustomed to such absurdities. To me, however, these conspiracies were more terrifying than the battles I had fought in up until this point. In a certain sense, it was even harder to accept than mages from the Age of the Gods and the Seven Superweapons of the Atlas Institute.

These people used others' lives, livelihoods, and futures as pieces on a chessboard. There was nothing but pure malice in that act.

Reines had said before that the Clock Tower was a melting pot full of schemes. But I had never imagined what living life saturated in it was really like.

Now, I finally understood a small corner of it. It was already enough to make me shiver with fear.

“Do you hate me now?” Reines said with a sigh as she saw my slightly troubled expression.

“...No,” I said, shaking my head multiple times. “No. I don’t. I’ll never hate you, Reines.”

“Good,” she replied, finishing her cup of now-cold tea with a single gulp. Her pale fingers quivered slightly.

Then, she took out a coin from the drawers inside the table.

“Oh, right. I forgot to give this to you.”

The face that had been impressed on one side reminded me of an antique.

“A gold coin?”

“It fell from Faker’s chariot after the fight underground. Do you know what this is?”

“Hm. Let me take a look.”

Putting on his gloves, my mentor stared intently at the gold coin.

“It’s a Gold Stater(*TN: Ancient Greek coin*)... of... Iskandar.”

“A golden coin of... Iskandar?”

“In the area around Ancient Greece, coins were often minted with the designs of kings or heroes. Iskandar was a very well-liked ruler, so the coins were probably worth a significant amount.”

Even at a time like this, his words still seemed to be full of praise. I found this sort of endearing. It was quite evident where the compass in his heart pointed.

“Because of his overwhelming popularity, there are many different types of them. Most of them are based on the ancient coins that depicted Heracles, except with Iskandar’s face instead. Others depict him with horns of the god Amun, who some claimed Iskandar to have been a reincarnation of. Others still depicted him with elephants that signified chariots. They were circulated for more than two centuries, across a surprisingly large area for the time. The coins alone are a testament to how much he was admired as a great hero...”

“Of course you know all this,” Reines said, interrupting my mentor’s tangent. “But do you know why Faker has this coin? Though I suppose it could just be one of her belongings. Maybe it doesn’t have any meaning to it.”

“...Hm. I’m not sure yet. Can I keep this for now?”

“Of course.”

“Thank you.”

My mentor carefully wrapped it in a handkerchief and put it in his pocket. Then, he put the cigar in his mouth back into its case.

“Either way, thank you. There are still many unanswered questions, but now I have a general grasp on the situation.”

“That’s good to hear. Do you have any thoughts on how to turn the tables?”

“I don’t know whether that can happen, but at least we have a general direction to investigate thanks to Atrum Galliasta’s letter,” my mentor replied as he scratched his head unhappily.

“Hm?”

“That’s why I’ll be away from Slur Street for a while. It will take more than half a day just to get here and back. So if anything comes up in the meantime, it will be up to you.”

“What!?” Reines’ expression suddenly twisted. “Wait a minute. The Grand Roll happens tomorrow night! What if something happens?”

“I’ll be back before then. If anything happens to me, you’ll have to take my place at the Grand Roll. You are the original successor, after all. No one will mind.”

“I do! I mind!”

As Reines uttered her sorrowful cries, my mentor and I walked out of the room.

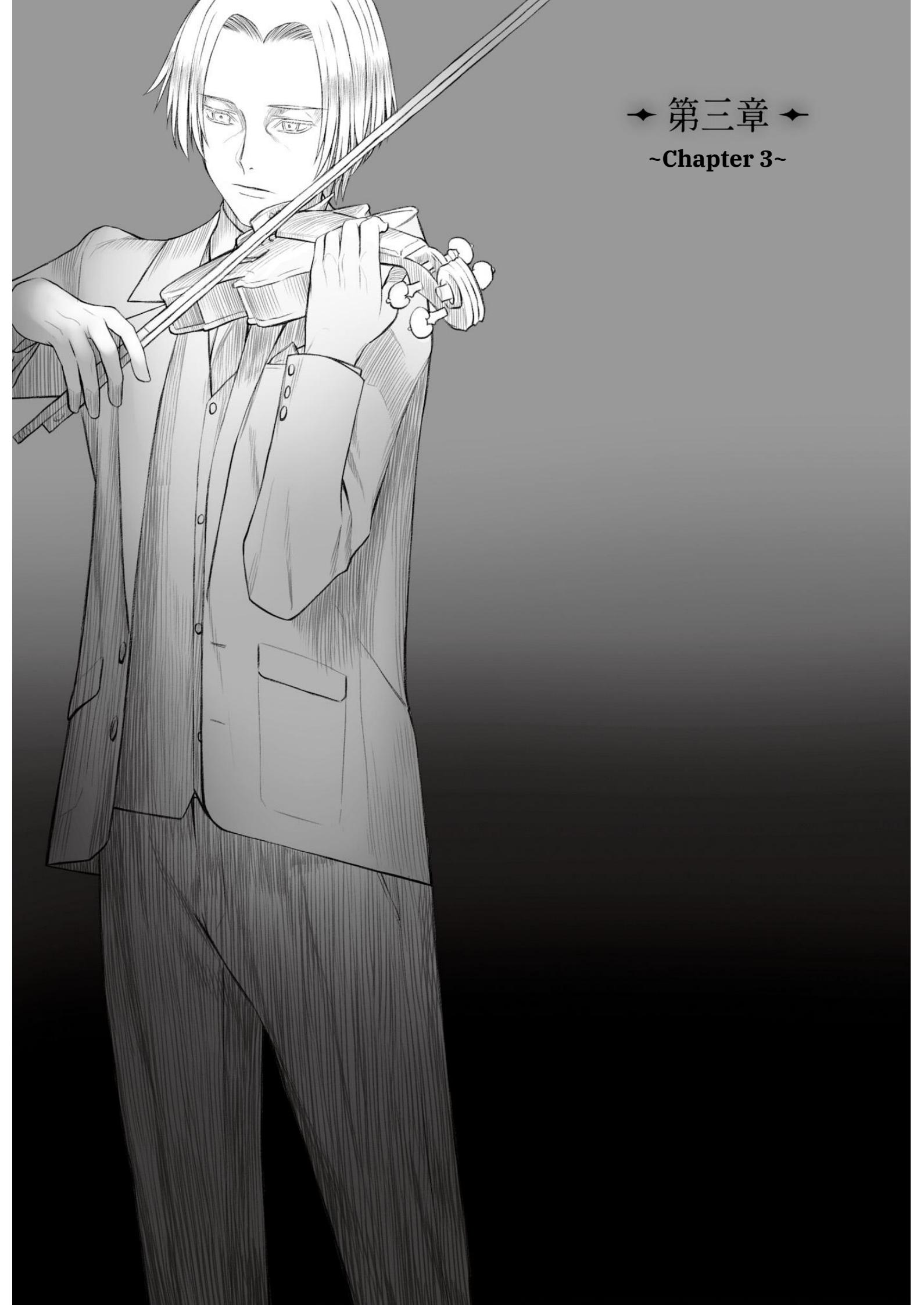
Midway, I stopped.

“Please come with me, Gray.” He said without turning around.

“.....”

That alone filled my heart with gratitude, and I stepped forward in larger strides than usual.

“Yes, Sir!”



◆ 第三章 ◆
~Chapter 3~

To Olga Marie Asmleit Animusphere, going to London was like going to a foreign country.

Her family, the Animuspheres, didn't reside in the cities. Instead, they constructed their domains in the mountains and highlands. Sometimes, they would come down from them to stay in contact with the Clock Tower, but they never did unless they needed to. Nothing about this city felt familiar to her; not the excessive number of people, the overly-crowded buildings, nor the horse carriage that she had been on for an entire day.

However, it would also be wrong to say that she felt a sense of familiarity when she was at home.

Marisbury, her father and the current Lord, hardly left his own workshop. They could only meet several times a year.

So, from her perspective, people were solitary creatures. Since they were selected to be mages, they needed to hold themselves higher than everybody else. She needed to accept this. As long as she didn't expect anything of her father, she could get used to this.

Ah, she had gotten too close to Reines El-Melloi Archisorite because she had shallowly thought that they were in similar positions. This kind of flimsy link meant nothing in the Clock Tower, but she could not resist the urge to talk a little more with Reines.

That was why the attack on Slur Street had left quite a large effect on her.

...What happened? She thought.

She had met Dr. Heartless once before on the Rail Zeppelin. Olga Marie had witnessed his Servant's Noble Phantasm. With a Noble Phantasm like that, trampling an entire district would undoubtedly be an easy task.

However, she couldn't think of why that mage would want to attack Slur Street at this time.

Of course, Olga Marie didn't know any of Heartless' goals. If Heartless wanted to use his Servant to attack, he could do so at any time. What was his motive(whydunit) for choosing to appear right before the Grand Roll?

...Would my father know? She thought.

Marisbury had once commissioned Heartless to investigate the Fourth Holy Grail War, a task that couldn't just be handed to anyone. The two had had some kind of special relationship, perhaps because they had simply met each other, or because they were both heads of departments in the Clock Tower.

Perhaps— even though she didn't want to think about this possibility— they still were in contact with each other today. She could not help but suspect that one of Heartless and her father's schemes had led to her being sent in place of a Lord.

“Is anything the matter?” Came a voice accompanied by a warm smile.

No. There was the unmistakable poison of the Clock Tower hidden in that smile. Olga Marie wasn't quite stupid enough to miss what was hidden beneath those glasses. Her life might actually be easier if she was, though.

“Nothing. I was just... staring into space.”

“Is that so? Remember to take care of yourself, Miss Olga Marie.” Adashino Hishiri said evenly.

Dressed in the traditional clothing of the Far East, Hishiri was a mage Olga Marie had met on the Rail Zeppelin. She had been the one who had just told Olga Marie about the attack on Slur Street.

“Is everyone from the Department of Law like you?”

“Are you interested in this? Hmm. You might become my junior one day, you know, Miss Olga Marie.”

The smile on her ruby lips widened.



“Unfortunately, I’m not sure either. I was recommended as an adopted child of the Norwich Family, so my situation is a bit different from the other students. Some of my juniors have gotten in by being gilded with money, but I don’t imagine that they are the majority. If you want to come, I’m sure you’ll be an outstanding student.”

Successors to families with decent amounts of power usually chose the Department of Law. The easiest way to understand the inner workings of the Clock Tower was to be there. That was why it was common for people to pay their way in, but the fact that these people didn’t constitute the majority goes to show something.

They were currently in a corner of London, in a mansion concealed by a forest.

There was another person with them, an old man who was as fragile as a dry twig. He was the owner of this mansion. Many gemstones adorned his chest and hands. However, rather than looking luxurious, they made him look like a lonely corpse.

It was Lord Eulyphus— Rufleus Nuada-Re Eulyphus.

Within the Aristocratic Faction, he stood for conservation and tradition.

“Leave... lapdog of the Department of Law. (TN: *Or any similar insult*)” Rufleus said, looking at her with his vacant gaze.

“How unfortunate. Here I was thinking that the Department of Spiritual Evocation(Eulyphis) didn’t hate me yet.”

“The Barthomelois... are our king... This has remained for millennia... and will continue to be the case... but we have no reason to have a liking for the Department of Law. ...Even though your department knew of the existence of Ghost Liners... You chose to stay silent...”

“We have an obligation to keep certain things secret,” Hishiri answered simply, taking out an envelope sealed with wax. “I have also been asked to present this letter to you.”

At this, the female mage left the room.

After a while, the old man looked up, and the letter floated upward along his line of sight. This was the Poltergeist phenomenon. Rather than taking the effort to move his fingers, it was easier to use the spirits around him. This power came from the Magic Crest that the old man had inherited. Or maybe it came from the abilities of one of the many jewels around him, but Olga Marie could not understand that much.

After reading the contents of the letter, Rufleus clicked his tongue, displeased.

“What does it say, Mr. Rufleus?”

“In the name of the late Lord Barthomeloi... we should reject the plan... to redevelop Albion... and such. Hmph, of course we should. ...Have they come to confirm it...?” Rufleus muttered, revealing his rows of uneven teeth. “I have predicted this... but there must be some other reason...”

The Barthomelois were the family at the top of the Aristocratic Faction.

Apart from the director who hardly ever appeared, they were the ones in charge of the Clock Tower and the Department of Law. It appeared that as Olga Marie had predicted, they had not ignored the Grand Roll even though they decided not to attend.

“Should we prevent the redevelopment of Albion?” Olga Marie asked after a pause.

“Will the redevelopment bring great benefits to the World of Magecraft like Lord Trambelio claims?”

“You don’t understand... Animusphere girl... There does not need to be a reason...” The old man said, staring terrifyingly at the girl. “We do not need to act... According to Lord Trambelio’s claims... regardless of whether or not it will bring benefits to the World of Magecraft... Those who can reach it will reach it... Those who cannot will not... That is all it comes down to in the end...”

It was precisely because he was an Aristocratic Lord that he was able to conclude this. This was the power of the chosen ones, a dead end that no one beside them could possess.

This, was the nature of a mage.

The Democratic Faction only slightly eased the process of selection. In essence, they were the same. What prevailed in the World of Magecraft was deep-rooted inequality, the illusion of superhumanity, and a sense of oppression that did not fit in with the rest of the world. Olga Marie did not think that this nature would change until the end of the world.

“Now, it is up to that fledgling Lord of the Department of Modern Magecraft...” The old man said bitterly.

Olga Marie couldn’t help but cut in before he could continue.

“But there will be mages after us. Shouldn’t we consider the future of the World of Magecraft for their sake? Mr. Rufleus, you have a successor, Mr. Bram too, right?”

“Haha... Bram, you say?” Rufleus said, cackling. “Like I said... Those who can reach it will do so. The same applies for Bram... If he is capable, he shall... If not, he shall not... Either way, he will end up better than his dead sister.”

“...Do you mean Miss Sola-Ui?”

“Like I said to that El-Melloi... I do not care what happens to Sola-Ui... That child is only a spare... Since my son has already grown up... Sola-Ui cannot become the successor anymore... her job is already complete...”

“.....”

Ten years ago, the then Lord El-Melloi of the Department of Mineralogy(Kischur) agreed to marry Rufleus' daughter. That would have been like a gear to unite the splintering Aristocratic Faction. Though it was one of the innumerable political marriages that had happened, it would undoubtedly affect the World of Magecraft.

However, the marriage never happened.

Olga Marie only knew the final result.

“...The matter with Kayneth was very unfortunate... Although I do not know what kind of mystery... he was working on then...”

“He was quite an accomplished person, wasn't he? It all happened when I was an infant, so I don't understand much.”

“As a researcher, yes...”

What Rufleus muttered was probably the truth.

The former Lord El-Melloi was a first-rate researcher. However, he was no fighter. That was why he lost in the Fourth Holy Grail War.

“...Mages should be this way... Though the Clock Tower rewards those who contribute to the study of combat... mages should not pursue such impurities. Perhaps some could... but not him...”

Olga Marie couldn't help but imagine that this old man also had dreams which were outside of his reach.

He probably wanted to entrust this dream to someone else so they could reach it in his stead.

“No matter what happens... I have already prepared... for the Grand Roll...” The old man said in a low voice.

“.....”

Olga Marie was silent.

Schemes were everywhere in the Clock Tower. There were not many people alive that knew this fact better than Rufleus. He had probably fought in countless battles that this girl from the mountains could not even imagine.

Perhaps those words were a preventative measure of sorts.

Maybe he was making things up to manipulate the young daughter of the Lord of Astromancy.

...It doesn't matter, the girl thought, changing her attitude. ...I'll keep doing what I have to do.

She couldn't help but think back to what had happened on the Rail Zeppelin.

If the incident had not occurred, her life would be so different. She wouldn't have lost Trisha, or known her true intentions.

—“Get it together, Marie.”

That sentence still remained in her heart.

Trisha had said it to Olga Marie ever since she was a child.

As if she had tripped and fallen, her world had changed dramatically. It was only two stones hitting each other, but the chain reaction had caused a massive shockwave. For the first time in her life, Olga Marie had intervened slightly of her own accord in this world which had been overwhelmingly transformed.

Part of this was cooperating with Reines to gather information. Though Olga Marie didn't trust her unilaterally, she believed that nothing would change if she didn't take action.

What is he trying to do? Olga Marie asked herself.

She was wondering about the other person who had given her the opportunity to stay by the words of her governess(*TN: Alternatively, servant*) on the Rail Zeppelin; the young, unpleasant Lord who should be a part of the Aristocratic Faction.

At this, she heard someone suddenly call out her name.

“...Olga Marie Asmleit Animusphere.”

“...Yes?”

“.....”

The girl managed to meet his vacant, emotionless eyes. It was not because she carried the burden of the Animusphere name. Rather, Olga Marie knew that if she avoided them, she would be a disappointment to her governess.

“There is something else on the letter...” the old man said after a pause. “It tells me to keep an eye on the heir of the Animuspheres... and to enlighten her if necessary...”

“S-sorry?”

Olga Marie suddenly tensed up.

To keep an eye on her and then to enlighten her, he said. What did that mean? Since he told her, did that mean she passed? Or would he leave in disappointment, like her father?

“...Just follow me...” The old man said, picking up his cane and turning around. Olga Marie hurriedly followed after him as he walked out of the door and through a hallway.

Though it was a spacious hallway, there wasn't a single other person inside the mansion. At least five or six servants would be required to maintain a house like this,

but there wasn't a trace of them to be found. It had been three days since Olga Marie had been brought to this mansion. During this time, she had not seen anyone but Rufleus.

They walked down the spiral staircase, across the main hall lit by a dejected chandelier, and through a hallway that became narrower and narrower. They passed through two doors. (*TN: Strange detail, but okay*)

Olga Marie saw something that made her eyes widen in surprise.

In the darkness, there was a staircase downward beside her feet.

Why is there a set of stairs here? She thought. Has it always been here?

Perhaps some kind of concealment magecraft had been cast over it. In that case, it must have been something too advanced for her to detect.

“The underground section of the Clock Tower is sometimes called the true Clock Tower... Compared to Spirit Tomb Albion, however... it is only the surface. Nowadays... there are more facilities aboveground than below... but the Clock Tower’s true form is still underground. ...There are many hidden libraries there...” The old man said as he ambled down.

Olga Marie followed behind him, listening to the knocking of his cane against the stone. It sounded like an incantation being recited. Her father had taught her that certain types of magecraft did utilize this technique.

The staircase was quite long. At the end, there was a rusted metal gate. The old man knocked his cane on the ground twice, and the door opened by itself.

The cloud of dust that greeted them made Olga Marie cover her mouth.

There was a strong scent of mold. This place had probably been treated to protect what was inside it, but nothing could defeat the effects of time. Or maybe the smell was the result of some kind of magecraft.

With her strengthened vision, Olga Marie could discern what the room contained. There were rows of bookshelves there, far more than there would be in a regular library.

“Wow...”

“One of the many underground storerooms of the Clock Tower... used to contain special books...” The old man said, clasping his hands together.

There was a white figure standing deep inside the room. Someone not familiar with magecraft would probably scream at the sight, for a skeleton was standing right next to the old man.

Olga Marie believed that it was a skeleton soldier. It made perfect sense that they would select a nonhuman guard who did not need to sleep or rest to guard this place.

At the same time, it was the best proof that this room belonged to Rufleus, the Lord of the Department of Spiritual Evocation(Eulyphis).

“This... is the treasure of the Aristocratic Faction... Usually, it is only shown to Lords... But it is a special time... so you have been given permission...”

“Aristocratic Lords... Then, has Lord El-Melloi II been here?” Olga Marie asked.

The old man sighed as if he had been caught off guard.

“Haha.”

He laughed with the sound of rusted gears creaking against each other.

“Haha...haha...hahaha...hahahahaha... Of course not... Reines would be fine... El-Melloi blood flows in her veins... But a lowly New Ager... Even if he has a little talent and was even promoted to the rank of Fes... Hahaha... of course he would not be brought here...”

Just like last time, he believed there was a strong disparity.

However, Olga Marie did not completely disagree. Since she had grown up in such an environment, perhaps it would affect her children and grandchildren as well.

Swallowing the slight bitterness that was rising up her throat, the girl turned to ask the old man something else.

“What is this library for?”

“...Research, of course... What else...”

The old man indicated for the skeleton soldier to lead the way, and it began to walk forward.

Much like the records of the Atlas Institute, this skeleton soldier probably knew every detail about this library. It traversed the rows of bookshelves without any hesitation and led the way for them, which was remarkable even though it made perfect sense.

As they walked, blue fires ignited on the walls beside them, as if they were welcoming the arrival of their long-awaited master.

“I never thought... that I would hear the term Ghost Liner like this... Nor have I thought... that it would appear here, in London...” the old man said as they walked.
“Have you heard anything... from Marisbury?”

“My father hasn’t said anything to me.” Olga Marie said. Technically, Olga Marie had met the Ghost Liner. She had even fought with the Servant. However, she didn’t think she needed to bring that up now.

“I see...”

“Is there any information related to my father?”

“...No,” the old man said. “Kayneth might know...”

“What do you mean by that?”

Just as she asked that, the skeleton soldier stopped walking.

There was something impossible to put into words here, in what could be called a forest of bookshelves. It wasn’t just magical energy. Rather, it was more like a rich

concentration of history. None of the books were printed. Instead, they had all been written by hand.

“...This one.”

The book that the old man took out had a cover of dust that was thinner than the rest.

He dusted the book off revealing a name.

“...Zolgen?”

“Makiri Zolgen.”

It was a name that she did not recognize.

Judging from the pronunciation, it was probably a Northern or Eastern European name. Olga Marie thought of the cold, dark countries of the North. The people who lived in such harsh conditions must have been able to dispel harsh, terrifying blizzards to have clear minds. (TN: *Or something like that I don't know*)

“These are the records of a mysterious dreamer from centuries ago, a mage who was investigated by the Clock Tower.” Lord Eulyphis said.



It took around two hours to get there by bus and tram.

The scenery became completely different as we arrived. The streets not only became narrower, but also seemed to be smothered by grassy fields and forests.

My mentor and I got off the bus there. After examining a map for a while, we walked for around ten minutes before we arrived at our destination.

After taking briefly with the sleepy old woman at the front desk, she immediately led us into the outpatient section.

We entered a sunlit white hospital room with the tingling smell of disinfectant.

Perhaps because there were no patients today, or because they were on lunch break, there wasn't a nurse in sight. There was soft classical music playing in the room, possibly because it suited the owner's tastes.

Not long after, the person we were here to meet appeared.

"Oh, Hello. Are you the visitor they spoke of?"

It was a doctor of around sixty. Half of his hair had already gone white, and a pair of glasses hung from the front pocket of his white coat.

"Nice to meet you, Mr. Gurrot." My mentor said, bowing slightly. After shaking his hand, the doctor sat in his chair.

"Did you come especially from London to interview me?"

"No."

"Oh? Then why are you here?"

Seeing a frown appear on the doctor's face, my mentor smiled warmly and responded with something strange.

"[We've been close friends for years now.] I just came to have a chat with you because I haven't seen you for a while."

Of course, this was the first time my mentor had seen him. He had just greeted the doctor as if they hadn't met before.

However,

"...Oh, yes... Right." The doctor said, nodding with a vacant look in his eyes.

"Huh?" I couldn't help but say.

My mentor put a finger to his lips.

"Shh. That was suggestion magecraft."

“Suggestion magecraft...”

To be honest, that shocked me more than the doctor’s reply.

My mentor analyzed other people’s magecraft often, but it had been such a long time since I had seen my mentor use proper magecraft.

“Unfortunately, it’s still just my magecraft. If anything contradictory happens, the spell will unravel immediately.” My mentor said unhappily as if he had predicted what I wanted to say. His expression was like that of a child who had it pointed out that they were bad at a subject.

The doctor sitting across from us tilted his head slightly.

“Is anything the matter?”

“No, it’s alright. This is my assistant.”

“Haha, is that so? So you’ve reached the age for that, too.”

Under suggestion magecraft, who did he think my mentor was? What kind of story would be behind a friendship like this? Maybe it would be easier to keep things consistent if the backstory was vague. Though I had attended classes on suggestion, I wasn’t sure of the details.

“So, as I was saying, do you remember your patients from thirty years ago?” My mentor asked.

“...Of course I do.” The doctor replied, nodding absent-mindedly.

“Do you remember someone who now goes by Heartless?”

“__.”

I gasped though I already knew what he was going to say.

...This is what Mr. Atrum mentioned... I thought, recalling what my mentor said on the bus.

—“Heartless has had contact with fairies in the past.”

Atrum had written information about Dr. Heartless on the back of the envelope. There was more information than the back of the envelope could contain. The words had been made into a pseudo-magic formula that showed everything that Atrum had discovered upon reacting with my mentor’s Magic Circuits.

In other words, it was a medium for recording magecraft, much like a compact disc.

It was an idea that was typical of Atrum, who was not averse to fusing magecraft with technology.

—“Though the linden leaf was stolen from me in that auction, it has helped me realize something. He probably thought that sending several people to bid together would be enough to conceal his identity. Unfortunately for him, it is a common technique to hide oneself among the sand in the land that I hail from. We have trained our senses to be able to detect the slightest smell mixed into the wind.”

I felt as if I could see his smug expression, even though he wasn’t here.

However, we had known all of this. When Heartless had first appeared, Melvin had mentioned that there were rumors that the former head of the Department of Modern Magecraft had his heart stolen by fairies. We believed that this experience was also the source of his strange abilities.

It was like the Noble Phantasm that I possessed.

—“You probably know all of this by now, but the problems with Changelings only appear after they return. I’ve heard a story about a Changeling who received the blessings of the fairies after returning to reality. That person was heralded by the Mages’ Association as a genius before that Touko Aozaki came.

Heartless seems to have been sheltered by a doctor. This is as far as I got to, as the Holy Grail War is about to begin.”

This was probably a natural thought from Atrum's point of view. The possibility that Heartless would become his enemy in the Holy Grail War existed, so of course he would do this.

—“I thought that you might be able to make something of this. This is the doctor’s address. And that concludes my thanks for entertaining me.”

His information had ended there.

That was why we had taken the bus to this hospital.

“I’ll tell you then, since we’re such good friends,” The doctor said after a pause.

His white eyelashes fluttered as he recalled the incident.

“Back then, I was still a young man full of aspirations. My late father used to reprimand me for that. But that was why I stubbornly refused when my father said that patient should be sent to a hospital with more resources. I decided to let him stay here.”

In his troubled tone, I thought I saw what the doctor used to be like, committed to his dream and determined to make it a reality. Everyone probably has a phase like this.

“When we first found him, he was covered with all kinds of injuries. I couldn’t believe that he was still alive. His wounds healed surprisingly quickly, but we soon realized a problem.”

“A problem? Was his heart missing, by any chance?”

“.....”

The doctor was silent for a moment.

“How do you know that?”

“I can’t tell you the details, but he told me himself.”

“We couldn’t send him to another hospital,” the doctor said. “He had a pulse, and his blood was circulating properly. But no matter what instrument we used, we couldn’t

locate his heart. It was almost like a dream... I recall that he would sometimes clutch at his chest as if he was in pain like his heart had been pierced through... Ha, to think that he calls himself 'Heartless' now..."

The doctor's voice slowly swept across the room.

Heartless had indeed said something about his heart having been stolen on the Rail Zeppelin.

—"It isn't exactly Imaginary Numbers, but I can do similar things. All in exchange for my heart."

I recalled what Atrum said about the fairies' curse.

"All of this stems from Changelings, also called Kamikakushi(*TN: Alternatively, being spirited away?*)" my mentor said.

His voice resounded across the white-tiled floor of the hospital room.

Though his statement was a bit too short to be a lecture, it was still full of insight.

"The tale of Urajimatarou from the Far East is a classic example of this, where the abducted person is taken to a completely different time and place. It's possible that the only beings who know where Heartless came from are the fairies that abducted him and Heartless himself. (*TN: Can the doctor hear all this?*)"

I didn't know why, but my mentor's words reminded me of the setting sun, a time when the world is indiscriminately dyed in a single shade of orange.

What had this mysterious person received in exchange for his heart?

"..So, are fairies real?"

"There are familiars and Phantasmal Species like them. However, the existence of true fairies is still a mystery that we have not yet fully grasped. In a certain sense, it's a mystery more complex than the magecraft of the Age of the Gods. After all, it was a fairy known as the Lady of the Lake who gave King Arthur her sword, Excalibur."

The mention of that name shook me. No matter how many times I heard it, I would never forget its significance. That name was carved into my soul, and had shaped my entire life.

“He stayed for three weeks.”

“Three weeks?”

“...Ah, how have I almost forgotten? Yes. He disappeared after three weeks.”

“He disappeared? How?”

“Yes. He left on a cold winter morning, leaving only a neatly-folded shirt behind as if he was only an illusion.”

“...The timeframe matches up,” my mentor said in a quiet voice. “Heartless began to be active in the Clock Tower several months afterward (*TN: after what?*). Mr. Norwich might have heard of his experiences and decided to help him.”

“Mr. Norwich?”

“I remember mentioning him before. Dr. Heartless is Mr. Norwich’s adopted son. They call him the Daddy-Long-Legs of the Clock Tower. He adopts and funds people who he believes are talented.”

I did recall hearing this name before. His support was also the reason why the Department of modern Magecraft was named after him.

“Hishiri Adashino also said that he was her brother, right?”

“Yes. Norwhich’s adoptive children are in every department of the Clock Tower, including the Department of Law.. However, there has never been another example of a department head without a prestigious background. Such a miracle can never happen anywhere else except in the Department of Modern Magecraft.”

My mentor’s words seemed to drive a nail into my heart.

It could explain why the Department of Modern Magecraft was frequently underestimated, and why my mentor's position was so precarious.

"Please, think about it some more. Did anything strange happen while he was here?" My mentor asked, turning to the doctor again.

"Strange things... let me think..."

The doctor's expression remained vacant as he looked up to the ceiling.

He had asked himself how he had almost forgotten. Had the Clock Tower erased parts of his memory?

"A mage less terrible than me might be able to dig up his memories. But all we can do now is hope he still remembers something."

I could see a tinge of frustration from my mentor. Would the clue that he had barely managed to catch slip from his fingers?

Finally, the doctor spoke again.

"...Yes," he muttered. "Yes. I remember. Back then..."

The doctor's fingers grasped at the air impatiently, as if he was trying to retrieve something that had been taken away from him. Finally, his hands came to rest over his own face.

"Yes... It was a strange condition..."

"Do you mean that Heartless had a strange condition?"

"No, I did... I had a strange illness at the time. Every once in a while, everything would disappear before my eyes... I didn't just see darkness. It was more like... the sense of sight had left me completely. ...If you think about it, people describe anything they cannot see as darkness. It only lasted for a couple of minutes, but I worried that I had some kind of brain disease. Back then, I was constantly busy fighting with my father, so I didn't have it checked at another hospital."

“However, he cured me with a touch. It really surprised me. I turned around then to see him smiling happily. That was the first time I saw him smile. After that, the symptoms never appeared again. We talked a lot after that. He had a good taste in books. I recommended him some science fiction novels, and he read them impressively quickly and discussed them with me. I introduced him to things like Asimov’s Three Laws of Robotics and Heinlein’s works after he married for the second time. We would talk for hours without me realizing. Ah, I still distinctly remember the feeling of wanting to be an astronaut.”

“.....”

My mentor listened to each word as if he was trying to comprehend an oracle’s enigmatic prophecy.

After talking a bit more, the doctor sighed.

“So, what do you think? That’s all I can remember.”

“I can’t thank you enough.”

My mentor reached out and tapped the doctor’s shoulder.

“Sorry to have bothered you.”

“I don’t mind. I’m glad I got to talk to you after so long.”

Perhaps because sifting through his memory had been incredibly tiring, the doctor leaned back on his seat. The light shining through the gauzy curtains illuminated the wrinkles on his hands, the sign of the passing of time which had chiseled away at the doctor’s ambitions.

“Is he living a good life now?” He said, looking up. “I know it’s a bit strange to be asking this after forgetting for so long, but he was a very nice man. He was suffering himself, but he still cared about me. I even joked that he could become my assistant. If he had said yes, maybe my life would have turned out differently.”

“I can’t comment on his life as a whole,” my mentor replied. “However, he has students that take his words very seriously. His motto was to dedicate your life to the most radiant thing.”

—“Dedicate your life to the most radiant thing.”

That was what Calugh had said back at the Secret Autopsy division. However, Calugh had been betrayed and murdered by Heartless.

The doctor smiled faintly.

“Oh? I was the one who told him that. He said he had no purpose in life, so I told him to search for something radiant to devote his life to. I believe that is what everyone should aim to do,” he said, putting a hand to his heart.

Perhaps this was where the most radiant thing in his eyes could be found (*TN: this sentence is vague. I think it means that being a doctor is his ambition, or something along those lines, but it could also mean that the most radiant thing for him is inside his chest cavity...?*).

“You said he has students, right? Good. That makes me feel happy. Isn’t it strange how many things make you feel happy once you get older?” The doctor said with a smile.

That smile was the last thing we saw before we left the room.



By the time we left the hospital (*TN: probably clinic, actually*), the sun had already started to set.

The landscape here was different from London. There were old-fashioned buildings scattered around the landscape, and grass grew out from the sides of the pavement. All of this was being dyed crimson by the sunset.

I could hear the sound of a bell tolling in the distance. It probably came from the church in the area. All the children who lived here probably used that bell as a sign for them to return home to a warm dinner, where their parents would ask them inconsequential questions about how their day has been.

What was the Changeling doing at this hour? Did he have a place to return to?

I didn't know why, but I suddenly felt a little like crying.

“Did you find useful hints, Sir?” I asked, surpassing my emotions.

“Some of what he said is worth thinking about,” my mentor said, gazing into the horizon. “However, no matter what hypothesis arises from this, it is only a speculation on top of a speculation. I still don't have anything reliable.”

“I don't mind how reliable it is. If it's alright with you, Sir, could you please tell me?”

I didn't feel compelled to ask for an answer, but I did so anyway.

I had only known my mentor for half a year, but I understood who he was. He wasn't a perfectionist, but I knew that his hypotheses were useful to me, no matter how incomplete they were.

“...I'm almost there,” my mentor said. “I feel like I've been chiseling at the wall of a cave. It won't be long until I reach the other side, but I don't know when it will happen.”

He scratched his head in frustration as he thought.

“There's only a little bit left... not until I reach the full truth, but something close to it... But the distance of one step seems too far away...”

“Sir”

“...No, it's alright,” he said shaking his head. Then, he reached into his pocket and pulled out a coin.

“A Golden Stater,” he muttered. “Like I said back at Slur Street, all sorts of coins were circulated around Greece in ancient times. Ones with Iskandar's face were especially popular. In a certain sense, his coins united cross-continental trade. Great kings like him were objects of the faith of their subjects(*TN: objects and then subjects. Hm.*).”

“Faith...”

“Exactly.”

My mentor held the coin out and polished it with an expression of admiration. He continued speaking after examining it for a while.

“Coins are one of the most ancient vessels of faith still present in the modern day. They’re so ubiquitous and meaningful that I don’t even need to give a lecture on the subject for you to understand. After all, modern society is built upon people’s faith in money.”

Of course.

Even before the prevalence of capitalism, human societies have long since been based on faith in money. As Mr. Shardan once said, money was the largest-scale magecraft created by humanity.

“So why would Heartless want to take it into the labyrinth?”

“Wait.”

My mentor narrowed his eyes as if he suddenly realized something.

“Why would he want to take the coin... into the labyrinth...?”

I had unknowingly said something that seemed to be important.

For a while, he continued to mutter things to himself as he ran his fingers through his long hair. Finally, he came to a revelation as he stared down at the ground.

“Exactly! Isn’t Spirit Tomb Albion a labyrinth?”

“...W-well, yes? At least, I think so?”

That was the only thing I could come up with in response to that.

Albion was a cornerstone of the Mages’ Association, made from the corpse of an ancient dragon that decayed away over centuries. We had established long ago that it was a labyrinth.

“I’ve talked about this before, right? Labyrinths are a type of magecraft. Going through one is a type of Initiation.”

“Um, you mean, when you told me that labyrinths and mazes are different, and that you can find another version of yourself in the deepest part of a labyrinth?”

My mentor had discussed all of this when he first told me about Albion.

It had been inevitable that I(Gray) would meet another version of myself in the labyrinth beneath my hometown. In order to die and to be reborn, I had had to return there.

—“To you, your hometown was a labyrinth.”

Even though it had only been a couple of days, that seemed like such a long time ago. It was probably because so much had happened in this short period of time.

“In that case, it’s clear what Heartless is trying to do to my king(*TN: specifically, 我が王. Adding this note because it was emphasized*). ...Ah, I see now. Heartless could only be trying to do one thing by taking his shadow, Faker, to Spirit Tomb Albion.”

“What is he trying to do?”

My mentor continued muttering things to himself.

“Damn it, why didn’t I notice earlier? Heartless is the former head of the Department of Modern Magecraft. It goes without saying what type of magecraft he’s best at. If he wants to summon Iskandar with the same field of expertise as me, he can only achieve limited things. Techniques in Modern Magecraft are often extremely specialized, so many components have to be pulled from beyond it, such as Emiya’s magecraft. ...Oh, for goodness’ sake(*TN: or at least a complaint around those lines*).”

Clouds of anxiety seemed to gather in him, just as it had been when he first realized that Heartless wanted to summon Iskandar. As if he had just unknowingly fallen into Heartless’ trap again.

But what would it be like this time?

Would another trap from Heartless await? Or, would my mentor's deduction finally grasp onto his enemy's heart?

Or, at least the void where his heart used to be.

“—!”

My mentor' shoulders began to shake, as if a sudden fire had overtaken his frail body.

“Sir?”

“...That's the second Whydunit!”

“Whydunit?”

Had my mentor finally reached the answer?

“I know what Heartless is trying to do now.”

I widened my eyes in astonishment as my mentor buried his face in his hands. It was as if his sudden revelation had actually struck him.

“But why? Why is this necessary? No. It'd certainly be the correct answer for a mage, but it shouldn't be this simple. Touko Aozaki would find this answer ridiculous. We shouldn't be going after something like this. If Heartless does indeed have an accomplice in the Grand Roll, how much do they know about his motive?” My mentor said in a small voice, not looking at anything in particular.

This was a symptom of my mentor thinking too quickly. His mind was capable of leaving everything else in the world behind sometimes.

What would happen next? I thought.

Would my mentor finally be able to catch up to Heartless? Or, would this finally stop him from doing so for once and for all?

“Sir?”

Hearing my voice, he turned to look at me.

“What is Heartless trying to do?”

“.....”

My mentor was silent for a moment. Perhaps he was reevaluating the answer he had reached. Or, perhaps he was still hesitant to accept it.

“This is purely based on my speculations,” my mentor said, carefully choosing his words. “Heartless wants to use Spirit Tomb Albion to completely alter the way magecraft exists in the modern day.”

Behind us, the red of the sky began to ebb away.



The window of the skyscraper provided a good view of the sunset.

There were hardly any other customers in the restaurant. This place was usually filled to the brim with people at this time of year for its panoramic view of the city of London. Today, however, it had been booked for a few people.

Specifically, they were an old woman and a burly man—Lord Valualeta and Lord Trambelio.

“The food is alright, but the chairs aren’t kind to my back.” The old woman commented succinctly, wiping the corner of her mouth with a napkin after she finished the main course.

“As unforgiving as ever.” McDonell replied with a smile.

It was a charming smile that would make anyone who saw it wish to make him smile again. That was one of the gifts of those in positions like his.

Inorai, however, met it with a cold response.

“The problem, McDonell, is that we have different expectations. New things are often wonderful, but real art must be accepted in the moment. This food is too tailored to people who are used to fine cuisine. It is expected that innovation in this area comes from people with enough money on their hands, but even if there is enough time on the vertical axis, there aren’t enough people to experience it on the horizontal axis. (*TN: I’m pretty sure that’s an accurate translation of what she said, but I still have no idea what she’s talking about.*)” Inorai said, picking up a glass of wine.

“I agree, Lord Valualeta. Do you think entertainment should be simple so everyone will be able to understand it?”

“Yes. That is a tenet of the Democratic Faction, isn’t it? Of course, the goal isn’t to simply appease as many people as possible. It is meaningless to have people accept things without actually enjoying them. We do not need to blindly pander to the masses. Instead, we should aim to win over them naturally. After all, why would anyone wish to follow a king who achieves victory in a boring way?”

“Again, I must say. As unforgiving as ever. I think the public needs enticement rather than entertainment. What do you think, Melvin-kun?”

“I’m quite satisfied. I thought the idea of pairing fig mousse with grilled scallops was absolutely wonderful,” the last person, Melvin Weinz said cheerfully. Even the sickly tuner stayed silent as the two Lords conversed.

“If you don’t mind, I’m going to bring out the whiskey that I brought.”

“Of course, please feel free to do so, Lord Valualeta.”

“Also, no one else is here. Just call me Mrs. Inorai like you used to, even though it’s a bit disgusting.”

“Haha. My apologies then, Mrs. Inorai,” McDonell said with a laugh. Then, he changed the topic. “We were just discussing the way magecraft exists in the modern day. What do you think about duels between mages?”

“I don’t have an opinion on them. The Clock Tower encourages it as if we still live in medieval times.” The old woman said as she tilted her glass of Islay malt whiskey,

produced in the Hebrides islands to the west of Scotland (*TN: It also smells of peat. I don't know how to fit that into the sentence though*). It was her favorite drink.

"I think it is very meaningful," McDonell said, eyes shining with intent. "Even more so when you consider the New Agers. Maybe they have talents that can only be honed through competition."

"Does that justify murder? Especially since mages are already an endangered species?" Inorai said, somewhat at a loss for words.

McDonell leaned forward, his body resembling a marble statue.

"Do you want to give it a try? It's been forty years, hasn't it?"

"Risking your life for no reason, are you? Don't tell me you think the Grand Roll just a good stage for an unobstructed duel."

"Haha."

McDonell laughed a little. This time, it was Inorai's turn to change the subject.

"I heard that Dr. Heartless attacked Slur Street," she said. "To put it plainly, it's a warning to pressure his opponent as the Grand Roll looms over the horizon."

Though the time and place were far apart, the old woman arrived at the same conclusion as Lord El-Melloi II.

That was the reason why Heartless had decided to emerge from hiding to flamboyantly attack the home of the Department of Modern Magecraft.

"There must be someone after Heartless. Unfortunately, I don't know why he suddenly resigned his post as the head of the Department of Modern Magecraft ten years ago, but it would make sense if someone was chasing him," McDonell said as if that was his eternal regret. "Does the Valualeta Faction have any ideas regarding it?"

"Who knows." The old woman replied, disinterested. "But you understand, right? Heartless used a portal beneath Slur Street to go to Spirit Tomb Albion. And the Grand Roll will be held in the deepest part of part of Spirit Tomb Albion, the Ancient Heart."

“Hm. Interesting.” McDonell said, stroking his chin.

She was right.

The Grand Roll was no simple meeting about the mundane operation of the Clock Tower. Though it might have fallen to that level in recent years, the Grand Roll of the past was an elaborate ritual held in a section of Spirit Tomb Albion infinitely close the inner sea of the planet(*TN: or stars of the inner sea I guess, if you go by Merlin's English NP dialogue?*).

“Son. You said that the redevelopment of Albion is meaningful. The Democratic Faction agrees with you in that.”

McDonell had said this during their discussion with Lord El-Melloi II. It was also why he proposed the Grand Roll.

“In that case, it’s time for us to go over the relevant information to support that claim, isn’t it?”

“I see. That makes sense,” Lord Trambelio said, nodding. “How about this!”

With a twirl of his hand, the angelic puppets waiting beside the table spread their wings and dove over the it before gently landing and turning into a stack of books with a puff of smoke. Though the performance had been planned extensively, the Inorai accepted it without batting an eye.

However, as she flipped through the pages, she froze.

“Son,” she said, in an unusual tone of voice. “Is this from the Secret Autopsy Division?”

“Hahaha, I removed the most revealing parts, but that isn’t enough to fool you, is it?”

“Don’t play dumb. Where did you get this from? I don’t believe it would be so easy to obtain, even with the power of the Trambelios.”

The Secret Autopsy Division had basically been granted complete freedom within the Clock Tower. Even the great family at the top of the Democratic Faction wouldn't be able to easily access its confidential information.

“Let’s not talk about that right now. What matters is that it backs up what I said earlier.”

“...I see... This report details all kinds of details that cannot be found above the surface, even down to specific mining sites. The amount of excavation around the Mining City have decreased drastically, but they have remained the same in the Great Magic Circuit. In other words, you’re saying that if we redevelop Spirit Tomb Albion and establish a route directly to the Great Magic Circuit, we will be able to attain the same amounts as in the nineteenth century,” Inorai said, reading the words on the page.

She was so used to this that she could check it with her Magic Circuits alone. That was one of the reasons why some mages still ridiculed the advance of technology in this day and age. However, the accuracy and efficiency of this technique varied based on the talent of the user.

“But how am I meant to trust unsourced information? Do I need to check it myself? The Grand Roll is coming up too soon for that.”

With a wry smile, McDonell backed down, probably because he sensed that he might be pulverized by the whirlwind of magic energy that was now emanating from Inorai.

“Didn’t you just say that duels between mages never should have been made popular?”

“I said that they are unnecessary and meaningless. Get it right, son.”

There seemed to be a trace of kindness in the old woman’s voice.

Like Lord Trambelio, the Lord of the Department of Creation was one of the Three Great Families. If the two ever got into a fight, it would put entire factions at stake.

A swirl of sand formed beside Inorai’s hand.

It meant that terrifying magecraft from the Lord of Creation (Valuay) would soon follow.



“Heartless wants to use Spirit Tomb Albion to completely alter the way magecraft exists in the modern day.”

I was dumbfounded as my mentor’s voice echoed away in the receding light.

“—Huh?”

I had no idea what my mentor was talking about.

Ever since I became my mentor’s disciple, I had encountered all kinds of unbelievable things. A great example of this was the super weapon of Atlas hidden in my hometown, which had the ability to make it feel like I was traveling back in time.

However, this was different.

It was far more significant than what had happened at Adra, the Castle of Separation, or at the Twin Towers of Ilsema. Even the incident at my hometown would only affect Wales, at worst.

This would impact the way all magecraft existed in the modern day.

In a certain sense, it was the first large-scale crisis we had encountered (*TN: I mean I would call the entirety of Wales kind of large-scale but sure*).

“Us mages always aim for the Root.”

My mentor brought up something that had come up many times before. The Root was the ultimate goal of all modern mages; an end that must be reached at any cost.

Though no one knew that the Root was, my mentor said that it was the origin of everything.

That was why the Clock Tower devoted an endless amount of resources to pass their dreams on to the next generation, even going as far as to redevelop Spirit Tomb Albion.

“But what if we don’t need to anymore?”

“Huh?”

The same, ridiculous sound escaped my throat again.

“What does that mean, Sir? Hasn’t it been mages’ ultimate wish for two thousand years? I think you’ve said several times that now that the Age of the Gods has ended, mages have no choice but to aim for the root. They can’t just suddenly stop needing to, can they?”

“.....”

My mentor did not respond immediately.

Perhaps because he saw something that was beyond my(*TN: or his*) imagination, he spent some time mulling over his words before he spoke.

“...I have to reiterate, I’m mostly confident in this hypothesis, but it’s still a hypothesis. Understood?”

“Yes.”

“Good. ...First, the mages of the Age of the Gods do not aim for the Root because they don’t have to. This is because the Root is quite close to them.”

I had heard this explanation many times before. Modern mages chased after the Root, but ancient mages did not.

“Faker is an example.”

By now, we were already familiar with her. She was a Servant who had been summoned from many millennia ago.

“The magecraft we know of is no more than the manipulation of formulas(*TN: Alternatively, spells*). It is only a trick to briefly fool the world. Their magecraft, on the other hand, directly connected with the Root and Divine Spirits— no, the gods themselves.” My mentor said, confirming the difference between mages in modern times and in the Age of the Gods, which had only been hinted at until now.

“Oh...”

Was that so? I thought.

“We only know how to fool the world. They had the power to rewrite it however they wished. That is how powerful Divine Spirits are. Of course, they could only wield a fragment of the gods’ powers, but they were still far more powerful than we can ever aspire to be. Some of their spells are similar to the Ten-Count spells we use to deceive the world, but they are still fundamentally different. You could say that we are entire dimensions behind them. They were capable of changing the world with a single word by simply invoking the gods.”

The rules had changed.

I had heard something similar before in a lecture.

Even a Ten Count spell had its limitations, but it was capable of somewhat influencing the laws of reality. For instance, a high-level spell like reversing the pull of gravity in an area or making light travel at the speed of a snail for a few minutes was very close to reaching the rules of the world.

Besides that, there were forbidden things like Reality Marbles that achieved a similar effect.

“...U-um... Can you wait a second... please...”

I heard a grating noise inside my head.

It was easy to understand Mystic Eyes and labyrinths because they were easy to imagine. The magecraft of the entire Clock Tower, however, was too conceptual for my brain to handle.

“Magecraft today is different from magecraft in the Age of the Gods. That I can understand, at least somewhat. Because mages from the Age of the Gods are very close to the Root, they don’t need to chase after it. I’m not sure why, but I can understand that as well. But what does all of this have to do with Heartless?”

“I’m afraid that— No. I’m sure of it. Heartless wants to create a god for mages.”

I was at a loss for words. It was just too far-fetched.

“...Is something like that even possible?” I asked carefully, suppressing my worries that my mentor’s mind had gone wonky because of Heartless’ schemes.

“It’s not impossible. There are already legends that Iskandar was a descendant of Zeus. There is even evidence of people attempting to make him an Olympian. There were already plenty of heroes who were later deified, so why couldn’t someone as great as him become one as well? Like I said before, there were even rumors that he was a reincarnation of the Egyptian god Amun.”

My mentor’s voice carried a strange mix of vexation and admiration.

“On top of that, a similar ritual meant to draw out greater mystery is being held right now in the Far East. All Heartless needs to do is adjust it slightly.”

“.....”

I could feel a tingling sensation on my skin.

It was probably because something similar had come up in every incident so far. They all aimed for something great enough to change the world... such as one of the Seven Superweapons of the Atlas Institute.

“But... how?”

“Like you said, Lady. Spirit Tomb Albion is a labyrinth.”

My mentor had already explained the significance of labyrinths in magecraft.

“An initiation surrounding death and rebirth...”

“Exactly,” my mentor said, nodding. “Faker is Iskandar’s shadow, and the properties of a labyrinth apply to Heroic Spirits as well. Since both Faker’s class and identity are shadows, the ritual will naturally be connected to the true Iskandar in the Throne of Heroes.”

I wanted to shout that it couldn't be possible.

However, it made sense. We had already established that Heartless wanted to summon the true Iskandar. That was the core of my mentor's earlier deductions. If that wasn't the case, he wouldn't have despaired.

"Then, upon establishing a connection, it is necessary to extract a more refined Spirit Origin. I suppose you could call it the process of ascension."

"...Ascension..."

"Of course, this is all usually within the bounds of a Heroic Spirit. On the other hand, however close the Heroic Spirit gets to their original essence, they are still far from a Divine Spirit. No matter how many times you ascend them, they are still only a Servant. Class labels like Faker or Saber already restrict Heroic Spirits to a single facet of their abilities. That's why I never considered this possibility before."

My mentor's voice was unusually powerful.

Perhaps it was because this blind spot still existed, even after he had thought it through so many times. This possibility had been deemed too absurd to actually happen.

"There are many elements required to create a Divine Spirit. ...Add, you know about them, right?"

"Ihiihi! It's not every day I get called on by the teacher!" Came an excited voice from the hook at my right shoulder.

"I find it rather apt that your seal is similar."

"Haha! Yes. Rhongomyniad's no ordinary Noble Phantasm. It's very close to the origin of the planet(*TN: Or possibly the stars*). If this seal had never gotten smacked onto it, the user would gradually become a Divine Spirit."

That was why Add existed. The gravekeepers before me said that it was necessary to seal Rhongomyniad away. I had thought that it was simply because the Mystery inside it would fade away. I had never known that there was another purpose.

“The problem is, it never affected King Arthur in the decades that she owned it. There are no substantial affects to using Rhongomyniad within a human lifespan. All it does is make the wielder ever-so-slightly more like a Divine Spirit.”

“Exactly. There just isn’t enough time,” my mentor said, taking over from Add. “It takes an enormous amount of time to make a deity through receiving worship and divine energy. Faith also needs to spread throughout the population, which requires even longer.”

“Time...”

I seemed to recall hearing something related not long ago. I immediately remembered a foreign-sounding name.

“...Oh! That’s where Emiya’s...”

“Exactly. That’s where the Seal-Designated magecraft of Emiya comes in.”

Indeed. That was a spell to create a flow of time separate from everything else.

...Wait, I thought.

I seemed to hear the sound of puzzle pieces falling into place. It was simultaneously exhilarating and dreadful, as if I was watching an anthill collapse in on itself.

Cold winter wind blew across my face.

My mentor took out a cigar and attempted to light it with shaking fingers. He succeeded in the end, and purple smoke began to trail from it.

“The problem of time can be solved with Emiya’s magecraft. It was originally intended to be used to reach the end of time in order to arrive at the Root. In this situation, because Servants cannot age, they cannot be overloaded. It’s just like how a few thousand years are nothing compared to the billions of years the earth has existed for.

“Another thing. The Grand Roll is always held in a special location in the very center of Spirit Tomb Albion.”

I gasped.

No one had told me about this.

“While the Grand Roll is being held, a special dam is unsealed. Because it is a ritual of sorts, it is held in the heart of the ancient dragon.”

I had seen that name before on Svin’s diagram.

The Ancient Heart.

Also known as the very center of Spirit Tomb Albion.

“When that happens, the Ancient Heart will be flooded with Magical Energy that cannot be found anywhere else. That is probably why Heartless chose to summon Iskandar right now. The Heart is an underground observatory of the Inner Sea of the Planet. As the Magical Energy of the ancient dragon swells, the conditions are perfect to transform a Heroic Spirit into a Divine Spirit.”

My mentor’s words were like a string of incantations.

I had never thought that this would be possible. However, my mentor’s deductions gradually gave Heartless’ plot a shape.

Of course, this was what magecraft was meant to be like. It was the way of a mage to manipulate mystery to create unbelievable results.

“Then, the coin from just then becomes important,” my mentor said, holding up the Golden Stater, which was illuminated by the light of the setting sun.

“Money, and the economy that results from it, is one of the strongest beliefs of mankind. In that case, it should be very easy to create some form of worship using coins as a medium. Hah, a trick like this is really emblematic of Modern Magecraft, isn’t it? It should be quite simple to establish a path because the coin was already connected to Iskandar when he was still alive, especially considering that this is Heartless we’re dealing with.”

Beliefs and Divine Spirits.

In other words, he didn't aim to recreate a god through faith. Instead, Heartless wanted to draw power from the god through faith.

"After Iskandar becomes a Divine Spirit, this golden coin will become a grand Mystic Code that acts as a bond between god and mage. It's not hard to imagine New Agers being drawn in by this promise of greatness. Though it probably requires a similar amount of training, just in a different form, those mages have no future right now. With this, they will suddenly become mages of the Age of the Gods. They will be able to escape the confines of their bloodlines."

"....."

I didn't know what to say.

"But..."

Was that... wrong?

Did it need to be stopped?

It was the opportunity that countless mages like my mentor probably hoped for. A way to achieve great things regardless of what family they were born into. In a certain sense, didn't my mentor wish for this just as much as reuniting with Iskandar?

It made perfect sense why my mentor would be troubled.

After following this chain of reasoning until its end, Heartless had turned the tables and trapped my mentor instead. I finally understood why he didn't ask for my mentor's help. His goal fit too well.

"...I must after go him." My mentor said.

"How though? Oh, what if we first head to the place where the Grand Roll is being held and go from there?"

"We can't. The Grand Roll was designed to be impervious to distractions. No one can leave or enter during the day. To get there, participants need to use a portal that opens

from the Mining City. It doesn't make sense if Lords had to go dungeon crawling every time a Grand Roll is held, does it?"

Maybe he intended that as a joke, but I found it hard to laugh.

My mentor's pace quickened as he started toward the train station.

"We're returning to Slur Street. I need to discuss something with Reines. Depending on how the Grand Roll goes, we might need to call on the help of other Lords."

...But there might be an accomplice of Heartless' there, I thought.

As I walked after my mentor in the growing darkness, I felt as if we were caught in the palm of a giant's hand.



McDonell stared silently at the sand swirling atop the table. He knew the old woman's magecraft very well.

She had three elements—Earth, Wind, and Water. However, this rare gift was hardly impressive next to her lineage, which had existed for millennia. The true terror of Lord Valualeta lay in the fact that she was the most mage-like mage that McDonell knew.

Even a plot built up over a decade could fall to pieces at her feet if she so wished. If anything arose that conflicted with her beliefs as a mage, Inorai Valualeta Atroholm would toss away those mundane thoughts without a moment of hesitation.

That was how the situation was kept stable, even though one of the most "proper" departments had joined the Democratic Faction.

The sand continued to swirl.

How fatal could she make this handful of sand?

After a few more seconds of hesitation, McDonell made his choice.

“I give up. I’ll confess!” He announced. Then, he turned. “Ow. My shoulders are sore. Could you help, Melvin-kun?”

“Of course.”

Melvin stood up with a nod. McDonell smiled as he picked up his violin case.

“Haha, I haven’t gotten to show off in front of Mrs. Inorai for a while. I still remember getting reprimanded by you because my reports were formatted incorrectly back when I was still a student.”

“Well, you certainly haven’t gotten rid of your bad habit of rushing things.”

The tune of the violin drifted through the restaurant.

Although this restaurant would often invite famous musicians to play, the music was rarely this wonderful. Melvin’s tuning was more than just a way to enhance Magic Circuits. It was also enjoyable on a purely musical level.

“...Simply wonderful,” McDonell said, tapping his fingers to the music. “I see, the Magical Energy in the tune revitalizes Magic Circuits. This is what true immersion feels like. If it weren’t for your physical condition, I might even consider making you my successor.”

“Please don’t spook me by flattering me like that. It might make me vomit blood.”

Seeing Melvin continue to play his violin without being affected at all, McDonell smiled.

“I have something I want to ask you. Which do you value more, friends or family?”

The tune of the violin continued. Since Melvin had been entrusted by McDonell to perform a task, he would do so with perfection.

“Haha, that’s a... direct question. Should I take this as an order from the head of the family?”

“No, there’s no need to take it that seriously.”

“Even if you say so, Mama will be troubled if I don’t.”

“Ah. I never intended on troubling the head of the Weinz family.” McDonell said, winking as if he was telling some kind of joke.

...Wait, Melvin thought as he continued to play.

Something was wrong. It felt as if he suddenly found himself almost submerged in water.

...The entire room... has been swallowed up by Lord Trambelio...! He realized.

The restaurant was filled with potent Magical Power, and Melvin felt as if someone had just dunked him into a pool.

Lord Trambelio had achieved this just then, when he nearly fought Inorai. Just like how Inorai began to manipulate sand, Lord Trambelio also prepared to unleash the magecraft he was proficient at.

Typically, magecraft beyond a certain threshold required the user to take in large amounts of Mana from the air, and then light it with their own Od as a fuse.

However, the Magical Energy emanating from McDonell was enough to forego this process entirely.

“The silence we hold dear burns brighter than fire(Sheep will burn quietly). (*TN: that is exactly what it says???*)”

Suddenly, fire appeared outside the window, even though this building was hundreds of meters tall. It gathered into a giant ball of flame before disappearing as quickly as it had appeared.

“Did you notice it as well, Melvin-kun?” McDonell said with a smile.

Yes, he had.

The fire had burnt the thing to a crisp, and its charred remains fell to the ground outside the building.

“Using a familiar to spy on us? How boring. It probably came from the absent Neutral Faction. If they care so much, why don’t they just attend the Grand Roll?”

“....”

If McDonell had used Mana, the familiars would have noticed and escaped. Instead, he only used the Od inside himself, slaughtering them all before they could realize. This was one of the specialties of McDonell Trambelio Elrond— a truly terrifying amount of raw power.

Since he was a mage of the modern era, he needed to recite a one-count incantation. After that, he could use any number of spells connected to it because of the violent efficiency of his Magic Circuits.

It was only natural that he was the most powerful person in the Trambelio Faction.

His qualifications were more than the average person could imagine. Lord Trambelio had outstanding abilities as a mage. Even though Melvin had witnessed the abilities of many mages as part of his job, it was the first time he had seen anything like this.

Melvin could feel his knees tremble slightly, even though he had thought that he was more resistant to fear than his friend.

...Sorry, Waver. He thought.

He could only succumb. Lord Trambelio’s magecraft showed that Melvin didn’t stand a chance again. If he didn’t retreat here, he might slip up and make a fatal mistake.

That was why Inorai and McDonell had made a scene on purpose.

No, that was more than a performance. If someone had misstepped, maybe it would devolve into a duel. That was why the Clock Tower was so scary. It was a game of kings, where a surge of emotion could dictate the fate of the entire world.

“Is the tuning over?” McDonell asked, turning to look at Melvin disappointedly.

“I guess so. If you want something more professional, please visit my workshop later.”

"I see. I'll look forward to it, then," McDonell said, picking up the silver bell beside his hand. "Let us continue our conversation."

With the light tinkling of bells, the door opened and a tall figure entered the room.

It was a dark-skinned woman, whose eyes shone full of intention. Though Melvin didn't know her, he figured that she must be important.

"As I was saying, this is my source of information," McDonell said. "This is Asheara Mystras of the Materials Branch of the Secret Autopsy Division. She is one of Heartless' students, possibly one of the last people he ever taught."

Melvin had a vague impression of that name because he exchanged information with Reines quite often. Of course, there were certain things that they couldn't talk about because of their positions, but he recalled that Asheara was one of Heartless' former students. After meeting with Lord El-Melloi II at the Secret Autopsy Division, she had disappeared.



All of this was already remarkable, but the woman's response was even more shocking.

"Please don't do this, Father."

"....."

Melvin was momentarily at a loss for words.

"Yes. As she said," McDonell continued, acknowledging the suddenness of the statement. "She's also my twelfth daughter."

"What?" Inorai asked, also shocked.

"Is that strange?"

"Well... I know you have many wives and daughters. You are a Lord, so certain things can be excused. But it's an entirely different matter if she's a part of the Secret Autopsy Division."

"I already said that I was going to explain. A while ago, I was on a secret joint expedition with the Secret Autopsy Division to Spirit Tomb Albion. I met Asheara at the Mining City, and I couldn't help but notice her wit and resilience. And her appearance, of course, but that goes without saying. I wanted to send a special request to get her back to the surface, but she refused."

"I wouldn't have been able to help that way."

"....."

Of course, Melvin knew of McDonell's habits. To put it nicely, he had a lot of love to dispense. Melvin reckoned that McDonell had enough wives and daughters to play baseball against each other. Either way, it was an extremely effective tactic to gain power through political marriages in the World of Magecraft.

However, it had never crossed his mind that one of Heartless' students would be McDonell's daughter—

Inorai stared at her with a gaze full of ice. The light of the chandelier illuminated her hand, which was firmly atop the classified files from the Secret Autopsy Division.

“I can’t allow Dr. Heartless to continue going after his students, so I called her back. Perhaps I’ll be mocked, but I must protect my daughter.”

McDonell put a hand on his daughter's shoulder and smiled again. That gesture alone conveyed the bond his family had, even though many were not related by blood.

...We're doomed, Melvin thought, clenching his teeth. The Lords had cards up their sleeves.

They either diligently collected them for the Grand Roll tomorrow, or revealed them to cause panic. Revealing Asheara's identity here was so that the Democratic Faction would be more united— In other words, to prevent backstabbing. He was implying that it wasn't a good idea to go against someone with so many cards.

If the need came up, he could also play cards to threaten others. Up until now, Melvin had been confused as to why he was called here, but now, McDonell's reasoning was clear. Melvin was the obvious choice, as he was a convenient source of information who was moderately rebellious and somewhat prominent. Above all that, Melvin was also trusted by the people around him.

McDonell had clearly calculated the right moment to incinerate the familiar of the Neutral Faction. He intended on leaking the knowledge that he had information from the Secret Autopsy Division.

There were plenty of monsters lurking about the Clock Tower.

However, not many could match Lord Trambelio in his skill at playing this delicate game of cards. He was doing exactly what he claimed the Democratic Faction stood for— deceiving the masses.

One could say that he was the king of the new era.

There was one thing in Melvin's mind as he saw McDonell's smile.

...As long as my desperate attempt reaches you, he thought.



By the time we arrived at the station, night had completely set in.

I peered across the interweaving branches that grew from the crumbling platform, at the constellations that hung in the winter sky. Perhaps because the light from the streetlights was faint, each star glittered brilliantly.

However, my mind was fixed on matters that went on in a place that the light of the stars could not reach, as if they wanted to hide from the stars' gaze.

“Damn it, she’s not picking up!” My mentor said, turning off his phone angrily.

“Why?”

“I told her the gist of things before we boarded the bus. After that, I wanted to talk about the way forward, but she hung up, and wouldn’t pick up no matter how many times I called. All she sent was a text that said: ‘I get it. There’s a pointless struggle (*TN: there’s probably a better word*) heading your way, I’ll leave the decision to you.’”

“A pointless struggle?”

It did sound like something Reines would say, but I had no idea what it meant.

That was why I was a bit slow in realizing the change in the train station.

No one else is here...? I thought.

Of course, this was a random station in the countryside, so it wasn’t impossible that no one was there. However, it was around 7 P.M., so it felt a bit strange.

“Sir?”

“...Oh.”

My mentor entered a preparative stance, strengthening his limbs. Perhaps because he was more timid than other people, he gave the impression of being reliable.

Slowly, a thick mist surrounded us. It was evidently the creation of some kind of magecraft. Not far behind it was the sound of steam which did not belong in this era.

“Wait, this is-”

The front of a rust-colored engine cleaved apart the fog, at the head of a metallic train. Its side rods moved in unison like musicians’ bows in an orchestra, creating a strangely nostalgic tune.

“...The Rail Zeppelin...?”

The old-fashioned train complemented the crumbling station well, adding a sense of beauty to the otherwise mundane scene.

My mentor and I stood there, frozen in place. Our reaction made sense, considering the events that had occurred on this train.

The door of the train opened slowly, revealing the silhouette of a thin man.

It was Rodin, the conductor of the Rail Zeppelin, whose name I had almost forgotten.

“Good evening, Lord El-Melloi II.” He said with a bow.

“...Why are you here?”

“It appears that Mr. Melvin Weinz’s intuition was correct.”

“Mr. Melvin...?!” I blurted out in surprise.

“Indeed. Mr. Melvin informed us of Heartless’ flight to Spirit Tomb Albion and decided that you might wish to pursue him. He contacted us to help you with that goal. We also have unsettled scores with Dr. Heartless, after all.”

There was a shocking amount of enthusiasm in his otherwise emotionless voice.

“Not only did he interrupt our famous Mystic Eye auction, but he also caused us to waste many sets of precious Mystic Eyes in a pointless battle. As a result, our Deputy Manager is still dormant. We cannot allow him to continue to wreak carnage.”

That was true.

The Rail Zeppelin had suffered significant losses because of the fight with Heartless and Faker. Regardless of the identity of the owner of the train, it was impossible to simply ignore this disgrace. Melvin had probably considered this, which was why he chose to play this card now.

Now was the perfect time to use the Rail Zeppelin’s undivided support to finally corner Heartless.

“We have also spoken with Miss Reines. We understand why you wish to head to Spirit Tomb Albion.”

So that was why Reines had said that. Even if she wasn’t talking to my mentor, I felt as if she would have said something similar (*TN: similar = similarly 口悪い = similarly sarcastic...?*).

“Our train can take you to the Mining City. It should be the best way of traveling there.”

Rodin said this because the Rail Zeppelin traveled between worlds, much like Spirit Tomb Albion, which also didn’t exist within the same bounds as the rest of the world. This fact made the Rail Zeppelin one of the best ways to travel there.

But, could we really accept the offer so easily?

“Sir?”

“...If Reines has given you so much information, she is probably prepared to attend the Grand Roll in my place. I see. That’s why she didn’t answer my calls. She’d definitely rather throw me into the middle of a whirlpool than properly explain,” my mentor said with a tsk. Then, he turned to the conductor. “But Gray and I won’t be able to achieve anything. Heartless has probably reached as far as the Great Magic Circuit by now, and Gray is the only one who can fight. I won’t allow my students to continue to be involved in this, either.”

“We are aware of that. So they’re already here.”

“They’re already here?”

The second the question left my mouth, the answer appeared.

“Hey!”

A certain mage opened the door to the train and waved at us cheerfully. He had a stocky build, tanned skin, and an unkempt beard that was tucked into a dirty headscarf. In the darkness of the empty train station, he looked as if he stood in a ray of sunlight, in stark contrast to the ominous hues that surrounded most of the mages I met. No matter what the rest of the world was like, I got the feeling that he would always remind me of a refreshing gust of desert wind.

“What are you staring at? Have you forgotten about me? Does the name Flue ring any bells?”

It was Flueger, the astrologer who we had met at Adra, the Castle of Separation.

“Why are you here, Mr. Flue?”

“Hahaha, I actually accepted a commission from your little sister a long time ago. She asked me to go to Spirit Tomb Albion— actually, ‘ordered’ is probably a better word to describe her attitude— so I got on this train.”

“So it was Miss Reines...” I muttered.

She had probably contacted Melvin not long after my mentor and I headed here. After that, while Melvin prepared the train, she had recruited people to join us on our trek through the labyrinth. Perhaps she had even considered this before my mentor found out Heartless’ goal.

Flue was not the only one here, either. Someone else stood behind the astrologer.

“It’s been a while, Lord El-Melloi II, and Miss Gray,” the young man said. He was missing his right arm. I knew I would never forget that I had done that to him with Rhongomyniad.

A black eye patch covered his right eye, and a small hat known as a tokin sat on his head. My mentor had told me back at Adra Castle that this was the attire of those in Japan who practiced shugendō.

“Jirobou Seigen Tokitou,” my mentor said. “...Um, excuse me, can I call you Seigen?”

To make a long story short, Seigen was the culprit in the case at Adra Castle. Another persona had been given to him unwillingly after he had his Magic Crest repaired there. In other words, his Magic Crest had overwritten his original persona. It was possible that the person we knew as Seigen no longer existed.

“...Seigen works,” the monk replied spitefully. “The memories of the boy from the castle are mixed with mine. Sometimes I can’t tell whether I’m Jirobou Seigen Tokitou or Granide Ashborn. Either way, I’m still Seigen. I’ll be glad if you call me that.”

How much time had it taken him to arrive at this conclusion? The idea of not knowing which of your memories and feelings actually belonged to you terrified me. What must have he felt when his body twisted into something else?

“...I see.” My mentor said with a slight nod.

“Do you still remember Heine Istari’s younger sister, Rosalind?”

“Of course.”

Heine was the monk who had lost his life at Adra Castle, also known as the Knight. He had originally gone to the Castle of Separation to repair the Magic Crest of the Istari family, which had been altered after it had been transplanted onto Rosalind. After he got there, Seigen(Granide Ashborn) had killed him.

Recalling this, a wry smile appeared on Seigen’s face.

“I swear your little sister is a demon in disguise. She said that her family would protect Rosalind to the best of their ability, in exchange for a small favor. Hmph, some small favor this is.”

It was true. It was impossible for Seigen to refuse such an offer. Though Seigen had technically killed Heine, he had built up a friendship with him before Granide Ashborn took over, so Heine had entrusted him to protect Rosalind.

“My apologies. I also believe that she is a demon.”

I agreed as well. Maybe I should talk to Reines about it later, but I figured she probably knew it better than anyone else.

“They say you need five people to traverse Spirit Tomb Albion, don’t they? There’s another person waiting.” Seigen said, turning.

Soon, a displeased voice rang out from the train.

“And here I was, thinking that I wouldn’t meet you for quite a while.”

It was a voice that I last heard only half a day ago.

I hadn’t thought that the young woman would command the night the same way she did the day, but it was quite the opposite. The mist in the station decorated her impeccable golden curls, which framed her striking face. Her cobalt dress wafted about in the breeze, making me feel as if I was at a ball.

It was Luvia gelita Edelfelt.

“You as well?”

“Blame the astrologer over there,” Luvia said with a glare. Flueger looked away immediately, trying to pass it off.

“Ahaha, I did a little fortune-telling, and guess what! It told me that the most powerful person I know happens to be in London. I simply had to invite you. Don’t you agree?”

“I don’t, but I concede that the matter at hand is interesting. A chance to ride the Rail Zeppelin does not offer itself up every day, especially not to Spirit Tomb Albion.”

Luvia had hired Flueger back at Adra Castle to kill my mentor. Her definition of “kill” was not the boring, simple kind—it was far worse.

—“That lady wants to prove your worthlessness in a way that practically renders you dead in the World of Magecraft.”

—“Her way of thinking is so political it makes me want to laugh.”

I think that was when I decided I didn’t hate Luvia.

Before I knew my mentor very well, I thought that all mages were extremely weird. They seemed to all be drowning in a thousand years’ worth of hopeless delusions.

The darkness that I witnessed at that castle had left a deep impression in my heart. However, it also taught me that mages who sought to fight against the darkness existed. My experiences at Adra Castle probably made me sympathize with mages for the first time.

Luvia slowly walked down onto the concrete of the platform toward my mentor.

“I understand that you do not want your students to be involved in your conflicts,” she said, pointing to him. “I am not one of your students. Surely that allows me to join you in your quest.”

“...And yet you keep asking me to become your tutor,” my mentor sighed, covering his face with his hands.

Luvia smiled. “Does that mean you finally agree to be my tutor?”

“No. Not at all. So I have a request for you all.”

My mentor lowered his hands and looked to the mages, addressing each of them in turn.

“Luviaigelita Edelfelt. Flueger the Astrologer. Jirobou Seigen Tokitou. Could you please lend me your strength to solve a personal issue of mine? My request is demanding. It

involves taking an entire day to traverse Spirit Tomb Albion and defeat Heartless and the Ghost Liner whom he has a contract with.”

“Do you still have to specify that it’s a personal issue at this point? I’m just a mercenary, though. It’s not my job to question my employer about unnecessary things.”

“And I don’t really have a choice.”

Both Flue and Seigen accepted without much hesitation.

“I know how urgent the situation is, and I cannot allow you to be left alone.” Luvia said, closing one of her eyes in satisfaction.

“Everyone here is from the first case,” I said in a small voice.

Of course, the first case technically was the one that happened at my hometown. Aside from that, I had a strong impression of the incident at Adra, the Castle of Separation. That was the first time I had seen my mentor dissect magecraft to solve a case. If I were to record all of these events into a case file of sorts, I would definitely make that story the first chapter.

My mentor turned to face the conductor.

“Can I hand the next part to you?”

“Yes. The Rail Zeppelin shall take you to Spirit Tomb Albion.”

After a bow, Rodin gestured to the door of the train. As if the train itself understood, the noble sound of a whistle pierced through the night.



Afterword by Makoto Sanda:

—The greatest secret of the Clock Tower is hidden within its depths, buried within mystery that is impossible to find in the surface world. At the same time, it was part of an ancient taboo that could not be broken.

Its name is Spirit Tomb Albion. Thou shalt witness the greatness of the great deceased dragon.



My sincerest apologies...!

If you want to know why I'm apologizing, just look to the title. It's "Grand Roll(Middle)". If you want to blame me for going back on my promise that this was going to be the final book, I can only ask for your forgiveness.

Actually, I got the feeling that this arc was going to be three books long a while ago, when I was planning out the previous volume. I discussed it with Mr. Nasu. If I wrote in the previous afterword that I wasn't sure whether the next book would be the last, all the people waiting be unhappy... After much hesitation, we decided on this. I am really very sorry.



At the same time, because of the unprecedented length of this arc of the story, I believe it contains a deeper and more complicated story. The final question for Lord El-Melloi II to solve has been revealed, containing hidden secrets in Heartless' past, mysteries in Spirit Tomb Albion, the interference of the Grand-ranked mage, Touko Aozaki, and the Lords' scheming.

Ever since I learnt of the Clock Tower and the labyrinth beneath it, I couldn't help but wish to borrow it as a prop. My immaturity in that regard is probably the main reason why there's an extra book.

In the past few years, I have constantly had an idea about the ending of this story swirling about my mind. Finally being able to write it makes me incredibly happy, but also somewhat sad.

Without your support, this story about a gloomy Lord and a grave keeper girl would never have become what it is now. I hope you all can witness their journey to the very end, until the mystery finally comes to light.



The manga version of the Case Files of Lord El-Melloi II by Tou Azuma-sensei has been continuing excellently. I don't have anything to say that cannot already be conveyed by the shockingly intricate illustrations of the world of Case Files.

The third volume will be on sale in January of 2019, so be sure to pick up a copy.

Besides that, an original manga that I am in charge of writing, Bestia, will be released on KADOKAWA on the same day(!). I would be very glad if you all give it a look. (I'm also grateful for getting to collaborate with Aco Arisaka-sensei, who was behind the character design of Seikaisuru Kado(*TN: Also known as KADO: The right answer. The person on the poster of that anime looks so much like Merlin.*))

Finally, I would like to thank Mineji Sakamoto-sensei for designing the characters and creating the illustrations, Kiyomune Miwa-san for the ever-detailed fact checks, Ryogo Narita-san for checking Flat's lines, Nasu-san for entrusting me with this world and these characters, and OKSG-san for helping me edit, among other members of the staff at TYPE-MOON.

Of course, I would also like to thank you for reading.

Usually, the next volume will be sold at the summer Comiket in August. However, I know it must be hard to wait until then, so I will try and release it earlier if I can. It will most likely be available when spring turns to early summer.

Please follow my account and the TYPE-MOON official account on Twitter to find the final date of release. Other announcements like ones about the manga will also be made there.

Well then, let us meet again in the final book.

—November 2018, while playing Warhammer: Blackstone Fortress

-End of Afterword, Book 7-
