

8

グランド・ロール

「case. 冠位決議(上)」

三田 誠  
イラスト 坂本みねち



ロード・カルメロイ  
三世の事件簿

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原作 TYPE-MOON

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

角川文庫



ロード・エルメロイⅡ世の  
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From left to right and bottom to top:

**Asheara Mystras**, a member of the Secret Autopsy Division

**Calugh Ithred**, a member of the Secret Autopsy Division

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

**Gray**, the disciple of Lord El-Melloi II

**Inorai Valualeta Atroholm**, the Lord of the Department of Creation

**Olga Marie Asmleit Animusphere**, the daughter of the Lord of the Department of Astromancy of the Clock Tower

**McDonell Trambelio Elrod** (*TN: It says エリオット/Elliot on that, but in the book his middle name is エルロッド/Elrond so I'm sticking with that*), Lord of the Department of General Fundamentals

**Rufleus Nuada-Re Eulypheis**, the Lord of the Department of Spiritual Evocation.

*(TN: I probably shouldn't be calling this book Grand Roll Up but it sounds dumb and that's why it's staying like that. I debated calling the three books of this arc Grand Roll, Grander Roll, and Grandest Roll, but that's both stupid and misleading.*

◆ 夢一夜 ◆

~A Dream~



The young man woke up and looked around with a significant degree of difficulty. He was in a narrow alley.

A strong odor drifted into his nostrils, like the smell of rotting garbage. His brain seemed like it had rusted, for though he tried many times to stand up with the wall beside him for support, he kept falling back down to the ground. Even a senile mouse, half-dead in a sewer was probably stronger than he was now.

“...Ha...ha...(TN: *heavy breathing, not laughter*)”

Even breathing was incredibly hard.

Every cell of his body had lost a large amount of Od. He concentrated all of his energy into controlling his Magic Circuits, like a drowning person fighting to survive. However, his Magic Circuits responded like a faucet that refused to let out more than a few drops of water no matter how hard he tried to wrench it open. Even so, he desperately accumulated Magical Energy, trying to Strengthen himself enough to stand up.

It felt like a long time had passed.

He could have easily dried up and died here, alone with his thoughts. However, he still circulated his Magical Energy with all of his might. That was the only thing he could do now.

Had it been ten minutes, or an hour?

He suddenly looked up.

He felt the sensation of a cold drop of rain hitting his forehead.

It was the light drizzle of London. Though he didn't see anyone with an umbrella, the rain which fell down like silk made him feel some sort of emotion that was strong, but difficult to describe.

First, these emotions came from the raindrops, but they soon originated from above the young man as well.

“[Why is there a sky...?]”

Ah, that's why.

He finally understood the situation he was in now.

He was already “outside” now. He had [floated up] to the surface from the labyrinth—No, that separate world he had lived in before.

Rather than feeling joy or excitement, he felt terrified.

What was more, he still couldn't move his body.

He had probably used up everything he had in that final push to reach the surface. Both his Od and the equipment he had possessed were no longer there. He felt something warm and sticky around his stomach, which was probably blood. He didn't know how much blood he had lost, but he was certain that he would die if he didn't do anything about it.

Even so, he needed to stand up.

Even if he could only move one finger, he needed to get out of here.

Otherwise, everything he did would have been for nothing. He wouldn't be saved. Even if he had to crawl, he needed to start moving.

Just as he made up his mind, someone spoke.

“Are you trying to hide?”

“—!”

A figure stood in a dark corner.

Was it winter now? He thought.

That person wore a dark green jacket over a suit that was the color of the ocean. Pale skin that resembled marble contrasted starkly with flaming red hair, making the man's appearance difficult to forget.

Though he was so close to the man, he could not sense a trace of life from him. Spooked, the young man reflexively tossed out the sacrificial dagger from his belt. The small blade with moonlight stored inside it had been strengthened, and he was confident that it would be able to cut through iron like it was warm butter. He poured all of the Magical Energy that he had worked so hard to gather and stabbed upward with it.

The other person calmly looked down at the blade in his hands.

"Hm. Unfortunately, that isn't quite enough to kill me."

"...O-oh."

The dagger stopped at the surface of the jacket.

He knew that this was probably some kind of defensive magecraft. However, he could not figure out how it worked. But regardless of whether the other person solidified the air or changed the direction of the force, that man was a much more skilled mage than himself.

"I am the head of the Department of Modern Magecraft(Norwich), after all."

This sentence sent a shiver down his spine.

He knew that it was the only department out of the twelve main subjects that didn't have a Lord. Because of its lack of history, nobody from a prominent branch family of the Lords was willing to take control of it.

If that was the case, whatever trick he pulled out of his sleeve, he wouldn't be able to do anything against his opponent as just a random New Age student.

No, it wasn't just that.

The young man had completely lost control of his entire body.

He desperately tried to activate his Magic Circuits again, but he could not. It felt like every one of his nerves had been carefully removed.

The red-haired man looked calmly down at the frozen young man.

“You’re a Survivor, aren’t you? And not the regular kind, either.” Knowing that the young man who he spoke to wouldn’t be able to respond, the man smiled a wry smile. “That didn’t even require deductive reasoning. Your clothes look too outdated.”

Hearing the man point that out, the young man felt a wave of terror.

He did not expect that. Though he knew that the world above the surface was a completely different place, he never thought that even the clothing would be so different.

“Besides, I can sense the disorderly Magical Energy of the labyrinth(Albion). After all, the appearance of cracks(Portals) is very rare.”

The man raised an arm covered by his jacket sleeve.

Though the young man didn’t know what kind of magecraft the other person would use, he knew that his consciousness could be easily wiped out by it.

It had taken him so much effort to get here. Everything, and the ideals of his companions would disappear, and lose their meaning.

No. That was the only thing that he could not bear. Just the thought of that alone was far scarier than death. It didn’t matter if his eyes were gouged out or if he was torn into pieces, he would not fall here, before he achieved anything—

“Ugh...ah...”

A sound managed to escape his paralyzed lips.

The man who called himself the head of a department had probably weakened the spell so that he could speak properly. Even so, his Magic Circuits could not function properly, and his Spell could not take effect. There was still nothing he could do.

There was only a searing impulse at his throat.

“—————!”

He shouted, losing himself.

He didn't remember what he shouted. All he knew was that in that moment, he had impulsively shouted something that carried the meaning of every crude and pathetic word he wanted to shout, as a foolish person who had not gotten anywhere.

However.

That final moment did not arrive.

The young man looked up. Only then did he realize that he could move his body again.

“You're not here to capture me?”

“Oh, so that's what you thought.” A somewhat troubled expression appeared on the man's face. It was an expression that seemed to say that he wasn't sure what he was doing either.

“Why?” The young man looked at his own hand, and asked.

He didn't get to finish his question.

The red-haired man had already turned around.

“Follow me.”

He didn't know why, but he didn't want to resist. If that man wanted to do so, then he would have been perfectly capable of compelling the young man to follow the order, but he was walking of his own free will.



As the two people walked, the young man's gaze darted around the town.

It was a beautiful town.

Stone bricks that looked like they were moistened by the light of the moon were arranged in an orderly fashion on the ground, and brick buildings that were both unique and fit together into a cohesive skyline lined the streets. Though some elements seemed contradictory, the history of the town had probably caused this peculiar scene.

The word Soho had been written on a signboard, signifying that this was the Soho area of London. He recalled that this name had been derived from a hunting cry. However, he never thought that the city that he was walking through right now would be so different from the one that he had learnt about in the past. At the same time, realizing that the “ceiling” of that world was so colorful and bright inexplicably gave him a pained feeling.

“...The wind blowing from the Thames river is colder than I expected.” In the young man’s memory, the name that the man mentioned referred to the river that flowed through the city of London. The wind blowing down the street was, indeed, quite strong. It was also snowing, and the small white shards that caught the light of the streetlights reminded him of the pollen that he would sometimes come across in the labyrinth. They passed by many people in the flurry of snowflakes, and though many cast suspicious glances at him, they walked by without incident while humming tunes on ale-filled breaths, as if thinking that this was a common occurrence in this area. (TN: *Ah yes, this kid who probably has a gaping stomach wound that's leaking blood. That's no cause for concern at all!*)

It was difficult for the young man to believe that none of these people were mages.

“Never seen one before?”

“Of course I’ve... No, I haven’t.”

The young man gave up denying in the middle of his sentence and nodded reluctantly.

“I’ve seen images... but underground... there’s no such thing as night. In order to increase sleep and productivity, sometimes the light levels will be adjusted... but that’s all there is.”

“So you’ve spent quite a while there after you went down.”

“No.” This time, the young man shook his head. “I didn’t go down there. I was born there.”

“Oh.”

There was a trace of surprise in the man’s voice for the first time.

“I’ve spoken with a few Survivors before, but this is the first time I’ve met someone who was born in the labyrinth. I see, so that’s why you reacted that way,” the man muttered, without turning to look at him.

Though he seemed somewhat surprised, the man in the coat was still calm and composed. With how weak the young man was, it was impossible for him to escape. Though he wasn’t particularly scared of where the man would bring him, he didn’t have a choice but to go there.

They continued to walk between the roads and streetlamp until the man stopped in front of a rectangular building.

“Is this... a flat?”

“Yes. The Department of Modern Magecraft doesn’t have as much money as the other departments do, and there isn’t someone powerful backing it up either, so we can’t afford mansions to live in.”

After he said that, he opened the door.

The young man lost consciousness there. Just as he was climbing up the creaking spiral staircase, he passed out.



The next morning, the warm sunlight made the young man sit up.

“The sun...” he muttered to himself. Its light was so majestic and bright. It did not exist anywhere underground.

A clean blanket had been placed on top of him, and after he carefully folded it up, he opened the door to the neighboring room. The red-haired man was sitting next to a cylindrical table in the middle of the clean living room.

“Did you sleep well?”

“Uh... yes.”

Though he hadn’t been conscious, that was probably because the quality of the bed was good.

The television in front of the man was playing a news broadcast of recent events. There were places with wired televisions installed underground, too, but he couldn’t tell at a glance if the channels were the same.

The man took out a pocket watch with his slender fingers and pressed down on the French Press on the table. With the steady falling and rising of the plunger, the rich aroma of coffee filled the room.

“Perhaps it’s more typical of a mage to serve guests with alcohol, but I don’t like drinking it, and you’re just in time for coffee. Do you want a cup as well?”

The same aroma also emanated from the cup that he was handed. He carefully accepted it, and took a sip. The bitter drink enveloped his tongue, and then immediately turned into a refreshing smell that tingled his throat. Though he had never been able to properly appreciate the taste of things, he could tell that the coffee was of a very high quality.

It had the taste of something that had been frozen for a long time finally melting away.

He clenched his teeth.

He couldn’t let down his guard yet. The surface world was even more dangerous than the labyrinth for him. He could not lose his composure here.

He swallowed the coffee in his mouth, put the cup back on the table, and spoke after wiping his mouth with his hands.

“Why are you being so nice to me? You know I escaped from the labyrinth using irregular means, so isn’t capturing me the job of a mage of the Clock Tower?”

“Wait,” the man sitting across from him said, raising his hand. “I haven’t organized my words to explain the reason to you properly yet. Even if I do explain, there’s no guarantee that what I say won’t be detrimental to you. Since that’s the case, shouldn’t it be better to just leave that question alone?”

Though it was a strange answer, it made it impossible for the young man to ask any further questions. It was true, though, that if the answer ended up getting him captured again, it would be more than a bit of trouble.

Seeing him sink into silence, the man continued to speak.

“If you really wanted me to find a reason, I suppose thirty percent of it is because I think my former teacher would have done it.”

“Your former teacher?”

“Yes. By that, I’m referring to Mr. Norwich, who is often called the Daddy-Long-Legs of the Clock Tower. If he comes across anyone who looks promising, he will reach out to help them. By promising, I don’t mean talented. Sometimes, it can be based just on whoever he finds interesting.”

The man poured himself a cup of coffee and picked it up slowly. Staring at the ripples on the surface of the dark liquid, he narrowed his eyes. The young man only realized then that there were traces of light purple mixed into the black irises of his eyes.

“Yes. I only did what someone else did to me once. ...Either way, it has nothing to do with kindness. I suppose you could call it something I did on a whim because I was curious.”

Though that still wasn’t a proper answer, for some reason, it was something that the young man could accept. For that reason, he took a deep breath, and spoke.

“Can you take a look at this?”

He took out a small, cloth-wrapped bag from his pocket, and carefully lay its contents onto the table. It looked like something taken out of a child's collection of "treasure". There were some crystals, some plants covered in dirt, and some fossils the size of a person's palm.

"Can I pick them up?"

Seeing his nod, the man slowly began to examine these items.

"This piece of crystallized Magical Energy is around a D rank, and these are some withered Spirit Roots. Judging from the appearance of the finer fibers, it looks like it grew somewhere that was closer to fire. All of these are impossible to find on the surface. These are fragments of Phantasmal Species... Kelpie mane... Phantasmal butterfly scales... Oh, and there are teeth from a juvenile Chimera too. It looks like it was hunted down by some other Phantasmal Species before it could start properly hunting itself, so the surface of the teeth isn't damaged yet. Wonderful."

It seemed like he could identify everything on the table at a single glance.

The fact that he managed to analyze the artifacts. (*TN: artifact is still a bad translation for 呪体. Think of... just magicky stuff.*) that should have been rare above ground amazed the young man. The man would probably be able to survive in the world of Magecraft with this eye for discerning things along.

After carefully looking though everything else the young man had laid out, the man nodded. "Impressive. Everything from the purity of the Mystery and the amount is impeccable. No matter where you sell it, it should give you enough money to buy at least three mansions."

"Then can you buy it?" The young man asked, after a second of hesitation.

That was what the young man intended on doing. The man was silent for a moment, and he ran his fingers over his red hair with his other hand on his temple.

"Isn't the Secret Autopsy Division in charge of purchasing items from the labyrinth?" He asked. "Of course, the price shouldn't be that different from what it would fetch up here. That's how the division earns money. There are countless people who try to dig up these themselves, but hardly anyone succeeds. I could count on one hand how many

entrances there are to the labyrinth, but if you could start a trade directly between the buyers and the excavators in the maze, both would reap huge profits.”

“Then, can you buy—”

“Please allow me to decline that offer.”

“Why!” He said, raising his voice without noticing it.

In response, the man took another sip of coffee, and then responded calmly.

“Like I said last night, the Department of Modern Magecraft doesn’t have as much money or power as the other departments too. Even if I suddenly received these artifacts, I wouldn’t have the equipment to utilize them properly, nor the means to deal with what would happen if we were targeted because of it. I don’t think breaking the rules necessarily deserves to be condemned, but for me, the risks outweigh the benefits here.”

“.....”

The risks outweighed the benefits.

The young man quickly returned the artifacts on the table to the bag and bowed his head.

“Thank you. I’ll never forget your help.”

His face felt like it was burning. He felt ashamed for not considering what would be beneficial for the other person. Just as he turned around to leave, a steady voice stopped him.

“Wait. ...Take this with you.”

The man took out a book, and wrote something down on it with a fountain pen. It was a checkbook.

What made the young man even more surprised was that the sum that he had expected was written there.

“What... Didn’t you say that you couldn’t buy it?”

“Indeed. Purchasing the artifacts would be incredibly risky, but that is a judgment only limited to this point in time. If you continue to come by, I might reconsider it. Like I said before, nobody has managed to illegally excavate in the labyrinth. However, though I don’t know how you managed it, you did so. If that’s the case, don’t you have quite some potential?”

The man had a strange expression, like the fusion of that of an uncooperative politician and a sincere scientist.

The young man looked over the man and the check on the table, sinking into silence.

After a while, he asked a question out of the blue.

“Then why don’t you imprison me here now, and use torture or something to try and find out how I left the labyrinth? That’s what a mage would do, right?”

Though he had always been afraid that this would happen, he couldn’t stop himself from asking about it now.

Otherwise, he felt like he couldn’t make himself accept the check that he wanted so desperately.

Hearing his question, the red-haired man let out a somewhat annoyed sigh.

“I must have picked up on Norwich’s bad habits. In other words, once I find something interesting, I can’t help but want to see what happens next. I’ve always thought my teacher was strange, but that family’s been that way for generations,” the man said as the steam of the coffee swirled around him. “Think of it as an investment. That check comes with conditions attached, so if you’re able to come here again—”

The young man would never forget what came after that. Those words changed the course of his entire life, connecting the lives of these two people.

“—Let me take you in as my student.”

Silence settled over the room.

The young man's hand shook slightly.

In order to not spill his drink, he held the cup with both of his hands and violently downed some coffee. He waited for the complex, bitter taste to reawaken his brain. He tried as hard as he could to suppress whatever emotions began to well up in his heart and analyze the request calmly, but he soon gave up.

He didn't know what the proper etiquette was for this kind of situation. In order to appear as respectful as possible, he bowed his head.

“Can you tell me your name, [Sir]?”

He had switched to honorific speech completely subconsciously.

“Dr. Heartless. You can call me Doctor or Heartless, too. Whatever you prefer.”

And just like that, the man gave his name.

◇

“.....”

At that moment, [she] woke up.

It felt like she had dreamed for a long time. No, that was an inaccurate way to describe it. However, the feeling that remained in her body wasn't that different from the feeling of waking up in her past life. It was just that she would not have been able to see [other people's] dreams before.

She sat up, reached out to take the bottle of wine on her bedside counter, and poured some into a glass.

She had drunk a cup yesterday night already. It had tasted very sharp then, but overnight, it had softened perfectly in the air. The gentle fruity aroma combined with the tannin left a bittersweet taste on her tongue, like the impression she had of a

beautiful dancer from a faraway land who she had met once, before fading into darkness.

She recalled that it was red wine imported from Spain, but the knowledge of the modern world she had been gifted with did not, unfortunately, contain detailed knowledge of enology. Being summoned was a rare occurrence, so why couldn't this sort of information be given out as an added extra?

It wasn't just the bottle of wine itself. The entire room was infused with the scent of matured grapes.

It seemed that this hiding place had been converted from an underground wine cellar. Modern wine seemed to be more complex in flavor, and she could glimpse into a corner of the wonderful variety of wines just by staying in this room.

She liked how it had evolved.

The boons of our god seem to still be thriving in this age, she thought.

That god's name was Dionysus, the god of wine and abundance, beloved in certain regions in and around Greece, such as Macedonia. His name meant "young Zeus" (*TN: that is an interpretation of the name suggested by Jane Ellen Harris. Other interpretations include 'the god of Mount Nysa' and 'the son of Zeus'*), he had many secretive cults and was adored by the people in many lands.

The queen that she had once served (Olympias) was one such follower.

She tinkered with the Magical Energy that derived from the god Dionysus, becoming a mage of the Age of the Gods, serving the great king Iskandar. Those were tales of her past life, or what could be called her youth.

She had never thought that she would become the Servant, and return to this miserable world once more.

"...Ah, I wish I stayed dead," she uttered.

If she had stayed dead, she wouldn't have had to be involved in this nonsense. She wouldn't have found out that her former comrades had started a war with the

successors(diadochi). There was no need to lament the incompetence of herself and her brother, since they had died before they could make a difference.

Though she said that, she didn't detest the mage that summoned her. She just felt empty inside realizing that the promise she made had been for nothing.

“.....”

She shifted her gaze toward the rest of the room.

Old wooden barrels and stills were stacked in every corner.

The red-haired man simply stood there, as if he hadn't heard what she just said to herself. Both the blue coat and the ageless face were just the same as she had seen in the dream.

“Master.”

Saying that word gave her a strange feeling.

In the past, there were only three people she served. Her brother, her king, and the person who had created her, Olympias.

And now, she had not sworn her loyalty like before. Her relationship with her Master was simply a contract that involved magecraft, a mutually beneficial trade. It was only temporary.

Dr. Heartless. The former head of the Department of Modern Magecraft. Looking at his back, she raised the bottle of wine and spoke.

“Do you want a glass, Master?”

“Like I said before, I don't like drinking alcohol.”

“Hmph. You're not drinking, simply because you don't want to? That's a strange reason to decline such a fine glass of wine.”

Whatever. If he didn't want any, she could have all of it for herself. She lackadaisically poured more wine into the glass.

These are the blessings of our illustrious gods, she thought, somewhat drunkenly.

She closed her eyes and let the aroma settle before she looked toward Heartless again.

She still did not understand how this person lived. Though she had thought that his peculiar personality was just how all the mages of this age were like, she had recently begun to realize that it might just be because he wasn't good at getting along with other people.

He reminded her of that thin mage, as well as Eumenes.

She thought back to the Lord she had fought on the Rail Zeppelin, Lord El-Melloi. Though that unremarkable mage with a displeased expression and a cigar in his mouth interacted with all the people around him, he didn't seem to be happy about it. He was probably admired by his students, too.

What an infuriating person.

That third-rate(*TN: the fact that he calls himself 'second-rate' while everyone else calls him 'third rate'*) mage had not only dared to summon her king as a Servant, he had arrogantly claimed to be his follower. He was a fool who had barged into the dream of the world's most glorious king.

“...It's a bit bitter.”

“Is it? I don't think it should have a corked taste(*TN: Basically when the cork in a wine bottle causes bacteria growth*).”

“It doesn't. My emotions are just affecting the taste of the wine(*TN: So like, the polar opposite of Reines*). I guess that's something that doesn't change, even though I've become a Servant.”

She tilted her wine glass back and forth.

The candlelight coming from the corner of the room spilled across onto the wine, dissolving in the velvety hue. Though it was much more exquisite than the wine she had drank while she was still alive, wine was still wine, and she could sense the brewer's pride in every drop of it.

She recalled the days when she would have long conversations with the king and warriors who had fought countless battles.

She sighed.

“Servants don’t dream,” she said.

“...So I’ve heard.”

“...Dreaming is the privilege of the living. No matter where we are, we are only fragments of the heroes of the past, a temporary record that just happens to be playing.”

What she said was an irrefutable truth. Though “Heroic Spirit” was a fancy title, at the same time, it also meant that they did not belong to the present.

“But I just had a strange hallucination. Were those your memories?”

“.....”

Her Master did not reply.

It was just as she expected, so she didn’t mind it too much and averted her eyes. She just wanted to talk about it. However, if it was one of her Master’s memories, the perspective of the dream was confusing, but since she was only a temporary guest, it wasn’t anything she needed to dwell on.

She wasn’t even of a proper Class for a Grail War, but a Faker, an extra Class that Heartless had created himself. It was only natural that some mugs would exist.

However.

Something managed to reach her ears.

“Who’s the real Survivor, I wonder?”

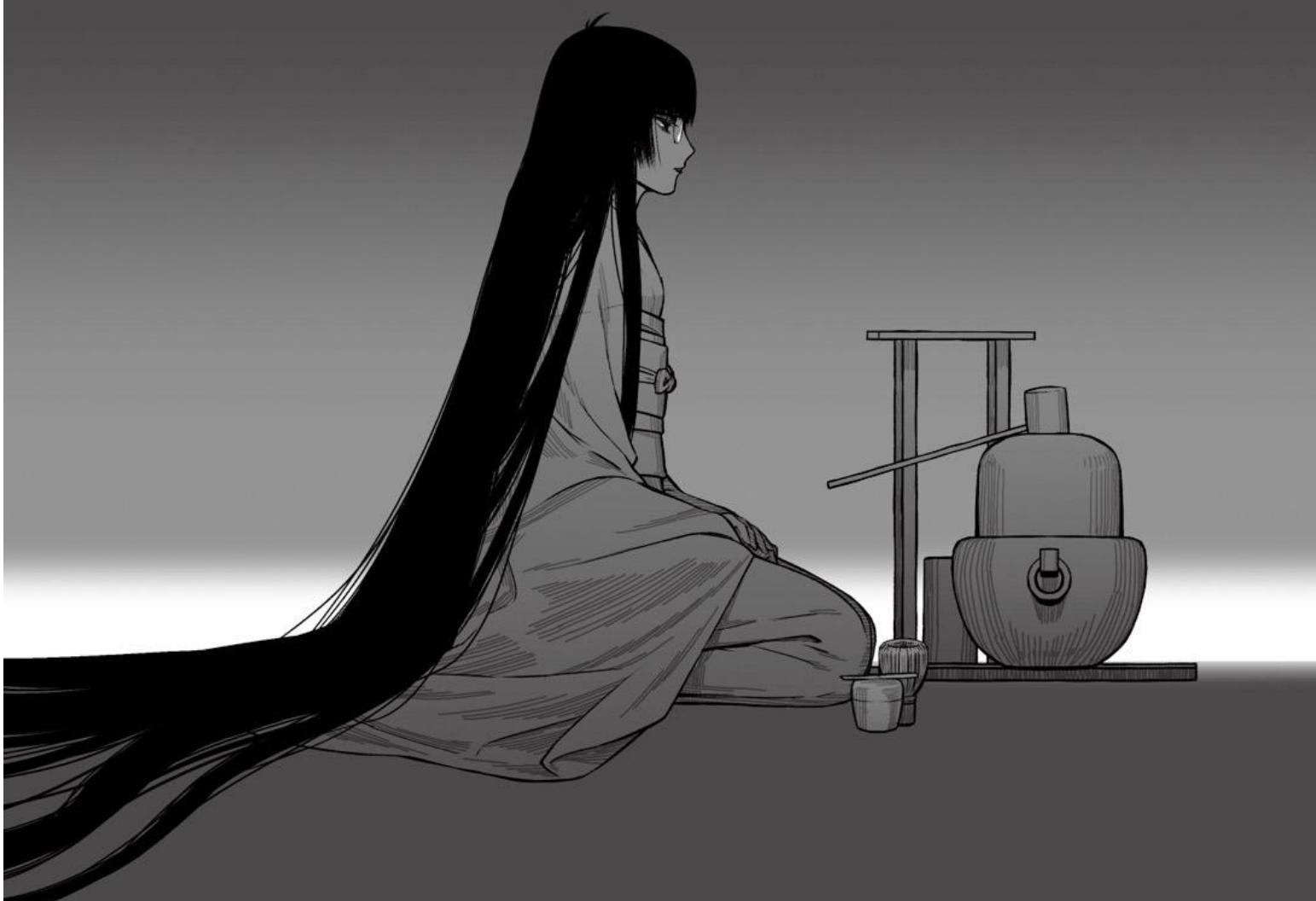
As a Heroic Spirit, she did not miss the whispered words, but she could not understand their meaning.

Heartless was buried in his work once again. There was a map on the wall in front of him, which was made of vellum. It depicted a sideways London.

Its composition seemed neither ancient nor modern. Beneath the metropolis, a dragon large enough to swallow entire planets had been pictured, preparing to burrow even deeper into the earth.

◆ 第一章 ◆

~Chapter 1~



“All classes taught by Lord El-Melloi II will be suspended for the next month. During this period of time, all the Modern Magecraft classes taught by him will be taken over by second-grade lecturer Shardan.”

Yesterday, this notice had been posted on the bulletin board, signed with my mentor’s name.

Of course, this news caused a great uproar among the students, and immediately after the notice was posted, a horde of students, including the informal students who usually took up seventy percent of the people, had barged into my mentor’s office, but by this time, he had already disappeared without a trace from Slur Street and the headquarters at the Clock Tower. He hadn’t told the other instructors where and why he had gone, so all the students could do was return, defeated, to the classes which had been delayed for a couple of hours.

Today, the dissent had not subsided, and though the classes went on as usual, the students still discussed amongst themselves. They seemed to settle on the conclusion of sending out teams all over the place to look for him. Since there wasn’t usually this much commotion when he went on field investigations, they must have noticed that something was different.

One day, in one of the buildings in the Clock Tower’s headquarters, a horde of students came up to Mr. Shardan as he was leaving and began to talk to him.

“He’s not at Druid Street, and the familiar we put there didn’t see anyone relevant entering or leaving.”

“He isn’t that good at concealment magecraft, so that means he can’t be there. If Mr. Melvin or someone else helped him hide, though... Ah, sorry. My automatic notes haven’t gathered anything either. Oh, would Svin-kun be able to find him?”

“Flat and Svin haven’t been coming to school since two days ago.”

“They’ve run off somewhere, haven’t they?”

“What about Disciple-chan?”

“Nope. People have seen her, but if you get close, she runs away immediately. That girl’s too good at strengthening. If we really want to catch her, we need to prepare some leopard spirits and runes to make a trap. I’m getting some catalysts for spiritual evocation ready, but it’ll take three days.”

“Ah...She’s a lot harder to deal with...! If we’re really going to do that, I need to dig up all the artifacts I have stored in the shed...”

They sounded like members of some kind of supernatural detective agency. If all the students of the El-Melloi Classroom really put their mind to it, perhaps they would be able to solve a few dozen missing persons cases. They might even “create” new missing people like Dr. Frankenstein.

A group of rowdy students walked through the dormitory corridor.

After they left, I carefully re-emerged from the pillar I had been hiding behind. Because I had held my breath for too long, I could feel my lungs hurting, so I slowly prepared to breathe in.

“Gray-chan!”

“...!”

My shoulders were trembling in shock. Holding my breath, I turned around to see a girl with twin pink ponytails staring down at me.

“It’s me!”

“Miss Yvette.”

Yvette L. Lehrman.

The self-proclaimed spy of the Neutral Faction, who called herself the Mystic-Eyed girl, and was outspoken about becoming my mentor’s mistress.

“Hurry up, come on!” Yvette said, gesturing for me to follow her.

Her eyes narrowed in happiness as she saw me tiptoe over.

“Oh, how nice of him! (TN: *Alternatively, ‘our dear teacher is both lovable and hatable/really is clever’ I can’t understand what Yvette’s saying half the time so please take this with a spoonful or two of salt*) Although the message’s sent through Disciple-chan, the only one he can trust is Yvette!”

“Because you can’t hide anything from Yvette’s eye and Svin’s nose... he said.”

“The right thing to say would have been ‘because you’re trustworthy!’ Or ‘I can’t get my mind off of your glamorous body, so let’s have a one-night love adventure!’ Hurry up and express your true feelings, Sir!”

The young woman walked in front of me, eyes sparkling with her delusions.

We turned around the corner of the corridor, and after checking that no other students were nearby, she took a thick envelope.

“Here, the files I mentioned earlier.”

“Thank you so much!”

There was a large number of stapled documents in the envelope.

My mentor had told me that these findings were essential, and that I needed to get them no matter what. They seemed to be information about some people in the Clock Tower, but I couldn’t comprehend the details. Though I said that, they weren’t classified information, so it was easy to get them as long as you asked the right person.

“I did what he said and found information about the Department of Modern Magecraft and the Clock Tower, up to about a hundred years ago. Of course, since I’m a spy, I’ve already given a copy to the Meluastea Faction,” she said, disclosing what she did as a spy without a moment of hesitation. Should I say that this was cunning, or kind of her?

Seeing me nod my head at a loss of what to say, Yvette tilted her head.

“What’s (TN: *our teacher? My teacher? Teacher? Sir? One of those*) doing now?”

“He’s staying for a couple of days each at the local hotels. He said that he wanted to keep his whereabouts hidden to others as well, not just the members of the El-Melloi Classroom.”

“Hm.” The twin-tailed girl knocked at her temple with her finger. “I can understand the feeling of always being on your guard. The important people in the Clock Tower are always worrying about something or the other. I don’t know much everyone knows, but they can sense it even if you don’t tell them about it. We are all mages, after all,” Yvette said, closing her eyes.

It was probably just like she said. I had been thinking of something similar just then as well. The reason why everyone in the El-Melloi Classroom had made a fuss couldn’t just be because my mentor had disappeared. Because they were all excellent mages, they had probably sensed the dark shadow looming over this city.

My mentor had once said in a lecture that intuition was an indispensable talent for mages. After that, he had, as usual, taken a jab at himself by saying that he wasn’t particularly skilled in this regard.

“So why did he suddenly decide to do this? You should know something about it, right?” Yvette asked, looking at me interestedly as I stood there with an armful of documents.

“That’s because—”

I worried about how much I should reveal to this self-proclaimed spy, and thought back to how this incident had started at the same time. An incident enough to shake the entire Clock Tower.

The memory was from a few days ago—



We were on the roof of one of London’s skyscrapers.

I had heard that the country had recently taken steps to make skyscrapers more eco-friendly by turning their roofs into gardens and planting trees. Since this place was

prone to changing with the times, artificial green spaces popped up left and right, at a rate that could be observed.

This one, however, was different.

I think it is called a tea room.

In a certain sense, to me, this place was stranger than magecraft. In the narrow room, there were beautiful shelves lined with vases that seemed to be made of thin strands of wood and bamboo. Though Reines' mansion was filled with all sorts of furniture of no lesser quality, I was enraptured by the exotic air it gave off.

I was especially shocked by the materials used to build the room itself.

...Had it been made of wood, dirt, and paper?

Everything, from the walls to the pillars and the floor, had been built with these plain materials. I couldn't help but feel how a history unlike ours had shaped this building.

Suddenly, someone handed me a curved bowl of tea.

Steam rose from the tea, sending a rich aroma into the air. Though the shape of the bowl looked almost distorted, it gave off a somewhat graceful feeling. Or, perhaps you could say that it had been designed this way for this purpose;

"You two can sit more casually if you prefer," the woman sitting inside the room said. Her brightly-colored kimono was different to the furisode she usually wore. With a soft expression on her ruby-red lips, she continued. "Though it might be easier for you to stand, I really would like you to enjoy this rare atmosphere."

"Oh... Alright."

According to her, it had already been simplified a lot, but it was still close to the limit of what I could understand, because I wasn't smart. I didn't manage to properly savor the tea she had recommended to me, either. Didn't she say that you needed to make a noise on purpose when you drank the tea?

Just as I desperately tried to remember what I was supposed to do, the person beside me spoke.

“—Hishiri Adashino.”

Unlike me, who followed the suggestion to relax a bit, he still sat perfectly straight.

With the bowl of tea in his hands, he slowly looked up at the other mage.

It was the female mage of the Department of Law, Hishiri Adashino. She was the one who had invited us to this tea room. Over the course of all the cases that had happened, we had been involved with— and sometimes, even opposed each other many times.

Her silhouette resembled a blooming flower.

However, this flower was definitely covered in thorns.

“I am grateful that you have introduced us to a Japanese tea ceremony, but isn’t it time to tell us why you have called us here?” My mentor asked, looking straight into her eyes.

“Impatient, aren’t you?” Hishiri muttered, with a displeased expression. “I heard that you’ve just been to Wales.”

What she was referring to was obvious. She was talking about my hometown.

In that village, my mentor had met the director of the Atlas Institute, Zepia Eltnam Atlasia, and had uncovered the events surrounding King Arthur and I. Though the answer had revealed my stupidity, knowing that the village had showed me kindness as well made me feel as if a heavy weight had been removed from my chest.

“It wasn’t something that would concern the Department of Law.”

“You must be joking,” the woman said, with a laugh that sounded like the ringing of bells. “It’s quite troubling to hear you say that after meeting the director of the Atlas Institute as well as an Executor of the Holy Church. Recently, I’ve heard some say that the Department of Modern Magecraft is overstepping its authority.”

“Is that all?” My mentor replied briefly.

Though it sounded like a provocation, no emotions like that really passed through the two of them. To them, it was just a confirmation of an assumption that had been made.

Was this what conversations between the Department of Law, which guarded the order of the Clock Tower, and the Lords that represented the Clock Tower itself were like?

With a loud sipping noise, my mentor finished his tea. I had heard that making this noise was part of proper etiquette. Though I found it surprising, I still carefully did as I was told.

Hishiri looked at us and continued.

“On top of that, the reason I have invited you here is, of course, to talk about my brother, Dr. Heartless.”

It took a lot of effort for me to stop my shoulders from trembling. That name held many meanings for me.

“I’ve heard that my brother was involved in that case.”

“Yes.”

My mentor nodded.

I recalled that Hishiri called Heartless her brother because they were both the adoptive children of Norwich. My mentor had said that he was the person who funded the Department of Modern Magecraft, like the Daddy-Long-Legs of the Clock Tower. From that perspective, he must also be someone with a deep connection to my mentor.

It was a fate that was difficult to evade.

The thought that everything had been decided long ago appeared in my mind.

Either way, my mentor narrowed his eyes at what Hishiri had to say.

“There were indeed traces of Heartless in Wales. It seemed that that was a place well-suited to his experiments. Would you mind if I didn’t go into the details?”

“If you could, I’d rather you tell me about the supposed details.” As she said this, Hishiri gently took out an envelope from her kimono.

“This is?”

“Something that you can use as a reference when you decide to do something from your position as a Lord.”

My mentor picked up the envelope.

“I get the feeling that the purpose of this is to make me act in a way that would benefit you, Lady.”

“The feeling is mutual,” Hishiri said, with an air of indifference. “My brother used the Fifth Holy Grail War to summon a Servant.”

“.....”

My mentor did not respond.

That was what had happened on the Rail Zeppelin. Hishiri had been on that train when Heartless summoned that Servant, too.

That is to say, the fake Heroic Spirit(Faker). An Extra Class(out of the ordinary), made for the purpose of summoning the shadow warrior of a hero who carved his name into history. Though her name had not been revealed, she had accompanied the hero, and may leave a greater mark on the world than the hero himself.*(TN: I think this talks about Servants of the Class of Faker in general, but I guess it's not wrong to apply it to this specific Faker, either)*

Normally, even the most talented mages would not be able to summon this kind of Heroic Spirit.

However, Heartless seemed to have used the spell of the imminent Fifth Holy Grail War, connected the Ley Lines of Japan to those of London, and manipulated a Subcategory Holy Grail as well as the Magical Energy of Dead Apostles. By stacking the phenomena caused by these, he had achieved the impossible.

For that reason, my mentor had decided to stay in London and not participate in the Fifth Holy Grail War.

“I’ve heard that several Servants of the Fifth Holy Grail War have already been summoned. I suppose it won’t take much longer for all seven to be gathered. When that happens, according to the information available about the wars in the past, it should be over in around two weeks.”

“Wars in the past” probably included the Holy Grail War my mentor had taken part in. It seemed that the Department of Law even had precise information about rituals in the Far East.

“Though Heartless used a Subcategory Holy Grail that he created himself to summon and maintain that Servant, it will inevitably be influenced by the original. This is evidenced by the fact that he chose a time before the Fuyuki Holy Grail War for the summoning. That is to say, once the Holy Grail War reaches its final stage, Faker will disappear. If that is the case, there is no doubt that Heartless will take action soon, yes?”

“No,” my mentor said, calmly denying what Hishiri said. “I’m afraid his plan is already underway.”

Hishiri did not react immediately to his words. She still sat there, like an austere flower brought to England from the Far East. Our words and emotions were all enveloped in her soft flower petals. Perhaps this, too, was a mystery of the East.

“Do you have any clues about it?”

“Please check the contents of the envelope first,” Hishiri said, gesturing to the envelope she had just brought out.

My mentor opened it as she said, eyed what was inside, and immediately frowned.

“...What? It isn’t time for that yet. Not only have I not been informed, what are they trying to decide by calling one now?”

“I wasn’t told the reason behind the timing either. Of course, the higher-ups must have their own considerations,” the woman from the Department of Law said evenly. “I suppose you’ll receive a formal invitation in the next couple of days. I think bringing you a few extra days of time would be enough to trade for some information about my brother, Heartless.”

“.....”

My mentor was silent.

This time, it lasted a lot longer because of what he just saw. His lips trembled slightly, but his eyes were fixed on the contents of the envelope.

“What’s the matter, Sir?” I couldn’t help but ask.

After a while, my mentor looked up.

“Miss Adashino.”

“I don’t mind. Isn’t that why you brought your disciple here? (*TN: You mean, to provide a reason to give exposition?*)” The woman said.

“—Have you heard the term Grand Roll before?” My mentor asked in a low voice.

I hadn’t.

However, I did recall hearing the word Grand before. I had the impression that it was the rank that had been granted to that puppeteer, Touko Aozaki, signifying the highest status in the world of magecraft.

To this, my mentor spoke with a bitter expression.

“It’s a meeting between multiple Lords and their representatives, to assess a situation across departments and factions. You can think of it as the highest decision-making body in the Clock Tower. For the El-Melloi Faction, the most important thing is...”

“...Yes, for the El-Melloi Faction, the most important thing was that the Department of Mineralogy(Kischur) was taken away from them in the last meeting,” Hishiri added with

a smile. “It was decided in the Grand Roll after that that the El-Melloi Faction would take over the Department of Modern Magecraft. Although, that one was only a process to mediate the controversy caused by the last decision, so there weren’t many Lords present.”

“.....”

I was suddenly at a loss for words.

This matter was too deeply correlated with both my mentor and the El-Melloi Classroom.

“This woman(*TN: calling Adashino that might be a Sherlock Holmes reference...? Either way it's still really weird*) just told me that another Grand Roll will be held soon.”

My heart suddenly began to pound violently.

For some reason, I had got the feeling that what was coming would finally come.

I think that was because I already knew. It was like the finals in a tournament.

I had a vague feeling that even if he didn’t take part in the Fifth Holy Grail War, what my mentor needed to face had come—

◇

—And now, back to the present.

After leaving the dormitories, I boarded the Tube.

Like I had been told, in order to avoid being followed, I chose the more crowded roads after I got off. I then walked from busy Kingsway and into Keeley Street, and continued walking in the cold wind blowing from the Thames.

London in winter looked like a city that had sunk to the bottom of the ocean.

Instead of being cold, it felt more like it was being buried underneath an ever-thickening layer of history. The mounted policemen that passed by once in a while reinforced this feeling.

I didn't know why, but when I saw cars, bicycles, and horses all waiting neatly at a traffic light, it made me feel kind of proud, as if I was standing in somebody else's footsteps.

...That's probably a weird thing to say.

I recalled that I used to only feel fear toward this city.

I had always been scared of all the people and history in this place. Seeing hundreds and thousands of people get consumed by giant gray buildings every day looked like they were being carried to an ancient necropolis.

However, now, it was different.

After only a few months, the past seemed more like a faraway dream.

In the face of such a drastic change, I still felt pretty calm. That must signal the end of something, too, I thought.

A meaningless pain pierced my chest.

At the same time, I stopped walking.

I tried to walk through the back door as inconspicuously as possible, and rode the elevator to my destination.

It was the hotel room I had told Yvette about.

The room was quite spacious, but if word got out to other people in the Clock Tower that a Lord was staying in a room this plain, their jaws would be dropping all over the floor. There was a cheap-looking sofa and a bed in the room, as well as a table and an old television set with a Bible put on top of it.

However, two blond teenagers that didn't look like they belonged there sat on the corner couch that had been repaired with tape.

“Welcome back, Gray—!”

“Don’t you dare approach Gray-tan like that!”

Flat cheerfully stuck out his head from behind the sofa while Svin held him down with an elbow, panting.

Ah yes, the twin juggernauts of the El-Melloi Classroom. (*TN: the sentence should probably be read in a significantly less sarcastic way, but I think this works too*)

“I’m just expressing my care for another member of the El-Melloi Classroom, like I do all the time! It would be mean to exclude Gray from that!”

“I-I never told you to exclude her!”

“Look! You’ve made Gray all upset!”

“N-n-n-no, I didn’t mean to! Gray-tan, I...”



“...Haha.”

I couldn't help but laugh, because it was impossible not to, seeing Svin flail his arms around while looking between me and Flat.

“It's alright, I understand. Even though Svin-kun might be distancing himself from me, he doesn't want to exclude me.”

“T-that's not what...”

The teenager was interrupted by a clap.

“Alright, that's enough messing around,” came another voice inside the room. “We've been switching places constantly in the past couple of days, so there's no way to settle down properly at all. Especially you, Svin. Are you the sort of person who can't fall asleep on the wrong bed? Isn't that something dogs tend to do?”

“Don't compare me to a dog!”

“My apologies. I just can't help but poke fun at people.”

Admitting to that readily was very much in her style. Reines sat on one of the better-maintained chairs and looked up from the book she was flipping through. The mercury maid, Trimmau, stood beside her as usual, preparing some black tea. There were some desserts on the table, and the aroma of tea combined with that of butter and sugar, transforming the area around her into a wonderful space. Perhaps this was some sort of Bounded Field, too.

“Gray, did Yvette give you the information?”

“Oh, um, yes. Here.”

As I reported on what I had learned, I handed the envelope Yvette had given me to her.

“Haha, looks like I'm going to have some work to do.” As she said that, she closed one of her eyes.

“So the theme really is the Grand Roll, right? But the issue they’re discussing doesn’t necessarily have something to do with the El-Melloi Faction...”

Of course, I didn’t think that the relationship between the two could be ignored.

However, Hishiri Adashino had not brought up the reason why they decided to call such a meeting. As far as I knew, the El-Melloi Faction had not made any decisive mistakes. Though I didn’t think my mentor and Reines were working in vain, I couldn’t really see why it was so important.

Hearing my words, Reines frowned slightly, and leaned back in her chair.

“No, the situation is just terrible. If we attend the Grand Roll without being sufficiently informed, opposing Lords may make proposals that will deal a fatal blow to the El-Melloi Faction.”

“Why?”

I couldn’t quite grasp how these were related.

Hearing my question, Reines nodded.

“Heartless is the former head of the Department of Modern Magecraft(Norwich), isn’t he?”

“...Ah.”

I only realized the obvious connection then, and I felt a bit dizzy from realizing my own stupidity.

“Though we don’t know what plan Dr. Heartless has concocted, he’ll undoubtedly take action in the near future, like Hishiri predicted. Looking at what he did on the Rail Zeppelin and in your hometown, whatever he does will have a significant impact on the world of magecraft.

“Of course, the El-Melloi Faction had nothing to do with all of these things. The only reason why we’re currently in charge of the Department of Modern Magecraft is that we were forced out of the Department of Mineralogy(Kischur), and decided to take the

empty spot. But that's not enough to plead innocence in the Clock Tower." There was a trace of pleasure in the young woman's words. "Strike the weak. If someone falls into the water, it's a good chance for others to make sure that they never float back up to the surface. That can be considered the basic ideology for the Clock Tower. There must be tons of people out there who are clenching their teeth, thinking that the El-Melloi Faction should have died out long ago."

To her, perhaps this was her home.

Fighting with the ease of someone eating, and trampling others as much as she breathed. That was how she managed to retain her position to this day, a place worth being proud of.

However, to me, it looked somewhat lonely. I felt like I saw her sitting alone atop a throne of ice.

"Would you like another cup of tea?"

"Yes please."

The young woman took a sip of freshly-poured tea, shrugged, and spoke.

"That's pretty much why we need to get as much information as possible. It's impossible that all twelve Lords will be there, but I want to know as much as I can about what motivates the Lords that are most likely to attend. Though it's only natural that these things can change, if we missed the big news that a Grand Roll was being held, it wouldn't be strange if something else slipped our attention."

Reines nodded, muttering as if she was reprimanding herself for letting her guard down.

"Did Yvette say anything about the Grand Roll?"

"Um, I don't think she was told about it, because she blinked and asked me if telling her about it was really okay. Then, she said that if she didn't even know, the Meluastea Faction either didn't know either, or decided to give up their votes."

“Is that so? You really have to hand it to Yvette, then. Though she should only be one of the least important spies, and there’s no way of telling exactly how much she really knows about the inner goings-on of the Meluastea Faction, she thinks the same way I do. This report is very well-written.”

With a thump, Reines hit the paper with the back of her hand.

It was rare to see her praise someone like that. I suppose Yvette’s insightfulness and the information she had compiled must be just as valuable.

“What is the information about?”

“Like before, it isn’t classified information, but it’s something that only belongs to the Meluasteas.”

“...Ah, that’s the faction that Miss Yvette is spying for, right?”

“Exactly. Even if it’s the same basic information, different factions will have different perspectives. This basically talks about who Dr. Heartless is from the perspective of the Meluastea Faction. Combining this with the information the Department of Modern Magecraft has gives you a different picture.”

Reines quickly scanned through the information, taking out a few photos.

“Svin.”

“Yes?”

“Compare this to the information from earlier. I can get an idea from this, but it’s easier if you can confirm it.”

“Got it.”

Svin took the files unexpectedly obediently.

I looked toward them and began to ask a question.

“Speaking of which, where’s—”

Before I could finish my sentence, a door was opened.

It seemed he had been taking a shower in the other room.

He was wearing a bathrobe, and his long, wet hair had been covered with a towel. There were still droplets of water dripping from his pale neck, but the thing that stood out the most to me was how he seemed to look even thinner.

“Oh, you’re back, Gray.”

He slowly sat down on another chair, as if he was liable to collapse then and there. The expression on his face was more sullen than usual.

“Are you alright?”

“In terms of how well I’m doing physically, I couldn’t be worse,” my mentor said readily.

His face was pale, and he clutched his stomach with his right hand. Though he had probably already taken magecraft medicine, it wasn’t enough to completely suppress the pain. He sloppily dried his hair with a towel, reached out to take a cigar from the desk, carefully lit it, and inhaled.

After taking a puff of smoke with a pained expression, my mentor spoke.

“I’ve just discussed it with Reines as well. Two letters arrived early this morning. Ah, I change hotels every day to avoid people tracking us, but of course they still managed to get here.”

As he said this, my mentor took out two envelopes from the desk drawer. Both of them looked incredibly elaborate, and different patterns had been pressed on each of the wax seals.

My mentor first looked toward the envelope on the right.

“One of them was sent through Melvin, from the Democratic Lord Valualeta.”

Of course, I remembered this name.

Inorai Valualeta Atroholm.

An old woman who was bold and forthright.

She was the first Lord other than my mentor I had met, back at the Twin Towers of Ilsema. She managed the Department of Creation(Valuay), and though she appeared to be kind, and accepted technology, she was one of the most accomplished mages I knew of.

She represented the pinnacle of a mage's ability, as someone capable of being the teacher of Touko Aozaki.

“The other one was from the Lord of the Department of Spiritual Evocation, the Aristocratic Lord Eulyphis.”

“The Department of Spiritual Evocation...”

That was a department I was not familiar with at all.

According to what my mentor had said in a class, that department dealt with utilizing spirits, or sometimes only a small part of them. In a certain sense, it had something to do with my hometown, so I felt the fear that was associated with it, too.

Even though the El-Melloi also belonged to the Aristocratic Faction, it didn't mean that the people who invited us only had kind intentions. The look on my mentor's face was a clear indication of this.

Reines' shoulders trembled as she giggled.

“Fortunately, there isn't a conflict in the times the two parties offered to meet. This means we've avoided being interrogated on our standing by both of the factions. But if they really did interrogate us, I'm sure I'll get to see an interesting expression from you, brother dear.”

“Lady. Do you understand that we're in the same boat here?”

“Of course I do. Regrettably, I am the sort of person who cares more about my pleasure than my ruin.”

“...You really are a horrible person.”

“Why, thank you.”

Hearing Reines quietly giggle, I sank into thought. This was more than my brain could handle. Everything, from the Grand Roll, to the two factions involved in it and the sinister plans Dr. Heartless had, was completely outside of my imagination. Perhaps it was just as Reines had said. Only those who were familiar with the constant scheming of the Clock Tower would be able to deal with this.

“.....”

For the moment, I switched to thinking of something else.

It was pointless to make a list of all the things I couldn’t do. I wracked my brain, trying to find something that I could do to actually help my mentor. Ah, in the end, all I was capable of was entrusting everything I had to someone I could trust.

For that reason,

“—What can I do?”

“Oh?” Reines said, raising one eyebrow. “Enthusiastic, aren’t you? A bit too disciplined to be the disciple of someone like my brother, don’t you think?”

“Shut up. ...I think so as well.”

Hearing what my mentor quietly added made my face heat up. I felt like I had just burst into flame, and I tried to organize my thoughts as my ears turned bright red.

“Um, I... I think that I’m still a worthless disciple. B-but there must be something I can do.”

“Yes. Well then, let’s divide up the teams according to ability.” As she spoke, Reines picked up five perfectly-baked sablé biscuits. Excluding Trimmau, that was exactly how many people we had.

“First, one group accompanies my brother to go and meet the big shots who sent us those letters. Well, the only people in that group are me and my brother. Against someone of that level, even the slightest mistake in manner could be disastrous, and none of you have any idea how to hide your emotions.”

I looked to the two biscuits that had been separated from the others. I understood this decision very well. Flat and I were undoubtedly unfit for this role. Though I felt that Svin was a bit more competent in this regard, it was still far from enough to converse with those politically savvy and cunning people at the very top of the Clock Tower.

Reines put the remaining three cookies on a small plate and handed them to us.

“The other group will conduct an investigation based on the information we just received. In order to make preparations for the Grand Roll, this group will look into what the former head of the Department of Modern Magecraft, Dr. Heartless, has been doing. The members are Gray, Flat, and Svin. Svin’s nose can be used for tracking, analysis is Flat’s specialty, and I hope Gray will be able to keep the two on a leash.”

“However, in the unlikely event that you come across Heartless himself or Faker, retreat immediately. That’s a non-negotiable condition for me to allow you to become involved in this.”

What my mentor added was obvious. He had suspended all the classes at the El-Melloi Classroom because he didn’t want to get his students involved, and I had already experienced what Flat and Svin would do if they were left unattended.

“I... will try my best.”

“And I will allow Gray-tan to keep me under control!”

Beside Svin, who seemed oddly excited, Flat clapped his hands together.

“Ah, Le Chien-kun! Are you interested in things like nose rings and leashes? I can go look for a style that suits Gray and Svin-kun later!”

“I said, don’t compare me to a dog! And also, why’d you mention nose rings first?” Svin retorted loudly, beginning to argue with Flat.

The two of them have such a good relationship, I thought.

“Ihihihi! They’re always arguing, aren’t they!” Said Add, somewhat happily from the hook at my right shoulder.

“Yes. I envy them a little— No, I envy them quite a lot.”

“Hey, you’ve become honest!”

“I hope I can become even more honest,” I replied quietly.

Then, I asked Reines the only other question that I had.

“But, if my mentor’s not there, who will lead the investigation? If someone else does it, my mentor will need to ask some more professional questions, right?”

Though he wasn’t a detective, he was always responsible for figuring things out in a case. Flat and Svin were also far from comparable to my mentor in terms of knowledge about magecraft.

“About that, I’ve thought about it a little bit. I don’t know whether it’ll suit your liking, though.” Reines said, as the corners of her mouth rose in a mischievous smile.



—{The seventy-eighth floor of the Great Magic Circuit.}

At least five people were needed to do anything in the maze.

Two people to excavate, one person to be the lookout, and two people to fight off the Phantasmal Species and other hostile creatures. Of course, there could be more members, and one person could take on multiple roles, but it was basically impossible for a team with fewer members to get a permit.

The young man was most skilled at excavation.

His element was Earth.

Though he didn't learn any impressive types of magecraft from his New Age mother, it was enough for him to navigate the maze. He had been taught all he needed to know to find and extract rare ores and artifacts.

Now, they were exploring the seventy-eighth floor, which was around thirty thousand meters from the surface. He had heard that on the surface(sky), the tallest mountains were no more than nine kilometers tall. What a small world it was.

However, it had such a beautiful night sky.

“Oi! What are you standing around for, kid? Do you want to become monster food?”

The one reprimanding him was a slightly overweight mage, who was also the oldest of the group.

Like the young man, he was an excavator. His element was fire, and his job was to use Alchemy to create all sorts of concoctions to dissolve the rock, causing the minerals to float to the surface.

“Ah, it'd be fine if you could die a quick death(*TN: It's unclear who he's talking about, so he could just as easily be talking about himself dying a quick death*). Otherwise, don't waste those potions(*TN: Alternatively, medicines*)! Don't underestimate how long they take to brew!”

In the moist air of the Great Magic Circuit, the alchemist's rambled on and on.

Though it was called a Magic Circuit, there weren't actually many traces of the [dead dragon] here, and it wasn't that different from a regular cave. However, the only cave system that would have dimly shining Magic Circuits embedded in it was this labyrinth, and a carnivorous spore or fire-eating rat would appear if you let down your guard for even a moment.

“Calm down, Gesell. You're both excavators, so cut him some slack.”

“He also earned us quite a bit of money up on the surface.”

The two who came to mediate were the people in charge of fighting.

He had heard that these two siblings had come here from the surface a few years ago, hoping to become rich. They often joked as they drank that if they came from a better family of mages, they might need to fight each other for the right to inherit the Magic Crest.

“Thank god you managed to sell that up there.”

“I thought I was going to die. The Autopsy Division really is violent! Speaking of which, who did you manage to sell it to?”

“Um, it’s a long story.” He muttered.

Actually, he didn’t plan on sharing the money with any of the others, and he hadn’t told them that he had become the student of the head of the Department of Modern Magecraft, who called himself Heartless. That was because he hadn’t figured out what had happened yet, so it was impossible for him to explain.

“You spoil this kid too much!”

The two brothers laughed as they talked to the grumbling Gesell. Even so, the atmosphere around them still felt harmonious. After all, they had been teammates for quite a while now. Though there were occasional disagreements, the young man knew that the three of them would often team up when they were in the City, too.

The last member of the team walked over.

She was a dark-skinned young woman, around the same age as him.

She was their lookout.

She had eyes that were the same color as her skin and beautiful lips. Her element was water, which matched her appearance as well, and her specialty was automatic elemental transformation magecraft. Her hair was shoulder-length and well-combed, and she always gazed calmly into the distance. To the young man, the side of her face

was dazzling(*TN: Literally dazzling. Like 'it blinded him' kind of dazzling. Hopefully she doesn't actually emit light*).

She walked up to him and spoke.

“I’m glad. About this, and about the matter of your family, too.”

Though she didn’t say much, her emotions came through clearly.

To the young man, this was enough.

So he couldn’t help but say something else.

“Um,”

“What?”

What he said next required just as much courage as the decision to go to the surface. He held onto the excavation tools at his belt, and looked not to the young woman’s eyes but to the ground, which emitted a gentle light.

“When we get back to the city, could we go for a meal together?”

In this instant, it seemed like he was ten thousand light years away from the brothers and Gesell.

After a while,

“...Sure,” the dark-skinned young woman said and nodded, somewhat embarrassedly.

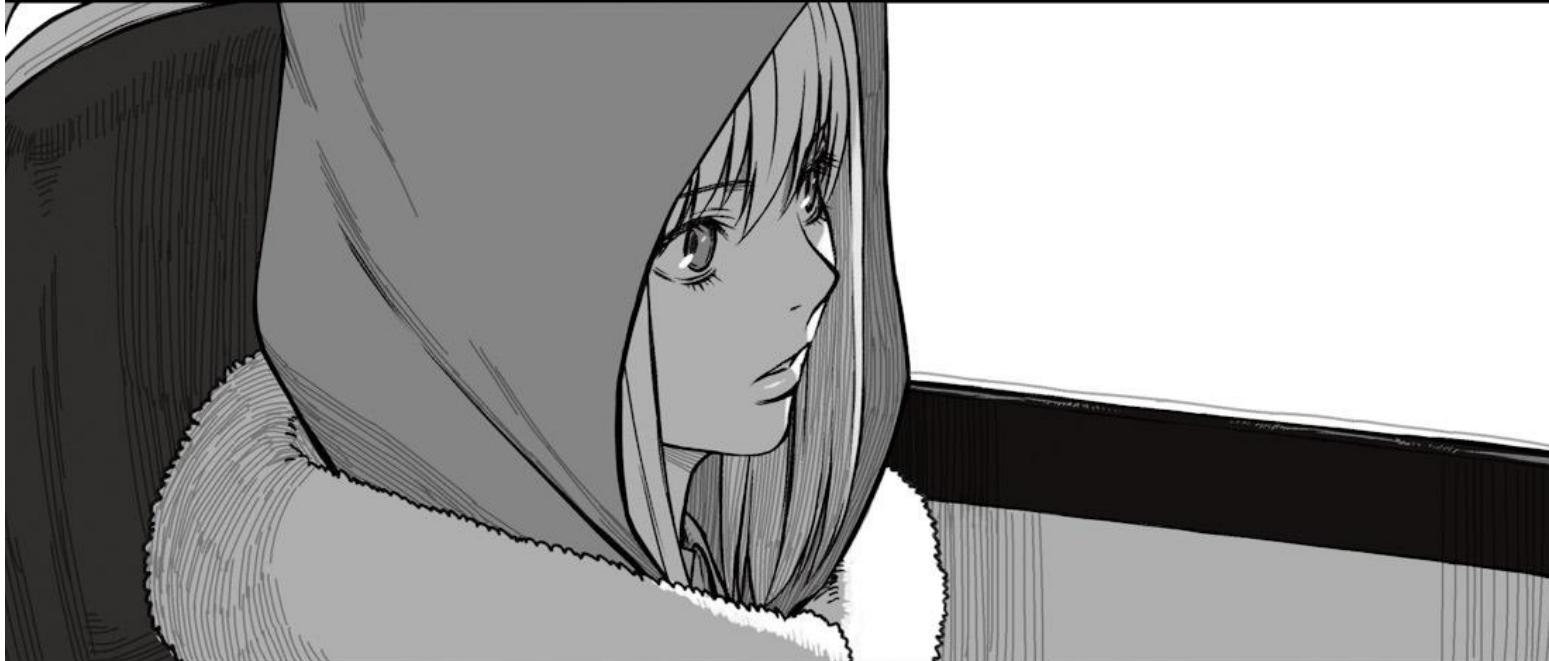
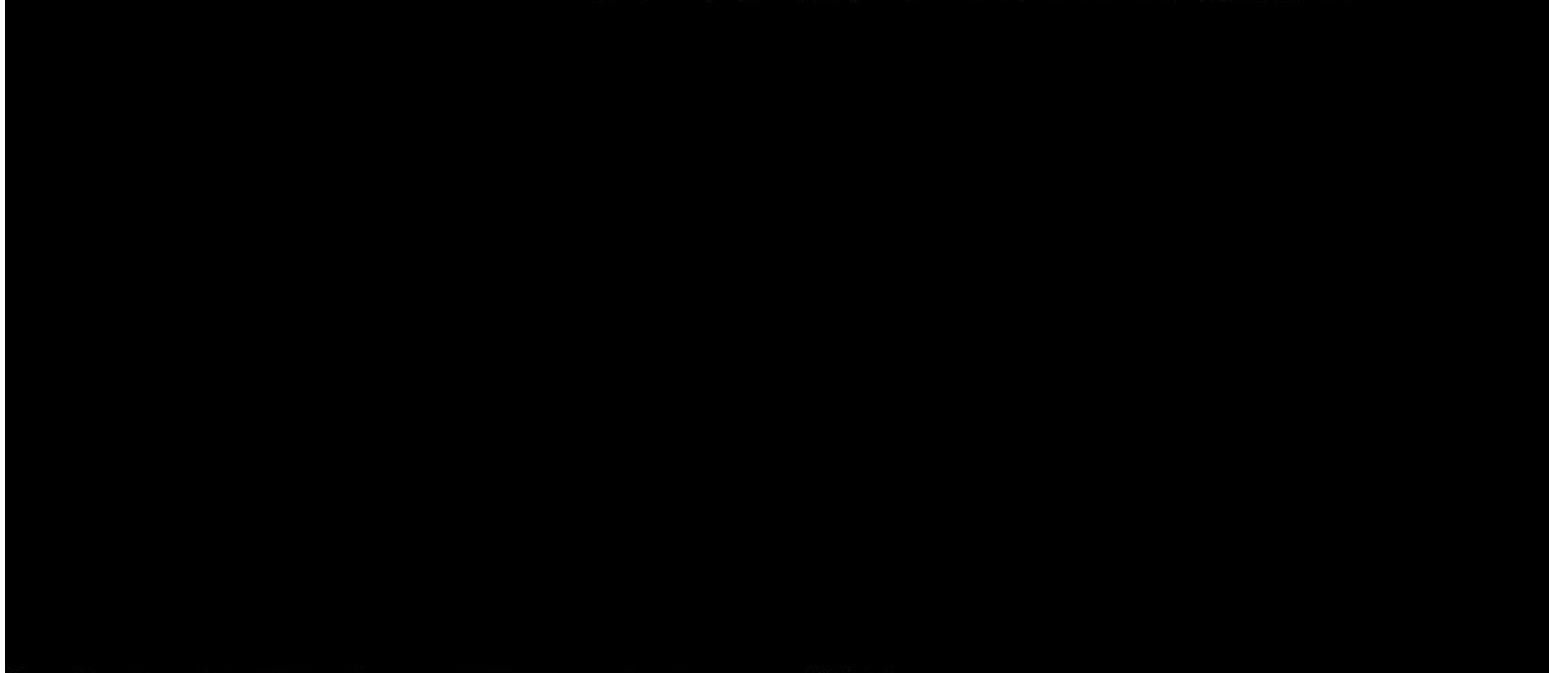
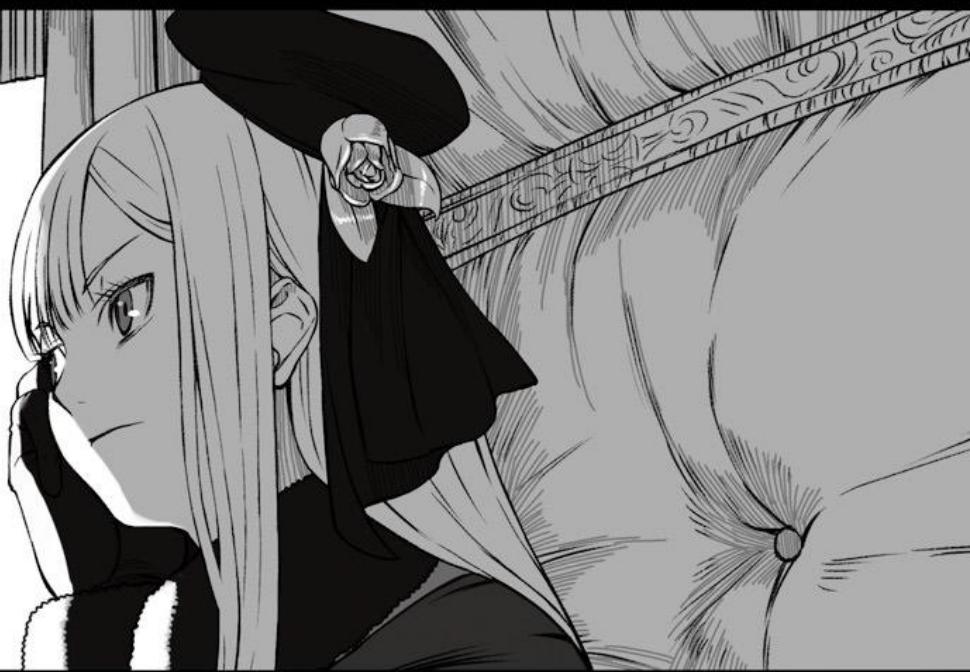
Though the light in the Magic Circuit was faint, it was beautiful. In his eyes, though there wasn’t a sky, this light was enough.

—That all happened more than ten years ago.

To the young man, those years were undoubtedly the best years of his life.

◆ 第二章 ◆

~Chapter 2~



—To [me].

The term Grand Roll meant something different.

That was because the fate of Reines El-Melloi Archisorte had been decided there.

In that meeting, it had been made clear exactly how devastating the death of Kayneth El-Melloi Archibald was. On that day, the El-Melloi Faction was dragged out of the Department of Mineralogy(Kischur), which they had managed for ages, and a majority vote was used to determine that a placeholder needed to be found.

Then, before the next Grand Roll after that one, I was forcibly installed as the new Lord-elect, and ended up as the target of so many assassination attempts that I didn't want to think about again. The only reason why I managed to survive was because of what my steward taught me, and the hard work I put into it... But in the end, what determines death or life is luck.

That was why I started to have my eye on my brother.

I'd always been a fan of his, ever since he survived from the Fourth Holy Grail War, when even my adoptive brother(Kayneth) died. In terms of combat and survival ability, he'd probably be last out of all the Masters, but he somehow managed to live, and acquired the El-Melloi Classroom.

Usually, someone in my position would hate him.

Though there were no records of them directly fighting each other as mages, he was undoubtedly one of my adoptive brother's enemies. Besides that, there were even reports of how he stole my adoptive brother's artifact. Though I hadn't met my adoptive brother that many times and didn't have any particular attachments to him, according to my usual style, I should have used this as an excuse to drain everything I could from him.

As to why I didn't do that, I may have been a bit fascinated by him.

The fact that a student who was average even amongst other New Age students managed to survive when a Lord died required some serious luck. If I could get in on some of this luck, perhaps I would be able to survive a bit longer. With a thought like that, which felt like some sort of bad magecraft, I dragged him over and tied him to this title.

“You’ve attended a Grand Roll before, right?”

“There were only four Lords present if you counted the representatives then the minimum number of people required. Lords are always incredibly reserved. Though, I’m doubtless the only Lord who we’re meeting in the Clock Tower wouldn’t be worth boasting about.”

“Isn’t that canceled out by how everyone is closer to you? Otherwise, you wouldn’t have any dignity or prestige at all.”

Seeing my brother look displeasedly back at me, I felt a sense of fulfillment. Though we’ve known each other for years now, your insecurities are still easy to see. How pathetic. I hope you never change.

I looked away.

We were now sitting on the horse carriage Lord Valualeta had sent for us.

The Trambelios had also prepared a horse carriage, but that didn’t mean they didn’t have fancy cars. Even this would send a message about what the relationships between the two parties are.

This time, the extraordinarily polite attitude of the coachman told us that “we respect you, so can you betray the Aristocratic Faction and join us?” One of these days, I’ll snap back at them for using this kind of communication by telling them that it was quite aristocratic of them. And then, I would ask them how the heck they managed to make the ride not make my butt jolt around.

“Either way, we still don’t have enough information. Since they’re the ones going all this way to invite us, we can use this as a pretext to gather some. The rest will depend on what the investigation team can find.”

I nodded, and asked him something else.

“Well then, how’s our investigation team doing?”

I was getting a bit excited, but don’t blame me for that, brother dear.

To tell you the truth, I didn’t think that I would like that idea so much, but the mere thought of it was enough to bring a smile to my face. Seeing Gray’s eyes light up when she saw it made me have the uncharacteristic thought that perhaps this was all the good deeds I needed to do in my entire life.

My brother’s frown grew even deeper, and he sighed.

“There are no problems for the time being, but since Flat and Svin are there, we can’t be too careful.”

“Hahaha. And what about Gray?”

“She’s [on the bus with me] right now. We’re going over the information we have about Heartless,” my brother answered with a look of pain on his face.

Trimmau, who sat in the same carriage, looked at us with the same expressionless face as usual.



London’s buses had a long history, so I’m told.

Even someone like [me] who hasn’t lived in London for very long should be familiar with those squat red double decker buses from movies and TV shows.

Though this city used to use horse carriages for transport, buses and underground trains had taken over after they were introduced in the twentieth century. I found it incredibly surprising when I heard that bendybuses had only been introduced very recently(*TN: only in 2001*) when I first arrived in London with my mentor. The way the two coaches had been linked together seemed like it would only create more problems, but I guess that just showed how much the city of London loved buses.

And now, we were sitting on one of those famous double deckers.

Outside the window, the streets flew past us along with the steady sounds of engines.

There were museums, art galleries, and bicycles lining the streets, and they combined together to form this city. They made me gradually forget what I was even here for.

Of course, the reason why we chose to ride the bus was to avoid being tailed. We didn't use the car given to my mentor for formal business, or the car given to him for personal use. We even walked to the bus station separately. Svin explained that those fanatical students would take note of the tiniest details, not only remembering the type of car and the license plate, but also what impressions the tires would leave on the roads. This made my mentor's car incredibly easy to track using magecraft.

Getting back on topic, one phrase appeared as we discussed our investigation on the second floor of the bus.

“Heartless’ students...?”

“Yes.” My mentor's voice confirmed.

I sat at the very back of the bus, while Flat and Svin sat in the row in front of me. Though we spoke as quietly as possible, we had strengthened our hearing, which meant that we could talk normally.

Of course, in order to prevent the other passengers from hearing, Flat put a spell in place so that they would perceive any dangerous discussions of magecraft as harmless talk about school life. I got the feeling that he would use this type of magecraft in class as well, but I didn't ask more about it.

My mentor cleared his throat and continued. “He was the head of the Department of Modern Magecraft once, after all. Countless people have probably been taught by him, but not many of them could be called his students.”

That made sense.

If you count the informal students, there were many mages that had received his guidance. However, there were only so many students that actually understood him. If

you limited those to only the formal students of the El-Melloi Classroom, there would be even fewer.

This applied to Heartless even more, considering that the Department of Modern Magecraft didn't have many people back then.

"Though the records from the Department of Modern Magecraft have been carefully removed, the Meluastea still have some information, although it's difficult to tell without something to compare it to. Combined with the extra information revealed to me by Hishiri, I've already grasped the whereabouts of five students. I hope you can go look for them in those locations."

"Al~righty!"

"...Flat, try to stay back. Svin, I'll let you handle most of the communication. I can help when you need me to, so try and find as much about Heartless as you can. But then again, even though I'm asking you to investigate, Heartless' actions may have nothing to do with the Grand Roll."

Though my mentor said that, he didn't sound like he believed that was the case.

Even though the Grand Roll was a sudden event, that didn't mean it was completely unrelated to the cases that had happened up until now. That was too unlikely. But even if they really were unrelated, my mentor still had to face both.

"Understood." Svin said, nodding. "But Sir, it's not a good idea for you to meet people [like this], right?"

"....."

My mentor was briefly at a loss for words.

At the same time, Flat turned around and covered his mouth with his hands when he saw my mentor again.

"Pfft, hahaha...!"

"Don't laugh at him, Flat! That's too disrespectful!"

“B-but still! Professor doesn’t fit the nickname of Big Ben ☆ London Star like this! Should I call him Little Ben ☆ London Star now? Or maybe Metal Ben ☆ London Star?”

Though the seats of the bus came in pairs, there was nobody sitting next to me.

My mentor’s voice came from beneath my feet.

The key was his size.

“...Lady, I’m glad you’re not laughing at me, but why do you have to have such a troubled expression? And why is your nose twitching?”

“N-nothing, I just, didn’t think you’d become so cute...”

“Ihihijihi! Now you’re the same as me!”

Add’s comment fit the situation well. It took all of my strength to stop myself from laughing, because now, my mentor was small enough to fit in someone’s palm.

Everything, from his long hair to his clothing now shone with a metallic shine, and had been sunk to [one-tenth] of its original size. Apparently, this was something akin to a mentor-familiar, created by adjusting part of Trimmau.

Some passengers heard our laughter and turned to look at us, and we apologized. Though Flat’s magecraft hid my mentor and the important parts of our conversation, it seemed that it wasn’t enough to hide our laughter, too.

“If the situation demands it, there’s no way out,” the miniature version of my mentor said, with a displeased expression. “If there is more to do at the meeting, I might not be able to respond to what’s happening here. For the moment, I can sense my surroundings because Volumen Hydrargyrum was designed to calculate feedback. Though it’s not like I don’t have familiars, I can’t hope to reach the same level of precision, and my Magic Circuits aren’t good enough to calculate action corrections. I’m not happy that I have to rely on Reines, but since this is the most effective way, it would be stupid not to use it.”

That was very much in my mentor’s style.

“Either way, Lady, if the time comes for me to speak as Lord El-Melloi II, say that you’re acting as my familiar now. I’ll speak from your pocket. Are you alright with that?”

“...Y-yes. Of course.”

“Thank you.”

The miniature version of my mentor gave a gentlemanly bow.

“Back to Heartless’ students. Right now, you’re going to meet Gesell Tolman. He is very famous for his potions, and his element is fire. Though he hasn’t been in contact with the Clock Tower for a while, other people seem to hold him in high regard. The report didn’t say that he is a belligerent person, but if we do end up having to fight...”

We confirmed a few other things besides that, and the bus arrived at our destination.

It was a very quiet place, close to a residential area and a park. Only a few pedestrians could be spotted walking by.

Of course, compared to my hometown, this was still evidently a city. Even though we were in London, a twenty-minute bus ride from the city was enough to bring us to a place like this. Who living here would think that they lived next door to a mage?

Given the Londoners’ liking of ghosts, perhaps that might make this place even more desirable.

“The workshop’s not far from here, to the west,” my mentor said from my pocket.

As we walked, the smell of fish and chips wafted from a small stall in the park. Most stores would add all kinds of seasoning for you, but I liked it with more mustard and ketchup, and less malt vinegar. Once you take a bite, the crispy exterior and the seasonings blossom in your mouth, and the texture it forms with the tender cod creates a taste that you will never get sick of, however many times you eat it.

That was a scent that I had only found out about after I came to the city.

My mentor was the one who showed me this wonderful taste.

Just as I thought of this, the teenager beside me stopped in his tracks.

“Svin-kun?”

“There are some smells mixed together.”

“Huh?”

Clearly, he wasn’t talking about the smell of fish and chips.

“It’s the smell of magecraft, like a murky blue and purple. It should come from some potions used in alchemy, and there’s some red mixed into it.”

Svin frowned, and my mentor gave some new instructions from my pocket.

“Flat, keep a lookout.”

“OK, Professor! Game Select!”

Hearing my mentor’s instructions, Flat drew a circle in the air with his finger and made a sheet of aluminum foil fly into the air.

It looked like Japanese origami. Or perhaps, like the wireframe of a game. A concentration of Magical Energy that looked neither like a bird nor like a butterfly flew into the sky above a house, flapping its aluminum wings like a real creature.

“It’s a house with a chimney. Hmm, yes, it really is a workshop... Do you want me to hack in from here?”

“Don’t. If you get discovered, it becomes self-defense for the other person to fight us. All we’re doing now is asking about his teacher. We only need to give him a visit. ...But if anything goes wrong, retreat immediately. Don’t let your guard down.”

My mentor’s low voice carried some nervousness, and I felt myself tense up.

Svin and I exchanged a look as we approached the front door. I swallowed and took a deep breath before I knocked twice.

There was no response.

I immediately got the urge to knock again, but I stopped myself. In order to protect my mentor, I silently circulated the Magical Energy in my body so I could strengthen myself and fight if anything came up.

Finally, something inside approached.

I heard the sound of unmasked footsteps.

A gap the size of a thread opened, and gradually grew wider—

“—Hi, how are you doing?” The person inside asked.

For a second, my mentor and I held our breaths. Behind us, Svin, who had even more acute hearing, tensed up, because we were familiar with this voice. The impression that this person had left on us was too deep.

Flat, however, clapped, and spoke with an excited voice.

“Long time no see! Why are you here? Are you a student of Dr. Heartless? No, that can’t be right, you two look the same age. And even though you do all sorts of things, the spells that you use don’t feel related at all, [Miss Touko]! It’s like if a street fighter tried to infiltrate into a bunch of office workers with a camouflage bandanna! Maybe a game like that will appear in the future!”

“Well, you haven’t changed. I don’t dislike your attitude. I don’t know much about games, though, so sorry about that. ...And the Lord’s become so cute,” the woman who wore glasses said with a light chuckle.

Though her smooth skin made her look less than thirty years old, there was no way to be sure. The color red, which was somewhat similar to the color of her hair, suited her well. It wasn’t a pure red, but rather, uneven and dark, and fit who she was. (*TN: I’m not sure what Gray’s talking about here*)

Her name was just as Flat had brought up. Perhaps I should have expected her to come up when I first heard the words Grand Roll.

“Touko Aozaki...” My mentor said from my pocket.

The Grand puppeteer smiled at us from the other side of the door.



After a brief moment of hesitation, we still entered the house at her invitation.

Just like Svin’s nose had determined, there were large amounts of medicines and potions on the shelves that lined the walls. All sorts of herbs and insects filled piles of bottles, making the miniature version of my mentor exclaim in wonder as he saw all of this from my pocket.

We drank the coffee that Touko prepared, as she started to answer our questions.

“Yes, of course I know Dr. Heartless. I’m familiar with the version of the Department of Modern Magecraft(Norwich) that he was the head of. Even now, it still feels a bit off to say that it’s under the El-Melloi now.”

“...It was only forced onto us because of our decline.”

“Looking at your students, didn’t it turn out pretty well?” Touko said, looking happily at the miniature version of my mentor, who sat on the armrest of a chair.

She drank her coffee and slowly leaned back on the wooden back of the chair. She looked like the head of some kind of detective agency. Perhaps she really had done something like that in the past.

“I’m evidently not one of Heartless’ students. Perhaps you could say that I’m here for the same reason as you.”

“You’re here for the same reason as us?”

Hearing my question, the woman smiled.

“Yes. This is someone else’s house. I’ve never even met the owner, much less gotten his permission. I just took some coffee randomly from over there, but it seems like this person’s taste isn’t bad.”

“Uh, Miss Touko?!” I instinctively exclaimed.

Touko took another sip of coffee with a brilliant smile. At the same time, my mentor’s frown deepened.

“Have you already taken over that person’s workshop...?”

“I haven’t done anything that reckless. I’ve just not done anything hostile yet. Isn’t it evident what acts would disrupt the workshop?”

I couldn’t comprehend how skilled someone would have to be to do that.

I didn’t even understand how entering the house and then preparing coffee could be counted as “not hostile”.

However, an expression of despair appeared on the face of the miniature version of my mentor. It was an expression like that of someone who had already used up all their stamina while running a marathon, and just realized how much more they had to run.

“...Well then, let’s get down to business.”

Touko removed her glasses, and her voice suddenly became lower (*TN: Alternatively, lost its cheer*).

Something similar had happened before. After she did this, her personality would change. It was like a switch that changed into and out of a mask to talk to others rather than a shift in personality, like a difference in how important good and evil were perceived as. One was more like a human, while the other was not. Both of them were Touko Aozaki, but that didn’t mean they were both real.

“I suppose you could liken my reason to indigestion (*TN:?*). Though I enjoyed what happened at the Twin Towers of Ilsema, I know that fragments were left behind. And since I was forced to leave, there were some things that were left unresolved, so I’m pursuing them with the mindset of using it to pass time.”

She was talking about Heartless.

That mage had been involved in that case as well. Both my mentor and Reines believed that Heartless was the one who provided the funds to purchase the artifact that was the key to that case.

For that reason, it wasn't strange that the Grand puppeteer who happened to be used was looking for his whereabouts. Actually, I had serious doubts about whether she really minded having been used or not, so an explanation like indigestion felt quite fitting.

"So, from what your student said just then, you've been chasing Heartless for a while now, right? How much do you know?"

"For the moment, we know that he has around five students."

"Ha. As expected of someone of your position in the Clock Tower. You really investigated this quickly. Can you show me the list of names?"

"Yes. Svin, help me show it to her."

My mentor nodded, and Svin obediently took his notes from his pocket. Seeing the names, Touko raised one finger and spoke.

"Ah, going to look for these two people will be pointless."

"What do you mean?"

"They've disappeared, like the owner of this house. I was looking into rumors of missing mages for something else, but I ended up bumping into the topic of Heartless. I guess you could call it a serial disappearance case."

Touko's response made me shiver, and the coffee I was holding seemed to lose its aroma.

[A serial disappearance case.]

I felt like I was suddenly sucked from the strange world of mages and into a detective novel. The development described by the highest-ranking mage I knew was so sudden it made me feel a pungent taste spread in my mouth.

“Disappearances, you say?” My mentor asked, somewhat stiffly.

“Oh, you didn’t know?” Touko said, observing our reaction. “It’s not something worth being surprised about. If a normal person disappeared, there might be some commotion, but mages are the anomalies of this world. Even if they disappear, it’s likely to go unnoticed. Even more so if they aren’t in contact with the Clock Tower.”

I didn’t know whether she was joking or not, but she then added that “the same goes for me.”

“Combining the statements given by the people around here and the state of the workshop, the mage that lived here, Gesell Tolman, went missing around three days ago. Counting the other two, that makes three people. I haven’t confirmed the situation of the two remaining students, but looking at this list, I can now be sure of the thing they have in common. After all, the other two are quite famous where you are. ...By that, I mean that they’re all Survivors of the labyrinth.”

“Wow! Really?”

“It’s the first time I’ve heard about real Survivors. They’re hard to find in the Department of Modern Magecraft.”

Hearing Flat and Svin’s reaction, I tilted my head.

“...The labyrinth?”

Both of them blinked in surprise.

At the same time, the compressed version of my mentor covered his mouth with one of his compressed hands.

“Oh, right. Gray doesn’t know yet.”

“Ah—, Gray goes to classes at the Clock Tower sometimes, but she isn’t a mage, after all.”

Hearing Flat’s words, I couldn’t help but feel scared.

“I-I’m sorry.”

“No, It’s my fault. This has nothing to do with Modern Magecraft, so I’ve never brought it up in class. There should also be other students like you.”

It seemed like this was common sense for people in the Clock Tower. I felt more and more guilty. Of course, my mentor didn’t show any disappointment toward me, and continued in a steady voice.

“Miss Aozaki, I need to spend some time to explain to my disciple. Do you mind?”

“Of course not. I’ve always wanted to attend a class taught by the Lord of the Department of Modern Magecraft,” Touko said, putting one hand on her chest and settling into a laid-back pose.



“Haha, I never thought you’d meet that Grand puppeteer.”

Even I couldn’t help but smile wryly.

That woman was just too difficult to deal with. The logic behind her actions was just too different from mine. I could have been fine with a mage that single-mindedly pursued the root, but I couldn’t understand her desires at all. To be honest, I felt glad that I wasn’t in that other group.

“You’re talking about the labyrinth now? I guess there is a need for that. ...Anyway, as long as nothing happens to the path. You’re pretty good at this, aren’t you? It’s a bit like the Atlas Institute’s thought partitioning, isn’t it?”

Hearing what should have been praise, my brother turned to look at me with a complicated expression.

“...You don’t have to force yourself to flatter me. It’s not like I created a split personality. I’ve just split my thoughts and had them run in parallel. It’s completely different from the thought partitioning of the Atlas Institute. Also, even if I make an error in my actions or thoughts, the Volumen Hydrargyrum carefully crafted by Kayneth(*TN: Actually more like Mr. Kayneth? Or teacher Kayneth?*) will help compensate for it. Even a normal person would be able to do this with a bit of practice.”

Yes, he was right.

If it was the director of the Atlas Institute who we had met in Gray’s hometown, Zepia Eltnam Atlassia— Oh! Just the mention of that name is enough to send shivers down my spine!—, he could probably easily split his thoughts into seven parts. That was why he was able to say things that made him sound like he had precognition.

This time, it was my brother who suggested helping him try and create a non-conventional familiar based on my experience at the time. Though, if someone asked me if I did this because creating two copies of my brother created double the teasing value, I would be at a loss of what to answer, wouldn’t I?

At that moment I felt some slight inertia(*TN: that sounds really weird*).

The carriage had stopped.

From the circular window, I could see the mansion that was our destination. It was one of the secondary villas of the Valualetas. At the entrance, the servants had lined up to greet us.

“Alright, time for us to attend a meeting in preparation for the Grand Roll.”

I raised one of my hands.

That was so my brother could escort me, of course.

My mentor reluctantly took my hand, and we got off the carriage. Then, we were led by the servants to the reception room, where a familiar face awaited us on one of the sofas.

“Melvin...”

“There you are, my dearest friend! Thanks for coming all this way! I’ve waited here because I wanted to meet you before Lord Valualeta does!”

It was Melvin Weinz, the first-class scum of a human being who called himself my brother’s “best friend of best friends.”

He greeted us with a smile that was as cheerful and suspicious as usual. His face was somewhat attractive, though. Since he was always vomiting blood, I thought that it was about time he died, but he hadn’t yet. Though I said that, if he died now, we’d really have no way to fix our Magic Crest, so I couldn’t help but pray in secret once in a while.

“It’s about time you died, isn’t it?”

Whoops, that accidentally slipped from my mouth.

“Hahaha, the little sister’s especially foul-mouthed today! You are a bit like Mama in that sense, but if you’re talking about how gracefelmghrhbrlghrbm—!”

I dashed away from him. I didn’t need to punish him at all. The tuner started vomiting blood all on his own, with excellent timing.

Just as I suppressed the urge to stomp on his head, Melvin looked up and dabbed at his mouth with a handkerchief as he asked a question.

“Oh, not much of a response. Is my darling Waver alright? You can express as much concern about me as you want, you know! Come, weave a poem for our beautiful friendship, which shines brighter than any gem! Or you can accompany me to the hospital my family runs if you want!”

“...I’m fine. ...Also, I’d prefer it if you didn’t make up some kind of wonderful relationship.”

“No no, but that is an immutable fact of nature! A truth decided millennia ago, confirmed nine and a half years ago! Ah, Waver, how sad it is that I still have to remind you of this to this day!”

As the self-proclaimed best friend used exaggerated body language to tell the tale of how he was on the verge of death with grief and shock, my brother managed to extricate himself with a disgusted look on his face.

“...They’re having a class over there,” he said, pursing his lips.



My mentor leapt onto the table.

It seemed like he was physically stronger than the regular version of my mentor. Perhaps it was because Trimmau was the one performing most of the calculations. ...I actually would have wanted to see my mentor struggle to get up there, though.

He held one of his hands to the lapel of his mercury jacket and began to speak.

“...Before I explain what it is, let’s have a lesson.” Maybe because he wanted to confirm his size, he stomped the table twice before he continued. “What do you first think of on the subject of mazes?”

“Mazes?”

The first thing that appeared in my mind was a famous story in Greek mythology.

The legend went that the wife of a king fell in love with a bull because of the wrath of the gods. The child that was born from this was a monster with the head of a bull and the body of a person. In order to imprison him, the king demanded the great inventor Daedalus build a maze that nobody could escape from.

“...The labyrinth of the minotaur, or something like that. The sort that’s complicated, and impossible to escape from.”

“Indeed. One of the most prominent mazes in legends and mythology is the Labyrinthos that trapped the minotaur. Besides that, the maze constructed by Amnemhat III of Ancient Egypt and the circular labyrinth of Epidaurus are also well-known.”

My mentor nodded with his mercury head. The swaying of his long hair looked like the waves of a faraway sea.

“However, mazes(Maze) and mazes(Labyrinth) used to be different. Mazes are just as you described: complicated, and with an abundance of dead ends, constructed to make explorers disoriented. By contrast, originally, a labyrinth had only one path.”

“...Huh?”

The unexpected statement surprised me.

“This is evident if you look at illustrations. Until around the Fifteenth century, though labyrinths looked complex, like the outer layer of the brain, there was only ever one path. In other words, it wasn’t made to make explorers lost, but rather, to have them walk a long, winding path, and to eliminate the feeling of the outside world.”

To eliminate the feeling of the outside world.

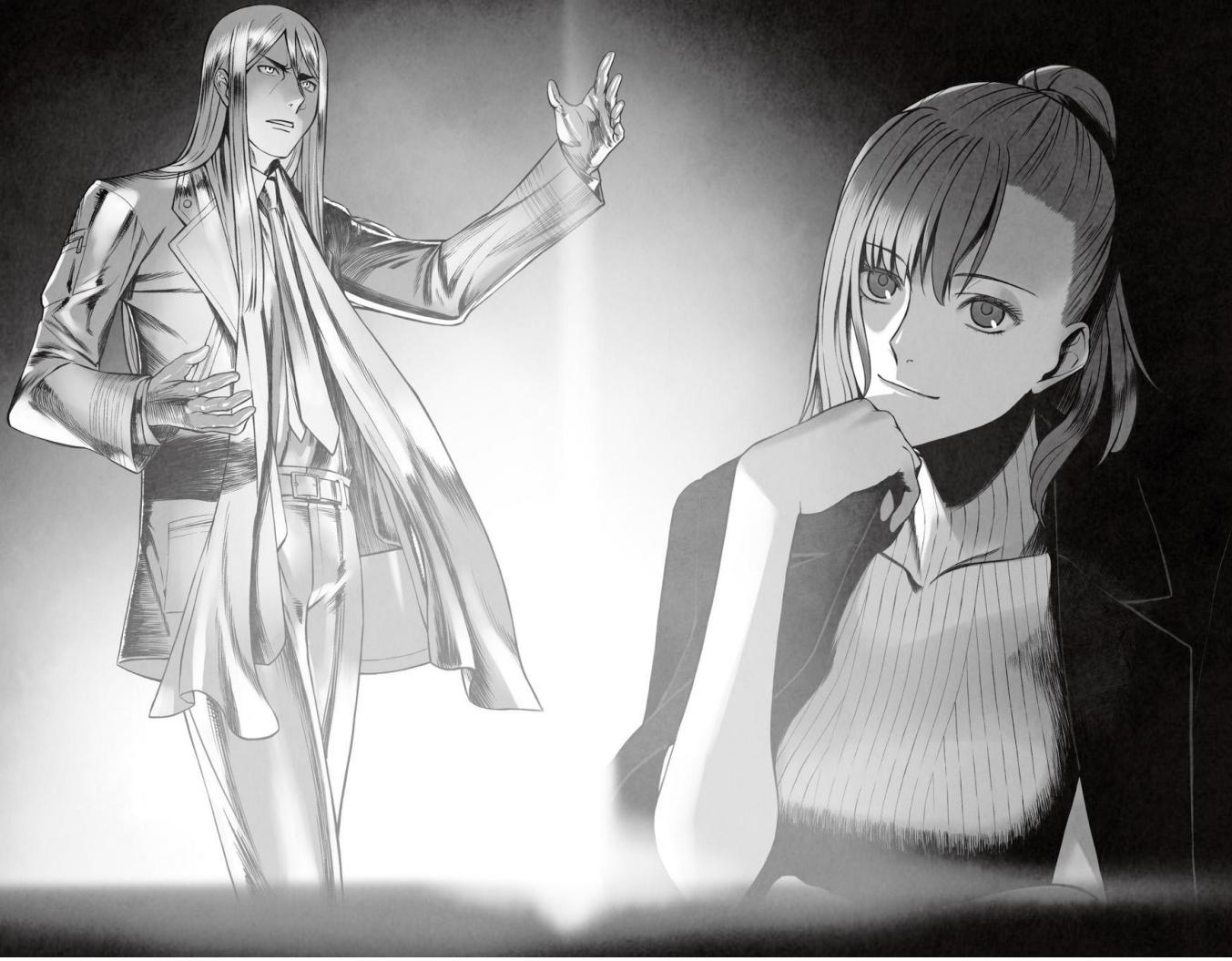
“There’s a reason behind only making one path. Since it doesn’t branch outward, the explorer must arrive at the deepest part of the maze. Once they are removed from the outside world, their consciousness will naturally turn towards themselves. Walking deeper into the labyrinth is like exploring deeper and deeper into yourself. In this way, the monster(Minotaur) that the explorers see at the deepest part of the labyrinth is actually a version of themselves that brings their death.”

My mentor’s words were so impactful that for a moment, I forgot to breathe.

“Isn’t that... my hometown...”

Though there was more than one path, what was waiting for us down there was undoubtedly another version of myself. She wore a mask, but had the same body, the same lance, and even knew how to use it as a Noble Phantasm to oppose me.

“—To you, your hometown was a labyrinth,” my mentor said. “Once you arrived at the deepest part, you must return the same way you came, looking back into the past, when you entered it. The explorers who experienced death then revive themselves step by step, re-experiencing the past. ...Or perhaps you could say that labyrinths are not just structures to make people lose their way, but rituals of initiation, from death to life.”



My mentor's words piled up inside me like snowflakes.

That was what my hometown used to be to me. It wasn't just the caves, I had even gone into the past that one of the Atlas Institute's Seven Superweapons had created, and had returned alive with my mother. If what he was saying was true, did that have a symbolic meaning?

"Ihihihi, are you crying?" Add said in a quiet voice from his hook. I really hoped that he could stop doing this. It was really embarrassing.

"This initiation ceremony gradually became used by religions over time. These labyrinths are also called church labyrinths, and you can find them on the floors and ceilings of various religious establishments. Usually, they are Cretan(*TN: Alternatively, 'classical'*) seven-course or eleven-course designs. In this situation, 'eleven-course' represents an incomplete number of sin, less than the number of Apostles and more than the commandments. Or you could say, it's a number that represents the common realm."

My mentor bent down to touch the table beneath his feet. Was this also how the labyrinths on the floors of churches were carved?

“Labyrinths in churches are meant to rid people of sin. Using this worldly number lets the sin and defilement that has accumulated on the living to be purified in the labyrinth. Here, the minotaur that sits at the depths of the labyrinth can be exchanged for the voice of Satan coiled in the hearts of people.”

Though what he said was profound, I could mostly understand it.

Basically, it was like the deep desires or impulses that were hidden in everyone’s hearts, which were difficult to see normally. And the role of labyrinths in churches used to be so people could face these desires.

“Similarly, labyrinths exist within mages as well. Nobody can understand themselves perfectly, and that is why only those who can draw things out from this maze in their minds can become powerful mages. Of course, the talent necessary to draw them out is prerequisite for any of this to work.”

After he said that, my mentor bit his lip silently. It seemed like something he would do.

Perhaps some people would find it laughable, but to me, it felt a little bit sad. How did my mentor feel about this himself?

“—I see, so this is a lesson from the El-Melloi classroom,” Touko said, watching from the side with a bemused expression.

“Apologies, this is all very basic.”

“Don’t apologize, that was all very detailed. We mages keep bumping into mystery every once in a while. Though we’ve learned the history behind it all, the link between history and magecraft gets fuzzy sometimes. Hearing this kind of class, it’s not hard to understand why students other people couldn’t deal with managed to learn from you. Of course, there must be teachers out there who think you’re wasting time.”

Though I didn’t think there was any deeper meaning behind her words, they made me feel terrified.

As a Grand mage, she probably thought that the highly-ranked mages of the Clock Tower were the same as my mentor, who was constantly troubled by his lack of talent. Both of them were inferior to her, and that was why Touko Aozaki could see my mentor's lectures with that kind of perspective.

I heard the sound of coughing.

It was my mentor. Though he shouldn't need to cough with this body, he probably wanted to use this sound to attract our attention again. I turned my head in guilt, and my mentor nodded lightly when he saw that. He stomped on the surface of the table again, and a crisp sound ran through the air as metal hit wood.

“However, what you need to know about now isn’t what I just talked about. There’s a famous labyrinth underneath the Clock Tower, too.”

“Is that the one where the Survivors from just then came from?”

I felt like we had finally reached the heart of the matter, like a ray of light had finally shone into a dark cavern I had been wandering about in.

“No, the order should be the other way around,” my mentor corrected.

“The other way around?”

“Yes. I should probably say that the Clock Tower was built here because of the existence of that labyrinth.”

I couldn’t grasp the meaning of that sentence immediately.

“What does that mean?” I asked, just as I wanted to sink into despair because of my lack of intelligence.

“After the Common Era, the mystery of the Age of the Gods disappeared. True, ancient magecraft was lost, and only small, insignificant things were left behind.”

I had heard something similar before.

Apparently, compared to what magecraft used to be, magecraft in the modern era was like an empty shell. There was a definite split between those two ages. That was also why Faker was so terrifying.

She was an ancient mage, from the age when the hero Iskandar rode across the world.

In the battle on the Rail Zeppelin, if she managed to use a single spell, we might have all lost our lives.

“However, underneath the Clock Tower— No, underneath London, there still rests a giant, mysterious corpse of immeasurable size,” my mentor said, pointing to the floor.

“By corpse, do you mean—”

“Compared to the surface, the texture of the Human Order influences the underground much less. For that reason, there will be fragments of things that have disappeared aboveground there. However, there are some items that can’t be explained as fragments buried beneath the Clock Tower.”

I felt that something terrifying was concealed behind my mentor’s steady words.

It reminded me of a secret treasure buried underground.

“That’s inside the labyrinth, right?”

“Yes. For instance, there are the scales and teeth of dragons, lost spirit stones, corpses of juvenile hydras trapped in amber, all sorts of artifacts that are impossible to find above ground. You could say that labyrinth is the backbone of the Clock Tower.”

“Exactly! It was just as I thought! Hack and Slash games are the essence of RPGs! You can turn your character into a ninja straight away with the first rewards, and you can raise dozens of your own demons! The strongest wizards won’t wait for you in your room all the time either, because they work in shifts!” (*TN: Wait how is this related at all*)

Flat happily struck a victory pose.

Though I was already vaguely aware of that fact, hearing it was still impactful. If that was the case, it made sense why my mentor would say that the Clock Tower had been built here because of the labyrinth.

However, the most important aspect of this was still shrouded in mist.

“...Why would there be a labyrinth like this underneath London?”

“.....”

For a moment, my mentor was silent.

My mentor, who always gave people the impression of being someone who always had something to say, looked like he was unsure of where to begin.

Was this that difficult to explain?

Just as I thought about that, my mentor began to speak slowly.

“Even amongst the people who know of the labyrinth beneath the Clock Tower, not everyone knows about this... It’s an ancient legend.”

That word immediately piqued my interest.

A legend of the Clock Tower. What would a legend passed down through time amongst mages who lived lives wreathed with mystery be like?

Of course, the story started somewhere completely outside of my imagination.

“In the distant past, there was once a giant dragon. Some say that it was larger than mountains, and that each of its claws was the size of a tower.”

“...Huh?”

Suddenly hearing something that felt like it came out of a dream made me blink several times in surprise.

I barely managed to understand all the talk of a labyrinth beneath the ground, but why would something as surreal as a giant ancient dragon appear?

“Wait, Sir, weren’t we talking about the labyrinth?”

“Just listen to what I have to say. Though it was passed around the Clock Tower like a fairytale, in a certain sense, there are traces of it in the present. Ah, you even think it sounds like a ridiculous story used to trick children, even though you have echoes of mystery inside you.”

My mentor cleared his throat again somewhat awkwardly and continued.

“Most dragons sensed the end of the Age of the Gods, so they moved to the Reverse Side of the World(*TN: Alternatively, the Inner Side of the World?*) before the disappearance of Phantasmal Species. However... that giant dragon stayed here for a long time. Perhaps it was because [he] thought he was strong enough. Or perhaps it was for some other reason.”

My mentor told the story of the dragon like a storyteller sitting in front of a campfire.

The reason why he called the dragon a “he” was probably because he resonated with the story somehow. Though I thought that maybe this was part of what mages were inclined to do, as pursuers of fading mystery, that might be a bit far-fetched.

“However, the dragon was eventually forced to succumb to the changing times. This was now the age of humanity. Once the dragon accepted that, he finally prepared to head to the Reverse Side of the World. However, it was too late. The gate from the surface, where mystery had already faded, to the Reverse Side of the World had already closed.

“The dragon roared, regretting his arrogance. However, he did not despair or give up. Since he could not rely on mystery anymore, he would physically make it down there, he thought. So he used his giant body to sink into the depths of the earth, where traces of mystery still remain to this day.”

It felt less like a lesson and more like a story, and a somewhat sad one, too.

I couldn't help but think of the dinosaurs. They once flourished in this land, sitting at the very top of the food chain. However, they ended up going extinct, maybe because they were too well-adapted to their age.

Perhaps I was the same as them.

"However." My mentor said. "However, it stopped breathing while it dug through the earth."

"What happened after that?"

"Not much else happened. His corpse, which was larger than a mountain, remained in the ground, gradually being torn apart by the movement of the earth. That was enough to make the body of the dragon turn into an even larger labyrinth."

Finally, it came back to our original topic.

As I muttered to myself in confusion, my mentor continued.

"That labyrinth is called Spirit Tomb Albion, and rests [even deeper down] than what is below the Clock Tower."

A tomb.

The instant I heard that word, I felt an electric current run through my body. I never thought that the word would return after I thought it had been cut off from me after the case at my hometown.

However, this story was too absurd and nonsensical for me to believe.

Until now, I had experienced many things that seemed unbelievable, and they made me feel unsure enough in myself to face something like this. This time, however, I felt like I had been dealt a fatal blow.

"...Um," I managed to say. "So Spirit Tomb Albion is right underneath us?"

"Like I said, that's a legend that's treated like a fairy tale. But regardless of whether it's true or not, there are remnants in the present. Beneath our feet, there is, indeed, a

giant labyrinth— No, it wouldn't even be wrong to call it a separate world. And that place yields great benefits for the Clock Tower.”

My mentor's words echoed back and forth in the room full of potions.

Though this was a mage's workshop, it was still too plain of a stage compared to what we had just talked about. Or, perhaps it was fitting because it was so plain. After all, for a mage that was familiar with the Clock Tower, this was no more than common knowledge.

“—Haha, it's pretty absurd, isn't it?”

Touko, who had been listening all along, smiled.

“I was speechless too when I first heard about it too. It seems strange that people can say that mystery has disappeared when something like that exists.”

“I was confused when I heard about the corpse of the dragon, too,” Svin said, expressing his thoughts.

Hearing that their thoughts were similar to mine made me feel more at ease. If these two people were shocked by hearing this, then of course I wouldn't be able to accept it immediately.

“I've believed it all along! Aren't we part of the Clock Tower? Since rich people have catacombs under their mansions, wouldn't it seem weirder if there wasn't something like that under the Clock Tower? Closed gates! Hidden treasures troves! Monster surprised you! (TN: Andyzero pointed out that this is probably a Wizardry reference)!”

“Shut up, Flat. —As I was saying, there are enormous benefits to be reaped from Spirit Tomb Albion. For that reason, the Clock Tower set up a special organization to excavate and manage the artifacts obtained from the labyrinth. This is to prevent any one of the twelve families to take over it and gain an overwhelming advantage.”

Suddenly, discussions of power and advantages came up.

It was like riding a roller coaster. Words that were too fantastical and words that were too grounded came one after the other, like they were holding hands in a waltz and spinning around and around.

I felt dizzy, and rubbed my temples through my hood.

“W-wait a second, please.”

“Are you alright?”

“Y-yes, um, I haven’t managed to take everything in...” I said honestly.

All this information was too much for my sluggish brain to take. It wasn’t just the amount, either. The combination of information was too special and complicated, and I couldn’t combine them together properly.

“I see,” my mentor said, nodding. “If that’s the case, let’s draw a diagram. Svin, you’ve attended a related class, yes? Can you redraw the diagram from then?”

“Oh, sure.”

As he said that, Svin took a pen from his pocket.

First, he wrote down the name “Spirit Tomb Albion”. Then, he drew a sketch of the maze as an upside-down pyramid that had been split into layers. Then, he drew a couple of lines, and added labels to them. From shallowest to deepest, they went Mining City Magisfair, the Great Magic Circuit, the Ancient Heart, Carillon Observatory... and so on.

Finally, he added the name of the organization we just discussed on top of the diagram. The Secret Autopsy Division.

the  
**SECRET AUTOPSY DIV.**



MANAGES

**SPIRIT TOMB ALBION**

Mining City Magisfair

Great Magic Circuit  
(Vein Corridor Odvena)

Ancient Heart

Carillon Observatory

the  
**Fairy Realm**

“Is that... the organization in charge of excavating Spirit Tomb Albion?”

“Yes. Everything in the labyrinth is under the sole jurisdiction of the Secret Autopsy Division. Even the Barthomeloi who lead the Aristocratic Faction and the Trambelio who lead the Democratic Faction have no say in their arrangements. In a certain sense, though they belong to the Clock Tower, they are also not part of the Clock Tower. So there’s nothing worth being ashamed about, as you’ve only been here for half a year.”

Belonging to the Clock Tower, yet not part of the Clock Tower.

An organization specifically in charge of the labyrinth, outside of the control of the twelve families. Though I couldn’t completely understand all of it, I had a vague grasp of its importance.

“Sir. ...So what are the implications of the owner of this workshop being a Survivor of Spirit Tomb Albion?” Svin asked, putting down his pen.

Finally, we returned to our original topic. Because there had been so much in the middle, I got the feeling of having been on a long journey, and I couldn’t help but exhale deeply.

The giant labyrinth of the Clock Tower, Spirit Tomb Albion. According to Touko, all of Heartless’ students were its Survivors.

What truth would be connected to this fact?

I swallowed.

But at that moment, my mentor let out a groan from the table.

“Sir?”

“My apologies. They’ve finished the preparations. Allow me to concentrate over there for a bit.”

With that, the expression disappeared from the face of the mercury figurine of my mentor, and he sank into silence like a robot who had been unplugged.



“...Are you done with your class?”

Hearing my question, my brother looked up with a displeased expression.

He was a bit pale, probably because he had been concentrating on his other body over there.

It was a bit like motion sickness. It happened a lot when switching between perceiving through yourself and a familiar far away. Of course, most mages were already used to that feeling, but my brother didn’t have enough experience for that yet.

“No, but since Valualeta’s already done preparing, I have to return here, don’t I?”

“You seem busy, Waver,” Melvin said, without even a bit of self-awareness.

Of course, he was the one who made my brother go through all this trouble by passing along the Valualetas’ message for them. He also made absolutely no attempt to be considerate enough to wait for my brother to recover from his familiar-induced dizziness.

“Alright, let’s go.”

As Melvin said that, he pointed his handsome chin in the direction of the door, and walked toward the hallway of the mansion.

“Are you alright, brother?”

“I’m fine. You aren’t the sort of person who would stop to wait for me anyway.”

“Haha. I just don’t want to ask too much of my dear older brother! It’s just that your cute little sister enjoys seeing other people in pain just a little bit.”

“If you enjoy having friends, you should change that part of your personality.”

“(TN: \*unhappy Reines noise that I don’t know how to translate\*).”

He really likes responding with redundant things like that. Then again, wasn't my brother the one who understood best that it was impossible to change my personality?

I swallowed those complaints and caught up to Melvin along with my brother and Trimmau.

The hallway was lined with all sorts of works of art.

Some of the pieces were so famous that I recognized them; their presence made the power of their owners all the more obvious. Of course, they were authentic. As the family in charge of the Department of Creation, the Valualetas loved art. They ran many art galleries, and the way these pieces were displayed didn't have the unnaturalness of being used to show off wealth. It even gave me the impression that they were testing our taste, which was annoying. There were pieces by Rousseau, which they likely specially selected for being stylistically between the Barbizon school of art and impressionism.

“Speaking of which, Waver.”

“What?”

“I’m sure you know about this already, but most people in the Democratic Faction want to eliminate the El-Melloi Faction. You’re still the least powerful out of the twelve families, and even if you were struck down, nothing would change much,” he said, talking about the demise of a Lord family with a carefree smile. “The Valualetas are different, though, because Lord Valualeta likes you quite a bit.”

“.....”

Melvin’s words weighed on me.

Being liked wasn’t necessarily a good thing. The El-Melloi Faction was still a part of the Aristocratic Faction, so it wasn’t a good reputation to have our Lord be favored by the Democratic Lord Valualeta. We were already despised by our fellow members of the Aristocratic Faction, so it was. Like a bomb ready to explode at any moment. ...Of course, the Valualetas were perfectly aware of this, so if they sent us the invite, they must have just as bad of a personality as I do.

My brother turned even paler. He covered his stomach and responded.

“You’re not really trying to talk about something that obvious, are you?”

“Of course not. But you’re reaching the bottleneck of your life walking on a tightrope. You’re not accepted by the Aristocratic Faction, and you can’t join the Democratic and Neutral Factions either. Being stuck in a self-reliant state isn’t going to last you forever, you know? Even Mama’s begun to notice you.”

“Your mother?”

“Yes, exactly. So that’s why I betrayed you.”

“...What?”

“What the hell do you mean by that!?” I yelled reflexively.

Though I always thought he was a scumbag from head to toe, I never thought that he would betray my brother.

The scumbag in front of me shrugged exaggeratedly.

“Haha, don’t worry. I would never sell out my dearest friend for a cheap price! I’ve put my own head on the line too! (TN: *\*insert cut off coughing noise here\**)!”

He coughed lightly again, and the handkerchief pressed to his mouth was stained red.

Along with this, servants opened the door.

In the spacious reception room, there was a long rosewood table that fit the decor well. The owner of the mansion sat on one of the chairs surrounding it, and raised her wrinkled hand.

“There you are, El-Melloi.”

“It’s been a while since I last saw you, Lord Valualeta.”

“Hey, hey. Are you trying to say that your perception of time is different from mine because I’m old? It’s only been a few months, hasn’t it?” The old woman, Inorai said, blinking. There was a cigarette between her fingers, and an ashtray beside her. From the scent in the room, it appeared to be some kind of herbal cigarette.

However, the real problem lay deeper inside the room.

There was another person there, sitting on the same side as Inorai. My mind went blank for a moment, and my brother’s eyes widened.

“...I never thought that you would also be here.”

“Hahaha, Lord Valualeta brings you up quite often, so I brazenly asked Melvin-kun to introduce me to you.”

He was a very muscular man.

Judging from his appearance, he was around forty to fifty, but for mages, appearances could not be trusted. He was wearing a suit that had obviously been custom-made, as the high-quality perfectly outlined the muscles on his shoulders and back.

However, what made [us] so shocked was something else (*TN: Saying that makes it feel like the reader could have thought that they were shocked by how muscular he was*).

“...McDonell Trambelio Elrod.”

My mentor barely managed to say his name.

Yes.

He was a Trambelio.

...I never could have thought that Lord Trambelio, the leader of the Democratic Faction, would be here...

Instantly, I felt my throat dry up.

◆ 第三章 ◆

~Chapter 3~



The leader of the Aristocratic Faction, the Barthomelios.

And the leader of the Democratic Faction, the Trambelios.

If you asked which group of people held the most power in the Clock Tower, the answer would probably be one of the two. Of course, the Brishisans in charge of the Department of Lore, who had been prominent ever since the day of their creation, and the leader of the Neutral Faction, the Meluastea, were also powerful in their respective fields, but if you wanted to ask if they could compete with the other two, the answer would be no.

The Trambelio were both at the very top of the Mages' Association, and one of the three Great Noble Families. They also presided over the Department of General Fundamentals(Mystile), cementing their place as an immovable force in the Clock Tower. And the Lord of that family, McDonell Trambelio Elrod, sat right in front of us.

"Thank you as well, Melvin-kun, for accepting my invite," the burly man(McDonell) said, smiling a bright smile.

It was the sort of smile that seemed suited for a politician. I got the feeling that if he appeared in a TV commercial, his white teeth would probably sparkle. His presence was so strong that I felt the atmosphere in the Valualetas' reception room become weird.

"Oh, there's no need to thank me. Since I was asked to do it by both Mama and you, Mr. McDonell, how could I refuse? And it's not a bad idea for my beloved friend here, either. Right, Waver?"

"Of course. It's an honor to meet you." My brother bowed, as I lifted the sides of my dress and swept one foot behind the other in as polite of a curtsy as I could pull off. The etiquette that had been hammered into my brain by my governess was not affected by my mental state, and it ran perfectly on autopilot.

"I am Reines El-Melloi Archisorte, and I am also honored to be able to accompany my brother to this meeting. Apologies for inconveniencing you. (TN: *Alternatively, apologies for my unseemly presence. Or, interpreting it very literally, I hope you can forgive me for tainting*

*your eyes with my presence. Please tell me if anyone has a better translation for お目汚しをお許しください.)”*

“Hahaha, you don’t have to be that polite. I heard you’ve even met with the director of the Atlas Institute. Is there any need to be so nervous in front of a Lord?”

Hmph, he really had the nerve to say that.

I tried to suppress the displeased expression that was creeping up on my face.

It was true that from a certain perspective, the director of the Atlas Institute had more authority than someone at the top of the Clock Tower. This way, Lord Trambelio was equivalent to his subordinate.

However, that wasn’t how it was in real life.

Think about it.

No matter how important it was, the Atlas Institute was only a separate organization with a weak link to the Clock Tower.

On the other hand, the Trambelio were like our direct superiors. To be precise, we were actually from opposing factions. No matter how you told the story, they were a group of people that had the ability to snap the neck of the El-Melloi Faction at a whim. How was I expected to not be nervous when someone like that invited us here?

...There was something else, too.

Just then, he was showing off that he already knew about the incident with the Atlas Institute. This was so he could show us the extent of the amount of weaponry he had in the form of information.

Then, McDonell looked my brother up and down before speaking cheerfully again.

“Well, you’re [dressed lightly], as always.”

These words carried a different meaning than what they meant literally. The jacket and scarf that my brother was wearing were enough to guard against the cold of a London winter, and they were reasonably fancy to fit the formal occasion.

What he was referring to was the accessories of a mage.

Lords and mages of their level often prepared all sorts of Mystic Codes to protect themselves, both against magecraft-based and physical attacks. After all, high-ranking mages were liable to become the target of an attack anytime. There were even some mages out there who would bring so many powerful Mystic Codes that they were rumored to be able to take on an entire fortress.

Of course, my brother probably had one or two Mystic Codes on him that I didn't know about, but compared to the more powerful people in the Clock Tower, he was unimaginably lightly dressed.

"After all, in front of someone as skilled as you, none of my meager tricks would make a difference."

"Hahaha. Though that is true, you can't just walk into a horde of lions with a toy gun, can you? I'm actually very curious where your confidence comes from. I might even have something to learn from you in that regard," McDonell said, eyes shining.

The trouble was that [half] of what he said was true.

The Clock Tower was a pit of conspiracies. There were always people plotting all manner of complicated schemes, and everyone was licking their lips in anticipation for some fool to fall into a trap.

The most terrifying thing was that things like kindness and respect didn't exist there. The struggle for power had fused into the good intent and passion for magecraft of the people. And that is how the night of the Clock Tower continues.

What was more, he was a Lord. Even worse, he was a Trambelio.

In front of what could be considered a representative of the modern Clock Tower, I inhaled gently.

...I am one of its members, after all.

Even if I looked down on it, I couldn't not think about these things.

From the moment I was born, the name Reines El-Melloi Archisorte had been written down on the list of all the people who played a part in this web of schemes. Though I should have retired early or lived a life of house arrest as a member of an insignificant family, I had managed to get to this point. I had always thought that it was because of a combination of talent and luck... but this time, I was up against someone who was too difficult to deal with.

Judging from what he knew about our encounter with the Atlas Institute, there was no way of knowing what kind of scandal he could uncover. To tell the truth, my brother was as kind-hearted as Lords get, but I am proud to say that I am the complete opposite. If you tapped me on the head, my intent would scatter out like coal dust.

Of course, I have done a considerable amount of concealment work, but the information still all managed to reach the Trambelios. ...If nobody leaked it, though, what hole had they crawled in from? Depending on how the conversation progressed, should this play a part in deciding whether we would join the Democratic Faction? No, if that happened, every piece I had put down until now would turn against us.

“...Calm down, Lady.” My brother whispered.

Though his eyes had just been unfocused and full of exhaustion, they were now shining with a light that no one could extinguish.

...I really didn't know what to say to him about that. Did he feel more at home the more unfavorable the situation was?

What was I meant to do with him?

He reminded me of a sewer rat. I guess he thought that whatever he did against a first-rate mage, he would still get killed. Since that was the case, I suppose it would be better to act brave.

I shrugged lightly and responded in a similarly quiet voice.

“...I am calm. I’m always at my best when I need to scheme, so leave it to me.”

“...Of course I’m leaving it to you. If I was here on my own, I might as well go drown myself along with all of my students. I have to trust you with my life.” (*TN: The other two Lords can probably hear this*)

Managing to say something so sweet without really intending to do so must be indicative of some sort of problem. Be prepared to get stabbed in the back by one of your students one day, dear older brother.

Sitting down on the chair the servants helped pull out, my brother smiled a formal smile.

“It almost feels like the Grand Roll is about to be held right here.”

“No, of course not. It’s necessary to find out about everyone’s opinions before the meeting starts, isn’t it? If the meeting comes and we spend all our time running around in circles, that would be such a waste of time. Like they say, time is money. I simply must hear the opinion of someone who is so popular among the New Agers,” McDonell said, spreading his arms welcomingly. “But that means you already know about the upcoming Grand Roll. You’re quite well-informed, aren’t you? It should take a bit longer for the formal invited to be sent out. Hm, yes. Your intelligence network really is interesting.”

“Lord Trambelio,” came a voice from the chair next to him. “Too long of an introduction can affect the conversation. Are you trying to get me to leave as soon as possible? Who was just saying that time was money? (*TN: oh by the way, Inorai uses the first-person pronoun of オレ*)”

“Oh, I’m so sorry. I got slightly carried away. But didn’t we plan on having a nice long chat over a meal? So it’s alright if I talk a little more, isn’t it?”

The man smiled again, reminding me of a lion.

He gestured to the servant behind him.

“As I was saying, I took the liberty of bringing my chef over. So let us discuss this over some food. Lord Valualeta, your tastes haven’t changed, have they?”

“Good food is a treasure cultivated in the modern age. Should the day that I won’t be able to eat ever come, I’ll also have to retire as a mage.”

“Hahaha, I wouldn’t stand to have my reliable partner leave me,” McDonell said in a steady and somewhat serious voice.

The two Lords fixed their gazes to where my brother and I were seated.

Besides that, Melvin plopped down on a chair at the end of the long table, as if to say that his job was done.

...I still didn’t have enough cards in my hand.

Though we had avoided the worst-case scenario of not even knowing that there would be a Grand Roll, what would happen next?

We only knew three things right now.

First, it was very likely that Heartless had something to do with this.

Second, this was related to the serial disappearances of Heartless’ students.

Third, according to what Touko Aozaki said, all of these students were Survivors of the giant labyrinth beneath the Clock Tower, Spirit Tomb Albion.

...I needed at least one more card.

Something I could use as a bargaining chip or some bait to get information from someone else. Although it wasn’t impossible to get information though bluffing alone, it was too hard to do that with these two people.

“Reines,” my brother muttered. “I’ll be gathering information over there while this meeting goes on.”

At that, I felt my brother’s eyes unfocus.

Even with the help of Trimmau, maintaining the bare minimum of conversation on this side while gathering precise information over there was almost enough to make my brother's brain burn.

“...You’re really not making my life easy,” I mumbled. But for some reason, my fighting spirit was ignited.

Looking at the champagne served by the servants, I made up my mind to buy as much time as possible(put up a last-ditch struggle).



We were still investigating the workshop of Heartless' student. Flat seemed to understand what Touko said about now being perceived as hostile by the workshop, and he was now looking around with Svin, muttering things like “I see!” and “So that’s how it is!”

Touko casually sipped at her coffee, answering my questions every once in a while. Though they were probably basic, boring questions for a mage, she answered me sincerely, which reminded me a bit of my mentor.

“In other words, for a certain type of mage, Spirit Tomb Albion is their final chance,” Touko said. “Even a New Ager can rise to the top if they acquire a large amount of expensive artifacts. Even if their Magic Circuits are not as good, they can still achieve something substantial.

“However, the Secret Autopsy Division doesn’t just let anyone enter and exit, because that would increase the possibility of smuggling. So apart from people with special permits and the members of the Division, it’s very difficult for people to leave once they enter. There’s even a special mining city inside Spirit Tomb Albion, where they can live. It’s a bit like a version of modern slavery in the world of magecraft.”

It reminded me of gold miners during the gold rush.

More than thirty thousand people rushed to California in the New World after hearing rumors of gold. However, it was said that the people who sold mining tools like pickaxes were the ones who benefitted the most from that.

“Survivors are people who excavated from Spirit Tomb Albion, and also managed to return to the surface. Even if we counted those who waited until they could leave as well as those who paid their way out, there are only very few of them.”

“Is that the same for the mage who owns this workshop?”

“Yes. He was the sort that paid his way out. After that, he probably kept his distance from the Clock Tower. Even though he was in London, that doesn’t mean he had to bump into the Clock Tower. I wouldn’t be able to stand that kind of life... Oh?”

Touko looked toward the table. The mercury figurine of my mentor had come back to life. He took a deep breath and began to look around.

“Sir?”

“Oh, hello. Is your meeting going well?”

Hearing Touko’s question, the miniature version of my mentor frowned. The fact that Trimmau could even accurately represent his expressions was incredibly impressive.

“Not at all. But I have to pay attention here as well. I’m sorry, but can I use some of your time?”

“You seem quite busy. What’s happening?” Touko asked interestedly.

“Can you first explain how Heartless’ students are all Survivors?”

“Oh, about that. I only became sure of that when I saw the list you showed me. I’ve only heard rumors of the other two. If I didn’t remember incorrectly, they were members of the same group when they were excavating in the labyrinth.”

“Group members...”

Hearing my mentor’s impatient expression, I held back my own question.

However, I could vaguely understand what that meant. It should be like what it meant literally: members of the same group of people who teamed up to excavate. It was

difficult for me to believe that it was a coincidence that Heartless' students were all part of the same team when they were excavating in Spirit Tomb Albion.

But what was the significance of this?

“There are many things that are hard to find aboveground in these bottles,” my mentor said, looking at the bottles on the shelves.

Inside them, there were fossils shaped like fangs and glowing crystals that I had never seen before, among other mysterious things. Though I didn’t understand them very well, I could sense an unusual kind of Magical Energy emanating from them.

Touko nodded lightly.

“Indeed. These must have been brought out from the labyrinth(Albion)... Hm, that’s strange. Though it’s theoretically possible to buy back the artifacts you excavated yourself, that’ll take far more than a small sum of money. Wanting to do that after paying to shorten the amount of time you spend down there isn’t easy.”

Hearing Touko’s words, my mentor hesitated for a moment before coming to a conclusion.

“...So that means they could have smuggled it from Spirit Tomb Albion? And Heartless might already know the path down there?”

“I see. That’s an interesting hypothesis. Though he isn’t a Lord, having the head of a department use his power for personal gain is quite the story. Speaking of which, is it really good for the Lord of the Department of Modern Magecraft to be sharing this with an outsider like me?”

“I figured you’d come to a hypothesis like that on your own soon anyway.”

“Haha, so that’s what you think. That makes sense. Make sure you’re still careful about being that direct. Are you an impatient person?”

“...Normal people like me wouldn’t be able to catch up(*TN: Alternatively, reach it*) at all if we aren’t direct.”

What was he trying to catch up to? Though my mentor didn't explain, I felt that this sentence revealed a deep part of himself.

At that moment, I heard the sound of an explosion behind me.

“Flat? Svin?” My mentor shouted, whirling around.

I put my hand on the Hook at my right shoulder, ready to release Add at any moment.

Thick smoke poured out of the door to another room.

“—Professor! We’ve succeeded in invading this workshop!”

Flat appeared in front of us with a faceful of soot, and saluted like a member of the navy.

“You idiot! How many times have I told you not to do something like that without consulting someone else!”

“But Le Chien-kun, you told me the general location of the core of the workshop already, so I couldn’t help it, could I?”

“Didn’t I tell you not to touch that place at all costs? Don’t put the blame on me! Also, don’t call me Le Chien!” Svin protested, walking out from behind Flat and coughing.

“It’s impossible for a person to resist when an interesting puzzle’s right in front of them! Chasing the shadows of spells left on the walls was interesting, so I just gave it a little try. ...Ah, but it looks like someone messed with it already, so it blew itself up as soon as I touched the central spell.”

“...Someone messed with it already?”

My mentor’s tone of voice became serious, and Touko narrowed her eyes.

“What are the shadows of spells you were talking about?” She asked.

“Let me think, I was just observing the place Le Chien-kun was talking about, and I found the traces of some spells on the walls, so I examined it a bit. Isn’t shadow art a

thing? You know, that kind of art when you put a mess of wires in front of a light, and the shape of a dog or an apple appears behind it? Because Miss Touko said that it was evident what acts would disrupt the workshop, I thought about the shadows, and I managed to unravel it!"

"...Ah, so you're that kind of person, kid. I thought you were the sort who would be able to create a puppet even without a blueprint, but you're actually capable of seeing a puppet and reverse-engineering it into a blueprint."

With a feeling that was half approval and half helplessness, Touko shrugged.

Though Flat's explanation was incredibly vague, she seemed to completely understand it. At the same time, a displeased expression appeared on my mentor's face.

"Oh, and also, the spells look like something I saw back at Gray's hometown, but I've only seen it through Mr. Zepia's crystal balls."

My mentor's mercury eyebrows twitched slightly.

"At Gray's hometown? Do you mean the ones at that hut?"

"Yes. It looks like Mr. Heartless' spells."

"Heartless invaded his own student's workshop?"

Why would he do that?

Did this have anything to do with the serial disappearances?

Before I could think about it more, my mentor pressed his hands to his temples.

"Sorry. McDonell's asking me a question. I need to focus over there for a moment."



The food was served.

First came the aperitif.

Though I didn't remember the precise brand given by the sommelier, the aroma and taste of the champagne wouldn't change because of that.

Just as I was enjoying the lingering aftertaste of the drink, colorful amuse bouches were placed onto the table. There were small, macaron-shaped things placed in a dish, drizzled with two types of colorful vegetable sauce. Each piece of dough had a piece of caviar or cream inside it, and the color of everything had been carefully coordinated to not exhaust the viewer.

“Is this modern British cuisine?”

“Yes. You can eat this with your hands, so there's no need to be shy,” McDonell said, laughing welcomingly. I did as he said, grabbing a piece and putting it into my mouth. The crispy texture harmonized perfectly with the taste of the filling, and I couldn't help but eat it eagerly.

Though they were all considered types of British cuisine, they were actually quite varied.

This country had been a naval empire spanning the globe before, after all. The countless different types of food from all sorts of different countries convulsed here, including the food of places like India and China. The chefs would also combine them as they wished, and even though the reputation of British cuisine may not have been high in the past, after absorbing elements of Spanish and French culinary skills, it began to become more and more popular.

You could say that Lord Trambelio's menu was made to show us his own thoughts, along with this history.

How do I put it? It almost feels like an American power lunch.

If the Aristocratic Lord Eulyphis saw this, his face would probably scrunch up immediately.

At the same time, this was one of the sources of the Democratic Faction's power. As long as it would be more logical or efficient, they would absorb anything and everything.

They wished to guide the society towards prosperity, and one of their principles was to take whatever was necessary.

Since that was the case, it made perfect sense why people thought that the Department of Modern magecraft was closer to the Democratic Faction than the Aristocratic Faction.

..However, my brother was a bit different.

I couldn't explain it well myself, but what he did was similar, but not the same, like the difference between fish and whales, or insects and spiders. I didn't know which side corresponded to which creature, though.

“Speaking of which, you enjoy dancing quite a lot, don't you, Mr. McDonell?”

“Hmm? Ah, I've learned a thing or two, mainly because it would be impolite if I couldn't catch up to one of my wives or daughters if we danced.”

“You have five wives now, right?”

“No, I married a new one last month, and now there are six. I have thirteen daughters. I'm incredibly busy because of that, because I need to give each of them enough love the way they want to receive it.”

This was the result of being able to ignore certain laws. I was actually curious as to what they planned on doing when they had to choose an heir, but the Trambelios probably had their own way of doing things.

And so, the conversation began.

Since my brother needed to prioritize investigating the scene, I needed to exclude him from the conversation. On top of that, I needed to find a way to get more information about the Grand Roll. However, doing that made it easy for me to accidentally shoot myself in the foot.

As we finished our champagne, the appetizer of bread and cheese arrived.

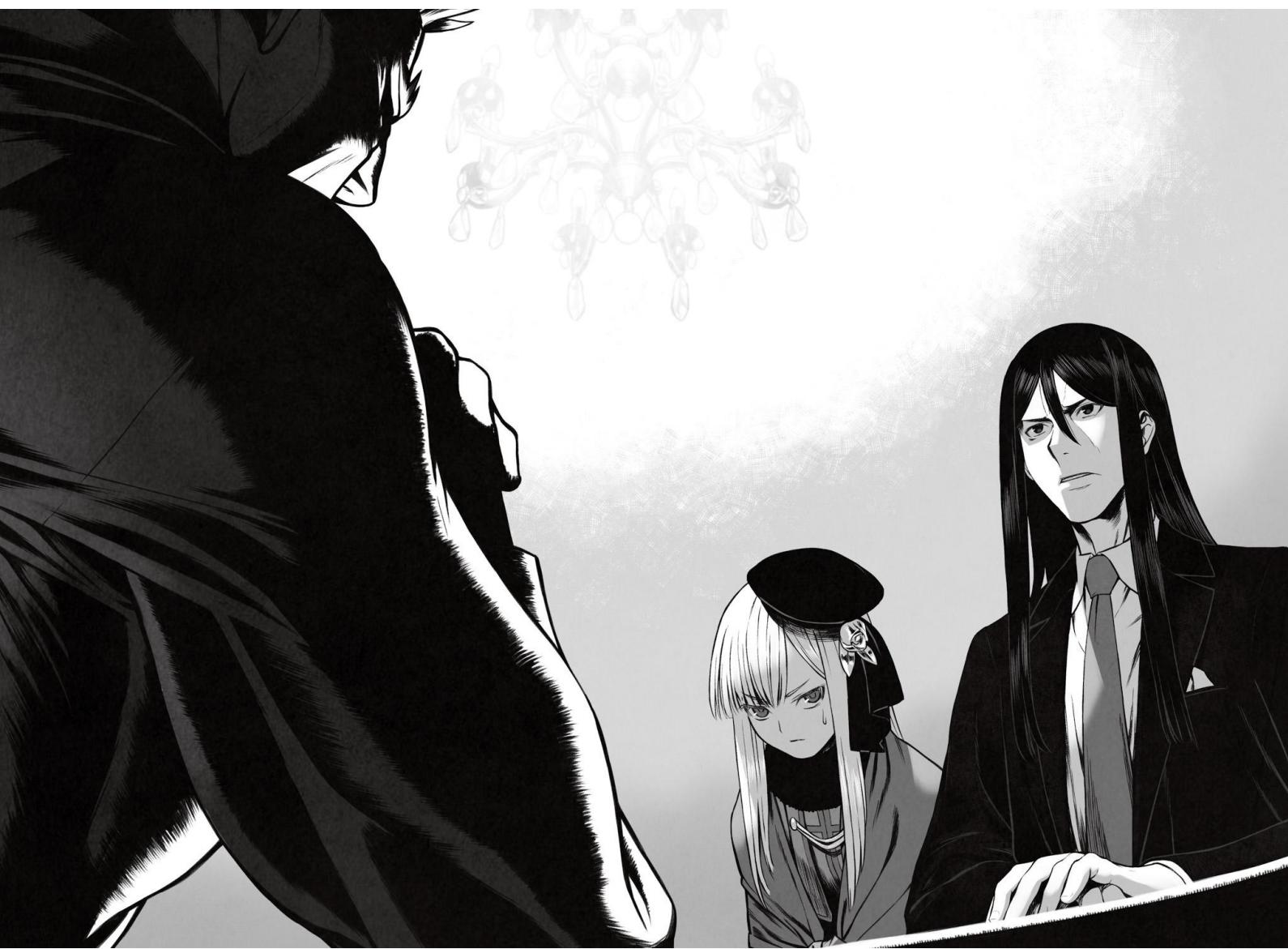
A sauce made from the broth stewed from mollusks was poured onto the ceramic plate in the shape of a sea creature wreathed around it like flowering vines.

Biting down, I felt a feeling of happiness burst in my mouth.

The rich taste swept my attention away from the champagne and amuse bouches in a heartbeat. This taste, which was good enough to be detestable, was enough to showcase the skill of the chef who had been especially brought here.

McDonell spoke as he used his knife to cut up the dish in front of him.

“Oh, right. I have something I want to ask you, Lord El-Melloi.”



“...If you don’t mind, I’d prefer if you could add the ‘II,’” my brother added as usual. However, this time, he sounded exhausted.

Having to control two bodies at the same time was probably enough to bring his brain to the brink of burning. It’d be like trying to do a wire puzzle with your right hand while painting an oil painting with your left. If he had his Magic Circuits do a bit more of the work, it might be easier, but without the necessary talent, he had to suffer.

“Alright. Well then, Lord El-Melloi II. Did you adopt a new approach(*TN: Alternatively, new guiding principles*) when you took over the Department of Modern Magecraft?”

Because he had been directly called, the conversation turned to him. There was no way I could intervene here. Though I felt that my brother reacted a bit slower than usual, he still gently put down his fork and responded.

“Nothing has changed from before. I just hope to teach as much of what I know to my students as possible. Of course, I can’t compare to my teacher.”

“Oh. But your teacher, Kayneth, was a staunch member of the Aristocratic Faction back then. That means you don’t plan on changing it so that you only teach your magecraft to chosen students. Are you sure you’re not trying to make magecraft more widely accessible?”

“...How do I say this. I can’t deny the possibility of that result.”

“Hm. Personally, though, I still hope you’d take a more traditional approach to teaching.”

What McDonell said just then was an example of the classic mindset of the Clock Tower.

The Aristocratic Faction existed to filter out the few chosen ones, while the Democratic Faction constantly absorbed whatever it could to gain power. Though I say that, it didn’t mean the two were completely incompatible,

When all is said and done, if you operate under the assumption that only talented people with excellent Magic Circuits can use magecraft properly, publicizing it doesn’t make sense. No matter how good of a teacher my brother might be, there is no way to overturn this fact.

Also, even though the Trambelios were the head of the Democratic Faction, that didn't mean that they hoped for a mindless publication of magecraft.

For a brief while, we enjoyed our own dishes.

"Flat Escardos and Svin Glascheit are unexpectedly lucky finds."

Suddenly, the topic of conversation turned to students.

"While all the other students thought they were hopeless, you were the only one who managed to make their talents shine. You must really be something if you managed to make these two very different students blossom together in the Department of Modern Magecraft."

"Please don't talk about my students as if they are objects."

"Oh, I'm sorry," McDonell said, wiping his mouth with his napkin after finishing his appetizer. "At the same time, though, what you do can cause people to be worried. Flat and Svin are very talented, and they will undoubtedly progress the history of magecraft. However, talent cannot be created without limitations. You should know as well that mystery becomes weaker the more it is shared. Being able to find a rare gem that would have been buried elsewhere in the world of magecraft is an achievement, but it can be harmful if you polish large amounts of rocks into imitation diamonds."

Oops, we've stepped into the minefield. It seemed that McDonell was more concerned than we had previously thought. I sent a signal underneath the table to "hang in there" to my brother, but I didn't know if he saw it or not.

"...Of course I understand what magecraft is meant to be like."

Wonderful, my brother made it. I'll give him seventy points for not saying anything unnecessary.

I also needed to thank McDonell for not naming which students were the rocks he was talking about. Otherwise, my brother might have lost his cool. Of course, I didn't think that he would have bothered to remember a bunch of insignificant names.

After the plates were taken away, McDonell leaned forward.

“Well then, I’ll get to the point. Do you approve of that plan?”



“—What plan?” The mercury version of my mentor said, pressing his hands to his temples.

Though he was tiny, his distress was clearly conveyed to us. Or, perhaps looking down on him made his distress even clearer.

“Oh my. Discussions between lords really are interesting. I see, the Trambelios are capable of saying something like that.”

Though my mentor didn’t explain much, Touko seemed to understand. However, the situation was still too complicated.

What hid behind the plan the Trambelios were asking my mentor about, and how Heartless invaded this workshop?

“...Heartless’ students are all Survivors of the labyrinth,” my mentor muttered to himself. “There’s a high likelihood that they were part of the same team when they were down there. Excluding the people who went missing, the other two are members of the Secret Autopsy division with a certain amount of authority. They’re quite famous in their respective departments. If they disappeared as well, I would be informed immediately.”

The miniature version of my mentor stood incredibly still with his hand over his face.

Usually, he would have brought out a cigar by now, but no matter how detailed this mercury version was, there wouldn’t be that function.

“If Heartless’ actions really are related to the Grand Roll, what kind of relationship would that be?”

He was silent for a moment.

“....No, if I look at it from McDonell’s perspective...”

My mentor looked across the room.

His mercury expression changed slightly, and he pointed toward the bottles.

“Svin, can you look into how the prices of these artifacts(*TN: talismans → artifacts*) have changed recently, around ten, or five years ago?!”

“...Huh? Um, I’ll need to contact the Clock Tower first, so it’ll take a while.”

“There’s no time. Rocco and Shardan should know plenty about them, but...”

“Hmm? You want to know about the artifacts?” Touko said, hearing their conversation and raising an eyebrow. “I know basically everything about those, you know? After all, if I come across one, I’ll buy it immediately with my little sister’s money.”



A plan, he said.

That was to say, if we didn’t understand enough about this, there was nothing we could do even if he ended the conversation immediately. This was the first stage of their evaluation of us.

“.....”

My brother was silent for a few seconds.

—Uh oh.

After a second or two, I made the mental preparations to take a gamble and interject.

“Are you talking about the one regarding Spirit Tomb Albion?”

“Of course. So you already know, Miss Reines.”

Seeing McDonell nod, I couldn't help but breathe a long sigh of relief. We've passed, at least for the moment.

Speaking of which, looking at the information we had, it was impossible that the Grand Roll had nothing to do with Spirit Tomb Albion. Even my brother should know this. The next question was how to keep the conversation going.

McDonell continued speaking cheerily. "The plan has actually been in the works for a while now. It was only completed enough to be shown to you all recently."

It began a while ago, but took form recently?

I racked my brain, trying to look for any information I could gather from that. There was nothing. I was missing the most important piece. How should I bait him into talking about it? Or could we admit that we didn't know anything about it and just ask? No, if we were on equal footing, it might be fine, but since the El-Melloi Faction was much weaker than them, we needed to be better than them in some way to level the playing field.

My brother's lips moved, but he didn't say anything.

He was probably still gathering information. Would he be able to catch up to what McDonell was saying?

I tilted my glass of white wine.

"Given the time and effort you have put into this, I'm sure the results will be extraordinary."

"Oh, you think too highly of us. The Barthomelois and the Secret Autopsy Division aren't easy to deal with. We also have to consult the Secret Judgement Division."

The Secret Judgement Division, Carillon Observatory.

It was in charge of evaluating exceptional mages and choosing the ones who needed to be Sealing Designated. It was another organization that was both part of the Clock Tower and separate from it. The mages there were also the ones who gave and then

recalled the decision of Touko Aozaki's Sealing Designation... It all makes sense when you take into account that the organization was situated inside that maze.

If that was the case, what would the plan be?

...What did they plan on doing to Spirit Tomb Albion? Did they want to send new personnel? Did they want to disband the Secret Autopsy Division? Or did they want to reevaluate Sealing Designations?

I thought up multiple possible answers to that question, and I couldn't eliminate any of them easily.

Just as I was thinking about that, soup was served.

A delectable aroma arose from the clear, amber-colored soup. There were no unnecessary decorations, and though it looked like a simple dish, one sip was enough to reveal the layers of flavors hidden within it, which spread throughout my tongue along with the subtle taste of sherry.

This dish calmed the tongue of the person eating after it had been shaken by the rich flavors of the amuse bouche and the appetizer. I almost got the feeling that I could see the chef's smug smile in it.

“Mm, yes. The soup today is fabulous, as usual. Are you all satisfied with it as well?”

Of course, this also mirrored McDonell's intentions.

The way the food was served represented what McDonell was going to say. He began completely without warning, made us uncomfortable by asking my brother about the future of the Department of Modern Magecraft, and then tossed the plan that was the subject of this conversation at us. He used these dishes to declare how legitimate he was, discouraging us from arguing. I suppose you could say this was a type of magecraft. (TN: *Clock Tower politics is so convoluted it's funny sometimes*)

However, since they intended on pushing us to our breaking point, the soup turned bitter in my mouth.

“.....”

I felt cold sweat seep from my forehead.

This was as much time I could buy as possible.

Just as I thought that, my brother muttered something as he sipped some soup.

“...[You mean, the redevelopment of Spirit Tomb Albion]?”

“Oh.” McDonell’s eyebrows twitched slightly. “Yes, of course I meant that. I originally wanted to toy with you for a bit, but it’s nice to see you understand what I’m talking about. It hasn’t been made public yet, but the plan to redevelop Spirit Tomb Albion has been made the main subject of the meeting.”

“.....”

To be honest, it took me so much effort to keep my expression neutral. That was how impactful that sentence was.

At the same time, there was nothing I could complain about in that answer. Spirit Tomb Albion was one of the cornerstones of the Clock Tower, so a plan for its redevelopment could be considered as a plan to rebuild the Clock Tower. For that reason, it wasn’t overly dramatic at all to have that be decided in the Grand Roll.

“I’ve investigated the market conditions of the main types of artifacts excavated from the labyrinth. The price has risen quite a bit in the past ten years. Usually, this would be because of a reduction in the number of expeditions to the labyrinth. It’s only natural then to want to redevelop the place to make up for this.”

“I see. That makes sense. Anything else?”

“I’ve also heard of the possibility of smuggling going on there. Redeveloping the facilities there would be an effective way to combat that. Without a Grand Roll, though, not even the Trambelios would be able to interfere with Spirit Tomb Albion.”

My brother vigorously revealed all the information he had gathered in his investigations. I’ll give him seventy points for that. It’s always good to make a move when the right time comes.

McDonell nodded as he listened to that and sipped at his glass of wine.

“The subject of smuggling has been coming up once in a while for a long time now. Considering the structure of Spirit Tomb Albion, it should be impossible... but we don’t have a perfect understanding of that labyrinth, either, so we can’t deny the possibility of there being a passageway somewhere.”

After he said that, he took another sip of wine, closing his eyes for a moment as if he was intoxicated by the taste.

“For that reason, we need to reassess the facilities. At the same time, redeveloping the labyrinth can increase the number of artifacts available, which can stimulate research. Don’t you think this plan kills two birds with one stone?”

“In the past, many people have suggested redeveloping Spirit Tomb Albion. Generations of Lords before us have anticipated the value of the redevelopment.”

My brother also agreed with the general idea of the plan. I didn’t know anything about the history he was talking about, but my brother probably remembered every tiny detail about the past of the Clock Tower.

“However, the idea was discarded every time for fear that it would lead to the exhaustion of the labyrinth. The labyrinth is already incredibly dangerous, and redevelopment means going deeper into even more dangerous territory. Even if we wanted to focus all of our effort on it, I cannot be sure if this plan will succeed.”

I had the feeling that this was the key.

Why wasn’t it discarded again? Why did they make the decision to persist, even to the point of calling a Grand Roll?

“Of course it’s because I think it would work right now. This is the best time for it. The mystery that we have held onto will gradually fade with the times. Do you understand? In this time and age, we still have enough to challenge the mystery of the mage, and the Clock Tower is able to support us from the surface. I doubt that the same conditions can be achieved by our next generation. Yes, the Democratic Faction believes that now is the best time to redevelop Spirit Tomb Albion!” McDonell announced.

At that, Inorai, the old woman who was the head of the Valualetas, interjected.

“Hey, don’t you think saying that’s a bit too over-the-top to represent the policy of the entire Democratic Faction?”



Generally speaking, you could count this as a failure on the part of the Trambelios.

Points should be deducted for not even coordinating with your team members beforehand. However, there wasn’t a trace of worry or frustration on McDonell’s face. Perhaps this was just how they communicated, but it could just as easily be that they disguised their emotions as well as we did.

“What a headache. And here I was thinking that the beautiful Lord Valualeta would definitely approve of my opinion.”

“I’m not arguing against it, son,” Inorai said admonishingly.

After the food had begun to be served, she had put away her cigarettes. Now, she was tilting her glass of wine around like I was. As a drink that came paired with the food, it perfectly complemented the aroma of the soup. Of course the flavors matched, but they had even considered how compatible the scents were.

“I just want to see some data as the head of the Valualetas. We can’t be lax in our judgment of what the correct goal of the Clock Tower is, or what the guiding principles of the Department of Modern Magecraft should be. Don’t you think so as well?”

“I cannot take the shame of being accused of laziness,” McDonell said, shrugging. I didn’t know why, but seeing someone that muscular do that was strangely humorous. Of course, even this air of humor was carefully calculated.

Tension silently settled into the air around us.

“Oh, Mama told me I should listen to Lord Valualeta,” Melvin said livelily.

Until now, this usually insufferably talkative man had been as silent as a corpse. And now, the first thing he said was that. It was as if someone was tossing a stone onto the slightly rippled surface of a lake. There was no way to tell whether the result would be good or bad.

McDonell sighed, leaning back on his chair.

“Is that what the head of the Weinz family says? Well, of course I understand what Inorai said. We are still collecting data. I assure you that we will have enough by the start of the Grand Roll.”

“As I can only expect from Lord Trambelio.”

I decided to take the chance.

Instantly, I felt my brother gasp beside me, but now was not the time to care about that. Since they had offered us a step to take, we could not miss it no matter what. Maybe doing this would make us indebted to Inorai and Melvin, but I didn’t have the luxury of choosing something else now.

“If that’s the case, just as Lord Valualeta said, let’s make a decision after we read the information. If it can get read at the Grand Roll, all the other Lords would surely benefit as well.”

“...Well, I don’t know what I expected to come out of this,” McDonell said defeatedly, stroking his chin. “But, this is an opportunity. Spirit Tomb Albion is a cornerstone of the Clock Tower. If something changes about that place, [we] must change alongside it. If we want that change to be for the better, now is the best time. (TN: *The emphasis was on the 私 part of the 私たち, so it’s like ‘we, but actually just me’*)”

What he placed the emphasis on in that sentence made it difficult to determine whether or not he was doing this purely for his own gain.

However, what he said was not exaggerated at all.

Mystery was fading as we spoke. The possibility that mages would reach the Root decreased every second, to the point where it was practically impossible. If we wanted to continue chasing after the Root, we needed something bold to reverse this trend.

Using the power of the Clock Tower to redevelop Spirit Tomb Albion was a very appealing option.

Maybe it would become impossible by the next generation of Lords.

We were a race that was gradually becoming extinct. Every mage probably knows this.

If someone told us that there was some way to escape this fate, we would easily sell our souls for it.

Perhaps because he guessed what I was thinking, McDonell smiled generously.

“Either way, I just wanted you to understand the process a little in advance. If I only revealed this at the Grand Roll, it would be quite a surprise, wouldn’t it?” He said, wagging his hairy finger as if he was doing us a favor. “The date of the Grand Roll will be decided upon soon. A couple of Lords probably already know about it. It’s going to be in less than a week.”

Besides that, I’d really prefer if he didn’t go around the place revealing how under-informed the El-Melloi Faction(we) were. Did he not know how goddamn embarrassing that was? If that Hishiri Adashino hadn’t leaked information to us, I don’t know how terribly this meeting would have gone.

“Just wait and see.”

After she said that, Inorai finished her glass of wine with a single gulp.

“Thank you for taking us into consideration.”

My brother’s frown deepened, and he gently rubbed his stomach. He hadn’t touched his wine, either. It seemed like he’ll need to double the amount of magecraft medicine he takes tonight.

“Well then, time for the main course! Though I can’t call it something to thank you for chatting with me for so long, I hope you will be able to enjoy it.”

McDonell spread his arms, and gestured for the servants to bring in the next dish.



Not long after that, we moved to another room in the mansion. (*TN: I cannot put into words how glad I am that Makoto Sanda did not decide to describe the main course as well*)

Melvin had asked to have this room prepared for us. After checking that there were no traps or surveillance magecraft, I collapsed on one of the sofas beside me.

“Oh god, I’m dead, I’m so dead! I died about three times during that meeting! I need to bulk purchase some graves with Reines El-Melloi Archisorte carved on them!”

I wasn’t kidding. I really felt that all the strength had been drained from my body.

If I relaxed, I might die immediately. Every cell in my body was begging to be liberated from this as soon as possible. Of course I knew how to use magecraft that could adjust my emotional state, but I didn’t even want to spare the energy to do that.

I basically didn’t need to mention what happened after that.

Either way, we managed to get by using the information(cards) we had. If you wanted me to give it a score, I’d put it around a sixty. It wasn’t great, but at least we passed.

As for all that about lean cuts of meat fried at low temperature and desserts cooked with knowledge of molecular gastronomy, it had completely evaporated from my mind, leaving only the general idea of what I just ate.

I wanted to lie here until the day I died, but Melvin began to talk to me with a cheerful smile as he gracefully put away his bloodstained handkerchief.

“Ahaha, that must have been tiring(*TN: Alternatively, good work*). I didn’t know you had an expression like that too, Reines.”

“Melvin...”

He annoyed me so much I wanted to puke over him, but I couldn’t even muster the strength to get mad. I even felt better than this when I was forced to participate in a Greater Magecraft Formula(*TN: I have no idea what this is*).

“Melvin, when you said you betrayed us, did you mean how you didn’t tell us that McDonell would be here?” my brother, who collapsed onto a chair just like I had, asked in a raspy voice.

“Of course! I sold you out for a good price! It’s alright if you want to thank me. I won’t mind if you drown us all in tears of gratitude either!”

“I still have plenty of things to complain about. But thank you, for now.”

There was around twenty percent genuine gratitude mixed into my brother’s sigh. I felt the same.

To be honest with you, there wasn’t a better chance than that to get accurate information. You could say that we had won a large number of cards in exchange for exhausting ourselves by walking a tightrope. At least we’ve avoided humiliating ourselves by being the only ones to know nothing at the Grand Roll.

After a brief moment of silence, my brother spoke.

“Can I ask you to leave for a moment?”

“Oh, sure. Even the most wonderful of friends can have different standpoints. After all that, the two of you do have a lot to talk about.”

In this situation, even Melvin— Or perhaps I should say, because of his background, Melvin knew the importance of standpoints better than anyone else.

He spun around and walked out of the room.

“Reines, you know what the situation is like now, right?” My brother said in an exhausted voice after Melvin left.

“...Of course I do. I did expect that the Democratic Faction would call us over for something like this.”

It was just that their reason for doing this was completely different from what I had anticipated.

The redevelopment of Spirit Tomb Albion.

If it was for that, the Democratic Faction needed to get serious. It was no wonder why even McDonell would start taking action, attempting to rope us in, despite everyone but Lord Valualeta ignoring us in the past.

“The most important thing is... if we consider Heartless as well...”

At this, my brother bit his lip.

Though I liked the way his eyebrows were twisted in worry, this time, the reason for that was also tormenting my stomach. I really hoped I didn’t catch my brother’s condition.

“Gah, I know! Of course I know. I’ve already thought of the worst case scenario.”

I shrugged with resignation(*TN: Every time someone shrugs in this series it makes me wonder if I know what a shrug is supposed to convey or not because it hardly ever seems like a time when I would shrug*).

Analyzing magecraft was my brother’s forte, but plotting was my place to shine. No matter how tired I was, my brain had adapted to always think of the traps other people could have set in those years of living under the constant fear of assassination.

“Heartless’ students, who are also Survivors, disappearing one by one. The plan to redevelop Spirit Tomb Albion. There’s no way it’s a coincidence that these two events happened at the same time. It’s also hard to imagine that this plan only took a year or two. It might have taken five, or even more ideally, ten. And like Zepia said, even if Heartless is your enemy, that doesn’t mean he’s an enemy of the Clock Tower.”

That was something that had happened at Gray’s hometown.

I thought back to what Zepia had warned my brother as thanks for helping him. His advice was so direct it almost felt like a curse.

“That’s what you wanted to say, right?”

“The person in contact with Heartless, what you could even call his accomplice— Yes, [that person is one of the attendees of the Grand Roll].”

I didn't want to think about that.

However, it was the most reasonable possibility.

Heartless was the former head of the Department of Modern Magecraft. The earlier cases revealed that he once helped the Lord of the Department of Astromancy, Marisbury. Therefore, it wasn't surprising if he struck a deal with another Lord. However, on a stage like the Grand Roll, it would be stupid to accuse anyone of a crime. ...Ah, I wouldn't even have cared if it wasn't for my brother.

I swallowed a sigh.

What was I meant to do in the face of feeling that my invisible enemies were increasing? I felt like there were maggots writhing about inside my body, and I couldn't calm down no matter how many deep breaths I took.

So, to conceal my pain, I turned to my brother.

"Oh right. Do you think Heartless' accomplice will be for or against the redevelopment of Spirit Tomb Albion?"

"We don't have enough information to determine that yet. It's possible that they've been obstructing work there. Maybe they plan on using this Grand Roll as an opportunity to end the plan for once and for all."

"I think so too."

It didn't matter whether it was done internally or externally, or whether they used legal or illegal means. A plan of this scale wouldn't be easily stopped. According to what McDonnel said then, he had even found it necessary to carefully keep the plan hidden until now.

However, in that case—

"—And there's the other letter," my brother said with a face full of contempt.

It was an invitation from the Aristocratic Lord of the Department of Spiritual Evocation, Lord Eulyphis. First, we had thought that it was a warning to prevent us from betraying. Now, it was different. Of course, that was because of the possibility that Lord Eulyphis was Heartless' accomplice.

Regardless of whether the accomplice was a Lord or a representative, their status couldn't be lower than ours.

“Oh, could this be any worse?”

The silence coiled inside the room reflected the despair that my brother and I felt.

◆ 第四章 ◆

~Chapter 4~



“Whoa, have you completely died, Sir?!” Yvette L. Lehrman exclaimed, after walking into the hotel room and seeing my mentor lying on the sofa.

It was the morning of the second day. After switching hotels like before, we met up with my mentor.

Reines had taken over the job of researching Heartless and the Grand Roll with Flat and Svin. Besides that, they said something about going back to check on the students of the El-Melloi Classroom just in case they got in trouble because they were left unattended. Of course, if Flat and Svin didn’t get jobs like this, they would probably be the most troublesome ones.

As for Touko, she disappeared after listening to my mentor’s brief report. Though I didn’t know why she was busy, it did seem like something she would do.

My mentor rubbed his temples.

“I might have overexerted myself during that meeting,” he explained in a tired voice as he sat up. To this, Yvette smiled and looked at my mentor flirtatiously.

“If that’s the case, do you want me to assist you with recovering? Did you know, it’s recently become popular among mages to add stimulating drugs and sexual experiences into supplying Od through magic circuits. Why don’t we try to introduce that to the Department of Modern Magecraft?”

“That’s enough joking around. ...How’s the favor I asked of you going?”

“You really don’t understand how girls with Mystic Eyes feel nowadays at all, do you? But the dedicated knock-off spy Yvette-chan shall answer! The Neutral Faction, including the Meluasteas, will not be attending this Grand Roll.”

“...I see.” My mentor breathed a sigh of relief. “Only the Aristocratic and Democratic Factions have the priority in purchasing artifacts from Spirit Tomb Albion. Though they aren’t poor, the Neutral Faction is only interested in research, so it’s difficult for them

to compete for the right to profit. I guessed they wouldn't be coming, but I suppose it's good news to have it be confirmed."

"Then, I'll pour you some tea now."

Seeing my mentor relieved made me happy too, so I walked toward the table.

The water in the kettle had already boiled, so all I needed to do was put the teabags in. Though my task required no skill at all, I guess it was understandable in this situation.

Just as I was carefully pouring hot water into some cups, Yvette spoke up again.

"Oh, one more thing, Sir. I heard that Atrum Galliasta, who went to the Far East to attend the Holy Grail War, has already died."

It took all of my might to stop myself from dropping the kettle. I looked up, and though I couldn't see my mentor's face, I saw his shoulders tense.

"...Is that so." My mentor said with a heavy sigh after a few seconds of silence.

The mage from the Middle East who came of his own accord every once in a while to show off during the time between the case at the Twin Towers of Ilsema and his trip to Japan.

Hadn't my mentor warned him not to underestimate the Holy Grail War?

But, in the end...

"All seven classes shouldn't have been gathered yet. Did he die before the Holy Grail War even officially started? ...Did the Servant he summoned also die?"

"No one's reported about that, but I think so. It is the Far East, though, so we don't have many details."

I felt like the gloomy look on my mentor's face became even more intense after hearing what Yvette had to say.

"Sir?"

“It’s alright, I was prepared for that possibility. It is the Holy Grail War, after all, so grieving over his death is like rejoicing over someone else’s. I can’t bring myself to do that.”

My mentor picked up the cigar on the bedside table.

It seemed like he just realized that the fire had gone out, so he took out some matches to relight it. Usually, he would have put it back in its case to stop it from getting moist, but I suppose he was too tired last night to remember.

Soon, smoke that also looked tired began to drift about in the air of the hotel room, and the familiar scent entered my nose.

“...Still, it makes me sad.”

“It must be a relief for him to hear that from someone who isn’t a mage, like you.”

When he said this, my mentor’s frown was deeper than usual. The shadows that fell over his face made me feel even sadder.

Atrum Galliasta probably wouldn’t be considered a good person.

When we first met at Ilsema, he had exploited the fact that he had more people on his side. Both his arrogant personality and his demeanor which made him feel like a self-proclaimed member of the aristocracy made him difficult to like. With how he only accepted those who he deemed high enough in status to qualify as human beings, I wouldn’t be surprised if he secretly did all sorts of violent things.

Nevertheless, he was one of the people affiliated with my mentor.

Maybe we hadn’t known each other for very long, but my mentor and I had shared some experiences with him. The thought of living in a way where I didn’t even feel sad about his death was too stifling. The silent smoke coming from the cigar made me feel talkative by contrast.

Of course, these thoughts were just part of my arrogant imagination. Only the pain I felt in my heart was real.

After a while, my mentor stood up. This time, he carefully put the cigar back in its case. He used one hand to gather up his disheveled hair, which would take some time to make neat again.

“It’s about time for us to go. Thank you for the information, Yvette.”

“Huh? Where are you going?”

My mentor considered it for a moment before revealing the answer, probably because he thought that it was pointless to try and hide it from her.

“The Secret Autopsy Division. They’ve agreed to meet us.”

“The Secret Autopsy Division? The one in Albion?”

Yvette whistled, and then put a finger to her pink lips.

“Well then, Sir, in exchange for the information, do you think they’d mind if a spy from the Meluastea Faction attended that meeting as well?” The girl with the eyepatch asked, as if it was an obvious thing to request.



Like most major port cities, London had a Chinatown.

The Chinatown in the Soho area had more than a hundred Chinese restaurants, making it one of the largest in the world. There were unique-looking red and white lanterns hanging between the many signs full of Chinese characters. The people passing by seemed even more diverse than usual, and I felt like I might lose track of what country I was in if I wandered around for a bit.

Going northeast from Chinatown and into Charing Cross Road, the buildings that lined the streets transitioned from Chinese to Victorian-styled architecture before becoming modern again.

London was distinctive because of this kind of intersection between countries and eras.

My mentor continued walking north along Charing Cross Road until he came to a stop in front of a certain building.

It was a giant glass-fronted building.

The futuristic cylindrical shape of the structure was quite eye-catching. Thinking of how most of the other buildings in the Clock Tower had been disguised as unassuming universities or government buildings, I got to experience first-hand how the Secret Autopsy Division was both a part of the Clock Tower and separate from it.

“All of the organizations here are affiliated with the Secret Autopsy Division. Though not every one of the people here are mages, all of them should at least know about magecraft and Mystery,” my mentor said after we signed in at the reception desk.

The reason why he felt the need to explain was simple. All the people I had seen entering and exiting were all dressed like businessmen, in suits.

My mentor seemed to be used to this kind of place and acted very naturally. However, I couldn’t help but get nervous. I pulled down my hood with my stiff fingers like I did when I first came to London and stared straight down at the floor, which I think was made of marble.

“—Sorry to have kept you waiting.”

Finally, the woman at the reception desk handed my mentor a card.

“Is this a magnetic key card?”

It looked very similar to the Oyster cards that had been recently introduced on buses. After we walked into the elevator, a swipe from the key card revealed a hidden control panel beneath the regular buttons. My mentor pressed one of them, and I instantly felt a jolt of inertia.

“Aren’t we going up?”

“We’re going to B45.”

My mentor quoted a shocking number as if it was perfectly normal. Then, he crossed his arms and tapped at one of them with his index finger.

“It’s several hundred meters underground, around the same as the deepest parts of the Clock Tower. One of the four total entrances to Spirit Tomb Albion is situated here.”

“There are four in total?”

“Yes. The Secret Autopsy Division is only capable of managing who enters Spirit Tomb Albion because there are so few.” After he said that, he glanced to the side. “Are you satisfied now?”

“Yes! Thank you so much! I’ve never been to the Secret Autopsy Division before!” Yvette said, giggling happily.

Just like she announced in the hotel room, she came along without an ounce of shame. Perhaps being able to do this was one of her strengths. Maybe I only thought this way because I was so shy, but she didn’t seem to care if she bothered others at all.

“Since you said it was in exchange for the information, I can’t exactly refuse. I don’t know how the people we’re going to meet managed to get the permission of the Division though,” my mentor said, displeased.

The feeling of weightlessness continued until the metal doors finally opened, revealing a spacious, circular room. It was around the size of the lobby of one of the better hotels.

There were giant crystals hanging from the ceiling, glinting with a faint light. My intuition told me that they were not products of science. Though I said that, they didn’t seem completely made with magecraft, either. They were probably objects of Mystery, but the clear light emitting from them made me feel like they were from something even more mysterious.

—Were they excavated from Spirit Tomb Albion?

I thought of that place again.

What kind of otherworldly realm would a labyrinth capable of producing things like these be? I silently pondered these thoughts as I stood under the flickering drops of light.

“Hm, it’s rare to see chunks of pyroxene this large.”

“Have you seen something like this before, Miss Yvette?” I asked.

“Yes, but only the size of pebbles and rocks. Even ones that small are useful for all kinds of things because of the Magical Energy inside them. They’re pretty expensive too, because you can only find them in places rich in Mystery. All I can say is that you only get to see something like this in the Secret Autopsy Division.”

Yvette nodded, and then looked around again.

She was probably this excited because of what she called the intuition of a spy. Since she went as far as to ask something this unreasonable of my mentor, the Secret Autopsy Division must be an intriguing place, even for a mage.

“...Strange,” my mentor muttered after we had waited for a while.

“Hm? What’s wrong?”

“No one’s here. They just told me that the person we wanted to meet would come immediately.”

My attention was drawn to one of the doors along the walls of the circular room.

With a hiss, the door opened, and an overweight worker rushed in. He tripped on his own feet and fell over backwards.

“—!”

A strange odor wafted in. Then, a loud noise sounded, like something was crashing into something else.

The sound repeated five times. During this time, the door was bashed out of shape, and a two-meter tall beast emerged from the doorway.

However, such a creature could not exist. A lion's head stared at me, but the heads of a bat and a chicken also sprouted out from the sides of its body. Its two claws were like scythes, or the forelegs of a mantis. Just as I stared in wonder at this amalgam of a creature(chimera), one of its heads turned to us.

“Sir!”

I rushed forward immediately, releasing Add from the hook. It immediately turned into a scythe.

“Ihihihi! What a grand welcome!”

Just as I did that, the three-headed beast came charging toward me.

I figured that I would be knocked flying by it, so I dodged to the side.

—However, even though I didn't bear the direct blow, my strengthened arms were still numb from the impact.

What was this—?

Until now, I had fought many mages and their creations. However, this time, it felt different.

Spirit Tomb Albion. This name appeared once again in my mind. It gave me a sense of bewilderment, like I was Alice stepping into Wonderland. I tried to swallow the fear that surged inside me and gritted my teeth.

“Gray-chan!” Yvette shouted.

I looked back to find her running toward me as she lifted her eyepatch.

Without hesitating, she plunged her fingers into the exposed eye socket, and inserted a shining ruby into her left eye. (*TN: That's... not how she did it in the anime and I'm kind of glad for that tbh*)

“Come on, get burnt into smithereens!”

A Mystic Eye of Flame. An artificial Mystic Eye made by Yvette herself, capable of setting fire to anything.

On the Rail Zeppelin, I heard that every one of the gems that could be swapped into Yvette's eye socket was comparable to a high-ranking Noble Color. The three-headed beast was immediately enveloped in flame, and it cried out in pain.

“Stay back, Sir!”

After warning him not to get close, I began to run. I made as much noise as possible while I ran in order to attract the attention of the beast that didn't lose its will to fight even though it was enveloped by fire. I stopped in the corner of the room.

I guess you could say that we were not from the same world.

Though we were all extraordinary beings, this beast was completely different.



I jumped to the side, using the wall to leap toward the beast and slashing down with my scythe.

However, the beast did not turn around. Instead, from its flame-covered body, a [tiger's head] emerged.

“—!”

My scythe was caught by the tiger's jaws.

With a creak, a piercing sound rang out.

“Add!”

“Owowowowow!”

I struggled to extricate the wailing Add. Though the scythe was only the exterior of a Mystic Code meant to seal the Noble Phantasm, and not Rhongomyniad itself, it was surprising that the teeth of the beast managed to harm it.

The beast jerked its head to the side.

Add and I were thrown into the air together. Just as I thought I was going to hit the wall—

Something soft caught me.

“...Are you alright, Gray?” A pained voice said.

My mentor had caught me. Though he had probably strengthened his body, my mentor's magecraft capabilities weren't enough to completely dispel the impact.

“I-I'm sorry!”

“...Don't worry about me. Can you make that thing shut up?”

“I'll try!”

I raised Add.

First stage restraints, rescinded.

Add's exterior shifted into the shape of a lance in a swirling vortex of light. It wasn't Rhongomyniad, just a hooked polearm that looked something like it. Since I wasn't sure what my opponent was like, I needed to keep myself at a distance from it.

I ran over and stabbed at it. However, the beast anticipated my attack and dodged in the nick of time. So it was intelligent. Or perhaps, it had a fighting instinct that was equal to intelligence.

Two of my three attacks were dodged by it, while the third was blocked by its mantis claws.

Then, as the lance was about to strike it, the beast leapt away.

—It wanted to get away?

With a woosh, the chicken head on the right side of the beast exhaled a little before taking a deep breath.

Because of what it contained, the decorative plants not far away drooped visibly.

—The breath of a chimera?

After realizing that it was preparing to take another breath, I froze.

I knew how powerful that was. Only a short breath was enough to make the plants look like that. A concentrated breath would surely be enough to dissolve my bones.

However, my mentor was right behind me.

If I dodged, the breath would definitely reach him. What should I do? Should I have Add turn into a shield? Would the shield be able to block all of it? Would Yvette have a Mystic Eye that could solve this problem?

As I pondered this dilemma, I cycled Magical Energy through Add.

At that moment, the ground around the beast suddenly rose to become walls, blocking its jaws.

Naturally, the breath was interrupted, and the walls immediately transformed into a sturdy metal cage, enveloping the beast. After recovering from the surprise, the beast angrily slashed at the cage with its many claws and teeth, but the cage deflected each strike. However, it did drastically change the shape of the cage, creating a piercing noise.

The person who had cast this spell kept the seal in place as he stared at the beast. It was the member of the Secret Autopsy Division who had fallen down a moment ago.

“Damn it! I’m too old to keep this up for much longer, Asheara!”

“Hold on a second, Calugh!”

The reply came from the door that the beast had entered through.

“—Flow backward.”

That was probably a one count long spell. As that happened, the beast quivered.

Green liquid erupted from its body like a balloon bursting. Even so, it still banged at its cage until it fell to the ground, defeated.

After that, the person who cast the spell carefully approached the cage.

“...It isn’t dead. Wonderful,” she muttered.

It was a dark-skinned woman. She looked to us with piercing eyes of the same color. From her efficient, crisp movements, it was clear that she lived her life this way as well.

“Gray, Yvette? Are you two hurt?”

After confirming that we were safe, my mentor turned to the woman who had just walked in.

“Did you use flow magecraft just then?”

“Yes. I fought Chimeras like these often back when I was still in the Labyrinth. I’ve worked with him for many years now.” After she said that, she bowed her head politely. “I am Asheara Mystras, from the Materials Branch. That was an oversight on our part. Apologies for frightening you, Lord El-Melloi II.”

After that, the other staff member dusted off his clothes and bowed his head too.

“I’m sorry for not introducing myself earlier. I am Calugh Ithred, from the Management Branch. Nice to meet you.”

They really were a peculiar pair.

Both of them were around thirty years old. They wore the same uniform.

However, I felt that these two people didn’t seem like they belonged in the Clock Tower. I didn’t know why, but they felt more like regular workers or scientists than mages.

Asheara Mystras.

I silently repeated her name to myself as I looked at her calm face.

Calugh Ithred.

The male staff member used a handkerchief to wipe at his sweat as he peered at us.

However, neither of them looked scared at all in the face of my mentor, who was still a Lord. Of course, maybe it was because my mentor’s title wasn’t really authentic and because the Department of Modern Magecraft wasn’t important enough. Either way, for members of the Clock Tower, they reacted rather calmly.

Perhaps this was the nature of the Secret Autopsy Division.

“...They’re the students of Heartless who I made a prior appointment with.”

Hearing what my mentor whispered to meet, I swallowed.

Then, my mentor looked toward the beast in the cage.

“Are you trying to capture Phantasmal Species?”

“Yes. We’re conducting a controlled observation of the ecology of the creatures of Spirit Tomb Albion. They’re quite different from the Phantasmal Species you see on the surface, aren’t they?”

She smiled as if she had completely forgotten about how the creature had just attacked us. I suppose you could say that this was very typical of a mage. Her only thought about the fight was probably that it was a source of useful data.

My mentor didn’t look like he wanted to pursue the matter further. Usually, he would have, but my mentor’s tendencies were affected by the state of the world of magecraft, at least when he was also talking to a mage. Perhaps for a similar reason, Yvette decided to hand the conversation to my mentor, so she didn’t say anything.

For that reason. I swallowed my complaint.

I looked down and used my hood to conceal my expression. Then, the person who claimed to be Asheara from the Materials Branch shifted the subject to us.

“And these two are...?”

“...I-I’m Gray, my mentor’s disciple.”

“Yvette L. Lehrman! I’m here as an assistant, at my teacher’s permission.”

I heard Yvette respond from beside me. It was very typical of her to have taken the position of assistant.

Asheara nodded, and reached out to one of the doors that were still intact.

“This way, please.”



After taking us to the reception room, they brought us some black tea that was identical to the tea on the surface.

It was a very simple room.

There were only two long couches and a glass coffee table. Though I was still confused as to where the air came from, it was probably the result of some kind of magecraft.

Besides that, there were several wall lamps that served an unclear purpose.

Considering the key card from just then, the Secret Autopsy Division didn't seem to avoid the use of modern science.

"I have something I want to ask you," my mentor said.

"You want to know about our teacher, right?" Asheara, who sat opposite us, said slowly.

"Unfortunately, neither of us has met Mr. Heartless for ten years," Calugh said beside her, still wiping his sweat. It seemed like he was the kind of person who sweated a lot.

They were two of Heartless' students.

Thinking of this alone made my heart rate speed up.

"Ten years. So you haven't met Dr. Heartless after he left the Clock Tower?"

"Yes. For a while after that, the Department of Modern Magecraft operated without a department head. Of course, that was before you became a Lord," Calugh said while carefully observing my mentor.

The Department of Modern Magecraft before my mentor was there.

Though it was incredibly obvious, hearing someone talk about it still surprised me. My entire impression of the Department of Modern Magecraft was built upon my mentor and the El-Melloi Classroom. However, back then, they weren't part of the Department of Modern Magecraft.

First, the El-Melloi Faction had been assigned to the Department of Modern Magecraft at a Grand Roll, and my mentor had been chosen by Reines to become a Lord. Those

two things had combined to form the Department of Modern Magecraft I was familiar with.

What was it like before then?

“Speaking of which, you two are our upperclassmen(*TN: senpai*) at the Department of Modern Magecraft.”

Yvette’s words knocked me out of my thoughts.

...Oh. That was true.

They were our upperclassmen, students of the Department of Modern Magecraft before my mentor was there.

“To be honest, though, Survivors of the labyrinth like us aren’t really suited for the Clock Tower. ...Oh right, has Slur changed much?” Calugh smiled wryly.

“I don’t think it has.”

“Is the pumpkin rice casserole(*TN: Alternatively, pumpkin doria*) still the most popular dish at the cafeteria?”

“I think it ranks about third. The most popular dish now is the shrimp chowder.”

“Hmph. You’re all too picky. Back in our day, everyone was fighting to order the pumpkin rice casserole because it was the cheapest.” Calugh rubbed his belly with a nostalgic look in his eyes.

“What sort of person was Dr. Heartless?” My mentor took the chance to ask.

“Well, we didn’t get to know him very well. ...But, thinking back, he was very caring. He treated our group of Survivors and his other students equally.”

“I’ve heard that he was biased towards your group of five Survivors.”

“Haha, that’s a bit of an overstatement. We weren’t like everyone else, after all. He treated us equally, but maybe that’s already a bias in the eyes of other people. ...Ah, as the head of a department of the Clock Tower, he was an incredibly kind man.”

Hearing Calugh’s reminiscences, I silently bit my lip.

That was another side of Heartless.

I found it somewhat difficult to believe. Though I accepted this as new information, hearing that the mage had stayed at Slur Street like my mentor and I and had even taught there made me feel uneasy.

On top of that, hearing someone say that he was a kind person made me at a loss for how to react.

After all, my mentor and I had nearly died by his hands.

“...I was completely used by him, wasn’t I?” Yvette muttered quietly.

She was referencing something that had happened on the Rail Zeppelin. In exchange for Heartless’ financing, she was used to help him disguise his identity. Though she had accepted the deal herself and therefore deserved none of my empathy, Heartless hadn’t revealed his true identity or intent to her either.

It was miles away from how the students described their teacher.

Which was the true Heartless, I wonder?

“Mr. Heartless was very passionate about education, even compared to the other departments. ...At least, I think so. It’s just that I always felt that he had his sights set on something different from the other lecturers.”

Hearing what Asheara said in a low voice, Calugh turned to her.

“Dedicate your life to the most radiant thing. (TN: ‘thing’... doesn’t fit well but it’s also vague enough to work)”

“That was always his mantra.”

An amused smile blossomed on Asheara's face, which had been devoid of emotion up until now.

"We are creatures that are always connected to one another. Since we must advance as mages, that means we must constantly face and be aware of those who are connected to you. However, at the same time, you are still uniquely yourself. In that case, you at least have to dedicate yourself to what you think is the most radiant thing."

...Her words immobilized me.

My mentor also froze beside me. Ah, yes. That was because this way of life was almost identical to someone else's. It was too similar to the person who had been fascinated by the king he had met during the Holy Grail War and decided to live by a new set of rules for the rest of his life.

I recalled what Heartless had said on the Rail Zeppelin.

—"The more I looked into it, the more I was drawn in by the Holy Grail War."

—"It was like a sunset I saw once in my childhood. At that moment, I prayed from the bottom of my heart that I hoped to chase after that view(*TN: Alternatively, landscape or scenery*) forever."

Was the radiant thing that Heartless chased after the Holy Grail War? Or, had he found something radiant in the Holy Grail War?

"What we should be after has always been the Root, right?" My mentor asked.

It was a word that I had heard countless times before.

The Root. Also called the Swirl of the Root, and sometimes represented as the difficult-to-describe " ". (*TN: Also the Vortex of Radix, the Akashic Records, or Heaven. ...Wait. Heaven? What?*)

Classes at the Clock Tower described it as the reason why mages were mages. It was a dream that must be realized, a manifestation of truth. It was the hope that someone would reach the Root in the future that caused mages to devote their entire lives to

refining their magecraft and do everything in their power to increase their descendants' Magic Circuits.

"Yes. Even if most mages, myself included, have lost sight of it because of the struggles within the Clock Tower, that fact cannot be changed," Calugh said with a wry smile.

Even as a Survivor of the labyrinth that rose to become a member of the Secret Autopsy Division, he could not escape the power struggles of the Clock Tower.

"However, I always got the feeling that he aimed for something else."

"...I see." My mentor said, nodding.

Did he gain some kind of insight?

I couldn't tell what he was thinking about. My mentor adjusted his position and leaned forward slightly before finally bringing up that topic.

"Are you aware that, among Dr. Heartless' former students, some of your fellow Survivors have gone missing?"

In an instant, the room was silent.

Then, the man lay back in his chair and spoke in a mumbling voice.

"...Of course I'm aware. Jorek Kurdice, who went missing recently, wasn't just one of our team members. He's my little brother."

"Oh, my apologies—"

"No, it's alright. I don't blame you. We don't have the same last name, after all. My brother was adopted by the childless Kurdice family before we left the labyrinth."

"I see. It is quite common for talented Survivors to be adopted by families without heirs."

"Yes. My brother was extremely talented. I was saved countless times by him back in Albion."

“Another pair as coordinated as you and Jorek is impossible to find.”

“Really? Thank you.”

The lips that were now smiling looked somewhat lonely.

At the same time, I took down notes in my head. Calugh Ithred— member of the Management Branch of the Secret Autopsy Division. The brother of Jorek. Asheara Mystras— member of the Materials Branch of the Secret Autopsy Division. Jorek Kurdics— the brother of Calugh. [Missing]. Gesell Tolman— a freelance mage that specializes in potions. [Missing]. I took note of their names and where they were now. Of Heartless’ five students, there was one person left. According to Touko, that person was also [missing].

After that, the conversation went on for around ten minutes. Just as I thought it was coming to an end, Calugh called out my mentor’s name.

“Lord El-Melloi II, can I ask you something?”

“Of course.”

Hearing my mentor agree readily, the man clasped and unclasped his hands in front of his abdomen repeatedly before he asked his question.

“You made a name for yourself after you survived that ritual in the Far East, right? The Holy Grail War, or whatever?”

The Holy Grail War!

My mentor blinked, surprised to hear that phrase come up.

“Yes...? And?”

“Oh, nothing. I just thought it was a bit similar to us Survivors. You’re probably the most successful New Ager in the Clock Tower. So how does it feel? Do you have any thoughts about your current stance? Do you think you’ve made the world more radiant by becoming a Lord?”

“.....”

My mentor sank into silence briefly as he pondered it seriously.

Then,

“I just think it’s a burden,” he said, shrugging.

“...Huh. So that’s what you think.”

Though it was a short answer, Calugh seemed to have sensed something from it. He didn’t ask any further questions. He just patted his plump stomach and sighed.

“My answer might not be very helpful.”

“No, it’s enough. Thank you, Lord El-Melloi II.”

Calugh Ithred of the Materials Branch of the Secret Autopsy Division bowed his head deeply again.



The conversation ended unexpectedly quickly.

After Lord El-Melloi and his group had left, the two members of the Secret Autopsy Division returned to the reception room.

Calugh stared grimly at the floor. He kept clasping and unclasping his hands, perhaps out of habit.

“Do you think our teacher has something to do with how Gesell and the others have disappeared, Asheara?”

“Of course he’s involved in this.” Asheara pursed her lips. Though she was wearing a simple uniform, she still looked very attractive. “He already knows what we did. He’s returned after ten years, and our team has become like this. It’d be a miracle if those two things weren’t related.”

“Mages shouldn’t talk about miracles like that,” Calugh said bitterly. “But if that’s the case...”

“...Yes. Goodbye, Calugh.”

Asheara picked up the briefcase she had packed in advance.

Calugh looked up at her, confused.

“Are you leaving? This is the safest place in all of London, you know?”

“I still have to leave,” Asheara said, as if she was emphasizing it.

And just like that, she walked out of the gates with the crisp sound of her footsteps.

Not once did she look back.



—The sun had already started to set. Because it was late January already, night came early. The concrete skyscrapers and quiet townhouses were all gradually dyed with the same red tint. The coat-wearing pedestrians were not exempted from this either, and their elongated shadows streaked across the paved stone roads.

After leaving the Secret Autopsy Division building, we walked south along the road for a while before my mentor spoke up.

“So?”

“Well, they didn’t lie!”

After checking the surroundings, Yvette lifted her eyepatch.

“Oh, the Mystic Eye of Emotion Sight(*TN: the wiki says ‘Mystic Eye of Seeing Emotions’ which doesn’t fit very well with the other names for Mystic Eyes.*).”

A polished piece of malachite(*TN: which is opaque*) was set into her eye socket. It seemed like she had changed the gem in her eye after the fight with the chimera without me noticing.

That Mystic Eye was capable of capturing changes in people's emotions.

Because of it, if Yvette really wanted to find out what we were doing, we wouldn't be able to hide it. My mentor had only agreed to her assistance because of this.

"But, they seem to know something about the disappearances of the other students. When you asked them a related question, the atmosphere shifted drastically."

"I see," my mentor said, nodding. "If that's the case, the question becomes what the nature of the facts they were concealing is. Why did they find it necessary to hide it from us?"

Whydunit.

Why would they lie? Was something compelling them to do so?

"Either way, we don't have enough information to reach a conclusion now. It's lucky enough that we managed to find people who knew Heartless back then."

"...He feels like someone who cared about his students a lot."

"Mages are meant to care for their disciples. Usually, though, this doesn't include their regular students. Mages are creatures who only care about the heirs to their Magic Crests or spells, sometimes even more than they care about their own lives. In this respect, Heartless is an exception to the rule. Or, perhaps the Department of Modern Magecraft made him this way."

I didn't bring myself to ask what the situation was with my mentor.

Usually, I would be included as a disciple, but I wasn't even a mage. I was just a grave keeper named Gray who was forced into this position by circumstance.

However, to my mentor, the El-Melloi Classroom was not insignificant at all.

Even though he treated the students who had already graduated like full-fledged mages and kept his interference at a minimum, it wouldn't be an overstatement to say that he doted upon his students.

Why was my mentor different from other mages? And what about Heartless?

“—Speaking of which, Dr. Heartless was rumored to have been kidnapped by fairies as a child,” my mentor said, completely out of the blue.

Hearing his words, Yvette tilted her head. “I heard he got some kind of special ability out of that as well. But he didn’t tell me the details, probably because he didn’t trust me.”

Fairies reminded me too much of fairytales. However, now I knew that they existed. At least, something similar to them did.

Besides that, just as Yvette said, though we had been obstructed by his power on the Rail Zeppelin, we didn’t know what exactly it was. According to him, it could do similar things to imaginary numbers, but we didn’t know any of the details.

It was still a complete mystery.

Though I could get the general idea from the statements of Heartless’ students, it was still hard for me to piece the Heartless of the past and the present together. It felt like I was filling out a crossword puzzle that had been eaten full of holes by maggots.

“There are many legends about the gifts of fairies,” my mentor said as he walked, as if he was delivering a lecture. “However, the more recent the legend is, the less likely that it is only a gift. Disregarding the heroes who managed to carve their names into history for now, in an age where the realms of fairies and humans have been separated, there must also be a price equivalent to the gift— no, a price on top of the gift. Even in the modern age, there are still legends of changelings in Western Europe, but that might be because disasters leave stronger impressions upon people.”

Changelings.

I heard that they were types of fairies left in place of a human stolen by fairies.

“The Rail Zeppelin...”

“Sir?”

“It’s noth...” He stopped in the middle of his sentence and shook his head. “I get the feeling that we missed something very important on that train...”

At that, he was interrupted by a gust of wind.

Snowflakes were mixed into the wind. The clouds were spreading outward as if they were chasing the setting sun, and harsh, cold wind began to blow. Just as I reached out to keep my hood in place, the neon lights beside us turned on, lighting up the streets full of intricate signs.

“There are so many theaters here.”

“Plays have always thrived in this area. But the people we’re meeting don’t seem like they’re here to enjoy one.”

“Was this the meeting place they decided on in advance?”

“Yes. They said that someone would come to show us the way, but...”

“Sir?” Yvette asked.

I also realized that the number of pedestrians had suddenly decreased. There was no one in sight. For a street in London at dusk, that was impossible.

Finally, Yvette turned in a certain direction, and my mentor looked there as well.

It was the balcony of a nearby cafe.

An old man was seated one one of the chairs there.

He had long, white hair, and a pair of glasses.

A large ornamental gem hung by his chest. There was a jeweled ring on each of his shriveled fingers. However, despite this extravagance, the old man looked like he had come from a dismal world of shadows.

The old man raised his hand like he wanted to part the drifting snowflakes.

“...It’s been a while... Lord El-Melloi.”

“If you don’t mind, I’d prefer if you add the ‘II’.”

“You’ve told me that before... However... that is only an unnecessary insistence... There is no point for me to go along with it... You are Lord El-Melloi... I am Lord Eulyphis... This fact will not change...”

His dry voice sounded like a curse of some sort. It reminded me of the winding tongue of a snake.

Lord Eulyphis. The Lord of the Department of Spiritual Evocation. One of the twelve monarchs of the Clock Tower.

“—Rufleus Nuada-Re Eulyphis,” Yvette whispered nervously. That was probably Lord Eulyphis’ name. I learned after the fact that each head of the Department of Spiritual Evocation was chosen from a different branch family, and would be adopted into the Eulyphis family. It was very much in the style of the Clock Tower to have such a strange set of rules about names.

The other letter sent alongside Lord Valualeta’s had come from this old man.

“So... You haven’t forgotten our agreement to meet...”

“Of course not. I just didn’t think that you would choose to have us meet here.”

The old man’s shoulders trembled as he laughed.

“It just so happens... that I have brought another guest...”

Rufleus’ eyes spun around. Another figure appeared on the road.

I couldn't figure out whether she had just appeared out of nowhere, or if she had always been standing there. Perhaps making me lose my concept of time was also part of this spell.

The snowflakes that kept drifting down seemed to blanket everything, locking the world into place.

A silver-haired girl stood there, as if she had cleaved apart this field of white.

Though she was younger than us, she didn't succumb to the heavy atmosphere here and stood firmly. Her amber eyes seemed to announce that she would not let her attention drift from the battlefield that was to emerge.

At the same time, she was also someone who my mentor, Yvette, and I were very familiar with.

“I haven’t seen you for some time, Lord El-Melloi II.”

Seeing the girl curtsy, my mentor muttered her name.

“Miss Olga Marie...”



—{Ten years ago, on the first floor of the Great Magic Circuit.}

The floor beneath his feet was very bright.

...It almost felt like a dream.

The young man tried his best to gather together the loose threads of his drifting attention and stepped onto the shining light emitting from the ground.

Light didn't just come from the Great Magic Circuits(veins) of this labyrinth in the walls and floor. Since the first floor was close to the Mining City of Magisfair, the light from the giant crystals shined through from the holes in the ceiling. Most of the monsters wouldn't appear in places illuminated by the light of the crystals. Combined with the

fact that the city's defenses stretched here as well, this place felt more like a place to take a relaxing walk than the rest of the constantly threatening labyrinth of Albion.

Though he could sometimes hear the howling of beasts, from here, it almost seemed cute. Of course, since the environment of Albion wouldn't change in such a short period of time, cases of unsuspecting groups getting ambushed and killed weren't unheard of. However, humans weren't capable of staying focused for long periods of time, so the more elite a team was, the more time they would devote to taking breaks.

"It's the last time we'll ever be down here!" Jorek, the little brother of Calugh, exclaimed cheerfully.

He had always been the mediator of the group. On top of being a top-notch fighter alongside his older brother, he also made up for the gap between the older Gesell and the other two members of the group.

If it wasn't for him, the team would have perished long ago in some corner of Albion, or split up because they couldn't cooperate. The young man felt nothing for him but gratitude.

"I never thought that everyone would become Heartless' students."

"It's only a title, but we'll be able to attend classes at the Department of Modern Magecraft for the next two years, won't we? Combined with being able to call ourselves Survivors, there'll be no lack of options after we graduate. Ah, it couldn't be better! You've really done something great here, kid!"

"Ahaha..." The young man laughed awkwardly.

It had been a few months since then. The situation finally progressed to him telling everyone about Heartless. After meeting several times with Heartless in secret, he had gotten the idea to just accept all the members as his students. In the blink of an eye, it was settled.

Was this really the most powerful head of a department beside the Lords, the young man wondered with a twinge of fear.

He would never even have dreamed of something like this happening to him.

Of course, an important factor was that they had managed to earn a huge sum by smuggling artifacts through Heartless during those secret meetings. They had used it to shorten their time here. In order to not make the Secret Autopsy Division suspicious, they had manipulated the information somewhat to say that one of the team members had always been in contact with the Department of Modern Magecraft, and that they had gotten funding from Heartless. It had taken quite a bit of effort.

Recalling all of this, the young man suddenly changed the topic.

“Speaking of which, have you all decided what to do after joining the Department of Modern Magecraft(Norwich)?”

“That’s thinking a bit too far, isn’t it?”

“Well, we’ll have to build up some connections during the two years when we’re students,” Calugh and Jorek replied, practically in unison.

Though it still seemed distant to the young man, Heartless had talked about something similar. He had said that he needed to consider what he wanted to study and who he wanted to become in the future.

[The future].

For the young man, who had grown up in Albion, that was a word completely unrelated to him.

“I want to go to the Secret Autopsy Division. It’s a good way to apply the experience I’ve gained here,” Asheara said.

The dark-skinned young woman stared out into the labyrinth with a calm expression.

That was a good idea. The young man was clueless about everything outside of the Spirit Tomb of Albion. Her actions were worth using as a reference, as he needed to get used to being a student. He decided quietly to stay beside her to learn from her.

“Ha. I don’t want to get dragged into Clock Tower struggles anymore. I’m excited to attend classes at the Department of Modern Magecraft, but I plan on returning to be a freelance potion maker,” Gesell said, shrugging.

Supposedly, he had been an independent mage before coming to Albion as well, so it seemed like he was prepared to return to his old job. Of course, the money and artifacts he had gotten here and the skills learnt from the Clock Tower would undoubtedly help him in the years to come.

“What about you two?”

“I plan on joining the Secret Autopsy Division, like Asheara,” Calugh said, scratching his head.

Jorek smiled somewhat embarrassedly. “My brother and I have the chance to get adopted by the Kurdice family. If I can get good grades at the Clock Tower, maybe I’ll even get to become a candidate for being the heir.”

The two brothers were very similar.

Both were slightly chubby, and if they continued like this for another several decades, their weight might bring them health detriments. In the future, the young man knew that they would be just as reliable.

He was sure that they would help each other in their next few years as students.

Then, the topic of conversation turned to the young man.

“You said you wanted to stay with Dr. Heartless after you graduate, right?”

“Yes, that’s what I plan on doing.”

“That’s such a waste of time! All your rights will get stolen by those pretentious old guys anyway! You might as well go find a family and organization to sell yourself to!”

“No, don’t rush to conclusions. Even a New Ager like this kid searches for the same thing as every other mage. Doesn’t the continuation of generations lead to the Root?” Gesell rebutted the brothers’ statement, and they began to argue.

This was probably the last time he would see this familiar interaction between the three of them in Albion. As he thought of this, the young man couldn't help but feel a deep sadness.

He would probably get to see them again after they went to the Department of Modern Magecraft.

“—You can also aim for the Secret Autopsy Division, you know,” the young woman beside him whispered.

“Oh, um, yes.”

Hearing Asheara's somewhat awkward voice, he nodded gently. The young man wiped at his face haphazardly in order to try and hide the redness that was creeping up onto his face.

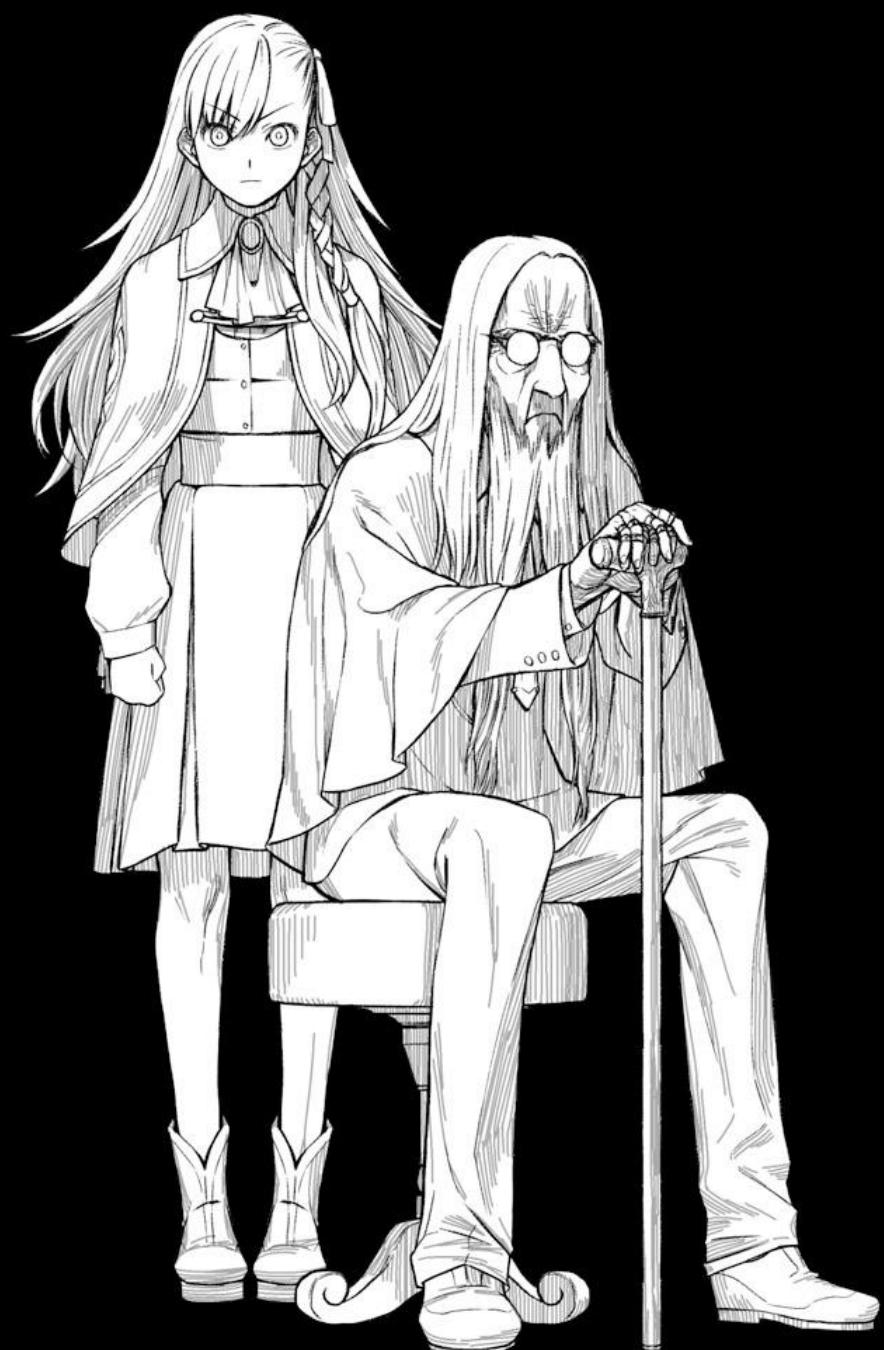
Each one of their dreams was about to become reality.

This was undoubtedly wonderful. The chance was radiant and bright, and definitely something worth being happy about.

However, for whatever reason, a subtle dark fog passed by the young man's heart. For the first time in his life, he felt uneasy about the future.

◆ 第五章 ◆

~Chapter 5~



There was no way I could have forgotten the silver hair that fluttered in the snow-scattering wind.

Olga Marie Asmleit Animusphere.

The girl whose life had been intertwined with ours on the Rail Zeppelin. I should have expected that she would also appear in this case. I silently bit my lip.

She was [the daughter of the Lord of the Department of Astromancy], after all. Besides, I had heard that the Lord of Astromancy didn't leave his territory often. This being the case, it was only natural that she would appear as his representative in the Grand Roll.

She glanced over to me, but didn't say anything.

That was probably because she felt that there was no need for nobles to greet other people's servants. If the dead Atrum was here, he'd probably laugh and say "did you really think that there are fools out there who greet other people's luggage? Or are you the sort of pervert that kisses the shoes of everyone you meet", or something along those lines.

I felt like this was more of a difference in values than a bad attitude. Those were values that had been distilled and passed down in the world of mages, which was only open to the chosen ones.

"Isn't it the daughter of the Animusphere family? I didn't expect that you would be here as well." My mentor bowed deeply.

The old man only frowned.

"...The last time I met with you, Lord El-Melloi... was several years ago."

"...This is the third time we have met. But my teacher has long enjoyed your favor."

"...Hm. The matter of your predecessor... is very unfortunate. ...Not only Sola-Ui, but also Kayneth El-Melloi Archibald... my best disciple in recent years."

Hearing his words, I couldn't help but stop breathing for a moment.

He was the mentor of the previous Lord El-Melloi...?

Up until now, I had heard so many stories of the previous Lord El-Melloi.

He had created many Mystic Codes, including *Volumen Hydrargyrum* easily at a young age, and was a mage who was regarded as a prodigy even amongst other outstanding mages of the Clock Tower. And the person who had taught him was the old man in front of us.

In other words, to my mentor, he was his teacher's teacher. (*TN: mentor and teacher are used pretty much interchangeably here*)

...So, he was my mentor's mentor's mentor?

This tongue twister-like thought flashed through my mind, and I immediately tossed it out.

Now was not the time to think about things like this.

It wasn't just that all the other people had disappeared from this otherwise normal London street at dusk. There was also a strong [aura of death] surrounding the old man.

The Lord of the Department of Spiritual Evocation...

Spiritual Evocation was just like the name suggested. It was a type of magecraft where mages called down the souls of the dead and made them do their bidding.

The dead bowed down to Eulyphis... I had heard something like that before in a class at the clock tower. If I was a grave keeper that ensured the dead could rest in peace, this old man was a mage who controlled and fed on them.

The old man smiled slightly. Every time his fingers bent, the jewels set in the rings would glimmer with eye-piercing light.

“...Haha, at least you’ve come. ...I thought that you were persuaded by the Trambelios, and wouldn’t even pay attention to an invitation from this old man...”

The old man’s words made my heart beat faster.

He was showing that even though it had only been a day since the talk with Lord Trambelio, he already knew.

“How would I? The connection between the El-Mellois and the Department of Spiritual Evocation(Eulyphis) runs far deeper than the last generation.”

“Of course... if you had answered ‘yes’ I would have had you strangled on the spot.”

The corners of the old man’s mouth curled upward in a sinister smile.

I could clearly tell that he was not exaggerating. This old man did have the power to do so. As the Lord of the Department of Spiritual Evocation(Eulyphis) of the Clock Tower, he probably had the ability to kill us all even if we resisted as a group.

His existence gave me a feeling similar to that of Touko Aozaki, yet completely different.

My mentor only narrowed his eyes slightly.

“Speaking of which, I thought that you would have let Bram attend as your representative like in the previous Grand Rolls.”

“...Ha. Ha. Since McDonell of the Trambelios is going to attend in person, how could I not as well? ...Well then... have you heard about... the Trambelios’... ridiculous plan to redevelop Spirit Tomb Albion?”

“Yes. If you had decided to inform us in advance, we might have been more prepared (*TN: this is said kind of semi-jokingly, so he’s not actually accusing Rufleus of anything*).”

“I have not... hidden anything from you... intentionally.” Rufleus’ voice resounded hollowly in the air.

“...That’s a barefaced lie,” Yvette quietly mumbled to me.

Since she said that, that was probably true. He had chosen deliberately to not give any information to the El-Mellois, who were the least powerful of the twelve families. It was just that I didn't know whether it was because he thought they were insignificant, or worried that the El-Mellois would betray them. However, I was at least aware that he had his reasons for doing that.

The Clock Tower's social relations were too complicated.

The plotting and scheming mixed into everything went without saying. Even traditions and evil intentions were almost indistinguishable from each other, and there was no way for an outside to tell the difference.

However, Olga Marie interjected then, as if she had had enough.

“Mr. Rufleus, that’s enough chatting, don’t you think?”

“Of course... Since you already understand the current situation... everything becomes easier...” Rufleus said. “...As Lord Eulyphis... I oppose the plan to redevelop Spirit Tomb Albion.”

Sure enough, I thought.

I had heard that similar proposals had been brought up before. The fact that they didn't manage to pass was a sign that opposition existed. Since the Trambelios, who were at the head of the Democratic Faction, were the people behind the redevelopment, it was natural that the Eulyphises at the head of the Aristocratic Faction would be opposed to it.

“Can I ask why you say that?” My mentor asked after a brief pause.

“...Because it is dangerous... is that not a satisfactory reason?”

“Yes, of course it is. Lords must work to ensure the stability of the world of magecraft. You must be more thoughtful than a junior like me could ever be,” my mentor said, agreeing with Rufleus' priorities. “I also think that it is very likely that increasing the speed of excavation by redeveloping Spirit Tomb Albion would cause the resources

there to dry up. Albion is an incredibly dangerous place, and no one would be able to ensure the success of the redevelopment.”

“To add to that, that’s the Department of Astromancy’s stance on this as well,” Olga Marie said from the side.

She seemed to be adopting the strategy of saying as little as possible. Was that because she was only her father’s representative, while the other two people were official Lords?

“But [what if] the success of the redevelopment [could be guaranteed]?”

Suddenly, Lord Eulyphis said something completely different. My mentor frowned slightly.

“What do you mean by that?”

“That Trambelio kid must have taken many considerations... since he has decided to bring it up... Otherwise, he would not have revealed it deliberately... Barely managing to take out a topic that will inevitably be rejected in the end... would only be a show of his incompetence...”

I could understand what Rufleus said. He was not underestimating Lord Trambelio. Rather, he saw Lord Trambelio as a potential threat. That was why he decided to attend the Grand Roll.

“That is very reasonable. I agree that he has made appropriate preparations.”

“Of course... And then... He seems to be close enough to you... to have you as a guest...” The raspy voice swept ominously across the stone slabs of the sidewalk. “Well then... can you... figure out what preparations they have made...?”

Because of the light reflecting off of his glasses, I could not see his eyes.

However, the terrifying implications of his words was enough to make me shiver, even though I was just standing there.

Was he basically asking my mentor to be a spy? Of course, in the Clock Tower, that was so common that it wasn’t strange for Yvette to directly reveal her intentions.

However, this was different. Even my feeble mind could understand that what was happening now was different from usual.

Yes. This was a Lord, hinting for another Lord to be a spy. This was too different in terms of severity. If the rulers of the Clock Tower were to commit such a treacherous act, and if we failed, what little prestige El-Mellois and the Department of Modern Magecraft had would crumble immediately. Though I said that, there was no way to directly reject his offer without ceding the initiative to Lord Eulyphis.

Both accepting and rejecting the offer could result in a deadly situation.

My mentor spoke again after a brief moment of silence.

“Would it bring any benefits?”

“Ha. So you’ve learned to ask for rewards?”

Hearing the old man’s question, my mentor shook his head and responded slowly.

“No, I’m not talking about myself. I want to ask [what benefits the Aristocratic Faction would gain from not redeveloping Spirit Tomb Albion.]”

In an instant, the old man’s expression tensed up.

“...Don’t overstep your authority, young man.”

“My sincerest apologies.” My mentor bowed his head again. “But if we wanted to obtain information from the Trambelios, knowing that would be essential. They are not stupid enough to trust someone who comes to them empty-handed.”

...Huh? What was going on?

I was suddenly very confused.

I could only sort of understand what my mentor just said.

I knew he was asking about what benefits it would bring the Aristocratic Faction, but this retort managed to make the old man sigh.

“I see. Let us pretend that exchange never happened.”

“I’m incredibly sorry that I cannot meet your expectations.”

“...No, don’t be. I see... I finally understand the reason... why the El-Melloi Faction did not die out.” Rufleus said, smiling to reveal teeth like that of a skeleton.

Then, he said something that I did not expect.

“You do remind me... of that Heartless boy though.”

“Was the Department of Modern Magecraft in Dr. Heartless’ age part of the Aristocratic Faction?”

“No... That man... did not join any faction... He was somewhat neutral... but he did not vie for the favor of the Meluasteas...”

After answering my mentor’s question, the old man left us with a final sentence.

“The Grand Roll will be held in three days... Do not forget it...”

At that, he raised his index finger. One of the gems there changed to a strange color. It seemed like some kind of spell had been activated. In the blink of an eye, the old man disappeared.

Olga Marie, who remained there, waited for a moment before turning to speak to me.

“Your name is... Gray, right?”

It seemed like she still remembered my name.

“Um... y-yes.”

Hearing my somewhat hesitant answer, Olga Marie cleared her throat uncomfortably and touched the back of one of the chairs on the balcony.

“Send my regards to Reines. She did a wonderful job. I’m very impressed.”

“...I’ll make sure to pass your message on.”

“Thank you. It would be nice to be able to have some tea with you again.”

After she said that, Olga Marie disappeared as well with a wave of her hand.

It wasn’t just that. The pedestrians on the street had returned too. Along with a cacophony of noise, the place around us returned to being a regular London street.

As if he had suddenly lost all his strength, my mentor covered his face with his hands.

“Neither Rufleus nor Olga Marie was actually here. They just shifted the street very slightly to create a simulated ‘field’ that other people wouldn’t be able to see. That way, they didn’t need to move their physical forms to appear here. This magecraft should be like child’s play to them.”

“Oh, also, did you think of that comeback by yourself?” Yvette said, tilting her head in interest.

I didn’t know if she asked out of her own curiosity, or because she was a spy. Either way, my mentor exhaled deeply as if to let fresh air flow into his lungs, and replied.

“No. As you may have guessed, it was Reines’ idea. She said it was very possible that they wanted us to spy on the Trambelios if they suddenly asked to meet us, so I needed to touch on the interests of the Aristocratic Faction. Because [if we did have to defect to the Democratic Faction, this information will be crucial. As long as Lord Eulyphus notices this, he will try to balance things out].

“Rufleus probably just wants to send us to the Democratic Faction because not sticking closely to a Faction makes us difficult to deal with. Then, he’ll probably send us to our deaths along with them. However, he didn’t judge that it was worth revealing the cards he has.”

“...Oh. I see.”

I was impressed from the bottom of my heart.

It seemed that only a battle where each side could guess the weapons the other side had could be called a drama worthy of the Clock Tower. To be honest, I felt like I didn't understand half of what was said during that conversation.

...Ah, so that's what Olga Marie was talking about.

That was to say, she figured out that Reines had told my mentor to say all that just then. Reines and Olga Marie had met every once in a while after the Rail Zeppelin case, so it wasn't really surprising that she could tell.

"Hmph. To be honest, I couldn't catch up with that interaction entirely either. Politics is not my specialty."

My mentor gazed out to the street with a slightly haggard look on his face.

"Yvette, you should probably go home from here."

"Huh? We aren't done talking yet, are we? And this is the right time to bring your cute lover around the place, isn't it?"

"Go."

Hearing my mentor emphasize that, Yvette pouted.

"...Okay, fine. But can you tell me the details later?"

Yvette walked away reluctantly, still pouting.

"Sir, why did you have her go?"

"Like we discussed earlier, that possibility exists in the Aristocratic Lords as well."

Even I could understand what possibility he was speaking of.

"You mean, the possibility that Heartless' accomplice is a Lord—"

“Yes. The reason why Lord Eulyphis would reject the proposal to redevelop Spirit Tomb Albion is not clear yet. Of course, we can’t rule out the possibility that even the basic reason he just brought up about how it was impossible was a result of Heartless’ intervention.

“Olga Marie is more suspicious. She has never had any contact with Heartless, but her father, the Lord of the Department of Astromancy, once [commissioned Heartless to research the Holy Grail War].”

What he said was true.

The only reason why Heartless successfully summoned Faker was the results of his research from then. We still didn’t know why Marisbury wanted to research the Holy Grail War, so there was no way to deny the possibility of a connection with Heartless.

I felt myself become dizzied by the crisscrossing interests and goals.

Was this how things normally were at the Clock Tower? Or was this just what interactions between Lords were like? Though I couldn’t tell, it was definitely part of what Reines had to deal with every day.

It was a world right next to me that I could not see.

“He said it was in three days,” I muttered to myself as we walked down a London Street already swathed in the hues of the night. “On February the second, the Grand Roll will be held...”



After we met up with the other members of our team, we discussed what had happened today.

It was night now, and we were in a new hotel room.

“Professor, I can’t remember it at all!” Flat said, raising his hand.

He said it without a hint of hesitation, and with a smile on his face. His demeanor was exactly the same as when he was in class. Every time that happened, my mentor would

cover his stomach with one hand while the blood vessels around his temple would twitch... Yes, basically, what was happening now.

“There are more people than usual involved in this one...”

“Let’s draw a diagram for it then,” Reines suggested with a smile like a wildflower, as if she was relishing my mentor’s pain.

Svin was standing behind me. Maybe because he hated me less now, he wouldn’t be as terrifying as he used to be, even when we were standing in the same room. This made me very happy. My mentor seemed to trust him more now, so if I could receive guidance from him once in a while, I would be even happier. However, that was just one of my delusions.

“A diagram? That would work. Svin, can I ask you to draw it?”

“Of course,” Svin nodded obediently. Then, he tore a page from the notepad in the hotel room and took out a ballpoint pen.

My mentor would ask him to take notes like this in class as well. Something similar had happened in the workshop of Heartless’ missing student, Gesell Tolman. It was clear that my mentor would often hand the work of organizing and summarizing things to him.

“Let’s begin from the attendees of the Grand Roll.”

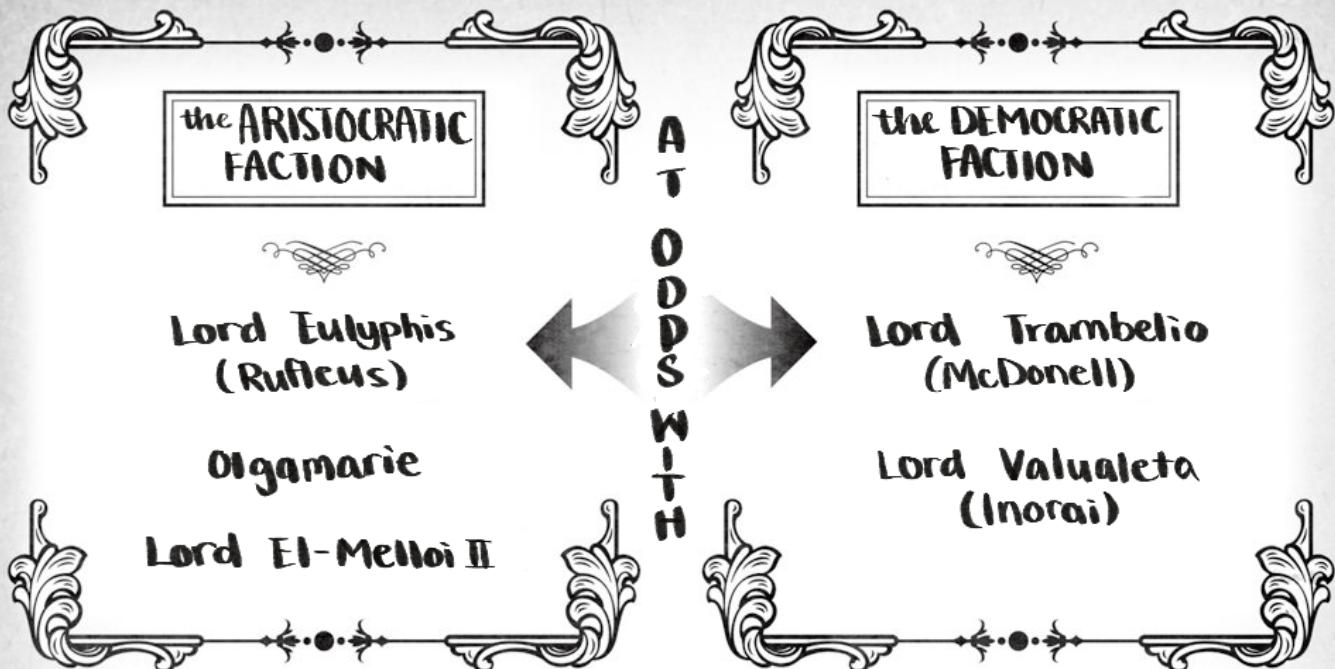
“Sure.”

Svin nodded again, and then wrote a few names down. First came the Democratic Faction.

Lord Trambelio.

And Lord Valualeta.

The two people who had dined with my mentor yesterday after sending an invite through Melvin.



### HEARTLESS' STUDENTS

Calugh Ithred  
Asheara Mystras

AUTO  
TOPSY  
DI  
SECRET

(The Secret Autopsy Division)

Gesell Tolman  
Jorek Kurdice  
Kuron

MISSING

Then came the Aristocratic Faction.

Lord Eulyphis.

Lord Animusphere— or, actually, his representative, Olga Marie.

And then, Lord El-Melloi II. It seemed like my mentor had gone along with tradition and decided to stand in there for now.

“According to what we know now, excluding the Neutral Faction and the Barthomelois, these five will attend of the twelve families. This is around the average level of attendance in a Grand Roll. However, it’s rare that four actual Lords will attend.”

“Why do you say that, Sir?”

“Basically, they’re taking it very seriously,” my mentor answered. “The Trambelios are serious about the plan to redevelop Spirit Tomb Albion. Lord Eulyphis only decided to attend in person because he is aware of their intentions. If a representative attended like before, they might be scared into conceding because of the gap in authority.”

Lord Trambelio’s charisma and his attitude to accept everything, regardless of how good or bad, was worth noting. It wasn’t surprising that Rufleus would be on high alert because of this.

“The Neutral Faction has decided not even to send representatives. That’s probably because they don’t want to be caught in the crossfire. The more serious they are, the more impact a rash action will have, which might lead to hatred. If the Democratic Faction and the Aristocratic Faction were just tossing friendly attacks at each other, it would be fine. But if they actually intended on crushing the other side, it would be better to keep their distance... That’s the general approach of the Neutral Faction.”

“Oh, I see...”

Now I could somewhat understand it. There was meaning behind being absent from the meeting of well. I felt strangely impressed by this.

“Add Dr. Heartless and his five students as well. Three of them are currently missing.”

Svin wrote down a few more names. First came the two students we had met at the Secret Autopsy Division, Calugh Ithred and Asheara Mystras.

Then, the ones who were missing.

Gesell Tolman.

Jorek Kurdice.

Finally,

“Is this... the last person?”

“Yes. Besides knowing that he is an unaffiliated mage, we couldn’t find any of his experiences. We couldn’t even figure out his last name. Considering how much of his life is shrouded in mystery, as well as who the other people are, it’s pretty much certain that he’s a Survivor as well.”

[Kurou].

That was the final name. According to Touko, he was one of Heartless’s missing students.

“Something like this?”

“Wow! That’s brilliant, Le Chien-kun! If I was the one doing it, it would have exploded already!”

“Go learn how to write an essay other people can actually read first! Explain [the reasoning behind things] properly! Even though it’s evidently all nonsense, Mr. Shardan keeps getting me to translate it just in case there’s some hidden meaning behind it all, so could you please consider my feelings?”

“Then you can be my co-writer!”

“Absolutely not! You’ll be able to memorize a hundred Great War of Heroes cards in a single glance, and you want me to help you?” Svin said, sticking out his tongue.

My mentor ignored their argument and stared intently at the notes, tapping the table with his index finger.

“The problem lies in why they went missing.”

“Yes. Do you not have a hypothesis, brother dear? This is your area of expertise, isn’t it?”

“There aren’t enough clues. But since Spirit Tomb Albion comes up so often, it should have something to do with this.”

That name had been brought up so many times, both regarding the Grand Roll and where Heartless’ students came from. However, I couldn’t imagine what relationship they would have at all.

Reines looked to my mentor and closed one of her eyes.

“Isn’t there another mystery here? Is Heartless gathering his former students, or is—”

“—Reines.”

My mentor interrupted her. He had a serious look in his eyes, as if he was saying that this was the only thing he could not condone.

He shook his head and continued.

“Either way, we need to find more information about Heartless’ missing students. Reines, can you go to Slur Street again to look into his students again?”

“I wish you’d be a bit kinder to your younger sister. So what are you going to do?”

“It would be troublesome if the students found me, but I plan on going with you.”

At that, Flat immediately turned around.

“That’s a pretty big deal, Professor! We’ll need to think of some magecraft to hide you!”

“You should first think of something to sew your mouth up so you won’t be so conspicuous.”

“Ohh, that’s a good idea! Locking up the mouth of the Big Bad Wolf so Little Red Riding Hood won’t get eaten! Having Pac-Man lose his identity! Wait, you look a bit like Pac-Man, don’t you, Le Chien-kun? With the streamline and all!”

“How are we similar at all?!” Svin shouted through his gritted teeth.

However, it didn’t turn out as we planned.

My mentor was called away because of an incident that happened on the morning of the second day.



Though we had only been called in a hurry, the only people allowed in were me and my mentor.

Reines and the others went to investigate as planned, while we came to the Secret Autopsy Division and took the elevator down like we had yesterday.

Yes, we were at the Secret Autopsy Division. However, a familiar figure awaited us as we walked into floor B45, which was where the incident had occurred.

“Good morning, Miss Adashino.”

“...Huh?”

I blinked as my mentor called her name.

Even in a place like floor B45, she was the same as usual. Of course, she was wearing the same luxurious outfit that I was told was a type of traditional Japanese clothing. Her long hair, which seemed to be strands of the darkness of the night, silently enveloped her, separating her from the rest of the world.

Hishiri Adashino gracefully adjusted her glasses as she smiled.

“Someone has been killed, so I am here to represent the Department of Law.”

Thinking back to the last times we had met her, she had always had a similar stance. This was probably the job of the Department of Law. They were there to regulate and control the world of magecraft, where any misstep could easily pass the point of no return.

As I thought about this, my mentor scowled.

“Don’t interfere with what I’m here to do.”

“You can do as you please,” Hishiri said.

Soon, we were led by the staff members to the laboratory where the incident had occurred.

“...!”

The odor swirling about the room made me cover my nose with my hands.

My mentor did the same. Only Hishiri remained undisturbed, maybe because she had already investigated the scene.

It was a spacious room, around the size of the lobby above it. However, there were all kinds of equipment in this room. With my shallow knowledge, I couldn’t tell whether they were for magecraft or science. The tangled masses of wires and shattered teapots reminded me of a hospital.

However, that feeling only stayed for the first second I was looking at the room.

It was hard to imagine that this was reality. ...To be precise, it was like reality and fantasy had been mixed together. That made the scene before my eyes different from everything I had seen before, in a sense.

On the strange metal floor of the laboratory, there lay many beasts.

Some were the chimeras I had seen yesterday. Others were entirely different.

For example, there were giant beetles with curved horns, and large lizards covered in metal scales.

All of them were dead.

Blood in all sorts of colors was splattered around the place. Some was blue and green, while more was, shockingly, white. Later, my mentor had told me that scientists have been developing white artificial blood. If they heard that creatures of Mystery had that kind of blood circulating around their bodies, I didn't know what they would say.

“.....”

My mentor bent down to inspect the floor.

There were claw marks and acid stains everywhere. It seemed like there had been a fight here. Lying dead on the floor, there were at least seven creatures of the kind that Yvette and I had barely managed to hold our own against.

But the reason we had been called here lay deeper inside the laboratory.

There was a splatter of red blood there. A shocking amount of the walls and the floor had also been dyed red.

Calugh had died there.

No.

Perhaps it would be more fitting to say that it was the [object that used to be] Calugh.

That was because the corpse was too heavily mutilated. It didn't stop at his limbs being severed from his body. It was as if a child with a pair of scissors had stabbed madly at a doll for an hour. Though I could only just discern where the head used to be, even piecing the body parts together would be difficult. If a forensics expert tried, maybe it would be possible, but I didn't think that regular police would be able to enter here.

Bones, intestines, fat, and muscle... all of it looked like it had been blended together.

“Why... did he have to be killed so cruelly...”

“...I don’t know.”

My mentor shook his head.

I had seen all sorts of corpses in the cases before. However, it was the first time I had seen such a horrible corpse.

Even so, my mentor’s expression remained clam, and he only bit his lip.

“Do you think it was my brother who did it?” Hishiri said in a voice too quiet for the staff members to hear as she stood by the entrance.

“It couldn’t have been anyone else. No mage would be able to defeat so many monsters of Spirit Tomb Albion. However, that Servant, Faker, could.”

“Yes. She could, even if she didn’t use her Noble Phantasm.”

There was a cold tension in Hishiri’s voice.

She had seen Faker fight on the Rail Zeppelin. That was why she knew that Faker was a powerful mage, even without using her terrifying Noble Phantasm, which was supposedly a chariot that originally belonged to Iskandar.

“Even if the intended purpose of the spell is the same, the spells of the Age of the Gods are completely different. I’ve heard that creatures from Spirit Tomb Albion tend to be able to deflect Magical Energy, but it seems like Faker wouldn’t be affected if the ability isn’t strong enough.”

“The magecraft of the Age of the Gods is very close to Mystery, after all.”

“Yes. That’s why they don’t need to keep trying to reach the Root. To us, that might be an unattainable truth, but to them, it’s just something commonplace.” My mentor spoke like he was describing nebulae thousands of light-years away.

“Maybe our aspirations are the true mystery in her eyes.”

Hishiri's genuine words revealed the passion she had as a mage who sought the Root, even though she was part of the Department of Law. Or, perhaps they revealed the passion that had once been there.

I remembered Calugh talking with my mentor about this when he had still been alive. This was probably the difference between Faker and modern mages.

"That doesn't matter now," Hishiri continued. "So. Is Dr. Heartless killing his own students?"

My mentor did not respond immediately. From the momentary tense in his shoulders, I could tell that he shared Hishiri's suspicions.

"Was this... what Miss Reines wanted to say last night?"

"...Yes," my mentor said, nodding. "It's a taboo among mages to kill your own students."

I think that this was even more so for him. He treasured every single one of them. Saying that he simply enjoyed teaching would be an understatement.

However—

"Of course, such cases have happened. It isn't exactly rare for students to kill their teachers, either. However, killing students is even more reprehensible than killing teachers, because it goes against a mage's instinct."

My mentor had talked about this before.

Mages were beings who would protect their students, no matter what it took.

That was because mages placed their hopes on the next generation. They needed to pass on their hopes of reaching the Root to their descendants and students, because they wouldn't be able to achieve them in this generation.

My mentor probably followed this instinct more than anyone else.

Even though he lacked talent, he wanted to be a mage more than any other mage. That must be because he saw his aspirations in all of his students. My mentor had placed his hopes in everyone's futures, from Flat and Svin to Yvette and even Luvia.

“...And why was Calugh the only one to have been killed in this way?”

The other students had only gone missing.

Even if they had been killed, I could sense that the person we were up against wanted to keep it discreet. If that was the case, why would Calugh be killed in such an exaggerated way?

My mentor and Hishiri didn't seem to know the answer to that question, either.

“However, I do understand something now,” my mentor said after a brief moment of silence as he observed the corpse. “[It wasn't a coincidence] that a monster from Spirit Tomb Albion managed to escape and attack us.”

It surprised me to hear the subject of our conversation to suddenly shift to the fight that happened yesterday.

“...What?”

“Calugh should have found out through some means that we had fought Faker on the Rail Zeppelin. Though he might not have known the details, he might have heard that we managed to fight her off.”

Those words swept across the bloodstained floor.

“He probably released those monsters because he wanted to use it as a point of reference. If it could stand its own against us, and since we were around equally matched with Faker, maybe a group of monsters would be enough to fend off Faker. Ah, so that was why he gave us a permit to enter that easily. Because that would be closest to the situation on the Rail Zeppelin. ...But his preparation seems to have been for nothing.”

...Of course.

After all, the only reason why we had managed to fight Faker to a draw then was the result of many coincidences piled on top of each other. If we didn't have the Executor with Jewel-ranked Mystic Eyes as well as Olga Marie's Magecraft support, we would not be able to stand here now.

For that reason, even though it had taken so much effort to defend against the monster from Spirit Tomb Albion, Faker was able to kill them all easily. Servants and humans were just that different. But, if it was Touko Aozaki, or another terrifyingly powerful Lord, the results might not be the same...

“...Wait, so that means that Mr. Calugh...”

“He already predicted that Heartless and Faker might attack him,” my mentor said.

I looked towards him.

If that was the case, Calugh probably already made preparations against them. He had found monsters through the Secret Autopsy Division and prepared a room for the fight to take place. Even so, he still lost.

After squatting down to examine the corpse more carefully, my mentor stood up again.

“There’s also something strange about this place.”

“Something strange?”

“Yes. Isn’t this a [locked room]?”

I knew what a locked room referred to. Something similar had happened in one of the previous cases. It was a place where the culprit could not enter or exit— In other words, a place where the crime could not have been committed. I never thought that a term mainly used in detective novels would be brought up here.

“This is floor B45. The only way to come in or leave is from the elevator we came through. It would be incredibly difficult to enter without the permission of the staff. Even Heartless and Faker would have a hard time reaching here without being discovered.”

“Wouldn’t he be able to teleport or pass through walls or something?”

Hearing my question, my mentor shook his head.

“Teleportation can almost be considered a type of magic. Though maybe Faker would be able to achieve it as a mage of the Age of the Gods, there are several tight Bounded Fields here. Even she wouldn’t be able to enter using magecraft without breaking the Bounded Field. The same goes for passing through walls.”

I could somewhat understand the reasoning behind this.

Though the rules of the Age of the Gods were strange, they weren’t a completely different set of concepts. It was like how arrows and spears are different, yet are still able to kill people by piercing through them. Both of them would leave a mark if they penetrated someone’s body.

“...So how did they do it?”

“.....” My mentor did not reply immediately. Instead, he turned his head. “Can I ask you some questions?”

“Of course,” the staff member said, nodding.

“First, why did you call me here?” My mentor asked. “The Secret Autopsy division is both a part of the Clock Tower, and separate from it. Even if someone died— No, perhaps I should say especially because something as serious as this happened, usually, it should be resolved internally. Even if we disregard Miss Hishiri from the Department of Law for now, there’s no need to ask a [Lord] to come. (TN: *All of these are emphasized*)”

“It was Mr. Calugh who requested it.”

“...Mr. Calugh?”

Wasn’t that the name of the person who just died?

“Yes. Ever since a while ago, he kept saying that if anything happened to him, we were to call Lord El-Melloi II.”

“Wait. How long ago was ‘a while ago’?”

Noticing something strange in what that person said, my mentor raised one eyebrow.

“Around two months ago,” the staff member replied calmly.

“...Sir.”

“I know. This doesn’t make any sense. I only met him yesterday.”

Yes. From what he said just then, it was clear that Calugh had started taking notice of my mentor from a long time ago. Of course, as a new [Lord], my mentor’s position was worth noting, but there wouldn’t usually be any need to tell people to call him if anything came up.

If my mentor was someone like the famous detective of Baker Street, that would have made sense, but that was not the case. At the end of the day, my mentor’s job was being one of the [Lords] and a lecturer of the Clock Tower.

My mentor was silent for a brief moment as he glanced around the room.

“...What about Miss Asheara?”

“We have not been able to contact her.”

“...!”

I felt like my blood had started speeding up as it circulated around my body.

“Is it possible that she has gone missing?”

“It is a possibility. We are still trying to confirm that.”

My anxiety increased even more, and I felt like there was a heavy weight on my shoulders. I felt like our opponents had managed to make more moves in a game of chess without us noticing. Now, we didn’t even have an idea of how much worse the situation had become.

My mentor carefully examined the scene once more.

This time, his gaze rested on Calugh's gruesome corpse for quite a long time before he turned to ask Hishiri a question.

"Has there been an attempt to evoke his spirit?"

"Of course. Unfortunately, though, the information has been sealed away. He was an important figure in the Secret Autopsy Division, after all. If no precautions are taken, important information could easily be leaked."

This seemed to be one of the security measures that mages took.

Magecraft was something that needed to be kept from others. Mages fought tooth and nail to keep it secret, even from their fellow mages. For that reason, I heard that powerful mages would prepare magecraft precautions when they were still alive to prevent people from stealing information from their corpses.

Though I said that, it only decreased the clues available to us now.

"...Have the other students taken measures against spiritual invocation?" My mentor muttered.

"Why do you ask that?"

"The other survivors of the labyrinth without powerful positions would have no need to set up precautions like this. Most of the people who take on the challenge of Spirit Tomb Albion are [spellcasters], and not mages. Their purpose is to successfully utilize magecraft, not to use it to reach the Root."

I recalled that spellcasters referred to people who only saw magecraft as a tool.

Mages sacrificed everything for the Root, and passed on— forced their hopes to their next generation. Though mages and spellcasters both used magecraft, the two were very different. My mentor had said something similar before. To some mages, the term spellcaster was the greatest insult.

However, according to what he just said,

“...So, if someone found their corpses, something might be revealed?”

Was that why the corpses of the other students had been disposed of? No, we weren’t even sure that they had died yet. However, I couldn’t stop myself from thinking about it as if that was the truth.

My mentor touched the mangled corpse without caring if his clothes would get stained. Since I was a grave keeper, I could naturally tolerate a sight like this. However, for whatever reason, my mentor was also able to tolerate such a corpse. Of course, since he was a mage, he shouldn’t have been easily disturbed, but I felt like my mentor’s situation was different. It was more like he had once witnessed something even more disturbing than this, which meant that he was able to face this situation calmly. (TN: *Why do I feel like an incredibly similar bit of narration happened with the Diadra’s corpse as well?*)

Suddenly, my mentor suddenly froze.

“Is something the matter, Lord El-Melloi II?”

“It’s nothing.”

He shook his head and wiped his fingers with a handkerchief.

“Was he one of my brother’s students?” Hishiri said with a sigh as she looked intently at Calugh’s corpse.

“Yes. I have a question I never got to ask you, too. What kind of person was your brother, Heartless, to you?”

Hearing my mentor’s question, Hishiri’s beautiful brow furrowed slightly.

“I actually haven’t met him many times. Though we are siblings by name, there are many children like us in the Norwich family.”

My mentor had brought this up before, too.

Norwich, the head of the noble family that had established the Department of Modern Magecraft, had strange tendencies..

He was the daddy-long-legs of the Clock Tower. Supposedly, he would do all he could to support the young people he saw potential in, and would adopt the ones he especially favored.

Hishiri and Heartless seemed to have been chosen in this way. That was how they ended up being siblings in name alone.

“However, though he was the head of a department, I got the impression that he used to chat with his students often.”

This was consistent with what Asheara and the former student who was now laying dismembered on the floor, Calugh, had said.

Heartless used to be a teacher who cared very deeply for his students.

It was so different to Heartless now, who killed his students in such a cruel way. What kind of puzzle piece would fit in this gap?

“Miss Adashino, I have a very absurd and somewhat rude question...” my mentor said, after a few seconds of silence. “Dr. Heartless wasn’t a spell caster, right?”

“Of course not. The Clock Tower has no reason to choose a spellcaster as the head of a department,” Hishiri said, tilting her head in confusion.

She was right. The Clock Tower was a place for learning. Even though they had let someone like Heartless become the head of a department, they would probably not accept a spellcaster.

“...I see. If it was someone from an older family, it might be because of the Grand Roll, but Heartless doesn’t fit that situation, either.”

“Have you discovered anything new?”

“No, I was just confirming something. I’ll report to you again when I manage to come up with some kind of hypothesis. Goodbye, for now. —Let’s go, Gray.”

My mentor suddenly turned and quickly walked away.

I hastily bid goodbye to Hishiri and the staff member before following him.



Several maids and servants were hurrying about the mansion.

Even for them, the guests today were special. Lord Valualeta's servants all came from mage families that had a long history of serving her family, but they still were a little nervous when another Lord came to visit.

The owner of the house sat next to a round window that encircled a patch of blue sky, enjoying some wine.

“It went pretty well, don't you think, son?”

“Please don't call me that, Ms. Inorai.” Lord Trambelio said, spreading his arms.

Though he accompanied it with an exaggerated wink, Inorai continued with a look of mild annoyance.

“I'm fine with redeveloping Spirit Tomb Albion. I also know most of the cards that you have. You've probably hidden some things from me, but I'm in no place to accuse you of that. So, as Lord Valualeta, I'll give you my vote.”

“Hahaha, thank you, Lord Valualeta! I appreciate your generosity,” McDonell said, laughing. Then, he turned to the other person in the room. “I'm also curious what you think, Melvin-kun. Depending on the situation, your friend may have to suffer a penalty. As the head of the family, I need to take the feelings of members of the branch family into consideration too, don't I?”

“Waver is a great friend of mine, of course,” Melvin said.

He sat at a table not far away, enjoying a glass of red wine. Several silk handkerchiefs were laid out on the table in front of him, probably because of his tendency to cough blood. Perhaps he had also chosen red wine to make the blood stand out less. Since it

was normal for mages to be strange in some way, the two Lords present did not comment on this.

“But, if the head of the Trambelio family orders it, I’ll have to assist you even if it puts my best friend’s life at stake.”

“Oh, really?” Inorai interjected. “I don’t have an issue with that, of course. But I’ve seen some other people like you who don’t feel guilty no matter how many people are dragged into problems, simply because they find it interesting. Don’t you think you would wipe out yourself and your entire family if you needed to?”

“Of course not. How could I?” Melvin said with a faint smile. He responded in a similar way to how McDonell just did. Was this a trait of the Trambelio bloodline?

“Speaking of which, can I ask you something?” He said, turning to McDonell and raising his hand. “Do you really think redevelopment is necessary for the Clock Tower?”

“Yes, of course I do.” McDonell nodded seriously. “Our primary goal is always to reach the Root. Since that’s the case, shouldn’t we do everything in our power to work towards it? We are mages born in the modern age. Increasing the amount of artifacts provided by Spirit Tomb Albion is indispensable for our goal.”

There was an unwavering passion in McDonell’s voice.

As if what he said was the paradigm of righteousness.

McDonell had something that made those around him feel that his choices were not just to win power, but to pursue the glorious truth.

Perhaps it was the result of history. A place where mere humans, who had trouble living past a century, could not reach. However, in lineages that existed since the distant past, such natural “kings” would sometimes be born. McDonell was undoubtedly one of them.

“A grand stage awaits us! Let us enjoy it!”



The castle was situated in a place that overlooked the Thames river.

It was originally built as a fortress, then used as an armory and a bank, before finally becoming a prison for nobles. For that reason, many kings and members of the royalty had been executed here, and many legends were spawned as a result of the regrets and laments of the people.

For instance, the tale of how an ancient queen's ghost haunted this place, or that the ravens that lived here were actually the cursed King Arthur(*TN: This is not an actual story*)... And so on.

This fortress was the Tower of London.

It is now one of the most famous tourist attractions in this city. Today, it was said to be closed for cleaning purposes, but there wasn't a cleaning staff in sight. There was only an old man taking a stroll around the grounds.

The man wore glasses, and had long, carefully groomed white hair.

It was Lord Eulyphus— Rufleus Nuada-Re Eulyphus.

Of course, he did not frequent the Tower of London to sightsee.

Every step that the old man took in the closed-off fortress caused him to absorb more invisible energy.

In other words, the Magical Energy of the dead.

However, it wasn't just the Magical Energy given off by the dead.

With the “concept” of the dead at its core, both the large amounts of Mana seeping from the Ley Lines and the Od given off unintentionally by the tourists could be considered by the Clock Tower as the Magical Energy of the dead.

As the Lord of the Department of Spiritual Invocation(Eulyphus), Rufleus used ancestral contracts and political means to carefully preserve this place, so he could use it to recover Magical Energy.

He stopped walking near the central White Tower.

“...Tired of waiting around...?”

“No. It’s a rare opportunity to see something like this,” Olga Marie said, curtsying with her silver hair gathered up in one hand. “Has everything been progressing like you hoped?”

The young woman looked to Rufleus.

There was a truly staggering number of gems inlaid into the old man’s clothing. However, they didn’t seem gaudy at all. Instead, they gave off an ominous air, as if they were not jewelry, but burial goods.

Perhaps this was the power of the Lord of the Department of Spiritual Evocation.

Every single one of those gems was an incredibly powerful Mystic Code. Someone well-versed in this area would be able to tell that with a single glance. Even the colossal amount of Magical Energy he had absorbed from the dead could not match even one of them. This array of ornaments made the old man into a fortified fortress.

“...Well.”

The old man’s eyes narrowed, neither confirming or denying what Olga Marie just said.

Piles of deep wrinkles nearly concealed his eyes.

“...This has nothing to do with territory... it all depends on how many people that Trambelio boy has persuaded... for this meeting...”

The old man was saying that this meeting was like a battle. The results would already be decided before it even began.

“We must maintain the order.... No matter what... we must guard the world of magecraft.”

To this old man, even asking about this would feel hollow. This was something that had already been carved into his soul.

—“In order to achieve the task handed to the Eulyphis family, the peace of the world of magecraft must be maintained.”

He had always lived life by those words in all the years of his drawn-out life.

The old man smiled, revealing a mouthful of yellowed teeth.

“I wonder... how much does this Lord El-Melloi understand...?”



As we were around ten minutes away from the Secret Autopsy Division, my mentor took out what he was hiding in his jacket pocket.

“This was hidden in Calugh’s corpse.”

“A rock? No, a piece of metal?”

It was a very thin sliver of metal. There were traces of words etched onto it. I had to practically press my face into it so I could manage to read the numbers and letters on there.

“Calugh tried to create a metal cage during yesterday’s battle. He probably used something similar to create a piece of metal inside his body with information on it. After all, the easiest place to use magecraft is within your own body.”

So was this how mages left their dying wishes?

Though I didn’t understand how it worked, I knew that simple magecraft only required one count, or a single action. The latter didn’t even require incantations, and could be achieved through manipulating Magical Energy alone. Calugh had probably used a spell like that.

“This was probably left for me. I’m probably the only mage out there who has to resort to fiddling with corpses.”

“But, isn’t this—”

“...Yes. It’s an address.”

British addresses were made from approximately seven characters. Every building had a different one. The characters written on the piece of metal in my mentor’s hand was probably that.

I swallowed.

“Aren’t we telling Miss Hishiri about it?” I asked.

“We still can’t completely trust the Department of Law.”

Considering all that had happened in the past, I completely understood my mentor’s reason for this even though I was reluctant to admit it.

Since it was very possible that someone related to the Grand Roll was also Heartless’ accomplice, revealing any information was an extremely dangerous thing to do.

“Even though it was left for me, we have no way of knowing what he was thinking when he did so. In the worst case scenario, Faker might be there as well. We can’t rule out this possibility, so it would be best if Flat and Svin don’t come along.”

I was slightly surprised to hear him say that.

“I thought you already made up your mind about letting your students help you if they want to.”

“Of course not. I have put their lives in danger before, but that was an unexpected outcome. If I have the choice, I’d still like to avoid it as much as possible.”

“But you won’t leave me behind, right?”

My mentor hesitated for a moment, frowning slightly before he sighed.

“If it wasn’t for you, I would have died a long time ago.” He said reluctantly.

He had said something similar before.

Why would the same words make me feel so proud now? I felt something slowly seep into my heart. It was very warm, and when I touched it, it began to pulse.

Light laughter came from the hook at my right shoulder.

“Ihihihihi, it feels good to be relied on, doesn’t it?”

“...Yes, it does feel good.”

Hearing my response, Add was silent for a moment before it laughed even louder.

“Yes, indeed! That’s right! Ihihi, you’ve grown up too, crybaby Gray!”



I raised my phone to my ear as I stood in the musty stack room.

“Yep. It’s not getting through.”

I put down my phone and pressed the button to hang up. Flat, who was looking over with interest, tilted his head slightly.

“Still can’t reach him?”

“Unfortunately not,” I answered, shrugging. “The Secret Autopsy Division is secretive, after all. It was surprising enough that they let Yvette in. Electromagnetic waves can be controlled by the security system there, but there shouldn’t be a signal underground anyway.”

However, I wasn’t sure if the reason I couldn’t reach my brother was the Secret Autopsy Division, or that he had turned his phone off because something had come up.

We were in the district of the Department of Modern Magecraft, Slur(*TN: this doesn’t have to be the translation for the name of the street, does it? It just feels so strange. It could be Slough street but there’s no reason why that would be スラーア. I don’t know, it’s weird*

Academic books about magecraft were not the only things stored there. There were also all sorts of scattered records related to the Department of Modern Magecraft, such as the backgrounds of students and teachers, receipts from purchasing artifacts, records of Ley Line activities, and so on.

Of course, this was usually a restricted area, but as the next head of the El-Melloi Faction, I owned the master magecraft key.

Even so, we still had to sneak around the place to avoid the groups of overly-excited students in the El-Melloi classroom who were still looking for my brother. If they did happen to find us, we would have to somehow find our way out in a bombardment of questions about his whereabouts.

We ended up having to dig through the entire mountain of documents, but our team of three people and one Mystic Code did manage to reach a conclusion after a bunch of tedious research.

“...There really is a loophole,” I said, looking at the results that the Mystic Code— that is to say, my mercury maid, Trimmau— had passed to me.

“But haven’t we already looked through everything that mentions Heartless? Le Chien-kun and I have looked from top to bottom, and we’ve tossed them around like Cooking Fighters!”

“I don’t know why you’re tossing documents around while talking about food, but, putting aside what you said about games for now, you two are researching Heartless himself, right?” I said, ignoring what sounded like the ramblings of a crazed fan. “However, we haven’t found enough about his students. If we hadn’t met that Touko Aozaki, we wouldn’t even have known that they were Survivors of the labyrinth.”

After all, many of the records had been deleted. It had already taken us enough effort to find their names.

“The information we obtained after that gives us more options to investigate. It should be incredibly difficult to erase someone’s footprints completely, in a time like the modern age where everything is recorded somewhere. The same goes for the world of magecraft. Since we know how many students there were and what ended up happening to them, everything else naturally follows.”

“Of the five people in the team, one person whose situation is unknown, two people who are unaffiliated, and two people who joined the Secret Autopsy Division, right?”

“Yes.” Hearing Svin’s summary, I snapped quietly, because it would be terrible if the other students found us. “Around ten years ago, the team of Survivors became Heartless’ students. There are all sorts of mismatches in the books during this period. I originally thought it was extra money given by Mr. Norwich, but that old man would have been more generous with his gifts.”

“...Then, does that money come from smuggling from Spirit Tomb Albion?”

It was what had been brought up during our conversation with Lord Trambelio.

If that originated from the Department of Modern Magecraft—

—Yes, that would put us in a ridiculously bad spot!

I really wanted to turn around now and pretend that I hadn’t seen anything. That was like knowing that the person who was the boss of a company before you had been embezzling funds. No matter how you looked at it, this was terrible news.

However, the reality was that since this was one of our weaknesses, we needed to get to the bottom of it. Otherwise, it might become even more deadly.

“Well then, let’s try and find out the precise details of those transactions. Flat, your intuition works well as long as you don’t try to organize something useful out of it, right? Svin, you’re sensitive about numbers, so I hope you two can combine to bring something useful.”

“....I see~! I get it now! Le Chien-kun, let’s revive the Easter egg of ‘Let’s fusion’!”

Just as Flat struck a pose I didn’t understand, Svin suddenly looked to the skylight.

“What is it, Le Chien-kun?”

“There’s a strange smell outside,” he said as his nose twitched. “...Or is there?”

He frowned, frustrated, like a hunting dog that just lost sight of its prey.



“—That was close,” the woman leaning near the lamppost muttered to herself.

It was an East Asian woman dressed in professional clothing.

Not long after that, some kind of mayfly-shaped object landed on her hand.

It was a mechanical mayfly.

Its body was clear and transparent, as if it had been carved from crystal. A faint, ethereal light emanated from its folded wings. Though it was only the size of a child’s hand, the wires, springs, and gears were perfectly balanced inside it.

All of this was fixed in place with a combination of chips of crystal, friction, and tiny amounts of Magical Energy. Even a high-ranking mage would be stunned with envy if they were told of how this Mystic Code worked.

However, none of the other pedestrians reacted to the presence of the crystal mayfly. They couldn’t see it at all. This was the result of magecraft that obstructed the senses.

“I should have eliminated the sound and smell completely. Hm. So that means his sense of smell isn’t limited to actual smells. The students there are so bothersome to deal with. I almost want to complain to them about how they ruin my happiness.”

The corner of Touko Aozaki’s lips curled upwards in a smile.

After they had parted ways in that workshop, her familiar had followed them. Since she knew how sensitive the one who used Bestial Magecraft was, she had the familiar keep its distance. However, it still caused a disruption when it entered the bounded field at Slur Street.

“Usually, I would probably leave,” she said, looking up.

The Department of Modern Magecraft(Norwich) was right in front of her.

“However, this place is the starting point, just like I suspected. The Grand Roll will begin soon. Sorry, Lord El-Melloi II, but I’ll have to come to investigate.”

The woman stepped forward. There was a strange light in her eyes, and it was impossible to determine what intent lay behind them.

The crystal mayfly extended its wings, and they glinted as it glided silently through the beams of winter sunlight.



My mentor and I boarded a taxi and headed to the address on the piece of metal.

It was even further north than the Regent’s Park in north London.

We got off around Belsize Park and walked the rest of the way.

The atmosphere in the area felt more like a quiet suburb than part of a giant city. The rows of staggered red-bricked buildings reminded me of a neat line of Matryoshka dolls.

The cold winter sunlight seemed to still and solidify here.

This place had probably looked the same for the past decade. There were dainty yellow flowers sprouting from the vines of winter jasmine that peeked out from the garden walls. The residents would probably see this sight every year.

“.....”

My mentor was silent.

He walked along the road at a brisk pace, past the brick buildings, blooming vines, and rays of winter sunlight.

I noticed that the number of pedestrians were decreasing gradually as we passed through the street that seemed to never change.

It was different from when Lord Eulyphis had appeared yesterday. The people had not suddenly vanished unnaturally. It was more like they had just gradually tapered away.

“Sir?”

“...It’s a bounded field,” my mentor muttered. “But it doesn’t use Magical Energy. It’s a type of modern magecraft that affects people psychologically. Heartless is the former head of the Department of Modern Magecraft, after all. Though it’s essentially the same as what I did at Druid Street, the technique here has been thought out very well.”

“What does that mean?”

Before he responded, my mentor first took out a cigar from his case and lit it.

The instant the smell entered my nose, I felt like some part of my brain relaxed. I had only just realized how tired I had become.

“Like I discussed before in class, it’s a matter of feelings,” my mentor said with the cigar in his mouth. “It affects mages as well. Because no Magical Energy is involved, even mages that are considerably highly-ranked will have trouble detecting it. On the other hand, ordinary people can also detect it, but most people don’t have enough knowledge about bounded fields to recognize them.”

In other words, it was something that only someone like my mentor would be able to detect.

However, a strange, sinister feeling crawled up my back.

Was this really Heartless’s mistake? I thought. Would he make a blunder like this if he knew that my mentor was working against him?

After several minutes of walking, we arrived at an old wooden house at the end of the road lined with brick houses.

“Is this the place with the address Calugh left us?”

Opening the door revealed the interior of an average-looking house. There was a dirty sofa, tables, cabinets there, and an assortment of cheap magazines had been scattered

all over the floor. Almost as if it was on purpose, the stairway to the basement had been left out in the open. My mentor and I exchanged a nod before we walked down.

The darkness had been steeped in the rich aroma of wine.

“...It looks like this place was converted from a wine cellar.”

I felt like if Svin was here, he would have collapsed, drunk.

We carefully advanced in the grape-scented air, which threatened to make my mind hazy again. The stone stairs were very slippery and were broken in several places, and I felt that a slight misstep could cause me to tumble down.

There were also more stairs than I had expected.

“I think I’m beginning to understand,” my mentor said as we walked. “Earlier, I said that the grave of King Arthur from before was your Labyrinth, Gray.”

He had said something like this before.

When he was discussing the history of mazes, he had explained how mazes and labyrinths were actually different.

“If that’s the case, this place is my labyrinth,” my mentor said through gritted teeth, as if he was trying to hold something back. “Heartless could definitely be described as another me.”

An alternate version of my mentor.

My mentor had said that labyrinths only had one path that allowed people to dive into themselves. At the deepest point, there would be a monster— another version of the person who entered the maze.

“My mentor isn’t someone who would ever harm his students.”

“That’s why I’m thinking about this,” my mentor said gloomily. “I’ve considered if it would be better to do that before.”

Those words sent a jolt of surprise through my heart.

My mentor had said something that was completely different from what he was usually like. However, I could feel that his words were genuine.

“If I just wanted clamber upward, there’s no need for me to teach at all. Rather than helping other people hone their talents to reach greater heights, I should devote my effort to trying to overtake them, in spite of their talent. Since I’ve been on the wrong path since the very beginning, I should have the obligation to get back on the right track, even if it means abandoning everything I have.

“Ahh, I should be cultivating the magecraft of the Velvet family. To that end, I need to take back my Magic Crest. Waver Velvet, if you really want to become a mage you can be proud of, throw away that stupid teacher’s facade and regain the nature of a cruel, callous mage. I don’t know how many times I’ve heard a voice in my head say that.”

—“You’re all cowards.”

—“Just because you’re a genius, you easily soar to great heights in a sky that I can only imagine myself flying freely in.”

I recalled that my mentor had said that back at Adra, the Castle of Separation. Seeing Luvia gelita Edelfelt double the effects of her magecraft just by listening to a few suggestions had made him jealous and revealed some of his true thoughts.

It was both laughable and pitiable, and had given me an instant of insight into my mentor’s heart.

There was also something else.

—“I’m also in possession of the Magic Crest of the Velvet Family.”

—“It’s the only Magic Crest in the world that’s compatible with Waver Velvet. You could call it the best possible collateral there could ever be to prevent mages from betraying you. It’s equivalent to taking away the meaning of his existence from the very beginning!”

That was what Melvin had said to me. As a collateral, he held my mentor, Waver Velvet's Magic Crest.

Magic Crests were a bit like notes to be passed to the next generation. So now, my mentor had had his notes taken away. Not being able to record his magecraft into the notes and wasting all these years must have brought so much suffering to my mentor, who was too genuine for a mage.

“...I don't think you're worthless.”

“Thank you.”

The stairs had ended.

We opened the door even more carefully than last time. When the door had opened a certain amount, I immediately dashed in, prepared to deploy Add at any moment as I scanned the room.

There was no one there.

There were, however, several buckets of wine, as well as a few bottles that didn't look like they had been uncorked for more than a week.

Behind them, there were some beakers and test tubes alongside some strange instruments. For planets, there was a metal balance that had been twisted geometrically, a silver model of the system, bells in the shape of the solar system, specimens of evidently extinct creatures, fuzzy dry objects, and so on.

My instincts told me that these were tools for magecraft experiments.

“...Is this Heartless' workshop?” My mentor muttered, lifting his cigar.

The fire at the tip of the cigar suddenly flared up, illuminating the dazzlingly complex display of string and paper on the back wall of the room.

“An evidence board...”

I had seen something similar half a year ago, in the hut that Heartless had lived in. By reading the spell that had been written on it, my mentor had managed to solve the case involving the Seven Superweapons of the Atlas Institute.

There was a map made of vellum hung up beside the evidence board.

It seemed to depict a sideways London, with a dragon that was large enough to devour entire planets digging deeper downward into the earth. I could vaguely understand that this map symbolized Spirit Tomb Albion.

“...He left us this on purpose, didn’t he,” my mentor muttered. “He should have had plenty of time to take it down. ...That is to say, he left it here for us to find. He’s taunting me to come decipher it if I want to try.”

Was that the case? I thought.

My mentor said that it was a taunt. However, I had a different feeling.

To me...

...It was more like he was telling us that if he deciphered it, we would be done for.

“Give me a moment. Since he left such careful notes, it shouldn’t take me that long,” my mentor said, looking to the evidence board and taking out a pen and a notebook.

—His movements looked as if he was going to dissolve into someone’s mind. Was this just an illusion my brain had conjured?



“...There shouldn’t be much to the whydunit this time, right?” She said, holding a bottle of wine in one hand.

It was a half-filled magnum wine bottle. She had already drank three whole bottles of this, but besides the slight flush on her cheeks, she remained unaffected, like she could down a thousand more. Though she was a Servant, this woman had probably been capable of this when she was alive as well. The look in her slightly tipsy eyes seemed to give that impression.

She pointed one of her supple fingers at her Master.

“It doesn’t take any reasoning for that gloomy Lord to figure out that you’re the culprit.”

“Doesn’t the information given to you about the modern world contain flashbacks? It’s a technique used often in Columbo.”

“I don’t care. I’ve never liked stories like the Illiad. Alcohol is all I need.” As she said this, Faker took another sip of wine. “You are kind of like that, though. Like those modern machine things.”

“Machines?” Heartless repeated.

“Yes. They have no content and no dreams. After their final goal’s been inputted, they’ll continue along the optimal path forever. That’s who you are. It’s hard to say you remind me of a human being.”

Though she was being slightly rude, Heartless’s expression did not change in the slightest.

“Do you find me to be a disappointing Master?”

“Not at all. To be honest, you actually make me feel quite at home,” the woman said, smiling a fierce smile.

She took another sip of wine, which made her lips more striking.

In the distant past, warriors seated around the dining table had probably seen this smile.

“I suppose you could call my king a capricious person. That’s why I was made to be someone like that. Yes, I suppose you could call me such a person.”

The nostalgia seeping from her wry smile deepened.

She was a human that had been created by the queen, Olympias, to protect Iskandar who was fated to be a conqueror.

One was a general.

The other was a mage.

However, she was different from her brother. As a mage, she was far from being a Heroic Spirit. Even the name Hephaestion was an illusion that had been borrowed from her brother.

For that reason, this world had always been too bright for her.

The Conqueror King Iskandar went without saying, of course, but the many heroes that surrounded him were so dazzling and beautiful that she could not bring herself to look directly at them.

“Ah, they shone too brightly for me to be with them,” Faker uttered, raising the bottle of wine. “So that’s why someone a bit plainer like you fits me just fine. I died such a long time ago, but it’s the first time I felt that I could truly be myself around someone. Even the wine tastes better now.”

“That’s strange.”

“It is,” Faker admitted. “But, if this is what it’s like, I wouldn’t regret it if I disappeared right here.”

That was almost like she was admitting to regretting something.

She had once pledged allegiance to her king, but because he had foolishly said before his death to have the strongest inherit the throne, the Wars of the Diadochi had broken out. The dreams and aspirations of the past broke one by one from there. Generals that she had once trusted killed friends that had entrusted their lives to them, and even the queen who had created her, Olympias, was dragged into the conflict. Betrayal followed betrayal, until all that remained was a tragic ending carved into history.

That was the end of a dream.

The fragments of memories too wretched to recall.

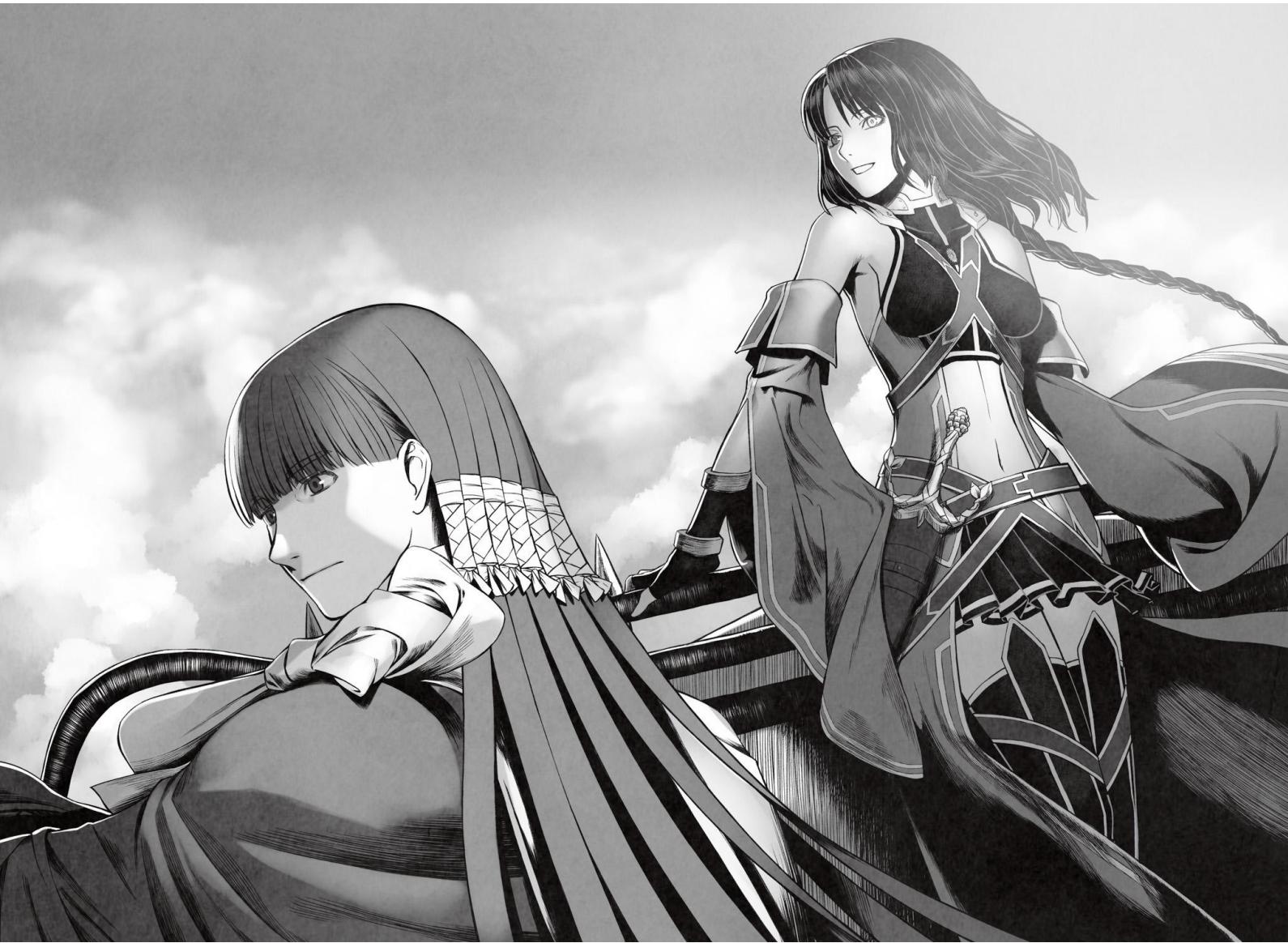
Beside her, her Master's red hair fluttered in the strong wind.

It was the same color as that of the person she had previously served(Iskandar). Of course, it was ridiculous to compare her temporary Master to the king she had pledged her soul to in any way, but she had created such an association, for whatever reason.

Why?

The two people weren't similar at all.

“What?”



Faker inadvertently looked away when she saw him look over.

“Nothing. I just think you’ve summoned a strange Servant, too.”

“I don’t think so. In fact, I’m actually more surprised that you’re willing to listen to me.”

“That’s an odd thought,” Faker replied. “I’m a Servant. An object summoned to obey my Master’s command. Our goals also align, so shouldn’t I follow your orders?”

“That wasn’t always the case in the Holy Grail Wars in the past.”

“Either way, I’m not familiar with those wars.”

She shook her head.

She had heard that in the Far East, the ritual had already been performed several times. It was the bloody ritual between seven Heroic Spirits and seven Masters to obtain the legendary Holy Grail, which was capable of granting any wish. Now, she was a temporary being summoned using that ritual.

A temporary Heroic Spirit.

A temporary Saint Graph.

A temporary Class(Container).

None of this was authentic. That was why she felt like it fit her very well. She wasn’t like one of the soldiers who had served Iskandar. She hadn’t left her name in history, and wasn’t even an anti-hero. Instead, she was just a nameless decaying corpse.

“More Servants have been summoned in the Holy Grail War in Fuyuki.”

“You can tell?”

“I’m connected to the Ley Lines there. Otherwise, I wouldn’t be able to know. The Fifth Holy Grail War will begin soon, after two or so more Servants are summoned. I don’t know when it’ll be over after that.”

“Then we’ll have to hurry up. It won’t take much longer for [him] to figure out the first whydunit.”

At that, Heartless suddenly changed the topic of the conversation.

“Do you hate Lord El-Melloi II?”

“Yes, I do. I hope he gets smacked on the head by falling books and dies. Not managing to kill him on that train is the most humiliating thing I’ve done since I was summoned.”

“Well. But what happened on the Rail Zeppelin was meaningful,” Heartless said with a slight smile. “Thanks to the incident there, I understand him now. I know how he sees the world, how he values magecraft, and how he treats others. I’ve learned what he holds dear, how he lives, and what his dreams are. At the same time, he probably understands me, too. He may see through one or two of my whydunits, but if he continues reading... he will have mired himself.”

“Ha, I’d love to see him in pain. Alright, we’re here,” Faker said, gesturing to what was [below them].

“Ah, how I miss this place. I did sneak in not long ago, but this is the first time I’ve looked at it from this angle,” Heartless said. “[My dear Slur Street].”

Yes.

Heartless and Faker were now looking over the district of the twelfth Department of the Clock Tower— the plain street or two that contained the Department of Modern Magecraft.

They were high up in the air.

Of course, this was because of her Noble Phantasm, the chariot pulled by skeletal dragons.

Every time their hooves(*TN: Do dragons have hooves?*) pawed the air, streaks of magical lightning would shoot out shaking the world around them. The sound of undulating waves of a type of Magical Energy that had already disappeared in this world rang out through the sky.

“Well then, I’ll leave it to you, Faker.”

“Leave it to me, Master.”

Faker tossed away her bottle of wine and laughed happily. The prospect of a new battle made her Saint Graph(heart) beat intensely.

“I have something I need to thank you for.”

“Hm? What?”

“You gave me a battlefield and a meaning. Thank you, Master.”

Then, she began to shout.

“[I am Hephaestion]!”

This was a complete lie. A meaningless opening line, necessary to unleash the power of this chariot.

As a Faker, she wouldn’t be able to tell the truth, even when she revealed the true name of her Noble Phantasm. Every other Servant probably felt at least a bit of pride when they unleashed their Noble Phantasm, which was like the concentration of their essence. However, all she had were these falsehoods, which were made to protect the original owner.

“[The loyal liege of the greatest conquering king in all of history, Iskandar]!”

This was also a lie.

That honor belonged to her brother.

Nothing about it was real. At least, not to her. However, in that moment, there was still a fire burning in her heart.

The Magical Energy outputted by the chariot doubled, echoing the flames in her heart. Faker held the reins that had been weaved with magecraft, and the energy swelled

faster. First, the chariot shot forward, arcing toward the sun. Then, it consumed all the Mana drifting along the west wind, transforming into a true comet.

It rushed toward the street in front of their eyes—!

“Come, gallop freely, Hecatic Wheel!”



After a while, my mentor let out a low moan.

That was his reaction to the result of his reading and note taking.

“All of these are about a Seal Designated spell...”

“A Seal Designated...?”

I recalled that it was an ancient measure of the Clock Tower. Touko Aozaki had been subject to such a designation.

It was said that the Association had a decree to preserve those who mastered magecraft limited to a single generation that could not be obtained through study and research. Supposedly, it was the greatest honor to be designated as a target of the decree. However, at the same time, it was the greatest possible disaster for a mage.

The symbol of the Secret Judgement Division had been stamped onto the corner of the document. That institution was also located inside Spirit Tomb Albion.

My mentor’s finger lingered around the document until it came to a stop at the name of the Seal Designated mage.

“The person who invented the spell was... Emiya.”

“Sir?” I called out, seeing the unusual look on his face. My mentor only repeated the name again.

“It was... Emiya...?”

“Are you familiar with that name?”

“He was one of the participants of the Fourth Holy Grail War.”

“.....”

Hearing that phrase unexpectedly turn up here, I gasped inadvertently.

“I’m almost there. The main part of the spell is very similar to the one at your hometown. He probably used that one as a basis, so it’s not that difficult to understand.”

The sound of the nib of my mentor’s pen scratching against paper continued.

I didn’t know if it was because he had already interpreted the spell from last time or because he had more information, but this time he didn’t need Trimmau’s help.

However, after only a few minutes, he made an unexpected noise.

“Why...”

“Sir?”

The hand that held his pen was shaking. His slender fingers looked like they could shatter like glass at any moment.

“Have you figured it out...?”

Had he interpreted Heartless’ spell?

If he had, why would he have such an expression of despair? His nails had sank into the document, but my mentor’s body continued to tremble as if he hadn’t noticed.

“Why...Why would he...” he uttered, like an artist deprived of inspiration, or a savior who had lost the grace of the heavens.

It reminded me of that sentence, Eli, Eli, Lema Sabachtani.

“No... that much is evident... Heartless left this evidence board behind so I would decipher this spell... Because he knew that it would prevent me from trying to stop him.”

I could not breathe. The feeling of helplessness wreathed itself around my heart, gradually eating away at my insides along with the fear that I had felt with my initial ominous premonition.

“In that case... What am I meant to do...?”

“Sir? What’s wrong?”

This was the first time I had seen my mentor like this.

Even the time when he had been knocked unconscious by Faker’s Noble Phantasm had not been as serious as this. Though he was sometimes pessimistic, my mentor had the heart of a challenger. He would sometimes even provoke opponents who he had no chance of winning against.

However, at this moment.

“Oi, what’s up with you? Has all that magecraft finally driven that half-filled brain of yours mad?!”

Even Add, who was still secured in the hook at my right shoulder, became restless and spoke to my mentor. However, he still stared blankly at those papers.

“This is... A spell used to call on the Saint Graph of the true target through summoning something else. Yes, it’s meant to use Faker as a shadow to summon the true Heroic Spirit. This isn’t impossible. Yes, it’s completely possible. We’ve seen it before. That’s why Gray’s hometown wanted to resurrect the true King Arthur by fabricating her body, mind, and soul...”

Yes.

My body was the proof of that.

The crystallization of a village's fleeting dream. We could not deny the fact that such a spell was possible.

Ah, so that was why.

That was the reason why what my mentor said next was my true nightmare.

"Heartless and Faker... want to summon the true Heroic Spirit... the Conqueror King, Iskandar..."

*(TN: Did you really have to end a book like this, Sanda!?)*

## **Afterword:**

By Makoto Sanda

—Those were like secret conversations between the stars. Every night, they would exchange words that would never be known to anyone else. Every dawn, they would hide away to a place that no one could reach.

Would the result of that be the end of our already ossified dreams?

Thank you all for your patience. The final act of the Case Files of Lord El-Melloi II, the Grand Roll, has finally begun.

I have had the idea to make a meeting between Lords the theme of the final arc since I first planned to write this. Since this story is set in the Clock Tower, both an Ivory Tower for mages to research their craft and a court full of scheming and tricks, this was mentioned before in many of the characters' lines and settings.



In the actual books, if Lord El-Melloi II is used to show the academic side of things, Reines would be the character used to show the schemes. No matter who the characters are, it wouldn't be the true Clock Tower if I didn't describe the complicated conflicts and detailed relationships of the Lords. If I did want to tell this story, then the best time to do so would be in the final arc, where all of the readers here should be familiar with the characters that appear.

If you want to ask for my reasoning behind this, it's because scheming is a type of complicated magecraft. It also contains all sorts of whydunits. There couldn't be a better subject for the finale of the Case Files of Lord El-Melloi II.

That was also why I decided to have this story be set in London. I believe that the charm of this ancient city will enhance this final act as well.

Apart from the meeting, I also used a set piece that I decided on using at the very beginning, the underground city of the Clock Tower that has been mentioned all throughout the series—Spirit Tomb Albion.

Gray's reaction in this book was based upon my own initial reaction when Kinoko first told me about this setting. I would never have thought that it would be like that! It isn't anything like the one in the fourth chapter of FGO...



New Lords. Characters key to the plot that have not appeared yet. Heartless and Faker, who are in control of the causes and effects of this case. And Heartless' students, who are all closely related to this incident.

All of these threads tangle and converge, and the story surrounding Lord El-Melloi II and his assistant has finally come to the final curve, and will continue to accelerate. How shall they unravel the mystery and darkness ahead of them, and what will be the ending that awaits them?

Please stay tuned for further installments.



By the time this book gets published, the second volume of the manga version of the Case Files of Lord El-Melloi II should already be released. Every page of the intricate manga drawn by Azuma Toh-sensei. Unlike other TYPE-MOON books, this manga will also be available in regular bookstores, so please make sure you don't miss it!

Finally, I would like to thank Mineji Sakamoto for drawing the gorgeous illustrations for the final arc, Kiyomune Miwa for agreeing to accompany me to London to collect inspiration, Kinoko Nasu, OKSG, as well as everyone else at TYPE-MOON for taking time from their busy schedules to help me read through my drafts.

The next and final volume of this series is scheduled to be released this winter. I hope that everyone will be able to accompany me all the way until the curtain falls.

—June 2018, while playing Detroit: Become Human  
-End of Afterword, Book 8-

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**Link to translation of the next book:**

 Grand Roll Middle (Book 9), Translated